YOU KNOW WALLS, CAN'T CONTAIN ME: APPROACHES AND REFLECTIONS ON DIRECTING CHARLES MEE'S THE BACCHAE 2.1 AS A HYBRID THEATRE AND THE INTERFACING OF ASIAN PERFORMANCE RITUALS TO THE WESTERN SPOKEN DRAMA

by

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Abstract

My MFA Theatre Directing Thesis Production inquires on intercultural theatre through hybrid pollination of Asian ritual performances to the Western spoken theatre using Charles Mee's *The Bacchae 2.1*. What attracted me about this text is Mee's rendering of different cultural influences and layering of various artistic traditions into one dramatic expression. In one of the lines of Dionysus, he ascertained, "You know walls, can’t contain me…", the premise that signifies in this line is the process and approaches I employed in crafting this performance. Global issues influence my experiences as a contemporary artist, and my central interest in this project is to seek how cultures blend without a compromise. Mee's *The Bacchae 2.1* captured this artistic rendition by sourcing various texts and materials while keeping the moral ethos and political premise of the original text. When cultures are mixed and blended to form a new style of artistic language, dialogues can then be opened between people of various cultural backgrounds. From this, new artistic forms are fused to transcend cultural differences in search of an understanding of the global human condition.
Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Dennis Desuyo Gupa.
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Dedication

Sa bukal ng alaala at gunita:
sumusunod ang mga buhay na anino-- may dugo at buto ang kanilang mga
katawan;
mga pag-ibig
sumasayaw na parang mga alon, na parang mga hangin, na parang mga alon.

With much, much, much love to my parents and siblings, to whom this project is
dedicated--Buenaventura Baris Gupa (Balangkayan, Eastern Samar), Josefina Deocariza Desuyo
(Sorsogon City, Bicol Peninsula) and Alvin, Beatriz, Chito.
Introduction

History says that the first performance of the tragedy *The Bacchae* was in the Theatre of Dionysus in 405 BC. Euripides’ play is the story of Agaue (Agave) and how she is driven to mistakenly kill her son, Pentheus, the young King of Thebes. Chastised by Dionysus, the god of intoxication and excesses, Agaue and Pentheus denied the deity's power, hence, the destruction of the whole city.

My MFA Theatre Directing Thesis Production aims to be a re-imagination of Euripides’ *The Bacchae* via Charles Mee's *The Bacchae 2.1* as a performance of intercultural and contemporary theatre. What attracted me most about this text is Mee's rendering of different cultural influences and layering of various artistic traditions into one dramatic expression.

Global issues influence my experiences as a contemporary artist, and my central interest in this project is to seek how cultures blend without a compromise. Mee's *The Bacchae 2.1* captured this artistic rendition by sourcing various texts and materials while keeping the moral ethos and political premise of the original text. When cultures are mixed and blended to form a new style of artistic language, dialogues can then be opened between people of various cultural backgrounds. From this, new artistic forms are fused to transcend cultural differences in search of an understanding of the global human condition.

Through this evolving practice of intercultural theatre in a globalized world, a number of Western theatre directors have intimately investigated the question of how to attain a universal
language in theatre that would allow people of diverse cultures to successfully access and create a work of art.

Amongst the prominent apologists and directors of the intercultural theatre movement are Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine and Yukio Ninagawa. Brook's *Mahabharata*, for example, was a French translation of the original Sanskrit epic text featuring a large cast of multi-cultural actors from Asia and Europe. By combining theatrical elements of dance, song, and Indian traditional performance aesthetics such as *Kathakali*, Mnouchkine, founder of Théâtre du Soleil, she re-interpreted classical European dramatic texts of Shakespeare, Moliere, and Euripides into highly physical performances while drawing inspiration from various Asian aesthetics in traditional drama. In Asia, Yukio Ninagawa's provocative and highly visual “re-languaging” of Western classical texts, which were folded to his Japanese artistic persuasions, remains a crucial contribution to the realm of intercultural theatre. The styles and artistic choices of these three directors are significant influences in my study as I prepare to direct Charles Mee's *The Bacchae*. 

2.1.
CHAPTER 1: Directorial Analysis


1.1 Initial response to the play

Charles Mee's re-interpretation of Euripides' play finds its resonance in contemporary social and religious order. How people encounter deities with fear is a question that hopes to guide me in shaping the theatrical expression of this performance project. As a work that depicts religious worship and the ways in which god, man/woman and tradition interact in a world where tragedy is always imminent, *The Bacchae* 2.1 seems an appropriate literary site for an intercultural intervention incorporating the aesthetic forms of the Filipino culture.

Currently, the Philippines remains deeply rooted in religious rituals and many God-fearing Catholics believe that moral transgressions may bring out the wrath of God. Take the local response to the typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan devastation that stuck the Philippines in November of 2013 as one example.

I believe that fusing this canonical Western play with traditional Filipino aesthetic forms of ceremonial worship practiced by the Tagalogs of Central Luzon and other indigenous Filipinos in Southern Philippines (Mindanao) can give rise to a potent hybrid reflection on the dichotomies of tradition and modernity.
The Philippines and many emerging nations are confronted with neocolonialism, as North America and Continental Europe expand their private enterprises, unhindered by national government interventions. Charles Mee's *The Bacchae 2.1* can be used as a provocative text that has the fluency to comment on global power brokers as well as political and social oppression. In the Introduction of the text found in his website, he noted that the play is where “*The first world meets the third world, the insiders meet the outsiders, the defender of the old meet the challenge of the new, the champions of reason meet the champions of passion, the men meet the women... find their place in Euripides' classic piece, set in the world both then and now*” (Mee, 1993).

*The Bacchae 2.1* is a new incarnation of Euripides' *The Bacchae* that departs from the well-known social and cultural construction of Cartesian dualism. Mee's interfacing of post-gender and post-modern discourses through his richly poetic articulation inspires me to investigate my aspiration for crossing boundaries of aesthetic expression fundamentally built from spoken theatre. I want to bring forth questions such as: Can an artist from a traditional society like the Philippines transform constructed ideologies of gender and sexuality and the politics of power? Who am I and what do I do with the thought systems constructed for me? What would the world be like if we have genders crossing boundaries, not just as a phenomenon that we observe, but as a non-contested value that celebrates genuine post-gender and post-capitalist liberation?

As an Asian artist and scholar from a "developing country," i.e. Majority World, I straddle privilege and underprivileged-ness. I vacillate among the tensions of resistance, negotiation, and acquiescence to dominant agencies of morality and religion. From this context, I wish to explore
not only the interfacing of cultures but also to question current dominant gender and power assertions, as they relate to my ongoing personal changes and as I continue to witness global transformations. Rooted in my heritage, I locate myself in the center of this modern and technological world where I wish to contribute in the knowledge production of new myth-making, thematic analysis, and aesthetic forms that encourage and celebrate human diversity in contemporary times.

This thesis project will certainly appeal to culturally diverse audiences. This is an opportunity for audiences to expand their exposure to contemporary texts that deal with human complexity and further reflect on cultural diversity through thematic explorations and re-workings of aesthetic forms. While the play is written in contemporary language, this could also attract people who have an interest in classical literature given the material is based on Euripides' *The Bacchae.*

1.2 Title and theme

In Mee's website, he categorizes *The Bacchae 2.1* under **Other Tragedies and History Plays,** second on the list after *Agamemnon 2.0.* It is dangerous to polarize the two or even to assert that one is a continuation of another. The numerical insignia in the title marks is an open interpretation. In another category called **The Trilogy: Imperial Dreams,** two more Greek plays were adapted with numbers attached to the titles, namely, *Iphigenia 2.0* and *Orestes 2.0.*

The numbers in these plays are methods of systematizing the historical continuation of Greek tragedies. Mee wrote these texts during the apex of computer science and one can surmise that his choices was influenced by how the technological fascination is affecting the whole world.
during that time. But what are the representations and semiotic meanings hidden behind the numbers in this title? Can this be due to the many sources of the text? Mee’s translations are a provocative interplay of classicism and contemporary styles. He kept the plot and the characters of *The Bacchae*, but interspersed it with other materials by Georges Bataille, Klaus Theweleit, and Wilhelm Stekel, as well as texts or portions of texts considered “dangerous” including the *Prinzhorn Collection* in Heidelberg, *SCUM Manifesto* by Valerie Solanas, selections from Joan Nestle’s *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*, and writings from Pat Califia, Jeanne Cordova, Barbara Duden, Mary Maclane, Aimable Jayet, and Sei Shonagon. The central theme of this play is the powerlessness of man in his relationship with gods. The destructive power of gods through their avenging hands (lightning, thunderstorms, and earthquakes) proves that these gods are not necessarily benevolent. Man's hope that god will always take care of him is an erroneous assumption. Sometimes, the gods can be fickle and they toy with us. The god of fertility and wine returns to his homeland to take revenge against Pentheus and this act is a way to vindicate the death of his mother, Semele. As he prepares to destroy the whole city he first enchants the women to engage in various lecherous acts of worship. Pentheus, the young king and ruler of the city, angered by these cultic observances, orders his men to seize the effeminate stranger. And Pentheus' unwillingness to venerate Dionysus leads to his tragic demise. The pathos expressed in filicide, of a mother killing her own son (who is under the spell of an avenging god), makes this text as one of the most horrifying dramas of all times. The theme of god versus man and man losing the battle against the divinities remain an interesting tension to articulate for a theatrical performance. The rational man will not succumb from the bacchanalian cultic rites of women and through his masculine and savage predilection he will aim to destroy them instead. He is blinded by his rigid, rational mind.
The women from the city who join the other women in the mountain find themselves soulfully awakened by engaging in an excessive sexual ecstasy. Enraged by this cultic and religious rite, Pentheus' plan to censure and destroy these women results in his undoing—a divine punishment (nemesis). The repression of his own unrecognized Dionysian impulses, lust for power and pride (hubris) are the causes of his own death. Possessed by his own rational power that hints at his internal folly and delusion, Pentheus is pictured as a typical tragic tyrant or what Geoffrey S. Kirk described as an image of “arrogant reliance on mundane power” (Oranje, 1884).

He thinks he is equal to gods, and by mocking the Stranger with his sophistic acuity, he believes that he can regain the women back to his city. In the interest of the people of Thebes, the king orders the Stranger be put behind bars. Unknown to him, this maneuvering will result in his eventual destruction (nemesis). Playing god and playing with god using his own reasoned mind will cause his complete destruction. For Dionysus, the survival of human existence belongs to the realms of the unseen and the workings of the unknown, which the origin of man's fate is in the hands of the god. It is therefore dangerous to upset him. The dervish, trance-like dance signify the Dionysian revelry of illogical, raw, sensual explosion of ecstatic state. Women holding musical instruments and engaging in intense pleasures of dancing and singing is a powerful act of reclaiming the body and spirit as restrained by the Apollonian logic and reason. The tension between the individual and the collective, reason versus emotion, logic against instinct is clearly articulated in Mee's The Bacchae 2.1. These dichotomies are characteristics of Apollo and Dionysus, both sons of Zeus. Mee’s chorus is unique. Composed of women from South America, Asia, Middle East, Africa, it makes a strong statement of politics of inversion to
the authority held by men. This Asiatic cultic religious rite affected and caused estrangement of Pentheus who is the personification of a white-male-dominated culture.

I visualize the production set design to be dark and ominous, yet richly poetic, with percussive soundscapes layered with projections. If Apollo is the god of the sun, the symbol of dreams and reason, Dionysus on the other hand is the god of fertility and wine, of excesses, of intoxication and ecstasy. Apollo’s characteristics serve as a template of Mee's characterization of Pentheus whose reason brought him to a tragic end, while the Stranger embodies the Dionysian ethos. I wish to plumb the notion of duality in the intersections of what is sacred and profane, the perils caused by too much desire for power, and the tension between gods and human beings. Along with the homecoming of god, revenge, restraint, moderation, and death by filicide, the serpentine venom of Dionysian energy is another significant theme that I would like to suture into this production. Duality and disguise are also well-pronounced in the prologue. Mee described Dionysus as "a transvestite in a white pleated linen skirt, combat boots, an orange silk blouse... 'the god that comes" (Mee, 1993). In his search of the depth and meaning of his art, Euripides decided to write The Bacchae to investigate the frenzied spectacles of the Dionysian ritual acts, as well as the rites performed for Bacchus, the god of madness and ecstasy, to whom we also attribute the origin of the art form called “theatre.” The Bacchae 2.1 is also an apt material for looking at the theme of the power of theatre to influence our lives as artists and to recognize its potency to bring change and transformation.
1.3 Unifying objectives: the thing that everyone seems to be after

**Central conflict:** core of dramatic action often expressed through the conflicting objectives of two characters, or within a single character, or between all characters and a given situation

**Plot (Ball/Serban):** Stasis, the status quo that has existed in the play's world up through its beginning. Dramatic stasis occurs when things would go on the same forever if something didn't come along and happen.

**TP1, [Intrusion/turning point one]:** *That thing that comes along and violates the world of the play. Upset the status quo, causing or releasing forces that compose the play's conflict and progress.*

The Arrival of Dionysus

Dionysus returns to the house of Kadmos for the retribution of Semele, his mother, who had enchanted the women to go to the mountain. Outraged by the killing of his mother, the god intoxicates these women and reawakens their sleeping souls causing an angry Pentheus to send armies to suppress the religious occultism brought by Dionysus. Pentheus, at the beginning of the play, is on the top of his ivory tower, enjoying the belief that his power cannot be defeated, his youth and intellectual agility cannot be challenged. But the vindictive Dionysus plans the death of this young king. At the beginning of the play, Pentheus' self-engrossed belief was challenged by the Dionysian cultic celebration where his mother Agave is involved as one of the women following to worship Dionysus:
And then the whirling Bacchae 
erupt in an ecstatic dance. 
Leaps, shouts, clapping 
to Zulu Jive music. 
The dancers take turns with solos 
while others are at the side singing and clapping. 
An invigorating, sensual, sexual piece, 
filled with intense pleasure 
soaring spirits, joy.

Armed with their musical instruments, the women are dancing and whirling to conjure the spirit of Dionysus. His cultic followers are in the state of wild dancing. These women of The House of Thebes cannot be stopped in worshiping the god of ecstasy. Kadmus and Tiresias are ready to join this carnivalesque celebration of sensuality to finally express their wild and orgiastic passion. For Pentheus, this is the ultimate act of threat hindering his desire for control and restraint. Dionysus is seen in his Dervish whirling of purification, cleansing as he prepares to destroy Pentheus and his craving for self-pride.

**TP2, [Intrusion/turning point two].** *Something triggers all the resources of the play to swing into high gear. From this point onward, high energy forces battle each other until a new stasis comes about.*

**The Arrest of Dionysus by Pentheus and the Earthquake and Thunder**

Through the help of his aides, Pentheus captured Dionysus, and eventually chained him:

*Put him in chains.  
Put him in a cell.  
Put him out of my sight.  
I don't want to touch him.*
Then take some men and bring those women back down from the mountains.

And, as for these women,
I'll have them sold off as slaves
or put them to work at my own hearth,
sewing, and knitting, and cooking,
since our own wives seem to have such little interest in their duties.

What follows next is a supernatural energies (thunder and earthquake) summoned by Dionysus. His arrest caused an earthquake with blast of thunders bringing apocalyptic dystopian circumstances. He enters the scene with snakes covering his/her body. From the rubble, Pentheus emerges, questioning his Aides, “who let him [Dionysus] out?” (Mee, 1993). Tony Ulasewitz comes, an undercover agent sent to spy on the activities of the women and report their hedonistic and savage acts to Pentheus. Pentheus' first reaction was to send his army but Dionysus convinced him to disguise as a woman for him to:

Reconnoitre the mountain
before you send troops to battle.
...
Or go yourself to spy.
See with your own eyes
what it is these women do.

TP3, [Intrusion/turning point three]. Battle takes a decisive turn; spectator finds out who wins and losses.

The Killing of Pentheus

In the Cockaigne, the women are resting and re-claiming their bodies by performing strange acts of social digression. This is followed by the cultic enchantment while Dionysus and Pentheus watch from a close distance, hiding. Pentheus is disguised as a woman and joins the Dionysian
revelries by saying “Amen,” while Dionysus, who intentionally distances himself from the Bacchantes, steps out to join the circle of revelry. Pentheus immediately becomes enchanted and drops his wig to expose his true self. Possessed by Dionysian indignation Agave forcefully slams the head of Pentheus, killing him. The head of Pentheus becomes her trophy, the huntress Agave shows the carcass/corpse of Pentheus to her father. Kadmus rebukes her by pointing out that it is the head of her son Pentheus that she is holding.

**TP4, [Intrusion/turning point four].** *New stasis achieved when the forces set in motion by TP1 are no longer in conflict.*

*The goal of every play: to come to rest.*

*Play ends.*

*The time between TP3 and TP4 is usually very short.*

**The Black Ash Falling and the Unstoppable Destruction of other Cities**

Pentheus is dead. Kadmus mourns. Agave is in shock. They soon leave the city while Dionysus whirls in a dervish state, conjuring the power of destruction. Dionysus is prepared to destroy another city that neglects him as a god. His vision of a burning city will soon happen and the women are kept captive, ready to whirl with him. Kadmus and Teresias are helpless, they will soon confirm the prophetic vision a city in rubble. The black ash falls like rain of death. It is the rain of destruction and this destruction will keep on going.
1.4 The story

1.4.1 What actually happens in the story?

The beginning of this play is the beginning of revenge. Dionysus, the son of Semele, comes from Asia to retaliate and demand justice for the murder of his mother (for having an affair with Zeus). This half-god, half-mortal being, dressed eclectically and androgynously, appears to the House of Kadmos as a stranger. He moves with a strong effeminate quality. He is a transvestite and a powerful character. He enters slowly and, as he occupies the space, is enveloped by a cosmic light, inspiring a cultic ritual worship from his followers—the women also called “the Bacchae.”

These women readily worship Dionysus, the god of epiphany, wine, fertility and excesses. This androgynous god brings madness to the women who then flee to the forest and engage in sexual ritual acts and revelries. These women whirl, sing and enact trance like dances venerating the god that drives them mad. The blind Tiresias and the old liberal Kadmos are seen wearing clothes with saffron ties indicative of Dionysian color. They want to join the women in the ritual rites. They concur to reunite with the women:

KADMOS
*Rather join the women in the mountains than stay here with the men.*

TIRESIAS
*Do what we please.*

KADMOS
*Bake bread.*

TIRESIAS
*Sing songs.*

KADMOS
*Bathe a woman's feet.*
Pentheus, the young king of the Thebans, admonishes the two generals and tries to stop them from joining the women. He then decides to hunt the “foreigner” who made the women “not wise guardians of the home and the state” (Mee, 1993) and who “‘abandoned all notions of civility’” (Mee, 1993). Dionysus, disguised as a stranger, is brought to Pentheus, chained and questioned by the young king. Pentheus is infuriated with the stranger, commanded the aides to put him behind bars. Beautiful music plays, followed by a dance, then, “an ear-shattering sharp, sizzling thunderbolt, an incredible flash of lighting, a blast of thunder that makes the entire theatre shake and tremble, a thunder rumbles and rolls and fades into the distance” (Mee, 1993). As a powerful god, Dionysus re-enters with snakes all over his body. Pentheus meets Dionysus amidst rubble then a spy sent by Pentheus arrives: Tony Ulasewitz. Tony reveals the strange activities the women in the mountain were doing:

TONY ULASEWITZ
They were there around the trees,
old women and young, some no more than girls,
lying around
like animals
relaxing in the forest
their hair loose,
lying in each other's arms
one young mother,
giving her breast
to a fawn,
or doing what they pleased
stretched out by the stream
washing each other
...
eating berries
no one in charge as far as we could tell
total hedonists is what they are
kissing, licking
fingers up each other's business
that kind of thing
His men were caught hiding, and violence erupted between Tony Ulasewitz's troopers and the women led by Agave, mother of Pentheus. Inflamed with anger, the young king concludes that this frenzied religious observance is “‘an intoxication beyond all intoxications a release that bursts all bonds a madness without discretion’” (Mee, 1993).

Mindless of the presence of Dionysus who pretends to be a Stranger/Priest of the women worshippers, Pentheus orders the aides to summon his army and massacre the women. Dionysus, still unidentified as the god of the revelers, stops Pentheus from his military maneuvering since his mother Agave is part of the cultic rites. But Pentheus is adamant about his decision. Dionysus then asks him to strategize his game plan by spying first and be invisible by wearing a woman's clothes.

PENTHEUS

*Enough talk of miracles.*
*How should I become invisible?*

DIONYSUS

*You'd go as a woman.*

PENTHEUS

*I go as a woman?*

DIONYSUS

*Yes.*

PENTHEUS

*Wear a woman's clothes, you mean?*

DIONYSUS

*Yes.*

PENTHEUS

*[really interested in the idea]*
*Pass for a woman?*
DIONYSUS
Yes.

PENTHEUS
Do you think I could be taken for a woman?

DIONYSUS
Yes.

The silence punctuates the gender-switching scene of a covetous warrior transforming into a feminine performer. The women join Dionysus in stripping and dressing up Pentheus.

"...they clothe him layer by layer from perfumed powder to satin undergarments stockings slip dress high-heeled shoes wig ..."

In the land of Cockaigne, Dionysus and Pentheus witness the women in this otherworldly and unfamiliar world. They are the Cook, naked women, Tattoo Artist, Tattooed woman Orange woman, Lavender woman, woman hanging and suspended mid-air and Agave. They sing, lament and celebrate. Pentheus as the cross-dressed non-native of the mountain joins the sacrament of the women, and in the state of uncontrollable frolicking, the possessed Pentheus accidentally drops his wig, revealing his true identity. With this revelation, Agave repeatedly crashes Pentheus’ head into the ground and performs the act of the hideous sparagmos or tearing apart. Kadmos, father of Agave, arrives, confronted by the terror as he asks Agave:

KADMOS
Agave.
What’s happened here?

Discovering the horror of what she has done, the mother, “collapses to the ground, her head thrown back in a prolonged silent scream” (Mee, 1993).
At the end of the play, Dionysus, now in his godly appearance admonishes Kadmos' existential recognition that life is only a dream.

**KADMOS**
Surely, all this is a dream—only a dream.

...

**DIONYSUS**
These human beings:
what unfathomable creatures.
In the end, when they feel themselves suffocating, covered over finally in a gully filled with rubble, swallowed up by the earth, the thought rushes up unbidden: it's only a dream—this is the last hope we have within us.

The women whirl and dance to conjure the gods, followed by Dionysus who also whirls like a howling dervish. Immense black ashes fall, manifesting his powerful energy to demolish. At the end of the play is the beginning of the unrelenting godly-love for destruction.

**1.4.2 What kind of story is it?**

Definitely a tragedy, Euripedes’ *The Bacchae* was written during the declining years of the Macedonian era to investigate human being’s arrogance leading to unthinkable tragic demise. *Hubris*, the Greek term for tragic flaw, is manifested in this piece when the noble characters, Agave and Pentheus, mother and child, find themselves in the precarious unfolding of mishap brought by the vengeance of god-human, Dionysus. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, Euripides was compared as a subsidiary to Sophocles, asserting *Oedipus Rex* as the perfect example of what tragedy is. Aristotle perhaps is less mindful of Euripides' intention of inventing a new way of approaching what a tragedy is. The tragedian wrote *The Bacchae* as a way to artistically express his vexation from the old stylistic expression of tragedy espoused by his arch-rivals, Aeschylus and Sophocles. Nuanced with some comic interpolations, *The Bacchae* is a unique tragedy: The
opening scene, Cadmus and Tiresias, men of power and position are seen dressed-to-kill a la Maenads, ready to join the women (in Mee's text: Tiresias wears a gray pinstripe Brooks Brothers suit—and a flamboyant saffron tie and saffron handkerchief in the breast pocket of his suit jacket. Kadmus wears the same suit and Tiresias is wearing a flamboyant orange tie and breast pocket handkerchief). Pentheus admiring Dionysus' lovely dress, lovely skin and lovely hair brings a comic relief:

PENTHEUS

So.
A lovely dress. The color suits you. Lovely skin—very pale— a complexion cultivated in the darkness, not the light of day, am I right?
Lovely hair.
Not the coiffure of a wrestler.

The god Dionysus incarnated as a human being who can play tricks and subterfuge with earthquakes and thunder at his own disposal. Aristotle asserted that “plot is the soul the tragedy,” and this storyline must be complete (beginning, middle and end) with an appropriate magnitude (peripeteia, περιπέτεια, reversal or sudden change of fortune), and a unified action. If this is a definition that we want to champion, The Bacchae fits into this definition. It is tragedy, indeed, where we witness a young king beheaded and dismembered by the queen's unrestrained action. It is tragedy—“a mysterious, almost a haunted work, stalked by divinity and that demonic power of necessity which for Euripides is the careless source of man's tragic destiny and moral dignity” (Green, Lattimore, 1959). Mee's The Baccahe 2.1 is a deep and rich contemporary adaptation that takes off from this synthesis.

1.4.3 Who does it happen to?

Pentheus is not yet a man, and his rise from an egotistical young boy to a king eager to engage in
the barbaric and savage act of mass killing is indicative of his “blindness.” The prurient Pentheus is tricked to wear women's clothing and spy on the Asian Bacchantes. Wearing a wig, perfume and high-heeled shoes he is tempted to engage in voyeurism and sexual fantasy. His sensual curiosity for power and flesh leads to a shocking filicide. Dionysus enchants Agave to believe that the woman-visitor is a spy, leading her to kill her own son. In her lamentation, she vocalizes her tragic cognizance: "This is a bottomless universe, a great abyss beneath our feet, we don't understand it" (Mee, 1993). When Pentheus' passion ends, hers begins, even more terrible than his (Green, 1959). While Dionysus triumphs in his ultimate revenge-destruction ploy, the women join him in the whirling act of preparing to annihilate another city with an inexorable magnitude.

1.4.4 What is the unusual action?
The brutal killing of Agave's son Pentheus is the pinnacle of action. This, I consider the most unusual action that brings about the downfall of both Pentheus and Agave.

1.4.5 Genre of the play
As discussed in the previous question (What kind of story is it?), *The Bacchae* 2.1 is a tragedy. Charles Mee, whose work was adapted to contemporary American English language, took the liberty of crafting and re-shaping the names using various texts and sources (e.g., changing Cadmus to Kadmus, naming the messenger Tony Ulasewitz and the Bacchae with individual identities as Orange Woman, Lavender Woman, Tatoo Artist, Tattooed Woman, and Cook). I envision this production as a blend of contemporary Western styles and Asian/Filipino aesthetic ritual forms evident in the chanting of lyrics, along with dance and video projections. Mee's text is a beautiful hodgepodge of materials ranging from the works of French intellectual George
Bataille and German sociologist Klaus Theweleit. It also includes texts from Freud's follower Wilhelm Stekel; texts from the Prinzhorn Collection, which contains visual art of the mentally ill patients in Heidelberg; the well-known 1967 radical feminist manifesto of Valerie Solana's SCUM; gay liberation activist Joan Nestle’s work The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader; the works of bisexual transvestite man Pat Califia, pioneer of lesbian and gay rights, Jeanne Cordova, and German writer Barbara Duden; the autobiographical works of Mary Maclane, who is also known as the “Wild Woman of Butte”; the art of Aimable Jayet and Sei Shonagon, the Japanese court lady and writer of The Pillow Book. These quilt-like sources that Mee used in his writing of The Baccahae 2.1 will also be the creative impetus for the designers of this thesis production. I wish to follow his passionate vision in re-creating one of the well-known tragedies of Euripides, The Bacchae, by threading a path towards discovery, creativity, truthfulness, faith and honesty through a highly collaborative process with my designers by introducing them to some Asian performance rituals and dramatic expressions.

1.4.6 Style

This is a Greek tragic genre morphed into a contemporary spoken theatre, and as a director from Southeast Asia, I seek to combine an Asian performance tradition of chanting and contemporary movement. Some of the most memorable interpretations of The Bacchae of the 21st century include The Performance Group's Dionysus 69 with Richard Schechner who directed the well-known environmental performance piece that re-envisioned the Greek tragedy drawing from the performance rituals of the Asmat New Guinea. Another notable interpretation was Wole Soyinka's The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite, a full production produced by the Royal National Theatre, London in 1970. The Swedish director Ingmar Bergman in 1996 had his
own interpretation with the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm, Sweden as his collaborator. The most recent innovative rendition of this play was the 2007 musical adaptation of David with the bacchantes singing black soul music and Alan Cumming as Dionysus for the National Theatre of Scotland. From these works, I would like to continue and contribute in the discourse of aesthetic investigation on the wide-range possibilities of interpreting *The Bacchae* with Asian aesthetic as the main persuasion.

1.4.6.1 Set

Inspired by the Southeast/East Asian architecture of balance and harmony, I wish to look into the possibilities of borrowing from this tradition where the affinity between nature and spiritual energy blend. The growing influence of Asian religion and philosophies in the Western world is central in this creative investigation and how to capture this in a theatrical expression in *The Bacchae* 2.1 is an exciting field to circumvent. With clean, white stage floor and guided by a philosophy of the economy of design, I wish to craft a performance that brings an interfacing of East and West aesthetic forms. These ideas resonate with the philosophical and moral guideposts of harmony and balance among the Greeks as well as East Asian aesthetic philosophies, the Ying-Yang.

1.4.6.2 Lights

Mysticism and a symbolic representation of reality have to be achieved in the lighting of the performance. I am also keen on using a film or video projection to heighten the world of the play with close-up shots of faces and anatomical parts of human body.
1.4.6.3 Sound

Theatricality, chanting and the choreographic movements are important aspects of this project and will be fully supported by live playing of instruments. The ritualistic element expressed through processions, where the Bacchae engage in ritual dances and scenes, will vacillate from reality to illusion. I hope to employ sonic elements influenced by Western electronic avant-garde and Asian soundscapes. It is imperative that there be live instrumentalist in this performance using percussive instruments and the traditional Filipino indigenous instrument called “ahongan.” Mee describes the entrance of the women in the opening of his play: "It would be best if the women were accompanied onto the stage by a live orchestra that played flutes, drums, Indonesian gongs and bells, donkey jaws, the kora, balaphon, sitar, cymbals, and other instruments. And if some of them played instruments themselves" (Mee, 1993) these musical instruments, when used by the performers, can elicit trance-like experiences.

1.4.6.4 Costume

The costumes vary from pinstripe Brooks Brothers suits to “'astonishing necklaces or other pieces of jewelry” (Mee, 1993). The designer is certainly confronted with a challenge to create exciting designs that transcend time and space. The characters like the Bacchae who are “'dancers, singers, operatic singers, players of musical instruments, Butoh performers, animal trainers, herders of peacocks or herons, or possessed of other extraordinary and highly developed arts” (Mee, 1993) as well as Dionysus—who at one point will enter covered with snakes—can be an interesting space for the genesis of exciting designs.
1.4.6.5 Props & others

Some of the challenges include hanging an actor upside down, prolonging a shower of rose petals from the flies, simulating an earthquake after an incredible flash of lightning, and producing a circle of fire around Dionysus. I hope to answer these challenges through an innovative use of lights, projections, moving set pieces and the blending of live musical instruments with recorded soundscapes.

1.5 Scene: major change in each scene. Who does it happen to?

Table 1. Major change in each scene

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Major change in each scene</th>
<th>Who does it happen to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prologue/Scene 1</td>
<td>Dionysus enters and started dancing in dervish-like movement, covered with a pool of light which he shares to his followers—the women. This is the beginning of the play. The women whirl, dance, sing, chant, and play musical instruments to occupy the space as they conjure the spirit of Dionysus with intensity and exhilarating pleasure.</td>
<td>The Bacchae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 1</td>
<td>Enters Tiresias looking for Kadmus. The two men decided to join the women in Cockaigne wearing their lurid tie and handkerchief hinting a ’feminine’ color, ready to sing songs and bathe a woman's feet in Cockaigne. But Pentheus (with his Aides) sarcastically questioned them (What are these orange things you're wearing, Are these the colors of Dionysus?) and eventually rebukes them stop from cooperating with the women since these women are engaging in licentious acts which are unlawful, unreasonable, and against the intellect and logic (These are women who have abandoned all notions of civility. These are wild women.) Pentheus commands his Aides to capture the ’effeminate stranger’ who is causing the cultic madness and strange ritual rites in the forest. Kadmus and Tiresias both taken</td>
<td>Pentheus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Major change in each scene</td>
<td>Who does it happen to?</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 2</td>
<td>The smiling Dionysus/Stranger is chained, almost voluntarily gave his hands to the Aides, unperturbed. This calmness that emanates from Dionysus intrigues Pentheus allowing him to exercise his power over him by interrogating and insulting the Stranger. With suggestions of homoerotic confrontation between the two characters, the collisions of logic versus instinct, violence versus social justice, sensuality versus moral restraint are revealed through the exchanges of dialogues between Dionysus and Pentheus. Unable to gain power over Dionysus, Pentheus imprisons Dionysus/Stranger <em>(Put him in chains. Put him in a cell. Put him out of my sight. I don't want to touch him.)</em></td>
<td>Dionysus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 3</td>
<td>A dance is seen accompanied by beautiful, sweet music. Then, when Dionysus exhorts his power to bring thunder, lightning and earthquake causing the destruction of Pentheus' palace. Dionysus dances with his snakes. Pentheus confronts Dionysus and threatens to destroy the person who freed him. Tony Ulasewitz, a spy, enters as he reports to the young King of what happened to his troop in an encounter with the women in the mountain. Pentheus is enraged and he decides to send an army to kill the wild women of the mountain. Dionysus intervenes by reminding him that his mother is part of the revelers. He convinces Pentheus to wear a woman's clothing and spy on the women in their bacchic rites. Thrilled by the idea of being 'invisible' Pentheus capitulates to Dionysus' suggestions. The ritual of dressing and undressing began, similar to a wedding preparation, the first intimation to his eventual death.</td>
<td>Pentheus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 4</td>
<td>After the ritual, the transvestite Pentheus is seen arriving to the land of Cockaigne, <em>'an idyllic, cooperative, communal female world.'</em> Upon witnessing the strange rituals of the</td>
<td>Pentheus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Major change in each scene</td>
<td>Who does it happen to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 4</td>
<td>women, Pentheus hallucinates and joins the women in their ritual acts, finding himself in ecstatic state; he drops his wig exposing his true identity. Agave, discovering a man from the disguised 'woman', furiously and madly slams Pentheus' head three times into the ground and finally killing him.</td>
<td>Agave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 5</td>
<td>Agave shows the carcass of the 'wild animal' to Kadmos. Kadmos reproaches her by saying: 'Agave, Look what you hold. A child torn, as one would tear a rag by the hands of his own mother.' Extremely shocked by the recognition (anagnorisis), 'she collapsed to the ground, her head thrown back in a prolonged silent screaming', a quintessential expression of Greek tragedy's ignorance to knowledge.</td>
<td>Agave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>Dionysus and the Bacchae women whirl with black ash pouring excessively while Kadmus is seen carrying Agave in his arms, evoking the tragic message of the anticipated destruction of his lineage.</td>
<td>Kadmus and his entire family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.6 The relationship of the play to its myth

1.6.1 What aspects are emphasized/omitted/diminished?

Mee used several sources to reconstruct Euripides' *The Bacchae* but kept the plot of the story. He lifted lines from various sources and use them as basis for the telling the journey of the characters. For example, the line of Pentheus' "Men should be extinguished...crushed and stepped on and utterly extinguished" is a familiar premise of Valarie Solanas' SCUM Manifesto. There are almost 31 well-known translations of Euripides' *Bacchae* and I believe there are more unknown ones adapted and translated in different languages. In Mee's text, the names of Dionysus, Pentheus, Agave, Tiresias, and Kadmus (Cadmus) are kept while the maenads/bacchae are named specifically, giving the chorus members distinctive identities.
(Lavender Woman, Orange Woman, Cook, Tatoo and Tattooed Artist). Each is given solo lines, monologues and dialogues to comment and share everyone’s deepest internal longings. Names of contemporary places (Duval Street) and recent historical personalities (e.g. Tony Ulasewitz, Nobel Prize) are included in the text to render a contemporary expression. By doing this, Mee's contribution to American playwriting is an innovation of how a classical text can blend to other texts. His artistic persuasions are informed by the American visual artist Robert Rauschenberg and German artists Marx Ernst and Hann Hoch, whose collage takes rootedness from Dadaism and Surrealism, Mee brings these artistic articulations to his text. Like Euripides who was the enfante terrible of the ancient Greek dramatic tradition, this notoriety resonates to Mee’s artistic trajectories in American contemporary playwriting.

1.6.2 If a ritual is used, what is its function and meaning?

Charles Segal identified in this Greek tragedy the scenes where rituals are specifically performed. Among them are of (1) Pentheus and Dionysus conversation, (2) Pentheus being dressed as a woman, (3) the account of Pentheus’ death: its ritual procession, the rendering. In his book, Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides’ Bacchae, Segal underlines the meanings of the ritual of killing the king by sparagmos. The murdering of Pentheus is akin to that of the Year-King (eniautos daimon) Festival or the seasonal killings of a god leading to resurrection and the Saturnalia festival of misrule. This festival signifies that there is a "mimed disorder from which a new order, fresh and purified, would be reborn, or the model of sacral kingship wherein the king's spilled blood and dismembered body were cast into the soil to replenish the earth" (Segal, 1997). This rebirth or new order will only be attained through the slaughtering of the king. The slaying of Pentheus, led by his mother Agave, is an astute affirmation of belonging and of religious
connectivity among the Bacchae, which mirrors the "Durkheimian view of ritual as a cyclic, recurrent activity that provides symbolic confirmation of collective values and emotions shared by members of the community and reinforces their sense of stability, security, and belonging" (Kaplan, 2012).

1.6.2.1 Dance

The Bali dance in Charles Mee's text indicates that the women are from Asia and they are "foreign and they bring something profoundly different, alien into the world of the piece—deep passions from origins unknown to the world of the play" (Mee, 1993). Inherent in this text is the clear suggestion that dance and ritual movements can be used to express the strange and wild world of the play. The opening of the play where Dionysus and the Bacchae whirl is an act of conjuring the spirit world and this is also repeated in the last scene. The whirling and the killing are opportunities to express the violence in a dance-like language. These dances signify the act of invoking the power and presence of god.

1.6.2.2 Symbol

Pentheus and Dionysus are two characters in the play who carry a permutation of symbolic meanings. Dionysus himself is the symbol of revenge, homecoming and excessive revelry. While Pentheus desires harmony and balance, Dionysus aims for threat and destruction. In the city where Pentheus claims power, his constant need for stability is suddenly endangered by the women who ran to the mountain to worship Dionysus. These women have left the city as a religious act of resistance. In my interest in understanding the power collisions in the play, I would like to zero in on the symbolisms inherent in two opposing characteristics of Dionysus
and Pentheus. The oppositions in the text bring rich interpretations that could inspire the making of the production: the city versus the forest, for example, reflects how the social order differs from these two sites and how relationships and rituals are performed. The wild nature of the women can only be expressed in the forest, where they are seen dancing and singing. Their unhindered ritualistic expression is valuable to re-claim their kinship. On the other hand, Pentheus, who resides in the city, is constantly accompanied by his two Aides, both power brokers and angry men of repressed sexual desires. They have adapted/adopted the walled city's life causing them to behave with violence and rationality. Cockaigne is a total contrast. If the city is restrictive, the women in the Cockaigne defy all rules and the systemic moralities agreed and indentured by masculine energy/mind. It is a place in the earth where there is an absence of daily sadness and frustrations, "a land of contraries, where all the restrictions of society are defied (abbot beaten by their monks), sexual liberty is open (nuns flipped over to show their bottoms), and food is plentiful (skies that rain cheeses)" (Wikipedia, 2014). The animals in the land of Cockaigne are symbols of divinities that cohabit with human beings and are connected to the natural world. In the book Dreaming with Cockaigne: Medieval Fantasies of the Perfect Life, Cockaigne is pictured as "a dreamland where roasted pigs wander about with knives in their backs to make carving easy, where grilled geese fly directly into one's mouth, where cooked fish jump out of the water and land at one's feet. The weather is always mild, the wine flows freely, sex is readily available, and all people enjoy eternal youth" (Peij, 2001). The characters are symbolic of the place they choose to inhabit, causing them to either suppress their natural impulses or to act with it excessively. The image of the snake in this play recurs both in the city and the Cockaigne. This reptile symbolizes both good and evil, this duality capture the essence of Dionysus. Is he a she or a he? Can Dionysus be considered a god or a human, an evil or a
savior? The god of wine is also a god of fertility and production. For some cultures, the snake symbolizes teeming productiveness. The serpent also symbolizes birth and regeneration, and in the scene after the earthquake, Dionysus appears with snakes covering his body. Frederick Monsen, who studied the ritual snake dance among the Hopi of the North America, reveals that "The snake dance is a prayer to the spirits of the clouds, the thunder and the lightning, that the rain may fall on the growing crops" (Wikipedia, 2014). But for Dionysus, this dancing is the conjuring of death, symbolized through the black ash falling from the sky. The snakes in his body are spiteful tendrils of vengefulness and the unannounced earthquake is similar to the sudden deadly bite of a snake to one's heel. Unknowingly, Pentheus is trapped in the coil of Dionysian serpentine death. The snake is also a symbol of umbilical cord or kinship, like in the case of Pentheus and Dionysus.

**1.6.2.3 Gestures**

I wish to employ dance-like movement especially in those scenes that demand ritual performance. The opening and the last part of the play where Dionysus and the women are whirling, as well as the *sparagmos* (Agave’s murder of her own son) should be well choreographed. The contrast between delicateness and intense violence will be employed as a way to guide the creation of these scenes. The beautiful Asian dance will be rendered with live chanting of the 15th century Tagalog poem, “May Bagyo Ma't, May Rilim” (“Despite Storms and Darkness”/“Though It May Be Stormy and Dark”):

*May bagyo ma't, may rilim*
*Ang ola'y, titiguisin,*
*Aco'y, magpipilit din:*
*Aeouing paglalacbayin*
Guided by the polarities inherent in the text, the author enlisted words that could enrich the symbolic representations of the actual performance output.

Table 2. Polarities in The Bacchae 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dionysian</th>
<th>Apollonian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far</td>
<td>Near</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beast</td>
<td>Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God/ Sacred</td>
<td>Human/Profane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explosion</td>
<td>Restraint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imbalance</td>
<td>Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discord</td>
<td>Harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortal</td>
<td>Divine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savagery, Anarchy</td>
<td>Civilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>Frenzy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollution</td>
<td>Sacrament</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecstasy</td>
<td>Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitless</td>
<td>Boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorder</td>
<td>Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction</td>
<td>Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscious</td>
<td>Unconscious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madness</td>
<td>Sanity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild abandonment</td>
<td>Exulted purity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Weakness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>Destructive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>Forest/Wild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic</td>
<td>Illogical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eruptive Force of Nature and Life</td>
<td>Civilized Order and Routine (Arrowsmith)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excess</td>
<td>Moderation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promiscuity</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild</td>
<td>Tame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy</td>
<td>Horrible (Dodds 1960)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irrational</td>
<td>Reason</td>
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<tr>
<td>Popular Piety</td>
<td>Aristocratic Skepticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dionysian</td>
<td>Apollonian</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curvilinear</td>
<td>Linear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>Mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Space</td>
<td>External Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up (god)</td>
<td>Down (man)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical</td>
<td>Lateral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Light</td>
<td>Untoward Shadow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Color</td>
<td>Untoward Shading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sound</td>
<td>Silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching forward</td>
<td>Receding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>Singular</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disperse</td>
<td>United</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-linear time</td>
<td>Linear time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plenary consciousness</td>
<td>Monologic narrative (Juan, 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truth</td>
<td>Disguise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.7 Use of chorus

They who worship Dionysus are rooted from Asia called the “Bacchae”; these women are followers of Dionysus (also known as Bacchus). Mee describe them as "artists: dancers, singers, operatic singers, players of musical instruments, Butoh performers, animal trainers, herders of peacocks or herons, or possessed of other extraordinary and highly developed arts that they perform with such power and beauty as to break your heart with that alone...." (Mee, 1993). The play The Bacchae 2.1 is named after these women.

1.7.1 Why are they there?

The women venerate Dionysus and from time to time they repeat the words of the god to spread the Dionysian cult. The women in the Cockaigne are followers of Dionysus with Agave as the main leader of the group. In one way or another, these women are complicit in the dismembering of the body of Pentheus. Mee crafted the lines (from borrowed texts) reminiscent of free flow
poetic verses, and like a long song chanted or sung, these lines allude to a ritual act performance:

**LAVENDER WOMAN**

*When my happiness is given me, life will be a nameless thing.  
It will seethe and roar; it will plunge and whirl;*

*it will leap and shriek in convulsions;  
it will quiver in delicate fantasy;  
it will writhe and twist;  
it will glitter and flash and shine;  
it will sing gently;  
it will shout in exquisite excitement;  
it will vibrate to the roots like a great oak in a storm;  
it will dance;  
it will glide;  
it will gallop;  
it will rush;  
it will swell and surge...*

They express their deepest desires and aspiration and sexual fantasies:

**ORANGE WOMAN**

*I have within me an unusual intensity of life.  
I can feel.  
I have a marvelous capacity for happiness and for misery.  
My brain is a conglomeration of aggressive versatility.  
I am convinced of this: I am an odd person.  
I know myself oh very well. I have attained an egotism that is rare indeed.  
I have gone into the deep shadows.*

1.7.2 **Do they develop in any way?**

From gentle women who were lounging and witnessing the debate between Kadmus/Tiresias and Pentheus, they were transformed into wild women of the mountain. In a ritual act of frenzied performance, the last bacchae woman to deliver the live is the Lavender Woman:
LAVENDER WOMAN

The sunlight you see in water as you pour it from a pitcher into a bowl.

Then, Pentheus joins in the ritual, ecstatically. In the following beat, the murderous slaughtering of Agave happens.

AGAVE

Yes,
there is some deep pleasure
in killing...

There is no description or directorial instruction in the text of what happened next among the women except they joined Dionysus in his/her whirling.

1.7.3 Distribution of lines...how will you handle this?

Since there are no lines dedicated to choral delivery, some lines will be split into two for the Cooks. Originally, there is only one Cook in the text but I like to work with two actors for this role, breaking apart the long lines into separate, making several dialogues within the original monologues. One of the recurring themes of this play is doubling/pairings/duality, and I wish to use this in my rendition of the chorus part in the play.

1.8 Character analysis

Character analysis in directing is a fundamental tool a director should use. My theatrical engagement in North America that started in New York City as a director-in-residence at Ma-Yi Theatre Co. through the Asian Cultural Council of the Rockefeller Foundation allowed me to observe American trained directors how they conduct their rehearsals. Their keen analyses of
the characters bring a psycho-emotional dynamism to their actors. This is one reason why I came to UBC to study directing. Below is the table explaining the character analysis:

**Table 3. Character analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Super Objectives</th>
<th>Polarities [Change]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dionysus</td>
<td><strong>To revenge for his mother and destroy the entire human world.</strong> He came to take revenge and vindicate the death of his mother. Dionysus exists to destroy and inflict harm to Pentheus and the city for not recognizing his divinity. He will never stop until he has not seen the total destruction of the city.</td>
<td>His transformation is from god to mortal; low status to high status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentheus</td>
<td><strong>To maintain the authority.</strong> As the protector of civic and rational order, his goal is to defy the god of revelry and to stop the spreading of the religious cult. He wants to maintain his authority by ordering to kill the bacchantes.</td>
<td>From an obstinate and restrained king to a cross-dresser 'spy' in the land of Cockaigne; high status to low status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agave</td>
<td><strong>To keep the religious rites.</strong> Possessed by Dionysus, Agave the mother of Pentheus and her ultimate goal is to exercise her hunting skill by killing an interloper, a man dressed in woman's clothes.</td>
<td>An obedient daughter to a murderous mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kadmus</td>
<td><strong>To gain freedom.</strong> Dressed in a saffron ties and handkerchief, reminiscent of the colors of Dionysus, the old king of Thebes desires to join the Bacchae in Cockaigne for his desperate bid for liberation.</td>
<td>Potential follower of Dionysus to a lamenting father of Agave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terisias</td>
<td><strong>To gain freedom.</strong> The blind seer, who was cursed as a woman wants to join the women and demands Pentheus to worship Dionysus.</td>
<td>Nothing has changed with him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Ulasewitz</td>
<td><strong>To revenge and save his face.</strong> To revenge for his own life by persuading Pentheus to go to the</td>
<td>From a brave soldier/spy to a coward secret agent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Super Objectives</td>
<td>Polarities [Change]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Aide</td>
<td><strong>To support Pentheus' goal of destroying Dionysus.</strong> Sexually repressed, he supports Pentheus in making sure that Dionysus is kept in captivity.</td>
<td>Nothing has changed with him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Aide</td>
<td><strong>To support Pentheus' goal of destroying Dionysus.</strong> Just like First Aide, he assists the young king of the house of Kadmus in keeping Dionysus behind bars.</td>
<td>Nothing has changed with him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bacchae</td>
<td><strong>They want to explore, expand, celebrate and protect their newly found sensual lives.</strong></td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.9 Production concept

#### 1.9.1 Metaphor

I am using the image of the snake as the central metaphor of my production. In one of our conversations about the play, my supervisor Stephen Malloy and I identified the presence of the snake in the text. He asked me several questions pertaining to the characteristics of the snake, being untamed and dangerous of fatal bites, this reptile is symbolical of Dionysus' destructive nature. I see revenge, cunning and vindictiveness in this play, resembling the characteristics of the serpent. The shape and line of the snake will inform the design of the set, costume, lights and music. “Coiling,” “circular,” and “hissing,” these are the keywords I would like to use in my design works. The Ouroboros, a snake eating its own tail, expresses the destruction of kinship in *The Bacchae* 2.1.

This ancient symbol from Greek mythology explains the notion of cyclical manifestations of death and renewal. Plato says of the Ouroboros:
"The living being had no need of eyes because there was nothing outside of him to be seen; nor of ears because there was nothing to be heard; and there was no surrounding atmosphere to be breathed; nor would there have been any use of organs by the help of which he might receive his food or get rid of what he had already digested, since there was nothing which went from him or came into him: for there was nothing beside him. Of design he created thus; his own waste providing his own food, and all that he did or suffered taking place in and by himself. For the Creator conceived that a being which was self-sufficient would be far more excellent than one which lacked anything; and, as he had no need to take anything or defend himself against any one, the Creator did not think it necessary to bestow upon him hands: nor had he any need of feet, nor of the whole apparatus of walking; but the movement suited to his spherical form which was designed by him, being of all the seven that which is most appropriate to mind and intelligence; and he was made to move in the same manner and on the same spot, within his own limits revolving in a circle. All the other six motions were taken away from him, and he was made not to partake of their deviations. And as this circular movement required no feet, the universe was created without legs and without feet" (Plato, 360BC).

In the last scene of the play, Dionysus whirls and in this circulatory process of movement, he calls the powerful force of destruction. I am using this metaphor of the Ouroboros to inform my design inspiration.

1.9.2 Setting: function/identification of place

There are two settings in the play: first is The House of Kadmus and second, Cockaigne. The two
contrasting places represent the two main characters. Pentheus, who is from the city, embodies the rational and restrained values while Dionysus flourishes in Cockaigne, the land of bliss and freedom.

1.9.3 Relationship of actor to spectator

While Greek tragedies are traditionally performed in a theatre that looks like a horse-shoe shape where the audience sit in a sloping area called theatron or a place for seeing, The Bacchae will be performed at the Frederic Wood Theatre, which is a proscenium theatre. This type of performance space has an arch used to separate the actors from the audience. The isolation of the actors and the audience through this arch is a theatrical convention introduced and practiced by the Moscow Arts Theatre. In this case, I am at the intersection of two conventions, the world of the ancient Greek tragedy and a theatrical space of the 18th century. How can I reconcile these differences? The actors should retain the awareness of the presence of the audience while keeping the internal psychological intensity of the characters' super objectives. These two aspects hopefully will help solidify the goal of the production in posing big questions to audience about revenge and kinship, threat and destruction and offer them opportunity to reflect of what decision they will take in case they are faced with the same situation as that of the protagonist. The moving sets can also contribute in the delimiting nature of the proscenium theatre.

1.9.4 Possible use of masks

Masks in Greek tragedies are elemental in the performance as it heightens the sound of the actors and function as ceremonial pieces of property. In Asia, masks are also employed in many performance traditions. In this case I am keen on using a three dimensional masks for the chorus
members that resemble the head of the ancient statues found in the ruins of Greece. This will also signify the reasoned and logical head of Pentheus, cut and beheaded. Dionysus, a transvestite god and son of Zeus, captivated the Asian/Minoan women, including Agave, Pentheus' mother, to engage in holy eroticism in the land of Cockaigne. Passionate and without moral restraint, the women erupt in ecstatic dancing. Known as the Bacchae/Bacchantes, they sing in an invigorating sensual and sexual manner. Mee describes them as "... culture bearers and embodiments of sophisticated arts: artists, dancers, singers, operatic singers, players of musical instruments, Butoh performers, animal trainers, herders of peacocks or herons" (Mee, 1993).
CHAPTER 2: The Production Journal

"Before becoming an artist, you have to become a person first. Then you have to become a good person, someone better than an ordinary people. And third, real artists are 'celestial', which is to say they are high up. Everything their movements, their thoughts, their hearts, is the highest possible." -Han Thun Hak

September 17 | Starting with women: the designers’ first meeting

Last week, I asked set designer Natalia Ruiz and lighting/projection designer Eric Chad if we can begin talking together with the intention of finding ways to coalesce our design ideas. They both agreed to meet up after our class with Kirsty Johnston (Studies in Dramatic Theories and Criticism). We decided that we can meet after the class.

Today, Eric, Natalia and I went to Great Dane Coffee shop to discuss our initial feelings and thoughts about the play. Natalia showed some images she feels connected to the world of the play. I was struck with a picture of a woman hiding from the tree and how this clandestine quality can inform the designs of our project. Eric showed us video of his works in dance and theatre that utilizes projection as a light. Then, they asked me why I chose this play. I shared to them that most of the plays that resonate to me are those texts written by women and/or about women.

Since I grew up in a clan with large number of women I feel completely empathic to the issues and pains of women. This play in a sense is homage to all the women who seeded their love and
power to me as I develop into a human being. I also shared how interested I am in understanding the relationship of man and god and how this relationship impacts the survival of human society. Coming from a conservative country like the Philippine, religion, rituals, spirituality are important containers of daily survival. I wish to bring this traditional conception of spirituality in this project and find out how the blending of cultures can articulate big questions of kinship, death and destruction. Before we ended this conversation, Eric, suggested that we should meet with other designers. The weather was cooperative. This afternoon was filled with anticipation of an exciting semester and creative endeavor. We all went home.

**October 1 | Going back home**

This afternoon, I was able to meet with the rest of the designers including, Kate de Lorme (Sound) whom I have worked with my THTR 520 project and Kiara Lawson (Costume) who recently stage managed *Twelfth Night*.

After the short introduction, Eric suggested that I share the premise why I selected this text for my project. Thrilled with the prospect of telling my childhood stories back in the Philippines and how intercultural theatre will guide my vision in creating the project, I began unpacking my reflections about the play. I had series of discussions with Stephen and those times of insightful interactions with him helped me bring my thoughts on the table with the designers. Everyone shared their thoughts about the play and the most prominent topic was how to handle the language of this text. Because it is not just complex but also very sensual and they think it might offend the audience. I told them that my personal intention is not to offend the audience; my desire is to make them stay in the theatre, listen, and watch that hopefully will lead them to
create an internal dialogue within themselves. I also told them that we can provoke them but we should be careful that this provocation will not cause into anger but instead a questioning spirit then an illumination.

_Hi Designers!
Thanks so much for that meet and greet lunch. It was lovely to hear your initial thoughts about the play._

_If we meet on Tuesday with Jay then we could also float to him that apart from the Creative Meeting we would like to have a Creative Workshop Sessions for Director-Designers. I shall send you a Rationale of this soon and the idea behind this workshop. You are very inspiring folks to work and I am looking forward to an open-hearted collaboration as we advance from here to there._

_I remain,_
_Dennis_

**October 23 | Director's presentation with the designers**

Meeting with the designers this afternoon was one of the most satisfying feelings I ever felt in this past few weeks. As I think about this project and immerse myself into it, I was thinking of how the designers will bring insights to the actual creative process. I prepared a PowerPoint presentation that summarizes my research about the play. It has been a long pre-production research process for me. Since last year, I have been reading about Euripides and _The Bacchae_. It is important to know about the historical and cultural contexts of the play and how these contexts affect the politics of that time. I felt ready to present my presentation to the designers. With images and information presented to them, the whole team were stoked and enlivened. I showed them images of Asian traditional performances and how I wish to blend different cultures in this production. I saw them writing and taking notes with excitement. One particular idea that I presented is the possibility of using bamboo for the set. Natalia was thrilled with the prospect. Interesting questions surfaced. We all agreed to be bold and be experimental. I sensed a
strong design team. Half way to the meeting, Stephen Malloy, my thesis supervisor came to
observed and shared his thought about the play.

October 25 | The supervisors

I sent an email to Robert and Natalia requesting if they can both meet up with me and Stephen.

Hi Robert and Natalia,

I just finished my audition this afternoon and had wonderful experiences meeting potential
actors for our project.

I am just wondering if it's possible if Stephen Malloy, who is my adviser and I can have a half an
hour chat with you on Monday (anytime afternoon) or Tuesday (after Stephen Heatley's
presentation which will begin at 12.30nn or before 4.30pm)?

Let me know if this is possible with both of you...

Thank you very much!

Best,
Dennis

A set presentation happened between Robert Gardnier, Natalia, Stephen and I. Natalia and I
conceived an idea of three moving set pieces. The shape is inspired by traditional Philippine
Bahay Kubo (Nipa Hut). Imagining the world of the play, we began to sketch a world that
presents two opposing sides of human nature. We “toyed” the idea of having three moving set
pieces. The first set embodies a rational mind and the third set is the spiritual self of the man.
Both of us were seeking on how to merge these two. The idea of the second set piece that
connects these dichotomies emerged when Natalia saw a picture of traditional houses of the Sea
Gypsies of the Southern Philippines. In lily-white, these three pieces move dynamically where
the actors are the ones who configure and sculpt them as the scenes move to reveal the world of
Pentheus, Dionysus and the women in Cockaigne. Robert who is Natalia's supervisor asked several questions pertaining to the functionality of the set and its specific locales that it suggests. Stephen helped clarify to both of us if the set piece number 1 resembles a palace or a house and if the third piece is a forest, how different it should look like to that of the Set Piece 1. I felt good to receive guidance from the two faculty members who have invested their professional and pedagogical efforts for us to grow as practitioners of theatre. Robert and Stephen are highly experienced theatre makers. What inspired me most from this discussion was when Robert took Natalia's set piece and asked her if it's possible for him to use the mark-up set pieces to further and demonstrate his ideas. I was taken by surprised when he tore one of the set pieces and eventually sculpted it into another shape. The set piece suddenly emerged with a new meaning that we thought was the one we were finding. I left the meeting thinking how far possibilities can reach in a simple act of creating.

**November 3 | In the flux of change**

There were a series of Wednesday Production meetings where set with faculty supervisors, students and crews involved in the project to bring clarity to every aspect of production making. This meeting made me realize what kind of life I should be having as a director in the future. Meeting with various creative and technical people who are skilled in their areas would be a regular treat for me as I see myself in the professional world. Initially, I was overwhelmed with the concerns and new challenges set on the table. It was my first time to see the designers' first draft of their works and I was processing the ideas presented to me. I usually am quiet when I am encountering facts that I know will impact my creative imagination.
The most overwhelming was the demands of the costumes. Kiara designed three sets of costume to ten women including the Philippine *baro’t saya* (turn of the century women's clothes). The costume design as presented was considered to be above budget and Jacqueline Firkins, faculty supervisor for Costume Design asked me what my thoughts about the costume. Seeing the costume designs for the first time, it was quite a challenge to make a decision but right there in then I told the audience that we could perhaps delimit the number of the costumes into two sets instead of three and remove the Philippine *baro’t saya*. Another issue that I needed to approach was the Suspended Woman's safety. We eventually ruled-out the idea of an actor being suspended from the fly of the theatre a using a high-tension wire or a harness.

_Hi Dennis,_

_You can see that a plan to have someone suspended for the length of time that we discussed at the design meeting is not advisable._

_We should discuss this further and soon as it will affect the costume design._

_Cheers,_

_Jay Henrickson_

_Manager, Technical Theatre Production_

........

_Hi Jay,_

_Does she need to be suspended for 45 minutes without interruption or break? That's a big challenge, but not impossible. If she can get support to her feet to help blood flow, it would help. Of course, a break here and there would help keep blood flowing and avoid suspension trauma._

_For most people, symptoms of suspension trauma begin after around 15 -20 minutes of immobile unsupported suspension. But I've hung longer (with pain mind you), so it depends of the fitness of the person and the quality of the harness. And if the person hanging can take some weight on their feet against a wall or with the use of straps, they can improve circulation and hang much longer._
Hi Stephen,

I've talk to Jay personally about this and I don't think I want to cause so much stress deciding whether or not we use a harness for the Suspended Woman. So I thought no more hanging and all. I'm currently thinking of another alternative. Sorry been asking you a lot lately...What do you think?

Best,
Dennis

we should chat about the chorus roles...like the hanging woman etc... Yes, I agree that you should find an alternative to the hanging. Let's try to meet in the next two weeks and go through what everyone in the cast will be doing and work out their rehearsal time.

Yes, thanks Stephen.
See you between 17th to 21st.
Just let me know the best day.

Best,
Dennis

One should learn how to adapt from given circumstances. Imagination and inventiveness are significant in the process of creating. In facing these challenges, what are my alternatives and attitudes in collaborating to bring about a successful theatre production?

December 1 | First reading: touching the text, knowing the characters

The first reading was yesterday. I have never been so happy with the first day of rehearsal.

Usually, I am scared and nervous, but the love in the room was palpable. We sat on the circle with the yellow cushions to provide them some comfort. I chose to make it a bit more 'comfortable' for everyone by removing the tables and chairs that somehow I find very formal.

Formality and some rigid observance of rules make me quiver. Since this play is about respecting instinct, I thought that changing the configuration of the space of our Reading will introduce the
actors to the intimacy that I want to employ in the process. The result: A more relax and organic process. Everyone was willing to share their insights into the process. I began the process with questions, "What is the journey of the characters?", "What does Dionysus’ want and need?", "What are the given circumstances before this scene happens?", and “What’s the mental state of this character”? These were my touchstones in surfacing their interests in discovering the characters. The analysis and dramaturgical investigation of the text can be very fun. My directorial analysis was significant in making me feel confident in this process. I kept coming back to what I had written and thought about. Discovering the text with actors who are exposed to a particular technique of reading the text makes the process stimulating as they engage and peel the layers of the text and find its authenticity. Our curiosity brought us to some questions of religion, sexual and gender politics and power relations. These made me realize how necessary it is to read the play many times and have a strong knowledge of it before the rehearsal starts. I have looked intensely at the repeated actions and to emphasize the goals of the characters’ wants. For a text like *The Bacchae 2.1*, written without breaks and devoid of excessive exits and entrances, crafted in poetic forms, with lines lifted from different sources, actions can be difficult to decode. But the volleys of actor-director interactions yield a fruition of insightful discovery. Those actors were prepared and completed their assignments beforehand by looking at the historical context of their characters impressed me deeply.

Matt Kennedy, who is the most curious of all, is a gift in the room. Both he and Javier Sortes came into the rehearsal with their texts pasted in the notebook. Thomas Elms, Francis Dowlatabadi, Allyce Kranabetter and Ghazal Azarbad are smart young actors who are contributing in making the discussion alive and insightful. The earnestness and happy disposition
of Selene Rose in the process makes me feel confident in myself. I have yet to discover the others. My research also helped in developing a better perspective about the play, whether historically, politically, religiously, socially, and religiously. We end the rehearsal with deep sense of appreciation to each other.

December 2, 2014 | Second reading: discovering 'joue'

Today, we had the second reading. I guess I am really learning a lot, reading/decoding the text (finding the goals of the characters) connecting with actors, being clear and having fun. I came to UBC to acquire new process of directing tools and my traditions on Philippine ritual, ceremony and blending it into my new understating of textual analysis. Interpretation of the text and staging ritual performance is a challenging feat and trying to balance this equation can provide an enlightening experience to the audience. The enthusiasm in the room was infectious. One can feel the energy of excitement and the hunger to begin this project. How you can sustain energy like this, I asked myself, during the break. We should keep on playing. The French word, "jouer" means "to play", interestingly, it carries many meanings like to perform, to gamble, bet, wager, speculate, to deceive or dupe. All of these verbs are vital in making the process of rehearsal alive. To dupe a character by another character in commedia del'arte is a fascinating act to watch. "Jouer" is also alive when an audience is actively speculating on the backstory in a melodrama. Delving into the essence of "joker" in my rehearsal process is significant for me. Humor is necessary because it balances the tension and releases the stress. Humor strengthens the power of "jouer".
We started the rehearsal by playing a game: "How are you?" is a question that begins by throwing a ball to someone and immediately answering it. Then the person who answered the question asks another person a different question; the second the person must react and if the person drops the focus, the actors will jeer at the person with a "bhoooo" in chorus. Then I asked the actors to think of questions about the character of the play or about the play? "Why are you coming back to the House of Thebes, Dionysus?", "Who is your father Pentheus?", "What is to be an Orange Woman?", "Cook, what are your favorite foods?" these questions give context to the back story and to unpack their knowledge of the characters. This game fosters focus, listening and attentiveness among the ensemble members. This set our goal for the following activity: our second reading. The clarity of the journey of the character depends on the actors knowledge of the goals and objectives. This process is an invitation to dig deeper to the world of the play through the analysis and conscious effort to know the character's situation and circumstances.

December 3, 2014 | Blocking the whirling god

I took the bus at exactly 9:00am. It was cold. The whiteness of the Park Drive field teases me. It was covered with snow. The color resembles the color of our set. I initially desired to have it in total white. But as the physics of lighting intervenes, the white floor will make the face of the actors blur when the light strikes the set. We turned the white set into a gray one that approximates the white color. There are varieties of white, I discovered. I wanted it white. White surface is where the feet of Dionysus will dance and whirl. Arriving at the rehearsal room with the Stage Manager and his cohorts, I began to sense the seed of love in this project. They came early to make sure everything was prepared. The joy in their hearts was felt. This energy
sustained me for the rest of the day. When the actors arrived, the swelling energies of enthusiasm filled the whole room. I conducted a workshop on creative movement and I asked them to improvise a movement based on the notion of ritual and to follow up the workshop handled by Pichet Klunchun. These uninterrupted bodily kinesthetic movements became the basis of our first scene: the arrival of Dionysus. I needed to layer this arrival with the conjuring of the god; a chant was the next thing to devise. I lifted a prayer text from Philippine *pasyon* book, a long narration of Christ's birth to death. The *pasyon* is sung by mostly women during the holy week of May, the most intense summer month of the year in the Philippines. I taught them how to pronounce the Tagalog words, once done we began singing in chorus. I asked Ghazal to lead the group in singing. In the afternoon, I started working with Kadmus, Terisias, Pentheus and his Aides in decoding their goals and objectives while the women were rehearsing the Filipino *pasyon* prayer.

I then consider the risks of cultural appropriating in this process as I taught them the song, the pronunciation and the meaning of the chant. The difficulty came with the question of adjusting. Since this is not their culture it was tempting to appropriate it according to their skills. They requested to find the chant that will most likely be easier for them to deliver and sing. So, I told them to improvise using the fundamental tune. After two hours, they came back and I was shocked at how it was transformed and sung differently. I changed it and asked them to be as truthful and committed to the 'original' tune. This is my first lesson in intercultural theatre making in this rehearsal.
December 4 | The working actors

When one is caught in the space and time of great attention and risk, response is imperative.

Generosity, hard work, imagination, persistence, and pertinacity to never give in to the temptation of inactivity in the rehearsal room are actors’ tools to a successful theatre making process. I share space and time with these amazing actors. What did I do in life that I merit such lovely gift of working with them for 8 hours a day? Integrating the Bacchae women into the first scene was a feat to grapple.

December 5 | The conversation

I sent an email to Stephen, letting him know about my thoughts.

Hi Stephen,

How are you? Hope the interview went well. I like to send you some of my thoughts about the process. All are good.

This email is part of my journal entry to this afternoon’s rehearsal...

I have been discovering many things about myself as a director in relation to deepening my understanding of this craft. It has been a delightful experience to work with the actors, especially for those I have worked before. It's good that they know me a bit. And I am very excited to those who are first time to be working. But of course, the process will always be fraught with challenges. There are many things to learn, certainly. One of the things I am intrigue is how to handle the actor’s confidence/ego and use it to their advantage and the character's and the world of the play. Another, is learning about resistance and acceptance. When to say "no" and "yes" to requests and/or complain? Acknowledging the most significant concerns the actors are facing and sensing those that are insignificant quibbles and eventually making them collaborators and allies to advance the power and potential of the story we have taken to tell through this project.

We had an amazing process. Question about the actions of the character was the most basic of all in this process. I am most thankful for having been in the room with Matt and Thomas, both generous in sharing their talents and to dig deeper to the characters’ intention. He is intuitive and serious. Allyce and Nathan are impressive in their willingness to work and take risks. Nathan has
the most childlike curiosity. I see joy in him when he discovers something. I felt bad with some of the women whining. Distracted by this whining I tried not to rest it but to re-direct it in other sites of creativities. Those who have strong resistance, I asked them to be the chorus leader or dance master. I must learn how to listen emphatically, I have to immerse myself with the moment and be patient.

December 5 | Fragility of fife and getting to the end of the line

It was raining when I left the house. My anticipation of going to the rehearsal room was languid. I had to fight this feeling of laziness; I don't want to be lazy. But I have to respect this feeling. The gloomy weather immediately seeped into me. As I cross the road, I saw a white crucifix attached to the light post. Last week, a woman who was crossing this road was rammed by a school bus to her death. Some ordinary days can turn into tragic moments. I lament every time I see this crucifix. Death in this play is imminent, I thought. I am dealing with death and destruction. And this is true to me every day too. Life is extremely fragile. When I entered the room, I found Stephen inside. He told me if I had an opportunity to check the set being built. I did not. Apparently, the apron was too close to the first row of the audience seat. Internally, I panicked. But I had to learn how to delay judgment and worries. He suggested that an alternative blocking should be executed. We gathered the actors and asked them to read the text. We began with the last part of Scene 1. In the presence of Stephen, we had an interesting discussion about the male domination and how women are displaced/oppressed/dominated due to this energy. Dealing with the text is one important facet of my learning process in this project. How do you read it? How do you decode it? What technique of reading you should use in making sure that you are faithful to the playwright’s intention? Goal and Objectives have been re-surfacing. What
are the actable verbs we need to clarify the characters' goals? Cohen devised this technique to unpack the action of the play. Get to the End of the Line is another idea that Stephen reminded us. He wrote it on the board. Clarity and intentions, these guided me in blocking the scene.

December 13 | Stumble through

We had a Stumble Through after two weeks of rehearsing. Present were Eric Chad (Lighting Designer), Kate de Lorme (Sound Designer), Gayle Murphy, our faculty for Voice and Diction and Stephen Malloy, my supervisor. It was a successful run through. While the actors were performing I wanted to stop them and re-block many of the things I have done. But I needed to see it from afar, Tom Sholte told me about Anne Bogart's "Looking without Desire." What is Desire in the theatre? Where does it sit in the rehearsal process? I have read an article posted on Facebook, "Queer Theatre and the Lack of Financing of Theatre Productions in the Philippines". There are some statements that I like to contest in this article, one in particular is what Nick Pichay, a respected playwright in the Philippines, ascertained, "Would it help to think that the musicals have actuality that is mostly associated with the gay culture?" asks Pichay. "Masaya lang talaga ang kumanta and sumayaw (It is just fun to sing and dance), but it doesn't necessarily mean that the person who is enjoying a musical is gay. To append queerness to the theatre should not even an issue. One important nature of theatre is its queerness, it's being strange. I would assert that the word gay here is both gendered and a process of imagination. It is liminal. The act of seeing in the theatre and the performing is a queer phenomenon. When a male audience member watches a male actor performing and feels emphatic and finds it desirous to continue the act of watching then, can we, say it as queer? Hélène Cixious calls it desire. Everything in theatre is about desire. We want to be filled with it and that makes it as the Dionysian excess. Dionysus
is the god of theatre and queerness. It is crucial that we recognize it as a queer event and there should be no apology with that.

December 18, 2014 | Playing the foreigner

What is death? What is death executed by mother to her own son? Today we began rehearsing the last part of the play, the killing of Pentheus. We read the scene again and had a discussion of the text. Matt who is playing Pentheus and Helena as Agave both agreed how challenging their roles were. In the traditional Bacchae text, the killing is done off stage. In this text this murderous act of Agave is carried out on stage with the audience witnessing it. There was a pressure to do it immediately as we were on the last phase of blocking this scene for this week. I took a deep breath and delayed the pressure of doing it. I stood up to ask everyone to stretch out, and then we played a game. We improvised a scene where Matt is a new student in a school who wants to be part of a click. I gave him a name (Dennis) and an ethnicity (Filipino). How will he play some familiar facts about a person he was working with? I “toyed” the idea of alienation. I asked the women and Thomas to play as friends. When Matt introduced himself as 'Dennis', a new student from the Philippines, the women playing the 'Mean Girls' gasped 'uhmmm' in chorus, then the bullying started. The scathing remarks toward the foreigner were expressed, clearly poet playing in. 'Where are you from?', 'Why are you wearing that ugly dress?', 'What do you want?', all questions in the forms of attack. No return, no way to escape. This game inspired us to unravel the issues and truths about the scene where Pentheus is interloping in the world of Cockaigne. I blocked the scene with difficulty but with deep inspiration. We had a stumble through with Stephen at 3pm.
December 19 | Learning from Stephen, remembering Zeami

Learning how to direct is learning how to do it from a critical eye of a mentor. Stephen came to see the stumble through yesterday. Before, I usually feel frightened with him being around but for some unknown reason I get the feeling of eagerness every time he would come to see my work. Below are the email conversations we had:

Hi Stephen,

Thanks for being there at the stumble through. Looking forward to hear your thoughts and comments. Let me know when is the best time for me to meet up with you.

Thanks again!

Best,
Dennis

I could meet you today at lunch if you're free? What time do you take a lunch break?

Good morning Stephen. Yes, lunch break would be good for me. Where will I meet you?
I will be at the FWT doing photo shoot. Let me know the best place to meet up? Thanks so much!

I'll come by the FWT at 1:30 if that works?

I sat on the black sofa of FWT waiting for him. While the silence of the place envelops me, I found myself asking, "Who is Frederic Wood?" He was a professor at UBC and founder of the UBC Players Club, it is through his contribution to UBC and British Columbia's theater that merit him to have this theatre named after him. With a long history of theatre performances, FWT will be the home of The Bacchae 2.1. The standard of excellence is demanded, the linage of creativity from countless numbers of students who received their degrees in theatre at the department through the guidance of theatre teachers is an inspiration to keep on moving forward even though directing can be treacherous and frightening. The rigors and discipline of directing
are two touchstones of this creative quest that I am leaning thus far. Stephen came and gave me his notes, I listened and focused on the thoughts he was telling me. I should not miss them, not even one of his suggestions. The word of Zeami resonates to my ear while Stephen was sharing his comments: “Strengthen your practice, don’t be conceited.” I am impelled to include in this entry the words of my supervisor that guided me in my next step as I go back to my rehearsal space:

1. Remember 'hot text, cool body'?

2. If there is too much screaming the audience won't listen to the actors. Go back to the text to what is being said. Matt has been screaming too much. The text is intricate, the ideas are complex. Pentheus, has the most complex. The delivery must be clean. It won't sustain the text if he is screaming. It should be crisp and clean. There is rhetoric. Dionysus and Pentheus are in argument. Go back to your text. Pentheus' attempts to understand and sway opinion are being lost in emotional delivery of the text. You should read his thoughts. You should go back and see the arguments. It's a debate.

3. On Bacchae women: The soul and faith are connected. They are (Bacchae) are soulful people. The women: they stand and witness. Are they always sensual?

4. Pentheus is logical. His arguments are clear. He is using logic. He attacks Kadmus and Terisias not to participate in the cultic frenzy but the two men are joining the women. The impact of Dionysus is becoming larger and larger. He needs to do more than that and to understand the enemy. Pentheus should not be explosive.

5. Dionysus is beyond logic. He embodies faith and fate. These are the two things Pentheus are most afraid of.

6. CLEAN THE TEXT UP. TWO WORLDS: THE LOGICAL VS. THE SPIRITUAL
WORLD OF THE WOMEN AND DIONYSUS.

7. On blocking. You are in a proscenium theatre, be aware of it. The two characters must stay open. Just because the people are talking doesn't mean they can't be twelve feet apart.


9. On Acting. MOMENTS OF SILENCE. MOMENTS OF STILLNESS. MOMENTS OF DISTANCE. FIND THE MOMENTS. Moments of cool thought. Moments of status. Moments of space and distance. Too much movement and too close together. Ghazal is acting the text. What is the argument of Ghazal? What is the argument of Jenna? The the barking aide? Look that up again. Pentheus–the aides at the back. Its the potential they have that's threatening. The aides are not stupid, they are twisted. Make them less of a stereotype but they are individuals who have individual perspectives.

10. Keep the audience interested. Use the tools.

   - tempo
   - color
   - pace
   - space
   - timing
   - use of space

11. ASK YOURSELF, "AND THEN WHAT?"

In this quest for a language of directing, these thoughts are the most valuable of all.

Stephen's eye is like a raven, quick and mindful. That afternoon, I left the room teary eyed. Grateful of the education I am getting for my growth as an artist. I breathed and
December 20 | Ten!

Ten things that I did to make the rehearsal efficient and effective:

1. Fresh mind and joyful heart. Zeami said, never forget the beginner's mind. Mind in Japanese culture means 'heart' plus 'mind'. I went back to my rehearsal room with a fresh mind, smiling and with a lighter disposition. The tension is there but it is to fuel the imagination and curiosity.

2. Re-configuration of rehearsal space. Stephen suggested that I change the configuration of the rehearsal space. I asked Curtis, the Stage Manager to re-configure it with more depth and vertical. It was a long space as oppose to the wider ones. When the actors entered, they had a feeling of new relief; a change of 'space' means a change of pace and rhythm. The Philippine gongs came in, this means, new energy to expect.

3. Anne Bogart through Tom Sholte. Revisiting the scenes that we created by allowing the actors do the performance without my intervention. I watched it from a far, I remember Tom Sholte telling me about Anne Bogart's 'looking without desire'.

4. Actors to Director 1. After the run through, I gave them 'two minutes' of break. I usually do this if I want to talk with actors and discuss something. I went to Javier and Francis, telling them to experiment another way of dealing with the characters. No more barking and being on guard with Penthues. I re-blocked many of our previous blockings.

5. Actors to Director 2. I talked with Matt and we both went go back to the text intending to unravel once again the objectives of the character. A smart and highly disciplined actor, Matt expressed his willingness to approach the character minus the
bellowing and screaming. We found ourselves agreeing that screaming clouds the objectives of Pentheus because we cannot understand the text: Hot text, cool body.

6. Identifying some scenes where I can slow down the delivery of the dialogues to hear clearly the text thus hearing the meanings and seeing the images (pgs. 50-58).

7. Rehearse the choreography and make the story clearer. Work on the objectives of the women why they are reaping the clothes of Pentheus during the transition. Note: they are wild women.

8. Listen to the music coming from the live instrumentation and decide which part of the play the music will be layered. Find the tempo and the appropriate rhythm.

9. Listen, be patient and allow oneself to be meticulous. No need to rush (pgs. 18-29).

10. Write to Stephen for him to see the changes I employed.

I wrote another email to Stephen.

Hi Stephen,

Thank you for the critical eye and generous heart of sharing your thoughts after the stumble through.

Working on the scenes that need overhauling based from your comments/thoughts. I would like to show the work to you again if that’s okay with you. I don’t want to be rushed but I like to know really if I’m getting the notes you gave me which is extremely important, thusly I would appreciate if you can come again and see it? Tomorrow at 4pm?

December 21 | This is how I want to remember my last rehearsal in 2014

This is the last rehearsal for 2014. How to make the actors excited and endure the rigors of eight hours of rehearsing to make the story clear and persuasive? In the last few days, some actors were getting sick. I had to re-strategize the schedule by calling some of the actors in different
time slots. There were days where we began the rehearsal at 11 am for them to have a longer time
to rest and sleep. Rest of the body and quietness of the mind are the demands of the previous
week. We had an intense rehearsal. As I forge a new direction in telling the story with more
moments of silences, I found the actors more deeply invested in the authenticity of emotions and
clearing up the confusion in meanings and actions. Call time is at 11 am. Helena, Matt, Nathan
and Allyce were called. We need to rehearse the killing of Pentheus again. There are times that I
feel tentative stopping when they are rehearsing with their co-actors because I want to discover
new ideas from what they are doing. But this time, I have to be decisive with what I want. Every
gesture means something. Every word is part of the story. Every action leads to the revelation.
These incremental parts are necessary to a full disclosure of the world of the play waiting to be
unveiled. How I can be collaborative but still solid with what result I want to gain? That is the
question that keeps on recurring on me in this rehearsal process. I love working with them. They
are ready for anything. The presence of Stephen and Gayle Murphy gave excitement for the
ensemble to do the stumble through. They gathered in circle and embraced as they screamed for
a last hooray for 2014’s rehearsal. Hooraying is a prefaced to a ritual of invoking the muse of
courage. A British expression that came via sports that originally has a root from the German's
'Hipp Hipp Hurra Veranstaltung', this word expresses approval and joy in anticipation for
winning. Watching the actors commit in this pre-ritual act made me realized how theatre can
create relationships. I cried.

The first note in the chanting was a signal how the actors love to carry on and continue this
journey of the unknown. I listened to every word being spoken. I open myself to the possibility
of a world being created before me. I cringe when the words, the sentence, phrase and paragraph
make no sense. I feel frustrated when I don't get the idea or hear the idea from the text. But most of the time I feel connected to them. I am proud how quick we accomplish things in this project. With the guidance of Stephen, I realized how important the clarity of the spoken word and the crispiness of its delivery. Gayle helped in coaching the actors and her unrelenting support to make the verbs and actions clear was beneficial for all of us. The action is in the words. The body reacts from this action.

December 22 | In the deep forest

Today, a good friend of mine invited me to go to Lynn Valley's Norvan Falls. A filmmaker and a graduate student studying urban planning at UBC, he has been updated with my creative process and the journey that I have taken since I began rehearsing last December 1. We spent five hours trekking and in between the hiking we discussed eternally topics about arts, family, society, human lives and the history of human survival. As artists, we found ourselves asking big questions. Amidst the grandeur of the forest and the longing to connect with nature, the intimacy of conversation we had was the most delightful feeling one can get during emotionally and intellectually exhausting creative period of one’s life. When I heard the water from the falls I felt a sudden rush of excitement. I chose to put myself in harmony with stones, water, dirt, soil, mud, trees, dead leaves, and the delight of the never ending stories I shared with my good friend. We came close to the falls and the majesty of the water relinquishing without uncertainty stunned me. I washed my face from the cold water of the falls, then, feeling the coldness that touched my skin, I tasted the water: I felt free, re-invigorated and cleansed. I know now why the women in The Bacchae 2.1 chose to go to the mountain. This sudden retreat to the mountain is the most beautiful experience and memorable December in the most recent history of my life. Inspired by
this experience I wrote the lyrics of the chant of Kadmus for Scene 1:

\[
\begin{align*}
Tayo'y \ iisa \ sa \ hangin \ at \ lupa \ (We \ are \ one \ in \ air \ and \ land) \\
Tayo'y \ iisa \ sa \ araw \ at \ langit \ (We \ are \ one \ under \ the \ sun \ and \ in \ the \ heaven) \\
Sa \ Tubig \ at \ Ilog \ (In \ this \ water \ and \ river) \\
Sa \ Tubig \ ng \ Dagat \ (The \ water \ of \ this \ Ocean) \\
Tayo'y \ tumungo \ sa \ pusod \ ng \ gubat \ (Let \ us \ retreat \ to \ the \ navel \ of \ the \ forest) \\
Upang \ lumaya \ ang \ puso \ at \ kaluluwa \ 3X \ (To \ free \ our \ heart \ and \ soul) \\
Oi \ Oi \ Oi \ Oi \\
Tayo \ na \ Tayo \ na! \ (Let \ us \ go, \ Let \ us \ go) \\
Oi \ Oi \ Oi \ Oi \\
Lahat \ ng \ umiibig \ (All \ who \ are \ enamored) \\
Tayo \ na, \ Tayo! \ (Let \ us \ go, \ Stand!) \\
Tayo \ na, \ tayo \ na, \ tayo \ na! \ (Let \ us \ go, \ let \ us \ go, \ let \ us \ go)
\end{align*}
\]

**January 3, 2015** | *When the words are being delivered the body stays*

New Year. The university was still empty. I walked in the pavement leading to BC Binning. I smelled the same stench of sweat and blood from last year’s rehearsal. We re-gathered to put the play back again to its old spirit. But a new spirit is required. The people in the room was excited, actors came to embrace each other, to be seeing each other again. Inside of me was a big fear on how to bring a new spirit of excitement and joy to our play. I rehearsed the opening ritual leading to the first scene. The blocking felt weak to see the women coming in one area and how Dionysus standing on the center stage. I went back to the text: "Dionysus...then he begins to whirl slowly, like a dervish." I reflected on that, why he needs to whirl at this point in time? It is hypnotic. It is power from silence. It is about the anticipation of the coming danger and tragedy. Women gather to join this god, driven by his thirst for revenge. I changed the blocking and made the women enter from different directions with Dionysus whirling slowly. With these changes, a new musical instrumentation was composed. I choreographed a piece with three women (Kelsey, Joylyn and Libby) that capture the Bali Dance before the Earthquake. It was a lovely experience.
making these three women move with the dances I have learned in Southeast Asia. Although, I can say that we are just appropriating the movement, I realized that through love and understanding of what we can do and express, we can pull it through. Before calling for this dance rehearsal, I gave an assignment for the three women to watch YouTube links of traditional dances from Indonesia. Kelsey selected a traditional dance called Ngarojeng Dance of the Betawis of Jakarta, Indonesia. Interestingly, it is a dance created by contemporary choreographer Wiwiek Widiastuti for a wedding. I listened to the text of Dionysus as he delivers his monologue before the thunder bolts. Stephen gave me this image of a Christ about to resurrect. I asked Thomas to deliver the lines slower as to bring about the images from the text. I changed the blocking from having Dionysus brought into prison by two Aides to having him enter alone center stage during the Thunder storm. There was a constant discussion with Thomas on how to attack the Objectives. I talked with Stephen about the Objectives of Dionysus. As an intuitive and insightful actor he never fails me to ask provocative questions. What does Dionysus wants from the rational and logical Pentheus? Upon reflection, I realized that Stephen is right that seduction and luring of Pentheus to go to the mountain by Dionysus should be taken as a crucial premise. Here lies the struggle. I tried this in my rehearsal and finding out that to be able to gain that tension; one should focus on the management of body movement. When the words are being delivered the body stays.

**January 7 | Tensions and reflections**

I like to reflect inside the theatre when it is empty and I found the shower room and when riding on the bus spaces make me feel divorced from my ordinary world but deeply connected to my own self. These spaces are sites that propel me to be authentic, invincible and imaginative.
In the shower room. I was frightened with the prospect of rehearsing at the FWT. But I don't show it when I talk to the actors or walk in the rehearsal space. "When you feel ten, act seven", Stephen told me that. While this is an actor’s maxim it could also be a director's motto.

In the bus. I embraced this feeling anxiety I wanted to cry, the hugeness of this project is overwhelming. I took time to be in solitude before the rehearsal. Inside the bus, I consciously breathed, deeply and release myself from the tension within me by looking at the green trees and feeling the sensation of my body in transit. I am moving inside the bus. I know that this trip will end and I know that I am at this present time experiencing past and the future. I breathe in and out.

In theatre. In the dark theatre at the FWT, Eric Chad, lightening designer is trying interesting designs. We talked for a couple of minutes on how to tackle the design and I gave him my thoughts on polarization and the opposites in this play. When he showed me couple of design works, I felt inspired. The actors came. Watching them as they watch the three sets onstage, I felt their excitement and terror from the anticipation of the danger of having the sets being moved by them. I asked Curtis to instruct the actors on how to 'manipulate' the set. I thought it would be an easy rehearsal for them to try moving it. But to my surprised we spent one and a half hours figuring out how to do it. I was frustrated. They asked me questions pertaining to the configurations. I told them just try it out, and then we will decide. There were many doubts and fears. In my mind, "What are you fear about?", "It's just a piece of set that you are moving."

Outwardly, I stayed calmed. More questions and one actor blurted out her disgust with what I was trying to do. I felt naked. I felt immobilized. I felt diminished. My knees were trembling. I was confronted by someone onstage in the presence of her co-actors. They were all looking at me. Wondering what will be my next step. Calmly, I told her to just do what I asked them to do
since I am also trying to solve the issue. Then, more questions. I feel exasperated. I raised my voice and told them "Stop asking questions at this point. We just need to do it. If all of you are asking questions, I won't be able to accomplish things. I have been democratic in this process but this time I wish you to just be cooperative. Now, let's go back to where we left off." We started trying the first scene and move on to Cockaigne. I don't want to be daunted and just to strive harder amidst confusion and mutual misunderstandings. Language barrier and those differing constructs of what is dangerous and safe are I think rooted from cultural gaps. I reflected on why we had these tensions. I grew up in a society where almost every day I see and hear news of death. Standing on a moving set piece is not dangerous to me at all. Security is imperative. There are requirements that we need to take before getting into the work, while in my culture, generally, it's "Bahala na" or Let God do it/God please intervene. This sounds fatalistic but that is how we operate since there is a lack and scarcity of resources. Another realization is how our educational system developed us. Raising questions and challenging the teachers in Western education system is valued while in Asia, students are expected to follow and focus on teacher's expertise, never challenging the teacher because the teacher is a master. At the time of this writing, I feel the anxieties the actors went through in our last rehearsal. How can we retain the possibilities of danger in theater making without compromising the political, moral, religious objectives of the play? There should be more efforts on understanding and love. I like to reflect from these tensions. I know that my growth as a director will happen in the acceptance, critical and emphatic way of navigating from these reflections. This project is about that. Coming together, being one, and an attempt for a combustion of differences to open new ways of understanding social justice and peace. The Bacchae 2.1 is a journey of self-reflection on and about challenging dominant discourse and changing ideas that often restrict us from being one in
a world that we should enjoy to its fullest.

After the rehearsal, I wanted to talk to the actors. But I let them go home five minutes early. Disturbed by the feeling of being diminished, I approached one of the actors who voiced out her disgust from the process to talk with her. We ended up feeling both piqued.

**January 8 | Rehearsing "maganda"**

My heart was wrenched. Yesterday's rehearsal was tough. I wasn't able to get a good sleep last night. I asked myself how [I can I bring back the joy of rehearsing in moments like this? T.S. Eliot once said *"For last year's words belong to last year's language and next year's words awaits another love. To make an end is to make a beginning."* While inside the theatre, I smelled the white paint on the set pieces. As it suffused through my nose a sensation of renewal visited me. No amount of anger and insecurity shall pervade our home--this home of creativity, of ensemble work, the home of our story. I sat and looked at the theatre feeling and thinking how to re-imagine my rehearsal from a difficult process yesterday to the creation of today. What happened last night was unexpected. I did not know how to begin the rehearsal. It was tough. I sat quietly in the theatre, looking at the unfinished set piece. Everything seemed unfinished; everything was work in progress including myself as director. I still have to develop many things that will make me a better director--patience, quickness of mind, eloquence. When the actors came, they were sprightly. It gave me a new sense of beginning. I went to the lobby and found Stephen there. I told him what happened last night. He helped me process the direction I was employing to the rehearsal. He said, "Allow the actors to find their ways in the space. Let them own it. Be patient. It's tough but that's the way it should be." I decided to listen quietly to
Stephen, allowing myself to learn from him, to be humble and open.

Like a student to a master teacher, Zeami, the Japanese Noh theoretician said, "Never forget the beginner's mind!" In the Japanese culture the beginner's means both heart and mind. What I gained from this experience was the value of being silent and calm amidst confusion and tensions. Stephen helped me understand this and look into the importance of not rushing the work because to do so puts the process at risk. Before we began the rehearsal, Kelsey Ranshaw, one of the Bacchae women and our dance master, sat beside me and told me that the actors spent an after-rehearsal-time-together to talk about what happened last night. We had an honest discussion about the process. She expressed that the actors will continue to help make this project successful. I wanted to cry hearing her speak with conviction. It was a beautiful moment of renewing our commitment to a theatre made through open hearted collaboration. She asked me how I felt and by the time I opened my mouth, I was shedding tears. I couldn't help it. She too was teary eyed. I took a depth breath and told her, "Please be patient with me. I don't like screaming. I hated the fact that I screamed last night. It was a terrible feeling." She said that after the rehearsal they went to the bar and had a discussion. She expressed how stressful it is for a director to handle the music, choreography, blocking, and the demands of it require. As we shared our feelings I became aware that part of this difficulty was language barrier. With tears she said, "We know, Dennis. Please don't be worried. This will be beautiful and we will work to make sure this will be beautiful." Danger, risk, mutual (mis)understandings, and sense of discomfort are all part of the process. We face these facets of the process and come to terms with it with courage and clarity in order to reach a communal experience of creating a theatre that we all respect and love. For the rest of the rehearsal, I stayed quiet, reflective and was sparse with
my words. It required an incredible balance of on bringing my voice inside the process but with economy of words as directions are being arranged and ordered. I listened to the lines and words coming from the mouths of the actors and at times I closed my eyes and imagined a picture or image of them on stage. Stephen from time to time sat beside me to coach me on what to do. His "Whys" were crucial in my bringing clarity to the story being expressed on stage through my stage picturization. In Philippine arts, we describe art that pleases us with the word "maganda"; the direct English translation is "beautiful", or aesthetically pleasing. Aesthetic is formed through personal taste. I developed my aesthetic partially by looking at the pictures of my mother and father. We had a stack of pictures of my parents but when our house was burned and turned to ashes when I was thirteen years old. My father who attempted to join Philippine show business in the late 50s had this photo of him with other aspiring film actors after they auditioned for one of the big time film outfits of that time. I was fascinated with the beautiful faces of these young men, elegantly posing like debonair Hollywood film actors. There were dozens of pictures of my mother in her charming and stylish dresses and shoes. She sold fine China-ware in Manila's posh department store called, C.O.D. Her photos with brightly polished plates and utensils were entertaining to look at. What images move you most? What feelings are evoked by looking at them? Do you like that feeling? Why don't you like the feeling? In my development as an artist, looking at pictures give me an idea of how I estimate the notion of beauty. Drawing the idea of beauty from them is a very intimate experience for me. From these pictures, I developed an early taste of composition and blocking. The people in the pictures are looking at me, as if telling me, "This is how we are right now. We had a painful life, we had beautiful life." Beauty for me is about people who struggle to re-birth themselves from their history of the vastness of pain. While rehearsing tonight, I remembered the struggles my parents
lived in their youth. Their pictures and memories made me strong.

**January 9 | Re-reading**

I woke up early in the morning to re-read the text. I reflected upon the questions and suggestions of Stephen. The whole day I was re-reading it wrote some of the things I wanted to employ for Saturday's rehearsal. The text opened up with new vistas of ideas.

**January 10 | Trust**

The rehearsal was prolific. I identified some of the parts that needed to be re-blocked to clarify the characters' objectives. Tempo, rhythm and cadence of speech were significant in this rehearsal. In the next few rehearsals I need to focus on these. I re-worked the first part of the ritual dance of the women and ended up with them dancing with a soaring spirit quality at the end of this part. Cathy Burnett came to help me in fine tuning the stories behind the choreography. Her input was very helpful in the process. I also worked on the scenes with Pentheus, Kadmus, Teresias and the two Aides. It was often difficult for me to unpack the objectives. At times I found myself confused since the text is written like a series of poem structures as long monologues. This was a challenging feat for me but I told myself I should not be daunted. This was a project I wanted to investigate to employ the sense of timing I was learning from the program. The actors who were equipped in decoding the goals and objectives of the characters definitely helped me clarify the objectives. It was a fascinating experience when you share the same language of creative expression and theatrical techniques. I understood better the importance of the Objectives when Nathan Cottell, who playing the role of Kadmus, applied them. He had a way of easily understanding what the objective of a character was. Trust was a
significant facet of the rehearsal process. Natan, Meegin Sullivan, Thomas Elms and Mariam Barry had special ways of trusting the director and the text. I enjoyed fully working with actors who are deep thinkers and willing to try new ways of approaching the character. Nathan’s ability to experiment was admirable. I would ask him questions, "What do you think Kadmus wants from Tiresias?" and “How are you getting it?”. He was not separated from his own thought. He was ready to answer precisely and honestly. The result was a dangerous attempt to divulge the hidden secrets of the text that we had never thought possible. The same way with Thomas, I am amazed with his artistic persuasions and passionate commitment to his role. He is a real trouper and very respectful of the process I bring to the rehearsal. He brings poem for cross referencing intending to enrich his interpretation to the play, I learned from him too. We ended up with a Stage Manager announcing that we would soon occupy the Frederic Wood Theatre and we would have a crew view on the 13th. I was petrified.

**January 16 | Tired from Q2Q**

This was the second day of our Que-2-Que (Q2Q). For the past three days I had been feeling insecure and confused but I didn't show it. When I walked to the theatre, I asked the Stage Manager, "Where are we now and what are the agendas we want to accomplish?". I wanted to stay focused although I was perturbed by technical requirements and demands that we needed to integrate to the rehearsal. The q-2-q is dedicated to input the lighting and sound elements in the performance with the actors working to build their knowledge of these elements in relations to their characters in the scene. It is one of the most technically difficult and tiring parts of the process. One almost needed to be very forensic in terms of approaching the technical facet of the rehearsal! Before the costumes are introduced, a successful Q2Q needed to be achieved.
Against the backdrop of stress and slowness of the process, the actors were asking me many questions. I wanted to be calmed externally but internally I was troubled by multifaceted technical stipulations and my lack of knowledge of the technical lexis delimits my ability to decide heads on. We finished the rehearsal. We were all tired. I had no more words.

**January 17 | The fog**

Going back to the theatre, I felt a sudden heartache. The whole UBC Arts Complex was enveloped by a thick fog. The students were walking, darting in and out from this haze as if they were dead souls going to purgatory, set to sail for their eternal cleansing. Another intense technical rehearsal waited. This time instead of feeling tired, I asked Dionysus to come to my rescue.

**January 20 | Dress-Tech**

It was the first time to perform with an audience in the theater. This dress tech was attended by the faculty members. Stephen and I were in constant communication while the show was going on. I loved the fact that I received direct comments and suggestions from my adviser. I felt good being guided during moments I do not know how to proceed, technically and creatively. His presence in this process gave me critical reasons for taking certain actions on the next crucial day, the Preview.

This phase demands decisiveness in bringing the production in tune with the right timing, rhythm and clarity. Again, I stayed focused and thought of how to use my time wisely. The actors were ready and enthusiastic, beaming with joys and eagerness to perform with their costumes. It was
also the first time that they had audience members watching them. I found confidence in being a director and recognition how important leadership in theatre is. We ended the rehearsal with a discussion with the designers and crew on which parts I needed to polish before the Preview. I loved the fact that people willingly stayed in the theatre late at night and to figure out how to make things work. I loved being in the theatre thinking of the best ways to solve issues.

**January 22 | The god in the opening**

The original icon saint of the Quiapo Church Manila has lost its fingers in several occasions. Believed to be a miraculous statue for millions of Filipinos, the Black Nazarene, famous for its corona of three golden rays that symbolizes the power of the Trinitarian gods of the Catholics, is dressed in a long maroon garb with pleats of golden thread. This is a Hispanic iconography used as an inspiration for Dionysius. Traditionally, every January 9th, the Black Nazarene is taken out from the church for a procession attended by over Twelve million devotees. As a sign of penance, more than 500,000 thousand people walk barefoot to bring this icon to various processional sites around the city. I grew up watching this icon carried and worshipped by devotees on national television every year. Aside from walking barefoot as an act of popular devotional expression, there are other expressions done by the devotees, these are the *Pahalík* (kissing of the icon), *Pabihis* (to dress the icon), the *Pasindi* (lighting of devotional candles) revealing a deep constancy to the patron saint. On ordinary days, thousands of church goers go to the church where the icon is enshrined and as everyone aspires to go to the nave of the church these devotees would creep or walk on their knees as embodiment of the suffering of Christ, an act of prayer and devotion. This icon of devout Filipino Catholics is the inspiration for our Dionysus. The devotional acts guided me to set up the opening scene of this project. I wanted the audience
to feel the presence of a god when they entered the theatre as if it were a sanctuary. The theatre is church, and I might venture to say, church is theatre. I sat beside Stephen and his wife Linda on the last left row of the theatre. It was a splendid area to watch the performance from afar.

Hearing the people chatting in the lobby made me more anxious. Thomas Elms, the actor playing Dionysus was standing on Set B, consumed by the quietness of the theatre. In black garb pleated with golden threads on his tunic like dress. Audience slowly filled-in the theatre. With the Baybayin (ancient Filipino syllabary) Lord's Prayer projected on the surface of the stage and three huge white set pieces intended to bring a hypnotic sensation to the audience. I paused for a moment to breathe deeply to calm my body and refresh my memories of all the events that transpired in the last few months when I begin this project. Like water from a faucet, memories gushed out unstoppably. This project was a litmus test for many of my values as a developing theatre director. What are the skills I need to develop? How far can I push myself in telling a story with sensitive issues? What aesthetic forms can I utilize to express the power of this story? How can I be honest with myself without losing the essence of what the playwright's intentions are? What kind of rehearsal space do I want to create to bring energy and full awareness to the actors? What inspiration can I bring to the table for the designers to connect and bring forward living art? These questions that I set to guide me from the first day of my rehearsal surged on before the show began. I needed these questions to broaden my understanding of why I decided to learn directing in a foreign land. I was breathless watching the performance. The audience was focussed listening to the very complex ideas imbedded in the lines as delivered by the actors.

The actors were striving very hard to bring about a clear and passionate performance. The interaction of the god and human beings was happening before my eyes: the stories were alive, the actors were alive, the audience was alive and I was gasping for breath. The gods came to
mark our space for some religious event this night.

January 31 | Re-visiting the show: liveness of the theatre

The liveliness of theater is enriched by the human beings invested in it. It is happening in the present time. The actors are breathing and the audience reciprocate by breathing back. They witness the performance in the span of the time fraught with unexpected events. If for example, when a hem of a costume is getting caught in the heels of an actor, the audience can see that. They are witnesses to the actors’ world unfolding through the characters within the story and how this conflates to the world of reality. This is the test of an actor's ability to go about the challenges of the live performance. Like athletes, the actor is trained to discipline the body for intense physical rigors. His/her mind should be prepared to go through stressful mental tests without being daunted by it. Matt's ability to tackle unforeseen circumstances was admirable. We saw him adjusting and acting without dropping the imagined character even when the hem and the shoes were not participating. The same was true with Kelsey who bravely and calmly tried fitting the corset of Pentheus. For almost two minutes she was putting it on when it should have been done in a few seconds. The relationship of actor and audience begins with trust. The audience trusts that the actor will not deliver a cheap performance, the actor trusts the audience to respect the world created for them. There is trust for each other that, even when there are unexpected problems that may arise during the performance, the world of the play must continue until it meets its finality. Tonight, this trust was manifested several times.
February 4 | The Wednesday show and the man named, Abbas Kariostani

The actors were screaming at the top of their lungs. It was unbelievable that some of them 'changed' the blockings. In the opening scene, the whirling was set to execute in very slow movement but tonight they were spinning quite fast. As Stephen commented, they were losing the hypnotic quality. In a live performance how can an actor stay focused and make the performance fresh and delightful? How can you be a committed artist in times when social relationships are already built in cyberspaces? When everything has to be quick and instant? How can we be slow and find the center within the vortex of moral confusion and technological bombardment? The film *Taste of Cherry* by Abbas Kariostani is still fresh in my memory. The Iranian film is known for its documentary style filmmaking whose imaginative use of techniques like close-ups, a provocative panning of the camera in almost slow motion and the mounting of camera in strange spots lime inside the car. Patience in watching his film is demanded to enjoy the fullness of its essence. Kariostani's sense of rhythm was the most significant inspiration for me as I built this project. *The Taste of Cherry* is an example of a minimalist film that depicts the story of Mr Badir. In the film, we regret that we don't know much about the life of Mr Badir. At first glance you think he is a peripatetic man, you grapple to understand his back story background? And yes he is a nomad of his own planned demise. Why does he contemplate death? We have hints, call Sarte and his existential estimation of the essence of life (what does this sentence mean?). From the vantage point of someone watching him, the viewers, the scores of long shots make us wonder: Can life just be spittle from the mouth of a wrathful god. One thing we know about the man, he drives the rover as he wanders in the umber desert land of his imagined death. It is a beautiful ending. It is intelligent acting. This is a brilliant director: Kariostami's minimalism inspires me to bring this in this project. This is the second Iranian film
that moved my heart, and I was awakened to realize that life is short. What are we doing with it—in peace and in war, in hatred and love? It is from this film that I took the inspiration of using the adaptation of Louis Armstrong's "St James Infirmary" for the piano scene of Pentheses. Ominous and foreboding, the song reveals how death comes in an unknown time and place. The rhythm of this music helped me understand the interiority of the film's language and its central theme: self-inflicted death. Pentheus, in his aspiration to sustain his power and defiance to the god, makes a parallel connection to Badir's self-destruction. My continued desire to connect with other forms of art to enrich my ability to be an effective director was significant in creating this project. I saw this film while I was rehearsing last December. A good friend of mine sent me a YouTube link of this film and I immediately found myself drawn with the first shot: a man driving looking for someone as if his is soul is about to sail in unknown purgatory. The story remained in me. It stuck in me 'wounding my memory' as how the American queer playwright Paula Vogel described it. Tonight's show revealed to me that the wounds inflicted to me by other arts are still fresh.

**February 8 | History of imagination in the ceremonial space**

I am writing this in the cold and lonely room. In my own little space I am aware that some parts of the world there is war going on or a horde of people storming a street in a cosmopolitan city ready to work, filling it with a life chock-a-block of dreams and expectations, or an entire village praying in chorus as it waits for a baby to be born. That in a distant country a classist in a laboratory is imperturbable in decoding a message from a newly discovered sheet of paper with an ancient and pithy message of love and desire. From this awareness I left a theatre currently sleeping. Resting, for it was used as a ceremonial space for souls to be awakened. This is our
theatre. We pay tribute to its memory. In this cold room, I remember hundreds of people who joined us in making our ritual alive and real. I am grateful. The theatre belongs to the audience and it also belongs to the tales of actors, directors, playwrights, designers, mentors and crews who marked their imagination in the walls of this theatre. It belongs to the history of imagination and re-awakening. I was anticipating the last performance in the next few hours. There is a sense of celebration and joy in the word 'last', its etymology from the German word 'leisten' meaning to ‘afford, yield, and follow’. We don't put an end, this theatre welcomes beginning. I referenced it from TS Eliot's, "to make an end is to make a beginning..." This was the premise of our last performance, which we took by heart, religiously. The Bacchae 2.1 closing show was on January 7, 2014 at the legendary Frederic Wood Theatre and I am writing this at 1:34AM in this part of the world called Vancouver.

February 9 | A tale of gratitude

We closed with an appreciation from the audience: friends, family, mentors, lovers and unknown people who were willing to engage in our imagination, our intentions to change ideas, and our challenging dominant discourse of dichotomies. Bringing a story about god's revulsion to man's arrogance--why I am doing this theatre? A sudden rush of pride came to my heart at what the faculty members, actors, designers and crew had achieved. While waiting for the audience to leave the theatre, a handsome gray haired man came to me and asked if I was the director, I smiled and said "Yes, Sir." He introduced himself as one of the early students who took MFA in Directing at UBC. I was happy to meet someone from the same program. The bloodline of connection was palpable. I looked into his eyes and I saw a glint of hope. I felt humbled when he said that he was emotionally moved and confessed without reservation that during his time their
works were not as emotionally powerful as this project. While he was sharing his thoughts about the play, I kept silent and centered, to maintain a self-effacing, gracious and polite demeanor in front of a dignified man who I was sharing a lineage of theatre that we both loved and respected. Another person approached me, excusing himself. Walking towards the exit door, he looked at me and his eyes beaming with affirmation and challenge, as if it was saying, "Do not stop doing theatre..." Immediately before he left my sight, our eyes still locked, I touch my heart and bow my head to express my humble gratitude.
CHAPTER 3: Reflection and Assessment

"I found in Asia such beauty in things, in gestures, a simple ceremonial quality which seems to me indispensable in the theatre. In Asia there is a perpetual formalization of every action. The everyday Western aggressiveness, especially in France and above all in Paris, comes from total loss of all formalization of relationships." - Ariane Mnouchkine

3.1 What went right, what went wrong?

Through UBC’s theater department, I obtained a valuable training in textual analysis to produce a vital and active theatrical interpretation. In collaboration with the actors, I decoded the text for live interpretation; this means a deeper investigation on how to layer my existing approach (textual analysis) onto a highly poetical text. During this process, I became interested on how words could blend with the body and bring a theatrically communicative expression on stage. As I reflect on this, I pose two questions that hopefully can guide me in my future productions. First, I would like to consider how spoken words could be articulated clearly and cogently as they blend with the body's gestural lexis in transmitting a message. Second, I would like to maximize the potential of the body in channeling the energy of the text effectively through bodily expressions, masks, and choral works. In the future, I would like to invest in an even deeper textual analysis with these questions in mind in order to probe the interior meanings of a play, to unpack the clarity of the story, and to lead the audience to the thematic essence of the play.

3.2 How did the audience respond? Why?

When the show opened on January 22, a certain moment in the opening scene caused a rushed
rupture of visceral emotion, and this sudden, visceral state manifested itself throughout the succeeding shows. When Dionysus, wearing a black tunic—a costume reminiscent of Catholic Jesus Christ, came walking towards the audience, I was breathless. It was interesting for me to feel this in relation to how the audience was responding to the languages, images, characters, and the story of the play. These visual stimuli invited the audience to re-experience issues that are often not openly brought up in daily conversations. After watching many plays here in the city, I sensed that audiences might be unprepared to go into their deep-seated emotions. I kept this in mind when crafting this production, inviting them to a richer experience and challenging sensations when watching a play. This inward-rooted reaction is ineffable and cannot be measured nor defined—from the communal breathing shared inside the theatre between the actors and the audience to the quality of silence suddenly punctuated by frequent laughter stemming from the audience’s intellectual processing and instinctual reactions. Some people were moved by the long monologues of Pentheus, some were aghast, while still others were annoyed with the screaming delivery of them. Many expressed their delights with the complex ideas presented by the characters, and others were drawn to the soulful and sensual lines of the women. I understood where these dissimilarities and diverse reactions had come from and by any means, and I welcomed them. The audience was fascinated by the play’s aesthetics, which were influenced by my own historical-religious and cultural roots. To manifest a religious-spiritual essence on a proscenium stage and to represent a Catholic image of a god in a non-sectarian society like Vancouver is fraught with risks of misappropriation. However, that is my raison d’être: to bring rituals on stage in an event where humans and gods interact in crisis.


3.3 What did I learn about the play that I didn't know before the rehearsal? Before the opening night? Before the run?

Through the artistic process of directing this play, I learned that the women are also victims of the violence brought on by Dionysus. The gruesome and bloody representations of death are as equally important as the birth of god and human beings. In order to experience re-birth, the entire society must experience communal spiritual and/or physical death. In this play I learned that the notion of hope is not even an alternative or an option.

3.4 What did I plan to do and what did I actually do? Why?

In my original design, I planned to hire a Filipino choreographer who was also a dancer with a comprehensive knowledge on particular traditional dance lexis in the Southern Philippines. I sought to employ a full musical instrumentation of the Bagobos, an ethno-linguistic Filipino group in the Philippines. In the beginning of the process, I conceived an idea where the characters would wear traditional Filipino baro't saya (dress and skirt), a fashion style historically worn during the Philippine-American war. I began pushing the possibilities toward an interpretation of the text to a specific historical period in the Philippines—the turn of the century Philippine-American war. In retrospect, I am glad that I did not follow this through, knowing it might look forced. Initially, I wanted to direct Tatarin: A Witches' Sabbath in Three Acts, a loose adaptation of The Bacchae by a Filipino playwright, set on the eve of American imperialism. Central to my interest is how kinship, genders, war, power, domination, the relationship of human to god, and indigenous belief systems all intersect into one story. However, a month of preparation to bring such a history of the Philippines to the project seemed daunting. Since I was also interested in learning how to direct a classical text, my second option was to
direct a European Western play. So, I considered *The Bacchae*. When I shared my ideas with Jacqueline Firkins, she suggested that I read Charles Mee's adaptation. After reading it, I settled to do it. Mee's contemporary style spoke immediately to me.

3.5 **What would I change/keep about the rehearsal process?**

I found it challenging to spend an enormous amount of time conducting textual analysis, since I am still developing this skill. Much of my rehearsal time was spent on theatre games and improvisation, which I believed was necessary to build trust and confidence. However, when we transferred to the theatre, I realized that I should have devoted more time and understanding to the dramatic actions. These dramatic actions, I discovered, were keys to the 'right' blocking. Informed and critical discussions to locate the active ideas in the text were critical to unraveling and deconstructing the story, especially where characters’ interiorities were revealed through their actions. By the same token, I would also keep the creative workshops that I employed in rehearsal. The actors were very much invested in the sharing process and allowed their vulnerabilities to be exposed. The complex ideas and sensitive issues found in the text needed meticulous handling, and, through our collaborative workshops, we built an ensemble that shared common values of trust, faith, respect, patience and openness. This was my first time to conduct a rehearsal where we read the text with the actors seated on the ground in a circle. This formation certainly encouraged open and intimate participation from each other without fear of judgments.

3.6 **What would I change/keep about the director-designer process and outcome?**

The director-designer conversations were important facets of the process, and through our collaboration, we gained inspiration from each other. Based on these conversations, I resolved to
hold an intense one-day creative workshop to bring forth a more cohesive direction and strong artistic expression shared by the team. A three-hour director's presentation and several director-designer meetings were not sufficient in bolstering a firm, strong and definite aesthetic style. There were times that I needed to rush my meetings with them since many were often preoccupied with other things, both academic and personal. Although we are still very autonomous in our own creative investigations, collaboration between individuals in a group, delving into the realm of imagination, must come from a place of calmness of the spirit, mindfulness and reflection. The time of incubation and experimentation must be extended for six months to a year in order to practice our craft and to ensure that we are intellectually and creatively engaged and curious.

3.7 What have I learned about myself as a director? What are my future challenges?

I have witnessed this work mature from its embryonic period into its full ability to breathe and communicate issues of dichotomies and tensions between gods and human beings. The written accounts commemorated in my journal are important markers of my own growth, though I concede that not every single creative undertaking, pivotal connection or memory can be accounted for, valued, and memorialized. The best things are those that cannot be read and spoken, and, though the acuity of my brain fails to express them, it lives in the memory of my heart. Watching the show on several occasions after its opening on January 22, I felt compelled to distance myself from the work. Looking at it honestly in the eye, stripping it bare again, and confronting it with a critical scrutiny is the most painful process for me, with my past works as well with my present. Disentangling myself from work that my mind, soul, heart and hands help to form is like a parent to a child who is now ready to let go of his/her child into the world as
he/she faces the unknown. I have no other choice but to witness its life from afar. Directing is a dreadful and terrorizing act as what Anne Bogart once said. I have asked myself why I am doing theatre in North America. Upon revisiting my Statement of Purpose for the UBC MFA Theatre Directing program, I professed that I am ready to bring the roots of my Asian performance to intersect with Western theatrical traditions. The practicality and mental rigor of Euro-American theatre is an artistic lineage I want to explore. I quote:

"I hope to engage in the continuation of such creative dialogues and styles at UBC. Eventually, I want to create theatre performances that can embrace diversity—cross-cultural and hybrid pollination of creativity that might occur due to migration, multiplicity and intersections of cultures. I believe that my roots in Asian Theatre processes and my desire to learn the verbal/spoken theatre of the West can be amalgamated to form a holistic language of expression. In a rapid changing multicultural society, particularly in North America, the changing face of contemporary theatre is moving towards transnational, transmedia, and multilingual aesthetic forms. I wish to be part of this and to learn from a guided mentorship by your faculty-artists to help me deepen my knowledge of new ways of theatre-making deeply constituted in the spoken texts."

The women in *The Bacchae* went to the mountain. Pentheus was initiated to experience his raw and sensual self. They were enchanted by the god of theatre. Little did I know, as I pushed to finish the project, I was also being initiated into this state of enchantment—an invitation to a deeper and intimate engagement with the craft of directing. Now that I found a new language of
expression, a deeper aspiration must be set: to be impeccable with this new language. I want to not only blend and interface the artistic expressions of the East and the West into a new language but also to develop and use this same language to argue issues of social injustice, gender differences, apathy, bigotry and the violence that stems from the growing economic, racial and cultural divide. When meanings are formed via languages and experiences, there is a space for enlightenment, with the hope that transformation will follow—from the inside (loob) to the outside (labas), and then to others (kapwa o sa ibang tao). What better way to distill this transformation than as an elixir of communal experience? As I go back to the Philippines, my home country, I am confronted with the lingering tragedy of social injustice and extreme poverty. A nation situated in the Pacific Ring of Fire, a country visited by nineteen storms a year, a democracy faced by rising joblessness, growing poverty, landlessness, and severe inequality. I am going back to a home where eighteen million Filipinos live below the poverty line surviving with $1.25 a day, which you can buy a kilo of rice and one egg or one small pack of Lay's chips. I am asked to go back to my motherland, a home of twenty-five supra elite families whose earnings amount to US$21.4 billion, a combined yearly income of eleven million poorest Filipino families (Angeles, 2014). I am writing this reflection paper at the SUB, and I hear two Filipino migrant women working at Starbucks Coffee conversing in Tagalog, my native language:

**Filipina 1:** Hindi na ako makakapunta sa party. (I can't go to the party anymore).

**Filipina 2:** Bakit? (Why?)
**Filipina 1:** Kailangan kumayod sa trabaho, alam mo na, para kumita. (I need to work double time, so I can earn more.)

Never mind the party as long as they can send remittances to their families. Their displacement and marginality are the quick answers for the salvation of economic growth propelled by the
migrant Filipino workers' remittances, totaling a staggering US $21 Billion in 2011. This is what has saved the Philippine economy from its collapse. As I reflect on these concerns, I wonder how my MFA in directing education from UBC prepares me to bring a sense of connectedness and relevance to the issues of my nation and of this world. In a required reading in THEA 520, I encountered Anne Bogart's wise words:

"Courage, patience, skill, listening and openness are required to sustain a handshake from a stranger. To keep calm and meet danger with patience and skill is also the requirements for solid artistic technique. In prehistoric times, humans transformed fire from a dangerous and destructive material into a controllable asset to human civilization. In our times it is key to maintain a connection with the original danger of human encounter, the heartbeat of the theater, and to use technique to shape it into a communicative exchange."

This quest to cultivate and develop my skill has been an exciting one. What sustained me was the passion, faith and exemplary mentorship of my supervisors, the inspiration drawn from my ordinary, daily survival inside and outside the university, and the unbelievable generosity of Filipinos in Canada. I received an email from Merlinda Bobis, a well-known Australian-Filipino poet and novelist who I was able to work with last year through UBC's Liu Institute for Global Studies. My short but very intense week with her gave us a connection that I value. Together, with sketches, images, directing and acting notes (G-goal O-Objectives T-tactics E-expectation, Actable Verbs, Delight and Surprise, etc.) that I gathered from my creative process with Stephen Malloy, I printed Merlinda’s email and put it in my folder alongside with The Bacchae 2.1 text.
"Yes, finding your voice and body as a Filipino artist in a foreign land is crucial to your survival, this process will grow, layer, and hybridize your craft and sensibility. And you will be able to imagine and invent new things, and take more risks. They might not always work or be accepted (in Canada or in the Philippines), but you'll be able to 'grow up' and go into territories you wouldn't have even dreamt of. From my experience, as artist and human being, this process is life changing. I believe I became a better person, as I became a better artist. One's humanity in relation to others is the heart of the matter. Life is short, and we can only do so much to contribute a little to this bid for a safe, meaningful, dignified and interconnected life, not just for ourselves but for others."

Courage is the best thing that I learned from being in this program. Hopefully through that virtue I will be able to re-enter the world filled with unbearable anguish and carry a living heart that yearns to participate in the creation of new myths and new histories.

3.8 What would I advise another director were he/she to choose to direct a similar/the same piece?

Go deeper to the text, be truthful to your own voice, and know your gods.
Books


Academic Articles

Marcus, (2012). "On the Beauty of Our Perpetual Marginality, and Why it Might be Time for All of Us to Figure Out Our Position on Social Housing". Canadian Theatre Review, Vol. 150, Spring , pp.34-35 (Article), University of Toronto Press.

Online


Chalres, M. *The Bacchae 2.1*. http://www.charlesmee.org/Mee, Charles, The Bacchae 2.1, the (re)making project/. April, 2014


Appendices

Appendix A: Production credits

A.1 Cast members

Thomas Elms *Dionysus* | Matt Kennedy *Pentheus* | Helena FisherWelsh  *Agave*

Nathan Cottell *Kadmos* | Allyce Kranabetter *Terisias* | Francis Dowlatabadi *Aide 1*  Javier

Sortes *Aide 2* | Demi Pedersen *Tony Ulasewitz* | Ghazal Azarbad *Orange Woman*  Jenna Mairs

*Lavender Woman* | Meegin Pye *Tattoo Artist* | Selene Rose *Tattoo Woman*  Parmiss Sehat *Cook*

| Mariam Barry *Bacchae Cook 2* | Joylyn Secunda *Suspended Woman* | Elizabeth "Libby"

Willoughby *Animal Mask Woman* |  Kelsey Ranshaw *Bacchae Solo Performer*

A.2 Creative team members

Dennis Gupa *Director* | Natalia Ruiz *Set Design* | Kiara Lawson *Costume Design* | Eric Chad

*Lighting & Media Design* | Kate De Lorme *Sound Design* | Sara Smith *Assistant Lighting Design* | Christian Lovell *Assistant Set Design* | Li Zhou *Assistant Costume Design* | Jessica Routliffe

*Assistant Costume Design* | Tony Ip *Light Board Programmer* | Chengyan Boon *Media Programmer*

A.3 Production team members

Curtis Li *Stage Manager* | Elaine Yan, Megan Lai, Benton Neufeld *Assistant Stage Managers*

Jay Henrickson *Production Manager* | Jim Fergusson Technical *Director* | Keith Smith *Head Carpenter* | Lynn Burton *Properties Department* | Jodi Jacyk *Head of Wardrobe* | Robert Gardiner *Acting Department Head* | Cam Cronin *Acting Administrator* | Deb Pickman *Marketing & Communications* | Ian Patton *Academic Administrator* | Karen Tong *Theatre and Film*
Graduate Studies Secretary | Zanna Downes

Theatre and Film Production Graduate Secretary | Tony Koelwyn Box Office | Harry Bardall

Poster Design, Program Editor | Gene Baedo Custodial Services | Linda Fenton Malloy

Department & Production Website

A.4 Faculty advisors

Stephen Malloy Directorial Advisor | Cathy Burnett Movement Coach | Gayle Murphy Vocal Coach | Marijka Asbeek Brusse Stage Management Advisor | Brad Powers Technical Production Advisor | Robert Gardiner Set & Light Design Advisor | Jacqueline Firkins Costume Design Advisor | Jill Wyness Hair and Makeup Advisor
Appendix B: The director's program note

"This realization of the "impossible" is the strongest fascination and the deepest secret of art. This realization is an act of our imagination and of a sudden, spontaneous, desperate decision to cling to unprecedented, absurd, ridiculous possibilities that are beyond our imagination rather than to the process...To pull the "impossible" into it, one must lack experience, be a rebel, be insatiable, defy all the laws, be in a state of absolute emptiness. Needless to say one has to be in the grip of the feeling of the "impossible". -Tadeusz Kantor

I saw my country in mutiny from the roof of our house: the clouds were bright and the hissing sound of the Tora Tora planes circling around our city riveted me. I was atop the history unfolding from the womb of my nation's memory that day of February. My sister and I watched these planes from the top of our house too close that I could almost see the pilot. That afternoon, my brother and my cousins joined thousands of civilians, church leaders, students marching down the street of EDSA as an act of civil resistance against Pres. Ferdinand Marcos and his cohorts from what Filipinos believed to be two decades of despotic regime, fraud, and embezzlement of government funds. Known as People Power Revolution 1986, this bloodless civil resistance led the Marcoses to flee for Hawaii as exiles. The wife of the assassinated Senator Benigno Aquino, staunch opposer of Marcos, took the presidential seat, but the political tensions heightened even more by coup attempts including the 'God Save the Queen Plot' intending to overthrow her. A call for change and transformations were prefaced with series of natural catastrophes: Luzon 7.8 magnitude Earthquake and the Mt. Pinatubo volcanic eruption that produced avalanche of mudflows that deluged an entire province of ash fall. When I first
saw snow in New York City, I was petrified; I thought it was the ash fall from the spewing mouth of Mt. Pinatubo. The eye of memory re-visited me; the sediment of the past haunted me with terror. As a society, the modern day Philippines remains deeply rooted in religious ritual and similarly fearful of the wrath of an avenging God brought on by the transgressions of its leaders. I lived in the times of hopelessness, a history of danger. The seismic impact of this past reverberates in my act of creating. In the process of my imagination, I seek the birthplace of the god of creation, discovering him/her in silence and in rage, in danger and in peace, in loathing and in love.

First performed in the Theatre of Dionysus in 405 BC, Euripides' play tells the story of Agave and how she is driven to mistakenly kill her son, Pentheus, as a punishment for his refusal to worship the god of fertility and wine, Dionysus. This production is a re-imagination of Euripides’ *The Bacchae* via Charles Mee's *The Bacchae 2.1* as an expression of intercultural and contemporary theatre. When cultures are mixed and blended, it forms an evocative style of artistic expression allowing dialogues to open between people of various cultural backgrounds. As such, artistic forms are fused to transcend cultural differences in search of an understanding of the global human condition and to dismantle polarization is the call of this project. Rooted in my heritage, I locate myself in the center of this modern and technological world where I wish to contribute in the knowledge production, new myth-making, and aesthetic forms that encourage and celebrate human diversity in contemporary times.

I would like to thank my directing supervisors: Stephen Malloy for the sustained, enlightened and beautiful mentorship to train my eyes to look at the text as the origin of actions from which
the birth of meanings blossom, Tom Sholte for his wise guidance allowing me to feel and commit to the spine of expression and to Stephen Heatley who reminded me of what collaboration in theatre process can yield. Three wonderful men of integrity and imagination, whose life in the theatre are signposts of my continuing quest for directing. My appreciation to Gayle Murphy, Cathy Burnett for their constant support in my creative process and the cast who joined me in this quest for the "impossible"; designers and crew for their open hearted collaboration. I would like to express my gratitude to Alvin Tolentino and Marilou Carillo for their most propitious help and love; Leonora Angeles and Murray Forster for the palpable spirit of care, generosity and faith. I am grateful for the Dorothy Somerset Memorial and the Dream Cather in Theatre Scholarships for helping theatre artists to thrive in the world obsessed with commerce and monstrous capitalism.

The masks and the faces of women in this production bear witness to the dangerous lives human have traversed, they are signifiers of the wounded past gone by and the anticipation for a better future. Amidst unbearable heaviness of life, hope is possible and it lies in the bones, blood and the wild hearts of the women.
Appendix C: Email correspondence with the playwright: Charles Mee

September 13, 2014
Dear Prof. Mee,

I hope this email finds you well.

I am Dennis D. Gupa currently in attendance to the MFA Directing (Theatre) program of University of British Columbia's Department of Theatre and Film. This is my last year to the program and gearing towards the completion with The Bacchae 2.1 as my thesis project. I got your email address from Ching Valdes-Aran whom I have met and became friend with while I was a director-in-residence with Ma-Yi Theatre Co. in New York City for a six-month grant from the Asian Cultural Council. And I am very grateful for Ching for being the conduit to initial conversation with you.

Central to my development as a theater maker and director is a continuing understanding of Asian aesthetics and to find ways to crisscross this to western classical text. My research on Philippine traditional performances including the flagellants and the epic chanting of the pasyon (passion) of Christ among the women of Southern Tagalog region of the Philippines and the topeng performance (mask) of Bandung Indonesia allowed me to create contemporary performances guided by the aesthetic philosophies of these performance forms. It has been my intention to find ways to amalgamate a classical western text to my own traditional performance forms and I yearned to do this in a conservatory approach. Last year, I decided to go here in Canada, a country that has a long and deep history of indigenous culture of the aboriginal peoples of their First Nations.

When I entered the MFA program here at UBC I wanted to direct a Greek tragedy, most particularly, Euripides' Bacchae. I have read different translations and found The Bacchae 2.1 a text that spoke to me intimately. The text's interfacing of post-gender and post-modern discourses through his richly poetic articulation inspired me to investigate my aspiration of crossing boundaries of aesthetic expression fundamentally built from spoken theatre.

I want to bring forth questions on whether an artist coming from traditional society like the Philippines, can transform constructed ideologies of gender and sexuality and the politics of power? Who am I and what do I do with the thought systems constructed for me? What would the world be like if we have genders crossing boundaries, not just as a phenomenon that we observe, but as a non-contested value that celebrates genuine post-gender and post-capitalist liberation? As an Asian artist and academic from a "developing country," i.e. Majority World, I straddle privilege and underprivilege-ness and I vacillate among the tensions of resistance, negotiation, and acquiescence. From this context I wish to explore not only the interfacing of cultures but also to question current dominant gender and power assertions, as they relate to my ongoing personal changes and as I continue to witness global transformations. Rooted in my heritage, I locate myself in the center of this modern and technological world where I wish to contribute in the knowledge production of new myth-making, thematic analysis, and aesthetic forms that
encourage and celebrate human diversity in contemporary times.

These are just some of my current questions and reflections that have been seeping on me as I prepare for this project. And if you would give me an opportunity to connect and ask questions to further my understanding of the text that you have written beautifully. I want this project to speak eloquently and deeply to our audience and if you could share your thoughts to me about the text I believe I would gain a better perspective in approaching the work. And I know that you are a busy man but if a Skype conversation is a good option to converse with you about my quires that would also be great.

Sending you all the love and goodness from the the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the han’q’əmin’əm’ speaking Musqueam people.

Sincerely yours,
Dennis D. Gupa

September 13, 2014
Dear Dennis,

Thanks very much for your email. I’m awfully sorry but I think I can't be helpful to you in any way. I wrote my version of the Bacchae more than 20 years ago--and then I've moved on to more and more plays, and I just don’t remember anything about the Bacchae any more: not what I had in mind, not what I did, not the sources I used to write it. My memory is wonderful while I’m writing something, but once I have finished it, it all just disappears from my memory. I'm really sorry. It sounds like you have a wonderful project underway, and I certainly wish you all the best with it, and I'm with you in spirit.

Best,

Chuck

September 14, 2014
Dear Chuck,

Thank you so much for responding immediately to my email and taking the time to connect with me. I sincerely appreciate it. You have provided us the best text to work on for my project--and that is one of the best things that happened in this project of mine. Your presence through your text and ’in spirit’ are immensely significant in building this performance from ‘page to stage’.

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Once again, I am sending you my warmest satisfaction of connecting with you.

Thank you so much!

Sincerely yours,
Dennis
...

December 27, 2014
Dear Chuck,

I am happy to let you know that the whole ensemble of The Bacchae 2.1 is having a meaningful journey as we deal with your text.

Thank you for creating such important adaptation of The Bacchae in a language the resonates to us. Most of the actors are young women taking BFA in Acting and there is no moment where we all find ourselves renew in talking about their lives as women in this world. With their soulful insights I found myself crying many times due to joy of discovery and empathy and empowerment as promised by the meanings imbedded in your beautifully, powerfully written text.

Sending you some pictures of our rehearsal processes.

Happy Holidays!
...

September 28, 2014
Dear Dennis,

Thanks very much for your note--and for the pictures! I hope you’ll stay in touch.

Best,

Chuck
Appendix D: Production reviews

Theatre review: *The Bacchae 2.1* benefits from a fearless cast and creative team

By Mark Robins on January 25, 2015

There are so many layers to Charles Mee’s *The Bacchae 2.1* that it would be easy for anyone not familiar with the story of Euripides’ tragedy on which it is based to become lost in its dense language and wildly heady trip.

Helping to bring all of its disparate parts come together is a cast that is the definition of the word fearless. Watch carefully though and its source material peeks through the layers that also draws from German literary theorist Klaus Theweleit’s *Male Fantasies*, Valerie Solanas’ *The S.C.U.M. Manifesto* and Joan Nestle’s *Lesbian Herstory Archives*. While familiarity with some of the material that Mee draws upon may be foreign to most (including myself), it does help to have some knowledge of the original Greek tragedy going in, as it is the glue that holds it all together.

Renouncing family and responsibility, a group of Thebes women escape to the mountains to workshop Dionysus (aka Bacchus), the god of wine and ecstasy. With King Pentheus bent on revenge against the women, Dionysus convinces him to dress as a woman and to spy on them rather than have them killed. With his disguise eventually discovered, the women, led by his own mother Agave, kill him.

Told in modern language, Mee’s sometimes poetic text is punctuated by explicit language and the equally explicit visuals from the minds of MFA Directing student Dennis Gupa and costume
designer Kiara Lawson. From a phallic wearing ram to a woman seemingly suspended from her skin by hooks, Gupa and Lawson seemingly take all of Mee’s inspirations to heart. Natalia Ruiz’s stark white set with its moveable pieces at times feels a little fussy as it is pulled apart and re-configured, but it allows Lawson’s costumes to pop.

Helping to bring all of its disparate parts come together though is a cast that is the definition of the word fearless. Whether it is Thomas Elms as Dionysus in iridescent hot pants, Matt Kennedy revealing and embracing his feminine side, this entire cast commits to Gupa’s vision from start to finish. And this is no easy task given Mee’s dense script, where the audience is at times left behind. Other stand-outs here include Ghazal Azarbad as the Orange Woman who gives a second-half speech that is rich and Helena Fisher-Welsh as Agave who ultimately captures a mother’s anguish at the realization of what she has done. Special mention must go to the female ensemble (Mariam Barry, Allyce Kranabetter, Jenna Mairs, Demi Pedersen, Meegin Pye, Kelsey Ranshaw, Selene Rose, Joylyn Secunda, Parmiss Sehat, Elizabeth Willoughby) who are as equally fearless in embracing some of the more sexually charged scenes. With a history of presenting more classical works, one would have expected the UBC Department of Theatre and Film to present The Bacchae in its original form. And while not everything works in this modern adaptation, this ambitious undertaking, for both audience and cast, is a surprisingly and welcome change. It also helps to have a cast and creative team fearless enough to take up Mee’s challenge.

The Bacchae 2.1 adapted by Charles Mee from The Bacchae by Euripides. Directed by Dennis Gupa. On stage at the Frederic Wood Theatre (University of British Columbia) until February 7. - See more at:
The Bacchae 2.1 reimagines Euripides’ classic Greek tragedy

By: Olivia Law

January 18, 2015, 12:30pm PDT

“How do you transgress boundaries? How do you dismantle polarities? How do you manoeuvre a system that’s being operated by opposing poles?” These are the questions Dennis Gupa, MFA directing student, is seeking to discuss in his production of The Bacchae 2.1.

Gupa’s production brings this reimagining of Euripides’ The Bacchae, adapted by Charles Mee, into context for a contemporary audience.

A dynamic, physical piece, Bacchae 2.1 draws on Gupa’s Filipino roots, and his views on equality, spirituality and testing the limits of the body.

“I react to contemporary issues, but am guided with my traditional spiritual practice, and my values are very much traditional,” said Gupa on the juxtaposition of Greek and contemporary theatre. Through rehearsal, the actors have focused on the contemporary issues and polarities through themes of excess and movement.

“It has led me to the conclusion that this is a play about emotions, it’s a play about feelings, and it’s a play about excess,” said Thomas Elms, who is playing the role of Dionysius, on the exploration of both Greek tragedy and Gupa’s style of directing. “It’s about making people feel
things, and it’s about the connection that kind of transcends language.”

Ghazal Azarbad is playing the Orange Woman, a member of the traditional Greek chorus. The individuality of the women in the chorus is something unique and different from Greek tradition. “I think it is an ensemble piece,” said Azarbad. “It requires a lot of group mind, a lot of group decision making, especially when it comes to furthering the story along and making sure that the focus is in specific places. It takes a lot of generosity from everyone.”

In Mee’s version, however, the Greek tragedy is made much more anachronistic, sexual and perhaps more feminist. “We discussed a lot about the individuality of each of the women in Bacchae,” noted Helena Fisher-Welsh, BFA acting student playing Agave. “There’s qualities to them that are not really quite human, but they do take on human qualities. Much of the rehearsals were finding out how we move, because it’s such a big part of who the women are.”

The separation of the women’s individuality is brought to light largely through the innovative costume design of student Kiara Lawson.

“They have certain anonymity to them, because they are all [initially] looking the same, and that’s kind of what a Greek chorus does to its members — they’re one entity,” said Lawson. “So as the play progresses, they remove that costume and underneath you find these crazy, wacky costumes that don’t have any particular base in period or time or place.”

Lawson has been designing the costumes since the summer, and has relished the freedom and creativity with this position.
“It gave me a lot of opportunity for creativity and designing things from my mind as opposed to conforming to a specific period,” said Lawson when asked about the originality of her designs. Like in many Greek tragedies, the essence of the play lies in the tensions of opposites. Gupa questioned throughout the process “how do you dismantle that, how do you understand man and woman … I feel that this play will give me an opportunity to breathe a new knowledge into these two opposing systems.”

The production is layered with live music stemming from Gupa’s Filipino heritage, influencing the movement of the actors. Azarbad noted how the use of movement and music ensures the actors rely on more visceral stimulation, rather than deep analysis of the text. “We’ve just allowed the text to be in our bodies and through our voices, so the rehearsal process has almost been reversed.”

As a production with endless levels, Bacchae 2.1 is not something to be missed.

“We’re still trying to decide what this play is really about,” said Azarbad. “There’s so many different things to think about, which is what makes this play so dynamic and incredibly rich to work on. It will just keep unravelling and will never have an end.”

The Bacchae 2.1 opens on January 22 at the Frederic Wood Theatre. Tickets are available online and at the door.
The Bacchae 2.1 a thought-provoking and evocative performance

By: Olivia Law

January 25, 2015, 4:50pm PDT

UBC Theatre’s newest creation comes with a warning — and for good reason. Bacchae 2.1, directed by MFA Theatre student Dennis Gupa is a shocking, thought provoking, wonderfully artistic piece of theatre, which left the audience on opening night first speechless, then unable to contain their admiration, earning a standing ovation and well deserved praise.

An adaptation of Euripides’ The Bacchae, Charles Mee’s Bacchae 2.1 sets the Greek drama in a contemporary period and tells the tale of Pentheus, played by BFA acting student Matt Kennery, Dionysius, BFA acting student Thomas Elms and the women of the mountains. This is not a play one can simply sit back and relax through, however. The complex speeches and at times difficult subject matter ensure the audience is kept alert and concentrated.

The Bacchae 2.1 could be used as an example of all the questions prevalent in today’s society about the meanings of gender, sex and freedom. Mee’s script highlights important subjects through huge contrasts between Pentheus, Dionysius and the women, switching at times from lines of hilarity, to vulgarity, to sincerity — quickly silencing the audiences’ laughter.

The storyline of the play appears, in all sense of the basic forms, to be completely Greek. There is a traditional chorus, played by 10 women who transform into their real selves when in the mountains. Through a series of monologues, the audience gets perhaps the most honest and raw
insights into the deepest parts of a woman’s soul.

Certainly, some parts of *The Bacchae 2.1* are shocking and unexpected. Some graphic, almost brutal energies transcend upon the audience, yet the realities of these sentiments hold strong. Making use of hyperbole to the point of hilarity, one must watch and embrace Gupa’s production with an open mind, saving any conclusions until the end.

Kiara Lawson’s costumes are a memorable element of the play. Drawing on elements of the ethereal, magical and supernatural, the transformation from women in black to individual women shows immense creativity and flair. The costumes make the production difficult to place in time, placing the world of Pentheus and Dionysius into somewhere completely unfamiliar. This is a play about transformations and dualities, and these themes are completely embraced through these costumes.

Drawing on Gupa’s Filipino roots, the majority of the music throughout the production was live, performed by actors and musicians upstage. The use of strings and percussion was prevalent in the strangeness of the happenings, and was effective in highlighting and emphasizing the actors’ words and movements, rather than detracting from them or appearing as an act of their own. Seamless in its transitions and quick to transform hilarity into sincerity, the entire connectedness of human, animal and monster gives light to the human condition and topics so important as we move forwards.
The play seems unlike a piece of university theatre, but more a work of art. It dismantles polarization of genders and the human condition, yet the brutality of the words and descriptions give you all the feelings. Feelings of joy, of despair for the human condition, pity, longing — it’s all there throughout the play, but moving quickly leaves you no time to address and take in what shocking lines or opinions you’ve just heard.

*50 Shades* has nothing on Gupa’s production. This is not the sort of play you can explain to somebody else, it’s the sort of play you must see for yourself. You need to experience the insane, wild world of the women in the mountains, the hilarious but strikingly familiar views of the men and the innovative lighting and sound technology from Eric Chad and Kate De Lorme. You will come away with maybe more questions than you entered with, but with a sense of invigoration, a sense of duty and a mind buzzing with all sorts of issues which are so important in our culture today, not just in our small world at UBC, but everywhere.

From a stunning opening night on January 22nd, 2015, to its closing yesterday on February 8th, 2015, UBC Theatre’s stage production of The Bacchae 2.1 proved that UBC Theatre has continued to push boundaries in theatrical performance and provide challenging and provocative narratives for the audience. CiTR Arts Report covered the event extensively on-air, providing an in-depth commentary on the nature of this play on the January 28, 2015 show.

Since then, Arts Reporter Danielle Tan attended the January 30th 2015 showing at the Frederic Wood Theatre at UBC and briefly reviewed the surroundings of this fascinating play.

UBC’s Theatre production The Bacchae 2.1, directed by Dennis Gupa, is a performance of courage, talent and hard work. Adapted by Charles Mee, The Bacchae 2.1 is a unique and extraordinary piece, featuring a sassy genderfluid Dionysus, the exotic Bacchae, 18th Century-esque Tiresias and Kadmos, and Pentheus the Platonic king dressed in a business suit. Throughout the play, boundaries are crossed and conventions are broken, what with the cross-dressing, sex monologues—and a lot of swearing. It’s a fun play to watch with seniors. If “expect the unexpected” isn’t enough, then you can expect everything from this play, from the classy and sophisticated, the mystic and poetic, the vulgar and explicit and burlesque to strobe lighting.

From the moment it begins, talent is interwoven into the fabric of this piece wherever possible. Aside from strong and passionate acting, there’s singing and dancing. Actors also play the drums, guitar, violin, flute, and more. To put all the components and techniques of this play together,
what is produced of the cast and crew is definitely hard work. Invaluable hard work and
dedication brought *The Bacchae 2.1* to life, alongside courage to perform what is unconventional
and talent to render an enjoyable and entertaining performance.


**Vancouver Theatre: *The Bacchae 2.1***

Euripides *The Bacchae 2.1* adapted by Charles Mee  Directed by Dennis Gupa  Theatre at

UBC, Frederic Wood Theatre  Feb 7, 2015

Vancouver, BC:  I saw *The Bacchae 2.1* on the closing night of the show, and this production is
one I will remember as much for its striking visual effects as for the awesome performances. The
costume designs by Kiara Lawson were stunning as the examples in the photos show. Great
animal mask too.

The movements of the ensemble of black clad women, and the individual performers especially
Dionysus (Thomas Elms) were captivating with many successive tableau-like moments that my
mind captured as would a camera. The set by Natalia Ruiz was also an intriguing design, though
I felt that there were too many times when the set pieces were moved around the stage for no
apparent reason, and this was a distraction. The lighting and video projections by Eric Chad were
well done. For example the abstract patterns on the floor while the piano was played were a
visual reflection of the music.

Overall this student cast were excellent. Elms was mesmerizing as Dionysus, observing the
storm of human foibles with the calmness of god-like superiority, comfortable as the sexually ambiguous Dionysus, and wily in his ability to entice Pentheus into his net. Matt Kennedy who played Pentheus, had a difficult role. While he did an outstanding job of manifesting the contrast between the orderly, autocratic ruler and the female side of the cross-dressed Pentheus, both Pentheus and his aides (Francis Dowlatabadi and Javier Sotres) were burdened with long tracts of list-like dialogue and tended to shout most of their lines. I thought they could perhaps have found more nuances; passion and power does not necessarily equate only with loudness. Helena Fisher-Welsh was both powerful as fierce Agave and overtly tragic in her realization of what she had done. I also admired Ghazal Azarbad's Orange Women, Nathan Cottell and his guitar as Kadmos, and Allyce Kranabetter as Tiresias.

While I enjoyed the spectacle and the performance I was less enamoured of the text. Euripides' *The Bacchae* tells the story of Pentheus, King of Thebes and his mother, Agave, who with the other women of Thebes, has become a follower of the Dionysiac cult. Pentheus is concerned that in the hills above the city, these women performing wild rituals of worship, singing and dancing, are defying the rational civilized order which he imposes on the city. To discover what is really happening, Pentheus follows Dionysus' suggestion to disguise himself as a woman and go up the mountain to spy on the reveling Bacchae. When Agave and the women discover that he is a man disguised as a woman, they kill him. Too late she realizes that, under the influence of Dionysus, she has killed her own son.

There are obviously many ways of adapting and re-making the classics. For example in Christian Barry's and Hawksley Workman's one-man rock opera version of *The Bacchae, The God that Comes*, that played at The Cultch in 2013, actor Hawksley Workman plays all the characters
including the chorus. *The Bacchae* 2.1 playwright, Charles Mee, is noted for his collage approach to (re)making theatre in which he freely incorporates or as he describes it, "pillages" passages or elements from other sources into the text. In this adaptation of The Bacchae, some of the "pillaged" material resulted in the shouted laundry-list type of dialogue that I mentioned above. Intended to evoke the sense of inter-gender rage reflecting the struggle between the men and women of Thebes, perhaps?

Overall I thought this was a well-directed production. I think many of the images will stay with me for a long time.

http://www.reviewfromthehouse.com/vancouver-theatre-bacchae-21
Appendix E: Radio Podcast

B – Interviewer
G – First Interviewee
G1 – Second Interviewee

B: And I know you’ve got a little bit more to share with us to a little bit closer at UBC.

G: So recently, I had a full week of just going to see the new UBC Theatre plays and performances. So the two that I talked about last week was *The Bacchae* and the feature-length film, *Mercury Falling*.

B: Yes and there are posters around campus for both of them and they are very interesting looking posters.

G: They are very interesting looking posters and both of them kind of back to back really emphasized how much UBC theatre is changing and growing as an organization and pushing against the boundaries, similarly like how the Push Festival is, to what is the norm and trying to develop more contemporary art. So *The Bacchae*, when I went to go watch it, what I found was really, really striking.

G1: All right guys. Hi. I just came in.

B: You saw *The Bacchae* as well?

G1: Yeah, I saw *The Bacchae 2.1*. It’s much more different from the original one. Have you seen the original *Bacchae* or no?

G: No. No. I haven’t.

G1: So the original, it’s based from a Greek myth.

B: A classic Greek play.

G1: Yeah, a classic Greek play by Euripides.

B: Euripides.
G1: So the way they changed it, I thought it was really, you said striking in a way.

G: Yeah. Initially, because once you sit down at the audience, the set itself is really striking. I’ve mentioned before that it’s completely white. But the beginning of the play is Dionysus in this extravagant Christ costume and get-up and he had this kind of sun halo in his head and when he moved from place to place in the set, it literally looked as if he was floating -

B: Really?

G: From place to place. And that really caught your attention because a) that’s not humanly possible; and b) the colors and the contrast between the white and his costume was really, really strong. So I liked how they utilized the white stage to bring out different features of the costume but also how they used the lighting. Because it’s white, the shadows that appear on the set as well as the walls of the theatre and the venue was really eye-catching and it really caught your attention. Surprisingly, with this play, there is a lot of dance to it. ‘Cause there’s a lot of dance, the rhythmic, I guess, shadows that appear on the walls and the set really entrance you along with the live music with the cymbals and –

G1: Even like the violin happening. A lot of music happens in the play. People are quite surprised when they hear the music. They think it’s a recording but actual casts are playing the music.

B: There’s a live performance?

G1: There are live performances, yeah.

B: Now I know a bit of classical Greek plays. They would have a sort of a chorus, like a group of people who would kind of foretell the story and they would kind of walk the line between narrator and characters in the play.

G1: And commentators who would comment on what’s going on.
**B:** How did The Bacchae kind of interpret that for this production?

**G:** I would say that the group of girls or women, I should say, who fled the mountains to kind of worship the god, Dionysus and live their whole life apart from society acted like that chorus because they were present in almost the entire play. There really wasn’t a scene where at least five or six of them were just kind of like moving around the backstage. In terms of the line and the narration that they had for the play as a whole, it wasn’t too strong. Like they didn’t talk as much but they did facial expressions that gave clues to the audience as how we should be reacting to some other things that were being said onstage. I really think that in terms of the visual, I guess, attraction of what was going on, it was really strong but I think that the plot of the story could have been more emphasized.

**G1:** From what I see, because I’ve seen the original one, now I see this one. The adaptation, I believe, it was Charles Mee –

**G:** Yeah, Charles Mee.

**G1:** He did. There’s a lot of, I guess, for the lack of a better word, a lot of controversy with these kind of choices and the speech that people do which make it kind of very difficult for audience such as yourself to get lost with what the plot is. I already have the underlying knowledge of what’s happening. But for other people, they seem a little bit confused on what was going on ‘cause they are focusing too much on what the characters were saying.

**G:** I do have to emphasize that I don’t think that it was the performers themselves that was limiting the communication of the plot but I do think, I guess it was the lengthy monologues that a lot of characters had. That being said, I think, specifically the actor, Matt Kennedy who played one of the main characters, Pentheus, his performance for about half an hour to forty minutes straight just talking and almost shouting at his lines was incredible to see. I was so shocked as to
see how comfortable he was in the role he was playing even though it was a pretty intense character and it’s hard to maintain that level of focus for that period of time. So I was pleasantly surprised. Struggling with that kind of difficult script and that kind of adaptation, I would say cheers to the performers for really doing the best with what they were doing.

**B:** Part of those lengthy dialogues to this modern audience is a practice in listening to dialogue in that format. But one of the things that definitely would have been striking about this play is you talk a lot about how the art direction in it was very kind of risky and a little bit, did that kind of bring the audience’s attention towards the play?

**G:** Surprisingly, I did mention that it was quite a liberal play with a lot of vulgar and sensual content but none of it was too bad in the sense that I got lost from the message of the play or lost from what the characters were saying.

**B:** So you wouldn’t have minded watching the play with your grandmother or something like that?

**G:** Yeah, no, really. I was watching it and it wasn’t to the extent that I might have made it seem last week. Now having gone seen the play and running through the play as a whole, I don’t think that it was as bad as some people might come to expect.

**B:** Excellent. Right on. Any final thoughts about *The Bacchae*?

**G:** Well my friend who I went to go see *The Bacchae* with, she did say that it was one of the coolest plays she has seen yet at UBC and I have taken her to see almost every single theatre play at UBC ever since I became a theatre correspondent. So for her to say that is a pretty big deal and I think in terms of how UBC Theatre is taking on such challenging plays such as *The Bacchae* and making it into something that is entertaining by utilizing things other than just character development like the set, live music, the light, dancing, I think that’s really
commendable.

**B:** Excellent.

**G1:** I think for people who are going to see *The Bacchae 2.1*, one thing that they should be really open about it, even though at first the shock value might go whether on what they’re saying, don’t really focus on what they’re saying but what the message underlying those words mean. Because I feel like people can get too wrapped up in it and I heard some people behind me going, “what are they saying, this makes no sense”. But there’s an underlying theme to all of it in which the direction does kind of show even you’re lost in the plot you can still see where the character development is going especially with the main character, Pentheus. It seems that it’s very kind of clear for everyone to see. I really recommend people giving it a chance at least and having an open mind. Because if you have an open mind, you’ll really come to enjoy this play and what it offers.

**G:** That’s a really good point because I also felt very similar. In kind of the middle of the play where the monologues were quite lengthy, but because I had an open mind until the end of it, when the climax comes when all of the loose ends of the play come to a finale, I think it really does click. And they make the final scene of the play really strong so that even if you weren’t really aware of exactly what was going on in the beginning or the middle of the play, it comes to be really clear at the very end.

**B:** Well thank you for covering *The Bacchae!*

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