



## Old Comedy, Public Intellectuals and the Origins of Dissent Communication: The Case of Aristophanes

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this article is to explore the emergence of a strategic communication management of dissent (the so called *dissent public relations*) and to set its beginnings in the context of ancient Greek comedy represented by Aristophanes. Indeed, Old Comedy was the first great example of mass communication in which political satire was used to dissent and protest against political and social circumstances in fifth-century BC Athens. This situation was determined by the Peloponnesian War and its political, economic and social consequences. From this perspective, this article also constitutes an investigation into the intellectual history of public relations, of which Aristophanes can be considered one of its first practitioners.

**Keywords:** Activist Communication; Aristophanes; Dissent Public Relations; Old Comedy; Public Intellectuals.

[esp] Comedia Antigua, intelectuales públicos y los orígenes de la comunicación de disenso: el caso de Aristófanes

**Resumen.** El propósito de este artículo es explorar los orígenes del surgimiento de una gestión de la comunicación estratégica del disenso (las llamadas *relaciones públicas de disenso*) fijando sus inicios en el contexto de la comedia aristofánica. Ciertamente, la Comedia Antigua fue el primer gran ejemplo de comunicación de masas en la que se utilizó la sátira política para disentir y protestar contra las circunstancias políticas y sociales en la Atenas del siglo V a.C. Esta situación fue desencadenada por la Guerra del Peloponeso y sus consecuencias políticas, económicas y sociales. Desde esta perspectiva, este artículo también constituye una investigación sobre la historia intelectual de las relaciones públicas, de la que Aristófanes puede ser considerado uno de sus primeros practicantes.

**Palabras clave:** Comunicación activista; Aristófanes; relaciones públicas de disenso; Comedia Antigua; intelectuales públicos.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the development of a critical perspective on public relations has highlighted the role of activism as one of the dimensions of strategic communication analysis.<sup>2</sup> In this framework, the concepts of *dissent public relations* and *protest public relations* emerged; concepts that are similar but different from public relations activism. Indeed,

Dissent PR is... about bringing attention to new thinking, new behaviours in areas of national life. It promotes ideas for change and for retention in the political economy and civil society. The term is not defined in a left-wing sense. Rather, it is PR promoting the ideas of public intellectuals, academics, experts, people of faith found in both progressive and conservative philosophical circles. It is PR techniques designed to bring attention to these thinkers and their arguments in order to change the policy climate. Dissent PR has a related form, Protest PR, and it is a consequence of the dissent term. It is also persuasive communication but not principally about ideas, behaviours and policies. Instead it persuades in order to implement those ideas, behaviours and policies into law, regulation and other forms of executive action.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, but from the same approach, Brown argues that we have to rethink the concept of strategic communication as styles of perception and expression.

Among the most visible styles is activism, which continues to occupy the attention of issues management. Activism, which includes a variety of techniques, shares its uncompromising sensibility with that of the Faith Culture. The spectacle and performance techniques of activist communication resonates with the sensibility of the Art Culture.<sup>4</sup>

This statement not only suggests the crucial role of performance techniques in communicating activist and dissent positions, but, as I will argue in this paper, it also legitimizes –in an intellectually way– that those performance techniques were the first manifestation of dissent communication. In fact, this article implies a reconsideration of strategic communication and public relations as a specific historical form of expression –the ancient Greek Old Comedy and his main representative, Aristophanes.

Even though the aforementioned definition distinguishes between dissent and protest, often the distinction between dissent actions and protest ones is not easy. In any case, when we analyse the plays of an author such as Aristophanes,<sup>5</sup> whose work was disseminated within the framework of public spaces (dramatic festivals) promoted by public authorities<sup>6</sup> and with forms of private euergetism or patronage,<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Brown 2006; Holtzhausen 2012; Demetrious 2013; Heath – Xifra 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Moloney *et alii* 2013, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Brown 2006, 210.

<sup>5</sup> Only about a quarter of Aristophanes' comedies have been preserved, but “this fraction does represent the development of a poet during a long lifetime” (Van Steen 2007, 110).

<sup>6</sup> Pickard-Cambridge 1953; Winkler – Zeitlin 1990; Csapo – Slater 1994; Thierry 2000; Ober 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Veyne 1976; Finley 1983; Plácido – Fornis 2011; Gyax 2016.

it is more accurate to talk about “dissent public relations” than “protest public relations”. From this point of view, another concept emerges to reinforce this distinction: political satire. Certainly,

Political satire focuses on gaining entertainment from politics, and differs from political protest or political assent in that it does not necessarily have an agenda, and does not necessarily seek to influence the political process. Satire, and specifically political satire, forms part of using humour in advertising and has been influential in shifting public opinion since ancient Greece.<sup>8</sup>

Political cartoons, by definition, strive to exploit the most obvious or grotesque features of a leader and put them on display, and in so doing, go directly to highlight or attack political image,<sup>9</sup> and, applying this idea to the work of Aristophanes, De Ste. Croix suggested that

...the best modern parallel for the kind of mixture of seriousness and foolery... in Aristophanes is the political cartoonist... He must always be *funny*: that is the precondition of his genre. But he can be, and very often, *serious at the same time*.<sup>10</sup>

Although the collapse of the brief and brutal oligarchy of the Thirty in 403 BC created an “atmosphere of profound disillusionment with practical attempts to establish a nondemocratic government at Athens, the elite Athenian critics of popular rule set themselves the arduous task of reinventing political dissent”,<sup>11</sup> the seed of this criticism must be found in the fifth century. In the democratic Athenian environment, this entailed finding new grounds for explaining what was wrong with “the power of the people”<sup>12</sup> and describing alternative visions of consensual and non-coercive political societies.

For this reason and within this intellectual context, Ober analyses Aristophanes’ play *Ecclesiazusae*, one of the only two surviving Aristophanic comedies that postdate the rule of the Thirty Tyrants. The next sentences –related to *Ecclesiazusae*– summarize the crucial role that Aristophanes’ comedies played in political dissent in Ancient Greece:

Aristophanes makes comic fun with Thucydides’ epistemological problem. The plot of his play poses a hypothetical question that was at once humorous and serious: Could the “social fact” that citizenship was limited to Athenian *males* be altered by the simple expedient of a decree by the democratic Assembly proclaiming that Athenian *women* were now citizens? Or was the capacity for citizenship a “brute fact” of unalterable human nature? The play explores the limits imposed on democratic egalitarianism in the real world by traditional Greek values. It confronts the audience with the arbitrary nature of those limits and the democracy’s potential capacity for revising those values –for good or ill.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Botha 2014, 264.

<sup>9</sup> Bal *et alii* 2009, 230.

<sup>10</sup> De Ste. Croix 1972, 357 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>11</sup> Ober 2001, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ober 2001, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Ober 2001, 5.

Furthermore, the question of the strategic and persuasive dimension of Old Comedy constitutes an open debate among specialists in Aristophanes. The debate about the condition of comedy as an effective channel of political ideas has had a wide development in the Aristophanic scholarship from the first decades of the twentieth century and continues to this day, generating different positions and perspectives of analysis. Those points of view have been summarized by Olson,<sup>14</sup> who addresses the political orientation of Aristophanic comedy, beginning with ancient opinions and continuing with the many differing positions in more recent times. Working from the evident paradox of a genre that claims to provide political advice while at the same time exerting no particular influence over current affairs, Olson concludes that the plays of Aristophanes contain little positive political content, but offer to their audiences the flattering fiction that the problems of the demos are not the fault of individual citizens but of their corrupt leaders.<sup>15</sup> This position, although moving away from a propagandistic vision of the works of Aristophanes,<sup>16</sup> provides a strategic and persuasive dimension as it seeks an effect on the audience.

The aim of this essay is to analyse the origins of dissent communication in Aristophanes' plays. From this angle, if dissent communication is about promoting ideas of public intellectuals, the first attempt of this research will be to analyse the consideration of Aristophanes as a public intellectual. Furthermore, it will be studied why the Old Comedy was the first great example of mass communication in which political satire was used to dissent from the social and political situation of Athens in the fifth century, a situation determined by the Peloponnesian War and its political, social and economic effects. From this standpoint, this article also constitutes a research of the intellectual history of strategic communication and public relations, since Aristophanes can be considered one of its first representatives.

## 2. Aristophanes as a public intellectual

Public relations –and, by extension, strategic communication–, as with any academic and social practice worthy of respect, should contribute to the ideas of its time; critical public relations, as with any critical theory, should criticize, with a view to change, social injustice.<sup>17</sup> For the latter to be effective, a figure with a substantial media presence –often acknowledged by the term “public intellectual”– can help significantly by expressing a justice agenda in the public sphere. So, in the field of public relations and strategic communication emerges a double-sided question on critical space: why are experts in public relations not considered public intellectuals and why are public intellectuals not considered part of public relations?

As part of his work on “Public Intellectuals”,<sup>18</sup> Etzioni offers his particular answer to the first part:

There is a group of people who have many of the attributes of PIs, who quack like PIs but do not qualify as PIs, precisely because their role is to form conceptions

<sup>14</sup> Olson 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Olson 2010.

<sup>16</sup> In terms of political propaganda.

<sup>17</sup> McKie – Xifra 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Which he abbreviates to PIs.

that support their employer, rather than to be critical. These people, sometimes referred to as “spin doctors,” do address the public on a broad array of issues, in the vernacular rather than technical terms, but are a distinct species, because they are retained by the powers that be, or volunteered to serve them as their advocates.<sup>19</sup>

To put it another way, while public relations, in common with public intellectuals, addresses the public on a wide range of issues in popularly accessible discourses and media (drama and comedy, for instance), its practitioners are excluded because they opt for supporting the powerful rather than being “critical” of them. Etzioni explicitly refers to “propagandists or PR experts such as James Carville and Mary Matalin... who, while in the advocacy role, clearly toe the line of those who employ them.”<sup>20</sup>

Strategic communication scholars have disputed Etzioni’s postulates, not only that those in strategic communication ought always to be excluded from being public intellectuals, but also that public intellectuals can sometimes be considered as doing strategic communication and public relations.<sup>21</sup> These contentions partially reject the views that strategic communication only advocates for the powerful and that PIs are a distinct species without commitments to people with power, or people seeking power. To further illustrate the issues at stake, I describe the dissent and protest communication of the Greek poet Aristophanes as an outstanding public intellectual contribution to public thinking in the ancient world. Likewise, I depict Aristophanes as one of the first public intellectuals and the first resistance communication figure.

Etzioni is not alone in identifying criticism as a central, socially desirable, and distinguishing feature of public intellectuals. For Posner too, the public intellectual has been a social asset for centuries and “exemplars include Machiavelli, Milton, Locke, Voltaire, and Montesquieu, and his [sic] ideologist is Kant, who linked philosophy to politics through the argument that the only morally defensible politics is one based on reason.”<sup>22</sup> This is a distinguished intellectual lineage but not every exemplar –notably Machiavelli and Milton– is detached from communicating in the service of the status quo, although there are conflicting views even among prominent academic studies of public intellectuals. Edward Said’s ideal public intellectual, for example, is definitely not someone serving the authority of a prince, as Machiavelli, or the Puritan parliament power, as Milton, but someone “whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), [and] to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations.”<sup>23</sup>

In the basis of these considerations, a question emerges: what kind of public intellectual was Aristophanes? At first glance, he should be counted among those intellectuals confronting power, but we can find a more accurate answer addressing the question of the function of comedy in the democratic polis. Ps.-Xenophon devotes a paragraph to it. His main point is that it is the Athenians as a

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<sup>19</sup> Etzioni 2006, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Etzioni 2006, 4.

<sup>21</sup> McKie – Xifra 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Posner 2002, 26.

<sup>23</sup> Said 1994, 27 (emphasis added).

collective (not the poet as an individual) who determine the critical content of comedy, and “they” decide who can and cannot be satirized in the theatre.<sup>24</sup>

Again, they do not allow comic poets to mock or speak ill of the people, so that they themselves are not spoken of badly. But if anyone [a comic poet] wishes to mock a private individual, they encourage it, knowing well that the person mocked is not, for the most part, a man of the people or the masses but rather a wealthy or noble or powerful man, and that only a few of the poor and common men are mocked and only because they are busybodies and are trying to get one up on the demos somehow, so that they are not aggrieved to see these people mocked either.<sup>25</sup>

Ps. Xenophon’s claim that the Athenian demos suppressed mockery of itself in comedy is refuted by Aristophanes’ surviving plays, notably by the *Knights* (424 BC), in which “Mr. Demos of Pnyx” is lampooned with great gusto.<sup>26</sup> However, the Old Oligarch’s claim that those mocked are typically rich, wellborn, or powerful men is certainly sustained by the evidence, and his assumption that it is the demos, rather than the individual playwright, who determines the tenor and targets of comedy should serve to warn modern interpreters of “the politics of Attic comedy”<sup>27</sup> not to focus exclusively on the playwright’s idiosyncratic opinions.

Similarly, French scholars<sup>28</sup> have highlighted the parallelisms between Athenian political life and theatrical performances. The comedy of Aristophanes presents the reality of the Athenian political life, reason why it has a formidable power to stage the consequences, often taken to the extreme, of acts or decisions made by the polis. Through the mechanism of fiction, situations are invented, many of them ridiculous, that explore the reality and practice of democratic government. As a staging of democracy, Aristophanic comedy interrogates democracy about the conditions of its actions, participating in the awareness of the citizens of the functioning and excesses of Athenian democracy itself, highlighting the laughable aspect of some of those actions or decisions.

On the other hand, this specificity of Aristophanes’ comedy is reinforced by the nature of the Athenian regime: direct democracy.<sup>29</sup> Athenian democracy is not representative. As members of the Assembly, all citizens are directly responsible for decisions taken about issues such as war, national policy, justice, and other public affairs. Therefore, when Aristophanes attacks Athenian politics, it is democracy who, through one of its voices, mocks itself and mocks its own decision-making processes. Under these conditions, the direct nature of democracy involves that comedy plays a role of self-criticism of the regime. That is to say, Aristophanic comedy “constitutes an instrument of self-criticism established by democracy whose political dimension results from its ontological foundation.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Ober 2001, 123.

<sup>25</sup> X. *Ath.* 2.18 (translation taken from Ober 2001, 123).

<sup>26</sup> Ober 2001, 123.

<sup>27</sup> Ober 2001, 124.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Gavray 2013; Villacèque 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Sinclair 1988.

<sup>30</sup> Gavray 2013, 496.

From this political dimension derives another, that of the relationship between the audience and the poet,<sup>31</sup> which is crucial for the effectiveness of the dissent communication. Thus, the more consistent with the interests of the audience the theatrical discourse is, the higher the degree of effectiveness of activism. But, in addition,

Aristophanes had to seek approval and public funds to produce each of his plays from the democratically appointed archon, the magistrate (chosen by lot) responsible for selecting dramas for production. If Aristophanes' plays were generically unrecognizable as comedies, those plays would not be produced by the polis, and there was no "off Broadway" for the Attic dramatist.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, the Greek theatre of the fifth century was composed by festive genres, represented only twice a year, during two great Dionysian festivals: the Lenaia (in January) and the Dionysia –the City Dionysia in March (when Aristophanes' plays were performed), and the Country Dionysia in December. Therefore, besides entertainment, they are part of the public religious festivals, whose organization and funding was responsibility of the government of the polis.<sup>33</sup> For this reason, "Athenian theatre was political, in the sense that it was organized by and for the polis."<sup>34</sup> In other words, Aristophanes was a public intellectual who worked for the political system as well. Even so, the critical and dissent messages of his plays are unquestionable.

Thus, to sum up the intellectual role of Aristophanes, his work evidences the complexity of the Athenian political system and the crucial role of public communication and reputation management in the classical Athenian public sphere. In consequence, it is also the proof of the existence of a public sphere in ancient Greece and, by extension, the proof that we can situate the origins of today's strategic communication and, in particular, public relations in Antiquity.

From this standpoint, Lamme and Russell expanded by "re-voicing" pre-1900 public relations not simply as antecedents to legitimate the history of public relations, but also as an amendment to "misunderstandings... which have misinformed public relations theory for more than 20 years."<sup>35</sup> Other extensions of the field's historical boundaries feature religious rehabilitations or resurrections such as the ninth century religious figure of St. Swithun,<sup>36</sup> St. Paul,<sup>37</sup> or twelfth century St. Hildegard of Bingen.<sup>38</sup> Secular shifts include imaginative claim for the existence of Bauhaus public relations,<sup>39</sup> and account of public relations in suffrage movements.<sup>40</sup> Holtzhausen illuminated South African public relations by incorporating the actions of Boer campaigner and public intellectual Emily Hobhouse into the field<sup>41</sup> at the same time as the growing inclusion of activists in general as a vital category of

<sup>31</sup> Ober 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Ober 2001, 124-125.

<sup>33</sup> Rodríguez Adrados 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Thiery 2000, 47.

<sup>35</sup> Lamme – Russell 2010, 282.

<sup>36</sup> Watson 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Brown 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Spaulding – Dodd 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Rossler 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Martinelli 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Holtzhausen 2012.

public relations.<sup>42</sup> However, the only research on the emergence of public relations in Antiquity is the one about the strategic communication and propaganda in the ancient Near East.<sup>43</sup>

Specifically “speaking up” for activists, Demetrious further interrogates and challenges the right of the term “public relations” to represent a unified field, “in part because it is ideologically invested to include some sectors and exclude others, in particular, activism”,<sup>44</sup> and in part because it “can also work to society’s detriment by stifling important social change.”<sup>45</sup> She argues for replacing public relations by another, more inclusive, grouping under the name “public communication.”<sup>46</sup> This proposal fits very well, as we will see, the case of Aristophanes and Old Comedy.

The theory of dissent and protest communication arose within the framework of the critical public relations school of thought.<sup>47</sup> This group of scholars is influenced by critical thinking and has found in the political philosopher Antonio Gramsci one of his most important intellectual fertilizers.<sup>48</sup> Gramsci dedicated a great part of his work to the role of intellectuals and he differentiated between traditional and organic intellectuals.<sup>49</sup> “The traditional intellectuals put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the social group.”<sup>50</sup> Alternatively, the organic intellectuals “were deemed to have a superior awareness of their class’ hegemonic potential, which was formulated by Gramsci as a relationship of ‘philosophy’ to ‘common sense’.”<sup>51</sup> Aristophanes can be considered one of the first –but not the first–<sup>52</sup> organic intellectuals,<sup>53</sup> who, in organizing his counter-discourse, engaged systematically in a project of passive revolution,<sup>54</sup> aiming at the rise of political awareness and making very slow movements towards what was prohibited. These steps entail a constant historical borrowing of symbols, myths and ideas from the past and their application to the present and the future, and a political satire which displaces them in a passive revolution.<sup>55</sup>

### 3. Historical context: An overview

Aristophanes was active roughly between 427 and 386; eleven plays survive intact, along with considerable fragments and titles of another thirty-two lost plays.<sup>56</sup> This historical period is often associated with the splendour of Athens through the

<sup>42</sup> Coombs – Holladay 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Xifra – Heath 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Demetrious 2013, 129.

<sup>45</sup> Demetrious 2013, 129.

<sup>46</sup> Demetrious 2013, 129.

<sup>47</sup> See L’Etang *et alii* 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Heath – Xifra 2016.

<sup>49</sup> Gramsci 1998.

<sup>50</sup> Bellamy 1987, 135.

<sup>51</sup> Martin 1998, 99.

<sup>52</sup> Xifra – Heath 2015.

<sup>53</sup> From a Gramscian perspective, Henderson (1990) considered that Old Comedy attempts to influence the fundamental issues of polis and considers comic poets as organic intellectuals, which often are an unofficial way of reviewing their behavior through comedy.

<sup>54</sup> Gramsci 1998.

<sup>55</sup> Masha 2008.

<sup>56</sup> Dover (1968) offered a chronological list of Aristophanes’ plays and prizes.



association of the leadership of Pericles to the fifth century. Thus, we often hear about the “century of Pericles”,<sup>57</sup> as if his rule had coincided with that century. This period was more complex. Indeed, from the political and social point of view, it is important to highlight two moments of crucial importance for the development of a current critical with the rulers: The Peloponnesian War and the government of the Thirty Tyrants.

With regard to *Ecclesiazusae*, this play was written in and about the postwar world, a world still struggling to recover from the twenty seven-year Peloponnesian War, the brief, brutal reign of the Thirty Tyrants, and the civil war that had restored full democracy.<sup>58</sup> The *stasis* –a domestic conflict which emerged without any declaration of war–<sup>59</sup> had ended with a decree of amnesty for those who had collaborated with the Thirty, but a good deal of bitterness remained on all sides. Militarily, Athens was on the way to recovery, and, with the help of Persian subsidies, the city was girding for renewed hostilities with Sparta. Yet in demographic and economic terms, the city would still need many decades to recover completely.<sup>60</sup> Indeed:

The restored democracy was based on the same central principles as the fifth century government, but there had been some noteworthy institutional changes. Pay for attending the Assembly had recently been introduced. And a complicated series of legal reforms, initiated in the last years of the war, had recently been completed. The legal reform codified parts of Athenian law and created a new procedure for the enactment of *nomoi*, which would now be established by boards of *nomothetai*, selected by lot from the ranks of the jurors. The Assembly would continue to pass decrees...The exact distinction between *nomoi* and *psephismata*, and the spheres of competence of boards of *nomothetai* and the Assembly, remain subjects of debate among modern scholars. In the late 390s, these distinctions were undoubtedly a matter of considerable confusion among the Athenian citizen-masses.<sup>61</sup>

This confusion helped to fuel criticism among public intellectuals. Aristophanes was one of them, who dealt with public concerns of the Athenian society. From this point of view, *Ecclesiazusae* emerges as a key example. This play brings to light problems which may not be as familiar to the modern reader, or as immediately recognizable as global concerns, as the issues of “war or peace” or “why Cleon (for example) is a corrupt politician and a fool.”<sup>62</sup> However, the problems highlighted in this comedy represented the burning issues of the day. They include the hope of regaining a sense of sociopolitical consensus among a citizenry that had been polarized along class lines by the bloody reign of the Thirty, the unusual demographic fact that there were so many more Athenian women than men alive in the 390s as a result of extremely high casualties in the naval campaigns of 410-404, and “the confusion arising from a complex series of legal reforms that had recently redefined the relationship between law and legislative Assembly decree.”<sup>63</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Flacelière 1991; Maffre 1994; Daniel 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Ober 2001.

<sup>59</sup> Loraux 2001.

<sup>60</sup> E.g. Romilly 1975; Andrewes 1992; Plácido 1997.

<sup>61</sup> Ober 2001, 128.

<sup>62</sup> Ober 2001, 128.

<sup>63</sup> Ober 2001, 128.

The fourth century represented a time of serious crisis in the sense of experiencing profound transformations, when the elements that sustained the democratic city tended to be eliminated to give birth to the Hellenistic kingdoms.<sup>64</sup> This fact prompted the emergence of intellectual currents in which criticism played an important role and whose main object was the Peloponnesian War. For the main representatives of the intellectual and philosophical currents of the time it was necessary to look for the causes of the transformation and to figure out alternative ways considering other political forms very different from the city-state. This trend has in Aristophanes one of its main, but not its sole, intellectual figures, since Plácido argued with regards to Plato that “the Peloponnesian war is so important that his Socratic dialogues are mostly located in that context.”<sup>65</sup>

One of the circumstances that influenced Aristophanes and must be taken into account in the Peloponnesian conflict was the peace treaty known as the Peace of Nicias. First of all, the situation at the end of 421 BC among the different contenders determined that “any event could have direct consequences for the future of peace.”<sup>66</sup> Secondly, although the treaty compelled the Peloponnesian League, it did not prevent its members from continuing hostilities on their own.<sup>67</sup> This is crucial to understand the complexities of the conflict in terms of participants and their different level of prominence. Indeed, “the entire Greek world as well as many of the cultures that in previous centuries had come in contact with it”<sup>68</sup> got involved in the Peloponnesian War, directly or indirectly.

However, in the conflict in which the Peace of Nicias is situated, a relevant and unusual agent emerges: the intellectual, and particularly Aristophanes. Certainly, Nicias was the architect of this treaty that was signed a few days after the presentation of, precisely, Aristophanes’ *Peace*, in which there is no reference to the protagonist of the treaty.<sup>69</sup> The most plausible hypothesis for this surprising omission is that satirical references to Nicias could have jeopardized the peace, especially since Aristophanes was an advocate of it.<sup>70</sup> We find ourselves, then, with a direct consequence on the usual register of a comedian, whose signs of identity include precisely satire. If we add the leadership in public opinion –what is called *influencer* nowadays– of Aristophanes, we must bear in mind that it was influenced by this dramatic silence that otherwise would have surely affected the reputation of Nicias; and reputation was also a resource for power during the Peloponnesian War, since it is, in the words of Bourdieu, a “symbolic capital.”<sup>71</sup> Therefore, the influence of intellectuals when it comes to build or destroy a reputation is also an expression of uncontrolled resources of power. In present day’s words, at that time there were no press agents or public relations managers, hired nowadays by leaders of opinion to favour with their writings or interventions a certain organization, brand or public figure. There were no structures to control the power to create a certain image. At that time, symbolic capital could not be directly controlled, but it could be influenced.

<sup>64</sup> Plácido 1997.

<sup>65</sup> Plácido 1997, 278. All translations from non-English texts are my own.

<sup>66</sup> Fornis 1995, 58.

<sup>67</sup> De Ste. Croix 1972.

<sup>68</sup> Domínguez – Pascual 2007, 205.

<sup>69</sup> Rodríguez Alfageme 2011.

<sup>70</sup> Gerlo 1954; Rodríguez Alfageme 2011.

<sup>71</sup> Bourdieu 2000.

One of the figures that shows the importance of building or destroying reputation is the sycophant. This word has its origins in the legal system of ancient Athens. Having no police force and only a limited number of officially appointed public prosecutors, most legal cases were brought by private litigants. Nevertheless, by the fifth century, this practice had led to abuse by litigants who brought unjustified prosecutions, who were called sycophants.<sup>72</sup> Sycophants are better illustrated through the satires of Aristophanes. In *Acharnians*, a Megarian trying to sell his daughters is confronted by a sycophant who accuses him of illegally attempting to sell foreign goods, and a Boeotian is shown purchasing a sycophant as a typical Athenian product that he cannot obtain at home. A sycophant appears as a character in *Birds*, and one of his lost plays had an attack against a sycophant as its main plot. In *Ploutos*, the character, Sycophant, defends his role as a necessity in supporting the laws and preventing wrongdoing.<sup>73</sup>

As mentioned above, “symbolic capital” is an expression of Pierre Bourdieu to indicate the different linguistic manifestations of social recognition (such as reputation) in which public opinion and opinion leaders (such as Aristophanes) play a key role in different scenes and moments (such as the Peloponnesian War) in which they participate as well. Thus, given the war context in which the Aristophanic work was framed, and the fact that the demand for peace is one of the issues that turn dissent and protest into a historical *longue durée* issue, Aristophanes was a pioneer of pacifism. Although Casari wonders about the reliability of the treatment of this issue in the context of a comedy,<sup>74</sup> a key strategic element underlies the works of Aristophanes to grant them all the credit as examples of dissent communication.

However, it must be made clear that talking about pacifism in Aristophanes “is anachronistic.”<sup>75</sup> Not only because the term “pacifism” was coined in the twentieth century, but because it is not an intentionally idealistic pacifism. It is a social, political, and above all, economic need. Indeed, it is a demand to stop a war that was ruining the people and, above all, the elites who contributed economically without receiving anything in return.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, from this perspective, the consequences of the Peloponnesian War affected the prestige of these elites as well since, in a society lacking a mass communication structure like ours, reputation was built mainly through economic patronage.<sup>77</sup>

#### **4. Reputation building and public communication in classical Athens: From the agora to the theatre**

In the field of strategic communication, the theoretical building of knowledge about public relations has pivoted on some key and interconnected concepts such as reputation and public opinion. In fact, public relations is a modern counterpart of reputation management –which includes generating favourable opinion environments– since the

<sup>72</sup> MacDowell 1986.

<sup>73</sup> *Ar. Ach.* 817-828; *Pl.* 914-919.

<sup>74</sup> Casari 2002.

<sup>75</sup> Durvy 2002, 82.

<sup>76</sup> Plácido 1997; Ajavon 2005.

<sup>77</sup> Gyax 2016.

emergence of capitalism.<sup>78</sup> Public relations represents, therefore, the adaptation to a new economic context of a *longue durée* phenomenon such as the individual concern for public image and reputation.<sup>79</sup>

In terms of modern corporate communication, reputation can be defined as the relationship established between an organization and the public inside and outside the company.<sup>80</sup> From this standpoint, corporate reputation is “a collective representation (...). It gages a firm’s relative standing both internally with employees and externally with its stakeholders.”<sup>81</sup> From a more psychological perspective, corporate reputation refers to “a cognitive representation of a company’s actions and results that crystallizes the firm’s ability to deliver valued outcomes to its stakeholders.”<sup>82</sup> Therefore, reputation is “an intangible yet valuable asset for a company, indicating positive outcomes from the firm’s past interactions with stakeholders”.<sup>83</sup> Good corporate reputation fosters indirect yet substantial benefits to a company, creating favourable public opinion and a business-friendly environment.<sup>84</sup> Before the Industrial Revolution, reputation was a matter of public individuals, such as political leaders and public intellectuals.<sup>85</sup>

The concern for reputation present in Athenian society and the existence of strategic communication processes similar to those employed by modern public relations are, without falling into anachronisms, the necessary conditions to include Aristophanes in the list of figures of dissent public relations. From an intellectual perspective, the key word is *doxa*. The first etymological sense of *doxa* in Plato is “appearance”, that is, the way in which someone or something appears before the eyes of third parties.<sup>86</sup> Consequently, from this etymological origin different literary meanings derive: reputation, glory, vainglory, prestige, renown, dignity and illusion. However, these are objective meanings. In contrast, the subjective meaning of *doxa* is opinion, as an individual opinion, public opinion, doctrine, notion, thought, idea, suggestion, belief, conviction, principles, foresight, decision, way of seeing, convention and judgment. Similarly, Liddell & Scott *A Greek-English Lexicon* offers a critical approach to *doxa* identifying different meanings: expectation, notion, opinion, judgment (whether well-grounded or not), mere opinion, conjecture, imagination, supposition (wrong); and also, the opinion and estimation of others, reputation (in special good reputation), honour, glory and popular reputation or esteem.

Accordingly, the polysemy of *doxa* requires the correct meaning for each case, not an easy task if we add the fact that we must contextualize the use of the word in each moment and appreciate the nuances for a correct translation. Consequently, it is not the same to talk about an “appearance of beauty” as a “reputation of beauty.”<sup>87</sup> Undeniably, reputation can be based on appearance or reality, while appearance is opposed to reality, something that not always happens with reputation.<sup>88</sup> The same goes for terms of admiration. Thus, we no longer speak of the glory of scientists

<sup>78</sup> Xifra 2017.

<sup>79</sup> Xifra – Heath 2015.

<sup>80</sup> Shim – Yang 2016, 69.

<sup>81</sup> Fombrun – Riel 1997, 10.

<sup>82</sup> Fombrun *et alii* 2000, 87.

<sup>83</sup> Shim – Yang 2016, 69.

<sup>84</sup> Fombrun *et alii* 2000.

<sup>85</sup> Xifra – Heath 2015.

<sup>86</sup> Lafrance 2015.

<sup>87</sup> *Smp.* 218e-219a.

<sup>88</sup> Lafrance 2005.

nowadays, but of their social prestige or reputation. Glory, as it cannot be otherwise, is reserved for heroes or for those who prevail in combat or in a competition.

From a more practical approach, the personal information that circulated in classical Greece about citizens and their private behaviour had a direct impact on legal and political affairs, “because gossip played a major part in conditioning popular opinion.”<sup>89</sup> However, the best way to show the importance of reputation is to consider its loss as a social or criminal punishment. From this angle, the institution of ostracism must be singled out as a situation that deprives a well-known individual from the possibility to be present as a political agent. Ostracism temporarily suppresses the identity of an individual and any possibility of being an agent in a public communication process, something that affected his prestige and reputation. Without physical presence no one is able to shape an impression or an opinion of his personality and identity, and any prior impressions and opinions fade as they become memory.<sup>90</sup>

From an intellectual perspective, the importance of reputation as a feature for Greek citizenship can be found in Plato’s work,<sup>91</sup> but the *Laws* deserves special attention. Certainly, even a superficial reading of the *Laws* reveals a striking number of penalties related with the loss of reputation, such as dishonour, shame and even degradation.<sup>92</sup> In fact, notions of honour and dishonour were among the foundational values of Plato’s ideal city-state, Magnesia. A recurrent form of losing honour (*timê*) is *atimia*, which Plato surprisingly did not include among the severe punishments in his penal code. *Atimia* has been translated as “deprivation of civic rights”, “degradation”, or “dishonour”. While *atimia* in the traditional sense may not be part of Plato’s penal code, yet the term and its cognates recur throughout the *Laws*. “They are found in conjunction with loss of reputation, dishonour and disgrace, and, in many instances, with the removal of a specific right or privilege.”<sup>93</sup> Anyway, whatever the meaning of *atimia*, one thing is certain: even a cursory reading of the *Laws* reveals that the institutionalized forms of dishonour (including *atimia*) are more than mere penalties. Like their opposites –honour, reputation or prestige–, they play an important role in regulating, articulating and sustaining the society of Plato’s ideal city.

The case of Magnesia reveals the importance of reputation not only in structuring the ideal city, but also as a structural element of citizen status. But there is no reputation without opinion, and there is no opinion without communication. That is, in ancient Athens –as today– reputation management implied the existence of a public opinion environment articulated through public communication processes and techniques. They used the (“mass”) media of this age in a society formed by a total resident population over 250,000 inhabitants (over 300,000 if we add non-residents).<sup>94</sup> The diversity of public communication in ancient Athens had in this fact a crucial feature, because “the more restricted the community area, the higher the speed of circulation of the news, even if this is entrusted exclusively to the communication mouth to mouth.”<sup>95</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Lewis 1996, 10.

<sup>90</sup> Conversely, some historians, such as Humbert (1991), insist that the person sentenced to ostracism did not lose their prestige, which from the perspective of reputation management is paradoxical.

<sup>91</sup> Lafrance 2005.

<sup>92</sup> See Hunter 2011.

<sup>93</sup> Hunter 2011, 134.

<sup>94</sup> Ober 2015.

<sup>95</sup> Longo 1981, 14.

Thus, the role of oral communication as public communication was crucial. For this reason, rumours and fake messages has been considered as a crucial source of renown.<sup>96</sup> Gossip was essentially information of a private nature, but it needed to be brought into a public setting to be effective.<sup>97</sup> In fact, from an internal and external (communication between city-states) perspective, “the dissemination of news was one of the key roles of a polis”<sup>98</sup> and this implied true news and fake news.

Leaving the role of gossip aside, whose importance in the structuring of the Athenian “mass” communication is, in my opinion, excessive, the theatre was one of the crucial contexts for public communication. Indeed, the Greeks had a very different conception of it: theatre was not a marginal activity, and performances were a high sphere of communication. They were an essential part of the life of the city. Along with the agora, the temples, and the gymnasium, dramatic public festivals were events in which public communication really took place in Athens.<sup>99</sup>

As already mentioned, the Old Comedy was a festive genre. Therefore, Aristophanes and his audience knew that the plays belonged to the fictional dimension of comedy, in which fantasy dominated, but where at the same time issues were approached seriously.<sup>100</sup> The best proof are the central topics of comedy: critical orientation, pacifism, egalitarian reformism, or the search for personal and collective happiness. These topics are not exclusive to comedy but also concern philosophers so, from this standpoint, Aristophanes is also part of the public intellectuals. For instance, the claims for an equal distribution of wealth in *Ecclesiazusae* and *Ploutos* had many connections with similar formulations by Plato and other thinkers. Everything in Aristophanes’ plays is serious and everything is, at the same time, festive, a permanent feature of his work.<sup>101</sup>

Nonetheless, if the plays’ “run” was limited, the audience was very large, perhaps as many as 17,000 people.<sup>102</sup> Most (though not necessarily all) of those in the audience were Athenian citizens, and all classes and social statuses of citizens were likely to be represented: rich and poor, urban aristocrats and yeoman farmers, educated and illiterate. It is quite possible that at least some Athenian women attended, as did some foreigners (at the City Dionysia).

For the Athenians, the theatre was a public space –the physical layout of the theatre was closely analogous to that of the ordinary Assembly place on the Pnyx; indeed, Assembly meetings were sometimes held in the theatre itself.<sup>103</sup>

In terms of reputation and communication management, political comedy, ridiculing political figures, also illustrates popular judgment of personality as a factor that ought to affect public standing.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, the status of Athenian comedy as an established public genre imposed certain formal constraints on the individual

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<sup>96</sup> Larran 2011.

<sup>97</sup> Hunter 1990; 1994.

<sup>98</sup> Lewis 1996, 5.

<sup>99</sup> Coulet 1996.

<sup>100</sup> Rodríguez Adrados 2016.

<sup>101</sup> Rodríguez Adrados 2016, 17.

<sup>102</sup> Ober 2001, 122.

<sup>103</sup> Ober 2001, 122.

<sup>104</sup> Lewis 1996.

poet.<sup>105</sup> The consumers of comedy (the Athenian audience) expected certain songs, dances, and choral interludes, a certain set of poetic meters to be observed, and so on.<sup>106</sup> A brilliant comic poet, such as Aristophanes, pushed the boundaries of the formal restraints of the genre. For this reason, he articulated a dissent communication discourse, maybe for the first time in Western history, establishing “the particularly theatrical model of engaging with public issues that continues to this day”,<sup>107</sup> using specific dramatic and rhetorical resources within a satirical background.

## 5. Staging and comic resources of Old Comedy as dissent communication discourse

The activist dimension of Aristophanes’ plays derives not only from his status as a public intellectual, but also from the content of his work, his concern for Athenian public affairs, and his fierce criticism against those who held political power and especially against Cleon. However, my methodological purpose is not to run an analysis of the content of the plays of Aristophanes (a task that would be limited to a purely exploratory study), but to analyse how this political and social criticism used staging and rhetorical resources to make Aristophanic discourse really effective and influencing.

The first one is related to an important rhetorical resource, metaphor. Certainly, the omnipresence of animals in his work is perhaps the feature of Aristophanes’ plays that most strikes his readers and audience. This, however, possesses an essential dramatic function: to participate in the construction of the poetic and comic universe, that is, Aristophanes’ dissident universe; they often represent the key of the play. Indeed, these creatures are closely linked to the depiction of the characters, the development of the topics of each comedy and the development of the show in a scene carried out by men dressed in zoomorphic transvestism.<sup>108</sup> There is not, in fact, a single aspect of the work of Aristophanes that cannot be approached through the study of his bestiary. His political criticism is not alien, then, to this analysis, as happened later with other eminent writers, such as La Fontaine.<sup>109</sup>

The representation of animals is widely used by Aristophanes to denounce the potential or actual corruption of the customs and institutions of Athenian democracy; this link between bestiary and political satire is confirmed by the importance of the role played by animals in Aristophanic political comedies. In *Knights*, the animals consumed by the sausage-seller<sup>110</sup> represent the demagogic measures and other claptraps that the popular leader gets the people to buy,<sup>111</sup> while Cleon’s greed and felony are symbolized by the *opsophagia* of Paphlagonia, that is, by his irrepressible and compulsive taste for the most expensive fishes.<sup>112</sup> From *Knights* to *Peace*,

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<sup>105</sup> Ober 2001.

<sup>106</sup> Parker 1996.

<sup>107</sup> Balme 2014, 12.

<sup>108</sup> Morana-Corbel 2003.

<sup>109</sup> Fumaroli 1997.

<sup>110</sup> Ar. *Eq.* 624-682, 1007-1010, 1166-1223.

<sup>111</sup> Morana-Corbel 2003.

<sup>112</sup> Ar. *Eq.* 283, 354, 361, 927-940.

symbolic animal images abound to characterize the Athenian people,<sup>113</sup> but also the demagogue, linked to the image of the dog cleverly used by Aristophanes to develop endless satirical shades and whose political meaning he contributes to establish.<sup>114</sup>

The animal metaphor is sometimes positive, but more often it denounces the faults of the human being and condemns the human beast. Aristophanes then preserves the negative connotations associated with the animal, an unnatural animal shaped as a human being, which shows that assimilation is a two-way process: from human being to animal, but also, and fundamentally, from animal to human being. It is more particularly in the political field that the notion of animality merges with that of degraded humanity. As a public intellectual, Aristophanes, endorses in *Clouds* and *Birds* the notion that defines human history as progress from the savage state of the origins to the civilization and the order of the polis. Certainly, in the public discussion about the antagonistic notions of *physis* and *nomos* that animates Athenian intellectual circles by the end of the fifth century, our poet takes a stand against the proponents of the rule of nature who, presenting animals as a model of behaviour for men, pose a threat to society and family.<sup>115</sup> The presence of savagery in the civilized human being, the regression of the political animal to the simple animal, which strikes or threatens to strike Athens in the exercise of its imperial power, in its social relations, in its perverted institutions, are boldly condemned by Aristophanes in a pristine manifestation of dissent communication.

The second dramatic resource that reinforces the activist dimension of Aristophanic comedy is the parabasis, which has no parallel in any other form of theatre, including tragedy.<sup>116</sup> In this kind of intermission in the middle of the performance, all of the actors leave the stage and the chorus is left to address the audience directly. “The parabasis is used by the author to enter into a personal debate with his enemies and to expose his points of view.”<sup>117</sup> For instance:

And I, although so excellent a poet, do not give myself airs, nor do I seek to deceive you by twice and thrice bringing forward the same pieces; but I am always clever at introducing new fashions, not at all resembling each other, and all of them clever; who struck Cleon in the belly when at the height of his power, and could not bear to attack him afterward when he was down. But these scribblers, when once Hyperbolus has given them a handle, keep ever trampling on this wretched man and his mother. Eupolis, indeed, first of all craftily introduced his Maricas, having basely, base fellow, spoiled by altering my play of the Knights, having added to it, for the sake of the cordax, a drunken old woman, whom Phrynichus long ago poetized, whom the whale was for devouring. Then again Hermippus made verses on Hyperbolus; and now all others press hard upon Hyperbolus, imitating my simile of the eels.<sup>118</sup>

In addition to letting us know that Aristophanes was bald, this passage from the parabasis of the *Clouds* provides a (patently self-serving) assessment of comedy’s

<sup>113</sup> Ar. *Nu.* 1201-1203; *V.* 31-36; *Ec.* 81.

<sup>114</sup> Ar. *Eq.* 415-416, 1017-1034, 1067-1068; *V.* 891-1008, 1031-1032; *Pax* 313.

<sup>115</sup> Morana-Corbel 2003.

<sup>116</sup> Thiery 1999.

<sup>117</sup> Gil 1996, 28.

<sup>118</sup> Ar. *Nu.* 545-559 (trans. William James Hickie, London, 1853).



escalating engagement with political issues and political targets, detailing as it does Aristophanes' virtual discovery of demagogue-comedy with his sustained attack on Cleon as the Paphlagonian in *Knights*, "which in turn served as a model for a series of later explorations of this mode of comic plot in other poets' assaults on Hyperbolus."<sup>119</sup>

The parabasis has two functions.<sup>120</sup> First of all, it serves to identify Aristophanes with his hero. Indeed, what Aristophanes says of himself in the parabasis coincides with what happens to his hero in the play, and both are seen to be involved in the same sort of problems and engaged in the same sort of attempts to solve them. This concurrence underlines the (dissent) message. For instance, in *Acharnians*, after the chorus has been persuaded by the hero's point of view, they too can be included in this identification. "These problems facing poet, hero and chorus are presented as causing distress not only to them in the play, but also to Athens generally and to Greece as a whole."<sup>121</sup> Then, the second function is to summarize and emphasize the particular faults that have been exposed in the first half of the play. Accordingly, the parabasis acts as a focus or as "a prism through which the play's chief themes are passed: it highlights the areas in which the hero (and so, by implication, the poet) brings benefits to the city."<sup>122</sup>

From this standpoint, the parabasis is a dramatic mechanism that allows the direct communication of the poet with the audience; that is, it breaks the narrative and intensifies the discourse to denounce and criticize situations and figures from the political, social and economic context. In other words, Aristophanes uses the stage for *parrhêsia*. In both his plays and his life, "Aristophanes demonstrated what could and couldn't be said in Athenian stage."<sup>123</sup> In *Acharnians*, the main character Dicaeopolis turns to the chorus and the assembled audience to assert his right of *isêgoria* and *parrhêsia*:

Do not be aggrieved with me, gentlemen spectators, if, though a beggar, I am ready to address the Athenians about the city while making comedy. For even comedy knows about what's right; and what I say will be shocking, but right.<sup>124</sup>

His exhortation encapsulates several of the main features of *parrhêsia*: "the right of even lowly citizens to speak before the citizenry, the act of courage to utter such things, and the epistemological status of what is said, its fundamental truthfulness."<sup>125</sup> The idea of truth has been analysed as crucial to differentiate public relations from propaganda,<sup>126</sup> and the example of Aristophanes helps –together with the rest of arguments exposed in this paper– to situate his work in the field of public relations instead of in the field of propaganda. In addition, as Gavray suggests with regards to Aristophanic *isêgoria*, the direct democracy depicted by Aristophanes is based on the need of a speech (i.e., a communication action) that "restores the deliberation and

<sup>119</sup> Biles 2014, 53.

<sup>120</sup> Bowie 1982.

<sup>121</sup> Bowie 1982, 29.

<sup>122</sup> Bowie 1982, 29.

<sup>123</sup> Balme 2014, 34.

<sup>124</sup> Ar. *Ach.* 497-502 (trans. Jeffrey Henderson, Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>125</sup> Balme 2014, 34.

<sup>126</sup> E.g. Girona – Xifra 2010; Fisher 2016.

interrogates the true collective interest, disguised by individual aspirations.”<sup>127</sup> Deliberation in public sphere lays in the core of the practice of public relations.<sup>128</sup> In ancient Greece, this idea of truth had to be linked with freedom of speech; that is, the freedom to speak in public, in the discussion that preceded any collective decision, not the freedom to have unpopular or intolerable ideas or to discuss them among friends and pupils.<sup>129</sup> As a result, “the most effective way to eliminate undesirable ideas –and undesirable individuals, political opponents– was by exile or capital punishment. That prevented oral communication, and nothing else mattered significantly.”<sup>130</sup> So, without communication (freedom of speech) there was no reputation.

Furthermore, the nature of the chorus is a fundamental factor of Aristophanes’ use of an audience that he will represent more or less faithfully.<sup>131</sup> There were many interactions with the audience in comedies, but Aristophanes gave them a role, as a fourth actor or a second chorus. This fact is crucial to understand the relational dimension of the staging of Aristophanes comedies and to stress the identification of the audience with the dissent proposals of the poet as a key element for the success of the public criticism and for the effectiveness of the goals of dissent communication.

From a public relations perspective, Aristophanes also used the parabasis as a technique to protect and build his own reputation.<sup>132</sup> We have already seen in *Clouds* the parabasis employed to indicate that he was bald, but the use of the parabasis is more focused on building a public image or restoring his reputation, in the sense of strengthening his activism. Thus, the message of dissent is more legitimate. For example, in *Acharnians*, the coryphaeus takes the scene to defend Aristophanes against slander and to highlight his merits:

Never since our poet presented Comedies, has he praised himself upon the stage; but, having been slandered by his enemies amongst the volatile Athenians, accused of scoffing at his country and of insulting the people, to-day he wishes to reply and regain for himself the inconstant Athenians. He maintains that he has done much that is good for you; if you no longer allow yourselves to be too much hoodwinked by strangers or seduced by flattery, if in politics you are no longer the ninnies you once were, it is thanks to him.<sup>133</sup>

It is important to remember that the plays were represented in a contest. In effect, there were other plays and the best one was voted and awarded with the prize.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, the author’s reputation matters here as well.

On the other hand, Gavray suggests that Aristophanes was accused of ridiculing the city and outraging the people, and wonders: “What does this criticism mean?”<sup>135</sup> The poet was allegedly persecuted for exercising one of the functions of his art: staging the city in a comedy and dealing with subjects related to the polis and the

<sup>127</sup> Gavray 2013, 510.

<sup>128</sup> Van Ruler 2015.

<sup>129</sup> Lanza 1979 (cited by Finley 1983).

<sup>130</sup> Finley 1983, 29.

<sup>131</sup> Thiery 1986.

<sup>132</sup> See Hubbard 1991.

<sup>133</sup> *Ar. Ach.* 628-635.

<sup>134</sup> See Pickard-Cambridge 1953.

<sup>135</sup> Gavray 2013, 497.

demos; in other words, political subjects. Fictitious or real, these accusations led Aristophanes to justify the role he attributed to comedy: He served his fellow citizens in many ways. Firstly, he made them less credulous, by sensitizing them to the rhetoric of flattery by which they allowed themselves to be deceived, dissecting before them the vocabulary of praise and the mechanisms of seduction.

Additionally, he presented himself as an instructor concerned with what was fair, unlike the demagogues who subordinated what was right to another goal: to satisfy the pleasure of the public. True political activity, the one coveted by Aristophanes in his comedies, therefore appears to be entirely based on justice. As a partner in politics, justice means in these circumstances to show how things really are, and not what the public would like to see and hear.

The just things that Aristophanes claims to represent show those that concern the collective interest, the well-being of the city as a totality of the citizens untied of their individuality, and not the individual pleasure of each of them... satisfied by the mouths of demagogues.<sup>136</sup>

This idea of justice is closer to the notion of *parrhêsia*, and definitely legitimates the activist dimension of Aristophanes and his leading role as dissent communication pioneer.

## 6. Conclusions

Humour and laughter entail a transgression of symbolism.<sup>137</sup> A meaningful satirical discourse cannot be other than the one that mocks the existing symbolic order and degrades the dominant or ascendant hegemonic system. Making fun of oneself or of a discourse becomes successful when it deals with the elements that constitute its symbolic existence and make it meaningful at the centre of popular attention.<sup>138</sup> In addition, “public relations and symbolic politics are both a meaning-construction process through the use of symbols, interactions and interpretations.”<sup>139</sup> Hegemonic discourse organizes its political space through the use of its symbols and myths and manages to set out what is expected, legitimate and meaningful. Political satire picks up every little detail of those expectations and turns them upside-down, making them unexpected and showing the other side of their symbolic existence. This process can easily be assessed as a revolutionary project or as an expression of resistance, and, in the field of strategic communication, as a manifestation of public relations activism through dissent and protest communication actions.

Furthermore, the research of public relations styles suggests an interplay between continuity and change, as well as convergences of strategies and techniques.<sup>140</sup> The divorce between the scholarship and pedagogy of public relations on one side and history on the other is sometimes claimed to have legitimized and professionalized the practice.

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<sup>136</sup> Gavray 2013, 498.

<sup>137</sup> Masha 2008.

<sup>138</sup> Purdie 1993.

<sup>139</sup> Zhang 2006, 27.

<sup>140</sup> Brown 2006.

But in our own era, when the battle for public opinion is orchestrated as theater and spectacle, it is no longer useful to insist that everything we disapprove must be excluded from our conception of public relations. Perhaps particularly in wartime, it is crucial to reexamine public relations without blinking. As we continue to hear discussions in the popular media about the ways public relations explains the world, it is vital to question how public relations explains itself. What has been lacking in many of the scholarly explanations has been a passionate engagement with culture and aesthetics. Whatever the reasons, it is a wasteful neglect, given their profound and continuing influence throughout history.<sup>141</sup>

Aristophanes' comedies constitute an excellent historical example of this declaration. As De Ste. Croix argued,<sup>142</sup> it has been asserted by leading academic authorities on Aristophanes<sup>143</sup> that the essential spirit of Old Comedy is that of the ordinary man in some stronger or better way: gods, politicians, generals, artists, and intellectuals; and that Aristophanes' treatment of politicians "does no differ significantly from the way in which 'we' satirise 'them' nowadays."<sup>144</sup> Nonetheless, the question whether Aristophanes intentionally expressed his political opinions in his plays is not so easy to answer to everyone's approval.<sup>145</sup> However, thanks to the arguments in this paper, I agree with a leading scholar as De Ste. Croix who did not have the slightest doubt that Aristophanes indeed expressed his own political opinions, "and that he used many of his plays, even while they... remained primarily comedies, as vehicle for the expression of serious political views"<sup>146</sup> about the Athenian democracy, its institutions and its leading figures, and about the Peloponnesian War.

Although the historiography of classical Greece tends to mix propaganda and public relations,<sup>147</sup> there is no doubt that Aristophanic comedy is closer to the latter than to the former. Indeed, the comedies of Aristophanes are human, that is to say, as fantastic and absurd as their characters were, they arise from a source of humanity that twenty-first century individuals can still feel.<sup>148</sup> If we compare them with tragedies, we can conclude that Oedipus, Orestes and Antigone do anti-human things in the strict sense of the word, confirming the mimesis and genre theory of Aristotle's *Poetics*. On the other hand, what the Aristotelian heroes pursue –peace, good government, education– are values which emerge from the same human nature. Maybe this is an essential element of the dissidence of Aristophanes' work, or perhaps this feature should be essential in any communication process that seeks to convey dissent or public protest. It doesn't matter, it is human.

To sum up, this qualitative essay has suggested that dissent communication (and public relations) arose in fifth century Athens with the Old Comedy. This development cannot be understood without the context of political and social crisis caused by the Peloponnesian War or without the intellectual context of the performing arts as a proper mass culture at that time. From a history of mentalities standpoint, the

<sup>141</sup> Brown 2006, 212.

<sup>142</sup> De Ste. Croix 1972.

<sup>143</sup> E.g. Dover 1968.

<sup>144</sup> De Ste. Croix 1972, 359.

<sup>145</sup> Ober 2001.

<sup>146</sup> De Ste. Croix 1972, 356.

<sup>147</sup> See Xifra – Heath 2015.

<sup>148</sup> Balasch 1969.

preoccupation of the Athenian society of the fifth century also favoured the attack against the public image as a strategy for social change. Finally, the use of drama resources, such as parabasis and the animalization of characters, anchors Aristophanes' plays in a dissent communication perspective, as a way to connect the poet and his audience, and reinforcing him as the true author and defender of the ideas delivered through the plays.

## 7. Limitations and further research

Aristophanes wrote for his audience, not for us, so there is no intellectual bridge that allows us to “descend to the deepest core of his works.”<sup>149</sup> This is not only the main limitation of this study, but of any research on strategic communication in Antiquity. For this reason, future research should establish a big picture of the contribution of Aristophanes' work to the intellectual history of public relations and strategic communication, far from propaganda approaches.

In particular, this research could cover three aspects of Aristophanes' work. The first one would be the capacity of influence of his ideas and criticism. The process (and execution) of Socrates, the target of his criticism in *Clouds*, seems to have been influenced by Aristophanes' play.<sup>150</sup> This is a controversial issue, but some link between both facts seems to exist and need to be analysed under the prism of the mechanisms of social influence. On the other hand, in this article some windows have been opened to reach new challenges about the contribution of Aristophanes to the history of strategic communication in general –which could be called “managed public communication”<sup>151</sup>– and to public relations in particular. One of the fields in which his contribution can be more crucial is the intellectual history of public relations, especially from the fundamental concept of *parrhêsia*. Aristophanes is a good starting point to analyse the approach to the history of strategic communication and public relations from Foucault's ideas of *parrhêsia* and regime of truth.<sup>152</sup> Finally, Greek theatre and Aristophanic work in particular are sources for social history.<sup>153</sup> From this perspective, Aristophanic plays offer, as has been noticed,<sup>154</sup> valuable information on the different forms of communication and public relations activities in ancient Greece.

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<sup>149</sup> Balasch 1969, 161.

<sup>150</sup> E.g. Marianetti 1992; Zimmermann 1993; Noël 2000.

<sup>151</sup> Moore 2014, 3.

<sup>152</sup> Foucault 1983.

<sup>153</sup> Plácido 2012; Lape – Moreno 2014.

<sup>154</sup> Longo 1981; Ober 2001.

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