ARTMAKING ON THE EDGE OF A CLIFF: DIRECTING IPHIGENIA 2.0

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ARTMAKING ON THE EDGE OF A CLIFF: DIRECTING IPHIGENIA 2.0

By

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A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Theatre Arts

Under the Supervision of Professor Virginia Smith

Lincoln, Nebraska

April, 2011
ARTMAKING ON THE EDGE OF A CLIFF:
DIRECTING IPHIGENIA 2.0

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University of Nebraska, 2011

Advisor: Virginia Smith

This thesis contains written documentation regarding the process of directing a theatrical production in fulfillment of the partial requirements for Master of Fine Arts in Directing for Stage and Screen at the University of Nebraska Lincoln.

Topics addressed include play selection, script analysis, director/designer collaboration, coaching and actors and evaluation of final product.
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1. Play Selection Process

In the fall of 2009 all MFA candidates in Directing for Stage and Screen were instructed to propose three plays for thesis production for the 2010-2011 Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film mainstage season. Virginia Smith, our advisor, suggested we pick something that is no less than ten characters that allows for the integration of digital media.

I knew immediately I wanted to direct a reinterpretation of an old play. It was important to me that the students at the Jonny Carson School of Theatre and Film be exposed to contemporary playwrights, due to the heavy emphasis of period plays at the school, while working on how to “awaken” an archaic text.

During my investigation of what show would excite me as a director I turned to a playwright who had thrilled me in the past, Mary Zimmerman. I had followed her career closely ever since I saw the Broadway production of her play, Metamorphoses in 2002. In 2006, I had the great fortune to direct that show at Hastings Senior High School and it remains, in my opinion, one of the best productions I’ve ever directed. I had read about Shakespeare Theatre Company and Berkeley Repertory Theatre’s joint production of Zimmerman’s Argonautika, based on the Greek myth of Jason and the Argonauts. I had never read the script but was intrigued by the short videos and photography of the production posted on the theatres’ websites. I came to find that Argonautika had not yet been published with no plans to publish in the short-term, so I moved onto another Zimmerman text, The Odyssey. This script didn’t excite me the way Metamorphoses did at first reading, but I had several striking visual images while reading it and knew at that
point I could direct the piece. My biggest concern is that it could easily be over three hours in length, which is quite long for most of the audience that will see the show. The majority of our audiences at the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film are from that student base, so it’s imperative I choose a show that engages them.

My second proposed piece was Caryl Chuchill’s adaptation of August Strindberg’s *A Dream Play*. Virginia Smith told me almost immediately her dislike of the show, so I knew it was quickly dismissed as a possibility. Lastly, I proposed Charles Mee’s *Iphigenia 2.0*. All three of my proposals are shows in which the author was working with a primary text from another author. It’s clear that Charles Mee deviated the most from the primary text.

There were several reasons why I proposed *Iphigenia 2.0*, but first was because it terrified me. Mee employs something he self-describes as “collage” technique when writing a play. He uses several pieces of found-text and cobbles them together to tell his story. I had only learned who Charles Mee was my first year of graduate school. I was interested in him once I had discovered the (re)making project. On his website, Mee states,

> “Please feel free to take the plays from this website and use them freely as a resource for your own work: that is to say, don't just make some cuts or rewrite a few passages or re-arrange them or put in a few texts that you like better, but pillage the plays as I have pillaged the structures and contents of the plays of Euripides and Brecht and stuff out of Soap Opera Digest and the evening news and the internet, and build your own, entirely new, piece--and then, please, put your own name to the work that results.”

Charles Mee is a playwright who trusts other theatre artists. To allow anyone to take his work and manipulate it to their heart’s desire is quite brave. Many playwrights include lengthy stage direction, to the point it feels as if they are directing from the page. However, Mee is quite the opposite. His only stage directions are merely suggestions and usually contain several options. For a director like myself this is at once freeing and terrifying.

Because the script is so open to interpretation it requires a director to be a master-collaborator. My designers have had a great influence over my concept and ideas, as will my actors once in the rehearsal hall. Although I have several ideas for this production, I always hope to find myself pleasantly surprised by the ideas of the artists around me. It will not be “direction by committee.” It is closer to some form of benevolent dictatorship. It’s imperative I create a rehearsal environment where everyone feels comfortable making bold choices and bringing in their ideas. Some ideas may be bad, but through the process of trying something out we learn and the show will be that much stronger because of it. I have told my cast at the first read-through that I expect them to be a creative force each day in the rehearsal hall and I promise to give them space to explore choices. In my experience every director says they want their actor to make choices, but too few actually allow them to attempt anything beyond the director’s vision. My great hope is to be adept at filtering through ideas and make the best choices for the sake of the story.

Being truly collaborative is not always an easy task. Cooperative creativity takes time, patience and stamina. What you sometimes lose in efficiency, you gain in respect and ownership of all involved in the piece. I trust my actors, designers and production
team. I know the show will be better if I hear all of their ideas. I feel those directors who carefully choreograph every movement on stage are insecure and narcissistic. I am to shape and sift through ideas, not proclaim mine are the best. My goal throughout this production is to trust my co-creators, foster a highly creative rehearsal hall while maintaining a safe environment to make risky choices. Iphigenia 2.0 will be owned by each person involved in the production. If I have done things correctly those involved will say, “my show” instead of “Shannon’s show.”

Beyond my personal interest in collaborative directing or how the play was constructed, was my interest in the story. The fact that this story is over 2400 years old and still remains relevant is remarkable. In America we find ourselves in a similar predicament as Greece did before they entered the Trojan War. Barry Strauss draws comparison in his essay Shifting Sands I,

“There's a war in the Middle East. The struggle is long and frustrating. Although the Western coalition wins every battle, victory is elusive. The public is losing its patience. Prominent supporters have quit the war effort. The opposition demands withdrawal. The commander in chief turns to religion for comfort. You know, of course, what war I am referring to. No, not that war: I mean the Trojan War. The mythical conflict between Greeks and Trojans over the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen, has a lot in common with the war in Iraq today. Archaeology increasingly shows that, the Trojan War really did take place around 1200 BCE, although there was a lot more at stake than a runaway bride. Freedom, security, and control of resources were all in the balance.”

Mee’s bold choice to update the Iphigenia story was no accident. He saw the comparisons between today’s conflict in Iraq and the Trojan War. Such a military action needs an excuse; a specific point that the government can use to assure the people that military action was now not only necessary, but actually unavoidable. The Greeks

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supposedly went to war with Troy because of the abduction of Helen and Americans because of weapons of mass destruction. It is arguable, however, that there was far more behind both campaigns. Ancient Troy’s strategic position between Europe and Asia allowed for total control of this strait, which every merchant ship from the Aegean Sea heading for the Black Sea had to pass. The interest in remaining in control was the real cause of the Trojan War. The true reason behind America’s occupation and overturn of Iraq’s government is a highly contentious topic. That being said, it seems that there are clear economic reasons (including the west’s desperate need for Eastern oil) for the destabilization of Iraq and replacement of an amicable government to the United States. If Iraq were to become a democratic state it would allow for America’s trade and control of oil producing areas to be made much more secure, and perhaps, more powerful.

I don’t mean to say that Mee was merely writing a play to draw interesting comparisons between both wars, I believe he was making a bigger statement about any empire’s primal need to grow and invade new territory. Mee’s intention was to draw attention to history repeating itself and to create a vehicle to re-sensitize his audience to the horror of war. I am a self-identified peace-monger, so the idea of making my audience wake up to the true horror of war seemed imperative. It wasn’t until many months after I proposed the piece did the play become a much more personal tale for me.

During the researching of this piece I fell in love with a Marine. That particular Marine is currently serving a seven-month deployment in Afghanistan. The moment he made the decision to volunteer for the deployment he not only chose to sacrifice the comforts of home and the people and things he loved, he also forced a sacrifice on everyone who loves him: to be without a son, brother, boyfriend, mentor and friend for
several months. The chorus of soldiers in Iphigenia 2.0 speaks the trials of what it’s like to live that life which I am now able to connect with in a far deeper way.

Our leaders are so often out of touch with the American people, although they often claim they speak for us and believe to know what the greater “we” want, they rarely consider just the single American person. Mee gives the power to the soldiers and allows them to finally make demands of their leader.

It is my hope that through this production I am able to execute a performance that people will not just remember, but re-experience when they are reminded of watching it.

I was completely inspired by Laura Gunderson’s article entitled Holy Sh*t Theatre An Urgent Age of Badassary. She defines “Holy Sh*t Theatre” as

“…a live thrill that might be racy, terrifying, shocking, surprising, bizarre but is definitely riveting, engaging, and high quality. You will feel this theatre. You will sense the performance. It might make you laugh or gasp, but it will make you do it. You'll see something unusual, risky, bold, and wild. The boldness will be in the acting, directing, design, music as well as the text. Holy Sh*t Theatre is an electric collaboration of quality, artistry, and intelligence. It needn't be expensive or highly technical. It is no place for irony or nonchalance. It must make you say, think, or yawp: "Holy sh*t, that was awesome,…Holy Sh*t Theatre does not want you to just remember the show - it wants to re-feel it. Every time you think of the production of Blasted your stomach will clench and you will take a fresh breath in honor of what you experienced. That. Is badass, charged-up, Holy Sh*t Theatre.”

Ms. Gunderson captures exactly the kind of theatre I want to see and make.

Although directing this play will feel always as though I am on the edge of a cliff, I know that the terror might just save the production and give my audience a perfect “holy shit” moment.

2. Historical Background of the Play and its Author: Charles Mee

Iphigenia 2.0 is adapted from Euripides play Iphigenia at Aulis. Euripides (ca. 480 BCE – 406 BCE) was the last of the three great writers of classical Athens. Scholars debate on the exact number of plays he wrote, some argue he had written ninety-five, while others believe Critias had written the bulk of those plays. Only eighteen of Euripides’ plays have survived. More of his plays have survived than the other great tragedians, 5th Century, BCE.

Euripides plays are littered with strong characters that often are portrayed weak by Euripides’ contemporaries, such as slaves and women, all while poking fun at many heroes of Greek Mythology. He seems almost modern, creating fully developed characters with inner lives, unlike other writers of his day who wrote characters propelled only by fate or the gods. Sophocles said, as reported by Aristotle, that his own men “represented men as they ought to be, while Euripides’ represented them as they were” In many ways. Euripides’ realism shocked his critics and debased historic tragedy. He did not believe in black-and-white morality or heroes with just one tragic flaw. Iphigenia at Aulis was written late in Euripides career and was not performed until after his death and after that went through several adaptations and alterations.

“In its original form it concluded with the appearance of the deus ex machina. After Iphigenia had been led away to sacrifice, Artemis descended from heaven, and consoled the weeping Clytemnestra by informing her of the substitution of the deer, and the future immortality of her daughter. This termination seems to have disappeared at some later epoch, and to have been replaced by the present scene, in which the messenger relates the details of the sacrifice. The concluding part of the substituted scene was itself lost in course of time, and its place is now taken by the barbarous composition of some medieval

grammarian. Hence the last fifty lines of the play, as they now appear, represent
the second variation from the original conclusion.”5
Charles Mee does away with the dues ex machina and ends his Iphigenia 2.0
rather abruptly, right after the sacrifice. Mee also deviates quite far from the text but
keeps a few of Euripides’ original ideas, including the hesitant and torn character of
Agamemnon, the awkward seduction scene between Clytemnestra and Achilles as well as
Iphigenia’s quick resolution to be sacrificed, in which she seems to age a decade in a
moment.

The story of Iphigenia and her sacrifice has been reinterpreted countless times in
paintings (Sacrifice of “Iphigenia”, Giambattista Tiepolo; “Sacrifice of Iphigenia”,
Giambattista Tiepolo; “Sacrifice of Iphigeni”a, Maiolica Bowl, Workshop of Guido
Durantino, 1535; “Cymon and Iphigenia”, Leighton, 1884; “Cymon and Iphigenia”,
Benjamin West, 1773), plays and operas (Iphigénie en Aulide, play by Jean Racine;
Iphigénie en Aulide, opera by Christoph Willibald Gluck; Iphigenia, film by Michael
Cacoyannis; The Songs of the Kings, novel by Barry Unsworth; Iphigenia, play
by Mircea Eliade; Iphigenia at Aulis, play by Ellen McLaughlin (Part of Iphigenia and
Other Daughters); Ifigeneia, a rewrite of the play by Finn Iunker; Iphigenia at Aulis, the
first part of The Greeks trilogy, adapted and directed by John Barton for the Royal
Shakespeare Company in 1980; Iph….., adapted by Colin Teevan.; Iphigenia in Tauris,
play by Euripides; Iphigenie auf Tauris, play by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; Iphigénie
en Tauride, opera by Christoph Willibald Gluck; Iphigenia at Tauris, play by Ellen
McLaughlin (Part of Iphigenia and Other Daughters); Iphigenia in Brooklyn, a

5 Haigh, A.E. "IPHIGENIA AT AULIS an analysis of the play by Euripides." Oxford: 
solo cantata by Peter Schickele under the guise of P. D. Q. Bach; *Iphigénie*, ballet by Charles le Picq *Iphigenia*, play by Samuel Coster; *Iphigenia in Orem*, part of Bash: Latter-Day Plays, a collection of three plays by Neil LaBute; *A Memory of Wind*, story by Rachel Swirsky.

Born in 1938, Charles Mee grew up in Barrington, IL a suburb of Chicago. In 1953, he was diagnosed with polio and was immobile for months. He chronicled his journey with the disease and its life-changing effects in his 1999 memoir *A Nearly Normal Life*. He was educated at Harvard in history and literature and began writing plays while a student. In 1960, post-graduation, he moved to New York City. While in the city, he supported himself as a writer/editor for Horizon Magazine as he continued writing plays for off-off Broadway. Between 1972 and 1993 he wrote eleven books on world history and American international relations, including *Meeting at Potsdam* (1975); *The End of Order: Versailles, 1919* (1980); *The Marshall Plan: The Launching of the Pax Americana* (1984); *Rembrandt's Portrait: A Biography* (1988); and *Playing God: Seven Fateful Moments When Great Men Met to Change the World* (1993).

“In 1986 Mee wrote the libretto for choreographer and director Martha Clarke's dance-theatre piece *Vienna: Lusthaus*, a meditation on turn-of-the-century Vienna. He used his skills and impulses as an historian to create a collage-like text by directly lifting material from historical sources and combining it alongside personal descriptions of his own dreams. This patchwork combination of found texts and his own imagination became the template in which he would compose all of his future plays, a technique inspired by the collage painting of surrealist painter Max Ernst and contemporary artist Robert Rauschenberg.

Mee's plays have been inspired by classical and modern texts, including ancient Greek drama, drama from the Yuan dynasty of China, Indian dance drama, and the works of William Shakespeare, Molière, Anton Chekhov, Bertolt Brecht, and Maxim Gorky. His Greek play adaptations include *Orestes 2.0; The Bacchae 2.1; Agamemnon 2.0; Trojan Women 2.0; Big Love; True Love; and Iphigenia 2.0*. Mee is the resident playwright of the SITI Company with whom he has written *bobrauschenbergamerica; Hotel Cassiopeia; Soot and Spit* (the
musical); and Under Construction, which explore the work of contemporary artists Robert Rauschenberg, Joseph Cornell, James Castle, Jason Rhoades, and Norman Rockwell. Other plays include The Investigation of the Murder in El Salvador; Time to Burn; Full Circle; Summertime; First Love; Wintertime; Vienna Lusthaus (Revisited); Limonade Tous Les Jours; Salome; A Perfect Wedding; Belle Epoque; Fetes de la Nuit; Mail Order Bride; and Gone.

Charles Mee's plays have been produced in New York at New York Theatre Workshop, The Joseph Papp Public Theater, Second Stage Theatre, Brooklyn Academy of Music, and Lincoln Center Theater. His work has premiered at the Mark Taper Forum, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, American Repertory Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, La Jolla Playhouse, the Humana Festival for New American Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville, as well as in Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels, Vienna, and Istanbul.

Mee is the recipient of the lifetime achievement award in drama from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, two OBIE Awards for Vienna: Lusthaus (1986) and Big Love (2002), a Laura Pels Foundation Award for Drama, and a TCG grant. His work is made possible by the support of Jeanne Donovan Fisher and Richard Fisher and his plays can be found at http://www.charlesmee.org.”

Iphigenia 2.0 is the last of the Greek plays for Mee to write. He has stated many times it was the most difficult to write because of his relationship to his own daughter. He knows he could never choose to sacrifice his own daughter no matter the greater good and he sees Iphigenia’s choice equally as tragic. I think the show is compelling because it is written with the heart of a father.

In 2007 Signature Theatre Company featured a season of just Mee’s shows. The most memorable for audiences was the Tina Landau directed production of Iphigenia 2.0. The New York Times questioned the choice in their review of the production, “It (Iphigenia 2.0) is a bold choice by Signature, since Mr. Mee is a less known and more experimental writer than most of its past choices. But this new work is an unfortunate way to kick off the season, since its variety of references and acting styles don’t just

portray the bland shallowness of contemporary culture so much as reflect it.”

Aaron Leichter of Metromix New York was far more enthusiastic about the production:

“The thrill of seeing forward-thinking yet relevant performances is a rarity these days, and the sense that artists are thinking about the world beyond the theater’s lobby is the exception, not the rule. It’s something that playwrights and directors should aim for more often. To see how it can be done, they might want to check out “Iphigenia 2.0” at the Signature Theatre.

To move theater forward, playwright Charles Mee and director Tina Landau take it back to its roots as a democratic tool. In ancient Athens, playwrights used myths to investigate contemporary issues. Plays like “The Oresteia” and “Oedipus” investigated the nature of government, justice, leadership and war. “Iphigenia 2.0” echoes the maturity that you’ll find in those plays, but the tone is utterly contemporary…It’s clear that Mee is grappling with the war in Iraq from a liberal’s conflicted perspective, but he refuses to make any characters (except neo-con Menelaus) into a mouthpiece, and avoids showing anything more than the toll that war takes on parents and the people.

Because of the play’s unique creative process, Mee’s own writing cuts across styles: naturalistic dialogues, patriotic orations, prayers, monologues and a hilarious comic speech about bridesmaid etiquette. There’s an R&B song and a hip-hop dance, a can-can, even an old-fashioned Broadway duet. The effect is like surfing the Web: all linked, despite the lurches from one style to another.

This sense of jumble extends to the visuals. Instead of the sets you’ll find in most shows—a realistic living room, an empty, abstract space—this stage is prefab barracks, with bare concrete, ropes cutting across the stage, ladders and cheesecake photos. The effect is far from a mess; it instead makes the play feel urgent. Much of the credit goes to the large ensemble, and especially the chorus of soldiers (JD Goldblatt, Will Fowler, Jimonn Cole and Jesse Hooker). Their performances hold the show’s center, and they change pace and tone smoothly, as well as perform dances, songs and a climax that explodes in bloody chaos and moving emotion.

This isn’t a show for all tastes. If you’re looking for realism, you’ll probably find the patchwork quality of “Iphigenia” oblique. If you like a solid story, the digressions and musings will frustrate you. And if you’re looking for political drama, you may be disappointed in the symbolism that myth brings with it. But thinking audiences who live in the 21st century and want their theater to do the same will find drama that’s a part of their world, not apart from it.”


Since Signature’s production in 2007 no other professional theatre company has produced Iphigenia 2.0. A few colleges (Virginia Tech and Baylor) have added it to their season in recent years. Red Eye Theatre in Minneapolis chose to embrace Mee’s (re)making project and commissioned a playwright Kevin Anthony Kautzman to adapt Mee’s Iphigenia 2.0. In October of 2010, I traveled to Minneapolis to see the result, a production they entitled Iris. The piece was an interesting experiment, but I think Mee ultimately wrote a far better piece of theatre than Mr. Kautzman. Iris spent the majority of act one setting up for the wedding. Throughout the preparations, Iris (the Iphigenia character) seems to assume that the audience (as she often addresses the house) doesn’t have that prior knowledge of how it will end. It burned through an enormous amount of stage time dealing with exposition and ceremony and tradition that has nothing to do with where the play is going to wind up. There’s no payoff. Nearly all the time spent on the wedding preparations would have been better spent letting the audience in on what’s really happening, even if some of the characters are still in the dark, so the play can deal with the larger issues of war and personal sacrifice—the heart of the piece. That’s where the emotional impact lies. Iris treats it almost like an afterthought or a subplot, rather than the main event. If you are going to steal and manipulate Mee’s text you have to take bigger risks and, perhaps, make even bolder statements.

Mee’s aesthetic seems to deter people from embracing this show. Perhaps it is the freedom I mentioned earlier that he gives to all theatre artists interested in producing his work. In America, we like our plays far more straightforward and well packaged than Mee prepares for us.
3. Script and Character Analysis

Hodge Analysis

Environmental facts

**Geographic Location:** The play’s action takes place exclusively in Aulis, which is an Ancient Greek town in Boeotia. Aulis was traditionally held to be the port from which the Greek fleet set off to the siege of Troy. Although Mee does not change the name of the town from Euripides’ version of the play, it’s clear he has written about an American war and American characters. Several times throughout the play he references the soldiers’ homes in various places around America as well as clear references to America’s involvement in Iraq, WWI, and WWII. The script states that the women have been “sent for” by Agamemnon and that they travel a great distance to get to Aulis.

I made the choice to set the play in an American staging area in Iraq because it increases the urgency of Agamemnon’s decision because of the literal looming war in their backyard.

**Date:** There is no exact date given in the text of the play. However, Mee used transcripts from soldier’s blogs that were part of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Mee wrote the play in 2006 and 2007, so I’ve decided to set it in May of 2003, right after the American entrance into Baghdad. I have no interest, nor do I think it is important for it to be a specific date. Agamemnon is not George W. Bush; he is a metaphor for all leaders of war, past and present.

**Political Environment:** The political environment is at the center of *Iphigenia 2.0.* The soldiers are ready and willing to go to Troy to fight for the abducted Helen. In this
production, “Helen” represents something like weapons of mass destruction. As I stated in the first chapter, Helen is merely an excuse for the people to justify entering into combat. Although Mee never clearly defines the details of why they must go to war, Menelaus makes it clear that Iphigenia’s sacrifice could save many and argues it is the best choice for the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

**Social Environment:** The main social institution present in Iphigenia is the military. I have decided that they are all part of the American Army, due to Mee calling the chorus “soldiers.” Had they been Marines, Sailors or Airmen they would have been called just that. The rank of each soldier determines certain freedom and behavior. Mee defies that hierarchy immediately by giving the “everyman” soldiers a strong voice in demanding that the General (Agamemnon) make the sacrifice of his daughter. The man that usually holds the most power is all at once vulnerable and weak and the pure, virginal, innocent young girl becomes the most courageous of all.

**Religious Environment:** Mee has taken out all references to the gods in Iphigenia 2.0. Allowing the soldiers to demand the sacrifice makes the dilemma that much more present and urgent. The “gods” demanding it takes power away from Agamemnon’s choice and makes it appear more like it is fate. I plan, however, to replace the Greek Old Man character with a female dancer who the audience isn’t sure at once if she is Iraqi, Greek or a mystical creature. She will represent a goddess-like figure, however she will not command or control, only observe. The only other religious elements that are present are each character’s sense of duty and mortality. Iphigenia believes that her sacrifice will allow her to live on past death.
**Previous Action:** Before the play begins, we know Helen has been abducted by the Trojans, which motivates the Greeks to go to war. The seasoned soldiers have refused to go to battle again until Agamemnon is willing to sacrifice his daughter to prove he’s willing to make the sacrifice he asks each soldier’s mother to make. He agrees to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia and sends for her under the ruse that she is to be married to Achilles. The women are on their way to Aulis when the play opens.

**Polar Attitudes:** At the beginning of the play:

Iphigenia enters the play hopeful and ecstatic at the thought of seeing her father again and being Achilles bride. She worships her father and she has discovered she also loves Achilles. She is concerned about what kind of bride she will be, but knows her father knows best.

Agamemnon feels the world crumbling around him. To him, tragedy is unavoidable. No matter the choice he makes he is forced to have blood on his hands. He feels like he has lost the ability to truly lead and is a skeleton of his former self. He is doomed.

Clytemnestra is hesitantly excited about the upcoming nuptials. She feels distant from her husband and, therefore, has some mistrust. She is confident in her ability to be a maternal savior to her daughter. Her prospects are hopeful all throughout the play until Achilles makes no move to protect Iphigenia and her daughter chooses sacrifice.

Achilles is ready to go to war. He believes his only calling is to be a soldier and has no interest in becoming a husband. He believes he is a fierce soldier and is bound to the job that must be done. He has every intention to go to war and be victorious.
Dialogue: Because Mee has gathered several texts to piece together this play, the style of writing sometimes shifts dramatically. Menelaus and the soldiers speak without any formality. They recall their experiences visceral detail, while Agamemnon’s and Achilles speeches are far more philosophical with only hints of vulnerability. Clytemnestra is brash and demanding, without hesitation. She instructs and commands as fiercely as Menelaus does, then transitions to reading straight out of a bridal magazine.

The whole play is mostly monologues but there are a few scenes in which Mee employs shared monologues. It isn’t exactly dialogue, even though the soldiers are taking turns speaking. It seems they are listing things for the benefit of the audience, not each other. The remainder of the show is straightforward dialogue, mostly between Clytemnestra, Achilles, Iphigenia and Agamemnon. The soldiers are, in essence, a Greek chorus but not in a formal sense. They do speak together at times, but mostly they have their own distinct lines. They are similar to a chorus, as they often speak poetically.

Characters

Agamemnon is a Four-Star General in his late 40s. He is a strong leader of his family and of his army. His whole demeanor is of a well-trained military leader. He desires to keep the world from imploding all around him, but feels powerless all at once. The majority of his life he has seen morality as black and white. Now confronted by the dilemma of his daughter’s sacrifice, he for the first time, sees a choice that cannot easily be made. He loves his daughter. He also is fully committed to his position as General and feels the intense push towards going to war.
His initial mood is desperate, torn apart, perhaps broken. We meet him right after a great moment of tension and he begins to become a bit more at ease as he speaks to the audience.

Menelaus is a Sergeant Major and desires his brother-in-law to sacrifice his daughter he may be reunited with his wife, Helen. He lives in a world of urgency and hasty, bold, risky decisions. He doesn’t concern himself with morality as much as being a strong leader. One cannot think with one’s heart on a battlefield. You do as you are instructed and you save as many of your men’s lives while attacking the enemy. That is Menelaus’ religion. He never strips from the veneer of being a Sgt. Major. His identity has become 100% soldier. Perhaps his full emersion in military life is all in the pursuit to get Helen back in his arms. He wants nothing more. His mood at the beginning of the show is aggressive. He will do anything in his power to persuade Agamemnon to follow through with the sacrifice. His body is stiff, wracked with tension and refuses to show any vulnerability.

Iphigenia is a 19-year-old rather wealthy girl that lives somewhere like the Hamptons. She is full of vital energy, love and hope. She is innocent, yet intelligent and full of optimism. She sees her father as a steadfast hero that will always protect her. Her desire to make her father happy far outweighs her desire to be married to Achilles. Her mood is joyous at the top of the show. She is elated to see her father and prepare for the wedding before the soldiers’ departure. Iphigenia, along with the other women, is an assault on the men’s work of drills and sand and testosterone. They descend on the base like a pack of butterflies bringing pink and perfume and femininity. Her spirit is pure, sweet and energized.
**Clytemnestra** is the mother of Iphigenia and in her mid 40s. She is very maternal and her desire is the safety and happiness of her daughter. She has the grace and predatory spirit of a panther and is constantly aware of the power of her femininity. She is seductive, intense and methodical. At the beginning of the play she is a bit hesitant to share her joy with Agamemnon, as she immediately suspects something, but she does her best to not trust her instinct and celebrate with her daughter. Her breath always drops in low and she commands the space with her breath, body and presence. Everyone seems to shrink in her presence.

**Achilles** is a Sergeant. His desire is to do his job and go to war. He dreams of being a war hero who will rescue Helen single-handedly. He has no interest in anything but war and carrying out his training. He is very idealistic, viewing the military as a moral machine, always making the best decision. He has a very clear sense of right and wrong and he holds all around him to a high standard. His energy is focused and resolute. He can be distracted and tempted but punished himself for it. He quickly moved up in rank because of his great ambition, yet isn’t old enough to have become even the slightest bit jaded about the process.

**The Soldiers** are a Greek chorus. They all have individual personalities and histories, but most importantly they operate as one voice—the voice of all enlisted army men. They desire to do their job and go home. Their will is to have a command that takes leadership seriously and communicates appropriately. They are cool as ice at the beginning of the show, but at times explode with rage, sadness, regret, love and lust. They are live wires ready to kill at any moment. They are the heart of the piece. Their
story is what is most clearly heard by the audience. They are well-trained, terrified young men ready to die.

The Bridesmaids are Iphigenia’s attendants. Their desire it to have a memorable wedding and have something to post on their facebook walls to make their other friends jealous. They desire to flirt with the soldiers and receive a lot of attention. Morality is not something they concern themselves with very often. They are rather hedonistic: making decisions about what feels the best. They are horrified by Iphigenia’s decision to be sacrificed, but that does not stop them from exploiting the situation to get comfort from a soldier. Their energy is bubbling over, ecstatic and lustful. They are an assault on the men’s world of order and regime. They are laughing, naughty ladies.

Idea

The title Iphigenia 2.0 is a reference to both Euripides play and a modern day reference to different versions of software. By adding the “2.0” Mee immediately communicates that this is an updated version of an old story.

Philosophical Statements:

The majority of the statements below center around duty, calling, choice, sacrifice and denial/avoidance. I think Mee is attempting to force the audiences’ eyes open to the constant string of bad decisions that lead to innocent death.

Agamemnon:

“I see that there are acts that will set an empire on a course that will one day bring it to an end. Because, we see from the histories of empires none will last forever and all are brought down finally not by others but by themselves, from the actions that they take that they believe are right or good or necessary at the time to
do. Sometimes they are brought to ruin by no more than the belief that something must be done when in truth doing nothing would have been the better course.

“(Mee 3)

“Might this fate be avoided or at least postponed? Might something else be done? Are there no precepts to follow in this murky, unpredictable world? Often, it seems, men of affairs think that moral laws offer no useful guide to behavior that they are not meant for the practical business of the world forgetting that moral laws are nothing more nor less than the accumulated folk wisdom of millennia of human experience. And so it will happen that some moral law of an unforgiving nature is violated-- a law against boundless desire, or cruelty a law against coercion or indifference to the humanity of others a law against initiating violence or being required, in the pursuit of some goal, to commit an act that anyone might see is heinous something finally is done that is so deeply wrong that the world must rise and crush it in order for the world itself to go on.” (Mee 5-6)

“How can this be right to substitute the certainty of a death for the possibility of one?” (Mee 6)

Menelaus

“Is it all a matter of distance, then? If you were an old man sitting at home by the fire you would tsk tsk the war even as you went out to dinner and the theatre you might even be appalled by it but not for more than a moment or two before you got on with deciding which wine to have with your fish. You have no problem contemplating what the soldiers have to do at a distance but as soon as you imagine such an atrocity close to home at your own hands then you shrink from it. Would you have the soldiers do the same?” (Mee 10)

Achilles

“How can it be you would found a policy on lies. Put the lives of men and women and children at stake on a ground of lies? Where, then, is the possibility of good judgment? Where is the chance for others to join with you in discussion about what is best? And so arrive at some decision that is indeed best for you and for the country and for its citizens. What chance can an empire have if its actions are to be based on lies and imaginings?”(Mee 16)

“This is the beginning of civil society. On this we build a world where all can flourish and prosper. But, if you show contempt for others, they will show scorn for you then hatred then violence and, finally, homicidal intent” (Mee 17)

Iphigenia

“To save one life you would put a thousand others in jeopardy? You and I both know this would be wrong… You don't mean to say it is only men who should risk their lives for others? Only men should give themselves? Only men should be patriots? Only men can be heroes? Not women, too?” (Mee 50)
4. Concept

This play is about sacrifice, choice and blindness. It examines the sacrifice of soldiers, soldiers’ families, innocent victims of war, war criminals and, of course, Iphigenia’s life. Agamemnon has the choice to let his daughter live and perhaps risk the lives of many and step down from leadership, or kill his daughter and guarantee safety for many. Although Mee does not explain the threat, it’s clear through the soldiers’ dialogue that Troy will come to them if they do not go to Troy. Iphigenia has a choice to live or die. Achilles has the choice to marry Iphigenia and protect her or follow through with his duties as a soldier. The blindness comes from the inability for the characters to see any option that doesn’t lead to certain tragedy. My goal is to create a production that provides hope that this audience will find the option the characters did not, and stop history from repeating itself.

I want my audience to fully experience this play. I want them to leave having felt something deeply and not just be reminded of the horror of war, but also feel the horror of the battlefield. I plan to execute that by making each choice big, bold, honest and urgent.

The concept word I gave to my designers was “collage.” Because Mee constructs a collage with text, I found it fitting for my show to be a collage of communication, choices and actions. Mee has not just written about the Iraq War in *Iphigenia 2.0*. He has written about every war so that attention must be paid to the larger picture. The goal of “collage” is to draw comparisons and extrapolate, to blow apart and synthesize information.
Lastly, I want this production to be one that requires stamina. Actors will be giving every ounce of energy present in order to find brutal honesty on stage.

5. Anticipated Challenges of the Play

1. Soldiers repelling on stage and in the house.

   I really assumed I’d receive more support from my technical director on this problem, but alas, the problem is mine to figure out. I have spoken with Kyle Hansen at Outdoor Education to train the Soldiers in how to repel and I’ve spoken with a civil engineer to come evaluate our space for safety. The last hurdle is getting gaining permission from UNL’s facility’s management.

2. Keeping a through-line regardless of the mish-mash of text.

   The rehearsal process will be vital to understanding what approach works to sorting through the collage of text. For example, how does the character of Clytemnestra go from threatening to brutally murder her husband to reciting aloud out of a bridal magazine? Justifying these kinds of drastic text/tactic shifts will take lots of discovery work in rehearsal.

3. Dance

   I have cast several good movers in the show, but I was quite scared for a while I’d be doing all the choreography. Luckily Khalisha Casey, a senior dance major and Sydney Readman will be choreographing the entire show with the help of Jordan Deffenbaugh, my dance captain. My biggest
worry in regards to dance is making it feel organic and not strange, coming out of left field. Also, I’m concerned about allowing for enough time for learning and cleaning the dance in the rehearsal process.

4. Abstract Design

Getting my designers to think abstractly was quite the challenge in the beginning. Since we arranged a long brain-storm session with the whole group of designers, things really came together. I feel like we are a very unified group coming up with some great ideas.

5. Length

Our first read-through clocked in at 52 minutes. I’m concerned about filling the time to ninety minutes. However I feel confident through dance, movement and song we will easily get there.

6. Mad Riot Party Murder War

The last scene of the play dishes and bottles are thrown, gowns ripped off and general chaos ensues. I’m concerned regarding safety, first. Also I worry about working up to the appropriate amount of intensity with the correct pacing. I think inviting Harris to be our fight choreographer will help insure safety and our choreographers will all work together to have a very clear plan of attack for this very important scene.

7. Futurism

I have a rather intense ending planned for the show, in which I blind the audience with light and turn the sound up to quite annoying levels and then just
pull out everything in an abrupt end. I continue to think it’s just the kind of
ending that’s right for this show.
6. Inspiration Images

These are some images I used while communicating concept to my design team.
7. Rehearsal Schedule

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Rehearsal Journal

In this section I have documented the entire rehearsal process. These journal entries were made almost every night immediately following rehearsal. They have been minimally edited.

Rehearsal 1

Today was the first rehearsal after the students returned from KCAC TF. The first thing I noticed about the actors streaming in was their health. They were 70% ill. Not surprisingly, a pretty horrid illness spread all around the hotel at KCAC TF and took quite a few victims. I was glad I had planned table work for the day, but I was concerned about the movement portion planned during the second half of rehearsal.

I started rehearsal by welcoming them all back and telling them I missed them. I introduced Khalisha, our new dancer/choreographer to the team. Following William Ball’s (author of A Sense of Direction, a textbook I use to teach Directing I) example, I thought it helpful for the company to devise an agreed upon goal for the production. I asked, “By what will we measure success with our production?” I told them that success shouldn't be measured by the audience, because that's something totally out of our control. We must choose something we can measure based on action in the rehearsal. There were great suggestions from the group ranging from never being complacent to coming to rehearsal giving everything to building a strong ensemble to becoming more aware of the current conflicts in the Middle East. We agreed upon measuring the degree of success for this production by our willingness to say yes to every creative idea and find out what happens. We talked about the power of “yes” and how it feeds the creative process, where "no" makes everything come to a screeching halt.
We then went through the play character-by-character and moment-by-moment. I had the actors stand close to each other and work for connection and eye contact. We stopped reading and asked questions and had great discussions. I think it was a great foundation for some wonderful work to come.

The second half of rehearsal I took them through a rushed viewpoints training. We spent some time on ensemble building, but I chose not to make them run in the circle due to the horrible coughing and hacking by half of the company. I chose to spend most of the time on the grid allowing them to explore all of the viewpoints. I plan on using the viewpoints vocabulary when I'm in rehearsal, this time spent on training will be imperative in rehearsals. We took a lot of time to discuss moments and learn how each was affected by the experience. I released the actors early because of how sick they all are...hoping they'll take some time to get some extra sleep.

I think they learned a lot about the play today and I learned a lot about how they work with each other and how they approach a script.

My concerns right now are getting Julie to open up fully and getting Nick to listen. Those will be challenges I attack right away, even in blocking rehearsals.

Rehearsal 2

Today's rehearsal was scheduled as movement. We started with some intense physical warm-ups led by Jordan, which few appreciated. I think they enjoyed Khalisha's gentle stretching a bit more, but I think the intensity is good for them. We jumped right back on the viewpoints grid at the top of rehearsal. I reviewed each of the viewpoints. We explored several different types of topography and then I added music. Lastly we
explored the viewpoint of "gesture" for each of the characters. The entire cast was asked to abstractly explore each character of the show. I also asked them to pay close attention to duration when responding to each other. That created all sorts of wonderful images and great moments. It seems everyone is becoming more comfortable with each other.

After a break, I handed around three books of photography of the Iraq war. I asked them all to spend some time looking at the images and be able to report back which photos were most striking and why. They each named a few and that allowed us to have a great discussion about war (all sides) and American's perception of war. We also spent quite a long time discussing what else the play is about: familial bonds, duty, sacrifice, awareness, blind faith, etc.

I then asked the actors to choose their most compelling line in the play. We, then, did an exercise in which they were to roam the room and say the line when they met someone. Their job was to be affected by the person talking to them...and to affect them. As I watched them change and adapt to different characters I saw some lovely movements. I think these things are helping them make character discoveries.

Lastly, I split everyone into groups and asked them to prepare a scene from the show. Their job was to decide one thing they wanted to communicate and make sure they use physical choices to communicate it. They rehearsed for fifteen minutes and then performed the scenes in the Howell. We have been rehearsing in the studio theatre so we don't have to worry about uneven ground. Seeing the scenes being performed on the set got me excited about working with it. The scenes themselves weren't brilliant, but it was nice to see actors on the set.

Tomorrow we start blocking. I'm looking forward to diving into the text.
Rehearsal 3

Tonight began the first formal blocking rehearsals. The only actors called were Agamemnon, Menelaus and the Soldiers. Needless to say, having all men in the room changed the rehearsal dynamic.

We started on page one at Agamemnon's entrance. Nick Wolf (Agamemnon) has quite the challenge ahead of himself. That monologue is difficult. Nick stumbled through the text a lot tonight, but as he got more comfortable he was making more and more interesting choices. Nick works damn hard. I know that eventually we will see a stellar performance. He just needs to get the script out of his hand. I asked him to spend time identifying objective and beat changes and then just memorize, memorize, memorize. I can't wait to get that book out of his hands!

Devon was very strong tonight. Maybe it was because he received a military haircut before rehearsal, but it was quite easy for me to see him as Menelaus. I am so happy I gave him that part. He has a very strong presence and was making nice choices. He takes direction very easily and he justified all adjustments I gave him. I need to work on him connecting physically to the text. Sometimes I believe he isn't sure how to use his body, but we'll get there.

The soldiers were a little too "soldiery" tonight. I reminded that many times they are funny, crude, vulnerable, etc. Once they got in "soldier-mode" it was hard for them to get out, but we worked the scene a few times and I think we were successful in showing the soldiers as individuals not just a band of brothers.
I added a symbolic moment during Menelaus' last monologue. I have two of the soldiers be the insurgents that Menelaus kills, with their backs turned to the audience...I think it will be powerful. I hope more ideas come to me like that.

I let breaks be extended by a few minutes so we could all chat and laugh together a bit. I think it's important that my actors enjoy rehearsal and want to come. I really enjoyed them all tonight. We were right on schedule and were able to repeat scenes and end a bit early tonight.

Rehearsal 4

Tonight's rehearsal seemed to go quickly. We added the women in tonight. The boys often seem unfocused on stage, especially the soldiers. I think it's mostly Will Bennet's influence. Will is making some great choices and I'm beyond happy to have him as part of the cast, but sometimes he is easily distracted.

I began to worry about Cale's performance today. Every choice he makes seems to be quite hesitant or as if he's "commenting" on his performance. I think this character is hitting a bit close to home for him and he's having a hard time differentiating between Cale and Soldier #4. When his character gets made fun of or he feels like he's getting made fun of and therefore becomes a self-conscious actor. I told him that it is great that he understands and identifies with the character, but he's not playing himself. He also has very little awareness of his body on the stage. Not much of this is a surprise to me, but I did think he'd be more willing to commit to his choices.

I was pleasantly surprised with our work in scene seven today. I thought it was going to be a boring mess. However, I discovered several nuances written in the text that
allows for a lot of humor. The entire cast was really willing to make a bunch of fun choices that had me laughing on and off throughout the scene. The scene now is so much better than I had imagined. This is why Mee is a brilliant playwright. The listing of honeymoon destinations bored me by just reading it. In staging that scene, my actors discovered how to make it work. There choices were creative, engaging and quite entertaining. They awoke the scene for me. I think, together, we found out a lot more about each character and the embedded humor. It was wonderful and a real relief that my actors followed their strong impulses and it all worked quite well.

Rehearsal 5

Tonight's rehearsal started with Vincent Luke, a freshman theatre performance major who just finished four years of active duty with the Navy, teaching the men how to properly salute, stand at attention and at ease, perform about face, left and right face. He also instructed them on some simple PT drills we will incorporate into the show. It was helpful, but I wanted Vince to be a little more specific in the details. I ended up correcting the men more than he did about proper placement of the hand in a salute and what angle the hand should be at. I realize very much that this is a piece of theatre and, therefore, will not be a perfect depiction of military life, but I want to get as many of the details perfect as possible.

After the quick instruction we ran scenes 1-7. I was disappointed by the lack of energy and general lack of fighting for what they want. Nick Wolf's opening monologue lacked any struggle and seemed completely scripted. The soldiers are still struggling to shape characters and the listing of care package items seemed really lack-luster. Lastly,
the girls' monologues were not nearly as playful as they were the previous night. In
general, it was disappointing. I gave them notes and we worked each scene backwards
and things improved exponentially. I think the girls simply forgot some things we talked
about yesterday. Once reminded, the scene was lovely and playful once again. Cale is
still a struggle. He opened up a bit last night, but this may be my biggest challenge in the
show. I hope not to regret the choice of casting him.

Devon and Nick have a wonderful chemistry together. Both are such large,
masculine presences and when they are fully connected and fighting for what they want
they are really electric to watch. I just need to figure out how to get that performance out
of them right away, instead of them "warming into it."

At the end of the night Jordan choreographed the drill exercise. It needs a bit of
work, but it will get there. My fear right now is I will not have enough brilliant ideas
about the show. I just hope they come fast and furious.

Rehearsal 6

Tonight's rehearsal was rough. We worked on dance for a bit, which doesn't seem
to be getting cleaner no matter how much we work on it. After the dance work, we ran
scenes 6-12. I worked some particularly rough scenes, but until all actors get their scripts
out of their hands it will be difficult to do any real work. Nick Wolf has some reading
difficulties, in general. It's a real struggle for him to read aloud without stumbling. That
really makes the whole rehearsal come to a screeching halt. I know he's frustrated by it,
so I just do my best to encourage him to keep working on his lines. I'm confident once he
memorizes the text he'll be wonderful.
I worked for a while with Julie tonight on opening up and being willing to go to a more desperate place emotionally and physically. I see the beginnings of what could be. We also worked the Achilles and Clytemnestra scene, which tonight had much more urgency and desperation. I feel much better about where that is going.

I still don't have a good idea for the boys in scene 12. This is the scene where the soldiers recite aloud George Washington’s book on what it takes to be a gentleman. I took Justin's idea with playing a game of “keep away” (with Washington’s book) from Clytemnestra, but it just seems as if it goes on too long....and Gary can't catch to save his life. I had them work on it for a while and it did get substantially better, but it is certainly still a problem that needs a better solution.

Rehearsal 7

Tonight we blocked scene 13 and reviewed scene 14. We also placed the dance number between 13 and 14...I think it will work well. We are starting it by the soldiers folding two ceremonial flags (we need to call Vince in to teach us how to properly fold them) and handing the flags off to Agamemnon and Clytemnestra as Jenny walks, ghost-like downstage. I hope the image all comes together. After that, it leads into the dance number. I discovered that Jenny will have to do some sort of solo piece in the midst of everyone else's dance since she can't roll around in her wedding dress.

Scene 14 went well after the boys finally remembered their blocking. It really was pretty powerful at the end. I need to remember to start sitting back further from the stage in rehearsal so I can check to see if I can hear them all and to make sure my stage pictures are effective.
Lastly, we rehearsed both of Khalisha's solos. The second one is really powerful and I found the perfect piece of music. I feel like we are well on our way to having a show...just need to clean all the details.

People are grumbling about having rehearsal during the super bowl this Sunday...so we are going to have a super bowl themed rehearsal with snacks and the game streaming on the TVs in the lobby...I know it's no replacement, but come on, this is theatre...what do you expect?

Rehearsal 8

Tonight we blocked the last scene of the show. Nick, Julie and Jenny have some really nice impulses, but it needs a lot of shaping. It has the potential to be really powerful. I still need Julie to open up and allow herself to be absolutely devastated.

We also rehearsed the dance between scenes 13 and 14. The company needs to realize they can't just rehearse the dance in rehearsal, but like their lines, they have to be rehearsing it outside on their own. If it's not clean, I don't want it in the show. We also rehearsed the "Single Ladies" dance. It needs some work. We just don't have dancers in this department, so everything is a struggle...but it's worth it.

The flag-folding bit I added yesterday looked dumb today. I need to find a way for it to be powerful instead of the current, hokey. Still hoping to have more ideas every day. Friday we run scenes 1-8. I'll have a better idea, then, how much more detail work we need. It should be interesting. I have to say, I know I have a ton of detail work to do...I just hope I can solve all the problems.
Rehearsal 9

Tonight’s rehearsal started off with rifle drill choreography. I took a “rubber duck” (ROTC practice rifle) home to choreograph the drill. It’s far more difficult than it looks. I spend hours on Saturday watching YouTube videos and reading step-by-step instructions for different parts of rifle drill. Stupidly, I had only scheduled 30 minutes to teach the drill. I could have used the whole evening. In the end, I simplified what I had planned and cued all the drill moves off of text. I sped through it and they got a bit lost. We’ll need a lot of review. I must talk to Amber about penciling that in to the rehearsal schedule.

Even though the rifle drill work was so slow to teach, I’m going forward with an idea I’m excited about. I’m adding in the Marine Corps Rifle Creed. I will have the soldiers recite it while they dance a “rifle ballet” to Tom Waits’ “Soldiers Song.” I love the idea of a romantic pas de deux between soldier and rifle. This could be brilliant or messy addition, only time will tell.

After the rifle drill was finished we ran part of the show. I did some stop and starting. I feel like Logan and Will have a clear sense of character, while Gary and Cale seem to have little to no point of view. I think Cale thinks his character is too much like himself. I need to work on him separating himself from the character. The other weak point at this time is Julie. I am unsure if she’ll ever fully let herself go to the place Clytemnestra needs to go. I know it is a lot to ask of an actress, but I will not give up. I’ll keep supporting her and pushing her until opening.

Other than the stumbles in dance, the run/work through was strong. Many of the cast members seem to really be taking ownership of the show. It is quite nice to always
look forward to rehearsals. Even when I’m frustrated about the time crunch or my inability to solve a problem, I am always happy to go to rehearsal.

Rehearsal 10

Harris came to rehearsal tonight and we spent over two hours choreographing the “murder party riot war” at the end of the play. He allowed them to improvise at first, which was a bit scary. The idea of improvised stage-combat with 12 people on stage is a bit terrifying to someone untrained in stage combat. Luckily, almost my whole cast has had good stage-combat instruction. I’m just glad Harris, and not I, was in charge tonight.

Even though it was the first rehearsal of the chaos at the end, I can clearly see how powerful that scene will be. I really need more help from my sound designer at this point. I’m not sure I’ve communicated effectively the effect I’m going for. I wish he’d come to a rehearsal to see just this scene so he could fully understand what it needs. I’ll ask him to again.

After the combat work, we worked problem scenes including scene 9: Agamemnon’s reveal of the secret to Clytemnestra and scene 12: the George Washington etiquette text and, lastly, the rifle drill in scene 8.

Scene 12 really needs something more. I’m thinking this will be the point I’ll use the parachute my propsmaster has ordered. I don’t think it will be in for another week, sadly.

The Agamemnon reveal scene is so important. It is the turning point of the play, and I seem unable to get Julie to really fight for what Clytemnestra wants. I’m thinking about having her play the opposite next rehearsal. We will see what that does.
We had a few moments to work the rifle drill. Gary surprised me by knowing it very well. Gary is the slowest to memorize lines and dance moves (okay Cale is just as slow memorizing dance moves) and I thought performing his monologue and the rifle drill at the same time would be too difficult. He really impressed me by doing some outside work.

Rehearsal 15

I’ve skipped a few days of journaling due to being so ill. I’ve collapsed after rehearsals. Tonight I was happy to sit back and watch. Sydney Readman, who was an actress in my production of *The Odyssey* at Doane College, is my choreographer for the soldiers “hip hop” dance number. We scheduled two hours for her to teach the dance tonight. Once again, the gentlemen didn’t pick up the dance very quickly. They seemed to whine a lot all throughout the night. They feel the dance is really difficult. I’m convinced it will look great once they work on it, but I’m concerned we don’t have enough time to teach it, much less perfect it. We only got through 6 counts of 8 in two hours.

Rehearsal 16

Tonight we worked the show. I’ve invited a lot of people for Monday’s rehearsal. So, we have just a bit of time to clean things up before we have an audience. I think it will be good for them. I’m really proud of how fast they have gotten off book. Now, I need to see more nuance and depth. I still am not sure Gary and Cale know what’s going
on with their characters. I talked to them more about it tonight. Both seem to understand things cognitively, but can’t get it into their bodies.

Rehearsal 17

This evening I invited my thesis team and other professors/mentors to watch a run of the show. I was hoping the rifle ballet would be learned by now, but there simply wasn’t enough time. I was beyond nervous for people to see the show at this point, but I think it’s for the best. I’m highly concerned about a few scenes and transitions. I hope they will give me feedback and perhaps some inspiration on how to fix some problem spots.

I’m not sure what everyone thought. No one said anything to me after rehearsal. I’m concerned that our choices may have fallen flat. I really want this to be a decent show that’s memorable. I certainly hope I’m not too off base with my directorial choices.

I think, overall, it was good for the cast to have a bit of an audience. The nervous energy served them well…but a few stuck out as still not being sure who they are in this play. Some, like Gary, really stepped up. I’m dreading and looking forward to all the notes I’ll receive tomorrow.

Rehearsal 18

I threw up several times before rehearsal and thought I’d have to end it early, but I stuck through until 10:30pm. I think it really is psychological. I listened to Paul’s, Bobby’s, Brad’s, Virginia’s and Trent’s notes today. Maybe it was just too much to take in one day or maybe I’m just so nervous and overwhelmed by the expectations of this
production. They all had good things to say and I attempted to mesh suggestions in tonight’s rehearsal.

I restructured the opening Agamemnon monologue. He is now coming out as a partially dressed Nick Wolf…really talking to the audience. As the monologue goes on he will add pieces of clothing and become more like Agamemnon. I think it totally transformed the opening to the show. I had a long talk with the soldiers tonight as well and their response to Agamemnon at the beginning. We discussed objectives, yet again and for some strange reason, it all clicked tonight. They finally understood why Iphigenia must be sacrificed. We spend a lot of time on the opening tonight and it seemed well worth it. It still needs to grow and deepen, but the soldiers seem far more connected to the piece.

Devon’s character, Menelaus, took a HUGE step forward tonight. He seems to be developing whole new dimensions after talking about the love and respect he has for Agamemnon. He doesn’t seem like he is in such a screamy place anymore. I’m looking forward to see how he continues to develop.

I also worked on scene 9, the crucial Agamemnon and Clytemnestra scene. It still isn’t working. I talked to the actress playing Clytemnestra a lot about objective and action. She just is so unwilling to be truly raw on stage. I now feel I may never get her to that point. I tried giving her opposites to play, to see if that would make a difference. It didn’t. I could tell she has not worked in this manner with a director and usually her best was good enough…but it isn’t in this case. I want to see a woman who is fighting for her daughter’s life. Right now all I see is an actress trying to look pretty and save her voice.
Rehearsal 19

Harris, our fight choreographer, came back today to work the final chaos combat scene. He wanted to lengthen the beginning of the scene and build up to the chaos. Again, this took over two hours of rehearsal time. We’ve been practicing with real glass and a crash box on stage. The bottles don’t often break; we are experimented tonight after rehearsal with different techniques. Drilling holes in the bottles seems to work. We’ll see. I’m grateful we’ll have a good amount of time to work with these things. The next hurdle is adding real cake and champagne.

After the fight work was over, we continued work on the rifle ballet and “Single Ladies” dance numbers, both need considerable time and work. The good news is everyone has a good attitude and is working hard.

Rehearsal 20

We stopped and started the show tonight, working scenes. I changed up scene 12. I think I’ll use the parachute. They plan to hang it tomorrow. The set is coming along. I love the airplane hangar arches, but I’m concerned that half of the stage is painted realistically and the other half is almost cartoonish. I’ve mentioned this in the past several rehearsal reports, but I’m afraid my set designer doesn’t agree. Her only response to the two-dimensional stage right piece is that it took her 17 hours to paint. I think that is exactly why it’s best to have a charge artist other than the set designer on a show. She doesn’t have the ability to really step back and see her set, she just sees her hours of work.
We worked the rappelling today. We really need to work the timing of it. I have a feeling this won’t be perfected until tech, due to the light and sound cues involved. It was one hell of a fight to get that to happen and now the whole moment seems a bit flat to me.

Beyond the usual scenes I’m concerned about is the “Single Ladies” dance. It doesn’t have the effect the “Seven Nation Army” men’s’ dance has. I am going to attempt to make it feel less choreographed and more staged as if they are getting ready for the wedding. I hope that helps.

Rehearsal 21

Today we reworked some trouble spots and I had Khalisha work on simplifying “Single Ladies.” It’s a bit better, but still could use some help. They had the idea of using “I Whip My Hair Back and Forth,” and in the vein of keeping my promises I said, “yes” to that creative idea. Timing still isn’t right for the rappelling, but I don’t want to push it, as the boys are getting comfortable.

The parachute was hung today and we realized we couldn’t use it the way I had hoped. There is heaviness in the middle of the chute that weighs it down. I am officially perplexed about this scene and how to make it effective.

I spent a lot of time working on the Clytemnestra/Agamemnon scene today. I told Julie to fight for her life and beat up Nick Wolf (in a safe way, of course.) This was a suggestion from Paul, to activate her physically so perhaps that would deepen her breath and connection to the text. I still feel at times she’s concerned with how she looks more than what she’s fighting for.
The gentlemen still don’t know the Rifle Ballet and I may have to cut the piece. I really love the “idea” of that piece, but if it continues to be so sloppy it has to go. Currently the soldiers are having a difficult time reciting the lines and moving in unison. I think that the juxtaposition of the dance and words have power, but it has to take leaps forward for me to keep it in the show. I hope they put the work in. One bright light with the soldiers today was the Simon and Garfunkel song. They had a lot of fun with it tonight, after my prompting, and it solves the entire problem of that scene. Now, I need to work on the transition into that moment.

Rehearsal 22

Today was our last rehearsal before tech. The run went well, for the most part. Gary flubbed lines on rifle drill and the rifle ballet still is sloppy. However, the “Seven Nation Army” dance is getting better each day. I absolutely have to change scene twelve’s blocking. It couldn’t be more meaningless. The beginning of scene twelve, with just the bridesmaids and Clytemnestra today was fantastic! Christina Leonard created all sorts of fun, new moments. It’s nice to see many of my actors really working hard on stage and continuing to try, even this late in the game, adding lots of new things. It certainly has helped me to keep my creative energy up!

I’m a bit concerned that the set isn’t done yet. In hindsight I really would have liked to see a color model or rendering. I had asked for a color model, but that never came to fruition. I never knew exactly what Corrie had planned to have it look like. She’s made a few small adjustments, but I still feel half the stage is in a different play. I have asked her to finish everything possible by tech Sunday.
Tech Week

This week started at a low spot because my sound designer failed to show up for paper tech. I’m still unsure what his excuse was. Luckily, he showed up for our scheduled level check and so did his professor, Jeff O’Brien. Where checking light cues with Harrison only took me an hour, checking sound levels took over five hours. I was, needless to say, perturbed. He was so unprepared for tech. If Jeff hadn’t shown up, I’m not sure what would’ve happened. Sound is imperative to this show, so I just hope this remains the low point for my sound designer. Later that day, we did another paper-tech for just sound cues.

On the Sunday tech day, we got through a cue to cue and run, which felt nice. The biggest things I worked on with designers were taking away the pretty lights Harrison has created. He often has lit the stage like candy land, and although beautiful, usually conveys the wrong mood. I kept asking to take out light, during level check and in tech. We have more work to do finding the right combination, but Harrison seems willing to comply. The blinders don’t work for the ending moment like we had hoped. Harrison and Laurel are brainstorming some ideas to make it a stronger moment.

The projections look great, but I only saw about 25% of them during tech. I’m not exactly sure what happened, and neither is my projection designer, Lucus. I had heard he usually isn’t finished for tech day, so this wasn’t a surprise…but that doesn’t mean I’m not concerned about it.

The run went fairly well. We only had to stop a few times. I wish I had used my time better, really demanding perfect timing on some cues. I think I’m too soft
sometimes and in an effort to move things along, I don’t demand perfection. This is something I need to work on. The end scene needs a lot of work technically. It just doesn’t sound or look right. I had a meeting with designers after rehearsal and we came up with a plan of attack. I hope it is effective.

Dress Rehearsal

Tonight we added costumes and it was one of the worst runs we’ve had in a long, long time. It was one of those days where I felt “this is the worst show I’ve ever directed.” It’s a scary time, but it just forces me to work harder to solve the problems before we open.

There were several costume problems tonight, but I feel confident that they will be taken care of. I’m still working with lights and sound to get the end scene correct and things are improving.

I had rehearsal for the Achilles/Clytemnestra scene and scene 12 after the run tonight. I worked on the blocking in the seduction scene, so Clytemnestra wasn’t chasing Achilles so much and that he came to her. I think it has helped the scene. The transition from scene 11 to 12 seems jarring, but I have not thought of an idea to fix it.

I thought of an idea to fix scene 12. It is a combination of Abu Ghraib and male sexual assault that happens in the military. I had them try it tonight and it’s the best scene 12 has ever gone. Although, the audience won’t see it as a nod to prisoner torture, I think their subconscious will see the connection. The taking of the photograph of Logan Gee’s character pointing at the tortured body, certainly is an recognizable image from the Abu Ghraib controversy. I like the danger in the moment now and I think it
helps the girls turn against the guys right before Iphigenia finds out she is to be sacrificed. We cut the parachute and Corrie has plans to use it somewhere on the set.

I threatened the soldiers to cut the rifle ballet because it is still sloppy, but I left it up to them. I told them if it is not 100% better by tomorrow it is gone…or they could tell me right now and I’ll cut it. They really wanted to keep it and they promised me it would be better.

Final Dress

I heard the boys worked for two and a half hours on the rifle ballet today. I’m proud of them and cannot wait to see the product of their labors. I often wished they’d work more outside of rehearsal on this show. I just don’t often think my actors know how to work outside of rehearsal.

The show was a thousand times better tonight and I took a great sigh of relief. Granted, there are a thousand things I could’ve done differently and perhaps better, I’m proud of my production team, cast and crew. I think we achieved something here. I know for sure, today, that this is not the worst show I have ever directed. I can’t say for sure if it’s the best, but regardless I’m proud of the work we all have done and I’m looking forward to getting it in front of an audience.

Technically we’re still a bit shaky. We can’t seem to get the calling correct in a few moments. I still haven’t seen all the projections we are using in the show and my sound designer hasn’t fixed certain cues. So, in previews I’ll finally (hopefully) see the show complete. This makes me a wreck. I wish we were not always playing catch-up in this school.
Preview

The most frustrating part of preview was that my sound designer didn’t show. Because of his absence his assistant (who doesn’t know much about SFX) changed a cue, which became a huge mistake in the middle of the show. Khalisha didn’t have her music for her dance that shifts the mood of the entire show and instead “Single Ladies” came on. Supposedly, Logan was sick…but I remember puking several times in the second floor toilet a week or two ago and still managing to make it through the entire rehearsal. This kind of apathy is just unprofessional. Unless you are in the hospital, you are here. It was just so unfair to those performers, but Khalisha handled it like a champ!

Other than that, the show went quite well. The audience responded well and I think, ladies and gentlemen, we have a show!
9. Self Analysis

In this section I will respond to the five questions I asked my thesis committee.

1. Was there unity of production?

I worked very hard from day one to make sure my design team and I were on the same page. Having heard and seen horror stories from other productions, I wasn’t sure how successful I would be. This was not an easy task in the beginning. I felt often they seemed wary of me and unsure if I was going to make them do a lot of extra work and then not use any of their ideas. It felt as if some of my designers expected me to design for them. I absolutely refused, knowing they were far more capable than I, not to mention I desperately wanted their ideas and input. The best idea we had was to hold a three hour “design conference” outside of school on a Sunday afternoon. There we developed a common language and some solid ideas for moments of the show. This was truly collaboration. I felt at all times I was respected by and gave respect of my design team. I am confident that our working relationship was positive and I got their best work.

The word “collage” united the team and I think they all delivered the essence of collage in different ways. I truly feel like my design team loved this show and were willing to go above and beyond. Sometimes I feel like I am too lenient as a director. I wish I had demanded a bit more at times. I should have followed through more with Corrie on the dimension differences on the set, forced there to be better calling of transitions, asked for more help with transitions for design team in general.

Respondent, Ian Borden stated, “The difficulties of the scattered imagery did
at times weaken that unity, but this is also part of Mee’s creative style to challenge
traditional unified wholes and make us rethink them. Shannon was effective in
adding her voice to these ideas.” Mee does ask for juxtaposition, harsh transitions
and general scattered images, however I always felt are choices existed in a unified
world agreed upon by actors, designers and directors. Was there unity of production?

Respondent, Paul Steger stated, “I think you achieved significant unity in
almost all of the production elements. The elements had a very satisfying balance
while providing enough moments of counterpoint to the action. Scenic, Lighting,
Sound and Projection design elements were particularly effective.”

Scott Glasser, the KCACTF respondent said something about seeing “so many
ideas on stage.” I’ve learned that I need to get better at filtering through those ideas
and not throw each of them up on the stage. I think I need to trust my vision more
than I do.

2. Was the audience effectively invited into the production?

Again, this is something I worked hard to achieve. I think where I went
wrong here, is using direct address to aggressively confront the audience. The dance
invited the audience in a much more positive, non-threatening way. I also think
Jenny’s (Iphigenia) monologues at the end of the show really make the audience
empathize with her. I, ultimately, really liked our choices of direct address; I just
would have made sure they were less aggressive and more inviting.
Most of my respondents found this a difficult question to answer due to its subjectivity. They could only answer from their own perspective. Was the audience effectively invited into the production?

3. Was the use of stage picture strong and/or effective?

I think there were several strong stage pictures. Perhaps the strongest, were not text based. I was a particular fan of the flag folding sequence, which is nowhere in the script. I felt we needed a moment of transition and we needed to see Iphigenia’s breakdown before her decision. I think stage pictures are strength of mine as a director. I now need to pay particular attention to transitions and justification of every moment.

Respondent Virginia Smith, thought my stage pictures to be quite strong but some of my blocking awkward. I agree that in the opening scene with Agamemnon, The Soldiers and Menelaus much of the blocking trapped the actors downstage. By the time I realized what a problem this was, I had already moved on to, what seemed at the time, far more pressing matters. However, I knew it was a problem at the time and I should have fixed it.

Respondent Paul Steger believed I found, “…very many layers in your staging, stacking the picture and creating an effective depth in the stage picture – thus giving a visual representation to the depth of the “message” or “themes” of the play.” I do think I used the entire Howell Stage to my advantage, only sometimes being trapped by the set and too many people onstage.
I think all the dances; except “Single Ladies” had powerful images and I feel like they carried on the story telling. I agree with Dr. Borden’s response that the “Single Ladies” dance really fell short of the power of “Seven Nation Army.” This is inherent in dance, but I think the dances I added in (Khalisha’s two dances, full company dances and the rifle ballet) were perhaps the most powerful. However, the strip tease number seemed to be a highlight for our audiences.

Other images that stand out to me are:

- The Iraqi Woman being shot in the head and the interactive projection with blood spatter
- The men relaxing in their “barracks” before singing “Home”
- The Rifle ballet, with the “Rifleman’s Creed” words scrolling projections while they romantically danced with their rifles
- The seduction dance between Clytemnestra and Achilles
- Smearing Soldier 4’s face with lip stick and Soldier 2 humping him from behind
- Iphigenia taking off her wedding dress and “walking down the aisle” to her death as the soldiers salute
- The entire end scene was full of brutal images, but the last moment of Iphigenia in Agamemnon’s arms with his scream and the burst of light.

4. Did the element of dance help or hinder the production?

I think the show was much better because the elements of dance. Mee leaves out key moments in each character’s journey. For example, we never see
Iphigenia process the fact that her father wants to sacrifice her. Adding a large company dance to help communicate her internal struggle was desperately needed. Professor Steger stage, “This dance/movement element, added a key-hole look into the psyche of the characters, their relationships and their relationship to the actions in the play. “ My hope was, that through dance, the audience is allowed to glimpse into the soul of each character.

Professor Smith never felt that the Achilles and Clytemnestra dance moment was “ever successful.” I agree that it often appeared more awkward than lustful. I think that was a failure in performance more than staging.

Although I think the production did greatly benefit from dance, I think at times the production was hindered in the rehearsal process due to the amount of time it took a cast of almost all non-dancers to learn dance. I think the show could have been stronger with fewer dances. I think “Single Ladies” was my biggest failure to communicate with the choreographers. That number always seemed stale and forced. In hindsight, I should have done a massive re-work. That all being said, I think the company number in which Iphigenia has a solo dance moment is one of the most powerful parts of the play and I certainly wouldn’t want to do without it.

From an educational perspective, this was a huge challenge to all involved. It took a level of dedication most of my actors weren’t used to. I certainly feel we achieved something with this show here at UNL. They all know how better to work in a show this dance-heavy.
5. Did I achieve layered, complex performances from my actors?

Sadly, I did not achieve this for all my actors. Clytemnestra was never where I needed her to be and she grew very little in the process. I’m not sure what more I could have done; I’m still rather stumped. I re-worked her scenes several times in the hopes that something would click. Perhaps with more distance from the process I’ll gain more perspective. I do not regret casting Julie in the role. I still believe she was the best for the role and had I cast a younger student, there would have been just different problems, not a better performance.

In general, I was very happy with my cast. They referred to themselves as the “underdog cast.” A lot of these actors don’t get large mainstage roles, but they rose to the occasion. I think this opportunity allowed them to grow and get some recognition they deserve. There was very little ego ever in the rehearsal hall.

Cale and Gary grew leaps and bounds from the beginning of the rehearsal process. I was very scared that they’d never connect to their characters objectives. Gary was still far stronger than Cale, but I was happy that Cale was finally able to exist in the world for some time.

I was quite pleased with Devon’s performance, although many thought it was too one-dimensional. I really believe he came leaps and bounds from where he was in rehearsal. I was quite impressed with his dedication, questions he asked and his growth. He was one of my favorite actors to work with because of the depth of his questions.
Will Bennet’s work in this show was outstanding. He was full of ideas in the rehearsal hall and fully committed to every choice. Jenny Holm, Nick Wolf, Logan Gee, Jordan Deffenbaugh also have their full selves.

Although we talked at great length about the bridesmaids’ characters, I don’t think I was able to help them as much as I had hoped to create fully developed characters. I think the last scene of the show we finally get to see another side, which they performed with grace.

6. Was the audience affected by the performance?

I realize, now, this is a very hard question to ask. Again, this was a question all three of my respondents struggled with. I was very aware of every shift the audience made while watching the show. I rarely saw students on their phones or talking during the show. If they did talk, they were at least talking about what was happening on stage. I think they were quite shocked by the ending scene and, of course, being blinded at the end always got a verbal response.

I’ll never really know how many people were affected by the show. I do know that the majority of my cast threw themselves into this show and gave their full hearts to the audience. They were proud of this piece and I think the ensemble that was formed could be felt from the audience.
General Comments

My biggest achievement throughout the production was collaboration. The last night of the show I was asked to come down to the dressing room where my cast and stage managers were waiting for me. There, the presented me with cards and gifts saying how much this experience has meant to them and how they never want the show to end. Since then, many of them have taken me aside one-on-one to tell me what a challenging and positive experience the rehearsal process was and how thankful they were to be involved. I’m not sure I can ask for more than that. The fact that my cast, crew and production team had true ownership of the show makes me beyond happy. I know now I can create a strong ensemble. This was proven opening night. Unfortunately, my propsmaster made a poor decision to switch out the crash box we had been rehearsing with for two weeks and replace it with a box lined with stage weights; his reason being, to facilitate all the bottles crashing when thrown. However, we had decided days ago to add sound cues of breaking glass, so it was no longer a problem that needed solving. Well, that choice led to the injury of two actors, causing stitches. In a different kind of production, this sort of incident could have been toxic. I believe the positivity of the rehearsal process allowed for the two injured actors to go on without feeling as if they were in continued danger. In fact, I think the whole accident brought people together. It was a very unfortunate especially because I felt up to that point we were very careful about doing everything in our power to prevent such an injury. Ironic, looking back on that day, I told my costume
designer she couldn’t give Clytemnestra an extra bangle because it was the night of performance and we don’t add anything the night of performance. Had I known there was talk of the crash box being changed I would have never allowed it. However, these things happen. Safety modifications were made the next day and there was never a problem again.

My weaknesses lie in really going after what I want. I still have a sick need for everyone to like me, which will never serve me well as a director. I need to not give up on a detail to avoid conflict, but pursue it with passion. I need to talk harshly to my actors if I see them getting complacent.

I also need to learn to filter ideas, choosing the strongest and making sure it is justified. My transitions were quite weak in this show and I never addressed them fully. I need to trust myself. I second-guess my choices entirely too much. I have enough experience to know what does and doesn’t work. I am not sure why I am so leery of my choices. I am my own worst enemy.

This has been one of my most challenging directing experiences, but at the end of it all I am very proud of the work we all did. I have learned a great deal about myself and directing throughout this process. I’m very thankful to know what I need to work on next to become a better director. I’m grateful to the many faculty members and students involved to mentor me along the way.

In this section my thesis committee has responded to five questions I asked them after seeing the performance of *Iphigenia 2.0*. Their answers are below. These are as reported, and are unedited.

Respondent: Ian Borden

1) Unity of Production.
   It is a difficult question to ask of a Mee play, “was there unity of production,” because so many elements are intentionally incongruous, but overall, the play felt like a unified world.
   The difficulties of the scattered imagery did at times weaken that unity, but this is also part of Mee’s creative style to challenge traditional unified wholes and make us rethink them. Shannon was effective in adding her voice to these ideas.

2) Audience invited into production.
   Again, a difficult question, as much of the play is a verbal and scenic assault. However, there were moments of direct address – oddly, these weren’t as effective as the hip-hop routines at bringing the audience inside a world they were otherwise unfamiliar with. Additionally, the familiarity of uniforms for the men and contemporary women’s clothing gave the audience reference points to connect the events to their own experiences, as did the lone dancer/woman wearing the burkha.

3) Stage Pictures
Stage pictures were very effective, and often very powerful. While the choreographed sequences were the obvious element for pictures, simpler moments, such as the four soldiers in the bombed-out house were also powerful. The stage pictures were among the strongest elements in the show.

4) Dance

For the most part, the dance sequences were a tremendous plus for the production. Most effective was the “This is my gun” dance, which juxtaposed romantic imagery with military training and dogma. Where the dance was least effective was in the those performed by the women. Where the male dancing was very powerful and appeared (mainly) skillful, the women’s dances gave the appearance of being much less intense and carried out with less skill, which in some ways weakened those characters in relation the men.

5) Performances

In the main, the performances were of a high caliber, including achieving significant growth for several actors. For example, while Nick Wolf does not have the worldly experience to truly understand the notion of a father sacrificing his daughter, the inner conflict of that was well executed, and was perhaps the best work he has done so far at UNL.

However, the role of Clytemnestra was not executed with the depth, energy and complexity demanded. The weakness here undermined the work of other actors and prevented Clytemnestra being an opposite force to the soldiers’ energy, a strong feminine presence in the world that embraced sexuality, intelligence, strength and fortitude in equal measure. It was only when Iphigenia
took on many of these qualities at the end of the play did these characteristics have a place on the stage.

6) Affecting the audience
   As I watched, I could tell that many in the audience were affected. First, there were moments of silent listening that can only happen when the audience cares about the events on stage. The stage pictures, dancing and music were entertaining and assaulted as much as invited the audience to make meaning with the play. I believe the audience did so, and because of this, whether or not there was perfect understanding of or familiarity with the American presence in the Middle East, with traditional play structure, with common theatrical narrative, the play was effective.

Respondent: Virginia Smith

1. Was there unity of production?
   There was. You worked very hard to achieve it. This was a good example of collaboration with designers of the various theatrical elements. It seemed to me that every department was supportive of the collective vision. I particularly enjoyed the use of the women's printed dresses mirroring the soldier's camouflage, the effectiveness of the music in giving us the ancient and the techno qualities found everywhere in the concept and the excellent pictures in the lobby, preparing us for what we were about to see.

   I do agree with Scott Glasser's comments about the painting of the set and the lighting not quite working together, though. I'm not sure I would have been able to
articulate it as effectively as he did, but something bothered me about the flatness of the painting. It seemed a little cartoony and though very angular, somehow flattened. I didn't know what was wrong, but if I were directing, my concerns would have pushed me to talk to the designers and if we couldn't articulate it, to the mentors, to discover why it didn't work as effectively as it could have.

2. Was the audience effectively invited into the production?
   I think it was. The lobby was inviting, the preshow music was inviting, though I missed hearing it over the conversation in the audience. The first dance, the rising building, the direct address from Agamemnon, the early breaking of the fourth wall, each of these served as invitations, waking us to the idea that anything could happen.

3. Was the use of stage picture strong and/or effective?
   Yes, both strong and effective. I will include some of my favorites:
   Khalisa's first dance with the house rising.
   The smoke on the house.
   Iphigenia dancing with the company in the decision dance
   The bridesmaid's feet in the air.
   The gun dance.
   The calisthenics dance.
   The strip dance.
   Achilles and Clytemnestra’s dance
   The chaos of the brawl.
   Will being thrown downstage.
   The fire on the sandbags.
   The birds.

4. Did the element of dance help or hinder the production?
   I thought the element of dance greatly enhanced the production.

I loved both of Khalisha's dances. They were very beautiful to watch. It's was tantalizing to see a beautiful woman dancing in a garment that completely covered her, and yet kept us so aware of her voluptuousness beneath the garment. I don't know if it was intentional, but it introduced the idea that there will be something strange and visceral underneath the
surface of this play. This is really an important theme and a wonderful, almost subconscious, way to introduce it.

I think the only weak thing about Khalisha's dances was the decision to have her character change throughout the play. I think giving her a specific point of view as the "other" who belongs here and will still be here after all the armies go home would have given her a story that could accumulate weight throughout the play. You could have used that weight more effectively in her final action of caring for Clytemnestra. Instead we wondered who she was.

The soldiers dance when Menelaus "pumps them up" was effective. It showed us the molding that they go through to become a hardened war machine, the force against Agamemnon, and Iphigenia. I loved the panting at the end of it and in a way that was the purpose of the dance. It told us early in the play that this isn't just talk, this is sweat and breath. This is a group of people that are alive, not just to each other, but they are alive to us, breathing hard in the same room. It arouses us, maybe not sexually, but maybe that too.

The gun dance was sometimes successful for me and sometimes not. I think it had everything to do with whether the soldiers were doing movements or playing with specific images in their heads. It was a wonderful concept, the juxtaposition of love and armor, sexuality and death. Not a new idea, but theatricalized in an interesting way. Maybe if the music had more of a build or climax it would have been even more effective. I never felt this scene went exactly where it needed to in the overall shape of the play. It was more like an interlude and not part of the build.

The "preparing for the wedding strip" was really effective. It was great to see the soldiers
doing such silly things in their underwear and yet it was about both their power and their vulnerability. It was a nice relief before the intense things coming up.

The women's dressing dance was fun. It lacked the meaning and humanity that the men's dance had, and some of it was pretty generic. You kept these characters pretty superficial and dippy. I think there might have been room in the play for the women to have, or gain, nearly as much depth as the men get. It just occurred to me you might have revealed the wedding dress more surprisingly. Maybe the dropping soldiers bring it, or it drops on a glittery hanger, from the heavens like a blessing from the wedding goddess. It always bothered me when Christina left the dance for no reason and then brought back the dress. It felt driven by the need to get Iphigenia into the dress rather than by emotional or character considerations.

The scene with Achilles and Clytemnestra was never completely successful. I know for you it was more about the shame of lowering herself to this to save her daughter. For me it was more about her hubris in thinking that her sexuality could take care of it. You went for shame with bits of hubris. I would have coached it in the opposite balance. The dance was the part that worked for me. I thought it was strange and sexy. It gave me the feel of a snake toying with it's prey. The throws at the end confused me, though, and they were poorly executed. Again, I wasn't quite sure if she felt she achieved her goals in that scene by the end of the dance. It she throws him away, how does this work to save Iphigenia? Nor did I know Achilles state of mind at that point. Nor did it seem that he was changed by the scene.

5. Did I achieve layered, complex performances from my actors? I think that all of your actors came a good distance in this area. Many of them did work
that they did not know they were capable of until this production. I still think that you could have coached them to go further in their characterizations. This and the staging of some scenes are the areas that needed more work. You said you felt out of time by the end. So many areas worked so effectively, but these two could have used more time or more thoughtful scheduling earlier in the rehearsal process.

Here are some examples of characters who could have added complexities. I give them as examples, not as things that should have been done. Nick worked so hard on being the loving father, torn between duty and familial love, but he never showed us the harsh soldier who is actually tougher than Menelaus, if without him Menelaus cannot succeed.

If Achilles ever loved Iphigenia, as she tells us he did, why don't we see his struggle between personal longing and his fidelity to his country's honor? If he is convinced by Clytemnestra to save her, then why didn't it seem for even one second that he cared enough to do so? If he loves country most, from start to finish, where's the drama? Jordan seemed to play only one note for me: angsty duty.

The soldiers were much more complex. They showed us their macho and their vulnerable sides. I think you did quite an effective job of helping them to find the layers and the complexity of the characters journey's. These young actors just didn't allow themselves to invest as specifically as is required. The brief section where they talk about the women back home, could have broken my heart, if they had created the inner detail necessary.

I don't think you tried to give the bridesmaids layers or complexity. For me, they were pretty generic dumb blondes.

Clytemnestra was absolutely the right casting from the group that auditioned. She
had effective moments, but lacked the training to do what would have made this role really sing. I enjoyed her in the dancing. You could have made her grieving at the end more effective, maybe by giving her a tempo or sound as counterpoint with the other chaos. Maybe, for example, the two women are keening: Khalisha mourning for her country, Clytemnestra for her daughter. Or that they are rapt and still, watching someone, say, bleed out, beyond tears watching in silent horror.

I loved Iphigenia. The use of the "decision dance" worked especially well for me. I watched it many times and always was moved by Jenny's journey. I think you still could have found more complexity in her role and made it even more rich and interesting. There was no connection at all, not even a giggle, or blush, between her and Achilles. Jenny clearly decided she loved Daddy and that was that. So choosing to lose her adult life, her life beyond Daddy, wasn't a struggle. She hadn't imagined it yet. To give up life as a girl is one thing, to give up the dream of future nights and mornings with a lover, the promise of children and the potential joys of ripeness, that's something else. I would have been even more interested in that journey.

In the same way, how does Iphigenia leave her girlfriends behind. Does she kick them to the curb or does she envy them, and wish them to live what she cannot? So in summary, there was a great deal of good work in this production in layering and complexity. I think you can push yourself to do more. Ask more character questions, questions about journeys, questions about objectives and obstacles, and opportunities to make discoveries onstage. This was a lovely production, but it could have been more complex. Push yourself to keep agitating the circumstances to make it the juiciest possible ride for us.
6. Did I ever affect the audience? In what way?
   This is a hard question to answer. You affected me. I loved the ride. I realize that in many ways I am the easiest audience member possible, because I care about each actor and each effect and am rooting for success. I want to go on an intense emotional journey. I want to be titillated, shocked, excited, surprised, and I sit there saying" Take me! Have your way with me!" That said. I could feel the energy in the audience, and feel them being swept away, and, I think you have been more effective at involving the audience than any play we've done recently. I also think you gave us time to fall out and become analytical. I think more work on transitions would have made it even more affecting. It was in the transitions that you let us ease out of your grasp.

Additional questions:

   Play selection: I always thought this was an excellent play for you to do. It's something that you feel comfortable with, based on your work with Metamorphoses, The Odyssey, and Eurydice, and yet it is a different style. I was happy to have Charles Mee introduced to our students and our audiences.

Script Analysis: Very effective. The only area that I would ask you to dig into more is character analysis and finding the most moving objective and obstacle for each character.

Concept: Your decision to set this in Iraq was excellent. It brought this ancient story much closer to home. We see soldiers looking just like this on campus everyday. I think the idea of letting the general's daughter, the president's daughter die first is as fresh as it was the first time it was played. You went far to reawaken it to our times.
Auditions/call backs:  This was handled very well. I thought your call backs were excellent.

Casting:  This was well done. You chose people who needed to grow into the roles, that was very appropriate. But you also chose the best people we had for each role, so I know you will do well when you get to choose from a larger more accomplished pool of actors

Staging:  So much of the staging worked so well. The larger group sections especially. But there were examples of not paying enough attention to pictures, and effective illustration of the conflict:

The scene with Menelaus, Agamemnon and the soldiers always seemed unfinished to me. Agamemnon was often in a place that blocked view for the audience, or didn't illustrate his journey through the scene. i.e. His motivation seemed to be "I want to look closely." So he seemed underfoot. I would suggest that for maximum interest it should be, "I must not be persuaded." Menelaus is trying to drag him back into the old way of thinking. Agamemnon should be resisting not tagging along. That way neither has a clear obstacle to fight against. I also was unsure of Agamemnon's P.O.V. at the end of the scene. Unmoved? Convinced? Nick usually adjusted his clothing after the soldiers left, which told me he didn't know. Then comes the next onslaught with Achilles. Does this convince Agamemnon or anger him with Achilles' insubordination? I wasn't sure. In the scene with Clytemnestra and Achilles, she keeps chasing him, though the scene is clearly a seduction. "Follow me, look, don't touch."
In the scene with Clytemnestra and the bridesmaids, she dissipates her power by continually moving around them. Is she a spider wrapping them in her web? Then slow her down. The movement was too fast for that. She seemed like she was frantic to win, but in that state, losing. So much farther to fall if after those two scenes she has won. And really it was all in the staging.

I never understood the slow beginning of the wedding. Having people enter and look upstage and leave looked like a mistake, and then it happened again and again. I was dropped completely out of the story.

For all the excellent movement in this production, I think you could have paid more attention to blocking in the scenes with dialogue.

Working with actors: Excellent. You got improved work from almost everyone and you did an excellent job of ensemble building. Everyone in the cast was pumped about the show and totally committed to doing the best job they could. This is not always the case in this department.

Pacing: I think within the scenes the pacing was well done. At least it was never too slow. You didn't always figure out the right pace for your transitions.

Acting: See above.

Vocal work: The vocal work was pretty good. I could mostly hear everything from any place I sat.
Movement: See above.

Conflict: I've mentioned a number of places where it could have even been more vivid, but for the most part this was well done.

Climax: You always said that you were afraid of this play. It is a hard one, if only because some of the strange elements make one feel like its more disjointed than it actually turns out to be. How can we trust dialogue that seems to come out of teen magazines, but trust it you must. I think you did a really good job with the builds and releases in this production. You used many theatrical elements together to create real chaos on the stage. However, if you had one more bash at it, I'd ask you to do more with the dialogue at the wedding and Iphigenia's goodbyes and to keep working on the very end, beginning with the slow motion section through to the last scream to make it still more effective.

Cohesiveness: Great.

Making and meeting deadlines: Excellent.

Effectiveness of rehearsal schedule: You felt like you were a little short on time in scene work, because of the extensive time needed on dances. In final analysis, I think you might be right. I suspect, though, with more careful pre-blocking of those scenes really analyzing objective and obstacles and not developing the staging with the actors might have given you time enough to work on deepening the emotional investment. Whenever time is tight using your craft in pre-blocking will pay dividends. Also, fixing staging that
doesn't work by giving specific staging rather than laboring over it with the actors can often rejuvenate a scene that was off track.

Collaboration with designers and mentors: Great. You were patient and firm with everyone. You made all the decisions and yet it belonged to everyone. This is one of your very strongest areas of expertise.

Leadership: Excellent. I commend you for wading through the malaise at the beginning of the process and insisting the first idea isn't always the best idea. I'm so glad I didn't attend the meeting where the production team became an ensemble. It empowered everyone to have made collective decisions without the mentors watching the tentative first ideas. Your leadership with the cast was wonderful. You built a very effective ensemble. This is a real gift, that you practice thoughtfully and skillfully.

Effectiveness during tech rehearsals: Excellent. You kept listening to everyone and while moving forward on your own agenda.

Effectiveness of performance: Excellent.

Problem solving: I will also commend you on your tireless work to get what you wanted. I know all the meetings necessary to get the soldiers to drop on to the stage was probably beyond, but you didn't give up! You kept at it, always cheerful, always with a can-do spirit. Really great!
Collaboration with producers: Excellent.

Working with rules budgets and policies: Seemed to work well.

Effectiveness during the run: I think it was smart that you let them breathe without you. That was good for them. They seemed to stay very committed and excited about the performance and proud of all they had achieved. Great work!

Respondent: Paul Steger

Mr. Steger preferred is comments to remain unpublished.
11. Conclusion

The process of directing *Iphigenia 2.0* has been one of the most rewarding and educational of my theatrical career. At many times it did, indeed, feel as though I was standing on the edge of a cliff hoping a choice I made wouldn’t drive the whole production down into the gaping abyss. Although, it is clear I have a great deal to learn about trusting myself as an artist, filtering through choices and demanding excellence from my production team, I feel that I generally had a successful production. I excel at inspiring actors, crew and a design team to be a creative force and building a strong ensemble. Everyone involved in this production had ownership and a great deal of pride. Had I to do this all over again, I would trust myself more, realizing that my intuition is rooted in years of experience, passion for the piece and support from my creative community. All along I thought I was standing on the edge of a cliff, perhaps I was, but those aforementioned elements provided a strong safety net.

I am so thankful for the many mentors and professors that guided me along the way. I have learned that not only do I appreciate collaboration in the rehearsal hall I need an artistic community to surround my work. I will always depend on other people to see and comment on my theatrical endeavors. Without their clever, insightful observations and solutions it would have not been the show it became. At one time I might have been too proud to seek out help, but now I realize it’s the smartest thing a young director could do.
From here I will continue to grow in my role as a master collaborator and surround myself with people willing to stand on the edge with me.
12. Appendix.

This section includes production photos by Molly Keen.

Figure 1

Figure 2
Figure List
(actors named left to right)

1. Opening Dance of Iraqi Woman. (Khalisha Casey)
2. Agamemnon’s First Monologue. (Nick Wolf)
3. Continuance of Agamemnon’s Monologue. (Cale Yates, Gary Henderson, Nick Wolf)
4. Menelaus recalling the memory of shooting the men in the church. (Devon Schovanec, Cale Yates, Gary Henderson, Khalisha Casey, Logan Gee)
5. Bridesmaid’s Monologues (Logan Gee, Christina Leonard, Jenny Holm, Will Bennet, Ayana DeNovellis, Gary Henderson)
6. “Homeward Bound” (Cale Yates, Gary Henderson, Will Bennet, Logan Gee)
7. “Rifle Ballet” (Gary Henderson, Cale Yates)
8. “Rifle Ballet” (Logan Gee, Gary Henderson, Cale Yates)
9. “Seven Nation Army” dance (Cale Yates, Logan Gee, Jordan Deffenbaugh, Gary Henderson, Will Bennet, Devon Schovanec)
10. Agamemnon’s Reveal of Secret to Clytemnestra (Julie Soroko and Nick Wolf)
11. Iraqi Woman’s Second Dance (Khalisha Casey)
12. Iraqi Woman’s Second Dance (Khalisha Casey)
13. “Single Ladies Dance” (Ayana DeNovellis, Jenny Holm, Christina Leonard)
14. Clytemnestra’s Seduction of Achilles (Jordan Deffenbaugh, Julie Soroko)
15. Clytemnestra’s Seduction of Achilles (Jordan Deffenbaugh, Julie Soroko)
16. Scene 12, George Washington Manners (Logan Gee, Julie Soroko, Cale Yates, Will Bennet, Gary Henderson, Ayana DeNovellis, Christina Leonard)
17. Soldier 2’s Monologue (Cale Yates, Logan Gee, Will Bennet, Gary Henderson)
18. Handing off the flags to Agamemnon and Clytemnestra (Will Bennet, Nick Wolf, Logan Gee, Jenny Holm, Julie Soroko, Gary Henderson, Cale Yates)
19. Folding Flags (Logan Gee, Will Bennet, Jenny Holm, Cale Yates, Gary Henderson)
20. Full Company Dance (Full Cast)
21. Soldier 1’s Monologue (Gary Henderson, Cale Yates, Logan Gee, Will Bennet)
22. Iphigenia’s Dance of Awareness (Full Cast)
23. Iphigenia’s Last Monologue (Jordan Deffenbaugh, Julie Soroko, Cale Yates, Logan Gee, Nick Wolf, Gary Henderson, Jenny Holm)
24. Agamemnon’s Acceptance (Logan Gee, Gary Henderson, Will Bennet, Devon Schovanec, Nick Wolf, Jenny Holm)
25. Saying Goodbye to Iphigenia (Jordan Deffenbaugh, Cale Yates, Logan Gee, Will Bennet, Devon Schovanec, Nick Wolf, Jenny Holm)
26. “Muder, Riot, Party War” (Will Bennet and Devon Schovanec)
27. “Muder, Riot, Party War” (Full Cast)
28. Last Moment of Production (Nick Wolf, Jenny Holm)