Introduction

People delight in looking at images, because it happens that, through perceptively seeing, they learn and infer about what each part is, for example that this person is that person.

—Arist. *Poet.* 4.1448b15–17

Understanding theatrical presence as the play of actuality (rather than as a stable essence, given in itself within the perceptual act) enables one to approach dramatic performance with an appreciation of its phenomenological complexity—a complexity that comprehends, indeed is fueled by, difference and absence.

—Garner 1994: 43

Painted on a red-figure chous (wine jug) in Athens from around 420 BCE, pieced together from fragments and much eroded, is the only surviving image of a theater audience and stage in Attic art (figure 1). To the right is a man on a raised platform. Traces of a mask and costume—lines suggesting a naked bodysuit, a large tied-up phallus—identify him as a comic actor.[1] Balancing on one leg and raising one arm, he carries a sickle and a bag, both objects

1. On such indications of costume and mask, see especially Hughes 2006: 424–25 and Froning 2014: 306–8. These analyses are based on empirical observation of the chous itself, which for a long time was held privately in the Vlastos collection and could not be viewed in person. Both repudiate suggestions that the figure is a dwarf (e.g., Pickard-Cambridge 1988: 237; Oakley 2020: 123, fig. 6.11) or satyr performer (e.g., Brommer 1959: 32–33; Wiles 2008: 377). Several other Attic choes from the late fifth and early fourth centuries show comic performances, though none with spectators also present: e.g., St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum 1869.47, *BAPD* 10930; Athens, Benaki Museum 30890, *BAPD* 44577; Athens, National Archaeological Museum 17752, *BAPD* 15483; Paris, Musée du Louvre N3408, *BAPD* 217495.

FIGURE 1. Attic red-figure chous, ca. 420 BCE. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 518. *BAPD* 216566. D-DAI-ATH-Athen Varia 1088. Photograph by Hermann Wagner © Deutsches Archäologisches Institut and Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports / Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources.

associated with the hero Perseus. Steps lead up to the platform; a curved structure rising up from beneath may represent a piece of stage scenery.[2] To the left are two males seated on chairs. One, older, bearded, and enveloped by his *himation* (mantle), is shown in profile. The other, younger, beardless, and with a bare torso, is depicted frontally as he turns toward his partner. In one hand he holds a long staff; with his other, his arm bent, he appears to point in the direction of the actor.

Discussions of this pot have generally been concerned with identifying these various details. One of its most remarkable features, however, is its focus on theatrical spectatorship itself. Actors, chorus, musician, judges, and audience have been reduced to an exchange between a single performer and two spectators.[3] The latter have been variously identified as two judges; a judge with the *chorēgos*, the man who financed the production; a judge with the dramatic poet; or just regular audience members.[4] Whoever they may be, the scene invites its viewer to position themselves alongside this pair—to look upon the actor and the physical properties of his performance space and perhaps also, like modern scholars, to wonder about their potential objects of representation. Yet the curved shape of the pot prevents any stable viewing of or with the spectators, for only when not actually using this chous to pour wine might a user see the entire scene; otherwise they would flit between audience and actor. In a way, this experience is analogous to that of seeing a play, especially in a light-filled, open-air structure: that is, an audience member may look as much at his fellow spectators as at the performance itself.[5]

The curved shape also accentuates the fact that it is not only the two seated men who look, for their gaze on one side is balanced by that of the actor on the other. Together, these figures suggest a two-way viewing experience; if we

2. On this object as a representation of stage scenery, see Caputo 1935: 274–78; Bulle 1937: 53; Webster 1953: 200, 262; Froning 2014: 309–10.

3. Cf. Csapo 2010a: 26 on the two spectators as "a synecdoche for the audience"; also Hughes 2006: 427–28; Csapo 2014: 105.

4. For these possible identities, see, e.g., Caputo 1935: 275; Bieber 1961: 48; Hughes 2006: 419, 427; Froning 2014: 311–13. It has also been suggested that the bearded man is the priest of Dionysus (Csapo and Slater 1995: 65; Wilson 2000: 378n204) or even Dionysus himself (Hamilton 1978: 386; Wiles 2008: 377).

5. I generally use male pronouns for individual spectators of classical Greek drama, since the plays were produced for a predominantly male audience. On the presence of women at theater performances in Athens, see especially Roselli 2011: 158–94.

look with the actor, we look back toward the spectators. We are also invited to dwell on how this pair presents several possibilities for how an audience might physically engage with a performance: it could be silent and motionless, like the older man, remaining entirely focused on the stage area; or it could respond to a play as the younger man does, by gesticulating, turning around, and talking.[6] Whatever the internal dynamics of this pair's relationship, the contrast between their two spectatorial stances, as well as between their ages and attire, suggests different forms of embodied response and complicates any sense of a homogeneous audience utterly immersed in the world of a play. Thus the vessel's focus is not simply on the actor, stage, props, and their various representational possibilities, but on the very act of seeing theater.

This book is a study of that act. It analyzes classical Greek tragedies, satyr plays, and comedies that interrogate the spectator's own viewing experience, often by presenting characters who verbalize what and how they see. These plays highlight and exploit the potential instability of the perceptual act, and in doing so encourage particular forms of deep engagement on the part of its audiences. The book also explores the extent to which such plays share elements of visuality with the entirely different medium of vase painting—the only surviving visual archive contemporary with the plays themselves that offers traces of fifth-century Athenian theater practice.

What the book is not is also what the chous is not—that is, a precise reconstruction of what classical Greek theater looked like. Though various suggestions have been made for the performance and physical structures possibly represented, the object itself evades many such identifications. This is partly due to extensive damage, which has led many to rely on a 1935 drawing instead.[7] But it is also because its entire scheme resembles that of several Attic vase paintings from the second half of the fifth century BCE in which a bearded spectator, wearing a wreath, wrapped in a *himation*, and usually holding a staff, sits on a chair (*klismos*) facing a musician, who stands on a raised

6. Froning 2014: 312–13 sees the differences in their attitudes as evidence for the older man representing an "ideal" type of judge and for the younger man being the poet, who is "[pressuring] the bearded judge to vote for the Perseus-comedy" (312).

7. The drawing, by E. Gilliéron, was produced for the pot's first publication. Hughes 2006 provides a detailed study of the drawing in comparison with the chous itself, based both on its current state and on four photographs by Hermann Wagner, which were also published in 1935; one of these is figure 1 above. David Palacios based his drawing for this book's cover on a combination of Gilliéron's drawing and Wagner's photographs.

platform playing a kithara (lyre) or aulos (double reed-pipes).[8] On an Attic calyx-krater in Larisa, dated to 440–435 BCE, there is also a beardless young man, seated, wearing a wreath, and holding a staff.[9] The adaptation of such a scheme here belies any attempt to view it as a sort of photographic snapshot or illustration of a particular dramatic production. It also prevents us from assuming that the seated men are in special front-row seats, or from linking the stage area to the structure of any one particular Attic theater.[10] Certainly little about this scene resembles the Theater of Dionysus, where most of the surviving classical dramas were first produced: there, some six thousand spectators would sit upon rows of wooden benches spread around the curve of the Acropolis hillside.[11] The stage area or *orchēstra* ("dancing place") was rectilinear in shape; from at least the middle of the fifth century there was a wooden stage building called a *skēnē*. The platform depicted on the chous more likely refers to a theater in one of the Attic demes, where plays were also regularly performed.[12] But regardless of such difficulties of identification, in its interrogation of the act of spectatorship, the chous provides a window into the visuality of classical Greek drama and suggests some of its complexities. This book follows suit. Like the chous, the plays analyzed here generate their own representational ambiguities, which, I argue, draw out the perceptual instability inherent to the act of seeing theater.

8. Athens, Agora Museum P27349, *BAPD* 2726; Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano 16556, *BAPD* 213505; Paris, Musée du Louvre, N3393, *BAPD* 11285; London, British Museum E460, *BAPD* 213525.

9. Larisa, Archaeological Museum 86.101, *BAPD* 44648. An Attic red-figure amphora in Basel, attributed to the Andokides Painter, from ca. 520 BCE (Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig BS 491, *BAPD* 200004), shows two youths as spectators or judges, one seated and one standing.

10. Hughes 2006: 428–29 suggests that the curved object included in the chous painting could refer to new curved benches at the stone theater in the Attic deme of Thorikos. Against this interpretation see Froning 2014: 309–10.

11. In the fifth century, the *prohedria* (front-row seating) in the Theater of Dionysus probably had wooden *klismoi* (chairs), which the later marble seats of the Lycurgan *prohedria* imitated. On this feature in connection with the *klismoi* depicted on the chous, see Csapo and Slater 1995: 65.

12. Froning 2014: 315–17. The depiction of the stage platform on this chous resembles that in many fourth-century BCE South Italian vase paintings showing comic performances: Caputo 1935: 277–78; Hughes 2006: 421–23.

PHENOMENOLOGY, ARISTOTLE, AND CLASSICAL GREEK DRAMA

My particular focus on the visual experience of theater and the instabilities that it could entail follows the now long-established movement within theater studies toward phenomenology. This was first heralded by Bert States with his highly influential 1985 book, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater*, which emphasizes the actuality or "affective corporeality" of the theatrical medium itself and the bodies within it over the signifying systems of textual semiotics, which tend to privilege text over material presence. Elaborating on States's work and drawing in particular on Merleau-Ponty's emphasis in *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945) on embodied subjectivity (or *Leiblichkeit*, "lived bodiliness"), Stanton Garner, Jr., has argued that all theater is characterized by a "play of actuality"—an unstable oscillation between the virtual and actual, presentational and representational.[13] On the one hand, we see and hear, for example, Lear as Lear, in the virtual world created for him by Shakespeare's play; on the other, "the actor's body never ceases asserting itself in its material, physiological facticity."[14] Scholars of Greek drama, especially of tragedy, have sometimes applied to ancient plays the idea of "illusion" and the breaking thereof, but the bodied experience of theater—its phenomenology—always involves some degree of actuality.[15] As Garner shows, even Ibsen's realist theater, precisely by incorporating so much of the "real world" beyond the theater, exposes the limits of its representation.

Such an approach prompts a fresh consideration of one of the best-known ancient analyses of visual perception in theater. In the *Poetics*, before shifting his focus specifically to drama, Aristotle refers to the visual arts to explain "the pleasure all men take in mimetic objects" (τὸ χαίρειν τοῖς μιμήσασι πάντας, 1448b8–9). We enjoy looking at, say, a wall painting by Polygnotus or Pauson because, by "perceptively seeing" (θεωροῦντας), we come to understand "what each [part] is" (τί ἕκαστον); we infer, for example, that "this

13. Garner 1994: 39–45, 2007.

14. Garner 1994: 44.

15. E.g., Bain 1975, 1977, 1987; Chapman 1983. For effective arguments against the idea of "illusion" or Coleridge's "suspension of disbelief" in (ancient Greek) theater, see especially Sifakis 1971: 7–14; Taplin 1986: 164–65; Marshall 1999–2000; Slater 2002: 3, 51.

[person is] that [person]" (οὗτος ἐκεῖνος, 1448b16–17).[16] Whereas Plato takes a primarily epistemological approach to mimetic art, concerned with its deceptive ability to produce mere "phantoms" (φαντάσματα, εἴδωλα) at "the third remove from that which is" (τριττὰ ἀπέχοντα τοῦ ὄντος), Aristotle is focused here on the viewer's aesthetic experience.[17] The pleasure of this experience derives from our connecting a figure in a painting with what it represents and, in doing so, appreciating the means of its representation.[18] According to Aristotle, metaphor works similarly, since it involves identifying "this as that" (τοῦτο ἐκεῖνο); like mimesis, it is a cognitive process requiring a particular way of seeing, for which he uses the verb *theōrein* (θεωρεῖν).[19]

The painting example in *Poetics* 4 is used to elucidate the workings of mimesis for poetry in general; occurring as it does in a discussion focused on tragedy, however, it is clearly meant to apply to the experience of theater.[20] Indeed, the neat, affirmative phrase "this [is] that," a combination of two deictic pronouns, echoes its occurrence in scenes of recognition in classical Greek drama: in Sophocles's *Electra*, for example, when Orestes is confused by his sister's unkempt appearance and asks "Is this really the renowned form of Electra?" (ἦ σὸν τὸ κλεινὸν εἶδος Ἠλέκτρας τόδε, 1177), she replies "This is that" (τόδ' ἔστ' ἐκεῖνο, 1178).[21] Orestes is like a spectator here, connecting

16. On the meaning of οὗτος ἐκεῖνος as "this person is that person" rather than a more generic "this is that," see Halliwell 2002: 178n3, with further references. On the question of whether εἰκών here means specifically a portrait painting or any sort of pictorial image, see especially Halliwell 2002: 183–84; Tsitsiridis 2005: 436–37.

17. Pl. *Rep.* 599a. See, however, Halliwell 2002: 72–97 for the "spectrum of psychological responses to mimesis" (84) explored in *Republic* and *Laws*; also Grethlein 2020.

18. See especially Halliwell 2002: 177–93 on this "compound reaction to . . . representational content and its artistic rendering" (185). On the nature of the pleasure that Aristotle means here, see too, e.g., Dupont-Roc and Lallot 1980: 165; Sifakis 1986; Nagy 1990: 44; Belfiore 1992: 46–66.

19. Arist. *Rhet.* 1410b19, *Poet.* 1459a7–8. Cf. *Rhet.* 1371b4–10. On the link between these passages and *Poet.* 1448b4–19, see especially Sifakis 1986; Halliwell 2002: 189–91; Peponi 2004: 309–12; Chaston 2009: 6–10. As Peponi notes, Aristotle is careful in *Poetics* 4 to distinguish between the verbs ὁρᾶν (for seeing the object itself) and θεωρεῖν (for seeing the object's representation) (311). Cf. Belfiore 1992: 67: "We see ugly shapes and colors, but by means of *theōria* we learn and reason about a representational relationship between the imitation and the object imitated."

20. On the scope of this account of poetic mimesis, see especially Halliwell 1986: 73–74, 79–80; Nagy 1994–1995: 15–16.

21. On the use of this phrase in tragedy, see especially Estrin 2018: 114–15. Tragic and comic examples of οὗτος ἐκεῖνος involving recognition and/or identification include Ar. *Ran.* 318 (on which see T. Power 2021: 185–86), *Pax* 240, *Thesm.* 1219; Eur. *Med.* 97, *Hel.* 622; Soph. *Phil.* 261.

the actor before him with the character he represents. It can be tempting, then, to follow Aristotle in using "this is that" as a convenient shorthand for the aesthetic experience of dramatic mimesis, and to approach visuality in classical Greek theater as a quite simple and stable process as a result. Essentially assuming a one-to-one relationship between the surviving script and the *realia* of a dramatic production, scholars of drama have often tried to map quite precisely what an ancient audience sees (and does not see) at an "original" performance of a play: this prop as that object, this stage scenery as that building, this body as that character performing that action.[22]

As Garner demonstrates, however, the experience of seeing theater is seldom so straightforward. And indeed, in Aristotle's own discussion of mimesis we can detect an appreciation of how it could be rather more complicated than his catchy "this is that" phrase might at first suggest. He does not claim that we immediately "see" one thing as another, for *theōrein* is coupled with "learning and inferring" (μανθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι, 1448b16); it takes cognitive work to realize the relationship between the means and object of representation.[23] Moreover, elsewhere Aristotle indicates that he certainly understood how, at least in the case of the visual arts, we can see "this" and "that" together, at the same time. In *Parts of Animals*, he points out that "we enjoy looking at (*theōrountes*) pictures of [animals] because we are simultaneously looking at (*suntheōroumen*) the technical skill that crafted them" (τὰς . . . εἰκόνας αὐτῶν θεωροῦντες χαίρομεν ὅτι τὴν δημιουργήσασαν τέχνην συνθεωροῦμεν, 645a11–13).[24] Modern art historians have discussed the view-

22. Still very influential in this respect are Oliver Taplin's two groundbreaking books, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (1977) and *Greek Tragedy in Action* (1978). For critical discussion of Taplin's working hypothesis that "there was no significant action other than that indicated by the words" (1977: 50), see Goldhill 1986, 1989; Wiles 1987. More recent studies concerned with mapping plays' "original" enactments include Wiles 1997; Slater 2002; Revermann 2006; Ley 2007. Revermann 2006: 46–65 and *passim* provides extensive analysis of the performative "reliability" or "authenticity" of the surviving comic and tragic scripts. Bassi 2005 offers an especially good analysis of "the script's role in signifying both the desire for, and the absence of, the original play in performance" (260).

23. See Halliwell 2002: 175–93 on "the potential complexity of Aristotle's cognitive model of the experience of mimetic art" (191–92). On the cognitive process suggested by μανθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι, see also Tsitsiridis 2005, with further references.

24. See Halliwell 2002: 181–82 on this passage, in connection with *Poetics* 4, in terms of "an aesthetic experience of mimetic art in which appreciation of both medium and 'object,' of the material artifact and the imagined world that it represents, *coalesce* in a complex state of

ing of art in a comparable way: most influentially, Richard Wollheim has coined the term "seeing-in" for objects that invite a sort of twofoldness in how we view them, whereby we see simultaneously both the represented object and the medium of its representation.[25]

Aristotle's painting analogy in the *Poetics* posits a commonality between the visual experience of these two very different media. As I explore more fully in chapter 4, we might in part locate this commonality in terms of how seeing "this is that" in theater itself always involves a duality, since a performance's materiality is never entirely absent from a spectator's perceptual field. Dicaeopolis in Aristophanes's *Acharnians* makes this clear when, readying himself for the role of Telephus, he declares that he must simultaneously "be who I am, but not appear so" (εἶναι μὲν ὅσπερ εἰμί, φαίνεσθαι δὲ μή, 441). As Ismene Lada-Richards notes, he thus "reflects self-consciously upon [the] twofold way in which the elements of 'actor' and of 'character' can co-exist in a performer's stage presence."[26] But for the audience, as Garner emphasizes, this is not necessarily a seamless experience: it is not about a smooth co-presence of the object and means of representation but rather, as he states in the epigraph above, it involves "phenomenological complexity—a complexity that comprehends, indeed is fueled by difference and absence."[27] Once we appreciate the lack of any fixed one-to-one representation and focus on how this could affect an audience's own act of viewing, we can gain a deeper understanding of the artistic opportunities afforded by the potential fissures, tensions, or misalignments between "this" and "that." We can also go beyond Aristotle's "this is that" formula to understand seeing theater not simply as a cognitive puzzle but as an embodied, multisensory process.

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awareness" (emphasis original). A difficult passage in *On Memory* is also sometimes seen in relation to *Poetics* 4: when we look at a painting, he says, "we can see [*theōrein*] it as both a *zōon* and an *eikōn*" (ἔστι θεωρεῖν καὶ ὡς ζῷον καὶ ὡς εἰκόνα, 450b23–24). Scholars disagree as to whether the meaning here is that we see the painting as "both a living thing [the most literal meaning of ζῷον] and an image [of a living thing]" or that we see it as "both a figural painting and a portrait [of an actual thing]." On this see especially Belfiore 1992: 48-49; Halliwell 2002: 182–84. See also Everson 1997: 194–96; Webb 2009: 111–13 (in relation to the concept of *enargeia* in ancient rhetorical handbooks); Griffith 2021: 53–55 (in relation to musical memory).

25. Wollheim 1980: 205–26. On the connection between the account of mimesis in *Poetics* 4 and Wollheim's "seeing-in," see Belfiore 1992: 62–63.

26. Lada-Richards 2002: 396. Cf. Slater 2002: 56. See also Lada-Richards 1997 on Stanislavskian versus Brechtian performative perspectives in fifth-century Attic theater (especially pp. 77–79 on Ar. *Ach.* 440–44).

27. Garner 1994: 43.