

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO WAYS OF ADDRESSING AND EMBODYING
QUESTIONS OF CHARACTER IN FOURSIGHT THEATRE'S 2004
PRODUCTION OF *AGAMEMNON*¹**

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I came to working on Greek plays not as a classicist but as someone deeply concerned with acting processes. My work as a director has been primarily related to research into the 'creative actor' and the processes that facilitate innovative theatre making. It has therefore been predominantly connected to the making of 'new work' rather than the interpretation of already existing texts. In directing Euripides's *Medea*, and Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, and then in acting as dramaturg to *Hecuba*, with Foursight Theatre, I was interested in investigating ways of addressing and physically embodying questions of 'character' within contemporary performances of ancient Greek texts.² Central to this investigation was an exploration of the relationship between interpretation and creativity, and also my understanding that notions of division, divergence, contradiction, simultaneity and multiplicity are as appropriate to the embodiment of character within Greek tragedy as they are to methods that may be used by the 'creative actor' for generating and structuring material for performance in making new work.³

I associate the term 'creative actor' with:

- i. A lack of enquiry into the 'real' or 'complete' in theatre, particularly a lack of search for ways to embody 'character' in relation to notions of 'real' or 'complete' people. In its place there is an exploration of alternative perspectives on questions of 'character', co-existing contradictions, representations, fragmentation and seepage.
- ii. A lack of respect for the idea that there is *one* way of doing something and that there are people who can show you *the* way of doing it. Instead there is a conscious attempt to combine forms from different artistic disciplines, for example, dance, puppetry, musical composition, naturalistic approaches towards acting, mime, and also to search for meaning within those combinations: playfulness towards the processes of discovering and exploring theatre language.
- iii. A lack of fear: courage that incorporates a sense of blurring between the processes of making theatre and the product, or production, of theatre. The two are not seen as separate, but rather the second is a continuation of the first.
- iv. A lack of deference towards a sense of hierarchy within the processes of making theatre. I am not talking here about cussedness within the psychology of the individual actor but rather an awareness, (on the part of everyone in a creative team), that the presence and skills of an actor can challenge the notion that he, or she, is there to embody the vision of others.

The 'creative actor', therefore, questions the role of the director as auteur and proceeds from the premise that a new set of relationships between all members of the creative team needs to be negotiated afresh for each project. There is a sense of fluidity within this premise, with an increased responsibility for the actor, within the process of rehearsal.

REHEARSAL STRATEGIES, INCLUDING GROUP ETHOS

The *Agamemnon* project with Foursight Theatre focused on Philip de May's translation of Aeschylus's text, and within it, as a creative team, we explored the notion of interpreting the text of the play from a number of different perspectives, each suggested by a member of the company. This process began with making a list of reasons for performing the play for each new audience. We titled this list 'A Sense of Purpose', and attempted to translate the notion of 'concept' offered by a director, into a series of possible *actions*, or *intentions*, in relation to an audience, for example:

- To listen to the play and notice how and when the words, and actions, resonate with our experience today, especially the suffering of children
- To encourage people to develop a sense of unity within society
- To celebrate multi-cultural society
- To make people think, and question, what we are told by our 'leaders' and the media
- To question what 'leadership' is
- To speak out against war
- To access the female experience of war
- To raise the question of whether Clytaemnestra was justified in her actions
- To try to change people

Within each performance of the play, therefore, there was an invitation for each actor to explore the language, and action, of the play from a different perspective. It was also possible, in a particular performance, for two contradictory perspectives to be played out, simultaneously, in relation to the 'meaning' of a scene. For example, the actor playing Clytaemnestra might adopt the perspective that her 'character' is justified in murdering Agamemnon, whilst in the same scene, the Chorus Leader might work with the perspective that Clytaemnestra is *not* justified in her actions.⁴

This kind of participation on the part of the actor, as well as access to information and decision-making in general, was intended to increase a sense of empowerment within the creative team.⁵ Crucially, however, as the rehearsal process progressed and if choices needed to be made, then the responsibility of myself, as director, towards the audience, left me with the responsibility for making those choices.

A MULTI LINGUAL APPROACH

During the four-week rehearsal period for *Agamemnon* we agreed, collectively, on two themes that we wanted to explore during rehearsals, and to share with an audience in performance. These themes were 'home' and 'war'.

Ideas of 'home' were rooted in the multi-cultural context of the West Midlands of England where the play was produced; as well as the sense that we live in an interconnected world. The approach was multi-lingual as well as multi-cultural; and sections of the text were sung and spoken in Gujarati, Turkish, Spanish and Patois. Ritual from Muslim, Hindu and Christian traditions was incorporated into the action.

We interpreted the Chorus as, collectively, representing the people of Argos who were left at 'home' when the army went to war: children now grown up, women and some men. Given our multi-cultural cast we also associated the 'character' of the Chorus with a diverse range of communities, which despite their differences had much in common.

The theme of 'war' permeated the language, and imagery, of the play. Specifically, we attempted to embody - through the use of life-size puppets - the suffering of children in war. The first of these puppets (representing the ghost of the young daughter of Agamemnon, Iphigeneia) was first introduced into the play as the 'watch girl' waiting for Daddy to come home.

In the production, Iphigeneia was portrayed as a Caucasian child with blond hair - but (until the moment she was divided from her) was manipulated by a black Jamaican actor who sang, and spoke, in Patois. The only word attributed to Iphigeneia in the text was 'Father', and this word was translated, and sung, by the Chorus in seven or eight different languages. This deliberate mismatching of voice, and appearance, was an attempt to present the character as being broadly representative of all the children who suffer in war, at the same time as being a figure within the immediate story of *Agamemnon*.



Neila Ebanks as Iphigeneia, with the puppet representing her mismatching self; Taylan Halici as Chorus.

Photo: Dave Finchett

In the accompanying video extract from the Parodos, Neila Ebanks plays Iphigeneia; and Taylan Halici and Ralph Mondri are members of the Chorus enacting her sacrifice. The Composer and Musical Director is Mary Keith. Purvin is the puppet maker. [\[Play extract 1\]](#)

Adopting a similar rationale, a second puppet (representing the prophetess Cassandra) was portrayed as an African child-woman with dreadlocks – but (again until the moment that she was divided from her) was manipulated by a white actor who sang, and spoke, in Spanish and accented English.

The cloth that Agamemnon walked on was represented by contemporary photographic images, from press cuttings, of children from all over the world who have suffered because of war. Implicit in this idea was the sense that Clytaemnestra murdered Agamemnon in vengeance for the suffering of *all* those children: both those in the play by Aeschylus and also the children who may now still be suffering. This idea was inspired by Sebastiao Salgado's photographic images, and it was also, in a way, an allusion or perhaps an answer to the cloth used in Katie Mitchell's production of *The Home Guard*: a patchwork of dresses that could have been worn by small girls, but all very European in appearance.⁶

SET DESIGN

The Foursight Theatre production of *Agamemnon* was performed in traverse at the multi-cultural Newhampton Arts Centre in Wolverhampton.⁷ The use of theatrical space radically affected the entire rehearsal process and led, for example, to the decision to map out the whole play in the first week of rehearsal.

Difficulties associated with the use of traverse primarily related to the fact that the audience were in very close proximity to the actors. The juxtaposition between the closeness of the audience's perception, and the size and depth of the emotions called for by the play, made it extremely hard to gauge the level of intensity needed. The narrowness of the space meant that audience members could very easily be aware of each other. It was also

extremely hard to light the traverse with back lighting, without it spilling into the eyes of the audience. Therefore the figure of the actors within the traverse tended to look less three-dimensional. The width of the hall meant that the central playing area was long and narrow: physically and metaphorically the traverse became a place to journey from one world to another rather than a place to stay in. Related to this was the fact that the actors could not remain standing still for any length of time, anywhere other than at the two ends, without blocking the view of the audience. They simply had to keep moving, or kneel, or lie down, if they were anywhere in between. Long speeches by characters were, therefore, usually played at one end of the space. During these speeches, however, the other characters were relatively still at the opposite end. Stichomythia, however, also needed to be played entirely at one end, or the other, for their rhythm and speed to be maintained. Moreover, once an actor was at one end of the traverse it was extremely hard to contrive ways of getting him, or her, down to the other end if s/he needed to be there to make an entrance as another character. This meant that I spent a great deal of time *before* rehearsals began 'blocking' the probable position of the characters in each scene, something I would normally leave until the rehearsal process itself. Testing this 'blocking' was a key reason for the decision to map out the whole play in the first week.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, I was happy to explore the use of traverse staging. There was an emphasis in the project on research and development and the rewards and interest within the experiment far outweighed the problems. Primarily, I enjoyed the multi-focal possibilities, as well as experimenting with ways of shifting an audience's gaze quite swiftly, inviting a filmic quality to moments.

Ideas related to the two themes that we explored in rehearsals were also reflected in the set design.

1. The theme of '**home**' and what it means to us individually, as well as what it means to us as a society: thinking about the idea of a multi-cultural home where a number of people are able to live together, celebrating their diversity, as well as the things they have in common; thinking about objects that might represent the idea of 'home', the words, the pictures and so on. Thinking, too, about what we, in our personal lives, value individually, and collectively, what we would give our lives in order to protect; thinking about the people that we associate with home, thinking about the way homes can be broken up, and thinking about how children may suffer, and be torn between adults, in these situations.
2. And, the theme of '**war**': thinking about the suffering in individual homes, and in society, on both sides in war, and the mass killing. Thinking about the suffering of children in war, the sacrifice of children in the name of some cause. Thinking too about how our images of war are mediated, how war sometimes seems distant and far away, how we make heroes, or scapegoats, out of our war leaders, how things at home are neglected during a war, how the gods of a captive land are disregarded in victory, how each side claims divine support for their cause and so on.

Collectively, we created two altars: one at either end of the traverse stage. At one end of the traverse, against three screens, was a 'home' altar: a place that, in spite of, or even *because* of its diversity, represented 'home' to us as a group. For this 'home' altar, each of us brought two, or three, objects that represented the idea of 'home' to us as individuals. These objects, in my case for example, were: a photograph of my mother watching me dance in the rain when I was small, a photograph of my daughter, and my husband, in our garden, and a text by John Berger that included a discussion of the term 'home'.⁸ Amongst these objects there was something that represented a person, or a quality, that we would risk our lives in order to protect.

This 'home' altar also represented a connection between our own personal ideas of 'home' and the theme of 'home' in the play. Clytaemnestra lit candles in front of it at the start of the play, and Iphigeneia's body (represented by a puppet) was laid in front of it after her sacrifice had been re-enacted in the *parados*. The three screens also provided an entrance into the palace of Argos.

At the other end of the traverse stage was a 'war' altar. There, as a group, we created a place that represented our perceptions of 'war' as we perceived it to be experienced in our contemporary global society. This 'war' altar also represented a connection between those perceptions and the theme of 'war' as it is explored in the play: the suffering on both sides caused by war, the mass killing, the sacrifice of children, the justification, or not, for war, the destruction of property, and so on. The three characters that came from Troy (the Herald, Agamemnon, and Cassandra) entered at this end of the traverse, and the Chorus lit candles at this altar at the end of Episode 1.

For this 'war' altar, each of us brought newspaper cuttings, and photographs that connected with the theme of 'war' and arranged these on two screens. These strategies blurred the distinction, at least within the rehearsal processes, if not directly within the audiences' perception, between 'actor' and 'character'.

COSTUME

Visually, as well as in every other way we wanted to bring the text alive for our audiences. Instead, however, of tying the production down to a specific period or place, or attempting to pursue relevancy when clearly there are values in the play that do not translate easily into a contemporary context, we tried to create a *mixture* of visual signs.

Costumes for the puppets suggested national dress but belonged to no particular period. Costumes for the Chorus consisted of a combination of visual elements that was intended to project the notion of a multi-cultural society that contained both traditional, and contemporary, strands within it. The Spanish, Turkish, Jamaican and British Asian members of the cast wore elements that represented their own ethnic costumes; and the three Caucasian performers wore elements that were intended to suggest specific groups within contemporary western society.⁹

Characters were further defined by *actions*, or *objects*, which in some way indicated the transformation between Chorus and a second 'character' that was also played by the same actor. For example, when the Turkish actor Taylan Halici 'transformed' from Chorus into Herald, the British Asian actor Sanjay Shelat offered him a tray of grey powder to mark his face and hands with. The Turkish actor, then, with his face marked, bent to kiss the earth: a moment of encounter between Hindu and Muslim ritual.

'CHARACTER' AS DIVERGENT ALTERNATIVES

I first explored the idea of 'character' as separated, or divergent, alternatives in the *Medea* project with the actor Naomi Cooke who was also the Artistic Director of Foursight Theatre at the time of all of the Greek projects. In this production, for the character of Medea, we experimented with the idea of a series of metaphorical (rather than literal) masks. In such a theory there is little accretion or emotion memory. Rather, the character lives in relation to the present moment of each stage of the story and his, or her, relationship with each of the other characters.

I proposed the idea of these metaphorical masks as a strategy for selecting and presenting one side of a character at a time, allowing the audience, I hoped, to engage with the feelings

and the thinking of the character, moment to moment in the play, rather than becoming overwhelmed and/or merely sympathetic to the level of emotion expressed. The notion of these metaphorical masks, like the masks of the ancient Greek theatre, affected and clarified the gesture and presentation of the body as a whole. However, unlike the masks of the ancient Greek theatre, the device was one that the actor could work with internally, in full view of the audience, yet not explicitly visible to them.

In *Agamemnon*, with the character of Agamemnon himself, we explored the idea of a series of metaphorical masks within a single speech, attempting to alter the presentation of the body, and voice, from image to image, rather than from scene to scene as we had in *Medea*, representing in turn, for example, 'Agamemnon the Devout', 'Agamemnon the Justifier', 'Agamemnon the Plunderer', 'Agamemnon the Man of the People', and so on.

In both these examples, the intention was to look at the possibility of presenting divergent alternatives *consecutively*. In rehearsals for *Agamemnon*, however, I also explored the idea of presenting divergent alternatives *simultaneously* with the body and voice of the actor operating separately in different spheres. In such cases, the sense of what was happening in the *verbal* text was contradicted, or qualified, by what was happening *physically*.

For example, in Episode 1, Clytaemnestra crouched over the body of her dead child Iphigeneia (represented by a puppet) whilst she was speaking about those who had lost their loved ones in the defeat of Troy. As she did this, she lifted from under the body of the child, photographs of children affected by war, taken from contemporary newspaper cuttings. These photographic images were projected live onto a screen behind her, with the intention of suggesting that her own child represented all those others.

In this scene, the representation of the body of Iphigeneia, as well as the presence of the newspaper cuttings, allowed a number of divergent alternatives to be suggested simultaneously; and it is possible to argue that the 'character' was physically, at one and the same time, *in the past* grieving over her dead child at Aulis, and implicitly, *existing contemporaneously* as well, representing the grief of mothers to come. Verbally, however, she was in Argos, *in the present moment of the play*, embodying the grief of those who had lost their loved ones in Troy, as well as speaking to the Chorus, and audience, about the defeat of Troy, as she imagined it to be.



Presenting divergent alternatives simultaneously:
Naomi Cooke as Clytaemnestra, with the puppet representing her dead child.

Photo: Dave Finchett

In the accompanying video extract from Episode 1, Naomi Cooke plays Clytaemnestra. Purvin is the puppet maker. [\[Play extract 2\]](#)

Sometimes moments in stories were illuminated by metaphors: Helen as a 'flying bird', Cassandra 'borne away by the god', 'out of her mind', and we located these and worked with them as movement images. The disembodied self of Cassandra, for example, led to the idea

of the puppet representing her body separating from her 'mind' or 'spirit' and being lifted up and moved to enact the inner feelings and images of her 'character'. At the same time the actor (representing the 'spirit' of her 'character') sang and spoke the text.



Beatriz Pasamon-Gonzalez as Cassandra seated behind the puppet representing the body of her 'character'.

Photo: Dave Finchett

In the accompanying video extract from Episode 4, Beatriz Pasamon-Gonzales plays Cassandra. Taylan Halici dances the 'character' of Apollo in her visions. Neila Ebanks, Sanjay Shelat and Taylan Halici manipulate the disembodied self of Cassandra. The Composer and Musical Director is Mary Keith. Purvin is the puppet maker. [[Play extract 3](#)]

'CHARACTER' AND EMBODIMENT

In rehearsals for *Agamemnon I* also continued to evolve methods for *embodying* 'character' developed during rehearsals for *Medea*. These methods used physical, vocal and imaginative exploration and drew on ideas, and practices, developed by a number of theatre companies, and people, including Kristin Linklater, Viola Spolin, and the Open Theater. In different configurations, however, they encouraged the actor towards a number of divergent alternatives to the interpretation of 'character', rather than the coherence of a single 'super-objective' (a term deriving from Constantin Stanislavsky, which relates to the notion of a 'spine' that motivates all of a character's actions on stage).¹⁰

For example, in order to broaden a sense of our understanding of the 'character' of the Chorus, rather than selecting a naturalistic 'super-objective', associated with the 'motivation' or 'intention' of a character, we found it useful to consider the Chorus as fulfilling a number of different, sometimes overlapping *functions* within the play.

Amongst those we explored were:

1. The Chorus as story-tellers: people who tell us the story so far; and how they feel about past events;
2. The Chorus as enactors of 'characters' *within the stories they tell*: Agamemnon, Menelaus, Helen and Iphigeneia all appearing as characters within the stories told in the Parodos and Ode 1

In the rehearsal process, therefore, more often than not, we put the story of the play on its feet by first asking the question of *what* was happening within each scene before asking why, where, when, or who? In working with the Chorus especially, we attempted to place the question of 'action' before that of 'intention' or 'motivation' (that is, *what* are the Chorus doing from unit to unit within each Ode and Episode, prior to *why* are they doing it?). This approach appeared to adapt itself usefully to the numerous changes of perspective within the 'character' of the Chorus, which had not seemed possible to encompass within a naturalistic approach. It also invited the depiction in action of stories and images *within* the play: the sacrifice of

Iphigeneia at Aulis, the grief of the women during the long war, the Aegean sea flowering with corpses, and so on.

More directly, in relation to embodiment, I developed an exercise I call '*sculpting the character with breath*'. In this exercise, I combined a practice described by Kristin Linklater in her book *Freeing the Natural Voice* with one by Viola Spolin in her book *Improvisation for the Theatre*.¹¹ In the Linklater exercise, the actor 'paints' a landscape with breath; in the Spolin exercise, the actor creates the image of a 'character' by associating three emotional, or emotive, adjectives with three facial features, and another three with different parts of the body.

Within the combination and adaptation of these two exercises that I developed, the descriptors of physicality may implicitly contradict each other. For example, the facial features of the 'character' selected by the actor playing Clytaemnestra might be:

remembering eyes, smiling tongue, sharp ears,

and for the body of her 'character', the actor might select:

savage hands, brave heart, sensuous hips,

I then asked the actors to 'sculpt' the image of their 'characters', three dimensionally, in front of them using gesture and breath. Following this, each actor, as it were, stepped into a three dimensional image of his or her 'character' as s/he might a coat, moulding its features and feelings into his or her, own body through touch; and experimented with speaking sections of the text concentrating on embedding contradictory 'emotions' within different parts of the body.

'CHARACTER' AND RELATIONSHIPS

Another example of an exercise that I developed which I call '*physicalising the emotional subtext*' drew together an interpretation of the Open Theater's 'movement action sequence' with an adaptation of Constantin Stanislavsky's idea of 'subtext', (a term used to represent the thought processes underlying a character's motivations).¹²

In the combination, and extension, of these two practices, I asked each actor to select three (possibly conflicting) 'emotional subtexts' for the character that he, or she, was playing: each emotional 'subtext' representing one aspect of his or her, relationship with each of the other characters.¹³

These choices of 'emotional subtext' might run counter to, or parallel with, the text, and could be traced back to textual clues. For example, the 'emotional subtexts' between Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra might be

Clytaemnestra - 'I hate you as a father, I despise you as a king, I desire you as a man,'

Agamemnon - 'I am amused by you, I am flattered by you, I am afraid of you'.

Within this process of selection was the intention that a sense of 'character' might emerge out of each set of relationships; and also that each character's 'inner emotional journey' could be guided by his or her, relationships with each of the other characters. What were the defining features of each relationship? How did each character feel about him, or her, as well as how did s/he feel about each of them?

These possibilities could then be used as points of inner focus for two characters in relation to each other (within a naturalistic style of acting); and/or (within a more expressive style) they could be used as a springboard for physicalisation in terms of body posture, distance from each other and etc. As part of this process, each 'emotional subtext' could be physicalised

within a 'movement action sequence' as a means of embedding it into the body, before being used to inform the energy with which the text was spoken.



Physicalising the emotional subtext: Naomi Cooke as Clytaemnestra; Ralph Mondy as Agamemnon.

Photo: Dave Finchett

In the accompanying video extract from Episode 3, Naomi Cooke plays Clytaemnestra. She is working with two related but distinct 'emotional subtexts': 'I love you' and 'I desire you'. Ralph Mondy plays Agamemnon. Duncan Chave is the Sound Designer. [\[Play extract 4\]](#)

'CHARACTER' NOTES

In the *Agamemnon* project, in the month prior to the rehearsal period, I guided the actors in detailed textual analysis intended to investigate questions of 'character'. These questions to the actors were formulated by me and informed by discussion with two scholars from Exeter University, Graham Ley and Les Read, as well as Philip de May's written commentary accompanying his translation of the play. As a strategy, they presented a number of options and invited the performer to propose others, encouraging an active engagement in interpretation on the part of the performer.

Notes for all the characters were circulated to all members of the creative team, partly because 'character' was seen as emerging out of a set of relationships; but also because that process invited everyone to take a responsibility, and interest, in the whole play.

In conclusion, the balance between emotion and thought, within the interpretation and embodiment of 'character', was a key concern. Sometimes we found it. Sometimes we didn't. The introduction of Iphigeneia into the play as a Caucasian child, played by a puppet, but manipulated by a black Jamaican actor was, I think, a successful device, as was the idea of the disembodied self of Cassandra, separating from her 'mind' or 'spirit' and being lifted up and moved to enact the inner feelings and images of her 'character'. Overwhelmingly, however, the sheer speed of the three week rehearsal process, determined by the pragmatics of funding, meant that I was only able to look in depth at questions of embodiment with some of the actors.

In the odes, too, the relationship between the songs, the spoken word, and movement, attempted to explore the balance between affect and cognition, and to invite both reflection, and feeling, in the actor, as well as in the audience.¹⁴ This attempt to engage the audience's mind and emotions in the Choral odes, as well as in approaches to 'character', was circumscribed by the need to edit the odes quite drastically, partly in order to make their length manageable within the rehearsal time available, and also in order to highlight the two themes that we connected with most in the play, and which we felt had contemporary relevance to an audience: those of 'home' and 'war'.



Neila Ebanks as Chorus, dancing the 'character' of Helen as 'a flying bird' in Ode 1.

Photo: Dave Finchett'

In the final accompanying video extract from Ode 1, the Chorus tell the story of Helen's departure from Sparta and the suffering that it brought in its wake: contrasting the individual suffering of Menelaus at the loss of his wife with the suffering of a whole community during the long war.

The Chorus is composed of Neila Ebanks, Taylan Halici, Frances Land, Ralph Mondì, Beatriz Pasamon-Gonzales, Sanjay Shelat and Rob Swinton. The Composer and Musical Director is Mary Keith. This video extract (and also the preceding extracts) is from a publication by *Arts Archives* in association with *Cambridge University Press*. Copyright is with Foursight Theatre.¹⁵ [[Play extract 5](#)]

Appendix

An example of the notes relating to the character of Clytaemnestra:

Thoughts and questions about the character of Clytaemnestra

A. What 'facts', and clues, about Clytaemnestra are contained in the text? And what are the questions that arise from those clues?

For example:

In the Prologue

1. To what extent does the idea that we are interpreting the Watch girl as the ghost of Iphigeneia affect our understanding of her relationship with Clytaemnestra?
2. The Watch girl speaks of Clytaemnestra's mind as being 'expectant, determined like a man's' (11). Later, in Episode 1, the Chorus say that Clytaemnestra speaks thoughtfully 'like a man of sense' (35, 37).
3. The Watch girl grieves for the difficulties at home and says things are not managed as well as they once were (19). Is she referring here to Clytaemnestra, or to Aegisthus, or to their combined management?
4. The Watch girl is afraid of speaking openly (36-39). Is this because she is afraid of Clytaemnestra, or Aegisthus, or both of them?

In the Parodos

1. What is Clytaemnestra's relationship with the Chorus in the Parodos?
2. She does not answer the Chorus when they beg her to tell them whether she has heard any news (83-103). Does she ignore them because she is busy in prayer - or

because she feels she can snub them with impunity – or because she does not yet feel ready to speak - or because she feels that she will not be believed? (In relation to the fourth possibility, she says, in Episode 2, that she 'kept making the sacrifices' despite knowing that people disbelieved her (575).) Any other thoughts?

In Episode 1

1. Does Clytaemnestra's relationship with the Chorus genuinely shift during this episode, and if so, why do you think this is?
2. At the beginning of this episode, she seems ready to make a public announcement concerning the fall of Troy (252, 253). Does she feel ready now because she has just been preparing the household altar for the sacrifices that are to take place inside the palace (1008)? Do you have any other thoughts?
3. Clytaemnestra's system for relaying the news of the end of the war seems very well managed (267-302).
4. She imagines the defeat of Troy with empathy for the conquered (312-315). She speaks later of the reports of the war that have been pouring in over the years (841). Has she been living and breathing and dreaming the war for years now?

In Episode 2

1. When Clytaemnestra speaks of her faithfulness to Agamemnon, her hypocrisy seems clear (585-595). It is also clear from the Chorus's response that some of them at least, are not taken in by her.

In Episode 3

1. How does Clytaemnestra feel towards Agamemnon?
2. Clytaemnestra makes a very public declaration of her 'love' for Agamemnon (829ff.).
3. For most of her opening speech in this episode, she speaks of him in the third person (876).
4. When she finally addresses him directly it is to invite him to walk on the cloth that will lead to his death. At this point she calls him her 'dear love' (878).
5. We understand Clytaemnestra's terms of endearment as being hypocritical, but does she, in a way still love, or desire, Agamemnon? It is clear from the depth of her bitterness expressed in Episode 5, that she is hugely jealous of Agamemnon's sexual relationship with Cassandra. Perhaps, in her jealous imagination she exaggerates it, but does this excess of hurt suggest a feeling closely akin to 'love'? (1413-1420). Might this 'love' also be discernible in Episode 3?
6. Clytaemnestra's insight into Agamemnon's motives and vulnerability are apparent when she asks him if it is *fear* that prevents him from walking on the cloth that has been laid out for him (905).
7. Clytaemnestra's sense that she is an instrument of the god of justice is implicit in lines 946 and 947.

In Episode 4

1. When does Clytaemnestra decide to kill Cassandra?
2. Perhaps when she first sees her in Episode 3? Or perhaps it is not until Episode 4 when Cassandra does not obey her order and, ambiguously, Clytaemnestra says that Cassandra 'will froth away her strength 'In *blood* [my italics] before she learns how to bear the bridle' (1036, 1037)?

In Episode 5

1. What is Clytaemnestra's state of being during this episode?
2. It is clear that she has finally accomplished the murder of Agamemnon, and that it was long premeditated (1348, 1349).
3. When she tells the story of the murder of Agamemnon, the tense changes from present - to past - to present. Compare for example line 1350, with line 1356, with line 1359.
4. Again and again, Clytaemnestra claims that her murder of Agamemnon is just: because of the misery he has caused - because of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia (1367, 1377, 1405, 1504) – and, also, because of the children murdered by his father (1470-77).
5. Clytaemnestra speaks of her own '*fearless heart*' [my italics] (1373). Later, she betrays her own vulnerability when she acknowledges that Aegisthus is a 'shield of courage' to her in the 'halls of *fear*' (1410, 1407).
6. The Chorus say that Clytaemnestra is arrogant and her mind 'unhinged' (1399, 1400). Do we want our audiences to agree with them?
7. The Chorus also say that there are 'streaks of blood' standing out in her eyes (1401). Does this suggest that the murders were committed in rage and passion rather than in cold blood?
8. What impression do we have of Clytaemnestra's feeling for her daughter from this episode? For example, she speaks of Iphigeneia as the 'most precious pain of my labour' (1389, 1390). She says that she was much 'wept-for' and speaks of her as 'My child by him [Agamemnon] and raised by me, He did something she did not deserve' (1500, 1501). She is speaking here as a mother – and she is speaking of Agamemnon as father to her child.
9. Clearly, Clytaemnestra loved Iphigeneia enough to kill Agamemnon, in vengeance for her death. This mother's love is the key underlying motive for the murder of Agamemnon - as well as a key driving force for the whole play.
10. Do you think that, ultimately, Clytaemnestra accepts responsibility for what she has done (1539-1548)? For example, she speaks of agreeing to retain only a small part of the family's wealth in exchange for driving away murder from the 'house'.

B. What are the key questions in relation to Clytaemnestra that the text leaves open for us to decide?

For example:

1. Is it possible to trace Clytaemnestra's inner emotional journey? Are there conflicts inside her? To what extent does she try to hide them? To what extent do we want to make her inner journey clear to an audience?
2. Perhaps her true feelings are most clearly expressed in Episode 5 beginning with her words 'In the past I have said many things to suit The moment; now I shall not be ashamed to say the opposite;' (1343ff.)?
3. What responsibility does Clytaemnestra bear for what happened? Is she justified in avenging the sacrifice of her own daughter in a society that stood by and did nothing?

C. Movement, Voice and Image in relation to Clytaemnestra

Some of the important areas to think about are:

1. Eye focus and direct address

Can Clytaemnestra, sometimes, address the audience directly, as if they too are members of the Chorus?

2. Individual character movements

Clytaemnestra is a queen and ruler of the people of Argos in her husband's absence. With Agamemnon, she is also the holder of long established wealth. She is also someone who is capable of murdering two people with a knife, one of them her husband, a warrior. How do you think these factors might affect her movements?

3. Individual vocal characteristics

It seems imperative that Clytaemnestra's voice has authority and strength, as well as the ability, at times, to convey other sides to her character, including her vulnerability.

4. Telling her individual story

What is the story of Clytaemnestra in the play? What are her intentions/objectives/motivations within each episode and when do the significant changes occur?

5. Physicalising ideas and themes within the play

In relation to acting style we want to experiment with moments of naturalism, as well as, ways of physicalising ideas, and themes, within the play, including feelings between characters. Ideas for motifs/emblems/images that could be physicalised - through repetition, freeze frame, or whatever – in relation to the 'character' of Clytaemnestra would be exciting. What are the key moments that we might want to experiment with in this way? What are the key lines of text? We may, in the end, cut back to a careful selection of movements but as with all the characters, certainly, to begin with, we need to brainstorm.

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Endnotes

¹ Further information about Foursight Theatre may be obtained from their website at <http://www.foursighttheatre.co.uk/>

² Naomi Cooke was Artistic Director of Foursight Theatre at the time of these projects, and also directed *Hecuba*. My tasks as dramaturg to *Hecuba* included: meeting with the director before rehearsals began in order to discuss interpretative approaches to the text, offering notes to the director at a work-in-

progress stage of rehearsals, writing extensive notes to the whole company, relating to each of the characters in the play, before rehearsals began, and suggesting practical exercises for approaching the embodiment of character.

³ My working methods are outlined in Hulton 1998.

⁴ In the Foursight Theatre production, the question of whether, or not, Clytaemnestra was the sole human agent of her own actions was fore-grounded by the strategy of omitting the appearance of Aegisthus at the end of the play. The final lines of text, in the Foursight Theatre production, were spoken by Clytaemnestra. They are quoted here from page 115 of Philip de May's translation:

I am willing to accept what has happened,
Hard though it is to bear, but as for the future,
He [the daimon] should go away from this house and wear away
Some other line with the murder of its kin.
It is quite enough for me to have a small part
Of its wealth, if I can drive from our house
The madness of murdering our own.

⁵ The actors in the production were: Naomi Cooke (Clytaemnestra), Neila Ebanks (Watch girl/Iphigeneia and Chorus), Taylan Halici (Herald and Chorus), Frances Land (Chorus), Ralph Mondri (Agamemnon and Chorus), Beatriz Pasamon-Gonzales (Cassandra and Chorus), Sanjay Shelat (Young Man/Chorus Leader) and Rob Swinton (Old Man/Chorus Leader). The Composer and Musical Director was Mary Keith, the Sound Designer was Duncan Chave, and Purvin made the puppets.

⁶ *The Home Guard* was part of Ted Hughes's version of the *Oresteia*. It was staged by the Royal National Theatre in London in 1999 and directed by Katie Mitchell. Sebastiao Salgado's black and white photography focuses on developments in the Third World. In his book *Migrations*, for example, (Aperture 2000), Salgado documents images of displaced peoples, and the way in which they have been affected by war, famine, and the global economy.

⁷ The Newhampton Arts Centre (<http://www.newhamptonarts.co.uk>) is home to a range of local Arts organisations including Foursight Theatre, Zip Theatre, Sekwense African Dance & Drumming, Surdhwani Asian Arts, North Indian Punjabi Arts, Allstars Cheer & Dance, Sam Sharpe Music Project, Central Youth Theatre and Radio WCR1300. The Centre serves the multicultural community in which it is located, by providing a wide range of opportunities for engagement and participation in the creative arts. Its current focus is on children and families, cultural diversity and inclusion.

⁸ See Berger (2005) 56.

⁹ In practice, only the costume worn by the actor playing Agamemnon was clearly indicative of its (military) provenance. Clytaemnestra wore an elegant black trouser suit that was intended to suggest an affluent and powerful background; and the Chorus Leader wore a costume that might have suggested, for example, a retired academic.

¹⁰ See Hodge (2002), 131, for a fuller definition of the term 'super-objective'.

¹¹ See Linklater (1976), 139 and Spolin (1983), 257 for fuller outlines of the exercises referred to.

¹² See Pasolli (1970) for an outline of the 'movement action sequence'; and Hodge (2002), 131, for a fuller definition of the term 'subtext' as it is used in 'Method' acting.

¹³ This term 'emotional subtext', that I have coined, is distinct from Stanislavsky's idea of 'subtext' in the important respect that it focuses on suppressed feeling. Also, unlike Stanislavsky's idea of 'subtext', (which is normally understood to run counter to the spoken text) 'emotional subtext' may run either parallel with, or counter to, the spoken text.

¹⁴ Foursight Theatre has a policy of soliciting audience response and detailed feedback in the form of notes. Audience responses to the Agamemnon project were overwhelmingly categorised as either 'excellent' or 'very good'.

¹⁵ The choice of the Philip de May's illuminating translation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) was determined by the publisher's expressed interest in the results of this investigation being documented onto three double DVD-ROMs to accompany the publications: *Medea*, *Agamemnon* and *Hecuba*, in the series Cambridge Translations from Greek Drama (Series Editors: John Harrison and Judith Affleck). Video records of performances by Foursight Theatre, director's notes, and collections of further material related to the processes of translating the plays from page to stage have been published by the Arts Documentation Unit, Exeter, in association with Cambridge University Press (2006). Details may be obtained from the *Arts Archives* website www.arts-archives.org.