

A WORLD FULL OF GODS: ACTIVE ANALYSIS, NEUTRAL MASK AND EMBODIED INQUIRY IN THE REHEARSAL OF TED HUGHES' VERSION OF AESCHYLUS' AGAMEMNON

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INTRODUCTION: AGAMEMNON IN BALLARAT

Theatre artists attempting to realise a Greek Drama on the contemporary stage are inevitably faced with important questions which have no single obvious answer. How do we deal with the language and the actor's physicality? How do we experience and communicate the tragic dimension? What does that mean for how the actors deal with space? How do we connect and engage meaningfully with the worldview of these plays, filled, as they are, with concepts so foreign to the secular postmodernity that dominates our collective life? How do we expand our imaginative vision to embrace a world full of gods and bonds of blood vengeance that stretch through generations? How can we approach rehearsal in order to bring these great texts viscerally to life in their full, imaginative scope? These were the challenges I faced when, in February 2006, Kim Durban at the University of Ballarat invited me to direct a studio production of Ted Hughes' version of Aeschylus' Agamemnon with second-year acting students, emphasising acting technique for classical text rather than production values. I have little experience with Greek Drama. I had never directed it previously and have acted in only one professional production, the Hole in the Wall Theatre's Medea at the Perth Festival in 2000. My background is more in the domain of psychological realism. I trained with Leonid Verzub, whose work was grounded in the Russian acting tradition centred around the work of Stanislavski, and earlier with David Latham at the Victorian College of the Arts, who works more in the French tradition stemming from Jacques Copeau and including Michel Saint-Denis and Jacques Lecoq. This paper describes how I drew upon the two acting traditions of Copeau and Stanislavski to approach the performance of Greek tragedy. Although the process I describe is somewhat idiosyncratic, it does offer novel possibilities for contemporary creative artists attempting to realise a Greek drama.

STANISLAVSKI

The images of Stanislavski and his work that have long prevailed in the English-speaking world are absurdly inaccurate and yet deep-seated. 'Stanislavski' means for many the status quo, naturalism, emphasis on a kind of cognitive-emotional psychology for the actor, representational truth, and a disregard for the physical and the fantastic. Sharon Carnicke's Stanislavski in Focus has gone some way toward correcting this false image. She points out that in the Soviet Union Stanislavski was filtered through a materialist lens, resulting in the Russian emphasis on physical action, whereas in the United States, he was received through the therapeutic lens, leading to 'the Method's' emphasis on emotional memory and psychology to the exclusion of the physical and overtly theatrical dimensions. But Stanislavski, far from being either a Freudian or a materialist, is interested in the unity of the mind and body and draws on the psychology of Ribot and Hindu Yoga, particularly the writings of Yogi Ramacharaka.

As Carnicke makes clear, the central concept of Stanislavski's system, the defining element of his approach, is 'experiencing' (*perezhivaniye*), also translated as 'living through' or 'living over' (107). The experiencing actor creates the part anew every time. She experiences not just the form, but the whole sensory world and inner feelings of the character. Through a process of infection, a term Stanislavski takes from Tolstoy, the audience too experiences the feelings of the actor. 'Experiencing' has nothing to do with naturalism as a style or psychological realism as a genre. Stanislavski's ideal actor of this kind was Tommaso Salvini, particularly in his famous performance of Othello (Polyakova 257). These feelings are not everyday feelings, however. In *My Life in Art*, Stanislavski offers an unequivocal statement about his aesthetic aims: "THE SUPERCONSCIOUS THROUGH THE CONSCIOUS! That is the goal to which I have devoted my life since 1906, and that is the goal to which I will devote my life while there is breath left in me" (483). His goal is partly "superconscious feelings," a term he borrows from Ramacharaka and which, possibly under pressure from the Soviet censor, he later changes to 'artistic feelings' (540). In *An Actor's Work*, Stanislavski describes the aim of the system as the embodiment of the life of the human spirit in the role (36). He also uses the term 'I am' (in Russian, *ja est*, an archaic term from Old Church Slavonic with religious overtones) as a synonym for experiencing (Carnicke 202). This too he takes from Ramacharaka, for whom it describes the second stage of self-realization, in which the adept is in touch with all life (1934: vi). So the actor must experience the role not only psychophysically but spiritually. Nowhere in his statements about the system does Stanislavski ever suggest that it is about representational truth, naturalism, or photographic realism. Indeed Stanislavski specifically defines the experiencing actor in opposition to the representational actor, who simply gives a picture of reality (2008: 35).

ACTIVE ANALYSIS

Never a fixed entity, the Stanislavski system has continued to develop within the Russian tradition. Maria Knebel and her artistic descendents represent one of the most significant developments of the work (Merlin 33-37). Knebel, Stanislavski's assistant at the end of his life, counted Anatoly Efros, Oleg Yefremov, and Lev Dodin among her students. My teacher, Leonid Verzub, also worked with her for sixteen years. Knebel's primary device, which I learned from Leonid, was to use etudes, structured improvisations with as little text as possible to actively analyse the play and role. Discovered by Stanislavski in his last two years, this new device was developed by Knebel through incorporating the techniques of Michael Chekhov, with whom she originally studied and whose work she eventually published in the Soviet Union. The term Active Analysis is used to refer to the process of using etudes in rehearsal and, more broadly, to Knebel's entire approach, which synthesizes the acting techniques of Stanislavski and Chekhov, as well as Nemirovich-Danchenko's school of directing. In Active Analysis, the director and actors break the play down into episodes and events, read an episode, discuss briefly the important facts and event(s), and then play it in their own words. They discuss the etude, read the text of the episode again, noticing what was missing from the improvisation, and play it again. Gradually the actors and director glean from the text those facts or circumstances that make the action necessary. 'What the character does' in detail evolves through the playful inquiry of actually playing the scene, each time coming closer to the text. When the event is experienced psychophysically, then the actors learn the lines. They continue to perform etudes, to dig into the world of the text, until they feel the need for each of the author's words, for their rhythm, cadence and so on (Merlin 34-35).

In my training in this technique with Leonid Verzub, he emphasized the 'second plan'. Much more than merely subtext, the second plan is 'the totality of psychological and spiritual baggage that the character brings with them'. The second plan exists in 'the zone of silence'. It is, in effect, the totality of experiences and beliefs that structure the actor's psycho-physicality, her consciousness and behaviour. Leonid would often say to his students: 'I'm sorry. It's only text! It's lalala!' To experience the second plan means to bring alive the whole inner and outer world (the circumstances) of the play in such a way that the whole organism participates organically. When the character is nervous, the actor's mouth goes dry, when she is frightened her heartbeat will go up. For the audience, a well-developed second plan creates the impression of a stable world living 'behind' and 'beneath' the actions and lines, and out of which the latter emerge logically and organically.

THE SECOND PLAN OF AGAMEMNON

Having learned to appreciate the effect of the second plan through my work with Leonid, I am now rarely satisfied by acting that lacks this dimension. I wanted to find out if the world of Agamemnon could be alive in the silence, and if the actors could incorporate a psychophysical communion with the circumstances of the play and an experiencing of the events that make up the story. I needed to ask: what is the totality of spiritual and psychological baggage the characters and chorus of Agamemnon bring with them that gives rise to these events and this text? Our understanding of the forces at work on the second plan of Agamemnon could never, of course, be 'the same' as that of Ancient Greek actors or audiences, and that is not the point to asking the question. Nor is it the point to try to recreate any supposed ancient mode of performance. The point is to discover and create an imaginative world that engages the psychophysical organisms of the actual particular actors in this production in such a way that the play can be experienced and infect the audience.

Richard Tarnas contends that one of the defining features of the Ancient Greek mind is the tendency to see the world in terms of archetypal principles or universal essences, whether represented by the anthropomorphic Homeric gods or the later Platonic Forms (1993: 3). Aeschylus was writing at a crucial historical juncture, at the start of a transformative period in the ways humans thought of the gods. The Oresteia demonstrates this. In Agamemnon, the Gods exist as both personae and as implacable forces of vengeance and justice, driving blood feuds through the generations of the house of Atreus. As the characters and chorus of the Oresteia struggle with their understanding of the gods, these greater-than-human personae and the ideas and concepts they represent, it becomes clear that the second plan underlying the play is full of Gods. The problem for me as director, therefore, was how to connect nineteen-year-old students imaginatively with the idea of these numinous, greater-than-human presences. How could I facilitate a deep imaginative and bodily engagement with cosmic moral laws, with curses as living bonds, with the presence of long dead children in the house, with a secret history that lies under the foundations as palpably as a force of nature? How, in other words, could we bring the second plan of Agamemnon to life?

THE NEUTRAL MASK

I decided to work with the neutral mask, a training tool from the Copeau tradition, because without requiring adherence to any particular belief system, the neutral mask offers the possibility of experiencing numinous, archetypal presences. For young actors whose imaginations have been saturated in naturalism and secular materialism, it offers the possibility of bringing to life the forces at work behind the action of Agamemnon. Understanding how this is so requires an understanding of how the mask works. Traditionally, the first exercise in the neutral mask is called 'waking up for the first time'. Lecoq writes about this exercise: 'Some students have a tendency to move first their hands, then their feet, to discover their own bodies, while all the time an extraordinary dimension is being offered to them: space' (39). The image David Latham uses for the discovery of space is the desert. He often said 'the image is in you, you are in the image.' To connect with space through this image is to feel vastness

within one's own inner experience; the mind becomes still and often the experience of space becomes a shared phenomenon, a presence that affects the rhythm of the observers, a presence expanded, in Chekhov's terms, to the level of atmosphere (1991: 26-36).

The discovery of space is a crucial moment in the training and the entry point to the neutral mask. It is the discovery not of a concept but an experiential medium, a living partner. Perhaps one could say that it is the discovery of a Platonic Idea, but experienced psychophysically, in the imagination, muscles, breath, affect, and gesture. It impacts the physiology, opening the body inside and out. Just as its stillness and silence give us the background which illuminates our movement and our words, the experience of space, which is without quality, structure, and conflict, can reveal the qualities, structures, and dramatic dynamics that shape our field of awareness and behaviour. 'When a student has experienced this neutral starting point his body will be freed, like a blank page on which drama can be inscribed.' (Lecoq 36). The mask exposes and loosens the hold of our own psychological and physical idiosyncrasies, our self-image/body-image, and allows other kinds of movements to emerge (Turner 37). The actor can then 'touch elementary things with the freshness of beginnings' and discover movements that 'belong to everyone' (Lecoq 38-40). The body's freedom from habit and conditioning allows deeper than personal movements to in-form it. The neutral mask work proceeds to identifications with the movements of nature: Earth, Water, Fire, and Air, the Tree, the Forest, the Sea, colours, and materials.

Whether or not one has an ideological or philosophical difficulty with the notion of universals or essences, the theatrical and personal experiences that result from this work are arresting and powerful, and often carry with them a sense of profound encounter with greater-than-human presences. At times, teaching this work and doing it myself, the mask has felt like a window on another dimension of existence, in which forms and rhythms crystallise particular meanings without internal contradiction or conflict.

This was particularly true of one element of David Latham's neutral mask work. Like Lecoq, Latham's teaching involved identification with the natural world. But unlike Lecoq, Latham also included identifications with archetypes: the Warrior, the Orphan, the Innocent, the Creator, the Destroyer and so on. His approach was to lead the actors to a personal memory connected to the archetype and then guide them through the image into the dynamic qualities 'at the centre of the image'.

In rehearsals for Agamemnon I used this approach to lead the students to archetypal identifications with the Greek Gods. For this, Tarnas, a historian of Western thought and a leading figure in archetypal astrology, was again useful. His analysis of the planets as archetypes provides a doorway into the Greek deities for the postmodern mindset. He argues that archetypes, far from being essentialist, are quintessentially postmodern. They are multivalent and irreducibly multidimensional (2006: 83). Using his discussion and analysis of the planetary archetypes as a guide, I led the students towards identification with Jupiter/Zeus, Pluto/Hades, Kronos/Saturn, and Prometheus. What followed was some of the most exciting work I have witnessed in neutral mask. The different archetypal principles came through with the same sense of elemental force and distinct clarity of form and rhythm that characterizes all the identifications in the mask. The work had an uncanny sense about it too, bringing home to the actors what it might mean to be in the presence of a numinous force or, in the language of Aeschylus, a God. Each archetype or God revealed its particular qualities in specific and recognisable rhythms and movement patterns: Jupiter's expansive size was clearly distinguishable from Pluto's titanic instinctual intensity; Saturn's implacable containment contrasted utterly with the Promethean impulse to liberation. This work warrants further exploration and development not possible in a pressured rehearsal schedule; it offers a means of accessing imaginative dimensions of Ancient Greek plays that usually remain closed when actors and directors attempt to find a way in through contemporary social and political parallels or personal memories.

EXPERIENCING THE DRAMATIC IMPACT OF THE GODS

Playing Gods, or representing greater-than-human presences is not one of the challenges of Agamemnon. Further steps were needed because the neutral mask does not deal with relationship, but is purely about identification, about discovering the rhythms and movements of the world within one's own body. The crucial task for us was to discover the dramatic dynamics of the human encounter with the Gods, or in Lecoq's terms, to find the 'motor of play' that drives the drama (Lecoq 99). I approached this in three different ways: by using the Gods/archetypes as atmospheres with which the characters struggled as they would with another character, through spatial constellations (which I explain below), and through the etudes traditionally employed in Active Analysis.

ARCHETYPE AS ATMOSPHERE

Atmosphere is an acting device formulated by Michael Chekhov (1991: 34). In this technique, the actors imagine an atmosphere filling the space, then move in harmony with that imaginary atmosphere so that it is strengthened and becomes experientially real for audience and actors alike. Once the archetypes of the ancient gods had been fully experienced in the neutral mask, it was easy

to imagine their particular quality of presence filling the space. The actor playing the Watchman, who opens the play, used Saturn/Kronos as an atmosphere.

Archetypally, Saturn is the principle of confinement, hard realities, suffering, no exit, separation, restriction (Tarnas 2006: 91). The actor discovered the rhythms and qualities of the archetype in the mask, and then imagined these qualities filling the space. Saturn became the atmosphere that hung over Argos. In keeping with the Stanislavski system, the actor was invited to imagine the specific facts and circumstances, and to connect her actions to specific images and inner objects, but to imagine all this in harmony with the specific atmosphere. Thus I was inviting her, in David Latham's terms, to imagine and to play 'in the duality of that which is psychological [the specific circumstances and objects] and that which is universal [the atmosphere or God which characterises all the objects]' (2). The actor then struggled against the atmosphere, which functioned in fact as her primary object: she tried to give herself room to move, to breathe; she tried to escape the sense of pressure and pain that filled the space at every point ("You Gods, release me!"). The resulting impression was of an ordinary human being struggling in the face of a great, active, invisible force. We both felt for the individual character and awaited the further 'action' of the presence against which she struggled.

SYSTEMIC CONSTELLATIONS

Aeschylus' world is not just 'full of gods' but ancestors and crimes that must be avenged. Fate, vengeance, destiny are all crucial inner objects and living forces in the play. It is difficult for us to understand the weight of these ideas for the Greek mind. In order to tackle this problem of a curse that stretches back generations, of loyalty to family members long dead as well as to understand experientially the dynamic effects of a second plan full of gods, I began to use systemic constellations. Systemic constellations, developed by Bert Hellinger, a German therapist and former priest, initially served as an approach to dealing with family systems in individual therapy (Hellinger, Weber and Beaumont 28). A markedly theatrical approach to therapy, in a group setting, participants who are not a part of the system being addressed are asked to represent the members of that system. The client with the presenting problem then places the representatives in a defined working space according to their own gut intuition. After standing in the resulting constellation for a few moments, the representatives themselves begin to feel the effects of the particular spatial relationships in ways that are illuminating for the problem.

Hellinger discovered through this method what he calls 'the orders of love' – laws of the system which, if any member acts contrary to them, will exert pressure upon all members of the system to correct the balance. For instance, one 'order' is: anyone who gives life, takes life, or makes way for life belongs in the system. If this person is not acknowledged to belong, someone else, usually a younger person, will represent them. Hellinger found, perhaps not surprisingly, that the causes of specific psychological symptoms can stretch back generations. Whatever one thinks of this approach as therapy, as a form of embodied inquiry into a play and a way for actors to experience the dynamics operating on the second plan, it is a remarkably powerful device. Very rapidly, the ensemble can experientially discover a shared understanding of how the hidden space of the second plan is structured.

THE ATREUS FAMILY CONSTELLATION

Drawing upon Hellinger's approach, I asked the students to represent the family constellation of the House of Atreus, asking first 'Who belongs? Who gave life, took life, made way for life?' We gradually brought in all the major players. The central characters for Agamemnon were clearly Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, Iphigenia, and the people of Argos (the students had difficulty in understanding who was who in the play until the constellation was complete). I asked the actors to place the characters instinctively. We then worked to refine the spatial relationships, asking the actors where they wanted to be until the space felt constellated, by which I mean that the spatial relationships were experienced as viscerally and emotionally meaningful in a way that was congruent with the text. Initially the constellation looked like this:

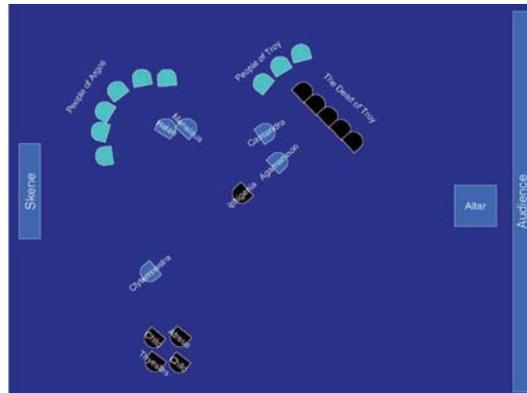


FIGURE 1: The house of Atreus family constellation

In Figure 1, the flat edge of the shapes indicates the direction the character was facing. Black figures indicate the dead, pale blue groups, and the dark blue shapes are living individual characters. Iphigenia knelt facing her father. Exploring this constellation, various actors represented the same characters at different times and felt very similar things; changing an actor did not alter the dynamics of the constellation.

There are a number of elements of this constellation I would like to illuminate.

- The people of Argos gathered around Helen and Menelaus, looking to them. The group exuded a palpable hatred toward Helen, no matter who represented her, yet the actors also reported that they looked to her return from Troy to justify their sacrifice. In the moment of the play in which the Messenger reveals that Menelaus' ship has gone down and Helen is not coming back, the intensity of the Chorus' reaction had previously seemed excessive to the actors. Through the constellation they understood the great blow that this represented to the people of Argos. In later improvisations, they understood the Chorus' hatred for Helen but also the need for her to return, to give meaning to the Trojan War and their collective suffering.
- Clytemnestra was staring straight at Cassandra. For the actor in Clytemnestra's position it provoked a murderous intent to see this captured girl standing beside her husband.
- Behind Clytemnestra are Thyestes and his children. Behind Agamemnon are the living people of Troy, and the dead Trojans Agamemnon had killed or caused to die, including Paris. The sense this communicated was of a triumphant Agamemnon standing victorious in front of an ignoble war. As we stayed with this configuration, Iphigenia's representative, and others, began to feel it was wrong for her to stand with Agamemnon.

Although we learned and experienced some important elements of the play in this configuration, it was not yet fully 'constellated', in the sense that we could not yet feel the necessity of the resulting action. It was at this point that I felt the need to bring the Gods into the space. As I did this, I remembered something Michael Chekhov wrote in *To the Actor*, about the different ways an actor's space can be 'imaginally' structured in different theatrical genres. For clown, he suggests that the actor imagine less-than-human creatures moving around the body (128). For tragedy he suggests imagining greater-than-human beings standing behind the protagonist, causing their destiny to unfold (125). Initially, I placed the Furies behind Clytemnestra, on chairs.

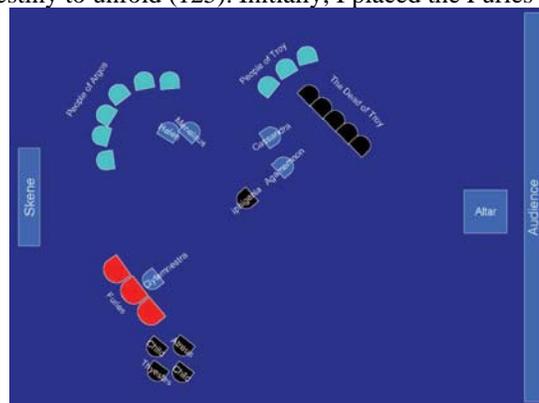


FIGURE 2: The Furies behind Clytemnestra

The effect on the constellation was immediate. Iphigenia now felt that she could stand with Clytemnestra, looking back at her father, and it was suddenly clear that Agamemnon was headed in the direction of Argos and the Furies: his destiny suddenly crystallized, seeming unavoidable, terrible, and morally satisfying.

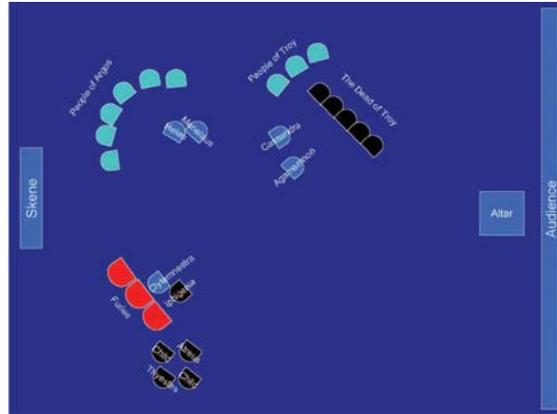


FIGURE 3: Iphigenia now stands with her mother

Cassandra now felt out of place, so we brought in Apollo, also on a chair.

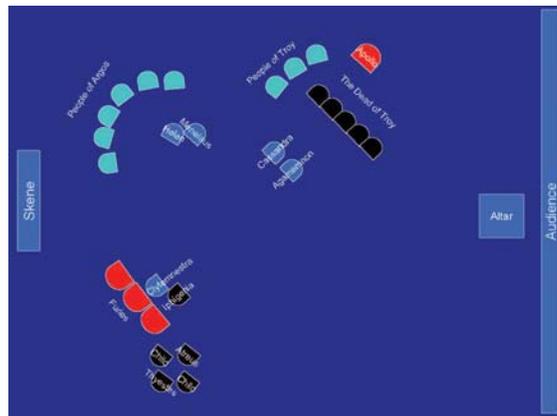


FIGURE 4: Apollo stands behind Cassandra

On a gut level, the actor felt he couldn't stand right behind Cassandra, but needed to be at some distance. This had a similar effect upon Cassandra in the constellation as the Furies had for Agamemnon: her fate was sealed, her trajectory constellated, and Apollo was ultimately responsible for what happened to her. Once Apollo was in place, the quality of necessity, so important to the tragic landscape, emerged, especially in relation to Agamemnon and Cassandra. There was nowhere else for them to go, in this geography of Being, except toward Clytemnestra, Iphigenia, and the Furies. Agamemnon's fate began to come alive for everyone, and crystally clear. As one student put it, 'Agamemnon is cactus'.

Finally, we placed Zeus on the altar.

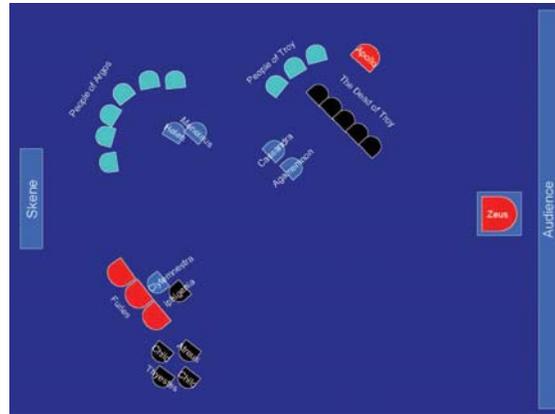


FIGURE 5: Zeus presides over the whole

We were using a little wooden box in the traditional position of the altar. When Zeus stood up on it, a wonderful and surprising transformation of the whole space occurred, which we all felt and which I asked the group to articulate. As one actor put it, 'It's all now OK'. No matter how horrible the events of Agamemnon were when considered on an individual level, with Zeus in place there was a feeling of order. The space suddenly came into harmony; it constellated from a broader perspective. Agamemnon was still going to die horribly but a quality of play seemed to now be possible, as if the actors might now be able to enact the fates of these characters with the easy equanimity of ritual.

This exercise was remarkably effective. It allowed the students to experience, psychophysically and very quickly, the second plan, the psychological and spiritual baggage of the city of Argos and of the Ancient Greek mind. The Gods came alive for the actors, in the sense that they were now able to respond psychophysically, without inner manipulation, to their presence in the text and imaginative landscape of the play. It was no longer a difficulty to pray, for example. This action was now understood, in the sense that the actors could now appreciate and experience the impulses for it. In improvisations, at moments of chaos for the chorus, actors would instinctively throw themselves at the feet of the altar, reaching to Zeus for some sense of order. They began to understand the forces that gave rise to the expansive language and extreme action. Because they were able to swap positions and so experience the different qualities and vectors that comprised the drama – the power and unwavering intent of the Furies, the love and agony in Clytemnestra, Argos' hatred for Helen, and the unconcerned, expansive certainty of the Gods – they were able to work thereafter with a feeling for the whole, at least in relation to the forces at work in the play, if not the entire trajectory of the action, and so to intuit the relative significance of the characters and events. In brief, the systemic constellation was an effective way of experiencing the important aspects of the second plan, the structure of the shared interior space of the characters. It is a profoundly effective device for embodied thinking about a text, and for facilitating creative inquiry in rehearsal, in and through body, emotion, imagination, and spatial relationship.

After the constellation, our work proceeded along the more traditional lines of Active Analysis, through improvisations structured around the main events of the play, striving with each repetition to discover the circumstances and facts – to build the world – in a way that made the actions and the text feel psychophysically necessary. Many of the early etudes were silent, some used minimal improvised text, and gradually we moved toward using the exact text.

This process worked well with regard to both the language and the actor's visceral and emotional connection to the text. For example, in a silent etude exploring the Chorus' reaction to the dawning realisation that their king will die, I threw an old shirt into the space, saying 'this is Agamemnon's fate'. Toward the end of this etude one chorus member, for reasons too complex to go into here, had the impulse to shake the shirt in the face of another actor, effectively rubbing his face in Agamemnon's fate. Even at this early stage of rehearsal, Agamemnon's fate had such a concrete and rich meaning for the actor (as an inner object, in Stanislavski's sense) that he experienced a totally organic outrage at this act, and was still shaking twenty minutes later. In terms of the language, once the actors had experienced the expanded imaginative-physical world of the neutral mask and the constellation, it was relatively easy to draw out the facts of Agamemnon in such a way as to evoke a real need for the poetry, a longing to use the full richness of the language. In the actual performances, the language was to a large degree transparent to its imagery and the action underlying it. One element of the production of which I was particularly proud was a scene in which three chorus members, who had previously struggled with the density of the language, told the fifteen-minute long story of the fleet setting out for Troy and Iphigenia's sacrifice while sitting still on a bench. They held the audience throughout. The simplicity of the mise en scène seemed immaterial, because the actors were so easily and fully in contact with the imaginative material of which they spoke and with their need to speak about it.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS: PHYSICAL ACTION AND THE SPATIAL DYNAMICS OF TRAGEDY

Other elements of the production were less successful. The score of physical action, in which I include also the movement style was not well-realised. I did not make clear stylistic demands early enough for the student actors to incorporate them well. The work would have benefited from making more explicit and concrete connections between the physicality of the neutral mask and the physicality of the performance. Specifically, I would have liked to investigate the efficacy of two processes: connecting, for the Chorus, specific given circumstances with unifying archetypal images, just as I did for the Watchman in the opening scene; connecting the powerful impulses of the Chorus arising in the etudes to images and physical rhythms drawn from the mask, so that the Chorus could become, for example, a 'River of Grief'. This would have drawn the personal imagery of the individual actors into a more unified collective action.

Related to the need for greater specificity in our shared movement style was the fact that, while there were moments that touched upon tragedy – and I will explain more what I mean by tragedy below – our production as a whole fell short of the tragic dimension, particularly in its final phases. I would like to conclude by discussing how it fell short, and what precisely happened instead. This discussion will demonstrate how the psychophysical spatial exploration common to the constellation exercise, the neutral mask, and aspects of Active Analysis can illuminate our thinking about tragedy and provide an interesting starting point for further exploration and discussion of the possibilities for contemporary performance of Greek tragedy.

Lecoq writes about the importance of the vertical axis for tragedy – humanity reaches up to the gods and its struggle with them happens along the axis of height and depth (126-27). In the exercises he uses as an introduction to tragedy, the actors play with being pushed and pulled from all directions, not just from above and below (Murray 140-41). The tragic struggle then becomes connected, for the actor, with the struggle to remain physically vertical, to avoid a collapse through the centre of body that would fracture the nobility of the hero and result in something like a modern slouch.

In *Agamemnon*, the struggle with the Gods is sharply drawn: like Job, the participants in the drama are being tested by unimaginable horror. Aeschylus seems to be asking whether it is possible to remain upright, in harmony with the Gods, or even to believe in order when at the mercy of such seemingly malevolent forces. Grotowski makes an explicit connection between being 'man' and being upright, and in *Agamemnon* the attempt to remain upright – standing, alive, and unbroken on the vertical axis – seems to be connected to the struggle to remain human, to determine a reasonable and therefore ordered response to such events (300). But, of course, as mentioned earlier, the Greek mind at this time is undergoing a 'metamorphosis of the Gods' and a revolution in humanity's relationship to the divine: the *Oresteia* is questioning the gods but its characters are unwilling to sever the relationship altogether. Reading and performing the play now, it is hard not to see the faultlines of the later fracture that Nietzsche famously declared, which is nothing but the severing of the vertical axis. In Hughes' *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra's final statements to the Gods, when she three times pushes them away, ("Now leave us... Forget us... Leave us...") is a severing of the vertical axis, one that can be taken either as a defeat, of her nobility and her humanity, or as a great act of autonomy, an assertion of human reason over the capriciousness of the Gods (79). Perhaps it is both. Clytemnestra clearly believes, as the Chorus says, "This Law of Zeus is a disease in our blood" and asserts humanity's right to judge the behaviour of the gods (80). In our production, working with these students, I wanted to assert the capacity of the human heart to know the right course of action, free of any coercive 'God', whether idea, ideology, persona, or instinct. But a fervent belief in the human heart is an appropriate ruling idea for melodrama, not tragedy.

Also, in the interior universe we created through the constellation, the Furies stood behind Clytemnestra throughout the play, driving her to murder Agamemnon. Once she has killed him and justified it as the work of the Gods to the Chorus, however, they clearly leave her: "I am satisfied" she says, "All rancour is dead in me" (79). At this moment, exactly the point at which the Chorus has accepted that the gods are to blame and not Clytemnestra, the queen, as she looked at the people of Argos, seemed only a woman. The actress no longer imagined the Furies behind her. Suddenly she seemed the same size as the other players, and related primarily to them, horizontally. The space no longer had the constellated quality we had discovered by placing the Gods behind Clytemnestra. It had, in some sense, gone soft.

I asked the actress to push our downstage shrine out of place, so that it was half out of its special light, refusing the Gods, fracturing the world we had established. But the Gods had already gone. Her walk back through the Chorus to the skene was as a shell, used by the Gods, abandoned by them and now rejecting them. She seemed now to belong more to Beckett than to tragedy, like a godless ghost with nowhere to go. In comparison, Cassandra's exit into the palace, when she gives up her struggle with Apollo and walks toward the fate he has laid out for her, worked more effectively as tragedy. She remained upright, in the presence of her fate and her God, who remained behind her, pushing her toward her destiny.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I believe the training and rehearsal methods of the Stanislavski and Copeau traditions, and especially the specific technical devices and processes I have discussed, have a fascinating potential for the contemporary performance of Greek tragedy. The neutral mask offers the possibility of experiencing archetypal forms, numinous presences, and bringing to life a 'world full of Gods'. Spatial constellations offer a way to experience these presences as dynamic forces at work on the second plan, to bring to life concepts like curse and Fate, and to illuminate how the presence of the Gods constellates the Greek world view in a meaningful way for contemporary actors. The psychophysical and spatial modes of exploration and inquiry also offer an effective hermeneutic frame for revealing the questions Aeschylus asks, in ways that remain connected to the physical and imaginative life of the actor in performance. These techniques and modes of inquiry are familiar to many actors trained in Australia and overseas, or at the very least harmonious with prevalent ways of working. I hope that for those whose work is in similar mode, this paper presents some useful possibilities for realising the potential of Greek drama in new and interesting ways.

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