Reflection on Upintheair Theatre’s *Inside the Seed*

The Culture Lab was set up like an office, with audience seating in three rows on both sides of the alley. One side of the stage had modern office furniture, while the other had corrugated-cardboard stools (nicknamed mushrooms, as I later found out at tonight’s talkback session). My dad and I took our seats in the first row of the far side, closest to the mushrooms. On the wall behind them was a section of a Rubens painting, something with sinewy men being persecuted by Hera: fitting as this play is a modern adaptation of *Oedipus Rex*. The riddle-solving king is now a “Golden Grain” producing businessman, whose genetically modified rice seed will feed an entire continent of starving African, if only for the three outspoken nations refusing to buy the “poisoned” seeds. Much is made of this ancient yet very timely allusion, all of it pointing toward the classic tragedy similar to news stories of today. Others in the cast take their positions on the mushrooms, acting as the chorus until they are called up to perform their scenes with Foster Bryant, the adopted son of Manhattan Project scientist James Bryant Conant, perhaps the closest the play gets to ethnographic details while remaining completely fictional.

Yet it is through art that truth gets revealed, and while the UBC creative writing graduate Jason Patrick Rothery does his best to update the grim details of Sophocles’ original, so much of the present-day details come straight out of disturbing documentary films: Joel Bakan, Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott’s 2003 *The Corporation*, Bethany McLean, Peter Elkind and Alex Gibney’s 2005 *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* and Sturla Gunnarsson’s 2010 *Force of Nature: The David Suzuki Movie*. Staying behind for the talkback session, I was able to confirm that the cast and production team had watched documentaries such as these (if not these ones specifically) during their three-week rehearsal period. Fellow LLED grad student Tetsuro Shigematsu gave a bravado performance as the play’s Tiresias, making the blind seer a hybrid of scientist David Suzuki’s aggressive activism and Enron executive Lou Pai’s over-indulgent corporate recklessness. The rest of the cast played their parts admirably, and Patrick Sabongui (the actor playing Foster Bryant) answered a question about his demanding role by saying it was more about him responding to the other actors and their demands. It is just as Johnny Saldaña notes in Chapter 3, how each actor commits to what scene partners needed.