

**Appropriating Narratives of Conflict in Contemporary Verbatim Theatre:  
A Practice-as-Research-led Investigation Into  
The Role of the Playwright**

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This is to certify that the following work presented in this thesis is my own.

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### **Abstract**

Despite the resurgence of interview-based verbatim theatre in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and scholarly debate surrounding the aesthetics and authenticity of verbatim plays, little examination of the role of the playwright integrating testimonies of war into the making of a verbatim play has been undertaken. The transactional relationships between interviewees and playwrights warrant study as this critical interaction informs the dramaturgy of the playtext. This area of inquiry also has significant resonance in debates regarding the ethics of representation in verbatim theatre, particularly as many contemporary verbatim plays examining conflict tend to incorporate testimony from interviewees whose lives have been affected by war and militarism.

What follows is a practice-as-research (PaR)-led investigation into my role as a playwright appropriating testimony from individual subjects affected by conflict. Through the creation of two verbatim plays, namely *This Much is True* and *Yardbird*, this investigation examines moments of disjuncture that occur when mediating war-related testimony. In addition to critically reflecting on the creative component of this inquiry, this dissertation also incorporates original interviews conducted with the creative team behind the National Theatre of Scotland's play *Black Watch* and examines more broadly the methodologies of playwrights working with trauma-related experiences by focusing on how playwrights' interactions with individual subjects inform the shaping of a play. This investigation examines the key issues that emerge as playwrights integrate personal testimony in a theatrical translation of subjects' experiences into the writing of a verbatim play. It also seeks to examine the ethical tensions I encountered within my verbatim playwriting practice. Furthermore, this investigation interrogates my process of locating interview subjects and facilitating testimony; maintaining critical relationships with interviewees; organising the structure of the play; and negotiating interview subjects' autonomy over the script.

Rather than generating codified guidelines for ethical verbatim practice, the findings and deliberations of my investigation are designed to assist other practitioners using personal testimony from interviewees as part of the playwriting process. Encouraging practitioners to critically reflect on the methods that they employ within the interview stages as part of the playwriting process helps to lay bare the ethical and aesthetic responsibilities involved in dramatising war-related testimony. These deliberations are offered for the benefit of other theatre practitioners as well as scholars working within the wider field of theatre studies.

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## Timeline of Creative Practice

- The Kratos Effect*** July 22, 2008  
Written by Sarah Beck  
First verbatim play about the Menezes shooting  
Rehearsed Reading at The Cavendish in Stockwell, London
- This Much is True*** October 28-November 21, 2009  
Co-Written by Sarah Beck and Paul Unwin  
Second verbatim play about the Menezes shooting  
Full Production at Theatre 503 in London
- Fortunate Son*** February 12, 2011  
Written by Sarah Beck  
Fictional play about an Iraq veteran reconciling  
with his estranged Vietnam War vet father  
Rehearsed Reading performed at The Calder Bookshop in London
- The Kratos Effect*** June 11, 2011  
Written by Sarah Beck  
Re-written Version  
Performed at The Bike Shed Theatre in Exeter
- Yardbird*** April 9, 2013  
Written by Sarah Beck  
First Version of *Yardbird*  
Rehearsed Reading at The George Wood Theatre  
at Goldsmiths College, New Cross, London
- Second Version of *Yardbird* June 4, 2015  
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## Introduction

This dissertation examines the aesthetic and ethical responsibilities I encountered as a playwright throughout the dramaturgy of verbatim playtexts. Verbatim theatre, in the context of this study, involves the process of interviewing subjects and incorporating excerpts from the interview material to compose the central text of the play. Furthermore, the intention of this study is to critically assess the playwriting process involved in shaping testimonies from verbatim subjects whose lives have been impacted by war.

The purpose of the study is twofold. First, it aims to critically understand the relationship between myself as the researcher-playwright and verbatim subjects (namely those individuals whose life experiences and testimony serve as the frame and origin of the text of the play) in relation to the dramaturgy of verbatim plays and the methods adopted throughout the research and writing process. Secondly, the dissertation attempts to comprehend how exploring narratives of war through the development of a playtext (the written design of the play prior to the theatrical performance) might foster new ethical considerations for theatre practitioners. Furthermore, this investigation examines my creative process and ethical engagement with subjects affected by war in the context of contemporary debates surrounding verbatim theatre-making and the methods other practitioners have used to incorporate testimony and interview materials in their working process. By drawing on the complexities of writing plays based on testimony and identifying the problems inherent in scripting private accounts for public viewing, I hope to contribute practical insights into the recent scholarly debates on the role of the playwright in verbatim theatre.

My introduction to verbatim theatre came early in my playwriting career. While I had written several short fictional plays for theatre and radio in the UK, I had only studied verbatim plays written by other practitioners as part of my MA degree. I was intrigued by the possibilities of utilising the verbatim form as a type of theatrical ethnographic examination of the lives of others. I was curious about combining ethnography and theatre in the dramatisation of personal testimony as a creative approach to making political and social interventions. In 2008 I was commissioned by Upstart Theatre Company to research and write a one-act verbatim play entitled *The Kratos Effect* based on interviews with members of the local community affected by the

police shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes at Stockwell tube station in 2005 as part of the third anniversary commemoration of Menezes' death in Stockwell. In contrast to my initial enthusiasm for a form that allows for expression of the personal stories of others as a species of political and social intervention, the process of mediating the experiences of others proved more challenging than I had first considered.

This inquiry into the ethical and aesthetic responsibility of the playwright is driven by a personal encounter with a verbatim subject who attended the rehearsed reading of *The Kratos Effect* and challenged my artistic interpretation of her experience suggesting my portrayal verged on the edges of misrepresentation. Afterwards she spoke with me about her thoughts on the play. Mary, a political activist and local artist who created the mosaic of Jean Charles de Menezes (now permanently mounted outside Stockwell tube station), felt the framing of her testimony in the play presented a despairing, one-dimensional portrayal of her political activism. While Mary had found the play compelling, she had felt very self-conscious watching the presentation of her testimony. This was because Mary felt that some of the statements she had made about war as conveyed in the play came close to making her sound like a paranoid conspiracy theorist. This framing, in Mary's view, obscured those moments of hope and humanity she has encountered in her life experience. Reflecting on Mary's response to the play, I realised that I had unconsciously silenced Mary in the framing of her story. In short, my selection of words and assemblage of her testimony over-simplified the complexity of her life experience and framed a more dismal, less empowering portrait of her activism.

My encounter with Mary reflects recent concerns in theatre scholarship regarding the ethics of representation in verbatim practice. Current scholarship on verbatim theatre has examined issues of authenticity, aesthetics and the representation of trauma, yet the role of the playwright in organising the verbatim material has been neglected; an oversight in scholarly research that requires further analysis. Playwright David Hare (2005) has claimed that verbatim theatre is the ideal medium to "give a voice to the voiceless" (Hare in Soans, 2005, p. 112). However, the frequent circulation of authors' claims to speak on behalf of the 'other' tend to overshadow the subjective process of appropriating personal testimony in verbatim theatre. The complex levels of appropriation involved in verbatim practice tend to be further veiled by uncritical claims of the form's veracity and authenticity. As Deirdre Heddon (2008) has argued, the term 'verbatim' implies "the 'authentic' and 'truthful'" (p. 130), while David Lane (2010) suggests that verbatim theatre's claims to objectivity and authenticity have a propensity

to “promise to present the unmediated truth” (p. 43). Adding to this, Stephen Bottoms (2006) insists that the “emphasis on the verbatim tends to obscure the world-shaping role of the writer in editing and juxtaposing the gathered materials” (p. 59), a role which also requires probing.

Moreover, the ethical stakes of verbatim practice are even higher because it “uses the life experiences of vulnerable and marginalised individuals” (Stuart-Fisher, 2011, p. 193), particularly when the testimony translated into a playtext originates from those who have been affected by traumatic events. Examples of contemporary verbatim plays investigating trauma and communities affected by conflict include Robin Soans’ *The Arab-Israeli Cookbook* (2004) and *Talking to Terrorists* (2005), and Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo’s *Guantanamo: Honour Bound to Defend Freedom* (2004). The problem concerning theatre studies is how can testimony regarding traumatic encounters be theatrically translated ethically and effectively so as not to minimise or re-inscribe the pain of others for the pleasure of the audience.

Furthermore, these concerns regarding the ethics of representing verbatim subjects have particular resonance following the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the invasion of Iraq and the 7/7 London bombings (Hesford, 2010; Hutchison, 2009; Martin, 2010). Alison Forsyth (2009) argues that the frequent and concise repetition of traumatic images embodied in post-9/11 news footage and the pressure for dramatists to respond to distressing events “presents the risk of emotionally anaesthetising the very people [the audience] that documentary theatre attempts to communicate with and inspire” (p. 140). Julie Salverson (2001) is also concerned with the process of collecting testimony and the subjects involved, condemning artists who are un-reflexive in relation to their responsibilities conveying the trauma of others. Salverson argues that this tendency “both disregards the complexity of negotiating life in the midst of loss and presumes that approaching experience as transparent maintains an innocent listening” (p. 121).

What also shapes these ethical and aesthetic debates is the public’s as well as critics’ lack of knowledge about the playwriting process and the appropriation involved in creating verbatim plays. Heddon (2008) argues that “in addition to sourcing and selecting interviewees, verbatim practitioners also construct the questions that are then posed, arguably thereby prompting certain answers” (p. 130). Elsewhere Patrick Duggan (2010) questions the extent to which verbatim subjects are made fully aware of the verbatim theatre process by practitioners, an omission that “alleviates the ethics involved in the appropriation of the other” (p. 156). While Nicholas Ridout (2009)

suggests theatre practitioners should use the question “How shall I act?” (p. 1) as an ethical guide to employ throughout the theatre-making process, few practical examples exist that would enable a playwright to tackle the issues and ethical concerns that arise in the verbatim playmaking process.

These concerns regarding the issues of ethics and the agency of the playwright in verbatim theatre were raised in my own creative practice, when I sought the advice of other – and more experienced – verbatim practitioners in the effort to develop an effective creative methodology for my collaboration with playwright Paul Unwin on the verbatim play *This Much is True*. Although the advice from other contemporary playwrights was somewhat helpful, albeit cursory, scholarship detailing the verbatim playwrights’ methodologies and difficulties experienced in the actual process of gathering and utilising material in verbatim dramaturgy was in limited supply. As a result, we – as co-writers – had to explore our own methodology within the playmaking process. Being in the early stages of developing a methodology led to ethical problems and aesthetic challenges regarding our appropriation of testimony, particularly as some of the verbatim subjects we had interviewed and represented had endured traumatic events.

One reason for the lack of research into, and understanding of, the responsibilities of verbatim playwrights arises from the limited discussion regarding the manner in which subjects’ experiences are negotiated in the dramaturgy of the play, and how their words are interpreted (Madison, 2003; Stuart-Fisher, 2011). This oversight is due in part to practitioners being protective of these relationships, often out of respect for the privacy of the individual subjects represented (Lane, 2010), but also because some practitioners are reluctant to examine their own control over their representation of verbatim subjects (Duggan, 2013; Luckhurst, 2011; Salverson, 2001). At times the narratives of verbatim plays appear seamless in their presentation, implying exclusive and intimate access into the lives of others (Bottoms, 2006; Heddon, 2008; Little, 2011).

As playwrights/researchers are both listeners and dramatists, the interview setting is a space for negotiation where connection, imagination, and exploitation occur, often in private. Therefore, the engagement between interviewees themselves as well as their relationship with the playwright is significant, and these dynamics and the latter relationship are even more critical when interviewees have experienced trauma. The manner in which war-related trauma is depicted matters as projecting certain



expectations held by practitioners during the interview process and dramatising the horror and melancholia of others risks romanticising interviewees' supposed victimhood.

The key problem with probing the agency of the playwright in verbatim theatre is that access into practitioners' working processes and relationships with verbatim subjects is limited. As Amanda Stuart-Fisher (2011) rightly observes, "interestingly, within a lot of the commentary around verbatim and documentary theatre there seems to be very few examples of playwrights evaluating their projects by consulting those whose stories generated it" (p. 200). Indeed, the practice of writing verbatim plays involves levels of appropriation in which the words of verbatim subjects are facilitated, interpreted, then recontextualised and composed in the form of a verbatim playtext. Three critical aspects of verbatim playwriting that warrant critical reflection include: the interview process – whereby verbatim subjects are encountered and testimony is gathered; the editing and writing process – where dialogue is recontextualised for the purpose of performance; and the sharing process where testimony is represented in the form of rehearsed readings and productions.

Furthermore, opportunities for analytical reflection on the representation of verbatim subjects in theatre are forfeited when playwrights fail to critically examine their practice both in the research and the writing process. As a result, the pitfalls of integrating testimony from vulnerable people and the ethical stress involved as well as the dramaturgy that operates within the interview stages of verbatim practice are often glossed over. The absence of critical dialogues among theatre practitioners regarding issues of misrepresentation and violation contributes to a casual notion that verbatim theatre is a "truthful" or somehow a more transparent approach in its representation of the spoken words of others. Moreover, the lack of key critical perspectives on the part of theatre practitioners regarding the complications that occur in verbatim playwriting contributes to a hazardous presumption that extremely personal stories are easily elicited for public performance and spectatorship.

Building on Stuart-Fisher's assessment (2011a) that verbatim theatre is "constructed through a creative process that is constitutively *appropriative*" (p. 194), it is my hope that this PaR thesis lays bare the critical issues that emerge in my practice from the stages of researching, writing and performing verbatim material and that my experience and resulting deliberations might aid in understanding pertinent moments where a playwright's intention intersects, absorbs or obscures the alterity of the

verbatim subjects they seek to represent. This PaR investigation is designed to consider my creative practice, exploring the issues that emerge in aspects of my work including researching, interviewing and creating a verbatim play from my perspective as the playwright engaging with a range of verbatim subjects affected by conflict (including but not limited to combat veterans and their families) and shaping these experiences for drama. By offering an epistemological inquiry that explores my agency as the playwright in relation to traumatic subjects and their testimony, and addressing the approaches used and being aware of manipulation and bias in creative practice, this new knowledge can encourage greater care and vigilance among theatre scholars and practitioners working with vulnerable subjects.

Examining my role as the playwright attempting to dramatise testimonies of war in contemporary verbatim practice, this PaR dissertation investigates the following questions: How does the agency of the playwright affect the way in which the testimony of verbatim subjects is generated in the dramaturgy of a verbatim play? What are the responsibilities of the playwright to verbatim subjects who have been affected by trauma? What are the responsibilities of the playwright appropriating trauma-related testimonies to an audience? In terms of the theatre practitioners' responsibility in verbatim theatre, Deirdre Heddon (2008) has raised the question, "to whom is one responsible or accountable in the production of verbatim performances?" (p. 129). Building on this concern, I want to situate this question in the context of the playwright appropriating personal testimony in the dramaturgy of the playtext by analysing the intricate social relationships that occur between the playwright and verbatim subjects throughout the interview and writing process prior to the eventual performance of the play on stage. In turn, these deliberations might offer valuable insight as to what extent playwrights are accountable for their interpretations of personal testimony. Furthermore, this investigation is grounded in a deeper understanding of the relationship between researcher-playwrights, verbatim subjects, and audiences within the creation of a verbatim playtext, which in turn centres on the playwright's responsibility for the verbatim subjects and the future audiences who will experience a theatrical representation of the playtext constructed from personal, war-related stories.

As this investigation concentrates on my agency as a playwright appropriating personal testimony in the writing process of a verbatim play prior to the theatrical production, it is important to note that the agency of the director, the actors, and the designer also shape the overall theatrical text (the play itself). However, this study is

limited to my practical experience as a playwright and the issues I encountered regarding responsibility in the initial stages of making a verbatim play, namely the interview process and dramaturgy of the playtext. My verbatim playtext of *Yardbird* for instance is an “incomplete object” as it serves as a “pretext” to the theatrical performance (Wallis & Shepherd, 2002, p. 1).

This dissertation integrates three distinctive writing styles to convey different aspects of my study in the form of subjective responses, the practitioner’s perspective, and theoretical reflections. Sections detailing my personal reflections highlight the important ethical and aesthetic negotiations that occurred in private interactions with interviewees. These subjective responses are extracted from an edited selection of my personal notes from the field and are indicated in italics. Moreover, there are times where I write in the frame of the practitioner’s perspective to articulate the dramaturgical strategies and techniques employed throughout the compiling of the playtexts. Theoretical interventions are also interwoven into the study to contextualise my creative process in relation to the wider field of theatre studies.

Chapter 1 reflects on the history and contemporary uses of testimony and trauma in documentary theatre and how scholars grapple with the issues of ethics and aesthetics by reviewing debates regarding authenticity, trauma, spectatorship and responsibility. Tracing the historical documentary and community-based roots of verbatim theatre, including its theoretical developments and functions to the form’s more recent resurgence in the post-9/11 period, this chapter illustrates the problems encountered in adapting the experiences of others for performance in the frame of the verbatim playwright. In addition, this chapter reviews the scholarly debates and existent documentation of the relationship between testimony, trauma and performance by focusing on the role of the writer working with fragile subjects in the realm of theatre of the ‘real’.

Chapter 2 explores my creative practice in the writing of the verbatim play *The Kratos Effect* as a pilot study for this investigation. In addition, this chapter reviews other playwrights’ methodologies and practice-led investigations of practitioners/scholars working with personal testimony in performance by assessing methods and knowledge produced through the writing of plays. Here, I investigate both playwrights’ and researcher-practitioners’ methodologies and practice-based models to craft a PaR model appropriate for exploring my integration of war-related testimony in verbatim playwriting. In this chapter I develop a PaR methodology that incorporates a

blend of ethnography and oral history practice. As the role of the playwright appropriating testimony for theatre is the central focus of this PaR-led investigation, I propose two practice-as-research case studies in order to analyse my role as the playwright in the creation of the verbatim plays *This Much is True* and *Yardbird*. Implementing a PaR framework allows me to examine the use of testimony and its materialisation in performance as a result of face-to-face interviews with verbatim subjects.

Chapter 3 critically reflects on my practice and collaboration in researching, developing and co-writing *This Much is True*, a verbatim play about the aftermath of the Jean Charles de Menezes shooting at Stockwell station written with Paul Unwin. The play explores themes of militarism, examining the social repercussions of the UK's Metropolitan Police Service's adoption of the military-style shoot-to-kill policy in the immediate aftermath of the London bombings. Here, I reconsider excerpts from the performance script and explore the methods my co-writer and I adopted during our research and collaboration, by examining moments in the process where our methods and joint approaches revealed new ethical understandings about the shooting and where our approaches and artistic interpretations diverged. This chapter raises new questions about my methods and preconceptions researching and composing the playtext in relation to the playwright's ethical responsibility representing subjects whose lives have been altered by traumatic events. This chapter identifies and assesses specific instances when the tensions between aesthetic representation and dramaturgical strategies were incompatible with the subjects' needs and expectations.

In addition to my own practical projects, I present in Chapter 4 a study exploring the making of the National Theatre of Scotland's production of *Black Watch* (2006), an acclaimed play based on the experiences of Scottish soldiers' deployment and return from Iraq. Here, I examine playwright Gregory Burke's role interviewing and interpreting soldiers' stories for the writing of a play.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, I assess the priorities and limitations of the creative team's approach to soldiers' narratives, situating original interviews I conducted with the *Black Watch* creative team within the wider field of documentary theatre and community-based practice. Exploring a variety

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<sup>1</sup> Although *Black Watch* is not a verbatim play in the sense that dialogue was prioritised as the primary material for the text, I explore how the study of the writing of the playtext and the theatrical text itself are critical for examining issues of responsibility when working with military personnel as part of the making of the theatrical text. The process of interviewing soldiers and the ethical boundaries established are key considerations that inform this author's understanding of my own research and writing process.

of methods and approaches adopted by theatre practitioners working with soldiers and verbatim subjects impacted by conflict, this chapter provides insight into the ethics and politics of representing war onstage. Investigating other practitioners' methods in relation to my own process, this chapter also discusses how *Black Watch* operates as a model for crafting plays based on soldiers' testimony, and discusses which techniques the *Black Watch* team incorporated informed my approach to the writing of *Yardbird*—an original verbatim play based on interviews with American veterans and their families—which is a critical component of this PaR-led thesis.

The theme of militarism also emerges in the *Yardbird* case study that uses verbatim practice to explore the recent conflicts and repercussions of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the effect of war on combat veterans and their families in the United States. Chapter 5 incorporates the full verbatim playtext of *Yardbird* based on interviews I conducted with US soldiers. Chapter 6 examines the research process and creation of the playtext for *Yardbird*. Addressing my research and playwriting approach, this chapter examines the tension between methods and ethics, in addition to exploring the challenges of weaving multiple narratives of war trauma into one playtext. It also reviews the most recent rehearsed reading of *Yardbird* presented by actors in front of a live audience. This chapter reflects on the project's findings and reveals my interactions with verbatim subjects, the actors and the audience.

## Chapter One: Appropriating War-Related Trauma and Testimony within the Dramaturgy of Verbatim Theatre

### Introduction: Conflict, Verbatim Theatre and the Role of the Playwright

This chapter traces the histories, theories and processes of recording the stories of others in documentary theatre and examines contemporary debates concerning verbatim practice. The chapter begins with a historical overview tracing the roots of documentary theatre through an exploration of the definitions, functions and ethics of creating plays based on the testimonies of others. This chapter then narrows its focus concentrating on scholarly debates regarding the role of the playwright in verbatim theatre. In addition to critical debates regarding verbatim practice, this chapter integrates theoretical debates on translating trauma in performance (Hughes, 2011; Salverson, 2001; Thompson, 2011; Wallis & Duggan, 2011) as a critical frame for probing the appropriation of war-related testimony in verbatim playwriting.

In times of war and political turmoil theatre practitioners often engage with various types of ethnodrama, which Joseph Saldaña (2011) defines as the “joining of ethnography and drama” (p. 13), including theatre of reportage, oral history performance and verbatim theatre. In the desire to make known the impact of events such as the Iraq War, theatre practitioners of ethnodrama tend to facilitate personal testimony from the very people affected by trauma as part of their creative practice. Theatre practitioners in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century have explored the efficacy of the theatre as an apparatus to engage audiences and provoke critical reflection concerning political and social injustice occurring globally and locally. The use of testimony in performance has proliferated in response to the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, and the deployment of US and UK troops to Iraq and Afghanistan. Testimony in performance as a means of exploring subjects of war and militarism and their respective aftereffects can be seen in the resurgence of documentary and verbatim plays in the post-9/11 era with such verbatim plays *Guantanamo* (2004), *Talking to Terrorists* (2005) and the documentary/fiction hybrid *Stuff Happens* (2004).

In light of the post-9/11 period, many practitioners of verbatim theatre developed methods to convey moral anguish and social injustice with the intention of

encouraging ethical responses from an audience. The impetus for making theatre from testimony involves raising questions or even moving audiences to respond to political events as active spectators/citizens.<sup>2</sup> However, crafting plays based on trauma-related testimony presents practitioners with a series of private ethical considerations, which are not always accessible for analysis. This is because theatre practitioners' distinctive processes of eliciting testimony from verbatim subjects often occur in private spaces, including interviewees' homes and workplaces. Because of this absence, there is a lack of discussion regarding how practitioners adapt their practice to address testimonies of war, particularly in relation to the ethical pitfalls and unpredictable challenges that emerge through practice.<sup>3</sup>

### **Terminology and Contention: Defining Verbatim Theatre**

Finding a fixed definition to describe the practices that align with verbatim theatre is difficult and continues to be negotiated by scholars and practitioners alike. Therefore, I will briefly introduce the various terminologies and functions of verbatim practice, thereby positioning myself as a playwright-researcher and my process in relation to the range of available explanations and definitions.

Most scholars credit Derek Paget for introducing the term "verbatim" to the wider field (Paget, 1987b). Paget's coinage of the term appeared in his 1987 article "'Verbatim Theatre': Oral History and Documentary Techniques" tracing the approaches of Peter Cheeseman and his use of the tape recorder, in order to theorise the methodology of using personal testimony in documentary theatre (Paget, 1987b). 'Verbatim theatre' according to Paget (1987) is distinctive as it "employs (largely or exclusively) tape-recorded material from the 'real-life' originals of the characters and

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<sup>2</sup> My understanding of testimony draws on Jan Cohen-Cruz's (2006) definition: "testimony is a genre of stories that are often so out of the ordinary they need to be told as a part of the teller's process of resuming the familiar... The shift from story to testimony, sometimes happens in the act of telling: what the teller has lived with as an everyday occurrence may become unbearable when revealed to people for whom such acts are unacceptable. Suddenly the teller has a context in which she can feel an extraordinary experience that she has nonetheless learned to live with as the breach it is" (p. 103).

<sup>3</sup> Recent texts that have discussed the tensions of conveying narratives of war in performance include James Thompson, Jenny Hughes and Michael Balfour's *Performance in Place of War* (2009), Karen Malpede, Michael Messina, and Bob Shuman's edited selection of war plays in *Acts of War: Iraq and Afghanistan in Seven Plays* (2011), Jenny Hughes' *Performance in a Time of Terror: Critical Mimesis and the Age of Uncertainty* (2011), James Thompson's *Performance Affects* (2011), Sara Brady's *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror* (2012), Jeanne Colleran's *Theatre and War: Theatrical Responses since 1991* (2012) and Julia Boll's *The New War Plays from Kane to Harris* (2013).

events to which it gives dramatic shape” (p. 317).<sup>4</sup> In addition, Rony Robinson defines verbatim theatre in the following terms:

[I]t is a form of theatre firmly predicated upon the taping and subsequent transcription of interviews with ‘ordinary’ people, done in the context of research into a particular region, subject area, issue, event, or combination of these things. This primary source is then transformed into a text which is acted, usually by the performers who collected the material in the first place (Robinson in Paget, 1987b, p. 317).

Both Paget and Robinson’s (1987) definitions explain more broadly the methods involved in verbatim theatre-making, however they fail to probe the connotations of the term ‘verbatim’. In recent years, Will Hammond and Dan Steward (2008) explain the term and process required to create plays within the form:

The term verbatim refers to the origins of the text spoken in the play. The words of real people are recorded or transcribed by a dramatist during an interview or research process, or are appropriated from existing records such as the transcripts in an official enquiry. They are then edited, arranged or recontextualised to form a dramatic presentation, in which actors take on the characters of real individuals whose words are being used (p. 9).

Hammond and Steward’s (2008) definition is effective in its emphasis on the process of recontextualising testimony, but their explanation does not adequately distinguish verbatim practice from documentary practice. This distinction is significant as the former involves working with living subjects where the latter concentrates on the recontextualisation of documents.<sup>5</sup>

What is more, the predicament regarding defining contemporary uses of the term verbatim theatre is evidenced in *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*, where Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson (2009) state that “we have sought to avoid homogenised definitions and approaches” (p. 2). Within each article the contributors use the terms as their own “critical apparatus” to suit the context of their analysis “in order to probe the utility and viability of these terms” (p. 2). While verbatim signifies the

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<sup>4</sup> Paget adapted a framework to map the idiosyncrasies and functions that constitute plays in this genre, as “over time they have demonstrated that they have functions in common, tending to exhibit at least one function in any specific manifestations in whatever medium their makers choose” (Paget 2009, p. 227). Paget’s (2009) original four functions are as follows: “(1.) They *reassess* international/national/local histories; (2.) They *celebrate* repressed or marginalised communities and groups, bringing to light histories and aspirations; (3.) They *investigate* contentious events and issues local, national and international contexts; (4.) They *disseminate* information, employing an operational concept of ‘pleasurable learning’” ... (pp. 227-228). In light of recent aesthetic trends in documentary theatre, Paget integrates a fifth function to his framework, adding “they can interrogate the very notion *documentary*” (pp. 228).



importance of interviews as a part of its methodology, the ambiguity of the term verbatim stems from its connotation that interviewees' words are presented word-for-word. Sharing this view, Stephen Bottoms (2006) raises concerns about equating the term verbatim with the dramatisation of personal testimony because of its implication that the words of verbatim subjects are presented as a transparent representation of their stories. Bottoms (2006) argues that a clear distinction between verbatim and documentary is significant:

[B]ecause, where the latter might be said to imply the foregrounding of documents, of texts, the term 'verbatim' tends to fetishise the notion that we are getting things 'word for word,' straight from the mouths of those 'involved' (p. 59).<sup>6</sup>

In addition, the implications of the use of the term verbatim are problematic according to David Lane (2010), who argues that "verbatim theatre often carries a promise to present the unmediated truth...a promise that it cannot hope to achieve" (p. 43). While I agree with both Bottoms' and Lane's assessment that the term verbatim encourages a preoccupation with "authenticity", primary importance should be devoted to distinguishing verbatim theatre from documentary theatre. The latter implies the process of recontextualising documents, while the former suggests the recontextualisation of personal interview material. This distinction is significant as verbatim theatre involves the use of personal testimony from living subjects as opposed to working with documents exclusively. Furthermore, facilitating personal testimony for public performance requires a series of complex ethical negotiations that need to be explained.

To help distinguish between documentary and verbatim practice Caroline Wake and Paul Brown (2010) have developed a typology for differentiating modes of practice within the realm of "theatre of the real" (p. 7).<sup>7</sup> Wake and Brown (2010) clearly distinguish forms of autobiographical, community, verbatim, documentary, tribunal and history theatre based on the "the distance between the actual person and the writer" (p.

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<sup>6</sup> Though the term verbatim is frequently contested in theatre scholarship since "word-for-word" connotes authenticity or accuracy, I do not embrace these assumptions. On the contrary I critique these associations by engaging in a self-reflexive analysis of my role as a playwright and mediator within the development of the performance script based on the testimony of others. By analysing the complex processes *translating* the spoken narratives of subjects, who have often endured extraordinary experiences (whether having fled a war-torn country or a readjusting to civilian life as a returning combat veteran), critiquing the role of the writer counters complacent notions of transparency, authenticity, truth and objectivity. Rather than equating objectivity and authenticity with verbatim practice, for Patrick Duggan (2013) representation "is less to do with verisimilitude and is more concerned with structure and experience" (p. 149) in theatre of the 'real'.

<sup>7</sup> Brown and Wake (2010) entitle their typology the 'spectrum of practices' (p.7).

7). By their definition, verbatim theatre involves practitioners directly “interviewing communities about an issue or event that has affected them” (p. 7).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, their definition of verbatim theatre provides clarity for this investigation as it distinguishes verbatim theatre-making from community theatre which is often “made by, with and about” the community involved; and as well as from documentary theatre practice which concentrates on the collation of primary documents and reportage (p. 7).<sup>9</sup>

For the purpose of this dissertation I maintain that verbatim theatre, although not unproblematic in its associations, is the most appropriate term for defining my work, as it is most widely identified with the practice of interviewing subjects who will go on to provide material from which a play is crafted.<sup>10</sup> My understanding of verbatim theatre is informed by Amanda Stuart-Fisher’s definition that “unlike documentary theatre then, verbatim tends to acquire its authority from its use of word-for-word accounts than its use of concrete, verifiable ‘evidence’” (p. 196). Stuart-Fisher (2011) rightfully asserts that “all verbatim theatre, like its closely associated practice documentary theatre, is of course, constructed through a creative process that is constitutively *appropriative*” (p. 194). Appropriation, therefore, is a valuable word for reflecting on verbatim practice as it emphasises the process of the recontextualisation of personal testimony for performance. In addition, as the word implies a re-working of personal testimony, it aids in alerting theatre scholars and practitioners to the mediation of the playwright involved in the process, and also highlights the writer’s ability to potentially exploit verbatim subjects. In turn, equating verbatim practice with appropriation encourages scrutiny regarding the representation of verbatim subjects, which might counteract the uncritical rhetoric that celebrates the implied transparency of the words of others in verbatim theatre.

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<sup>8</sup> Erica Nagel (2007) contends “both critics and practitioners seem to view documentary theatre and community-based theatre as completely different ends of a spectrum. Advocates of one tend to ignore, patronise, or even scorn the work of the other” (p. 154). Elsewhere, Nagel suggests that documentary theatre practitioners would benefit from the knowledge of practitioners working in community-based theatre

<sup>9</sup> Jan Cohen-Cruz (2005) distinguishes between community theatre and community-based theatre in that community theatre involves amateur actors, often re-staging commercial productions for the purpose of entertainment whereas community-based work is focused on the interests of the community itself (p. 7).

<sup>10</sup> My work also overlaps with documentary practice, as transcripts, newspaper reports, and media artefacts are often used to contextualise personal interviews framed within the play.

## **Tracing the Heritage of Verbatim Theatre: Theories and Approaches Used in Documentary and Community-based Practice**

Tracing the historical and theoretical approaches of practitioners, this section locates the roots of verbatim theatre's origins in the documentary tradition and community-based theatre practices. The historical and contemporary strands of documentary and verbatim theatre presented as follows focuses primarily on companies based in the United Kingdom and the United States where my creative work has been developed.

### **Early Forms of Documentary Practice, 1920s-30s**

The first wave of documentary theatre emerged within the early forms of theatre of reportage and propagandist theatre in the early 1920s and 1930s in Russia, Germany, Britain and the United States. These documentary performances were intended to deploy theatrical devices in order to organise and arouse the political consciousness of the working-class and developed a more agitprop style "to break the theatrical illusion" of naturalism, since naturalism at the time was equated with the bourgeois politics that exploited workers (Govan, Nicholson, & Normington, 2007, p. 44). The following approaches highlight early theatre practitioners' relationship to documentary material and form, and provide historical context for the role of the playwright using personal testimony as source material for the creation of the play.

Emerging from Soviet Russia in 1923, the Blue Blouses theatre collective dramatised contemporary news headlines with the intention of educating workers. The aims of the Blue Blouses, as Govan, Nicholson and Normington (2007) describe, were to:

make news and revolutionary propaganda accessible to an illiterate populace. The 'living newspapers' were also a medium of education, and included topics on health and farming as well as more overt political messages. Performing in the open air, in factories and workers' clubs, these performers adopted the blue smocks worn by factory workers in order to indicate solidarity with them (p. 43).

Breaking from naturalism, the Blue Blouses experimented with popular conventions of "song, acrobatics, burlesque and vaudeville" (p. 44), employing a more demonstrative approach to interpreting newspapers for illiterate audiences, an approach which also

operated to emphasise the fluidity and construction of the performed material. This presentational mode was purposefully symbolic of the alterability of political conditions in terms of its execution.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the British Workers' Theatre Movement was founded in 1926 order to focus on the "urban, working-class" community, borrowing from the Blue Blouses' "propagandists forms" to politicise, educate, and show solidarity with workers (Govan et al., 2007).

In Germany, Erwin Piscator experimented with documentary materials in performance such as film footage and projected images, which he used to contextualise the live performance.<sup>12</sup> Piscator's protégé Bertolt Brecht experimented with form and documentary techniques to critically engage audiences, thereby deconstructing political conditions that appeared natural, in turn showing the alterability of economic and power structures (Innes, 1972; Paget, 1990).<sup>13</sup> Based on this, Brecht's legacy is identifiable within the familiar features of verbatim theatre, such as direct address, visual projections and the incorporation of historical documents and statistics to contextualise the words spoken by actors. It could be argued that while verbatim plays might utilise Brechtian techniques, they might not necessarily share Brecht's political intentions.<sup>14</sup> In the United States, the American Federal Theatre adopted theatre of reportage in 1930, also employed agitprop techniques such as direct address, documentary materials such as newspaper sources and projections of diagrams (Govan et al., 2007, p. 45; Paget, 1990).<sup>15</sup>

These early approaches to documentary practice evidenced theatre practitioners' commitment to making socio-political issues more accessible to working-class audiences. The presentational style of performance was not necessarily to purport authenticity. Rather the intention was to encourage audiences' critique of the artistic recontextualisation of the material, and more broadly the political structures at work. I would suggest that ethical issues within the recontextualisation of documentary material

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<sup>11</sup> Critiquing the social conditions as well as the form itself, Govan et al. (2007) explain that the overall aim of the Blue Blouses was to convey "a political relationship between their theatre-making and everyday life..." (pp. 43-44).

<sup>12</sup> Paget identifies the technological innovation of using screens and projections in *Rasputin, the Romanoffs, the War, and the People Who Rose Up Against Them* (1927) as a moment that "broke new ground" in documentary theatre (Innes, 1972; Paget, 1990, p. 44; Piscator & Rorrison, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> Piscator, a mentor and collaborator of Bertolt Brecht, inspired the formulation of the latter's early theories on epic theatre and estrangement effects.

<sup>14</sup> See David Barnett's (2015) *Brecht in Practice* for a thorough exploration of his politics and practice and the post-Brechtian aesthetic.

<sup>15</sup> Chris Megson (2012) defines agitprop as "a conflation of the words 'agitation' and 'propaganda' – is a form of touring left-wing theatre intended to mobilise working-class audiences" (p.44).

became more complex in the 1960s and onwards with the arrival of mobile tape recorders to capture people's everyday speech. The practice of approaching people to convey their personal experiences for theatrical translation presented new ethical and aesthetic implications (Dawson, 1999; Paget, 1987).

### **Documentary Theatre of the 1960s-70s**

The second wave of documentary theatre and the development of verbatim practice emerged in the UK during the 1960s and 1970s. Influenced by political intentions of theatre companies, the early documentary theatre practitioners of the 1960s and 1970s experimented with documentary forms to explore labour conditions and war, but also branched into subjects such as cultural memory and education. Moreover, theatre practitioners of this time experimented with documents and testimony in performance to empower local communities. Joan Littlewood and the Theatre Workshop created the musical *Oh What a Lovely War* (1963), integrating war statistics, popular ballads, and satire to address the devastation of World War I.<sup>16</sup> Although gathering and recording personal testimony was not a part of her creative methodology, Littlewood used documentary materials with an acute awareness of how form and spectacle could operate to portray the devastation of war and thereby engage an audiences' political sensibilities through theatricality (Govan et al., 2007; Paget, 1990).

The use of personal testimony in verbatim theatre-making became popular in the 1960s, partly due to the technological advancement of the tape-recorder (Dawson, 1999; Paget, 1987a). This is evidenced in Peter Cheeseman's locally-inspired series of plays at The Victoria Theatre in Stoke-on-Trent, including the *Jolly Potters* (1965) and *The Knotty* (1966). These plays were designed, as Cheeseman (1987) explained, to provide the Stoke community with a "sense of pride and self-confidence that every district outside London desperately needs – so you don't feel like you're a non-entity" (Cheeseman in Paget, 1987b, p. 322; 1990). Thus, when Cheeseman, along with the company and playwright Rony Robinson, wanted to develop *Fight for Shelton Bar* (1974), a play about a complicated industrial dispute in the area, Cheeseman thought the best way to tell the story was by using the verbatim accounts of those in the community who were affected (Paget, 1987b). As a result, collecting oral history narratives became

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<sup>16</sup> In 1946 Joan Littlewood and Ewan McColl formed Theatre Workshop in the UK, devising political plays with actors, designers and musicians in order to generate ensemble pieces.

a key method for recording and celebrating local perspectives and unheard histories that countered London-centric politics (Cheeseman, 1970, pp. xiii-xiv).

What is more, Cheeseman (1970) outlines rules for how his company worked with verbatim material. For example, in the director's note in *The Knotty*, Cheeseman (1970) explains that actors served as a "research committee" and were expected to acquire a thorough knowledge of the primary source material (Cheeseman, 1970, pp. xiii-xiv). With a research committee established, the resident writer and Cheeseman (1970) consult the committee regarding the dramaturgy of the play. Although Cheeseman (1970) indicates a reverence for the subjects and verbatim material, there is little consideration given to the ethical dilemmas or failures that occurred during the research and writing processes.

Taking a different approach to documentary material, educator and director Albert Hunt employed rigorous research and theatre games to devise, in collaboration with students at the Bradford College of Art, politically-focused live art events (Chris Megson, 2012, p. 43).<sup>17</sup> These works include *Russian Revolution in Bradford* (1967) and *John Ford's Cuban Missile Crisis* (1971). Inspired by the radical Happenings movement (Heddon & Milling, 2006), Hunt also created plays based on documents, collaborating with Peter Brook and the RSC in 1966 to stage the Vietnam War play *US* (Kustow, Hunt, & Reeves, 1968).<sup>18</sup> The play *US* was devised by the company as the "individual playwright, working alone, seemed unable, at the moment, to handle a direct statement of this size" (Kustow et al., 1968).<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to the political aims of Cheeseman and Hunt, Pam Schweitzer employs interviews with subjects as part of the devising process with the intent to foster

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<sup>17</sup> 1960s Britain witnessed a movement in theatre-in-education programmes (Van Erven, 2001). A key starting point for Albert Hunt and his collaborators when devising political theatre was to identify a subject matter, assessing the urgency of its telling, and to establish the most effective form for conveying the content of the message. In an interview Hunt discussed the use of games and improvisations as a key component to developing alternative theatre (Histories, 2010). For Hunt, part of the problem with political theatre is that the critical message of plays is often compromised by a lack of theatricality required to engage audiences—thus boring them (Hunt in Histories, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> The 'Happenings' of the 1960s and 1970s that influenced contemporary autobiographical performance is explained by Govan et al. (2007) as, being shaped by "the relationship between art and everyday life was blurred and the focus was not on the skilled performance of character in the narrative but on participants being 'themselves' in a range of situations" (p. 59). For a concise overview of the phenomena see Marvin Carlson's *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (Carlson, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Exploring the relationship of the Vietnam War and its effects on the British public, the impetus for creating *US* – as Albert Hunt (1968) reflects – was not to "try to make a documentary about Vietnam" but rather "to examine our own attitudes, to ask ourselves as totally as possible how the Vietnam War affected us" (Kustow et al., 1968, p. 17).

social exchanges between younger and older generations.<sup>20</sup> Schweitzer, more so than her contemporaries, expresses a clear concern about how verbatim dialogue is sourced for the making of a play.<sup>21</sup> For instance, in reflection on the process of creating the verbatim play *What did you do in the war, Mum?* (1985) based on interviews with older women about their experiences at the end of World War II, Schweitzer cautions theatre practitioners against writing prior to and during the interview stages. She (2007) asserts:

The creative team must avoid writing the show in their heads before conducting the interviews. This does unfortunately happen occasionally, especially when a writer or director has a strong view and is using the vehicle of reminiscence theatre to promulgate it. Such an approach, where the testimony is reduced to confirmatory material, seriously undermines and compromises the interview process (p. 45).

While I agree that theatre practitioners need to be wary of their preconceptions about the experience of others in the interview process, assuming that theatre practitioners maintain neutrality while facilitating testimony is problematic. This presumed impartiality adds to the assumption that theatre practitioners are presenting an “unmediated truth” (Lane, 2010, p. 43), negating theatre practitioners’ influence in relation to verbatim subjects’ responses during the interview setting.

### **Theatre of Testimony in the US**

From the 1980s onwards director/writer Emily Mann and writer/performer Anna Deavere Smith were generating documentary plays from ‘real’ stories in order to expose the underbelly of American life; confronting issues of racism, elitism, post-traumatic stress and domestic violence. Verbatim practice in the United States is known, as Emily Mann terms it, as ‘theatre of testimony’, which describes the process of collating personal narratives into a dramatic piece (Dawson, 1999, p. xiv; Heddon, 2008).<sup>22</sup> Some

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<sup>20</sup> Govan, Nicholson and Normington (2007) describe Schweitzer’s process making *Many Happy Retirements* (1990-1991) as reflecting her objectives “to represent the social experience of retirement in ways that enable people to recognise parallels between the fictionalised narratives on stage and their own personal circumstances. To facilitate the audiences empathetic responses, the divisors did not use autobiographical stories verbatim, but they isolated recurring themes which they structured in the optical shape” (Govan et al., 2007, pp. 42-43).

<sup>21</sup> Schweitzer (2007) founded the Age Exchange Theatre Trust, devising community-based plays primarily throughout the 1970s and 1980s and refers to her work as ‘reminiscence theatre’ – theatre that engages memory within the exchange of narratives through community participation (Govan et al., 2007; Schweitzer, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Helena Enright (2011) argues that the term theatre of testimony emphasises intimate encounters with subjects and imaginative spaces through storytelling, whereas verbatim theatre is based on a multitude of

of Mann's testimonial plays include: *Annulla: An Autobiography* (1985) *Still Life* (1980), and *Having Our Say* (1995) (Dawson, 1999; Mann, 1997; J. Reinelt, 2009). For Mann, domesticity becomes a means to engage audiences' political consciousness, a bridging that makes issues such as the Vietnam War as seen in *Still Life* more familiar due to their being placed in a domestic setting. Mann (1997) contends that "[i]f you take things that are difficult to hear and put them in a domestic situation, then the audience is more open. You can talk about the Holocaust when you're making chicken soup" (Dawson, 1999, p. 52). Through domestic details such as the making of soup in the context of the Holocaust, more political and traumatic events become increasingly relatable for verbatim subjects, audiences and practitioners.<sup>23</sup> However, generating empathy through domestic details can be used to elicit more solipsistic forms of identification in performance, which I will discuss at a later stage (Mann in Forsyth & Megson, 2009; Mann, 1997, p. 32; Soans, 2005a).

Playwright/performer Anna Deavere Smith's method of facilitating testimony involves recording interviews whilst carefully observing the nuances and mannerisms of interviewees. In reflecting upon her interview process, Smith explains "I can learn to know who somebody is, not from what they tell me, but from *how* they tell me" (Anna Deavere Smith in Phillip B. Zarrilli, 2002, p. 338). Smith then rehearses with the resultant interview audio recordings to devise a script which she subsequently performs herself in one-woman shows.<sup>24</sup> Smith's more well-known plays include *Fires in the Mirror* (1992) and *Twilight* (1992), both of which reflect on race relations and discrimination within the US. As Smith performs the material herself, presenting a multitude of characters across race and gender, audiences are made aware of her presence as a playwright and mediator of the testimony.

Throughout the 1980s to the present Teya Sepinuck (2013) has devised community-based theatre pieces with homeless communities, soldiers and prisoners in the US, the UK and Europe. Sepinuck's production *We Carried Your Secrets* (2009),

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perspectives and information sources, thereby undervaluing storytelling in its pursuit for truth. However, I argue that this view of verbatim practice simplifies the variety of approaches adopted by playwrights.

<sup>23</sup> This is a similar framework as that used in Robin Soans' *The Arab-Israeli Cookbook* (2004), which situated narratives of trauma in the context of making food. Soans highlights in the play that the national dish of Palestinians and Israelis is falafel.

<sup>24</sup> In an interview with Carol Martin, Smith (2002) illuminates her process of interpreting people's stories, processing their words and incorporating their inflections and mannerisms into her performance. By listening to the interviewee's words through an earpiece over the course of the rehearsal process, Smith exhibits what Carol Martin describes as a "hypernaturalistic mimesis" (Martin in Phillip B. Zarrilli, 2002, p. 334).



which reflected on the affects of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, was performed in Derry in front of an audience comprised of local community members who were directly affected by violence (Sepinuck, 2013).<sup>25</sup> Sepinuck (2013) describes her work as ‘theatre of witness’, where the subjects share their story, going on to develop and perform their own narratives onstage. While the overall strategy here is to use theatre as a form of therapy, one rich with healing properties that Sepinuck (2013) refers to as ‘medicine’ – the term simplistically places practitioners in the role of healers. In a similar vein, James Thompson (2011) criticises theatre practitioners who approach people affected by war-related trauma inviting them to tell their stories with offering the promise of providing “‘relief’, ‘liberation’” and “‘healing’” (p. 45). However, in pressuring subjects to disclose their trauma-related experiences, theatre practitioners can, in turn, invalidate the needs of subjects recovering from catastrophe or violent encounters, and potentially cause further harm. Conscious of Thompson’s (2011) concern, I approach verbatim subjects not with the aim to heal, but rather to facilitate personal testimony as a means of generating connections between verbatim subjects, practitioners and audience members.

### **Post 9/11 and the Third Wave of Documentary Theatre**

Concerns regarding the performance of testimony have multiplied in the aftermath of 9/11 and the terrorist attacks on the London Underground. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century Great Britain witnessed a resurgence of verbatim plays reflecting on the effects of trauma and social suffering. Mary Luckhurst (2008) equates the resurgence of performing testimony with the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, arguing that:

The reasons for the apparent ‘explosion’ of verbatim theatre in the west are complex and seem to be bound up with widespread suspicion of governments and their ‘spin’ merchants, a distrust of the media and desire to uncover stories which may be being suppressed, and a western fetishization of representations of ‘the real’... (p. 200).

Elsewhere playwright David Edgar (2008) proposes that “[t]he war on terror brought politics back on the world stage, and it’s no surprise that politics returned to theatrical stages as well. But the predominance and resilience of verbatim, witness and testimony

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<sup>25</sup> ‘The Troubles’ refers to the thirty-year conflict in Northern Ireland between Protestant unionists and Catholic Nationalists. For a historical overview of the conflict in Northern Ireland see Aaron Edwards’ *The Northern Ireland Troubles* (Edwards, 2011).

theatre needs explaining”. The following section considers some of the key companies and playwrights engaging in verbatim practice in the post-9/11 period.

### **Out of Joint and Verbatim Practice**

Producing verbatim plays in the UK in the early 1970s with his company Joint Stock and from the 1990s to the present, Max Stafford-Clark’s theatre company Out of Joint fostered the verbatim writers David Hare and Robin Soans (Hammond & Steward, 2008). Hare’s verbatim plays include *The Permanent Way* (2004) dealing with the privatisation of British railways, and the quasi-verbatim play *Stuff Happens* (2004) exploring the relationship between the US and Great Britain from the perspective of the invasion of Iraq where Hare interjects fictional scenes, including Bush and Blair’s putative private conversations for example, all set in between edited documentary materials (Hammond & Steward, 2008).

Also at the forefront of the resurgence of verbatim theatre is playwright Robin Soans. In collaboration with Out of Joint, Soans’ works include *A State Affair* (2001), *Talking to Terrorists* (2005) and *Mixed Up North* (2009). His other works are *The Arab-Israeli Cookbook* (2004) and *Life After Scandal* (2007) (Fisher, 2007; Soans, 2009). Regarding post-9/11 verbatim theatre, *Talking to Terrorists*—which features a range of testimony from that of a former Ugandan child soldier to an ex-member of the IRA—has, as Janelle Reinelt (2006) has identified, sparked a new critical focus and scholarly debate on the appeal of verbatim plays in the context of political acts of violence. The pivotal events that prompted theatrical responses include September 11<sup>th</sup>, the invasion of Iraq as well as the London bombings. I will discuss those aspects of Soans’ methodology relevant to this study in Chapter 2.

### **Recorded Delivery: Headsets and Hyperrealism**

While the majority of verbatim plays after 9/11 concentrated on Western foreign policy, human rights violations and terror, playwright and actor Alecky Blythe diverged from using the form to engage with global politics in favour of more local, social issues based primarily in British communities. Blythe’s most popular works include: *Come out Eli* (2003), *Cruising* (2006), *The Girlfriend Experience* (2008) as well as *London Road*

(2011), a verbatim-musical about a community dealing with the murder of several prostitutes in Ipswich.<sup>26</sup>

Blythe's methodology for crafting verbatim plays differs from many of her contemporaries as she integrates edited audio recordings to capture and mimic interviewees' inflections, hesitations and idiosyncratic modes of speech, thereby the audio recordings guide the performance rather than using written transcripts to generate a text. Inspired by Anna Deavere Smith's use of rehearsing recorded audio throughout the rehearsal process, Blythe and her London-based company Recorded Delivery have expanded on this method. Blythe incorporates the audio interview recordings into the performance where actors listen via headphones and repeat the recorded testimony (Blythe & Bush Theatre, 2006; Wake, 2013). While Blythe prefers audio to text and tends to shy away from overtly political issues, her methodology is still of interest in the way that she stresses the importance of the relationship between her and her verbatim subjects. She considers maintaining good rapport to be a critical component of the playwriting process. Blythe's methods will be explored further in the following chapter.

### **Contemporary Scholarship on Verbatim Practice: Aestheticising the 'Real' and Translating Testimony**

The rise of verbatim theatre as a political response to the events of 9/11 situated the form in the context of examining war and also marked the emergence of scholarship documenting and theorising contemporary verbatim practice.<sup>27</sup> Whereas scholarship

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<sup>26</sup> Carol Wake (2013) considers Blythe an example of a "headphone verbatim playwright" meaning that – unlike other practitioners who edit from interview transcripts – headphone verbatim playwrights' "edit the sound files with software such as Pro Tools, meaning that they do not always 'transform' the interviews 'into a text', or at least not in the narrow sense of the word" to produce an audio script (p. 322).

<sup>27</sup> As the verbatim form waned in popularity in the political shadow of the more popular 'in-yer-face' theatre of the 1990s (Sierz, 2000), the scholarship examining documentary theatre also faded until 11 September 2001. The early scholarship on verbatim theatre from the 1980s to the late 1990s includes Derek Paget's article "'Verbatim Theatre': Oral History and Documentary Techniques" (1987) and monograph *True Stories? Documentary drama on radio, screen and stage* (1990); Alan Filewood's *Collective Encounters: Documentary Theatre in English Canada* and Gary Fisher Dawson's *Documentary Theatre in the United States* (1999). The last two offer critical histories of documentary plays and community theatre practice in North America (Dawson, 1999; Filewood, 1987). In 2006 Carol Martin collated *The Drama Review* series, thereby marking a new wave of documentary theatre scholarship by providing a range of perspectives and theorising the re-emergence of verbatim plays in the post-9/11 decade (Bottoms, 2006; Martin, 2006; J. G. Reinelt, 2006). Expanding on this scholarly enterprise and the burgeoning field of verbatim theatre, Martin published *Dramaturgy of the Real World on Stage* (Martin, 2010). *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present* (2009), edited by Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson, incorporating chapters from Carol Martin, Alan Filewood, Atillio Favorini and Derek Paget, while Tom Cantrell and Mary Luckhurst's *Playing for Real* (2010) incorporates interviews with actors playing real people. Elsewhere, David Lane's *Contemporary British Theatre*

preceding post-9/11 debates on verbatim theatre celebrated themes around socialism and local politics (via the use of more experimental forms), the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> saw a growth in the popularity of verbatim plays dominated mostly by realism (Bottoms, 2006). This recent emphasis on the most exact vocal delivery of spoken testimony, as evidenced in many contemporary verbatim plays, contrasts the more presentational and propagandist forms deployed previously. Stephen Bottoms (2006), sceptical of David Hare's use of the terms 'authentic', 'red-blooded' and 'realism' to describe verbatim theatre, asserts that "realism and reality are not the same thing" while "unmediated access to the 'real' is not something theatre can ever honestly provide" (p. 57). Sharing this view I contend that more hyperrealist modes of representation emulating the exactness of subjects' spoken accounts does not necessarily amount to more ethically sensitive and authentic representation. Moreover, purporting to present the most realistic depiction of testimony risks negating the process of recontextualisation in verbatim practice. Elsewhere, Antoinette Moses (2011) employs the term "hyper-naturalism" to explain the popularity of emphasising exactness of testimony, citing Max Stafford-Clark's claim to present facts "nakedly", an adverb she goes on to describe as "useful in understanding why the genre appears in many cases to be anti-theatrical, or even, I would suggest, anti-aesthetic" (p. 309). The pursuit of realism and hyper-naturalism devoid of theatricality can be problematic for both audiences and verbatim subjects, particularly when verbatim subjects have endured trauma (Salverson, 2001). Emphasising the transparency of the representation of verbatim subjects' stories obscures the role of the playwright and the levels of appropriation carried out by theatre practitioners.

The impetus for more realistic modes of presentation could be seen as having emerged from practitioners' desire to achieve what they regard as a greater degree of authenticity. However, the popularity of integrating testimonies of violence has raised ethical issues regarding appropriate modes or representation. The upsurge in verbatim plays in the post-9/11 encouraged a new wave of theatre studies scholarship as Carol Martin (2006) asserts in the special verbatim theatre issue of *The Drama Review*, "documentary theatre represents a struggle to shape and remember the most transitory history—the complex ways in which men and women think about the events that shape

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(2010) and Duska Radosavljevic's *Theatre-Making: Interplay between Text and Performance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2013) document contemporary processes used when making documentary and verbatim theatre (Cantrell & Luckhurst, 2010; Forsyth & Megson, 2009; Lane, 2010; Radosavljevic, 2013).

the landscape of their lives” (p. 9). In the *TDR* special issue is Stephen Bottoms’ (2006) ‘Putting the Document in Documentary: An Unwelcome Corrective’ questions the agency of the playwright in contemporary verbatim practice (Bottoms, 2006). The article challenges popular notions of the authenticity and transparency of the verbatim form while calling for practitioners to be more experimental and critically aware of the ‘mediation’ of the artist (Bottoms in Martin, 2006). With regard to verbatim playwriting, Bottoms (2006) argues that one of the means of fetishising authenticity is by implying the illusory absence of the playwright. Therefore, Bottoms’ (2006) analysis offers probing mediation as a key component of the responsibility of the playwright of verbatim practice and the need to encourage rather than obscure a healthy scepticism of the politics of producing narratives for theatre. While I agree that playwrights should encourage audiences to critique the mediation of testimony, Bottoms (2006) does not take into account the complex negotiations that occur between the verbatim subjects and practitioners.

Negotiating representation, particularly stories of trauma, is an ethically complex terrain informing how the playwright shapes the material, and the way in which issues of responsibility and aestheticisation throughout emerge. Particularly poignant for considering the tensions of aestheticising testimony in performance is Suzanne Little’s (2011) assertion of the verbatim form:

At one end of the spectrum are hyper-aestheticised productions that exploit and manipulate source material in the interests of spectacle. At the other, are highly ‘ethical’ productions where practitioners inadvertently drain the drama from theatrical representation in attempting to preserve the perceived ‘truth’ (p. 2).

Between these polarising extremes lies the anxiety of representing the testimonies of others. However, I am suspicious of the ‘ethical’ whereby theatrical presentation is minimised for the sake of a ‘truthful’ presentation as it obscures the roles of theatre practitioners. I am equally wary of theatrical presentations that exploit the trauma of verbatim subjects for the sake of spectacle. At the heart of this tension between aestheticising testimony and ethics is the fact that the verbatim subjects represented tend to testify to various personal, psychological and physical traumas, the implications of which I explore later in more detail in Chapters 3 and 6.

Responding to the pressure of playwright to purport authenticity, playwright Steven Waters criticises the promise of authenticity associated with verbatim theatre as detrimental to the creative process. He argues that “...the playwright’s imagination

should be chastened, but not defeated, by actuality: in a world flooded with information, its task remains to reveal the facts behind the facts” (Waters in *The Guardian*, 2004). In contrast, Duska Radovsavljevic (2013) contends that rather than debating verbatim’s word-for-word ‘authenticity,’ scholars and practitioners should examine the complexity of interpreting the lives of others in the interview process, explaining that:

it is irrelevant whether or not the words being used are repeated verbatim, what is much more important is for the theatre artist/interviewer to engage epistemically on a number of levels with what is being related to them both verbally and non-verbally by their interviewee so that they can find an appropriate theatrical translation for it (p. 137).

Radovsavljevic’s (2013) assertion underlines the importance of addressing how playwrights “engage epistemically” (p. 137) with verbatim subjects. Furthermore, her perspective reduces the concentration on verbatim form’s authenticity but on the relationships between theatre practitioners and verbatim subjects and the theatrical possibilities these meetings might present.

What is more, “finding an appropriate theatrical translation” (Radovsavljevic, 2013, p. 197) of testimony becomes a critical part of this investigation. Inspired by Julie Salverson’s (2001) critique of the “processes through which artists and cultural workers listen to stories of violation and violence and translate them into theatrical form” (p. 119) I adopt the term translation a part of my conceptual language. Translation, as I use it in the context of writing verbatim plays, is important for this investigation as it refers to the manner in which I relate to verbatim subjects as a listener and dramatist, negotiate my ethical and aesthetic concerns in relation to verbatim subjects’ experiences, and interpret their personal testimony in the writing of the text. The term translation is valuable as it emphasises the intricate social and meaning-making processes that emerge throughout playwrights’ encounters with verbatim subjects and in the appropriation of testimony within composition of a verbatim playtext. By recognising the selection and editing process within the interview stage and situating the process in the context of trauma, addressing methods of practice at the beginning of the research and playwriting process via a PaR investigation, my epistemological and creative study will address the manner in which I approached and selected subjects, the conditions in which the material was generated and, through theatrical translation, the process of listening, interpreting and negotiating testimonies within the making of a playtext.

## Verbatim Playwriting, Tensions in Verbatim Practice and Responsibility

The process of interpreting testimony for performance, I would argue, occurs from the beginning of the research process. This includes the playwright's preconceived notions of the interviewees; the conditions in which questions are prompted; and how identities are constructed in the framing of the verbatim play. These social conditions and the mediating of material are significant, particularly when analysing the relationship between narratives of vulnerable subjects and verbatim theatre.<sup>28</sup> The agency of the playwright within the research process and the playwright/subject dynamic within the interview and collation of the verbatim material will be a key element in my PaR-framed dissertation's attempt to understand how life stories are collected and translated within the dramaturgy of the playtext.

A key insight into the working practices of verbatim playwrights from the post-9/11 period is Will Hammond and Dan Steward's (2008) edited collection *Verbatim, Verbatim: Techniques in Contemporary Documentary Theatre*. The book takes the form of both essays and interviews, incorporating reflections authored by Richard Norton-Taylor and Nicolas Kent, Alecky Blythe, Robin Soans, and interviews with David Hare and Max Stafford-Clark (Hammond & Steward, 2008). While each playwright explains their methodology, limited critical reflection on the problems that emerge when working with verbatim subjects is offered. Perhaps even more limiting is the absence of any reflection on the possible vulnerability of the subjects involved and how these considerations affect their approaches to representation. Although the source material is rooted in testimony, the playtext is very much reflective of their own vision as playwrights. While I agree that the playwright's vision and the distinctive shaping of the material is dependent on the unique approach and style of the practitioners involved in the creative process, I would argue that the practice of researching and writing material which originates from face-to-face encounters between theatre practitioners and subjects and how, in turn, playwrights interpret personal narratives within the dramaturgy of verbatim plays requires further articulation.

Elsewhere, *Theatre and Autobiography: Writing and Performing Lives in Theory and Practice*, edited by Sherrill Grace and Jerry Wasserman, engages more

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<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that not all verbatim theatre is text-driven. DV8, for example, integrates verbatim theatre practices such as the use of documentary materials alongside physical theatre. For example, *Can We Talk About This?* (2012) explores Islam and extremism in everyday life, and uses complex physical sequences to engage and critique the spoken material.

directly with practitioners interpreting and aestheticising autobiographical and biographical issues in performance (Grace & Wasserman, 2006). Incorporating short reflection pieces by Canadian autobiographical artists, the last part of the collection reflects on truth, ethics and representation within their own work, as evidenced when the practitioner Sharon Pollock (2006) asserts that the integrity of plays must take precedence:

[I]s there an ethical dimension to my cutting and pasting their lives to make a better dramatic point or play? I believe acknowledging and not pussyfooting around my thefts and manipulation of their lives meets my ethical obligations of them. My primary ethical obligation (if one can prioritise ethics) is to the integrity of the work... the relationship of my work to the society to which I offer it is symbiotic (p. 299).

Other autobiographical playwrights in this series offer similar narratives debating ownership and truth; the overall sentiment in the volume is that the playwrights concerned acknowledge ethical stresses when negotiating subjects' experiences and feeling bound to the audience in order to convey the material through the most effective means possible (Grace & Wasserman, 2006).<sup>29</sup> Playwright Marie Clements (2006) reflects on her own process of engaging in an ethical self-critique when writing *The Unnatural and Accidental* (2004). She explains:

Between the beginning and the end are so many questions. Are you doing the right thing? Are you respectful? Are you truthful? Is it your place? But the voices keep coming and it is your responsibility as a writer and a craftsman to create a world for them to continue to live. Is that right? Should I have written it this way? Questions. That is the process, and in that process you will pay for what will become your truth, your play, and the integrity with which it was created... (p. 331)

While these ethical issues contribute to the debate on the textual representation of vulnerable subjects, I argue that there is an on-going need for theatre practitioners to articulate the processes involved in the construction of a playtext. This includes making more apparent the (often invisible) political, social and geographic conditions in which testimony is gathered, collated and translated in the making of a verbatim play.

The playwrights' proximity to verbatim subjects in the dramaturgy of the play may also have ethical and aesthetic implications. Actor and researcher Bella Merlin reflects on the problem she and actor/co-researcher Matthew Dunster faced in sharing

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<sup>29</sup> Reflections from Canadian playwrights include Sharon Pollock, Linda Griffiths, Tomson Highway, Lorena Gale, Joy Coghill, Andrew Moodie, Sally Clark, R.H Thomson, Marie Clements and Guillermo Verdecchia (Grace & Wasserman, 2006).



their research and improvisations with playwright David Hare based on their interview with a bereaved mother whose son was incinerated in a fire during the Ladbroke Grove rail crash in 1999 for *The Permanent Way* (Merlin in Boon, 2007). Unlike other interviews conducted in public spheres such as offices and pubs, Merlin and Dunster met with the mother concerned in the privacy of her home "...with photographs of her deceased son and the regalia of family domesticity" surrounding the actors/interviewers (Merlin in Boon, 2007, p. 126). Reporting back to Hare and director Max Stafford-Clark, Merlin explains her ethical anxiety improvising the mother's account and the need for Hare as the playwright to meet the mother before writing scenes based on the encounter. This was so Hare could grasp in person what material could and could not be explored in the play because of the manner in which the mother's son had died, and to understand how it was still affecting her.

The same anxiety regarding the distance between the playwright and verbatim subjects is raised again in Gareth White's analysis of The Red Room's collaboration with playwright Fin Kennedy devising the play *Unstated*. White (2010) explains the difficulty Kennedy faced writing a fictional scene inspired by a video recording of an interview with Victoire, a refugee, who the actors had interviewed prior to Kennedy's arrival on the project. White documents a critical moment in the rehearsal process where actors began to question the ethical implications of Kennedy's fictional interpretation of Victoire's story. White (2010) goes on to examine Kennedy's struggle as a playwright creating a compelling story whilst adhering to the ethical standards of members of the company.<sup>30</sup> The anxiety Kennedy experienced was partly due to feeling responsible to the asylum-seekers and the trouble they went to in order to help his interpretations, and also because the company had been conducting interviews with the subjects for a two-year period before Kennedy became involved in the project (Kennedy in White, 2010, p. 102).

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<sup>30</sup> White (2010) begins his analysis of the collaboration by describing a rehearsal where Kennedy's approach to a refugee's testimony and his written interpretation of the recording raises concerns amongst the actors: "The actress, Marva Alexander, has just read a speech in which she describes a violent sexual assault, and the murder of her son, as if they were Victoire's experiences. Now Alexander expresses her reservations about using the 'character' in this way, when it is not known if these are really part of Victoire's story. Another actor is concerned about the feelings of Victoire if she should come to see the performance – her son is missing; do the company have the right to speculate about his death?" (White, 2010, p. 93).

In light of this tension, White (2010) argues that theatre practitioners working with testimony must take responsibility for their interpretations, particularly as:

Political theatre which advocates for people – speaking on their behalf rather than involving them directly in the creation and performance of the work – cannot treat its raw material casually, and the processes through which an ethical treatment of this material evolve reward closer attention (p. 94).

What the above scenarios suggest is a general anxiety surrounding the distance and contact between the playwright, who translates the experience of verbatim subjects in the writing process, and verbatim subjects, who are offering stories of trauma to be shared with an audience. The struggles explored by Merlin and White suggest a need for playwrights to have personal contact with the verbatim subjects they represent. Reading the levels of what is appropriate and translatable for performance (Radosavljevic, 2013) therefore becomes important for establishing theatre practitioners' ethical responsibilities to both verbatim subjects and future audiences.

David Lane (2010) reiterates the double-responsibility of theatre practitioners working in verbatim theatre in terms of both the audience and the verbatim subjects:

This is the tension at the heart of verbatim plays which so intrigues us as audience members; we want to know what happened but we want it shown in a theatrical engaging way. In this sense, verbatim's unavoidable failure to create the objective 'real' has always been drama's gain, but it is a delicate conversation between two different responsibilities: respecting the source material and crafting a theatrical experience (p. 77).

Being cognisant of Lane's (2010) observation of the "double-responsibility" involved in verbatim practice and Radosavljevic's (2013) assertion that what matters is how playwrights identify with interviewees as part of the creative process, I will examine how I as a playwright interpret the experiences of combat veterans, political activists, and bereaved families in the interview process and the responsibilities that arise in the creative process. These complex interactions between verbatim subjects and myself during the interview process are significant as they inform my approach to the writing process. Furthermore, gauging the responsibility of the playwright is critical as the author's appropriation of testimony has real-world effects, particularly when the content is related to war. The potential risk of proceeding uncritically in verbatim practice is causing verbatim subjects—who may be managing psychological and physical trauma—further harm by exhibiting their private experiences in the public realm.

In Chapters 3, 4 and 6, I explore more closely the relationship between the playwright and interviewees (some of whom have experienced traumatic events) to ascertain the responsibilities of the playwright translating testimony for performance. In light of Radosavljevic's assertion that considering that the manner in which theatre practitioners "engage epistemically on a number of levels" (Radosavljevic, 2013, p. 137) with verbatim subjects is more important than debating the form's authenticity, I explore my own interactions as the playwright with verbatim subjects I have interviewed as part of my creative practice in more depth in Chapters 2, 3 and 6. In these chapters, I also explore the subsequent process of writing plays based on trauma-related testimony through a series of practice-as-research case studies. In response to Stuart-Fisher's (2011a) observation that verbatim playwrights rarely communicate their working relationships with verbatim subjects to a wider public, my PaR case studies explored in Chapters 2, 3 and 6 also examine how I balance my responsibilities to verbatim subjects and to future audiences. Moreover, these chapters grapple with my accountability as a playwright gathering personal testimony as a central part of my creative methodology compiling/writing playtexts for verbatim theatre.

### **Trauma, Testimony and Witnessing in Performance**

Verbatim practitioners aim through the use of testimony to illustrate the political, social and economic violence suffered by people, thereby encouraging critical engagement and connection with audiences. Some verbatim plays explore traumatic events as a means of raising awareness and promoting ethical connections between audiences and those verbatim subjects represented onstage. However, when traumatic narratives are the origin of a performance text, to what extent are practitioners responsible for those individuals whose testimony is incorporated within a verbatim play? Tracing the convergence of theatre studies with that of trauma studies (including the work of Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub and Dominick LaCapra), I examine literature detailing the relationship between testimony and trauma and performance, thus mapping the complicated ethical intersections involved in developing art from the trauma of others. I will review how these perspectives illuminate my investigation into the agency of the playwright researching and writing verbatim plays based on testimonies of war through a PaR-led thesis (Caruth, 1995; Felman & Laub, 1992; LaCapra, 2001).

It then becomes necessary to understand the relationship between crafting plays based on traumatic experiences, and the ways in which testimony is facilitated. Cathy Caruth (1996) suggests the term trauma can be “understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind... the wound of the mind— the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world – is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event...” (pp. 3-4). Elsewhere, Patrick Duggan (2012) defines trauma as “a disruption of the self, of self composure; it is a perpetual disruption of personal time which questions understandings of self because it recurs without anticipation continually to call into question our comprehension of the world and our movements through it” (p. 27).

In an edited issue of *Performing Ethos*, Alison Forsyth and Amanda Stuart-Fisher (2013) discuss the disjuncture between trauma, representation and the necessity of representing trauma in performance:

The process of remembering, of course, becomes all the more complex and ethically acute in the context of the event of trauma. For as we have seen, from the extensive work undertaken by trauma studies, the events of trauma can be understood to exceed cognition in his communicability and therefore resists any representational articulation... However, it is precisely the timeliness and unknowability of trauma, its radical otherness and its unrepresentability that means performance practices are well placed to forge a meaningful engagement with sites of traumatic memory (p. 4).

But while trauma studies might develop fruitful connections between witnessing, testimony and identification within performance studies, it becomes necessary for researchers and practitioners working within testimonial theatre to analyse more critically the limitations when combining these fields. Furthermore, it is imperative that I, as both facilitator of testimony and practitioner of verbatim theatre, consider the manner in which I approach people who negotiate the “disruption of the self” (Duggan, 2012, p. 27) in everyday life for the purpose of creating a play. As evidenced in Merlin’s expressed anxiety, the process of facilitating testimony with the bereaved mother for the purpose of performance, the playwright’s use of traumas of verbatim subjects in the translation of testimony warrants ethical consideration. Moreover, it is critical for playwrights to evaluate the nature of their meetings with verbatim subjects who have experienced trauma and the implications of their resulting creative interpretations.

In Mick Wallis and Patrick Duggan's (2011) co-edited *Performance Research: On Trauma*, the editors introduce the paradox of trauma as a triangulation between the intrusion of trauma-symptoms, the subjects' "desire to forget" and the subjects' need to remember the trauma-event to "heal" (p. 5). They suggest that "the theatrical apparatus has particular potency with respect to the responsibilities of bearing witness to trauma..." (p. 7) posing performance practice as a potential avenue for exploring the intricacies of trauma. In this issue, Stuart-Fisher (2011) highlights the inadequacy of verbatim theatre to effectively articulate in an authentic manner the complexity of the lived experiences of those who negotiate trauma. This inability is due to the verbatim form's reliance upon the direct language of verbatim subjects to convey traumatic experiences so incomprehensible they cannot be sufficiently articulated in words. As Stuart-Fisher (2011) explains, "the challenge trauma places upon verbatim theatre, then, concerns the problem of how a dramaturgical strategy, constituted on the promise of direct communicable experience, can *authentically* engage with that which stands radically beyond language" (p. 114). In regard to the limitations of verbatim dialogue to express trauma, my immediate concern with verbatim theatre practice and war is not guided by the intention to replicate the fragmented traumatic experiences of interviewees, such as the combat experience of veterans, as a way to unsettle an audience. Rather, my impetus for using verbatim dialogue as part of my practice is twofold: first, to convey alternative social histories to be considered by audiences, and secondly, to more broadly create connections between verbatim subjects, performers, and audiences. However, it is critical to be mindful of the implications of representing trauma in performance as Anna Harpin (2011) contends:

Violence and cruelty in and of themselves should not be understood as synonymous with trauma. To do so is to collapse events and their experience in a singular interpretive frame. Instead, one ought to excavate the particular manner in which an artist has sought to translate extreme experience into the materiality of the theatre and performance practice (pp. 106-107).

I share the same concern as Harpin, conscious of how my viewing of verbatim subjects solely in the context of extreme violence can diminish the complexity of their experiences. This is particularly pertinent to my practice facilitating testimony from military personnel who have witnessed or enacted acts of violence, a subject explored in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Underpinning my concern about simulating or facilitating in trauma narratives in verbatim practice is James Thompson's critique of trauma studies situated within war

and refugee contexts. Thompson (2011), whose applied theatre practice includes working with people living in conflict areas, warns off practitioners from uncritically adopting the trauma paradigm as a framework for practice, arguing that a “dependency on theories of *trauma* narrows the potential of work and aligns applied theatre with some deeply problematic assumptions and practices” (p. 43). He goes on to question Caruth’s characterisation of trauma as universalising the experiences of those affected by war, which – according to Thompson – diminishes distinctive cultural characteristics and local specificity, thereby further marginalising and victimising subjects.<sup>31</sup> Thompson (2011) also explains that “telling one’s story” in theatre-making is not always beneficial to the wellbeing of participants, particularly in war-torn communities.

Critiquing the theatrical translation of trauma narratives, Julie Salverson (2001) questions artists’ fervour to heighten testimonies of the oppressed. In the tendency to valorise the process of promoting voice, Salverson calls upon theatre practitioners to recognise the ethical intricacies of representing trauma. One of Salverson’s (2001) key criticisms of artists working with traumatised others, is what she refers to as the ‘erotics of injury’, to emphasise practitioners’ tendencies to focus solely on verbatim subjects’ pain. This fixation on injury tends to obscure more positive attributes of verbatim subjects’ experiences such as humour and joy. These violations tend to be reinforced by practitioner’ claims to offer an authentic and unfiltered representation, a tendency which often devalues theatrical technique (Salverson, 2001). The potential risk of emphasising singular representations of pain is the possibility of ‘re-inscribing’ the trauma encountered by verbatim subjects through a fixation on their victimhood. I share Salverson’s concern regarding my role as a playwright as I facilitate, listen and interpret the experiences of combat veterans and bereaved family members. Therefore my aim is to examine how I facilitate and translate experiences of conflict in an attempt to avoid creating an oversimplified, trauma-focused interpretation of testimony, which can be detrimental to verbatim subjects. Trauma studies may aid my critical understanding of how I approach verbatim subjects, making me more vigilant of the limitations and implications for framing traumatic experiences in my creative practice.

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<sup>31</sup> To illustrate his argument, Thompson (2011) draws on the immediate response of drama therapists working with youths in Sri Lanka affected by the 2004 tsunami.

## The Politics and Limits of Identification in Verbatim Practice

The connection between trauma and performance begs the question, how is testimony facilitated and interpreted by playwrights in verbatim practice? For testimony to be manifested and trauma recognised it requires a listener. As Dori Laub (1992) explains,

Bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener. For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the instrument and total presence of an *other*—in the position of one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are talking to somebody: to somebody they have been waiting for for a long time (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 70).

If we apply Laub's explanation of testimony within the context of researching and creating verbatim theatre, then the former is a two-way process requiring both the subject who testifies and the one who listens – in this case the practitioner/listener. In order for the subject to realise their experience, they are dependent on a listener. As Laub (1992) reiterates, “[t]estimony is the narrative's address to hearing; for only when the survivor knows he's being heard, will he stop to hear—and listen to himself” (p. 70). Therefore, understanding the role of the practitioner/researcher as a facilitator of testimony might offer new insights into the capacity of verbatim theatre to promote the survivability of subjects.

Another essential point Laub (1992) makes within the context of memory and trauma relations to the notion of 'subjective truth', as he terms it (p. 62). He recognises the value of testimony, not as a concrete representation of historical events, but rather in its delivery and capacity to convey the extraordinary horrors experienced by the testifier (p. 62).<sup>32</sup> The notion of subjective truth is of value to practitioners of verbatim theatre as secondary witnesses, in that it helps them to understand that their research with others cannot be dependent on historically accurate accounts but require a critical and empathetic understanding of the subjective experiences of participants.

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<sup>32</sup> Laub (1992) offers an example, one frequently used within scholarship regarding trauma and testimony, of a video recording of a female Holocaust survivor's recollection of the uprising at Auschwitz from the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies from Yale University's archive, and which was shown to a conference of artists, historians and psychoanalysts (Felman & Laub, 1992). The woman testifying describes seeing a series of chimneys explode amongst the chaos. The historians at the conference dismissed the value of the testimony for its factual inaccuracies as only one chimney had been documented as being destroyed, resulting in a controversial debate amongst conference participants about the reliability of subjects' accounts.

As practitioners approach others who have been affected by violence, I would argue that it is critical to consider Dominick LaCapra's (2001) concept of 'empathetic unsettlement' when engaging with vulnerable subjects (p. 78). LaCapra (2001) argues that the exchange of trauma narratives requires the "role of empathy and empathic unsettlement in the attentive secondary witness [which] involves a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's position while recognising the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place" (p. 78). LaCapra's empathetic unsettlement becomes a useful framework to help position the ethical role of the playwright both as a secondary witness and also within the aesthetic framing of identification intended between the representations of subjects' experiences, actors and the audience. In short, for LaCapra it is important for researchers to record social histories of others, particularly those testifiers whose experiences are inscribed by trauma. However, this has to be done with an acute sensitivity that the testifier's experience is distinct from that of the researcher's personal experience. For LaCapra (2001) over-identification with the testifier's trauma on the part of the researcher potentially obscures or consumes the testifier's experience (p. 79). The risk of over-identification with the trauma of others in the process of testimony impacts the creative process according to Salverson, who asserts that concentration on the pain of others in performance supersedes the positive aspects of verbatim subjects' experiences.

Empathetic unsettlement is integral to considering the dramaturgy of plays exploring testimonies imbricated in trauma, as it is important not only for the practitioner facilitating testimonies from a victim of trauma, but also within the exchange between verbatim subjects and audiences. It is vital that the audiences as secondary witnesses distinguish the representation of the person and trauma from the actual person. This means it is important for secondary witnesses to be mindful that their life experiences are separate from the experiences of the verbatim subjects whose stories are being conveyed, thereby respecting the alterity of the person who is being represented. Helen Nicholson (2014) provides a conceptual framework to address identification in performance, interweaving theories from Freud and Brecht within an applied theatre context. Drawing on Freud, Nicholson outlines two types of identification within psychoanalytic theory, that of 'primary identification' which is a more narcissistic quality in which the identity of the other is obscured by one's sense of self; and 'secondary identification' whereby Nicholson (2014) describes the process as beneficial to practitioners conveying the stories of others:



Social relationships are entered into, and emotional attachments are formed on the basis of recognising that other people are *not* oneself, and that they have distinct identities of their own. It is from this position of self-awareness that individuals might learn to see identification not as a violation of identity, but as a potentially positive dynamic in the process of self creativity. In this sense, identification both produces and destabilises identity (p. 74).

This distinction between the Freudian concepts of primary and secondary identification is important for a critical analysis of my role as a writer, facilitator and listener, and the manner in which I address and perceive those whose testimonies are collected with the intent of composing a playtext. This is also a key issue for my investigation in terms of understanding how I, as a researcher and playwright, might utilise dramaturgical strategies to frame the stories of others, and to what extent “empathetic unsettlement” (LaCapra, 2001, p. 79) might be compromised by the manner in which I construct verbatim subjects in the dramaturgy of the playtext.<sup>33</sup>

Within applied theatre and verbatim plays based on trauma-related testimonies the process by which audiences are encouraged to identify with verbatim subjects stories has proven problematic.<sup>34</sup> Wendy S. Hesford questions the ability of verbatim theatre to incite political action beyond theatre walls. Drawing on Susan Sontag’s (2003) critique of sympathy in relation to war imagery, Hesford (2010) surmises that “[i]dentification, like compassion, is an unstable rhetorical stance that can function as an alibi for *lack* of action” (p. 55). In short, as long as audiences are encouraged to sympathise uncritically with the suffering of others exhibited in performance, verbatim plays will fail to incite political action or self-reflection. This problem of identification will be a critical issue explored in Chapters 2, 3 and 6 as a key challenge that concerns my creative practice is how I can effectively convey the experiences of verbatim subjects beyond limiting frames of sympathy and sameness. Considering how trauma and testimony are framed in my practice, and the intended effects and limitations of my interpretations is critical, particularly as I am calling upon verbatim subjects to account for war-related experiences.

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<sup>33</sup> The crisis of self and otherness proposed in Nicholson’s reading of Freud in Brecht is recognisable in Adrianna Cavarero’s (2000) argument regarding the empathetic trap in which “the constitution of a self that metabolises the story of the other,” a concern even more urgent when the subject who is telling their story often “belongs to the ranks of the oppressed” (p. 91).

<sup>34</sup> Helen Nicholson (2014) uses the term ‘applied theatre’ in order “to conceptualise theatre-making in educational, therapeutic or community settings rather than to define specific methodologies, dramatic strategies or ways of writing” (p. 6).

The framing of subjects in verbatim plays can also reveal biases and false forms of identification. Jenny Hughes (2011) argues that verbatim plays tend to mobilise “mimetic identifications that rest on sameness rather than difference...” promoting a privileged frame for the audiences to view (p. 93). To return to Nicholson’s forms of identification, verbatim plays tend to encourage more solipsistic manifestations of primary identification, rather than fostering connections between audiences, performers and verbatim subjects based on “a respect for difference” (Ridout, 2009, p. 54). To illustrate this, Hughes (2011) critiques Alan Rickman and Katherine Viner’s play *My Name is Rachel Corrie* (2005). She questions the playwrights’ use of Rachel Corrie’s story, a liberal American activist bulldozed by Israeli soldiers when defending a Palestinian family’s home, over the experience of a woman from Gaza (p. 113).<sup>35</sup> Hughes’ argument is that the process of identification within many verbatim plays promotes a sense of sameness rather than a decentring sense of self where an awareness of the other might be recognised by making less familiar voices more empathetic (p. 113).<sup>36</sup>

Both Nicholson’s and Hughes’ analyses of identification in performance reveal the political and psychoanalytic implications raising questions about how theatre practitioners of verbatim and community-based practices might select material and employ aesthetics to generate empathy that can encourage reductive modes of identification, no matter how well-intentioned the practitioners. These types of identification are also relevant to the interview setting in verbatim practice. Monitoring and reflecting on the playwright’s preconceptions, dramatic considerations and emotional responses to the testimony of verbatim subjects throughout the interview process is a key part of this investigation in an effort to ascertain my responsibilities as a verbatim playwright. Therefore, I consider the relationships between myself and verbatim subjects affected by militarism (such as combat veterans and bereaved families) throughout my creative process. I consider how I identify with the stories disclosed to me in the interview process, vigilant of how these interactions shape my approach to writing verbatim playtexts. Furthermore, I consider how I anticipate prospective audiences might respond to my interpretation of war-related testimony.

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<sup>35</sup> The privileging of the familiar in verbatim theatre, is indicative of a wider problem that Jill Bennett has identified in the post 9/11 media whereby certain cultural identities are asymmetrically mediated and prioritised (Jill Bennett in Greenberg, 2003, p. 134).

<sup>36</sup> Hughes (2011) concludes in her analysis of the three plays that “The *other* of the exception emerges within the frame of the familiar and comfortable and is rarely permitted to disturb those frames” (p. 113).

## **Examining the Role of the Playwright Through Practice**

While verbatim and documentary plays continue to present the personal narratives of those affected by acts of war, the circumstances in which these testimonies (some of which detail acts of violence) are collected and how the playwright negotiates theatrical language in their interpretation involves an ethical responsibility to the verbatim subjects and audiences. The complex relationship between testimony and theatre, and how theatre practitioners integrate and shape the words of others who testify to acts of violence requires further investigation.

Exploring the key issues that arise during the verbatim playwriting process can make visible the tensions that come to the fore when appropriating the life stories for performance, and can complicate the casually circulated “voice to the voiceless” (Hare in Soans, 2005b, p. 112) rhetoric often attributed to verbatim theatre. The value of critical reflections through practice and analysis of the triangulation between the playwrights’ intentions, the relationship between the playwright and interviewees, and the aesthetic considerations for the audience affords new insights regarding the ethics and dramaturgy of verbatim theatre.

In light of the debates regarding the role of the playwright in relation to representation (authenticity and mediation), proximity (the distance and relationship with verbatim subjects) and trauma (bearing witness and identification) previously discussed, I examine and develop my own approach to practice-as-research in Chapter 2 as a means of exploring these debates through the interview, writing and performance stages of my verbatim practice. What follows is an appraisal of my initial working process in verbatim theatre and an overview of different methods and approaches employed by verbatim playwrights and researchers, whereby I develop my PaR methodology to investigate my role and responsibility as a verbatim playwright.

## Chapter Two: Adopting a Practice-as-Research Methodology and the Role of the Playwright in Contemporary Verbatim Theatre

### Introduction: Methodologies

In order to enhance my critical understanding of how I, as a playwright, engage with verbatim subjects and interpret narratives of conflict, I adopt a practice-as-research framework to articulate the ethical issues and aesthetic concerns that emerge in my creative practice. Practitioners of verbatim theatre over the years have indeed written about their practice (including Alecky Blythe, Robin Soans and David Hare) (see Hammond & Steward, 2008), providing valuable insights into their distinctive approaches adapting testimony into playtexts. However, what distinguishes the practice-as-research methodology from simply writing about practice is that the application of the PaR framework allows me to identify key issues encountered throughout my process. This includes thinking through the negotiations with verbatim subjects as they occur during the interview process, and addressing the ethical and aesthetic issues that arise during the composition of the playtext. What is more, scholarly debates both aid my practice and help contextualise my findings. As my aim is to identify the responsibilities of theatre practitioners adapting trauma-related testimony, the PaR methodology provides opportunities for studio-practice to examine my role as a verbatim playwright. What follows is a reflection on my previous practice writing the play *The Kratos Effect*, an overview of the PaR methodology, and how I position myself within other PaR research models and verbatim playwrights' methods. From this vantage point, I establish my research questions and the design of my PaR projects for this investigation.

Adopting a PaR methodology, I present two verbatim play projects as case studies in order to analyse my role as an interviewer and playwright adapting the words of others for the composition of playtexts. The first PaR case study revisits my role as a researcher and co-writer shaping testimony from those affected by the police shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes at Stockwell Underground station in July 2005 and writing a verbatim play, including accounts from human rights lawyers, activists, senior police officers and the Menezes family. The second PaR case study concentrates on recording and dramatising the perspectives of American combat veterans returned from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Comparatively speaking, the events of the Menezes shooting

and the return of deployed US soldiers are seemingly disparate subjects, but their commonality lies within the effects of everyday militarism heightened in the aftermath of 9/11 and the 7/7 bombings and their effects on ordinary lives. In addition, the experiential part of this study addresses themes of everyday militarism, which Michael Mann (1987) defines “as a set of attitudes and social practices which regards the preparation for war as a normal and desirable social activity” (p. 35). Engaging with personal testimonies from those affected by contemporary warfare through verbatim playwriting, the verbatim plays produced as part of this study aim to disrupt civilians’ everyday fascination with displays of military power, acts which now appear so ordinary and benign they are intertwined into our “leisure experiences” (p. 248).

Moreover, this PaR-led research concentrates on the responsibilities of the playwright engaging in verbatim practice, including issues of aestheticising testimony in the dramaturgy of the playtext, mediating narratives of trauma, and the methodologies of playwrights working with testimony as part of the playwriting process. These two PaR projects endeavour to relay – through documentation and critical reflection – the challenges and possibilities of aestheticising interviewees’ personal accounts in the dramaturgy of the playtext.

### **PaR Starting Points: *The Kratos Effect* as a Pilot Project**

In the autumn of 2007 I began working as an assistant director on Upstart Theatre Company’s series of workshops entitled ‘The July 22<sup>nd</sup> Project’ about the shooting of the Brazilian national Jean Charles de Menezes, which were held at the Ovalhouse Theatre in Stockwell.<sup>37</sup> The series of workshops with actors under the direction of artistic director Tom Mansfield were designed to devise short pieces in preparation for the third anniversary of the Stockwell Shooting in 2008. Mansfield recruited me to assist him on the workshops because I had recently completed an MA in Drama at Goldsmiths and had written my dissertation on the verbatim practice of the

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<sup>37</sup> The ‘July 22<sup>nd</sup> Project’ was founded by Tom Mansfield, artistic director of Upstart Theatre. In 2006 Mansfield started auditioning actors for a series of workshops to devise artistic responses to the Menezes case. On Upstart Theatre’s website under the ‘July 22<sup>nd</sup> Project’ blog, Tom Mansfield (2006) writes: “Why does the world need a play about the death of Jean Charles de Menezes? I’ve always believed that a theatre is a place where people come together to talk about ideas, hopes, fears—the things that penetrate through to the life of a community [...] the range of opinion unleashed about Jean’s death has been so incredibly broad—from seeing him as a victim of governmental oppression to the idea he somehow ‘deserved it’ because he’s overstayed his visa. What’s the truth if that’s something we can know?” (Mansfield, 2006).

playwright Robin Soans. Though I had a keen interest in verbatim theatre, my prior knowledge of the Menezes' case was thin.

At the time of the shooting I was a visiting student studying in London for the summer of 2005. Throughout the short six-week program I was in the capital during the announcement of the Olympics, the chaos of the London bombings, the second terrorist attempt on London Transport and the Stockwell shooting. I was aware of the Menezes case but my memory of how the event transpired reflected the initial media reports that Menezes had been running from police, jumping the ticket barrier at Stockwell station and had foolishly resisted arrest, after which he was subsequently shot. In my recollection of events, Menezes ran from police during a time of heightened vigilance and general anxiety two weeks after the London bombings. Just the day before Menezes was shot and killed on July 22, 2005, a second attempt to bomb London Transport failed. It was at the first workshop with Upstart Theatre Company, reviewing articles and online reports with actors from *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph* and the BBC News website when I learned that, contrary to the initial reports, Menezes had not been wearing a padded jacket and was not carrying a rucksack at the time, nor did he run from police. I was surprised and saddened upon viewing the CCTV footage that showed Menezes walking calmly through the entrance hall of Stockwell station with a free copy of *The Metro* in hand and using his Oyster card to enter the ticket barriers to make his way to the descending escalators towards the tube carriage.

Through my participation in the 'July 22<sup>nd</sup> Project' workshops I was forced to confront my complacent attitude regarding the police response to the Menezes case and I felt that many others in London shared a similar perception of the event, carrying misconceptions of the Menezes case that required probing. The goal of the workshops was twofold, to develop work to "set the record straight" regarding systemic misreporting and the circumstances of Menezes' death but also to prompt audience questions such as how do we enact and respond to acts of violence? (Beck, 2014; Forsyth & Stuart-Fisher, 2014). Working with actors once a week for six weeks at the Ovalhouse Theatre, we began devising scenes around the London bombings and the Stockwell shooting.

In the months leading to the third anniversary performance of the 'July 22<sup>nd</sup> Project' at The Cavendish in Stockwell, director Tom Mansfield asked me to write a play based on the material we as a company had gathered from interviews with people

affected by the shooting.<sup>38</sup> I entitled the play *The Kratos Effect* named after the shoot-to-kill policy known as Operation Kratos.<sup>39</sup> The play revolved around the experiences of strangers who never knew Jean Charles de Menezes but whose lives were affected by his death. Though I had knowledge of the verbatim process, I had never before written a play using subjects' accounts and was both intrigued and sceptical about the processes of encountering subjects and using their testimony for the genesis of a verbatim play.

During the workshops Tom Mansfield arranged interviews with the local shrinekeepers who changed the flowers left at the memorial to Menezes at Stockwell tube station every Friday.<sup>40</sup> On a given Friday morning in 2007, the actors, Mansfield and myself went to the memorial outside Stockwell station to interview Chrysoulla, a Greek woman and local to the area and Mary, the co-founder of the shrine, political activist and local artist.<sup>41</sup> Several months later I went with Mansfield and a small group of actors to interview Asad, a spokesperson for the Justice 4 Jean campaign who had experience with deaths in police custody and was a general organiser of the Stop the War Coalition at the time. All three interviewees offered candid personal experiences in response to the case, which in my view humanised the Stockwell shooting. These narratives – if circulated in different forms – had, in my view, the capacity to challenge public perceptions about the Menezes case.

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<sup>38</sup> The anniversary performance included a rehearsed reading of my short verbatim play *The Kratos Effect* (2008) and fellow playwright Steven Lally's scratch piece *Oh Well Never Mind Bye*, a fictional piece about the politics of the press in the wake of the Menezes shooting which had a four-week run at the Union Theatre in the spring of 2009. For more information on the projects see the Upstart Theatre website that also contains archive material: <http://www.upstart-theatre.co.uk/notes-from-the-rehearsal-room/> (Mansfield, 2008).

<sup>39</sup> 'Kratos' alludes to the shoot-to-kill policy Operation Kratos as well as the word for Greek tragedy and 'Effect' reflects the ripple effect of the shooting and how Jean Charles de Menezes impacted on the lives of strangers he never knew.

<sup>40</sup> For the purpose of the project I refer to the women who tended to the shrine at Stockwell station every Friday as 'shrinekeepers'. The shrine at Stockwell has since been replaced by a permanent mosaic in honour of Jean Charles de Menezes.

<sup>41</sup> The shrine was mounted outside of Stockwell station shortly after the shooting and was later replaced by a mosaic plaque of Jean Charles de Menezes made by Mary, Chrysoulla and Jean Charles de Menezes' cousin Vivian. The former was made of plywood, with a variety of posted newspapers, political cartoons, personal letters and postcards addressed to Menezes from around the world. At the shrine's epicentre was a wooden box containing a tray of candles, mosaic tiles and a painted Brazilian flag framing an image of Jean Charles de Menezes smiling. A group of local women who commissioned the building of the shrine tended to its maintenance every Friday, replacing flowers, laminating and posting letters left by visitors, and cleaning up after the occasional vandal.

## **Writing *The Kratos Effect*: Methods and Approach**

During the writing process I concentrated on themes of memory within the Jean Charles de Menezes case. Chrysoulla's character represented a religious perspective, emphasising the spiritual vitality of memory, while Asad and Mary's testimonies represented the political importance of remembering the Menezes shooting. Tending to the shrine every Friday to replace the flowers, Chrysoulla distanced herself from politics, yet her weekly acts – such as posting newspaper articles that detailed the misinformation about the shooting and stapling letters to Menezes to the shrine as well as changing flowers left by the occasional passersby – were inherently political. Mary, in contrast to Chrysoulla, is a self-declared political activist. Originally from South Africa, Mary, who is white, became politicised during the Apartheid era, where she was imprisoned with her mixed-race child. Mary views the shrine as a site of remembrance and protest, raising awareness about police misconduct, corruption and the everyday militarism in the UK in the wake of 9/11. Asad's perspective on the Menezes case focused on the wider problem of deaths in police custody and the police mishandling of these investigations. The play integrated these three perspectives and emphasised the word-for-word emulation of the interview material. My aim was to achieve verisimilitude—"the appearance of truth" (Stucky, 1993, p. 170), by attempting to create the most precise replication of the intonations of each interviewee in the transcription process, encouraging actors to achieve the most exact representation of the words spoken as possible through the composition of the text. I had adopted what I believed at the time to be the puritanical approach, meaning I had tried not to alter the intended meaning of the spoken testimony within the editing process, thereby avoiding mediation that would risk distorting the context of the original message of the verbatim subjects. This approach seemed appropriate when I was composing the script, but proved problematic at a later stage of the project as I will go on to explain.

Transcribing the recording with Chrysoulla and Asad, I listened several times to each interview stopping every few seconds to transcribe. Through careful listening I used punctuation to capture each intonation, and replicate each "erm", hesitation, pause and stutter in the transcription phase. The goal was to achieve the most accurate transcript possible. When compiling scenes any significant passage where dialogue was spliced or reconfigured would be marked with an ellipsis to signify cuts. However, in



rehearsal these indications proved confusing and disruptive for actors' attempts to find a rhythm for the speech.

My presence as a playwright was critical in developing the play. Two of the interviews I conducted with Asad and Chrysoulla were recorded on digital devices. At the start of both interviews I asked permission to record the material, explaining that it may be used directly in a play. While conducting the interviews at the shrine, Mansfield and other actors interviewed Mary as another group of actors and me interviewed Chrysoulla. Afterwards, Mansfield provided me with notes documenting Mary's account. Without knowing what questions had been asked of Mary, or having a clear understanding of the context in which she delivered her words, I proceeded to draw conclusions on what seemed the most important aspects of Mary's story. I framed Mary's testimony in the play in order to convey a message of political activism.

As I explained in the introduction, Mary's reaction to my representation of her story in *The Kratos Effect* required me to reflect on my uncritical approach to my framing of her testimony. My encounter with Mary after the performance also highlighted the disadvantages of not having a relationship with her as a verbatim subject prior to the writing process. In the aftermath of this project I was concerned with how my preconceived ideas about Mary and my framing of her story proved inadequate. This lack of reflexivity was also emphasised by my intention to replicate the exactness of language in the writing process. I began contemplating what dramaturgical strategies might be more suitable for representing Mary's story and the stories of other verbatim subjects. In response to this encounter, I decided to conduct two more full-length interviews with Mary to rectify the issue. The additional face-to-face interviews with Mary conducted at her home helped provide a personal context for her testimony that assisted me in composing a more complex representation in the later drafts of *The Kratos Effect*. I was surprised how open and willing Mary was to entrust me with her testimony, after having had an uncomfortable experience the first time around. The later version of *The Kratos Effect* performed at The Bike Shed in 2011 explored other aspects of Mary's experience in addition to her activism.

This encounter was a significant introduction to the problems of mediating the stories of others without having face-to-face interactions first in order to appreciate the context in which words were spoken. At the time of the project, I was inexperienced in researching and composing verbatim plays. The experience illustrated both a naivety in my approach, the limitations of purporting realism (Bottoms, 2006), as well as an

urgency to understand more clearly the problems that emerge when trying to shape personal testimony into a play. The experience made me want to understand more clearly the dramaturgical strategies employed in the composition of the text and how to approach the narratives of others more effectively in the creation of a verbatim play.

### **Vocabulary: Defining Terms through *The Kratos Effect***

The following section briefly introduces the conceptual language required for the primary writing techniques I have utilised and defined within my verbatim playwriting practice. Using examples from *The Kratos Effect*, I define and illustrate the key terms that characterise my approach to verbatim dramaturgy, including interweaving, intercutting and secondary dialogue.<sup>42</sup>

Interweaving involves looking for patterns and commonalities in the interview transcripts, as well as locating and tagging thematic parallels between narratives. Interweaving involves the thematic or temporal plotting of testimony. For example, in the case of *The Kratos Effect* this would include: the founding of the shrine; the forty-eight hours after the shooting; roots in political activism; and the future of the Menezes case. For example, the thematic plotting of the roots of political activism was generated from Asad's discussion of growing up as a young Asian man in Burnley and surmounting everyday racism had politicised him, paralleling Mary's story of her imprisonment in South Africa during Apartheid. The temporal plotting would include a timeframe of where each interviewee was when they first heard about the Stockwell shooting or attended the shrine for the first time. Once I consolidated thematic links through the interweaving process the transcript material was intercut to generate scenes:

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<sup>42</sup> This is the vocabulary I adopt to articulate particular techniques I employ in my individual practice as part of a growing lexicon as I become more self-reflexive in my practice. I recognise that other practitioners may use other terms with similar meanings to articulate their processes.

**Script Excerpt No. 2.1** *The Kratos Effect*

MARY: I've seen it in South Africa where I come from. And how they use the whole concept of anti-terror to control people's political awareness...so that you make people – you create the other. You create the – the other that people feel scared of.

ASAD: I grew up in Burnley, a shitty little town with a lot of racism and when you're young you know that's what motivates me.

MARY: I was an activist in South Africa. I was in prison there.

ASAD: Your house is attacked by racists, you ring the police, the police don't come.

MARY: I was accused of terrorism, and communism. I supported the ANC but I wasn't a member. I was with my daughter who was from a mixed relationship. That was illegal at the time.

ASAD: You know you see that happening to you. Your house is daubed with swastikas everyday, your mother is scared to go out...

MARY: When they found us in a house they arrested us...I was in solitary confinement with my daughter who was nearly a year old...a concrete cell with a concrete bed, bread pushed through the grill. 'Here, terrorist, eat'.

Intercutting involves splicing testimonial monologues together after interweaving monologues. Here, I make cuts through the monologues to create a clearer story. For instance, in *The Kratos Effect* after interweaving elements of Asad, Mary and Chrysoulla's transcripts I wrote the heading 'Recollecting the Event', grouping testimony which conveyed where each interviewee was and what they were thinking when they heard the announcement that a man had been shot at Stockwell tube station. The fragments of testimony were intercut into dialogue to convey the unfolding of the Menezes shooting:

**Script Excerpt No. 2.2** *The Kratos Effect*

MARY: ...After...this happened...immediately I heard that someone'd been shot dead here, for jumping down the barrier and running downstairs, I thought that – my son is 23.

ASAD: ...I think personally, they were working on the basis that these are immigrants...they're not English...at that point apart from Alex, Patricia and Alessandro barely spoke English at that time. You know they wouldn't know what to do. And those first few hours are very crucial.

CHRYSOULLA: Mary lives around the corner...She said to me I had to check and see if my son was okay. When they said someone was shot she immediately thought it would be him.

ASAD: What happened is Alex left...the autopsy...he rang a friend of his...and obviously by then people knew that Jean had...the friend said 'Look, you sound like you need some help. I know somebody else who is a friend of somebody else who does that sort of thing'. So via that I got a call...

CHRYSOULLA: To be honest, when I first heard that someone was shot dead by the police. Oops. They found a terrorist! They killed one person and they saved 200 people. And I thought, unfortunately it had to be done. That was on Saturday morning.

ASAD: I can remember I was walking down Oxford Street, it was on a Saturday...I got a call from this guy, saying, you know, what should I do and I said, well this is my advice, you need a lawyer, you need the best lawyer. So I rang Gareth and we went straight down to the hotel and Gareth went to the hotel and talked to the family. Most police officers know Gareth Pierce, a big human rights and civil liberties lawyer... got the telephone line, got a telephone and really changed that situation. And immediately the family had legal representation.

CHRYSOULLA: Then Sunday morning I was listening to BBC News and they said he was Brazilian. The moment they said he was...because I thought he was a terrorist...when they said he was Brazilian I thought, my god, they don't have to tell me he's innocent...

MARY: He's – he's Jean Charles' colouring – brown hair and taller and everything, but I thought – that could, that could've been him because, he was when they were teenagers they'd jump over – if they wanted to get from here to Brixton and they didn't have money or whatever just – you know teenage boys.

Secondary dialogue involves generating dialogue from one monologue. This involves working against temporal constraints in verbatim theatre. If one person's testimony involves quotes from the words of others, this can be used as a device to create a duologue or group scene. As I had interwoven parts of the transcript that placed Mary and Chrysoulla at the shrine upon their first meeting, through the intercutting of testimony my aim was to illustrate how Chrysoulla and Mary as strangers came to know each other and subsequently began to work together. Therefore, secondary dialogue became a technique that placed the characters in a more intimate and shared space in the play. For instance, in the later draft of *The Kratos Effect* (2011) performed at The Bike Shed Theatre in Exeter, I reshaped Chrysoulla's former monologue as a duologue, in order to integrate Mary into the scene. This was Chrysoulla's monologue from the original script which provided quotes for Mary:

**Script Excerpt No. 2.3** *The Kratos Effect*

CHRYSOULLA: Mary is the lady who helps here...and she saw me...I was putting this up...Mary stopped behind me and said, 'Hi, my name's Mary. Would you like to join us? We come every Friday'. And I said, 'I'd love to join you'. So I started doing that. It was exactly two years ago. It was Friday the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2005. It's exactly two years I've been coming every Friday.

For the later draft of *The Kratos Effect* (2011) for The Bike Shed Theatre production Chrysoulla's monologue was crafted into a duologue to include Mary:

**Script Excerpt No. 2.4** *The Kratos Effect*

CHRYSOULLA: Mary is the lady who helps here, and, she saw me. I was putting this up. Mary stopped me and said...

MARY: Hi. My name's Mary. Would you like to join us?

CHRYSOULLA: So I started doing that two years ago...



**Fig. 1** Rose Romain as Chrysoulla in *The Kratos Effect* (2011). Photo by Benjamin J. Borley.

Another key technique employed in *The Kratos Effect* is repetition as a rhetorical strategy. Four times in the original script Chrysoulla says “keep the flame alive” in English and twice in Portuguese “*mantana chama viva*”. This double meaning was central to the story, referring to the literal flame of the candle placed in the shrine that

burned beneath the photo of Jean Charles de Menezes, and metaphorically as the rising flame connotes the need both for social justice and to keep the memory of Jean Charles de Menezes alive. “Keep the flame alive” was used to close the play as an ethical call to the audience. These terms are significant to my research inquiry as they help articulate the techniques utilised in my writing process. Furthermore, this PaR thesis reflects on how relationships with interviewees are considered within the process of interweaving, intercutting and the construction of secondary dialogue within different scenes in the playtext.

### **Adopting a Practice-as-Research Methodology: The Performance Praxis Model**

Adopting a practice-as-research (PaR) methodology is a vital framework for effectively engaging in the interaction between the agency of the playwright and the methods employed within the recording and shaping of war-related personal testimonies in verbatim practice. Underpinning this dissertation’s PaR methodology is Robin Nelson’s performance praxis model. Nelson (2013) contends that theory is “imbricated within practice” (p. 33) and thus offers the performance praxis model as a means of mobilising practitioners-as-researchers to produce knowledge through and in reflection of studio-practice (p. 37). This knowledge, when situated within a broader field, in Nelson’s view, has the capacity to enrich a theoretical understanding of the practitioner’s process.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, for the purposes of this dissertation I adopt Nelson’s model, which entails a dialogical relationship between the “know-how, know-what and know-that” in order to examine the agency of the playwright in verbatim theatre through studio-practice (Nelson, 2013, p. 65).<sup>44</sup>

This performance praxis model helps to frame the triangular relationship between my prior experience in verbatim practice, my role as a playwright and practitioner-researcher shaping personal testimony based on conflict, and how my practice interacts with wider debates in theatre studies. More specifically, this

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<sup>43</sup> In *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen*, Ludivine Allegue et al. (eds.) (2009) assert that: “The task of addressing ethical issues across performance practices most widely is made easier by rich discussion of ethics in documentary film and community arts. A wider debate of these issues might be initiated by the proposal to apply, within the performing arts disciplines, the principles that have informed documentary film and community arts practices. The status of practice-as-research would benefit from this debate, as it frequently addresses issues of social inequality and injustice, and promotes empathy, understanding and tolerance in, and through, creative practice” (p. 80).

<sup>44</sup> For a clear visual diagram of Nelson’s (2013) performance praxis model see his book *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistance* (p. 37).

triangulation delineates the main through lines of this inquiry: the agency of the playwright, mediating war-related personal testimony, and the dramaturgy of verbatim plays. While each component (the “know how,” the “know what” and the “know that”) of the performance praxis model are introduced consecutively in this section, it is important to reiterate that these three elements need to be equally interacting with one another throughout this PaR study. This means that my creative work needs to be informed by a critical understanding of the debates in the wider field of theatre studies to enhance intelligent practice (Nelson, 2013, p. 65). But also, because my creative work may produce new insights into verbatim playwriting, these findings need to be critically analysed and situated within the wider field of theatre studies.

I approach this investigation as a playwright with experience in verbatim practice having written the *The Kratos Effect*. This expertise constitutes the “know-how” component of the performance praxis model, as I enter the field with prior knowledge of the process involved in making verbatim theatre. This ‘tacit’ knowledge becomes ‘transformative’ through the ‘know-what’ process, which involves the meticulous documentation of studio-practice and critical writing to articulate the procedures and findings of case studies (Nelson, 2013, p. 29).<sup>45</sup> Nelson (2013) refers to this process as the ‘doing-thinking’ which includes critical reflection on how I, as a practitioner-researcher, record and adapt particular narratives of trauma for the compilation of a verbatim playtext (p. 29).<sup>46</sup> Therefore, I propose two practice-as-research-led projects as case studies to document the dramaturgy of verbatim plays, which in turn aids the process of generating ‘transformative’ knowledge (Nelson, 2013a, p. 29). The first case study reassesses the research, writing and performance stages of my practice as a researcher and playwright co-creating *This Much is True*, while also drawing on my archive of the play’s creation as evidence for critical reflection. The findings from this first study produce questions that in turn inform the following case study, which explores the dramaturgy of the verbatim playtext *Yardbird*, based on US soldiers’ narratives of war.

This PaR investigation also incorporates what Borgdorff (2012) calls “artistic processes or products [as the] indispensable component[s]” (pp. 24-25) of the research,

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<sup>45</sup> Henk Borgdorff (2012), not unlike Nelson, recommends “extending from abstract knowledge to instrumental knowledge” (p. 24).

<sup>46</sup> Borgdorff (2012) reflects on the value of practice-as-research when artistic expertise – or ‘tacit knowledge’ as Nelson (2013) suggests – is transformed through critical writing and analysis of practical projects, documentation and extensive self-reflection to corroborate one’s impact.



including excerpts from the verbatim play *This Much is True* and a full-length verbatim playtext based on interviews with US soldiers.<sup>47</sup> Also key to the ‘know-what’ component is critical writing, which I employ as a tool to help when reflecting on the ‘doing-thinking’ both writing within and as a response to the outcomes of each case study. The purpose of the critical writing is for the “articulating and evidencing of the research inquiry” (A. R. Brown & Sorensen, 2009; Nelson, 2013b, p. 36).<sup>48</sup> Critical writing aids my understanding of the aesthetic and ethical tensions that emerge when mediating trauma-related narratives within each case study.

Documentation is vital to the ‘know what’ element of the performance praxis model to capture and provide evidence for reflection on the meaning-making processes that emerge within studio-practice. Documentation for this PaR dissertation is multi-modal, taking the following forms: writing field notes within the interview process with verbatim subjects; recording the correspondence with interviewees and collaborators; the transcription of interviews; note-taking throughout the composition of scenes writing play drafts; taking notes in rehearsals; the recording of interviews with actors and audience members; as well as digital video recordings of the rehearsed readings. More specifically, I draw on edited notebook entries indicated in italics in each case study to highlight my initial subjective responses to interviewees’ experiences in the interview process. For example, in the case of meeting Chrysoulla, I documented:

**Box 2.1**

*Chrysoulla’s draw to the shrine is, in her view, a religious calling. She is uncomfortable discussing the legalities of the case, the fight for justice—almost reluctant to engage in the politics surrounding Jean’s killing. At the same time she is incredibly engaged with the spiritual aspect of the shrine and the need to pray for Jean. Despite her tendency to shy away from politics, her routine stop at the shrine every Friday—placing articles and pictures on the wall and lighting candles beneath Jean’s picture—is both a kind of ritual and a political act.*

In addition, I integrate excerpts from the scripts (as presented earlier) as aids to help explain the writing process more clearly. Documentation is used to help ‘iterate’ the roles I adopt as a researcher-playwright.

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<sup>47</sup> In the PaR framework, evidence of creative practice in the form of scripts and productions are the “indispensable component” of the research (Borgdorff, 2012, pp. 24-25).

<sup>48</sup> Andrew R. Brown and Andrew Sorenson (2009) also emphasise the need for artists to reflect critically on their practice: “[I]t is common for arts practitioners to have significant knowledge without necessarily being able to adequately describe that knowledge [...] in order to make this personal knowledge more generally useful a process of reflection and contextualization is often required” (pp. 162-163).

The ‘know-that’ element of the performance praxis model includes my understanding of – and engagement with – scholarly debates and practitioners’ approaches within the field of verbatim and community-based practices.<sup>49</sup> This involves situating my work within the wider field of theatre studies and to some extent trauma studies.<sup>50</sup> The effectiveness of the ‘performance praxis’ model hinges on a clear research inquiry and a strong conceptual framework, thus the knowledge of both practitioners and theatre scholars working within the field is considered throughout my practice (Nelson, 2013).<sup>51</sup> Many of the key themes and debates raised in Chapter 1, such as the tensions involved in aestheticising real stories in verbatim practice as well as those affecting expressing trauma and conflict in performance, is considered within each case study. In turn, the outcomes of these case studies produces “key resonances” within these debates (A. R. Brown & Sorensen, 2009; Nelson, 2013, p. 29). The result of these overlapping aspects of the performance praxis model when applied to my case studies culminates in a “convergence of evidence” that has the potential to elevate creative practice through critical thinking to “intelligent practice” (Nelson, 2013, p. 65).

### **Organising PaR Case Studies: Critical Writing and Reflection**

While Nelson’s performance praxis model provides structure to the overall methodology of this investigation, I apply Baz Kershaw’s (2011) five overlapping aspects of theatre and performance within practice-as-research as an organising principle for the critical writing component of each case study. Kershaw (2011) identifies five essential requirements for effectively evaluating the PaR project in performance research:

To narrow my case-study focus I rule in five aspects of theatre and performance that together may be minimal constituents of PaR, i.e. take any one of them away and it disappears or becomes something else. They are:

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<sup>49</sup> Part of the ‘know that’ also includes my participation as an active spectator watching various forms of documentary, verbatim and community-based plays as well as fiction, which in turn informs my studio-practice.

<sup>50</sup> For a comprehensive overview of research and methods in oral history performance see D. Soyini Madison’s *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics and Performance* (2012) and Della Pollock’s edited collection of oral historians’ and theatre practitioners’ work *Remembering: Oral History Performance* (2005), of which are used in Chapters 3 and 6 (Madison, 2012; Pollock, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Similar to Nelson’s assertion, Borgdorff (2012) asserts that the practitioner-turned-researcher is “obligated to the research community to situate each study in a broader research context and elucidate both the process and the outcome in accordance with customary standards” (p. 25).

Starting Points, Aesthetics, Locations, Transmissions and Key Issues (p. 64).<sup>52</sup>

At this point I want to clarify how Kershaw's principles operate in my work.<sup>53</sup> Each case study in accordance with Kershaw's framework begins with one or more starting points. For example, one central starting point for this inquiry began with the creation of *The Kratos Effect*. Reflecting on this project I became curious about the complexity of the social processes involved in verbatim practice, in particular the manner in which playwrights "engage epistemically" (Radosavljevic, 2013, p. 137) with subjects affected by trauma, and how these relationships are factored in within the dramaturgy of a verbatim play.<sup>54</sup>

The process of framing aesthetics within these case studies includes the various techniques and dramaturgical strategies employed in the writing of each case study, such as how personal testimony is assembled, rearranged and shaped within scenes. Articulating the aesthetics within the dramaturgy of the interview and the composition of the playtext clarifies both my research methods as well as my position as a playwright in relation to the verbatim subjects, the recorded material, as well as the future audience. Location frames both the geographical environment for which the interviews take place and my proximity to the verbatim subjects throughout the writing process. Kershaw's transmissions include both evidence of the practice and critical writing as reflection in order to articulate the research inquiry. Transmissions are explored throughout the case studies in the form of excerpts from my verbatim plays, the DVD recordings of rehearsed readings, as well as within the process of writing about the practice.

The key issues guiding my inquiry are the challenges that emerge for the playwright negotiating relationships with subjects and mediating the narratives of others

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<sup>52</sup> Kershaw explains the importance of building on outcomes from project-to-project: "[W]hatever the project topic, PaR research engages specific aspects of theatre and performance as innovative process; but even so a tighter focus of analysis is required to make useful comparisons between different projects" (Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011, p. 64).

<sup>53</sup> Illustrating how Kershaw's 'minimal constituents' operate in practice-as-research, theatre practitioners Lee Miller and Joanne 'Bob' Whalley reflect on the methodology they used when developing their performance *Partly Cloudy, Chance of Rain* (2002) (Whalley & Miller in Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011, pp. 69-71). Whalley and Miller's project involved turning the location of a motorway service station away from a transient 'non-place' to a place of meaning or a 'real place' through a series of experiments, such as staging a performance of multiple weddings, exchanging narratives with various truck drivers and replacing discarded bottles of urine with personal 'gifts' as an exchange (Whalley & Miller in Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011, pp. 69-71).

<sup>54</sup> The exploration of the archive of my collaboration when writing *This Much is True* raises further questions about aestheticising trauma and cultural memory, which also operates as a starting point for the research and creation process of *Yardbird*.

throughout the dramaturgy of verbatim playtexts. Thus, the key issues that are identified when mediating personal testimony in the making of *This Much is True* and the questions these issues raised inform my approach within the dramaturgy of the playtext based on interviews with US soldiers. Overall, Kershaw's principles aid in focusing on the meaning-making processes within my praxis and helps to articulate the outcomes of each case study within this PaR-led thesis.

### **PaR Investigations in Documentary Practice**

Situating my PaR project design within the wider field of documentary practice, I consider three PaR models that aid my approaches to developing each case study. The first model is playwright Helena Enright's PaR-led investigation into the writing and staging of theatre of testimony (Enright, 2011).<sup>55</sup> Enright's work incorporates three playtexts, including *Walking Away* based on interviews with survivors of domestic violence, *Under Pressure* about road-safety based on interviews with the bereaved parents and friends of a young man killed in an automobile accident (inspired by a Theatre-In-Education model), and a third fictional play *Aquéro* (deviating from an interview-based practice). Enright provides a clear framework for organising the writing of case studies by integrating each play into individual chapters where the process is further contextualised through critical writing and reflection on each project. Adopting a similar organisational approach to Enright, I include both the full playtext of *Yardbird* and excerpts from *This Much is True* as evidence of practice using critical writing to reflect on the different approaches and theoretical models within each case study.

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<sup>55</sup> Playwright Helena Enright has been both an influence and advisor on several of my verbatim plays, but our positions as playwrights diverge slightly in terms of how we engage with personal testimony. It is important to note that Enright (2001) prefers the term 'theatre of testimony' to the more commonly used 'verbatim theatre' as former term "provides more of a sense of where, how and why the words originated [and] allows for more creative space in regard to interpretation," thereby working to maintain the "narrative essence" of the testimony, whereas for Enright the latter has connotations of 'word-for-word' or 'truth claim' (pp. 43, 263). In my own work I distance myself from claiming that I maintain the 'narrative essence' of interviewees' accounts as it risks negating the complexity of the social processes at work (problems of bias, location, ownership, critical distances) mediating plays from narratives of trauma. While I use the term 'verbatim' to emphasise that the origin of my work involves engagement with interviewees as the key practice for generating material for the play's dramaturgy, I do not consider the phrase in this context to constitute a truth claim but rather a method for fostering new social histories (Thompson, 2000) to be interpreted and performed for an audiences' consideration. Enright aims to explore more intimate encounters with interviewees through storytelling, more so than to generate a multitude of alternative narratives to investigate political events, the latter being a key function in my practice.

In the case of facilitating new social histories for verbatim theatre, my aim of interrogating the role of the playwright in relation to ethics and aesthetics overlaps with Antoinette Moses' PaR investigation evaluating the tensions between the "adherence to facts against creative impulse" as encountered by the playwright in documentary practice (Moses, 2011, p. 8).<sup>56</sup> Moses incorporates two 'artistic products' as evidence of performance praxis, including the verbatim play *Trash* and a theatrical installation of a documentary script *Cuts* (Borgdorff, 2012, pp. 24-25; Moses, 2011).<sup>57</sup> Both Enright and Moses' models aid in the organisation of my creative practice within this dissertation. However, I diverge from these PaR investigations by focusing more on the methodologies involved in the interview stages of each project (particularly when facilitating war-related testimony) as interviewing plays a central role in the dramaturgy of each play. Thus, the critical writing component of each case study as part of this inquiry will provide detailed accounts of the social conditions (such as location, environment, socio-political background and rapport) from which the raw material is generated for each verbatim project.

The use of war-related narratives as part of my inquiry corresponds with Cahal McLaughlin's application of the PaR methodology to create documentary films about political violence. McLaughlin's films such as *Telling Our Story* and *A Prisoner's Journey* are primarily works based around 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland.<sup>58</sup> McLaughlin's (2010) primary concerns in documentary practice are location and ownership. Location for McLaughlin becomes a 'second character' as it prompts memories and affects participants. Secondly, McLaughlin (2010) emphasises the autonomy and collaboration of participants as being influenced by the idea of a 'shared anthropology' (pp. 30, 146) which is central to his methodology working with subjects whose lives have been somehow shaped by violence. McLaughlin (2010) often invites participants to screenings of film edits in progress, affording interviewees, if unhappy with the modes or representation with the chance to veto aspects of the film "as it lessens opportunities for exploitation and re-stimulation of the trauma" (pp. 30, 146). He also tends to minimise mediation such as intercutting stories simply for 'dramatic potential' which he contends provides interviewees with opportunities to tell their

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<sup>56</sup> Moses' (2011) scripts use testimony derived from interviews as well as transcripts and articles to explore the deaths of women in state custody (p. 8).

<sup>57</sup> Moses (2011) integrates both full-length plays prior to the critical writing component within the PhD dissertation.

<sup>58</sup> 'The Troubles' refers to the thirty-year conflict in Northern Ireland with roots in the conflict between Protestant unionists and Catholic nationalists (Edwards, 2011).

stories in the manner in which they wish to tell it (p. 132). While McLaughlin (2010) prefers a naturalistic aesthetic in documentary film, I approach the medium of theatre differently, exploring the potential and limits of aestheticising narratives of war for the dramaturgy of verbatim plays.

Perhaps the most valuable components of McLaughlin's PaR approach for my investigation is his commitment to the well-being of interviewees affected by violence, and also his stress on the importance of assessing location as a key factor for understanding how environment, memory and interviewees' testimony operate in relation to one another. Collaboration and location are critical themes that emerge as part of this research inquiry exploring my practical work and relationships with verbatim subjects in Chapters 3 and 6. Overall, these three distinctive models specific to documentary and verbatim practice serve this PaR dissertation by providing useful reference points to help focus the design of each practice-as-research case study in this investigation.

### **Oral History Methodology and Qualitative Research**

Oral history methods are integral to my PaR study, as my overall strategy approaching this investigation as a playwright-researcher is to explore the possibilities and limitations of verbatim practice as a means of expressing social histories of conflict, often never before heard in a public forum. Within qualitative research, oral history methodology is paramount in producing new knowledge as it "integrates the methods and techniques of observing, documenting, analysing, and interpreting characteristics, patterns, attributes, and meanings of human phenomena under study" (MacDonald, 2012, p. 34). Thus, an oral history methodology is critical within my verbatim practice for understanding the ethics and social dynamics within the interview process, since I am meeting people in social settings, spending time at their places of work, and in some cases entering their homes. In these private and public spaces I am asking them to discuss on-the-record war-related experiences, producing testimony which is then used as the raw material for the composition of a playtext. This is a delicate process requiring scrutiny.

The goals of theatre practitioners working in verbatim practice share common ground with that of oral history methodology, as oral historians use spoken testimonies in the hopes that 'alternative narratives' might re-shape collective memory or perhaps

disrupt grand historical narratives (Shuman, 2005; Thompson, 2000, p. 23).<sup>59</sup> Similar to debates regarding the creation of theatre of the ‘real’, evaluating the transformative potential and limitations of working with the narratives of people as well as the researcher’s position and bias within the meaning-making process of shaping testimony has been a core debate in the fields of oral history and ethnography (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; P. Brown & Wake, 2010; Shuman, 2005).<sup>60</sup> My critique of my role as a verbatim playwright facilitating social histories of conflict overlaps with the concerns of social scientists Atkinson and Delmont (2006) who argue that “when it comes to personal narratives, spoken performances, oral testimony and autoethnographies, we should not simply collect them as if they were untrammelled, unmediated representation of social realities [while] moral commitment is not a substitute for social-scientific analysis” (p. 170).<sup>61</sup> Therefore, oral history methodology aids the process of ‘doing-thinking’ through verbatim practice in regard to how I, as both researcher and playwright, approach interviews (Nelson, 2013, p. 29). These considerations also guide and provide texture to the writing component of each case study (Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011; Nelson, 2013). Furthermore, adopting oral history methods enable critical reflection and help me to identify how I, as both interviewer and playwright, shape the dramaturgy of the play within the interview environment; for example how I pose questions or prompt particular responses with an awareness of creating scenes.<sup>62</sup> Although comparatively speaking the intentions of oral history practitioners and theatre practitioners presenting personal testimony diverge, employing oral history methods within verbatim practice generates testimony and can contribute to this PaR study by

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<sup>59</sup> Paul Thompson (2000) argues that oral history is a dialectical process between the interviewer and interviewee that can be transformative in its capacity to challenge accepted historical myths through the conception of alternative narratives: “Oral history is a history built around people. It thrusts life into history itself and it widens its scope [...] It makes for contact—and thence understanding—between social classes, and between generations. And to individual histories and others, with shared meanings, it can give a sense of belonging to a place or in time. In short, it makes for fuller human beings” (pp. 23-24).

<sup>60</sup> Debates amongst theatre scholars about the role of theatre practitioners working with personal testimony and the ethics of representation in verbatim theatre echo recent debates between narrative analysts and social scientists As practitioners shape meaning within the interview process, that in turn impacts upon the dramaturgy of the play (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008; Watson, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> My preoccupation with the role and expectations of the playwright working closely with people and the transformative potential of sharing stories aligns with that of social scientists Paul Atkinson and Sara Delamont (2006) who contend that “the telling and sharing of stories have important social functions. Narratives have moral force...” but who also assert that the use of personal narratives in qualitative research is a socially complex space that requires further analysis (p. 165).

<sup>62</sup> Maynes et al. argue that in qualitative research the encounter between researcher and interviewee matters as “these interpersonal and intersubjective processes inevitably shape the content and form of personal narratives and thus require attention, acknowledgement and critical examination” (p. 13).

helping to clarify and contextualise the meaning-making processes operating within the relationship between the playwright, the subjects and the dramaturgy of the play.<sup>63</sup>

### **Interview Approaches and Techniques for Recording Stories**

Co-writing *This Much is True* with Paul Unwin revealed how our diverging approaches as interviewers affected the responses of interviewees. My strategy followed a more semi-structured approach to the interviews.<sup>64</sup> This was to allow the interviewee to have some autonomy over the direction of the interview, providing only those personal stories they felt inclined to share for possible inclusion in the play. Unwin, by contrast asked more probing questions to prompt contentious responses, that at times alienated interviewees which I explore in Chapter 3. In this PaR-led research I avoid probing tactics as assertive questioning risks closing possibilities for understanding between verbatim subjects, practitioners and audiences.

Therefore, for the creation of the play based on war stories I adopt a semi-structured approach at the beginning of each interview and ask for clarification and further details so as not to miss out on crucial information. However, I am aware that some subjects I encounter, depending on the circumstances, require a different approach. Also, sharing my own experiences during the interview process is an essential part of developing rapport and trust with interviewees. As interviewees share many personal details about their lives, I am open to disclosing aspects about my own personal experience.<sup>65</sup>

This PaR dissertation also critiques the manner in which personal testimony is recorded, evaluating technology, note-taking and how these modes of documentation help generate material for the composition of the script.<sup>66</sup> While I take notes during

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<sup>63</sup> Through ‘analytical scrutiny’ (with consideration of the appropriations of personal narratives in other fields) PaR studies examining work based on “the ‘personal’ and of ‘experience’” might inspire new insights as to how stories are interpreted and mediated in verbatim theatre (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, p. 169).

<sup>64</sup> My interview technique is shaped by phenomenological interviewing as defined by Shulamit Reinharz (1992), namely “an interviewee-guided investigation of a lived experience that asks almost no prepared questions [...] feminist phenomenological interviewing requires interviewer skills of restraint and listening as well as interviewees who are verbal and reflective” (p. 21).

<sup>65</sup> For an interesting discussion of rapport and ethics see Ann Oakley’s *Women confined: Towards a sociology of childbirth* (Oakley, 1980). Alecky Blythe (2008) also offers insights in terms of the importance of building rapport for verbatim playwriting in *Verbatim* (Blythe in Hammond & Steward, 2008).

<sup>66</sup> The manner in which practitioners record stories varies from digital recorders to copious note-taking. Robin Soans tends to write shorthand notes as it is less intrusive than technology. He contends that



interviews, the use of digital recorders enables me to capture material that I might otherwise miss in my notes.<sup>67</sup> The use of note-taking and digital recorders helps capture metadata that is interpreted in transcripts, and later composed in script form in my thesis. Oral historians Douglas A. Boyd and Mary A. Larson (2014) suggest that “a typical oral history interview contains a massive amount of information—questions, answers, descriptions, reflection, dialogue, laughter, silences, language, culture, worldview—yet, from the researcher’s perspective, oral history’s greatest value is found in these moments” (p. 4). In a similar vein, my role as researcher and playwright is to interpret the significance of these verbal and non-verbal responses in relation to the verbatim subject’s experience, which is important for shaping moments in the play.

While digital recorders ease the process in recording metadata there are ethical implications to consider in terms of how I use technology in the interviews. I also obtain oral consent for interviewees before I record them, explaining the process of adapting oral testimony for the dramaturgy of a play.<sup>68</sup> Obtaining the right to record is ethically important and crucial for verbatim practice if the goal of the practitioner is to use spoken accounts from the interview directly in the play.<sup>69</sup>

Recording audio in peoples’ houses, workplaces and social settings also enables me, at times, to use the “fly-on-the-wall” approach (Hammond & Steward, 2008, p. 86). These private moments between the interviewer and verbatim subjects can dramatically illuminate the social dynamics and “domestic details” (Soans in Hammond & Steward, 2008, p. 39) that provide a sense of the interviewee’s everyday environment. Capturing dialogue between interviewees means that as a playwright I am not bound to single testimonials and monologues in the play. This ‘fly-on-the-wall’ approach is favoured by Alecky Blythe as she patiently observes conversations in the interview process (Blythe & Bush Theatre, 2006). In times of conflict or discomfort between interviewees, Blythe

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recording devices can make interviewees’ self-conscious (Hammond & Steward, 2008). Meanwhile playwright Helena Enright (2011) integrates both note-taking and recording devices as part of her practice, acknowledging that technology can be unreliable.

<sup>67</sup> To ensure that all of the interview material is accounted for, I use two digital recorders as a precaution.

<sup>68</sup> Patrick Duggan (2013) reflects on The Paper Birds’ 2010 production of the *Others* by examining the ethics of spectatorship and the shaping of personal testimony for the production. Duggan (2013) critiques The Paper Birds’ co-artistic director Jemma McDonnell’s statement that the process of shaping interviewees’ material for the purpose of the play was explained in detail to them beforehand. However, Duggan ponders “to what extent the fact that the women ‘knew what they were getting into’ alleviates the complexities of ethics involved in the appropriation of the other” (p. 156).

<sup>69</sup> For example, in the case of *Black Watch* (2006) the playwright Gregory Burke was asked by soldiers not to record the interview, and instead worked from notes about the interviews that inspired fictional scenes.

chooses not to intervene as not to hinder the dramatic potential offered within the social dynamics (Blythe & Bush Theatre, 2006, p. 4; Hammond & Steward, 2008, p. 86).<sup>70</sup> Blythe sometimes leaves digital recorders with the verbatim subjects, allowing conversations between interviewees to unfold without her presence (Hammond & Steward, 2008). This action may seem as if it gives interviewees more autonomy over the recordings, but in my view, when the fly-on-the-wall approach drifts into the realm of eavesdropping, my concern is that this approach positions the playwright as an omniscient onlooker.

While the fly-on-the-wall approach offers dramatic potential, I use this minimally within the interview setting rather than as a central method for recording testimony. I conduct interviews while being mindful of my position as researcher and playwright and the manner in which interviewees' interactions are recorded, with appropriate sensitivity to the needs of interviewees.

### **Transcription: Listening and Interpreting Stories**

Careful listening to interview recordings and meticulous transcription are essential to my verbatim practice, and are key methods of my PaR project creating a verbatim play based on interviews about traumatic events. Transcription is necessary as it transforms audio recordings to text for the play, and it is within this phase of careful listening where new aspects of the silences and hesitations of each interview occur, enabling me to capture material I might have otherwise overlooked during the face-to-face interview.

In turn, transcription helps me map the cadences and rhythms of interviewees' speech patterns, and illuminate the unique vernacular characteristics of the original speaker. While these original rhythms might be disrupted during the weaving of material, I argue the patterns of speech are important, as they add texture and context to the experience of the interviewee.<sup>71</sup> It is critical to note that the exactness of the 'real'

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<sup>70</sup> For the making of *The Girlfriend Experience* (2008) on days when Blythe could not be present at the brothel in Bournemouth, she would leave recording devices with the sex workers, describing this as "the ultimate way of creating a non-pressurised, non-interview environment" (Blythe, 2010; Blythe & Bush Theatre, 2006; Hammond & Steward, 2008, p. 84). While capturing dialogue amongst a group might enable more colourful scenes in the making of the playtext and to some extent promote autonomy amongst the interviewees as the recording devices are literally in their hands, there are ethical questions that arise regarding social dynamics and power relations.

<sup>71</sup> To maintain the 'narrative essence' of the interviewee's testimony within the transcription process Helena Enright (2011) states that "in order to try to transcribe the interviews as meticulously as possible I

utterances within performance is not a substitute for the mediation of the material. In the case of *The Kratos Effect* the punctuation and hesitations were subsequently disrupted within the process of the intercutting multiple interviewees' testimony within the writing of the script.<sup>72</sup> Precision and accuracy are vital in transcription, but I do not meticulously transcribe with the intention of preserving every "erm", "ahh" and pause for the sake of promising the unmediated exactness of the testimony, which is an illusory goal.

Listening and re-listening to descriptions of traumatic events is also a concern in my approach to transcription. I approach the transcription of testimony with an awareness that frequent listening to descriptions of traumatic events might prove emotionally affecting for me as a transcriptionist. Helena Enright (2011) describes the experience of listening to the testimonies of domestic violence as more traumatic in the transcription phase than the interview phase as Enright, in the process of conscientious transcription, was compelled to listen repeatedly to upsetting details having already heard these traumatic stories once in the interview (pp. 114, 125). Enright's response correlates with Lauri Anne Pearlman and Karen W. Saakvitne's concept of 'vicarious traumatization' which they define as the "process through which the inner experience of those empathetically engaged with client's trauma material, is negatively altered" (Pearlman & Saakvitne in Etherington, 2005, p. 86; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995, p. 35). Therefore, within this PaR study I also explore the position of the playwright as a witness within the transcription phase and the tension involved in maintaining critical distance to the spoken material. I also consider to what extent my emotional response to

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can listen carefully to the words the person speaks paying particular attention to their phrasing – their 'punctuation' of their words", while in relation to the staging of the play *Walking Away* "...the punctuation, I believed, would therefore assist them [the actors] in telling the story as accurately as possible" (p. 125).

<sup>72</sup> Alecky Blythe prefers the use of editing digital to generate an "audio script" rather than composing a script from transcribed interviews. The aesthetic intention of Blythe's reliance on audio scripts and the incorporation of headsets is to create the appearance of "verisimilitude" (Lane, 2010, p. 68; Wake, 2013, p. 322). As Wake (2013) argues, "Headphone verbatim theatre" goes beyond the emulation of vernacular speech prioritised in many verbatim plays "to include replicating coughs, pauses, hesitations, and repetitions" (p. 322). Partly my resistance to relying so heavily on audio software and headsets in performance is partly because this staging to some extent fetishises the authenticity of the oral material spoken, which is problematic in verbatim theatre. I saw a performance of Alecky Blythe and Adam Cork's verbatim musical *London Road* at the National Theatre in the spring of 2011. While the content of the play did not, in my view, offer a strong multitude of narratives regarding the Ipswich murders (concentrating more on petty community politics), the use of song to accentuate the content of the interviewees' testimony was effective in its strategy to draw attention to the mediation whilst illustrating a range of idiosyncratic material. In this show, the actors performed without the headsets commonly used in Blythe's other plays (Blythe & Cork, 2011).

transcribing stories of violence compromises my aim to maintain “a respect for difference” for the interviewee’s unique experience (Ridout, 2009, p. 54).

### **Writing Techniques and Dramaturgical Strategies in Verbatim Practice**

Direct address, domestic details, authorial voice and meta-theatricality are dramaturgical strategies in verbatim practice that are valuable to this practice-as-research investigation.<sup>73</sup> Reflecting on how I use these techniques within the composition of the script helps in articulating my intention as a playwright mediating narratives of conflict.

Direct address is a standard documentary technique where the illusion of the fourth wall is broken, as actors talk directly to the audience. The technique was employed in early forms of documentary and propagandist theatre to challenge audiences’ sense of the ‘real’ and was also designed to encourage critical assessment of the production itself to serve as a metaphor for the alterability of society’s oppressive political and economic structures (Brecht & Willett, 1964; Govan, Nicholson, & Normington, 2007; Paget, 1990). However, direct address in verbatim practice can add to the illusion that verbatim subjects are speaking directly to the audience, thereby “inscribing the spectator as the interviewer” and perpetuating the “authenticity” of the material (Watt, 2009, p. 193). Given this, in my dramaturgy and critical writing I explore how direct address and secondary dialogue might operate with one another to disrupt the audiences’ perception of the role of the interviewer. The problem with positioning the audience as the interviewer is that this dynamic might encourage a greater identification with the presented material (Hesford, 2010; Hughes, 2011; Nicholson, 2014).

Domestic detail, a technique most notably equated with the work of Robin Soans, entails the inclusion of distinctive details revealed in the conversations between interviewer and interviewee that convey a sense of character. These domestic details – such as the particular brand of soap the interviewee uses or the interviewee’s choice of beverage – operate in plays as symbolic indicators of the socioeconomic characteristics/habitus of the interviewees (Bourdieu, 2010; Soans in Hammond &

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<sup>73</sup> Works that are significant to the writing methods I adopt in the construction of each verbatim playtext include Paul C. Castagno’s *New Playwriting Strategies* (2012), David Edgar’s *How Plays Work* (2009) and Steve Water’s *The Secret life of Plays* (2010) (Castagno, 2012; Edgar, 2009, p. 74; Waters, 2010).

Steward, 2008). These shared domestic details, often symptomatic of a strong rapport between interviewer and interviewee, emerge from the initial interview ‘pleasantries’ (Hammond & Steward, 2008). Domestic details add texture to the subject’s point of view and encourage empathic connection with verbatim subjects as Soans explains:

Even from the main body of the interview I will select the material that is idiosyncratic, personal and emotional. The incidental domestic details which dovetail an interview are important because they humanise the situation. They are the common link between the interviewee and the audience; they make the audience care (Soans in Hammond & Steward, 2008, p. 39).

The extent to which domestic details are used as a strategy for human connection is assessed in my practice with careful consideration of how identification and empathy are employed within the composition of the text. These considerations are important, particularly when conveying trauma-related narratives of others to an audience. While domestic details can promote a nuanced character, domestic details might also be counter-productive in terms of enhancing the audiences’ understanding, thus encouraging primary identification “where individuals are unable to distinguish between themselves and others” (Nicholson, 2014, p. 74) and risks encouraging a voyeuristic indulgence in the pain of the other (Hesford, 2010; Salverson, 2001; Sontag, 2003).

Examining my own authorial voice and writing style in the composition of the verbatim playtext is key to my inquiry.<sup>74</sup> The degree to which playwrights position themselves within verbatim plays varies. For instance, the presence of the playwright can be subtly implied with the inclusion of references to the play or to the interviews themselves as featured in Robin Soans’ *The Arab-Israeli Cookbook* (2004), or foregrounded in the performance, dramatising the process of making the play as explored in Moisés Kaufman and Tectonic Theatre’s *The Laramie Project* (1998). Stephen Bottoms (2006) uses the term “textual reflexivity” (pp. 57-58) to explain the approach whereby theatre practitioners’ integrate direct references to the play-making process in the performance to underline the levels of mediation that occur adapting testimony and documents for stage. This is done with the purpose of appealing to audiences’ critical assessment of the play-making process. In some plays the role of the playwright can be obscured or absent which can create a sense of the playwright’s

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<sup>74</sup> Stephen Bottoms (2006) critiques David Hare’s (2004) authorial voice as almost ‘god-like’ and controlling, as if Hare has unlimited access to political personalities, while Bottoms also criticises Robin Soans’ control of sources in *Talking to Terrorists* (2005) for disguising the identities of diplomats and terrorists (Bottoms, 2006, p. 59; Hare, 2004; Soans, 2005).

omnipresence, as evident in David Hare's hybrid verbatim play *Stuff Happens*.<sup>75</sup> To add to these approaches, meta-theatricality is a dramaturgical strategy often used to critique the processes at work in verbatim practice. The self-referencing of the playwright can raise awareness about the mediation of the interview and playwriting process, but at times this strategy also reinforces the 'mastery' of the writer's position over the voice of others (Alcoff, 1991-92; Bottoms, 2006, pp. 59-60; Heddon, 2008).<sup>76</sup> Another strategy for critiquing the production of the play is writing the actors as narrators in the playtext, thus encouraging a presentational mode of acting.<sup>77</sup> Projections, audiovisual materials and statistics may be incorporated into verbatim plays to contextualise the actors' presentations and in turn can remind audiences of the process of mediation.

In addition, the integration of theatre practitioners as characters within the play is a common device. The strategy employed is used to remind audiences of how the material is mediated, which makes the process of making the play a subplot for critique within the drama. This is evident in *The Laramie Project* (1998) where the journal entries of actors and their interviews with townspeople about the murder of gay student Matthew Shepard are dramatised within the play (Bottoms, 2006; Heddon, 2008; Kaufman & Tectonic Theatre Project, 2001). While meta-theatrical techniques are considered in both playwriting projects – particularly in my composition of an original verbatim play based on soldiers' testimonies – I am aware that too much self-referential material exploring the role of the writer can overshadow the importance of the subjects' experiences.

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<sup>75</sup> Tony Dowmunt (2007) reflects on his own PaR project making the autobiographical film *A Whited Sepulchre* analysing how his own agency as a filmmaker became a central focus of his investigation. He (2007) explains, "Part of my research was an attempt to question—and experiment with undermining in practice—conventional notions and models of documentary authority. In relation to autobiographical filmmaking a key site for this experimentation has to be the 'character' and 'voice' of the filmmaker – in other words, the 'authority' of the 'author'" (p. 42). In order to critique my own authority I use a variety of sources such as notebook entries, play drafts and correspondence for documentation and self-reflection within the critical writing component of the thesis, thereby situating the different projects' outcomes within a theoretical discussion of the playwright's authorial voice.

<sup>76</sup> In *This Much is True* we used actors to present times and locations and to add context to the interviews. This aided in terms of clarifying who was speaking as well as encouraging a presentational mode of acting rather than a psychological acting style.

<sup>77</sup> In some verbatim plays inspired by Brechtian principles, actors function as narrators, present new characters and comment on the events taking place (Brecht & Willett, 1964). *What I Heard About Iraq* (2006), based on sound bites from politicians, newspapers and members of the public, featured actors who would state "I heard" before each statement, which provides us with an example of a verbatim play in which actors present material to encourage audience critique. Lyn Gardner (2007) wrote in response to the play that "[t]he strength of a piece such as *What I Heard About Iraq* lies not in its staging, but in the way it presents its material in a fashion that makes the audience question every single word it hears. It sends you out of the theatre and back into the world determined to question every sound bite you hear and every newspaper article you read" (Gardner, 2007).

## Collaboration, Ownership and Autonomy

Collaboration is essential to my verbatim practice, as generating the raw material for the development of a verbatim play is dependent on healthy relationships between practitioners and subjects. But while verbatim plays begin as a collaborative enterprise with verbatim subjects throughout the interview stage, the degree of autonomy interviewees have throughout the composition of a verbatim play may vary from project to project.<sup>78</sup> This is an ethically slippery area in verbatim practice raising the question to what extent should verbatim subjects exercise control over the dramaturgy of the play. To go further, what right, if any, does the playwright have over the spoken words of others? (Duggan, 2013; Heddon, 2008; Madison, 2005; McLaughlin, 2010). Therefore, negotiating issues of ownership and autonomy are important features in any inquiry intending to understand my responsibility as a playwright to the verbatim subjects.<sup>79</sup>

While conducting research on *This Much is True*, I approached Robin Soans (2009) for advice about the extent of control subjects should have over the written transcripts of their interviews or the playtext itself.<sup>80</sup> Soans (2009) contends that “the best scenario is always to have an understanding with the interviewees that if they agree to the initial interview that implicitly means you can use the material in the play”. Only if interviewees insist on reviewing the material does Soans extend what he calls ‘red pencil rights’ – the subject’s ‘right to review’ allowing interviewees to make changes to the material (Soans, 2009). He also describes the negative impact extending red pencil rights has on the dramaturgy of the play:

the trouble with that is they will always want to cut the bits that are the most interesting, and reveal [the] most about themselves. If you are writing a play like *Life After Scandal* you are bound to be in a red pencil

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<sup>78</sup> If David Hare senses interviewees may want to withdraw their material he will change their identities in the play (Hare in Hammond & Steward, 2008).

<sup>79</sup> Cahal McLaughlin’s (2010) view of documentary film is that “[t]echnical and artistic decisions about recording and editing take on an ethical dimension for they can deny or enable the ownership and control of the survivor’s representation of their histories, memories and identities” (p. 24). McLaughlin (2010) adopts the notion of ‘shared anthropology’ as a key concept within his methodological approach, with the latter prioritising the input of interviewees’ responses to his documentary film and impetus (p. 30).

<sup>80</sup> Soans (2009) offered his expertise on the ‘red pen rights’ approach to negotiating ownership over testimony with interviewees while Paul Unwin and I were developing *This Much is True*. Both Tim Roseman, a former collaborator of Soans’ on *The Arab- Israeli Cookbook* (2004) and I, having had discussed red pen rights with Soans previously on my MA research, sought Soans’ advice to inform our own methods of distributing transcripts amongst interviewees.

area, but you have to very clear with your diplomacy, and lose a few skirmishes in order to win the war.<sup>81</sup>

As I proceed with this PaR study, I adopt a similar stance to that of Soans. While I adhere to subjects' wishes to remove their testimony at any time and comply with requests to read transcripts, I am reluctant to extend subjects' control over the writing of the script. In particular, allowing some subjects to have creative control over the dramaturgy of the playtext might impact on the narratives shared by other verbatim subjects whose viewpoints might conflict with those of the former. However, as I am encountering verbatim subjects who may disclose sensitive material, I am more flexible in terms of the needs and circumstances of individual interviewees so as not to cause harm.

### **Research Questions and PaR Case Studies**

The culmination of this review of methodologies leads me to the research questions and project design for this PaR-led dissertation. This investigation includes a review of my archive compiled when co-creating *This Much is True*, and the creation of *Yardbird*, the latter being an original verbatim playtext integral to this research inquiry into the agency of the playwright mediating narratives of war.

The following questions guide my research inquiry exploring the agency of the playwright mediating narratives of war in verbatim practice:

- 1). How does the agency of the playwright affect the way in which the testimony of verbatim subjects is generated in the dramaturgy of a verbatim play?
- 2). What are the responsibilities of the playwright to verbatim subjects who have been affected by trauma?
- 3). What are the responsibilities of the playwright appropriating trauma-related testimony to an audience?
- 4). How might the outcomes of this PaR investigation into the agency of the playwright offer new modes of approach and initiate critical thinking amongst theatre practitioners and scholars regarding the role of the writer in verbatim theatre?

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<sup>81</sup> In an email response to me, Soans (2009) surmises that an open approach with interviewees promotes positive relations, adding “[d]on’t be shy about saying to people exactly what you are doing. Honesty is always the best policy...being up front and candid”.



In addition to these key questions for this PaR dissertation, other questions for consideration within this interrogation include: To what extent is the presence of the playwright problematic for individuals whose lives have been affected by violence? And to what extent are relationships based on trust between the playwright and subjects illusory in verbatim practice?

### **Case Study: *This Much is True* Re-thinking the Archive and Verbatim Practice**

The first PaR case study revisits my collaboration with co-writer Paul Unwin and the archive of *This Much is True*, and critically reflects on the problems encountered co-writing and mediating narratives of violence within the dramaturgy of the play. *This Much is True* is a verbatim play about the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes at Stockwell station that was performed at Theatre 503 in Battersea from October 28<sup>th</sup>—November 21<sup>st</sup> 2009. The project developed from my previous work *The Kratos Effect* but featured a wider range of testimonies from members of the Justice 4 Jean campaign, senior police officers, human rights lawyers, the Menezes family as well as a whistleblower.

As a part of my investigation I address the proposed research questions examining the development process, the collaboration between Paul Unwin, director Tim Roseman and myself, and the outcomes of the production. I re-examine documents such as my notebook entries from the research, writing and rehearsal process, recordings and transcripts from interviews, correspondence with interviewees regarding the project, press interviews, press reviews as well as comments on weblogs.<sup>82</sup> The purpose of this is to unpack the ethical and aesthetic tensions we as researchers and co-writers encountered when dramatising verbatim interviews based on traumatic events. Drawing on excerpts from the full-length playtext of *This Much is True*, I identify the key issues that inform my future practice.

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<sup>82</sup> In addition to the original documents from our interviews, I also reflect on the integration of outside sources such as audiovisual clips from the day of the shooting as well as transcripts from the official inquest into the death of Menezes, and the two Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) Reports.

### **Case Study: Recording and Writing the Lives of US Soldiers in the Verbatim Play *Yardbird***

Expanding on the ethical and aesthetic questions raised by my collaboration and co-writing process involved in *This Much is True*, in conjunction with the problems of mediating war in *Black Watch* and other plays based on war testimonies I develop an original verbatim playtext based on war as the central project of this PaR-led dissertation. The *Yardbird* project explores the triangulation between the agency of the playwright, mediating narratives of war and verbatim practice and how these strands operate within my composition of a playtext based on US soldiers' narratives.

For the creation of the *Yardbird* project I travelled to the United States, spending six weeks in Pennsylvania, Maryland and West Virginia conducting interviews with American veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan and their families. Careful documentation of the research process by recording interviews, archiving my correspondence with interviewees, as well as note-taking prior to the interview, throughout the interview and within the debriefing stage post-interview, serves as vital evidence for analysing my verbatim practice and how I interact with verbatim subjects.

Throughout the development of the script, I document the stages and processes within the genesis of the *Yardbird* playtext. Through critical reflection on the problems that emerge within various drafts of the play, the development meetings with collaborators and the correspondence with the interviewees aids in articulating the responsibility of the playwright throughout the script's development. As part of the development of the playtext I present two rehearsed readings of *Yardbird* performed by professional actors that provide evidence and new insights when considering the development of the play. These insights are situated within wider debates on mediating narratives of war for performance. This case study incorporates DVD recordings of two rehearsed readings of *Yardbird*, notes from post-show Q&As, as well as feedback from actors and audience members and correspondence with subjects.<sup>83</sup> In addition to the critical assessment of the research, interviewing and writing process, I incorporate the full-length playtext of *Yardbird* as a key element of the dissertation. This supporting evidence aids my critical reflection and the writing component of this case study, which in turn enables 'intelligent practice' (Nelson, 2013, p. 65) when working with narratives

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<sup>83</sup> The playtext for *The Kratos Effect* can be found in the appendices of this dissertation.

of verbatim subjects who have been affected by conflict (Borgdorff, 2012; Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011; Nelson, 2013).

The methodologies of conducting interviews and dramaturgical strategies employed in *Yardbird* are shaped in part by the research outcomes from the creation of *This Much is True* and the ethical considerations that have emerged in the wider field of documentary practice and war narratives. Overall, this PaR-led investigation enables an ‘ethical self-critique’ of my process as a playwright interpreting trauma-related narratives (Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011).

## Chapter Three: Re-visiting *This Much Is True*: The Role of the Writer and the Dramaturgy of the Stockwell Shooting

### Introduction: *This Much is True*

This chapter explores the methods and approaches Paul Unwin and I employed co-researching and co-writing *This Much is True*, a verbatim play about the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes based on interviews with human rights lawyers, activists, senior police officers and his family. The production ran from 28 October-21 November 2009 at Theatre 503 in Battersea, London, two miles from where the event occurred. This chapter interrogates our playwriting practice, assessing the tensions, problems and approaches of aestheticising the personal testimonies of those affected by the Menezes shooting for the purposes of composing a verbatim playtext. Using critical reflection as a form of “ethical self-critique” (Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011, p. 83), I re-visit textual archival materials from the project, such as correspondence with collaborators and interviewees, writing notebooks, script reports, while I also draw on excerpts from the production playtext as part of my PaR methodology assessing the role of the writer appropriating testimony in verbatim practice (Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011, p. 83).

The purpose of this study is twofold: to expose through deep reflexivity and critical writing the role of the playwright and the ethical responsibilities that both inform and complicate the writing process and, secondly, to contribute new knowledge in regard to translating traumatic experiences within verbatim writing practice thereby enriching other practitioners and scholars’ understanding of the ethical and aesthetic stakes involved in writing plays based on the accounts of others. The outcomes of this practice-as-research project raise new ethical and aesthetic considerations for playwrights adapting trauma testimony in verbatim theatre practice, and in turn inform my next PaR project exploring the lives of American soldiers.

### Starting Points

The collaboration between Paul Unwin and I on *This Much Is True* began as both a continuation of and departure from *The Kratos Effect*. As this thesis considers the agency of the playwright within verbatim theatre, this section examines how our backgrounds and levels of experience as playwrights enabled different approaches and

considerations of the material and at times caused disagreements as to how to proceed with the writing of the script. Professionally, Unwin had spent thirty years in theatre and film, serving as an artistic director at the Bristol Old Vic and has also written and directed several television series and films, most notably co-creating the television show *Casualty*. By comparison, I had written a dissertation for my MA in Drama at Goldsmiths about verbatim theatre practice, and had composed several short playscripts for theatre and radio. As the ethos of Theatre 503 is to support new writers, I would be mentored by Unwin, a more experienced writer, while developing my voice as a new playwright with a first full-length production.

### **Research Plan and Strategy**

As verbatim theatre places theatre practitioners in the field, engaging with subjects to produce testimony for the creation of an original playtext to be performed, recognising one's positionality as an interpreter of others' narratives becomes an essential consideration for reflecting on my practice as a researcher and playwright throughout this thesis. "Positionality", as Jill Dolan (1993) has argued, "is a strategy that locates one's person and political investments and perspectives across an argument, a gesture toward placing oneself within a critique of objectivity..." (p. 417). As co-writers our personal politics and interview approach affected the way in which we engaged with interviewees, in turn shaping how they responded to us. In order to become more critical of my position as a playwright recording and aestheticising trauma, reflecting on my positionality also unveiled the process and politics of producing life stories.

Our research strategy was to interview as many people as possible who were connected to the Menezes' case including witnesses to the shooting, the firearms officers, the family of Jean Charles de Menezes and human rights lawyers.<sup>84</sup> I had the advantage of having formed earlier relationships with the members of the Justice 4 Jean campaign and the shrinekeepers, while Unwin had contacts in the Metropolitan Police Department from his work on crime dramas.

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<sup>84</sup> At the start of each interview I asked each interviewee for their "on the record" permission for the interview to be recorded. I explained the purpose of the material and how we would use this in the play before proceeding. While discussing verbatim practice with interviewees is an important part of ethical practice as Patrick Duggan (2013) recognises, it is not always initially clear for practitioners how the material will be shaped and mediated in the playwriting and performance process.

Over the research process we interviewed sixteen people, and acquired more than 26 hours of recorded material with interviewees. This included interviews with Jean's family, the Justice 4 Jean campaign, senior police officers, human rights lawyers, as well as a trauma expert and whistleblower. We read the IPCC (Independent Police Complaints Commission) reports investigating the police handling of the case, transcripts from the 2008 inquest into the Menezes killing and various articles covering the case. We also collected media clips from the BBC including immediate witness accounts and YouTube clips showing public reactions to the shooting. These court documents and media materials were integrated into the performance text by using televisions screens and projections, thus creating a media montage of misreporting that served to contextualise the actors' spoken material.

### **Issues of Presence, Location, and Interview Approach**

Location played a significant factor in terms of the testimony produced. Unwin and I tended to meet those in positions of power in formal settings such as the unidentified senior police officer at Scotland Yard and the solicitor Michael Mansfield at Mansfield Chambers. Regarding theatrical possibilities, location also aided in informing scenes. For example, our interview with the trauma expert at the Aberdeen Centre for Trauma Research to interview was interrupted by a fire alarm, which resulted in the evacuation of the building. This was later used in the play as a device to interrupt an explanation about the events of 7 July 2005 and the heightened urgency of Londoners as a result. The purpose was to alert the audience to how we respond with fear in the wake of violence, and functioned to clear the stage to introduce the family—the immediate people affected by the Metropolitan police shoot-to-kill policy as a response to counter terrorism.

Other locations took place in more informal settings such as meeting the Menezes in Stockwell at a café. On one occasion location also played a performative role in alienating interviewees; for instance we shifted a group meeting with the members of the Justice 4 Jean campaign to Stockwell tube station. Unwin suggested the campaigners take us through the station and explain their version of events. The campaigners were dismissive of the idea, and the location felt a contrived set-up for dramatising the shooting.

There were also different power dynamics operating in the interviews, as interviewees would read our political motivations, thus socio-economic class, gender and age affected their responses. These attributes are significant as they impact on how interviewees respond to the interviewer/practitioner, as Beverly Redman (2009) explains of her experience interviewing and collaborating with a homeless community in the US for a community-based theatre project:

I became aware that the representations I constructed of people's lives were themselves interpretations of interpretations, or semblances upon semblances, and that the actions involved in reading and making versions of the world in text carried with them more personal and broader political agendas, as well. From their complex personal histories and complex socio-economic perspectives, the men and women I interviewed presented versions of their lives, I must assume, tempered by their interpretations of me. In turn, I performed a close reading of their lives, based on what they gave me, as much born out of my own complex personal and socio-economic positions (p. 295).

In consideration of Redman's observation regarding the complex negotiation of assumptions operating in the series of exchanges between participants and theatre practitioners, our distinctive positionalities as interviewers and writers also had a significant impact on how we facilitated and interpreted testimony from verbatim subjects.

Unwin would lead the interviews with senior officers and Michael Mansfield, while I would lead the interviews with the Menezes family, the shrinekeepers and members of the Justice 4 Jean campaign. While I would employ empathetic listening allowing interviewees to feel free to disclose or refrain from discussing certain aspects of their stories, Unwin would from time-to-time probe the elites for information that was not the official line. I tended not to press interviewees for information, while at times Unwin would challenge or antagonise interviewees in positions of power. While I did not always agree with Unwin's approach it was clear he posed contentious questions to prompt impassioned responses that would, in turn, generate good drama.

I was present for all of the original interviews as part of our research with the exception of two short conversations. I also carefully transcribed all of the material. This took a significant amount of time but it also meant I had a more acute knowledge of the tone of what was said or of particular moments that were significant in the

interviewees' lives.<sup>85</sup> Part of our working method involved working through my knowledge of the material to find significant beats in the play.<sup>86</sup>

### **Framing Trauma and Victimhood: Researching the 7/7 Bombings and the Stockwell Shooting**

As co-writers, Unwin and I considered the timeline of the Menezes case and found it important to contextualise the heightened sense of urgency in the wake of the London bombings on 7 July 2005. The purpose was to promote vigilance amongst an audience regarding how we respond to acts of terror, thereby exploring the Menezes case as a means of ethical and political reflection. In my view the heightened sense of fear at the time of the London bombings affected a lack of public criticism surrounding the killing of Menezes. We as dramatists felt that it was important to incorporate perspectives from survivors of the terrorist attacks on London transport for audiences to critically consider the issue, thereby offering testimony that might encourage listening and reflection.

As approaching 7/7 survivors seemed invasive, we decided to make initial contact with those who actively gave testimony to the press. We located a survivor who actively spoke about the experience on television interviews and online posts. This survivor whose name will remain anonymous was the first and subsequently the last person we as playwrights approached who survived the 7/7 bombing on one of the tube carriages. While the survivor initially offered to provide their insight they were opposed to sharing personal experience of 7/7 for use in a verbatim play about the Stockwell

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<sup>85</sup> In addition to our own interview transcripts we acquired additional interview material from an unproduced BBC documentary on the Menezes shooting. Katy Jones, a producer on the unmade documentary, gave us transcripts and video recordings of testimony from the Menezes family and friends from the summer of 2006. The BBC documentary was cancelled by the head of Drama. Producer Katy Jones (2007) told *The Guardian*, "The de Menezes family were right in the middle of a traumatic experience and it was a huge blow for them. I feel very angry and I have urged the BBC to send an apology to them" (Katy Jones in Thorpe, 2007). Jones felt a responsibility for the material to be used as her project had been cancelled by the BBC and she wanted the testimony to go to good use. This raised questions concerning the ethics of using second-hand material, as we were not in the room to understand fully the context in which these sensitive accounts were disclosed. Also, the family had initially participated in the making of the BBC documentary with the expectation that it would be watched by a wider audience.

<sup>86</sup> An early plotting exercise between Unwin and I was to choose 26 lines from the entire interview transcripts and documents that I felt should be prioritised in the script. Drawing on key moments from interviewees' testimonies initiated the plotting process. This method also helped Unwin to filter important moments in the interview process. Together we began writing these key moments on post-it notes, rearranging these points to develop a structured timeline of events for the play.



shooting. The correspondence between us and the interviewee raises concerns regarding voice, victimhood and agency in the making of verbatim plays based on traumatic events.

Through our correspondence, it became clear the survivor questioned our intention in using her voice, thus prompting questions as to how roles are cast in the making of a verbatim play prior to the interview process. The primary reason for the correspondent's objection to participation in the verbatim project was how we might use this testimony to emphasise her victimhood. The correspondent stressed that she did not want to be a "victim voice", as she did not consider herself to be a victim, emphasising that their opinion on the Menezes shooting had no more value or importance than any other Londoner (personal communication, 13 March 2009). The correspondent's primary objection to contributing to the project was her inability to be certain that her words would be used only to express her individual viewpoint and that they would not be used as emblematic of all 7/7 victims, reiterating that her voice has no more significance as to what happened to Menezes than any other voice (personal communication, 13 March 2009).<sup>87</sup> The correspondent expressed concerns of mediation in relation to how we would take these perspectives out of context, and spin them for our own dramatic purposes. Our motivations as writers in appropriating 7/7 survivors' experiences for the purpose of creating a play about the Stockwell shooting was being questioned. At the time I had been unaware of how this approach might be both manipulative and intrusive.

Our impetus as playwrights was to make audiences think critically about the events that transpired in the wake of the Menezes shooting, and more broadly to encourage vigilance about how we as a public respond to acts of terrorism. However, to incorporate a montage of 7/7 survivors' testimony detailing their physical and psychological trauma in an effort to contextualise the Menezes shooting was problematic. Calling upon 7/7 survivors to provide context for the turmoil felt in London at that time was not only potentially harmful for the survivors, but also this uncritical strategy was in danger of oversimplifying the Menezes case in its suggestion that the Menezes shooting was an inevitable by-product of the London bombings and simultaneously implies that the police response was justified. In addition, this approach

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<sup>87</sup> She emphasised her wariness to comment on Jean Charles de Menezes due to the manner in which the media had in the past used her comments as representative of all 7/7 victims and therefore it would be inappropriate to offer an opinion on the Menezes shooting.

risked rationalising the police shooting of Menezes, while simultaneously obscures the police cover-up that ensued after the killing and legitimising the media's framing of the Stockwell shooting. Approaching personal testimony in this way risked presenting the killing of Menezes as an unavoidable tragic mistake rather than an event that warrants critical reflection. Reflecting on the 7/7 survivors' criticism of our intent was critical to the dramaturgy of the play, as in this moment as playwrights we had to question our research and creative aims and consider the potential implications of our interpretation.

We also found approaching witnesses to the Menezes shooting to be equally problematic, although it was our intention to hear from those who had seen the Menezes shooting unfold as their experiences were scarcely presented in the press.<sup>88</sup> As co-writers we considered how listening to the personal testimony offered by witnesses, beyond the witnesses' tribunal transcripts from the inquest into the Menezes shooting in 2008 might promote new understandings of the social repercussions of the case.

From the IPCC reports and the testimony provided by witnesses as part of the Menezes inquest in 2008, Unwin and I had a list of names of witnesses. It was difficult to find contact details but through the testimony we were able to locate a contact number for one witness's workplace. While we as co-writers debated the intrusion of calling upon this witness, it seemed necessary for the contextualisation of the play to extend the opportunity for them to offer their perspective. Their testimony was important to enhance the complexity of the play.

When I called the witness's office in March 2009 a secretary answered and I explained why I was calling and the nature of the project. The secretary, curt in response, alluded to the fact that her employer had been through enough and demanded we leave him alone and hung up. This crystallised my concern that our approach to collecting witnesses' testimony was misguided. Fearing that in prioritising the securing of these testimonies might enhance the play we had devalued the risk of re-traumatising witnesses who desired to move beyond the traumatic event.

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<sup>88</sup> In the autumn of 2007, Anna Dunwoodie, a witness to the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes wrote a personal piece for the Opinion section of *The Guardian* entitled *Our Silence is Senseless*. Dunwoodie expressed her frustration of the silencing of witnesses to the Stockwell shooting: "With the witnesses removed, the shooting can be described in impersonal terms. And while this may be the clearest way for a court to investigate, I don't think it is the best way for this terrible event to be remembered. If you take the people away, you lose the means to understand the true horror. I was there; I can tell you: 'I watched someone die on a rush hour tube train. His body was left in a pool of blood on the floor.' To fully comprehend what happened and begin to put things right, the witnesses need to be back in the picture" (Dunwoodie, 2007).

It was clear from both scenarios that our ambition to capture witnesses' accounts extended beyond a respect for privacy.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, we chose to end the pursuit of finding witnesses and to concentrate instead on incorporating the source material from the inquest transcripts as a more appropriate approach to contextualise the witnesses' experiences in such a way that it would not interfere in their personal lives. These experiences were an occasion of self-reflexivity. This raised the question to what extent approaching witnesses to violence and appropriating their testimony perpetuates a limited construction of victimhood. These failed negotiations with potential interviewees prompted new ethical considerations regarding our intentions and process. In re-assessing our role as playwrights and facilitators of testimony, we decided to approach those who were connected to the case but were not witnesses to the shooting.

### **Relationships Based on Trust: Alterity and Critical Distance**

As conducting interviews became a vital method in generating material for the play, one of the key tensions I encountered as a researcher and playwright was maintaining a respectful distance from the experiences of interviewees. Throughout the research phase there were times when my personal political biases made me more sympathetic to some interviewees' experiences than others and I developed friendships with some of the interviewees. This in turn blurred the distinction between the roles of playwright and friend. While I am not suggesting friendships with interviewees are problematic, at times my own complacency, given that relationships are fundamentally based on trust, had the potential to obscure the underlying risk of exploitation. Bearing in mind Ridout's (2009) proposal that perhaps we might be able to find a model for performance that promotes ethical encounters with others and encourages "a respect for difference" (p. 54), I suggest that a causal sense of heightened responsibility might in fact obscure the violation that can occur in verbatim practice and one's responsibility as a playwright. Here, I explore the question to what extent are relationships based on trust illusory within the research and writing process of the verbatim play? Here, I reflect critically on my first encounter meeting the Menezes family to examine the ethical

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<sup>89</sup> As the witnesses' testimonies were published as part of the Menezes inquiry several months prior in the autumn of 2008, seeking out personal details proved to be a violation of privacy, and risked appearing (as evidenced by the secretary's strong reaction) unethical and unnecessary.

tensions and complications I encountered negotiating my role as an empathetic listener and playwright.

I met the Menezes family in the spring of 2009 nearly four years after Jean's death. We met outside of Stockwell station at his shrine so that Vivian, Jean's cousin, could change the flowers left at the site. Vivian had arranged for Alex and Patricia, Jean's other cousins to join us.<sup>90</sup> Seeing Jean's relatives in front of the memorial triggered a wave of anxiety. Previously, I had only interviewed individuals who had never met Jean Charles de Menezes. Now, I was engaging with members of his family, asking them to share intimate details about their cousin's death, details that would be scripted and later performed in front of a live audience.<sup>91</sup>

### **Box 3.1**

*When I sat face-to-face with Jean's cousins Patricia, Vivian and Alex, I was at a loss for words and felt unable to initiate the interview. Sensing my uneasiness Alex, who is energetic and talkative, broke the tension by asking me questions about my nationality and where in America I was from. Alex began talking about his Brazilian friends living in New York City and how Jean wanted to move to the United States but his visa application had been rejected. We discussed Jean's hometown and how he had decided to come to the United Kingdom (as Alex had) in an attempt to seek higher wages. Jean and Alex would send money back to their village in Brazil to aid their families and the local economy. Jean encouraged his cousins Vivian and Patricia to come to London to take advantage of better opportunities. The conversation gradually shifted to the shooting as the cousins started talking about the stress of balancing everyday life with their efforts to restore Jean's reputation. My initial anxiety meeting the family stemmed from the uncomfortable questions that centred around Jean's killing, such as: What was Jean like as a person?; How were you informed of his death?; How did you feel about the manner in which Jean was represented in the public domain?; What upset you most about the way in which the police and press handled his death?*

Contrary to my concern about asking questions specific to the immediate aftermath of the shooting, such probing questions had become routine for the family as

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<sup>90</sup> To make the interview feel more conversational, and to balance the group family dynamic, my sister and colleague Jessica Beck, who was at the time the assistant education director at Theatre 503 and a theatre director, accompanied me to the interview for moral support and to help clarify any questions about the production. In retrospect, it may have seemed more professional to have taken director Tim Roseman, or my co-writer Paul Unwin to the interview rather than a family member, but Vivian and Patricia responded positively to the fact that we were sisters, and Vivian expressed her feelings of longing to be with her sister who resided in Brazil.

<sup>91</sup> In *The Weight of the World* the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1999) noted in terms of his own relationship with interviewees, "[h]ow can we not feel anxious about making private words public, revealing confidential statements made in the context of a relationship based on trust [...] no contract carries as many unspoken conditions as one based on trust" (p. 1).

they – unlike me – had become accustomed to speaking about their cousin’s death. Their words when detailing the tragic events evidenced a distancing from the immediate horror of the killing as their recollections had been reshaped over four years of self-reflection. Still saddened and angered about the manner in which Jean’s name had been publicly tarnished, publicising their version of the events in the wake of the shooting had become a priority for the family as a means of negating the media’s misrepresentation of Jean Charles de Menezes.<sup>92</sup>

**Box 3.2**

*In this instance I felt an acute responsibility to the family and their experiences, at the same time recognising our intentions as playwrights calling upon the family to disclose sensitive material.*

In reflection of my immediate response as indicated above, my perceived connection to the family at times became at times was problematic in terms of maintaining a respect for difference.

What felt like an empathetic understanding of Menezes’ cousins and their experiences was blurred and what seemed like fostering ethical encounters were at times morally suspect. While on the surface my best intentions were to respect the family and be sensitive to their journey, my inability to remain conscious of my role as a playwright risked a respect for alterity. I had been affected by the Menezes’ stories and their vulnerable position in challenging the Metropolitan Police but failed to understand at the time that I was perhaps indulging in their narratives, thereby projecting what Nicholson labels as “primary identification” (Nicholson, 2014) in which our sense of self overrides the unique experience of the other. Furthermore, Amanda Stuart-Fisher (2011) highlights the risk of the identification process involved in creating verbatim theatre, borrowing from Dominick LaCapra’s concept of “unchecked identification” (LaCapra, 2001, p. 27) Stuart-Fisher explains the risks involved “when we replace the other with ourselves and see the other’s happiness or suffering as our own” (Stuart-Fisher, 2011a, p. 201) can paradoxically eradicate the alterity of the other we seek to represent. In the process of interviewing the Menezes family, this is evidenced in the false sense of identification I experienced when I on

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<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, there were allegations that Menezes was a suspect in a rape case, which was later proven false. Also, it was circulated that because was found in the autopsy that Menezes had cocaine in blood, the cocaine somehow made him act suspiciously at the time of the shooting.

occasion inadvertently equated the loss of the family and the struggle for justice as part of my own experience. This pattern of my becoming emotionally attached to some of the verbatim subjects' experiences, in the case of the family, but also in my friendships with Justice 4 Jean campaign members, resonates with what Antonious C.G.M. Robben (1996) terms "ethnographic seduction" (p. 83). Reflecting on encountering subjects, some implicated in the disappearance of Argentinians, and victims traumatised by this experience, he writes:

I realised that I had been engrossed in ethnographic seduction. This process of seduction and subsequent awareness repeated itself in my meetings with bishops, human rights activists, and former guerrilla leaders. Each group was seductive in its own way, and it was only after months of interviewing that I succeeded in recognising the prevalent defences and strategies and learned to diminish seduction from good rapport (p. 83).

While I recognise on reflection on these moments a blurring of "good rapport" into ethnographic seduction it is also worth noting that interviewees have their own intentions for sharing particular stories. It would be naïve to assume in our relationships that they did not have their own political agendas for participating in the project. I consider for my next project this notion of ethnographic seduction and adopt with caution a clearer awareness of the blurring of one's role as playwright and friend in the process of gathering testimony.

### **Dramaturgical Strategies: Writing *This Much is True***

As co-writers our key method of research and generating material was through interviewing, thus we employed the verbatim technique as an integral part of our practice as we knew we wanted audiences to hear accounts from those affected by the events and aftermath of the Menezes shooting. Our overall strategy collating oral testimony was to encourage audiences to consider the human cost of the shooting as well as listening to witness accounts that had never heard before, employing new social histories to "set the record straight" (Forsyth & Stuart-Fisher, 2014, p. 5).<sup>93</sup> Discussing the dramaturgy of the play, I draw from extracts from the play to illustrate how we

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<sup>93</sup> Employing three out of the six of Carol Martin's (2006) identified functions of documentary theatre, our aims were "to create additional historical accounts," "to reconstruct an event" and "to intermingle autobiography for history" to challenge audiences' preconceptions of what transpired on the day of the shooting and how the public perception of Menezes was shaped by media and the police and what these iterative acts meant for those fighting for justice (pp.12-13).

employed techniques and rhetorical strategies, reflecting on what we as playwrights were trying to convey in the playtext to inform the theatrical staged text.<sup>94</sup>

### **Linear Progression: Generating a Timeline**

The limitations of condensing a vast amount of interview material into a 90 minute play meant we had to adhere to a strict framework, allowing minimal room to explore anecdotes that did not directly fit into a specific sequence of events. While I was concerned with the aftermath of how interviewees' lives were affected by the death of Menezes such as the Assistant Commissioner Andy Hayman's resignation in the wake of the police cover-up and Yasmin Khan's periodic remorse prioritising the campaign over the rest of her life, Unwin wanted to show what happened leading up to the event of the shooting, using expert testimony in addition to accounts from those close to Menezes to illustrate to audiences the series of errors that led to Menezes' death.

We decided to concentrate on the linear progression of the case as an organising principle. We opened the play with witness testimony from the inquest describing the event, interrupted by a montage of misreporting of the event using witness and police statements as well as bystanders' accounts. Following the montage, we focused on the individual journeys of those we interviewed, tracing the interviewees' stories from the initial aftermath of the shooting and focusing on key moments that transpired in the aftermath of the case. This included how interviewees' lives had been affected by major moments in the case such as the formation of the Justice 4 Jean campaign and the families' protest at the inquest into the death of Jean Charles de Menezes. Thus, the writing began with the process of interweaving, namely selecting, grouping and arranging key testimony around significant moments in the case and important dates in the timeline. The timeline of the event framed the process of interweaving dialogue, rather than interweaving materials centred around broader themes of memory, social justice and grief.

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<sup>94</sup> In Chapter 2 I introduced the conceptual language I employ to describe my construction of a verbatim playtext including interweaving, intercutting and secondary dialogue. Interweaving involves the thematic organisation of testimony. Intercutting involves the editing, intersecting and crafting of the dialogue between characters. Secondary dialogue involves the construction of duologues from one interviewee's account in order to dramatise action.

## Locating the Central Question for the Play

One of the key problems in the dramaturgy of *This Much Is True* was identifying the central question the play was asking, not only as an approach to help frame the verbatim material but also to provide the metaphorical question for the audience to consider (Lane, 2010). Simultaneous to the initial research and development process of *This Much Is True*, the women tending the Stockwell shrine – Mary, Chrysoulla and Jean’s cousin Vivian – were creating a permanent mosaic to replace the shrine tiles making up the face of Jean Charles de Menezes surrounded by tiny mosaic flowers. This mosaic metaphor operated as an initial frame for the play—how do our perceptions of others influence acts of violence? By exploring the inconsistencies of perception, we had hoped our interviews and playtext might raise vigilance and prompt self-awareness concerning how perception operates and can be manipulated in a heightened state of fear. However, the initial question at the starting point was also dependent on what was discovered throughout the recording and collection of materials. In the cacophony of voices and material, we had lost direction as to what we as artists were trying to convey and lacked a clear question to focus the material.

To help with the dramaturgy of the play, we worked with Theatre 503’s resident dramaturg Sarah Dickenson and director Tim Roseman who was also co-artistic director of Theatre 503, and co-artistic director Paul Robinson.<sup>95</sup> Identifying the key question around which the play would coalesce became a central point of discussion as David Lane (2010) has documented:

The act of taking a position of posing a central question is characteristic of both verbatim and non-verbatim plays. Reflecting on Theatre 503’s process in developing *This Much Is True*, resident dramaturg Sarah Dickenson commented that specifying the question the play was asking became central to the play’s development, and the questions often reached beyond the factual specificity of the case, elevated on much broader moral plane (p. 71).

Initially, the play’s question of investigation was: how do we perceive people in the wake of terrorism and what is the human cost? However, through the research process, the accounts given only brushed over the day of the shooting, and offered far more

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<sup>95</sup> Katalin Trencsényi (2015) emphasises that “doing dramaturgy” is not limited to the presence of a designated dramaturg but includes “professionals engaged in a dynamic dialogue-relationship with a theatre-maker, a collective or a theatre; a collaborative, hermeneutical, facilitating role that is characterised by a high level of communication” (p. xxi).



about the long-term impact of the events that transpired in the wake of the shooting. This included the families' seventy-two hours following the notification of Jean's death without legal representation, the formation of the Justice 4 Jean campaign, the resignation of Assistant Commissioner Andy Hayman who seemed to be the scapegoat for the Metropolitan Police actions on the day of the shooting and the subsequent cover-up, the false rape allegations against Jean, the isolation and fear of a whistleblower who leaked the IPCC documents to the press, and the findings from the inquest that the police had shot Menezes without warning. The repercussions of the Menezes shooting were still impacting people but these human stories were not being circulated. We were momentarily struggling to find the new question and meaning driving the play, as the content of the play extended beyond a question of perception. The emergence of another play about the Menezes shooting helped us to articulate a new question for the play.

In this moment of saturation another event helped us to refine the question we were trying to investigate was Kieron Barry's *Stockwell*, which debuted at the Landor Theatre in Clapham North running from July 21-August 8, 2009 just three months prior to our opening. Unlike *This Much is True*, which concentrated on personal interviews with those affected directly by the Menezes shooting, Barry's *Stockwell* used transcripts from the inquest, editing them down to reveal the key mistakes made by the Metropolitan Police on the day of the shooting.<sup>96</sup> Politically speaking, we knew the importance of raising public awareness about the events that led to the shooting of Menezes, in other words to counter initial misleading media reports that Menezes had acted suspiciously, but as playwrights the timing was problematic.<sup>97</sup>

Seeing *Stockwell* directly impacted on the dramaturgy of our play, as we as co-writers had to justify how and why our approach as writers and our play was different. Our advantage in terms of generating an alternative theatrical response was based on personal stories from the family and we could focus on their journey over the course of

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<sup>96</sup> Kieron Barry's *Stockwell* condensed key elements of the Menezes inquest within a 90-minute production. Edited transcripts from Cressida Dick, Michael Mansfield, Charlie 2 and Charlie 12 (the firearms officers who shot Menezes and who remained anonymous throughout the inquest), witnesses to the shooting on the train as well as Menezes' cousins Patricia, Alex and Vivian. All of the material generated for the play came from the public inquest transcripts.

<sup>97</sup> The artistic directors of Theatre 503 became concerned about programing, that another Menezes play would lose public interest given that it was coming on the heels of another documentary play, thereby somehow diminishing the importance of *This Much is True*. This forced us to reassess and justify our play.

the legal process.<sup>98</sup> It became clear that hinging the play on the minutes leading up to the shooting was insufficient in comparison to *Stockwell*, which was able to explain the complexity of the circumstances that led to the shooting of Menezes using the court transcripts alone.<sup>99</sup> In my view our play had to concentrate on the aftermath of the shooting, tracing the ripple effect of the shooting through the lives of those who had been affected in the wake of the event as these were stories audiences were not familiar with and which would make our play unique.

Dramaturg Sarah Dickenson submitted a report to aid our re-drafting of the script stressing the need to distinguish our approach from *Stockwell*, encouraging us to move away from the tribunal-like use of both transcripts and verbatim interview material, focusing on the face-to-face personal accounts which were more idiosyncratic and poetic than the clinical tribunal impression and expert perspectives that co-artistic director Paul Robinson (2009) suggested were “too analytical.”<sup>100</sup> The advantage we had as writers has been access to those directly impacted by the case, including a relationship with the Menezes’ cousins. Dickenson (2009) noted in the report, “I think it’s going back to a central question [...] Then one way in would be to explore the material in relationship to that question”.

The central question for *This Much is True* became what happens to us when we respond to violence with violence? We explored this question through the journeys of the family as well as strangers whose lives were affected by the shooting. By showing the human impact and timeline of the events and their aftermath, our intention was not

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<sup>98</sup> The one element of Barry’s *Stockwell* that I found to be deeply problematic was the concentration on the family’s perspective and a re-evaluation of this omission would inform how we restructure *This Much is True*, prompting us to include more detail about the family living in London. I was preoccupied by Barry’s editing of the family testimony and the actors’ portrayal of Jean Charles de Menezes’ Brazilian cousins, Patricia, Alex and Vivian. Each cousin’s separate testimony from the inquest transcripts was edited and presented as a set piece. The actors playing the cousins huddled together as a group of three, and shared a melancholic presentation of the edited words from the inquest recalling their reaction to their cousin Jean Charles de Menezes’ killing, underscored by an acoustic guitar playing a generic Latin song. In my view, this editing and representation made Vivian, Alex and Patricia indistinguishable, vulnerable victims, their lines becoming interchangeable. In contrast, characters such as barrister Michael Mansfield and Cressida Dick (the senior police officer in charge who oversaw Operation Kratos) were distinctive.

<sup>99</sup> Watching the piece as a co-writer of yet another play about the shooting I was acutely aware of how effectively the testimony was edited in order to both illuminate the key issues and stimulate a sense of concern amongst audience. While I was well aware of the errors made by the police through my research and review of the inquest and IPCC reports, (through a concise portrayal of the evidence) many audience members became aware for the first time of the miscommunication and occasional incompetence that led to Menezes’ death. Listening to witness Anne Dunwoodie’s testimony, which was excerpted almost exactly in our current draft of *This Much is True*, I knew that we as playwrights had a lot of re-evaluating and re-writing to undertake.

<sup>100</sup> Dickenson (2009) dramaturg’s report states: “The question I heard, and indeed I ask, is how does this piece take on an identity of its own which goes beyond the tribunal play and, what material is needed in order to create that piece”.

to answer why Menezes was shot but to raise further questions. To position the audience in relation to the human stories, we chose to concentrate the play on the four-year journey of the family in the aftermath of the shooting. By carrying out several follow-up interviews guided by this question we could generate more personal material beyond the constraints of the tribunal transcripts. Thus the personal material and how the interviewees' lives changed became the focus of the play, rather than attempting to examine and explain the events that transpired in the lead up to the shooting, became our purpose.

### **Considering Style: Writing for Performance**

Thinking about the appropriate theatrical language for the piece and the questions we wanted to raise became a key part of the writing process. As co-writers we discussed frequently with director Tim Roseman throughout the preliminary stages of script development the pitfalls of documentary plays. As many verbatim plays and conveying interviewees' experiences risked seeming too "earnest" or "worthy" (words that continually came up in early creative meetings), we were continually conscious of appearing self-righteous in our exploration of the Menezes case (Tim Roseman in Stage, 2009). However, we were also concerned stylistically with how to present these stories effectively. A hyperrealist style that concentrated on presenting an interviewee's exact punctuation, breaths and hesitations seemed to be a misleading illusion given that as playwrights and researchers we were already concerned with the idea of perception and how public perception was shaped in the wake of the Menezes shooting. We felt that the style should play on the fluidity of perception rather than trying to convey a truth claim. We felt that replicating the testimony in a hyperrealistic manner would not encourage audiences to question the attitudes and construction of the Menezes shooting. In addition, while we considered non-naturalistic portrayals of given characters, Roseman did not find the agitprop style appropriate for the Menezes case and was concerned that the form would appear dated. As playwrights, we were both interested in what a more presentational style would offer in terms of critiquing the way truth is constructed but also felt that more sensitive testimony, particularly the family' words, had to be handled with care. Thus, we decided on employing a myriad of styles thus fusing a presentational mode with realism.

Rather than trying to achieve verisimilitude, we wanted to create a collision of perspectives and reports to underscore the intricacies and inaccuracies of accounts surrounding the case. This was contextualised by designer Paul Wills' vision of a rehearsal room decked in graffiti, which incorporated television screens used for projections of actual news footage, interview transcripts taped to the walls, IPCC reports, dozens of binders of evidence from the inquest scattered on the floor and various props utilised for the actors' transformations. The result was a collision of styles and a myriad of personal standpoints presented by self-aware performers Actor One, Actor Two and Actor Three played by Gerald Kyd, Amber Agar and Justine Waddell respectively against the more empathetic portrayal of Jean Charles de Menezes' cousins Alex, Vivian and Patricia by Stefano Braschi, Beatriz Romilly and Alice Da Cunha. Due to the fact that our interviews reflected the transient nature of memory, revealing disparities in recollections, the statement 'this much is true' was repeated by a narrator to reiterate various divergences in personal interpretations. The performance was in the traverse, with audience members in direct view of one another, thus encouraging a sense of witnessing and self-awareness while watching the performance.

### **Multiple role-playing**

The play was written for six actors, which included the parts of Actor One, Actor Two and Actor Three and three actors portraying Jean's cousins Alex, Patricia and Vivian. We employed a presentational mode with Actor One, Actor Two and Actor Three as Unwin was influenced by a Brechtian aesthetic—the actors would take on various roles such as police officers, members of the Justice 4 Jean campaign and human rights lawyers, making the audience aware that they were actors picking up materials, costumes, props and throughout the play while they would comment on the action as narrators addressing the audience directly.<sup>101</sup> The rules of Actor One, Actor Two and Actor Three were different for the actors portraying Vivian, Alex and Patricia who would adhere to a more natural performance style.

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<sup>101</sup> I use the Brechtian aesthetic here to highlight the influence of his techniques as part of our dramaturgical choices. However politically our aims as playwrights often clashed with Brecht's principles with our realistic depiction of the Menezes cousins. For a contemporary study of Brecht's techniques and political theories in modern playmaking practice see David Barnett's *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, theory and Performance* (Barnett, 2015).

The advantage of doubling characters in Actor One, Actor Two and Actor Three meant a range of characters were played across gender, nationality and political standpoints. Justine Waddell as Actor Two, for instance, played barrister Michael Mansfield, Lana Vandenberghe a Canadian whistleblower, and Estelle a member of the Justice 4 Jean campaign. The constant transformations of Actor One, Actor Two and Actor Three also showed the transient nature of perception we wanted the audience to consider. The transformations of Actor One, Actor Two and Actor Three was a performative dramaturgical strategy exploring the variety of subjectivities and the alterability of perception.<sup>102</sup> This doubling was to show audiences how perception is affected at the height of terror via the media, personal bias and police statements, and in doing encouraging audiences to question their own perception of the Menezes case.<sup>103</sup>

I will concentrate later in this section on the naturalistic performance style of the cousins but first I offer an example of our approach when constructing Actor One, Actor Two and Actor Three. Below is an excerpt from the play that illustrates the presentational mode between Actor One, Actor Two and Actor Three moving from the scene ‘Trauma’ that incorporates perspectives from senior police officers on the shoot-to-kill policy and the actors’ transformations into the ‘The Campaign’ scene in which they present the relevant activists:

**Script Excerpt 3.1** *This Much is True*

TRAUMA

*ACTOR ONE steps forward - Andy Hayman, wiry, energetic likeable Essex man.*

ACTOR ONE (HAYMAN): (*interrupts, then smiles*) I was Assistant Commissioner of Specialist Operations at that time and was responsible for the overall investigation into 21/7 and the 7/7 bombings and the operation that sadly ended up with an innocent life being lost.

ACTOR THREE (PADDICK): Two aspects to Kratos –

ACTOR TWO (NARRATOR): The official Met strategy to deal with suicide bombers...

<sup>102</sup> Joanna Zylińska (2005) describes performativity as an empowering concept pertinent to achieving political change “...because it not only explains how change happens but also shows that change is possible even when we are functioning within the most congealed, oppressive and totalitarian social and cultural structures” (p. 5).

<sup>103</sup> Paul C. Castagno (2012) explores the functions and popularity of doubling in *New Playwriting Strategies: Language and Mediation*. Similar to our use of “doubling characterisation” in *This Much is True* as part of our critique of perception in the dramaturgy, Castagno explains how “doubling” and “character transformation” operate in Suzan Lori-Park’s play *In the Blood* (p. 105).

ACTOR THREE (PADDICK): Two aspects to Kratos: one is, when the armed team get to the suspect, they have absolutely no doubt that he is a suicide bomber about to explode his bomb – then they shoot him in the back of the head without warning. If they have any doubt as to whether he is a suicide bomber or not i.e.: an assessment has been made by the designated senior officer who says this *is* a suicide bomber but *when* they actually see a person face to face, if they have any doubt about it they're supposed to shout a warning and then only shoot the person on the basis of how that person responds.

*(slight pause - gently)*

That was the original Kratos policy. Which might explain why the armed officers were claiming that they shouted a warning to Jean Charles that nobody else in the carriage heard.

*ACTOR THREE steps out of character. She puts on a denim jacket, takes out rolling tobacco.*

ACTOR ONE (HAYMAN): The thing of it is – had he been a proper one he would have blown himself up (*serious*). If you look at the footage of 21/7 where the guy's standing like that...

*Mimes strap hanging on the Tube – thunder of a tube train.*

ACTOR ONE (HAYMAN): ... and down there is a black woman with her baby in a pram and he looks down like that, his hand in his pocket and presses the plunger. And then it doesn't go off – he keeps pressing the plunger!

### THE CAMPAIGN

*ACTOR THREE is Yasmin ... mid-twenties, good looking, confident, political.*

ACTOR THREE (YASMIN): Um – I heard about the shooting on the Friday about half ten/eleven. I was in a cafe, a Portuguese cafe on Gray's Inn Road just by King's Cross and at that point the radio just announced that an Asian man had been shot...

*She is rolling a cigarette.*

ACTOR ONE (NARRATOR): Yasmin Khan – A founder and Spokesperson of the Justice for Jean Campaign.

ACTOR THREE (YASMIN): I was sitting with a friend of mine, kind of similar to what you guys said.

*She refers to ACTORS ONE and TWO who have now joined her. The members of JUSTICE 4 JEAN have a mixture of vigour and wariness.*

ACTOR THREE (YASMIN): You kind of hear something like that initially you just, you know it was, that time in London was terrible wasn't it? That month, just shocks and then immediately very suspicious as well 'cause

you know I, intrinsically, I'm usually suspicious of news reports anyway ... er, so there was that and I remember feeling quite sad and scared actually. I had been on the 7th of July at work just off Tavistock Square so the bus had exploded just outside our offices. Do you have a light?

*ACTOR ONE hands her a lighter. He is holding a shoulder bag.*

ACTOR ONE (MIKE): Uh, I'm Mike Podmore [...] Er, yeah, how do you begin? I guess we all heard about the shooting...

*ACTOR TWO is tenser than the other two, less open.*

ACTOR TWO (ESTELLE): I'm Estelle Du Boulay. My memories of... I remember on the day. My friend, a friend of mine, said: "Have you heard they shot someone on the Underground?"

ACTOR THREE (YASMIN): having a healthy cynicism of media reports... following the state line media. It's weird, but, I mean initially – I remember when I heard that a man had been shot and they were saying an Asian-looking man on Friday morning, just came on the radio, and just, I remember my mind was going: "Fucking hell, they better not have gotten the wrong person."

ACTOR ONE (MIKE): Yeah, I think when we heard it was an innocent man - and sort of feeling like the police had been lying, a text went round late on a Saturday night from a friend of ours saying: "oh there's a bunch of people, we should go down to the station on Sunday, and you know show support".

*The lighter has been used to light candles. The three ACTORS are holding them - back to the first vigil.*

By intercutting dialogue with senior police officers Paddick and Hayman, though separate interviews, we were able to contextualise the police response to the London bombings, the subsequent failed attacks and the shooting of Menezes. In contrast, the following scene interweaved stories from members of the campaign upon first hearing of the shooting, intercutting both individual interviews with Yasmin Khan and later a group interview with Khan and fellow campaigners Mike and Estelle, thus we were able to show the campaigners' group dynamic. The multiple roleplaying of Actor One as Andy Hayman/Mike Padmore, Actor Two as Narrator/Estelle Du Boulay and Actor Three as Brian Paddick/Yasmin Khan showed the variety of "subjective truths" (Felman

& Laub, 1992) and how each interviewee's relationship to the traumatic event affected their perception of the case.

### **Naturalistic Portrayals of the Menezes Family**

In contrast to the presentational mode adopted by Actor One, Actor Two and Actor Three, the characters of Vivian, Alex and Patricia were performed by separate actors adopting a natural performance style. This is where we departed from Brechtian influence, as we felt the naturalistic portrayal of the cousins in juxtaposition with the shifting roles of Actor One, Actor Two and Actor Three was more appropriate and symbolic of the shifting perceptions and information about Jean Charles de Menezes that the family endured throughout the four-year aftermath.

We wrote the scenes featuring the Menezes family to allow for a more natural performance style in order to achieve a more representative depiction of the family's experience throughout the case. In the writing of the script based on interview transcripts we made a conscious directorial decision to have the actors imitate the vocal utterances of the Menezes family and replicate their individual mannerisms in the writing of stage directions. However, by adopting this approach we were uncritically endorsing verisimilitude or "the appearance of truth" (Stucky, 1993, p. 170). Our encouragement of the actors playing the Menezes family to match their performances closely to the audio recordings of the interviews and mimic the family members' physicality, as captured in video recordings conveying key moments in the case, blurred "the boundary between the real and not-real" (Stucky, 1993, p. 177). Nathan Stucky (1993) observes that, "scripts for natural performance, derived from naturally complex human interaction, contain a high level of detail" (p. 169). While our intent was to replicate the spirit and nuance of the individuals telling their story, at times I was uncomfortable with the depictions, arguing that we were exaggerating the family's emotional responses beyond what was exhibited in the interview setting.

Adding to the illusion of the 'real', the actors performing as the Menezes cousins sat in theatre seats amongst the unaware audience until Beatriz Romilly portraying Vivian interrupts the performance to tell the audience of her experience hearing about the London bombings.<sup>104</sup> In retrospect, the naturalistic portrayal promoted

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<sup>104</sup> The characters of the cousins and the actors' biographies were omitted from the programme to add surprise to the interruption.



the illusion of the veracity of our construction, which was even more pronounced when juxtaposed with the presentational mode adopted by Actor One, Actor Two and Actor Three. Below is an excerpt from the scene ‘The Family’ to demonstrate how the characters of the cousins Alex and Vivian interacted with each other and the audience:

**Script Excerpt 3.2** *This Much is True*

THE FAMILY

*Vivian Figueiredo, a cousin, is 24, wears tight, trendy clothes. She has a warm smile, but there is tension around her mouth.*

VIVIAN: (strong accent) On 7/7 I was working in Surbiton. A colleague rang me and said, “Find a way to get home – there have been bombs.” Patricia and Jean started ringing me to see if I was OK. I was scared but carried on. We talked about it at home, watched the news on TV. Jean was the first one to find out about it. He was always watching TV. Patricia saw it too, and he explained what was happened. He relayed all the facts to her – how many people die [*sic*], that it was a terrorist attack.

*Another of the Brazilians steps forward. Alex is an energetic young man.*

VIVIAN: Every Sunday Alex would come to our house – and we would see each other then. But often our schedules were conflicting. Patricia would leave early, but mainly we caught up on Friday evenings and do something like watch a film together.

ALEX: People always say they came for a holiday and wanted to stay – but in fact they plan for their whole life is to come here. The money you can earn here will take you years to earn in Brazil. Everyone wants to go to America – 25% of Gonzaga live in America! I know all about Boston and New York. I hadn't even checked England out on the map before I come here!

VIVIAN: My first impression of London was Brixton. Brixton was overwhelming, crowded, disorganised. We were offered drugs, I was shocked. It was worse than Sao Paulo.

ALEX: To move from London, England to Brazil is very good. London's the bad part.

*(laughing)*

At first it was very exciting. After a year you just work, work, work. He used to say – in life you have to work hard, but if you are foreign here you have to work twice as hard. He had a Portuguese expression:

*(in Portuguese)*

Life in England – if you are a foreigner – is like a cow having to taking it up the backside.

*Vivian looks uneasy. Alex laughs loudly.*

The reasoning for the realistic portrayal of the Menezes cousins was twofold: This style functioned to frame the four-year journey of the family throughout the aftermath of the shooting, guiding the audience through the cacophony of information; and secondly, as these family members had known and loved Jean Charles de Menezes we felt at the time a naturalistic portrayal of the cousins to be more ethically appropriate, particularly as we were exploring traumatic material, such as their identification of Jean's body. This would later raise new ethical questions regarding representation and exploitation and how our use of style potentially encouraged a false sense of identification that re-inscribed the Menezes family's victimhood.<sup>105</sup>

### **Whose Voice Matters? The Hierarchy of Testimony and the Risk of Double Silencing**

Considering the ethical and aesthetic tensions we encountered in the interview and writing process of *This Much Is True*, I briefly consider the risks of suppressing particular voices in the process of making a verbatim play. Drawing on three aspects of the dramaturgy I consider how voices were silenced through heightened aestheticisation, omission and identity construction.

One of the constant discussions between Unwin and myself was how to make portrayals more theatrical without distorting the voice of those who entrusted their personal stories to us. One pivotal moment in the development of the play was when one of our interviewees pulled their testimony from the script. This demonstrated the difficulty of mediating life narratives for theatre and allowing interviewees to exercise control over aesthetic choices. A key senior police voice was cut from the play several months before the play's performance as a result of the police official viewing the work-in-progress script. This particular interviewee disclosed details about the heightened atmosphere after 7/7 and the round-the-clock efforts made by police officers in the pursuit of finding more terrorist suspects and preventing another attack. He was

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<sup>105</sup> In August 2009 we staged a rehearsed reading with professional actors. In the post-reading discussion actor Alan Cox, who played Actor Three portraying Andy Hayman among other parts, questioned our reasoning for depicting the Menezes family in a more realistic light. Cox contended that this realistic portrayal as a style choice was emotionally manipulative and reduced the audiences' critical engagement. Cox suggested that the competing styles did not work and the actors playing the family should, as Actors One, Two and Three, perform other roles so as not to single out the Menezes family.

also a close friend of Cressida Dick – the commanding officer of the operation in which Menezes was shot – and provided both professional insights and poignant personal reflections that gave depth to the police experience in the summer of 2005.

One of the conditions for our interview was that he would be permitted to read a draft of the script prior to the performance. In an earlier draft Unwin suggested we present Metropolitan Police Commissioner Ian Blair’s letter to the Home Office Permanent Secretary John Gieve requesting that the Independent Police Complaints Commission’s investigation into the shooting of Menezes be suspended, thus delaying an investigation into Menezes’ death and evidence of a cover-up by police (Punch, 2011). In this scene it had been written that Actor Three would present the letter wearing a paper bag over her to contrast the serious tone of the play—using humour to engage audiences.<sup>106</sup> We decided with our director Tim Roseman that the use of paper bags was perhaps in poor taste and cut the action from the script. However, Unwin had accidentally sent this particular script prematurely before the cut had been made.

In response to the script, the interviewee contacted Unwin by telephone. The police officer objected to, in his view, our biased construction of the aftermath of the case and did not agree with other characters’ criticism of the police’s mishandling of the Menezes case and the implications of a police cover-up. Over a long conversation stressing the importance of the testimony to the telling of the complexity of the case, Unwin confirmed that the police officer demanded we cut his testimony from the play. Perhaps our style choices and mediations compromised the ability to portray a countervailing personal context to policing on the Menezes case, resulting in the disruption of the balance of the play. However, shaping the play to appease certain interviewees, especially those in positions of power, might result in propaganda.

As we had only had two senior police perspectives, one from Andy Hayman and the other from Brian Paddick, a trauma expert and Michael Mansfield offered professional opinions about the events that transpired on July 22nd, all of which were used to contextualise the mindsets of trained firearms officers on the day, the shoot-to-kill policy as well as the key mistakes made by police involved in the shooting and their response to its aftermath.<sup>107</sup> Stephen Bottoms (2006) critiques the reliance on “expert”

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<sup>106</sup> In script notes Unwin (2009) explained, “I am seeing People Show/Dario Fo/Brecht/Bread and Puppet Theatre scale and colour—from the high theatre of that to go back”.

<sup>107</sup> The trauma expert, though working closely with firearms officers, knew little about the Menezes case and stated that Menezes had run away from police, thus triggering the instinctive reaction to “stop” the suspect. I countered this statement in the interview explaining that the CCTV recordings revealed

opinions in Robin Soans' *Talking to Terrorists* (2005), stating that these "insights" function to circumvent any need for comprehension of the possible motives behind political violence" and at times our overreliance on the "expert" opinion (p. 58), such as that of the trauma expert, failed to offer any personal and political insight into the effects the event had on the people involved in the aftermath of the shooting.<sup>108</sup> These "expert" perspectives at times took precedence over more personal stories, and thus provided those who already have a strong media presence with more audience time. At times these expert decisions made the play too analytical and less personal. It also meant that those who worked on the shrine outside Stockwell station such as Mary and Chrysoulla and Justice 4 Jean campaigner Asad were repeatedly cut from later drafts of the script. This was also because we were working with a strict linear timeline following the aftermath of the shooting and stories that did not fit this timeline were cut.

During the first previews of the performance Mary's monologue describing Jean Charles de Menezes' mother's reaction to the shrine and to the inquest, illuminating Jean's mother's spirituality in the wake of her son's death, was used to close the play but it was eventually cut because audience members were confused by the introduction of a new character at the end of the play. This was because we had already cut Mary's testimony from other scenes. In *Autobiography and Performance* Deirdre Heddon (2008) argues that while in the dramaturgy of verbatim plays some interviewees become primary or secondary characters, others "remain invisible, having been cut from the script. In such instances, then, these people are doubly 'voiceless', having been initially courted, but then passed over in favour of other voices who are given time in the spotlight" (p. 136). I felt the act of cutting Mary from the play was a double silencing of Mary's story. In addition, several of the unheard voices recorded during the show were

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Menezes had not ran or jumped the ticket barrier. The expert requested to review our interview transcript and proceeded to make changes and re-write the document, thus re-writing the comment on Menezes' running as if this was what people had thought had happened. While this trauma expert provided an interesting perspective on how firearms officers were trained perhaps his "expert" opinion was more of a badge of credibility than actually necessary in the play.

<sup>108</sup> In my preliminary research looking for an expert opinion, I contacted a trauma psychologist who had contextualised in various press articles the effects of the 7/7 bombings. To my surprise this psychologist had been familiar with verbatim theatre having provided testimony to Robin Soans in the making of *Talking to Terrorists*. This expert insisted that if we were to use his testimony, it would be better for him to review the perspectives given and contextualise these experiences rather than giving testimony out of context. After discussion with Roseman and Unwin, we decided it was best not to use an expert who had already participated in a verbatim play. On reflection, we could have presented our trauma expert with the whole of the perspectives in order to contextualise the psychological process—but the prospect of using an expert to "psychoanalyse" other participants through analysis of material seemed immoral.

jettisoned to make way for more elite voices, thus “this reiteration of invisibility might be considered less than empowering” (Heddon, 2008, p. 136).

While I argued with both Roseman and Unwin over the importance of this monologue, I was overruled. At the time I took this as a personal attack on what I had valued as a playwright in favour of Unwin’s years of experience as a dramatist. I found the human stories that gave the Menezes case emotional depth had been thwarted due to an overreliance on information and expert perspectives and a dogmatic adherence to a strict timeline. Co-writers Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen (2005), also fought over the framing of narratives in the making of the verbatim play *The Exonerated*:

[A]s the changes got more detail-oriented, we started to disagree—and fight. As writers, we worked from opposite ends of the spectrum: Jessica looked for the most condensed, vivid moments, the little specificities that illuminated the characters, on sentence or phrase that opened up a whole new world. Erik had his eye on the larger narrative arc, focused on keeping the stories moving along at a fast clip, hooking the audience in [...] Erik thought Jessica was being precious, hanging on to moments that didn’t serve the play just because she found them beautiful. Jessica thought Erik was too ruthless with the text, stripping away the very things that illuminated the hearts of their stories, throwing the baby out with the bathwater (p. 198).

As in the working relationship described above, my standpoint was that we needed to integrate more human details into the story, whereas Unwin privileged information regarding the case in order to ensure the story progressed in a more linear framework. However, in retrospect there was an imbalance between the personal and the analytical, an imbalance that was also indicative of our working relationship and the power dynamics between Unwin and myself. The excised excerpt of Mary’s monologue is cited here:

**Script Excerpt 3.3** *This Much is True*

THE SHRINE

Mary: I saw his mother when she came here. She, er, she was so—I met her at the day she arrived. I was just coming home and passed the shrine, and she was there with her son, Vivian and the other cousins. And she was so, so sad. Just grief written in her face. And I just felt, em – I just wanted to hold her, and I did, I just held her. I can't speak Portuguese, and she can't speak English but just holding her, she had a sense of this transference of love, really. Just the understanding of her pain. To go back to Brazil, whatever the result of the inquest, she's still got that pain. And I felt that somehow, I have to get it across to her somehow that while she holds that pain – they've won again. The forces that killed her son, are killing her. She has to let go of that, because why, why should she die as well, with that terrible pain? So we spoke about it with translation and I was saying she had to give that pain to the police. When she was sitting in the inquest, she should have a sense of giving them the pain, and taking back her joy and connecting with Jean Charles, wherever he is, whatever belief she has on, a kind of level of joy and love – and restore her motherhood.

*(Beat)*

I took her up to Gloucestershire, in forest of Dean. We had a walk in the forest and er, they have a well, an old- an ancient well that's in the forest. It was made by this monastery and the priests used to go up there for drinking water. Maria, she drank from it and washed her face. And the next day she was in the court and that was when the guy who actually shot Jean Charles was giving evidence. And, she said she sat there and she just felt that water, she felt the strength. And after that her face started changing.

Losing this piece meant that the analytical and high profile testimony was privileged over Mary's more poetic language. I felt that this was the key limitation of *This Much is True* in that given the plethora of information the play lost the sense of the ordinary lives affected and to some extent in my view curtailed opportunities for audiences to connect with respect to difference to the case through human stories.



Fig 2. Speaking with Mary after the show. Photo by Jessica Beck.

Another form of double silencing emerged from our framing of the Menezes family, particularly in the context of immigration. This was evidenced in the scene ‘Samba’ which depicted a vibrant house party where members of the Justice 4 Jean campaign and the Menezes family dance and laugh until their momentary happiness is interrupted by the smashing of plates. This interruption marks the end of the party, where Harriet Wistrich, the family’s solicitor, addresses the audience sipping on a coffee reflecting on the hurdles the family has surmounted and the police’s besmirching of Jean’s character, while Vivian and Patricia clean up the mess from the party. While this scene was intended to comment on tensions of perception regarding immigration issues and the denial of socio-economic and political disparities between immigrants and a middle-class theatre audience, I felt this scene both simplified the portrayal of the Menezes family as victims and was more disempowering in terms of presentation than illuminating. The scene also undermined Harriet’s role as the family’s solicitor. Harriet’s calm reflection on the family’s plight, as the family labours over the mess of the party, connotes a sense of Harriet’s “mastery” (Alcoff, 1991-92) over their voices, which was unintended. This particular scene was a weakness of the play as the linear shape of the dramaturgy circumscribed the complexity of the characters. Furthermore,

the Menezes family's victimhood romanticised connecting their status as immigrants to that of their labour.

### **The Limits of Representing Trauma**

The most difficult task framing the multitude of narratives both chronologically and theatrically was how to appropriately compose scenes based on moments of trauma.<sup>109</sup> While we addressed the family's early response to the Menezes shooting with their permission, we were able to use older testimony from an unproduced BBC documentary as well as their statements from the inquest to convey their early responses to the shooting.<sup>110</sup> Mining these additional sources was thought to be a more effective approach to conveying sensitive material without causing the family harm. However, the question was how were we to ethically and aesthetically convey these events in the writing of the performance script?

One of the more sensitive scenes that we attempted to re-create through the collation of material was when the family was first notified of Jean Charles de Menezes' death and were called to identify his body. In order to heighten the urgency and show the frantic pace of the family's experience in the immediate aftermath of the shooting and the formation of the family campaign we decided to generate duologues from one-person testimonials. In my writing process I call this technique 'secondary dialogue'. To illustrate this technique I draw from the scene 'Brixton-Greenwich-Kingston' when the cousins were first met by detectives Kevin and Tracey who escorted the cousins to a police station in Brixton the morning after the shooting. Though we as researchers and playwrights never interviewed Kevin and Tracey, we utilised Vivian's testimony, when she describes what was said and done in the encounter, to generate dialogue, thus Actor Two and Actor Three were designated lines from the secondary dialogue of Kevin and Tracey. This technique also breaks the

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<sup>109</sup> Amanda Stuart-Fisher (2011) underlines the limits of the verbatim technique: "The challenge trauma places upon verbatim theatre, then, concerns the problem of how a dramaturgical strategy, constituted on the promise of direct communicable experience, can *authentically* engage with that which stands radically beyond language" (p. 114).

<sup>110</sup> The difference between the family's accounts for the unproduced television documentary and the testimony recorded for our project was largely ascribable to immediacy. Meeting the family four years on they were used to addressing the case and in 2006 they were also in the midst of their fight for justice countering the public perception of Jean Charles de Menezes. Obtaining written and oral permission from Menezes' cousins Alex, Patricia and Vivian we were able to interweave early interview material in order to contextualise the case.



banality of single monologues as it “shows” an extension of the testifier’s recollection of the events that transpired. In addition to this secondary dialogue, we intercut testimony from cousins Alessandro, Vivian, Alex and Patricia detailing the days following the shooting, describing their trips to the police station, the mortuary and the hotel room in Kingston:

**Script Excerpt 3.4** *This Much is True*

*PATRICIA, VIVIAN and ONE sit in the back of the Astra. ACTOR TWO + ACTOR THREE are Police Liaison officers – in the front.*

ACTOR TWO (KEVIN): You can relax. (They drive, friendly) What’s the neighbourhood like? Problems?

VIVIAN: So we went to the police station, so the people that went with us was Kevin and Tracey –

ACTOR ONE (ALESSANDRO): This was all in English. (Car stops) At Brixton the police told us:

ACTOR THREE (TRACEY): You go inside.

VIVIAN: And then they took us to a room and we had to wait.

PATRICIA: *(In Portuguese, translated by ACTOR ONE)*  
We were all sitting in a small room with a long table...

ALEX: He came with a copy of his Brazilian driver’s license.

ACTOR TWO (KEVIN): *(kind)* We’ve got a picture we want to show you.

ALEX: I don't want to stay in this room. I stood up and said I couldn’t open the door. “Open this door – You better open it or I'll break it!”

*TWO (KEVIN) and THREE (TRACEY) sit and talk in an incomprehensible, HUGELY SYMPATHETIC whisper.*

PATRICIA: *(In Portuguese, translated by ACTOR ONE)*  
When the police were speaking I couldn’t understand a lot of what was being said and then I heard a police officer say that he was dead. It had to be explained to me and they said he had been killed, he had been confused with a terrorist.  
My head started spinning and my stomach was turning.

*PATRICIA slumps forward, ALEX slams angrily against the wall. VIVIAN is numb – stunned.*

PATRICIA: *(in Portuguese translated by ACTOR THREE)*  
We had to go and see his body...

VIVIAN: At the ... the how do you say... mortuary.

ACTOR ONE (ALESSANDRO): When they opened the curtains up  
Patricia shouted:

*PATRICIA is silent.*

ACTOR ONE (ALESSANDRO): "No! Jean! What have they done to  
you!"

In early drafts we re-constructed Patricia's scream in response to seeing Jean Charles de Menezes' body; however re-dramatising the traumatic event in this manner seemed insufficient. As Stuart-Fisher (2011b) asserts, the use of words to embody the language of trauma is often unravelled by its literal inadequacy to present the fragmented and inarticulate trauma event. Therefore, we used Actor Three to translate Patricia's testimony presented in Portuguese in English, thus breaking the intensity of Patricia's physical reaction through another character's presentation of her words as a sort of distorted echo of Patricia's response. This seemed like a more ethical approach to present the events through the family's perspectives without making demands on the family to provide specific details regarding their experience.



**Fig. 3** *This Much is True*, image from The Guardian Theatre blog (Stott 2009).

## **Subjects Respond to the Performance: The Role of the Writer as an Accountable Witness**

During the second week of the production, Vivian, members of the Justice 4 Jean campaign, as well as their friends and family came to see our work. With a traverse stage I watched as they processed our interpretation of their experiences being performed in the presence of an audience:

### **Box 3.4**

*I was nervous, worried that the dramatisation of personal accounts would distress the interviewees. This anxiety was most potent during a particular scene where we had dramatised the family's memories of being informed by police that a man they believed to be Jean Charles de Menezes had been shot and the re-creation of the cousins' responses when they went to the mortuary to identify the body. The spectators watched in silence. Observing this performance I witnessed a visceral exchange between audience, the verbatim subjects and performers.*

The presence of interviewees watching amongst an audience heightened pivotal moments in the case and the personal stories depicted. This was most pronounced in the last scene as Alex pulled down a panel from the wall revealing a replica of the shrine dedicated to Jean Charles de Menezes outside of Stockwell station. The shrine reveal was met with gasps. The shrine, a site of protest and remembrance, conjured memories for those involved in the Justice 4 Jean campaign as it symbolised a place of congregation for raising awareness, for anniversaries and for mourning. As the actors portraying Patricia and Vivian joined Alex to light the candles under the image of Jean Charles de Menezes for the close of the play, Alex, reflecting on their journey since the shooting stated, "His parents bought a phone line a week ago. Jean died four years ago. They still live in the same house, their lives hasn't [*sic*] improved".

Afterwards Vivian expressed her difficulty watching the performance. For her, seeing the play meant re-living those painful moments, being taken down to the police station and being informed of Jean's death, placed in a hotel room while police continued their investigation, restoring Jean's character and interrupting proceedings at the inquest in protest at the coroner's decision to throw out the 'unlawful killing' verdict. Despite her discomfort, Vivian felt it necessary for audiences to acknowledge their hardships and the injustice they had experienced. In a response to a blog on *The*

*Guardian* website entitled ‘Why are there so many plays about Jean Charles de Menezes?’ Kahn commented:

The play this much is true [*sic*] genuinely put new information into the public domain. The stories of the family being locked up by the police in a hotel in Kingston and having their telephone lines cut off, or how the Brazilian embassy tried to get the family to drop the case and insisted there was no human rights violation, or how the coroner tried to lock the family out of the end of the inquest? All of these were stories have never been told before. And after everything the family had gone through – the grief, the intrusion, the struggle and the injustice - having a public space where their story could be told had a great impact (Khan in Stott, 2009).

While there was a mostly positive reception on the part of the family and the members of the Justice 4 Jean campaign in regard to content, there was no direct feedback regarding our aesthetic approach to the testimony.<sup>111</sup>

However, the senior officers Hayman and Paddick as well as the officer who vetoed his use of testimony never attended the show. Reflective of our communication and bonds with certain interviewees, the absence of others at the performance was indicative of a lack of trust or perhaps a disinterest in having a version of their testimony mediated and performed in front of an audience.<sup>112</sup> Perhaps they suspected a bias as to how we as practitioners would shape their accounts. At the time I considered this to be a sign of failure in our relationships with interviewees but I explore the limits of collaboration and unrealistic expectations of participation in Chapter 6.

### **Audience Responses and Debates Regarding the Role of Theatre Practitioners and the Menezes Shooting**

Writers can never be sure how their work impacts on an audience (except for the occasional review from a critic or conversations with friends or acquaintances), but the internet has enabled the growth of virtual discussion boards, allowing writers a rare glimpse into the thoughts of some audience members. During the run of *This Much Is True*, theatre critic for *The Stage* and *Guardian* blogger Sally Stott (2009) wrote a piece entitled, ‘Why are there so many plays about Jean Charles de Menezes?’ Her question fuelled a public debate over the creation of work based on tragic events. In the blog

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<sup>111</sup> Yasmin Khan did share her disappointment that co-spokesperson Asad Rehman’s testimony was secondary in our framing of the play.

<sup>112</sup> Twelve IPCC employees attended the performance and responded favourably, though they did not respond empathically to Lana’s story, the former IPCC secretary who leaked confidential documents as part of the on-going investigation.

Stott (2009) acknowledged the wave of dramatisations about the shooting and questions the aims of these dramatists; doubting the necessity of having multiple productions that express similar perspectives on the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes (Stott, 2009).

Stott's blog raised many familiar ethical questions I encountered in my own work, specifically the notion of "giving voice to the voiceless" (Hare in Soans, 2005, p. 112). Stott (2009) states:

[I]t's easy to see why dramatists want to support the Justice 4 Jean campaign: it's a worthy cause, and an extremely troubling case. However, if the family of a working-class immigrant needs predominantly white and middle-class theatre companies to make their voices heard, what does that say about equality in our society?

The comments in reaction to the blog opened up a larger debate about what socio-economic class has to do with creating theatre based on defining events. Our positionality as writers mediating the testimony of others became open for debate. For instance, one blogger highlighted the limitations of such plays in terms of reaching a wider audience and asserted that television and newspapers are more influential media for reaching a broader audience:

The family probably didn't feel like putting on a play about it. And even though these plays are getting good coverage, they're hardly the most prominent part of the campaign. I'm sure those predominantly white, middle-class journalists at the Guardian and the BBC are reaching far more people (Phil Porter in Stott 2009).

In reaction to the blog, another audience member commented on the issue of white, middle-class playwrights and giving voice:

I don't think the family of a working class immigrant need white middle theatre makers to get their voice heard, I think theatre makers, who may or may not be white or middle class, are creating this work because its an era-defining news story and they wanted to explore it (James M.B. in Stott 2009).

During the research process I was conscious of my white, middle-class background (and being from America, many of the individuals I spoke to were curious about my opinions on firearms, police issues as well as US geography and cities), but I never felt the need to abandon the project for fear that my own worldview would compromise the integrity of the project or inevitably marginalise those individuals we interviewed. Instead, I found it necessary to recognise these factors as part of my positionality, questioning our research and editorial approaches throughout the entire process, concluding that the benefits of creating a piece based on real stories about the Menezes case outweighed the

drawbacks of working with personal testimony and that this was a story that should be told.

In regard to our approach to style, Honour Bayes condemned our use of personal testimony on the blog writing:

Conversely I found *This Much Is True* to be offensive, as the gratuitously over the top and emotionally manipulative piece that it was. This was a production that was more about style than substance and if the company had discovered new material from the family then they should have given that much more import, space and time (Honour Bayes in Stott 2009).

The fusion of spectacle and analytical material, from Bayes' perspective, diminished the importance of the Menezes family's experience, which demanded a more delicate approach to theatrical presentation. In the matter of conveying trauma in performance Bayes' (2009) comment reveals the tensions of mediating testimony and a key concern in verbatim playwriting as to where on the spectrum between representing non-aestheticised, true-to-life depictions and maximised theatricality is most morally appropriate in verbatim playwriting? (Little, 2011; Honour Bayes in Stott, 2009). Moreover, Bayes' comment evidences the underlying tension of our co-writer relationship and competing ideas about how to translate testimony for performance.

### ***This Much is True: PaR Outcomes***

Working on *This Much is True* with a co-writer whose experience as a dramatist and political interests were different from my own, prompted reflection on my own practice and the relationship between aestheticisation and ethical representation. Throughout the process our debates, arguments and compromises as co-writers revealed the advantages, limitations and ethical tensions of our competing visions for the play.<sup>113</sup> My co-writer and I had many diverging ideas on how to represent the other. I initially favoured an aesthetic that would promote the most authentic representation possible, resisting any loose interpretations of the subjects' testimony; whereas my co-writer felt

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<sup>113</sup> As D. Soyini Madison (2003) suggests, "I am hoping we find that slippery place in the performance of personal narrative that is not at rest with the polarising stance of either the dour cynics or the doting zealots. I hope we will always be restless and worried about performing the lives of lived Subjects" (p. 482).

a responsibility as a playwright to the audience to present events theatrically. Both competing desires at times skirted the edges of misrepresentation.

I was initially drawn to the realistic depiction of the cousins' testimony used to contextualise events, rather than providing a more dynamic construction of Vivian, Alex and Patricia. In addition, my preoccupation and fear of the prospect of taking liberties in our representations of verbatim subjects beyond the interview setting where they took place and aestheticising verbatim material blurred opportunities for self-critique. I failed to examine my own attachment to the "authenticity" and "exactness" of using people's words (Kershaw, 1992; Little, 2011). Stephen Bottoms (2006) argues regarding documentary drama that presenting "stage realism purports to present a transparent representation of 'life-like' behaviour, while in fact providing a constructed authorial perspective on the real" (p. 59). Presenting more self-referential material (Bottoms, 2006) might have encouraged further critique of the fluidity of perception around the case and the manipulation of facts, including our own shaping of the testimony. In light of this, my uncritical approach to encouraging the most realistic depiction of the Menezes cousins evidenced a lack understanding how these constructions might encourage audiences to falsely identify with the struggles of the family. This approach was also underscored by my lack of self-reflexivity in relation to how I identified with the experiences of verbatim subjects in the interview setting.

As a co-writer, Paul Unwin was more experimental with the verbatim form employing style to engage and entertain so as not to "bore" audiences with grand political statements. A banal presentation in Unwin's view would fail to make audiences aware of the repercussions of the shooting. Our opposing views in regard to presentation resonates with what Suzanne Little (2011) identifies as a key dilemma in the dramatisation of real stories:

Attempts to avoid manipulating and aestheticising the source material can result in strangely muted presentations that strip the drama from theatrical representation, placing it at one end of the spectrum. Other attempts to creatively shape and reconfigure testimony and context, can result in a heightened aestheticisation and sensationalism (p. 1).

Unwin, though more experimental in relation to representation, was also more distant to the interviewees. For him, the main responsibility was not so much to alleviate the concerns of the interviewees but to reveal the broader political structures at work. In contrast, I was very vigilant of our responsibilities to the verbatim subjects. Perhaps our

approaches were on either side of the extreme, which for the benefit of the play presented a well-balanced, theatrical account of the stories provided.

### **Research Questions and Forward Thinking**

Re-evaluating my role as a playwright in the process of making *This Much is True*, analysing archive materials, and noting shifts in my practice revealed ethical and aesthetic tensions about the dramaturgy of life narratives. These tensions were more acute in the case of verbatim subjects whose lives have been affected by traumatic events, such as the Menezes family. The project revealed aspects about my own practice that require further investigation and critique, particularly in terms of how I operate as a researcher and playwright facilitating testimonies that are sensitive in nature. Areas that require further reflexivity include an awareness of critical distance within the subject/practitioner relationship (differentiating good rapport from *ethnographic seduction*); considering style with a greater awareness of how trauma is facilitated during the interview stage and framed in the composition of the script; adopting a clearer understanding of my own position and how biases affect and shape testimony; the risks of re-inscribing trauma through presentation, and awareness of character construction and the risks of essentialism when interweaving and intercutting dialogue within the writing of the verbatim playtext.

As a result of posing the research questions in Chapter 2 and answering them in this case study, I found the following to be true of my experience co-writing *This Much is True*. In response to the first question—how does the agency of the playwright affect the way in which the testimony of verbatim subjects is generated in the dramaturgy of a verbatim play?—I found that the location of the interview setting had a critical impact on the interaction between verbatim subjects and me as a writer. This was evidenced in how the members of the Justice 4 Jean campaign responded negatively to our approach when Unwin and I had changed the agreed-upon interview location to Stockwell station. Choosing to meet the members of the Justice 4 Jean campaign at this location in an attempt to frame their response to the Menezes shooting raised suspicions in our interviewees' minds about our motives and how we would represent their experience. I found the use of location to be more effective for the interview process when locations were chosen in collaboration with verbatim subjects, without an attempt to contrive scenarios or pre-empt dramatic responses from the interviewees. For example, when



Vivian suggested we meet at the Stockwell shrine—a location with which Vivian and the cousins were comfortable—this place of significance to Vivian informed and enriched the end of the play. The closing scene featured Vivian, Patricia and Alex reflecting on their four-year journey throughout the case whilst attending the shrine of Jean Charles de Menezes.

In addition, critically reflecting on my agency during the interview process revealed that I had carried detrimental preconceptions into the interview process and struggled to maintain a critical distance from the experiences of verbatim subjects. This was most clearly evidenced in my interview with the Menezes cousins. This realisation connects to my second question, what are the responsibilities of the playwright to verbatim subjects who have been affected by trauma? In the process of interviewing subjects it became important for me to reflect on how I listen to verbatim subjects' descriptions of trauma and their life experiences. The manner in which I interpreted interviewees' experiences as they spoke to me, and the manner in which I responded to them in the interview had implications for how we as writers subsequently framed verbatim subjects' experiences in the writing of the play. When I concentrated solely on the most traumatic aspects of verbatim subjects' experiences in our interviews—as evidenced in my interaction with the Menezes family—I had foreclosed critical opportunities for verbatim subjects to speak more openly about other more important aspects of their lives outside of the case. Therefore, part of my responsibility as a playwright to verbatim subjects, as realised from this case study, is the need to be vigilant when listening to interviewees and allow the sharing of information beyond one-dimensional frames of trauma.

This complex relationship between my preconceptions about verbatim subjects' experiences and how I listen to verbatim subjects in the interview process connects with my third question—what are the responsibilities of the playwright appropriating traumatic testimony to an audience? I found that the way in which we had framed the verbatim subjects' experience in the script impacted upon how audience members identified with the stories presented. Encouraging a natural performance style for the portrayal of the Menezes family in the writing of the script—concentrating on the family's emotional responses to key events in the Menezes case—meant that audiences were encouraged to identify with verbatim subjects in a solipsistic manner. This meant audiences were ultimately invited to sympathise with the family on a primary level of identification, rather than motivated to respect the experiences of verbatim subjects as

distinctive from that of their own experience as audience members. This also countered our creative aims to prompt the audiences' critical engagement with the Menezes case. Furthermore, our own relationship as writers in the presentation of the material was not problematised in the construction of the play. This leads me to consider how I might integrate opportunities in my creative practice for the audience to reflect more critically on the actual process of appropriating personal testimony in the creation of the verbatim play.

In light of the *This Much is True* case study, location (the setting of the interview) and how I listen and respond to interviewees will be ideas I consider in my next PaR case study as explored in Chapters 5 and 6. It is my hope that examining these issues closely in the context of trauma and identifying how they affect my verbatim practice might aid in informing my ethical role as a playwright.

## Chapter Four: The Making of *Black Watch* and Mediating War-related Narratives in Plays Based on Soldiers' Testimony

### New Considerations for Practice-as-Research: *Black Watch* as a Model

After writing *This Much is True*, I was still reflecting on my writing process and the unresolved issues I had encountered translating interviewees' testimony in the form of a verbatim playtext. In light of this experience, I questioned how I could better engage with narratives of trauma, rather than emphasising the victimhood of verbatim subjects. *This Much is True* revealed there were moments in my listening to verbatim subjects in the interview process when I had failed to maintain a respectful distance from their individual experiences. As a result I had inadvertently romanticised (Salverson, 2001) the difficulties faced by the Menezes family in the writing process without highlighting their narratives of strength and survival as well as aspects of their humour and personal interests. Moreover, it was my objective in future practice to reflect more critically on the interview setting as a significant space of negotiation between verbatim subjects and playwright-researcher that impacts on the playwriting process. By exploring these issues more thoroughly, I hoped to approach future verbatim plays with a clearer understanding of how I interpret the experiences of verbatim subjects both in the interview process and in the compiling of the material for the playtext.

What is more, as a playwright-researcher I also wanted to know what disjunctures and negotiations other theatre practitioners encountered when adapting war-related testimony for performance. I had hoped that considering the deliberations of others who had experience in translating testimony for the dramaturgy of a play would, as part of my PaR investigation, enhance my own understanding of my practice. In turn, I had anticipated this knowledge would better prepare me for embarking on another verbatim play. These concerns led me to consider the creation of *Black Watch*, a play based on soldiers' testimony, as a critical part of this investigation.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> In Chapter 1 I stressed the importance of distinguishing between the terms 'verbatim' and 'documentary theatre' (Brown & Wake, 2010). The former emphasises the process of engaging with living subjects and using their testimony directly in the play, whereas the latter emphasises the use of documents. As *Black Watch* is commonly referred to as both a verbatim play (Heddon, 2008) and a documentary play (Gardner, 2006) it becomes necessary to clarify how *Black Watch* is situated within this distinction. Although *Black Watch* does not directly incorporate the words spoken by the

What follows is an examination of the *Black Watch* creative team's priorities in creating a play informed by soldiers' experiences in which I explore the possibilities and limitations of the creative team's approach to theatrically translating soldiers' accounts of war. Furthermore, this chapter situates the dramaturgy of *Black Watch* within the wider frame of documentary and community-based theatre engaging with war-related testimony and trauma. Considering the processes of theatre practitioners engaging with conflict-related trauma informs the dramaturgical strategies employed in the writing of my verbatim play *Yardbird*. While other plays engaging with war and testimony influenced my process in the writing of *Yardbird*, the making of *Black Watch* is the central focus and model for my own practice. Moreover, this chapter focuses on the interactions and ethical disjunctures that occurred within the dramaturgy of *Black Watch* and the cast and creative team's responsibilities to the soldiers and to the audience realised throughout the research and development of the play. The insights offered by the creators of *Black Watch* impacted my approach to adapting soldiers' testimony in the composition of the *Yardbird* playtext.

### ***Black Watch* and Personal Resonance**

Gregory Burke and the National Theatre of Scotland's (NTS) production *Black Watch* is arguably one of the most popular plays that examines the contemporary soldier's experience of war in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Based on interviews with Scottish soldiers, the play dramatised the effects of the Iraq War on Black Watch soldiers, whose deployment coincided with the amalgamation of the Black Watch into a super-regiment of the British Army.<sup>115</sup> Since the play's debut at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2006, *Black Watch* has become an internationally celebrated play, bringing Scottish working-class soldiers' perspectives to the forefront of the Iraq War debate. Fusing documentary materials, dialogue inspired by interviews with soldiers and fictionalised scenes, *Black Watch* departed from the hyperrealist trend of verbatim plays in the post-9/11 era,

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soldiers/interviewees, the play was inspired directly by Burke's interviews with the soldiers and the accounts of war and re-entry the soldiers shared with him. These negotiations between Burke and the soldiers are significant as they impacted upon the dramaturgy of the play. Therefore, I refer to *Black Watch* as a play based on testimony rather than as a documentary or verbatim play.

<sup>115</sup> While the Black Watch soldiers were stationed at Camp Dogwood in Iraq, Secretary of Defence Geoff Hoon announced the amalgamation of Scottish regiments. This restructuring meant the independent regiments would "form a five-battalion regiment, The Royal Regiment of Scotland" (BBC News, 2004a; Strachan, 2006, p. 332).

infusing folk songs, humour and movement to contextualise the accounts of local soldiers caught up in the midst of a foreign policy disaster.

I saw *Black Watch* in December 2010 at the Barbican in London. At the time I was still considering my concerns writing plays based on testimony, troubled by the issues that arose in writing *This Much is True*. My immediate response to *Black Watch* was an invested-interest regarding the manner in which the interview process between the playwright and the soldiers was brought to the forefront of the play for the audience to critique. The play reminded me of how my co-writer Paul Unwin and I struggled with ethical issues and relationships with verbatim subjects throughout the writing process. In addition, I felt the manner in which the material for *This Much is True* was constructed implied that we as playwrights had unprecedented access to the innermost thoughts and feelings of others – a presumption which was both ethically problematic and illusory.

Also, at the same time I saw *Black Watch*, I had been writing a fictional play about a US soldier readjusting to civilian life after the Iraq War entitled *Fortunate Son*.<sup>116</sup> In the process of researching *Fortunate Son* I had interviewed an infantryman in the US Army who had described his experiences during two deployments near Baghdad.<sup>117</sup> The interview had been conducted ten months prior to attending a performance of *Black Watch*. Watching the latter revitalised my inquiry into how interview-based material exploring the soldiers' experience could be effectively conveyed in a play based on testimony.

After seeing *Black Watch*, I listened once again to the audio recording of my interview with the American infantryman. As a result, I realised that conducting interviews with US soldiers for the purpose of writing a verbatim play might prove a more effective vehicle to explore the after-effects of war than writing a fictionalised story. *Black Watch* inspired my research trip to the United States to conduct interviews with US veterans in the summer of 2011. As mentioned previously, still troubled by how my co-author and I had used testimony in *This Much is True*, I wanted to know

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<sup>116</sup> *Fortunate Son* follows the journey of Iraq War veteran Kyle reconnecting with his estranged father John, a Vietnam War veteran.

<sup>117</sup> Sharing more mundane aspects of deployment, the soldier discussed the boredom of guard duty, the joy of receiving letters from his grandmother, and the occasional fights that would break out between soldiers over access to the computer. He also relayed more extreme details of the deployments such as his witnessing the deaths of Iraqi civilians. In the process of recording the infantryman's story, I was listening to his sense of humour and vivid descriptions of military deployments, which in turn altered my conception of the contemporary soldiers' experience. The interview took place on March 23, 2010 via Skype.

what obstacles the *Black Watch* creative team had encountered in the dramaturgy of the play before beginning another verbatim play of my own. Therefore, to enhance my approach as a verbatim playwright, I conducted interviews with members of the *Black Watch* cast and creative team as part of my research inquiry. Their responses and my critical examination of the play presented new considerations for my creative practice, thus informing my approach to writing a verbatim play based on US soldiers' experiences.

### Testimony and War Plays

During times of conflict, documentary and community-based theatre have explored the subject of the soldier as an entry point when examining the impact of war.<sup>118</sup> In recent years scholarship in applied theatre studies has addressed the politics of post-9/11 theatre-making more closely (see Balfour, Thompson, & Hughes, 2009; Boll, 2013; Brady, 2012; Collieran, 2012; Hughes, 2011; Malpede, Messina, & Shuman, 2011; Thompson, 2011). In parallel to this, within the resurgence of 'theatre of the real', verbatim and applied theatre projects began featuring stories about military personnel. Recent plays examining servicemen's experiences in addition to *Black Watch* include: Emily Ackerman and K.J. Sanchez's verbatim play *ReEntry* (2009), based on the testimonies from deploying and returning US Marines and their families about the process of transitioning to civilian life; and community-based and applied-theatre projects, such as *The Two Worlds of Charlie F* (2011), *The Return* (2014) and *The Long Way Home* (2014), which examined the aftereffects of war on military personnel. Some of these projects were devised by members of the armed forces, some of whom performed alongside professional actors in the productions. These works dealing with

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<sup>118</sup> Soldiers' experiences of the Vietnam War have previously been examined through documentary practice as evidenced in Emily Mann's *Still Life* (1980), and in the work of Vietnam-veterans-turned-theatre practitioners John DiFusco and David Barry's play *Tracers* (1985), as well as Peter Brook and Albert Hunt's RSC collaboration *US* (1967), which was inspired by documents detailing US involvement in war atrocities (DiFusco & Caristi, 1986; Kustow, Hunt, & Reeves, 1968; Mann, 1997). Jeremy Weller and The Grassmarket Project's (GMP) play *Soldiers* (1998) reflects on soldiers' combat experiences more broadly in addressing conflicts in Northern Ireland and Eastern Europe. Moreover, soldiers' testimonies became more prominent in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Indication of this growth in theatrical responses to soldiers' experience include the following community-based projects: *We Carried Your Secrets* (2009); *The Two Worlds of Charlie F* (2012); *Abandoned Brothers* (2012); *The Return* (2014). In addition there are a number of verbatim plays: *Deep Cut* (2008); *ReEntry* (2009); and *Voices of Student Veterans* (2014). Some of the works include practitioners and plays that directly integrate narratives from military personnel, while others engage narratives of trauma in relation to everyday militarism, particularly within the heightened militarism evident in the post-9/11 era.

war raise questions regarding the relationship between theatrically translating narratives of trauma and how audiences bear witness to the experiences of servicemen and military families. Moreover, these works evidence the importance of – and desire to understand – war narratives in a performance context.

Julia Boll (2013) correlates this draw towards performing soldiers' narratives as a response to war, observing "...it appears a natural development that the war traumata of soldiers and civilians inside and on the periphery of the war zone should find an adequate means of representation in the documentary dramatic mode" (p. 80). Despite the seemingly ideal form, I share Boll's (2013) concern that a preoccupation with the testimonies of others detailing their suffering "can feed a sinister public appetite for stories of loss and suffering" (p. 80). To critically understand the balance between sensationalising traumatic experiences and communicating lived experience effectively, it becomes necessary to examine how theatre practitioners negotiate responsibilities to both servicemen-as-subjects and to prospective audiences.

In a recent interview on applied theatre, Michael Balfour suggests that the articulation of artistic intention and limits amongst practitioners/researchers is necessary in order to deepen our understanding of how theatre engages with communities:

[A]rticulated intention is very important not just to theatre and war but to all applied theatre... as with applied theatre there are always limits and constraints. And it is very important that practitioners/researchers acknowledge and admit to the limitations in the work. There is not enough precision in academic discourse about how more often than not there are small but significant contributions theatre can make, rather than grand narratives of world change and empowerment. Writing about the qualities and texture of limits, failures, ethics is where the field needs to focus it is to better understand itself (Balfour in Flade, 2014).

It is at this point in the investigation that I want to consider how articulating the problems encountered by a playwright mediating narratives of war might aid in our understanding of the intricacies of utilising personal testimonies and the moral and aesthetic implications it generates. To enhance my own approach to composing the playtext *Yardbird*, I focus on the limits, failures and key issues that arose for the creative team theatrically translating soldiers' testimony in the making of *Black Watch*.

## **Original Interviews with the *Black Watch* Creative Team and Methodology**

As part of my research methodology, I conducted five interviews with cast members and the creative team of *Black Watch* between 22 November 2011 and 15 February 2012.<sup>119</sup> My research comprised of four individual face-to-face interviews in theatre bars with playwright Gregory Burke, musical director Davey Anderson, actor Brian Ferguson (who portrayed Cammy in the 2006 original production and the 2007 national tour of Scotland), as well as Ross Anderson (who played Rossco in the 2010-11 international tour).<sup>120</sup> In addition, I interviewed *Black Watch* director John Tiffany via Skype.<sup>121</sup>

The duration of the interviews ranged from forty to ninety minutes. The result was a more interviewee-led discussion (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, p. 21) about the creative process in which I periodically asked for more detail regarding their responses. While my research questions were open-ended, the subject matter of each interview centred primarily on the problems that emerged adapting soldiers' testimony for performance and the ethical and aesthetic constraints that required the practitioners to alter their approach to creating the play.

### **Starting Points for *Black Watch***

Playwright Gregory Burke's research for *Black Watch* coincided with NTS artistic director Vicky Featherstone's commissioning of several playwrights to explore possible projects for NTS' first season in 2006 (Burke, 2010).<sup>122</sup> Featherstone approached Burke about examining the amalgamation of the Black Watch regiment, which was announced while Black Watch soldiers were still fighting in the Iraq War (Burke 2011). At this point in time Burke had already been actively following the Black

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<sup>119</sup> The full interview transcripts are featured in the Appendices. It is important to note that the interviews took place nearly six years after *Black Watch* first debuted at the Traverse at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2006 (Gardner, 2006).

<sup>120</sup> Meeting places included The Young Vic bar, the Soho Theatre bar, a pub beneath The Gate Theatre in London and Stereo, a bar in Glasgow.

<sup>121</sup> I called the National Theatre of Scotland office in Glasgow via Skype to record the interview with Tiffany. Therefore our interview was not face-to-face but conducted via VOIP.

<sup>122</sup> The National Theatre of Scotland was formed in 2006 under the leadership of Artistic Director Vicky Featherstone who was actively looking for plays for the first NTS season (Holdsworth, 2010). Unlike most national theatres, the NTS does not have a flagship venue, but rather operates across Scotland showcasing works in unorthodox settings from school gymnasiums to traditional theatres (Holdsworth, 2010). The mobility of the NTS is representative of its mantra: "[a]ll of Scotland is our stage, and on that stage we perform to the world. We are a theatre of the imagination: a Theatre Without Walls" (The National Theatre of Scotland, 2012).



Watch soldiers' deployment and the planned amalgamation of their regiment (Burke, 2010; Cooper, 2004; Fisher, 2008). As a result, Featherstone programmed *Black Watch* as part of the NTS first season and recruited John Tiffany (a NTS Associate Director at the time) to direct the project.<sup>123</sup> The initial aim of the creative team was to interview Black Watch soldiers with the intent to create a play that "should try and tell 'the real' stories of the soldiers in their own words" (Burke, 2010, p. x).

### **Negotiating Soldiers' Participation**

In the case of *Black Watch*, soldiers initially proved reluctant to share their stories for a play. Over many months the creative team went through several researchers from the BBC and Channel 4 who proved unsuccessful in attempts to find a group of soldiers willing to share their experiences for the project. Accessing soldiers for the purpose of making theatre can prove difficult for playwrights depending on their positionality within military culture. For Herman Farrell's play *Bringing it Home: Voices of Student Veterans* (2010), interviews with soldiers were conducted by Marine Corps veteran Tyler Gayheart because Gayheart shared a similar experience with the veteran-interviewees transitioning to civilian/college life (Kentucky, 2015).<sup>124</sup> In contrast, when writing the play *ReEntry* (2009) based on interviews with US Marines, playwrights Emily Ackerman and K.J. Sanchez—who both grew up as part of Marine families and have brothers who served in wars—proceeded with their project with a prior knowledge of how to approach servicemen (Ackerman & Sanchez, 2010; Levin, 2011; Pressley, 2010). In the case of *Black Watch*, researcher Sophie Johnston succeeded in arranging Burke's first meeting with a group of Black Watch soldiers (who had been stationed at Camp Dogwood in Iraq) at their regular "Sunday sesh"—where Burke would continue to meet the soldiers in his research for the play (John Tiffany in Burke, 2010, p. x).

Playwright Burke's positionality to the *Black Watch* soldiers was critical for the research process. Burke's class, culture and politics proved to be significant factors in

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<sup>123</sup> Vicky Featherstone worked with Tiffany and Burke previously when she was the artistic director of Paines Plough (Cooper 2004).

<sup>124</sup> *Bringing it Home: Voices of Student Veterans* was first performed in 2010 and under the title *Civilians* was later performed as part of the New York Fringe Festival in 2011. A new production of *Bring it Home: Voices of Student Veterans* (Kentucky, 2015) produced in collaboration with the University of Kentucky and the Louie B. Nunn Centre for Oral History toured Kentucky in 2014.

establishing reciprocity with the soldiers. Burke grew up in a working-class community in Rosyth near Dunfermline. Burke (2008) said of his hometown, “Dunfermline, didn’t even have a bookshop, let alone a literary scene” (Gregory Burke in Fisher, 2008). Class distinctions for the Black Watch soldiers mattered both in terms of the soldiers’ views on the hierarchal organisation of the military as well as how they viewed Burke’s creative intentions. Burke’s advantage as a playwright-researcher was that he was more representative of the *Black Watch* interviewees in terms of class and culture.<sup>125</sup> As a young man Burke himself has claimed he had once considered enlisting in the armed forces as the career options in Dunfermline, Scotland were limited (Fisher, 2008).<sup>126</sup> In addition, Burke’s personal knowledge of the culture that moulded these soldiers and identical regional accent helped him gain their trust throughout the research and development process.

### **Departing From Verbatim Testimony: Mediating Lived Experiences and Trauma**

Burke’s relationship with the soldiers had a key impact on the shaping of the theatrical language of the play, particularly in the play’s departure from the established verbatim form. First, the vital shift in the dramaturgy of *Black Watch* occurred when soldiers refused to allow Burke to digitally record their words during the interview process. Opposition to being recorded stemmed from the soldiers’ concern about how the MoD (Ministry of Defence) would respond to their participation if they were to be identified (Tiffany, 2012), but the soldiers’ reluctance to be recorded was also indicative of suspicions characteristic of the area of which they came. As Burke (2011) explains:

No recording, cause it’s typical of where I’m from and where they’re from. It’s that whole thing of, you’ll talk to anybody about anything but as soon as you put it on record, ‘Are you going to hold this against me in

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<sup>125</sup> For instance, in our interview, Burke (2012) stated that the *Black Watch* soldiers were sceptical of journalists, citing their experiences with the embedded journalist David Loyn as an example. The soldiers, according to Burke (2011), viewed Loyn as a pretentious, middle-class authority figure as he frequently liaised with senior officers. Although I do not fully engage in military studies, I have read that the socio-economic relationship between the military subjects and researchers has a critical affect on social interaction between parties. As Eyal Ben-Ari (2014) explains “In some contexts such as the British one, class is important since if the researcher is middle-class he or she may be hampered in gaining access to certain groups labelled as working-class. And because the armed forces are an extremely hierarchal organisation, the level at which researchers enter could limit the willingness of the researcher to cooperate since researchers may be identified as a means for organisational control or as stooges of commanders” (p. 32).

<sup>126</sup> In an interview for *What’s On Stage*, Burke characterised the local job market in his area this way: “[t]here’s four choices for jobs in Dunfermline... there was the dockyard, the pits, the army or the jail and that’s basically it really” (Fisher, 2008).

court'? And also they think its going to come back and haunt them. You just think it's a police statement.

The inability to record the sessions allowed Burke to adopt a fly-on-the-wall approach. Formal interviews, according to Davey Anderson (2011) were not an effective means of engaging the soldiers as “they would just clam up and give them kind of modest answers”. So, rather than conducting formal interviews Burke mostly observed the men as they discussed the match of the day and the war in Iraq, and only engaged the ex-soldiers in conversation sporadically (D. Anderson, 2011; R. Anderson, 2011). Throughout the sessions Burke documented the soldiers’ stories in private.<sup>127</sup>

What is more, the *Black Watch* creative team’s inability to obtain recorded testimony forced them to deviate from the hyperrealist trends in verbatim theatre (Brady, 2009, p. 29) that emphasise the authentic replication of every “erm” and “ah” from the selected interview material in performance. Although the inability to capture the words on a recording device was seen initially as an obstacle for the creative team, I argue this diversion contributed to director John Tiffany’s vision of the play creating a more theatrical and experimental interpretation of soldiers’ stories (Burke, 2011; Anderson 2011; Tiffany 2012). The absence of digital interview recordings meant that Burke (2011) had limited verbatim material from which to work. As a result, Burke (2011) began writing fictional scenes based on the pub session, explaining:

I kind of wrote down all of the things they were telling me and whenever I got to a part about Iraq, whenever I got to a bit about Iraq I’ll just write that, rather than write them telling me about that, I’ll write that scene happening. So when they arrived at Camp Dogwood—when we first arrived it was a shit hole, it was this it was that, I’ll just write that with them arriving. It’s a shithole.

Therefore, when Burke entered the rehearsal room he had two different scripts. The first script incorporated notes based on conversations with soldiers during the interview sessions at the pub, while the second script dramatised the soldiers’ experiences in Iraq. Burke explains how the second fictional script, in turn, informed the re-writes of the written conversations gathered from the soldiers in the pub:

What was quite strange in a way the transcripts from the interviews didn’t have characters in them, but the fictionalised scenes did have characters in them and almost in a way the characters from the fictionalised scenes became the characters in the pub. So in a way that

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<sup>127</sup> Periodically in the interview process Burke would often run to the men’s toilet to record notes (D. Anderson, 2011; R. Anderson, 2011).

kind of got rid of the guys—the actual real people. And that was kind of one of the things that made it effective (Gregory Burke in Fisher, 2008).

Burke's amalgamation of fictional scenes and testimony provides an important opportunity for assessing the limitations of appropriating testimony and purporting authenticity in theatre. Jenny Hughes (2011) contends that fictional/testimonial play hybrids are more effective in their approach to presenting interview materials as they alert audiences to:

The complex relationship between the authentic and constructed, the real and made up or mediated, and its potential relevance for understanding verbatim's critical potential, can be usefully explored through an analysis of plays that consists of the compositions of real and imagined voices (pp. 113-114).

Gravitating toward the fictional Iraq script, Burke began to create more diverse yet recognisable characters whose names were inspired by highland clans such as Frazer, Campbell and McKenzie. These names are used intentionally as they are symbolic of the lure of The Golden Thread—the proud military history associated with Scottish identity and subsequently a key through-line for the play.

As part of Tiffany's intention to tell a theatrically-engaging story, he “decided to create the play in the rehearsal room” rather than developing a script written prior to the rehearsal process (Tiffany, 2012). Therefore, the collaboration with movement director and co-founder of Frantic Assembly Steven Hoggett (Graham & Hoggett, 2009) and musical director Davey Anderson became important for developing the physical, visual and aural texture of the play.<sup>128</sup>

### **Theatrical Models: Form and Content**

Form and theatrical language were key considerations for Tiffany throughout the development of *Black Watch* as he aimed to create a more theatrical play distinct from contemporary verbatim plays. As a result the creative team departed from the trend of hyperrealism in verbatim theatre as described by Sara Brady (2011):

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<sup>128</sup> In my interview with Davey Anderson, he explains the role of the cast and creative team, and the devising process “[w]hich is kind of created by the ensemble of actors. And the creative team and they all have an influence in the shaping of the text. And Greg wasn't—he just wanted to write a play, his own play about soldiers and John stopped him from doing that. Bring in other stuff as well, bring in history, lyrics from songs and we'll play with all of those things” (Anderson, 2012).

In its quest for the truth, verbatim theatre, a genre criticised for being a text-heavy project devoid of spectacle and theatricality, can fall short of doing what theatre does best – that is, offering to audiences an experience that *rings* true, that is filled with meaning. Ironically, the hyperrealism of testimony plays can lead to disappointing nights in the theatre... (p. 29).

Echoing Brady's critique of this hyperrealist trend, Tiffany was adamant that the documentary sources and interviews for *Black Watch* should be aestheticised through physical theatre, folk songs and comedy (Tiffany, 2012).

Two plays that influenced Tiffany (2012) in terms of their "ambition" throughout the development of *Black Watch* were Joan Littlewood's *Oh What a Lovely War* (1963) and John McGrath and 7:84 Scotland's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (1973). Both plays utilised song, comedy and movement as well as historical documents/facts to engage audiences.<sup>129</sup> The strategies of these plays were to employ theatricality to entertain audiences as a means of conveying critical political messages such as the devastation of war and economic violence.<sup>130</sup> For musical director Davey Anderson (2011), these texts were influential on the *Black Watch* creative team in terms of their spectacle:

Both are kind of cabaret, vaudeville, music hall style. And they use song and dance, and gags and sketches. So John's idea very early on was, let's not make a play, let's make a piece of theatre that's kind of like *Cheviot*—that early 7:84 work.

Inspired by Littlewood and McGrath, Tiffany (2012) combined theatrical techniques with more realist modes of representation (Heddon, 2008) to create a piece of theatre that responded to the timeframe of the Iraq War.

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<sup>129</sup> While both texts were present in the rehearsal room, Tiffany argued that "[w]e didn't really use them as references, they were there as kind of good luck charms". These plays were, in Tiffany's view, emblematic of the time in which they were created.

<sup>130</sup> Writer and director John McGrath founded '7:84' and later '7:84 Scotland' that toured Scotland throughout the 1970s. 7:84 Scotland's agitprop play *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* captured a 300-year history of political, economic and cultural violence endured by the Scottish people in the formation of the British Union from the 1700s up to the Thatcher era (Burke & National Theatre of Scotland, 2010; McGrath, 1996).<sup>130</sup> The ethos of the 7:84 company was reflected in their company name based on a disconcerting statistic featured in *The Economist* that in the United Kingdom only 7 per cent of the population controls 84 per cent of the national wealth (MacLennan, 1990; McGrath, 1996; Reinelt, 1994). McGrath (1996) defines the nine elements as follows: *Directness, Comedy, Music, Emotion, Variety, Effect, Immediacy, Localism, Localism* (pp. 55-58) (localism is reiterated twice to reinforce its importance for connecting with a working-class audience).

## Inviting Subjects into the Rehearsal Room

The presence of interviewees in the rehearsal room had a critical impact in the shaping of *Black Watch* and established ethical boundaries, while at the same time enabled the creative team to explore new approaches to documentary materials as I explain later. When the soldiers visited the *Black Watch* rehearsal space there were limits as to what the practitioners were able to ask soldiers and represent in the play. For example, Tiffany (2012) invited one of the soldiers Stephen (who the character of Cammy is based on) into the rehearsal room during the workshop phase of the project to answer the actors and the creative team's questions. As an exercise Tiffany asked actors to prepare two questions each for Stephen upon his visit to the rehearsal room. The key question that Tiffany (2012) wanted to ask and explore as the framing question of the play was "What's it like to kill somebody?" as he anticipated that the audience would desire to know the soldiers' response to this question.

This same question also emerges in other war plays such as evidenced in the play *Soldiers* (1998) where the principle question framing the play was: "What happens when a man kills?" (Grassmarket, 2006). In *Tracers* (1980), written and performed by Vietnam War veterans, the play opens with the ensemble reciting a montage of civilians' frequent questions: "You killed people? You were only nineteen? You volunteered? [...] How does it feel to kill somebody?" (DiFusco & Caristi, 1986, p. 11). However, in the case of *Black Watch*, Tiffany (2012) refrained from asking the soldiers about killing directly despite his initial interest, explaining to me in our interview, "When I met them, when I met the soldiers, it was the question I realised I had no right to ask". Tiffany's recognition of these unspoken ethical boundaries informed by the presence of the soldier complies with Amanda Stuart-Fisher's (2009) reflection that a sense of responsibility emerges between the playwright as a facilitator of testimony and the testifier in the interview process. She asserts:

To create a playtext that performs or mediates the testimony of the other, is to bear responsibility for that testimony and for the other [...] The act of giving testimony is in effect an ethical demand: listen to me, hear my story, let me tell you what I have encountered (p. 114).

While Stuart-Fisher's (2009) reflection is situated in the context of the relationship between the verbatim subject and the playwright, I contend that the presence of the ex-Black Watch soldiers throughout the creative process also presented members of the cast and creative team the opportunity to consider their own responsibility when

conveying the war-related experiences of others. Actor Brian Ferguson (2011) explained to me how meeting the ex-Black Watch soldiers and journalist David Loyn caused him to examine his own assumptions about combat veterans, stating “there was a danger certainly for me of approaching it [the play] with preconceptions about war and what that meant” (Ferguson, 2011).<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, inviting the soldiers into the rehearsal room was critical for inspiring theatricality as the soldiers’ personal documents also shaped the physical sequences of the play such as the scene ‘Blueys’ that I examine later on.<sup>132</sup>

### **Finding the Play’s Question and Through-lines**

The central question used to frame the material for *Black Watch* was, what lies are told to soldiers by their country time after time? Establishing the framing question of *Black Watch* and the key through-lines exploring the play’s question proved difficult for the creative team, as it did for me in my experience co-writing *This Much is True*. This was because as *Black Watch* had been rooted in the soldiers’ real experiences, the creative team struggled in the rehearsal room to find a question that corresponded with the material that Burke had collected from the interviews. He (2011) explains:

What is this play about? What are we trying to say? And for me it was about, you know we could only tell what they told us. We can’t really put words in their mouth about war, that it’s wrong [...]. We can’t. We just have to say the same lie is told over and over again. It’s the same lie told again and again over history.

Three through-lines that operate within *Black Watch* to examine the question include: the presence of the playwright in the pub with the soldiers, the soldiers’ deployment at Camp Dogwood in Iraq, and The Golden Thread – “the regiment’s grand narrative of their 300-year history” (Archibald, 2011, p. 93). First, the pub scenes, set in present time, illustrate the tension when gathering war-related trauma and translating it

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<sup>131</sup> David Loyn was embedded with the Black Watch at Camp Dogwood in 2004.

<sup>132</sup> The soldiers’ presence throughout the interview and rehearsal stages also revealed the limitations of using personal accounts to comment on macro-issues such as the invasion of Iraq. This led to the creative team using documents in other ways to approach wider political issues and eventually to the incorporation of the writer as a representational figure for the benefit of the audience. As Tiffany (2012) recounts: “[I]f you ask them [the soldiers] ‘what it was like.’ ‘It was. It’s alright’. Anything to do with how did it *feel*, anything that started with that it was like, ‘It’s a job. It’s alright’ anything you went into... and that was, that became the tension for me and Greg, me and Greg against the play. Which is then why then I expanded it to be the writer. To include Geoff Hoon and Alex Salmond because Greg rightly said, ‘I can’t put politics and emotions into their mouths’”.

into performance and dramatise the disjuncture between civilians and soldiers represented through the soldiers' interrogation of the playwright. Secondly, the soldiers' deployment is punctuated by movement pieces such as the letters home sequence in 'Blueys' and 'Ten Second Fights', as well as war scenes, such as the American's bombing of a nearby Iraqi village, and the spectacle of the suicide bomb that kills three of the Black Watch soldiers. Thirdly, The Golden Thread through-line is accentuated by the inclusion of Scottish folk songs, the appearance of Lord Elgin (Archibald, 2011), and the highly stylised movement piece 'Fashion' where Cammy is dressed and redressed in various uniforms while delivering a potted 300-year timeline of key moments from the Black Watch regimental history (Sierz, 2011). Furthermore, these historical scenes juxtaposed the deployment scenes, function to highlight the ambiguity faced by soldiers who have killed and have witnessed their friends die in the Iraq War at the same time that their regiment was being amalgamated.<sup>133</sup>

Therefore, the through-lines are designed to critique the cyclical nationalist discourse that promises young men glory in war—a lie told to soldiers throughout history.<sup>134</sup> Benedict Anderson defines nationalism as a 'process' not defined by geographical borders, but by cultural 'imaginings' in which people feel a connection to others they have never met. These imaginings compel strangers to die for one another out of a presumed kingship, as Anderson (2006) explains:

[R]egardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries for so many millions of people not so much to kill as willingly to die for such limited imaginings... (p. 7).

Anderson's (2006) question "[w]hat makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices?" (p. 7) resonates

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<sup>133</sup> Hew Strachan's (2006) article 'Scottish Military Identity' provides an overview of the progression of Scotland's military tradition over the course of the British Union in relation to reinforcing a Scottish national consciousness: "Scotland gained its early national identity from victory and defeat on the battlefield rather than through the vigour of its political institutions.... Modern Scotland too has found forms of identity to those purely military ones that gave it birth... today's tourist symbol – the kilted, feather-bonneted piper, instantly recognisable through the world as a short-hand for Scotland – is still a military symbol...The Bruce stands for the idea of Scotland as a nation; he fought for political independence. The piper is a cultural artefact, and what embodies the notion of Scots as warriors" (pp. 315-16). Strachan (2006) suggests that the regimental identity of the Black Watch is intertwined with Scotland as a nation—a tie that has been damaged by the recent regimental amalgamations.

<sup>134</sup> Nadine Holdsworth (2010) contends that "theatre is deeply implicated in constructing the nation through the imaginative realm and provides a site where the nation can be put under the microscope" (pp. 6-7) and in the case of *Black Watch*, the NTS commissioned the production to critically examine Scotland's relationship with the Iraq War by exploring soldiers' narratives and the amalgamation of the Black Watch regiment.



with the creative team's aims in making *Black Watch*. For instance, the integration of the folk song 'Forfar Soldier' underscores the allure of the "imagined community", namely the strong sense of tradition that compels soldiers to serve their country.<sup>135</sup> However, this particular song which emphasises the loyalty, honour and camaraderie felt by serving one's country is juxtaposed against the current isolation and disappointment felt by the soldiers over the amalgamation of their regiment and the lack of glory experienced upon their return from Iraq, and functions symbiotically to deconstruct The Golden Thread myth. The creative team's intention was for audiences to consider what draw soldiers to war and why they are willing to die for these imaginings.

### **Textual Reflexivity: Writing the Playwright Into the Play**

The creative team's incorporation of "textual reflexivity" (Bottoms, 2006, p. 67) – specifically the strategy of writing the playwright into the play – emerged from the disconnect that the creative team experienced with the soldiers in the interview and the rehearsal process. Stephen Bottoms (2006) contends that theatre practitioners, especially playwrights, should be more textually reflexive in relation to their positioning when recontextualising spoken testimony and documents in the creation of a play, suggesting:

Artists working in the liminal space between 'art' and 'life' that is documentary theatre should also actively think about developing their own forms of theatrical and textual reflexivity by the way of reminding audiences that history itself is necessarily complex, uncertain, and always already theatricalised (p. 67).

In consideration of Bottoms' argument, I briefly review how textual reflexivity emerged in the *Black Watch* creative process as a means of ethical critique, as well as the limitations of the construction of the playwright character. The referencing of the play and the playwright in *Black Watch* play operates on two levels: first, to critique the audiences' relationship with soldiers and the Iraq War, and secondly, to critique the cultural production of testimony in documentary theatre.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> This approach is resonant of McGrath's use of the *ceilidh* tradition in *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* and the music hall variety of Littlewood's *Oh, What A Lovely War!*

<sup>136</sup> In an interview with John Tiffany for *What's On Stage*, Tiffany tells Garvin: "Greg and I are both anti-war, but we didn't want it to be a piece of theatre which said we were wrong to invade Iraq, because that would have made us a bit ill really. You preach to a liberal Edinburgh Fringe audience, telling them that George Bush and Tony Blair were wrong and then we all go and have a gin and tonic and pat ourselves

The play begins with ex-Black Watch soldier Cammy directly addressing the audience, who asserts that the stories of Black Watch soldiers in the relating of their stories do not desire the sympathy of an audience.<sup>137</sup> This confrontation establishes the recurring tension between the audience and the soldiers and carries on throughout the play. Cammy's message is blunt, and this character signals throughout the play that the soldiers are not to be pitied and that the audiences will not sit comfortably wrapped in the safety of their sympathy for the lives lost at war, as Cammy declares:

CAMMY: [P]eople's minds are usually made up about you if you were in the army...poor fucking boys. The cannay do anything else. They cannay get a job. They get exploited by the army... Well I want you to fucking know. I wanted to be in the army (Burke, 2010, p. 3).

I interpreted Cammy's language as a form of distancing, perpetuating an "us and them" dynamic—"us" representing the Scottish, working-class soldiers and "them" meaning us as the privileged civilian audience attempting to "understand" the lives of soldiers.<sup>138</sup> While the creative team continually attempts to interrupt any false identification between the represented soldier-subjects and the audience, there are times when these attempts counteract the creative team's intentions, as I discuss later.

Textual reflexivity is most pronounced in the inclusion of the writer character, who is utilised to illuminate civilian spectators' underlying enthusiasm for hearing war stories all the while hiding under the mask of good intentions. In my interview with Tiffany, he explains how the accidental insertion of the writer in the play came about when he asked actor Paul Higgins to read the voiceover of the writer in the rehearsal room (Tiffany, 2012).<sup>139</sup> Thereafter, Tiffany made the decision to integrate the

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on the back. We knew we wanted to try and find a story which would be more challenging to that audience" (John Tiffany in Girvan, 2011).

<sup>137</sup> The *Black Watch* set itself is a subversion of the Edinburgh Tattoo. When I first saw *Black Watch* at the Barbican in 2010, I was surprised by the traverse stage with its extensive trussing, steel rods, large projection screens, and disorienting swirling spotlights against bagpipes. The grandeur of the familiar Barbican proscenium arch space had been transformed to resemble the Edinburgh Tattoo. The purpose of the set was to unsettle audiences' fascination with military power (Burke, 2010). This distorted (yet familiar) space was designed to deliberately critique civilians' everyday fascination with displays of military power and to be indicative of what Michael Mann (1987) calls "spectator-sport militarism" (p.14). Traces of military enthusiasm are subtly intertwined into our "leisure experiences" (Lutz, 2001, p. 248) from football matches to national parades.

<sup>138</sup> This "us" and "them" relationship seemed less visible in the recorded performance where it seemed the Scottish spectators (who appeared more working-class in sweatshirts compared to the Barbican audience) were watching an element of their own national narrative performed.

<sup>139</sup> Tiffany (2012) reflects on the initial intention of using the writer's voice: "[T]he writer was actually only going to be a voice to begin with. And then it was just an accident in the rehearsal room. That Paul was cast as the sergeant, who is a fantastic actor and I just one day in the rehearsal room I said 'Look will you just read these lines?' And then it just developed from there".

playwright as a theatrical device to confront Tiffany's initial question, "what it's like to kill somebody?" In doing so, the writer-character became what Richard Ings (2014) refers to as an "interrogatory figure" (p. 126) who represents the audience. By exposing the voyeuristic intent of the writer, Tiffany felt his presence would prompt critical examination of the audience's own desire to hear the stories of combat soldiers who have killed, as Tiffany (2012) explains:

It wasn't necessarily about the writer, writing himself into the play, the whole thing with the writer's story, is for me about the audience—I think we have this insatiable desire to hear these war stories. Almost to be voyeurs. And "Did you kill anybody?" And that's interesting because that's the question, 'What's it like to kill somebody?'

Tiffany's intent to have audiences confront their own voyeurism while encouraging them to listen to the stories inspired by soldiers reflects LaCapra's (2001) concept of empathetic unsettlement. The latter entails "[b]eing responsive to the traumatic experience of others, notably victims" (LaCapra, 2001, p. 41) where the other's story is recognised as distinct from one's own experience. However, as I explore later, the creative team's intention to create an empathic distance between the audience and the characters, representative of real soldiers, is at times distorted throughout the play.

In addition, the writer character not only serves as a device to implicate the audience, but also as a critique of verbatim plays that imply that the testimonies of verbatim interview subjects—particularly those affected by war—are shared effortlessly. For instance, Burke was initially apprehensive about writing the writer into the play as he shared the same background as the Black Watch soldiers and felt that the scenes would therefore be ineffective for sustaining a tension between the writer and the soldiers. However, by changing the writer character into the embodiment of a middle-class, anti-war liberal desperately trying to give voice to the soldiers' experience via theatre created a more dramatic tension. Inspired by playwright David Hare, Burke (2011) explained how the writer figure became "a nice liberal guy who'd feel their pain," thus commenting directly on practitioners' attempts to make theatre from the traumatic testimony of others for "the good of the oppressed" (Salverson, 2001, p. 121). Elsewhere, Bottoms (2006) has critiqued the style of realism recognisable in the plays of David Hare and Robin Soans where the playwright appears to be omnipresent in their own works, presenting the words of verbatim subjects as if they have unprecedented access into the private lives of others. In this way, verbatim theatre that conceals the playwright's presence negates "the world-shaping role of the writer in editing and

juxtaposing materials” (Bottoms, 2006, p. 59). Likewise, Deirdre Heddon (2008) cites *Black Watch* as an effective model in its meta-theatrical approach to dramatising testimony, stating:

Unlike other verbatim plays, where it seems as if people easily tell their implicitly dramatic stories, complete with a natural narrative formation, in *Black Watch* what we witness is the fragmented structure of interviews, the diversions and digressions, the moments of anger and impatience – all that stuff that is cut from the typical verbatim play (p. 140).

Expressing the same stance as Heddon, the actor Brian Ferguson (2011) expressed in our interview that he felt it was necessary for Burke and Tiffany to underline the soldiers’ initial reluctance to participate, explaining:

There’s that constant battling on both sides of the person, who’s interviewing but also you know the soldiers’ wanting to share their stories but at the same time, I mean, it’s such a vulnerable thing to do to give that story over and then, ‘Ok now you’re going to go [make a play] —what are you going to do with this, like?’

The integration of the writer in *Black Watch* is the same strategy often used by Jeremy Weller and The Grassmarket Project’s (GMP) plays. The technique operates as an ethical-critique intended for the audience to consider their own relationship to the subjects presented, as Richard Ings (2014) explains:

A common device in Grassmarket productions is to bring into the community an interrogatory figure, often played by a professional actor, who represents a version of mainstream society (like the audience) and against whose conventional values the voices of the marginalised are set in contrast, protest or opposition (p. 126).

The character of the journalist in Jeremy Weller and The Grassmarket Project’s play *Soldiers*—which debuted at The Traverse at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1998—explores soldiers’ experiences of conflicts ranging from Northern Ireland to Yugoslavia (Grassmarket, 2006; Shuttleworth, 1998).<sup>140</sup> In both *Black Watch* and *Soldiers* the writer/journalist figure functions as a symbol of civilians’ disconnect with the soldiers depicted in the play.

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<sup>140</sup> In a review of *Black Watch*’s debut at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2006 in *The Scotsman* stated that: “Burke uses a technique favoured by another early-’90s theatre practitioner, Jeremy Weller, whose productions would feature real-life homeless people (*Glad*), juvenile delinquents (*Bad*) and mentally ill (*Mad*). Invariably, these plays would feature a naïve outsider—representing the director [Weller] himself—who would stumble into the world of the disposed and the sidelined, and act as a way in for the audience and a catalyst for dramatic action” (Scotsman, 2006). While it is unclear if Tiffany was directly influenced by Weller’s inclusion of the clash between the journalist Kokan and one of the veteran performers in *Soldiers*, Tiffany’s production of Liz Lochhead’s *Perfect Days* was also being performed at The Traverse as part of the Edinburgh Festival in 1998 at the same time (Paddock, 1998).

The tension between the writer and the soldiers depicted is complex. On one hand the distinction between soldiers and the writer operates to counteract the audience's attempt to easily identify with the soldiers' experience, thereby creating a sense of distance between the soldiers and the audience. In addition, the writer and the soldiers' social dynamic operating in *Black Watch* attempts to confront the "standard white mythology of 'us' as normal and decent and 'them' as the dark and dysfunctional" so often presented uncritically in contemporary documentary and verbatim plays (Bottoms, 2006, p. 59). In other words, as Lyn Gardner first wrote of the production, "*Black Watch* avoids the pitfalls of most documentary theatre, which allows us liberal theatre-goers to take a cosy gander at the zoo" (Gardner, 2006).

On the other hand, the play employs a problematic "us" and "them" dynamic that at times resonates with Bottoms' (2006) "standard white mythology" (p. 59). For example, in scene 'Pub 4', ex-Black Watch soldier Stewarty threatens to break the writer's arm (in a fabricated episode) (Cull, 2007), which is used to heighten the dramatic tension between the writer as "us" and the soldiers as the "dysfunctional" (Bottoms, 2006, p. 59) "them".<sup>141</sup> Heddon (2008) argues that it matters not whether the depicted event represents what actually happened, as the mediation of personal experience for performance is always a "creative act" (p. 141). However, this particular construction has real-world implications. This is partly because the character Stewarty was to some degree inspired by the life story of a soldier named David (Burke 2011), who was never interviewed by Burke, but served alongside the Black Watch soldiers until he was honourably discharged due to PTSD (Macleod, 2007).<sup>142</sup> This uncritical portrayal of Stewarty as the "dark and dysfunctional" archetype (Bottoms, 2006, p. 59) risks perpetuating clichés that combat veterans are volatile, dangerous and broken. Likewise, K.J. Sanchez, who co-wrote the verbatim play *ReEntry* (2009) explains how portrayals of soldiers "as emotionally damaged, distraught and abusive" (Sanchez, 2011) contributes to servicemen's reluctance to speak with theatre practitioners. This issue of how soldiers-as-subjects are framed in plays, and, more broadly soldiers'

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<sup>141</sup> This same device was used in *Soldiers* (1998) depicting a soldier's threatening of female war correspondent Jane Kokan. As *Financial Times* critic Ian Shuttleworth (1998) observed: "There is little acting-out of events; mostly Jane Kokan interviews others about their experiences under fire in the former Yugoslavia and in Northern Ireland, or the other participants deliver monologues directly to us. When action does arise, as when Kokan is terrorised by a post-traumatically stressed soldier (one of the actors), its directness is shocking".

<sup>142</sup> The surname of the soldier is not used here for reasons of privacy.

scepticism of how combat experiences are represented in popular culture is an area I will explore in the writing of *Yardbird*.

### **Theatrical Translation of Documents and Ethical Considerations**

Soldiers' personal documents as well as public documents inspired key scenes in *Black Watch* but required the creative team to consider the effects of their theatrical translation of these personal and public archives. While there were ethical boundaries for the creative team to consider, the documents inspired new possibilities for how the creative team might present soldiers' experiences.

Inviting the soldiers to meet the creative team in the development presented the creative team with the opportunity to look through the soldiers' personal documents. For instance, in our interview Tiffany (2012) discussed how ex-Black Watch soldier Stephen's photograph inspired Steven Hoggett's physical sequence, 'Blueys'. Tiffany (2012) described the significance of the document, elaborating "[t]here was one beautiful white and black photograph taken of his best friend, sat in the back of the wagon and he's reading a letter from home, and his face is absolutely transported somewhere". The photograph evoked a more emotive insight into the soldiers' experience that had not been verbally expressed by the soldiers to Burke during the interviews. In response to the photograph, Hoggett devised an exercise with the actors as Tiffany (2012) explained that involved the actors writing a letter to themselves as if it was written to them from a loved one such as:

a girlfriend, daughter, mother, father, brother, whatever, telling them what they were up to back in Scotland. And he got them to take three sentences from that letter and to find a gesture—a kind of language that would communicate that, but not to communicate to an audience.

The intent was not for audience to understand the secret hand language, but for viewers to see the soldiers in a private setting expressing their intimate feelings.

At the same time there were constraints on how 'Blueys'—the intricate movement sequence presenting the soldiers' correspondence through blue letter mimes—was staged based on the creative team's knowledge that the bereaved families of the soldiers killed would come and see the play. Burke (2011) explained to me that the soldiers had disclosed to him that one of their comrades, who had been one of those killed by a suicide bomber, had never received mail from home throughout his

deployment. As a response to this story, Burke had intended to feature ‘Fraz’ as the isolated soldier who never receives mail in ‘Blueys’ juxtaposed the soldiers reading their letters. However, Burke and the creative team decided that making this statement, although dramatic, would be potentially harmful to the bereaved family of the particular soldier who was killed. Therefore, the scene was amended so that all soldiers were featured gesturing in the letters sequence.

In addition, public documents also prompted moral debate among the creative team as evidenced in the scene ‘Casualties’. During the workshop phase of *Black Watch* the stage manager found film footage of the insurgent’s bombing that killed three Black Watch soldiers: Sergeant Stuart Gray, Private Paul Lowe, and Private Scott McArdle and an Iraqi translator (News, 2004b). Tiffany (2012) felt an obligation to view the footage and felt an obligation to re-create the suicide bombing on stage, stating:

And I found that, I watched it just to get a sense of the actual reality of it [...] And I found something very disturbing in the fact, that you know, that mother’s of dead soldiers used to get telegrams. Saying that their son was dead. Now they can watch it online. Which I think is repulsive. And very moving. So I knew that we had to show that, and I knew we needed to show the horror of it. And, so we just went there. We had to just go there.

Furthermore, Ross Anderson (2011) explained his motivation for viewing the footage in preparation for the role of Rossco (for the international 2010-11 tour) as a part of his accountability for portraying a soldier, adding:

I wanted to see it because, I knew at the end of the play when they get blown up, that’s what I— the character would have been seeing so I felt that I had to, you know, and it was just... and nothing really prepares you for how shocking it is.<sup>143</sup>

In relation to identification and performing the other’s experience, Anderson also expressed in our interview that seeing the real footage of the soldiers killed helped him differentiate his experience as an actor from the experience of Black Watch soldiers on the ground. Reflecting on the “identificatory relationship” (p. 200) between the verbatim subject and the actor is a critical one, as Amanda Stuart-Fisher (2011) explores in reflection upon her own project *From The Mouths of Mothers* that features testimony from mothers whose children have endured sexual abuse. In relation to the actor/verbatim subject relationship in her project, she argues that “this particular appropriative process seemed to contain the most potential to be disempowering,

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<sup>143</sup> John Tiffany (2012) invited actors to watch the explosion only if they felt obliged to view the incident that killed the soldiers and if it would enhance their understanding of the soldiers’ experience.

because the actors were taking the mothers' stories, their intonation and speech patterns and incorporating these into their own experience" (p. 201). Tiffany seemed to share a similar caution expressed by Stuart-Fisher when working on *Black Watch*, often disciplining actors when they appeared to lose respect for the experiences of the soldiers concerned. He explained:

There were a few comments like 'Wow, I really feel I'm someone who'd been there'. And I'd say 'I think that's insulting. Because you really don't know what it's like to be there. Because you take off your uniform and go to the pub, and chat up pretty girls. They watch their friends die so. Do not let me hear you say that again'.

While Tiffany's statement reflects a consciousness of the importance of actors to maintain a critical and respectful difference—I believe there are times when Tiffany and Burke were less critical of their own attitudes regarding the distinctive experiences of the soldiers. Mary Luckhurst (2011) argues in relation to verbatim and documentary practice that the hierarchical organisation in traditional theatre tends to minimise the viewpoints of actors and the "ethical stress" they encounter—critical perspectives which are rich with key insights regarding the ethics of representation. Therefore, consulting actors as a means of enhancing my own ethical approach to testimony is something I explore more critically in my development of *Yardbird*.

The footage of the suicide bombing inspired the scene 'Casualties'. The scene takes place at a checkpoint in Iraq where the audience sees Cammy, Macca, Rosco, Granty, Stewarty and Nabsy securing the perimeter of a checkpoint as Fraz, Kenzie, the sergeant and the Iraqi translator (only referenced in the dialogue) question a driver of a vehicle offstage. In an instant, there is the sound of a loud explosion blowing the group of soldiers seen onstage back in slow motion (Burke, 2010, p. 67). Tarp falls from a scaffolding to reveal the bodies of Fraz, Kenzie and the sergeant, suspended by strings, dangling motionless in the air. Underscoring the vivid depiction of the slow descent of three blood-soaked soldiers, is Margaret and Martyn Bennett's rendition of *A Thearlaich Òig (Oh Young Charles Stewart)* featuring a woman singing in Gaelic about the loss of her family (Bennett, 2006).<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> *A Thearlaich Òig* is an old Jacobite song. As musician Martyn Bennett (2002) explained: "It is addressed to Prince Charles Edward Stuart and was composed in 1746 after the Battle of Culloden, though tragically, in other parts of the world [Bosnia], the guns of war have not ceased. An unknown woman, distraught by grief, sings between the battleground and the grave, still within the range of cannon fire and sniper's bullets" (Bennett 2002). The lyrics "Young Charles, son of King James I saw a great army eager in pursuit of you/They were joyful and I was weeping/The flow of my tears, sick on my



Integrating a re-staging of the immediate aftermath of the soldiers' deaths in the play also prompted the creative team to warn the bereaved families of scenes depicting the soldiers being killed in advance of their attendance of the performance out of a sense of responsibility to the families' feelings. Tiffany (2012) was aware of the scene might affect the parents of the soldiers who had been killed, and upon whose characters Fraz, Kenzie and the sergeant were loosely inspired, explaining:

I feel, very aware and sensitive, like when we performed it in Glenrothes and two of the mothers of the boys who died came to see it. But we make sure we tell them what the content of the show is before they sit in. And of course they can't watch it, they can't watch that part of it. You know and some people find it therapeutic. But the main thing is its about getting audiences into the horror of it. Cause at the end of the day, that's what happened. And that's what it's about. So because that was a story we were telling it felt like we had to tell it.

Although Tiffany felt an obligation to warn the Scottish soldiers' families of the play's depiction of how their sons died, the same sensitivity was not was not expressed concerning the death of the Iraqi translator who died alongside the soldiers. This resonates with Jenny Hughes' (2011) assertion that verbatim and documentary theatre responding to terror are often limited in their capacity to prompt critical reflection from audiences regarding voices outside the Western frame of experience. Although *Black Watch* was intended to be anti-war, in many ways the creative team's lack of consideration for Iraqi lives aids in the neo-colonial attitudes symptomatic of the 'war on terror' rhetoric, rather than problematising it.

### **Ethical Anxiety, Exploitation and the Role of the Playwright**

For Burke as a playwright, the departure from working with verbatim testimony was initially more liberating as a writer and provided opportunities to craft fictional dialogue. However, Burke had anxieties about the process because the stories were based on real accounts. The gravitation toward the fictional script and the departure from the script based on Burke's notebook entries marked a turning point in the play's development. As Tiffany (2012) explained, "it's not verbatim *Black Watch*. So, because we realised how quickly limiting it was we realised just because it's true isn't to say it's

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vision" is the call of a woman who bore witness to the ruin of her homeland and her family singing, (Bennett 2002).

dramatic”. The same was realised by playwright Sonja Linden creating *Crocodile Seeking Refuge* (2008), a play based on testimonies of asylum-seekers in the United Kingdom.<sup>145</sup> Although she had intended to incorporate verbatim material from the subjects’ own personal writings to create the play, Linden came to the conclusion that her skills as a playwright were better suited for theatrically translating the experiences of the interviewees for performance, explaining:

I found it quite confining and limiting in many ways [...] I suppose at one level I thought ‘well I’m actually a playwright’ and I want to be able to use my creativity, be more inventive. But it was a really difficult decision. My loyalty to these people made me, for a long time, not want to break away from their own writing. Once I’d made the decision, though, I found it very liberating (Linden in Stuart-Fisher, 2009, p. 111).

In my interview with Tiffany, she affirms Linden’s discovery, stating “our responsibility is to tell their story in a way that has resonance for a large audience” (Tiffany, 2012).

In our interview, Burke and I briefly discussed the anxieties that emerged meeting families of soldiers who were killed. Burke (2011) explained that his personal gain from the traumatic stories of soldiers, caused him anxiety about meeting the bereaved family members of the soldiers who had died:

After all of the success, I did have to meet them. I couldn’t avoid it. And I didn’t want to run away. ‘Cause what do you say? Because your son died, it’s advanced my career’. It feels very exploitative. And I had those doubts about the thing anyway. Not doubts but those moments—Whenever you appropriate someone else’s experiences and use them for your own. There’s a little bit of something inside you—if you’re human being that goes ‘hang on a minute’. I found that quite difficult, cause again. Cause you don’t want to lie and say ‘I wrote it because I wanted you to feel that your son’s life was worthwhile’, you don’t want to say, ‘I wrote it because I got asked to write it. Or to make money’.

Burke felt that his presence and the process of adapting the stories of soldiers for *Black Watch* was exploitative and limiting as a writer yet the bereaved family members of the soldiers killed found watching the performance cathartic. This was similar to my experience during the production run of *This Much is True*. Although they expressed their approval of our interpretation of their stories in *This Much is True* I had found that our representations devalued the complexity of the Menezes cousins’ experience—highlighting only a series of losses in their fight for justice. Helen Nicholson (2014)

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<sup>145</sup> Sonja Linden is the founder of the theatre company Ice and Fire Theatre.

attaches the gift metaphor to applied theatre-making, whereby – like a gift – the contact between subjects and practitioners can symbolise an exchange of gratitude and generosity as well as expectation and disappointment. In the context of applied theatre Nicholson explains, “there is always a need to be vigilant about whether the practice is accepted as a generous exercise of care or whether, how ever well-intentioned, it is regarded as an invasive act or unwelcome intrusion” (Nicholson, 2014, p. 166).

Burke’s (2011) acknowledgement of his own scepticism towards his role as a documentary playwright is significant. Rather than purporting to speak for others, his critique of his own position coincides with Salverson’s (2001) insistence that theatre practitioners should consider their intentions and implications of their theatrical interpretations of testimony in relation to the trauma of others. In my view, adapting plays based on testimony is inevitably a kind of “betrayal” (Heddon, 2008, p. 143) of another person’s experience, as creating a play based on testimony is an appropriation of the private lives of others (Stuart-Fisher, 2011).

### **Frames of Identification and Exclusion**

Despite the international success of *Black Watch*, three main charges against the production include the exclusion of critical narratives of women, the families of the soldiers, and Iraqi civilians (Archibald, 2008c; Reid, 2013; Sierz, 2011). David Pattie has argued that these particular charges against *Black Watch* are inconsequential as the play is really about the sorrow felt by working-class soldiers in response to the dismantling of their beloved regiment (Pattie, 2011; Reid, 2013). However, I argue these frames of exclusion and their implications need to be considered in the context of *Black Watch* and have provided me with a more self-aware approach to framing testimony in *Yardbird*.<sup>146</sup>

In relation to the omission of female voices, Trish Reid (2013) argues that *Black Watch* “consistently fails to problematise its own residual masculinism – that is, the grounds on which it constructs and critiques the world from an exclusively masculine

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<sup>146</sup> In Chapter 1, I briefly introduced Jenny Hughes and Helen Nicholson’s arguments on the politics of identification, particularly in relation to applied theatre and verbatim plays (Hughes, 2011; Nicholson, 2014).

perspective” (p. 81).<sup>147</sup> I share Reid’s (2013) concern regarding the exclusion of women and the romanticised misogyny in *Black Watch* as women are only referenced in the context of sexual conquests and grief. The “residual masculinism” (Reid, 2013, p. 81) in *Black Watch* is evidenced in the hyper-sexualisation of women in scene ‘Pub 1’ as the soldiers fantasise about the prospects of receiving oral sex from a female researcher in exchange for their war stories, to which Stewart enthusiastically comments “she was gagging for a line up from some battle hardened Black Watch toby” while gesturing with a pool stick (Burke, 2010, p. 5).<sup>148</sup> In addition, the only distinguishing female voice featured in the production is the sorrowful recording of Margaret Bennett (2006) singing *A Thearlaich Òig (Oh Young Charles Stewart)* in the scene ‘Casualties’ as the bloodied soldiers descend to the ground.<sup>149</sup> Although it could be argued that the intimate mime sequence in ‘Blueys’ suggests the presence of mothers, sisters and girlfriends, little consideration is given to the impact of war on women.

Reid’s (2013) critique of *Black Watch* resonates with Adrienne Scullion’s concerns about gender, representation and contemporary Scottish identity. Scullion (2001) argues that contemporary Scottish theatre practitioners and critics alike need to consider gender and feminism in their critical discourse and artistic practice, in order to understand the complexity of modern Scottish culture. She asserts:

Identity remains a significant area of concern, that gender matters, and that feminist practice aims to promote new or alternative approaches to conventional representations [...] when challenging the conventions of narrative or of gender representation, artists also challenge the conventions of representing and responding to the nation (p. 388).

While Scullion’s assertion is based primarily on an examination of the works of contemporary female Scottish playwrights (Zinnie Harris, Sue Glover and Nicola McCartney) and issues of nationhood in post-devolution Scotland, this critique affirms the importance of considering gender and representation more broadly as an integral aspect of national identity. In this way *Black Watch*’s omission of female experiences

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<sup>147</sup> Reid (2013) contends that *Black Watch* “reinvigorates and reanimates the iconography of the Scottish soldier to paint a picture of a masculine community established through centuries of shared experience: ‘We’re a fucking tribe ourselves’” (p. 80).

<sup>148</sup> Watching the play, I was aware of the hyper-masculinity depicted which made me consider what reactions to my gender I would experience as a playwright-researcher throughout the interview process for *Yardbird*.

<sup>149</sup> Davey Anderson (2011) felt the song was ideal for the sequence as “it’s about a mother mourning her son who gets killed in a war, and it was important that the lyrics resonated with the content of the scene”.

contributes to the play's failing to interrogate conventional notions of Scottish national identity. Moreover, Scullion's (2001) point validates my own exploration of the appropriation of personal testimonies from US soldiers and their families in verbatim theatre. Sensitive to the exclusion of women's experiences in *Black Watch*, I explore how women's experiences of war are critical to my examination of my approach to gathering and appropriating trauma-related testimony in my verbatim practice. Thus, for the writing of my verbatim play *Yardbird*, I endeavour to integrate a range of voices from military families and female military personnel—key perspectives that are often negated in debates on national identity and war.

What is more, the omission of the families' experiences in *Black Watch* negates the impact of war on military families. The integration of military families' narratives can engage audiences on how war violence permeates the domestic setting. For example, Emily Mann's Vietnam play *Still Life* (1980) integrates the relationship between a Vietnam veteran, his estranged wife Cheryl and his mistress. Marta Fernandez Morales (2007) explains how Cheryl's experience as a wife of a Vietnam veteran and victim of domestic violence illuminates an overshadowed history of women's experiences of the aftereffects of war, stating:

Emily Mann, following the path opened by other feminist playwrights, recuperates the female view and saves the wives' voices from oblivion through the character of Cheryl, who is given a chance to speak the truth about a conflict that has been interpreted mostly from a male perspective. After all, war and violence have always been 'boys' stuff' ... (Morales, 2007).

In contemporary verbatim theatre, Emily Ackerman and K.J. Sanchez's *ReEntry* (2009) expands on the effects of war on women as well as men, incorporating testimony from American marines, including women serving in the armed forces as well as the perspectives of mothers, wives and sisters of marines (Ackerman & Sanchez, 2010). In addition, the family dimension of the servicemen's experience also became central to Re-Live's applied theatre project *Abandoned Brothers* (2012) and as director Alison O'Connor (2005) states, "[t]his was a story of families, of boys who grew up and become men, of men who went away to war and came back different. And as for the women, their war began when the men came home" (p. 155).

In addition, the exclusion of Iraqi perspectives from *Black Watch* counteracts the creative team's aims to critique the Iraq War. David Archibald (2008) analyses the scene 'Casualties' in which the bodies of Fraz, Kenzie and the sergeant are suspended in

mid-air yet the Iraqi translator killed alongside the soldiers in the explosion was not shown (p. 11).<sup>150</sup> Highlighting the omission as an example of the play's ethnocentrism, Archibald (2008) poses the question:

Why are there only three bodies? The translator is also killed: but he is rubbed out, literally and metaphorically. Again, conscious or otherwise, it erases the Iraqis (even the ones fighting with 'our boys') from the narrative (p. 11).<sup>151</sup>

I share the same concern as Archibald (2008) that by focusing exclusively on Western soldiers, this impedes the ability for audiences to consider the lives of Iraqi civilians.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, the representation of the Scottish soldiers' bodies in 'Casualties' conforms closely to the "our boys" fantasy of warfare often glorified in pop culture (Hall, 2007). Karen Hall (2007) criticises how the deaths of soldiers are appropriated in television and film for an audiences' indulgence by depicting the loss of "our boys" (p. 101).<sup>153</sup> In our interview, Burke (2011) explained the importance of generating certain soldier character types that would affect an audience:

They're recognisable stock-in-trade war movies characters [...] You have to have stock characters—you have the funny one, you have the psychopath and the one who's not coming back. The guy who everyone's gonna feel sorry for—who's going to die. You got to kill him! It's like that you always have one. I've got to kill them. Cause the audience will be sad when I kill him. So I thought, right, I'm going to make them the characters in the pub now with minus three or four of them because they're the ones who died.

Once again these war film-inspired character types at times operate within the frames of the 'war on terror' discourse used in the aftermath of 9/11.<sup>154</sup> The framing of the soldiers' deaths is perpetuated by the theatrical layering of Hoggett's physical

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<sup>150</sup> Burke justifies his resistance to integrating the experiences of Iraqi civilians due to his reluctance to speak on behalf of the Iraqi people, which in Burke's view is indicative of British and American neo-colonial attitudes that led to the invasion of Iraq in the first place (Fisher, 2008; Macleod, 2007).

<sup>151</sup> Archibald (2008) argues that *Black Watch* is politically "limiting, ambiguous and contradictory, in some ways radical whilst, simultaneously, deeply reactionary" (p. 279). Archibald (2008) argues that Cammy's presentation of the regimental history in *Black Watch* fails to recognise the regiment's violent history given its omission of the Black Watch presence in Northern Ireland.

<sup>152</sup> Archibald's (2008) questions resonate with Judith Butler's concept of precariousness—where Butler poses whose lives are considered grievable and whose lives are considered un-grievable in times of war (Butler, 2006). In other words, how are the lives of others such as Iraqi and Afghan civilians downgraded in times of war and thus perceived by the Western public as dispensable?

<sup>153</sup> Films such as *Behind Enemy Lines*, as Gearóid Ó Tuathail (2007) argues, aided in providing ideological clarity for the events of 11 September 2001 by perpetuating good guy/bad guy binaries indicative of the military mythology during the Bush Administration (Butterworth, 2008; M. Mann, 2003; Ó Tuathail, 2007).

<sup>154</sup> In the wake of the attacks on the Twin Towers, Michael Mann (2003) upgraded his definition of militarism in light of the Bush era as the "the new militarism" whereby military power and political rhetoric are used offensively with the intention "to remake the world into a better place" (pp. 8-9).

depiction of the slain soldiers' slow descent accompanied by Anderson's emotive Gaelic song of a mother's mourning. This is where the play encourages a "totalising 'we'" (Diamond, 2007; Salverson, 2001, p. 120) where the deaths of the soldiers are designed to conjure a sense of loss from the audience. As a result, the emotive climax of the play depicted in 'Casualties' disrupts Tiffany and Burke's intention to critique the British and American public's participation in the war in Iraq. Considering whose lives matter in the context of war plays becomes a significant aspect for assessing the intention of the playwright.

Furthermore, deciding whose narratives are framed and whose are discarded in the creative process has real-world ramifications, particularly in the context of war. This begs the question how can practitioners help encourage critical reflection on the experiences of civilians living in war zones even when they are not accessible in the interview process?<sup>155</sup> Although *ReEntry* (2009) focuses on the stories of US marines and military families, the play includes references to the impact of the Iraq War on local people. For instance, the play incorporates a commanding officer's story about a US marine who stayed beside a dying Iraqi child for hours so the boy would not have to die alone (Ackerman & Sanchez, 2010). *ReEntry* provides opportunities for audiences to reflect on how soldiers cope with the ambiguity of killing civilians. In contrast, any reflection on the Iraqis' lives in *Black Watch* is limited to the 'Bullies' scene where Black Watch soldiers criticise the American military's heavy artillery shelling of an Iraqi village. The predicament of framing certain narratives and excluding others, particularly in the context of Iraqi and Afghan civilians, will be considered throughout the dramaturgy of my play *Yardbird*.

### **Further Considerations for Writing *Yardbird***

In conclusion, the making of *Black Watch*, while not a verbatim play, presented the creative team with ethical boundaries regarding their presentation of the soldiers' experiences. This includes the creative team's reluctance to ask soldiers probing questions regarding combat, and as a result these non-verbal negotiations dictated what aspects of the soldiers' stories could or could not be explored in the play—such as the

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<sup>155</sup> Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen's verbatim play *Aftermath* (2009) focuses exclusively on the experience of Iraqi refugees impacted by the Iraq War, while Jonathan Holmes' verbatim play *Fallujah* (2007) concentrates on the experiences of American soldiers and doctors and Iraqis as witnesses to the US invasion of Iraq (Holmes, 2007).

soldiers' experiences of killing. In addition, ethical boundaries were evidenced in Burke's decision not to show the isolated soldier who never received mail because of the implications of how the deceased soldier's family would react to this portrayal. Reflecting on the *Black Watch* creative team's concern for the soldier-subjects as part of their creative practice, I consider throughout the writing of *Yardbird* the verbal and non-verbal interactions that presented ethical boundaries for my writing practice.

Three key techniques I explore compiling testimony in the *Yardbird* playtext informed by *Black Watch* include an emphasis on imagery, textual reflexivity and through-lines. Engaging with the development of key scenes from soldiers' personal documents in *Black Watch* leads me to consider the theatrical possibilities of exploring imagery in the transcription process and the composition of scenes in the writing of *Yardbird*. I also explore how integrating textual reflexivity operates as part of an ethical critique of my own presence as a playwright as a means of alerting audiences to the levels of mediation that occur throughout the verbatim-playwriting process.

The examination of *Black Watch* presented here also revealed problems I hoped to avoid in the writing of *Yardbird*. Elements such as the re-staging of the suicide bomb in the scene 'Casualties' leaned toward purporting an 'our boys' (Hall, 2007) trope which, I argue, elicits a form of "primary identification" whereby individuals are unable to distinguish between themselves and others (Nicholson, 2014, p. 74).<sup>156</sup> What is more, in *Yardbird* I explore the relationship between my composition of scenes and the possible forms of identification and my framing of testimony and what forms of identification scenes might elicit from future audiences (Hughes, 2011; Little, 2011; Nicholson, 2014; Salverson, 2001). My aim is to avoid representing soldiers as isolated, dangerous and broken subjects.

Furthermore, my analysis of *Black Watch* raised concerns regarding exclusion of narratives or references to the impact of war on Iraqis, women and families. In response to these omissions I consider how these narratives operate in the writing of *Yardbird*. The *Black Watch* creative team's concentration on the male experience limited critical understanding of the wider impact of war on women and families. For this reason, in the making of *Yardbird* I explore the experiences of military families and women in the armed forces and working with military personnel as part of my research process. In

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<sup>156</sup> By immersing audience members into the grief felt by soldiers for their fallen comrades (Fraz, Kenzie and the Sergeant) without reflecting on the life of the Iraqi translator, the scene in 'Casualties' undermines the intentions of the creative team to encourage the audience to question their own relationship to the soldiers' deaths.



addition, I consider how plays such as *ReEntry* (which includes both female military personnel and Marine families' experiences) and *Still Life* (which addresses relationships at home) raise awareness of the ongoing effects of war-related trauma in the domestic setting. Additionally, while I may not have had access to the testimonies of Iraqi and Afghan civilians, I explore how I might alert audiences to consider their experiences. What follows is the introduction to the *Yardbird* case study and its playtext, my original verbatim play based on interviews with American servicemen and their families.

## Chapter Five: *Yardbird*: An Original Verbatim Playtext Based on Interviews with US Veterans and Military Families

### Introduction

This chapter incorporates the full playtext of *Yardbird* given its status as the culmination of my practice-as-research investigation. The examination of my role as a playwright in the creation of the verbatim play *Yardbird*, based on the narratives of US soldiers and their families, is explored in Chapter 6. For a six-week period in the summer of July 11-August 18, 2011 I travelled to the east coast of the United States and conducted interviews with American veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and their families, as well as with Vietnam and World War II veterans and those who work closely with military personnel. From the interview transcripts I created *Yardbird*, a verbatim playtext exploring soldiers' lives at home following their return from war.

The purpose of integrating the *Yardbird* playtext prior to the critical reflection and analysis of the interview and writing process is to provide context for the characters, scenes, environments and dramaturgical methods employed, and to illuminate the overall shape of the play. In doing this, I hope that by providing the full playtext prior to examining my creative practice will help the reader to better engage with my critical reflections on the key issues that emerged in the interview and writing process as detailed in Chapter 6.

The version of the *Yardbird* playtext presented in this chapter was performed as a rehearsed reading before a live audience on June 4, 2015 at The Pineapple Pub in Kentish Town in London. The rehearsed reading was directed by Tom Mansfield who I had worked previously with on the development of *The Kratos Effect*. The cast included Loren O'Dair, James Wrighton, Simon Darwen and Joshua Manning as Actors One, Two, Three and Four respectively. A DVD recording of this performance is included in the appendices of the dissertation as evidence of my practice. My findings upon critical reflection on the genesis of the play – including the research process and the dramaturgical strategies implemented in the writing of the playtext – are examined in the following chapter.

## YARDBIRD

By Sarah Beck

This version of the playtext was performed on June 4, 2015 at The Pineapple Pub in Kentish Town, London.

Please note: A prior reading of *Yardbird* took place on April 9, 2013 at The George Wood Theatre at Goldsmiths College in New Cross, London.

FOUR HANDER: Actors play multiple parts.

ACTOR ONE (female) - Administrator, Erin, Marine Mom, Janine, Waitress, Kelly, Cindy, Kate, Courtney, Katherine

ACTOR TWO (male) - Sergeant, Jason, Man 2, Nathan, Mr. Watson, Waiter, Ben

ACTOR THREE (male) - Devin, Gathers, Man 3, Sam, Bean, Mr. Walters, Commander

ACTOR FOUR (male) - Sergeant George, Kenny, Man 1, Tim, Gavin

### Breakdown

SAM—mid-fifties—is an outdoor enthusiast and a businessman, looks like Jeremiah Johnson. His son John was an Army crew chief on a medevac helicopter during his deployment in Iraq.

CINDY—early fifties—Sam’s wife (Cindal). She is bubbly yet reserved.

JASON—late thirties—served in the 82nd Airborne Division of the Army and talks like a bit of a burn out. He owns Infidel Custom Cycles a chopper shop in Hagerstown, Maryland. His 17-year career in the Army took a turn when he was injured in Iraq from an IED. He has a serious brain injury that causes severe migraines, making it hard for him to concentrate.

JANINE—late thirties—Janine is a medical logistics officer in the Navy and was deployed in Iraq. She is a devout Catholic.

KENNY—early twenties—Kenny was a sniper in the Marines Corps and was deployed in Iraq. He is big 6'2". Now he works the night shift for FedEx

KATHERINE—late twenties—is an Army wife and mother of two. Her circumstances changed when her husband Derrick Miller (Army) killed an Afghan civilian. He was tried in a military court and found guilty of pre-mediated murder and sentenced to life in prison. Katherine is now the breadwinner, stressed and broke but devoted to Derrick.

GAVIN—mid-twenties—was an Army Ranger and completed three deployments in Iraq. He is charming, kind and smiles constantly.

COURTNEY—early twenties—Gavin’s wife. A bit shy.

BEAN—mid-thirties—Burly biker. Really hairy and goofy. Talks all over the place and very excitable.

KATE—early twenties—Not very friendly.

KELLY—late twenties—works as a recreational therapist in the Dementia/Alzheimer's wing of the VA Medical Centre.

MR. WATSON—late eighties—served in the World War II working as a spy for the Army Security Agency. Has Alzheimer's.

MR. WALTERS—late eighties (now deceased)—served in the Air Force in World War II. Flew in B-17s dropping bombs. Survived plane explosion and was captured by Germans.

TIM—late forties—paratrooper and PTSD patient at the Medical Centre.

NOTE: Actors present the titles for each scene.

#### **SCENE ONE: AT THE GATE**

SAM:           *(email)* Hello Ed, Here's a photo of some spruce gap grizzlies. The sow with her two cubs.

*(Beat)*

                  In regards to your daughter's project, she's preparing to make a brief visit to hell. Few people who make that trip, even vicariously, return entirely unaffected. She has my respect. Sam.

SGT. GEORGE:

*(email)* Sarah, our office according to the Privacy Act cannot provide you with any information of any soldier in any type or form. Respectfully, George B. Williams, SGT STAR U.S. Army.

NATHAN:       *(email)* Sarah, I would be happy to answer just about any of your questions. I have a bar in an old chicken coop in my back yard. Maybe we can meet there?

ADMINISTRATOR: *(email)* Dear iVillage Member: You recently posted a message on the Military Wives board asking members of our community to participate in a documentary project. Our message boards are intended to be a place where women can find advice and support. Your post has been removed.

DEVIN:         *(phone conversation)* Cheeeeeessee! Sup? How's it hanging? You know what your problem is? ...you make is sound like you're a reporter for CNN. I'll ask around for you.

ERIN:          I live with him. I have a child with him, and he doesn't even talk to me about it. I don't think he liked who he was when he was there. He wants to forget.

*Phone Rings.*

JASON: *(phone conversation)* Is this Sarah? Yeah I'll talk to you but I need to be played by someone badass, erm Mickey Rourke or someone a bit sexier. Nah, I'm sick of Johnny Depp. Come stop by the shop and we'll talk.

MARINE MOM: *(phone conversation)* Hello? Yes? This is his mother. He's sleeping right now. *(Beat)* That's right a Purple Heart. *(Beat)* Oh it's been ringing off the hook yes we've had *The Record Herald, The Herald-Mail* and *The Public Opinion*. *(Beat)* And, you want to interview my son for...? A school project.

*(Beat)*  
I see. I'll have him call you.

*(Beat)*  
Oh, I wouldn't mention the whole hero/sacrifice thing, he doesn't really respond to things like that. And my advice to you would be to prepare some questions- my son, well, he's not a talker. *(Beat)*  
What's your number, dear?

## SCENE TWO: A SNIPER'S VIEW

KENNY: It's hot outside!

WAITRESS: Welcome to T.G.I. Friday's! Is anyone on our Stripes Reward program here?

KENNY: No.

WAITRESS: Can I start you out with some drinks?

KENNY: I'll have a Coke.

*KENNY wipes sweat from his forehead. He's huge.*

KENNY: When I came back, I did the typical thing like a lot of guys who are injured. I'd sleep with a gun under my bed or hide one somewhere—it's kind of a comfort thing.

I would go back in a heartbeat. I loved being there. Especially that compared to what I'm doing now... a packer for *FedEx*? Working the night shift. How did I get into the Marine Corps? A recruiter, Sergeant Gathers came to my school, when I was in the ninth grade...

GATHERS: I'll give you a T-shirt if you can do 15 push-ups.

KENNY: So I'm a support sniper. I was in Iraq. Two days after I had arrived I had an IED blow up about a hundred yards in front of me big enough to kick me back. It had been a bike frame that had been packed up with some kind of explosives. I've seen stuff like trees burrowed out, packed full of C-4 dynamite. I've seen a person's shoe that was just left on the side of the road for someone to pick up. I've seen it big enough where they can take out a city block...

WAITRESS: There you go!

KENNY: I've heard of dead babies...

WAITRESS: You need a few more minutes to look over the menu?

KENNY: *(to waitress)* Can I get the Jack Daniels burger. Without the tomato?

*(Beat)*

Don't Apologize. Trust me, if somebody doesn't want to talk about it they won't talk about it. I've had guys who won't talk about one single mission and I was actually on a mission with them.

WAITRESS: So Burger and chicken fingers...

KENNY: I had 92 confirmed shots... kills.

WAITRESS: Ketchup's there.

KENNY: Thank you.

*Picks up ketchup. Has trouble getting it out, looks through opening.*

My spotter saw every one of them. The biggest problem for him was actually keeping his cool. His scope is zoomed in a lot more than mine is when I shoot. I don't actually see the bullet hit the person. He watches the bullet hit them.

*Slaps ketchup and it splats.*

Downtime? My girlfriend sent me a PlayStation 3. I was like, "Sweet, I get to play Modern Warfare now." So I'd pretty much play that while there was a sandstorm going on. We had basketball courts. Some guys'd bring footballs. Some guys actually get into camel spider fighting.

*KENNY pulls out a Tupperware container with a giant spider in it...*

*Waitress pulls out a coffee pot with another giant spider inside. The following sequence comes from Camel Spider fight footage:*

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTEyd1dh48c>.*

*The camel spider fights are projected onto a screen.*

MAN 1: *(filming with camera phone)* This one here is a beast!

MAN 2: Should we do the two little ones first?

MAN 1: All three

MAN 2: Nah, nah, we got to go one at a time, one at a time. I mean if that bitch can jump out of there then we need to reorganize!

*(Beat)*

What's up with this guy in the coffee pot?

*They jump. Spiders scare the men.*

MAN 3: You got to put a lid or something on that!

KENNY: You have to tease them a little bit. You pretty much get a shoebox type deal, and you set it up, and they're just dropped inside.  
*Soldiers start wrestling as if camel spiders.*

KENNY: Some guys'd put money on them.

MAN 1: That one's not going to last cause he's already fucked up. Dude let's let the other two beat themselves down and then we'll throw the little one in after.

WAITRESS: Got your burger here.

KENNY: (*Looks at hamburger*) At the time it happened I was actually eating a sandwich... it was a turkey or ham sandwich.  
(*Beat*)  
We were on patrol, in a small village and, there were reporting of guys with mortars. We have to, of course, chase them out because it was a green zone. Erm, well, we'd been looking around for them pretty much all day we didn't find anything. So we started loading up the Humvees, the tanks and stuff. I was trying to jump in the Humvee when I was clipped in the shoulder by a bullet. And at first it didn't bother me too much. And I still held onto the handrail trying to pull myself into the truck- I got about halfway. Another bullet hit me in the hip. I fell out. Hit the ground. I hit it perfectly, shattered my tailbone. They didn't know I had fallen out. They drove off.  
(*Beat*)  
And, erm, I crawled underneath this disabled tank. When I fell I landed on top of my radio it broke, but luckily the radio I had, had an emergency transponder that sent out a beacon. The first twenty or thirty minutes I just tried to check myself out and I could tell my shoulder wasn't too bad, I couldn't really get to my hip because you only have about two feet of space underneath the tank, with all my gear I was barely able to turn. The first day, the town had been taken over by insurgents. I was just laying under the tank. I could see people walking past and talking. I couldn't speak the language, so I didn't know what they were saying, but every second I was laying there I was afraid somebody is going to look underneath the tank and see me. It was everything I fear rolled up in a ball and shoved down my throat.  
(*Beat*)  
The second day I noticed the drag marks from behind the tank... I could see peoples' shadows walking at the end of the tank. I just laid there and I noticed that more people were arriving. But at night, it was pretty much empty. Quiet. But it never left my head. Knowing. I'm only a sergeant, I'm easily replaceable. I know how the military works.  
(*Beat*)  
The third day, I had fallen asleep for a little bit. Which I was trying not to—doze off and not wake up. I dozed off. I woke up when I heard a helicopter coming, and the insurgents had left the town, but they had left a team behind in case we came back, so as soon as I heard the chopper I heard mortars going off. And I was afraid that

something would then hit the tank I was under. When they came back there was about seven choppers and two tanks on the ground!

*(Laughs)*

There was a twenty-to-thirty-minute gunfight and then everything went silent. Next, I hear them calling my name out. I had drank all of my water and I was pretty dehydrated and couldn't yell. Behind the tank I could see this foot in front of me. I stuck my gun out so it hit their foot.

GATHERS: Kenny what the hell are you doing? *(Laughs)* Come out of there!

KENNY: The guy who found me was actually the guy who recruited me, Sergeant Gathers. And I yelled "I can't move!"

GATHERS: Alright we'll get you out of there.

KENNY: And they took some chains and hooked it up to the tank that was above me they drug it out so they could get to me.

*(Laughs)*

I found the driver when he came back Stateside. At first I had played it off cool and invited him out to a bar. I remember his first words to me were "Thank God you made it!" I went off on the guy. "How could you miss a guy who is 6' 2" falling out the back window? Falling out after being shot, and driving away like it was nothing?"

### **SCENE THREE: WELCOME INFIDEL**

*We hear a pitbull barking loudly. In JASON's chopper shop. TANK barks again.*

JASON: Tank! Tank!

*Phone rings. JASON answers*

Infidel! Yeah hey Bapa. What's up? Oh you got a flat!? Yeah, yeah man bring it over- we'll hook ya up. Right on. Alright bye!

*JASON hangs up phone.*

My life is a fucking circus!! *(Sighs)*

*TANK barks.*

JASON: We can just chill out-you don't mind the Iron Mountain String Band...

*Turns up the music. TANK barks!*

*(Sings)*

*Hound dog comin' down that road possum better run...*

*If you want to get you eye knocked out, If you want to get your fill*

*If you want to get your head cut off, Just...*

*JASON picks up Dictaphone and examines it.*



JASON: Are you a cop? (Beat) I'm kidding. It's fine to record.  
(*Listens*)  
And then you have someone act them out, and make it  
*entertainment?*  
(*Fast*)  
Well they can be educated, entertained all of the above. Turned on.  
Turned off. Gassed Out. Turned up. Smile. Laugh. Cry. It's bad. It's  
heavy. I don't know if you can handle it. You got enough tape? My  
story's going to do funny things to you and I apologize now to your  
boyfriend, your husband, whatever.  
(*Beat*)  
I'm Jason Frank Anderson. I'm thirty-seven years old. I'm a military  
brat. My father retired after twenty years of service--Vietnam. I have  
three boys now- all from different mothers. I'm now seventeen years  
in the Army, still on active duty.  
(*Beat*)  
I was looking for a job. I just wanted to leave on whatever was going  
fastest out of town. And this Army dude told me, I could jump out of  
airplanes and shoot people. And I told him that's exactly what I want  
to do.  
I got shot in the hip in Somalia. Purple Heart number one!  
After that, I did the hot dog business. Yeah I was in the hot dog  
business after I got back for a while. Sixteen restaurants. Franchises,  
yup!  
I got shot again in Iraq. In the shoulder, that's Purple Heart number  
two!  
We went back in '08 and that's when I got blown up by an IED –  
that's three!  
I interned with a chopper shop in Baltimore as part as my rehab. And  
now I am the owner of Infidel Custom Cycles—Hagerstown,  
Maryland.  
(*Pause*)  
Your face looks familiar... Have we slept together??

*JASON shows us around Infidel Custom Cycles. This is JASON's chopper shop.*

JASON: This is our shop! When guys want to  
escape their shitty lives they come here to my sandbox!  
(*Beat*)  
That's my bike right there. Nothing beats the sound of a Harley.  
(*Beat*)  
Yup, that sticker says "Yes. You are too fucking close."  
(*Beat*)  
This bike is a year old and it's got 22,000 miles on it.  
(*Beat*)  
The doctors told me I'm not allowed to drive but they didn't tell me I  
couldn't ride!

*JASON picks up oil cans.*

Tank you watch her, make sure she doesn't steal anything.

#### SCENE FOUR: CHRISTIAN-BASED ADVICE

*JANINE carries a laundry basket and folds clothes.*

JANINE: I've got an idea for you. I would like to have the song "Praise You in This Storm" by Casting Crowns playing...

*Turns up Casting Crowns.*

Oh and, I think it would be nice for it to be a one-person testimonial told through the eyes of a "Religious Lay Leader". Because. That's one of the things I volunteered to do while I was in Iraq. I was finishing up my Master's and, when 9/11 happened, I wanted to kick some ass. You know when God calls you to do something? God just called me. So I deployed for Iraqi Freedom.

*(Beat)*

I don't know if you've ever really interviewed females in the military—you're like expected to be a social worker. They assign you to do sexual harassment cases, rape cases, counsel people with their family problems. I did sexual assault cases but I can't talk about it. And I won't.

*(Beat)*

You kind of have to be careful with the interaction you have out there as a female. It's lonely. We're all human, it's the humanity of deployment that really humbles you. The military's an alpha male culture—you can't be weak especially when you're deployed, you can't show your feelings. That's why they turn to their female counterparts. You have to be careful what you say when you're deployed because if you say you're going to go to chow with a male counterpart they can take it the wrong way. I would like be walking to the chow hall and some people would drive by in vehicles, "Mam would you like to go to lunch with me sometimes?" *(sweetly)* "No thank you!" A lot of them are lonely. A lot of them miss their wives.

*(Beat)*

The integration with your spouse. You miss that 8-month timeline that you're away. It's like a blip in time. Sometimes they just kind of expect you to come back into the fold.

*(Beat)*

It's funny, when I was in Iraq I'd get care packages from this lady who'd buy me soap for guys. The Bath and Body Works kind. 18 bottles of fancy soaps for me and my guys. In Iraq you sweat so bad! And when I got back—the phone was ringing off the hook. People wanting to know how you are, what you did. I just wanted to take a shower! And I opened up the drawer and there were 10 bars of soap. Why did he buy 10 bars of soap? 10 people in Iraq can't buy one bar of soap.

*(Beat)*

And he'll just mention certain stuff... like, there was like a time when I had left, the gas was four dollars and he's like, "gas went up"! And I was like *what's he talking about?* And then he'd play the Call of Duty video game, and I'm like "I can't fuckin' hear that

shit!" I don't want to hear that shit! If that was you, if you had to see that in real life you wouldn't play that game anymore... I don't want to hear bullets. I don't want to hear the sounds of war. Turn that shit off!" I try to give Christian-based advice.

*JANINE picks up laundry basket.*

## **SCENE FIVE: PRE-FLIGHT**

*SAM's in his office, having a cup of coffee. He owns Mellott Manufacturing.*

SAM: You got here for the hot times! *(Beat)* You come up here expecting that I'd be in a suit not in some overalls.

*(Beat)*

It's kind of funny, my wife, when I was building my plane. Now, it's not quite the way you think! It's *safe*. I built in the shed behind my house! Hey, if a guy's going to build himself a plane for him to fly, you think he'd tend to be more careful!

*(Beat)*

When I was building it, my wife was entertained, "You have your fun but don't think I'm getting in that thing. It's just a coffin with a plexiglass lid." Anyway I made a few trips down to Virginia Beach, took me about an hour. She drove down with other people. The trip took them seven hours. Before they could get anywhere I'd be sitting with a cup of coffee on the front porch watching the cardinals fly around.

*(Beat)*

I fly all over, I've seen some beautiful sights!

*(Beat)*

Well my son Johnboy... helicopters, that was his type of thing. He didn't want to work here, he wanted to have an adventure! "I want to be a helicopter pilot in the Army!" He was a crew chief on a helicopter, Black Hawks.

*(Beat)*

Johnboy was optimistic, but then he got over there. They took the helicopter to Tal Afar. *(explains)* In Tal Afar it was mostly was tribes fighting... Sunnis, the Shiites I believe. He told me one time, they were in the mess hall eating and booooooom! The whole place shook. And what it was, was, somebody pissed somebody off and some guy went into the big bazaar nearby, where the women and the kids do their shopping, and was giving out coupons for free propane, and he... well he got a bunch of women and kids. There were little kids blown up, heads, arms and this... this, was going *on* and *on*. And he had to fly in and sort through that carnage. He was trying to find something, anything, a pulse.

*(Beat)*

It wasn't more than a year, year-and-a-half after that he, erm...

See when he did come back stateside, he was working at Letterkenny rebuilding Humvees. Blown up, Humvees that had hit IEDs. And that's when he started going crazy. He'd hear loud noises and he'd be jumping to the floor. He said the worst thing was, he could smell it. And that's the thing, he was smelling blood, and guts, and the carnage, and there'd be no smell. He thought he was going crazy. And he actually had a CAT scan done. But they didn't find

anything. And it wasn't so long after this that he did the *deed*. His mother, Cindal well that's a tough one too, she's still— the news was more than she could stomach. Her bedroom light's always on wishing it would have gone differently.

*(Beat)*

I have to have a flight physical every couple of years. The flight surgeon brought up the fact that I lost a little bit of weight. Well I didn't have much of an appetite for the next two weeks after the funeral, dealing with everything. I told him, "My weight loss program, isn't something most people would want to sign up for!" The airplane community is small and he probably had wind of it. He just told me very matter-of-factly "My Dad lived with this, was 85 years-old and never had a good day after the war. What kind of life is that?"

*(Pause)*

Well you doing anything right now? I only live a couple miles away. I'll show you the house and the plane. I'll introduce you to my wife she's over there. I'll give you the tour of the whole operation...

#### **SCENE SIX: VA HOSPITAL, LAST PLANE RIDE**

*Walking with recreational therapist KELLY through the dementia wing of the VA hospital. Older men sip coffee while daytime television plays.*

KELLY: Okay this is my floor here. It's a locked unit. It's Alzheimer's/Dementia but it's not all... it's like 30 percent and the other is psych, sort of, so if you see something kooky or whatever, just...

*KELLY tries to enter MR. WALTERS' room but he is getting changed.*

Oh Mr. Walters!! Sorry! He's getting dressed!

*Shuts the door. KELLY sees MR. WATSON sitting alone.*

Hey Mr. Watson. Come here hon. *(whispers)* He was a spy! *(to Mr. Watson)* I have someone who wants to talk to you.

MR. WATSON: I won't tell you what I did and I shouldn't be telling anybody!

*MR. WALTERS walks out with a walker.*

KELLY: Mr. Walters! Can you talk to her about the military and flying airplanes and stuff?

MR. WALTERS:

Okay! Of course. What say ya, slim? What's on your mind?  
My name is Richard J Walters. Or R. J. W. Run, Jump or Walk!  
Well I've had an unusual experience!  
Spent some time in a prison camp in World War II...I was in a B-17.  
I was shot down. That was my last plane ride!

MR. WATSON:

Well I did special ops in Kentucky... learned how to sneak up on people. Grabbed a purse! So I went into the military. Excuse me.

*(Coughs)*

Cheerful place here!

MR. WALTERS:

It's a crazy war you know, well you could imagine, I'm sure. I was doing the dirty work. I was dropping a bomb! I was up in the nose--that's what saved me. See when it blew up...BOOM!! I came out the plastic nose. And I'm up at 20,000 feet! Flapping my wings, trying to fly. That was my last plane ride!

MR. WATSON:

I was clumsy, clumsy as a worm!

MR. WALTERS:

I saw these German planes coming so I put my parachute on. And when they hit us our plane blew up. That was my last plane ride. I either go by train, car or horse! No, the good Lord has been good to me, yes he has. The plane blew up boom and I woke up and I'm up 20,000 feet flapping my wings, trying to fly!

MR. WATSON: I went to Germany as part of the Security Agency.

I shouldn't be telling anybody what I did!

*(Looks at Dictaphone)*

I had a recorder like that...

*MR. WATSON picks up Dictaphone.*

MR. WALTERS: Oh the Germans captured me, I was hanging in a pine tree.

And they cut me down. And put me in prison!

KELLY: *(to Mr. Watson)* Some toast for you?

*KELLY gives MR. WATSON toast. And takes the Dictaphone from him.*

MR. WATSON: Thank you. She's a sweet girl.

*(Holds Kelly's hand as if she were his wife)*

She's a sweet girl even to this day!

*(Offers toast)*

Go on take it! *(Agitated)* It's toast! *(Kindly)* Please.

MR. WALTERS: Oh we did our dirty work! Blowing up houses. Nice job! I wasn't happy about that. Blowing up houses, you could see them. I'm up in the nose, you can see straight down and... They were ugly looking bombs—up to 2,000 pounds. I used to pet them. *(like soothing a horse)* Whoa boy!

*MAN is wailing.*

What was I...? I'm sort of vague about things.

*MAN wails louder. KELLY is on the phone.*

KELLY:

Kelly here. I just need vanilla ice cream for the guys, bowls and napkins? No, no toppings, just ice cream!

MR. WALTERS:

It seemed like many moons ago. Sitting by a big bomb bed... and when those two doors open you can look down and see the earth.

*MAN wails.*

MR. WATSON:

*(Stares at man wailing)* That drives me nuts!!!

KELLY: You're OK. You ready for lunch Mr Watson?

MR. WATSON:

He sits all the time there!!

MR. WALTERS:

Crazy world ain't it? That was my last plane ride!

*KELLY helps MR. WATSON to the next room. TIM enters*

KELLY: This is Tim. He's one of our younger ones!

TIM: Your next victim! Well I like to metal detect—go out to the old fields, by rivers and streams. I've found some silver dollars dated back to the 1800s.

MR. WALTERS:

Haven't been on one since. I go by train, bus or horse...

TIM: In Ocean City I found three bands. Wedding bands. One with a diamond.

MR. WALTERS:

I landed in the biggest pine tree in the world, hanging in a tree surrounded by Germans with guns!

TIM: I was in Desert Storm—The ground war started 10 minutes past midnight. 100 hours. They wanted us in to Kuwait. And they wanted the Iraqis out in 100 hours. It was quick. Smooth. But to this day is still agitates me...we had a hard time getting equipment, like, uniforms and boots during the war. My soldiers and I had been wearing battle dress uniforms made for jungle environments. Or European environment. Little trees and all that. So here you are in the middle of the desert wearing black boots made for jungles. And dark green. You don't blend in.

MR. WALTERS:

That was my last plane ride!

TIM:

When it ended we got a flight date. And then a debriefing situation. Now this is disturbing... they had barbers available. They had brand new uniforms. Brand new boots. They had warehouses full of brand new equipment. They had it. They just didn't want to give it out. We came home in brand new uniforms, desert battle dress uniforms. It's all about show—The military. Some of my best friends are military.

*(Beat)*

Now I'm stuck, here in the VA. That's the down side of it all.

MR. WALTERS:

*(Points out window)* That's a big airplane. This must be a traffic pattern down here... I'm just happy I ain't in one. I either go by train, car, or horse... I had to walk home. I came home on a ship!

KELLY:

How's it going? You ready for lunch Mr. Walters?

MR. WALTERS:

Yup.

*(Beat)*

All I know is when I saw that...what's that big 'ole statue out in the New York Harbor? That Statue of Liberty. I was so happy! Home.

*KELLY helps MR. WALTERS walk out.*

It's nice talking to you!

## SCENE SEVEN: GETTING HURT

*Back in JASON's shop listening to Bluegrass.*

JASON:

I was always so excited to come home! Always excited. I didn't come home this time when I was supposed to come home. It wasn't planned. I was hurt. It wasn't a 'welcome home Jason' thing. My wife cheated on me and I knew about it.

*TANK barks.*

JASON:

Tank! Tank!

*BEAN enters.*

JASON:

Lord have Mercy! Here comes a character. This is the supervisor of the supervisor!

*BEAN walks quietly to the store counter.*

BEAN:

Do you guys want to get high? A little loopy in the head?

JASON:

Watch what you say you're being recorded. She's doing a

documentary for a bunch of Brits.

BEAN: Ohhh man, definitely put me in it. Does that mean you'll be coming and hanging out over the next couple days?

JASON: So anyways. It was a *terrible* mission. It sucked. It hit my truck. My gunner got really hurt. We were in a convoy of six security vehicles and two big tankers. We had just secured an area so we could fix a water pumping facility to pump water into a town in Iraq... We set up this perimeter... And this is a perfect example of how communication works and doesn't work. We had been doing missions in this area forever. And we knew how the Iraqi people operated. We knew if we threw our cones in the road they would just drive around our cones and go where they wanted to go. But, if we used their signals which was to put rocks and bricks up around the perimeter, they would not pass those rocks or bricks. So we set up rocks and no one came through. Well then, these guys from another unit were coming in to replace us. They set up a perimeter with cones. An off duty Iraqi police officer saw the cones, drove straight through, and they lit up this Iraqi policeman.

*BEAN pulls sparklers from bag. JASON unaware keeps talking.*

JASON: Their rules of engagement are this... the Americans hurt you... you get one chance at retaliation. So needless to say they blew us up and the bomb hit the driver-side of my truck. Luckily, it was angled up and away but the gunner was exposed he was hurt. I got my head rattled. Thus, the traumatic brain injury.

*BEAN lights a sparkler and holds it to JASON'S face. JASON chases BEAN out the door.*

JASON: You fuckwit. Sorry, it's chaos.

*Lights a cigarette. BEAN comes in acting coy.*

JASON: Does it suck being sick? Yeah. It sucks being sick. But when I'm happy. I'm real happy. And I think life is better, 'cause I know what it's like to suck.

*JASON lights sparkler and chucks it at BEAN.*

JASON: So I got a prognosis. It's what they call, *cavernous hemangioma*. Google it. It's on the right frontal lobe of my brain. And it's gotten to the point, it's really big. So it bleeds every once in a while. And, the chance of blindness with an operation is really high.

Do I go ahead with this operation and be blind and try to live a life that way? You don't realise it 'til you almost lose it--how important seeing things are. And seeing people's faces, and people's faces seeing you. So I go on living with these terrible headaches and bleeding out of my brain.



*(Beat)*

Hey, ya wanna Coke or something? The doctor just put me on a diet yesterday, like I drink thirty Cokes a day. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays I'm allowed to have a Coke. I'll just sit here and watch ya drink this ice cold refreshment.

*(Beat)*

Yeah I just had a big appointment yesterday. They put me on more drugs, which the Army is known to do. I take 19 pills a day! They range from everything to deal with PTSD up to sleep apnea.

## **SCENE EIGHT: AT HOME WITH CINDY AND SAM**

*Outside SAM's house. We approach his kitchen porch.*

SAM: I love it up here. Our family's been here for generations. We own the mountain, we got some grounds. And bears. You know they're up there, you can see signs of them but they're more afraid of you than you are of them. The only time I've ever ran into one was hunting in the spring. Three little bears just happen to walk over the ridge. Well they look like groundhogs, the little ones. And I thought I wonder where the Mom's at? Well the mom rose out of nowhere behind a rock, and they'll look at you like you're yawning. And they'll go Arrrrrrrrrrhhhhhhhhh *(gentle growl)*.

*Roxy, a black lab barks. Woof woof!*

Roxy! you gave her a shock. Don't you worry about her. She just barks.

*We enter the house. Dog (ROXY is barking). CINDY, Sam's wife, is vacuuming.*

CINDY: Roxy!!

*CINDY switches off vacuum.*

I just got back from Virginia Beach and this house is horrible!! Do you want some iced tea or something? I just made it not too long ago. It might still be warm.

SAM: Sit down and make yourself comfortable.

CINDY: You want any tea Sam?

SAM: I might just have some coffee and a piece of this here pineapple upside down cake. *(Whispers)* It's store-bought!

CINDY: No, It's Mom's recipe!

SAM: *(to Cindy)* Did you know, did you know she was coming?

CINDY: *(to Sam)* No.

SAM: *(to Cindy)* Well I thought someone from the office would have told you.

CINDY: (to Sam) No. I haven't talked to anybody. I've been cleaning and doing things.

SAM: This is how I live! Cake waiting at home!

CINDY: Coffee made!

SAM: If you want to go flying we can fly. If you don't we don't have to. If it's any consolation to you I just flew down to Virginia Beach and brought her back.

CINDY: At first I said I wouldn't fly in it, but if I can see my Grandbabies! It spoils you!

SAM: It's entirely up to you. We'll just buzz around and I'll show you the mountains. Come this way for adventure!

CINDY: So did you already do your interview?

SAM: I just told her some of the things... we went over the sad stuff now we're trying to get to the happy stuff.  
(Beat)  
You've got broad shoulders to pull this one off.

CINDY: Yeah.  
(Pause)  
It just upsets me the way they're treated. Once they come back, you know. They don't really do anything to help them. I think the VA thought there was a lawsuit coming... they called back and...

SAM: They were very conciliatory. There was one lady crying...

CINDY: His therapist. It was his therapist and he really, really liked her. And he felt like he was getting somewhere, she said that he was making progress, but something, something just set it off.

SAM: Well, what are the VA supposed to do for you? Deal with this, you fix this, you unwind this. Sometimes you can't put everyone back together.

CINDY: Well there's a lot of them, not only John. There's a lot I mean look at his friend who called all the time over Christmas...

SAM: I wouldn't be surprised if we checked in on him and found out...

CINDY: I hope not. He seems to be doing better.

SAM: I hope so. They all seem like they are... right before they aren't.

CINDY: Yeah, but I mean, why do they go and fight for the country, and then they come home worse people?

SAM: Well what can you do? Anyway, easy for me to say, I'm sitting here I guess.

CINDY: Well, and you don't understand it I guess.

*CINDY anxious changes the subject and gets up to do more cleaning.*

Well, I didn't know you were coming nobody called me!

SAM: I thought Amanda would have called you.

CINDY: No honestly she didn't.

SAM: That's why she ran back here to bake a cake!

CINDY: So I Cloroxed down the counter and got the cake mix... and that's his favorite. And I did laundry...

SAM: Anyway we'll take the plane out if you wanna go! I got to change my shoes. Did you take my shoes upstairs?

CINDY: Yes I did! You had them laying under the table. Men!

*SAM carries shoes and photographs.*

SAM: That's Johnboy. Put a face to the name so to speak.

CINDY: *(Laughing)* That isn't a very good picture of John!

SAM: Well it was the one I had in front of me!

CINDY: Here's one his friend took in Iraq. And here's one, his friend took of us all together. That's Sam's plane.

SAM: Oh yes, he played the guitar.

CINDY: He taught himself! He had thirty guitars at one time.

SAM: He's got 10 electric guitars up in the attic!

CINDY: We got more than that up there! He just picked it up! He just said to me one time, "Mom I wanna play the guitar". So he started on an acoustic and it just... Oh he was in to music big time! He could just sit down there, at that piano and just start playing. I don't know where he got it.

SAM: Not from me.

CINDY: His Grandpap played the banjo. John just sort of did it.

CINDY: He picked it up *(Snaps fingers)* Just like that! We took him to a guitar teacher in Fayetteville and he said "You don't need my help. You got it."

*(Beat)*

I sent him his one guitar to Iraq.

SAM: He tried to teach his buddy Nash the bass so they could start a band but I don't think anything ever came of it.

Well you wanna get out there and I'll show you the plane?

*(to Cindy)*

We won't be long Cindal.

*Phone rings.*

CINDY: That's fine Sam. Take her up through the valley. I'm just trying to get the cleaning done. Roxy can go out. Have fun!

*CINDY answers phone.*

Hello? Oh hi Julie! Ok. Yeah, I'll run them over.

*We leave and head to SAM's garage/hanger. SAM opens the garage door and reveals the plane.*

SAM: This is an RV-8. Plenty 200 horse power, big engine... I finished the plane in 2001, but I started in '97 or '98. Been flying it for ten years. I keep it washed up. Shined up. Still looks pretty much like the day I finished it.

*(Beat)*

I can fly anytime, weather permitting, if there are no flight restrictions. But see the P-40 prohibited area—when Obama's in town at Camp David it goes from a 3-mile radius to a 10-mile radius. It takes over all of Waynesboro. And if we want to go down to your place we better do it tonight, just in case some big shot comes to town! 'Cause I'm not getting' chased by some jets.

*(to me)*

Wanna go buzz your house? Surprise your dad? He knows I built this thing in my shed. Alright, sit tight while I do the pre-flight...

*(Reflective pause)*

I still wonder if the morphine didn't contribute to anything. If he hadn't started that, if they got him off of that he might... for most people morphine's the end of the trail stuff.

*Connects the fork to the plane.*

I got to fork the plane out of here.

*Pulls plane out of garage.*

If you would have seen what I saw in his possessions, he had a rucksack- it was just full of bottles: OxyContin/OxyCodone, morphine. For the life of me I couldn't figure out what the VA was doing... All that "Take that- it'll make you feel better!"

*(Quizzes motivations of project)*

I mean... what are you going to do with this? How are you going to do a play? I'm just curious, how are you going to do all of this, for this life; and this life; and this life. Talk is cheap and I got a lot of respect for you, but you could be doing a cooking show for all I know, if you want to hear everyone's worst days.

*(to me)*

Right, step on and then step on the seat and slide down with feet on either side. Here's your headset, and the microphone has to be touching your lips. And again, if you decide this isn't fun, you just say and we'll come right back.

*(Beat)*

Well I'm gonna fire it up here!

*Plane engine starts. SAM speaks over headset.*

And we are ready for take off! Make sure your tray tables are up for take off and your seatbelts fastened.

*(Laughs)*

Now, will you be having the chicken or lasagne?

*Footage over Tuscarora Mountain's flight.*

## **SCENE NINE: A ROSARY AND A GUN**

*Back in JANINE's house. She's tidying up before her daughter returns.*

JANINE: When I first got to the compound, in Iraq, when I was getting myself settled in, I found a bottle of holy water in my room. And I went to Lt Love and I said, "I found this Holy Water in my room." And he said "Janine we cleaned that room from head to toe and it wasn't there." I knew God was speaking to me, girl! And look the back says... it says back here

*(Reads)*

"This is holy water. Water that has been blessed to protect those who use it. Sprinkle on yourself and share with your buddies before you go on a mission."

*(Laughs in disbelief)*

This is a Catholic Custom and I'm Catholic. But it's open to anyone. I thought it was amazing how this was in my room. I never told anybody about that.

*(Beat)*

See how it's used? I use it for difficult times. I ration it...

*(Beat)*

And those are the pictures.

*(Pause)*

Those are my guys there. I was the officer in charge, I felt like I was a mother to these 17 young sailors and marines. They are babies! They're like the backbone of this nation let me tell you. That's how they entertain themselves karate.

*(Another picture)*

And the Eagles cheerleaders came! Such beautiful women so pleasant to look at! That was the highlight. And Gary Sinise, he's got the Lt. Dan band!

*(Beat)*

This is a chaplain praying before a convoy. See everyone kneeling down. No atheists in foxholes, there are no atheists in foxholes! In Iraq we used to run supply convoys, we went to different camps, Fallujah, Al Asad. And when you leave the base, you go outside the wire and you have your weapon in position Code 1, locked and loaded, you're like "Holy Shit!" In 2008 one of the most dangerous roads in Iraq was Al Taqaddum to Fallujah. Usually a chaplain blesses the supply convoys. There was not a chaplain but someone

said "let's pray" and we actually intercepted an IED in the road. Convoys move very, very fast and I had a rosary in one hand and my gun in the other. God never left my side when I was deployed.

*Points to next picture.*

That's a sandstorm—it's like a snowstorm but sand... it's like the second coming of Christ! The whole atmosphere turns red, you can't breathe, it's a suffocating feeling. Places like Iraq and Afghanistan, biblically speaking, God was serious when he cursed this place! Oh man I was ready to get the fuck out of there!

*(Beat)*

Are your parents here? Have they been waiting? Are your parents really over protective?

*Pulls out a chaplet.*

Wait. Do you know what this is? This is called a chaplet. Catholics pray with a rosary and this is Padre Pio. He's a saint and he got the stigmata. Padre Pio's biggest thing is the little things matter in life not the big things. I feel like I need to give this to you. My wish is for you, if you do my story, for it to be a message of faith. Just remember when your road gets hard, keep going 'cause God is with you girl!

## **SCENE TEN: RULES OF ENGAGEMENT**

*Back in Jason's chopper shop. JASON is sitting on his motorcycle.*

JASON: Being on a bike... it's not like driving in a car. I'm not just sitting there, my mind is focused. When I drive a car, the problem is I fall asleep.

*(Beat)*

But on my bike I'm constantly looking around. I'm constantly making sure no one's going to run me over. I listen to how good my motor sounds. I'm constantly shifting gear. I can ride for hours. It's a physical thing. They told me I couldn't drive, but they never said I couldn't ride.

*(Beat)*

I also have this thing of riding in the car with someone else driving, it takes me back to those years in combat. Those years in Humvees, on those roads, we were the boss! You got out of our way. If you were too slow in front of us we'd push you out of the way. We shot flares at you. We'd shoot at your car. You can't do that here you go to jail.

*(Beat)*

Now the rules of engagement have changed. They fill the void of real combat with bureaucracy.

They put blame on people. I don't know if you're familiar with what happened to Derek Miller, if you read the local paper, he's one of my soldiers, got a life sentence. Afghanistan. I know how this kid is. He's a stand-up individual, and to see what's happening to him and his family is terrible. He was at the right place, at the right time, and

did the right thing. He felt threatened... Getting punished! It's the bureaucracy of it and the crap that goes along with fighting this war now.

*(Beat)*

I would have shot the same guy at the same time. In '04 he would have been celebrated, got awards.

*(Beat)*

There's a thing on Facebook, we're going to do a ride to raise some money for his wife and kids. They've been kicked out of their house.

*TANK barks loudly.*

JASON: Tank! Really? Really Tank? This is why you're getting a new home. 'Cause you don't know how to act when people come to the door.

*KATE enters.*

KATE: *(to Tank)* Back up. Back up.

JASON: This is my girlfriend Kate—she keeps me straight. She's the one that does my pills.

KATE: Hi.

JASON: Hi Baby. You look nice!

KATE: Uh-huh

*KATE grabs JASON's pill case. Holds them up for him to take them. JASON holds open his hands. KATE carefully places each pill in his hand.*

JASON: I like that watch. What times is it?

KATE: Uh, yeah.

JASON: I got her that watch.

KATE: Don't give me those eyes! I am not in the mood today.

JASON: We've been fighting today so...

KATE: *(agitated)* And who are you with?

JASON: We're going international. London Baby.

*Phone Rings. KATE just stares at the audience.*

JASON: *(Answers phone)* Infidel? What's the engine like? We're not building the long stretched out vampire bullshit! Jesus you want top dollar for that!

JASON: Sounds like what we're looking for. 6,000 dollars?

KATE: (*Yells*) Are you almost done off your phone!? She's waiting to talk to you.

JASON: Send me some pictures. Give me a couple of days. Bye.

*JASON puts phone down. Looks on computer.*

Baby, wait till you see the bike he's getting' us! Now I just got to find six thousand dollars. That's the problem with this business. Anyway.

*(On computer)*

Derrick's what 22, 23?

*(Finds website)*

Here it is "free Derrick Miller", Katherine Miller's her name. I thought I had her number, but... Right now he's in Fort Leavenworth.

KATE: Where's that?

JASON: Kansas. It's a maximum military prison.

*BEAN enters. JASON searches for KATHERINE's number. JASON finds the number and dials.*

BEAN: (*Laughing*) Everything in my mind is all jelly!

KATE: Hey Fourth Grade!

JASON: (*On phone*) Katherine, it's Jason. Yeah good. How are you doing?

*JASON exits.*

BEAN: So Kate, yesterday I got my suit pressed. Went to get something to eat. This hot girl walks by and says, "You are too hot to be eating alone!" and I was like "where you going?" She was with a man...

KATE: With a guy?

BEAN: Just her friend or something.

KATE: Why wouldn't she sit down?

BEAN: She was with her friends.

*(to Kate)*

I think I've lost weight.  
I've been on a diet.

KATE:  
I'm losing weight too. In my  
butt.



JASON: Send me some pictures. Give me a couple of days. Bye.

*JASON puts phone down. Looks on computer.*

Baby, wait till you see the bike he's getting' us! Now I just got to find six thousand dollars. That's the problem with this business. Anyway.

*(On computer)*

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*BEAN enters. JASON searches for KATHERINE's number. JASON finds the number and dials.*

BEAN: *(Laughing)* Everything in my mind is all jelly!

KATE: Hey Fourth Grade!

JASON: *(On phone)* Katherine, it's Jason. Yeah good. How are you doing?

*JASON exits.*

BEAN: So Kate, yesterday I got my suit pressed. Went to get something to eat. This hot girl walks by and says, "You are too hot to be eating alone!" and I was like "where you going?" She was with a man...

KATE: With a guy?

BEAN: Just her friend or something.

KATE: Why wouldn't she sit down?

BEAN: She was with her friends.

*(to Kate)*

I think I've lost weight.

I've been on a diet.

KATE:

I'm losing weight too. In my butt.

*JASON enters and BEAN and KATE continue side conversation as JASON'S on the phone to KATHERINE.*

JASON: *(On the phone)* I just gave her your number. She's gonna give you a call.

*(to me)*

It's Katherine

*(to Katherine)*

When's the best time for her to call you?

KATE: (to Bean) Anyway I'm staying at my sister's tonight but if you guys get really drunk and need a ride from wherever you are you give me a call and I'll pick you up, OK? You're probably going to be annihilated.

JASON: Evenings are better.  
(to Katherine)  
If you need anything you've got my number, you know that right? Bye.  
(Hangs up phone)  
Katherine, could do with the help. Derrick's a great kid. Great fucking American, if there was a small smidgen of a doubt in my mind that he could have been in the wrong...  
(Beat)  
You don't smoke do you? Got some good stuff that just came in!?

### SCENE ELEVEN: ARMY WIFE

*Footage of a news reporter from Democracy Now! is projected on the screen.*  
*[http://www.democracynow.org/2011/7/28/headlines/us\\_soldier\\_convicted\\_in\\_murder\\_of\\_afghan\\_civilian](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/7/28/headlines/us_soldier_convicted_in_murder_of_afghan_civilian). We're in a restaurant.*

REPORTER (V.O.):  
A U.S. soldier has been found guilty of premeditated murder in the killing of an Afghan civilian last year. On Wednesday, National Guard Sergeant Derrick Miller was convicted of fatally shooting Atta Mohammad in the head after taking Mohammad from his home and beating him. Miller was court-martialled at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. His sentence is expected to be announced today...

KATHERINE: Hi... (Introduces herself) Katherine.

WAITER: Two for lunch? Can I get you all a drink?

KATHERINE: I'll go with Dr. Pepper.

WAITER: Ok. Dr. Pepper and an iced tea. I'll bring 'em right out for ya!

KATHERINE: I hadn't talked to Jason in years just because my husband's been deployed with other units since. I knew him before the motorcycle thing. (Laughs) Years ago I saw him with a black eye, a missing tooth. It was his wife at the time that did it! The way he is, "you would have had to have said something!"

(Beat)

Erm I'm going to set my cell phone out— I'm waiting to hear about a job interview. I don't want to miss that call.

(Beat)

The lady who works at the day care said she'd watch the girls today. They need to learn to branch off. My five-year-old is going through a whole separation thing. We moved out of the house a week ago. I put it up for short sale at the end of this past week. I mean it'd be awhile before the house foreclosed on us but I couldn't even pay the utilities. We spent all of our savings on this trial. I thought I would

have the house with the white picket fence a husband who worked nine to five!!

WAITER: Alright ladies what are we having?

KATHERINE: Can I get the barbecue burger?

WAITER: Sure.

KATHERINE: Eight years ago Derrick and I went on our first date. And he wasn't in the Army at all he was just kind of wandering around with no purpose. I tell the girls a lot about when we first met. To them we're all princesses and princes! I worked at a restaurant with Derrick's best friend. I didn't actually know until after I married Derrick, that his best friend liked me. It was my birthday so he had asked Derrick to come, bring a cake in and candles. This guy had made the cake! So Derrick brought it in that evening with candles all lit up. They all sang happy birthday but I was just looking at Derrick. All I could see was *him*.

We got married in June of 2005. I got pregnant two months after that with our first daughter. When Chloe was six months old, so it was December of '06, he joined the army. He didn't tell me. That's when everything started declining as far as the economy. So he joined the army as a back up, "it's just one weekend a month!" Derrick, on the first deployment in Iraq was finding himself, enjoying the military and it was two months before he would call home. It was hard for Derrick at first to come home, back to civilian life. We got pregnant right away and he couldn't find a job. I don't think he wanted to find a job, he wanted to go back.

*(Beat)*

He volunteered again and within three months of being home he left. For Iraq- a year of deployment. Three months home and then gone again! I know he went through the phase if he wanted to be married 'cause he was around all these single guys with the freedom, he didn't really want to be calling home to his wife every week or so. He did have an affair in that deployment. Which, now looking back, he's so sorry.

*(Beat)*

But he came home in December, I had our second child in February. And he was home for a year, but he didn't want to be here rebuilding what we had before. And I was so *gaga* for him! The day I found out he had volunteered for a third deployment was the day I found out I was pregnant with our third child. And he would be leaving in three months I didn't know he was going to be volunteering! Two weeks before his third deployment I lost our child. We went to the hilltop where we were married—we got married in my parent's town, Burkittsville and across from their house is a dirt road and nobody knows it's there to the hilltop—It overlooks the valley it's really pretty, really secluded my absolutely favorite spot as a teenager if I just wanted to get away. Two days before he was deployed we sprinkled the ashes on the hilltop. Two days later he went to Afghanistan. I didn't want the girls to forget him, so I videotaped him before he left—we were playing peek-a-boo. They wore out that

video. When it comes to a relationship, if I was going to be in it, I was going to be in it for the long haul.

*KATHERINE checks phone.*

Starting at the “day of the incident” as they call it, Derrick was having chow by his truck and one of the specialists hollered for Derrick. The specialist had with him a man that Derrick knew had been driving insurgents the day before. So Derrick started asking him questions, “What are you doing here?” “Where’s your truck?” And the guy said he was there to fix a power line, but earlier he said he was there to fix a water pump. Derrick thought this was really sketchy so he told the guy to leave the defense perimeter. So the guy left. And Derrick went up to his senior sergeant, “I’m going to ask him more questions.” His commander sergeant said “Do what you need to do.” He asked the other sergeant for his weapon, so the sergeant gave Derrick his pistol. Derrick was running to catch up with this guy, but the guy was getting ready to leave the perimeter. Derrick was able to stop him at the edge. Derrick had an interpreter with him and started asking the man questions “Where’s your truck? Were you the guy driving the truck?” The man was saying “I don’t have a truck. I don’t have a license” And there were car keys in his pocket—And Derrick was trying to get information out of this man and the questioning became more intense. Derrick had his pistol out—the man grabbed for Derrick’s weapon. You know, struggle, struggle, struggle and Derrick pushed through and shot him. It was self-defense!

*(Beat)*

We were so shocked when they came back with the verdict. As far as premeditated murder... That second that the man struggled with Derrick to the point of Derrick pulling the trigger, from Derrick's mind to his finger... That's what they consider premeditated murder? The jury is all high-ranked military. They pulled up the rules of engagement. They have to make example. “We're supposed to be winning hearts and minds.” One old veteran said to me, “if you want to win hearts and minds you should send over girl scout cookies, not US soldiers.”

*(Beat)*

Our family car just got repossessed. I could have held on to it for another month or so but I can't afford the gas in it. As of July 27<sup>th</sup>, I was no longer an Army wife.

*Looks at phone anxiously.*

Job interviews. There's always one question that throws me off. There's always a question about your weakness, or if you can remember a time you wish you did something differently...

## **SCENE TWELVE: SOMETHING IN THE GROUND**

*GAVIN and his wife COURTNEY are holding hands on Skype.*

GAVIN: I don't use these experiences as a measuring stick against anything in my 19 years of life. But, there was this one time, erm, we had been there in Iraq for months and months and months. It was a green zone and we were just passing by, reconnaissance. As we were going up the road, we just passed Iraqi civilians, men with AK-47s. They're on our side, they try to enforce peace there.

*GAVIN looks at COURTNEY and stands up. We're in a green zone in Iraq. GAVIN is joined by other SOLDIERS.*

And we're rolling up the road passing the area and the Iraqis found an IED at the center of the road that hadn't exploded yet. The Iraqis wanted to get it out. It was a container and they were on either side of it pulling on it with their AK-47s right up trying to pry it open. And they thought that was a good idea! My company commander was driving, and he says:

COMMANDER:  
Hop off and give them a shovel, will ya?

GAVIN: OK. Roger that sir.

COMMANDER:  
Hang on a minute while I move the truck up.

GAVIN: 'Cause we were right next to them. So we pull forward but we're still less than fifty meters away. I hopped out and went to the trunk and lifted up the hatch. And I look for the shovel and I can't find it.

*(Beat)*

I can't find the shovel! And I was like "Oh my god. He's going to be so mad at me for not checking before we got out here."

*(Beat)*

I was standing on the back of the Humvee. I was just staring at the bumper. And then the percussion comes.

*Sound of explosion.*

All this asphalt is just hitting me. And all this other stuff. And I'm just staring at the bumper.

*(Beat)*

So I jumped under the Humvee and hop in the passenger seat. The commander was just sitting there and Ben was in the back. And they're like "WOW, you're here!"

*(Beat)*

It took awhile to process what just happened.

*(Beat)*

We turned around and there was nothing there. Just a hole in the ground.

*(Beat)*

What happened was when the Iraqis were trying to pull the container out of the ground, they hit the pressure plate... the detonator... and all the other stuff, all that stuff, all that stain that wound up on me, were the Iraqis.

*The men look at each other and laugh.*

GAVIN (CONT'D): This is going to sound sick. But we just all started, like, laughing hysterically. Partly because we survived. If we hadn't pulled up again. I would've been that much closer.

*(Beat)*

I don't know how to describe it any better than that. I think people will probably have trouble understanding why we were laughing like that.

### SCENE THIRTEEN: JOHNBOY

*Back at SAM's house. SAM greets CINDY at the porch. She's on a swing and drinking iced tea. ROXY barks.*

SAM: Back again. Cindal!

CINDY: How was it?

SAM: Tonight we were doing 200 mile an hour down to Waynesboro, it took all of five minutes to get there. We buzzed her house.

CINDY: Oh did ya?

SAM: Ed was sitting there on the porch! Hey you better call your Mother and Dad.

*(to Cindy)*

Her dad'll probably "call damn you Sam! You take my baby girl up there!"

CINDY: You can use our phone. When he sees the caller ID, he'll probably think it's me calling...

SAM: Calling to report the accident!

*CINDY laughs.*

*(Yells inside the house)* Ask him if it looked like it was backfiring or anything. If it looked like it was running alright...

CINDY: Oh Sam!

SAM: *(to Cindal)* So where do you want to go sweetie pie? You've got the Flight Department at your disposal.

CINDY: Josh wants me to come down next week and babysit, cause it's their anniversary. And I want to take my mother, but I don't want to drive.

SAM: I could get a bigger plane but I'm not doing that. We'll take two trips!

CINDY: I don't know if Mom would fly...

*Kitchen door opens.*

SAM: Well, what'd he say?

CINDY: So they're having a thunderstorm in Waynesboro now?

SAM: Could be, there were cumulus clouds in the area, they weren't moving much. (*Beat*) Did you see that smoke? Sort of coming up and going nowhere?

*Thunder roars.*

Well, you better get back. I'll walk you out.

CINDY: Have a safe trip now. Take care!

*ROXY barks. SAM walks to the car.*

SAM: Yeah, I would imagine that Johnny probably wouldn't have talked to ya. "I don't know, what do I care?" I think he was trying to deal with why, why wasn't he the same fella he used to be?

I knew he had trouble when he came home for Christmas. There was a lot of people here, and the kids started fighting, screaming, hollering. And I said, "Where's Johnboy?" I find him upstairs crying like a little girl. That's when he told me he whacked some kids.

See they had a couple helicopters, that had been blown up. The bad guys would get kids candy and a brown grocery bag and say, "Give these to the Americans when they land" and see when it's a medevac deal, whenever a helicopter would land, there were all these kids come up with these bags. These kids had no clue. And the baddie would be sitting off somewhere with his cell phone and as soon as the kids got the helicopter, BOOM!! I guess the question is, what do you do? If you're the one holding the gun, and here they come, okay one of those kids got a bag, and two days ago, two of your buddies got blown to smithereens. And when John has a pulse at the end of it, and the guy two days ago doesn't. What are you going to do? I'm sorry. It's bad. It's nasty. But it wouldn't serve you any purpose to get blown to smithereens, because they, the kids, get blown up too.

I knew he was having trouble. And I told him, you can come home. "Come home! Come home!" Johnboy didn't want to come home. His old buddy said, "he knew probably how this was going to end. He's not going to do it at your place!"

He *off-ed* himself up in New Jersey. And it was 6:30 on a Saturday morning. He just couldn't sleep. And he texted everybody. He didn't

text me as I'm not set up to get texts. He texted his closest friends, "I'm sorry. I just can't take it any longer." "Sorry I didn't have a chance to say goodbye. Hope you understand" or something to that effect. His sister got the text and she knew there was trouble brewing. So the waves sort of broke to us.

*Two Soldiers sit with night goggles on.*

When we had the service, two of his buddies came over to the house they didn't know places like this existed anymore. Farms and streams...

And they would tell stories. In Iraq there were a lot of stars, there isn't ambient lighting out in the desert, so you see stars which you didn't know existed. And you could see falling stars all the time. They went on a lot of night missions, with the night vision goggles, they were coming back from a mission, Nash was talking to John and said, "Johnboy, I've seen a lot of falling stars but I've never seen them coming up like that!" And John said "You dumbass! Those aren't falling stars. They're shootin' at us!"

*Starts to rain.*

Well you better get yourself home...so make a left out the driveway and you'll go straight, straight, straight, and you'll hit a dead end. Make a left and go straight in to Waynesboro. You have fun!

#### **SCENE FOURTEEN: BIKE PEOPLE**

*Back at Infidel Custom Cycles. JASON is on the phone. TANK is barking.*

BEAN: Are you single?

JASON: Bean. Shut up.

BEAN: Oh man you need to hang out with bikers. Way more fun. You'll be skinny dipping by the end of the night.

JASON: Just the other night we shut the shop down. Went skinny dipping.

BEAN: We got caught by a state trooper put the spotlight on the butt cheeks!

JASON: *(to Bean)* He didn't catch me. As naked as I was I was well camouflaged.

BEAN: *(to Jason)* That one chick was going fucking crazy, cursin' and shakin' her hands. We just showed respect.

*Phone rings. JASON answers.*

JASON: Infidel?

BEAN: Anyways...

BEAN: Jason could give two shits what this place makes as long as everyone



can get by, ride Harley's.

JASON: Hmmm? Well bring it by man we'll take a look at her for ya. No problem.

BEAN: *(to Jason)* I got to go to Twiggy's.  
*(to me)*  
You wanna hop in? Just sit on the back of the bike hold on. No?

*TANK barks furiously.*

JASON: Sorry it's been crazy here. You can stop by again if you want.  
(Beat)  
Well seventeen years. Of the last ten, eleven years, six and half I was in combat. And it weighs on you, you know? People wonder about your health issues, where it comes from - it's not only about being physically hurt. Six plus years of running for your life, and chasing people for their lives. It's crazy. It's not six and a half years of working at Walmart welcoming people to your store.

#### **SCENE FIFTEEN: IN THE HERE AND NOW**

KENNY: *(email)* Hey Sarah. Me and a few buddies of mine are actually planning to hike the entire Appalachian Trail next year and I just finished my re-enlistment paperwork so I'm just waiting for them to assign me somewhere...

JANINE: *(email)* Sarah, great to hear from you! I am doing good... I am no longer stationed at Fort Detrick. But all is well and I feel truly feel blessed.

KENNY: So far the plan is to start in Maine and head south.

DERRICK MILLER WEBSITE:

The years Derrick has spent detained and now incarcerated has been an incredible strain on his young family. His marriage, unfortunately, is coming to an end, and his wife is currently seeking a divorce.

KENNY: To be honest with you I'm just hoping not to run into any bad groups of people. I've had a few strange ones...

JASON: Wow! Sarah... what a surprise! I wish I could tell you all was well... I'm still riding and trying to fix bikes.

KENNY: About the tank—You can go ahead and tell your actors I didn't really have much of choice while it was happening. I found out that I'll be heading back to Parris Island next month to work off some of the rust.

JASON: Unfortunately a year ago this past November I suffered a pretty bad stroke. [Infidel's closed] It's more about my kids now than anything else. A whole lot to tell and typing SUCKS!

SAM: Good Morning Ed, I believe we were just talking about this... Waynesboro's in the P-40 [the Temporary Flight Restriction Zone] for Camp David, guess Obama's in town! Let me know what time you'll be outside tomorrow morning, I'll buzz your place and you can watch the F16's chase me.

*(Beat)*

And Sarah, I think you're aware I had a little medical issue last July that grounded me for a bit. Well, I've recovered quite nicely and passed, to the FAA's satisfaction, the exhaustive medical testing required to get a flight medical back after the heart attack.

*(Beat)*

If [you're ever] home and would like to go for a hop just give me a shout if [you're] game. Given the circumstances if [you'd] rather not I certainly understand, I've been flying quite a bit lately, I've been down to Virginia Beach a few times to visit my son Josh, if that helps allay any reservations [you] may have regarding my flight status.

Anyway, good luck on your project, let me know how it goes. With the time difference I would imagine it's already happening...! Well, the aviation division is on alert and patiently awaiting your return. You just don't know what you're missing!

THE END.



**Fig. 4** Joshua Manning as Tim, Loren O'Dair as Kelly and James Wrighton as Mr. Watson in *Yardbird* (2015). Photo by Ashley David.

## Chapter Six: Appropriating War Narratives of US Combat Veterans and Military Families in the Dramaturgy of the Playtext *Yardbird*

### Research Aims and Questions for the Creation of *Yardbird*

This case study is designed to examine my role as a playwright researching and writing *Yardbird*, concentrating on the interactions between me as a researcher-playwright and the US soldiers and military families interviewed for the play.<sup>157</sup> Through the examination of my negotiations with verbatim subjects including confronting my own preconceptions and how trust and rapport emerge in the interview process with verbatim subjects, I consider how these factors inform my framing of the verbatim playtext.<sup>158</sup> What is more, the interviews conducted with the *Black Watch* cast and creative team presented new approaches for me to consider in the writing process, and the responsibilities that arise presenting soldiers' testimony in performance. What follows is an examination of the key issues and the negotiations that emerged meeting and representing verbatim subjects throughout the interview and creative process.<sup>159</sup> This chapter, is organised in three parts, including reflections on the research phase, the composition of the *Yardbird* playtext and the findings from the most recent rehearsed reading of the play.<sup>160</sup>

The outcomes of *This Much is True* revealed my taken-for-granted assumptions regarding my role as a playwright, particularly with respect to my relationships with verbatim subjects and how this relationship influenced the dramatisation of the playtext. For this case study, I consider more critically the sensitivities required in the process of listening and representing verbatim subjects' unique experience in verbatim practice with a greater awareness of the tensions of appropriating narratives of trauma in verbatim theatre. In light of my process creating *This Much Is True*, I explore further in

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<sup>157</sup> Julie Salverson (2001) and James Thompson (2011) have both expressed the need for artists to be more self-reflexive in their engagement with narratives of trauma.

<sup>158</sup> The concerns for how the aesthetics of verbatim theatre are employed for audience reception have been raised by Jenny Hughes (2011), who criticises the form's tendency to be used to purport frames of sameness rather than critical understanding and Julia Boll (2013) who pinpoints the possible underlying (almost voyeuristic) desire of audiences to observe stories of turmoil.

<sup>159</sup> I periodically integrate my subjective voice written in the form of edited notebook entries. These notebook entries detail my personal reflections and highlight the important ethical and aesthetic negotiations that occurred between my private interactions with interviewees during the interview process.

<sup>160</sup> It is important to note that while the initial interviews for *Yardbird* were conducted in 2011, various drafts of the play were generated over a two-year period between 2013 and 2015.

this case study how location, and the manner in which I listen to testimony in the interview process impacts upon the creation of the verbatim playtext. Therefore, the questions I will explore in the *Yardbird* case study include: How do I engage in narratives of trauma in the interview and writing process? How does location affect the interview process? In reflecting upon my exploration of the creative team's process in the making of *Black Watch*, I build on the above questions posed, asking in addition: How might dramaturgical strategies and techniques operate to encourage audiences to critically consider the experiences of others as well as the limitations of these constructions in the playtext?

### **Starting Points for *Yardbird*: Considering Soldiers' Experiences**

The *Yardbird* project grew from an encounter I had with a veteran regarding the recent war in Iraq, a meeting that marked a clear disconnect between him (the soldier) and me (the civilian). What follows is a subjective reflection, written in an edited notebook form, of the encounter that prompted me to write *Yardbird*:

#### **Box 6.1**

*It started with a conversation with a high school classmate in the cold huddled around a bonfire at a New Year's Eve party in 2006 in my hometown of Waynesboro, Pennsylvania. Seth, a veteran, had sustained injuries to his leg after his team intercepted an IED on a mission in Iraq. He appeared older, stoic, with a long beard sipping on Natural Light beer. We had not seen each other since our graduation ceremony from high school in 2003. We had lost touch as Seth was soon thereafter deployed to Iraq, and I went off to college and later graduate school in London. The conversation began awkwardly, with the exchange of hellos and casual comments about the party and the antics of some of our former classmates who were also in attendance.*

*During our conversation I asked Seth: 'Do you think what we are doing over there is right'? Seth was silent for a moment and replied, 'I don't know. All I know is my brothers are over there'. The 'brothers' Seth was referring to were his fellow soldiers. The moment I asked the question I was embarrassed by my arrogance and naivety. Asking a soldier to account for the morality of the US government's occupation of Iraq was ill-considered at best. Seth's response was patient, but it was clear to both of us that my question was intrusive and entirely inappropriate.*

This encounter stayed with me for years, setting in motion a curiosity regarding the miscommunication that occurs between civilians and soldiers. My own lack of understanding gave rise to my interest as to how members of my hometown community,

which included active duty soldiers and families of veterans, were being affected by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, the encounter was significant to my playwriting practice, prompting me to write a fictional play entitled *Fortunate Son* (2011).<sup>161</sup>

The development of *Fortunate Son* played a significant role in the creation of *Yardbird* as I had interviewed a US Army infantryman as part of the research process for the fictional play as discussed previously in Chapter 4.<sup>162</sup> The infantryman's sense of humour, frankness and vivid descriptions of military deployments altered my conception of the contemporary soldier's experience. The interview had been conducted in early spring, ten months prior to attending a performance of *Black Watch* at the Barbican in 2010. Watching *Black Watch* revitalised my interest in exploring soldiers' experience via verbatim theatre.

### **Positionality as Researcher/Playwright**

For six-weeks from July 11-August 21, 2011 I returned to my hometown of Waynesboro in rural Pennsylvania to interview veterans in the local area about their experiences of war and everyday life post-deployment. Throughout the interview stage of *Yardbird* my positionality as a researcher/playwright – including my relationship to local military culture and my gender – had a direct impact on how testimony was facilitated for the making of the play.

Despite my unfamiliarity with military culture, I had grown up in the same local area as the soldiers interviewed, having a similar advantage as Gregory Burke engaging with ex-Black Watch soldiers who were from his hometown area of Dunfermline, Scotland (Burke, 2011). Meeting soldiers in local restaurants and discussing familiar activities, such as evenings out in nearby bars to trekking Appalachian hiking trails, prompted conversation.<sup>163</sup> These shared locations provided the opportunities for discussion of topics that were not primarily trauma-focused.

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<sup>161</sup> The play followed the journey of a US Iraq War veteran re-connecting with his estranged father who was a Vietnam veteran. *Fortunate Son* was problematic in many ways, but more troublesome was its concentration on PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) as the central focus of the veteran's experience.

<sup>162</sup> The interview took place on March 23, 2010 via Skype.

<sup>163</sup> While I do not purport to be a military ethnographer, *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods and Military Studies* (Ben-Ari in Soeters, Shields, & Rietjens, 2014, p. 32) provides a critical insight on how researchers interact with military personnel. Also helpful is Edna Lomsky-Federer's (1996) critical

Also, my gender affected how soldiers relayed their stories to me. After watching *Black Watch* I was expecting that I might be subjected to the same sexual innuendo exhibited by the male Scottish soldiers' hyper-masculinised and hetero-normative fantasies about the female researcher in Burke's depiction. In contrast, sexual innuendo was minimal, but soldiers did tend to simplify military procedures for my understanding because I was female.<sup>164</sup> As a result of their assumptions based on my gender, soldiers would frequently break down the ranks and characteristics of their military branch in an uncomplicated form. Therefore, I began to use these assumptions for my benefit in the writing process as the simplified military information was important in providing context for the audience.

### **Acknowledging Personal Politics and Confronting Preconceptions**

More pertinent to the investigation of my responsibility as a practitioner was the process of confronting my preconceptions about military culture and the soldier's experience. Confronting my own political prejudices about those who enlist in the armed forces became an important task at the outset of the research process, a process which I had not experienced in the creation of *This Much is True*. In devising the latter I had engaged with activists, human rights lawyers and the Menezes family whose politics I found to be compatible, albeit a more radical version of my own. What follows is a subjective reflection of my initial political standpoint approaching *Yardbird*:

#### **Box 6.2**

*I was against the Iraq War. The ability to kill others, even in the circumstances of the battlefield, was an alien concept for me. In terms of the location of the project, I am aware that there is a strong conservative tendency in rural Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Maryland. My own left-leaning background might generate suspicion from potential interviewees as to what my motivations are for collecting soldiers' stories in the first place.*

While I had approached *Yardbird* with an assumption that there would be a divergence between my personal politics and that of the soldiers I might interview, I had been

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ethnography of Israeli soldiers where she contends in regard to encountering soldiers that sharing the same cultural insiderness with soldiers is beneficial for military research (p. 235).

<sup>164</sup> The gender dynamic in military ethnography is also examined in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods and Military Studies* whereby gender difference has been proven to be a potential advantage for female researchers (Ben-Ari in Soeters et al., 2014, p. 32).

unaware to what extent my assumptions were affecting my ability to secure interviews. It was through a failure of communication in the initial stages of arranging interviews that my underlying attitude towards soldiers and military families from the surrounding area was confronted. This realisation occurred during a brief telephone conversation with a mother of an injured marine:

**Box 6.3**

*Calling the first soldier I was nervous and uncertain of how I was going to explain to him the purpose and process of making a play based on his words and the words of other soldiers. The mother of the marine answered politely. I explained the project to her, stumbling through the reasoning for interviewing soldiers ending with the phrase ‘...because of your son’s sacrifice’ or something to that effect. This felt particularly false as I am normally critical of this sort of rhetoric. The mother was curt in response, instructing me not to use any hero/sacrifice remarks when talking to her son as “He does not respond well to these kinds of statements.”*

The marine mother’s admonishment of my expression of veneration caused me to shift my approach and question my intentions.<sup>165</sup> My act of making superficial statements as a means of securing interviews with soldiers operated within the rhetoric of casual militarism, which Michael Mann (1987) forewarns is indicative of how speech acts can normalise war. With this new knowledge I refrained from expressing veneration of the military throughout interviews.<sup>166</sup>

### **Gaining Access, Locations and a Fragmented Community**

*Yardbird* focuses on US veterans and their families living in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in America’s Mid-Atlantic region, verbatim subjects who are part of what Caoimhe McAvinchy (2014) might describe in the context of making theatre as a “community of interest” (p. 3).<sup>167</sup> Issues of access and locating participants

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<sup>165</sup> In K.J. Sanchez and Emily Ackerman’s verbatim play *ReEntry* (2009) based on US Marines testimony, the playwrights create a sequence whereby soldiers express their mixed emotions about American civilians’ expressions of gratitude.

<sup>166</sup> In contrast to my initial preconceptions, several of the veteran interviewees communicated their mixed feelings of appreciation and discomfort at the frequent public displays of appreciation and glorification of their military service.

<sup>167</sup> The majority of the interviewees lived within a thirty-mile radius of my research base. Very few of the interviewees were acquainted with one another, with the exception of a former Army wife Katherine, who knew Jason (her husband’s former Army comrade) and the two World War II veterans who lived in the dementia wing of the Martinsburg VA Hospital.

willing to be interviewed proved problematic in the initial research stages of *Yardbird*, and led me to question my methodology for developing a play based on soldiers' experiences of war.

In addition to confronting my preconceptions about contemporary soldiers as discussed previously, finding interviewees proved to be a substantial barrier in the research process. Before arriving in my hometown of Waynesboro, PA I had reached out to several high school classmates who had enlisted in the military. However, within the first week of being home, a number of interviewees reconsidered, declined to be interviewed or did not return my phone calls. As part of a clear research plan I had set up an email account entitled [soldiersathome@gmail.com](mailto:soldiersathome@gmail.com) and contacted several organisations by email and telephone including Iraq Veterans Against the War, the US Army Recruiting Command and the Wounded Warrior Project, but made no progress identifying potential interviewees. The difficulty I faced finding soldiers was not dissimilar to Gregory Burke's experience in the making of *Black Watch*. However, unlike Burke I did not have a team of professional researchers to seek out and recruit local interviewees, nor had I been commissioned by a major theatre to write a play. Rather, I was operating as an individual playwright and PhD student and only conducting interviews in the local area for a brief period. As my university and current residence was in London, my requests to organisations seeking military members to interview were easily dismissed.

With few interviews arranged, I began to doubt the success of my proposed project. Here, I incorporate an edited notebook entry to convey my consideration regarding whether to abandon the project:

**Box 6.4**

*I had naively underestimated just how many soldiers would be unwilling to speak of their wartime experiences and the whole project seems pointless if soldiers do not want to participate. In my work centring on the Menezes case for *This Much is True* most of the interviewees were eager to have their stories recorded so the case would continue to be explored in the public domain—but calling on soldiers to share their experiences for this play feels more intrusive.*

Concerned that the project was in jeopardy, I had to shift to a less formal approach to securing interviews, and began asking family members and friends for any potential contacts. Relying on personal contacts proved more successful in reaching soldier/interviewees than making formal requests to organisations to assist in finding



interviewees. This has also been evidenced in Emily Ackerman and K.J. Sanchez's process creating their verbatim play *ReEntry* (2009), where the playwrights depended on their military families as both interviewees but also as resources for securing more interviewees (Ackerman & Sanchez, 2010; Levin, 2011). Word-of-mouth was also an effective approach for ReLive's applied theatre project *Abandoned Brothers* (2012) in finding individual soldiers "who were not in contact with official services and support groups" (p. 154).<sup>168</sup> Securing interviews for *Yardbird* became easier after a personal contact helped me secure approval from the Veterans Health Administration to interview veterans at the Veterans Medical Centre in Martinsburg, West Virginia.

Moreover, my being personally invested in family and friends who aided in securing research contacts also helped solidify my accountability as a researcher-practitioner to verbatim subjects. Deirdre Heddon (2008) argues that in autobiography performance the ethical investment of practitioners can be higher than in verbatim theatre, as the playwright/performer is more intimately involved in representing partners, parents, siblings, and close friends in performance and therefore the playwright/performer is more exposed and liable for their construction of personal materials. Heddon (2008) explains "[a] sense of betrayal is, perhaps, also greater, given that trust is a key component of most intimate relationships and it is within such relationships that one can arguably become most exposed and therefore 'known'" (p. 143). However, I would argue that the risk of betrayal and a sense of ethical investment runs high in verbatim theatre-making in situations where close friends and family help secure contacts/interviewees. As a co-researcher/co-writer working on *This Much is True*, many of the interviewees were contacted after enduring a delicate vetting process whereby we would meet a gatekeeper/stranger who would probe our intentions as writers before putting us in contact with potential interviewees. In comparison, when researching *Yardbird* there was an additional layer of personal and ethical responsibility to the friends and family who trusted me and who had expectations that I would approach the project with sensitivity and integrity. As Pierre Bourdieu (1999) highlights, "researchers who are socially very close to their respondents provide them

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<sup>168</sup> In the case of *Yardbird*, one example of how a personal contact benefited the project was when a family member put me in touch Dieter, a retired Army colonel. Although I had initially intended only interviewing young veterans from recent wars, I first interviewed Dieter, a Vietnam War veteran, because he had access to younger soldiers as he had been actively raising money for phone cards and travelled to and from Ramstein airbase in Germany to deliver them to injured US soldiers. After vetting me for an afternoon, Dieter put me in touch with a source who had contact details for several veterans who had been deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

with guarantees against the threat of having subjective reasoning reduced to objective causes...” (Bourdieu & Ferguson, 1999, p. 610).

### **Release Forms and Gaining Consent: Moving Away From Paperwork**

Gaining access to the VA hospital changed my practice regarding obtaining participants’ permission. After providing an official document stating the aims of the project and the types of questions I would be asking the veterans, I was granted permission to conduct interviews at the Veterans Medical Centre by the Director of Public Affairs. I was allowed to interview veterans at the VA Medical Center under the condition that no veterans would have to sign a release form as this created additional paperwork for the staff and would slow the interview process. While I had originally intended for all the interviewees for *Yardbird* to sign a release form, it became evident that the formality of paperwork was disconcerting to potential interviewees and created a bureaucratic obstacle. Therefore, I returned to my method of obtaining permission from verbatim subjects orally on the digital recorder at the beginning of the interview.

### **Interviewing Soldiers**

As part of the research process I interviewed twelve US soldiers. Of the twelve veterans, five had served in Iraq between 2003-2009 and two had been deployed in Afghanistan between 2010-2011. One veteran served during Operation Desert Storm (1991), two veterans served in Vietnam and two of the interviewees served in World War II. The soldiers participating were from various military branches including the US Army, Marine Corps and Navy. The wide-ranging sample presented limitations in the organisation of early drafts of the script, difficulties that I will describe later on.

Through my work on *This Much is True* I recognised the importance of considering aspects of interviewees’ experiences beyond descriptions that were the most traumatic. As mentioned earlier, by admitting to interviewees my lack of knowledge about military culture, interviewees became more responsive to my presence, and as a result less sceptical about my presence. Furthermore, my openness allowed soldiers to discuss a range of topics, balancing stories of training, combat and sustaining injuries

against domestic issues such as reconnecting with a spouse and finding new careers, background and details that helped illustrate the complexity of soldiers' experiences.

In contrast to my prior notions that there was a distinct civilian/soldier divide, the blurring of soldiers' experiences of war and home life upon their return illuminated how militarism (Lutz, 2001; M. Mann, 1987) is embedded in everyday life and also affects citizens. For example, one of the most revealing interviews came from Kenny, a working-class marine, which proved critical for the play:

**Box 6.5**

*I met Kenny at T.G.I. Friday's, an American restaurant chain. The restaurant was occupied with families and workers on their lunch break. In contrast to the convivial atmosphere, Kenny relayed the details of being a sniper, encountering targets and killing them. Throughout his graphic description, the waitress would frequently interrupt him to take our orders, place condiments on the table, and ask us how we were doing. This was a peculiar juxtaposition between a soldier recounting horrific details of war against the backdrop of the comfortable restaurant setting.*

In response to this strange encounter, I decided to construct this as a scene in the play depicting a former marksman eating a burger and fries discussing kills, juxtaposed with the banality of dining at a T.G.I. Friday's in order to make the familiarity and safety of the location unfamiliar. While I had not prompted discussions about killing, Kenny discussed in detail his targets as occupational data and I felt obliged to listen. Personally, I had felt uncomfortable with Kenny's equating people with targets and at times thought he was exaggerating. My concern, however, was not necessarily the legitimacy of the facts of Kenny's story. Instead, I was interested in recording his "subjective truth" (Laub in Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 62) and how he as a soldier was negotiating these experiences and civilian life simultaneously.

Moreover, the interview made it possible for Kenny to reflect on his current situation adjusting to civilian life in relation to his desire to return to the military, declaring, "I would [go back] in a heartbeat. I loved being there [Iraq]. Especially *that* compared to what I'm doing now. A packer for FedEx?"<sup>169</sup> This moment illuminated Loïc Wacquant's (1999) observation that the interview setting provides "a rare opportunity" for participants to reflect on their lives (cited in Bourdieu, 1999, pp. 144-

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<sup>169</sup> Kenny's interview alleviated my prior concerns outlined earlier concerning whether or not soldiers would be willing to engage with me as a playwright regarding their experiences. In our interview Kenny had expressed his enthusiasm for having an opportunity to share his experiences commenting, "It's actually nice to talk about it for once".

5). To emphasise this, Wacquant draws on an encounter with an interviewee named Rickey where the respondent re-examines his life throughout the interview. As Wacquant (1999) explains of the interview process, in “the face of human dramas which, blinding in their banality, too close and too familiar, had escaped his [Rickey’s] scrutiny until he was put in a situation where he had to relate them to an outsider...” (Loïc Wacquant in Bourdieu, 1999, pp. 144-5). In the case of Kenny, the interview allowed him to consider the sense of power and belonging that the military provided him, a sense of purpose he had yet to find upon re-entering civilian life after being honourably discharged.

However, while this interview conveyed a certain complexity and reflection, I offer this observation with caution. While I recognise the potential for verbatim subjects to reflect on their lives in the interview process, this can be problematic if playwrights place too much emphasis on their intention to prompt therapeutic reflections. Particularly when, as Julie Salverson (2001) warns “we take on unreflexively the enthusiasm of the helper” (p. 121). Because I had been less cognisant of my role as a playwright in the interview process throughout making of *This Much is True*, my relationships with some interviewees became distorted in terms of my recognition of the verbatim subjects’ personal grief as distinct from that of my own. This ‘collapsing’ (Salverson, 2001) in turn affected the script and at times perpetuated verbatim subjects’ victimhood. Therefore, in the making of *Yardbird*, I was aware how equating my role as a ‘therapist’ or projecting a narcissistic kind of empathy in the interview process might contribute to one-dimensional constructions of the soldiers and military families.

A second finding in the interview process with soldiers was that stories about civilians in war zones seldom emerged. On the rare occasion that civilians were mentioned in depth, it was usually within the context of the soldiers’ witnessing of civilian deaths or injuries. For instance, Gavin, an Army Ranger who served for three tours of duty in Iraq, relayed a story about surviving an improvised explosive device (IED) that killed several Iraqi civilians. The most revealing aspect of this disclosure was his recognition that his response in the aftermath would appear inappropriate to most US civilians, as Gavin described:

All the other stuff—all that stuff—all that stain that wound up on me, were the Iraqis... This is going to sound sick. But we just all started like laughing hysterically. Partly because we survived... I don't know how to describe it any better than that. I think people will probably have trouble understanding why we were laughing like that.

Upon listening to Gavin's story, I recognised the rarity of these descriptions in the heavily mediated constructions of US soldiers in the coverage of the Iraq War. My aim in incorporating this aspect of Gavin's story in the play was to aid in drawing the audience's attention to the lives of Iraqi civilians who were killed.

### **Interviewing Military Families**

Families' narratives became an essential part of *Yardbird*, highlighting the domestic struggles experienced by loved ones in negotiating soldiers' experiences throughout deployments and upon their return home. After assessing the omission of family narratives in *Black Watch*, I had hoped that by integrating the knowledge and experiences of civilians who have dealt with war would provide a sense of familiarity for the audience and also show how military families negotiate military culture and domestic life.

A key perspective for the play came from Katherine whose husband Derrick Miller, a former Army National Guardsman, was sentenced to life in prison for killing an Afghan civilian.<sup>170</sup> In our interview Katherine described Derrick's difficult transition adapting to civilian life between deployments, his extramarital affair during his deployment, her pregnancies and a miscarriage, the stress of trying to raise two children while he was deployed, and the emotional and financial impact of his incarceration. Nancy Sherman (2010) explains how families are continuously affected by the soldiers' experiences:

Families at home are also under severe stress, emotionally, psychologically, and financially. With daily e-mail and cell phone conversations between soldiers and their families, stateside family members suffer combat fatigue in real time alongside their loved ones on the battlefield (p. 81).

In keeping with Sherman's findings, Katherine described in the interview the emotional burden Derrick's deployments had on the family and economic strains caused by his legal difficulties that had become increasingly difficult to bear. Katherine's testimony highlights the struggles campaigning for Derrick's innocence as a former army wife and

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<sup>170</sup> My interview with Katherine took place less than one month after her husband's military trial.

an unemployed mother of two, who has endured isolation and loneliness after being shunned by the military community.<sup>171</sup>

Negotiating when to listen and when to refrain from asking military families about their life experiences became an important process for creating boundaries for what should and should not be included in the writing of the play. The need for boundaries was made evident in my meeting with married couple Cindy and Sam. They are the parents of John, who served in the Army as a crew chief on a medevac helicopter during Operation Iraqi Freedom. John committed suicide in 2008, a year-and-a-half after returning home from his deployment in Iraq.<sup>172</sup>

During my individual interview with Sam at his office he invited me to his home to meet his wife Cindy. While Cindy was aware of the nature of my project she was unaware that I would be speaking with Sam on that particular day. When Sam and I arrived at their family home Cindy was in the middle of vacuuming. As Sam and I continued our interview in the kitchen, Cindy joined us at the table to talk:

**Box 6.6**

*From a playwright's perspective, I was eager to observe and record the husband and wife dynamic and how they interacted with each other, since the majority of participants interviewed thus far were one-on-one, which presented obstacles in the writing process for generating dialogue between interviewees.*

*However, I had also felt a burden of knowledge. Prior to meeting Cindy, Sam had expressed, 'I thought we'd talk and then you could talk to my wife Cindal if you'd like. But she's not privy to all the brutality. John didn't discuss it with her. Nor should he, you know?'<sup>173</sup> In addition to taking Cindy by surprise, I was also sensitive to the fact that Sam had not relayed details about John's difficulty reconciling the killing of Iraqi children to Cindy.*

A shifting point in the interview dynamic occurred when Cindy began expressing her views on John's 're-entry', the soldier's process transitioning to civilian life (Morin, 2011). Cindy insisted that it is precisely the government's negligence as to how soldiers are aided physically and psychologically upon their return home that contributes to high levels of drug addiction and suicide among veterans. Cindy began detailing John's progress prior to his suicide. At this moment Cindy's voice became strained and then she went silent. Lee Ann Fujii (2010) stresses the ethical importance for researchers to acknowledge silence as "a collaborative effort between researcher and

<sup>171</sup> I found out shortly after the first rehearsed reading of *Yardbird* on April 9, 2013 through the Free Derrick Miller website that Katherine had filed for divorce from Derrick Miller (Miller, 2013).

<sup>172</sup> 'Medevac' or 'medivac' means medical evacuation.

<sup>173</sup> Sam refers to his wife as 'Cindal'.

participant” whereby silences can indicate “subtle admonishments to the researcher to respect certain topics as ‘off limits’” (p. 239).<sup>174</sup> Fujii’s stance on silence resonates with my own reading of the situation at the kitchen table with Cindy and Sam. Cindy’s silence made clear for me the ethical boundaries of what topics were “off limits” in the interview process and in the writing of the play.

In addition, the experience with Cindy also provided an opportunity for me to examine the violations and negotiations that arise in the interview process as part of the playwriting process. By integrating Cindy’s hesitations, moments of disclosure, and subsequent resistance in the writing of the script, I had hoped this would operate as part of a dramaturgical strategy to convey to an audience that facilitating and collecting testimony is not a seamless process, and moreover, to underscore the presence of the playwright. This in turn highlights the desire of audiences to hear testimony, which at times can be more intrusive than empowering for interviewees.

### **Narratives of Survival: Fear of Flying**

In my interview practice I took into consideration debates on trauma and performance (Little, 2011; Salverson, 2001), which yielded three important findings. The latter included the value of recognising interviewees’ assumptions, exploring personal interests and kinetic ethnography. In addition, being alert to these important factors in the interview process enabled key metaphors to emerge from my interactions with interviewees. My awareness of these factors also marked a shift from my previous research approach to *This Much is True*. During the research process for *Yardbird* I was more alert to the domestic details (Soans in Hammond & Steward, 2008) that surfaced in our conversations and how these idiosyncrasies helped in establishing the interviewees’ complexities.

I recognised that interviewees might also bring a set of assumptions of what they think the researcher-practitioner wants to hear and this key realisation enhanced my interview approach and helped me to move beyond narratives of trauma throughout the interview process. For instance, being open to exploring interviewees’ hobbies proved significant during my initial interview with Sam. In between disclosures about his son’s

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<sup>174</sup> Fujii (2010) reflects on interviews with survivors of the Rwanda genocide and provides a conceptual language of meta-data that includes “informants’ spoken and unspoken thoughts and feelings which they do not always articulate in their stories or interview responses, but which emerge in other ways” (p. 231).

deployment and return home, Sam would frequently interject comments about his RV-8 kit-built airplane that he had assembled himself in his backyard shed. When discussing his plane, Sam would often interrupt himself fearing he had veered off topic. This was because Sam had assumed, because of my war-centred project, that I would be more interested as a researcher-practitioner in his son's deployment and re-adjustment to civilian life rather than hearing about Sam's interests.

Recognising that interviewees might project their own preconceptions about how I might expect their story to be told was an issue throughout the research process. This is because approaching interviewees and encouraging them to speak of trauma exclusively can contribute to what Salverson (2001) considers to be reductive representations "of melancholic loss" (p. 124). Additionally, the interview process can be oppressive for interviewees if they feel they are only expected to divulge stories of trauma and loss. Jan Cohen-Cruz (2006) has asserted that "[w]hile people have much to gain by investigating solutions to their oppression, constantly telling such stories can inadvertently reinforce oppression rather than liberate from it" (p. 112). Cohen-Cruz's (2006) acknowledgement that interviewees do not always want to be recognised for their pain alone but also for their good days influenced my shaping of the playtext.

Moreover, acknowledgment of interviewees' individual interests aided in generating domestic details for the playtext. For example, when meeting Iraq War veteran Jason in his motorcycle shop, we mostly discussed his fascination with motorcycles, his tumultuous love life, his excursions with his biker friends, and his love of bluegrass music. Jason only interjected war experiences when they had relevance to how they were affecting his current lifestyle. The most interesting aspects of Jason's war experience came via his observations about riding his Harley-Davidson motorcycle. For instance, when discussing his motorcycle Jason explained how doctors had told him he could not drive automobiles. This was due to the fact Jason suffered a severe brain injury to his left frontal lobe from his encounter with an IED in Iraq. His description of his motorcycle was integrated in the script as follows:



**Script Excerpt No. 6.1 *Yardbird***

JASON: This is our shop! When guys want to escape their shitty lives they come here to my sandbox!  
(Beat)  
That's my bike right there. Nothing beats the sound of a Harley.  
(Beat)  
Yup, that sticker says "Yes. You are too fucking close."  
(Beat)  
This bike is a year old and it's got 22,000 miles on it.  
(Beat)  
The doctors told me I'm not allowed to drive but they didn't tell me I couldn't ride!

What is more, Jason's motorcycle prompted me to consider how riding was an important metaphor for the play. For Jason riding is how he copes with his recovery and re-adjustment to civilian life.

In addition, building on the importance of reciprocating interviewees' interests was my realisation of the value of participating in activities led by them and the theatrical possibilities these activities offered to the dramaturgy of the playtext. Discussing and at times participating in some of the interviewees' favourite activities provided possibilities for scenes beyond the recreation of formal interview scenarios. For instance, my subverting of Sam's initial assumptions of my research interests and encouragement to share his fascination with aviation resulted in him taking me on an airplane ride over the Tuscarora Mountains in the two-seater aircraft he had built himself. In Rene Moelker's (2014) study of veteran bikers, Moelker (2014) rode alongside bikers employing what he calls "kinetic ethnography," the process whereby the researcher participates in activities with interviewees and "is interested in the preferred cultural items of a group" (p. 110). In Moelker's (2014) study the motorcycle was both "a research tool and the cultural artefact under study..." (p. 110). While comparatively speaking Moelker spent a longer period with interviewees than me, his analysis of kinetic ethnography is key to my critical understanding of my relationship with Sam and how Sam's plane operates as an important cultural artefact (p. 110). Moelker (2014) reflects on the physical body of the interviewer as a key element of the meaning-making process:

You do have to put yourself physically in the material situation the group under study is in, and be willing to use your own body as a research tool. If you want to practice kinetic ethnography, be ready to be on the move just like your respondents are. You need to be ‘talking the talk’ and ‘walking the walk’ (p. 110).

While I have a slight fear of flying, I felt that sharing Sam’s enthusiasm by accepting his offer for a flight was an important expression of my gratitude for his willingness to participate in the project. However, I was also aware that this event if used in the playtext could engage an audience beyond the replication of the exactness of the interview setting or replication of the spoken language (Bottoms, 2006). In my notebook I had written of the experience post-interview:

**Box 6.7**

*Flying over my hometown with Sam, I had never seen my hometown from that view before.*

As a result of participating in a mild form of “kinetic ethnography” the plane became an important vehicle and flying a central metaphor for *Yardbird* in terms of representing verbatim subjects’ acts of “survival” (Salverson, 2001, p. 122). By integrating the plane ride as a key event in the script, I had hoped to counter audiences’ assumptions that bereaved parents are identifiable only by their sorrow.



**Fig. 5** Flying with Sam over south-central Pennsylvania. Photo by Sarah Beck.

### **Transcription and Imagery**

My approach to transcription for *Yardbird* in terms of theatrical language and testimony changed after studying the relationship between soldiers' documents and physical sequences incorporated in *Black Watch* as examined in Chapter 4. As my goal in writing *Yardbird* was not to replicate the exactness of each utterance of the interviewees or re-create the most precise construction of the interview settings, I considered the importance of theatrical language and how a more aestheticised representation of testimony might enhance the audiences' critical engagement of the playwright's influence over the material.

Therefore, for the transcription process of *Yardbird*, capturing the locations and activities described by interviewees became an important process for generating more

imaginative scenes for the play. For example, during Kenny's interview, he had explained how camel spider fighting was a common recreational activity for some of the soldiers during deployments. Soldiers would collect camel spiders, scorpions and other native insects and place them in a shared container to watch various species fight to the death. Therefore, I began collecting YouTube videos of camel spider fights recorded by US soldiers in Iraq. These YouTube sequences would be integrated between the transcribed sections of Kenny's interview and aided me in thinking through creating more imaginative physical sequences. Curating visual documents and employing this annotated transcription technique provided context for the soldiers' experiences. As a playwright the collection and archiving of images and video clips within the actual interview transcriptions helped me consider new theatrical possibilities for the staging of the play.

### **Finding the Framing Question**

After listening to the interview recordings and transcribing the material, finding a clear question became the first step in organising the *Yardbird* playtext. While I, like other verbatim practitioners, approach a subject with a primary question to investigate, it was my experience that the framing question of the play tends to emerge only after the interview material is collected and the writing process has begun. For *Yardbird* this included experimenting with techniques such as interweaving and intercutting as I discussed in Chapter 2. In Albert Hunt's reflection on his RSC collaboration with Peter Brook in the making of *US* (1966), Hunt specifies that while Brook knew he wanted to create a piece of theatre about the Vietnam War, "the statement [of the play] had grown out of a process of work, and had not been conceived in Brook's mind before" (Kustow, Hunt, & Reeves, 1968, p. 12). The same process is true of Jeremy Weller and The Grassmarket Project's *Soldiers* (1998) that hinged on the central question, "What happens to a man when he kills?" (Grassmarket, 2006).

Finding the question to frame *Yardbird* was at times an arduous process that took the writing of several drafts to identify. After reviewing all of the recorded material and writing various drafts it emerged that the soldiers' and families' narratives, though war-related, required a focus within the domestic realm. After a brainstorming session with Tom Mansfield who directed the second reading of *Yardbird*, it became apparent

that testimony concentrating on soldiers in their home environments where themes of war permeate in the domestic setting was the strongest material that emerged from the interviews. Therefore, the framing question of *Yardbird* became: What is war for a soldier at home?

### **Organising Principle and Establishing Through-lines**

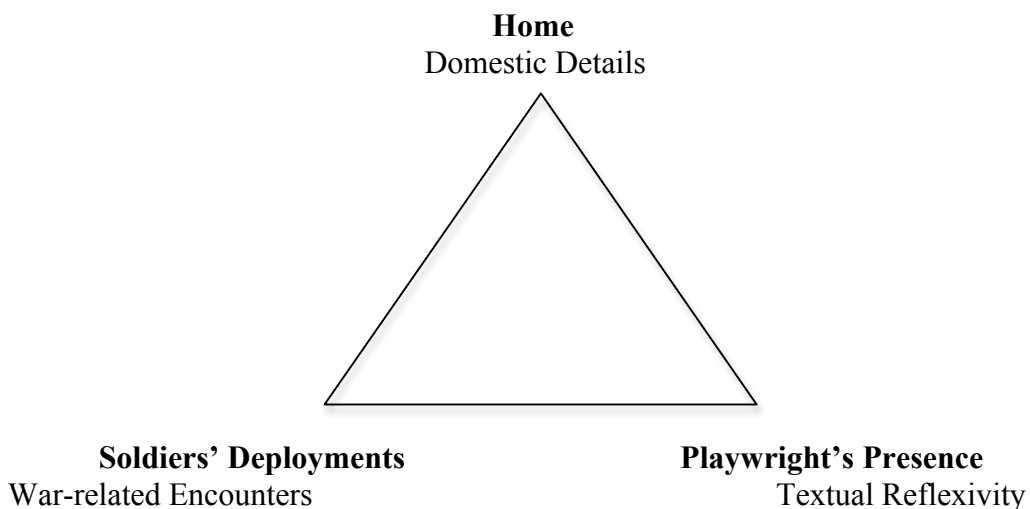
In the first few drafts of *Yardbird* I generated scenes based on techniques I employed previously on *This Much is True* and *The Kratos Effect*, such as interweaving, intercutting and secondary dialogue. Many of the initial *Yardbird* narratives were organised chronologically to mirror a soldier's journey from enlistment, deployments, combat narratives, sustaining injuries, to returning home and readjusting to civilian life. Scenes such as 'Welcome Infidel' and 'Pre-flight' explored Jason's and Sam's son's reason for joining the Army. 'Rosary in one Hand and a Gun in the Other' explored the potential dangers of convoys. 'Getting Hurt' in the initial drafts included the intercutting of Jason's monologue about being injured in a tank by an IED with Kenny's story of being shot by insurgents and taking refuge under an abandoned tank for several days. However, this pairing of interviewees' stories by theme and the chronology of the soldiers' journeys was predictable and limited theatricality. Also, as an organising pattern, traumatic encounters were plotted together and focused particularly on deployments, firefights and injuries sustained in combat. By grouping these extreme accounts together there was a risk that the soldiers' trauma would appear banal.

It became clear that the soldiers in their home environment and readjusting to civilian life illuminated more effective (but perhaps mundane) details that to me presented interesting and engaging aspects of soldiers' lives that were seldom explored in relation to combat stories. It occurred to me that *Yardbird* had more potential in exploring the question "What is war to a soldier at home?" In addition, the need to examine the domesticity of soldiers' lives beyond the chronology of their journeys as combatants became central to the dramaturgy of the play. Therefore, with this slight shift in focus, I needed to adopt a new organising model that would help address this question.

During the re-writing process in preparation for the second reading of *Yardbird*, I employed Moisés Kaufman's concept of an 'organising principle' to frame the

narratives of *Yardbird*, where a framing question is developed after exploring the entirety of the material.<sup>175</sup> By defining the question and the organising principle (Brown, 2006, p. 61), through-lines for the piece begin to emerge. Rich Brown (2005) draws on Kaufman’s verbatim play *The Laramie Project* to illustrate how these through-lines operate in the dramaturgical process: “[f]or Laramie three through-lines developed: the story of Laramie, Matthew Shepard’s story, and the story of the company” (p. 61).

Therefore, in the making of *Yardbird* addressing the question “What is war to a soldier at home?” I established three through-lines that needed to be dealt with in the re-writes. This included: the home life of soldiers, the soldiers’ deployments, and the playwright’s presence. Home life would include domestic details to establish a sense of the home environment soldiers and their families inhabit. Soldiers’ deployments included the experiences of combat, life on the operating base and communication with loved ones back home. Concerning the final through-line, the playwright’s presence was used to incorporate material that referred to the interview process, the making of a play, bringing attention to the process of appropriating testimony. As part of the writing process I employed the diagram below to help determine which scenes from prior drafts fitted within the triangulation of the three through-lines of home life, soldiers’ deployments and the playwright’s presence.<sup>176</sup>



**Fig. 6** Diagram of the Organising Principle and Through-lines for *Yardbird*

<sup>175</sup> Rich Brown (2005) defines Kaufman’s organising principle as “a tool against which the work is measured to determine whether or not individual Moments fit into the scope of the overall project and should be included or excluded from the final piece [...] The organising principle which Kaufman generated for *Laramie* was a town looking at itself in the year after Shepard’s murder. From the organising principle, formal questions arise, such as, how do you tell this story?” (p. 61).

<sup>176</sup> This triangular model was inspired in part by Robin Nelson’s (2013) ‘performance praxis’ model.

Establishing this organising principle and through-lines aided me in determining which participants would become primary characters and secondary characters. Although I was more acutely aware of the importance of maintaining critical distance, there were times when listening to recordings and reflecting on the interviewees' situations I became more emotionally-attached to the individuals, thus making cuts difficult. However, adhering to the concept of the organising principle helped me identify the primary characters Sam, Jason, Janine and Kenny as their testimony aligned with the established through-lines. Verbatim subjects whose stories did not directly align with the established through-lines of the organising principle became secondary characters or were omitted from the script.

### **Dramaturgical Strategies**

After reflecting on the problems I as a playwright encountered dramatising trauma in *This Much is True* and my awareness of the issues experienced by the *Black Watch* team in dramatising war testimony, my aim in writing *Yardbird* was to employ dramaturgical strategies as a means to promote more effective representations of verbatim subjects. Bearing in mind debates regarding the politics of identification in verbatim theatre, I employed several key rhetorical strategies when shaping the text bearing in mind how the verbatim subjects' stories might be appropriated by an audience. These strategies included textual reflexivity, direct address and domestic details.

Regarding textual reflexivity, I incorporated references about the presence of the playwright, verbatim subjects' concerns about the process, and the creation of the play itself to function as a reminder to audiences about the mediation inherent in the writing process. Stephen Bottoms (2006) argues:

Without a self-conscious emphasis on the vicissitudes of textuality and discourse, such plays can too easily become disingenuous exercises in the presentation of 'truth,' failing (or refusing?) to acknowledge their own highly selective manipulation of opinion and rhetoric (pp. 57-58).

Influenced by Bottoms' critique I incorporated self-referential components within the play to allude to the mediation process, but decided against inserting myself as a playwright/practitioner character in the playtext. My concern was that by introducing a

prominent ‘interrogatory figure’ (Ings, 2014) as featured in *Black Watch* would detract from the stories of the soldiers and their families. Furthermore, Bottoms (2006) contends that the use of ‘theatrical self-referentiality’ is necessary in documentary and verbatim theatre as an ethical and critical reminder to audiences that the words spoken have gone through an intricate process having been facilitated, collected, edited (some words discarded), and shaped through the various filters of the playwright, the actors, the director and designers (p. 57). Deirdre Heddon (2008) might argue that my approach to integrating references about the play is even more illusory in regard to asserting the work’s veracity, “as the inclusion of such direct references to the process appears to make the mechanisms of that process more transparent” and, moreover that any “rhetorical appeals to ‘fairness’, which lack detail, serve to further mask the playwright’s power” (p. 132). Conscious of how references to the play and my presence could be incorporated in the composition of the playtext complicates notions of “fairness” or “veracity” (Heddon, 2008, p.132), I integrated replies from interviewees that problematised the appearance of a seamless representation of the words of others. For example, scene eight, ‘At Home with Cindy and Sam’, features Sam questioning my intentions regarding making a verbatim play based on the suffering of others:

**Script Excerpt No. 6.2 *Yardbird***

*SAM pulls plane out of the garage*

SAM: If you would have seen what I saw in his possessions, he had a rucksack—it was full of bottles: OxyContin/OxyCodone, morphine. For the life of my I couldn’t figure out what the VA was doing... All that “Take that—it’ll make you feel better!”

*(Quizzes motivation of project)*

I mean... what are you going to do with this? How are you going to do a play? I’m just curious, how are you going to do all of this, for this life; and this life; and this life. Talk is cheap and I got a lot of respect for you, but you could be doing a cooking show for all I know, if you want to hear everyone’s worst days.

Sam’s comparison between verbatim theatre-making and a “cooking show” resonates with Salverson’s (2001) concern about encouraging “a type of contact that consumes the other person and reduces them to our terms” (p. 120) in verbatim plays. I had hoped Sam’s statement would encourage an audience to consider the moral implications of the verbatim process.



What is more, the presence of the playwright and my relationality to verbatim subjects provided a structure for the play. As the veterans' interviews were wide-ranging because of the range of military branches and deployment locations during different times and different wars, the key relationship connecting all of the soldiers was my presence as the interviewer/playwright.

Direct address was utilised to connect the audiences' relationship with the performers, and by proxy to the verbatim subjects themselves. Through direct address the audience is invited to share the role as the interviewer. This approach was influenced by Emily Mann's playwright's note for the documentary play *Still Life* (1981) about a Vietnam War veteran. Mann (1997) instructs, "the characters speak directly to the audience so the audience can hear what I heard, experience what I experienced" (p. 34). Suzanne Little (2011) contends that inviting audiences to participate as a "surrogate interviewer" encourages audiences to maintain a respect for the alterity of the original participants:

[I]t means that rather than directing the audience directly to empathise with the interview subjects and to try to place themselves in the role and position of these individuals' experiences, the audience are instead being asked to place themselves in the role and position of the interviewers. Potentially this is an ethically sound position for the audience as it preserves a respect and distance for the other (p. 8).

Working on the play with an understanding of the limits of identification that operate in verbatim plays, I used the personal references to the playwright to occasionally disrupt the audiences' sense that the verbatim subjects were speaking directly to them. This device was used to remind audiences that the idea of a neutral interviewer in verbatim theatre is an illusion. I had hoped that from time-to-time these disruptions would prompt the audience to reflect on how the presence of the playwright impacts on the responses of those being interviewed.

Domestic details were used in addition to conveying other aspects of interviewees' lives beyond their traumatic experiences as argued previously, to make the everyday life strange. For instance, the waitress' continuous interruptions of Kenny's stories about killing in the banal restaurant setting as described in Box 6.5 was incorporated in the scene 'A Sniper's View' as a device for audiences to consider how

militarism is embedded in everyday life.<sup>177</sup>

### First Rehearsed Reading

I arranged a rehearsed reading on April 9, 2013 at The George Wood Theatre at Goldsmiths, University of London.<sup>178</sup> The purpose of this reading was for me to be able to hear the material read by professional actors in front of an audience, and to help discover which aspects of the play worked effectively and what required cutting. The reading revealed several problems with the playtext. First, there were too many characters making it difficult for the audience to engage with the individual narratives. Also, the multitude of fragmented stories meant that some of the narratives featured in the script concentrated too heavily on the more extreme, traumatic aspects of interviewees' life experiences. The problem was later rectified by integrating the "organising principle" inspired by Moisés Kaufman's approach to theatre making. In addition to providing an opportunity for me to reflect on the effectiveness of the play and collaborate with a director and actors, recording the rehearsed reading meant I had footage to share with some of the interviewees who were able to see the dramatisation of their words and provide feedback for making revisions to the play.



**Fig. 7** Louise Kempton reading the part of Katherine in *Yardbird* (2013). Photo by Siheng Guo.

<sup>177</sup> Domestic details also prompted metaphors that emphasised both the interviewees' relationship to their current environment and their resilience.

<sup>178</sup> This reading was directed by Adam Brace. The cast included professional actors Louise Kempton as Actor One, Chris Brandon as Actor Two, Simon Lee Phillips as Actor Three and Laurence Pears as Actor Four.

## **The Verbatim Subjects' Autonomy: Expectations and Limitations**

During the four years spent writing and developing *Yardbird*, the participation of the interviewees throughout the compiling of the script was minimal. This was because geographic and social proximity limited the verbatim subjects' agency over the creative process as I was writing the play while conducting other aspects of my research for my doctoral research in London. Dan Rebellato (2009) argues that economic and cultural exploitation can occur when communities' experiences are appropriated to benefit the careers of theatre practitioners, rather than enhancing or reciprocating the interests of the community. To support his critique, Rebellato (2009, p. 54) draws on Jan Cohen-Cruz's (2005) condemnation of theatre practitioners who "mine the raw material, all that experience and all those stories. Then they leave with the natural resources and make their own art out of them" (p. 91).<sup>179</sup> Arguably, this stinging critique raises questions about my agency as a playwright as I had collected narratives from my local community only to return to London to develop the script. As a result of the distance, communication with interviewees was limited to email correspondence rather than face-to-face engagement.

The lack of verbatim subjects' participation in the script's development was also due to ambiguity as to what extent I had expected interviewees to participate in the project. Since I had recorded the first rehearsed reading of *Yardbird*, I sent the material to three verbatim subjects (Sam, Jason and Kenny) to acquire feedback from interviewees who were featured in the play as primary characters. The aim was to provide interviewees with some creative agency over the material and help rectify any ethical oversights regarding my representation of their narratives.

However, the response from the few interviewees to whom I had sent the footage was limited. Jason did not respond to the video footage at all while Sam offered only minor comments about other verbatim subjects' experiences and mostly exchanged

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<sup>179</sup> I attended a symposium at the Tricycle Theatre in June 2011 called 'Verbatim Theatre: A new dramaturgy' which included as speakers Chipu Chung, Nicolas Kent, Robin Soans and Alecky Blythe. Nicolas Kent gave advice to those embarking on verbatim projects warning, "don't be a cultural cowboy" which means to descend upon a community, mine the raw materials and leave. Instead Kent stressed the importance of maintaining contact with interviewees, valuing their experiences rather than using their experiences selfishly for artistic use alone (Kent, 2011).

emails with me about aviation.<sup>180</sup> Kenny was the most responsive of the verbatim subjects. Kenny explained which parts of the play he found to be confusing, such as the overlap of voices in the first scene of the play where servicemen and families dismiss the project. However, Kenny asserted that there was value in rewriting the scene as it acknowledged that some soldiers are apprehensive about divulging their war experiences to civilians. Kenny also offered reflections on how watching the footage of the first *Yardbird* reading made him feel:

I liked how you mixed some of the stories together. Have two readers go back and forth between stories made it really interesting and made you see the similarities between two people stories [*sic*]. Kind of made me not feel so alone with some of the things I went threw [*sic*], saw and thought.

Throughout the course of the re-writes I would consult with Kenny regarding military jargon and technical information, a role he embraced enthusiastically.<sup>181</sup>

Also, it was understood by interviewees that the play would be performed by professional actors. Many interviewees expected only to participate in the interview process with an expectation of one day attending a performance of the play in the local area. While some of my follow-up emails with interviewees went unanswered, it was clear that some interviewees were undergoing major changes in their life circumstances and the development of the play was not their key concern. Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki (2010) recognised interviewees' disinterest working on the oral history project *Montreal Life Stories*. Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2010) came to the conclusion that the limits of collaboration can sometimes be attributed to the fact that subjects do not always reciprocate the interviewer's interests, offering:

It is important to remember that while a truly trusting, collaborative space may be the highest ideal for any oral historian, we cannot assume that our interviewees aspire to the same goal [...] no matter how much trust is established, an interviewee might have perfectly

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<sup>180</sup> Part of the problem was that the interviewees were unfamiliar with theatre and did not necessarily know what to expect or how to contribute to the writing process beyond sharing their stories. Erica Nagel (2007) argues that practitioners working in documentary and verbatim theatre need to consider community-based modes of theatre making, such as sharing a vocabulary with verbatim subjects and providing workshop opportunities for subjects to participate in the playmaking process. Establishing a clearer vocabulary with interviewees at the interview stage beyond a general explanation of verbatim theatre might have also negated concerns of exploitation as raised by Rebellato (2009, p. 54) and Cohen-Cruz (2005, p. 91).

<sup>181</sup> For the second rehearsed reading on June 4, 2015 I discussed the possibility of using Skype so that Kenny could watch the performance in London live, but due to the five-hour time difference and Kenny's work schedule this arrangement was not possible.

good personal reasons to put limits on our relationships with them (pp. 198-199).

Furthermore, despite my alertness in the interview process not to focus solely on the most traumatic events, there were times when I had perhaps inadvertently re-affirmed interviewees' victimhood in my email exchanges. For instance, in an email exchange with Sam I had warned him that some of the material incorporated in the script included John's story about killing Iraqi children, details I was aware Sam had not disclosed to his wife Cindy. Sam did not express concern, but rather changed the subject of the correspondence. In reflection, continually seeking Sam's approval regarding certain elements of his story actually accentuated his grief. Alison O'Connor (2015) realised in the process developing the play *Abandoned Brothers* with combat veterans and their families that the more effective theatrical work emerges when the researcher/practitioners "stopped treating the participants as though they were made of glass..." (p. 156). Finding O'Connor's observation to be true of my experience with dealing with Sam, I have concluded that throughout the development process Sam did not want to be constantly reminded of the more sensitive aspects of his son's struggle, including the taking of his own life.

In addition, continually seeking approval from some verbatim subjects might also inadvertently question the interviewee's decision to participate. As Amanda Stuart-Fisher (2011) argues, "it is important to allow for the possibility that in some instances the verbatim subjects do enter into this process willingly and do get something back in return" (p. 205). Without being able to guarantee a production in the local area however, I was concerned that the interviewees' contributions to the *Yardbird* project had yet to be reciprocated.

## **Second Rehearsed Reading: Collaborating with Actors**

Part of the process of developing the script was working with actors and director Tom Mansfield throughout the day of the second rehearsed reading on June 4, 2015 at The Pineapple Pub in Kentish Town, London.<sup>182</sup> I had worked previously with Mansfield on the development of *The Kratos Effect* and met with him several times to

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<sup>182</sup> The cast included Loren O'Dair as Actor One, James Wrighton as Actor Two, Simon Darwen as Actor Three and Joshua Manning as Actor Four.

discuss the dramaturgy of the *Yardbird* playtext. Mansfield worked to create a rehearsal environment that supported my practice-as-research imperatives, thereby ensuring that we would work closely with actors to aid in the development of the script.<sup>183</sup>

A key finding that emerged from the second reading was the importance of sharing primary source material with the actors. First, it becomes necessary to reflect briefly on a mistake I had made in the rehearsal process for the first reading, which I attempted to rectify in the rehearsal process for the second reading. In preparation for the first rehearsed reading I had distributed limited five-minute samples of the interview sound files of the individuals the actors would be portraying. My reasoning for providing short audio recording samples was that I did not want the actors to feel as if they had to ventriloquise the speech patterns, accents and the intonations of the interviewees. Moreover, part of my research aim for producing a more aestheticised interpretation of the testimony was to shift away from a hyper-realistic style more akin to Alecky Blythe's early Recorded Delivery productions such as *The Girlfriend Experience* (2008) and *Cruising* (2006) that emphasise the precision of the actor's vocal delivery of the verbatim subjects' words (Hammond & Steward, 2008; Little, 2011; Wake, 2013). In withholding the full recordings however, I marginalised the actors' efforts to explore the verbatim material and unconsciously became a "gatekeeper" to the recorded sound files, thus re-affirming my "mastery" (Alcoff, 1991-92, p. 22) over the narratives of others. Mary Luckhurst (2011) has critiqued the hierarchy of production that operates in verbatim theatre, arguing that actors often have less power than directors and playwrights over the verbatim material, yet often experience "ethical stress" (p. 135) when portraying real people.<sup>184</sup> My own preoccupation with my ethical stress as a playwright overshadowed any consideration for the responsibility that actors felt when embarking on this project. Therefore, for the rehearsal period of the second reading I set up an area in the rehearsal room where I made available all the video clips and interview recordings for the actors to view.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> In preparation for the second rehearsed reading I planned to avoid some of the mistakes I had made two years before with a different cast in the first rehearsed reading of *Yardbird* that took place on April 9, 2013.

<sup>184</sup> Theatre scholarship, in Luckhurst's opinion, has failed to examine the depth and complexity of the social processes that takes place when actors undertake roles based on real people.

<sup>185</sup> Here, I adopted a role as an archivist pulling up particular sound recordings on the actors' requests to listen to the interviews. I also shared photographs taken during my interviews with actors, and displayed maps to provide geographical context.

Allowing time for actors to question the construction of the scenes and discuss the implications of the dialogue influenced important changes in the script. Shared discussions between Mansfield, the actors and myself enabled a wider debate regarding ethics and presentation, and more specifically addressed preconceptions about US soldiers. For example in scene eleven, ‘Army Wife’ Katherine describes the circumstances in which her husband Derrick shot an Afghan civilian, I had considered cutting the line “I know the report says the man was laying on the ground. But there was nowhere in the case where it was ever said the man was laying on the ground—” as I felt the extra details about the court case would overwhelm audiences with additional information. However, Loren O’Dair (2015) who portrayed Katherine explained that this line was indeed essential for both the character and the audience. Not only did it communicate Katherine’s version of events and offer a logical explanation for her husband’s actions, but this line, if omitted, risked implying Derrick’s guilt, and in doing so would reinforce the “trigger happy” stereotypes and preconceptions many British civilians have about American soldiers. Furthermore, working closely with the actors and consulting with them on my construction of dialogue and scenes that they or I found ethically questionable or ineffective within the storytelling process created a sense of shared responsibility for the material.

Moreover, working with the actors also helped to identify parts of the script that required further clarification. Discussing the dramaturgical strategies with actors – including reaffirming the purpose of textual reflexivity, domestic details and direct address – illustrated what parts of the script needed to be revised. Sharing significant aspects of the interactions that occurred within my interview process with actors, in turn, helped them to explore more effective ways to convey certain lines. It also allowed me a forum to consult the actors and director about ethical concerns I had in terms of the composition of the playtext, as well as identified passages where material could be edited, clarified or explored in more depth.



**Fig. 8** James Wrighton (left) reading the part of Jason and Simon Darwen (right) reading the part of Sam in *Yarbird* (2015). Photo by Ashley David.

### **Critically Listening to the Audience**

Following the performance I collected audience responses from the most recent rehearsed reading of the play that provided data for critical reflection, thereby revealing both the audience's expectations and reactions to the play.<sup>186</sup> These responses included reflections on issues of authenticity and theatrical language, domestic details and textual reflexivity.<sup>187</sup> In addition, this data provided further insight regarding the responsibilities of the playwright dramatising testimonies of war that had not yet occurred to me.

One of the outcomes that challenged my preconceptions was the audience's attitude to the veracity and authenticity of content, as only one audience member expressed an interest regarding the exactness of how the verbatim subjects' words were spoken by the actors.<sup>188</sup> Also, many audience members shared an interest in seeing more

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<sup>186</sup> Eighteen audience members attended the rehearsed reading, of which most were regular theatregoers or worked as theatre practitioners. Only a few audience members did not attend the theatre regularly.

<sup>187</sup> I collected audience feedback in several forms, including distributing a list of questions of which audience members could either answer in writing or via recording voice memos on their mobile phones—memos which they could later email to me. I also supplied the audience with digital recorders if they wanted to record their responses privately. In addition, I also recorded my discussions with audience members after the show.

<sup>188</sup> Only one member referenced the use of verbatim testimony and questioned what my expectations were in terms of the actors' delivery of the lines, stating: "I wondered how much access the actors had to the



physical sequences such as the camel spider fights rather than recreations of the interview setting.<sup>189</sup>

Another key finding, in terms of domestic details and home life, was that audience members recognised the effectiveness of idiosyncratic details for connecting a character to their environment. Furthermore, the domestic environment operated as a site that explored verbatim subjects' interests and concerns, and was also important for bridging the environments of battlefield and home.<sup>190</sup> Also, the inclusion of humour in relation to the domestic surroundings, such as the series of barking dogs (Roxy and Tank) that acted to interrupt narratives, helped to break focus on traumatic war experiences alone.

In terms of textual reflexivity, the majority of the audience reacted positively to the embedded references to the interviewer and the play-making process. For instance, one audience member explained how the references to the playwright enhanced his consideration of the play-making process:

The perspective of that observation of you, the references to you [...] at first I thought it was unnecessary. As it went on, it's actually very necessary. Because as it went on gradually in the story it told you these people had a relationship with you as a storyteller, who was like interviewing them and at different places, at different times, and I thought that was very interesting, and reminded me the fact that another person's story was coaxed out of them by some, by a storyteller.<sup>191</sup>

My intention for adding references was also designed to prompt the audience to consider how they identified with the experiences of others.

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original interviews (if they were recorded)? Is the actor's job to emulate these real people or is it to create characters from the script?"

<sup>189</sup> One audience member in particular expressed in writing that physical sequences and the inclusion of more aestheticised representations would enhance the play: "Some of the more physical moments that took us back to Iraq were really engaging and interesting but I wanted to see more of them. I wasn't exactly sure why they came in when they did and not more frequently. (I'm guessing some of those bits are the result of artistic liberty/creative freedom, no?) For example, the camel spider fight".

<sup>190</sup> For instance, in a one-to-one discussion with another audience member after the reading we talked about to what extent my integration of domestic home life in an exploration of the impact of war was effective. I had expressed to the audience member that my aim in integrating more domestic details was to counterbalance the singular focus on soldiers' combat stories, to which she responded: "As much as I like the domestic stuff in the story, the other stuff [the trauma] is necessary to make the domestic stuff relevant. If you didn't open with the story of the guy who had to take refuge under a tank, then I don't think you could come in with the home, the lady hovering trying to get the house nice cause she'd [Cindal] been away for so long would have made sense. It needed to come from that history".

<sup>191</sup> Echoing the same sentiment, another audience member wrote on the questionnaire that the presence of the mediator "helped the story strands and showed that the recollections were not framed in a vacuum but coaxed from an interviewer".

In relation to trauma, one audience member approached me after the reading and stressed that the references to the soldiers' household and geographical environment were the more interesting and surprising aspects of the play, rather than the narratives about deployments. He suggested that placing more emphasis on the domestic realm would improve the play. This was necessary, according to this audience member's viewpoint, to move beyond the familiar tropes of soldiers' traumatic stories popular in war films—citing Kenny's tank story and Gavin's reflection on the IED that killed Iraqi civilians as examples of this familiar and predictable representation of the modern soldier.

In terms of identification, the audience's response to *Yardbird* exhibited a concern for the lives of Iraqi civilians as framed in the play. This included Sam's account of how his son admitted to killing Iraqi children when they were attempting to reach the medevac helicopter.<sup>192</sup> For instance, one audience member commented on both the lives of the Iraqi children as well as Gavin's story recalling the IED that killed four Iraqi men as affecting, stating:

[t]he recounting of the story where Iraqi children were killed, and the impulsive reaction of the soldiers was laughter. The mixture of horror and the banality was particularly affecting.<sup>193</sup>

However, it occurred to me in reading the feedback that Iraqi civilians in the play were only framed within the context of victimhood, while the killing of the Afghan civilian Atta Mohamed was only referenced within the context of Katherine's explanation as to why her husband killed him. Jenny Hughes (2011) argues that prioritising certain lives in verbatim practice operates to exclude certain voices (such as the priority of Western soldiers' narratives over the accounts of Iraqi and Afghan civilians in *Yardbird*), by focusing on narratives that are familiar. This means verbatim theatre tends to focus on subjects to whose experience an audience can more easily relate. The consequence of this risks reinforcing sameness among audiences, thereby marginalising the voices of others that are not easily identifiable. In light of Hughes' (2011) concern, I conclude that because *Yardbird* only featured references about the Iraqi and Afghan civilians in

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<sup>192</sup> One audience member described this narrative as “[u]ncomfortable and unsettling in a good way—the story about the children carrying sweets and then being killed”.

<sup>193</sup> Also in response to Gavin's narrative another audience member wrote: “[t]he soldiers laughing—it jarred with what had just happened and in a way made it more mundane—it was interesting to see the moments that those in the situation found funny”.

regard to their deaths, these constructions also operate to sideline the experiences of civilians living in warzones, which is problematic.

Additionally, I was concerned in the dramaturgy of the play that the audience would sympathise with characters without critically reflecting on the wider repercussions of the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In response to *Yardbird*, one audience member wrote how she had identified personally with Sam's story as well as with the wider issues affecting soldiers and military families:

The story I love the most is the one about the parents whose son killed himself. I think military-related suicide is more common than we think and people don't talk about it enough. I can also relate to the parents and their grief over their son and how hard it is to live a normal life after a major loss. I enjoyed the dynamicism [*sic*] of the plane ride and the lead up to that too.

To unpack this statement I draw on Helen Nicholson's (2014) explanation of the two kinds of identification that can occur in performance.<sup>194</sup> Primary identification promotes a false empathy among audiences where a respect for alterity deteriorates (Nicholson, 2014, p. 74). Secondary identification, in contrast, promotes a respect for difference meaning that the audience's experience the narratives portrayed with the understanding that the verbatim subjects' experiences are different from their own. The above response indicates an element of primary identification (Nicholson, 2014) within the phrase, "I can relate to the parents and their grief over their son and how hard it is to live a normal life after a major loss". Yet reflection on the wider issue of how to address suicides among members of the military aligns with my aim to promote a form of secondary identification, where a greater collective responsibility for the after-effects of war might be realised. What is more, this response to the play illustrates the value in creating a space where soldiers' narratives can be considered amongst a wider civilian audience. As Chris Hedges contends, "[t]hose who return from war have learned something which is often incomprehensible to those who have stayed at home" (Chris Hedges in Malpede, Messina, & Shuman, 2011, p. vii).

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<sup>194</sup> Nicholson (2014) argues that theatre practitioners need to take into account the forms of identification they wish to elicit.

## Research Questions and Findings

In response to my research questions raised in the *This Much is True* case study and from my examination of the *Black Watch* creative team's playmaking process, I found the following answers resonated with my findings in the creation of *Yardbird*. In response to the first question—how do I engage in narratives of trauma in the interview and writing process—I found that discussing a myriad of topics with interviewees including personal interests and hobbies in addition to queries about traumatic events was critical to exploring the complexity of the soldiers' and their family members' experiences. The latter included being injured in combat, or seeing comrades killed. In consideration of the debates regarding the representation of trauma in performance (Salverson, 2001; Thompson, 2011), I had attempted to avoid reinforcing limiting clichés by representing soldiers as isolated or damaged in the process of writing *Yardbird*.

My findings from the first research question connect with my second question: how does location affect the interview process? Location is crucial as it aided in prompting verbatim subjects' reflections about the transition from war to home life. For example, meeting Jason at his motorcycle shop revealed how motorcycles are symbolic for his survival and recovery. Also, being invited to Sam's home to conduct the interview and listening to his experience beyond the frame of his son's deployment and subsequent suicide led to the plane ride over south-central Pennsylvania. These physical locations—some quite meaningful for interviewees—provided a sense of their personalities and home life. In turn, considering location within my creative practice aided me in constructing more unique environments, representative of interviewees' distinctive experiences for the contemplation of an audience. Familiar and comfortable locations prompted interviewees to convey narratives of joy, pleasure and survival, providing a more personal and richly textured backdrop to narratives of personal grief.

Inspired by the *Black Watch* creative team's critique of the role of writer appropriating the Scottish soldiers' experiences, I posed the third question for *Yardbird*—how might dramaturgical strategies and techniques operate to encourage audiences to critically consider the experiences of others as well as the limitations of these dramatic compositions in the playtext? In consideration of Stephen Bottoms' (2006) call for theatre practitioners to adhere to more textual reflexivity in verbatim and documentary practice, I explored my own relationship with verbatim subjects as a

through-line for the play. By strategically incorporating verbatim subjects' dialogue referencing the play project—including my presence as an interviewer and my influence as a playwright over their words—I endeavoured to alert the audience to the process of recontextualisation that occurs in the creation of verbatim theatre.

In addition to this strategy, establishing a clear organising principle to guide the writing process allowed me to more effectively structure narratives. Creating through-lines also helped me cut material that was not necessary to the play but to which I had formed emotional attachments. What is more, recognising my emotional attachments to extracts that did not benefit the story also allowed me identify moments where, upon reflection, I had struggled to maintain a critical distance from verbatim subjects. For example, once I had established a clear organising principle for *Yardbird*, I cut a scene from an earlier draft that featured the testimony of a Vietnam War veteran. The scene focused on the lifelong guilt he had carried having killed women and children when his unit had misidentified them as enemy combatants. While the story was compelling, I had realised it was the feeling of loss to which I was drawn. By focusing exclusively on this act of killing, I was concerned that audience members would fail to recognise the complexity of the Vietnam War veteran's experience outside of any sympathy they might feel towards the victims or for him. In turn, by recognising moments where I struggled to maintain a respect for difference as part of the writing process meant I was more aware of how audience members might react to the stories presented in the play.

### **Transactional Moments**

In conclusion, the findings from the *Yardbird* case study reveal that the writing of the playtext is informed by a series of critical interactions between the playwright and interviewees that emerge in the facilitation of testimony and the creative process. In my own engagement with soldiers and military families, I was confronted with my personal biases about what soldiering entails. Furthermore, I witnessed the complex challenges soldiers face as they readjust to their home surroundings after war and how they and their families reconcile their future prospects after their military service.

From this project I gained a clearer understanding of how I as a playwright operate in relation to narratives of trauma, however, in my collection of testimony, it is difficult to gauge how – if at all – verbatim subjects benefit. From a sociological

standpoint Les Back (2007) reflects on his own experience collecting narratives and interpreting the lives of others within the interview process, asking “When we listen to people, do they give us their stories or do we steal them? At the heart of all social investigation is a dialectical tension between gift, appropriation and exchange” (Back, 2007, p. 97). Back’s use of the words “gift, appropriation and exchange” (97) correlates with Helen Nicholson’s (2014) metaphor of the gift that operates in applied theatre-making. She contends that in the process of working with subjects, theatre practitioners are presented with the paradox of ‘giving’, ‘taking’ and ‘expectation’. Listening to soldiers and their families’ experiences, I had hoped that my presence was less of an intrusion and more of an affirmation that people care about their experiences and how war affects them and society as a whole.

Building on this transactional relationship between verbatim subjects and me as a playwright I consider these critical interactions with interviewees to be what filmmaker Susan Clayton (2005) identifies as ‘transactional moments’. She explains this concept in her recent work documenting young asylum-seekers’ journeys and their lives in Britain, where “identity is a constant transaction between each party, in a world where values and boundaries, as much as actual people, actual migrants, are constantly shifting”.<sup>195</sup> Clayton adapts the term transactional moments from Stuart Hall’s assertion that “identity is an ever-unfinished conversation” (Stuart Hall in Akomfrah, 2013). From this meaning, I consider how my perceptions of verbatim subjects and their perceptions about me shift in the interview and writing process. The term ‘transaction’ also underscores the tension inherent in interpreting narratives of trauma. The concept, much like Nicholson’s gift metaphor, presents both positive and negative connotations. Transaction can imply an interaction, an exchange, a contract, or even a business deal, which brings to the surface the tension between sharing and exploitation in the process of verbatim theatre-making. Examining the transactional moments in the making of *Yardbird* was definitively shaped by a series of negotiations with soldiers and military families. These transactional moments highlight the ethical disjunctures and help inform the dramaturgy of verbatim plays. Furthermore, reflecting on transactional moments aid in identifying my responsibilities as a verbatim playwright.

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<sup>195</sup> In examining the encounters between the researcher and documentary subjects that impact on future audiences Clayton contends “transactional moments [have] extraordinarily profound real-world effects [that illuminate] how the process affects not only them but us” (Clayton, 2015).

In light of this, the *Yardbird* case study revealed three key insights in relation to transactional moments that will inform my future practice. First, it was imperative in my role as a playwright to listen and express interest in the lives of verbatim subjects rather than concentrating on framing testimony that “privileges injury” (Salverson, 2001, p. 123).<sup>196</sup> Moreover, studying transactional moments through face-to-face encounters with the soldiers and military families established parameters for my creative practice.<sup>197</sup> Second, in connection to listening beyond traumatic experiences, I learned in the writing and development process the importance of not treating verbatim subjects as if they were “made of glass” (O’Connor, 2015, p. 156). For instance, just as I became more vigilant as to how I as an interviewer-playwright conducted myself in the *Yardbird* interviews, after recognising that in the process of *This Much is True* I had been preoccupied with the Menezes family’ pain, I similarly realised in *Yardbird* that expressing an over-sensitivity to verbatim subjects at times accentuated the trauma of verbatim subjects. This was reflected in particular in my need to garner Sam’s approval of the way in which I presented his story and the details regarding his son’s death. Thirdly, the project established the importance of sharing responsibility and engaging in concerns regarding aesthetics and representation with actors involved in their presentation. My attempts to create a more collaborative rehearsal environment with actors in the second reading allowed the actors’ input to be taken into consideration. Enlisting them in the dramaturgy of the playtext aided in the exploration of the theatrical possibilities of conveying testimony more effectively for the benefit of the audience given the fact that *Yardbird* was a singularly individualistic enterprise in contrast to the devising of *This Much is True* and *The Kratos Effect*, in that I conducted all of the interviews and compiled the script in isolation, it was crucial to the success of this project that I create a space in the PaR study where other practitioners had opportunities to question my constructions and suggest alternative approaches to the representation of verbatim subjects. Creating opportunities for debate with actors in *Yardbird* was instructive and provided for the sharing of responsibility in terms of the representation of others.

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<sup>196</sup> Establishing boundaries in the interview process helped to determine which topics were “off limits” (Fujii, 2010, p. 291) and opened up new creative possibilities for critiquing the process of making a verbatim play.

<sup>197</sup> For example, Cindy’s silences and Sam’s cynicism about the verbatim process were incorporated in the playtext as a means of reminding audiences that testimony is not collected and presented free of “rhetorical manipulations” (Bottoms, 2006, p. 60) whilst providing a space to examine the effects of war on soldiers and their families.

In closing, these findings also reaffirm the importance of valuing my role as a playwright, and how I can employ my skills to mediate experiences of war for a wider audience. From this investigation I came to recognise the value of identifying transactional moments as they occur, and how they in turn impact upon the dramaturgy of the play, signaling the ethical responsibilities of the playwright when translating testimony for performance.



## Conclusion

### **The Role of the Playwright Appropriating Narratives of Conflict in Verbatim Practice**

My practice-as-research investigation was initially prompted by my experience writing *The Kratos Effect* which presented me with a series of questions and ethical uncertainties about the process of translating testimony in the compilation of a verbatim playtext. These unresolved issues regarding representation and the appropriation of the narratives complicated my initial approach to verbatim theatre and my playwriting practice. On the one hand, I was aware of the potential of verbatim theatre to make a connection between verbatim subjects, theatre practitioners, and audiences, but on the other I was sceptical about some of the ways in which testimony was facilitated and compiled in the research and writing process. I was (and continue to be) particularly concerned about how the traumatic experiences of others can be facilitated and appropriated by verbatim practitioners, particularly when this process is approached uncritically.

Over the last fifteen years scholarly debate on verbatim theatre has probed issues of authenticity, aesthetics and the representation of verbatim subjects as I outline in Chapter 1. However, it was my view that further analysis of the role of the playwright and the interactions between verbatim subjects in the research process – interactions that are critical for the making of plays based on testimony – and the implications of interpreting testimony in script form was necessary. My inquiry was prompted in part by Deirdre Heddon's (2008) criticism that the complex negotiations that occur in private between verbatim subjects and practitioners often go undocumented. She (2008) cites instances such as the "sourcing [of] and selecting interviewees" to the construction of "the questions that are then posed" which prompt "certain answers" (p. 130), all of which Heddon views as aspects of verbatim practice that remain under-examined. These intricate processes are important subjects for exploration, as she argues, because they can result in the marginalisation of verbatim subjects. I was also influenced by Amanda Stuart-Fisher's (2011a) assessment that "within a lot of the commentary around verbatim and documentary theatre there seems to be very few examples of playwrights evaluating their projects by consulting those whose stories generated it" (p. 200). The absence of evaluations regarding practitioners' working relationships with verbatim

subjects is problematic and reflecting on these arguments I was intrigued by how the interview setting operates as a critical site for understanding the responsibilities of writing a verbatim play. David Lane (2010) insists that the process of verbatim playwriting entails “a delicate conversation between two different responsibilities: respecting the source material and crafting a theatrical experience” (p. 77). While I agree with Lane (2010), few guidelines or cautions about just how this “delicate conversation” takes place and the ethical issues raised in the process are available for would-be verbatim practitioners. Little discussion has been devoted to what strictures and considerations should be honoured in the private spaces where negotiations take place between playwrights and the individuals they are interviewing for a verbatim play.

In my view Duska Radosavljevic (2013) has identified the most critical aspect of the verbatim theatre debate, pinpointing the importance “for the theatre artist/interviewer to engage epistemically on a number of levels with what is being related to them both verbally and non-verbally by their interviewee so that they can find an appropriate theatrical translation for it” (p. 137). The levels of engagement that operate between playwrights and verbatim subjects are critical, particularly in the context of trauma. In regard to the relationship between testimony and trauma, my concerns align with Julie Salverson’s (2001) caution to artists that “those of us who practice theatre that engages with people’s accounts of violent events must articulate the nature of that contact” (p. 119). In response to this, it was my view that in order to fully comprehend the responsibilities that emerge in translating testimony, the relationships and interactions between playwrights and verbatim subjects need to be articulated through a series of practical explorations.

In light of these concerns, this PaR-led dissertation was designed to identify key issues that emerged in my practice, which led to my writing of verbatim plays with the purpose of critically reflecting on the process. This investigation produced two studio-based case studies to examine the limitations and ethical dilemmas as well as theatrical possibilities involved in translating testimony for the writing of a verbatim playtext. These factors included the issues that emerged for this researcher-playwright when co-creating a verbatim play *This Much is True* about the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes, and the original verbatim play *Yardbird* based on US soldiers and their families impacted upon by deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, and written specifically for this investigation. Each case study revealed a series of transactional

moments between the verbatim subjects and me, the theatre practitioner, which in turn presented new responsibilities regarding my role as a playwright.

My aim in adopting a PaR framework was to enable me to understand more fully my relationship with verbatim subjects over the course of the selection, interview and writing process. Conducting interviews and writing verbatim plays as part of the investigation generated an environment to assess my creative process, the findings of which have aided in clarifying my responsibilities as a playwright to verbatim subjects and to prospective audiences. Moreover, it is my hope that insights gained through this self-examination will, in turn, highlight key issues and generate new theatrical approaches to shaping testimony to improve my ethical practice as a playwright going forward. In addition, this appraisal of my research and playwriting practice was both inspired by and undertaken to contribute new findings to scholarly discourse regarding verbatim theatre.

As I discussed in Chapter 6 I have adopted Susan Clayton's (2015) concept of "transactional moments" to help articulate my findings. The term 'transactional moments' conveys the complex relationship between my role as a playwright encountering verbatim subjects and attempting to translate their testimony into playtexts.<sup>198</sup> Transactional moments are the critical negotiations that emerge from the contact between verbatim subjects and the playwright that have a lasting impact on the writing and, in turn, the rehearsal and performance processes. Moreover, transactional moments are the specific instances where identities are negotiated, preconceptions challenged and altered, and important relationships established. For example, Sam's questioning of my intentions of making theatre from narratives of "carnage and misery" challenged me to consider more carefully how I was framing soldiers' experiences of combat in the *Yardbird* playtext. Recognising transactional moments and the important interactions that occur in the research phase delineate ethical boundaries as well as creating theatrical possibilities to consider in the writing process. In short, these transactional moments are critical as they significantly influence and shape the dramaturgy of the play.

Each PaR case study, as part of my investigation, allowed opportunities to examine my interactions with verbatim subjects by providing an "ethical space in which

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<sup>198</sup> In the context of documentary filmmaking based on asylum-seekers narratives, Clayton (2015) observed in her lecture that "identity is a constant transaction between each party, in a world where values and boundaries, as much as actual people, actual migrants, are constantly shifting".

a relationship between detachment and contact occurs” (Salverson, 2001, p. 119). My studio practice enabled transactional moments to be reflected upon, allowed new responsibilities to be realised, and thus precipitated modifications to my practice. By articulating the transactional moments, several important findings emerged which shaped – and will continue to influence – my playwriting. What follows is a brief overview of the findings and critical reflections my PaR case studies yielded in response to my primary research questions regarding the role and responsibilities of the verbatim playwright.

## **Research Questions**

### **How does the agency of the playwright affect the way in which the testimony of verbatim subjects is generated in the dramaturgy of a verbatim play?**

In relation to the first question, I found that my presence in the interview process had a profound influence on the way in which testimony was facilitated and directed in the interview process and in the translation of the text. My practice-as-research case studies revealed that critical developments in the dramaturgy of plays based on testimony are informed by what happens during the interview process. For instance, in the creation of *The Kratos Effect*, my oversimplification of Mary’s activism and imprisonment during the Apartheid era and, in turn, her feeling that I had misrepresented her story, revealed how the meeting between playwright and verbatim subjects, or the absence of such a meeting, can significantly affect how narratives are crafted within verbatim plays. Based on this experience I realised the importance of facilitating interviews as part of my role as writer of verbatim plays, as these encounters between verbatim subjects and playwrights significantly impact upon the shaping of the playtext.

Furthermore, in reflecting on co-writing *This Much is True* with Paul Unwin, it emerged that our differences in terms of how we approached interviews elicited different responses from interviewees. While I utilised a less structured interview style and at times shared my own thoughts and experiences with interviewees, Unwin framed his interview questions to focus on specific events surrounding the Menezes case. The strength of Unwin’s approach was that it helped structure a timeline for the play. However, at times his strategic approach meant he would ask probing questions

designed to exaggerate the drama, a technique that also limited verbatim subjects' responses or, as Heddon (2008) suspects, prompts "certain answers" (p. 130). Because Unwin was not present for all of the interviews, he at times had less difficulty negotiating concerns for those interviewees he had not met personally, giving greater weight to the interviewees with whom he had come into direct contact. In contrast, due to my more open-ended questions, many interviewees shared with me more personal aspects of their experiences outside of the context of the shooting of Menezes. These personal details could have prompted us as writers to explore complex constructions of verbatim subjects' lives beyond the case but due to our rigid framing of the play these details were subsequently overlooked. The weakness of my personal approach was that I had difficulty maintaining a critical distance in the interview process, which created further complications in the writing of the script. For example, my uncritical and narcissistic identification with the Menezes family and members of the Justice 4 Jean campaign meant I had actively sought out details that would encourage audiences to identify with the verbatim subjects' struggles in the writing process. Therefore, in the case of *Yardbird* I adopted a more conversational approach, alert to the value of encouraging verbatim subjects to divulge more about their lives than just their most traumatic experiences while also conducting interviews with a greater awareness of necessity and value of maintaining distance between verbatim subjects and myself.

The physical presence of the playwright is critical to comprehending and evaluating the ethical boundaries set by the interviewees. This was evidenced in my interaction with Cindy in the interview for *Yardbird*. I perceived her series of silences as an indication of what I could and could not ask regarding her son's death – indications that were important for establishing boundaries regarding how I could present her story in the play. The same was true for director John Tiffany in the making of *Black Watch*, who realised upon meeting the ex-soldiers that it was inappropriate to ask them to divulge their experiences of killing for the purpose of making a play. Interpreting spoken and unspoken boundaries is important, and negotiating the limits of aestheticising testimony is not the same undertaking as examining and compiling dialogue from transcript material. Reading the social context in which the interview takes place is critical for the theatrical translation of testimony for the playtext. Therefore, being physically present when interviewing verbatim subjects – or at least meeting subjects prior to the composition of the play – is part of the verbatim

playwright's ethical responsibility. This is because the physical, verbal and nonverbal relationship presents opportunities to overturn playwrights' preconceptions about verbatim subjects and offer unanticipated material for the subsequent translations of their stories for the stage.

**What are the responsibilities of the playwright to verbatim subjects who have been affected by trauma?**

Building on the findings from the first question, in response to my responsibilities to verbatim subjects I recognised the importance of how I as a practitioner identified with verbatim subjects in the interview setting and also how considerations of identification mattered in writing a script for future audiences. While I argue that the physical presence of the playwright in relation to the verbatim subjects is important, it is not a safeguard against misrepresentation. The PaR case study based on *This Much is True* evidenced that as co-writers, Unwin and I had appealed unintentionally to audiences to uncritically identify themselves with the Menezes family struggle uncritically by framing their narratives strictly through the frame of the latter's suffering. This was brought to light by Helen Nicholson's (2014) conceptualisation of the forms of primary and secondary identification that take place in applied drama. Our misrecognition of the Menezes family's experience was reinforced by our instructions in the playtext for the Menezes cousins to be portrayed realistically, juxtaposed against the more heightened presentational style of the other characters. Our over-simplified construction of the Menezes family's experience leaned perilously close to becoming what Salverson (2001) identifies as an uncritical approach to testimonial theatre that "disregards the complexity of negotiating life in the midst of loss and presumes that approaching experience as transparent maintains an innocent listening" (p. 121). This misrepresentation was rooted in my lack of awareness regarding the types of identification that manifested themselves between the interview subject and the interviewer. What is more, Nicholson's (2004) conceptualisation of the forms of identification not only helped me to locate my narcissistic tendencies throughout the writing of the play *This Much is True*, but also alerted me to how my solipsistic identification with the Menezes family during our interview affected our representation of their testimony in the playtext. My preoccupation with the Menezes cousins' narratives of trauma in the interview process filtered through the writing process. As a

result, I was more vigilant regarding this in the interview process for the creation of *Yardbird*. Therefore, this PaR dissertation revealed that one of my responsibilities as a playwright to verbatim subjects is to remain vigilant in terms of how I frame traumatic experiences, thereby dictating that I maintain an awareness of the types of identification I seek to elicit from future audiences.

By preserving an awareness of how I facilitate testimony, I tried to listen more effectively to interviewees' narratives in the making of *Yardbird*, prompting conversation that was not focused solely on interviewees' most traumatic experiences. This broader parameter allowed me to capture interviewees' interests, humour and qualities which, in turn, presented new theatrical possibilities beyond the frame of social suffering. Furthermore, being open to experiences beyond trauma brought about opportunities for kinetic ethnography, namely my physical participation in activities with interviewees. For instance, encouraging Sam to speak about subjects not directly focused on his son's suicide led to our plane ride. In turn, this approach presented theatrical possibilities beyond re-creating the typical interview setting. Furthermore, assessing one's own presence and responses to interviewees might help locate the potential collapse of a "respect for difference" (Ridout, 2009, p. 54). While at times my emotional responses were difficult to control in the interview process for *Yardbird*, part of my responsibility is to maintain an awareness of my role as a dramatist in the process of facilitating testimony. My responsibility as both playwright and interlocutor with verbatim subjects is to find effective ways to convey the complexity of these personal experiences for performance, experiences that are not defined by trauma alone. As a part of this responsibility it became important not to treat verbatim subjects as if they were the breakable, fragile other, particularly as this approach tended to reinforce victimhood rather than emphasise aspects of the verbatim subject's survival.

Furthermore, I chose to adopt Amanda Stuart-Fisher's (2011a) use of the term 'appropriation' as she suggests that the process of making verbatim theatre "is constitutively *appropriative*" (p. 194) to reiterate the series of creative filters through which testimony is mediated in the writing process. On reflection, when appropriating testimony I have found that it is during moments of violation, misrecognition and doubt where critical ethical considerations emerge for practitioners. Heddon (2008) explains that in the context of autobiographical performance, "[a] sense of betrayal is, perhaps, also greater, given that trust is a key component of most intimate relationships and it is

within such relationships that one can arguably become most exposed and therefore ‘known’” (p. 143). I argue that in the context of verbatim theatre the ethical stakes of betrayal expose critical tensions that require articulation in order to benefit practitioners’ approaches to testimony. Rather than concealing ethical discomfort, theatre practitioners should be encouraged to share transactional moments, including moments of disjuncture and failure, as these reflections dictate shifts in practice.

### **What are the responsibilities of the playwright appropriating trauma-related testimony to an audience?**

Recognising the importance of remaining vigilant about my relationships with verbatim subjects helped provide answers to my third question regarding my responsibilities as a playwright appropriating war-related testimonies for an audience. In many ways my previous work has focused on the experience of subjects throughout the creation of script, yet at times anxiety about how subjects would feel or respond to my interpretations of their life experiences took precedence over how the audience might respond to such experiences presented on stage. The manner in which audiences are encouraged to identify with verbatim subjects’ stories matters as the practitioners’ interpretations have real-world effects. For example, in the creation of *This Much is True* the most realistic portrayals of interviewees did not, despite my initial intentions, equal the most ethically appropriate representation of the Menezes family. This was because the characters of Alex, Vivian and Patricia were framed exclusively within their grief and struggle, resulting in a singling out of the family as the tragic other, a portrayal reinforced by the Menezes characters’ juxtaposition alongside characters that were more heightened in their representation. As Salverson (2001) has underlined, when “testimonial theatre [...] relies on ‘instinct’; and denies technique” the play takes the form of “a dramatic structure dependent upon the unconscious structures of ideology and trauma that emerge in moments of vulnerability and confusion” (p. 125). Rather than maintaining the most realistic portrayals of verbatim subjects, what proved more effective in the making of *Yardbird* was highlighting the artifice that takes place in verbatim theatre. Therefore, in *Yardbird* I incorporated references to my presence as a playwright as a form of textual reflexivity (Bottoms, 2006). This allowed opportunities for audiences to both listen effectively to the stories conveyed whilst being critical of the manner in which interviews were conducted. In the context of war, this approach



also operated to challenge audiences' preconceptions about soldiers' experiences of war and home life. In addition, thinking-through transcription in *Yardbird* with attention to theatrical language became a key component in relation to creating more heightened aesthetic representations designed to engage audiences.

Running parallel to the playwright's responsibilities to the audience is the importance of collaborating with actors in an effort to provide new insights for the development of the script. Collaboration allows ethical responsibility for the theatrical translation of verbatim subjects' stories to be shared by other theatre practitioners. Furthermore, my PaR case studies clarified the importance of re-affirming my role as a playwright throughout the creative process. While the material in the play is generated from the stories of others, the composition and the interpretation of these stories are my own. Rather than asserting that the playtext is a precise rendering of the words spoken, it is important to acknowledge my appropriation of the material. This is particularly important when sharing the experiences of others whose lives have been affected by acts of violence as encouraging the exactness of the interview – rather than consider wider theatrical possibilities – risks making personal stories appear banal. What is more, the responsibilities to verbatim subjects and audiences are symbiotic rather than mutually exclusive, as finding appropriate modes for effectively conveying the experiences of verbatim subjects to audiences via performance is critical for enhancing a connection based on a “respect for difference” (Ridout, 2009, p. 54).

**How might the outcomes of this PaR investigation into the agency of the playwright offer a new approach and initiate critical thinking amongst theatre practitioners and scholars regarding the role of the writer in verbatim theatre?**

The outcomes of this PaR thesis revealed significant shifts in my practice but also prompted alternative approaches and practical considerations for other theatre practitioners working with personal testimony. These strategies included: listening beyond traumatic experiences; participating in interviewees' activities; and finding a clear organising principle. Participating in kinetic ethnography, which entails exploring interviewees' cultural objects, such as Jason's Harley-Davidson motorcycle, provide key metaphors for the playwriting process. Jason's emphasis on the act of riding a motorcycle operated as a metaphor for a soldier's survival in *Yardbird*.

In addition, finding the central question driving the play and establishing a clear organising principle helped me to separate personal attachments in the selection of

testimony. Rather than reverting to standard modes of interweaving and intercutting I had developed in my own practice (evidenced in my writing of *The Kratos Effect*), exploring other practitioners' models of theatre-making aided my writing of *Yardbird*. Moisés Kaufman's 'organising principle' (Brown, 2005; Kaufman & Tectonic Theatre Project, 2001) became essential for clarifying the through-lines that were most effective for conveying soldiers' and military families' experiences to an audience. Abiding by a clear organising principle, paired with an awareness of how frames of identification can operate in performance, helped me to work through emotional attachments to particular stories that did not fit within this framework. This approach to framing the material meant that primary and secondary characters were clearly established. While Heddon (2009) forewarns against the risk of 'doubly silencing' verbatim subjects whose unheard voices are often excluded a second time when their narratives are omitted from the resulting play, I contend that describing the potential models of verbatim plays and explaining to verbatim subjects how the framing processes operate in the initial stages of the process may help curtail feelings of exclusion.

Overall, this PaR investigation affirms the importance of evaluating transactional moments that impact on verbatim practice. In light of representing war-related trauma, reflecting on transactional moments is critical for the writing process. Articulating the issues that occur – or what Lane (2010) recognises as the conflict experienced by the verbatim playwright caught between “respecting the source material and crafting a theatrical experience” (p. 77) – can reveal the ethical tensions and theatrical possibilities that are significant to verbatim playwriting. Therefore, the findings of this investigation lead to further questions regarding the role of the playwright and transactional moments that enhance ethical and aesthetic debates regarding the use of personal testimony. From the results of this research project, it is my recommendation that emphasis be placed on the interview setting, where important interactions and ruminations occur, which, in turn, significantly influence the playwright's approach to the writing process.

Furthermore, practical reflections in verbatim practice across a spectrum of subjects aid in the understanding of those practitioners engaging with specific communities. My approach to dramatising military narratives in *Yardbird* was enhanced by insights provided by members of the cast and creative team of *Black Watch*. Their perspectives on the challenges they encountered when interviewing soldiers and

creating a theatrical presentation of war-related trauma influenced my own approach to framing soldiers' and military families' experiences. In light of my findings, I share the same stance as Michael Balfour, who contends that "writing about the qualities and texture of limits, failures, ethics is where the field needs to focus if it is to better understand itself" (Balfour in Flade, 2014). As I have mentioned previously, encouraging practitioners to articulate the failures and assess the negotiations inherent in verbatim practice might provide a clearer range of models in relation to translating testimony for future practitioners to consider.

### **Research Outcomes and Key Debates**

In light of my findings, let me return to the conflict inherent in the critical debates between scholars and practitioners regarding how, and to what purpose, trauma-related testimony is gathered and aestheticised for verbatim theatre. The urgency of the debate centres on to what extent the use of verbatim dialogue in performance (which is selectively gathered from individuals, many of whom have witnessed traumatic events or social injustices) is used for raising awareness about real-world dilemmas, or alternatively mined for the pleasure of an audience. The controversy surrounding what is ethically-appropriate in terms of the theatrical translation of testimony concerns issues of emotional connection and critical distance; more specifically, how an audience is encouraged to respond to the performance of 'real' accounts, and at what cost to the participants are their private experiences recontextualised and exhibited in performance.

Advocates for the use of personal testimony in performance suggest that theatre is an ideal medium to garner meaningful encounters between verbatim subjects, practitioners and audiences. Optimistic in his claims, Derek Paget (1987) predicts that there is potential in the methods of verbatim practice for "reclaiming and celebrating" experiences that are "perennially at the margins of the news" (p. 336). Building on the promise of the genre to mobilise disenfranchised voices, D. Soyini Madison (2003) identifies testimonial performance as a site where "moral responsibility and artistic excellence culminate in the active intervention to *break through* unfair closures and *remake* the possibility for new openings to a shared center" (p. 481). As for why the theatre is an ideal medium to represent unheard voices, the playwright Robin Soans, who credits himself for "the flourishing of the form" (p. 43), endorses the notion that

“great drama gives playgoers a heightened emotional experience when strong narrative combines with the empathy that comes from recognition” (Soans in Hammond and Steward 2008, p. 41). Soans’ declared intent in verbatim theatre is “to use people’s real words to move us to a new understanding of ourselves” (p. 41). Often attempting to transfer a feeling of responsibility to the audience, some verbatim playwrights position the audience in the role of the interviewer. As Emily Mann (1997) outlines in *Still Life*, “the characters speak directly to the audience so that the audience can hear what I heard, experience what I experienced” (p. 34), and in doing so playwrights often omit their own presence in the playtext. Rightfully conscious of the complexity of representing individuals who have endured disturbing events, Amanda Stuart-Fisher (2011a), after working closely with mothers of sexually abused children in her own practice, argues that despite the levels of appropriation in verbatim theatre, the genre does afford verbatim subjects some agency and benefit by taking part.

However, balanced against claims about the potential of verbatim practice for establishing important connections between verbatim subjects, practitioners and audiences, some scholars are concerned – and with good reason – that theatre practitioners actively choose to brush aside the mediation involved in the research process and during the theatrical presentation of testimony. Stephen Bottoms (2006) and Deirdre Heddon (2008) are particularly wary of the over-emphasis on word-for-word dialogue in verbatim theatre, adamant in their belief that hyperrealist approaches to testimony suggest a ‘truthful’ authenticity in the presentation of the material. This anti-theatrical illusion, often underscored by the omission of the playwright from the playtexts, risks giving the impression that audience members are being allowed unfiltered access to the private stories of others. In addition, in terms of verbatim war plays, Sara Brady (2012) pinpoints a key problem of aesthetics in verbatim, noting that hyperrealism can compromise the practitioner’s critical message by disengaging the audience due to a lack of theatrical activity. More concerned about the ethical consequences of more literalist approaches to testimonial theatre, Julie Salverson (2001) takes an interventionist stance, connecting practitioners’ tendencies to strip away theatricality with a preoccupation with the most traumatic aspects of subjects’ experiences. Such an uncritical approach is more exploitative than empowering for participants, thereby invalidating admirable claims that theatre approached in this way is “about connection” (p. 119).

My own position on verbatim theatre reflects and reacts against aspects of both sides of this argument. While verbatim playwriting is an appropriative act consistently fraught with ethical concerns, the form does allow purposeful meetings between playwrights and verbatim subjects where preconceptions can be challenged and important alternative histories can be dramatised for the consideration of an audience. However, I distance myself from the overblown declarations of solidarity with verbatim subjects, such as Soans' pronouncement that verbatim theatre "literally [...] allows people to speak for themselves" (Soans in Hammond and Steward, 2008, p. 33) or the playwright David Hare's own validation that verbatim theatre is an exemplary egalitarian art-form, suggesting, "isn't it the noblest function of democracy to give a voice to a voiceless?" (Hare in Soans, 2005, p. 112). Ill-considered statements (which I myself accepted early in my practice), however well-meaning, camouflage the imbalance of power between practitioners and participants, further obscuring the ethical conflicts inherent in the dramatisation of personal testimony.

My own creative practice exhibits a combination of heightened aestheticisation and anti-theatrical tendencies; measured first against how I think my representations might affect interviewees, and then how my aesthetic framing of the testimony might be interpreted by an audience. Though I am object to the hyperrealism that punctuates the intonations, coughs and ticks in some plays that suggest a pure version of testimony, I also have reservations about the presumed superiority of the meta-theatrical approaches that Heddon (2008) and Bottoms (2006) propose as necessary in the presentation of testimony. My concern is that shallow gestures pointing towards the mediation of verbatim practice can excuse dramatisations that suit the playwright's purpose, thereby freeing them from the ethical consequences of representation just because they draw attention to theatre as a creative act. Salverson's (2001) illustration of the "erotics of injury" (p. 119) associated with sensationalising the pain of others leads me to believe that the verbatim playwright's self-awareness regarding the power of their position in verbatim practice is critical, particularly when witnessing narratives of conflict from combat veterans to bereaved families.

As verbatim practice involves real people, the ethical task of the playwright is to ask themselves a series of questions regarding the implications of their approach as they enter into the personal lives of interviewees, mindful of the impact of their aesthetic decisions on others. In order to situate my findings from my own creative practice and

the *Black Watch* interviews in the wider field, I engage with these arguments on the ethics of verbatim practice in a war-related context, breaking this argument down into three central categories: identification, meta-theatricality and participation.

### **Aesthetics, Identification and Ethics**

In defence of accusations of exploitation made against verbatim practitioners for purporting the authenticity of spoken testimony, I argue that the motivations behind less aestheticised approaches to testimony are more ethically complex than simply romanticising the truthfulness of testimony, particularly when those artistic choices incorporate themes of violence and loss. What is more critical is tracing the origins of the creative process back to the relationship between playwrights and verbatim subjects in the testimonial process, and how themes of responsibility and representation manifest themselves as part of the playwright's methodology from the outset.

Take for example Emily Mann's approach to war trauma in the creation of *Still Life*. Mann's (1997) impulse for creating a war play based on interviews was to confront audiences with the ongoing effects of the Vietnam War in the domestic realm, via the testimonies of Mark (a troubled vet), Nadine (Mark's mistress), and Cheryl (Mark's wife who Mark has subjected to psychological and physical abuse). The play overlaps monologues of suffering from these three characters, much like my organising approach to writing *The Kratos Effect*, thus linking personal admissions of physical abuse, torture and desire. In my view, Mann is not employing war-related testimony for the sake of exhibiting cruelty for an audience's pleasure, but rather she is attempting to extend the sense of responsibility she felt in the interview process to the spectators by placing the audience in the role of the interviewer. In bearing witness to the interviewees' stories, Mann describes *Still Life* (Mann in Greene, 2000) as "traumatic to write," explaining:

When I gathered that material I was so shattered by it I couldn't touch it for months. I was scared of knowing what I had learned, I was frightened of the responsibility I had. I was scared to what it did to me personally (p. 83).

I see a connection between Mann's aesthetic intention with Amanda Stuart-Fisher's (2009) claim that playwrights feel a greater responsibility to "the other" when they take on the role of a "listener" or "custodian" in the interview process (p. 114).

Despite this, Mann's theatrically bare recreation of the interview process, which concentrates on interviewees' personal misery, presents limitations for ethical

understanding. At times *Still Life*, in its anti-theatrical fixation on the personal anguish of those represented, feels relentlessly bleak, and in this way is indicative of Salverson's (2001) concern that trauma-fatigue (which can leave audiences feeling immobilised) is a defective aspect of testimonial theatre that requires scrutiny (p. 124). Such was the case in my creation of *The Kratos Effect*, where Mary's imprisonment and paranoia became the focus of her experience. This was also a problem in the creation of *This Much is True*. Despite the heightened theatricality of the multiple role-playing exhibited by characters Actors One, Two and Three, the naturalistic portrayal of the Menezes cousins – which fixated on their sorrow – diminished their personal strength and joy. Based on my findings, it is useful for playwrights to question the manner in which they identify with verbatim subjects in the research and creative process in order to improve ethical approaches to trauma-related testimony.

Heightened aestheticisations of personal testimony can also act to sensationalise the trauma of participants. In the pursuit of creating good drama practitioners can revert to “uncomplicated portrayals of victims, villains, and heroes...” (Salverson, 2001, p. 124). Simplified character portrayals can undermine the multifaceted experiences of those who have been affected by war-related violence. For instance, *Black Watch*, which integrates a combination of heightened theatricality, realism, and meta-theatrical techniques, illustrates a tension between encouraging critical distance and emotional connection. The theatrical ambition of *Black Watch*, which Davey Anderson (2011) describes as “an exercise in emotional manipulation”, paired with Burke's “stock-in-trade war movie characters” (Burke, 2011) at times devalues the personal experiences of the ex-soldiers interviewed for spectacle.

Despite *Black Watch*'s meta-theatrical critique of verbatim practice, the play relies on appealing to the audience's ethical response by dramatising the deaths of three Black Watch soldiers in the scene ‘Casualties’, which forms the narrative arch of the play. Replacing more realistic depictions of ex-soldier interviewees in favour of identifiable dramatic character types, the creative team risk encouraging a “romanticised identification” (Salverson, 2001, p. 124) with the fallen soldiers. In the creative team's desire to dramatically engage the audience, they inadvertently satisfy the audiences' desire to experience loss via the “our boys” (Hall, 2007, p. 101) narrative familiar from so many war films. Fundamentally, the aim of *Black Watch* is to analyse militarist attitudes regarding the Iraq War, but its rousing climax, fueled by

popular archetypes in war films, in favor of more pragmatic representations of the real soldiers interviewed, further separates military personnel from civilians.

These concerns regarding the balance of critical distance and emotional connection impacted upon my approach to the dramatic climax of *Yardbird*. In the pinnacle scene ‘Johnboy’, I distilled Sam’s testimony about his son’s confession to shooting Iraqi children in order to illustrate soldiers’ precarity, some of whom have killed in our name (including civilians). While self-conscious regarding the delicate balance of identification, I knew that concentrating solely on the most traumatic aspect of Sam’s loss, though dramatic, might encourage the audience to identify narcissistically with him based on pity. Therefore, I also integrated a heightened dramatisation of Sam’s joyful anecdote about his son. As Sam speaks, two soldiers in Iraq donning night goggles lie on the ground staring upwards at the night sky, thus contextualising Sam’s story. Recalling a story John once told him, Sam describes a time when his son was on patrol in Iraq with his buddy Nash. Nash remarked on some shooting stars that were flitting curiously upwards, to which John mockingly replied “You dumbass! Those aren't falling stars. They're shootin' at us!”. While I had hoped the story about John’s suicide would alert audiences to the everyday struggles affecting returning service members, their families and the rest of us more broadly, at the same time it was important to illustrate the complexity of Sam’s grief.

To return to Mann, Burke, and my own practice, the politics of empathy and identification creating drama from war-related testimony is a delicate operation that requires self-reflexivity. Too much emphasis on the most dramatic aspects of an individual’s testimony can interfere with the healthy, critical, and necessary distance between audience members and the verbatim subjects who playwrights seek to represent. If the intention of verbatim practitioners is to raise awareness of social injustice and violence, or to influence political change, then audiences, as suggested elsewhere by Salverson (2001) and Sontag (2003), need be encouraged to reflect more critically on how we as civilians are implicated in the narratives of violence depicted in the media and onstage.



## Meta-theatrical Gestures and Critical Distance

As a safeguard against uncritical, simplistic forms of representation in verbatim practice, some scholars offer practical aesthetic solutions to illustrate the complexity of utilising personal testimony in performance. As a critic of verbatim playwrights who cloak mediation in the name of authenticity, Bottoms (2006) makes a persuasive case for playwrights to be more self-reflexive in their aesthetic rendering, and suggests that they employ meta-theatrical techniques to excise any assumptions that verbatim theatre is an unmediated process. More than that, gestures towards mediation can interrupt audience members' over-identification with the representations of verbatim subjects. Bottoms' call for textual reflexivity intersects with Dominick LaCapra's (2001) conceptualisation of "empathetic unsettlement", which encourages the listener bearing witness to narratives of trauma to be "attentive" (p. 78) as they listen, reminding themselves that – though they might be moved by what is being said – the experiences are distinct to the teller.

Therefore, meta-theatrical techniques might appear to be a logical translation of empathetic unsettlement in verbatim practice, reminding audiences to maintain a "respect for difference" (Ridout, 2009, p. 54) by calling attention to the fact that the theatrical depiction of the personal experiences represented are different from their own (p.78). In the case of *Yardbird*, being textually reflexive meant a deliberate inclusion of instances when verbatim subjects questioned my motivations for developing a play based on war trauma. Inclusion of personal references to my presence as a playwright were effective meta-theatrical gestures intended to remind the audience that testimony is never objectively shaped.

Yet it is also important to consider how meta-theatrical gestures can be utilised superficially, giving practitioners leeway to ignore the consequences of their creative endeavours. Deirdre Heddon (2008), although sceptical of the ethics of verbatim, commends *Black Watch* as an exceptional model of blending personal testimony with fiction; particularly in its integration of the writer and his struggle to develop a relationship with the soldiers. Citing as an example the suspenseful scene in which Stewarty threatens to break the writers' arm, she contends that these actions – whether they have transpired or not – have little importance as the actions in *Black Watch* "draw attention to theatre as always a creative act, whether 'based' on interviews or meta-theatrical not" (p. 122). However, just as Heddon (2008) is critical of the ethics of

verbatim plays that rely heavily on the “ventriloquism” (p. 110) of testimony, it is curious that *Black Watch* escapes criticism due to its meta-theatrical approach. In my view, the portrayal of Stewarty as the ‘psychopath’, which was loosely inspired by a soldier coping with PTSD symptoms and who Burke had never met but had heard details about from the interviewees, presents a stereotype harmful to veterans. Moreover, Burke invited interviews with ex-Black Watch soldiers only to create Hollywood “stock-in-trade” (Burke, 2011) characters, which undermines Heddon’s ethical concerns that verbatim subjects are at risk of being “doubly silenced” after being requested to participate, only to be “passed over in favour of other voices who are given time in the spotlight” (p. 136). While I see the value of meta-theatricality, and heightened aestheticisation when appropriate, these approaches also carry ethical implications.

In turn, the *Black Watch* creative team did express an awareness of the ethical tensions inherent in their practice, but in their pursuit of theatrical spectacle and the making of good drama they allowed little room or evidenced very slight interest in challenging their own preconceptions or understanding of the real soldiers’ experiences. While I do not claim to understand what it is like to operate in a warzone, in my experience of creating *Yardbird* the damaging impact of “everyday militarism” (Mann, 1987, p. 35) – affecting service members and civilians alike – was tangible; a dynamic that requires critical reflection, not withdrawal. This is precisely why I contend that the interview process is also the site where the playwright needs to be open and vulnerable in their approach to testimony, allowing their own preconceptions and expectations as creatives to be challenged by verbatim subjects, particularly if their aim as practitioners is to employ personal testimony as a mode of critical reflection.

Returning to Bottoms’ (2006) assertions, while I share his concerns about the importance of acknowledging the mediation involved in verbatim practice, I reject his cynical appraisal of verbatim playwrights’ motivations for using personal testimony, based on Bottoms’ inability to distinguish the spoken words of living subjects from that of documents. Bottoms fails to grasp the intricate relationships forged between playwrights and verbatim subjects, and how the relationality or “transactional moments” (Clayton, 2015) between the two parties factor into the artistic choices made by practitioners, some of whom bear witness to stories of trauma. While it is helpful to critique the mediation of verbatim theatre in performance, too much emphasis on the

unreliability of performing testimony driven by a postmodern distrust of the 'real' can devalue the meaningful connections between practitioners and verbatim subjects in the process of interpretation. Therefore, with regard to drama and theatricality, the context of the relationship between interviewees and practitioners matters in terms of aesthetic decisions if we are to better understand the implications of utilising personal testimony in performance.

### **Participation and Valuable Relationships**

While there are no guarantees against misrepresentation or harm in verbatim theatre, it is necessary to consider the value of verbatim theatre itself from the beginning of the testimonial process through to the execution of the theatrical translation. Despite the genre's faults, Amanda Stuart-Fisher (2011a) defends verbatim theatre against critics on the basis that it allows verbatim subjects some critical distance from their own traumatic experiences. Based on my own practice, I wish to draw on two insights from verbatim subjects that support this argument.

After seeing *This Much is True*, Alex Pereira, the cousin of Jean Charles de Menezes, wrote to the cast and creative team expressing his gratitude for providing an alternative representation of the case to the public. In broken English he wrote:

Thanks for include everyone in the play, the film forgot the most important people in our fight for justice. It is so hard to see, but it is true. Congratulations to everyone involved, you all are doing a very good job, showing how much you knew [J]ean, how much we knew he was innocent in all the alegations [*sic*] [...] putting very clear how big were the lies. If anyone ask how important is this play, tel [*sic*] the person to see it and find out by himself (Pereira, 2009).

Meanwhile, in the case of *Yardbird* the former US marine Kenny, who spent three days trapped under an abandoned tank in Iraq, provided critical feedback after viewing footage of the first play reading, thus suggesting the value of allowing a participant critical distance from their own experiences. As Kenny reflected, "I have to say it was definitely different hearing someone else talk about the roughest three days of my life" (Williams, 2013). Extending his critique of the aesthetics of the play, Kenny commented on the use of montage to illustrate soldiers' resistance in terms of discussing war:

I also really liked how you had [showed] what [it] looked like when you called some of the people to interview them in the beginning. I thought

that kind of showed how not all people like or are willing to talk about their own experiences (Williams, 2013).

In addition, Kenny identified how the juxtaposition of testimony from different service members “made you see the similarities between two people stories [*sic*]. Kind of made me not feel so alone with some of the things I went threw [*sic*], saw and thought” (Williams, 2013).

While I believe there is an imbalance of power in verbatim theatre that needs to be acknowledged, I agree with Amanda Stuart-Fisher (2011a) that we need to consider that the process is potentially valuable for verbatim subjects. I liken the potential of verbatim theatre to provide trauma survivors’ with some agency over their experiences to Lisa Fitzpatrick’s (2011) reading of Dori Laub’s (1992) work on testimony. Witnessing trauma in a performance context allows “individuals [to] perform histories that support their sense of their own subjectivity and position them as agents rather than victims” (p. 61). Being more mindful as a playwright of the intricacies of the witnessing process, rather than claiming the capacity to give voice, means there is the potential through creative encounters to promote the agency of verbatim subjects affected by war trauma.

### **Forward Thinking and Future Practice**

In closing, the ongoing struggle for verbatim playwrights is concerned with how to represent empathetic portrayals of verbatim subjects while simultaneously encouraging audiences to maintain a critical distance from the lives of the verbatim subjects represented onstage. What is more, playwrights are faced with challenges regarding how to respectfully represent verbatim subjects without compromising drama and theatricality. Therefore, the interview process, as I have argued, is important to the ethical dramaturgy of the verbatim play and warrants further critical examination. Verbatim theatre presents playwrights with a psychoanalytical dilemma of identification that begins at an interpersonal level between practitioners and subjects in the interview process, which can have social and political repercussions. In order to understand more deeply the ethical relationship between witnessing testimony and the aesthetics of playwriting, it is essential that there is more investigation of the moral obligations the playwright takes on as a listener and dramatist in the testimonial process. To clarify my

position, I return to Laub (1992) once more. He surmises that the listener of traumatic testimony:

has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma and a witness to himself. It is only in this way, through his simultaneous awareness of this continuous flow of those inner hazards both in the trauma witness and in himself, that he can become the enabler of testimony –the one who triggers its initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and of its momentum (p. 58).

While I remain wary of rhetoric around the healing power of verbatim, I nonetheless liken Laub's description of the role of the "listener" of trauma to the unique role the verbatim playwright takes on as a co-participant in the testimonial process. This is why verbatim theatre is more complicated than a transparent rendering of 'real' stories. The potential for a deeper understanding between verbatim subjects, practitioners and audience members is also why the genre should not be dismissed as exploitative or somehow a lesser art-form because of its reliance on personal testimony as the starting point for dramatisation.

This PaR investigation focused on private and public negotiations from the perspective of the playwright grappling with themes of militarism and trauma in verbatim theatre. It is my hope that these deliberations will offer other theatre practitioners and scholars alike new considerations regarding the use of testimony in performance. Examining the transactional moments that take place between verbatim subjects and practitioners creates a series of ethical boundaries and theatrical possibilities that aid the dramaturgy of a verbatim play.

With regard to the limitations of this investigation, more critical focus can be applied to how transactional moments between verbatim subjects and actors impact on the staging of a play. As Mary Luckhurst (2011) has addressed elsewhere, the presence of actors and the value of their experiences representing the testimonies of others is consistently overlooked in scholarship. Working more closely with actors as a part of this investigation would have provided more insights into the theatrical possibilities to consider in the development of the script. In addition, studying the audience reception of verbatim plays with an emphasis on the modes of identification that operate in performance would benefit theatre scholarship. These findings would aid in addressing concerns regarding the ethical consideration of "speaking on behalf of others" (Heddon, 2008, p. 128), and how an audience interprets trauma-related narratives. Finally, case studies investigating verbatim subjects' responses to how their narratives are collected

by practitioners, coalesced into a script and performed, might provide insights in terms of what areas of verbatim practice need to be improved.

Regarding the implications of future practice in verbatim playwriting, the outcomes of this investigation are not offered in order to establish a set of guidelines for verbatim practice, as different subject matters and interviewee circumstances require unique modes of conveying a particular story. Rather the aim of this investigation is to make future practitioners aware of the issues they need to take into consideration from the outset of their research and throughout the process of compiling a verbatim playtext. In my view scholarship examining authenticity and veracity should consider the complexity of framing narratives faced by verbatim playwrights and their political implications, particularly through the form of studio-practice. In turn these PaR case studies might help practitioners identify more appropriate models for conveying the story they wish to tell in the writing process.

All things considered, it is my prediction that playwrights will continue to utilise war-related testimony as a vehicle to examine global situations such as the Syrian refugee crisis, the Western response to the mass shooting in Paris on 13 November 2015 and the continuing conflict with ISIS, as well as unknown incidents to come. Bearing this in mind, now more than ever, it is important to consider how – and to what ends – narratives of trauma are framed and the implications of these interpretations. In particular, when the verbatim subjects involved in dramatic projects have been affected by traumatic events, it is essential to consider to what purpose dramatists facilitate and appropriate narratives of conflict for the writing of a play. While there are no set guidelines for verbatim practice that will be applicable to the vast range of potential subjects nor is there a set of techniques that will fully alleviate the tensions that emerge when playwrights facilitate personal testimony with the intention of creating a performance. While shared deliberations might enhance knowledge of how practitioners can approach their creative methodology, those who seek to translate life stories centred on trauma must be ever vigilant to possible ethical failures and the risk of betrayal that might arise in verbatim practice. This self-awareness rather than being bound by the codified standards and expectations of objectivity or truth in their interpretations is what should guide practitioners. The more models and critical reflections that are offered, the more playwrights will develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the complexity and value of translating testimony for performance. In short, fostering the

collective knowledge that verbatim playwrights have acquired in the field and assimilating thoughtful deliberations that illustrate the tensions and potential of dramatising testimony will improve ethical practice as well as introducing new approaches and theatrical possibilities going forward.

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## **Appendices**

# *The Kratos Effect*

WRITTEN BY SARAH BECK MARCH 20, 2011

This is a verbatim play based on the testimony from interviews with those caught in the aftermath of the shooting of Brazilian immigrant Jean Charles de Menezes at Stockwell tube station in July 2005. Though none of the people involved in this story knew Jean Charles their lives were affected and subsequently changed as a result of his death.

The text comes from interviews conducted with the women who maintain the shrine at Stockwell underground station and members of the Justice4Jean campaign. The text is written to emulate the speech patterns of the interviewees. Additional supporting materials for the text include audio clips/television reports from media coverage of the shooting.

**CHARACTERS** (actors two women, one male)

**MARY/GARETH:** (two parts, one actress)

**MARY**—is a white South African woman in her late fifties. She is a human rights activist and is one of the shrine-keepers at Stockwell tube station.

**GARETH**—Is in her late fifties, British white and well-spoken, calm yet firm in her speech. She is a famous human rights lawyer. Her firm represents the de Menezes family.

**CHRYSOULLA/YASMIN:** (two parts, one actress)

**CHRYSOULLA**—is Greek and in her late twenties and one of the shrine-keepers at Stockwell station. She is very bubbly and excitable and speaks with a thick Greek accent.

**YASMIN**—is British Asian in her late twenties- very witty and cynical. She is a human rights activist and spokesperson for the Justice4Jean campaign.

**ASAD**—is British Asian in his mid thirties and has a Northern accent. He is a human rights activist and an active member of the Justice4Jean campaign.

Additionally, there are a few media clips and voice-overs.

## **SCENE ONE: THE SHRINE**

The action takes place at the shrine to Jean Charles de Menezes at Stockwell tube station. The shrine is flimsy and worn in appearance. At the centre of the shrine is a 2 x 4 box. In the centre of the box is an image of Jean Charles de Menezes surrounded by tiny blue tiles. His picture against the blue tiles is encapsulated by an outer diamond shape of bright yellow against an emerald green rectangle- to emulate the Brazilian flag. At the ledge of the box rest candles against a small mirror. This box is against a large flimsy wall made of plywood. The wall is covered in laminated articles about the shooting, political cartoons, cards and personal letters from visitors from around the



world. A panel at the top of the plywood wall reads, “Jean Charles de Menezes: Jan 1978- July 2005.” At the foot of the shrine are vases of dying flowers and potted plants. Amongst the dying flowers are sporadic bundles of fresh flowers from visitors who have come to the shrine to paytribute.

*MARY and CHRYSOULLA are working diligently cleaning up the shrine and replacing the dead flowers with fresh ones as they do every Friday.*

MARY: I had brought these potted plants. And they’ve survived.

CHRYSOULLA: I come here every week but initially there were about five people. I just noticed the amount of crosses and Catholic images and Orthodox images. The whole spiritual side of this struck me.

MARY: She was wanting to stick something up on the board.

CHRYSOULLA: MARY is the lady who helps here, and, she saw me. I was putting this up. MARY stopped me and said.

MARY: Hi. My name’s Mary. Would you like to join us?

CHRYSOULLA: So I started doing that. It was exactly two years ago. It was Friday the 28th of October 2005. It’s exactly two years I’ve been coming every Friday.

MARY: I came here, and there were flowers here, and there was Tanja, a Mexican woman, and Dagmar, a Brazilian woman, and they started cleaning up the flowers. And I joined them. And it was a real mess you know, people were still bringing flowers and there were dead flowers underneath, so we started cleaning it. They were listening to people’s comments-And that’s what Tanja started. So we started coming here every Friday.  
(referring to vendors)  
They wanted to move it.

*MARY and CHRYSOULLA continue cleaning up the rubbish around the shrine.*

*FX we hear snippets of audio recording of the flower vendor next to the shrine being interviewed... <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nb-HIHymkk>*

FLOWER VENDOR (AUDIO):  
Oh yeah but at the end of the day he should have stopped and surrendered shouldn’t he? If it

happened in his own country he would have been shot down as well.

*(beat)*

Cause his visa had run out- he's not going to have armed police run after him cause his visa has run out, has he? So- the police were protecting the people traveling on the tube so I don't see anything wrong in what the police have done at all.

*(beat)*

I don't know- it is a lot of times to shoot him, it is a lot of times to shoot him.

*(beat)*

Five at first. Five, and then- No three first! Then five and then it went upto eight.

*(beat)*

Well they told him to surrender didn't they? They told him to stop and he carried on running so-

MARY:

The flower sellers were saying this is too much. Can you move it out of the way here? Well we wanted something more permanent. Something that will stay until this thing goes through-

*(beat)*

When the station closed these guys were coming in and re-tiling the front of the station and putting new lights in. There was a Portuguese guy I think he was one of the senior contractors and he then built the box, screwed it in and bolted it to the wall. We met the guys who actually built the box they were two railway contractors they were saying, "Ahh no we just built it." We kind of thanked them and they were "Ahh no, no we just built it, we were just doing what we're told we don't know what it's all about. We're not interested. We were just told to build the box." But the guy who instructed them to, he knew what it was all about. And we got the box. And then it's been there ever since, three years.

CHRYSOULLA:

What happens is erm, they decided to keep it alive because Jean Charles's mother to all of the ladies who have helped here, she said in Portuguese "Mantana chama viva" -"Keep the Flame Alive," so that was her request. When she left England she asked people here "Keep the flame alive."

*(beat)*

So Mary sort of recruited me here. Her profession- she's an artist. So she said to me I would love to do something for Jean Charles. So I work for a place one day every week and we put this together. We have a Brazilian flag with Jean in the middle. And then someone said we

should light candles and then a mirror to make the flames look a bit, you know more, make the flames look

*(excited, struggling to explain in English)*

Reflected you know in the mirror!

MARY: A guy stopped me- he was from Brazil. He was going back to Brazil the next day and he wanted me to take a picture of him. It's become a place of- what's the word...? Pilgrimage.

CHRYSOULLA: A lot of Brazilian people think that through their prayers he will be feeling better. He would feel the prayers. He would feel that people care for him. Wherever he is now. So that is a very sweet way of thinking that he will be in a good place, the justice still has to go on, because also we believe in the divine justice.

MARY: There's a threshold that people cross over- this is a place of protest.

CHRYSOULLA: We put this together to raise awareness. And make people realise what's happening. I'm mainly-I would say in charge of the shrine.

MARY: A lot of women stop and look but they end up saying, "I want to get involved here but I've got a husband back home."

*(beat)*

She's been getting more confident.

CHRYSOULLA: This is a tribute to him. We want to keep his memory alive. We think he deserves justice.

MARY: Chrysoulla- she has strong religious views, she's Greek Orthodox. There are sort of things about the Bible unquestioned, like, 'Erm can you really believe that?' But you know she does, it makes her being here more powerful really. She's see Jean Charles as a sort of...

CHRYSOULLA: We are trying to keep his memory alive and remind people that this is that. They are fighting a legal battle, the biggest effort is being made by the solicitors, the family solicitors, they have a very big, a very responsible job to do. So we are doing something very small. But that's all I can do for my part. I'm not a legal expert.

## SCENE TWO: WHISPERS

WITNESS (AUDIO): An Asian guy ran on to the train. As he ran, he was hotly pursued by

*(beat)*

They held it down to him and unloaded five shots into him.

ASAD:

I work a lot on civil liberties cases and things, deaths in custody and I worked for Amnesty and involved with- in organizations etc. So when the shooting took place at Stockwell tube station, Jean's cousins were taken by police, they weren't told anything. They ended up going to the police station themselves. So they actually found out very late on that Jean had- they were very worried about him you know. He hadn't shown up for work. The police took the cousins to a hotel way out in South London.

Put them in a hotel with no telephone, they took the telephone line with a police officer there and just basically kept them away from everybody, because by then they knew they had made a major mistake.

*(beat)*

I think personally, they were working on the basis that these are immigrants, they're not English at that point apart from Alex, Patricia and Alessandro barely spoke English. You know they wouldn't know what to do. And those first few hours are very crucial.

CHRYSOULLA:

To be honest, when I first heard that someone was shot dead by the police. Oops! They found a terrorist. They killed one person and they saved 200 people. And I thought unfortunately it had to be done. That was Saturday morning.

MARY:

After this happened Immediately I heard that someone'd been shot dead here, jumping down the barrier and running downstairs, I thought that-

CHRYSOULLA:

Mary lives around the corner. She said to me...

MARY:

I had to check and see if my son was okay.

CHRYSOULLA

When they said someone was shot she immediately thought it would be him.

MARY

That could be...My son is 23

ASAD:

There's a lot of dimensions to it. There's a family dimension.

You know you're going through something most people haven't gone through In terms of losing a loved one under horrific circumstances.

MARY:

My son, walking from the barber, rapping to himself and sweating

MARY:

He's-he's Jean Charles's colouring- brown hair and taller, but I thought that could have been him because, he was...

CHRYSOULLA

Then Sunday morning I was listening to BBC News and when they said he was Brazilian I thought, my god, they don't even have to tell me he's innocent...

MARY

when they were teenagers they'd jump over- if they wanted to get from here to Brixton and they didn't have money or whatever, just- You know teenage boys.

CHRYSOULLA

CHRYSOULLA: The first thing I had to do is check and see if I knew him because my friends. A lot of my friends in London, most of them are Brazilian. In London, I have a lot of Brazilian friends! A lot of Brazilian friends! They are very warm people, very friendly... As a Greek person I see a lot of similarities in our cultures. Even though we are miles and miles far away from each other, we are very similar. I was in Brazil that year, four months before he died. I went to Brazil for the first time and it was a dream of a lifetime.

*(beat)*

So I have a lot of Brazilian friends. I had to check if I know him, who is this poorman?

*CHRYSOULLA leaves the shrine. She steps forward grabbing a red cardigan. She clips her hair up into a bun. She is now Yasmin Khan*

MARY: So he once got a thing from the rail, I think it was transport for London, some kind of fine, you know, that he's got from doing that. And I thought, God, that could be him

### **SCENE THREE: WHEELS IN MOTION**

*Lights are flashing and Yasmin Khan steps forward addressing the public at a press conference on behalf of Jean's family.*

YASMIN: I think what the family campaign has seen in the last few weeks is a Laurel and Hardy police operation. There are three stages to this- There's a shoot-to-kill policy nobody knows where it came from where the guidelines are and how it's implemented. There's the incompetence of the police on the day and there are operational failures. And there is now, thirdly, the attempted cover-up and misleading by Ian Blair, the Metropolitan Police and with government officials colluding with this.

*She steps out of the flashing and begins a casual conversation with the audience. Unwinding she pulls out her tobacco and rolls a cigarette as she speaks.*

YASMIN: Erm I heard about the shooting on the Friday, about half ten/eleven. I was in a café, a Portuguese café Gray's Inn Road just by King's Cross and at that point the radio had just announced that an Asian man had been shot. I was sitting with a friend of mine, initially it was just, you know it was, that time in London was terrible wasn't it? You know I- obviously I'm usually suspicious of news reports anyway erm so there was that and I remember feeling quite sad and scared actually. I had been on the 7th of July at work at Russell Square where the bus had exploded just outside our offices and we were kind of in the offices all day. The 7th of July

was really kind of poignant and personal and then obviously with the 21st of July it was all of the sudden someone getting shot- was all pretty frightening.

*(beat)*

So that happened and then it's just what everyone was talking about for 48 hours. Then I remember on the Saturday night getting a text message, I was at a friend's house, saying the guy who was shot was Brazilian and he has nothing to do with terrorism and immediately me and some friends got on the internet. And then a really strange thing happened that night. Loads of text messages went around me and my friends and I don't really know who started it off but someone said you know someone's been killed, let's go to Stockwell tube station in the morning and hold a vigil and this kind of just went around our friends. Yeah, it was really sad. I have a particular relationship with Brazil. I had been over already that year- so it was all felt kind of quite fresh to me- I just remember turning around and talking to a guy, I said you know isn't it terrible and this guy happened to be- he just turned around and said to me "Yeah well he was one of my really good friends." Oh fuck what do you say? You know? 'I'm really sorry for your loss,' and then I guess that activist thing just kicked in and I was like, "Listen I don't know a thing about this stuff but you probably need a good lawyer and here's my number, if anyone wants to contact me feel free to do so I've got friends who work in activism and human rights stuff." And I didn't really think anything of it. I kind of went home and was quite upset that afternoon and I kind of live locally as well and then I got this phone call from Alex who is one of the cousins and he just said...

ALEX (V.O.): I don't know who you are but someone gave me your number and I need a lawyer and I'm in this hotel in

YASMIN: He was just rambling incoherently. And I was like okay well I'll try to sort something out and then I phoned my friend Asad

ASAD: I can remember I was walking down Oxford Street, it was on a Saturday, I got a call from this guy saying-

ALEX (V.O.) What should I do?

ASAD: Well this is my advice. You need a lawyer, you need the best lawyer. So I rang Gareth.

YASMIN: Asad phoned me back and then very quickly Gareth was on the case-

ASAD: *(to Yasmin)* You should go to Kingston.

YASMIN: And to put it all in context I was twenty-four at the time and I had been involved in, you know activism for a long time around anti-racism and you know anti-war stuff some things in university but never a death in custody. So I remember yeah just getting in a cab and going to Kingston, getting there and you know there were all of these journalists there and it was just in the middle of nowhere and his family were kind of walking around totally dazed. It's enough to feel- who the fuck am I to kind of come into the space like 'Hello', knowing nothing of what I'm doing waiting for the lawyers to turn up.

ASAD: And we went straight down to the hotel and Gareth went to the hotel and talked to the family. Most police officers know Gareth Pierce, a big human rights and civil liberties lawyer. Got the telephone line, got a telephone and really changed the situation. And immediately the family had legal representation.

YASMIN: Gareth was just on it straight away, got the phone lines set up, explained what was going on and at the end of the night I thought wow what a good thing I did today, I helped this family get a lawyer and I really thought that was it and I kind of turned around and then I was kind of like "Okay. Great to meet you all good luck, good luck Gareth, good luck family." I was really thinking I was just going to go to work tomorrow nothing's going to come of this and then the lawyers just kind of turned around and went well...

GARETH: No you're obviously going to be around tomorrow we need someone to go to the family while they identify the body, we need someone to go to the coroner's court and also do you know someone who speaks Portuguese?

YASMIN: 'Cause no one could really communicate with the family. And that is just really how it started. I think was the most insane day of my life. I was going to be involved in what was going to... It was totally insane I just remember sitting there in silence with Asad in the evening and me just kind of going  
(to ASAD)  
I can't do this. I don't know what I'm doing, I've never done this before-



ASAD: You know you have now. We all have to get on with it even if no one has done it before, something terrible's happened.

#### **SCENE FOUR: WRITINGS ON THE WALL**

*We hear audio of Police Commissioner Ian Blair's statement about the shooting. (can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=siTJavjkdM&feature=related>)*

*CHRYSOULLA and MARY are pinning more and more articles to the shrine.*

IAN BLAIR (AUDIO): The information I have available is that this shooting is directly linked to the ongoing and expanding anti-terrorist operation. I need to make clear that any death is deeply regrettable. But as I understand the situation the man was challenged and refused to obey police instructions.

CHRYSOULLA: I was almost hoping he did something wrong. That he gave the wrong impression that it would be a genuine mistake on behalf of the police. But because he didn't give any excuse. His behaviour was perfect I thought why did this happen? So I started coming here.

MARY: When I heard that actually he hadn't jumped, and they were lies, I thought now hang on, this is serious.

CHRYSOULLA: He wasn't running. People have kept the initial impression- that was a rumour that spread in the early days. And the public they tend to keep the first impression. And when it just came out later, it's in small print and people will remember, "Ahh the truth came out six weeks later and he wasn't running." No- People don't remember that. They remember the running.

MARY: I can understand that if he had been running, and he had acted as they said he had acted, in the context of the attempted bombings from the day before, it could be understood that they could have got it wrong.

CHRYSOULLA: He walked down calmly. He sat down reading his newspaper and he didn't give them any reason to suspect him. And he didn't realise he- what was going to happen to him. So I thought, Oh my God I do the same, I use my travel card every morning and I start to take my free newspaper, the Metro newspaper.

ASAD: We were trying to make it very real for people. So people could know that this is a real person. So that it's easier for people to connect. And people see,

actually that could have been me cause that's just someone going on their way to work, and that's a connection we wanted people to feel.

CHRYSOULLA: I realised that what he was doing that day I do everyday.

ASAD: This was not about a migrant, it was about just somebody who could have been like millions of people every day. And that's partly why we believe there were all those leaks from the police, about you know, he was an illegal immigrant, the rape allegation all those- which were really about dehumanizing him, moving him back in terms to the other so that there would be less empathy felt for him in terms of him as a person.

MARY: But the fact that he hadn't jumped, he had been walking, he, erm, and they were lying about it. You know that they had lied about it.

CHRYSOULLA: Just leave the man alone, he's dead. You can say he was innocent, that it was a genuine mistake and we will investigate. I would have respected that much more than all this cover-up and to slander him because I think they killed him twice. I think they killed him that day when they shot him dead and they killed him a second time with all the things they said about him.

ASAD: Now they were saying it wasn't even his clothes that was an issue, it was the way he was moving his hands, he was on his mobile phone, it was all sorts of those things. Okay, he's- the man's late for work, you get back on the bus, you tell them, "Look I'm really sorry, I'm running late, I'm going to try to get there."

*(beat)*

They lost the argument to the baggy jeans and jumping over the- because of obviously, the CCTV footage showed that- that was all incorrect. Even, Ivor, you know the surveillance guy said Jean moved his hands to his sides and it's at that point he thinks he's going to pull the trigger. But. Ivor's been all the way on the bus with him, he's sitting on a tube carriage, you can pretty much look: There's a man wearing a T-shirt and a denim jacket and he's, nothing bulky, no wires, no bags, no nothing.

CHRYSOULLA: And another thing they said to me was, he was a man who never felt cold easily. On a cold day he would go out in a T-Shirt. He wouldn't mind the cold weather, yet some people complain. So Vivian said to me, "No, my cousin never does that.

He's a very proper man." They said he was wearing a heavy jacket on a warm day, but she said to me, "Jean's not like that, he likes to wear light clothes," she couldn't believe it was him.

ASAD: In fact, ironically Ivor, the surveillance guy, looks more like a suicide bomber than anybody else.

CHRYSOULLA: You have to look at the bigger picture and the bigger picture for her is the war on terror, the wars on an international scale really not just here. There is the war in Iraq. So there is that- he's a victim of that war on terror.

*(beat)*

I wouldn't make the connection so strongly but she does. So she has a very interesting point of view. I think more of that, it's a terrible instance, it's a tragedy. They said they were using the operation Kratos, K-R-A-T-O-S which in Greek can mean many things...

ASAD: The police claim that operation Kratos wasn't in operation, cause in operation Kratos you have to give a command. And when the command is given, that basically means you can shoot to kill.

MARY: This was meant to terrify the public, to say "We will kill"

CHRYSOULLA: In Greek...Kratos- It can mean the state and power and I think In English they mentioned it on the BBC News, they gave a different English word to translate, because sometimes a Greek word has five, six English equivalents. But they used that word because it was the name of the operation and they, they said it was like a Greek tragedy, they said the word Kratos was like a Greek tragedy.

ASAD: They claim there was no command given at all on the operation, we say operation Kratos was in effect cause all you have to do is look at the police briefing in the morning- the firearms briefings, the firearms briefings talks about- they are determined killers. You're going to be up for it. You're going to be asked to do extraordinary things that you've never done before in your ordinary life. All the mindset becomes, you are about to deal with people who are going to potentially blow themselves up, blow you up.

MARY: They learnt about how to deal with suicide bombers from Israel.

CHRYSOULLA: I come from Greece and in Greece they say if one hair from your head falls- it's God's will.

ASAD: All day the situation was building and building and building. By the time they get to the carriage and by the time Ivor stands up and he says, "Here! Here!" As the officers, they enter, what else are they going to do but shoot that person, the person he's pointing to-

MARY: If it was a cock-up that's bad enough. If they've been instructed by the Israelis-

*CHRYSOULLA pulls her hair off of her shoulders and begins wrapping her hair and clips it into abun.*

CHRYSOULLA: If one hair falls... in Greece we say that a lot. I spoke to Patricia his cousin, the other day she said to me "Oh it was his time to go. No, it was his day."

*CHRYSOULLA takes out a lighter and begins to light one of the candles of the shrine. She then pulls a rollie from her pocket.*

ASAD: Somebody was going to get shot. We say shoot-to-kill, they say no.

MARY: You're creating enemies. You're creating war

#### **SCENE FIVE: SMOKE BREAK**

*Lighting the rollie CHRYSOULLA is now Yasmin. She is alone, addressing only the audience.*

YASMIN: I'm pretty much kind of, if Asad's the inspiration I'm the kind of the practical organiser so- because of my relationship with the family that's just kind of you know because I met them first, I speak Portuguese, I lived around here we would just kind of see each other socially a lot, my, I'm the one who has more of a relationship with the family and the legal team so I don't know. But it's something that...

*(beat)*

So many people have brought things to it so even if people have only been there on the sidelines through their experience and advice it's really kind of shaped things erm so- Although the other part is, is that sadly this isn't something I've particularly relished in, I have been kind of the organiser. This is all done in our free time in the evenings, at each other's homes, our own expenses. I remember my phone bill last summer was 150 quid like two months in a row. Being just so skint. There's nothing professional about this. We all have other commitments to our families, friends or other political things we might be doing. But for me, and other members of the campaign will have different experiences of it, but it's very hard to take any positive stuff out of it when you know despite the

fact that this is one of the most high profile deaths in custody- nothing has really come out of it. Nothing has really changed. We can sit here in this room and talk about my experience and talk about a play but actually nothing has come of it. No police officers have been held responsible.

The family are no closer to finding justice, And I think that's why people naturally perhaps come in and out of it because it is exhausting and draining and when you kind of sit around and you've had a shitty day, you can't help but talk about it and also about motivations I think it's healthy to kind of question your motivations I think because people always- I mean I got a load of shit from people I thought were my friends around that time kind of like, "Oh yeah she's just doing this to kind of get herself in the papers." I mean I think it's important to try and question that thing as to why you would do something like this for essentially someone you didn't know and it always comes back to things that I won't bother repeating just the fact that it's personal and it happened in our...

(beat)

t's just something you can't walk away from. If they could do it to Jean, they could do it to any of us and I don't want that to... sound extreme but I think that's true.

(beat)

I don't, I don't... Maybe you got me on a bit of a tired day. I don't regret anything I've done but it's fucking exhausting... oh erm... yeah... I'm gonna stop. Yep.

## SCENE SIX: ROOT OF A TREE

*YASMIN puts her cigarette out and exits. MARY enters, picks up the cigarette as part of her weekly routine cleaning up the shrine.*

MARY:

I was brought up on a farm outside of Capetown. And in Apartheid in South Africa. We were brought up to accept the family, the church- we went every Sunday- the state I wasn't really aware of politics when I was growing up it was- I saw the police in action, the way they treated it, local, the local population. Erm to see that, for me, I was brought up in a large Catholic family. And certainly I thought, even in the house when I saw relationships between people, my parents and their what they would call- servants, their domestic workers. The men on the farm - would hit a nerve for me and "Hold- that's not right." But you kind of have to question your parents. Erm which is difficult as a child, you normally accept what your parents tell you but as I became a teenager, those things happened more regularly. Each time I would have a spark of consciousness. Oh okay, hang on a moment something's not right. And so when I left

home and went to university there were already radicals on campus- they were talking about things they had seen, explaining what I had seen. So I kind of joined that radical movement. There weren't that many of us but then it was sort of radical and I got involved. I was scared. And so were they because the police would come on campus and try to break that spirit by imparting laws on the right to protest, on the right to protest on campus. I remember we had one protest on the right to protest and we were all on the steps of the university great hall and the police tried to break up the protest and I kind of retreated. I was terrified- up the steps. And people just carried on sitting they just sat down. And I thought Oh my, you're so brave! One of them was a friend of mine and I was astonished. And I thought wow that took courage and I went home thinking, really ashamed of myself that I didn't have the courage to sit and face the police, I mean I retreated up the steps.

*(beat)*

And I started questioning; What does it mean to protest? What are your values? How far are you prepared to stand with those values? How far are you prepared to go with them? What are you prepared to give up? What are you giving up?

ASAD: I'm a political activist.

MARY: It's about political rights.

ASAD: I am a community activist. What motivates me is my politics. That's why I'm doing the de Menezes case. My politics are my social justices and with those sorts of cases and those sort of families.

MARY: I've seen it before.

ASAD: My niche I would say is working in civil rights and political rights. For me human rights is the most important. I'm a campaigner. What gets me is people. People motivate me so it's not abstract political theory.

MARY: I've seen it in South Africa where I come from. And how they use the whole concept of anti-terror to control the whole people's political awareness. So that you make people- you create the other. You create the other that people feel scared of.

ASAD: I grew up in Burnley, a shitty little town with a lot of racism and when you're young you know that's what motivates me.

MARY: I was an activist in South Africa. I was in prison there.

ASAD: Your house is attacked by racists, you ring the police, the police don't come.

MARY: I was accused of terrorism, and Communism, I supported the ANC but I wasn't a member. I was with my daughter who was from a mixed race relationship. That was illegal at the time.

ASAD: You know you see that happening to you. Your house is daubed with swastikas every day, your mother is scared to go out.

MARY: When they found us in a house they arrested us. I was in solitary confinement with my daughter who was nearly a year old. A concrete cell with a concrete bed, bread pushed through the grill. "Here terrorist. Eat." I know what that's like, that mindset. They interrogated me for three weeks.

ASAD: And that is what politicised me. I joined a group, set up a group called Asian Youth Movement during a time, I suppose the first wave of second generation young Asian people being involved in politics, a lot of it racism-based politics the focus. Young kids were being arrested for defending themselves protecting their community from racists, police would come arrest them and not the perpetrators. There were 14 or 15 in Burnley who went on strike because the school wasn't doing anything the fact that we were getting attacked inside and outside of school. And the school I went to, it would build up in corridors-

MARY: A friend of mine was in Angola... was blown up by a parcel bomb. She thought it was a literacy parcel from the United States Information Service. And it blew her up.

ASAD: I became politically active.

MARY: Another friend crossed the border into Lesotho. She was shot in her bed.

ASAD: You know there's only so many times you can hear, you live in a jungle.

MARY: I've committed to using my experience to speak up.  
(beat)  
It's the root of a tree.

**SCENE 7: KEEP THE FLAME ALIVE**

*We see CHRYSOULLA carrying in a new bundle of flowers and laminated articles to post on the shrine.*

CHRYSOULLA: So we have seen a wide range of reaction. We've seen people who've stopped here and they say, "Don't stop what you're doing. You're doing a great job." And that, you know, even if it's one person every Friday, it keeps me going.

ASAD: From day one Jean's mother and father said, "We won't rest until the promise we made our son-- we want to know absolutely everything that happened and want the people responsible to be tried in court." From the cousins, we also want to make sure this doesn't happen to anyone else.

CHRYSOULLA: And then I have people, even last Friday was, someone who walked past and he said, pardon my French, okay he said, "He shouldn't have even been in this bloody country"...I don't want to say all people are like this-

*(beat)*

You know in Greece there was xenophobia. Xenophobia doesn't mean hatred... it's a Greek word it means fear. Xeno- means stranger or foreigner. So Xenophobia, I think people are scared of the unknown.

*(beat)*

I think some of the people in this country are fantastic, I've met some fantastic people, very, very welcoming and that's why I'm here.

ASAD: The campaign's gone through different stages. There'll be moments why you think, is that is? There'll be moments when you'll feel overwhelmed and nothing's happening. When the inquest happens and it's an unlawful killing verdict, when it happens hopefully the family can say, we couldn't rest until there was a sense of justice... that's what- why the campaign is called Justice4Jean. It's about that concept. A very human concept.

CHRYSOULLA: "Keep the flame alive." That was her request. It's something very human. It's not political.

ASAD: I believe the personal is the political.

CHRYSOULLA: A human being died.

ASAD: You've got to live the life you want to. You've got to be the change you want to see in the world. Get serious about it because that's what you need to be engaged in, but not humourless.

*(beat)*

You know life is shit. It's humourless, it can't laugh at itself. You can't take everything so seriously, rather than saying the very nature of human struggles is sometimes a piece of piss and sometimes it's contradictory and sometimes it's



completely stupid you know and some of the things you think- one day you turn around and say, seriously?

*(beat)*

I'm all over the place.

*(beat)*

It was a late night out lastnight

*ASAD exits. CHRYSOULLA is looking over all of the messages on the shrine.*

CHRYSOULLA: So these are messages. In Polish. In Greek. In Portuguese. In English, In Spanish. All of these people have been writing for Jean Charles, and many times they stop by and they talk to us, speaking all of these languages, Italian... Latin American people come here.

*(beat)*

Two weeks ago a Columbian man stopped by here. And said to me, "Do you know if he knew how to dance the Salsa?" I said to him, "I don't know." And he said to me, "Now he will be dancing Salsa with the angels."

*(beat)*

Salsa's not Brazilian.

*(she laughs)*

*MARY enters observing the shrine, making sure every new flower and article is in place.*

MARY: I saw his mother when she came here. She erm, she was so- I met her at the day she arrived. I was just coming home and passed the shrine, and she was there with her son, Vivian and the other cousins. She was so, so sad. Just grief written in her face. And I just felt, erm, I just wanted to hold her, and I did, I just held her. I can't speak Portuguese, and she can't speak English but just holding her, she had a sense of this transference of love really. Just the understanding of her pain. And I felt that somehow, I have to get it across to her somehow that while she holds that pain-they've won again. The forces that killed her son, are killing her. She has to let go of that because why, why should she die as well, with that terrible pain? So we spoke about it with translation and I was saying she had to give that pain to the police. When she was sitting in the inquest, she should have a sense of giving them the pain, and taking back her joy and connecting with Jean Charles, wherever he is, whatever belief she has- on a kind of level of joy and love- and restore her motherhood.

I took her up to Gloucestershire, in Forest of Dean. We had a walk in the forest. It was made by this monastery and the priests used to go there for drinking water. Maria, she drank from it and washed her face. And the next day she was in court

and that was when the guy who actually shot Jean Charles was giving evidence. And, she said she sat there and she just felt that water, she felt that strength. And after that her face stated changing.

THE END

## ***Black Watch Interviews***

### **Interview with Musical Director Davey Anderson**

Date: November 22, 2011

Location: The Young Vic Theatre Bar, London

#### **Interview**

Sarah Beck: Do you have time to write, while you're working as a musical director and composing.

Davey Anderson: Yeah, I've been writing. I'll have a piece that'll be on at the Edinburgh Fringe next year so I'm working towards that.

Sarah Beck: It's always good to have a deadline for writing.

Davey Anderson: I don't know how anybody writes without knowing it's going to be on...so tell me about what you're studying.

Sarah Beck: I'm looking at documentary theatre and war. I did a verbatim piece awhile ago about Jean Charles de Menezes, the Brazilian who was shot, and I was always interested in verbatim theatre because I like the idea of giving a platform for giving a voice, but it was almost a disaster. The show went on at Theatre 503. But it was really hard because we weren't sure if it should be more naturalistic, how much can we break away from the testimony, how are the actors going to go about portraying the characters, so I was interested in the challenges of working with personal testimony.

Davey Anderson: Absolutely!

Sarah Beck: And so I went in with the challenges into a PhD program and have completely changed the way I feel about it, because I used to be quite puritanical where I was like you have to get it to the very tone to which the person told you and I realised that's quite manipulative. Cause it's never the same. So I've been looking at post-9/11 theatre and theatre of war because I'm a light-hearted person. So I had seen *Black Watch* for the first time last year at the Barbican, so I missed the first big wave, it was really wonderful. What I liked about it was not just the movement and music but also the fact that the writer was in it, and some of those ethical things come up. You're always as an audience member, at least I was always questioning how much, is some of this

verbatim. No? No! And I was always aware, which I thought was good. So that's why I'm looking at the approach that all of you took working on it.

Davey Anderson: It's a total post-verbatim, very aware that, there was such a movement, a verbatim style. And quite quickly there was a desire to react against the strictness of trying to get it down to the inflection of the interview subjects and just wanting to be freed up artistically and the limitations of that I suppose. And also a belief that by being strictly verbatim, and being very true and honest to the interviews, wasn't necessarily, didn't equal great art but also didn't equal something that was truthful on a deeper level more than just being faithful to the words. Trying to find truth in the ideas and people's experiences, and it got fictionalised quite a lot, I think anyway.

Sarah Beck: Well I guess I'll start with, did you ever feel approaching the project in some ways that because it was real people that it influenced some of your choices with the pieces. It was the suicide [explosion] sequence I was wondering about.

Davey Anderson: Do you mean did it influence the?

Sarah Beck: Did it ever impact your thinking knowing that this really happened?

Davey Anderson: Well I guess it's important to know a little bit about how, that particular story came to be chosen and how it became a play about that. Erm, I mean the idea for the project, erm had been a response to a particular news item that Vicky Featherstone had read and was really interested. Not so much the suicide bomb and the soldiers being killed. It was more the deployment in itself actually because two really important things were happening simultaneously one was the deployment of this particular regiment to a dangerous part of Iraq to cover the American soldiers that were leaving for very political reasons. Coming in and supporting the United States. But also the sort of breakup of the Scottish regiments and the makeup of super regiments. And the fact that these things could happen at the same time. It seemed like a really strange irony, so Vicky was interested in exploring that and wanted to get a writer involved who was from that part of the world. And had an infinity with the characters so set up this thing called an assignment for a lot of us, for the first three years just giving writers assignments to do, just go off and don't— we're not commissioning you to write anything but follow the story. And got Greg involved to try to talk to a few soldiers which told him to fuck off basically. Cause it was like...

Sarah Beck: 'Who is this person?'

Davey Anderson: Yeah. 'I'm writing a play.' 'Fuck off.' So it was a big process of kind of getting Greg in the room as a writer was very involved just going through an amount of researchers before finding the right researcher.

Sarah Beck: It's really hard to access soldiers. I've talked to veterans before going through this is whole touch/feel process, if they don't like the smell of you they won't talk to you.

Davey Anderson: They want to know what your agenda is, they want to know how they are going to be represented, and particularly the military has quite strict control over its PR, it's image in the press. So all these television researchers who'd worked on various documentaries or the BBC and Channel Four were getting nowhere and we finally found this woman that kind of did the job and the access for Greg. And he didn't approach it, we didn't approach it as a verbatim with a Dictaphone with that kind of, 'I'm going to record your words' to begin with- because he realised when he asked direct questions of the guys that'd he'd managed to pull together, they would just clam up and give them kind of modest answers. They wouldn't say anything if they knew their words were going to be used. So he just had to hang out with them basically. And just go to the pub with them and just listen, just overhear their conversation and gently contribute toward the conversation with the odd question, rather than interview. Because interviews were useless. And then he went away to the toilets, pretending he needed to take a piss. And he would just sit in a cubical for a couple of minutes, take notes, he'd get his notepad out.

Sarah Beck: And did he do that quite a lot?

Davey Anderson: And they'd get suspicious about his bladder you know, what's wrong with you? So even from the beginning it didn't have that kind of faithfulness of their words literally recorded. It was from memory a few moments after they'd spoken. And trying to write it down and then trying to type it back up when he got home. So it didn't, it wasn't a piece about the three guys who got killed, or the four guys as well cause there was a translator as well, until much later on during the rehearsal process when there were all these scenes, disparate, episodic scenes based around location and these groups of characters. But there was nothing of structure the overall narrative that was a big headache, I think for John Tiffany directing it. Because he was like Why are we telling this sequence of events? What does it add up to and what is the climax of the story? And we visited newspaper articles at the time

that had been the initial inspiration to Vicky and discovered that particular moment, which had come up in conversation but Greg went back to talk to the soldiers a little more about that. But the soldiers were very reluctant to talk about the friends who had died. Very, very reluctant, because they, you know, they didn't want it to be a piece that was about the pure tragedy about how unfortunate it is to be a soldier and how much they are exploited. They had an argument that they wanted to convey through Greg, you know the only reason they were dissatisfied with the army was about the lack of glory maybe former generations had by serving in the armed forces, and they wanted, and were promised that glory but they didn't get it, misled in some way, not really manipulated but used just a bit disheartened by the fact that they weren't going to be heroes like they wanted to be. So, you were talking about those three guys and it was tricky to kind of use that as the core and I suppose there was a kind of moral dilemma, was it legitimate to use their, yeah, to use—

Sarah Beck: Well just in creating music around it, was there pressure?

Davey Anderson: Aside all things, the whole thing is an exercise in emotional manipulation, the whole soundtrack. Especially looking back on it, it's quite heavy-handed, it's quite bombastic in some places. The piece needed to be a whole emotional rollercoaster, like theatrical spectacle and because some much came out of the movement as a kind of a core strand of the piece and we did something that was equally grand in terms of a musical accompaniment to it. We started thinking about bringing pieces of Gaelic singers in, and recordings that we liked into the room and fool around with them a little bit and yeah and used a Margaret Bennett thing for the bomb itself and the suicide sequence, and I suppose that piece had politically, it's about a mother mourning her son who gets killed in a war, and it was important that the lyrics resonated with the content of the scene. But you know, it's kind of yeah, it's a bit odd to use a piece of Gaelic singing as apart of that tale cause it's not really a language that is used in Fife and Wayside where the soldiers come from, it just felt right to use it.

Sarah Beck: What about the old folk songs, the recruitment songs? Were you familiar with them before or did you just pull them up?

Davey Anderson: Yeah I had an interest in Scottish folk song that goes awhile before that. The reason for having songs in it in the first place was that there were kind of two models for the play, and one of them was *Oh What a Lovely War* and the other one was *The*

*Cheviot the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil*. And both are kind of cabaret, vaudeville, music hall style. And they use song and dance, and gags and sketches. So John's idea very early on was, let's not make a play, 'Let's make a piece of theatre that's kind of like Cheviot that early 7:84 work'. Which is kind of created by the ensemble of actors. And the creative team and they all have an influence in the shaping of the text. And Greg wasn't—he just wanted to write a play, his own play about soldiers and John stopped him from doing that. Bring in other stuff as well, bring in history, lyrics from songs and we'll play with all of those things. And Greg initially identified old regiment songs and then I went away and found some more and eventually we had about ten maybe possible songs and whittled it down to three. And just used those ones. The thing about the songs is that they exist in all different versions as well. You have multiple verses that had been added to over the years. And every singer likes to re-work it slightly to make it their own. So I just tweaked it a little bit and found the best verses I liked.

Sarah Beck: I thought most effective was the folk song—*Over the Mountains and through the Hills*. I saw the National Theatre of Scotland clip where you were discussing the delayed melody. And paring it back.

Davey Anderson: Initially all the songs were unaccompanied, we did them a capella, a simple two-part harmony, which was I was very adamant about being simple and then unaccompanied, but it wasn't enough so we needed to have some kind of underscore to anchor the melody, the sung melody. And I just kind of got fed up with all of the arrangements I heard like really kind of rousing, pub session kind of style, I just wanted to combine it with some of the classical inspired pieces we've been making with the soundtrack so that's why there's a minimalist kind of classical approach to the folk song and just kind of give it room to hear the words. I think that happens a lot in folk songs as well, you rattle through the pieces they're character pieces but you don't really get to sit with the line for any length of time and really think about what it means, so that was another idea put space between the lines and just kind of reflect on it as it goes along.

Sarah Beck: Well it's great because in the recruitment song at the end of it. They don't kind of get that glory that you were talking about... So how important was it to—because the movement and the music work so well together—how did you work with Steven on it? Did you just find the music for the piece, or did you roll around and work things out?

- Davey Anderson: A lot of it, Steven, is a great collector of music he likes to rehearse to and then I have a big bunch of stuff. It's hard to explain. The whole thing was done so quickly, we didn't do much analysis of the thing at the time.
- Sarah Beck: That's what's really interesting, because it sounds like you threw a lot of it together within a limited amount of time.
- Davey Anderson: That's why in some ways the soundtrack is a real mixture of different things and different sources. It was just like 'Ahh shit we need something for this moment!' and we didn't have time to find, so we just combined these elements, a bit like that sequence at the end, 'But it's not right on it's own. Maybe we should stick some drums in there. Ah but maybe it needs an introduction so we'll combine it with that other piece to the beginning and...' Yeah, and I feel like I was dishonoring people's music in some way. Completely making new pieces of music by clashing in a hotpot aesthetic way, slapping pieces together, and dapple with them in new ways. And I just sat, endlessly accumulating erm, different, kind of massed pipes and drums beats, and I just have a huge library of pipe drums now. Initially that last track is a big drum and bass track isn't it? It felt so inappropriate to do anything that was really modern so I kind of tried to create these beats and rhythmic stuff out of canon noises, and kind of military and noises of the military and did sound things out of that. So it was a combination of—in terms of matching the movement to the music, a lot of the time it was about having the music in place first and choreographing around that and do it. In some cases it went the other way around where, erm, Steven had the idea about the sign language piece, trying to match different pieces to find the right one—to fit the tone of it. And then writing the odd new piece to kind of underscore movements. Particularly those transitions between scenes that were initially functional about getting actors from one space to another, but then they became little moments in themselves. Time, passing compressed time moments.
- Sarah Beck: I was noticing the mail sequences sounded almost futuristic at times...so what was it like the second time around for the second tour did you have a lot more time?
- Davey Anderson: More leisurely. Much more of a chance to rediscover the meaning behind the whole play, and the song lyrics and the scenes and to kind of communicate that in much more detail with the actors. And explore it with the actors. That's the time that sticks in my head more. The re-rehearsal with an entire new cast.



Sarah Beck: Because it was a totally different dynamic?

Davey Anderson: Yeah. They were aware that they were coming into a piece that already had a life, and already had a cast that helped originate the piece. We were really adamant that the new cast had to own it and not feel they were mechanically acting out the costume of the other actors. So there was license to kind of mess around with things and change it. In doing it you discover why you make the decisions in the first place anyway.

Sarah Beck: Did you go with the show to the States this time?

Davey Anderson: I didn't go to the States but I went to Australia for the first tour, leading up to the Sydney Festival at one stage. And it's just fascinating to see the reaction globally, that particular voice which is a global phenomenon from a big kind of world-wide news event but it's coming from a very local—that particular way of talking and thinking about things. I think that's part of the success of the piece that there's a good combination of writer with subject matter. And I think particularly with plays which are about real life events, it's all about the authenticity of the voice, and the reason Greg was able to capture that voice so authentically, in some ways that *is* his own voice. And I could quite have easily imagined him going into the army. That could have been one possible route in his life, and also he talks just like those guys, he's got the same accent, the same foul mouth. There's something quite disingenuous about the writer character in it. The writer character comes across as very middle-class, very well educated and mild-mannered and kind of nervous. And Greg is not like that at all, he's very much like Cammy or one of those guys you know, clever but mouthy and rough.

Sarah Beck: That's an interesting psychology, and getting people to talk. I was interested in the part where he's threatened by the soldier who wants to break his arm.

Davey Anderson: That didn't happen!

Sarah Beck: I could imagine someone wanting to do it though. When someone comes in and asks you all of those questions... But in what you said about the global reaction, I was curious about the States of the patriotism and because in my neck of the woods...

Davey Anderson: Where is your neck of the woods?

Sarah Beck: A small town Pennsylvania near Gettysburg, Near cow fields. And it's very patriotic, and you can't say anything about the war,

or to counter the war because then you're not supporting your troops, there's not really a dialogue about should we be there, or even a dialogue when soldiers come back, how does it feel for them to come back. It's not just about dropping back into the same bar, you don't fall back into the same mundane lifestyle. That's why I think *Black Watch* must have been really fascinating for some of the US audiences, bring these things issues to the forefront. My parents saw it in DC and there was an older couple in the bookshop, and they said 'It was good but did there have to be so much swearing?'

- Davey Anderson: I think that's what a lot of schoolteachers have been saying when they're bringing their kids along.
- Sarah Beck: I saw *Beautiful Burnout* recently, at was moved by the movement and just how many young people were in the audience.
- Davey Anderson: I think a lot of it is about the physicality and combing it musically and visually and it all kind of hangs together, and it not overly reliant on the spoken word. I'm a big Hoggett—Steven he's brilliant, he's got a real great way of storytelling physically and Frantic Assembly is quite special.
- Sarah Beck: In *Black Watch* the letters home sequence it's the silence of that moment juxtaposition. And the hyper fight scene.
- Davey Anderson: Yeah we tried not to make it like a crazy ballet fight scene. The actors were adamant that we weren't going to look silly. I think its, I think that'd be a completely different piece if it was just the scenes and not the rest of the production. I think at least half of the production is the stuff that's nonverbal. And you wouldn't have access to the emotional lives of the characters, the physical, aural elements, a big part of them is they are very closed off and they don't know how to communicate their thoughts and feelings about things in language. So it's a nice combination of form and content. And in that way it's the right production for the style.
- Sarah Beck: Was there a chance to have some of the interviewees come in and work with them in any way?
- Davey Anderson: We met quite a few people as a part of the initial rehearsal process. Even before the rehearsal period there was a development period of about a week in which the former soldier, Cammy character, who Cammy is based on, came in and spoke to all of the actors and us the creative team and we got to ask

questions to him directly compare what Greg had written in the story to the horse's mouth about his experience in camp Dogwood. His experience in Dunfermline and the pub and having left the army, and the difficulty he had leaving the army and it took him a few years to get out and he was working as a janitor in a primary school. Feeling very estranged, feeling very disconnected from the world and the environment he used to know so well. His home community was kind of an alien territory now. So we got to have access with him and ask him lots of questions. That helped with the text as well, actors could ask questions of Greg about the text based on their knowledge of the real stories. And then we got in a guy, in the rehearsal period, his name escapes me now but it'll come back to me. He was a journalist that was embedded with the Black Watch regiment for a few weeks, maybe even a couple of months.

Sarah Beck: Is this David Loyn?

Davey Anderson: Yes David Loyn, yeah, yeah. That's the guy. So he came in and he talked about that and his experience as a member of the press.

Sarah Beck: How did he feel about the play? Did he bring in a lot of ideas? A journalist's perspective versus the creative team.

Davey Anderson: He wasn't around to see what we were up to. We didn't show him anything that we were doing. Just kind of brought him in and asked him a lot of questions. And he gave us access to a lot of footage that hadn't been broadcast, stuff that had been recorded, hours and hours of video footage and audio recording. And kind of gave us that stuff to wade through. And then there were lots of photographs as well that had been taken by some of the soldiers and gave us their own personal camera rolls of pictures taken. It was quite amazing, an amazing privilege that we had that stuff. And then a drill sergeant came in as well and actually I think he was retired at that stage but he had been a drill sergeant for a long, long time. He was quite keen to come in and work with a group of young men. He was just deeply, deeply unimpressed with a group of actors which were so hopeless, he thought there was nothing to be done with them. He thought there was no way they'd learn how to properly march.

Sarah Beck: I bet the actors were crushed. I suppose a drill sergeant doesn't know how to give notes gracefully.

Davey Anderson: And something we adopted from him was, if you did something marginally wrong he'd make you drop to the floor and do twenty press-ups. Something we started doing as well, if someone had a bum note, we'd make you drop and do twenty press-ups. Anyway so because of his abuse they got better at marching quite quickly. And then he took them outside parading to kind of show them off because he was quite proud of them by the end. And it was interesting as well just to have that mindset very much about discipline and very much about self-respect and self regard and all that. It's just a completely world and it's something the actors hadn't really seen before, really. And the actors they were all really soft.

Sarah Beck: Did the actors really get into it?

Davey Anderson: Far too much. It's very tempting to... John had this very ongoing note, 'Remember you're not really a soldier, you're an actor. Pretend all you want onstage but once you're off stage you're an actor.'

Sarah Beck: I suppose it's really desirable though. That structure that they have in the military. To shift focus, I met you a long time ago, I came over to London for the first time and I was working box office at Theatre 503. And so *Snuff* was one of the first plays I had ever seen in London and this was my introduction to what fringe theatre was and could be. That was a really intense play, and I was wondering, because one of the characters was a soldier back from Iraq, the character seemed to be dealing with post-traumatic stress, so this is a subject matter that you've—

Davey Anderson: Well with *Snuff* there were two starting points for that basically. One of them was that response about what was going on in the war in Iraq at the time and the other one was very local, it was about a part of North Glasgow where there was a type of conflict based around the—it's quite a lot of stuff to get into with Glasgow side to it, erm, in terms of the social housing and the whole idea of slum clearance and the building of new housing estates on the outskirts of the city and the fact that there's a Utopian dream surrounding areas, which quickly became wastelands and the building materials weren't that great so it wasn't really a great place to live. High rises being kind of brought down. There was this kind of easily avoidable kind of mismanagement of wee housing of asylum-seekers in Glasgow. And all kinds of fascinating conflicts that were happening. Both

in terms of between asylum-seekers who had been kind of housed right on top of each other. Almost separated from their own community but particularly I was struck by this one story with the residents of this one tower block waking up in the middle of the night and removal vans coming in with new furniture and that was the first they knew that the asylum-seekers were going to be in their tower block and why should that be a problem? That shouldn't be a problem? The only reason it was a problem was because it was a particular imposed thing, nothing had been said to them in advance, and so they felt particularly at the bottom of the pile in terms of living conditions. Anyway, long, long story! I won't get into all of it. But that, the things were happening, there were things of white working-class Scottish men attacking—this guy got killed in a knife attack and various thing, and it seems really related to the experiences of soldiers in terms of people who had come back from fighting even though that was quite early in the war at that stage and erm, what had happened which caught my attention was just those photographs that came out of Abu Ghraib. And then not long after that, a few months after that. This camp and prison where soldiers had been doing the same as American soldiers, and it seemed like this, yeah it made me curious about what it, how does a culture change domestically when a country is at war and how does that aggressive attitude of the government affect or trickle down if you like to everyday experiences and everyday life and the interaction, and give a kind of legitimacy to those who want to control to exploit their power... And they always tie them to a kind of paranoia about all of our outsiders, a xenophobic paranoia. And so I didn't want to write so much about post-traumatic stress, and about the experiences of those who had been in the war and had come back and had been traumatised by it. I was more kind of looking at the trauma of the kind of people who are left behind, you know? So it was more about the character that doesn't go to war, but actually stays behind and fantasises he's fighting his own war that his own settee is a war zone. So it was a bit of weird skewed thing.

Sarah Beck: It's not a parallel you often make what happens in deployments and at home. And the one character's personal photo collection and the other's videos. And you never find out, do you, if she [the sister] dies?

Davey Anderson: No you never get to find out. And it kept coming up again and again after the show and I had to put a gagging order on the actors to stop them telling the people. They kept coming up to Brian [Ferguson] and Stevie [Steven Ritchie] asking, 'So what did happen? What happened to Pamela?' 'Don't tell them, don't

tell them!’ I was really adamant, really adamant, no I want the piece to be open-ended I want it to be a mystery that doesn’t get solved, cause erm that way I think it lingers in the mind a little longer. My, I mean, it was an exercise in tension doing something almost like a Hitchcock story or Warp or one of those room-based Hitchcock stories where it’s all about building up a sense of dread. What on earth is going to happen? I know it’s not something very nice but I want to know what it is exactly. And oh I don’t want to see what happens next. And so I liked those kind of thriller structure like things but I don’t want it to be sewed up all nice and neat in the end because that’s kind of all there is and the bigger question of why. Why questions don’t linger if you solve all the whats. But you know, it’s kind of interesting having done that with Brian Ferguson and obviously working with him again. In *Black Watch* it was a totally different scale.

Sarah Beck: I’m actually going to go up in a few weeks to interview Brian Ferguson.

Davey Anderson: He’s a great actor, I think he’s brilliant. He’s got something, he’s very intense. He’s very serious and he takes the job really seriously and kind of puts a lot into it.

Sarah Beck: And you’ve been a part of the whole development of the National Theatre of Scotland, what was that like to be a part of?

Davey Anderson: It’s just very fortunate they wanted to have these essentially trainee director posts and I was kind of lucky to get in there first and do the first one cause it meant being there a couple of years right when the company was establishing its identity. And help assist them on a few projects and doing some music on some projects and dramaturg on some other things and develop my own pieces as well. Yeah it’s meant that I’ve developed a good understanding of how they work. And have kind of come back to them as a freelancer and have worked with them ever since on various things. But also so interesting just to see, the ambition of that company you know, not having a building but having to do things in ten different locations in ten different parts of Scotland, doing one weekend’s worth of entertainment over ten different places in Scotland is just crazy ambitious. And almost more established companies wouldn’t attempt to do that kind of thing. But because they were starting off they had license to experiment.

- Sarah Beck: What was the theatre scene like before?
- Davey Anderson: It was, there was big debate in the lead-up to it the National Theatre of Scotland coming together as a real company. There was a lot of speculation about what it would mean and what it might do the infrastructure of Scottish theatre. Whether it would kind of detract away from some of the work that companies were doing already which was very good and already well established, who thought Scotland doesn't need a national theatre, it already had a national theatre, a kind of national theatre community that creates work and people work across a couple of companies there was already a kind of national theatre. People were worried there was kind of a drain on resources as well, and there would be less money for other people to make their work and etc., etc. I think it's more, I did something, you end up with people who get to work on things on a larger scale and give that experience back to smaller companies and help and kind of improve the work that everybody does. Hopefully. I think it's harder for smaller companies to find good actors tied up with National Theatre of Scotland shows.
- Sarah Beck: Well thank you for that, I didn't even asked you if you minded being recorded.
- Davey Anderson: No, it's fine. I always have my Dictaphone with me wherever I go. So where are you in the PhD?
- Sarah Beck: Early stages I suppose.... [...] (discusses soldiers).
- Davey Anderson: I think the thing with the soldiers and Greg and the guy who came in as well, the frustration of being expected to have an opinion about political things, that they didn't have an opinion about or any interest, especially. You know, a lot of soldiers just view it as a profession, I'm a professional soldier that's my job. And any kind of ethical and moral argument around just the war we're fighting has nothing to do with me, and I don't want to think about it. It's just the same as working a factory or working in the pits as a miner. But there's just something certain about my daily routine, and that there's something that identifies me. You know. That's what's always interested me those kind of characters, you know, there was just a kind of vacuum post-industrial UK is a very interesting place in terms of male identity. And the kind of lack of handles of what you can claim as your own sense of self, and your own sense of worth, and so a lot of the time I've seen a lot of guys view the army as one avenue of

doing something useful. I can be a hero and save people and shoot people and that kind of makes me somebody, rather than a nobody and that's all they care about. They just want that. They don't really care about the cause they fight for, or the lack of cause.

Sarah Beck: But I also think about the soldiers coming back, the women too. Coming back to a town like mine, like Waynesboro, everything's shut down, the construction there are no houses being built. So all of the jobs that these people had, had aren't there. And they're coming back to some bleak, economic prospects jobwise. And some people go back in a heartbeat because they had a mission they had something to do and they're handling it that well. I think when you meet soldiers, you have a new respect for them. Beyond the debates, the moral debates of whether it's right or wrong—and it's through the personal stories—that you have to latch onto I think help you understand. Anyway I'm exploring this in the PhD but it changes directions very often. But I will write a play about it, so we'll see.

Davey Anderson: Well I'm jealous I would have loved to do a PhD!

Sarah Beck: But you actually get commissioned! How did you get to that place where you got things made?

Davey Anderson: Well I graduated university in 2002 and always did a lot of work for different companies like running workshops, erm and kind of supporting myself that way and writing the whole time. Just had my own company for awhile and did devised collaborative theatre with them and just invited as many people to see the shows as possible and through that managed to get some assistant directing work in Glasgow and through the assistant directing work, managed to get scripting work as part of the job. Until I managed to get the The Arches to do *Snuff* which was kind of all about stage directors, it's changed its name now, but it was one of the few young directors schemes where you don't really have had to have done any professional work before that to get the small grant to put the show on. And that's, that's a lot of work. I've worked for many, many years for little money. I still do! In truth! But now the last few years different companies have approached me to, for commissions to write projects for their company, which will be a tour or a set venue. That's unusual for a writer, quite early on. It means I've had back-to-back commissions for awhile. But also the other thing is that's allowed me to work solely in theatre and not to have to do so many bar jobs is the music, so if the writing dries up I can do a little music as well.



Davey Anderson: So what is it you want to do ideally? Write or direct...?

Sarah Beck: Write. I've never had that really collaborative experience before of working with actors. When I did the play at Theatre 503 I think that's why it was such a mess, because I co-wrote the play, we interviewed about twenty people and it was really wide-ranging and because it was the Menezes case it was really wide-ranging interviews with the family, the human rights lawyers and some of the senior police officers, so in an hour and a half you had this huge span of all of these sides, this is my side, this is my side, this is my side of the story, and the actors! It was so demanding on the actors because we tried to do a thing where half of it was quite Brechtian where we had these actors taking on all of these roles. And they always presented the text in a 'listen to this' almost cartoonish-way at times, and then we had the family—pure naturalistic, they looked like them, they spoke like them. It worked out in the end, I was psyched that the family responded really well to it, and they were happy to have their story told again, because people weren't listening because he wasn't—I don't know if you followed the case...?

Davey Anderson: I did. I did! I wrote a play about it as well.

Sarah Beck: Oh!

Davey Anderson: Yeah, a wee small thing. Well kind of inspired by it but, just a little piece, a two-hander play set in a hotel room, about a chambermaid who had been on the subway and witnessed it and  
  
about coming into contact with a retired police officer who had been given the job of conducting the inquiry about what went wrong, and about her access to him, and him ignoring her basically for demanding his time. So it was just a very simple idea of bringing these characters together, the witness and someone who led an inquiry. But the whole thing fascinated me, really.

Sarah Beck: The events that happened afterwards...that's what the family were really upset about, they were put in a hotel room for three days, in isolation. They didn't have at that point legal representation, It was easy to blow things over. Just by chance a friend of Jean Charles bumped into a woman at the shrine, at the ceremony a couple days later, Yasmin [Khan] who became the Justice4Jean spokesperson, she was just saying 'It's awful what's happened' And he said 'Yeah he was a friend of mine' and she said 'What about the family do they have legal representation, are they ok?' So they passed around these numbers and it was one of these really weird coincidences and they got Gareth Pierce, huge

human rights lawyer, which they might have gotten anyway. So it was more about the aftermath and the family finding their way through the legal system and blow after blow. In the end nothing really changed, nothing really happened. And to be a police officer in the climate must have been horrible, but the way they handled things afterwards. And people still think he ran, and jumped the barriers, and he didn't. That's why I'm interested in verbatim, that people have an avenue to have their say, it's just not as clear cut as that, is it?

Davey Anderson: Totally. I guess like you I've gone through different phases of thinking one thing about verbatim and thinking, switching around and thinking the opposite. And gone through, I worked on a very strictly verbatim play for 7:84 and it was a bit of a mess because it was too many people who interviewed, it was too disparate in terms of topics and it kind of lost any thread of human story even though there was one woman interviewed, I really wanted to tell her story, but because of the whole setup we couldn't concentrate on that, it made me adamant afterwards if I was going to another verbatim piece it was going to be with one person and I would just interview them in a lot of detail and not interview anybody else, well I could research about, or around it interviewing as many people but not use anybody's words except for this one person, so that I could have one voice and follow one journey, because you know drama is such short story form to try and do an epic doesn't really work because you don't have time to do it. Erm, so I kind of worked on numerous different documentary type pieces but no verbatim since then because I was so disillusioned and ended up working on a couple pieces recently where I've interviewed people and they've kind of had the understanding that I'd use their stories and experiences and some of their words in the making of the piece but I've actually created fictional characters with the amalgamation of a few people put together, which initially I would of thought, I don't know if that's morally suspect, if you're misleading the audience in thinking this is a real experience, but you know if you just frame it as a play like any other it means you have very well researched fictional characters, you have some kind of authenticity of how they talk. And real experiences. That's what makes it worthwhile more than anything else for me, not just what people have done, what real people have done, that you and I as writers haven't done because there's only so much living we can do as individuals and human beings so we need to find out what other people have done in their lives. It's just trying to inhabit somebody else's voice. It's just fascinating.

Sarah Beck:

Well a friend of mine did a play called *Stovepipe* and he—it was about mercenary soldiers and stuff, and he went to Jordan and he was interviewing guys coming in and out of Iraq. At first, because I was talking to him and he was taking around this giant recorder and sticking it in his pocket, and then he took it out, because it wasn't right. He just let go, and started hanging out with people and started just hanging out with people, and did very good research. But he did find it a burden when he'd go to write... or then there's too much research and you get lost in it and he starts to resent the people. Then he's sick of them and it starts to come out naturally, because he doesn't care anymore and then it all sinks in. You just have to be so pure and honest. But even that is problematic. When someone's just miming on stage. Structuring all of that testimony can be a nightmare.

Davey Anderson:

And also because trying to recreate something as accurately as possible, like you know recreate real people's inflection and tone and the quality of voice means sometimes you end up with acting that just—is a lot of artifice and that just seems to undermine the purpose, and the honesty that you're seeking somehow. Especially with the documentary pieces you try to work with, with performers who don't do much acting per se but are great performers and storytellers and just use their own manner or their own voices. I did this thing recently it was working with this beat boxer and an MC, he used to perform good music stuff but not acting—I created something based on all of these interviews with this guy and wanted someone to play the part, I wanted to find someone who wasn't an actor, who didn't try to perform that much. So I tried to get this beatboxer guy to do it, and he didn't want to do it, and I was like it's just like MCing but there's no beats! And he's like 'Nah, I'm not doing it.' And I was just like

'Read it. And he read it and he was like 'This—can I remove this bit?' And I was like, 'Yeah' and he was like 'Well I'll do it!' Right well I better get back to work.

Sarah Beck:

Thank you and sorry you didn't get a pint out of it in the end.

## **Interview with Actor Ross Anderson**

**Anderson played Rossco in *Black Watch*, second international tour the (2010-2011)**

Date: November 23, 2011

Location: The Gate Theatre Bar, London

### **Interview**

Ross Anderson: They went with a much younger cast this time.

Sarah Beck: How old are all of you? The range...

Ross Anderson: The youngest was nineteen or twenty when we started. And the oldest was twenty-seven. But the guys who had been doing it on previous tours some of them were pushing forty. It was a conscious decision this time around, cause some of the guys are as young as eighteen, nineteen who are out there. A lot of people said as well we—we felt so much more sympathy because they were so young some of them.

Sarah Beck: Where are you from originally?

Ross Anderson: I was born near Glasgow. And then we moved to Edinburgh, my family live in a little harbor town. But I've been down here for three/four years.

Sarah Beck: And are you happy being down in London?

Ross Anderson: Yeah I always wanted to come down to London to study. I got my first choice drama school here. I was very excited about that. And then I came down and loved it. I was all cued up for my third year, and getting my degree and then I got offered *Black Watch*. Which I never regret. It was so much better than doing a final year when everyone else in my class was just stressed out.

Sarah Beck: Well all of that pressure of getting people to see your showcase and getting agents after drama school.

Ross Anderson: And with *Black Watch*, everyone in it all had agents anyway. So, it was a great showcase for me.

Sarah Beck: When you had taken the part of Rossco, was this different than other plays because it was loosely based around true stories?

Ross Anderson: Yeah, obviously the first research I did was on the Black Watch and their history. The history of Black Watch that went all the way from centuries ago and how they got the name Black Watch because of their seemingly black hearts. And you know all the way through to present-day conflicts. And then. Once I got the facts down about the regiment. I wanted to know what the individual characters were like. I suppose I took most of that from the text. Most, the part about my part Rossco was, he kind of represented the soldier who wanted to go to war, he is a young guy, a bit naive who likes the thought of going out and having a gun and killing people and kind of relished in that. He was kind of—he—served the longest, he served seven years and then Cammy he served five years, so Rossco kept going out, and so he enjoyed it and I think it became...we had he heard so many stories of guys who would come back and then just fall into depression because they don't know what to do with themselves, and society's so... they don't have enough re-integration programs for them when they come back. And that's why they go back.

Sarah Beck: And a kind of withdrawal from the adrenaline.

Ross Anderson: That's the thing, that's why it's so hard for the guys psychologically to fit back into society. And again, one of the characters was based on that side of it, the Stewarty character suffered from depression. Obviously, my guy was like a rock just enjoying it. But there are a lot of guys like that, you do I guess associate Scottish soldiers, like the Black Watch as well have a reputation of being rough and ready. And actually when were in Aberdeen we had seventy serving Black Watch soldiers come in.

Sarah Beck: And what was that like?

Ross Anderson: Well we didn't know they were coming in and just five minutes before we got the red light to go on we heard there were seventy guys out and they took up a whole seating bank and they were in full military uniform with the hat with the red hackle, and we had to peek out from the curtain and it was so intimidating and those were the guys we were representing and you don't want to show them in a bad light. It was interesting afterwards, they were very quiet and very reserved and I think that, it showed it had affected them, but when we spoke to them, when we eventually got something out of them, they laughed at how they could pick out individual characters in their own regiment and their sergeant major as well, it was just like watching a piece of their life taken

right out of erm, their base in Iraq, but that's—I remember doing an interview for a paper before we came to London and the guys wanted to know all about the politics, and it's not really a political play it's more about the human side of it, and it's about

your mates. And I said that, it's like the last line of the play is I fought for my mates. And that's it. That sums it up. It's not really, at it's heart, it's not a political play at all, it's about camaraderie and being there for the mates.

Sarah Beck: Well during all of those debates was it unlawful the way we invaded Iraq, but there is potential in this kind of theatre because it does show the personal side behind the bigger picture. What Davey Anderson was saying yesterday was, it's kind of about Scottish masculinity in crisis. And wanting to become a part of something to be part of something bigger, to be proud of, and at the end of the play Cammy decides not to go back, it's not just about the loss of friendships but the lack of glory as well.

Ross Anderson: And that's why I was very keen on getting my younger brothers to come and see it, I have five younger brothers, two of them really want to join the army. You know, against everyone's wishes. And I was glad that when they came to see the play, they changed their minds about it. Because they did come with the mindset, 'Yeah I get to go to war and hold a gun and shoot people.' And they completely changed their outlook when they came to see it. I was so happy about it because I would hate to see, to see them go out and maybe not come back. After doing that play and spending so much time thinking about that thing, well if you can't get through to people with that play, then how else are you going to get through to people.

Sarah Beck: I was watching the DVD the other day, and it's David Ironside the soldier who's suffering from post-traumatic stress. And it shows him watching the play. And it's incredible to see the idea of part of your story coming back to you [...] Let me go back and ask you about the rehearsal process, the physical side of it, it must have been like boot camp.

Ross Anderson: I remember I had the audition for it I remember the next day my shoulder was aching and I had all of these bruises and what, what had I been doing? And then I remember I had that audition yesterday for *Black Watch* and we all thought that was hard, the audition for it, but when we got into the first day of rehearsals, Steven Hoggett gave us our first work out session, which is what it was. He disguised it as movement but it was trying, to you know, see what it was like if you were in the army and he would

literally for an hour and half before we did any rehearsal or running any scenes or anything, he would come in in the morning and do an hour and a half of pure physical work, whether it was running or resistance exercises, have people jump on our backs and we had to run around, or crawl about as a wheelbarrel. And then when we were completely knackered and couldn't do any more, he would make us do the physical sequences in it, because in the show, when you do the show, this is how tired you're going to be and you have to find every last bit of energy and put it back into the parade in the end for example—that was when you had no energy left and I remember in ten second fights, every night before I went on I'd have a moment with myself, I don't know how, or where I'm going to get the energy for this...

Sarah Beck: Because you're lifting people.

Ross Anderson: It's just pure adrenaline. And once you're doing it, it's so much fun. I think it was nine months with twelve of us, just twelve guys just basically having fun.

Sarah Beck: It's been all over the States.

Ross Anderson: Yeah we were in the States for six months.

Sarah Beck: My parents saw it in Washington D.C.—now I heard the accents were pared back.

Ross Anderson: Yeah there were some words of the Scottish dialect, ay, dinnay and kan, were changed to yes, and don't and no. It wasn't as strong it was more articulate—but you know people still had problems! There's be too much of a barrier but I think the thing is, actually, and I remember this from Washington people said we couldn't understand a lot of what you were saying but we completely got it. It's just you know the movement and everything's enough, and Davey's music. And that way you can do the show as a piece of mime and people would still get it. They loved it in the States.

Sarah Beck: The subject matter is, even though it's about the experience of Black Watch soldiers it really does parallel with what's going on for veterans coming back to the US... I want to ask did you have any access to Black Watch soldiers or a drill sergeant in rehearsals?

Ross Anderson: I know the first time they did it in 2006 they had a drill sergeant come in. But we just had Steven Hogget, which was enough he was thorough and regimental with us and even if there was a

point where our focus would slip or we'd have a bit of a carry on he would say, 'Go take five minutes. You can't work like this.' Because it's all the safety and looking out for each other and the real priority with this show was safety because anything—because I broke two fingers during a show in New York, and nobody saw because...

Sarah Beck: Which sequence was that?

Ross Anderson: Ten-second fights.

Sarah Beck: And were you able to still go on?

Ross Anderson: I knew—I strapped my fingers. I had a feeling it was broken but I was afraid they'd send me off if they knew it was broken. We only had a week left so then after I got an X-Ray in New York.

Sarah Beck: How did you manage the pain?

Ross Anderson: Just painkillers. Yeah, Steven, he had a big whip!

Sarah Beck: How much rehearsal time did you have?

Ross Anderson: Three weeks. Just three weeks. It was amazing how much we did. Just at the end of the first week, we got through a lot of the play and we laid all of the foundations for the physical sequences and yeah, but by the end of three weeks, I mean we were still, cause right up until New York we had an assistant director with us the whole time and constantly working and re-working things, and fine-tuning things. You know you have to because things slip and you get comfortable. Which is death for the theatre. The thing about it is you want to do well because you know how good it is and you know the potential affect it could have on an audience, you know I got a bigger buzz, from the beginning to the final bow to look at the audience it was so rewarding seeing their reaction.

Sarah Beck: What a feat for the National Theatre of Scotland made when it was all coming together and seen around the world... So the Black Watch soldiers who came to see the show and were reserved—did you happen to know any Black Watch soldiers from before?

Ross Anderson: There were a couple of guys from my high school who joined the Black Watch, but there were just two after I was coming down to London and one I was in primary school with and he's been



deployed twice and he's got a son now and I think he's going out again and I haven't spoken to him in awhile but I know he's going out again through his girlfriend and she's worried. And I just can't imagine. But my cousin he was in the Black Watch, and he was killed in Belfast in the eighties. I was only about three at the time, but I remember my Gran was telling me recently cause I went and asked her about it because she obviously had family that were in the Black Watch. She said she could remember watching the news and there had been fighting in Belfast and there was one person who had been killed and it was her sister's son, and they were all in the room when they heard the news and she said it was heartbreaking, and there was so much anger involved in it as well. You know, you can't, it's frustrating because you can't—a lot of families I don't think you grieve straight away because there's so much anger and it just draws out even more.

- Sarah Beck: In the *Black Watch* DVD there's the mother of a soldier who was killed Gordon Gentle.
- Ross Anderson: Was he the one who was blown up?
- Sarah Beck: He wasn't killed in the suicide bombing incident. But it was strange because they filmed her reaction to it in the play...
- Ross Anderson: When they come down on the wires...yeah. She says in the documentary that that's how she found out about her son as well. And I remember in rehearsals, John saying to us, he says, 'You know, we've got the'— shortly after that the suicide bomb that features in the play, it was released on the internet and it was quite quickly taken off, obviously, but John had a video of it. He had a video from, it was taken from one of the suicide bombers was videoing it in the car driving up. And he said 'Listen you don't have to watch it, but if you want to then I'll give you the tape and you can go into a room and watch it yourselves,' and erm, and me and a couple of the other guys went into the room during the rehearsals, yeah and it was just, it was horrible.
- Sarah Beck: Because that's something you never really see, quite so vividly those images... how did that affect you then knowing that's what happened?
- Ross Anderson: Yeah I wanted to see it because, I knew at the end of the play when they get blown up, that's what I- the character would have been seeing—so I felt that I had to, you know, and it was just, and nothing really prepares you for how shocking it is. The blast

itself consumed everything. It was so quick and so massive you only hope they went quickly, which I think they did, but. It's just, the guy- the Iraqi who was holding the camera is just shouting 'Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar' And there's just no—it seems completely inhuman. You know they were just cheering at the sight of this massive explosion but that his friend had just gone into as well. And it's just, it messes with your head a bit. It makes you question, we all questioned could we do this? You know, and , you know we all said no. And we'd say that to people as well you know, people would say, 'What's it like? Is it like you're in the Black Watch?' And we'd say, 'No. It's not like that at all— We have no idea what it's like. We're just trying to represent these guys in a good light. And we have no idea what it's like'

- Sarah Beck: So you were constantly reminded that you weren't soldiers?
- Ross Anderson: Cause people would kind of make that assumption and you have to say, No. Purely out of respect for the people who actually do, do it. That was another thing we all developed this kind of, much more respect than we already had, through meeting people as well. The young soldiers that we met in Aberdeen, they were so reserved and very humble. That was the thing that struck us the most. They didn't come across as these kind of brash guys, but they were with each other but to us, to us as strangers they were lovely and very thankful.
- Sarah Beck: That's what was really interesting about Gregory Burke—how difficult it was to gain access it almost felt like there wasn't going to be a play at one point, because the researchers failed.
- Ross Anderson: Because he said they didn't allow him to use a tape-recorder, this is when he was in the pub in Fife and he used to have to run away to the toilet and write things down. Yeah, a lot of the dialogue, the banter, Gregory interpreted himself because they were just very quiet and reserved, but the information they shared with him was enough.
- Sarah Beck: The minute you sit down and ask direct questions it becomes in a way less authentic.
- Ross Anderson: First they were quite hostile because the thing where the female researcher comes in...yeah they weren't too happy about that.
- Sarah Beck: I was really interested in the mediation...how Gregory presented himself even though he's not quite like that.

Ross Anderson: He was just one of the lads. Which was great because he was there throughout the rehearsal process and he would pop up and see wherever we were at and it was just great because he'd buy a drink for you, was really pal-y, he would always have stories about these guys, just funny things because it was nice to hear that because in the pub scenes where we interact, they're just having a laugh, and it was good to hear that from him, because every time we met him, we heard some mental story about these guys that you would kind of think about going into the scene at night, it kept it fresh.

Sarah Beck: Was there anything specifically useful to your character, any anecdotes that helped you portray Rossco?

Ross Anderson: I based it on my brother actually, my brother who really wants to join the army. He's just this big rough guy. He's only sixteen. My Dad has a bar and works on the door. He's just this big guy and he's supposed to be my little brother and he's a big, gentle

giant really and he has this sensitive, he has this front like he's a real hard man but I know what buttons to push to make him crying on the floor. And I think, if I put him amongst all of those characters, a lot of it is a front but underneath you know there's so much suppressed emotion which I think kind of comes out, and that's why the letter scene is there.

Sarah Beck: I love that scene, the letters home and the sequence. What makes it so good I imagine is it's not just the text—the stories you hear are quite compelling but getting that whole side you would never get from written dialogue. So what kind of sign language were you doing?

Ross Anderson: It's based on. The way Steven described it was when he was younger he used to go fishing with his Dad and he could never catch anything and that for him represented that story. So he we had ten minutes where went away and they played that song and we each wrote a letter which was the one we used in the play, and we each wrote our own letter and had a sequence of movements echoed each sentence and we went around the circle and everyone told their story but nobody said what it meant. And that was important to John, that everyone's story nobody else knew. And so even when we were on stage doing them it doesn't matter if the audience can't see what you're doing because it's your own private moment. And even—there were some nights where you kind of get emotional about it and he said don't, don't let that

come through, let the audience be emotional about it. And the idea of that actually came from a photograph that one of the guys gave to Gregory of himself sitting on the wagon in the little tank, sitting against the window in the light with his letter and his mate had taken a picture of him and he had given that photograph to Gregory and that's how that came about because he said that the letters—the Blueys—every time they would come around anyone who didn't get one you'd be gutted because that was the only link that you had to home. And he said they would just look forward to getting a letter so much, it was like Christmas for them.

Sarah Beck: Did you always keep it personal then? Did you ever share your personal story?

Ross Anderson: No! Never! No the letters were always distributed in a certain order and one night the letters got mixed up so we each had different letters but no one better read them, you know we dropped them on the floor but nobody read them. And afterwards it was like, you' go up to somebody 'Did you read the letter you had?' And no you couldn't do that. And that was nice because I think we would have felt a little cheated by each other if someone had read. But yeah it was nice to know that, and that moment in the play meant so much to everyone in the cast.

Sarah Beck: How did you get to finish it all? Did you go out?

Ross Anderson: Yeah we finished in New York and my parents came out to see it. They came and surprised me to see it, we always thought 'Right, this is the last show we ever do of this.' I don't know how we're going to hold it together at the parade at the end just because the music's so emotional and erm, I remember we were standing at attention and the officer in his last speech, and I could hear Jack in the background just sniffing behind me. Then once we got on with it, it was fine you're running about you know doing your drills as a soldier would do, but then when we finished and the last movement came in and the lights went up it was just hard to hold it together because it was nine months together.

Sarah Beck: I guess everyone got along ok.

Ross Anderson: And that was the weird thing, there were no major fallouts that I knew of, it was just nice, I think it's rare. I think in most productions there's always some little spats.

Sarah Beck: You must have to have a lot of trust in each other, especially with all of the physical elements... I might have the opportunity to

interview Cameron [Barnes]...and he's interesting because he wasn't a professional actor before.

Ross Anderson: Cameron, yeah he was an electrician and they had an open audition cause they were struggling to get pipers and then he got the part and he was an amazing, amazing piper and he just brought realism to it. Because he didn't try to act he just came on as himself. And it was perfect for him, because he's from Fife.

Sarah Beck: Cause those are the places mainly the Black Watch are from.

Ross Anderson: Yes cause we had a show in Glennrothes, we had a week in Glennrothes in Fife and there were loads of Black Watch families that came to see the show that was one of the weeks we thought right, we need to nail it.

Sarah Beck: Did you get feedback from some of the families, any letters?

Ross Anderson: Yeah we did, we did. Often we'd get letters just saying how much they enjoyed it and how they had families in the Black Watch, how much it meant to them to see it. They just wanted us to know how important it is that this play is going around the world, and that people were seeing it, which is nice, it's good that people get that message through.

Sarah Beck: Well thank you, do you have any last words you want to share...

Ross Anderson: Yeah it was one of those shows as well, Cameron's always on the phone to me saying 'Do ya think Black Watch is going to go out again?' Cammy I don't think so. If it was ever to come back, because that was the thing, after we finished it in New York John was like "No, I'm going to put it to bed for awhile." But I just hope they still do it, while we're all young enough. It's one of the shows if we're to do it again—

Sarah Beck: There's such a demand for it. There was just a verbatim play in D.C. called *ReEntry* about US marines, there was a reviewer for *The Washington Post* and he was so captivated by *Black Watch*, in itself it's an important piece of theatre but it's nothing like *Black Watch* it doesn't have the theatricality. And *Black Watch* came out of a time where you were getting lots of verbatim plays with a lot of miming going on, and this was much different because it was documentary, it's theatrical and there were stories being told and it's refreshing [...] I am hoping to talk to John but I am sure he's very busy. And I'm really looking forward to talking to Greg regarding the tension and the access [...] Well, thank you.

Ross Anderson: I've enjoyed...cause it's weird I haven't really spoken about it since we did it in June and there's a lot of good memories from it, it's nice to revisit.

Sarah Beck: And how's everyone else doing?

Ross Anderson: It's great, a lot of guys came down to see the show [*Yerma*] last week, it was just funny because they were all shouting and I thought 'Who...who are those idiots?' It's nice a lot of the guys have moved down to London. And I've been staying with one of the guys in Brixton and we were roommates when we toured about so you do try to keep in touch with each other.

Sarah Beck: Did some of the creative team come out to catch up with you on tour [in the States]

Ross Anderson: Yeah John came out, saw him quite a bit in Chicago, and then Washington, Chicago and New York he came out as well. It's nice you're always kind of on edge when John's in the audience. You really have to, you can't get away with anything. He's just very thorough and specific.

Sarah Beck: It must have been so different this time around because the first time it sounds like it was so frantic putting the show together.

Ross Anderson: He didn't know how it was going to turn out. But it was nice he said, he said, he said "Thank you," because he finally got the show where he wanted it, the show that he wanted and he's got it as close as perfection.

Sarah Beck: So he's apprehensive about sending it out again! I'm sure there are people asking...

Ross Anderson: Yeah. There were a lot of places in the States who wanted it, and we just couldn't fit it in.

Sarah Beck: You have to go to Canada too.

Ross Anderson: Yeah, there was Toronto and talk about LA.

Sarah Beck: Toronto has quite a theatre scene. They do a lot of verbatim theatre there too. Well, I'll have to come see this show [*Yerma*]. It's had great reviews.

## Interview with Playwright Gregory Burke

Date: December 6, 2011

Location: Soho Theatre Bar, London

### Interview

Gregory Burke: Will you have trouble with my accent?

Sarah Beck: No, I interviewed Davey Anderson last week.

Gregory Burke: Well Davey's is posh compared to me though. Davey's a posh boy! I think it's just anyone whose Scottish has a difficult accent. You know what I mean? If I actually spoke how I spoke at home you wouldn't have a clue.

Sarah Beck: I find when I got to visit my friends in Glasgow and I go into a shop, I get very embarrassed ...

Gregory Burke: Because you have to ask them five times what they're saying.

Sarah Beck: I know there's not a language barrier here...

Gregory Burke: No, but there is! To relate it to *Black Watch* most of the air controllers that were working with the Black Watch were Americans, so when they were calling in coordinates, none of the American operators knew what coordinates they were saying.

Sarah Beck: That's life or death.

Gregory Burke: So they would speak really fast and get all panicky. So they'd have to say 'No. Don't bomb. Because you don't know the coordinates we're saying.' Until then they put Scottish guys on to interpret.

Sarah Beck: I heard when *Black Watch* went to the States, the actors pared back their accents.

Gregory Burke: It's a tuning in thing. Once you tune in you're fine but at first it can be very difficult. If we went in at full helm, no chance. But after ten or fifteen minutes it's ok. When my play *Gagarin Way* was at the National, that was ten years ago now, even then you had to slow it down. Because people didn't know, they didn't understand what they were talking about. And that's not demotic

speech, well it is, obviously, but it isn't as well because it's theatrical, it's different, you know what I mean? It's not actually how most people speak with like er, er, er, and grunts. I think till I was about sixteen I communicated by spitting! You know what boys are like I mean? My little nephew is fourteen now and that's how he speaks.

Sarah Beck: How are the accents in Fife compared to Edinburgh?

Gregory Burke: The accents the same as Edinburgh now. It used to be different. But it's exactly the same, particularly West Fife where I'm from. Like working-class Edinburgh, not posh Edinburgh.

Sarah Beck: I must only hear the posh accents when I attend the festival.

Gregory Burke: Go to Niddrie. Lots of the less celebrious parts of Edinburgh are behind Arthur's Seat. They put them over there so nobody can see them.

Sarah: I must try and go! See the more authentic Edinburgh. So I am doing a PhD.

Gregory Burke: You're at Goldsmiths. And you're a writer as well are you? I Googled you! And a couple of plays came up.

Sarah Beck: I've had one verbatim play that's been on. And that's why I decided to do a PhD, because the process was a real nightmare in a way, because it was almost puritanical at times the way we tried to represent the de Menezes family because we did a play about the Stockwell shooting. And it became intense because we didn't have a clear trajectory of what we wanted to do. Because there were two of us writing it. The family were very supportive of us. They enjoyed—enjoyed's not the right word but they liked being part of the process ...

Gregory Burke: Grief is amazing. I mean something like that helps you. It's like the Black Watch families, you know, the one's whose sons died. They came to the play and they were like 'This is the best thing that's happened since he died.' And you're like that. Just because of the catharsis of it. Seeing it be recognised and see people, just noticing that the person died. Cause that was quite awkward obviously. I mean it's really horrible. Yeah I had to and I didn't enjoy it. I resisted kind of meeting them for a long time . I didn't want anything to do with it, you know what I mean.

Sarah Beck: Was that after they came to see the play?



- Gregory Burke: After all of the success. I did have to meet them, I couldn't avoid it. And I didn't want to run away. 'Cause what do you say? Because your son died, it's advanced my career. It feels very exploitative. And I had those doubts about the thing anyway. Not doubts but those moments- Whenever you appropriate someone else's experiences and use them for your own. There's a little bit of something inside you- if you're human being that goes 'hang on a minute.' I found that quite difficult, cause again. Cause you don't want to lie and say 'I wrote it because I wanted you to feel that your son's life was worthwhile,' you don't want to say, 'I wrote it because I got asked to write it.' Or 'to make money.'
- Sarah Beck: But I think that's part of the process. It is interesting about this kind of work because you are confronted by—
- Gregory Burke: I would never do it again ever.
- Sarah Beck: You wouldn't do it again. Did you have sleepless nights about it?
- Gregory Burke: No it's not that . I didn't enjoy it- not that I didn't enjoy it but I think it's unsatisfying as a writer as well, you couldn't put words, well in the end this is an interesting thing, and we'll talk about this, *Black Watch* didn't really end up verbatim, it wasn't really in the end a verbatim play, I erm, just through the process we went through with it—but at the same time you I found it frustrating that couldn't put into their mouths the things that I wanted them to say, obviously things that I thought related to the conflict. You couldn't have them all the sudden talk about the history of Arab countries in the West, you know what I mean, cause you couldn't have that. Cause they don't care, they're not interested. They're just like 'you point a gun at me and I'll shoot you. I didn't like anyone who'd point a gun at me'. I found it a limiting process as a writer. And conversely it's your biggest success as a writer. Perversely it's your biggest success. Maybe I should learn something from that. Maybe I'm not as good of a writer as I think I am.
- Sarah Beck: I heard a podcast with you on *Theatre Voice*. That you almost had two scripts for *Black Watch*, a script from the interviews and a fictional script. And that fictional piece kind of drove the characters in the pub.
- Gregory Burke: What happened was. Obviously, I did the first interview initially. And they didn't want recorded, that was another thing. No recording, cause it's typical of where I'm from and where they're from. It's that whole thing of, you'll talk to anybody about

anything but as soon as you put it on record, are you going to hold this against me in court? And it's that thing of, 'I'm not saying anything on the record'...

Sarah Beck: Because they are soldiers as well...

Gregory Burke: And also they think it's going to come back and haunt them. You just think it's a police statement if you have to write it down. So I just I kind of wrote down all of the things they were telling me and whenever I got to a part about Iraq, whenever I got to a bit about Iraq I'll just write that, rather than write them telling me about that I'll write that as the scene is happening. So when they arrived at Camp Dogwood- when we first arrived it was a shit hole, it was this it was that, so I thought I'll just write that with them arriving. It's a shit hole. And so then I found that I had two scripts I had the Iraq script and I had the pub script with the real people in the pub. And what I then found was the Iraq script had characters, rather than in the pub that had lots of similar voices talking at the same time about the same thing. So I thought they're characters, they're recognisable, stock-in-trade war movie characters, cause that's what it is. When you're writing. Something like that. You have to have stock characters—you have the funny one, you have the psychopath and the one who's not coming back. The guy who everyone's gonna feel sorry for—who's going to die. You got to kill him! It's like that you always have one. I've got to kill them. Cause the audience will be sad when I kill him. So I thought, right, I'm going to make them the characters in the pub now with minus three or four of them because they're the ones who died. So that was it really, and that solved everything. And then I just went back and put the characters from Iraq back in the pub. And re-wrote all the things that they were telling me in the pub. So the characters would work in the before and the after. So it wasn't complex at all once I cussed that out. And once we wrote the writer in. That's another thing. That was John Tiffany's idea. Yeah.

Sarah Beck: Because that solved a lot of problems for you?

Gregory Burke: Absolutely. Well I said 'There's no point in writing me in'. But Tiffany said 'Let's put you in it.' And I said there's no point because I'm just like one of them. And he said 'Well, why don't we make it like David Hare went an interviewed them. So let's pretend David Hare went to that pub and interviewed them. Because we thought he'd have no chance! That is what we worked out—a nice liberal guy who'd feel their pain.

Sarah Beck: The conflict you feel between the writer and the soldiers. That whole 'Yes I do understand' rhetoric.

Gregory Burke: Because they do hate that. They didn't want to come home and get people feeling sorry for them. They're just like 'Fuck off!' You know what I mean? But at the same time they were quite happy to be portrayed. They wanted that recognition as well. They wanted it to be a film. Just normal chat like whose going to play me? I'm wanna be played by Ewan McGregor or Kevin McKidd. Just bullshitting with me, and they knew I was bullshitting as well. And it was easy for me as well because I came from where they came from. They all knew who I was so they opened up to me quite easily, probably not like they would if it was someone else like David Hare.

Sarah Beck: I have experience interviewing veterans from my hometown for a verbatim project. And it was a difficult process. I had intended to start with people I knew high school classmates, acquaintances from my hometown. Some potential interviewees just disappeared. It can be a difficult process. Can you just talk me through your process finding soldiers?

Gregory Burke: Well yeah, again it's how we did it in the play. We got a researcher to find them because all of my contacts, the guys I know, I mean I'm forty so. All of the guys I had known had been out of the army for ages. Most people come out in their thirties, even if they've been in for a long time. Even if you go in at seventeen and you're in it for seventeen years you still come out in your thirties. So I didn't really know anybody. I had known guys who had been in it before. But I never knew anyone who was still in it really. And I didn't want to speak to guys who had been in too long either cause I felt they might be institutionalised. If you talk to someone who's been in the army for twenty-five years he's not going to say anything bad about the army. Because it means his life has been a waste. Guys who have done fifteen to twenty years thinks the Army is the best thing on earth. So I kind of wanted guys in their mid-twenties. Who had been in the job for a little while, so they knew what they were talking about but who weren't institutionalised by the army. So we actually got a researcher to go and look for them. And of course we found them and it had turned out that two of them knew my cousin. And one of them, I was in the same class at school with his big sister. We kind of vaguely knew each other. It was all really easy for me. And after the first five minutes, you know, they said a few names that they knew, and I said a few guys that they knew and everybody was it was like it's all ok. So I had to invent all of that tension.

- Sarah Beck: So did they actually think it was the researcher who was going to come?
- Gregory Burke: They did genuinely think that.
- Sarah Beck: I was watching the making of *Back Watch* on the DVD. And I was thinking about the girlfriend of one of the soldiers [Stewarty] who came along. And how she'd react to the statements about the female researcher.
- Gregory Burke: We never interviewed him [Stewarty] the guy who had the mental breakdown. He was the guys they told me about, the one who had the mental breakdown and then he came to see it. No but we never interviewed him. But he came [person Stewarty's character was based on] later, erm, and once the scene came out with the guy having the breakdown, and a lot of them who came to see it were like 'Are people going to thing that's him?' Davey or something or other, and I said 'No, it's not him', trying to get bogged down when they get dropped back home. You can't have that, when they start to operate a machine gun, can't have that. And not just because he could have been a danger to other soldiers. And he had a machine gun, and was kind of threatening everybody.
- Sarah Beck: Did you find when you were interviewing the Black Watch soldiers, did they enjoy talking about it, well maybe not enjoy, but it's very rare that you're put in that position where somebody you don't really know that well comes in and asks you all about your experiences.
- Gregory Burke: I think it did help. It's a kind of therapy thing. In the end it wasn't like I was there most of the time as well. It was like we were there in a pub on a Sunday. A regular Sunday session. Football's on, everyone goes to a pub sort of that age on a Sunday, football's on after a Saturday night out kind of talking about these things, so I just kind of sat there. And they would just start talking about things amongst themselves and just listen. And I didn't ask them questions so much. One of them said to me afterwards, 'You never really even asked any questions.' I said 'I didn't really have to.' 'No you just sat there' Yeah and it was really simple. Because it's what they do anyway on a Sunday. They kind of talk about it amongst themselves. I just sat there and listened.
- Sarah Beck: Were they curious about you and what you were up to?

- Gregory Burke: Well no they just curious. Once they established I wasn't a homosexual. It was genuinely fine for me. It was easy. They were quite interested in well how did you get into that job. Finding the right people was difficult. But interviewing them was easy. And I think now we live in a much more confessional age than in the past when men didn't really talk about things like that. My grandfather, my Dad's dad that was in the First World War, my granddad never mentioned it once, never said a word about it. So I think people in this day and age are much more confessional. They will talk. Cause the culture's much more about that. Sharing feelings and showing emotion. Whereas in the past... Now don't get me wrong, they [the interviewees] show much emotion. They didn't cry or anything, none of that. It was all a big massive holiday. A giant holiday except people get killed so there was that kind of bravado. Join the army thing you know what I mean. See the sights, killing people.
- Sarah Beck: I thought it was interesting what they thought of the American soldiers. I interviewed an American marine who would call the British soldiers 'toy soldiers' because their equipment wouldn't be as good, but they were the best snipers in the world.
- Gregory Burke: They call them 'the borrowers' as well because they steal the American's kit, they have rubbish kit. All of the cheapest, worst kit ever and it falls apart. And the Americans have the best equipment. So whenever they're stationed with the Americans they just steal everything. It's like everything Jeeps. Steal them and repaint them. And if you go way off and no one sees it you can just get away with it. And that's what they do. And even when they were in Kuwait to one of the American bases they had warehouses full of gifts from people from America, people would just send over parcels of gifts. For the American soldiers. 'You brave guys you fight for us' play stations and tellies. And the Black Watch soldiers would drive up at night and steal it all and send it all home to their families for Christmas.
- Sarah Beck: That's terrible. I mean it's not it's just...
- Gregory Burke: If it's not nailed down then they're going to steal it, you know what I mean. But in their [Black Watch] case they're lucky to get one letter from home every six months. But the American soldiers had loads. So they stole it. And it did cause some friction, but they'd say they don't care. They had so much stuff the Americans had the kids were just like 'So what, we've got fifteen playstations in our camp so we don't need anymore.
- Sarah Beck: Well Americans have the patriotism thing—

Gregory Burke: The patriotism in America is unbelievable. We were in Texas and I went over. I had been to New York and stuff like that but I'd never been anywhere else. If I was on the east coast I'd be in Boston or New York. I hadn't been anywhere else. So I wanted to go to Texas, see what it's like. And it was mental. It was really so different. The people of Austin.

Sarah Beck: Austin's sort of the liberal—

Gregory Burke: But outside of Austin—it's a completely different culture. It's patriotism...

Sarah Beck: And guns.

Gregory Burke: And guns! The actors would go to these ranches and shoot machine guns and rocket launchers at old cars.

Sarah Beck: You can do that in Texas?

Gregory Burke: It was culture shock. When we were at the University of Texas where the play was, has one of the biggest veteran's programs for people who have served and they get their college fees paid. One night there were about 200 guys who were veterans, you know and people are missing arms and legs and they were like, 'That's amazing. Someone should do this for America—the American army' and I was like 'You guys should do it- cause you guys were there, you've been there. And you've studied English literature'. Again they loved the play but it was a different thing from being in New York.

Sarah Beck: So how then did the US soldiers respond to it?

Gregory Burke: They thought it was spot on.

Sarah Beck: Kind of in the same way the Black Watch soldiers responded?

Gregory Burke: Yeah well they're all just soldiers, that's the thing of it. It's the same job for everybody. Whatever army you're in, it's the same. And the army, they always say the same thing. They always say someone should have gotten—no letters. There is always one guy who doesn't get any letters, and they all feel bad. And give them one 'oh you can read that one'. But when we were doing the play, we felt like if we did that someone would then say, because they're recognisable, it was supposed to be the character of Fraz who didn't get any mail, but because he was the character of the real guy who died, and if his family would have come to see it, and they would say 'are you saying we didn't write to him?'

- Sarah Beck: Because the characters you have like Fraz—it's not the name of the real person.
- Gregory Burke: The names were, I—The names, the names are all the original names of the families who formed the Black Watch in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but I just made them into nicknames. So it's like Fazer, Grant, Ross, McKenzie, they're the families from the Highlands who formed the Black Watch, the clans who formed it. So I just made them into nicknames for now. So to give them that...
- Sarah Beck: The Golden Thread...
- Gregory Burke: That Golden thread thing.
- Sarah Beck: Going back to the making of the play, Davey said there were, with the use of songs, the idea of *Oh What a Lovely War* as a kind of a model and *The Cheviot, The Stag and the Black, Black Oil*...Did that help inform...?
- Gregory Burke: Absolutely. They were the texts on the rehearsal desk. Not so much for me but for John and Stephen Hoggett and Davey, they were the two texts that they wanted to use, just because they also have the combination of singing and dancing the kind of cabaret, vaudeville, music hall style They were the two. But only kind of in a structural way, as a model for the way it's been done before...obviously none of them were verbatim, but this wasn't either really. But yeah, they were the two texts they used.
- Sarah Beck: So what was that like for you, because it sounds like you were trying to get these interviews, trying to find something to write about, and then everyone comes together with all of this stuff—had you worked with a movement director before, a musical director or was that all new to you?
- Gregory Burke: Well I did work with Stephen before on my play *The Straits* which was in 2003, but again it wasn't a lot to do with the text, and with this the erm, originally the catwalk bit, the part where he [Cammy] is changing in uniforms and it's the history bit. They were history scenes—I had them written at different points in history of the regiment which was all about the reality of life in the army and basically in all of the scenes, you know how there's a Lord Elgin scene where he comes in with the sword? And he kind of tells them the same lies, you're going to have great fun in the First World War, you'll just be with your pals, there won't really be much fighting and then they get over there and

obviously it's a total slaughter. It was about that, it was about showing that that lie was told throughout history. When you say to them—which is what the song *Fofar Soldiers* is about—you know you can get away from all of your troubles at home you can escape with the army, come along with us, come along with me and you'll be in the army and you'll get away from everything. You get away from the family you don't like, your wife you don't like and come away with me. And you can escape financial problems, you know and the army is an answer to all of your problems. And of course it never is, it's just worse. And you can get killed as well, you know what I mean? So it's each of those history scenes that we had was about how that's been repeated over the ages, the same lie gets repeated throughout the ages

about the army. And then they find the reality of it. So erm, then of course with the movement, I had been off for a few days, and I came in and John said 'Right come in' and he showed me the catwalk scene and he said, 'Now I need you to go make all of those history scenes about two-and-a-half minutes long. Can you do that?'

Sarah Beck: The montage scene.

Gregory Burke: Yeah, it was about four minutes long. So I took out all of that stuff that was in the Lord Elgin scene—that was the only one we kept when it says the same lie gets told all of the time. And so I just wrote the history of it. All through it. But then they got really fast at doing it. So I had to make it shorter, and shorter and shorter, and then it got too short and then I had to make it longer again. So that was really the only re-writing I had to do, the massive re-writing in the actual rehearsal. The rest was just cuts and stuffs like that.

Sarah Beck: So were the actors reading some of the transcripts at some point and then some of the Iraq scenes together?

Gregory Burke: No, because once I had the two scripts, we did a workshop and then I moved the characters from Iraq to the pub, it just became about shaping it within the time we had and what we wanted to say, did we want to say about you know how much of it we wanted to tell in the pub about Iraq, and how much we wanted to tell that actually was in Iraq. So erm, but most of what happens in the pub is mostly about, well it just starts off about them and the regiment, when they joined, where the first went, when they were in Bosnia, erm and when they went to Iraq the first time for the invasion because this was their second tour. So it's just basically a chronology of their own careers in the army. And erm, and also their interaction with the writer, teasing the writer.



Sarah Beck: I loved the tension with the writer. And I was also interested in how you worked with people in the rehearsal room, like embedded journalist David Loyn. Did you work with him at all?

Gregory Burke: Well he was much more—we had a drill sergeant from the Black Watch who taught the actors how to do the marching drill so that was really important for the actors. David Loyn was just talking from, cause well basically when he was embedded with the Black Watch cause he's a journalist he spent most of his time with the officers, he's the same as the officers really. He's not really the same as the men. And he said the men were quite difficult for him to speak to because- Well one of the soldiers pointed it out to him, 'David you're the three things that all of the men hate.

You're English, you're middle-class and you're tall'. Cause another joke is about how short the Black Watch is, they're all really short. But that's joke that goes back years because when we did the play in Belfast there were quite a few IRA guys who went to the play in Belfast, and he said one of the things to me was, he says, 'Look it was brilliant but there's one thing I knew that wasn't true. Some of them were over five-foot-five.' And I just love that. He was like 'I used to fight with them, and they're all like tiny guys.'

Sarah Beck: I looked up footage of one of David Loyn's last missions with the Black Watch where they're dressed with the night vision goggles.

Gregory Burke: That's Operation Certain Death, that's what it's called and we had the actual cameraman, who was the guy. When we were at the Barbican, this was a couple of years ago now, the first time we were at the Barbican and he goes 'Listen, I was the first cameraman for David Loyn' at the part afterwards—he introduced himself as that. He went 'I was at Operation Certain Death. I was the man in the back with the guy who opened the first door.' Because they went to this village to raid it and basically they knew the guys who opened the door first, in the first wagon in—with the guy who opened the door they were just all going to get shot basically so they took this one wagon into the village, the guy had to open the door and it was Operation Certain Death is what we're calling it cause as soon as they guy opens the door...

Sarah Beck: They're going to get it.

Gregory Burke: They're all going to get killed in the back of the wagon. But they had to do it. But this cameraman was there as well and they put David Loyn and the cameraman in that wagon because they thought it'd be better that they get shot instead of the soldiers got shot. And they said, they never told them till afterwards that<sup>317</sup> they had done it. So that was, nothing happened that night it

was a farce, they were completely outwitted in that tour. The Iraqi insurgents were running rings around them basically, they never laid a glove on them, they were just getting mortared and shot at every day and they never even saw them let alone fire at them—an Iraqi insurgent. They would just attack you and disappear. Attack you and disappear. Classic guerrilla warfare. That's eventually why they got pulled out because they were basically just sitting there taking casualties really which they find very frustrating as well. The regiment. And that's why a lot of you know one of the things we wanted to do when we went through it is what are the things we're trying to say here? What are we trying to say here?

Sarah Beck: What is this play about...

Gregory Burke: What is this play about, what are we trying to say and for me it was about, you know we could only tell what they told us. We can't really put words in their mouth about war, that it's wrong, you know what I mean. We can't, we just have to say the same lie is told over and over again It's the same lie again and again over history. You're going to have a great time and the army's going to be great and you're going to love it. And it's not that. But then they do love it when they go back but it's because they're young, it's their youth. Everybody loves your youth. If you spend your youth driving around tanks and shooting people it's still their youth. And you love it, Do you know what I mean? So it's one of those weird things, human beings, no matter how you spend your youth you look back on it fondly because it's your youth. It's got nothing to do with anything else. So that's all I wanted to say, that this same lie is told to the same people, and it's always the same people who do it. It's people at the bottom of the pile, because they have to, and there's nothing else. It's their job.

Sarah Beck: And they didn't get the glory in the end.

Gregory Burke: No, they didn't get anything. But nowadays there's a lot of Help for Heroes and all this support and all this Help for Heroes stuff in the media but soldiers don't really get anything. I feel quite uncomfortable with that. Every country needs an army to protect its interests—whatever it's interests aim to be—interests tend to be money. All countries are interested in economic gain. So wars will only be fought for money. Show me a war that's been fought for anything other. It's nonsense. But what you can do is say that once again this lie has been told that you're doing something that isn't worthwhile. It's just what the army is for—it's to protect the

conventional interests of the country. Or the elite of the country or whatever it is. That was all that. But the reaction to the play is another kind of strange thing, because it kind of appeals both to anti-war people and pro-war people, Scottish nationalist type people like it and anti-war protestors like it. So I don't know, what it is, it's just one of those things.

Sarah Beck: Can I just ask about one of the soldiers who came in and helped with the costumes and stuff, what was his experience like because I had heard he said something to the effect, 'I thought nobody really cared about us.'

Gregory Burke: Yeah, he said to John Tiffany one night after he had seen it and he said, 'I didn't think anybody cared about us. About me.' He said. That's a why it affected him cause he just thought, you know, this is about me, and my pals.' And it was just that kind of thing, he felt that someone was acknowledging his life. And I guess it's

like anybody, if anybody watches their life on stage I suppose you'd go- 'that's me!'. But he just said 'I didn't think anybody cared about me' and I think—but then he went back into the army, loads of them did. Eventually, they came out and then they went back. Because either they didn't find a job that they liked or they thought. A lot of them went to Afghanistan, they thought, 'Well I've never been to Afghanistan.' The thing is I know some of the Black Watch guys from being in Afghanistan a few times who went to Iraq, and they looked down on the ones who were in Iraq.

Sarah Beck: Because they think it's easy—

Gregory Burke: They think it's easy compared to the war in Afghanistan. They were like Iraq's easy. They call it Afghan, Afghan's the hard one. So some of them went back in because they felt that Afghan was a hard one, and 'everyone says it's harder so I should go.' But also what do they do? They go get a job somewhere and it's boring! They want the adrenaline.

Sarah Beck: I interviewed a sniper who was in Iraq. He was injured two weeks before he was due to go home and he can't go back because he has hip problems, but he works the night shift at FedEx and says it sucks! And he goes to these job interviews and they ask what makes you a good team leader under pressure? And he's like what am I doing here?

Gregory Burke: 'I can shoot somebody from a mile away!'

- Sarah Beck: That's why I'm interested in the process of doing the interviews, because it's an unusual experience for the participants.
- Gregory Burke: The thing about a sniper is it's really difficult for a sniper because they see where they're shooting. Really up close.
- Sarah Beck: And he was worried about his spotter actually. Because as a sniper he didn't see the impact the way the spotter witnessed it
- Gregory Burke: Because the spotter's watching it, ay!
- Sarah Beck: So he came back and he's got no problems talking about it but his spotter, he says 'You need to see therapist.'
- Gregory Burke: I know a support sniper for the Black Watch actually, he's got the longest shot ever recorded for a kill. In the history of a sniper. It was nearly two kilometers, right. And another one where he shot someone and it was a massively long shot, and everyone was like 'I don't know if you should try it' and he thought 'I'll try it' and missed and he hit a kid. Cause a lot of them when they shoot, they shoot them in their houses cause they track them down, the guys that are insurgents, they kill them in their houses, so he fired through the window of the house and someone stood up with a baby. And the baby's head came off. And all this kind of stuff. And that guy has gone completely loopy. And it's that thing, because you've been sitting there watching them for ages and their family and the guy comes in the room and sits down, and the babies gone, ay. But you know they're murdering people, the state. The sniper is murdering people are very different people. Organised crime really is the only thing left to do, there's not much else! Or be a mercenary. Or go back to the army. One of things that happens that are so prolonged by the fighting like this you get a certain amount of men. After they've done that, they can't just settle into civilian life. They do mercenary war and things like that. It's like the French Foreign Legion. After every war the French foreign legion they were filled with guys who were. After the Second World War the French foreign legion was full of German people, cause the German guys after the war couldn't settle and didn't know what to do so they joined the French Foreign Legion so they could still be soldiers. And the in the 70s there were guys from Vietnam who were in the French Foreign Legion. And in the 80s it's the Falklands war. It was full of Russian in the 90s. I know all this cause I had a pal who was in the French Foreign Legion. And I guarantee you in the next coming years you'll see a load of British in it and Americans again cause guys who come back will think I don't want to join

the Army again, I don't want to join it here so I'll go over there and joining the Foreign Legion. It's a funny old game like. I don't know how you settle back to normal life.

Sarah Beck: Did you go back for the last tour of the United States?

Gregory Burke: I went to Washington D.C., I really like it. I like the feeling of power. I didn't know what I expected from it, just kind of amazed by the center, by how monumental it was, the huge boulevards, huge malls, it's really built to a scale that's really impressive. And I know it's by the same guy who did Paris. It has that feel to it. If you go for a few stops later out on the train it's bonkers, you know. It's amazing as well cause it's a company town, and the government is the company, and you know during the week and that, after 6 p.m. everyone goes home to the suburbs. We were staying in Dupont Circle so there was a really good bookshop with a bar, and it used to stay open all night. I can't remember what it's called. And it was by the hotel so that's where the actors would go after the show.

Sarah Beck: But with all of the physical stuff they have to do the next day...

Gregory Burke: Come on! They're young lads. If you're twenty-two and you can't go out all night and do a show two hours a night.

Sarah Beck: Well when I spoke to Ross Anderson who played Rossco he was telling me that when they were in New York in the ten-second sequence he broke two of his fingers, but he didn't want to get kicked out of the show at the very end. Maybe I shouldn't say...

Gregory Burke: No Ross is great! I really like him and he wouldn't bother about that. There's a few of them who had to get an air ambulance home you know what I mean! (jokes) It has that effect just because of they're actors—'Oh my finger!'

Sarah Beck: Well Stephen Hoggett—the physicality of his work—I had only seen *Beautiful Burnout*—I hadn't seen that many young people in a theatre crowd.

Gregory Burke: Yes The National Theatre—average age 97!

Sarah Beck: So in D.C....

Gregory Burke: D.C. was very good because we had the Shakespeare—The Washington Shakespeare Theatre that did it. So we had this dinner, like a really ritzy dinner with all of the like socialite

people there and two Supreme Court Justices Kagan and Sotomayor. The head of The Joint Chiefs of Staff was there. And Hillary Clinton was supposed to be there but she couldn't because it was at the time Egypt was all going mental and she had to stay in. Outterbridge Horsey III. His family were Tennessee whiskey magnates, so obviously hundreds of years ago, but obviously now they're just socialite people.

Sarah Beck: I love those stories of growing up in a little shack like Dolly Parton and then building your own Dollywood.

Gregory Burke: He wasn't in a shack. He went to Yale. It was his Grandad in the shack. It just felt like somewhere, sometimes you go to places and there's nothing really new or anything with Washington so I enjoyed it. And Austin was alright. Austin-felt a bit pleased with itself. 'We're liberal and look at us we're kooky!' Do you know what I mean? Someone in a bar and there's hula-hoops on the floor and people are hula-hooping in the bar. And me Ross were like if someone's hula-hooping and I spill my drink, there's going to be a problem. It was a bit too, kooky, too self-aware of being kooky and trying to be extra cute. And I've never been to Chicago. John Tiffany has a play opening in New York tonight called *Once* the musical version. You know the film *Once*? It's about an Irish busker and a Czech girl. Well they're doing a

musical version of it, and it's on Broadway. It's opened at the New York Theatre Workshop tonight till January and then opens on Broadway. This is what John's always wanted. This is his dream come true. That's his thing. It is quite a strange thing cause I don't, I'm not a theatre person anyway. I never went to the theatre before I wrote for theatre. And I still don't really go. I mean I do go.

Sarah Beck: Are you afraid it will affect the writing?

Gregory Burke: Well, anything can like reading books and stuff like that, but, erm I like films and I like telly and that's my, that's what I like and have been doing for a year and a bit.

Sarah Beck: You're writing for film now.

Gregory Burke: I'm going to have two films shot next year.

Sarah Beck: What are they about? Or are they secret?

- Gregory Burke: Well it's not a secret. I mean obviously they could still fall apart but you don't want to jinx it. One is set in Belfast and erm one's set in Glasgow and I'm writing another thing for Film Four and then there's other people keeping.
- Sarah Beck: So it's all starting to flow with the screenwriting?
- Gregory Burke: I say write when you're ready, because if you mess up your first film you're fucked. It's a lot of money at stake. I've always wanted to do it. I'm developing a TV series as well for BBC One. It's about class. It's about a family who are both criminals and privately educated people. So it's like the father the sons are private criminals like he was but the daughter's are all lawyers and accountants and they can manage the legitimate side of things. And it's about their children then, the boys who want to be criminals, but they don't want them to be anymore, they want them to be like their sister's children. So it's about do we perpetuate social class or is social mobility really possible? But obviously entertaining. I am mentally busy. I'm going to write more plays don't get me wrong but, it's just you feel like you're doing the thing you want here. And one of the things about *Black Watch* was everybody's kind of done well out of it, John's in New York now most of the time, and that's where he wants to be and Steven's doing the movement for *Once* as well, and Edna Walsh.
- Sarah Beck: Well it's funny because Davey Anderson's play *Snuff* was the first play I saw when I came to London and Brian Ferguson was in it.
- Gregory Burke: Do you know Brian?
- Sarah Beck: I am interviewing him in Glasgow next week.
- Gregory Burke: Well when you see Brian tell him I'm asking for him. I think he got married recently. I've seen a picture of him in my local paper from my hometown and he married a girl from Dumferline I think. I've not seen Brian for ages. He wasn't acting for awhile, he had given up.
- Sarah Beck: I saw him in *Earthquakes in London* recently.
- Gregory Burke: Brian's a brilliant actor. He kind of, I understand he didn't want to do *Black Watch*. He was in the first reading of it and then after Edinburgh he didn't want to do it anymore—he was Cammy to begin with.

Sarah Beck: But I thought he went on to do the first international tour to Australia, to...

Gregory Burke: No. And no one could believe it because he was going to be a superstar. If he goes on this tour he's going to be a superstar. But he didn't want to do it and I understand. I think he has artistic integrity. I don't. I don't know what his objection was, I know he kind of fell out of love with acting for a wee while, I think he had a bit of an ideological problem with *Black Watch*.

Sarah Beck: What do you think that was?

Gregory Burke: I don't know. I think he felt. I don't know. I can't second-guess it. I think you'll have to ask him. Maybe you can find out and then tell me. I think he was just amazing it. He's a great actor. I think he wants to direct and write as well and acting's a bit—I don't know if he enjoys the company of actors so much.

Sarah Beck: Well I can imagine when you're acting in a show like this—well, I just spoke to Ross Anderson and he told me about the fact that they were constantly reminded that they weren't soldiers. And when it came to the footage [of the blast] he wanted to watch. But he had to remind himself, 'I'm not a soldier, I'll never be a soldier, I can't do this job...'

Gregory Burke: You can get it on YouTube though. You can actually see them walking up to the car to speak to the guy. And there was another insurgent filming it. What happened was, the guys who were there all got blown up. There was twenty guys all together around it, right. And we had, the guy the left Lieutenant, the officer who was in charge of the whole twenty the whole platoon, he came to see it in Loreburn, Scotland. He sat in the bar, and this was on the first tour, I wasn't there but he told all the guys stories. We wish we had known. Afterwards his wife was, 'He's never even told me any of this.' But he was standing at the back of one of the wagons, and when the blast came, the door- the blast was so big, this car- it was like an enormous explosion and erm, the door of the wagon flipped around the back of the wagon and he was standing at the wagon looking at a map and it crushed him against the back. And it closed on him, broke his legs, broke his arms, and he had crawled around to see what had happened. And he said everybody was *gone*. Cause all the guys who had also been there the blast had blown them so far away. And there was a little river- that ran past a little stream. And he said, 'Everybody's



gone, everybody's dead I've lost everybody.' And he's in the pub telling them all this, in tears, 'I've lost my whole platoon and I'm still alive. I'm fucking useless.' And what had happened was they had all been blown into the river, everybody was lying in the river. And he crawled across and he looked down with his two broken arms and his two broken legs. He crawled over and looked down and they were all piled on top of each other unconscious and they're all dead. He still thought they were all dead. And he just laid there until somebody came—it was ages before anybody even came and he says 'I was just lying there, and some of them started waking up and crawling out like, "What the fuck?"' They didn't even know what had happened. It was just fucking huge. And when you see it on the telly, you do realise how big of an explosion it was.

Sarah Beck: This is one of those cases where you meet people and you don't know these kind of things have happened to them.

Gregory Burke: Even his wife had said, 'He's never told me anything about that until now, until he's seen that, the play.' And he didn't tell his wife. He just told all of the guys about it. He told all of the guys, the actors. It was one of those weird things where the actors were all sitting there, kind of frozen. He was there. It happened to them. It didn't happen to them [the actors]. But he was there. But the actors do go through a period where they do think they're soldiers, when they get their guns their like...

Sarah Beck: And you bring the drill sergeant in...you have to be in very good physical shape.

Gregory Burke: Steven Hoggett is the fittest man on the planet. And the physical stuff they do is amazing. Ross is one of the best at it. Ross can do the plank where you hold yourself on your elbows and your toes and you have to go straight. Ross can do it in eight and half minutes.

Sarah Beck: He said he wanted to do it again.

Gregory Burke: I think it is going to come out again next year. I'm very proud of it. I don't mind if people are interested in something you've done, you should talk to them about it. It's polite. It's not a fucking secret how we created it. You get a lot of fucking artists who are like you can't possibly understand how we did this. And we just did it.

Sarah Beck: That's what was interesting about talking to Davey, I was asking him if the suicide blast impacted his music and he's like...

Gregory Burke: No!

Sarah Beck: 'The whole thing's an exercise in emotional manipulation the soundtrack.' And he said I didn't have time to think about things like that I just sort of did it.'

Gregory Burke: Davey's amazing he'd just go away with a line from a song and come back and we'd all be like whoa. And it is brilliant how he manipulated the audience with that. It's brilliant.

Sarah Beck: What I really like about it as an audience member, and having worked with verbatim material before, I had always questioned, when you put yourself in the play or a writer character in the play, you're so much more aware of the interpretation, and you should be aware of the interpretation when you see a play but so many people for awhile with verbatim theatre being really popular, this is the truth from the horse's mouth...

Gregory Burke: We shamelessly manipulated everything! (laughs) But that's what show business is though. And that's what we're doing at the end of the day. We're taking the deaths of soldiers and we're going to make it a big show.

Sarah Beck: But think about the people who got to talk.

Gregory Burke: But I'll tell you something else, one week before the show opened, well a couple of days before the show had opened, if you would have given us the option of scraping it and getting the money back that we had spent I think everyone would have said, 'Right let's not do it' because we all felt it was going wrong. I felt it was going wrong. And I think the week before we would have said, 'Right let's not do this,' we don't know what we're doing here, because it was such a kind of, it's like Davey said we never had anytime to think about it. And when we did think about it, it was like, 'Shit this doesn't work, does it?' And we were all so close to it, we didn't see what it was anymore. And it was a bit of a whole mess.

Sarah Beck: Was it because what you saw wasn't what you envisioned in the beginning?

Gregory Burke: No, it wasn't that. I don't think I envisioned anything, that's how bad it was. I just thought John will work out what to do. And John thought, 'Oh Steven Hoggett will work out what to do,' and Steven Hoggett just thought get Davey – I think we just all felt, 'Well, it'll be fine' and a week before then a couple days before we were all like, 'Fuck!' You know what I didn't like? I didn't like the explosion at the end. Every time we did it in rehearsal somebody would get stuck, so it was like *Spinal Tap* the movie.... And somebody's swinging about up in the air—and they'd be trying to get him down. And they'd all be trying to bury the dead and this guy's floating about and people will be thinking, 'Oh he's going up to heaven.' I just thought 'Stop. If we don't do the explosion I'm happy to go ahead.' They were like 'No we have to do the explosion' but it just kept not working. Somebody would always be stuck. And the guys would be trying to untangle them and they couldn't untangle them. It was funny. Everything was just descending into chaos. Everybody's like running on stage with nothing on cause the wardrobe wasn't ready at the time. And it was funny. And I think everyone thought in the final week—cause all of the dress rehearsals were kind of chaotic. And it didn't really work until we did the first preview, cause we had never gotten the whole way through.

Sarah Beck: And did you have the reaction from the first people to watch it?

Gregory Burke: We had loads of people in and they were like this is brilliant! It was the first preview when the knife came up through the pool table. That's when John. We heard a big gasp from the audience. And I moved along the line. And John was sitting on one end of the line in the front row. And John just leaned forward when everyone gasped and looked along at me, and I looked at him and we both went 'Yeah.' And we went 'Here we go!' And that was it, and we didn't have to do anything else.

Sarah Beck: When you think about all of the time and resources that when into it. I had heard at one point there might have been an armored car purchased.

Gregory Burke: Me and Tiffany were on the Internet trying to buy armored cars. £16,000 was the cheapest. And one of the guys, the guy from the Black Watch, the one who said erm, 'I didn't think anybody cared about us,' he was going to drive it for us. Cause he could drive, he was a fully trained armored car driver. He said 'I'll drive, I'll drive it on every night, don't even worry. But we never—we had a lot of crazy ideas about things we should do. It's when you're desperate you come up with stupid things.

Sarah Beck: And you think it's genius.

Gregory Burke: We never suspected what was going to happen. Not at any point did I think it was going to turn in to what it turned into. And I don't think anyone else did at all.

Sarah Beck: And you didn't set out to be a playwright.

Gregory Burke: I think in my mind when I was younger in my twenties I thought I might try to be a writer but I just had normal jobs and then when I started writing I didn't think I was writing a play [*Gagarin Way*], and my first play which was a big success as well, I don't know it's kind of weird, there's so many people who really, really want to be writers but I was never one of them, but I am one. And I can do it. But now it's a job like anything and you just have to get on with it. And it's a good job. If you can do it.

Sarah Beck: What is your process? Do you stay up for hours? Do you watch a lot of television, or write when you have a deadline?

Gregory Burke: I used to write to a deadline. A lot's changed in the last couple of year in my life really and I just, I'm really ambitious about doing it, and doing it properly, and all I do is write. I write during the week and then on the weekends when I have time off I have a little girl and she's five so I get her on the weekend. I split with her Mum. So all I do is write all week. And I stopped drinking a year ago as well. There's a lot of hours in the day when you don't drink, you accomplish a lot. You're at the desk at 6 o'clock in the morning just like that (typing motion). And also I think you get to the point where you see the rewards that could potentially be there. If you apply yourself. Whereas before it's just my character, I'm a bit of a bam as they say in Scotland. I never really bothered for anything really my whole life, I just did the least possible to get things done. You know what I mean? Where as I wish I would have been this ambitious when I was thirty. You know what I mean? And I found out at forty. But I think it's good you know? The time is right, because I deliver scripts on time, I re-draft on time. I'm very professional about it. Where as in the past—'They paid me, Fuck it!'

Sarah Beck: And do you have people you trust that you work with your scripts, dramaturgs?

Gregory Burke: I just work with whoever's commissioned me really. And I—just, as a writer. If it's TV and film you have to serve the director if it's a film or whatever a program wants to a certain extent, or what the program-maker wants, but at the same time, I don't know, I'm not very precious about writing. As I say it's only

words, and there's plenty more where that came from. So I don't have a lot of that—and some writers have that thing—can't move full stop unless there's a ten-hour meeting. I'm very practical about it. Well I should have a play for the National Theatre of Scotland next year. Hopefully they'll program it for next summer. It's about David Hume the philosopher. When you don't drink there are a lot of hours to fill.

Sarah Beck: Would you write about soldiers again?

Gregory Burke: No. Well. Not for theatre. Maybe for a movie. Well I kind of have written a film about soldiers. But I don't want to get bogged down in it.

Sarah Beck: And have you watched *The Hurt Locker*?

Gregory Burke: Yeah, and I liked it, but it's like the end. All these films go a bit crazy. Kind of going about Bagdad at night on their own. It just doesn't happen.

Sarah Beck: What I found most interesting in that film was near the end when the lead character is in the grocery store and is overwhelmed by choice...just the idea of coming back to civilian life.

Gregory Burke: Well that's the part *Black Watch* almost missed out. It has it but at the same time that's the third act of *Black Watch*. Five years on. How they get on. You know. But I would never do that.

Sarah Beck: What struck me was that moment when Stewarty threatens to break the writer's arm.

Gregory Burke: But that didn't happen.

Sarah Beck: I know it didn't happen, but it was one of the moments you could see how it could have and it reveals the tension.

Gregory Burke: Well you know. A fair amount are in jail now, not the guys I know, but the amount of them who will end up in jail is huge.

Sarah Beck: I was surprised to learn in the US twenty-five percent of the homeless people on the street are veterans. And when I was home I went to the VA hospital and interviewed a guy, who had a twenty-five-year, glittering career as a meteorologist for the Navy. It wasn't just doing the weather forecast—there will be sunny spells—but this many people could die if a sandstorm hits and the equipment fails. And when he retired he didn't know

what to do with himself. He ended up getting a divorce. Sleeping in his parents' basement. Then his friends' basements. Then later he ended up homeless on the streets of Baltimore. And it happens.

Gregory Burke: No it happens to so many of them that's the thing. Because, cause the thing for me for me cause it's the defining moment of all of their lives, and it's a defining moment for all of them. That's the thing that's going to be the thing in their older lives that keeps them from moving forward. And erm, it's like anyone who goes through some sort of trauma and it's very difficult for them to move on from it. And but it isn't like when we were interviewing them it's like six months, or one year, or two years, five years or ten years down the line or when their marriage splits up or when they're unemployed or drinking too much. It's how they cope with things then, and you know it's not going to end well. Do you know what I mean? Because it won't. And one of the things I learned in Washington when I was sitting at the dinner, because one of the guys in Washington who was at the theatre was a guy very high up in Veterans Affairs, and he said the average amount of time before post-traumatic stress disorder manifests itself is fourteen years after the event. It's mental.

Sarah Beck: All of these young guys.

Gregory Burke: Just time bombs walking about. That's what he was saying. 'We're going to have to build a lot more prisons.' I don't know if he was just joking, but at the same time it's true. It'll all come at some point. And he says even some from the Second World War where there's spikes of violence, crime, domestic violence and crime statistics and you can see it's post-traumatic stress disorder from the coming home. Because again even though, say in America it was different in the Second World War II they were isolated the mass population didn't have to go through with it. It was still a small amount of people. America was never bombed like Great Britain or France was, it wasn't like the whole country was involved in the war effort. American veterans came back to from World War Two to a country where no one cared. And people were just getting on with their lives. And were like 'You were over there. So what kind of thing.' He said so, it was a different experience for those vets.

Sarah Beck: Another thing they do when soldiers return home and are injured they put them on serious painkillers like Oxycontin.

Gregory Burke: Oxycontin. Ay, hillbilly heroin. Oxycontin is such a strong opiate. You don't have as much here but in America it's a big

thing. [...] I had a meeting with Michael Mann who was doing a film about Agincourt archers, he had seen *Black Watch*. And he's doing a film about Agincourt archers—it's really about Henry V and Johnny Depp's playing Henry V. So I had to go meet him, so that would have been a lot of money if I got the job.

Sarah Beck: It's quite tough for writers in film. They're given a hard time.

Gregory Burke: But I don't mind it. You pay me and I'd re-write it a hundred times if you'd ask me. Well, listen lovely to meet you.

Sarah Beck: And nice to meet you. Thank you.

Gregory Burke: And good luck with it. Drop me an email you know if you hear anything about anything if Brian tells you why. Just as a question. Don't say it's from me. Just say 'You only did the first tour, why was that?' And he'll say 'Oh yeah there was no ideological reason for it,' and he'll maybe tell you. He's a proper artist. He thinks about things a lot. I don't think. I just do it. I'd write a poster for a poison company!

Sarah Beck: Well thank you very much for your time.

Gregory Burke: No problem and good luck with it.

## Interview with Actor Brian Ferguson

**Ferguson played Cammy in the original production of *Black Watch* (2006-2007), and the first Scottish tour**

Date: December 10, 2011

Location: Stereo, Reinfield Lane in Glasgow

### Interview

Sarah Beck: I'm doing a PhD in documentary theatre and war, and I'm interested particularly in the subject matter of how you approach subjects like that of soldiers. But I had seen you in *Snuff* at Theatre 503, and that was interesting because it was about a man's personal war in his flat.

Brian Ferguson: I had loved it. We had done it a few times two tours. We did it at The Arches when Davey [Anderson] first won the director's award and we did a tour for just a week? And then went to The Traverse for the Edinburgh Fringe and then it got picked up by The National Theatre of Scotland. For the tour we went down to London, but in terms of a play, it was just so well written, and a world that really sucked you in both as actors, but also as an audience. It was also so intriguing. And yeah and such a strong play I thought that you don't see all that often it was just so good.

Sarah Beck: Just the tension. I think Davey did a really good job of just winding up the audience and then you never figure out if Pamela's dead or not... as I understand you weren't allowed to say to audience what you thought happened—I interviewed Davey a couple of weeks ago. But that was an interesting point because you were there at the beginning of The National Theatre of Scotland.

Brian Ferguson: That was really good for me actually because that was, I had been out of work for quite a while before *Snuff*, for like a year-and-a-half or something. And then *Snuff* was the first show I had done—I mean I did little bits and pieces but it was the first kind of proper acting job that I had for eighteen months, and Davey had just seen me doing a rehearsed reading and it was about that time that The National Theatre of Scotland was just starting so John Tiffany and Vicky [Featherstone] both saw that show. And then from off the back of that I started working with a company called Poorboy and did a couple of shows with them that John and Vicky saw as well. It was just really good timing.



Sarah Beck: So they targeted you?

Brian Ferguson: Yeah they did, luckily for me, they came and luckily gave Poorboy a show, during the first year of NTS and their workshop strand and they, Poorboy had an idea for a show on the streets of Glasgow, so they did it in Glasgow city central, because they were doing a lot of site-specific and promenade work, so and ended up getting funding for that for the NTS workshop strand. And then pretty much after that we went into rehearsals for *Black Watch*.

Sarah Beck: So what was it like then going into *Black Watch*? Because from the way it sounds from when I talked to Davey and from when I talked to Greg [Burke] it was really up in the air the way, and the forces came together in the rehearsal process. So what was it like for you a performer? I mean I guess they came and they wanted you.

Brian Ferguson: Yeah they did and it was really nice. We did four days workshopping kind of six weeks before rehearsal started, so it wasn't cast at that point and they got a few of us in and they just did a few workshops just trying out ideas. And then when we actually went and did rehearsals proper, 'What was it like?' Well I had never been in a rehearsal process that was quite so, I guess, like a rollercoaster just really kind of—. And real tension. Creative tension, and kind of- Just because Greg came in with a big pile of verbatim interviews and there was no— And certain ideas for the show that he thought he wanted in. But there was no order to it. There was no- I don't think we even knew – I can't remember what we knew- I think we knew that it was going to cut between the pub and Iraq. I think a lot of that was written, I think that idea was there, but, I mean so much of it was still up in the air. And during rehearsals it was- there was tension. There was definitely a lot of tension between a lot of us, between, you know like I felt it between myself and John, and between John and Greg, you know cause, people, I think what was happening was people were all working really hard but not—and just wanted to be sure that I guess that everyone else was doing the same. And we could tell it was such a beast of a show. And it kept changing and kept changing. And Greg was in rehearsals, certainly full-time for the first two or three weeks. And then just eventually John just said, 'You need to go. You need to leave rehearsals for like a week'. At least a week, maybe two weeks, the final couple of weeks of rehearsals. And John just asked Greg to leave. And I guess then it started to come into shape the

way John wanted it to come into. What was I going to say? There was also lines, something that happened out of that rehearsal process which I had never really known before was that the characters weren't really kind of defined. So a lot of the lines that were in the script, it was much more about hearing these

sentences being spoken, but it wasn't all that important at first, which character said what. So there was a lot of shaping ourselves characters as we went along. So literally saying, 'I don't think my character would say this.' But kind of carving your own character out of, just chipping away, trying to define you from the others... So I remember just doing a fair bit of that just trying to kind of make some headway and at the time I thought it was a weak point about it. That I would say, 'I don't want this line'. And John would go, 'ok who wants that line?' Ok well you have it'.

Sarah Beck: And did it make you feel weird because some of it's verbatim testimony and some of the lines are inspired by real stories—was it chaotic throwing these lines around?

Brian Ferguson: No I think we felt, it was hard for us to feel, I guess because from the minute we got up, it felt so theatrical that it felt like lines. It didn't really feel like—and because it was from a world so distanced from us and the world that we were used to, it was hard to imagine that a lot of this had come from normal guys. And then when we met them, because we met them and one guy came in a couple of times. And that was amazing you know, because, well without-- it's obvious, but he was just a normal guy. He was a lovely guy, and like the same age as us. You know we had a really good chat. He came in and we got to ask him questions. I think that was really important. Actually I think that happened during the four-day workshops.

Sarah Beck: So you were asking them questions...and the guy, the one who came in a few times, did he help with the uniforms?

Brian Ferguson: I can't remember if he helped with that. We had two—we had a lot of people come in actually during the rehearsal process, cause we also had, a really, really interesting guy who was a war correspondent.

Sarah Beck: David Loyn, I was reading about this. And I've seen him in videos with the Black Watch and I had seen him on the last mission, it was crazy, with the Black Watch and they were going out with night-vision house-to-house looking for insurgents, but it was frightening. But what was it like with him in the room?

Brian Ferguson: He came in for like an afternoon. We talked to him- and again meeting people like him. I think we watched those videos when he was there. Or we had already watched them. But also his respect for—So we talked to a lot of people who were clearly intelligent and clearly compassionate people that had this real respect—and had knew their stuff and had such respect for the Black Watch. So I think we all approached it with- Cause there was a danger certainly for me of approaching it with preconceptions about war and what that meant so actually to meet these people who had such respect for it and gave their life to it—was pretty huge you know cause it makes you, it's kind of humbling you know, so you take it on as, you just approach it—you want to do it justice. And that happened quite quickly, it only got deeper when we went further into rehearsals. It was that actually, that became stronger, that need to do these guys justice cause that was David Loyn, that was the thing I just remember as he was speaking just such respect for the Black Watch for the boys who are out there, you know, the troops who are out there. Which was brilliant and invaluable to be around it. And watching a lot of videos from Iraq at the time. They're really humble guys. It makes you more compassionate I guess, we all went into it with a kind of compassion, which I think is so important for—to approach it in the way.

Sarah Beck: And some of them came to see the show. Well I guess many Black Watch soldiers came to see the show...but what was it like meeting them afterwards?

Brian Ferguson: Well, they didn't talk very much, well, one of them talked a lot the guy who Stewarty is based on, so the guy with depression who came to see the show when we were up North in Scotland. Yeah and BBC Scotland, I don't know if you saw the documentary?

Sarah Beck: Yeah I have. It was him, and the mother of a soldier—I'm not sure if he was in the Black Watch, but Gordon Gentle's mother who was a real advocate for calling Tony Blair to account...but that was intense watching the documentary because it shows them react to the suicide scene.. I did a verbatim play a few years back about the Jean Charles de Menezes case and I knew when the family was coming and had to watch and was scared, I know you as a performer have a job to do, did you know they were coming?

Brian Ferguson: Yeah, had we met? I can't remember. No we hadn't met, but we went out for beers that night with him and his girlfriend, and Rose Gentle came a lot to see the show, so she was around quite a lot.

Sarah Beck: So she got really involved in it?

Brian Ferguson: I think she saw it a couple of times in Edinburgh we spoke to her a bit after that, and she came again that night in Dingwall with the BBC documentary and came out for drinks after it, yeah and she was amazing her and her husband. And also the guy who

Stewarty is based on is just such a lovely guy and, such a kind of a honest, intelligent, guy who had been taken by completely by surprise by what had happened to him from the war. I suppose he was just trying to figure out-, figure it all out so he talked a lot about it as he was trying to make sense of it all- and stuff but he talked a lot about the show and how much he loved it. And you could really see, it landed with people who had been out there. I suppose it's done something well- cause they really, really related to it.

Sarah Beck: And you were in the show until 2007?

Brian Ferguson: I don't know, I did it at the Fringe in about 2006? Yeah that's probably right. And then the Scottish tour the year after until the Spring in 2007.

Sarah Beck: Going back to the beginning to what you were saying about all of the tension and then it all kind of worked. What was the first night like for you after all the tears and sweat?

Brian Ferguson: Yeah I think I remember thinking. Once we got out of the venue actually and seeing—well one thing I remember doing, doing a run of it in a rehearsal room and Neil Murray the producer came and afterwards he was just shaking his head and he just looked so sad. And I remember thinking it was because the show was terrible and it wasn't till afterwards that I found out that he was just blown away by it. Erm, and then when we went to the venue—and that's where my head was at with it I mean, because the rehearsal process had been so tumultuous I suppose, I really had no idea what it was like and then we got into the venue and saw the set and it just all started coming together and I thought 'Ok, this is going to be...' and then I started getting a bit of faith in it 'Ok actually this is going to be—this is quite exciting.' But I

still had no idea, and actually during the previews although the feedback was really good I think it was still, I didn't really know, until the second night after press night, walking in with the boys and we were going for a drink and we bought a really late edition of *The Scotsman* and there was a review in it, and it was five stars, and it was like a page. And it was just saying, it was just a brilliant, brilliant review. And then going, Oh. That's the first point I remember actually think all right this is going to go quite well. And then it just took off. It just kind of took off yeah.

Sarah Beck: That must have been really exciting for you.

Brian Ferguson: Yeah, it was out of nothing. But I think that's part of the reason why it was such a success because, everyone was working so hard and no one had, there's no egos, no egos in the room because everyone was just working.

Sarah Beck: And all of the work you did with Steven Hoggett, the text itself is one thing, all of the movement was incredible. And how much you have to depend on each other [as performers] to get through the sequence—actually do you want to talk about the uniform sequence?

Brian Ferguson: Working with Steven was just brilliant, I mean just brilliant. He's, I don't know, if you met him.

Sarah Beck: I haven't met him. I guess he's off on Broadway working with John Tiffany on *Once*.

Brian Ferguson: He is brilliant really, actually amazing as a man and as a teacher and director. As a teacher and what he did with us and how he got us there was amazing. And very quickly—we were doing dance, but none of us were thinking of it as dance. So we started, he would start, it started with physical fitness and core strength. And it was sore. He really put us through our paces the whole time. And we would basically spend the mornings working with Steven and the afternoons of going to rehearsals with John. Which would start with doing Yoga and pilates, real core strength and stuff. And then we'd do a lot of cardio vascular. Lots of running, lots of sweating, lots of intense exercise and that would go into and one thing would be running, running, running, sprinting, racing, running and then one of us jumps up and the other catches them. And before you knew it you were doing lifts and working in pairs, using each other to get across the room but at that point you were so in your own body, and you got into your

body in a way that kind of, there was like this competitive edge to everything, but not competitive, never enough to overcome the support so we used to do handstands and everybody would do a handstand and it would start for like a minute so everyone would try that, and some people would fall, and some people would be left up and everyone would cheer them on. So it quite quickly it did become a squad and there was a healthy level of competition but above all that there was a real group, that I don't know how he did it, but he did it so well and so quickly and that was essential such a trust, for that for that section I just remembered it being so easy. Like I mean, my job is reasonably easy.

Sarah Beck: So you just allowed them to move you?

Brian Ferguson: I just had to relax.

Sarah Beck: And were you a cannonball at some points? You were at times twirled around, almost like a cannonball I didn't know if it was a cannonball reference at some point.

Brian Ferguson: Ahh right. Why not! Probably! Yeah and we just worked through it. We worked through all of the movement, the big set pieces, through the rehearsals so maybe one morning a week, for six or seven weeks, we'd work on each bit so the kind of end drill, or maybe three big sections, you know.

Sarah Beck: The ten-second fight sequence looked very hard. I guess that's when you're doing most of the lifts. Did you break anything?

Brian Ferguson: Nobody got bad injuries when we did it. I maybe hurt my knee slightly. Nothing bad. Nothing that stopped anything. But he was amazing yeah.

Sarah Beck: So what was the play about for you?

Brian Ferguson: What was the play about for me? Oh wow. I don't know if I have an answer for you.

Sarah Beck: It's one of those nagging questions you get when writing a play. I guess because *Black Watch* was inspired by real stories, it's more difficult to grasp because you probably don't have the same freedom as you would if it was just written from someone's head [...] but you played Cammy, so what was the story for you?

Brian Ferguson: I guess for me it was about Cammy's story because it's kind of hard to keep an eye on the big picture. So I guess and the guy we

met was who Cammy was based on, the guy who came in for rehearsal. A couple of times to talk to. So I guess I always had that in my head. And that last scene with him, which came very late from Greg, the officer and Cammy where Cammy says 'This isn't about war, and war fighting, it's about bullying' and Greg wrote that really late on in rehearsals, Peter Forbes who played the officer and myself just picked up and read it with each other and it was just perfect. It's just one of those scenes that you picked up and you know, it's this. So, I guess that scene for me was always, the anger of it I suppose as Cammy was the bit for that felt really true, and important, what he's saying in those last couple of scenes and the discussion with the officer, so I mean I suppose, Cammy's story was what it was about for me, and meeting them. What it's like as a person to be out there, rather than any political review of anything.

Sarah Beck: The personal stories I can imagine, offer a whole new perspective.

Brian Ferguson: And also he had come back I remember, something that really kind of landed was that Stephen, who was the guy who Cammy was based on. When we met him he was back from his second tour. And he decided that was it. He wasn't going to go back. Which is kind of how *Black Watch* ends, not how *Black Watch* ends, but where his story ends, with him saying, 'that's it for me. I'm not coming back'. And Stephen had said the same. And then he had come home, and he was working, as a janitor in a primary school. And he was really struggling, I mean we didn't know this at the time but you do think how do you go from all of that excitement? And all that responsibility? And camaraderie to then being a janitor in a primary school? So he went back. After we had met him, we heard that he'd gone back.

Sarah Beck: And was Stephen the driver of the wagons?

Brian Ferguson: I don't think he was the driver but he sat up front.

Sarah Beck: I had interviewed American soldiers and one of the things that came across for me and *Black Watch* was the sort of civilian/soldiers divide. 'Oh I understand'. Did that come across for you, meeting them?

Brian Ferguson: No, it was all pretty amazing. We were all very respectful. The minute he came in we all immediately were just respectful. That's kind of what I remember, there were questions you thought would be the questions, that would be the first question you

would ask, and none of us asked them because you just thought, you can't do that, you can't ask them that. Like you know, so I think if anything we were all respectful.

Sarah Beck: And would you allow him to say what was on his mind before asking some of the questions?

Brian Ferguson: Yeah, yeah, I guess to tread the water a bit. To let him see what he volunteered more than, he was very open. He really wanted to be there. I mean it's pretty incredible he was the one that actually—I had forgotten this—but he was the one who made sure that all of the guys kept coming back to the pub to meet Greg. And Greg was in touch with him, and he was the one that wanted, he was the main driving force behind getting the story told.

Sarah Beck: Were the other soldiers reluctant to open up to Greg?

Brian Ferguson: I think they were. I don't know. I do think there is truth between that torn thing. First of all I think Cammy was keeping them there especially towards the beginning you know. But then also there is a kind of conflict one thing between to tell, I guess there's that constant battling on both sides of the person, who's interviewing but also you know the soldiers of wanting to share their stories

but at the same time, I mean it's such a vulnerable thing to do to give that story over and then ok now you're going to go, what are you going to do with this, like? I think that's huge.

Sarah Beck: Did you ever feel that in the play? Did you feel kind of ethically that you were unsure about how to represent, or how the play represented the stories?

Brian Ferguson: Yeah I felt really unsure about the play going through rehearsals. Really unsure. I mean yeah totally I remember thinking about that quite a lot during rehearsals...going...Oh God I was...what ended up being created was an incredible piece of theatre and I thought it was kind of judged perfectly in terms of where it sits. But yeah there were a lot of points during rehearsals, just because you're not seeing the bigger picture, I didn't have what John was doing, in my head so there were scenes where taken out of context, I was maybe taking them slightly out of context and I was worried that what are we saying here? I think that was the thing. 'What are we saying here?' And I think John asked that a lot of himself during the rehearsal period during rehearsal. 'What are we saying?' And I think what it got to was, we're trying hard not to say anything, we're trying hard not to fall into a camp. But that's just a risky place to live.



Sarah Beck: Well I guess you would feel, if the whole thing was in shambles after meeting the guy, and having a story that didn't really work [...] Were you surprised how much it's grown? It's gone everywhere now.

Brian Ferguson: Not when I saw it. When I ended up seeing it, it was quite recently that I saw it, I mean when I saw it I was completely bowled over by it. I just thought it was beautiful, I thought it was absolutely beautiful, but I didn't know that was the position I was in.

Sarah Beck: What was it like on the night of your last performance. Were you ready to go?

Brian Ferguson: I was so ready actually. It was a strange one yeah, by the time it got to the end, cause obviously it went on, erm, I was just ready to leave. But it was huge, it was huge for me just going on the journey of it. So it was really a big thing when it finished. It was a big thing to do, to leave.

Sarah Beck: Did you feel tired of playing Cammy or—

Brian Ferguson: I felt tired of... what did I feel tired of? It was such a kind of rapid, into the spotlight. I felt that there wasn't...how to phrase this?... there was a danger of that becoming more important than the show...

Sarah Beck: Than the stories?

Brian Ferguson: Yeah, I guess.

Sarah Beck: And what was it like than working with Davey Anderson again on *Black Watch*?

Brian Ferguson: It was good. Davey was hidden away in a corner. I didn't see him at all. He hardly came out. He just sat with his headphones on, and a keyboard, tinkering away and a laptop. And then his music arrived, so I don't know how many memories involved. But we're great friends.

Sarah Beck: And I saw you in *Earthquakes in London* last year.

Brian Ferguson: I just played a young version of Bill Patterson's character as a young man, just at the beginning. That was a successful show.

Sarah Beck: And are you writing, directing, acting now?

Brian Ferguson: Mainly acting. Erm, and with Poorboy, there are quite a lot of, we have an ensemble of actors and we meet up quite often and we devise a lot of work, and write. So kind of practicing in different ways. I mean, most of my, work is as an actor.

Sarah Beck: And are you still working a lot with the National Theatre of Scotland?

Brian Ferguson: I haven't for a while. I stay in touch and there's been a few projects that nearly happened, but not for awhile. It was mainly because *Earthquakes in London*, and all that year I was kind of down in London. And a year after that, last year, I did a couple of shows that were traveling around a bit so I wasn't here that much. And then I got married at the end of August. So I haven't, but I think it's been a great thing for Scotland. And I think they're going about it all the right way. I think it's good.

Sarah Beck: And have you done any other verbatim theatre?

Brian Ferguson: I did a workshop with Emma Calendar, we did a workshop, but no. *Black Watch* is the only thing really. I'd like to do more, I think it's a really interesting area.

Sarah Beck: And the process it's quite unique because I think it's rare for people to have someone come in and ask them all of these questions about their experiences, and I also think it's dangerous because people will open up about things and you have to be really careful, and really respectful when you stage personal testimony.

Brian Ferguson: And the show you did, that was all verbatim was it?

Sarah Beck: Yeah and it was all about the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes and we interviewed the family—and I had a co-writer, and human rights lawyers, and members of the Justice4Jean campaign, and senior police officers, although it was very hard to get people to talk from an institution like that, because it was a sore moment for them...

Brian Ferguson: For who?

Sarah Beck: For the police. Because of all of the mistakes. And the family were very supportive of the play, but I didn't really feel we did the story justice, it wasn't really ready to go on, and it did. It was

on at Theatre 503 and we just kind of scrambled. And half of it was Brechtian and half of it was naturalistic. But they were just happy to have someone tell their story again, because Jean Charles wasn't running from police, and he wasn't in a padded jacket and he didn't jump the ticket barrier. A lot of people didn't know that, and they still shared the initial impressions from the shooting, that the man had jumped that, he was running from police. It's an interesting research process. But you do constantly question how appropriate it is to put some of these things in a play and then they come to watch it. And is it about the benefit for the family? Or is it about a piece of theatre—and you don't want to capitalise from other people's stories but you are. So I'm interested in the ethics of it.

Brian Ferguson: One of the gray areas about it is worrying about it being manipulative or are you manipulating what they are saying just by putting it in the context you choose to put it in.

Sarah Beck: What I liked about *Black Watch* was the fact that there was a writer figure in there, and I know it wasn't much like what Greg's really like. But some of the guys are questioning what his motives are and are you going to put it on for a bunch of theatre people. You were always kind of aware of the mediation involved in the creation of *Black Watch* in a way. And then you're questioning why as an audience member, are you being really voyeuristic? [...] Well thank you for meeting me, do you often get PhD students knocking on your door?

Brian Ferguson: Quite a few. Because a lot of secondary schools across Scotland are studying *Black Watch* [...] Just watching the DVD. And a lot of them do monologues just for drama school entry. It's kind of studied now, and you do get people probably almost old enough to be my child coming up 'Oh you're the guy from *Black Watch*.' It's good—the effect it's had.

## Interview with Director John Tiffany

Date: February 15, 2012

Location: Telephone via Skype, National Theatre of Scotland Office, Glasgow

### Interview

Sarah Beck: I've talked to Davey Anderson and a few others so it's great to talk to you...and congratulations on *Once*!

John Tiffany: Thank you I'm very proud of it. I just got back from New York on Saturday and we're taking it to Broadway, which is lovely!

Sarah Beck: That's wonderful and are you also going to Harvard?

John Tiffany: I've done it!

Sarah Beck: So you're a Harvard graduate.

John Tiffany: I graduated from Harvard. I am very clever.

Sarah Beck: Well thank you for talking to me. Basically I am doing a PhD about documentary theatre and war—and war is a fairly new aspect to my research. So looking at soldiers, testimony and working with veterans. And I was talking to Greg [Burke] about verbatim theatre, because I know about the process of interviews, the process working with real stories, and the ethics. And Greg was talking about how limiting it is as a process, for a writer—You couldn't just make up things that people would say, or you couldn't create dialogue that was true to the experiences. I was just curious as a director for you if the process was ever frustrating for you, if it was a different kind of experience for you than anything else you've done?

John Tiffany: It was different because I never really, I had never really based things on interviews but we really quickly realised how limiting it was, so it's not verbatim *Black Watch*. So because we realised how quickly limiting it was we realised just because it's true isn't to say it's dramatic. Our responsibility is to tell their story in way that has resonance for a large audience. And so although the texture and the content in terms of the stories and anecdotes of the interview are true I would say the language is all Greg.

Sarah Beck: He has quite an ear for dialogue.

John Tiffany: He does, but he's also from there. That's why I had no qualms really about him doing that, because he could put it into their words and make them seem wittier. Which of course is what we all want, because he you know, because even though they refused to be recorded, erm, the guys. So we didn't have verbatim what they said anyway. They only had Greg's memory.

[Phone cuts out. Calls backs]

Sarah Beck: Hi my apologies we got disconnected!

John Tiffany: Yeah I lost you there!

Sarah Beck: Sorry, so you were saying that because Greg was from the area.

John Tiffany: Yeah because Greg is from there he could put into their vocabulary, their language, their dialect. And make them seem wittier.

Sarah Beck: I also want to ask when I was talking to Davey Anderson, he mentioned the *The Cheviot* and *Oh What a Lovely War!* were—so 7:84's big play...

John Tiffany: *The Cheviot the Stag and the Black, Black Oil!*

Sarah Beck: So how did those scripts influence your choices or why were they guides in the rehearsal room?

John Tiffany: Because I like the ambition of them. We decided to create the play in the rehearsal room as opposed to developing a play that we took and started *rehearsing*. And I had never done that before and I was a bit like..... uhh!? (laughs) I didn't know what the hell I was doing to be honest with you! We didn't really use them as references. They were there as kind of good luck charms. So because of their ambition, what Joan Littlewood did with *Oh What a Lovely War!* in which she involved spectacle and music, erm, *Cheviot* we knew, well I knew I wanted to do something along those lines, but, and also those shows are very about the time they were written and I wanted to make a piece of theatre that was about now. I didn't know it would still be around say eight years later it would still be performed, because when we made it for a limited span really.

Sarah Beck: And now you're telling war stories about the making of it!

- John Tiffany: Exactly!
- Sarah Beck: One of the things I loved about *Black Watch* and I saw it at the Barbican in 2010, one of the things I loved—because a lot of verbatim plays I had seen were quite dry and kind of puritanical and I loved how the writer became a part of the play. And the tension making stories based on peoples ‘experiences being a part of that tension. So I was wondering what the inspiration was there...
- John Tiffany: Erm, the inspiration there I suppose, we’d... Well I’ve had some very dry experiences watching verbatim plays. David Hare—not mentioning any names. And so I really wanted to avoid that. I don’t know my taste is theatricality. So that’s why I brought Stephen Hoggett and Davey Anderson in to work on it. And erm, yeah the inspiration for the writer, well the writer was actually only going to be a voice to begin with. And then it was just an accident in the rehearsal room. That Paul [Higgins] was cast as the sergeant, who is a fantastic actor and I just one day in the rehearsal room I said ‘Look will you just read these lines?’ And then it just developed from there. It wasn’t necessarily about the writer, writing himself in to the play, the whole thing with the writer’s story, *is for me about the audience*- I think we have this insatiable desire to hear these war stories. Almost to be voyeurs. And ‘Did you kill anybody?’ And that’s interesting because that’s the question, ‘What’s it like to kill somebody?’ was the question I really wanted to ask and then when I met them, when I met the soldiers, it was the question I realised I had no right to ask.
- Sarah Beck: Right and did you meet them in the rehearsal room, or did you meet with them a long time before.
- John Tiffany: I had met them before to make sure it was going to be all right. It could be potentially explosive bringing soldiers into a rehearsal room with actors pretending to be soldiers. And it was just the main one, the one who Cammy was based on who came in first and all of the actors sat around and I asked all of the actors to prepare two questions each and we had a really good conversation. He was very generous, and he gave me all of his photographs of when he was in Iraq. And then he came into the tech and showed the actors how to wear their hats and carry their rifles. He was great.
- Sarah Beck: And were there any revelations that came out of the process of actors asking an actual Black Watch soldiers about their experiences?
- John Tiffany: It was more the studying thing really, because the whole point is

there are no revelations. Because if you ask them what it was like. ‘It was. It’s all right.’ Anything to do with how did it *feel*, anything that started with that it was like, ‘It’s a job. It’s all right’ anything you went into... and that was, that became the tension for me and Greg, me and Greg against the play. Which is then why then I expanded it to be the writer. To include Geoff Hoon and Alex Salmond because Greg rightly said, ‘I can’t put politics and emotions into their mouths.’

Sarah Beck: Because they don’t say things like that...

John Tiffany: And it sounds ridiculous when they do. So we had to find other ways to get them in particularly with the movement where the language opened up. And we started working on the *Blueys* section when they’d read the letters from home and I realised how we could get into it...

Sarah Beck: I talked to Ross Anderson and he told me briefly about the Letters Home sequence and so everyone had their own individual sign language from a letter they wrote...

John Tiffany: Yeah, well what happened was, as I said the main guy who gave me all of his photographs, they’re all really kind of, what’s the word? Macho. Aggressive. They were posing in it—the soldiers. And there was one beautiful black and white photograph taken of his best friend, sat in the back of the wagon and he’s reading a letter from home, and his face is absolutely *transported* somewhere. Me and Stephen really loved this photograph and put it up on the wall in rehearsal. And then one day Stephen said ‘Can I do an exercise with the actors?’ and I said, ‘Ah’. And he got them to write a letter to themselves from a loved one, whether it be a girlfriend, daughter, mother, father, brother, whatever, telling them what they were up to back in Scotland. And he got them to take three sentences from that letter and to find a gesture. Erm a kind of language that would communicate that, but not to communicate to an audience, it wasn’t about, it wasn’t about presenting it at all it was for them, and them alone. And so they created that language for themselves. And then he got them to put it into a sequence. So as a result I’ve got no idea what they’re doing—which is very important I think. It’s personal.

Sarah Beck: Because Ross Anderson was saying that one evening the letters were mixed up and everyone made it a point not to read them.

John Tiffany: It’s one of the rules of *Black Watch*. The Rules of *Black Watch* (*joking in an American accent*). Is that nobody’s allowed to read those letters.

- Sarah Beck: I was curious about something I read a long time ago about Gregory Burke, and I didn't ask him in the interview. I love the Lord Elgin integration into the contemporary and the World War I recruitment. And was that inspired by Gregory Burke's story of his grandfather who was recruited in World War I.
- John Tiffany: It's Lord Elgin (correcting pronunciation)
- Sarah Beck: Oh, sorry Lord Elgin.
- John Tiffany: No don't worry. It's about his—his Grandad's story about how Lord Elgin used to go around Edinburgh and recruit people in pubs for the First World War.
- Sarah Beck: I've been reading a lot about the Golden Thread—the Black Watch history and how it comes back up. And when *Black Watch* was touring around did you have any Black Watch soldiers come up to you and talk to you and the actors?
- John Tiffany: Not just *Black Watch*, soldiers all over the world, it's interesting, marines, a lot of marines in the States, and that's been quite interesting. I think, they think that we won't get it right. They come quite suspicious. And of course the marines get the piss taken out off them in the play by the Black Watch. And the marines absolutely love it, 'that's just like us', a part from there's more swearing.' The Black Watch soldiers that we interviewed came to see it. There were six of them, but they were like 'Yeah, that's us'. And I had to be, 'You do not want your identity to be revealed. Because the press will be all over you. And also the MoD, won't take kindly to it. It is critical of war as a thing.' I got them to come a couple days after opening and it was amazing and it was incredibly intense because, of course, they were watching their friends die again on-stage. And they didn't say much afterwards but we went to the pub and a few pints in, the main guy who we spoke to came up to me and said 'Thank you' and I said, 'No, Thank you.' 'No thank you because I didn't think anybody gave a shit—a fuck about us. And I just saw people giving a fuck.' So that was quite moving.
- Sarah Beck: Because I had heard about another soldier who came and was sharing stories with actors—revealing things about the event [the explosion] that his wife who was with him had never even heard before.
- John Tiffany: I think that was David Ironside who Stewarty's based on who attempted to break the writer's arm.



Sarah Beck: I had heard that the soldier actually ended up going back—the one who Cammy was based on.

John Tiffany: Yeah he went back. He couldn't cope with civy life.

Sarah Beck: And what was that like when he came in to work with the *Black Watch* team, was he eager to be a part of the process?

John Tiffany: You mean the theatre process?

Sarah Beck: Yes.

John Tiffany: No not really. I mean I think that becomes a different thing then. Which becomes more about you know—I'm in two minds about it, the whole thing about getting real people to perform their own stories, you know, there's a technique, a craft that comes with *training*. And that's the craft of telling an audience a story. And erm we're theatre professionals, he's a military professional. And it's great that we can connect outside of the rehearsal room, but that would be like asking me to join the army. I'm not trained to do that. He's not trained to be a part of a theatre process.

Sarah Beck: And I had also read that it had to be a constant reminder with soldiers that they are not soldiers.

John Tiffany: That's right. There were a few comments like 'Wow, I really feel I'm someone who'd been there.' And I'd say 'I think that's insulting. Because you really don't know what it's like to be there. Because you take off your uniform and go to the pub, and chat up pretty girls. They watch their friends die so. Do not let me hear you say that again.'

Sarah Beck: And what was it like right before it all came together before the Edinburgh show, because I heard it was a bit chaotic.

John Tiffany: Oh it was a disaster! An absolute disaster!

Sarah Beck: Well it just sounded like a miracle that it had all fallen into place! So I don't know what that was like in your position as the director holding it all together.

John Tiffany: I'm like you know that, ah well! (laughs). The thing with theatre is, I just feel you have to ambitious. If you fail, like Samuel Beckett says, 'Fail better'. Fail again, fail better. And we were being ambitious. Yeah we did think we were about to deliver the first turkey of the National Theatre of Scotland. But you know,

we done something right. And the audience just loved it. And we had some really positive reactions from very emotional responses from runs in the rehearsal room but I'm always a bit like 'You're paid to like it!' but so it was an incredibly overwhelming response when we first opened—I meant there were things like the actors are quite funny about it because they were quite convinced with Fashion which is where Cammy goes through all of the uniforms, when they dress him in all of the uniforms, they didn't get it right until the first preview and the actors were absolutely convinced that that was going to be cut. And that became the signature piece of *Black Watch*.

Sarah Beck: And was it difficult to re-create the blast scene, because it was based on a real event?

John Tiffany: Difficult in what way?

Sarah Beck: The actual event where the blast...

John Tiffany: You mean the event of the explosion Well, We knew we had to do it. Erm, our stage manager found online, you can still watch it actually, on an insurgent's website, the actual explosion. And it's filmed by one of the insurgents who's, as you can see the car kind of going up to the checkpoint and erm the guy who is filming it is going, 'Allahu akbar. Allahu akbar. Allahu akbar.' It's really, it's really disturbing and then there's a huge explosion. It's enormous. And I found that, I watched it just to get a sense of the actual reality of it. But I never—And I said to the actors, 'Look, this is something we have, if you want to watch it, obviously you can but I'm not going to ask you to. You don't need to watch it. Me and Stephen Hoggett, and Greg needed to see it.' And I found something very disturbing in the fact, that you know, that mothers of dead soldiers used to get telegrams. Saying that their son was dead. Now they can watch it online. Which I think is repulsive. And very moving. So I knew that we had to show that, and I knew we needed to show the horror of it. And, erm, so we just went there. We had to just go there. We had to just go there and I feel, sometimes, I feel, erm very aware and sensitive, like when we performed it in Glenrothes and two of the mothers of the boys who died came to see it. But we make sure we tell them what the content of the show is before they sit in. And erm of course they can't watch it, they can't watch that part of it. You know and some people find it therapeutic. But the main thing is it's about getting audiences into the horror of it. Cause at the end of the day, that's what happened. And that's what it's about. So because that was a story we were telling it felt like we had to tell it.

Sarah Beck: And just a quick question—you worked with David Loyn. Was he a good resource?

John Tiffany: Yeah David was amazing, actually. He changed the whole, he changed everything because, we, we at that point just had the soldiers' perspective. And some of their facts were actually a bit hazy. I think it's just because they were just there. They weren't

recording it for anything. Erm and then David Loyn came and there was one scene, a bit like in *Jarhead*, where the actors were playing volleyball in gas masks. Because I think Greg has a memory that one of the soldiers told him that. But David Loyn was like, 'In Camp Dogwood? No way. They were being mortared all the time. There is absolutely no way they would have played volleyball in gas masks.' So that was interesting because David brought the whole perspective, from the commanders, to the colonels, and the Iraqi perspective as well. Because he's a reporter, he's a journalist. So he was incredibly useful. He came and changed the whole thing.

Sarah Beck: Just one more question because I know time's an issue. I read about the lottery project.

John Tiffany: Oh yeah!

Sarah Beck: How is that going? Is that rolling along...

John Tiffany: I mean what happened is they, in Scotland they brought veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, mainly Afghanistan to see *Black Watch* and kind of use it as a talking point, as a talking point about their own experiences. I wasn't, I wasn't part of any of those discussions but I know that happened. I was at Harvard. I got an amazing message from a friend who was working as a stage manager on the recent project at the Haymarket, which I'm sure you know about.

Sarah Beck: Oh the Bravo 22 Company.

John Tiffany: Exactly! So there was a massive group of soldiers apparently, and they were, which is a great compliment to us and my friend Sunita who sent the message, they were very suspicious about theatre ever being able to capture what they'd been through. And then they showed them the DVD of *Black Watch* and apparently they were blown away by it, they thought it was brilliant.

Sarah Beck: Very good. Well I love watching *Black Watch* on the DVD but I have to admit sometimes I have to watch it with the subtitles!

John Tiffany: That's all right.

Sarah Beck: Because in America you paired back the accents?

John Tiffany: Well you see the DVD was shot in Dingwall, which is just outside of Inverness and obviously they do it, they know they're performing for a mainly Scottish audience. When we come to London—it's actually the same thing, when we come to London, London we need to be as aware as we do in the States. We just have to slightly temper what we say and not what we say but how thick the accents are because there's no point in doing it, if they wouldn't understand it.

Sarah Beck: Well thank you for your time and good luck on Broadway. So are you going to be in the States for a long time?

John Tiffany: I'm going back on Saturday for a month.

Sarah Beck: Well thank you and I hope to track down Stephen Hoggett at some point.

John Tiffany: No worries and good luck with that! Good to speak with you ok thanks, bye!

### ***Yardbird List of Interviewees***

- 1). Sam: mid-fifties. Father of an Army crew chief on a medevac deployed in Iraq.  
(married to Cindy)

Location: 1<sup>st</sup> interview: Sam's Office, Mercersburg, PA;  
                  Sam and Cindy's home, Mercersburg, PA  
                  2<sup>nd</sup> interview: Sam and Cindy's home, Mercersburg, PA

- 2). Cindy: early fifties. Mother of Army crew chief on a medevac deployed in Iraq.  
(married to Sam)

Location: 1<sup>st</sup> interview: Sam and Cindy's home, Mercersburg, PA  
                  2<sup>nd</sup> interview: Sam and Cindy's home, Mercersburg, PA

- 3). Jason: late thirties. Served in the 82nd Airborne Division of the Army.  
Sustained a brain injury after intercepting an IED.

Location: Infidel Custom Cycles, Hagerstown, MD

- 4). Janine: late thirties. Served as a medical logistics officer in the Navy  
and was deployed in Iraq.

Location: Janine's Home Harper's Ferry, WV

- 5). Kenny: early twenties: A sniper in the Marines Corps and was deployed  
in Iraq.

Location: T.G.I. Fridays, Hagerstown, MD

- 6). Katherine: late twenties. Army wife and mother of two. Her husband  
Derrick (Army) killed an Afghan civilian. He was tried in a military  
court and found guilty of pre-mediated murder and sentenced to life  
in prison.

Location: Uno's Pizzeria, Hagerstown, Maryland

- 7). Gavin: mid-twenties. Served as an Army Ranger and completed three  
deployments in Iraq.

Location: via Skype

- 8). Courtney: early twenties. Army wife (married to Gavin)

Location: via Skype

- 9). Bean: mid-thirties. Works for Jason at Infidel Custom Cycles.

Location: Infidel Custom Cycles, Hagerstown, MD

- 10). Kate: early twenties. Works for Jason at Infidel Custom Cycles  
(Jason's girlfriend)

Location: Infidel Custom Cycles, Hagerstown, MD

11). Kelly: late twenties. Works as a recreational therapist at the VA Medical Centre

Location: VA Medical Centre, Martinsburg, WV

12). Mr. Watson: late eighties. Served in the World War II working as a spy for the Army Security Agency.

Location: VA Medical Centre, Martinsburg, WV

13). Mr. Walters: late eighties (now deceased). Served in the Air Force in World War II. Flew in B-17s dropping bombs.

Location: VA Medical Centre, Martinsburg, WV

14). Tim: late forties. Paratrooper. Served in Desert Storm

Location: VA Medical Centre, Martinsburg, WV

15). Abe: late forties. Meteorologist. Served in the US Navy during Iraqi Freedom.

Location: Medical Centre, Martinsburg, WV

16). Matt: mid-twenties. Served in Afghanistan with the Marine Corps. Sustained injuries from an IED

Location: Matthew's Home, Waynesboro, PA

17). Dieter: mid-seventies. Served in Vietnam, originally from Germany. Served in Hitler's Youth Army

Location: 1<sup>st</sup> interview: My family home, Waynesboro, PA;  
2<sup>nd</sup> interview: Dieter's home, Hagerstown, MD

18). Don: mid-sixties. Served in Vietnam (Marine Corps)

Location: Rolling Mills Restaurant, Waynesboro, PA

19). Gregg: mid-twenties. Served in Afghanistan (Army). Sustained injuries from firefight

Location: via Skype

## ***Yardbird* DVD Recordings of Rehearsed Readings**

Please see both recordings attached (in sleeves) to the back of the dissertation for reference.

### ***Yardbird* DVD Recording of Rehearsed Reading No. 1**

Date: April 9, 2013

Location: The George Wood Theatre, Goldsmiths College New Cross, London

Director: Adam Brace

Cast: Louise Kempton, Simon Lee Phillips, Chris Brandon, Laurence Pears

Videography: Seung Guo

### ***Yardbird* DVD Recording of Rehearsed Reading No. 2**

Date: June 4, 2015

Location: The Pineapple Pub (upstairs) in Kentish Town

Director: Tom Mansfield

Cast: Loren O'Dair, James Wrighton, Simon Darwen, Joshua Manning

Videography: Ashley David

