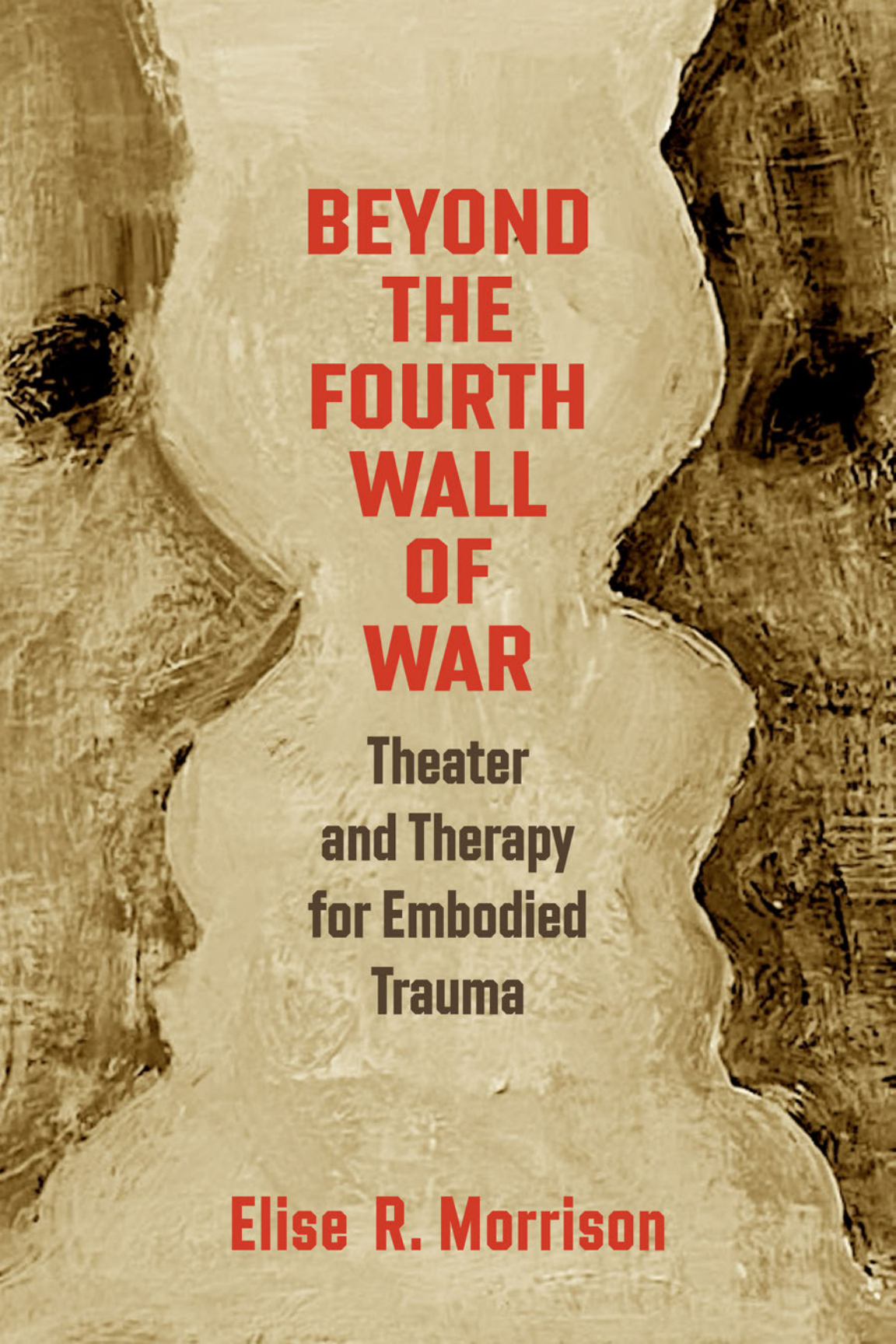




BEYOND THE FOURTH WALL OF WAR

**Theater
and Therapy
for Embodied
Trauma**

Elise R. Morrison

Beyond the Fourth Wall of War

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*Theater and Therapy
for Embodied Trauma*

Elise R. Morrison

University of Michigan Press
Ann Arbor

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*For my parents,
Nancy Rosenberger and Clinton Morrison III,
who taught me that intergenerational pacifism
is also possible.*

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In peace and gratitude, here's to making war a memory rather than a future.

INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Wall of War

Same war different desert
Or same desert different war
No—different desert different war
I don't know
Anyway

—FROM *GROUNDED* BY GEORGE BRANT (2013)

As I was researching the final chapter of my first book, *Discipline and Desire: Surveillance Technologies in Performance* (2016), George Brant sent me a draft of a new play he was working on called *Grounded*. He knew that I was writing about performance artists who were using unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, in their work. *Grounded* tells the story of a female Air Force pilot who, after a surprise pregnancy “grounds” her from physical flight, is reassigned to pilot Reaper drones over Iraq from a trailer in the Nevada desert. I devoured Brant’s dramatic monologue in one sitting, unable to turn away from the tragic and uniquely contemporary narrative. *Grounded* indeed proved pivotal for that book, illuminating intersections of surveillance, militarized technologies, and the ethical choices that individuals face when encountering remotely controlled interfaces of power and violence. As a vivid account of war trauma, *Grounded* also proved to be an important pivot point from that book to this one.

Brant dramatized the Pilot’s journey from Air Force to “Chair Force” in a riveting first-person narrative that shed light on new forms of remotely controlled warfare—and of contemporary war trauma. Since the early 2000s, military service members had been returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with unprecedented rates of traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress

disorder (PTSD), raising alarm, driving up suicide rates, and accelerating trauma research in Veterans Administration hospitals and trauma clinics. Even amid increased awareness of war-related PTSD, the traumatic costs of waging war from a distance were largely eclipsed by the perceived benefits of utilizing remotely controlled weaponry like drones. Brant's fictional dramatic narrative illuminated this burgeoning reality and the dangerous contradictions therein. "The threat of death has been removed," the Pilot repeatedly intones in the play, with a blend of defeatism and relief.¹ She may no longer fly in "the Blue," her term for the sky and the thrill of embodied aerial flight, but performing her pilot duties through "the grey" of a drone screen means that she can be home to kiss her daughter and husband every night.

However, commuting to and from war every day exacts its own psychological toll. Oscillating between realities conditioned by vastly different ethics and consequences, the Pilot's psyche begins to unravel. Is she living in the "same war different desert" or the "same desert different war"? The demands of repeatedly crossing the border between civilian life and military warfare leave her agitated and exhausted. She imagines herself and her family to be constantly under the kind of surveillance she performs through the "eye in the sky" of her drone camera. Her sleeping daughter appears gray when the Pilot peeks in after a long shift, as if the girl is being watched through the screen of a drone. An "extra fun" mommy-daughter trip to a Las Vegas mall ends in a paranoid breakdown as the Pilot feels the eyes watching them through the mall's closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras. "The Odyssey would be a very different book if Odysseus came home every night," the Pilot wryly observes on yet another white-knuckled drive home from the military base to suburban Las Vegas. "A very different book."² She no longer feels like a hero. And she cannot shake the feeling that no one is safe, no matter their distance from the war.

As the Pilot's undiagnosed traumatic stress worsens, she begins to see double. In the climactic scene of the play, her prime "target" in Iraq, a man she has been following via drone for weeks on end, finally gets out of his car, giving her a clear shot. But he is met by another figure: a young girl, likely his daughter. The Pilot freezes, suddenly seeing her own daughter, Sam, in the small, gray figure half a world away. The Pilot cannot fire and instead makes the drone self-destruct. Military leadership step in to remove her from her post and deliver a fatal shot through the gray screen from another drone that has been flying above her own.

While fictional, the story of *Grounded* illuminated factual aspects of early

twenty-first-century warfare, from gender politics in the military to harsh responses to symptoms of psychological distress in combat. Importantly for this book, the Pilot's narrative illustrated the impact of crossing cognitive boundaries between military warfare and "peaceful" civilian life, both for the Pilot and for the audience gathered in the theater. The two realities blurred across the gray of her drone screen and, as the play entered its concluding moments, within the gray space of the theater itself. I can still recall the impact of the dissolution of spectatorial distance within the "theater of war" in the first production of *Grounded* that I saw live. It was like a gut punch, a somatically memorable experience that pointed me toward the galvanizing question of this book: What happens when we move beyond the illusion of distance and security—the proverbial "fourth wall"—in "theaters of war"?

Seated in the audience of the Soho Repertory Theater's New York production of *Grounded* in 2014, I found myself identifying with more of the Pilot's experiences than I would have anticipated. I, too, had recently become a mother, and viscerally felt the stress of the Pilot's impossible balancing act between the competing demands of caretaking and professionalism. (Stowed under my seat in the theater, next to my computer on which I would write a review of the production, were two bottles of freshly pumped breast milk.) I could relate, in my own way, to the pressures under which she cracked, to the doubled vision that kept her from being able to act as she had previously been trained. I was also keenly aware of our differences in relation to militarism and war. Though I had grown up moving every two years to locations around the globe, my upbringing was shaped by the opposite of military service: my father, a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, was assigned to teach English in Japan, shaping his and my mother's careers and our family's geographic nomadism. With him and my Quaker-Buddhist mother, I had grown up attending antiwar protests and stood as a pacifist in all cases of war.

Even so, I was not prepared for the effect of the final words of the play. The Pilot, now seated in a gray metal chair in a military detention center following her act of disobedience, looked directly out at the audience seated across from her in the intimate theater.

You who watch me
 Who observe me watch my every move here and I know you watch me for
 Everything is Witnessed . . .
 You who seal me in a tomb and think you are safe
 Know this



Fig. 1. Hannah Cabell in George Brant's *Grounded*, produced by Page 73/Soho Rep, 2014. (Photograph © Rob C. Strong II, used by permission.)

Know That You are Not Safe . . .
None of the Guilty Will Be Spared.³

No lighting shifted, but suddenly the theater seemed bathed in a different light; the actress wasn't talking to an invisible military hierarchy, or about the cameras that surveilled her working and living spaces. She was talking to—and about—us. We, the audience, were no longer protected by a fourth wall that sheltered us through aesthetic, or ethical, distance. Like the Pilot who had killed from a distance through a gray drone screen, we were culpable for what *we* saw in the gray in front of us. Fiction and reality blurred. "There was, she seemed to alert us, a burden of responsibility that comes with witnessing a play like *Grounded*," I wrote in my review: "The devastating impacts of this war belonged not only to military superpowers and terrorists in the Middle East, but also to . . . witnesses like us."⁴ The theater in which we sat was less than two miles from the site of the World Trade Center Twin Towers, a communal wound that continues to influence U.S. responses to international politics, national security, and militarization. Yet the Pilot's words seemed to

be gesturing toward something even bigger and older, an edifice that had yet to fall.

Though I didn't have the terminology for it at the time, we were being called in to a much bigger theater of war, not simply as audience members in a representational theater, but as what trauma theorist Judith Herman calls "implicated subjects." Implicated subjects are members of a community that are "neither perpetrators nor victims but [that] should not simply be considered passive bystanders because they benefit, knowingly or not, from the oppression of others, and their actions, or failure to act, help to perpetuate the social structures of inequality."⁵ It is well established that wars cannot be waged or national militaries maintained without the tacit participation—and nonintervention—of a broad civilian public.⁶ In the U.S., where less than 1 percent of the population actively serves in the military, much of this participation occurs monetarily, through federal taxes and labor for institutions that fund military research and development, weapons manufacturers, and other arms of the military-industrial complex, as well as through electing public officials that support militarized responses to global or domestic conflict. Implicated subjects form the majority of civilians in the U.S. who fuel but remain physically removed from war violence. I am an implicated subject of contemporary war, and, in all likelihood, you are one, too.

I didn't realize when I began my research that this book would end up being largely about—and for—implicated subjects of war: specifically, civilians living far from active war zones that consume theatrical and mediatized representations of war. Initially, I had been focused on how war trauma was being represented in contemporary theater in relation to new discoveries about the neurobiology of trauma and somatic treatments for post-traumatic stress (PTS). In both representational and militarized "theaters of war," the most visible and indeed most vulnerable are those individuals that directly enact and absorb military violence—military service members such as the fictional Air Force Pilot of *Grounded*; "military age males" in Middle Eastern deserts like the ones she profiles through the drone's eye; "enemy targets" such as the father she was meant to kill; civilian "collateral damage" like the daughter who ran to him; and scores of people fleeing and displaced by war. The bodies and lives of those directly touched by military violence are most crucial to keep in view when it comes to recognizing the devastating impacts of war, and these individuals continue to hold a prominent place in my research, writing, and ethical concerns. At the same time, I have become convinced that implicated subjects are just as critical, if seemingly passive, players in the

scripts of contemporary war. While aesthetic strategies for accurately representing PTS on stage—what I describe as “postdramatic stress” in chapter 1—remain significant to this study, they are only part of the *mise-en-scène* of contemporary “theaters of war.” Many audience members in the U.S. are habituated to consuming stories of war across a range of media—in theaters, video games, movies, podcasts, news feeds—and yet these representational media largely avoid connecting our spectatorship in any substantive, ethical way to the violence and suffering we witness.

In a small theater in downtown Manhattan, *The Pilot’s* closing speech offered a theatrical punctum⁷ that pricked my conscience as a pacifist, as a mother, and as a theater maker and scholar. Though her words emanated from a theatrical fiction, and were spoken by a paid actor, they held a warning and an accusation that took aim at real world myths of distance, security, and innocence. “Boom.” The final utterance of the play, delivered in close to a whisper, shattered those myths and with them the imaginary fourth wall of theater—and militarized culture—that has long maintained them.

The Fourth Wall of War

War is an embodied habit that we, as humans, do not know how to break. Our species has rehearsed and performed war so regularly that it has accrued the weight of cultural ritual through seemingly endless iterations across centuries and communities around the world. This reality has been reflected on stages throughout theater’s long history, as humans have told, retold, and borne witness to stories of war and its devastating impacts on individuals and communities. Theater about war is not directly responsible for human habituation to war, nor for healing the devastating traumas documented in reams of dramatic literature. And yet, as performance theorist Diana Taylor puts it, “war cannot be conceptualized without theater models and metaphors that prepare politicians, soldiers, and the various publics to imagine, rehearse, and participate in militarism.”⁸ Euphemized as a “theater” that, when entered, recasts violence, brutality, and ever more destructive weaponry as expected plot points, war has become a script that substitutes the “as ifs” of political strategy for actual human suffering.

Indeed, as a military metaphor, “theater” has long functioned as a tool of spatial, temporal, and behavioral containment. Military theorists of the nineteenth century, such as Carl von Clausewitz and Antoine-Henri Jomini,

established now common phrases such as “theater of war,” “theater of operations,” and “combat scenarios” to describe preparations for and enactment of warfare. In Clausewitz’s treatise *On War*, he explained that he coined the phrase “theater of war” because the term “denotes properly such a portion of the space over which war prevails as has its boundaries protected, and thus possesses a kind of independence.”⁹ Theatrical metaphors suggest that war is a temporary and spatially discrete sociopolitical formation in which hired actors take on specific, well-rehearsed roles, behave according to a set of pre-ordained rules, and whose entrances and exits are observed and managed by selected spectators. As dramatized in *Grounded*, networked screens and remotely controlled tools of contemporary warfare reinforce such metaphors of containment and distance—they erect digital “fourth walls of war” that seek to further control, delimit, and distance wartime violence. While theatrical metaphors support an idealized model of warfare, the euphemism belies a far more interconnected and sprawling reality. Wars are messy, complex, and extend far beyond the spatial and temporal borders that military rhetoric and mainstream representational media erect. From the global economy in weapons trading to PTS carried by war survivors to ruined civic infrastructures, war defies containment.

Simply put, representational and militarized “theaters of war” are connected by far more than metaphor. Performance scholars such as Diana Taylor, Lindsey Mantoan, Sara Brady, and Scott Magelssen, and artist-activists, such as Harun Farocki, have called into ethical examination theatrical scenarios and “role-plays” used in contemporary military training and video games, arguing that these perpetuate and normalize “war thinking” necessary for repetitive enactments of war.¹⁰ From immersive reenactments of war to virtual reality environments used to simulate battle and, in an ironic cycle, rehabilitate injured veterans, theatrical methods of embodied rehearsals, role-playing, and suspensions of disbelief play directly into the work of war. Taylor goes so far as to insist that theater and performance professionals must awaken to “the largely unexamined ways in which the tools of [our] field contribute to waging war.”¹¹

Perceptual boundaries, or “fourth walls,” determine habits of seeing and not seeing, acting and not acting for implicated subjects of war as well. Drawing on her groundbreaking scholarship on the powerful interplay of performance, war, and conquest in Latin American history, Taylor reminds us that the “as if” structures of military scenarios and “war thinking” depend upon controlling the sight lines of war. Justifications for military violence frequently

depend upon performative acts of “percepticide”—articulations of power that determine what can and cannot be seen, named, humanized, and fought for or against.¹² Despite our participation in militarized societies, most of us do not view war trauma as a communal spoil of war—that is, a burden that belongs as much to a broad population of implicated subjects as to those who enact war on behalf of the nation-state. We are shielded from taking responsibility for wars and the individual and collective traumas they produce by our roles as spectators and consumers of war. The result of this percepticide is an increasingly paralyzed body politic that cannot respond effectively, if at all, to the devastating injuries, injustices, and long-lasting traumas caused by wars that our nations fuel.

This book argues that representational theaters of war offer a starting place to recognize, feel, and begin to heal collective war trauma, beginning with an assessment of how audiences are habituated to viewing war. While theatrical representations of war will never fully capture or communicate the lived realities of military warfare, and indeed the two cannot be equated, *theater about war* conditions cultural perceptions of *theaters of war*. Theatrical traditions of representation and reception have not only reflected but also helped to perpetuate militarized behaviors and ideologies.¹³ Classical Greek tragedies, many of which were set within the context of war, structure human conflict into linear narratives and suture the perspective of a given audience to that of a central protagonist. These Aristotelian narrative traditions, which continue to dominate mainstream theater, TV, films, and first-person shooter video games in the U.S., tend to reinforce politically dominant notions of who the enemy is and how “we” should respond to “them.” As Taylor points out, war thinking, be it in military planning or onstage/onscreen representations of war, typically “do[es] not involve members of the opposing side in [their] enactment[s],” hence “the enemy is always one of us—an extension of our fears and fantasies, which nonetheless have perilous implications for others. Instead of engaging in meaningful dialogue with people with other viewpoints or from other places, we thus create the conflict in our own image.”¹⁴

Militarized theaters of war have also been aided by theatrical traditions that maintain the fiction of a “fourth wall.” The “fourth wall” is a well-known concept in theater, referring to an invisible barrier separating the stage world of performers and the observational world of the audience. While this imagined barrier characterized theatrical performance even in ancient Greece, the concept was formalized by Diderot in 1758, as he praised the convincing effects of actors behaving “as if” a barrier existed between themselves and the

audience.¹⁵ In the neoclassical tradition of staging action on a singular set, often the interior of a house or institution, the “fourth wall” was meant to complete the fiction of a boxed room in which characters would behave “as if” they were not being watched, such that the audience, with the advantage of peering through a removed wall, would be able to observe human behavior with a kind of scientific accuracy. The concept became more prominent in the late nineteenth century with the rise of naturalism in theater, which was supported by positivist scientific research methods that emphasized the value of neutral observation in studying natural phenomenon. Today, realist traditions of representation and reception maintain the illusion of such a barrier, aided by theatrical tools of stage lighting, darkened auditoriums, and spectatorial codes of conduct. We are instructed to silence our cell phones at the start of a play. We are expected to sit quietly in the dark.

To be sure, realist traditions and fourth walls do not necessarily mean that audience members are emotionally, intellectually, or politically passive or disengaged from that which they witness. As Jacques Rancière posits, any form of theatrical spectatorship can support “intellectual emancipation,” as audience members participate in meaning-making by actively interpreting onstage material into their own contexts.¹⁶ He promotes theater, with or without a fictional fourth wall, that “calls for spectators who are active interpreters, who render their own translation, who appropriate the story for themselves, and who ultimately make their own story out of it.”¹⁷ In theorizing theater’s role in political critique, Bertolt Brecht advocated for even greater cognitive separation, or alienation, between audience and stage world, employing aesthetic strategies to produce a critical distance by which spectators might better see the structural operations of injustice.¹⁸ These arguments for critical, emancipated spectatorship illustrate the value of having time and space to see anew stories that might otherwise be obscured by social norms, political divisions, or simply the hustle and bustle of daily life.

Indeed, the problem with “fourth wall,” illusionist theater does not arise from having time to sit with and contemplate lives and circumstances other than one’s own. Rather, the problem lies in the codes of spectatorial behavior that attend fourth wall theater. Mainstream theatrical etiquette suppresses embodied responses from audiences, beyond sympathetic, socially acceptable expressions of laughter or tears. Not only are we not to bother the actors or those seated around us with any unseemly somatic reactions, we are not to bother our selves. Theater director and social activist Augusto Boal famously critiqued the sociopolitical effects of illusionary theater traditions, drawing

connections between acceptable spectatorial behavior and political inaction in the face of social injustice.¹⁹ Boal's "primary charge against Greek theater and mainstream Hollywood productions is that they seduce their audiences away from their instinctual desire to change by instilling a fear of transformation," a fear that is reinforced by spectatorial traditions in which physical signals of instinct and embodied intervention are frowned upon.²⁰ That is, the fourth wall of theater may not render audiences intellectually passive, but the invisible barrier it maintains relegates our bodily, sensorial languages to the dark, quiet rows of the auditorium, hidden even to ourselves.

Theater productions typically point audience members toward emergency exits before a performance begins. We may be warned that certain elements of a play could be triggering for some audience members. But we are rarely if ever given any guidance as to how to navigate the effects of those triggers within our bodies and psyches, how to locate ourselves within a global theater of war—from which there is no emergency exit—or how to process the traumatic effects of the roles we play in national systems that perpetuate such violence. We are not, to invoke Boal's solution to traditional spectatorship, offered opportunities to become "spect-actors"²¹ and to use our own bodies to process that which we witness or to rehearse nonviolent alternatives to the conflicts around which we gather. Boal reasoned that rehearsing one's ethical responses to representations of injustice within a theatrical framework would pave the way for taking action against actual injustices in the public sphere beyond the theater. However, interventions or outcries in real time from audiences of mainstream realist theater are discouraged and most theater about war rehearses physical non-responsiveness from its spectators.

Thus, the danger is that representational theaters of war train "audiences" of warfare in the broader world to observe reports of war and its damaging effects from a seated, nonintrusive distance. Despite our participation in the wide-ranging effects of militarized violence, spectators of global theaters of war are separated from the primary actors of war that carry the weight of war trauma. As implicated subjects we are protected—but also paralyzed—by a fourth wall of war.

Beyond the Fourth Wall of War

This book is about using the tools of theater—and of interactive, embodied therapies—to help human communities recognize, metabolize, and begin to

heal collective war trauma so that we can break our collective habituation to warfare. The coming chapters feature examples of performance makers, activists, and therapists that intentionally reach “beyond the fourth wall of war” to help survivors and implicated subjects of war to better understand and respond to the widespread effects of war violence on individuals, communities, and environments. Going beyond the fourth wall of war means performing critical interventions into the structures, behaviors, and ideologies—the dramaturgies—of militarism that have long operated behind the scenes of both contemporary theater and therapeutic practice. These hidden scripts shape how war trauma is represented, perceived, and responded to in powerful, often unconscious ways.

Grounded tuned my ear to other performance works that were breaking down and reaching across such barriers that separate audiences and performers, and between global publics and wars around the world. I began attending productions of Jonathan Wei’s *Telling Project*, a U.S.-based testimonial theater organization that supports combat veterans and war refugees in sharing their personal accounts of war, trauma, and recovery within their local communities. I participated in numerous “Act II” community dialogues that theater director Bryan Doerries structures into his Theater of War productions, joining military service members, veterans, and civilians in unpacking ancient Greek tragedies about war as a means of illuminating experiences of contemporary war trauma. I followed the development of Christine Evans’s play *Closer Than They Appear*²² (2017), which explores the use of immersive virtual reality (VR) technologies to rehabilitate U.S. combat veterans diagnosed with PTSD. I spoke with and observed drama therapists working with veterans, refugees, and other survivors of war trauma. I spent time in Hiroshima and Okinawa, Japan, meeting with activists and artists who saw their ongoing work for nuclear de-proliferation and demilitarization as part of their inheritance of intergenerational war trauma from World War II. I encountered performance makers who had grown up under shadows of wars in Syria, Palestine, and Bosnia, their genre-defying creations reaching beyond language to offer sensorial expressions of loss and resilience. I volunteered with the Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services and Sanctuary Kitchen organizations in New Haven, leading theater workshops for school-age children from war-affected regions around the world. Through my participatory research, I found that the interactive, somatically attuned methods of representation and reception that these performance makers employ are, in essence, closing distances between disparate and often politically divided

subject positions of global warfare. At the same time, they open audience-participants to unconventional methods of comprehending and interacting with traumatic experiences induced by war violence.

These case studies, along with many others from the U.S. and around the world, illustrate a range of strategies for moving beyond the fourth wall of war and healing war trauma in individuals and communities. Their strategies include breaking the fourth wall between audiences and performers such that lines of address and dramatic situations are clearly directed at the here and now of a co-present community; deconstructing and diversifying stories about war that have been typically told from a singular, often heroized perspective; creating forums for interactive dialogue among audiences and performers during or following theatrical presentations; replacing or augmenting linguistic narratives with sensory experiences that engage audiences somatically as they bear witness to another person's experience; and doing away with a barrier altogether, such that audiences are, from the start, spectators in an immersive, participatory field of performance. The common element across all these strategies is that seeing, moving, touching, and acting through the fourth wall acknowledges and engages the bodies of "actors" on all sides of and at all distances from war. Importantly, these works also employ elements of interactive, embodied therapies designed to treat post-traumatic stress following war.

The Body Keeps the War

Around the time I saw *Grounded* at Soho Rep, neuroscientist and traumatologist Bessel van der Kolk was breaking what we might think of as a "fourth wall" in traditional trauma therapies and speaking directly to the bodies of trauma bearers. In *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014), Van der Kolk asserted that trauma is experienced not as a linear story about a violent experience from the past so much as an unruly and overwhelming set of physical-emotional symptoms experienced in the present: "Terror, rage and helplessness are manifested as bodily reactions, like a pounding heart, nausea, gut-wrenching sensations and characteristic body movements that signify collapse."²³ Trauma responses to violent experiences often manifest physically, as sudden returns of bodily sensations (sometimes referred to as flashbacks), dissociative perceptual states, mistrust of one's own bodily sensations, numbing behaviors, violent outbursts, and impulses to self-harm. Van der Kolk posited that ask-

ing trauma survivors to put their experiences into verbal, linear narratives from a seated or prone position—as was the established protocol in mainstream therapy for well over a century—was in fact ineffective in treating the devastating physical symptoms of trauma. He explained that linear narrative and linguistic representation is governed by the “rational” prefrontal cortex region of the brain, removed from the neurological site of traumatic memories, which reside in the “emotional” limbic center of the brain and manifest somatically.²⁴ These assertions flew in the face of a century’s worth of trauma therapy theory and practice:

For a hundred years or more, every textbook of psychology and psychotherapy has advised that some method of talking about distressing feelings can resolve them. However, as we’ve seen, the experience of trauma itself gets in the way of being able to do that. No matter how much insight and understanding we develop, the rational brain is basically impotent to talk the emotional brain out of its own reality.²⁵

Van der Kolk thus proposed that “trauma victims cannot recover until they become familiar with and befriend the sensations in their bodies.”²⁶

Many trauma therapists have followed suit, developing embodied, interactive, and nonlinear “alternative” forms of trauma treatment known broadly as “somatic” or “action-based” therapies.²⁷ My research put me in touch with numerous somatic therapists, drama therapists, and nature-based therapists who have dedicated their careers to working with combat veterans, war refugees, medical responders, and people in many other subject positions on the complex network of global warfare. In addition to being profoundly moved and humbled by the bravery of these therapists and their clients, I was struck by shared concerns between contemporary traumatologists and performance theorists regarding how bodies are addressed, ignored, and engaged in theater and therapy about trauma. Not unlike traditions of realist “fourth wall” theatrical spectatorship, there were established codes of behavior in traditional trauma therapies, such as putting experiences of trauma into linguistically represented, linear narrative structures from a seated or prone posture. Although Freud expressed interest in the relationship between bodily movement, neurology, and trauma early in his career, his influential “talking cure” maintained that the practice of narration translated psychosis into a logos-based form in which “language serves as a substitute for action.”²⁸ Furthermore, traditional psychiatric approaches to

trauma have categorized PTS as a medicalized disorder, which has framed PTS as an individual problem to be medicated and repaired, rather than an outcome of structural violence for which we are all culturally responsible. Together with mainstream Western theatrical traditions, these practices created a hierarchy of representation in which linear narrative and passive postures became the accepted mode—and even the measure—of therapeutic and communal responses to war trauma.

Significantly, then, there are also many dramaturgical similarities between somatic “action” therapies for post-traumatic stress and theatrical strategies for engaging audiences through the traditional “fourth wall” of theater. Body-focused approaches to healing trauma, particularly those in the field of drama therapy, have been referred to as “the acting cure,” indicating an expansion beyond Freud’s “talking cure,” which has dominated trauma psychotherapy in military and civilian arenas for well over a century.²⁹ Many of today’s most successful therapies for PTS focus on participant interactivity, embodied improvisation, increased somatic awareness, and nonlinguistic, movement-based methods of expression. Not coincidentally, Augusto Boal was also influential to the development of contemporary trauma-informed action therapies. His techniques have been taken up as much by therapists and activists as by theater makers and have been vital in stimulating a felt sense of the mutual implications between participants and structures of violence, injustice, and collective trauma. Boal was invited to deliver the keynote speech at the tenth annual meeting of the International Association of Group Psychotherapy in 1989, signaling potent collaborations underway between participatory theater, psychotherapy, and social justice.³⁰ His son, Julian Boal, has followed these synergies further, partnering with drama therapists to use “forum theater” and “theater of the oppressed” as therapeutic methods for treating collective traumas and the social injustices that perpetuate them.³¹

Many forms of drama therapy seek to empower trauma survivors as “spect-actors” to their own embodied experiences and to the structural conditions from which their war trauma arose. By introducing embodied role-play and physical communication into the frame of treatment, drama therapies make bodily actions sources of healing rather than merely symptoms of trauma. Somatic therapies move beyond linguistic representation to focus on embodied and relational sensory experiences as a means of accessing and transforming traumatic experience. By emphasizing interactivity and bodily relationships, these practices enable participants to explore the complex entanglements between the symptoms of war trauma, the sociopolitical systems that produce them, and their own embodied agency.

War Trauma in Bodies Politic

Going beyond the fourth wall of wall involves getting in touch with war trauma as it manifests in individual bodies and bodies politic, including bodies of implicated subjects. Part of the challenge of acknowledging one's own role as an implicated subject, let alone learning to work skillfully and ethically from that position, is that war trauma is far more widespread than commonly acknowledged. What the Pilot in *Grounded* doesn't say, though her dramatic arc certainly implies it, is that we all see double when it comes to viewing war. War trauma—be it acutely experienced by an individual, inherited through familial stories and experiences of war, or woven into the fabric of a national culture—shapes how each of us view war and how we respond to ongoing practices of militarization and armed violence today.

I recognize that applying the term “trauma” to groups that have not directly experienced a traumatic event themselves (as in intergenerational trauma, vicarious trauma, or cultural trauma) will be uncomfortable for many readers. Not all readers may feel that the term “trauma” accurately describes any grief, denial, avoidance, or shame one may feel about war violence they have tacitly absorbed or fueled. My aim is not to diminish experiences of acute war trauma, nor our collective responsibility to attend to and prevent those cases first and foremost. Instead, I intend to draw connections between—while not conflating—acute and generalized war trauma that are not typically acknowledged in mainstream discourse. Indeed, such connections are often deliberately obscured to keep the war machine going. I use the term trauma to connect dots between micro and macro effects of warfare, with full awareness that it will be unfamiliar or uncomfortable, but also with the belief that it will be illuminating. It is controversial to consider that our behaviors, even as seemingly far-removed spectators of global warfare, are part of cultural trauma responses that have been so deeply conditioned and normalized as to escape notice. (They have also escaped empirical study and “proof” for these very reasons.) However, there is evidence to support the widespread existence of war trauma, even beyond direct contact with armed conflict.

The diagnosis of “post-traumatic stress disorder,” or PTSD, was established in the annals of psychiatric medicine in 1980 following the Vietnam War.³² Now more commonly referred to as “post-traumatic stress,” PTS has been applied to numerous experiences of violence and abuse. As noted above, symptomologies of war-related trauma can be expressed as avoidant or obsessive behaviors, numbed senses, physical paralysis or impaired movement, lapses in memory, difficulty sleeping, isolation or problems relating to

other people, and dissociative psychological states. In clinical terms, trauma therapists call these “maladaptive behaviors” that attend acute or complex trauma in individuals who have experienced military combat, structural violence, and forced migrations of war. Beyond these most critical and acute cases of war trauma, collective expressions of maladaptive behaviors also exist in populations that have not directly experienced wartime violence, though these symptoms often remain unrecognized and untreated.³³ These include avoidant behaviors that favor distraction and numbing over responsive intersubjective relationships; “compassion fatigue” or dissociation in response to suffering (one’s own and the suffering of others); lack of connection to community and environmental surroundings; myopic approaches to structural injustice and inequality; and lacunas of historical memory that erase portions of human experience and rights. Such symptoms of collective war trauma do not only characterize the margins of human societies but occupy their very centers.

As cultural theorist and therapist tayla shanaye puts it, collective trauma responses are so widespread, so sutured into the maintenance of dominant structures of power, that they have become normalized into what we call culture: “One of the things about the dominator culture, western civilization, is that it’s not actually a culture, but a patterned and ingrained relational trauma response to genocide and enslavement and different layers of conquest. . . . it’s a collective trauma response from centuries of violence.”³⁴ Trauma therapist Resmaa Menakem explains how this happens:

Unhealed trauma acts like a rock thrown into a pond; it causes ripples that move outward, affecting many other bodies over time. After months or years, unhealed trauma can appear to become part of someone’s personality. Over even longer periods of time, as it is passed on and gets compounded through other bodies in a household, it can become a family norm. And if it gets transmitted and compounded through multiple families and generations, it can start to look like culture.³⁵

War and structural outcomes of armed conflict have accrued the weight of cultural ritual through their seemingly endless iterations in communities around the world. We are an intelligent, creative species, and still we humans have not figured out how to stop enacting war as a “resolution” to international/intersubjective conflict. I posit that this is not a failure of imagination, engineering, or intelligence, nor is it evidence of a bloodthirsty, violent core

of human nature. It points toward unhealed and widespread war trauma—with attendant symptoms of violent outbursts, hypervigilance, self-harm, and distorted perception—being acted out again and again on national and international stages. One need not look farther than the crisis of civil discourse and (in)action in the U.S. regarding the brutal war in Gaza, ongoing as I write this book, to read the signs and signals of intergenerational, collective war trauma in the broader civilian public. That pacifist calls for ceasefire and divestment from military weaponry fueling Israel's attacks on Palestinian civilians are deemed categorically "antisemitic" can be understood as a symptom of unhealed war trauma in the body politic. The horrendous genocide experienced by Jewish people during World War II, central to the formation of the Israeli state following World War II, has, in this view, created a post-traumatic blind spot, a distortion that obscures clear-eyed recognition of the current genocidal actions against Palestinians living in Gaza. War trauma leads to more war and more trauma unless it is brought to light and recognized as a player in our theaters of war.

Our cultural understandings of war trauma—in real and representational theaters of war—thus must expand to include epigenetic ripples from decades- and even centuries-old wars, carried across generations and diasporas. We must understand that, like individual survivors of war violence, our bodies politic also keep the score of war trauma. Genetic inheritances and cultural transmissions of war trauma exert powerful influence on contemporary conflicts. Marianne Hirsch, writing about inherited forms of Holocaust trauma in generations born after World War II, called this form of re-membered trauma "postmemory," or a "structure of inter- and trans-generational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience."³⁶ The forces of "postmemory" affect populations around the world. Applying postmemory to a Japanese postwar context, Akiko Hashimoto asserts that postmemory "shows how personal and intimate connections shape the moral evaluation of war for postwar generations in ways that are more real and intimate than school textbooks and cultural representations."³⁷ When I have described my research topic to colleagues, they often respond with their own postmemories of wars that, however silently, shaped their youths and comings of age—a father who never spoke about serving in the U.S. Air Force in World War II until, on his deathbed, he detailed the horrors he witnessed as he participated in fire-bombing Tokyo; a teenage brother who enlisted to fight in Vietnam and never returned; a mother who, as the sole survivor in her family of the Holocaust, only ever spoke the names of her parents and

siblings in annual holy services. The list grows with nearly every conversation I have about my research.

This book is likewise laced with my own postmemories and observations about my inherited war trauma and implicated subjecthood. I attempt to candidly acknowledge the privileges and responsibilities that attend my implicated subjecthood—including the time, resources, and relative safety that have permitted me to research and write this book—as well as my personal and cultural relationships to historic and contemporary warfare.

I recommend this practice to others, too. When I teach classes on the topic of “Theater and Therapy after War,” I always begin our first day with a group question for my students to answer one at a time: What is your relationship to theater? To therapy? To war? I am careful to emphasize that participants should only share according to their comfort level, particularly regarding their personal histories with therapy and trauma. The answers to these questions are instructive, revealing much about how we have been influenced and shaped by each of these sociopolitical/cultural institutions and the embodied practices that attend them. In conversation with eight students in a recent seminar, we discovered that our relationships to theater were fairly similar. We were all theater makers or regular attendees of live performance and had largely positive personal associations with the “*communitas*” of being a part of a co-present theatrical community. Most students had also experienced psychotherapy sessions of some kind, although several, particularly students of color, were the first in their families to seek out psychotherapy.³⁸ Some students had more intense histories of therapy based on personal experiences of assault, loss, anxiety, or depression, and others discussed cultural stigma or institutional barriers that complicated access to professional therapy.

Our post-memories of war and experiences with militarism were far more varied, beyond some initial similarities. Most students expressed antiwar stances, though this depended on historical context, and everyone had played or witnessed someone play a war-themed, first-person shooter video game at some point in the last year. Several students had grown up in towns that were heavily influenced by the military, either due to large military bases in the area or because joining the military was seen as the best economic option in a low-income area with few job prospects. Two had multiple family members and friends who were either combat veterans or active service members. One student was Ukrainian American, with family living in Ukraine and Russia. Fluent in Ukrainian and Russian, she had spent the summer in Spain work-

ing with Ukrainian refugees displaced by the Russian invasion and ongoing war. Another student had immediate family in both Palestine and Israel. Even before the events of October 7, 2023, which occurred in the middle of our semester together, that student stated flatly: “We can’t have dinner together without discussing war.” As the extreme violence in Israel and Gaza unfolded, her cell phone vibrated constantly on our shared seminar table, cataloguing the heated debate among her family members in time zones that spanned the globe. In those weeks (which turned into months and now years) when it was nearly impossible to use any language to discuss the pain of the events unfolding in Gaza and Israel without becoming immediately politicized, the cell phone vibrations spoke wordlessly of the overwhelming distress, conflict, and helplessness she and so many others of us were feeling. Even in our Ivy League classroom, the weight of communal war trauma was palpable, pushing through the fourth wall of distance, privilege, and relative safety.

Expanding beyond the bounds of an academic reading list, I urged my students to make a practice of “somatic witnessing,” as I call it in chapter 3: tuning in to their bodily sensations and somatic responses to the course materials, to the international news, to the performance pieces we viewed. Our own bodies are important sources of research, I assured them, as sensory responses are often the way in which personal postmemories come to amplification. Indeed, unpacking the somatic luggage of our postmemories of war—and whatever form of unhealed war trauma one carries—is necessary for clear-sightedness when bearing witness to the war traumas of others and responding to the entrenched structures and ideologies of militarism around us.

However, the process is not necessarily easy or immediately accessible. Somatic experiences of trauma are difficult to grasp in large part because we (contemporary, intellectual, digitally networked humans) have forgotten or not learned how to effectively sense, interpret, and respond to trauma symptoms in ourselves or in others. This is not because we are incapable of doing so but because we have not been taught to value and utilize somatic knowledge, particularly when it comes to sociopolitical topics like war, entrenched structural violence, and social (in)justice.

In the chapters that follow, I extend van der Kolk’s assertion—that “trauma victims cannot recover until they become familiar with and befriend the sensations in their bodies”—to a broader public of theater practitioners and audiences, implicated subjects, and survivors of war, who carry inherited traumas and postmemories of war into the cultural spaces we inhabit. Drawing on therapeutic and theatrical methodologies that move beyond the fourth

wall of war, I explore how we might activate the tools of these disciplines to listen to the somatic languages of our individual and collective bodies—from gestures and sensations to political movements—as we look candidly at war.

Mapping the Terrain

Each chapter of this book pairs case studies of performance works created with, for, or about individuals impacted by wartime violence with clinically developed, action-based therapeutic interventions for addressing post-traumatic stress. Through this structure, I point to dramaturgical similarities between somatic trauma therapies and interactive theater works about contemporary war. I consider what theater practitioners might further glean from somatically informed therapies designed to recognize, articulate, and heal the embodied consequences of wartime trauma. Conversely, I offer insights into what therapists might gain from theater makers who deploy immersive environments, multisensory design, and interactive dramaturgical frameworks to present war trauma in ways that resonate with broader publics.

I begin in chapter 1 by tracing the roots of contemporary action-based trauma therapy to a defining moment in U.S. cultural history, when a collective of Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) embarked on a series of public actions in protest of the ongoing war in Vietnam and its widespread traumatic effects. Not quite therapy, not quite theater, yet also something of both, the VVAW collective actions created communal opportunities for veterans to “awaken” together, as the veterans described it, to the brutal injustices of war and “moral injuries” within military practices.³⁹ The VVAW utilized theatrical methods for awakening themselves and civilian publics to shared responsibility for war, such as reenactments of war violence and communal storytelling forums known as “rap sessions.” Politically sympathetic therapists observed and supported the VVAW, and later built upon their methods to radically reform therapeutic definitions and treatments of trauma, a development I call a “postdramatic turn in therapy.” No longer defined by therapeutic philosophies that privileged linear narrative structure or “language as a substitute for action,” postdramatic therapies opened new terrain for treatments and public representations of war trauma. This history, while seemingly removed from our present moment, forms the ground upon which contemporary war trauma therapy—and theater about war trauma—

are built. Post–Vietnam War collaborations between therapists and veterans, along with their theatrical methods of expression, are essential to understand how theater and trauma therapy can work in concert today to (again) awaken audiences and civilian publics.

Chapter 2 traces contemporary theatrical applications of therapeutic lessons from the 1970s social justice and therapy movements. “Communalizing” war trauma, a concept developed by trauma therapist Jonathan Shay during his work with Vietnam War veterans, reframes individual, acute war trauma as a wound that belongs to a broader body politic of witnesses and implicated subjects. I analyze several theater and drama therapy programs in which war survivors share their experiences with civilian communities across the U.S., including Jonathan Wei’s *Telling Project*, Bryan Doerries’s *Theater of War*, and Stephan Wolfert’s DE-CRUIT. All of these theater makers emphasize the value of dialogic exchanges between performers, text, and audience/witnesses. While the majority of the case studies occur outside of clinical therapy settings, I argue that they enact a kind of public-facing group therapy in theatrical form. These theatrical-therapeutic forums guide audiences to do more than witness from behind a “fourth wall” and instead to begin the hard but necessary process of locating themselves as agentic forces on the map of contemporary warfare.

If theatrical performances that communalize war trauma place participants and spectators on a map of war trauma, then the next chapter provides embodied strategies for navigating the terrain once there. Chapter 3 introduces a practice I call “somatic witnessing”—an embodied set of strategies that can support participants in the physical experience of bearing witness to others’ experiences of war in performance. In case studies of works by Chikako Yamashiro and Tania El Khoury, I explore how touch, smell, sound, and kinesthetic interactivity can support audiences in bringing attention to their own embodied experiences as they bear witness to the experiences of others. The tools for somatic witnessing are drawn from somatic psychotherapy, which guides participants (clients and therapists) to become aware of and learn to tolerate (stay with, befriend) psychosomatic expressions of trauma in themselves and others. Somatic witnessing expands upon Emmanuel Lévinas’s theory of ethical relations, which he locates in ocular, “face-to-face” recognition of co-humanity.⁴⁰ The case studies of this chapter figure what Peggy Phelan, building on Lévinas, has called “ethical witnessing” in performance as a more than visual act, one that instead requires multisensory, immersive, and kinesthetic attentiveness.⁴¹

Chapter 4 focuses on performances that put audience members in motion by asking them to step into the subject positions they witness. I introduce several performances that utilize audience role-play and kinesthetic reenactment as a means of bearing witness to others' experiences of war, including Rimini Protokoll's *Situation Rooms* (2013) and annual community performance pieces that commemorate the atomic bombing in Hiroshima, Japan. These projects take "somatic witnessing" on the move through a process I call "somatic drag." Drawing on Rebecca Schneider's theorization of war reenactment as a kind of "temporal drag"⁴² and Judith Butler's claim that "drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself,"⁴³ I argue that somatic drag can likewise reveal the imitative structures of militarism within a body politic, while at the same time permitting participants to witness and act with a difference. Placing theatrical processes of somatic drag alongside trauma therapies that employ imitation and reenactment in the service of healing, such as action observation therapy and role therapy, I ask what reparative function "somatic drag" might perform for audience-participants that step into auto-ethnographic stories of war survivors.

Chapter 5 examines somatic encounters with war trauma in the expanded spatial framework of virtual space. Christine Evans's play *Closer Than They Appear* explores the "virtual somatics" of first-person shooter video game interfaces that normalize and rehearse "war play" in civilian and military communities. Evans theatrically intervenes in the controlled perspective maintained by the VR exposure therapy program, *Virtual Iraq*, inviting in multiple other perspectives that unsettle the limited sightlines of the military therapy. Two other performance case studies—Ivo Van Hove's *Roman Tragedies* (2012) and Wafaa Bilal's *Domestic Tension* (2007)—reveal additional interactive tactics to engage audiences in what Judith Butler terms "virtual assembly."⁴⁴ I conclude this chapter with an analysis of sensory-focused virtual therapies that, in contrast to simulation-driven experiences, focus on developing a user's ability to self-modulate their own interoceptive responses to stress. This leads into a final chapter—a future-oriented "resolution" in place of a conclusion—that offers examples of generative, material practices for making peace out of the ashes of war.

The performances that comprise the case studies of this book are experimental—and experiential—in form. That is, they are grounded in "performative ethics," Maurice Hammington's term for the "inclusion of corporeal dimensions in the teaching of ethics" that can encourage individuals to "treat the actions of their bodies as public artifacts of their morality and identity to

be studied, understood, and shaped.”⁴⁵ As embodied, human endeavors, they are also imperfect, partial, and transitory. The effects and affects of moving beyond the fourth wall of war often emerge in fleeting, brief expressions and sensations—the punctum, the flashes of “aesthetic resonance,” the “utopian performative” of an intersubjective encounter.⁴⁶ Although they are brief and often unpredictable, these eruptions of insight, connection, and perspective constitute the building blocks of positive change and more sustainable and sustaining futures. I thus invite readers to dream with and speculate beyond these gathered case studies as part of a collective effort to break out of our cultural habituations to war.

Grounded: An Operatic Epilogue

Over the years I have written this book, *Grounded* has gone through its own evolution. Brant partnered with musical theater writer and composer Jeanine Tesori to transform his play into an opera.⁴⁷ In October 2024, I went to see the New York premiere of *Grounded* at the Metropolitan Opera. The transformation of the one-woman show into a large-scale opera brought many changes. The shift to opera created opportunities to represent and witness trauma through sonic vibration, engaging an important subfield of somatic therapy.⁴⁸ The opening scene featured a glowing platform packed full with men in Air Force flight suits. They moved and sang in chorus about the power of “the Blue,” their deep voices celebrating the ownership that their blue uniforms gave them in the wide expanse of the blue sky. When the Pilot, who was referred to as Jess in the opera version, entered the stage her distinctive gender was revealed sonically, in a soaring soprano that cut through the phalanx of baritone voices. After Jess conceives a child and is grounded from flight, digital images of her pregnancy swelled to meet the large budget and grand stage of the Met. Ultrasound images of a fetus growing over months were projected over aerial maps and flashes of light that signified U.S. bombs being dropped. The chorus of men listed a crescendo of attacks, naming city after city in Iraq, punctuated by “booms” until landing on the final destination: “Boom goes Baghdad, Boom goes Baghdad, Boom goes Baghdad!” The baby was nearly ready to be born. This sequence was among the most visually memorable as it vividly demonstrated the dramaturgy of intergenerational trauma and militarization. Like a fetus in an Air Force pilot, we absorb the sounds, textures, and logics of war.

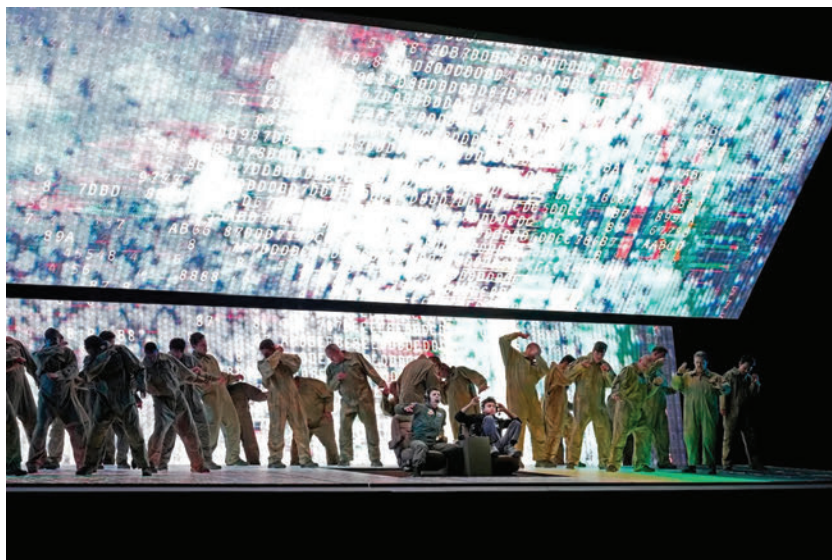


Fig. 2. *Grounded: An Opera*, directed by Michael Mayer, at the Metropolitan Opera, October 2024. (Photograph © Ken Howard, used by permission.)

As the story progressed, Jess's traumatic stress was again represented through sound. A second actress appeared as her body/voice double, physically representing the division that Jess experienced between home and war front, mother and soldier. As war trauma sent fissures through Jess's psyche, the voices of the two sopranos were cannily scored by Tesori to express the splitting of her senses of self, security, and physical locatedness. Sliding into dissonance at half-note intervals and refusing resolution across long, aching arcs of anguish and disorientation, Jess and her double sang of simultaneously watching and being watched from above. The sonic representation of dissociation that so commonly attends traumatic experience was gripping and heart wrenching, as Jess struggled to stay with her husband and daughter amid her growing paranoia-cum-ethical awakening over the violent effects of military warfare.

Intrigued by the many changes brought by the operatic form, I waited for that final moment when the Pilot would call us out in our velvet seats, letting us know that we, too, were implicated in the story of war that we watched. But that moment didn't come. The opera ended with the Pilot in a narrow

rectangle of light, relegated to a prison cell for her disobedience of military orders. Her final moments were introspective, stopping at the edges of the light and leaving a gulf as wide as the opera house between us and her. The Pilot's lines that had effectively broken the fourth wall and turned an ethical eye back on us, the spectators, had been lost. Where had they gone in the adaptation into operatic form, I wondered? Would they not have reached across the opulent cavern of the Metropolitan Opera House? Were our seats too plush to feel the uncomfortable prick of guilt, of implication? Was the fourth wall of opera simply too large to breach?

Later, in conversation with George Brant, I learned that those final lines had indeed been changed for the production at the Met. Following a run at the Kennedy Center the year before, in which he retained the stage play's implication of shared responsibility for war violence to the audience, the producers at the Met recommended that the ending be altered.⁴⁹ Apparently, having the Pilot tell the audience that "No one is safe" or innocent and state that "None of the guilty will be spared" would not fly, so to speak. Any new opera is a commercial risk for a storied institution, and such an assertion was too much of a gamble.

In many ways, the gulf that separates implicated subjects from acknowledgment of, let alone active interventions in, our roles in global warfare has grown as large as the Met and as entrenched as its economic and public relations concerns. The suppression of widespread campus protests at universities in 2024 over U.S. participation in the Israeli war on Gaza is only one example of this. We need to be called in, to awaken, to be communalized around the wounds of contemporary warfare. We need ethical and aesthetic punctums to awaken us to the roles we play in these "theaters of war"—especially those of us who live in globally powerful, militarized countries, who can attend opera at the Met and pretend to remain untouched by the disastrous and dehumanizing effects of war.

The weight of war is upon us all these days, as consumers, as voters, as educators, as culture makers, as law enforcers, as taxpayers, as protesters, as parents, as fugitives, as critics, as humans. A few bear the burden of war most heavily—civilians caught in war zones, refugees fleeing them, and military service members who are frequently escaping other difficult circumstances by enlisting. Although war trauma is unevenly distributed, we must remember that it belongs not only to the body of the individual war survivor but also the larger body politic. Moving beyond the fourth wall of war, then, is

like applying pressure to that wound, which has not been allowed to heal for a very long time. Without this, we are, as a species and perhaps as a global ecosystem, at risk of bleeding out.

But this does not have to be how the story of war ends. The chapters that follow brim with practical, embodied, care-filled, and empowering strategies that can build toward individual and communal healing, social justice, and even, I believe, that most ephemeral of all human practices: peace. We are still a long way from realizing a world that practices nonviolence, respect, and collaboration as embodied responses to conflict, instead of militarism and war. But it is essential that we start moving—and I mean somatically, kinesthetically in our bodies *moving*—in that direction.

CHAPTER ONE

(A) Sleep No More

“Once you come back from the Nam, your awareness of not only the Vietnam War but of the [U.S.] government is fantastic. . . . And you say, ‘Hey, wow, you mean this is what I’ve been asleep under all this time. Jesus Christ, someone hit me with a baseball bat. You know, I’ve been asleep!’”

—FROM TESTIMONY OF ALAN AKERS, VIETNAM VETERAN AGAINST
THE WAR, TESTIFYING AS PART OF THE WINTER SOLDIER
INVESTIGATION (1971)

The language of awakening has long attended social justice movements, indicating clear-eyed political assessment of systems of injustice and structural violence. Awakening, or in contemporary activist discourse, “wokeness,” refers to coming into awareness of the harms to, and responsibilities of, both self and other within those systems. Sleep, conversely, is one of the first and most fundamental casualties of wartime violence. Sleep vanishes as communities brace for air raids and bombings, and it becomes a scarce commodity in the temporary, insecure housing of refugee camps and army barracks. War trauma is likewise characterized by insomnia, nightmares, flashbacks, dissociative states, and other sleep irregularities for those who have experienced, witnessed, or enacted war violence. As Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* famously found, the afflicted mind can “sleep no more.”¹ And, as Vietnam veteran Alan Akers suggested in 1971, in his public testimony on U.S. military war crimes quoted above, the indoctrinated mind may need to be afflicted to awaken to the realities of war.

Sleeplessness as a condition of war trauma merged with efforts to awaken a compliant public in a radical antiwar campaign during the Vietnam War era. Several months after the Winter Soldier Investigation in which Akers testified, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) staged a “sleep in” on the National Mall.² For four days and nights in April 1971, hundreds of veterans recently returned from military combat in Vietnam occupied a



Fig. 3. Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) protest during Operation Dewey Canyon III in Washington, DC, April 1971. (Photograph by Fred W. McDarrah, courtesy of the New York Historical Society.)

stretch of lawn in front of the U.S. Capitol. Their foremost demand was an immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam and an end to the war that they insisted was an unacceptable crime against humanity. The VVAW expressed their demand theatrically: by day they staged avant-garde reenactments of military violence they had enacted and witnessed in Vietnam and dramatically hurled their medals of honor and military papers onto the steps of the Capitol. At night they shared stories of war violence that haunted them in grassroots forums known as “rap sessions.” They collectively resisted federal orders to vacate the grounds of the Washington Mall, bedding down in sleeping bags in an antimilitary encampment they called Dewey Canyon III.³

Although the encampment was peaceful, the “sleep in” became the legal flashpoint of the protests: occupying the federal grounds overnight was the only law they were officially breaking with their inflammatory protest. In their own defense, the VVAW insisted that they were protesting the war by performatively enacting a fundamental human right that the U.S. government had taken from them through their military service: a peaceful night’s sleep. The group insisted that “public sleep was a material necessity to take care of

returning soldiers,” who often confronted homelessness and lack of support services for living with trauma upon returning from war.⁴ Their insistence upon sleeping in public space was thus a way of performatively illuminating the abuse of that, and many other, human rights by the U.S. military and government. Indeed, their lawyers’ defense drew upon legal precedents that had protected guerrilla theater as free speech in other activist movements, arguing that “there is a substantial argument that the activities that the VVAW propose in this case are in the nature of a theatrical representation to the American public of the condition of the Vietnam Veterans.”⁵ In other words, the VVAW used sleep—and the ways that the U.S. government was legally and psychologically preventing them from sleep—to theatrically awaken public attention to the inhumane violence of the Vietnam war.

Building on the legacy of the VVAW’s “sleep in,” among other collective actions the group performed in their antiwar campaign, this chapter examines theatrical and therapeutic methods of awakening to war trauma. Though largely forgotten in dominant narratives of militarism, trauma therapy, and antiwar protest alike, the actions of the VVAW in the early 1970s exemplify strategies for reaching “beyond the fourth wall of war” that continue to be vital to theater making and therapy today. As if anticipating Augusto Boal and his *Theatre of the Oppressed* techniques published later that same decade, the VVAW manifested a form of anti-Aristotelian catharsis that sought, in Boal’s words, “not to create calm, equilibrium, but rather to create disequilibrium which prepares the way for action.”⁶ The participatory, often sensorially shocking protest strategies of the VVAW produced a watershed moment in U.S. military and civilian history that irrevocably complicated the relationships between the state, its citizenry, and those who enact war on its behalf. They marked a radical shift in the social, political, and psychological identities of combat veterans, the nature of their relationships to therapy and therapists, and what it meant to share stories about war and war trauma with each other and with a broader civilian public.

But first: the VVAW’s insistence on “awakening” themselves and the American public implies that something had previously put them/us to sleep. Therefore, before we can fully appreciate their strategies of awakening, we must examine the prevailing dramaturgies of militarism and the complicities they have produced in both military and civilian bodies, then and now. The journey toward awakening in twentieth-century trauma therapy is a particularly instructive place to start.

Soporific Dramaturgies of Military Trauma Therapy

When the VVAW participants staged their “sleep in” in 1971, sleep already loomed large in veteran experiences of war trauma and military therapy. War trauma therapy as a field was birthed by military-employed psychologists during World War I, and was directly shaped by military disciplines, hierarchies, goals, and ideologies.⁷ The primary onus placed on military psychologists was to treat soldiers suffering from debilitating “shell shock” or “combat fatigue,” as war trauma was called in World War I and World War II, respectively, and bring them back to a state of functionality such that they could return to the front lines of battle. Sleep was often impossible for those on the front lines or for those haunted by combat trauma, or both, and so sleep, by whatever means necessary, was often the primary treatment for suffering soldiers. In both World Wars, sleep—often medically induced—was thus the primary method of “salvaging” soldiers and efficiently returning them to combat duties.⁸ Sleep therapy was scaled in length and proximity to the warfront based on the severity of the case, with “sleep” described as if it were a medication. Dr. William Menninger, who served as chief psychiatrist of the U.S. Army during World War II, detailed the process by which military psychiatrists would treat suffering soldiers: “Beginning with treatment near the theater of war and moving progressively farther away with the severity of the case, at each station sleep is administered in longer doses.”⁹ Sleep therapy would first occur in the battalion’s “kitchen area” where a soldier could get a “a night of sound sleep with the help of a mild sedative and some warm food,” followed by a return to combat within twenty-four hours. More deeply troubled soldiers were sent “2 to 5 miles farther back to the division clearing station” where they would be “given sufficient sedation to insure a good 12 to 14 hours of sleep, only interrupted when awakened for food.”¹⁰ They would be sent back to combat after 48 hours. The last level for those who could not be salvaged by briefer sleeps were sent to “exhaustion centers” ten to fifteen miles behind the lines where they would sleep for two days straight and rest for another five to eight.

However, the dramaturgy of military sleep therapy was not ultimately about the immediate health of the soldier, let alone their long-term healing. Sleep for combat soldiers was a tool of war, weaponized to “salvage” soldiers as material resources for the front lines of war. As Franny Nudelman reveals, “Therapists used barbiturates or induced insulin comas to put soldiers to sleep in the hope that their symptoms would abate—at least temporarily—

once they were rested.”¹¹ In his postwar lectures on the evolution of psychiatry, Menninger discussed the conflicted medical-military duty of war-front psychiatrists: “Psychiatrists had the difficult assignment of returning men to the hell of battle, knowing full well that in many instances it would make their illness worse.”¹² So obedient to military protocol was the job of military psychologists that World War I therapists recalled forcing “shell shocked” soldiers to rest and recover only so that those same soldiers could stand and be shot for insubordination and cowardice (for attempting to escape a return to battle by fleeing or by suicide).¹³

Sleep therapy was combined with other forms of trauma therapy, including what Sigmund Freud popularized in Western psychoanalysis as the “talking cure” for trauma symptoms. As I explore later in the chapter, Freud observed that prompting traumatized patients to verbalize their experiences of violence would eventually resolve the seemingly unrelated somatic expressions of trauma, such as headaches, vision disturbances, hallucination, insomnia, intense nightmares, and partial paralysis.¹⁴ Within a military context, however, even therapeutic “talk” under the care of a military doctor had immediate risks. W. H. R. Rivers, a pioneering psychologist employed by the British military during and after World War I, employed “talk therapy” as well as “exposure therapy” with his traumatized military patients.¹⁵ Although Rivers privately called the anguished narratives of his military patients an “anti-war complex,”¹⁶ he knew that his ability to entertain (let alone support) such viewpoints was severely limited: “So long as I was an officer of the RAMC [Royal Army Medical Corps], so long as I was in uniform I was not a free agent.”¹⁷ By and large, this was the condition of military therapy, asleep or awake: “all patients knew their doctors were required to act as army officers, to return soldiers to the war, and to maintain an anti-pacifist stance.”¹⁸ In other words, all were subservient to the directive of “salvaging” soldiers for further military service.

During World War II, advances in narcotics and an even greater crisis of combat trauma blended sleep and talk therapies together. Psychiatric corps in the later stages of World War II and again in Vietnam used sedative medications to induce “twilight sleep,” during which soldiers, in a half-conscious state, would be verbally interviewed. Known as “narcoanalysis,” the sedative-induced talk therapy sessions proved to be an accelerated and tractable version of psychotherapy fit to the urgent context in which they were practiced: in active war zones, under military orders, and within tight timelines for “recovery” and reactivation of soldiers.¹⁹ Even while military psychiatrists

noted that patients spoke more readily about the sources of their trauma when drugged, it is difficult to look past the coercive military hierarchies that structured narcoanalysis and the goals of “salvaging” versus healing. “When it worked well, the drug loosened the patient’s tongue, stripping away inhibitions and inspiring a ‘desire to communicate and speak about problems or personal matters’ and, more ominously in the context of military discipline, an ‘inability to refuse to answer questions.’”²⁰

Within narcoanalysis sessions, role-play and reenactment were also frequently deployed, as therapists realized the extent and efficacy of what they could prompt soldiers to do and say under sedation. Nudelman describes the dramaturgy of these sessions in theatrical terms: “During this brief, unguarded phase, the therapist encouraged the patient to relive the foundational trauma as if it were happening in the present moment and, in doing so, produced a cathartic release of repressed emotion—what was termed an ‘abreaction.’”²¹ Under twilight sedation, soldiers crouched, cried, hid, and fought, at once reenacting combat violence and allowing themselves to express trauma responses that they were not permitted to show in the strictures of daily military life. Abreaction depended upon a level of theatricality, as “psychiatrists who practiced narcoanalysis were frank about the fact that they sometimes suggested fictions in order to cure a soldier’s traumatic symptoms,” offering numerous examples that illustrate “the process of narcoanalysis combin[ing] recollection and suggestion, effectively scrambling fact and fiction in order to produce emotional healing.”²² While theatrical scenario, imagined realities, therapist-led “play,” and release of armored layers of traumatic memory are likewise foundational to contemporary drama therapy, the framework of military narcoanalysis did not posit imagination as a liberatory tool for the patients. Fiction and reality, both within and after narcoanalysis, were under military jurisdiction.

Thus, when VVAW member Alan Akers testified that he had been “asleep” under U.S. militarism—until awakening to the horrors of the Vietnam War hit him like “a baseball bat”—he indexed a deep history of control and routinized violence in the guise of sleep.²³ Sleep was at once a devastating symptom of war trauma, a physicalized exercise of military power, and an embodied metaphor for military service members’ obedience to the war machine. Practicing ownership over one’s sleep—and awakening—became a performative practice of dissent.

In the months leading up to the Winter Soldier Investigation testimonies and the Dewey Canyon III “sleep in” on the National Mall, the VVAW radically intervened in dramaturgies of military-controlled therapy in other ways

as well. As in the etymology of “radical”—meaning “forming the root”—the VVAW participants went to the root of their war trauma and the coercive therapies that had been employed to keep them in cycles of military violence. In their collective “rap sessions,” the veterans reappropriated the techniques that had been used by military psychiatrists to “salvage” soldiers during war, speaking openly and vividly with one another about the sources of their war traumas. These peer-led, nonhierarchical conversations prioritized emotional candor and mutual support, allowing individuals to openly share psychologically painful experiences from war and military culture. Often conducted in the presence of politically sympathetic therapists, though not officially led by them, the rap sessions provided veterans with forums outside of military and medical hierarchies in which they could disclose difficult feelings and experiences they carried home from Vietnam—guilt, shame, and “moral injury,” as well as instances of racial and sexual violence they had perpetrated and/or experienced in the military.²⁴

Rather than returning to the front lines of battle, however, they went to the front lines of antiwar activism. While many participants found the rap sessions to be psychologically beneficial, they were more immediately motivated by a political goal: to awaken the American public. Community rap sessions served as opportunities for the VVAW members to develop and rehearse auto-ethnographies of their violent military experiences, which they then offered in public testimonies like the Winter Soldier Investigation. The veterans took intrusive recollections of the war that appeared in their traumatic flashbacks, rehearsed them in rap sessions, and performed them in public testimonials that “bid for the attention of an apathetic public.”²⁵ In other events, they created visceral performances that they toured through civilian spaces. For example, in September 1970 the VVAW staged multiple reenactments of assaults on Vietnamese villages as they marched for three days between Morristown, New Jersey and Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The event was called Operation Rapid American Withdrawal (Operation RAW) and featured an avant-garde mash-up of violent scenes of warfare and peaceful domestic routines put in deliberately nonsensical order to create a jarring juxtaposition meant to disquiet spectators. “When veterans flashed back they brought home the intrusive force of traumatic memory; Operation RAW aimed for a similar effect.”²⁶ If flashbacks were tokens of trauma by which veterans “brought the war back home,” then VVAW members mined their intrusive memories for source material to create theatrical reenactments that might “bring the war home” to U.S. civilians.

Participatory performances also aided VVAW members in breaking

through restrictive barriers erected through their own military training and therapeutic traditions. Durational public protests such as Dewey Canyon III and recurring rap sessions offered veterans camaraderie and solace in antimilitary community and catalyzed a profound reimagining of postmilitary recovery. Gathered in church basements and bunked down together in impromptu open-air barracks, veterans openly talked and moved through their war traumas with one another and with therapists who supported their cause. At great personal cost, these forums offered VVAW participants the “chance to participate in the production of therapeutic knowledge and, in the company of professionals, to reclaim expertise for themselves.”²⁷ They began to form their own body politic and reclaim their own bodies as agents of something other than war. For both veterans and participating therapists, the VVAW rap sessions and protest actions illuminated somatic, nonlinear, and fragmented structures of traumatic experience and illustrated the value of action-oriented, group therapies for war survivors. These insights led to the establishment of “post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) as a medical category in 1980²⁸ and inspired numerous forms of contemporary drama therapy and other action-oriented trauma therapies.

The partnerships between VVAW veterans, therapists, and the interactive theatrical strategies they employed ultimately informed the next generation of trauma therapies and theater for combat veterans and other war survivors—a (r)evolution I have come to think of as a “postdramatic turn in therapy.”

The Postdramatic Turn in Therapy

Hans-Thies Lehmann’s concept of “post-dramatic theater”²⁹ describes avant-garde performance forms that are united around the aesthetic goal of disrupting traditional, Aristotelian structures of dramatic narrative, cohesive characters, and the authority of the text in theatrical representation. While postdramatic performance makers are too varied in their representational aesthetics to neatly categorize,³⁰ their strategies include nonlinear, fragmented, or unresolved narrative structures; multiperspectival and multi-sensorial methods of communication; and a deliberately porous relationship between performers, audiences, and their physical environments. Postdramatic theater makers have proliferated in the avant-garde and in postmodern theater since the mid-twentieth century, even as they remain on the fringes of mainstream theater economies.³¹

Alongside the postdramatic theater practices that were unfolding throughout the twentieth century, a similar revolution in therapy was fomenting. Long before the post-Vietnam War turn toward action-based, somatic therapies in western psychotherapy, French psychoanalytic feminist Luce Irigaray critiqued the oppressive, patriarchal forces of linear narrative and passive body postures in the scenography of Freudian “talk therapy” psychoanalysis. Irigaray asserted that Freudian methods normalized a kind of “therapeutic violence” that could only be resisted by creating a therapeutic space that allowed for “an active subject and the possibility to speak through the body.”³² Interestingly, there is evidence that Freud was interested in somatic expressions of trauma in his early clinical research with hysterical female patients, sowing some early seeds of therapeutic attention to the “speaking body.” In fact, Irigaray herself looked to early Freudian processes to recoup “gesture” as both symbolic and somatically expressive in the therapeutic encounter.³³ Freud’s case notes on his work with “Elisabeth von R” document his attentiveness to his client’s painful and twitching legs, a condition that would, he observed, follow the narrative arc of her psychological pain:

Her painful legs began to ‘join in the conversation’ during our analysis. . . . If by a question or by pressure upon her head I called up a memory, a sensation of pain would make its first appearance, and this was usually so sharp that the patient would give a start and put her hands to the spot. The pain that was thus aroused would persist so long as she was under the influence of the memory; it would reach its climax when she was in the act of telling me the essential and decisive part of what she had to communicate, and with the last word it would disappear.³⁴

However, his attention to bodily languages of his clients was curtailed by other cultural forces. Freud was a devotee of classic dramatic theater, even naming some psychological experiences and “disorders” after famous characters and dramatic structures of Greek theater.³⁵ Catharsis, which meant purifying or cleansing in Greek, was understood in Freudian psychoanalysis as a release of strong or repressed emotions that, once they are articulated and witnessed, allows for relief from symptoms that accompanied them. While Freud paid close attention to the bodily expressions of psychosomatic pain that “joined” his therapeutic conversation with “Elisabeth Von R,” his analysis reinforced Aristotelian dramatic structure that ultimately limited the interpretation of her somatic symptoms to her verbalized narrative. The “climax”

of her dramatic story was mapped onto the “climax” of his patient’s movements, pairing her “last word” with her physical symptoms that simultaneously “disappeared.” Cyclical or nonlinear structures of traumatic experience did not fit this Aristotelian mold of rising action, climax, and resolution.

As his research and social prominence progressed, Freud “stopped listening to his female patients” altogether, as Judith Herman puts it, along with their somatic expressions of trauma.³⁶ As Herman shows, there were sociopolitical reasons for Freud’s turn away from somatic therapies and toward linguistic methods of representing and treating trauma. One of his early papers on hysterical symptoms in women argued that all hysteria was a result of childhood sexual abuse, often in the form of incest.³⁷ The paper tacitly outed many prominent Viennese families and caused such public pushback that, within a year of publication, Freud rescinded that line of argument. He began explaining hysteria in vaguer terms, such as the “return of the repressed,” which could be treated through a “talking cure” that remained behind closed doors.³⁸

When Freud was consulted about how to treat combat veterans traumatized after World War I, he similarly concluded that war trauma must be treated in private, one-on-one talk therapy sessions. If a traumatic memory was not described verbally, he asserted that the patient was more likely to act that trauma out. Acting trauma out, violently or inappropriately in civilian life, often led to charges of criminality or insanity, prevented veterans from holding jobs or relationships, and generally kept them from reintegrating smoothly into capitalist society. As a result, Freudian talk therapy was again used as a means of maintaining rather than upsetting the sociopolitical status quo. Military trauma therapy was performed in private isolation, and any meaningful action with regard to the root causes of a patient’s war trauma were not taken beyond the four walls of the therapy room.

Putting one’s traumatic memory into a spoken narrative from a seated or prone position thus became the dominant protocol in military and civilian therapies for trauma. Not only did the practice sideline somatic methods of processing trauma, it reinforced cultural taboos against “acting out” the traumatic effects of abuse or physically intervening in dominant political structures that perpetuated abuse. As Jonathan Kahana and Noah Tsika write: “the interview” that serves to elicit testimony of a client for a therapist is “today so ubiquitous that we hardly recognize it as a practice with a history as well as a practice *of* history.”³⁹ Not unlike traditions of realist theater spectatorship, which have helped produce particular historical relationships between a

seated viewing public and crises they witness, the scene of traditional trauma therapy was ripe for disruption.

J. L. Moreno, the founder of psychodrama and progenitor of modern drama therapy, was a contemporary of Freud's, but took a very different approach to treating trauma. A frequent attendee of Freud's public lectures, Moreno saw value in Freud's reconception of mental illness as stemming from psychological rather than neurological roots, but believed that his emphasis on linguistic narrative, stilled body postures, and isolated interviews were ultimately limiting.⁴⁰ Moreno recalled an interaction following a lecture Freud gave on his recently minted "talking cure" in 1912:

As the students filed out, he singled me out from the crowd and asked me what I was doing. I responded, "Well, Dr. Freud, I start where you leave off. You analyze their dreams. I give them the courage to dream again. You analyze and tear them apart. I let them act out their conflicting roles and help them to put the parts back together again."⁴¹

Moreno, also a theater devotee, led an avant-garde theater troupe in Vienna called *Stegreiftheater*, or Theater of Spontaneity.⁴² The group enacted a "living newspaper" technique that brought current events and news items into the theater as subject matter for the actors and audiences to grapple with. As Moreno wrote in his autobiography, the aim was participatory action and co-creation: "The key to the Stegreiftheater was the participation of the audience so that the actors and the spectators were made one. And the actors/spectators were to be the only creators involved. Everything was to be improvised: the play, the motive, the act, the conflict, and the resolution of the conflict."⁴³ While the group's work was not focused on therapy, their performance experiments in action-based improvisations informed Moreno's system of "psychodrama," which he developed in New York during the 1930s.⁴⁴ Moreno's revolutionary methods focused on "sociometry," or interpersonal, relational dynamics between individuals within a given social group. Moreno thus always worked with patients in a group, rather than as individuals in isolation.⁴⁵ Like Carl Jung's theory of the "collective unconscious," sociometry aided therapists in tracking dynamics across a group of individuals, accounting for relational and cultural influences on behavior and self-expression.⁴⁶

While they have not been theorized as "postdramatic" within discourses of psychoanalysis, Moreno's approaches to treating trauma mirrored many strategies of avant-garde, postdramatic performance. In postdramatic theater,

the relationships between audiences, performers, and the theatrical environment are based upon participation and mutual influence, recognizing that all present constitute creative forces within a performance encounter and in the world beyond. In place of linear, textual narrative, postdramatic theater pieces often present symbolic, multimodal fragments that, when encountered and interpreted by audience members, produce insights into lived experience. As Lehmann puts it, "When theatre presents itself as a sketch and not as a finished painting, the spectators are given the chance to feel their own presence, to reflect on it, and to contribute to the unfinished character themselves."⁴⁷ This described Moreno's approach in his Viennese theater company and also characterized his therapeutic work. Moreno described a similar, dynamic process of gaining insight through "role theory," a fundamental aspect of psychodrama and sociometry. He guided participants to enact various social "roles" as a means of exploring and better understanding themselves and their relationships. Exploring the physical, emotional, and cognitive behaviors that accrue to various roles would facilitate deeper understanding of self and other, as well as the ability to unpack habits and assumptions that shape prior understanding of those relationships.⁴⁸ Like collectively working on an unfinished painting, sociodrama utilized role-play to bring social relationships and attendant affective experiences into a play space. This could allow for role shifting that could invite dynamism, power sharing, and growth into what Moreno called a "social atom" (which includes members of a familial or cultural group).

Over time, historical distinctions between "talk" and "action" therapies have become somewhat more porous. Contemporary psychoanalysis takes note of relational dynamics and psychosomatic symptoms, and the field of drama therapy utilizes both narrative and embodied expression as tools in representing and processing trauma.⁴⁹ Retelling a traumatic experience in narrative form can help clarify the source of a trauma for a therapist and arrange fragmented memories of trauma into an organized form that can aid a trauma survivor in gaining some distance and control (as is evidenced in the testimonial theater studied in the next chapter). Riffing on the symbiosis and tension between historical approaches to trauma, drama therapists Dan Tomasulo and Andrea Szucs write: "These powerful methods took different paths to a common destination—Freud's through talking, Moreno's through action. Dramatic methods may provide the best of both worlds."⁵⁰ In other words, postdramatic theater and drama therapy alike encourage participants to become witnesses, students, and agents of their interactions with others.

The Postdramatics of Trauma

Like postdramatic theater makers that experiment on the boundaries of theatrical representation and reception, the participatory, action-based drama therapies that have grown out of Moreno's methods continue to push beyond strictures and authorities of seated, narrative-driven therapeutic paradigms. Recalling Irigaray's terminology, postdramatic therapies support trauma survivors as "active subjects" in their therapeutic process and allow them "to speak through their bodies" by encouraging movement, vocalization, intersubjective responsiveness, imaginative play, and somatic awareness. Somatic trauma therapies and drama therapies emphasize the need for therapist and client alike to listen to the many languages spoken by the body in response to trauma. They employ embodied methods of processing or "metabolizing" traumatic memory in multisensory and dynamic frameworks as both patient and therapist seek to investigate layers of lived experience, relationship, and cultural influence. As Moreno insisted, linear narrative and verbal representation cannot tell the whole story of trauma, either for the sharer or receiver of the story.

Peter Levine, a pioneer of the contemporary somatic trauma therapy movement, wrote in *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*:

Most trauma therapies address the mind through talk and the molecules of the mind with drugs. Both of these approaches can be of use. However, trauma is not, will not, and can never be fully healed until we also address the essential role played by the body. We must understand how the body is affected by trauma and its central position in healing its aftermath. Without this foundation, our attempts at mastering trauma will be limited and one sided.⁵¹

In other words, traumatic memories are fundamentally expressed in somatic languages of the body, reappearing as bodily sensations and physical reactions.⁵² These may present as dissociated physiological states that mirror the body's automatic defense against overwhelming trauma, or fragmented images, smells, or sensations that recall the traumatic event itself. As a result, adhering to verbal narrative representations alone, as in traditional "talk" therapy, can get in the way of sensory processing of trauma and making valuable cognitive shifts in perspective. Mary I. Daly, a therapist trained in using somatic methods of treating trauma, asserts that narrative representations

of traumatic memory can inhibit therapeutic processes of healing: "the story itself becomes a defense against the experience and re-telling it keeps them [the patient] stuck" in patterns that help them survive but not heal from the trauma they continue to carry in their bodies.⁵³ Somatically oriented questions such as "Where do you feel that in your body?" and "What does the ache in your chest want to do? What is it asking for?" invite the somatic languages of the body to participate in telling the story of trauma and of healing. Trauma-informed drama therapy espouses a similar value: "The focus is not so much on what happened as on renegotiating the way those events live on in the mind, emotions, and body."⁵⁴ That is, if the "body keeps the score" of trauma, as van der Kolk reasoned, then effective therapeutic responses to trauma must likewise reach beyond verbal language to the nonlinear, sensory languages of the body.

In keeping with objectives of postdramatic theater, somatic therapies depart not only from linguistic analysis but also from classical narrative structures that set Aristotelian "catharsis" as a goal. They focus instead upon what the survivor/performer feels the need to physically "complete" in their bodies. As Daly puts it, somatic therapy is in fact not focused on "catharsis," in the sense of a purifying release, but instead upon following somatic sensations toward "completion" of a physical response to threat as a result of unresolved trauma.⁵⁵ These somatic impulses are often a direct result of an action that could not be taken at the time of the traumatic event. Levine similarly argued that embodied impulses and actions that emerge in response to traumatic recall are manifestations of the body trying to "complete" an action that was not possible at the time of the traumatic event, due to overpowering circumstances or survival behaviors such as "freezing," temporary paralysis, or dissociation.⁵⁶

The distinction between "catharsis" and "completion" is well illustrated in a case study offered by drama therapist Margie Pankhurst, in which she worked with three women survivors of gender-based violence in South Africa to create a semipublic performance based on their auto-ethnographic drama therapy work. In one exercise, the women experimented with embodying some of their female ancestors, many of whom had also suffered gender-based violence. One of the women, Miyo, found that she could not speak about what was "coming through" to her, and instead found herself running, stomping, and shaking her hands and body. Another participant, Lucia, responded similarly: "When Lucia accessed the previous [ancestral] bodies followed by the resulting emotions, the aversive state presented itself: a throbbing womb and

an urgent need to run. The physical reaction was clear. When asked what her body was needing to do, the answer was run. We ran. Her body was asking to express the need to escape: for herself, but for her mother as well, for she had run for her life."⁵⁷ The embodied expressions of the ghosts of intergenerational trauma that these women expressed was, in subsequent sessions, turned into choreographed sequences for the performance. These sequences were structured by their physical discoveries in rehearsal yet remained open to their own agentic interpretation (choice) in the moment of performance itself.

Considering these findings from the perspective of a theater maker and performance scholar suggests that trauma is, in essence, postdramatic in form. Trauma is what remains after an event that happened with such speed, force, or shock that the mind and body could not organize an effective protective response. Trauma is not the violent event—the drama—itself, but instead the shock experienced by the mind/body that witnessed and survived the violent event, a shock that prevented the event from being effectively assimilated into cognitive experience (what we might think of as a dramatic narrative). In other words, as in the postdramatic aesthetics that Lehmann describes, trauma is unrepresentable in linear narrative; it is an inherently fragmented and incomplete rendering of an event that refuses closure. For Cathy Caruth trauma is an aporia in experience, “a breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world.”⁵⁸ Jacques Lacan describes trauma as a “missed encounter” with the “real,” as “trauma ruptures the symbolic and the imaginary structures that assimilate me to the world.”⁵⁹ As Amanda Stuart Fisher sums up, trauma “is ultimately always already postponed and unknowable, refusing cognition and the absorption into experience . . . Trauma is therefore best conceived as a *limit* experience, since it can neither be articulated nor comprehended *within* experience. On the contrary, it is the point at which experience confronts its own impossibility.”⁶⁰

To be clear, I draw this comparison to postdramatic performance not to aestheticize trauma, but rather as an offering to ongoing creative research in somatic, action-based trauma therapies. It seems that the postdramatic nature of trauma necessitates treatment forms that are similarly postdramatic. As a theater maker, I likewise reflect this logic back onto representational strategies for expressing war trauma: Are postdramatic representational forms therefore also better suited for communicating embodied experiences of trauma to broader audiences of theaters of war?

The Impossibility of Representing Trauma

Primo Levi, author of many testimonial books about surviving the Holocaust, avers that the representational tool of writing (words, sentences, books) cannot fully communicate the experience of war trauma he and millions of others experienced: “for my Holocaust lies hovering between the words, drips from the punctuation marks, staining everything, while remaining invisible to all others.”⁶¹ Indeed, trauma, like any form of deeply felt suffering or pain, can never be fully communicated to another being, as Elaine Scarry persuasively argued.⁶² Searching for forms that can accurately represent traumatic experience, that which has been “written upon the body by the traumatic act,” drama therapist David Read Johnson asks, “What kind of theater portrays narratives that are incomplete, lack coherence, and privilege randomness over meaning? . . . How can the signs of trauma—the open mouth, the silent scream, the pain with no message—be effectively dramatized without importing some familiar story structure recognizable to the audience?”⁶³ If trauma is unrepresentable, the “aim, then appears to somehow be able to *perform* incomprehensibility, rather than trying to *be* comprehensible; to show absence through mime, gesture, tone, and stillness, rather than only to tell the story through word.”⁶⁴

Johnson built his career as a drama therapist and trauma-informed theater maker by utilizing avant-garde theater techniques, in collaboration with action-based therapies, to uncover the physical dramaturgy of trauma. When he began working with war veterans as a psychologist, he found himself turning to his roots in theater. Theater “calls forth the absent,” exists in “the boundary of the seen and unseen,” and functions as a “bridge that allows the imaginal and liminal worlds to reveal themselves.”⁶⁵ He found that traditional theatrical representation did not effectively meet the vagaries and violence of living with trauma. Where Aristotelian theater “takes us to the point of catharsis of emotion, trauma leads us to emotional numbing and the cold stare into elsewhere. Theater develops, it moves us; trauma repeats, it freezes us. . . . Characters on the stage are ‘larger than life,’ while trauma victims feel that some essential part of them has been removed or stolen.”⁶⁶ Johnson, a disciple of avant-garde theater practitioners such as Jerzy Grotowski, thus concluded that “the avant-garde theater (absurd, dada, minimalist) may offer some means by which these aims can be accomplished on stage. By disrupting the usual forms of continuity on stage, perhaps the sense of the thing [war trauma] will be communicated.”⁶⁷

Indeed, many of the avant-garde theater forms Johnson cites emerged during and following World War I, as artists sought symbolic, multisensory, non-Aristotelian methods of representing the horrors of the “war to end all wars.”⁶⁸ Other performance forms such as Butoh, which emerged in Japan following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II, have likewise attempted to express the “limit experience” of war trauma.⁶⁹ Rather than using codified technique or narrative strategies to create performances, Butoh is manifested through detailed, imagistic “scores” that prompt individualized movement. These “scores,” known as *butoh-fu*, are experiential descriptions, postdramatically detached from any cohesive narrative or character, save that they are meant to be interpreted by a human body that exists in shared space with observers.⁷⁰ The scores prompt dancers to explore in their bodies graphic, sensorial manifestations of extreme suffering, animal drives, and even trans-species embodiments.

In each of these postwar performance forms, postdramatic representations of trauma were vital to intervening in nationalistic narratives of war that focused on politics and heroism in place of human suffering. Johnson notes the “pernicious contradictions” that have for centuries attended veterans returning from war to civilian life: “Society has helped soldiers on the winning side recover by labelling them heroes and honoring their great effort, and not asking them about the horrendous mistakes and terror they experienced. Soldiers from the losing side have been ignored, punished, and shamed.”⁷¹ Johnson, who spent much of his career developing drama therapy programs and performances with Vietnam veterans, notes that it is therefore “not a coincidence that the modern emergence of post-traumatic stress disorder occurred among soldiers coming back from a war they did not win. Defeat laid bare the bones of the disorder.”⁷² As described above, VVAW participants represented their experiences of war trauma in radical public performances that sought to interrupt entrenched dramatic arcs of heroic warfare. They reclaimed and deconstructed the narrative denouements of their personal war stories in service of awakening themselves—and a broader civilian public—to the horrors of war and the shared responsibility for its perpetuation.

In his work with veterans, Johnson has sought avant-garde theatrical forms that provide “room for gaps, empty spaces that give rise to the shadows unseen in conversation and prose” and that can still be understood and tolerated by both the performers and the spectators.⁷³ During his many years at the Veterans Administration Hospital in West Haven, Connecticut, Johnson ran the Specialized PTSD Inpatient Unit, where he worked with twenty-

seven cohorts of eight to fifteen veterans. Through each four-month long program, Johnson worked with the veterans to create a communally devised play that would be performed, at the end of the program, for hospital staff, patients, family members, and other invited guests.⁷⁴ The initial rehearsals/group meetings centered on open-ended improvisations with the goal of identifying relationships and situations that group members found particularly potent. The improvisations would then be organized into what Johnson describes as “an integrated play with coherence and continuity,” even as the script pointed to the absences that characterize war trauma.⁷⁵ “Of the many types of experiences veterans have after an armed conflict, one of the most important is absence,” Johnson avers, a sense of “something valuable that is not here, but should be.”⁷⁶ Johnson distinguishes absence from loss, from nothingness; instead, absence “is memory that refuses its status as memory; that seeks to rise up, to come alive again; that calls out to be found.”⁷⁷ To represent the important role of absence at the heart of war trauma, scripts were subsequently treated to postdramatic revision: “elements of scenes were removed or disrupted in order to replicate the sense of fragmentation and absence we wished to portray.”⁷⁸

In one performance, for example, the drama therapy group investigated the sense of absence that so often attends war trauma, as well as the high numbers of Missing in Action (MIA) soldiers that characterize all wars. Their co-created performance centered on a fictional Vietnam veteran named “Joe” who goes missing one day from his suburban home (Joe never appears onstage, only as an absent central figure). As his family searches for him, evidence of sightings filter in from his friends at the local bar, his psychologist, and the police, but the reports place him in opposite directions around the county: his hat in one direction, his lighter, impossibly, in another. The narrative of the search deconstructs into direct address soliloquies in which Joe’s wife, children, and war buddies try to interpret their own felt sensations of loss and the absurd experience of being present with absence. War buddies share memories of vanished soldiers from the war; his son draws him as a “Hologram man” that you can “put your hand right through;” and his wife imagines her internal distress and vicarious trauma depicted as a “snow-woman with sweat pouring down her face.”⁷⁹ In the final scene, Joe’s young daughter touches her cheek, seeming to sense Joe passing through the living room, though everyone else feels nothing. There is no resting place for Joe or any of the characters, only uncertainty as to where and why Joe went—or, more hauntingly, whether Joe could ever return from the war at all.

The irresolution of the theater piece, the lack of catharsis and the inability to rest, even in mourning, was, by all accounts, an effective representation of living with war trauma. Johnson, too, felt that it was an accurate representation of the veterans' experiences of living with war trauma: "Performance of traumatic experience intrinsically involves the incomplete, the absent, the missing, and, for the performance to be credible, these gaps must disrupt the aesthetic principles of harmony, continuity, and tragedy, for traumatic experience interferes with catharsis and mourning."⁸⁰ The performance the group developed evoked this sense of disruption, hollowness, and absence at the heart of trauma for the participating veterans and their families.

In addition to the haunting absences carried by war trauma survivors, there are also significant absences in the experiences of audiences of war. Habits of inaction and passivity on the part of bystanders are as much a part of the equation of trauma, as Johnson emphasized when he visited my class at Yale: "the fact of trauma means that . . . no one intervened to prevent it."⁸¹ The damaging lack of intervention at the time of violence can be echoed in the passivity of audience witnesses in post-traumatic representations. Reflecting on his decades of theatrical and therapeutic work with war veterans, Johnson likens audience passivity to the fable "The Emperor's New Clothes," in which the naked king's subjects pretend not to see the embarrassing truth hidden in plain sight. In the fable, only a child, not yet enculturated into the socially conditioned blindness, or percepticide, is able to tell the truth. Johnson writes: "Audiences of trauma testimonies are placed in the same situation; they must sit back and watch someone else's suffering and not intervene, no matter how uncomfortable they are. Unlike children's theater, where the children cry out to the main characters, 'Watch out! The wolf is hiding there!' adult audiences merely stare."⁸²

Indeed, traditions of proper theatrical spectatorship mirror the absence of intervention by witnesses of real world theaters of war. Audiences of traditional, realist theater have been coached to sit still and silent, dutifully consuming what we paid for. We have been so well trained that we don't cry wolf, even when there is one clearly lurking in the shadows. The scripts for such behaviors echo those in militarized theaters of war: "In most wars, the civilian population is forced to collaborate with whoever has power over them," thereby entraining collusion with military ideologies in times of conflict.⁸³ For many U.S. civilians, our own docility is largely not visible or apparent, due to the geographical distance between our daily lives and the armed conflicts our country's military wages and fuels. However, "armed conflict injures all

participants, combatants and non-combatants alike,” Johnson writes. “All are scarred.”⁸⁴ The cost of civilian docility is directly paid by those who enact and absorb war on behalf of nation-states, but we civilians, too, remain ethically impaired, morally injured, and effectively traumatized, unable to intervene in our own passive participation in war violence.

This double bind is brutally illustrated in another Vietnam-era performance. In 1976 Vietnam War veteran Kim Jones staged a performance in which he burned three rats to death in front of a live audience.⁸⁵ Jones walked onstage, smeared with mud, carrying a cage with live rats. He then repeatedly sprayed the panicked rats with lighter fluid and burned them alive, burying them in mud at the end of the performance. Jones’s *Rat Piece* (1976), was, not surprisingly, immediately condemned as horrific and inhumane. Audiences of the piece expressed outrage, the gallery director was fired, and Jones was charged with cruelty to animals and ordered to appear in court.⁸⁶ Through it all, Jones insisted that he was accurately representing wartime violence that he and his comrades had performed in the jungles of Vietnam, as well as the civilian public’s unwillingness to intervene in such violence.⁸⁷ As Peggy Phelan wrote, “*Rat Piece* was not a ‘representation’ of killing or of the war carnage that was so well aestheticized by Hollywood and the nightly news. Rather, it was a deliberate, calculated, ritualized, and prolonged public killing, which may be a brutally accurate definition of war as well.”⁸⁸ *Rat Piece* was, as Martin Harries argues, part reenactment of Jones’s military experience in Vietnam and part social experiment in the aftermath of that war.⁸⁹ In his “Artist Statement” for the piece, Jones recalled, “vietnam dong ha marine corps our camp covered with rats they crawled over us at night they got in our food we catch them in cages and burn them to death i remember the smell.”⁹⁰ The audience that gathered in 1976 were cast as representative subjects of an experiment on public spectatorship of intentional violence. “They could have stopped me,” Kim insisted, in a 2005 interview, at once referencing his torture of the rats onstage and the napalm that American military forces had sprayed on Vietnamese civilians.⁹¹ But they didn’t. During the Vietnam War, as in his gallery performance, U.S. civilian audiences did not intervene in the inhumanity of war, even if they voiced complaints after the fact and from a distance.⁹²

Instead, the outcry following the performance focused on the public abuse and suffering of the rats, rather than the wartime violence the performance directly referenced. Some critics argued that Jones’s extreme act of animal torture undermined his focus on collective responsibility for war by

instead igniting political debates about animal abuse and ethical boundaries in performance art.⁹³ And indeed, the piece does exemplify the impossibility—or illegality—of representing the actual brutality of war violence onstage. Based on the horrific mental artifacts of war he has witnessed as a therapist for combat veterans, Johnson states bluntly: “Any theater that portrayed what happened to [veterans] would be banned, or more likely, never attended.”⁹⁴

Though his artistic methods were certainly inhumane and crossed ethical lines, Jones was not wrong in his larger allegations. From Rwanda to Cambodia, Darfur to Vietnam, Nazi Germany to Gaza, global audiences of war crimes and genocides *do* see, we *do* know. The violent scripts have by now been played out through so many iterations that we cannot help but know the book by heart. And yet our capacity to react seems to be nullified. We remain in our seats, behind a fourth wall as it were, unable or unwilling to effectively intervene in response to violence that we witness. Indeed, Phelan suggests that the responses to Jones’s performance revealed the effects of unresolved cultural trauma in the post-Vietnam War civilian audiences: “The outcry over the rats’ deaths may well have been displacement of the repressed grief about those murdered and maimed in Vietnam. Insofar as the rats function as surrogates or substitute objects for something that neither Jones nor his audience could fully handle, the trauma of the performance resides in the manner of their slow public death.”⁹⁵ This is not to say that rats were undeserving of the public outcry against their suffering—although Harries points out the irony of the sudden outpouring of care for rats, which are typically treated as pariahs of urban life. However, the public condemnation and Jones’s ensuing court appearances rallied almost exclusively around the figures of the rats, as if relieved to avoid the uncontained specters of wartime violence and collective trauma the rats indexed.

Because of the displaced reaction of the audience, Phelan declared the piece a “misfire,” in the Austinian performative sense: “a speech act fails to become a performative when the person who speaks lacks the authority to put into action the thing said.”⁹⁶ In the piece, “the rats both under-reach and over-reach the psyche’s tolerance for the knowledge that we have the capacity to kill and to be killed,” Phelan argued, making the work miss its political mark.⁹⁷ However, from another vantage point, Jones and his audiences were actually quite successful in reenacting the performative misfires of war traumas that effect different members of militarized culture: where Jones was driven to enact irrational violence, his audiences were paralyzed to intervene in the horrors of that violence in both representational and real theaters of

war. The piece made painfully obvious that dominant scripts of militarism—and of theater—did not “authorize” them to enact a different story.

Reawakening “as if” from a Distance

The performative actions of Jones, the VVAW, and other artist-activists from the Vietnam War era established a genealogy of social activism, participatory performance, and communal therapy in the U.S. However, this genealogy is marked more by breakages than continuity, as Lindsay Goss argues in her book on the antiwar GI movement. Goss warns against a tendency in theater historiography, particularly of progressive, avant-garde movements, to “foreground a continuity between past and present practices, to celebrate successes, and to delay or prevent altogether a confrontation with (political) failure.”⁹⁸ Indeed, it is of utmost significance that, for all the creativity, courage, and passion of the VVAW members, their efforts did not ultimately succeed in moving their intended audience of politicians, military leaders, and civilian publics to end the war and oppose militarism. The Vietnam War continued for four years after Dewey Canyon III. Numerous other wars and war traumas have followed, nearly without pause. The revolutionary cultural awakening the VVAW sparked, like that of the concomitant civil rights and feminist movements, were eventually reblanketed by a dense, pillowy status quo. This is not to say that the radical social movements of the 1970s did not establish substantive gains, but, as evidenced in the string of rollbacks of rights won on each of these fronts, militarized, white supremacist, and patriarchal political structures endure.

Set within the history of the VVAW’s efforts to awaken from militarized theaters and therapies of war, questions about our own contemporary relationships to militarism gain new clarity. Do military trauma therapies that have flourished in the wake of the VVAW continue to collude with military and other nationalist agendas? Has the nomination of PTSD to the medical annals of the DSM in 1980 resulted in pathologizing trauma as an individual “disorder,” leaving the social and political systems that produce war trauma unexamined, untreated? Like wartime narcotherapy, do “fourth wall” theatrical traditions serve to put audiences into a twilight sleep in the auditorium, seeking to later return us, blinking and catharted, to the front lines of consumerism and obedient citizenship in our military industrial complex?

The VVAW’s history of sleep, trauma, awakening, and collective action

reveals much about our contemporary relationship to these issues. Some things have changed as a result of the VVAW's actions: most notably the psychotherapeutic advances in understanding and treating war trauma and trauma more broadly. Therapists working in partnership with Vietnam veterans recognized an expanded variety of trauma symptoms, which in turn led to the establishment of trauma therapy programs in VA hospitals, increased funding for trauma research, and the development of new techniques for treatment. As I explored above, the post-VVAW wave of postdramatic therapies support participants in physically processing their traumas through telling, moving, and acting together.

At the same time, other things haven't changed. The dramaturgies of militarism that structured twentieth-century war trauma therapy continue to shape and propel what Sara Brady, writing of twenty-first century warfare, calls "the soldier cycle" that flows between reality and representation, and civilian and military forums.⁹⁹ Harun Farocki's documentary film installation series *Serious Games* (2009–10) vividly illustrates the "soldier cycle," showing how soldiers are recruited, train for, enact, and even receive rehabilitative therapy for wartime combat using immersive first-person shooter gaming interfaces.¹⁰⁰ Given that many service members—like much of the civilian public—grew up playing first-person shooter video games and consuming mainstream entertainment, the complex interplay of reality, representation, and (re)enactment in such environments leads to blurred boundaries between spaces of play and spaces of serious consequence. In a particularly bold handshake between militarism in representation and reality, the Hollywood blockbuster *Top Gun* had such an inspirational impact on civilian viewers that the Navy set up recruitment tables in the lobbies of movie theaters.¹⁰¹ As dramatized in Christine Evans's *Closer Than They Appear* (analyzed in chapter 5), military trauma programs like "Virtual Iraq" are modeled after first-person shooter games such as *Full Spectrum Warrior*, itself an immersive and highly theatrical representation of contemporary warfare that, while it originated as a U.S. Army-funded combat tactical simulation trainer, is best known as a commercially successful Xbox game.

The effects of these magnetic cycles of militarism are not unlike a fugue state experienced in a realm of half-sleep. While these militaristic dramaturgies affect military service members most directly, they have also had a soporific effect on civilian publics—and our representational theaters of war. Even in civilian theaters that seem to bear little relationship to militarism, habits of spectatorial passivity continue to produce docile consumers of war



Fig. 4. Still image from Harun Farocki's *Serious Games III: Immersion* (2009–10). (Copyright Harun Farocki GbR, used by permission.)

trauma—as if it were not also our own to bear. Seated, silent, and still in the dark, audiences of mainstream theater consume stories of war from behind a fourth wall, observing “as if” from a distance, even as we actively fund martial theaters of war. Augusto Boal saw in these traditions the production of political somnambulism, in which “through the passive witnessing of these stories . . . audiences are vicariously tranquilized.”¹⁰²

Breaking the spell of conventional spectatorship, when not explicitly invited or cued, is met with immediate disapproval, removal, and institutional correction. Johnson recalls an avant-garde performance that he developed with patients at the Yale Psychiatric Institute. The performance, called *The Struggle for Freedom*, featured a young patient-veteran-actor tied in a straitjacket; while surrounded by the gathered audience, he struggled to free himself and eventually, after ten or more minutes, succeeded.¹⁰³ In one iteration of the performance, an audience member who was also a schizophrenic patient that suffered routinely from psychosis could not bear to simply stand by; he stood up from the audience and made his way onstage, shouting, “Free that man!” An aide quickly intercepted the intervening patient and guided him out of the room as he continued to shout: “You cannot do that to him! Free him!” The performance consequently raised institutional questions about the intensity of the scene for patients with psychosis, but for Johnson, the lesson was a different one. Witnessing the “wave of fright [that] sped through the audience as the boundaries of theater and life wobbled for everyone,” Johnson saw that “many audience members had become intensely aware in that moment of their own passivity: of being bystanders to the albeit pretend suf-

fering of the patient-actor, and though they had been held back by the as-if agreement of theater, the psychotic man had actually tapped into what can only be described as an authentic response. In fact, his response may have been the appropriate response!"¹⁰⁴

The example, and the institutionalized control exerted over the audience member that actually sought to intervene, articulates a central trope in this book: addressing cultural war trauma requires breaking with traditional theatrical conventions of spectatorship. As Harries sagely observes of *Rat Piece*, "Not to intervene is what it is to be an audience: Audiences do not intervene, or when they do intervene, the members of this group become something other than an audience. . . . The success of the performance relies on the failure of the audience, its failure to intervene."¹⁰⁵ The question thus shifts: What might become possible when the audience fails to be an audience? If an audience fails in complicity, fails in "proper" spectatorship, might we instead succeed in taking on some of the burden of war trauma we witness? Rather than recapitulating symptoms of post-traumatic stress, might we instead be moved toward action through a productive pressure, a "postdramatic stress"?

Postdramatic Stress

Interactive theater and therapy methods can be combined to exercise the muscles needed for participants to turn and point out the wolves that they see lurking in theaters of war. That is, they can be combined to create what I call "postdramatic stress," a fruitful tension that can exert pressure—stress, if you will—on habits of spectatorial silence and inaction in theaters of war. Like the improvisatory actions of the VVAW, postdramatic stress is a justice-oriented social force, a blend of postdramatic performance forms and "postdramatic therapies" for PTS. Although they are by no means mainstream yet, I argue that postdramatic stress in theatrical forums can function as nonclinical, public-facing therapy.

In essence, "postdramatic stress" combines fragmented narratives and sensorial methods of postdramatically representing and treating trauma with Boalian strategies of interactive spect-actorship. Although Hans-Thies Lehmann did not consider Augusto Boal to be postdramatic in his representational strategies, Boal's antihierarchical methods share foundational characteristics with postdramatic practices of audience address. Where Boal

promoted the cultivation of “spect-actors” in place of spectators and a commitment to theatrical states of “disequilibrium,” Lehmann argues that postdramatic theater seeks to implicate audiences in the co-creation of a stage world and the larger ethico-political world referenced therein. The result of a “doing” rather than simply a “viewing” audience, Lehmann wrote, is that “instead of the deceptively comforting duality of here and there, inside and outside, [postdramatic theater] can move the mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images into the centre. . . . Such an experience would be not only aesthetic but therein at the same time ethico-political.”¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Boal argued that providing audiences with a felt sense of imbalance and social unrest could lead to a politically productive version of change, what he called “the catharsis of detrimental blocks.”¹⁰⁷ Both approach the theatrical event not as a story-driven spectacle to be consumed whole, but as a shared, live encounter that has impacts on—and is impacted by—the gathered community and the world they live in.

The impulse to awaken civilian “spectators” of war follows contours similar to those found in immersive and participatory performance, where audience members—like Boal’s “spect-actors”—are called into action, not just observation. The detrimental blocks to ethico-political awakening and political catharsis for audiences of representations of trauma can be the same as for bystanders to the violent actions and systems that cause trauma: inaction, passivity, turning the other way, and complaining or protesting later about what we saw at the time. Instead, crying “Wolf!” in a theater piece that deliberately makes the fourth wall porous could serve as a way of pointing to the realities of war trauma. Instead of a childish fib, the wolf might be a flashback, an awakening to a postmemory of war, a moment of recognition of mutual implication for the burdens of war trauma. Such an action might make good on countercultural activist Abbie Hoffman’s sardonic wisdom for Vietnam War protesters: “free speech is the right to shout ‘theater’ in a crowded fire.”¹⁰⁸

As I suggested in the introduction, postdramatic form and interactive models of spectatorship are essential tools for awakening audiences of real-world theaters of war. Experiences like Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More*, referenced in the title of this chapter, exemplify deconstructed narratives and immersive theatrical landscapes, offering audiences the chance to kinesthetically engage with postnarrative action.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, contemporary action-oriented trauma therapies utilize postnarrative and kinesthetic modalities of expressing traumatic experience in collaborative therapeutic relationships. In these practices, the fictional barrier of a “fourth wall” is made porous such

that all those present become participants in creating and interpreting a situation as it unfolds in the theater or therapy space. Postdramatic stress thus offers audiences of theater about war trauma something akin to Moreno's action-based, role-playing therapy methods, something that might reveal and loosen restrictive social dynamics and behavioral patterns. Pressing spectatorship beyond the fourth wall of war, postdramatic stress urges audiences to "role-play" as well, to "break out from [our] role as audience."¹¹⁰

Johnson's Developmental Transformations Therapy (DvT), a highly physical and improvisatory form of drama therapy, provides guidance from within clinical settings that can be applied to public-facing theater work. In developing DvT, Johnson drew inspiration from the postdramatic theater methods of Grotowski. Indeed, Johnson calls the improvisatory, raw, no-holds-barred (save actual physical harm) container of DvT a "poor drama therapy."¹¹¹ In his descriptions of his "poor theatre," Grotowski used psychological terminology to describe a twofold structure of human selfhood, with a "mask" or "false self" of social conditioning and compliance covering over a deeply hidden "true self," a construction that was limiting for both actors and audiences.¹¹² He insisted that his actors must approach the true self "via negativa," by dislodging the mask bit by bit in a "total act."

the discarding of masks, the revealing of the real substance: a totality of physical and mental reactions. The actors' act—discarding half measures, revealing, opening up, emerging from himself as opposed to closing up—is an invitation to the spectator. This act could be compared to an act of the most deeply rooted genuine love between two human beings. . . . This act we call a total act.¹¹³

Similarly, Johnson's DvT seeks to "introduce movement into the adaptive system that has formed to protect the self."¹¹⁴ While every person develops social "masks" designed to help them fit in with or resist forces in their environments and social lives, survivors of trauma must develop an extra thick "adaptive shield" in order to continue to survive the impacts of the traumatic experience as it continues to express itself in response to their present circumstances.¹¹⁵ This "adaptive shield" becomes habitual, seemingly necessary for survival, so much so that it becomes part of one's personality and diagnosis, even if it causes great tensions, disruption, and suffering within one's own body and interpersonal relationships.

In DvT, therapist and clients become partners in creative exploration,

shifting between roles, taking cues from one another's body language, and engaging in uncensored, unmasked verbal exchanges. Playfully enacting whatever content arises together, the DvT therapist leads and follows equally, with an eye toward "playing the scene" in different and unexpected ways. Through the exhaustive repetitions and revisions, the client's "adaptive shield" can be safely jostled, dislodged, cracked open. This process creates what Johnson calls "varielation" or, more colloquially, "shaking the tree."

Varielation is purposefully varying one's responses away from what is immediately expected; that is, playing the character, scene, line, or word slightly differently, slightly off. . . . By constantly changing the imaginary circumstances—that is, by transforming the scenes in DvT into new scenes—the client is presented with an entirely different set of present circumstances to which to adapt.¹¹⁶

Varielation is a play-based, relational method of gradually encountering trauma, and the "true self" that remains beneath it. Like Grotowskian actor training, it is demanding, sweaty, joyful, painful, and deeply human. With the careful and courageous partnership of a DvT therapist, the process is highly effective in destabilizing the petrified, defensive, and often narratively concretized relationships between adaptive shield and past trauma, freeing up a "true self" that can begin to heal in relationship to self and others.

Somatic therapies are designed to tune participants in to what hovers between words or escapes logos-based representation altogether—they bring the bodily languages of participants to amplification as part of understanding and treating trauma. Interactive, movement-based performance forms can, with care, provide similar experiences for larger civilian groups. For example, in a memorable Butoh workshop led by Butoh dancer Kae Ishikawa, my students and I were given the *butoh-fu* prompt: "imagine the skin of your back melting off, your skin hanging in strips as you walk forward." Then, several steps later, we were prompted to "turn into pollen; to move from human form into the dry dust of pollen." Five steps later, we were to be blown away by a passing wind.¹¹⁷ The physical directions were devoid of any national or historical narratives of war; they were not meant to directly communicate the experience of an atomic bomb detonating over a human community, nor to elicit or process guilt over being from a country that utilized such a weapon. Kae was cheerful and upbeat as she demonstrated the Butoh score prompts and coached us on our performances. We all laughed a lot, and we were also in unfamiliar, physically uncomfortable territory. And then, after the workshop,

my students and I had the most open discussion about cultural war trauma and its impacts on ourselves and our communities that we had all semester.

Shaking the tree of adaptive shields and habitual defenses is uncomfortable work and extends far beyond acute trauma survivors and formal drama therapy sessions. As drama therapists Craig Haen, Maria Hodermarska, and Lucy McLellan argue, acknowledging one's own conditioning by and participation in systemic violence can trigger something akin to "stage fright," requiring somatic methods to stay present with and awake to one's own role. In their work, they consider how white therapists must overcome sensations of "stage fright"—physical hesitation, immobility, psychological mechanisms for avoidance—that may arise in themselves when working with clients of color.¹¹⁸ The embodied metaphor of stage fright is particularly effective in describing the dissociation and disorientation that can occur when grappling with the important work of racial consciousness and repair, and offers tools for therapists (and teachers and directors and audience members) to meet their own experiences with compassion and creativity. Acknowledging, experiencing, and intentionally working with sensations of "stage fright" triggered by historically traumatic relationships can become a pathway for ethical encounters in such relational spaces.

Ethical spectatorship in theaters of war likewise entails "revealing and acknowledging obscured power dynamics" of militarism that not only affect the most prominent war trauma symptom bearers (such as veterans and refugees) but that also condition and restrict civilian audience members' relationship to witnessing and responding to war trauma. Shaking the tree of defensive posturing that shields oneself from pain, discomfort, and change is of utmost importance in awakening implicated subjects of theaters of war to our own conditioning. The process of awakening to one's implication in the war machine often triggers blockages, avoidance, and the "adaptive shield" of collective war trauma, which keeps sources of trauma at bay but also inaccessible to change. Without learning to varielate or shake the tree of collective war trauma in civilian populations, and to tolerate the "stage fright" that arises when awakening to our own implicated subjecthood, our body politic remains trapped in scripts of war, trauma, and militarism.

Awakening the Sleeping Hand

The VVAW radically, albeit briefly, complicated the powerful dramaturgies of militarism and broke the fourth wall of the Vietnam War. Their collective

actions disrupted—we might say varielated—dominant images of heroic military service, playing the scene of military service toward radically different ends. However, the dynamic sociopolitical identities, let alone performative and dialogical actions, offered by the VVAW have largely evaporated, like a dream dissipates under the harsh light of conditioned consciousness. Through militarized cultural forces far bigger than the VVAW, even the existence of a category of “antiwar soldier” has been largely erased—if not entirely from the historical record, then at least from how that devastating war might have shaped our present conversations about militarism and war.¹¹⁹ Abandoning mandatory conscription following the Vietnam War may have narrowed and redirected the casting pool, but it did not change the brutal scripts of military violence.

The next chapter traces theatrical efforts to recuperate some of the complexity, dynamism, and interactive methods of awakening modeled by the VVAW. As in the VVAW rap sessions, theatrical methods of embodied interaction, deep listening, and varielative role-play can support audiences and participants, trauma survivors, and implicated subjects alike in awakening to their own relationships to war trauma in militarized cultures. Jonathan Wei, founder of *The Telling Project* (2005-ongoing), a case study in the next chapter, fittingly described bringing civilians and veterans together to have genuine communication about war as “trying to re-sensitize a hand that has gone numb or fallen asleep.”¹²⁰ Wei believes that reawakening in community forums that involve war survivors and civilian audiences is the essential first step to addressing social disconnections and immobilized discourse/action around contemporary warfare. While *Telling Project* participants are not united around an antiwar stance like the VVAW, Wei’s project offers anomalous spaces for military veterans to emerge as vulnerable and human, distinct from the goals and ideologies of militarism, and thus “salvageable” for something other than war thinking and enactment.

However, the “sleep” of civilians remains deep. Continuing the metaphor of the hand that has fallen asleep to describe the disconnection between civilians and warfare in the U.S., Wei cautions, “at this historical moment . . . the disconnection has been long enough and complete enough that we don’t yet know what [the sleeping hand] is holding.”¹²¹ Indeed, civilian audiences continue to be in particular need of “awakening” because our “sleep”—our habituation to militarism and disconnection from wars we nonetheless fuel and benefit from—is often unacknowledged and hard to shake. The majority of civilians, including myself, in powerful, militarized countries like the U.S. are

“implicated subjects” of contemporary warfare—a point that the VVAW was making in 1971 and that remains true today. Without “afflicting” the comfort and complacency of the larger body politic, awakening to and breaking the collective habit of war will not happen.

Wei’s metaphor of a numbed or sleeping hand is particularly apt in regard to historical cycles of awakening to war trauma: the restriction of flow that creates the conditions of numbness and disconnection, the desensitization of receptors that results, and the uncomfortable, sometimes even painful, process of bringing the hand back to sensory and motor function so that it can, in time, return to the larger body of which it is a part. Thus, we arrive, again, at the question that continues to keep some theater makers, therapists, and war survivors awake: How can theater offer a space and practice of awakening to, talking openly about, healing from, and imagining beyond rigid scripts of militarism, for both war survivors and civilian audiences? What collective actions can come of awakening together, in our corporeal bodies and bodies politic? And if, like the VVAW we fail yet again, how might we at least (invoking Samuel Beckett) *fail better*?¹²²

CHAPTER TWO

Communalizing Trauma

Six actors take their places on the worn floorboards of the “Ballroom” of 220 York Street, in New Haven, Connecticut. Three are U.S. military veterans that had been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan in the previous decade; three are political refugees from Iraq or Afghanistan whose lives came under risk during the U.S.-led wars in their homelands. The actors form a semicircle; the audience, packed to capacity in folding chairs, forms the other half. I am not the only one eager to catch this production, a new iteration of Jonathan Wei’s *The Telling Project*, which has been promoted on the local National Public Radio station. Since 2005, Wei has traveled to regional centers to interview local combat veterans—and now war refugees as well—about their experiences preparing for and living through war, turning their testimonials into a theatrical script that the interviewees then rehearse and perform together. *Telling: New Haven* quickly sold out its initial run at the Yale Cabaret the week before, so I worked with the producing team to remount the production in a rehearsal space in my academic home of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies at Yale.¹ The nimbleness with which the team moved the production here, sans theatrical lighting and no set other than six folding chairs, revealed the “poor theater” aesthetic—and power—of the testimonial theater piece. The potency of *The Telling Project* is in the telling. And in the listening.

I switch off the Ballroom’s chandelier lights to indicate a beginning. The performers introduce themselves, name the towns they each call home, and offer brief descriptions of when and how they went to war or war came to them. The U.S. veterans explain their reasons for joining the military, their experiences in boot camp, when and where they were deployed overseas. One flew helicopters, Nighthawks, in Iraq. Another was a medic in Afghanistan. Two of the refugees, from Afghanistan and Iraq, respectively, share that they worked for the U.S. military as translators, recalling the precarity of navigating between military and civilian spaces in various cities in

Afghanistan and Iraq, coming under suspicion no matter where they were. None of the six onstage knew each other from their time in Iraq or Afghanistan, yet their stories interweave with one another, creating resonant echoes and contrapuntal eddies of human experience.

In one particularly affecting scene, Tom, a Marine from Fairfield, Connecticut, who served in Afghanistan, and Maher, a young man from Baghdad, Iraq, take the stage together. They face one another as they tell interlocking stories that, though they did not involve each other and happened in different countries, bear eerie symmetry. Tom was on patrol in Nawa, Afghanistan, hoping to buy some cigarettes. When he saw what he thought was a motorcycle careening toward a routine traffic stop, Tom fired his rifle several times, only later realizing it was an Afghan boy who worked on their base, riding a bicycle. The boy was not killed, but he was beaten up by a nearby man for bringing such risk to himself and his community. Maher, who was fourteen at the time of his story, had defied his father's prohibition and gone to a neighboring city in Iraq in search of a charger for his first cell phone. While there he bought a pair of binoculars and, as he idly raised them to watch a passing U.S. military convoy, he was nearly shot by a U.S. soldier for the gesture. Maher returned home safely, but his father grounded him for weeks after.

On stage, after telling their harrowing stories, Tom and Maher stare at one another, taking in their mutual near misses with death, the frightening symmetry that united them even long after they left those cities-turned-combat zones. After a few beats, they trade places, each taking up the position that the other had just occupied during their "telling."

A collective exhale ripples through the audience. We shift in our seats, as if we too have changed positions.

Later, after those onstage finish their stories and receive a standing ovation, we—the audience—will be invited to share our own thoughts and questions, to change positions and perform our own parts in an unscripted dialogic performance.

Telling is not a one-way street. We hear. We are here. This theater is porous. These wars are ours, too. What we hear matters. What we say and do in response matters too.

Telling: New Haven (2016) was the first *Telling Project* performance I witnessed, though I have since seen several others around the country and spoken with numerous *Telling Project* participants. The experience of witnessing



Fig. 5. *Telling: New Haven* rehearsal in a theater building on the Yale campus. Former Marine Tom Burke (left) and Maher Mahmood, an Iraqi refugee, rehearse for the play *Voices from the Long War*. (Photograph by Lucy Nalpathanchil, in Lucy Nalpathanchil, “In ‘Long War,’ Iraq and Afghanistan Vets and Refugees Tell Their Stories,” April 30, 2016, National Public Radio.)

and dialoguing with the cast and creators of *Telling: New Haven* germinated questions about what theater about war can *do* about war. About how theater can not only *communicate* details of war trauma but also form *community* that can witness, share, and respond to traumas brought “home” from war. That is, how theater can animate the concept at the heart of this chapter: *communalizing trauma*.

Communalizing Trauma through Theater

Trauma therapist Jonathan Shay argues that “healing from trauma depends upon *communalization of the trauma*—being able safely to tell the story to someone who is listening.”² Shay’s insistence on the value of communalizing

trauma emerged directly from his psychiatric work with Vietnam veterans. As in the “rap sessions,” collective actions, and political *communitas* of the VVAW, Shay posits that communalizing trauma is as much about sharing one’s burden with a trusted community as it is about communicating details of a survival experience. Communalizing war trauma depends upon people, who may or may not yet consider each other as part of a common group, coming together around the purpose of telling and listening to lived experiences of war and the wounds it has left.

Shay finds a cultural model for communalizing war trauma in ancient Greek theater. Historians estimate that Athens was at war for 80 out of 100 years of the fifth century BC, the height of the City Dionysia theater festival in Athens, and that all male citizens, including playwrights such as Sophocles, participated in military life through mandatory conscription and leadership roles.³ Given the centrality of theater in Athenian civic life, the physical spaces and subject matter of classic Greek theater were deeply entwined with the dominant military culture: graduation from military training took place in the theater; audiences were seated for theater festivals according to military rank and unit, and “the same young soldiers who had recently done close-order drill in the theater *made up the chorus for the tragedies*.”⁴ Shay deduces that the frequent community gatherings in Athenian theaters thus played an essential role in collectively recognizing war trauma and maintaining democratic military culture: “The distinctive character of Athenian theater arose from the political need to purify, purge, and reclarify civic understanding to its returning soldiers, so they could again fulfill the roles of citizens of a democracy.” In short, “the role of tragedy [was] *re-education* for those same citizens as they returned again and again from war.”⁵ Thought about in this way, classical Greek theater was an ancient military technology designed to put stories of war trauma onstage to help the community of Athens collectively understand and cope with continual cycles of war.⁶

While the frequency of war in the twenty-first century has not decreased, the contact between civilians and military veterans in most Western centers of power has. In the decades since the Vietnam War, less than 1 percent of the U.S. population serves in the military.⁷ Civilians and military service members in the U.S. tend to live in separate silos of experience, even in shared spaces like colleges and workplaces. Communication, let alone open dialogue, between these subject positions is rare at best. Shay thus insists, “We must create our own new models of healing which emphasize communalization of trauma. Combat veterans and American citizenry should meet together, face

to face in daylight, and listen, and watch and weep, just as citizen-soldiers did in the theatre at the foot of the Acropolis. We need a modern equivalent of Athenian tragedy.”⁸

The case studies of this chapter are that modern equivalent, but with some significant revisions to the Athenian model that Shay cites. While some draw directly on canonical dramatic texts of Shakespeare and Greek tragedies, as in Stephan Wolfert’s DE-CRUIT and Bryan Doerries’s Theater of War, the classical texts are employed as a means of illuminating contemporary war trauma such that it can be witnessed and openly discussed by survivors and audiences today. Others, like *The Telling Project*, stage contemporary auto-ethnographic testimony of individual experiences of war, offering personal accounts that challenge monolithic conceptions of militarism that can obscure the individual costs and lived realities of what it means to perpetuate war today. The classic dramatic scripts and contemporary testimonial narratives thus function not as “reeducation” for returning military veterans so much as catalysts for community formation and dialogue among the citizenry gathered in a given theater space. Doerries formed his company, Theater of War Productions, “to create a vehicle that would help Americans to come together to share the burden of the pollution of war.”⁹ Blending Brechtian tactics of “historicization” with Boalian “forum theater,” Theater of War produces staged readings of Greek tragedies for audiences of veterans and civilians; the readings are always followed by “Act II” dialogues among the audience about what the ancient stories of war trauma illuminate of suffering caused by contemporary wars. Doerries’s Act II forums set in motion unscripted dialogue—what Dwight Conquergood has called “dialogical performance”—between the diversity of people that gather for Theater of War productions. In Conquergood’s words, dialogical performance is the “path to genuine understanding of others. . . . This performative stance works to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another.”¹⁰

Indeed, utilizing strategies of dialogical performance for communalizing trauma across civilian-military barriers and “beyond the fourth wall of war” is crucial. Framing theater as an ancient military technology for processing war trauma, as Shay does, is a reminder that theater has long served purposes of militarism. Military-led commemorations of war and its losses through Athenian theater would have publicly acknowledged and communalized war trauma, yes; *and* they also would have normalized war and its losses. Given the near ubiquity of war during the Athenian golden age, Shay’s observa-

tions also suggest that classical theatrical habits of representation and reception formed in support of military power structures and interests, ultimately serving to prepare communities at local and national levels to rally for the next war, even while they carried the unhealed wounds of wars past. In other words, while Greek tragedy may have served the structural integrity of Athenian society, it did not “heal” collective war trauma to the degree that human societies—then or now—have been able to successfully stop enacting one of the most prevalent and destructive symptoms of collective, intergenerational war trauma: more war.

The case studies of this chapter utilize theatrical and therapeutic strategies to intervene in precisely these structures of militarized warfare—by altering the patterns of representation and reception that have supported them. The motto for DE-CRUIT encapsulates the dramaturgical inversion at the root of Wolfert’s drama therapy process: “We were recruited and wired for war, but we were never DE-cruited and unwired for war.”¹¹ The process of “unwiring” from militarism, for both participants and audience witnesses, is, I’ve learned, never straightforward or universal, even in clinically manualized (structured and tested) therapy programs or nationally touring theater projects. To support participants and witnesses in encountering our own conditioning around militarism requires nuance and flexibility, a dynamism of structure and spirit.

Years after I attended *Telling: New Haven*, I received a copy of the script from Wei. On the first page was a “Tao” or “yin-yang” symbol with interlocking regions labeled “Home: War Zone” and “Home: Non War Zone,” and circles labeled “away” nestled within each region. In deliberately broad strokes, the symbol grouped the performers not by nationality or ethnicity but by indicating where each person was “from” in relation to active war zones and in which spaces they were displaced. In the script Wei calls the yin-yang a “flag” for the performers, as they navigate their postwar lives both onstage and off:

It’s not definitive as much as it is a suggestion, like a flag in a field that you are all crossing. Depending on where you are, what is preoccupying you in the moment, the wind, the time of day or night, that flag may be one thing or another, visible or invisible, deeply meaningful or irrelevant. But it’s there—a flag, in the field that you are crossing.¹²

The yin-yang is a symbol of dynamic balance and a fitting “flag” for communalizing trauma. Though codified in form, the yin-yang is not a model of



Fig. 6. Yin-yang from *Telling: New Haven* script. (Created by Jonathan Wei, used by permission.)

stasis but instead indicates an ever-evolving condition of interconnectedness between contradictory yet interdependent realities: familiarity and difference, dark and light, hurt and healing, self and other, distance and proximity, telling and listening. Each element is part of the other, even as they retain their own character and truth. The yin-yang shows an innate potential for harmony that includes—in fact, relies upon—difference, tension, change, and movement. It is circular rather than linear, implying the ongoing, iterative nature of the work of being in relationship across difference, and the necessity of re-cognizing, again and again, the self in the other and the other in the self, while not effacing one with the other.

Seeing the yin-yang on the first page of the script was an elegant reminder of the dynamic, moving encounters that I witnessed in the Ballroom in 2016. The eerily twinned experiences of Tom and Maher, two sides of a coin sharpened to a razor's edge by war, and turned to new tender in the theater. The uncanny (*un-heimlich*, German for “not from the home”) forces of global conflict that can hold people apart and also bring people together. Tom and Maher, the audience and performers, were all brought together in an ephemeral theatrical “home.” With heightened awareness of our differences and our capacities for connection, we each continued our diverse journeys “crossing the field” through ongoing theaters of war.

The case studies of this chapter are similarly gathered under the flag of a yin-yang. Even as they rely upon ancient communal practices of theater, they bring forward new theatrical strategies for communalizing trauma. Through them, I emphasize that communalizing trauma is essential not only to repairing the isolation of trauma survivors but also to acknowledging a collective responsibility for the structural causes of trauma. Trauma theorist Judith Herman spells out this vital and often overlooked step in healing trauma:

If trauma is truly a social problem, and indeed it is, then recovery cannot be simply a private, individual matter. The wounds of trauma are not merely those caused by the perpetrators of violence and exploitation; the actions or inactions of bystanders—all those who are complicit in or who prefer not to know about the abuse or who blame the victims—often cause even deeper wounds. These wounds are part of the social ecology of violence. . . . If trauma originates in a fundamental injustice, then full healing must require repair through some measure of justice from the larger community.¹³

Communalizing trauma thus requires mutual engagement between tellers and witnesses, performers and audiences, survivors and implicated subjects of war. Communalizing trauma means recognizing that all of these subject positions have a place on the complex, sprawling map of contemporary warfare and a role in healing war trauma.

The first step in communalizing trauma is to share the burden of trauma carried by so many war veterans. The etymology of veteran is, like veterinarian, rooted in *veter*, which means “beast of burden.”¹⁴ Even within military culture, verbalizing let alone physicalizing the burdens carried by service members is uncommon, leaving many veterans struggling with isolation and shame under the already heavy weight of PTS. This is the core challenge of communalizing trauma that is addressed in our first case study, DE-CRUIT.

DE-CRUIT: Unwiring from War in Theatrical Community

Stephan Wolfert, a military veteran and founder of DE-CRUIT, pulls no punches when articulating the burdens of war trauma for combat veterans and the high stakes of communalizing their trauma. “Twenty-three veterans take their own lives each day, resulting in a death rate from suicide that exceeds the number of combat deaths . . . and nearly 50,000 veterans are

homeless (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2014)."¹⁵ An underlying problem Wolfert and his trauma therapist collaborator, Alisha Ali, identify for these troubling trends is the sudden loss of community after leaving combat service. Whereas PTS is often diagnosed and treated as an individual "disorder," Wolfert and Ali see community as central to its healing. "One identified reason for the persistent rates of post-traumatic stress in veterans is that the isolation commonly experienced by those returning from war is compounded by dominant treatment approaches which focus on an assumed pathology within the individual patient rather than on sources of strength and resilience within veterans' existing and potential communities."¹⁶ DE-CRUIT thus builds a tangible community for combat veterans suffering from PTS through a ten-week physical theater training intensive. Featuring physical acting exercises and warm-ups, including breathing exercises, muscular stretches and flexibility, improvisation games, and physical expressivity, the DE-CRUIT process "transform[s] military camaraderie into camaraderie among treatment group members."¹⁷

In essence, Wolfert reverse engineered DE-CRUIT based on the community centered methods of recruiting, basic training, unit formation, and physically "wiring" soldiers as a collective for war. As he knew from his own military training in the years leading up to the post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, "wiring" for war happens in communities of recruits, in repetitive physical bootcamp drills, and in immersive simulations for battle that, over time, change psychological as well as physical perceptions of violence and allegiance. The "process of training and enculturation in readiness for military combat is founded upon camaraderie with fellow trainees by which those who are recruited are progressively numbed to the violence around them, and compassion for those deemed to be the enemy is removed."¹⁸ Indeed, the concept of "unit cohesion" formed among members of a military group originated with Freud's 1921 study of the "psychological factors that drive groups of soldiers to succeed on a joint mission."¹⁹

Drawing on the same tactics, but marshaling them towards different ends, Wolfert and Ali created a model of treatment based in social, physical, and psychological aspects of "unit cohesion" and trust in other members that emerge not from militarized units but from theatrical ones. DE-CRUIT cohorts deliberately mirror aspects of military units, with emphasis placed on enacting previously unfamiliar practices together, side by side; developing strengths that will uphold the well-being and safety of the unit as a whole; and achieving communal goals.²⁰ Participants come together for a ten-week pro-

gram centered on embodied theatrical performance techniques, text analysis, and a community performance of Shakespearean monologues and testimonial narratives by the veterans themselves.

Wolfert intuitively developed the program's use of actor training and Shakespearean performance through his personal journey with violent traumas that left him feeling isolated, suicidal, chemically dependent, and unmoored. He recalls literally "finding himself" at a production of *Richard III* in Montana, after pulling off the road on an out-of-control bender while on leave from the military: "I sat transfixed in the audience [of *Richard III*]. And yet there I stood on stage, like me, a soldier. Hearing the poetry, feeling this rhythm in my body. Seeing a veteran on stage express exactly how I felt without even realizing."²¹ Wolfert eventually left the military and enrolled in an MFA acting program at the Brown University-Trinity Repertory Theater in Providence, Rhode Island, where he began studying, memorizing, and eventually performing Shakespearean monologues that featured descriptions of trauma. Out of this experience he met and worked with the choreographer Twyla Tharp, who observed that, where most of her dancers had been wired to stand like dancers since they were extremely young, he had been wired by the military to stand and move like a soldier.²²

Over time, Wolfert saw evidence in himself that embodied practices of actor training and participation in communities of performance were, in effect, *rewiring* his brain and body. He developed a one-man show, *Cry Havoc!*, that blends Shakespearean monologues with his own stories of surviving and healing trauma in the military, as well as recalling the childhood physical and sexual abuse that sent him searching for an escape in the military in the first place.²³ Wolfert found that moving between Shakespearean text and his own personal narrative helped him to be both inside and outside the trauma experiences he was recounting. The DE-CRUIT program begins with veterans watching Wolfert's *Cry Havoc!* as an example of what they themselves will embark upon.²⁴

Drawing on Keith Oatley's theorization of the "psychological benefits of simulated narration" through the study of Shakespeare, Wolfert and Ali argue that embodying Shakespearean verse "allows us to run simulations that increase our understanding of our human capacities and of the ability that we as humans each have to use our actions to alter the conditions of our lives."²⁵ By reading, discussing, and memorizing Shakespearean monologues about war trauma, participants practice cognitive distance from trauma stories that may resemble their own; at the same time they engage with the texts



Fig. 7. Stephan Wolfert in his play *Cry Havoc!*, 2017. (Photograph by Kenny Yoo, used by permission.)

as actors in ways that can, through embodied performance, be experienced and worked through their own bodies. As Wolfert puts it: “Among the characters in Shakespeare’s plays are numerous veterans who astutely describe their military trauma through heightened verse that is at once linguistically distinct from the clients’ own language and experientially close to the clients’ own traumas.”²⁶ The interplay of cognitive distance and embodied sensations, of personal memory and canonical theater, form a therapeutic yin-yang that can offer a path forward for veterans to form new relationships with others and themselves.

The therapeutic form of theatrical simulation used in DE-CRUIT is deliberately distinct from the battle simulations in militarized theaters of war, such as those that Scott Magelssen chronicles. In “Rehearsing the Warrior Ethos,” Magelssen describes Fort Irwin’s National Training Center, a 1,000 square mile area in the Mojave Desert in California that, at the height of the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2007, contained eleven mock Iraqi villages.²⁷ The simulated villages, marketplaces, and roads were staffed by hundreds

of Arabic-speaking Iraqi Americans hired as actors to play Sunni and Shiite civilians while the U.S. military trained service members before deployment to Iraq. As Magelssen notes, the simulations at Fort Irwin have the effect of framing war as both theater and gameplay. While some exercises are set up like “Capture the Flag”-style games, the actions and role-play function as “high realism,” military rehearsals that are studied, debriefed, and then run again. The simulations at Fort Irwin are pitched toward future enactments in the “real” theater of war. However, even there, the notion of “play” extends into the framing of combat deployment itself: Iraq was diminutively referred to as “the Sandbox” in U.S. military parlance—a space of play.²⁸

Wolfert’s own military trauma story, which he shares in *Cry Havoc!*, punctures the theatrical “as if” veneer of Fort Irwin, where he trained for many months. In a highly physical performance that blends reenactment with narrative commentary, Wolfert repeatedly reaches through the theatrical fourth wall to speak directly to his audience about his personal journey through military trauma. In performance, Wolfert tells his audience of a training exercise that he and his squad took part in at Fort Irwin. As they drove their tanks through the Mojave-Iraqi desert, the simulation got out of hand: the tanks got too close to one another and a particularly large tank began firing at the smaller tank that contained Wolfert and his best friend Mark. Despite radioing to “hold their fire,” Mark was hit in the head by a mortar that broke through their tank. His brain swelled and he died several hours later. On stage, Wolfert recalls cradling his friend’s head, held together only by his helmet, with a simple, devastating gesture. He recounts telling Mark’s widow and young children of his death, miming his own hands holding Mark’s head in his helmet while he uses sanitized military terms to deliver the news of his friend’s death. As he vividly illustrates onstage, the fiction of simulation at Fort Irwin was ruptured for Wolfert, leaving him personally devastated and disillusioned with military training and the brutal realities of war play. He ended up on a train going through Montana, which brought him to a representational theater of war trauma where he found himself riveted by *Richard III*.

But even after he left the military and began an MFA in acting, Wolfert found he was still “wired for war.” In a zoom visit to my class on Theater and Therapy after War, Wolfert told my students that he came to dread the big blue mats that seemed to be in every acting studio—as his fellow MFA cohort would cheerfully topple the heavy mats onto the floor for physical acting exercises, he would flinch at the loud percussive sounds. He found it

difficult to explain the gulf he felt between that cohort and the one he had had with Mark and the other recruits at Fort Irwin. Telling his own story in *Cry Havoc!* and varielating his own trauma with that of *Richard III* was the beginning of his healing process.

As he teamed up with trauma therapist Ali and studied for his own master's in social work in trauma therapy, he learned that what he had been doing was a therapeutic "simulation" process called "mimetic induction." As Ali describes it, mimetic induction "involves immersion in a fictionalized world that approximates clients' own worlds, thereby mimicking, revealing, and eventually transforming their actions, responses, and real-life behaviors beyond the in-session therapeutic encounter with self-referential dramatic texts."²⁹ Veterans participating in DE-CRUIT write their own trauma narratives after engaging with the Shakespearean examples, then share them with the group. Wolfert describes this as "a graduated spectrum of aesthetic distance" that evolves through the series of exercises over a ten-week process: "clients first encounter a resonant, trauma-infused language, then adopt that language in the construction of their own stories of trauma, and eventually engage in a process of communal narration of their trauma."³⁰ In a final twist, they trade their auto-ethnographic monologues with another group member, then memorize and perform each other's words.

Telling their own and one another's stories is a fundamental shift in cultural practices of militarized theaters of war, in which "the largely non-verbal nature of the hyper-masculine environment of the military engenders a dual danger for veterans in that they encounter highly traumatic experiences but simultaneously lack a language of distress to express their trauma."³¹ Finding expressive language for trauma is framed in DE-CRUIT as both a physical and a relational skill. Using Shakespearean verse and each other's trauma monologues, participants are encouraged to feel and name emotional responses to traumatic material, participate in open dialogue about those responses, and complete physical training regimes based in bodily care and well-being. Noting the "heartbeat"-like rhythm of iambic pentameter, Wolfert and Ali contextualize the breath work and rhythmic recitations they lead in DE-CRUIT within empirical studies on the efficacy of breath work and rhythmic shifts employed in trauma therapies.³² They draw participants' focus to "fully inhabiting the spoken verse in passages and monologues, progressively immersing themselves in the patterns of breathing, movement, and rhythm that are required to master the execution of the various texts."³³

In the program's framework, the execution of these actorly skills is as much

in the service of the clients' therapeutic progress as their growth as thespians. In fact, these two things are seen as unnecessary to separate, or perhaps even inseparable. DE-CRUIT guides participants to identify any blocks or hindrances to their process of memorizing or delivering their Shakespearean or fellow group members' auto-ethnographic monologues. Rather than framing these struggles as shortcomings of an actor, they use them as points of inquiry into emotional and cognitive "stuck points" that might link to their war traumas or challenges of reintegration into civilian life.³⁴ In other words, stumbling over a line is not a sign of a poorly prepared actor, but instead a trauma survivor coming into contact with an aspect of their own trauma—it calls not for more line study but instead for therapeutically supported exploration of one's own mind and heart. I have come to think of this as Diderot's paradox of the actor turned in favor of the veteran who wishes to escape, or be de-cruited from a militarized theater of war. The seeming paradox of "pretending" and "experiencing," which Diderot puzzled through in his study of professional actors taking on characters night after night, is, in drama therapy, therapeutically entwined: pretense, or the "as if" of theatrical acting, can allow for experiences of traumatic memory to emerge, to become visible, and approachable from new angles and distances.

Importantly, community formed through theatrical play can blend and hold fiction and reality simultaneously, allowing play to do serious work. As drama therapist Renée Emunah writes, a "fictional realm is protective, at the same time that it indirectly enables self-expression and revelation. . . . Over time, the associations clients have between the fictional scenes and their lives lead to a direct working through of real-life issues, but from a fresh, often unexpected perspective."³⁵ David Read Johnson emphasizes the value of improvisatory dramatic play as clients and therapists uncover and examine the emotional and relational effects of trauma. In a reversal of the classic Sanford Meisner adage that "acting is behaving realistically under imagined circumstance," Johnson describes effective drama therapy as "behaving imaginatively under real circumstances."³⁶ The *communitas* established through theatrical rehearsal and performance provides a container in which drama therapy participants can "behave imaginatively"—that is, freely emote and enact their inner sensations and thoughts and express safe, agentic choice with their own bodies. The dramatic structure importantly "opens" at the start of a drama therapy session and "closes" when it ends, creating a protected container in which trauma can be named, witnessed, and communalized.³⁷

For the combat veterans who take part in DE-CRUIT, the opportunity

to play and “behave imaginatively” within the realities of their postmilitary, post-traumatic lives is a transformative process. Participants report renewed interpersonal social bonds and what their therapists describe as greater “self-efficacy,” or confidence in one’s own “abilities and competencies.”³⁸ The retention rate for DE-CRUIT is notably high for trauma therapy with veterans (less than 10 percent drop out after beginning the process), and the bonds formed often last far beyond the manualized ten-week program.³⁹ The process is insulated, as group members work closely with one another and their facilitators, ending with an invited performance for a small audience of group members, family, and close friends.

As a carefully structured, or manualized, clinical program, DE-CRUIT is not designed for broader communities of “implicated subjects.” However, just as participants in Wolfert’s program need to be “de-cruited” from the military ethos, the civilians, veterans, and war refugees that come together to experience representational theaters of war must undo prior training as spectators. Well-practiced habits of silence and avoidance, as well as cultural assumptions, misapprehensions, and judgments surrounding militarism must be reckoned with in order to listen well and dialogue openly about war. In *The Telling Project*, our next case study, the theatrical gates are thrown open to a wider community of audience members who attend the public-facing performances. Expanding beyond the clinical structure of DE-CRUIT, yet utilizing many of the same techniques, *The Telling Project* seeks to connect and foster communication between the communities that form—and must reform—our theaters of war.

The Telling Project: “It’s Time to Speak. It’s Time to Listen.”

It was the third year of the post-9/11 U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan when Jonathan Wei began working as an academic advisor for military veterans enrolled at the University of Oregon.⁴⁰ Wei had not, at that point in his life, had much previous contact with military service members, and many of his advisees in the fledgling program had recently returned from combat “tours” in Iraq or Afghanistan. Getting to know the young veterans as they navigated postmilitary life at a large state school in a town notorious for its hippie culture, Wei became keenly aware of the cultural divides, assumptions, and communication blocks separating civilian and veteran populations in the U.S. He recalls awakening to a widespread “collective reluctance” among

both veterans and civilians to talk about—and listen to—actual experiences of war. Existing forums for engagement around war that he had previously participated in were not, he realized, equivalent to talking, let alone listening: “Protest is a way of not talking about war. Advocacy is a way of not talking about war. We have hundreds of ways of not talking about war, and almost no way to actually talk about it.”⁴¹

So Wei set out to create a forum in which combat veterans could tell their stories, civilians could listen, and the two groups could begin a conversation from there. Two decades later, Wei’s *Telling Project* continues to offer localized community forums for civilians, veterans, and war refugees to gather and bear witness to the lived experiences of fellow humans who have survived the brutal realities of warfare. The results are rare and potent opportunities for community formation and the communalization of war trauma. *Telling Project* participants are not unified around antiwar objectives, as in the VVAW or DE-CRUIT, yet the personal stories they tell allow for nuanced, contradictory, or harmful experiences with militarism and war to emerge.⁴² Struggles with VA hospital systems, harsh discipline in boot camp, stories of sexual assault, and betrayals by military leadership are as common as the stories about long lasting camaraderie and pride in being part of victorious missions.

Wei is careful to frame *The Telling Project* as theater and not therapy, although he has, on occasion, worked with drama therapists (as I discuss at more length below). Through conversations with *Telling Project* participants, I have learned that there are as many who find *Telling* to be personally therapeutic as those who say that the retelling costs them something painful every time. For the latter group, it is a price they say they are willing to pay in service of awakening civilian audiences to greater understanding for their fellow veterans. When I sat down to interview the four women veterans performing in *She Went to War*, an all-female nationally touring *Telling Project*, at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, Tabitha Nichols described to me that telling her story onstage (of military sexual assault) “feels almost like it’s separate from me. Which is strange. But it is like therapy, it helps me get it out.” Another, whom the group called Sergeant, disagreed: “If I tell my stories, it has to be for a good reason, have a real purpose, like for education. Because it costs me something to tell them. For me it is not therapy. It costs me something every time.”⁴³ My purpose here is not to determine whether or to what degree testimonial theater is therapeutic on an individual basis. My goal is instead to understand the reparative potentials of the nonclinical dramaturgy of *The Telling Project*, for both the tellers and the witnesses. Remain-

ing in conversation with trauma therapy strategies, I thus consider how the dramaturgy of *The Telling Project* reaches beyond clinical settings to facilitate communal needs of awakening to the effects of war trauma: that is, for war survivors to tell their stories and for a broader civilian audience to listen.

The majority of veterans who participate in *The Telling Project* have already undergone a good deal of clinical therapy, often arriving to the process with multiple psychological and physical post-traumatic diagnoses. Most have told at least parts of their trauma stories dozens of times already to therapists. They come to the theatrical process to tell their stories again but, to invoke Judith Butler, they repeat them with (and for) *a difference*. They come to *The Telling Project* looking for a different modality for working with their war trauma, and a different outcome from sharing it.⁴⁴ Like the Vietnam Veterans Against the War of the previous chapter, the most frequent motivation that *Telling Project* participants describe is a duty to provide a “civilian education” or to “awaken” audiences to the realities of war and to the difficult experience of coming back home. Some say they tell in order to “help give an understanding [to the community], of what we are going through as transitioning veterans” or “to close the communication gap between the 1% that serve and the 99% that benefit from that service.”⁴⁵ Nichols, who performed in *Telling: Pensacola* and again later in *She Went to War*, viewed her participation as a duty to share her experience of military sexual assault: “Somebody has to talk about it—and if it’s me then it’s me,” she said.⁴⁶ Another of the *She Went to War* veteran performers aligned her participation in the theatrical process with a kind of public service: “I am not one to sit around and tell war stories. It’s not in my ilk. If I tell my stories, it has to be for a good reason, have a real purpose, like for education.”⁴⁷ A. S. Minor, one of the participants in *Telling: Orlando* (2016), described it as a necessary part of individual and communal healing: “It’s like ripping off a Band-Aid and allowing people to see that wound. At the time it may hurt, but it’s part of the healing process for both the audience and myself.”⁴⁸

The *Telling Project* process begins with the tellers: the veterans and, more recently, refugees who have survived war. Wei and his operations director Max Rayneard put out a call for volunteers in a given town or geographical region, often via VA hospitals and other veteran or refugee community centers.⁴⁹ In initial “audition” meetings, each volunteer is assessed for their ability to participate, based on personal commitments, as well as on their psychological health, or degree to which they have processed the traumas they would be discussing.⁵⁰ Wei and Rayneard then conduct in-depth, solo



Fig. 8. The cast of The Telling Project's *She Went to War*, 2019. (Photograph by Gaea Dill-D'Ascoli, used by permission.)

interviews with each of the participants they cast. These interviews provide the monologic, verbatim material for the scripts that Wei composes.⁵¹ The rehearsal phase, which can last for three months, typically commences between the initial “intake” interviews/auditions and the first “table read” of the script. As they await the script from Wei, early weeks of rehearsal involve theatrical techniques for building trust and community among the participating veterans, similar to those in DE-CRUIT.

Lisa Powers Tricomi, a theater director and certified drama therapist who directed several *Telling Project* productions in Florida, illuminated for me the theatrical and therapeutic strategies employed by *The Telling Project*.⁵² While she was aware that the participating veterans, like Wei, did not see the process as formal therapy—“if they wanted more therapy, they would have gone to the VA instead of rehearsal,” she quipped—she was aware that the theater “games” would have both aesthetic and therapeutic effects on the participants.⁵³ In the early weeks of rehearsal, Tricomi folded in drama therapy techniques of “mirroring,” “gestalt,” “projection,” and “role theory,” as well as actor training exercises, physical and vocal warmups, and team-building exercises in early rehearsals to help participants get to know one another and

open up to the expressive art form of theater.⁵⁴ In an early exercise, she put the veterans in pairs and asked them to interview each other about something important that happened to them in their life. The listener then told the teller's story to the larger group, beginning a process of relational trust and care across the newly forming theatrical "unit." Like Wolfert, she saw the need to differentiate the culture of the theatrical "unit" from that of the military: "Making theater is about getting people to play and get comfortable being open, even silly together," Tricomi told me.⁵⁵ In the military, by contrast, "mistakes are not welcomed," she said, let alone celebrated. (This dynamic holds true for war refugee populations as well, who are often trapped within the "fawn" response of obedience and people-pleasing as a means of staying safe in a new, potentially precarious situation.)⁵⁶ Being emotionally vulnerable or not yet certain with oneself in front of others thus constituted an ideological and practical shift in how to be creative, vulnerable, and supportive together in a group.

When the participants' interviews return in the form of a script, the company gathers for a "table read."⁵⁷ The first group reading of the script is, by all accounts, one of the most transformative moments of any *Telling Project* process, on both therapeutic and theatrical grounds. Reworked (though not rewoded) by Wei, the members' testimonials return to them, now interwoven with one another in a textual "unit" that reflects the theatrical community they have formed. The *Telling* scripts weave disparate stories of the performers together, but the weave is loose and dynamic enough to allow for, even facilitate, change. Like Richard Schechner's theorization of performance as "restored" or "twice behaved" behavior, the scripts that Wei creates for *Telling Project* companies position their stories as "twice told" or "restored" telling.⁵⁸ In drama therapy terms, this is a "projective technique" in which a representation of an experience (in writing, song, image, action), is used as a projection surface that allows for distance, clarity, and reflection between self and experience.⁵⁹ In *Telling* table reads, the projective surface of the script becomes a dynamic meeting place between teller and their (re)told story, the beginning of telling with, and for, a difference.

Indeed, the function of restored, "twice-told" telling in Wei's testimonial performances is to construct a flexible dynamic between teller and story, such that the teller retains a sense of agency over the telling. When I interviewed the cast of *She Went to War* in November 2019, I asked the women what it was like to memorize their own stories as "lines" in a play. They laughed, several of them having called for their lines in the rehearsal I'd just observed.

"Like, how can I forget my lines when it is my own story? But I also tell it myself, improvise a little, so it comes out a bit different each time," one said. Another joked about the changes that emerge in their improvised retellings: "Yeah, we often add swear words!" Max Rayneard, who directed the piece with Wei, added that this freedom was purposeful: "Some people feel that the stories can't be scripted, they need to tell the story fresh each time. And that is fine. I tell them they just have to hit their cue at the end so the next section can begin."⁶⁰

Testimonial performance in *The Telling Project* thus does more than "restore" behavior or past experience, it allows participants to "re-story" past experience. In drama therapy discourse, the term "re-storying" is used to describe a process of (re)constructing one's own experience within an evolving sense of self and awareness of one's "background field" of conditioning and cultural power dynamics.⁶¹ Re-storying is a process of building new meaning from old narratives, a mode of storytelling that involves discovery as much as repetition, as performers "craft and tell at the same time."⁶² Indeed, the notion of "re-storied" behavior is embedded in Schechner's "restored" behavior: "Restored behavior is 'out there,' distant from 'me.' It is separate and therefore can be 'worked on,' changed, even though it has 'already happened.'"⁶³ Both restored and re-storied behavior in *Telling Project* testimonial performance is an active (and act of) negotiation wherein the capacity for change is intentionally placed back into the participants' hands and bodies. A *Telling* script is built less as a *play* than *as play*, a mode of structured, imaginative engagement that re-stor(i)es lived experience for an effect of a performer's choosing.

Much of the dynamic energy and potential for change comes in the live, co-present act of *telling*. Indeed, for all the time and energy he devotes to scripting the collective interviews, Wei insists that *The Telling Project* is at its essence not about the form or structure of the stories but instead about the communal, physical process of *telling*: "The stories take a back seat to the experience of witnessing a group of individuals engaging honestly with themselves."⁶⁴ "Telling" is deliberately in verb form, a relational action: it is notably not called the "Story Project," a term detachable from living bodies. While the script provides protective structure and orienting details for the tellers and audience members alike, the script itself is not treated as a fixed thing. Rather than a noun—a dramatic play—it is a platform for playing, for telling, for re-storying and changing.

As Amanda Stuart Fisher argues, testimonial performances about trauma must be inherently adaptive, with room for change and development as a sur-

vivor speaks the truth of their ongoing journey. This is because in testimony, “what is at stake is not factual veracity, but fidelity to the very conditions of our own existence.”⁶⁵ Testimonies of war trauma frequently account at once for what did happen and what almost happened. Cathy Caruth describes this as the “impossible and necessary double telling” of trauma by a survivor of violence.⁶⁶ Given the life-and-death nature of most war trauma, survivors carry what Caruth calls the “oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*,” or “the unbearable nature of . . . survival.”⁶⁷ Such contradictions within traumatic truth are often revealed in the failure of language: as Fisher puts it, in “testimonies of trauma it is often precisely at the point where language and explication fails that the subject gains profound—even revelatory—insight not only into the situation that has been lived through but also existentially into what it means to *be* in the world.”⁶⁸

As in Tom and Maher’s scene from *Telling: New Haven* described in the opening—and the yin-yang symbol Wei employed to emblemize it—*Telling* scripts intentionally retain lines of difference and dynamism within their structure. This process creates a model that Laura Lodewyck calls “conflict dramaturgy.”⁶⁹ As Lodewyck reasons, “Conflict is, in essence, the heightened recognition of a problem. It points to the possible upheaval of the normative order.”⁷⁰ Conflict is at the root of most dramatic structure: for Aristotle, it points toward catharsis and resolution within the theatrical narrative; for Brecht and Boal, theatrical conflict implies a need for social change beyond the theater. In *Telling*, the playscript functions as an organized representation of the upheaval of war trauma, for individuals and communities both near to and far from conflict zones. While the composed script provides an important sense of protective structure for the tellers and listeners, the interwoven monologues also retain a sense of the liminality of trauma, the instability of conflict, and the “disequilibrium” (per Boal) that points to a need for structural, collective change.

Importantly, *Telling* asks not only the performer to adapt and change as they tell, but also the audience to become dynamic and receptive as they witness.

The Yin-Yang of Witnessing Testimonial Theater

To be sure, there are risks of exploitation in marketing personal trauma as “testimonial theater”—*Telling Project* creators, along with other theater makers discussed in this chapter, take great care to counter these risks by prior-

itizing the agency, respect, and empowerment of war survivors who choose to share their experiences with others. At the same time, audience members, too, carry responsibility for practicing nonexploitative witnessing. The etymology of “testimony” reveals the ethical contract made with audiences of testimonial theater like *The Telling Project*. Drawing on analyses of “testimony” by Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben, Fisher notes that “testimony” requires two things: the teller, or “the one who has lived through something from beginning to end and survives,” and “the presence of the witness” who receives the testimonial account.⁷¹ Derrida likens bearing witness to an “act of faith [*acte de foi*],” that mirrors and shares space with the “pledged or sworn word [*foi jurée*] (‘I swear to tell the truth’)” of testimony.⁷² The *Telling Project* participants I have interviewed provide truthful personal testimony out of a duty—to themselves, to others whose stories are unheard, to the law, to a sense of justice—so that witnesses can receive that testimony, as part of a social-theatrical contract. Derrida argues that witnessing testimony is thus likewise duty-bound: “Bearing witness is constitutively bound not to objective or factual truth, but to an oath or a ‘promise’ to ‘[engage] a responsibility before the law.’”⁷³ Testimony is thus an act in two parts—a yin-yang—that mirrors the teller’s act of telling with an equal and opposite act by the witness. This is to say that the witness must give themselves to the process, much as the teller does.

The process requires not only candid telling but also enhanced skills of listening on the part of audiences, such as what Liza-Mare Syron calls “deep listening.”⁷⁴ “Deep listening” signifies the importance of bearing witness wholly when a story is shared consensually, from the lips of the one who owns the experience or has gone about getting the proper permission to retell it. Though the consensual, communal nature of this kind of storytelling is not historically central to Euro-American dramaturgies, it is crucial in many traditions, including those of Indigenous women in Australia and North America that Syron uplifts. In a similar vein, trauma theorist Jill Bennett proposes “ethical listening” as a therapeutic method for bearing witness to another’s experience that “can support and tolerate difference, rather than either repudiating it or assimilating the experience of the other in the self.”⁷⁵ Ethical listening, Bennett argues, is essential in therapeutic settings wherein the subject of violence and trauma is being explored as material for both artistic expression and trust building.

Lola Arias’s *Minefield*, another play featuring the testimonial stories of veterans, overtly wrestles with layers of deep and ethical listening. Like *The*

Telling Project, Arias developed *Minefield* through in-depth interviews with veteran survivors of the Falklands/Malvinas conflict of 1982, a fierce yet undeclared war between Argentinian and United Kingdom military forces. As a piece of testimonial theater, *Minefield* gained authority (authenticity) through the fact that not only were the events historically accurate, but the veterans-turned-actors were telling their own experiences and memories of the war.⁷⁶ Arias, who also directed the production, chose to include references to the process of crafting their testimony for the stage onstage. At one point in the performance, one of the British veterans turns to the audience in direct address:

David: During the process of rehearsals I had concerns about: Why am I saying I instead of we? Where are the stories of the Royal Navy, The Welsh Guards, the Scots Guards, who fought with us? . . . Do I have the right to stand here and talk for all those who went to war?⁷⁷

Minefield was far more “produced” and theatricalized than the typical *Telling Project* production and was not designed to include a forum-style discussion with the audience. (I saw *Minefield* at New York University’s Skirball Center in 2018, where the 852-seat proscenium space was not conducive to the “dialogical performances” I discuss here.) David’s questions were posed rhetorically, theatrically, and were not meant to instigate dialogue. Still, his queries formed a performative gesture that included the audience in considering the ethics of representation and reception in theaters of war.⁷⁸ Even if we weren’t meant to answer, David’s questions likewise applied to us: What does it mean for me to sit here and listen to these stories of a war that happened when I was five years old? What will I do with the knowledge I carry out of the theater of that war, of those bodies that stood in front of me and told me of their experiences?

To engage in deep and ethical listening, audience members of testimonial theater must perform “as witnesses,” taking on a role within the space of testimonial theater that may differ from their social roles in daily life. No longer distanced or removed from the realities of war, nor couched within consumerist models of entertainment, the testimonial role-play entails a shift from spectator to witness. In essence, the audience shifts from observing stories about ethics to becoming ethical actors whose capacity to listen plays an active role in healing war trauma. As Judith Herman argues, the existence of trauma is an indication of a breach in the “rightness of the social order.”⁷⁹ Rec-

ognizing this plays no trivial part in healing individual and collective trauma: “listening,” she writes, “turns out to be a radical act.”⁸⁰ Therefore, communalizing trauma in theatrical performance requires an audience to *restore* their behavior—not as a method of repeating established social behaviors, but instead as a means of enacting ethical subjecthood. In other words, testimonial audiences must participate in something like “restored behavior” as well—or perhaps more accurately, a “restoration” of “rightness,” or the health of a social order in the form of deep listening.

The practice of deep and ethical listening within a *Telling Project* performance requires confronting assumptions about militarism and military service members. Indeed, Wei argues that “the fundamental ‘problem’ that *The Telling Project* is addressing is that the military is conceived as a monolithic organization—in the civilian community, in the media, among policymakers, etc.”⁸¹ Wei thus works to “break down the monolith and ‘reveal’ the individuals” who have each had unique, embodied, lived experience of war. In the several *Telling Project* performances I have seen, “revealing” each participant as an individual involves foregrounding personal idiosyncrasies that nuance or contradict the conformity that attends military service in military and public imaginaries. In some cases, these individualities manifest as lively group reenactments—as in a scene from *Telling: New Haven* that showed Tom getting harassed by his squad leader in boot camp for obsessively reading the latest Harry Potter book. In other cases, a veteran might stand apart onstage to reveal a personal experience of sexual assault on a military base that had been actively ignored or silenced in military circles. Regina, a *Telling: Austin* participant who survived military sexual assault, found validation, even a sense of justice, in sharing her individual story with audiences who listened deeply: “knowing that I’m able to reach out to the audience . . . and have them experience *somewhat* what I’ve gone through. It’s very powerful. And it has helped me come out of my shell even more. And watching the reaction *from* the audience—like I said, that’s my justice, right there.”⁸²

Disrupting assumptions about others through deep listening is essential to the practice of ethics in theater. As Nicholas Ridout argues, “Because so much ethics is concerned with questions such as the relationship between how people seem and how they are, this situation of mutual spectatorship raises the ethical stakes in theatre in a way that is not quite possible anywhere else.”⁸³ As civilian audience members witness individualized accounts of war, assumptions we might hold about military service members will be challenged and nuanced by the humanizing, individuated stories shared in

the theater. Indeed, Wei says his own political “stances” have become far less fixed and monolithic since beginning this work: “It is very difficult to hold a ‘stance’ in relationship to an individual relating his or her experiences. . . . When we take that monolith apart, we have to change other things—our arguments and adjacent ideas.”⁸⁴

Wei thus deliberately steers clear of monolithic questions about whether the military is good or bad, although he does “hope that we might, through better understanding war, end it.”⁸⁵ Instead, Wei attempts to break down binary models of war through the concept of “meaningful” experience: “If you are opposed to war, the characterization is that war is meaningless, but it is exactly the opposite. It may not be easy. But to call it meaningless is a complete misapprehension.”⁸⁶ Time and again, place after place, Wei says that the veterans who participate in *The Telling Project* describe their time in the military as extremely meaningful, whether that meaning was positive, negative, or (most often) mixed. Wei thus insists that his civilian audiences likewise ask themselves what enacting war means to them, as family members of service members or as implicated subjects in a nation where military might defines our international relations and internal discourse about war. He posits that “to make progress” as a culture, we need to be able to ask questions about war, listen to the answers, and answer sincerely ourselves: “When we go to war . . . what do [the experiences] mean to us?”⁸⁷

Such questions fuel the talkbacks that follow *Telling* performances, extending to include the audience as active participants in a community dialogue. For this portion of *Telling: New Haven*, Wei and his team had cannily invited a range of local stakeholders, including news media, city politicians, and community leaders of the New Haven-based Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS), an organization devoted to aiding refugees and immigrants who were resettling in the area. One of the performers in the piece, Ali Asaadi, had described in a monologue his family’s plight, which left his wife and children still without visas to leave Iraq and join him in the U.S. In the post-show discussion, several audience members asked how civilians in New Haven could help with legal barriers such as these or support newly arrived refugees. IRIS founder Chris George and his legal team provided concrete, strategic answers to these questions and described numerous ways that community members could partner with IRIS. Following that performance, I began volunteering with IRIS in summer and after-school programs for children, using theater games for developing literacy and forming community among newly arrived refugee families, becoming part of the commu-

nity myself. Even after the formal post-show discussion concluded, audience and performers continued to mix and mingle, talking with one another, performing choreographic moves similar to the cross-stage position exchange between Tom and Masir. While each of us in that room had greatly varied relationships to New Haven, to the U.S., and to wars happening far from that space, these differences functioned as permeable borders that, at least in the temporary yin-yang of the theater, opened to us each as fields to cross.

Post-show discussions like that one follow each presentation of *The Telling Project*, providing audience members with useful information about local organizations that support veterans and war refugees.⁸⁸ The post-show discussions following *Telling Project* performances are generally kept brief, instead allowing audience and performers to mingle and speak informally as they choose. Wei deliberately limits open-ended, Q&A-style forums in favor of protecting his performers from unanticipated questions and unrehearsed exposure.⁸⁹ Indeed, the safeguard of a script is clearly valuable for the tellers in the testimonial theater of *The Telling Project*. As Lodewyck observes, Wei's "written script allowed performers to relax within the boundaries of the play text."⁹⁰ However, such a structure can also allow the audience to "relax within the boundaries" of listening and thus sidestep the productive discomfort of setting into motion their own shifting positions and perspectives.

It should not be the ongoing burden of war survivors to hold the hands of the general civilian public as we work through our own reactions to accounts of war trauma for which we, as implicated subjects, bear some responsibility. Still, for civilian publics to actually sort through and unpack the meanings of war and militarism, and to begin to process the collective traumas that testimonial performances can shake loose, time, support, and dramaturgical structure is needed. The final case study, Bryan Doerries's Theater of War series, invests in exactly this process, with substantive, audience-focused "dialogical performances" that are built into the structure of performances.

Dialogical Performance in Theater of War

Doerries, a theater maker, translator of Greek tragedies, and social activist, held his first "Theater of War" forum at a Combat Stress Conference for the Marine Corps at the San Diego Hyatt in 2009.⁹¹ The event began with a table reading of Doerries's translation of Sophocles's *Ajax*, in which the title character falls into a post-traumatic blend of mania and depression after his friend

Achilles is killed in the Trojan War.⁹² Ajax's mania, or what Shay describes as the "berserk state" that periodically grips some combat veterans after war, is so deep that he attempts to kill his commanding officers and instead slaughters a herd of cattle that he mistakes for his enemies.⁹³ The tale ends with Ajax, overcome with shame, grief, and moral injury at having been betrayed by the military to which he gave so much, taking his own life. The resonances of the story to contemporary expressions of war trauma among the combat veterans was stark and immediate. As Doerries knew, combat veterans die by suicide at an alarming rate of nearly one per hour, easily outstripping the numbers of U.S. military deaths in active combat.⁹⁴ The staged reading of *Ajax* served as a spotlight on this widely known yet little discussed reality of military life. The community discussion that followed the reading had been slated for forty-five minutes: it lasted for over three hours.⁹⁵

Doerries recalls the scores of people—from new recruits to military spouses to officers—who lined up at the microphones placed in the aisles to share their responses to the play and its bald critique of the brutalities of military culture. "Each person . . . quoted lines from *Ajax*, without consulting notes, as if they had known Sophocles's plays their entire lives. They interwove their comments about the plays with their own experiences with such prosody and rhetoric that it seemed Sophocles himself had written their monologues."⁹⁶ What had been envisioned as a brief, perfunctory post-show discussion became a radically participatory forum: the fourth wall of ancient and contemporary war fell away as military service members of all stripes stood up, walked forward, and expressed their own pain, anger, hurt, and hope for healing. In answer to one of Doerries's open questions—"Why do you think Sophocles wrote this play?"—a junior enlisted soldier in the third row said, "He wrote it to boost morale." Surprised, Doerries pressed him to say more, to which he responded, "it's the truth and we're all here watching it together."⁹⁷ In other words, the traumatic truth in the play, in all its brutality, was a salve for this young soldier. The play allowed for a rare community discussion about the moral injuries of militarism and warfare, giving air to a communal wound that would fester if left unacknowledged.

Since 2009, Doerries has facilitated numerous forums for military veterans, their families, and military and civilian communities, using Greek dramatic narratives such as Sophocles's *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* to instigate community discussion about war trauma today.⁹⁸ Although the initiating currency comes from some of the most enduring pieces of the Western theatrical canon, Doerries's company, Theater of War, is largely invested in



Fig. 9. Bryan Doerries leads an “Act II” discussion following a performance of *Ajax* at Columbia University, 2019. (Photograph courtesy of Theater of War.)

engaging contemporary audiences in dialogic performance. Though he does not describe it in quite these terms, he employs dialogical performance as a kind of social therapy for the paralyzing cultural effects of individual and collective war trauma. Theater of War is made for nontraditional theater audiences in nontraditional theater spaces—conference centers, VA hospitals, barracks, radio stations, public parks, Times Square. Employing Shay’s logic of communalizing trauma, Doerries argues: “Through their plays, Sophocles and his contemporaries, Aeschylus and Euripides, forged a common public vocabulary for openly acknowledging and discussing the impact of war on individuals, families, and communities.”⁹⁹ These play scripts, excerpted and translated by Doerries with an eye toward brevity, access, and clarity, are read by professional actors. The scripts are then responded to by a new cast of characters: the gathered audience that takes the spotlight, as it were, in Act II. As in the first iteration of Theater of War, the Act II dialogues always last far longer than the readings of the Greek tragedies themselves, opening into wide-ranging and candid conversations about what it means to live and make ethical choices in times (and theaters) of war.

In so doing, Doerries flips the military use of the metaphor “theater of

war." In military parlance a "theater of war" demarcates a space governed by exceptional rules and behaviors that seek to reframe consequences of war in favor of military logic. With his Theater of War, Doerries uses theatrical containment to create a space in which gathered communities can respond candidly to the consequential effects of militarized theaters of war, while at the same time forming new temporary communities in a representational theater of war. As such, his "theater of war" hews closer to that of drama therapy, in which the theatrical container serves as a protected space, safe enough to support participants as they begin to shake loose, or varietate, traumatic memories and the attendant adaptive shields. Doerries's Act II portions engage what I called in the previous chapter "postdramatic stress," or a combination of interactive therapies and postdramatic theater techniques that aim to deconstruct and varietate responses to war trauma so that new insights, dialogues, and actions can emerge.

To initiate a drama therapy process of varietation, Doerries focuses on the emotional core of the war stories: "stripping the performance to its bare essentials" and working "to deliver the plays in their purest, most efficacious form, while leaving room for [the audience] to project their memories upon myths from the Trojan War."¹⁰⁰ Doerries attempts to avoid "the cultural baggage and pretension long associated with Greek tragedy" by "present[ing] the scenes from Sophocles's plays as simply and straightforwardly as possible, in the form of a table reading."¹⁰¹ Doerries's translations foreground the visceral experiences of war and trauma articulated by Sophocles's characters in direct, contemporary syntax. Short, often guttural, and onomatopoeic phrases abandon the meter in which Sophocles wrote, drawing the focus to action, emotion, and embodied experience. To amplify embodied sounds, Doerries does away with theatrical representation of all but the words, sounds, and emotions that charge through the bodies of the highly skilled actors, augmented only by microphones.

These representational methods recall Grotowski's "poor theater" that strips the actors and audience of their "false selves" and "social masks," a process that also informs David Read Johnson's Developmental Transformations (DvT) drama therapy described in the previous chapter. As in Johnson's "poor drama therapy" techniques, Doerries's directorial focus on visceral, sonic expressions of the text provide non-intellectualized entry points to understanding and relating to war trauma. "Placing the clients in touch with their bodily-felt sensations, not prematurely defining or naming feeling states or seeking images to work with, the method attempts to tap into and remain

in contact with the inner flow of the physical body,” Johnson writes.¹⁰² Doerries likewise creates figural, visceral incarnations of the Greek tragic characters against which audiences can project their own experiences and feel what bounces back. Ajax, Tecmessa, and Philoctetes function less as tragic figures from a classical past and more as time-traveling apparitions of ageless war trauma, reappearing to shake loose that which needs to be revealed in the here and now.

Doerries’s unvarnished presentation of the tragedies encourages audience members to likewise let their own “masks” and defenses slip, crack. The feelings and insights that get shaken loose during the staged reading become the fodder for the dialogical performance of Act II. From the beginning, Doerries deliberately prioritized dialogical performances with the audience after the staged readings of Greek dramas. As he puts it, “The discussion was never an afterthought. In many ways, I saw it as the main event. I have always viewed our performances as catalysts for discussions that otherwise would never have occurred. The readings and discussions are one interdependent thing.”¹⁰³ He emphasizes the value of this format, as the spare dramatics of the staged reading shakes loose—or varietates—the audience’s own experiences, prejudices, fears, and hopes: “By presenting an abbreviated selection of scenes that lasted just over an hour, my hope was to leave time for a conversation that would be as potentially charged and powerful as the actors’ performances.”¹⁰⁴

If the Greek stories of war trauma shared by performers and witnessed by the audience form the shape of a yin-yang—ancient and contemporary, fictional and real—the dialogical performances that follow set the dynamic partnership in motion. Doerries is a highly skilled moderator of dialogical performance, a talent he uses to guide participants to speak from their hearts about what the reading of Act I shook loose for them. Although the dialogues of Act II are entirely improvised, Doerries has developed a script of sorts that, in all the Theater of War forums I have witnessed, works to catalyze genuine dialogical performances with whatever audience has gathered. Doerries transitions between the first and second acts by asking everyone in the theatrical space to respond to something that landed with them from the reading. Rather like a somatic therapist, he uses embodied phrasing, such as “What did the reading bring alive in you?” or “How is the play living in your body now?” or “Now that you’ve heard these actors, going for broke, voicing these lines from [anywhere from 3,000 or two years ago] what resonated with you, now, here, today?”¹⁰⁵ He typically only needs to ask one such question and the

dialogic performance begins: inhibitions fall away, voices shake loose, and Act II unfolds itself.

Conscripted to the Theater of War

In October 2023, I took a group of Yale students to experience a Theater of War production in person. We journeyed down to Four Freedoms Park on Roosevelt Island, New York, to attend an open-air production of *Ajax*. The actors, who included Academy Award nominee Jesse Eisenberg, wore baseball caps, contemporary dark shirts, and slacks. They read from black binders, spoke into microphones, and remained in their seats behind a long table. Aside from a select few hand gestures, their deliveries were focused on bringing the story to life with their voices alone. Doerries's translation was notably modernized—colloquialisms like “shell shock” and “thousand-yard stare” described Ajax's symptoms of postwar trauma.¹⁰⁶ Even while the goddess Athena was an active character, the story, themes, and expressions of post-traumatic suffering felt contemporary, immediate.

We, the audience, sat attentively in rows in a stone amphitheater. There were no lights to indicate scene changes or a division between performers and audience, only the slowly setting sun, reflecting off the glass-fronted office buildings across the water in Manhattan. The gathered group of actors, veterans, and civilians were as visible to one another throughout the performance as we had been walking through the park on our way from the midtown air tram. Joggers and kids playing tag skirted the theater area and the skyline of Manhattan shone chrome, then pink, then dark purple blue. The open-air container was regularly punctured by helicopters and ferries passing Roosevelt Island. After the reading, Doerries quipped that he had arranged for the helicopters, just to remind us that we still lived in a theater of war.

At the close of the Act I reading, abbreviated by Doerries to four scenes read in forty-five minutes, the actors slipped to the back of the stone seating area. As he typically does, Doerries invited a prearranged panel of respondents to begin Act II, chosen for their professional or personal association to the themes raised by the play. This one included three military service members (one of whom had read a role in the play and another of whom was a military psychologist) and the wife of a military veteran. Doerries stepped forward and asked us all, beginning with the panelists, to state what landed with them from the reading. To support the process, Doerries frequently stepped in to

validate and position audience comments in relation to the play and to one another, providing guide rails, as it were, to the improvisatory process. The dialogical performance that ensued felt like a community seminar in which there were no wrong answers, only expansions of perspectives, developments of themes, and candid expressions of concern and care. The conversation in Four Freedoms Park involved discussion of depression and suicide rates in veterans and about needing to change the taboo around talking about suicidality as an outcome of war trauma. In the talkback, one woman, a civilian who verbally identified herself as a lifelong pacifist, shared that she was struck by a recurring theme in the play and in the veterans' accounts of their time in combat and in years after their return: the bonds between comrades and the deep dedication they feel toward one another. She wondered aloud, why must it be something as extreme and destructive as war to create those bonds? Why could we not find that kind of dedication to one another's humanity in civilian life and through peaceful rituals of community?

As my students and I continued to talk about the performance in class the following week, we kept coming back to these questions of community formation: What if going through this kind of extended dialogue with a randomly assembled group of audience members could begin to forge some of the same kinds of bonds? What if a civilian body politic, in combination with war survivors, participated weekly in a forum theater like Doerries's Theater of War, as we might do individually in a therapist's office?¹⁰⁷ What if survivors and implicated subjects alike of contemporary warfare were conscripted to therapeutic theaters of war, just as soldiers are sent to militarized theaters of war? Facilitated by a skilled moderator like Doerries, might we learn not to shut down or flee from the discomfort and complexities that arise with sharing diverse perspectives, but instead to explore them, to sift through their textures, and face them head-on, together? Reframed as a cultural ritual for the communalization of war trauma, companies of spect-actors might form over time, bonded like Wolfert's DE-CRUITs around the process of witnessing, of dialoguing, of being in community. How would the yin-yangs of these communities take shape? How might they reshape our collective understanding of and responses to war? How might cultural conscription to dialogical performances about war trauma "bring the war home" to us all?

In the months after attending *Theater of War*, with Ajax, Eisenberg, my students, and the rest, I have followed this thread of thought, seeking out opportunities to facilitate and participate in open dialogic forums following cultural events on Yale's campus and in local theater communities.¹⁰⁸ In June

of 2024, I attended another Theater of War production called *Conversations during Air Raid Sirens: A Documentary Symphonic* focused on the current Russian-Ukrainian war. The performance was hosted at the WNYC radio station in the West Village of Manhattan and live broadcast on Zoom. The Act I portion featured a long-form poem compiled by a Ukrainian poet Ilya Kaminsky, who had gathered poetry written by Ukrainian civilians while they hid in bomb shelters during air raids between 2022 and 2024. Prefacing the reading, which was performed by four American actors, Kaminsky spoke briefly about the conditions of war in Ukraine, about his poetry “studio” project that distributed prompts to children to write poems and songs during the long hours they had to spend in basements and bomb shelters, often with no electricity. His work was poignant, courageous, and also, I recall thinking, felt very far away—very much not here, in the air-conditioned studio of lower Manhattan or in the neat squares of the Zoom room I shared with hundreds of others from around the world.

Then, pulling no punches, Kaminsky abruptly punctured that distance, remapping the war in relation to the audience gathered in the studio and on Zoom. He said, “These words come from a recently famous country called Ukraine. But the war is right here, right now. It is our job to admit it or decide you don’t see it. The choice is yours.”¹⁰⁹ The fourth wall was gone. A new flag had been raised. The yin-yang was in motion.

The reading commenced and suddenly, nothing about the words felt far away at all. The poem pushed through borders of geography and language to express the in-articulable violence and losses of war, pricking the assembled audience from our various locations around the globe.

What good are words in a bombardment?

Language in a time of war can’t be understood.

Through the broken windows of D, the world watches as E loses its head,
and the roof of the letter M caves in.¹¹⁰

Buried in a human neck a bullet looks like an eye gazing back at its fate.

There is a hole in this sentence. No one wants to die.

Russian soldiers burning Ukrainian books to cook food stolen from our
gardens.

Explain this poem, this line break, they demand, while our children are
locked in basements.

You and I are the language of war.

I don’t want to scare you, but please talk to me?¹¹¹

In Act II, as I listened to the panelists and other audience members, many with strong ties to Ukraine, responding to the poem and to Kaminsky's challenge, I kept thinking: What did it mean to admit that the war is *right here, right now*, in lower Manhattan, and on my computer screen in my office at Yale? Like one of the civilian poets, I too had an eight year old and a ten year old; I could imagine walking an elderly neighbor into her bathroom for shelter because she could not manage stairs to the basement; I have a neck, a dog, chickens, a home, all vulnerable to bullets and bombs. Such details of life lived in a war zone can, unlike the numbers and weaponry and military strategies, reveal war "as it sits truthfully in someone's body," as another audience member put it in the Act II dialogue.¹¹² But how to understand and carry forward the fact that that there is no exit from this theater of war? "The war is right here, right now. It is our job to admit it or decide you don't see it. The choice is yours." What language, what theater can prick us enough to actually understand this reality?

When I attempted to put this into words in the Act II dialogue, Doerries reflected my thoughts back to me with a visceral metaphor: "We all have blood on our hands. We are all implicated. We are not consumers in this kind of theater. To consume stories of war would be to consume our own bloodied hands."¹¹³

Communalizing war trauma entails seeing the stain of war traumas on our own hands, as much as on others' hands. It means rehumanizing, resensitizing the seemingly automatized hands of militarism that control the brutal puppet strings that pull us all, in varying roles, into theaters of contemporary warfare. Rather like the dynamic interstitiality of a yin-yang, the case studies of this chapter communalize trauma in the spirit of dialogical performance, which "brings self and other together even while it holds them apart. It is more like a hyphen than a period."¹¹⁴ We live in a hyphenated world when it comes to warfare and the traumas it causes. Communalizing trauma means approaching differences of home and not-home, here and there, veteran and civilian, self and other, as interconnected, relational realities. From the formation of de-cruited units in clinical drama therapy, to the testimonial theater of *The Telling Project* and dialogical performances of *Theater of War*, the value of moving beyond the fourth wall of war is evident. Participatory, dialogical strategies of drama therapy and community performance offer war survivors and civilian audiences embodied methods of re-storying war and restoring ourselves as ethical actors.

Sophocles posed an ethical question via the war wounded Philoctetes, which is echoed again by Nicholas Ridout in his meditation on ethics and theater: “How shall I act?”¹¹⁵ The work of this chapter extends the question to spect-actors in theaters of war: “How shall I act *as a witness*?” How does the truth of war trauma sit in my body? Once we have located ourselves on the map of contemporary warfare, how do we navigate the terrain beneath our feet, with our own bloodied hands?

As I have suggested, the case studies of this chapter are models for theatricalized forms of collective trauma therapy. However, to make this vision a reality, audiences will need support and trauma-processing skills as well. Just as drama therapy programs like DE-CRUIT train participants in embodied practices for tolerating the distress of encountering trauma, civilian audiences also need trauma-informed skills to perform effectively and safely as witnesses. I turn to this challenge in the next chapter on “somatic witnessing.”

CHAPTER THREE

Somatic Witnessing

I stand in a corner of a white room in large prefectural museum in Okinawa, Japan. The floor is hard concrete, the lighting soft but bright. I am facing a large screen that dwells in cinematic close-up on the face of a woman, approximately my age. She is crying, tears wetting her cheeks. She does not wipe them away, instead looking steadily ahead, holding eye contact with someone, someone whom I can't see, someone looking back at her, someone who may be crying too. The woman's mouth moves, but it is a man's voice that comes out. His voice is scratchy, thickly accented with an old Japanese islander dialect, heavy with emotion and age. As he speaks, she moves her lips, mouthing along with the details he is sharing from his childhood memories of a brutal war over sixty years prior. I feel tears on my own cheeks and an ache in my chest as my eyes remain fixed on Chikako Yamashiro, the filmmaker and woman pictured in the film. The film, which she made in 2009, depicts one of her most prevalent themes: bearing witness to inter-generational war trauma in Okinawa.

It is September 2019. A typhoon has just passed through Okinawa. Next year will mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the end of World War II in Japan. There are signs up already about the events that will commemorate the Battle of Okinawa, the brutal battle that the film recalls. The plane I arrived on a few days earlier from Hiroshima, where similar signs mark the anniversary of the atomic bomb dropped on that city, was turbulent and packed full of American military men, presumably headed for one of the several U.S. military bases that continue to occupy large portions of Okinawa's main island. One pair of young, camo-clad guys wouldn't stop dropping F-bombs. It was unclear if they were pissed off or celebratory, but every utterance was wrapped in expletives and barking laughs. I flinched at each casual curse, stretched flat by their American accents—there are kids on the plane! Looking back, I wonder what I expected from them. Or of myself.

In the white gallery of the prefectural art museum in Naha City, I feel the weight of their loud American voices still, feel the weight of my own national identity in tension with the horrific war stories I have traveled here to hear. What “we” did to “them” . . . a weighty equation I balance on the fulcrum of our common humanity and my own blended loyalties. I am an American who spent my childhood in Japan. I too speak in an American accent; my Japanese is halting and fragmented. I can follow the thread of a conversation but struggle to add to it. I know the word for nostalgia yet can’t effectively tell someone how I feel today in this language that isn’t mine and yet that is the soundtrack of my earliest memories.

On the screen, Yamashiro’s mouth continues to borrow the old man’s voice. Their images toggle, him then her, her then him. He is old, his skin marked with lines and age spots. She is younger, skin smooth, eyes clear and so very sad. Her lips try to keep up as he recalls being taken from his family when he was conscripted as a young student to be a soldier, going to live in a bomb shelter. His voice thickens, falters, as he remembers a particular horror: his family jumped off the cliffs of the island, leaping into the ocean to kill themselves ahead of advancing U.S. forces. Her lip-synching halts; she seems unable to speak, only to listen as tears streak her cheeks. At this point, his face maps onto hers, cinematically superimposed, touching across time, across the screen. I look through him to see her, or through her to see him . . . which way does it go? The projections of their faces struggle to align, her eyes on his eyes for a moment, then his mouth over hers, a constantly shifting mosaic of speaking and listening, loss and survival, now and then. I blink, my breath stilled by the unspeakable suffering, by the blur of the overlapping images. My own body feels blurred, I feel my own skin distort across my cheekbones, stretching in response.

The short film described above, titled *Your Voice Came Out Through My Throat* (2009)¹ emerged out of a series of interviews Yamashiro conducted with survivors of the Pacific island battles of World War II. The now elderly survivors she interviewed were all living in nursing homes in Naha City, the capital of Okinawa. The primary interview subject whose voice was described above was a survivor of the battle on another island, Saipan, which shared many elements of the Battle of Okinawa, such as school-age children conscripted as soldiers, mass suicides of civilians, and murders of local inhabitants at the hands of both the Japanese and U.S. militaries.² Yamashiro’s film and performance work has gained international recognition, with recent installations in



Fig. 10. Still image from Chikako Yamashiro's *Your Voice Came Out Through My Throat*, 2009. (Copyright Chikako Yamashiro, courtesy of Yumiko Chiba Associates.)

London and LA, and several award-winning films. Her subject matter is frequently intergenerational and cross-temporal, as she performs her ongoing commitment to exploring and protecting the environment, imagery, history, and political struggles of Okinawa.

In overlapping frames, *Your Voice Came Out Through My Throat* represents memories of a war three-quarters of a century old, war trauma that still appears raw and open, and Yamashiro's embodied experience of bearing witness. Said another way, the film represents Yamashiro's experience of bearing witness to another's personal war trauma, while at the same time encountering her own inherited, cultural war trauma. As she navigated these layers of experience in the creation of the film, she employed sensorial contact—touch, eye contact, shared breath—as a conduit for communication, comfort, and support. “When talking about the war there was a moment when the elderly people would stop speaking. Details that were too painful to put into words became blank moments in their stories. They fell silent and began to shake or weep. . . . so then I just asked them to touch me and express what they were feeling in some other way.”³ In the film, her postproduction editing represented these expressive, supportive touches by bringing her face together with those of her interviewees, imaginistically overlapping their skin to her skin, eye to eye, mouth to mouth. As described above, their images

never fully aligned—indeed, they could never by virtue of their physical and generational differences—but their projected images kept trying to touch across the limits of time, bodies, and language.

Somatic Witnessing, or Touching (across) War Trauma

Your Voice Came Out Through My Throat is a vivid portrayal of a practice that I call *somatic witnessing*: a double and simultaneous sensory witnessing of self and other. At its essence, somatic witnessing involves attentiveness to one's own psychosomatic responses when taking in the experience of another. Like touching, somatic witnessing is an act in which one senses from the inside and the outside, giving and receiving sensation at the same time. Somatic witnessing is a practice of using one's own embodied senses to at once lean in—listening with care and respect to another's experience—while also remaining located, intentionally grounded, in one's own time, place, and subject position in the relational field of a performance encounter. As in Annie Murphy Paul's description of embodied cognition, somatic witnessing is "a flexible back-and-forth movement between attending to others' social cues and to our own interoceptive signals . . . By drawing on data from both sources, we can feel our way into the other person's emotional world while maintaining a vivid sense of our own."⁴ Somatic witnessing draws on our innate abilities of embodied cognition by which self and other are connected through somatic, relational cues and communication, even as each remain autonomous and agentic in their own lived experience.

The goal of somatic witnessing in the context of encountering war trauma is to balance between over- or under-identification with other subject positions and their lived experiences. The practice requires one to avoid under-identification through pity or dissociation (dehumanization of the other or misrecognizing the other as less than the self) and also to guard against overidentification that can result in emotional overwhelm (loss of distinction between self and other, or misrecognition of the self for the other or the other for the self). Witnessing from either of these poles unsettles the balance and groundedness needed for effective communalization of war trauma and ethical somatic witnessing. Paying attention to one's embodied senses while bearing witness to another provides a material practice for encountering difference, suffering, and discomfort that often arises when reckoning with the causes, implications, and lived effects of war trauma, in others and in oneself.

As in the practice of communalizing war trauma, discussed in the previous chapter, somatic witnessing is central to the ethics of postwar justice and healing. Witnessing one's body—and *with* one's body—requires gaining fluency in the languages that the body speaks; that is, the languages of the senses. As traumatologist Bessel Van der Kolk put it, "Trauma victims cannot recover until they become familiar with and befriend the sensations in their bodies."⁵ So too with audiences and performance makers bearing witness to traumatic memories of war. As I have established, we all as humans carry some form of war trauma in our bodies: in postmemories inherited from past generations that enacted, protested, or fled from war; from growing up alongside or within persistent global conflicts; even from reading the daily news of current wars. Somatic witnessing is a gentle yet firm approach to recognizing embodied expressions of collective, inherited, or acute war trauma in oneself. It is an embodied strategy for attending to one's own internal experience so that bearing witness and tending to others becomes genuinely possible.

The practice of somatic psychotherapy offers concrete guidance for building awareness of and familiarity with one's bodily sensations, beginning by noticing interlocking sensory systems: interoceptive (awareness of one's own body through physical sensations and different mind-body states), exteroceptive (sensing stimuli that originate outside one's own body), proprioceptive (awareness of the location of one's own body and body parts in dimensional space) senses, and kinesthesia (perceiving one's self/body through corporeal motion).⁶ Somatic psychotherapist Manuela Mischke-Reeds emphasizes the importance of building awareness in each of these modes of sensory experience within trauma-focused therapy, particularly because trauma frequently disrupts an individual's ability to trust, interpret, or even perceive the somatic messages that their bodies are sending them.⁷ Given that war trauma and racialized trauma (among other violent traumas) often form the "background field" upon which any two humans meet in psychotherapeutic and theatrical settings, becoming aware of inter- and intrapersonal habits of reactivity, uncertainty, anxiety, and defensiveness is vital.⁸ This can shift the discomfort or challenge of an intersubjective encounter from what Resmaa Menakem calls "dirty pain" to that of "clean pain."⁹ Clean pain is not *painless*, but if seen clearly and openly, the pain is in service of radically accepting (not necessarily approving of, but taking clear-eyed account of) past harm, a necessary first step to healing trauma in one's body and present relationships.

Sensations that arise when bearing somatic witness might include symptoms of unacknowledged trauma, or "dirty pain." Dissociation, numbing out,

distraction, dehumanization, overwhelm, reactivity, and panic are, in fact, habitual strategies for avoiding contact with the sources of one's own traumas, be they acute, intergenerational, or cultural trauma. Somatic witnessing thus often requires trauma processing skills to be effective and sustainable, such as embodied strategies for tolerating the distress and discomfort that may arise when bearing witness to experiences of war violence in a theatrical performance. In the performance analyses that follow, I apply the distinct yet interconnected modalities of sensory awareness listed above (interoceptivity, exteroceptivity, proprioceptivity, and kinesthesia), as well as distress tolerance skills such as using "touch points" and somatic experiencing techniques of body scans, focusing, and shuttling awareness between inner and outer states.¹⁰ I employ these terms not to classify somatic witnessing into forms, or to deem one performance as better than another, but instead to assess the effects of different dramaturgical choices in representation and reception. My goal is to fine-tune the strategies with which performance makers might support somatic witnessing for participants and audiences.

From a theoretical standpoint, somatic witnessing is similar to what Peggy Phelan has termed "ethical witnessing," in which audiences and performers must reckon with one another's humanity in a direct, "face-to-face encounter" between self and other.¹¹ Drawing on Emmanuel Lévinas, Phelan argues that this face-to-face encounter between self and other "is the most crucial arena in which the ethical bond we share becomes manifest."¹² Somatic witnessing deepens and complicates the ocular-centric Levinasian "face-to-face" encounter to include tactile and multisensorial experiences that arise when communicating and bearing witness to accounts of war. As Dierdre Sklar argues, sight requires distance from and objectification of that which is seen: "Seeing implies an object, something to see. And in order to see an object, one must be separate from it, at enough distance to bring it into focus."¹³ Not incidentally, ocular and linguistic modes of receiving information about others have long been privileged in Euro-American intellectual society over proprioceptive senses of touch, smell, taste, and movement, or kinesthesia, which do not function at a receptive distance.¹⁴ "The objectification implicit in seeing is associated with the objectivity of mind, while the somatic sensation implicit in touch is associated with nearness and the subjectivity of proprioception," Sklar writes.¹⁵ Expanding beyond the visual realm of the photographically frozen or cinematically fetishized faces of war victims and refugees is thus vital in our remotely connected, media-saturated age. While not ineffective or unimportant in aid donation campaigns and journalistic

attempts to humanize the effects of war, the “facial” trope of war suffering can further distance viewers from viewed, turning bodies on view into objects rather than multidimensional humans. In contrast, somatic witnessing cultivates multisensory embodied awareness in intersubjective encounters, offering a layered depth of field in which multiple positions and sensations can exist.

The case studies of this chapter make bodily sensations the medium of ethical witnessing. In Yamashiro’s *Your Voice Came Out Through My Throat* faces are represented not so much as signifiers of identity but as sensorial surfaces *in touch* with one another. Together, they materially and metaphorically mark a process of intergenerational re-membling in an effort to regenerate opposition to militarism and war. In later case studies drawn from Tania El Khoury’s *ear-whispered works*, faces and sight are further de-emphasized, replaced instead by hands, touch, and voices that guide audience-participants in kinesthetic exploration. El Khoury’s oeuvre of work features immersive scenographies that situate contact with environment as an essential part of bearing witness to another person’s lived experience of wartime displacement and violence. As in the opening section above, I occasionally describe my own embodied experiences of somatic witnessing, locating myself geopolitically, cognitively, affectively, and sensorially within the material spaces of performance/installation. This is not intended to promote my own experience as universal by any means, but instead to offer candid examples of how somatic witnessing might be practiced in various performance situations.

Recorded mediums of film, video, and remote communications (e.g., Zoom, audio recordings, and letter writing) also feature prominently in all of the case studies, making embodied, multisensory somatic witnessing all the more crucial. In fact, video and remote technologies of representation at times better serve the physical precarity and temporal constraints faced by the people most directly impacted by war. This is particularly true when displacement, physical injuries, aging, or political instability make being visible or remaining in one place, or both, dangerous or impossible. These factors, along with the dominance of screen-based modes of communication, consumption, and activism in the twenty-first century, necessitate learning how to support somatic witnessing in performances and installations that feature prerecorded or remote representations of war experiences. Throughout the case studies, I thus identify emotional, neurological, mental, and physical techniques that can support the practice of somatic witnessing in performance scenarios within and through screens.

I return now to our first case study, Yamashiro's film *Your Voice Came Out Through My Throat*. This example primarily showcases somatic witnessing diegetically, in and across the film's screen, rather than as a physical dramaturgy Yamashiro structures for her audiences (although I include my own somatic witnessing experience as part of my analysis). I start here for the sake of clarity, to show how somatic witnessing works between people in a performance-making process.

"Touch My Arm, Let Me Sense What You Can't Put into Words"

Yamashiro created *Your Voice Came Out Through My Throat* as the remaining World War II survivors in Okinawa entered their eighties and nineties. In Okinawa—and in Japan more broadly—the practice of sharing stories of World War II war trauma is something of a cultural ritual and a process of intergenerational care. As I describe in the next chapter, the now elderly child-survivors of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, known as "Hibakusha," continue to dedicate copious time and energy to vivid retellings of the horrors they witnessed in their youths, as a means of educating upcoming generations about the devastating impacts of war and galvanizing the multigenerational fight for nuclear disarmament and demilitarization. This is notably different than the cultural approach to sharing war memories in the U.S., where war stories tend to be glorified as heroism, pathologized or medicalized as PTSD, or silenced by shame or the weight of "moral injury." These forms of "dirty pain" have been baked into the military history of the U.S., even as performance projects like those analyzed in the previous chapter seek to repair them. In contrast, my interviews in Hiroshima and Okinawa, where the scars of World War II remain apparent in local ecologies and cultures, revealed a strong multigenerational commitment to keep alive the hard-won lessons of that war. It was clear to me in nearly every conversation I had that passing on memories of war violence continues to be a vital part of antinuclear peace activism in Japan, the need for which is intensified by the aging population of survivors and younger generations of politicians and voters exhibiting a turn again toward nationalistic militarism.

In Okinawa, the inherited legacies of war are complicated by histories of structural violence. Once the seat of an ancient, independent Ryukyu Kingdom before being formally annexed to Japan in 1879, Okinawa has sustained

a long, and, at certain points, extremely violent relationship to occupying forces, both Japanese and American. The most destructive of these in living memory was the three-month Battle of Okinawa in the summer of 1945. There, the Japanese military, along with conscripted battalions of local Okinawans, many very young or very old, sought to stave off the U.S. advance on mainland Japan for as long as possible. The battle claimed the lives of approximately half of the civilian population of Okinawa, while intense shelling, teargassing, and firebombing devastated the tropical landscape. Along with markers of shelling and bomb casings that still scar the hillside caves of Okinawa, museums commemorating the battle express a lingering sense that the people of Okinawa were sacrificed by the Japanese government as an inferior, dispensable prefecture in order to protect mainland Japanese cities.¹⁶ The nationalistic ideology that fueled Japan's military aggression was mixed in Okinawa with legacies of racism that are still being confronted today. In the interviews I conducted, I heard stories of Okinawan civilians being executed as spies by the Japanese military simply because they were speaking Okinawan rather than Japanese. Prohibitions were placed on speaking or teaching the Okinawan language for many years surrounding the war and Okinawan has only in the past decade been reinstated in local school curriculum. As recently as 2007, mainland Japanese textbooks eliminated mentions of the mass suicides of civilians during the Battle of Okinawa.¹⁷ The sting of these erasures has been magnified for many Okinawans by the U.S. military occupation of vast portions of the island, which has continued since 1945, despite significant local and international protests.¹⁸

In a nursing home in Naha City, Okinawa, Yamashiro conducted interviews with elderly survivors of World War II. The elders were eager to speak with her, as someone from a younger generation: "because we survived you were born into this world. . . . we have to tell what really happened."¹⁹ Still, for all the mutual desire of sharing and bearing witness, the process was not an easy or straightforward one. The elders found it difficult to put their painful memories into words, and Yamashiro said that the interviews "made me keenly aware that . . . no matter how I stretched my imagination, their experiences would never be mine."²⁰ The stories were not hers, in a personal sense, yet both she and her interviewees felt the need to take part in a transfer of these memories as part of their mutual intergenerational responsibilities. So Yamashiro turned to embodied, nonlinguistic means of connecting to her interviewees. When the survivors reached points in their stories that were unspeakable for them, either because no words could describe what they

experienced or they felt it was taboo to speak of the inhuman decisions they had faced, Yamashiro asked them to simply touch her arm. “Please touch my body,” Yamashiro would say to her interviewees. “Let me sense the things you were unable to tell me in words through your touches.”²¹ These instances of shared touch between her and her interviewees were, for Yamashiro, the “exact moment when each speaker transferred the burden of remembering the past” to her.²²

Bringing attention to touch points—the places where one’s body touches itself, the floor, a chair, or another person’s body—is foundational to developing skills of “distress tolerance,” a central concept in dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), a commonly used therapy for complex PTSD.²³ Distress tolerance skills in DBT frequently involve sensory witnessing: guiding a practitioner to connect with physical touch points and their five embodied senses as a psychosomatic means of becoming present in one’s current reality. In DBT, touch points are meant to ground practitioners in the present time and place by somatically processing strong emotions as sensorial experience, rather than mental narratives that can keep practitioners stuck in habitual patterns of thought and behavior, reliving the past, or worrying about the future. Touch points aid practitioners in approaching their responses to trauma (their own or others’) as psychosomatic experiences that are located and perceived in the present, even when these experiences are in response to past memories or future anxieties.

Although Yamashiro’s approach was not necessarily meant to be therapeutic, touch during the interview process served as a mechanism to ground her elderly interviewees as they talked about painful events from over six decades earlier in their lives. When language faltered or failed, as it often does in recounting embodied trauma, touch stepped in for Yamashiro and her interviewees as a modality of nonverbal witnessing. A touch on the arm could provide a gentle sensorial anchor to the present moment and offer a reminder of the care and companionship of another human in a moment of pain and sorrow. When it came time to turn the interviews into a film installation, touch points again emerged to structure the aesthetic dramaturgy of *Your Voice Came Out Through My Throat*. Utilizing cinematic language to reveal the sensorial language spoken between her body and that of her interviewees, Yamashiro represented the intimacy and pain of bearing somatic witness to past trauma by putting bodies *in touch* with one another. Through the postproduction editing of the film, the faces of speaker and listener over-

lapped, features never perfectly aligning, but nevertheless staying in contact. Their subjective, embodied differences were intractable and yet also served as the cinematic membrane for contact and communication. The effect dramatized an aching for alignment, to not only touch another human being for comfort but also to ingest something of that experience that could be carried forward to others who would need to hear it.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick hybridized the relationship between sensation and emotion in her term “touching feeling,” which she describes as an “intuition that a particular intimacy seems to subsist between textures and emotions.” Indeed, the “same double meaning, tactile plus emotional, is already there in the single word ‘touching.’”²⁴ At the same time, skin, the medium of touch and sensate feeling, maintains another duality too: It is as much a limiting barrier as it is a conduit for shared experience, a divider and connector between humans. As in Dwight Conquergood’s concept of dialogical performance described in the previous chapter, touch-based somatic witnessing must be practiced with care, respect, and equity, with touch functioning as a “hyphen” connecting across but not effacing difference between humans.

Through touch Yamashiro was enacting the tension between her desire to bear witness to past trauma, on one hand, and the intersubjective impossibility of fully being able to do so, on the other. As Joshua Chambers-Letson put it, Yamashiro’s work articulates “an incommensurable break that often keeps us from being able to fully *share* the experience of past injustice.” However, he goes on, “We honor the past when we acknowledge this rift rather than pretending to overcome it. And we are given a responsibility to keep alive the hopes of previous generations even as we struggle to protect them from the violence of the dominant power’s eliding and negating forces a second time over.”²⁵ Yamashiro powerfully materialized this conceptual “break” across her own body through the close-up, overlapping shots of her face and the faces of her interviewees. In her process and performance, she made of her body a somatic bridge that attempted to connect—and feel—across intersubjective difference through the sensorial language of touch.

Her performance of somatic witnessing represented her personal desire to understand and vicariously experience something of a long-ago war that shaped the conditions of life in Okinawa. Yet even as she mirrored, touched, and cried along with her interviewees, her effort was not to *pass as* but to *pass along*. Her performance of bearing somatic witness reached forward, into the gallery space that exhibited the film. Somatic witnessing was a means

of using her body transitively, to create a sensorial field that might transfer something of the embodied memories she had received from her interviewees to spectators of the film in white rooms around the world.

Standing on the hard cement floor of a white gallery in Naha City, Okinawa in September 2019, I received Yamashiro's somatic pass. Like the not quite aligning faces of Yamashiro and her interviewees, like the "incommensurate break" of any intersubjective encounter, the pass (transfer) was not, and could never be, direct or complete. Yet I was, without a doubt, *moved*. I shifted, internally and externally, to meet the film with my own sensory responses within the space of the gallery. Some of my own somatic responses mirrored Yamashiro's—her own steady gaze cued me to keep looking, keep listening, and to weep as she did. These (at least) twice-behaved behaviors were at once automatic embodied responses to what I viewed on-screen and somatic expressions of what I carried into the gallery from my own lived experience. My somatic witnessing emerged between the slippery lines of past and present, of self and other. Yamashiro's somatic pass was echoed and met by my interoceptive experience, the felt sense of tears, my psychosomatic responses to hearing about war atrocities, an inner tension as the American and Japanese parts of my identity complicated the us/them dynamics of that war and its long aftermath. The exteroceptive and proprioceptive touch points that my body sensed in the gallery kept me from getting lost in overwhelm, often a factor of overidentification with another or even one's own past, while at the same time avoiding dissociation, or under-identification, by grounding me in the present time and place.

Although Yamashiro did not construct her work to extend into the gallery and shape spectatorial experiences of her film beyond the screen itself, she clearly intended the effects to extend beyond the diegetic frame of the film, to affectively "touch" her spectators and "move" them/us toward the antiwar values expressed therein. In the final frames of the film, the images of a multitude of interviewees were projected across Yamashiro's face, distorting her own face, gender, and age. The other voices of her interviewees began to fall away, leaving Yamashiro to speak alone in her own voice: "No matter who starts it, we must end it. We must never agree with it. It wastes people's efforts and destroys lives. We must never let war happen again."²⁶ It was unclear if the words were hers, his, theirs, or ours to inherit, producing an undecidedness that strengthened the shared ownership of and responsibility to the message. The multiplicity of faces, put in touch with one another, were caught in a somatic dragnet of cinematic rendering, speaking cacoph-

onously yet in one voice. Yamashiro thus channeled the clear message to her audiences, pulling us all into ethical arm's reach: Wherever the war trauma started, whoever it passes through, an unequivocal, collective opposition to all future war is where it must end.

Somatic Witnessing for Audience-Participants

The case study of Yamashiro's film demonstrates that sensing through one's body can be practiced at any point in the process of researching, producing, and spectating a performance. For Yamashiro, the process emerged organically in the nursing home rooms as she conducted interviews. For me, somatic witnessing was a do-it-yourself practice that I developed on my research trip to Okinawa and Hiroshima in 2019. Anticipating that much of my time in Japan would be spent bearing witness to war atrocities and extreme human suffering, I had talked in advance with several therapist friends about strategies for doing so effectively and sustainably. I needed to look and to listen, as a researcher and as a global citizen, and I also knew that bearing witness to these war atrocities would be physically, mentally, and emotionally distressing. Building on their advice, alongside mindfulness techniques I had learned through years of Buddhist meditation, I developed my own practice of somatic witnessing, which supported me in opening to and tolerating the discomfort of bearing witness to war trauma testimony.

Rather like Jill Dolan's concept of "critical feminist spectatorship," which can be practiced by a spectator regardless of the gender politics of a given piece of theater, I have found that somatic witnessing is a tool of receptivity and critical analysis that audience members can apply on their own, even if a performance experience does not overtly cue it.²⁷ Bearing witness somatically adds layers of awareness—sometimes complicated and dissonant harmonies—to any aesthetic experience. But it need not be a "dirtying" dissonance, to return to Menakem's terms, unless it is left unacknowledged. To bring one's own somatic experience of bearing witness into the light of awareness is to begin the process of accounting for and sifting through whatever pain, discomfort, numbing, fear, or guilt attends one's spectatorship. This kind of somatic accounting or "cleaning" is not about erasing, absolving, or whitewashing, but instead a careful method of inviting one's own ghosts—of militarization, of implicated subjecthood, of war trauma—to become knowable as players in the field of an intersubjective encounter. As a DBT therapist

friend of mine put it: “You can walk through your life with the lights off and pretend there isn’t a bunch of stuff to bump into. Or, you can turn the lights on and navigate your way through the stuff (or at least not be surprised when you bump into it).”²⁸

Somatic psychotherapy offers a particularly useful framework for thinking about the importance—and challenges—of practicing somatic witnessing from an observational position. While much of Mischke-Reeds’s “somatic psychotherapy toolbox” is dedicated to exercises and practices that a therapist might use to guide clients, she emphasizes the importance of a therapist learning to tune into their own body state as part of their practice, before, during, and after a session. This ensures that a therapist is tracking their own internal experience as a source of information about their own bodymind state and how their personal experiences may play into their responses to the clinical relationship. The practice also models somatic awareness for their clients and hones the therapist’s own ability to read the bodymind state of their clients through somatic cues and somatically informed dialogue.²⁹ Somatic self-awareness for a therapist (or director, teacher, audience member, and so forth) is also essential to acknowledging and dismantling the systemic violences of racism and sexism that continue to impact interpersonal relationships in any space, including the therapy room and theater house.³⁰

However, somatic awareness skills are not taught or fostered in much of contemporary culture. Visual, linguistic, and screen-based modalities of representation and communication, paired with economic values of productivity and consumerism, condition daily lived experiences of most modern humans in the globalized digital age. These conditions largely work against living in embodied awareness. Communal war traumas and racialized traumas upon which the U.S. was founded compound the lack of cultural support for sitting with and sensing into the experiences of self and other. The force of these “moral injuries” in our own violent, militarized past can perform a kind of trauma-based percepticide (in Taylor’s terms) on our sensory awareness in the present, leaving us barking our shins and tripping in the darkness of our personal and cultural histories.

Similarly, in most traditional theatrical or cinematic experiences, time or attention is rarely dedicated to *assisting* in, let alone *insisting* upon audiences attending to their own embodied reactions to what they witness. The recent “trigger warning” movement in theater has made some progress in alerting audience members to potentially distressing content at the top of a performance. Yet this information is typically provided in a perfunctory

manner, alongside the location of fire exits, the unwrapping of cough drops, and silencing of cell phones, or only in print on a website or a program. The rhetorical arrangement suggests that if an audience member experiences a physically intense somatic response to what is witnessed on stage or screen, acceptable actions are limited to either an emergency departure or muffling one's responses so as not to disturb fellow audience members. While removing oneself must always remain an agentic option for participants and spectators, other options and skills are necessary to effectively communalize trauma and to foster time, space, and methods for ethically responding to war traumas. Some professional and educational theaters now program "sensory-friendly" performances that are specifically adapted to accommodate audience members with particular sensitivities, including individuals on the autism spectrum, those with PTSD, and others with sensory processing differences.³¹ Such adaptive practices remain far from the norm, but they reveal the potential for performance makers to diversify, deepen, and support audience engagement with difficult, uncomfortable, yet vitally important subject matter in the theater.

Performance makers have the power—and therefore the responsibility—to facilitate and support the practice of somatic witnessing in their audience-participants. Yamashiro's film work, while aesthetically and politically powerful in its demonstration of somatic witnessing, did not extend any such cues into the gallery space for her audiences. How, then, can performance makers facilitate somatic witnessing for their spectator-participants? How might performance makers intentionally bring the lights up on the somatic experiences of audience-participants in theaters of war? And how can performance dramaturgies offer tools for navigating the potentially uncomfortable psychosomatic responses that arise when bearing witness?

I turn now to a series of performances conceived by Lebanese-born, U.K.-based artist Tania El Khoury that illustrate how experiences of war survivors and refugees can be presented in such a way as to more directly prompt and support audiences in somatic witnessing. The case studies, drawn from El Khoury's series titled *ear-whispered*, all involve some amount of prerecorded or remotely represented material, yet they take a step beyond Yamashiro's film to directly engage audiences in the practice of somatic witnessing. In each piece, El Khoury engenders embodied connection between audience members and elements of her performance work. This is often accomplished through theatrical elements that extend into the spectatorial environment, creating a setting that orients audience-participants toward sensorial aspects

of an experience being represented on screen. In other instances, touch is utilized as a method of connecting across geographic distance and different situations.

I start by offering my own experience of one of El Khoury's pieces: *As Far as Isolation Goes* (2021), performed by Syrian-born Palestinian musician and refugee Basel Zaraa. I again emphasize aspects of my personal and geopolitical histories, my embodied experiences, and lasting somatic memories of the piece.

As Far as Touch Goes

I sit in my new office, surrounded by boxes and silence. My computer is open to a web page that tells me that the host knows I am here and will let me in soon. The building is empty because it is February 2021, another peak in the COVID pandemic, and Yale is still sequestering people from one another. I can hear myself breathing. My eyes feel restless and keep checking the screen, rechecking the supplies I was asked to bring: a small paintbrush, a glass of water, and a Sharpie marker. All of a sudden the screen changes, like a door just opened, and a young man appears. He is lightly bearded, with glasses, olive skin. He introduces himself as "Basel." His voice is soft and unhurried, with an Arabic accent. He asks my name, if I have my supplies, if I am right- or left-handed. As we talk, he invites me to massage my left hand, mirroring him. Then my forearm, again mirroring him. He says that if we were in the same place, instead of on Zoom, he would be massaging my arm for me. After a moment, he tells me to draw a line down from my middle finger in black marker. Then draw a box in the center of my palm. And put a figure—a person—inside it. I am using a thick black Sharpie from the supply closet downstairs and it is hard to get much definition on the person. He then directs me to dip my paintbrush in water and get the person wet. Then to blow on them to offer a drying wind. The water evaporates off my skin before my eyes.

"Now draw a circle around your whole arm, just below your elbow." He shows me what he means on his own arm. I trace the marker around the front, back, sides. Is it a border, I wonder? Outside the circle, traveling toward my wrist, he tells me to draw more figures. "Draw yourself first, then others in your life." Rather like the oxygen masks on an airplane, I think. These are all refugees, he says. Give them backpacks, suitcases. They are going some-

where new, somewhere they don't know. He says he imagines specific people when he draws these figures on his arm. People he knows. His family. His friends. I look up: there are figures on his arm now, too. I try to find the finest point on the thick marker tip. I draw two small figures carrying backpacks. I guess they are my kids. I draw two more, taller people: my parents, my father carrying a duffel bag like he always did when we traveled in my childhood. I am recently divorced, and I decide to stop drawing there.

Basel asks if I want to hear some music; it is performed by some friends of his, also refugees. I say, yes, of course, please, I would like to hear it. He starts to play a music video featuring a rap song in Arabic. Subtitles read: "How many times have you lost yourself? Your home, your wife, your kids, your life. How many times have they shot at us with live bullets, rubber bullets, teargas. How many times have you lost yourself? There is not enough cement to house all the people. They should bury me under a tree, like my brother." I look at the figures on the video that sing from hostels and detention centers. I look at the figures on my arm, resting on the dark wood desk that came with my Ivy League office. How many times have you lost yourself? The question reverberates across an ocean, across virtual space, across language, across the inky effigies on our arms, across international borders that have treated the two of us, me and Basel, each so differently. Me with my U.S. passport, issued when I was two years old as my American-born family moved to Japan, then Australia, back to the States for holidays, later doing research stints with my anthropologist mother in India and Uzbekistan. Basel was born in a Palestinian refugee camp in Syria, and as a young adult made his way through numerous countries to Sweden with his sisters. He is in England now. In his living room.

How many times have you lost yourself? What does it mean to find ourselves . . . here? Now? At this crossroads, in time, in virtual space? How far can touch reach?

The artistic partnership between El Khoury and Zaraa, the creative team behind this piece, *As Far as Isolation Goes*, began several years earlier, when El Khoury received a commission from "On the Move" London International Festival of Theatre 2016 in partnership with the Royal Court Theater in London. El Khoury reached out to Zaraa, who was working in London as a musician with the Palestinian/Arabic group Raast and as a street artist. Zaraa was born in Syria and grew up as part of a third generation in his family that called Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus home. El Khoury initially



Fig. 11. An audience-participant in *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* by Tania El Khoury, performed by Basel Zaraq, 2019. (Photograph courtesy of Tania El Khoury.)

commissioned Zaraq to write a song inspired by the journey he and his sisters made from Syria to Sweden, though his role in the piece soon grew to artist, storyteller, and (as I found him to be) somatic witnessing guide. *As Far as Isolation Goes* (2021) was a virtual remediation, designed specifically for Zoom during the pandemic, of a previous co-present performance experience, *As Far as My Fingertips Take Me* (2018–19). That earlier piece likewise left audience-participants with hand-drawn temporary tattoos of stick figures on their left arms, but in the prepandemic version, the drawings were done in person by Zaraq's own hand as he spoke and rapped about the journey he and his sisters had undertaken from Damascus to Stockholm.

As in the Zoom version, audience-participants of *As Far as My Fingertips Take Me* booked an individual fifteen-minute session at a theater.³² Each session began with a single audience-participant taking a seat in front of a large white wall that separated them from Zaraq, who again was the main interlocuter. The wall had a set of headphones hanging on it and a hole through which participants were instructed to reach their bared arm, up to the bicep, resting it on a small platform that extended into Zaraq's side of the partition.



Fig. 12. Basel Zaraq performing in *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* by Tania El Khoury, 2019. (Photograph courtesy of Tania El Khoury.)

The headphones offered orienting instructions in Basel's prerecorded voice, speaking intimately, softly and slowly, over the sounds of seagulls and waves: "Hello. My name is Bas. I am sitting on the other side of the wall. Please, place your left arm in the hole in the wall in front of you." Video footage of *Fingertips*, which toured throughout Europe, Asia, and North America, shows Basel's ritual of taking a moment to look at the arm presented to him, then handling it gently to establish the sense of his touch.³³ Just as the audience-participant could not see him, Basel could not see the rest of their body or their face, so touch was the mode of communication for both. Basel's voice linked the sensation of touch to the newly forming relationship between audience-participant and artist. "This is me. Touching your arm," he would say, as his music began to play. Next, Basel carefully dipped each of the five fingertips of the participant's hand in black ink: fingerprinting, like at a border crossing. He would then gently turn the participant's arm over and begin to draw figures walking on their inner arm, toward their palm. As in the piece I took part in, the figures were drawn carrying backpacks, pulling suitcases, in a line moving along an arm, together.

In contrast to the examples of communal storytelling theater and dia-

logical performance in the previous chapter, El Khoury and Zaraa used the sensory experience of touch to explore connections across disparate lived experiences and global spaces. The performance *drew* attention to the embodied experience of bearing witness, asking participants to, quite literally, put their “skin in the game.” As El Khoury put it, she wanted audience members in the West “to literally ‘feel’ a refugee” as a means of developing their/our understanding of “the effect of border discrimination on peoples’ lives.”³⁴ The intimate, touch-based dramaturgy of the piece mobilized what dance scholar Jessica Rajko calls “tactile listening,” which links touch and sound as a cognitive, somatic experience of reception in performance.³⁵ El Khoury and Zaraa emphasized touch and sound, notably shifting away from ocular-centric modes of consuming news about war refugees and disrupting habitual methods of viewing others from a distance. As Yamashiro did, they utilized the sensation of touch as an experiment in *feeling*, combining sensation and emotion/cognition as a method of connecting with another person, across whatever distances and differences separate them.

How far, then, does touch go as a means of communicating experience and fostering somatic witnessing?

Alex Torra, a member of experimental theater group Pig Iron, reflected on his experience of being drawn on by Zaraa in *As Far as My Fingertips Take Me*: “The tactile component feels really potent—it bypasses my brain a little bit and, like, hits me in another place . . . that shifts into another place that isn’t intellectualized, you just feel it.”³⁶ At the same time, the sensorial experience did not preclude conceptual and personal associations. Torra, the child of Cuban immigrants, said that he found himself “toggling between the stories [he was] being told and the stories [his] parents told.” By “hitting in a place that isn’t intellectualized” and activating a “mindset” beyond one’s typical subjective positionality, the performance encouraged participants to become aware of multiple subjective experiences that they could sense within their bodies and psyches. “Toggling” between perspectives describes a kind of “variative play”—the drama therapy technique explored in chapter 1—which can arise within the experience of somatic witnessing. Shifting between perspectives engages multiple senses and expands beyond rigid definitions of one’s identity and experience, thus loosening cultural hierarchies of sensory knowledge and allowing for a more expansive, dimensional sense of self and other.

Even within a virtual Zoom room in *As Far as Isolation Goes*, Zaraa and El Khoury prompted and supported somatic witnessing in audience-participants

such as myself.³⁷ This was in part because of the simplicity of the exchange and the relaxed, calm tone Zaraa brought to the fifteen minutes spent together. Zaraa established a personal connection in a soft-spoken voice, extending attentiveness into my physical surroundings, my art supplies, my arm. The seeds of somatic witnessing were planted there, as he took time to touch upon each tool I needed to enact the choreographic script of his performance. He noted that my hand would stand in for his, linking us even as I drew on my own arm as he would have done if we had been in the same place. While our bodies, like our lived experiences, never stopped being unique, different, and conditioned by geography and national citizenship, these shared actions and sensations called us into mutually created contact. The reality of pandemic isolation never departed, nor did the reality that border crossing and travel had meant very different things for each of us and our families, along with material differences in our personal proximity-precarity to war and political dis/enfranchisement. But the rigidity of these differences was softened and made temporarily permeable by the coordinated somatic experience, the shared sonic landscape, and the dramaturgy of physical interactivity. Through the unpretentious act of drawing stick figures on skin, of listening to music, and engaging in light conversation, we did our best to align, even briefly, imperfectly, in the performative palimpsest of the here and there, the then and now, the virtual and the material, the self with another.

Skin surface stimulation, in both versions of the *As Far as . . .* series, functioned rather like a somatic psychotherapy exercise, activating embodied awareness of an audience-participant's interoceptivity and exteroceptivity, and foregrounding the interpersonal relationship involved in the encounter. Even as the performances gestured to complex global politics by naming Zaraa's background as a Palestinian Syrian refugee and selected details of his journeys, the performance experience itself remained grounded in simple contact: touch, ink, paintbrush, water, stick figures emerging on skin. While many different places, global tensions, and traumatic memories were invoked, the tactility of the performance itself served to keep participants sensorially grounded in the here and now.

Indeed, the performance spoke loudest in wordless moments of touch and kinesthetically grounded empathetic connection. Jesse Green, theater critic for the *New York Times*, reviewed *As Far as Isolation Goes* during the same run I participated in (Bard Arts, February 2021). Opening with the question "What does it mean to be touched by art?" Green contrasted the participatory, sensory dramaturgy of *As Far as Isolation Goes* to "well-meaning plays"

and “barn-burning outrage dramas” that traditionally position audience as consumers. Such works may “make us feel good for getting and liking them,” but they “substitute a fleeting aesthetic experience for a lasting tangible one.”³⁸ Green asserted that *As Far as Isolation Goes* instead “reach[ed] farther with a smaller idea . . . built on the idea that you are the canvas—and now, to some extent, the artist.”³⁹ He clearly experienced the value of the somatic engagement, but misread the piece to be apolitical in its goals: “It has no political agenda, only an emotional and physical one,” he concluded in his review. While Green perhaps intended this as an easier invitation to spectators, his phrasing reinscribed the problematic, if common, assumption that politics is the domain of the rational, linguistic, prefrontal cortex—one that is held separate from emotions, feelings, and embodied experiences. This traditional valuation of politics has been challenged most memorably in the feminist maxim “the personal is political,” as feminist activists, performance makers, and theorists insisted that lived experience and embodied memory could be the site and substance of politics and radical change. The politics of somatic witnessing similarly make the spectator’s body an active site of performance, of personal experience and sociopolitical knowledge.

Put another way, somatic witnessing enlivens the relational connection between the spectator and the performer—and *living in* that connection, however briefly, becomes a politically significant practice. As in feminist theorist Jill Dolan’s “utopian performative,” by which she describes an experience of unity and harmony with others gathered in a theater space, the temporality of these performance-based, tactile connections are often brief, passing. Indeed, Dolan insists on the value of brevity and ephemerality in her theory of utopian performatives, noting that an intense sense of presence will, quite naturally, be followed by a sense of absence:

At the base of the utopian performative’s constitution is the inevitability of its disappearance; its efficacy is premised on its evanescence. Performance’s poignant ephemerality grounds all our experiences at the theater. The utopian performative’s fleetingness leaves us melancholy yet cheered, because for however brief a moment we felt something of what redemption might be like, of what humanism could really mean, of how powerful might be a world in which our commonalities would hail us over our difference.⁴⁰

Like an emotion, a touch, a passing sensory experience, the goal of somatic witnessing is not to be intellectually sustained or dramatically cathartic, but

rather than an experience be sensed fully in the body. In the context of theaters of war, somatic witnessing is a method for re-membling (embodying again) past experiences in the present, sensory experience of one's body.

What then, do such experiences have capacity to become? Dolan closes her book with similar questions: "What finally do *communitas* and the utopian performative *do*? What is their action in the world?" In answer, she muses, "Perhaps utopian performatives create the *condition* for action; they pave a certain kind of way, prepare people for the choices they might make in other aspects of their lives."⁴¹ In other words, the political ripples of such experiences of *communitas* can extend beyond the passing moment of sensation.

Toward the end of our fifteen minutes together, Zaraa invited me to offer thoughts and questions. I asked if doing this piece was difficult for him—I said I felt quite sad listening to the music and asked if it was hard for him to talk about people and places he had had to leave. He said that of course he is sad but that it feels better to remember than to forget. And then, with a little smile, he said that the drawing helped him feel better, that drawing has always helped him. I asked why we drew on our arms instead of paper. He answered by saying that he was a street artist, that he likes how graffiti marks a city with people's experiences, suggesting that his arm, my arm, was like that too: marked now with our shared experience.

Although the direct sensory contact of the performance ended after fifteen minutes with Zaraa, the inky figures remained visible on my left hand and inner forearm for almost a week, an embodied reminder of the experience. Yet they were not souvenirs in the tokenized sense. The noun "*souvenir*," which came into parlance in the late eighteenth century, comes from the French verb meaning "to remember, to come to mind, to occur to." However, it later came, and continues today, to refer to a "token" of an experience or event, an object often gained by purchase or poaching by a participant in or witness to the event.⁴² The commodification of memory evidenced in the shifting usage of the term *souvenir* is mirrored in the commodification of attention in theater, news, and other forms of communication/experience. In contemporary commodity culture, we *pay* attention. We *spend* and *invest* our time. These colloquial metaphors reveal the casual ways that late capitalist culture has tokenized and dehumanized embodied, time-based experiences. Like drawing. Or dialogue. Or live performance. In contrast, Zaraa's hand and pen—or my own pen, under his remote direction—made contact with the arm of each participant, using touch to *draw attention* to the embodied sensations of interpersonal contact. Engaged as we all were in a trans-

actional experience of a ticketed performance, *drawing* attention—versus *paying* attention or *spending* our time—was not an insignificant shift in the performer-audience relationship.

Somatic witnessing necessarily operates in an alternative, affective economy of attention, as illustrated by the ephemeral, lingering marks left from participating in an *As Far as . . .* performance. Even while the performance took place within commodity culture, through the structure of a ticketed performance that ensured that labor of artists was materially supported, the exchange was focused on attention and contact rather than any kind of product. *Drawing* on his audience-participants, Zaraa reframed our attention—sensorial and mental attentiveness—as the foundation of time-based art, of bearing witness. Harkening back to Jonathan Wei’s description of the value of awakening a “sleeping hand” through dialogic exchanges between combat veterans and civilians, my hand had become newly sensitized by my time with Zaraa: I could look down and re-member what it has the capacity—and response-ability—to hold.

Ear-Whispered Works

El Khoury has gathered her interactive installation/performance works under the evocative title *ear-whispered: works by Tania El Khoury*. The title, which El Khoury chose when exhibiting her works during a residency at Bryn Mawr College in the U.S., bespeaks bodily intimacy and sensorial communication. Ear-whispering is gentle and slow. It is private. It is meant just for you. It requires bodies to be close together. It has an urgency, communicating something that can’t be spoken out loud but that needs to be spoken nevertheless. And, read as a statement, it is a practice that *works* on the bodies it touches, from individual corpuses to bodies politic. These valences of intimacy, of urgency, of care, and of efficacy are the subtle yet important qualities of somatic witnessing in performance.

In the following two examples of El Khoury’s *ear-whispered: works*, audience members were asked to actively bear witness—or *act* as witnesses—by immersing themselves sensorially in various textures and materialities of representation. From bunk beds to handwritten letters to garden soil, El Khoury utilized material substances and environments to create sensorial substrates through which disparate subjects could meet, across geographical distance, experiential difference, and even across the threshold of life and death.

Stories of Refuge (2013) was a video-performance-installation created by El Khoury in collaboration with the Munich-based Dictaphone Group and a group of Syrian refugees that had recently relocated to Munich. To produce the videos, El Khoury and the Dictaphone Group gave each of the Syrian participants a wearable camera for a day and asked them to film their daily life, including their favorite spots in Munich. Postproduction editing retained their camera work and their personal stories were self-narrated. The resulting films were staged within an installation space into which the viewing audience was invited, one at a time or in small groups. The first presentation of the piece was installed in a large shipping container placed on a busy road in Munich, invoking the treacherous conditions that attend the migrations of many refugees fleeing war violence. Subsequent installations of the piece, such as El Khoury's residence at Bryn Mawr College in 2021, invited audience members into a white gallery space that had been outfitted with several metal bunk beds, invoking a scene of temporary housing, as in a refugee camp or detention center. On each thin pillow, a pair of black headphones rested: an invitation to make a temporary home and listen. Audience-participants could sit or lay down on one of the bunks, even crawl under a light sheet if desired. The film, in the style of a hand-held home video, was projected on the white wall, showing haptic images of a day in the life of a recently immigrated refugee as they navigated their new home, Munich.

Audience members were never co-present with the refugee filmmaker-narrators. Indeed, the physical absence of the tellers was part of the political concept of the piece. The refugees often could not stay in one place for very long, as global tides of structural violence and anti-immigrant policies continued to sweep them between temporary camps, detention centers, and indeterminate legal status. When they did take up residence in a location like Munich, they would often try to keep as low a profile as possible; that is, to become invisible even when present. El Khoury's detention center bunk beds placed audience-participants in a physical situation that was suggestive of being detained and under institutional authority, while at the same time temporary, in transit, waiting for the next step. The goal was not to transmit what that experience was actually like for the storyteller, but instead to aid audiences in entering a "mindset" or "body space" that could open them sensorially to the lived experiences being shared through the film.

Entering the scene as a spectator asked for more commitment than typical gallery arrangements, which often maintain as blank a surrounding canvas as possible. Comparing the viewing experience to other installations that

feature visual work, many participants found the environment to be unusually sensory and personal. One audience member at Bryn Mawr remarked that she had seen “nothing as intimate as this. Nothing where I’m like laying down in a bed with headphones on.”⁴³ Another described the environment in tactile terms: “It really touches you, directly, more than another visual experience.”⁴⁴ Many found that El Khoury’s spectatorial installation produced a kind of immediacy that matched the informal, auto-ethnographic style of the films: “the complete raw honesty of someone just holding a camera” as they walked around a city, and went in and out of living spaces.⁴⁵

El Khoury created an inhabitable space that communicated through multiple senses—the smell of metal-framed bunks, the texture of bleached white institutional sheets, the feel of a thin pillow, were all part of the experience of viewing the films. In so doing, El Khoury engaged an embodied cognitive process known as enactivism, or learning and understanding through interaction with one’s environment. The theory of “enaction” in cognitive science posits individual cognition as an intersubjective, embodied process, one that is reflexively produced by a subject in an environment and with other beings.⁴⁶ Enactivism proposes that “organisms do not passively receive information from their environments, which they then translate into internal representations.” Instead, human cognitive systems “participate in the generation of meaning . . . engaging in transformational and not merely informational interactions: *they enact a world*.”⁴⁷ This is to say that entering into a multi-sensory environment like El Khoury’s installation asked audience members to somatically participate in their own process of learning about the lived experiences of others. El Khoury’s installation offered participants embodied, sensory methods of understanding a politically divisive and intellectually complex topic: the precarious and often hidden experiences of immigrants and war refugees in Western countries.

The intentional blankness and anonymity of many gallery spaces does little to require audiences to stay for any particular amount of time. In El Khoury’s spectatorial scenography, however, the setting offered, even insisted upon, entry into a space of refuge: to take refuge in witnessing. Rather like Buddhist meditation, the kind of refuge taken in somatic witnessing is not one of avoidance or hiding from. It is a refuge that arises from opening to lived experience as it is unfolding, through the body and its ever-evolving symbiotic relationship to the surrounding world. To take refuge, however briefly, in *Stories of Refuge* was to find meaning in the tactile exchanges between self and environment, between bodies present and bodies absent. Audience members

who took time to settle in and listen participated in enacting a world in which stories, lost to most of the bustling world, could be whispered—and heard.

Gardens Speak

The final example from El Khoury's oeuvre continues her commitment to employing enactivist dramaturgy as a means of communicating little-known experiences of war violence to audiences around the world. *Gardens Speak*, the work that brought El Khoury to international prominence in 2014, is one of the most powerful enactments of somatic witnessing that I have yet found. The piece, which continues to tour around the world, asks audiences to bear somatic witness to oral histories of war violence from the early years of the Syrian Civil War, circa 2011–12. As El Khoury describes the piece, "*Gardens Speak* is an interactive sound installation containing the oral histories of ten ordinary people who were buried in Syrian gardens."⁴⁸ She explains that "across Syria, many gardens conceal the dead bodies of activists and protesters" who were killed and buried during the uprisings and ensuing violence. These civilians were buried in domestic gardens by friends and relatives as a means of "conserving their identities, telling their stories, and not allowing their deaths to become instruments to the regime."⁴⁹ Given the extreme violence and volatile politics of the Assad regime, the private garden burials, often performed under the cover of night, were themselves acts of resistance.⁵⁰

With the touring performance installation of *Gardens Speak*, El Khoury sought to extend to audiences in the West some sense of life under and against regimes of authoritarianism as experienced by these civilians in Syria. The performance experience began with a somatic reorientation before audience members even entered the installation. In the lobby, audience-participants were asked to don clear plastic ponchos and pants that resembled hazmat biohazard suits. Once dressed, they were given flashlights and sent into a darkened room. Instructions read by flashlight told them to dig in one of ten plots of garden soil that lined the space. They were to dig to find a buried speaker through which they would listen to stories of ordinary people that had been buried in backyard gardens by neighbors and family members. To listen to the stories required further physical commitment and effort: Each audience member had to dig in the soil of their assigned garden plot, performing a kind of forensic investigation to access the stories. In the soil, they would find a speaker, stitched into an earth-covered cushion anchored to the



Fig. 13. Tania El Khoury's *Gardens Speak*, 2014. (Photograph courtesy of Tania El Khoury.)

ground. To listen, each participant had to stretch their body onto the earth, pressing an ear to the dirt to hear the stories the ground held.

The buried recordings were constructed through interviews with friends and family members of the deceased activists—mothers who buried their sons or daughters, friends burying their neighbors—and through personal notes, diary entries, and social media posts. The products of risky and difficult forensic research, the recordings do not tell complete narratives, but rather offer assemblages of memory, of political upheaval, of risk, of loss, of courage. Lyn Gardner, who reviewed a 2014 version of the installation in Birmingham, U.K., described the unearthed findings as “not fragments of bones but fragments of stories.”⁵¹ Indeed, the small scale and fragmented form of the stories are as central to El Khoury’s piece as the dirt. El Khoury asserts, “During big historic events, it’s the small voices, the individual human voices, that get lost. . . . These individual histories are not part of the grand geopolitical narratives that are unfolding and get reported in the west.”⁵² El Khoury’s dramaturgy required audiences to physically dig for what she calls “the history below, the histories that seldom get told.”⁵³

A form of artistic political reform, the tactics used in *Gardens Speak* engaged “action-based” drama therapy techniques explored in the previous chapters. As described in chapter 1, the goal of Johnson’s Developmental Transformations Therapy (DvT) is to “introduce movement into the adaptive system that has formed to protect the self from the oppressive circumstances.”⁵⁴ Through improvisatory role-play between therapist and client(s), DvT “varielates” or “shakes up” habitual defenses, or “adaptive shields,” that form around individual and collective trauma and that “obstruct contact between the person and caring people outside.”⁵⁵ In contrast: “Varielation is purposefully varying one’s responses away from what is immediately expected; that is, playing the character, scene, line, or word slightly differently, slightly off. . . . By constantly changing the imaginary circumstances—that is, by transforming the scenes in DvT into new scenes—the client is presented with an entirely different set of present circumstances to which to adapt.”⁵⁶

Gardens Speak performs a similar series of tectonic shifts upon its spectator-witnesses, presenting an unusual set of circumstances to which audiences must adapt. The replica garden beds offer visceral representations of specific war violence and serve as inhabitable spaces in which to rehearse unfamiliar methods for uncovering traumatic truth. In hazmat costumes and with flashlight and trowel props, the audience members enter the scene already “slightly different, slightly off.” Once in the installation, they must play an active role within the scenes they have come to observe. As a spectatorial mode of “varielation,” El Khoury’s dramaturgy prompts unusual methods of gaining information, such as “putting your ear to the ground” in order to “uncover the story and to make an effort to uncover the truth.”⁵⁷

Digging deeper than mere aesthetics, the enactivist dramaturgy performed a kind of cognitive-political retraining. Literally “putting one’s ear to the ground” not only amplified the specific stories being told in *Gardens Speak* but also challenged habits of consuming political news. In contrast to the smooth, neatly contained screens of smart phones, navigated with a casual flick of a finger, *Gardens Speak* required that audiences “quite literally have to dirty their hands.”⁵⁸ Indeed, the only option given to audience-participants of *Gardens Speak* was to get dirty, to bear witness kinesthetically, proprioceptively, through the actions and multiple senses of their bodies. Gathering information through informal back channels is particularly important in contexts like Syria, El Khoury insists, “where what is happening is contested” through official news channels.⁵⁹ Without interacting “physically, politically and emotionally” the stories would remain unheard, unearthed.⁶⁰

In the immediate aftermath of the performance, while the varietative role-play of *Gardens Speak* was still fresh within the bodies of participants—dirt under fingernails, the smell of earth on skin—El Khoury supported audiences in metabolizing their experiences. Ushers invited participants to sit for a time in an adjacent room and write letters to the families and friends of the dead they had just listened to. The handwritten letters by audience members revealed shards of what the experience had “shaken loose,” as they poured out their sorrow, outrage, and support for the buried Syrians, their families, and their friends. “These handwritten letters, artifacts of each performance, provide insight into the varied audience experiences of *Gardens Speak*, including their reflections on politics, empathy, loss, and death,” El Khoury saw.⁶¹ Over time, the volume of letters grew to a point that they assumed their own corporeal weight. “The letters were first conceptualized as a message of solidarity that would be written by audiences around the world and sent back to the families and friends of the deceased whose stories they shared,” El Khoury recalled. But after “thirty showings of *Gardens Speak* across five continents, . . . the pile of letters kept growing.”⁶²

As El Khoury describes them, the content of the letters was “overwhelmingly complex, messy, and intimate.” They expressed desires to help, anger at the injustices that led to the murders, political arguments, rehearsals of history, and prayers for peace. As the volume of handwritten responses took on a corpus of their own, El Khoury decided to create a companion installation performance piece titled *Tell Me What I Can Do*—the phrase that appeared most often in the letters that audience-participants wrote after taking part in *Gardens Speak*. El Khoury again made the experience fully embodied, papering an entire room with the letters, covering walls, floor, furniture, and long hanging ropes with letters that audience members could touch and pick up as they read them. The piece is deliberately messy, overflowing, and ever growing, sensorially communicating both the overwhelming desire to “do something” about injustice and the difficulty of figuring out what that something can be. *Tell Me What I Can Do* immerses audiences in a somatic experience of witnessing and its aftermath: reading and touching and smelling the handwritten, heartfelt words of hundreds of witnesses from around the world.

There is no clear answer offered in any of El Khoury’s interactive performance pieces. She invites participants to walk through the fourth wall of spectatorship and to get uncomfortable, get dirty, get real with what they find and feel there. The remains of these encounters are often likewise partial,

messy, in process: a fading line of stick figures on a forearm, a story sewn into a soiled pillow, an unwieldy volume of letters. But this, above all, is the point of somatic witnessing. After listening, after touching and being touched, our bodies carry new sensorial knowledge. Like dirt under fingernails, traces of ink on skin, tear tracks on our faces, these are physical messages that can become part of our ethical decision making, part of the world that we too co-create. Uncertainty about what to do, or how to do it, is not a barrier to creation. It is the somatic entry point that can become the first step in enacting change.

One step at a time, or not at all.

How do you cross the flood?
 You cross calmly—
 One step at a time,
 Feeling for stones.
 How do you cross the flood, my heart?
 You cross calmly—
 One step at a time,
 Or not at all.

—POEM OF AWAKENING INSPIRED BY EARLY BUDDHIST NUN
 UPASAMA (CALM)⁶³

As these case studies demonstrate, somatic witness is not an easy or straightforward process, physically, emotionally, or interpersonally. It is slow. Incremental. Nonlinear. As in the above poem inspired by the Buddhist nun Upasama, one must feel their way across the floods of human experience step by step. Doing so—without falling or getting swept away or never starting at all—takes care and attentiveness. The crossing is practiced in the present moment, or not at all. In my own experiences researching this book, I have needed embodied practices that would help me tolerate the discomfort and distress of listening, looking, and feeling deeply when encountering experiences of war violence. I needed to be moved and at the same time remain grounded in the life and opportunities I have been given, so that I can do my version of something with what I witness and feel. As you see or make theater about war, as you read this book—and almost certainly the daily news—you may need such practices, too.

Somatic witnessing, while not yet a common practice in either psychotherapeutic or theatrical contexts, can provide footholds for “crossing the flood” of war trauma. Somatic witnessing provides skills for bearing the distress of listening and for hearing one’s own compassionate, embodied responses. The practice can support touching and being touched by others whose experiences may be very different from one’s own, or so similar as to be triggering of one’s own past pain or fear about the future. The values of somatic witnessing are not reflected in dominant capitalist culture, and so there may be a sense of not only crossing the flood of war trauma, but potentially of moving upstream against much larger cultural currents as well. Nonetheless, or perhaps because of this, I believe that somatic witnessing constitutes a step—a time-based, embodied act—that we can individually and collectively take toward ethical maturity as humans.

Performances such as those described in this chapter deliberately center multisensory experience and draw the attention of participants to the value of somatic witnessing. However, I will reiterate that it can be practiced in *any* performance situation, by virtue of an audience member’s conscious attentiveness to their own sensory experiences as they bear witness. Somatic witnessing can aid practitioners, audience members, performance makers, critics, and responders of any kind in locating themselves—proprioceptively and socially/ethically—in the matrix of a given performance. As the case studies have demonstrated, somatic witnessing can take various postures of engagement: hands touching arms, faces touching faces, bodies touching environments that shaped and were shaped by other human experiences. The following chapter goes a step further to study performances in which somatic witnessing, as a spectatorial practice, is combined with physically mirroring or enacting the embodied experiences of others. This practice, which I call “somatic drag,” similarly centers bodily sensation and kinesthetic intelligence as a means of understanding human experiences of war and its aftermath.

If war is an embodied habit that we struggle to break, then peace and reconciliation must likewise manifest in embodied practices that can replace war. As Ann Weiser Cornell, a somatic guide in the practice of “Focusing,” puts it, somatic awareness involves learning to “listen to the whispers of the body before it needs to shout.”⁶⁴ As in El Khoury’s *ear-whispered: works*, if war and physical violence are akin to shouting at and with bodies, peace may need to begin in a whisper. *Lean in.*

CHAPTER FOUR

Somatic Drag

“You will play 10 different roles.

My hand and your hand will merge. My situation will become your situation.

Follow the film carefully. Stay with me, and you won’t get lost!

Let’s go.

Let’s open this door together.”¹

A prerecorded hand enters the screen of the individually issued iPad that has just displayed this text. The hand reaches towards a yellow door with a metal handle, guiding the audience-participant holding the iPad to follow suit, to reach out and open the physical version of the same yellow door that appears on the screen, and to step inside the situation rooms.

This series of choreographic directives initiated each audience member into the immersive theater experience of *Situation Rooms* (2014–16). The production, created by European experimental theater collective Rimini Protokoll, toured internationally over the course of several years for audience-participants in urban centers around Europe and North America. Once inside the yellow door, the onscreen voice and first-person video perspective continued to prompt each participant’s movements, haptically indicating when to walk, where to look, and what to touch within the interconnected spaces of the set. While the initial prompt was the same for all participants, the directions quickly became individuated. Through their iPad screen and headphones, each audience-participant would be guided to follow a unique pathway through the warren of rooms that comprised the immersive set.

The individuated choreography was designed to hail participants into a series of roles they would play throughout the performance. Each role rep-

resented the story of a different “protagonist,” Rimini Protokoll’s term for the war survivors whose auto-ethnographic stories made up the narrative content of the production. First, an audience-participant might play the role of—meaning enact the movements of—a child soldier from Uganda. Then, seven minutes later, that participant would shift to follow and enact a new role, perhaps this time a father moving his family to a refugee camp in Turkey. Then, seven minutes later, a surgeon with Doctors Without Borders, working in Sudan to treat displaced children from Uganda, some of whom may have served as soldiers in the Lord’s Resistance Army. In that last scenario, the child soldier they had enacted earlier would be played by a different participant, cycling through their own series of roles.

Melanie Wilmink, who experienced *Situation Rooms* in Toronto in 2016, describes the visceral effects of these role-play moments:

As I exited the doors of the mausoleum to transition into a new story, the video screen made me pause to gaze at a bland-looking office hallway. As the image turned my view from left to right, another spectator rounded the corner at the end of the hallway, staring intently at their own screen. Simultaneously, a virtual character appeared on my tablet, pointing a gun in my direction. My stomach clenched in visceral reaction to the synchronized appearance of spectator/character and their doubled gesture of pointing the gun/tablet in my direction. This moment was entirely scripted by the production, which timed and maneuvered the movement of spectators perfectly.²

Individually, yet in tightly choreographed concert, the twenty audience-participants thus spent the performance in motion and bearing witness at the same time. Embodied performance became a means of bearing witness and, at the same time, bearing witness a means of performing.

Similar to many of the performances detailed in the previous chapter, *Situation Rooms* centered on the voices, stories, and embodied traces of people from around the globe who have been touched by war. The key difference was that, in Rimini Protokoll’s production, audience members bore witness by being *in motion*—and not just any motion, but motions that mimicked those previously enacted by “protagonists” as they filmed their personal narratives about contemporary warfare. The Rimini Protokoll collective, based in Germany with members from across Europe, have spent several decades building performances that feature people they call “experts of the everyday,” or “protagonists of everyday life.”³ Rather like the examples of veteran storytelling theater from chapter 2, these “protagonists” are typically nonactors



Fig. 14. Entry way to Rimini Protokoll's *Situation Rooms*, 2014–16. (Photograph by Jorg Baumann, used by permission.)

who share their lived experiences in a theatrical framework. The *Situation Rooms* protagonists were selected from the sprawling, diverse network of contemporary warfare:

from classical victim perpetrator categories to the gray zones of economics and human rights policy: the refugee, the drone pilot, the weapons manager, the human rights lawyer, the weapons expert, the parliamentarian, the computer hacker, the drug gang member, the photojournalist, the marksman, the weapons technician, the NGO employee, the surgeon for Doctors without Borders, the journalist and the lecturer, the protocol chief, the cafeteria director, the pacifist, the distributor of bullet-proof clothing, the boat refugee, the child soldier.⁴

For the production process of *Situation Rooms*, the protagonists filmed their own stories in first-person perspective on the set that would later host audiences. After postproduction editing, which fit each “protagonist experi-

ence” into seven minutes, their videos served as mediated guides for audience members to move along with—or rather, in place of—the protagonists. The videos created a visual-haptic guide for audience-participants to follow through the same set, performing the actions that the now absent protagonists had, at an earlier time, performed in the same rooms and hallways. Through a complex and tightly timed choreography, the piece maintained a one-to-one ratio between audience-participant and protagonist, creating brief but intimate encounters between the twenty prerecorded protagonists and twenty audience-participants per performance. The result was a process of somatic witnessing via kinesthetic surrogation, or what I call *somatic drag*.

Somatic Drag

With the term *somatic drag*, I intentionally index cultural practices of cross-gender, cross-temporal performance, as well as scientific research behind various mimetic performance therapies. At its basis, somatic drag is a referential performance practice grounded in embodied sensation and intersubjective, mimetic movement. Somatic drag is a method of learning about other times and people through kinesthetic movement and at the same time remaining in touch with one’s own time and politics through one’s embodied responses to experience and environment. As in the concept of “somatic witnessing” from the previous chapter, somatic drag engages each participant’s sensory systems as a means of building embodied knowledge of self and other. As we will explore later in the chapter, somatic drag builds upon the neuroscience of mirror neuron networks, as well as on cognitive science theories of enactivism, or how organisms develop understanding of self, other, and world through dynamically interacting with their environments.⁵ I set the case studies of this chapter alongside Action Observation Therapy (AOT), a kinesthetic therapy that has been developed in recent decades to treat post-traumatic brain injury. AOT utilizes recent research on mirror neurons engaged in the process of witnessing and performing embodied actions to create a reparative protocol for brain-injured people seeking to regain physical mobility and socio-motor skills. I look also to role theory, which is foundational to many drama therapy exercises, for a therapeutic perspective on the public health value of engaging in role-play within and across social groups. Bringing together theatrical and therapeutic practices, I consider what reparative function somatic drag might have for impaired empa-

thetic reception and paralyzed social-political systems of responsiveness to war and its many traumatic scars.

Calling this process somatic *drag* invokes the aesthetic and cultural performance practice of “drag,” which is likewise grounded in mimetic enactment. In its most widespread cultural usage, “drag” is known as a spectacular performance of gender transgression, in which normative, preexisting signs of gender are heightened and made legible through costume, makeup, and gestural choreography. Mainstreamed in TV shows like *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and cultural fads like weekend “drag queen brunches,” the term drag tends to conjure signifiers of hyperfemininity exalted across male-sexed bodies: fabulously high heels, glittered cheekbones, arched eyebrows, and skin-tight dresses. In drag, gender is made hypervisible as a performance beyond biological sex, a set of signs and gestures kinesthetically layered (dragged) across and animated by human bodies. Defined by Judith Butler as “performative,” gender is constituted both socially and upon individual bodies as a “repeated set of acts,” an outwardly directed set of kinesthetic and visual signals that, at the same time, affect internal senses of self, identity, and lived experience. As Butler puts it, drag is a form of gender play that purposefully carries (*drags*) with it the normative structures it at once quotes and critiques: “drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself.”⁶ And, as a performance of gender, drag is a practice of sameness and difference, as each iteration is an opportunity to reinscribe imitative structures and to repeat them *with a difference*.⁷ That is, drag is at once reiterative and individualized: it is rewritten across each body, with enough familiarity to be recognizable and enough change to be individuated. (Indeed, RuPaul’s competitive show is predicated upon who can “own,” or recognizably individuate, their drag performance most impressively.) As such, drag is an embodied encounter with that collective performance form we call culture: a form of embodied communication through which individuals recognize, replicate, revise, and take ownership of their own roles within their culture.

Performance studies proliferates theories of drag, using the concept to unsettle ontological structures far beyond gender, such as archives, reenactment, capitalism, nationalism, and even time itself. My term “somatic drag” is another pass at this tradition, with a particular emphasis on what the embodied practice of drag can reveal about the myriad subject positions and experiences that make up international warfare. I consider how drag aestheticizes the labor and desire invested in *passing*: passing *as* (e.g., a gender, race, age, nationality, patriot), as well as *passing along* (as in cultural or familial

traditions). How do our bodies know what we know about war? How can those understandings shift through engaging in unfamiliar, or defamiliarized, embodied encounters with contemporary war?

Central to my theorization of somatic drag is Joseph Roach's concept of "surrogation," which provides a way of thinking about continuity and the *passing along* of stories and experiences, even across breakages between generations, bodies, and communities at war. In *Cities of the Dead*, Roach argues for the historiographic power of cultural rituals and performance acts as choreographic scripts passed through bodies and across time.⁸ As Roach puts it, "to perform in this sense is to bring forth, to make manifest, and to transmit" historical memory and lived experiences between bodies in ways that both escape and exceed that which can be captured in—or remembered by—archives and written records.⁹ Somatic drag is a method for bringing forth and manifesting bodily consequences of history—in these cases, of histories of war. It is led by bodies that have borne the consequences of war most directly and transmitted, through mimetic enactment, to those who are more distant from but no less implicated by those consequences.

Time, as well as bodies, is a foundational player in somatic drag. Investigating "drag" in her analysis of Civil War reenactment practices in the U.S., Rebecca Schneider asks, "What if time (re)turns? What does it *drag* along with it?"¹⁰ In her rhapsodic response to this question, Schneider invokes Elizabeth Freeman's concept of "temporal drag," by which Freeman "refuses to dismiss temporal replay as 'merely' citational, . . . instead reading for the *force* of citation in the political present."¹¹ As Schneider argues, temporal drag allows for a simultaneity of here and there, now and then, self and other, that does not efface or eclipse the one with the other: "the past can simultaneously be past—genuine pastness—and *on the move*, co-present, not 'left behind.'"¹² Out of this formulation, disparate bodies and time frames can produce "mutually disruptive energy" as bodies (corporeal and politic) in the present grapple with bodies from other times and places, never fully eclipsing one another as they "touch across time."¹³

Somatic drag is a practice of bodies, from different times, places, and political realities, *on the move* and, at the same time, persistently located. Somatic drag contends with how bodies—then and now, here and there—both *move* and *matter*. The knowledge gained from and by bodies in motion, what dance scholar Deidre Sklar calls "kinesthesia," has been largely "omitted from the western sensorium" and culturally subsumed, even in dance studies, to a "visualist bias."¹⁴ However, the language in which militarized

cultural habits, and material effects of those cultural habits, communicate is sensory—proprioceptive, interoceptive, kinesthetic—as well as political. Somatic drag can reveal the imitative structures and citational force of militarism, reproduced consciously and unconsciously through individual and collective bodies in motion. Somatic drag thus indexes human habituation to militarism and the resulting ways that contemporary cultures are shaped by war trauma through the language of bodily senses. Moreover, because it is a performance-based practice, somatic drag can remind participants that bodies (including their own) are political actors. Our bodies are carriers of past war trauma, which we may unknowingly enact and reproduce, *and* agentic entities that can move *with a difference* in future encounters with diverse peoples and beliefs.

Indeed, to speak of *moving* suggests not only kinesthetic activity, but also feelings, emotions, and that slippery yet powerful human capacity: empathy. Empathy is often described as “being moved” by the condition or experience of another; and yet, usually “being moved” is imaginative or figurative, rather than literal. However, somatic drag engages an older definition of empathy, which posits kinesthetic awareness as the center of intersubjective connectivity. As Susan Leigh Foster describes in *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, empathy was coined by eighteenth-century German aestheticians seeking to define “a kind of physical connection between viewer and art in which the viewer’s own body would move into and inhabit the various features of the artwork.”¹⁵ Despite its origins in physical sensation and embodied experience, the meaning of empathy shifted over the course of the twentieth century, “eventually residing with the domain of psychology where it has been investigated largely as an emotional, and not physical experience.”¹⁶ Sklar’s concept of “kinesthetic empathy,” which I employ throughout the chapter, instead seeks to recenter the moving, sensing body into discourses of cognitive and affective knowledge production.¹⁷ As she puts it, kinesthetic empathy is “re-cognizing kinesthetically” an event, person, or experience that can only be partially accessed by other senses or intellectual faculties. Kinesthetic empathy is made available by “participat[ing] with another’s movement or another’s sensory experience of movement.”¹⁸

Situation Rooms, and the following case study of *Grandchildren of Hiroshima*, an annual community performance in Hiroshima, Japan, each center somatic drag as a representational and experiential performance modality. They contribute to a genre of immersive, imitative theater pieces/live gaming events that likewise utilize kinesthetic activity (and kinesthetic empathy) as a

means of understanding lived experiences of war and militarism.¹⁹ *Situation Rooms* and *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* each prompt audience-participants to mimetically engage with stories of war trauma across geographic and temporal distances. In so doing, these performances ask audiences to actively participate in representing and re-membering²⁰ experiences of those who have most directly borne the violent impacts of war, while at the same time wrestling with their own relationships to and postmemories of warfare. These participatory performances raise rarely asked questions of contemporary audiences: How might our bodies aid us in understanding something of the vastness, the interconnectedness, and the material effects of the global weapons network? How can experiences of militarized violence—and perhaps also commitments to antiwar activism—be *passed along* from body to body, across generational and geographic distance, and political and national divides? What *moves* within us when we are asked to *move with* other people's experiences in performance?

Of Mirrors and Mimesis: Action Observation Therapy and Kinesthetic Empathy

Action Observation Therapy (AOT) is a relatively recent trauma therapy that has been developed utilizing neuroscientific discoveries of mirror neurons and neural plasticity. The discovery of mirror neuron networks in the early 1990s revealed that kinesthetic and proprioceptive sensors work in concert with optical-cognitive processes when witnessing the actions, experiences, and even emotions of another being.²¹ In the past two decades, AOT has employed this inbuilt neurological process to treat patients with traumatic brain injuries, partial paralysis, and impaired mobility. AOT researchers found that when patients with partial paralysis undergo occupational therapy, observing a performance of motor skills lost to traumatic brain injury significantly enhanced the recovery of their impaired motor skills. When repeated over time in AOT, the process of observing physical mobility accelerated a patient's ability to themselves regain physical mobility. These findings suggest that observation paired with mirroring actions with one's own body greases the wheels, as it were, for learning or relearning actions that are not yet possible.

In a 2007 pilot study, Italian neuroscientists Morales-Rodriguez and Pavard first conducted AOT in a virtual reality environment according to

the following hypothesis: “the virtual platform provides the patient with a vision of his hands undertaking a movement that he cannot perform.”²² They believed that, according to the “mirror neuron paradigm,” such an experience would “induce a cerebral plasticity and increase the patient’s motor recovery.”²³ A description of their study will clarify the process:

There are two protocols for the session that the real therapist could select: “real feedback” protocol or “improved” protocol. According to the protocol, the movements of the patient will either be reproduced exactly in the virtual session (the patient will see his hand moving as in reality) or artificially amplified (“improved” protocol). With the improved protocol the patient sees a gesture that he himself cannot do (application of the therapeutic paradigm based on mirror neuron concept). The idea behind this approach is that the perception of his “false” movements activates gradually the motor circuits associated with the production of real movements.²⁴

The results of this study, along with subsequent controlled studies of VR-AOT, suggest that performing AOT through VR results in an accelerated recovery and higher rate of success overall, with patients regaining use of their impaired limbs and diminished motor skills. I have yet to find any conclusive research that indicates that mirror neurons themselves fire any differently when observation occurs through VR than when watching a live person. However, VR appears to be a particularly effective medium for AOT, due to the immersivity of VR environments and the adaptability of programming, such that avatars can be sculpted in such a way as to mirror the visual details of a user’s physical appearance more accurately. While it is still an emergent arena of research, neurological studies on expertise and mirror networks suggest that prior experience, or a subject’s familiarity with a given action or activity, affects the responsiveness of their mirror neuron networks. For example, if an experienced guitar player watches a video of someone playing guitar chords, their brain activity shows stronger “mirroring” activity than someone who does not have prior experience playing the guitar themselves.²⁵ This suggests that our degree of identification with the actions or behaviors of another person has an impact on the responsiveness of our mirror neuron networks.

That said, identification, like the gender play invoked in drag, is not a stable or unchanging process. A foundational aspect of mirror neuron networks is that they are adaptive over time. Recent neurological research has shown

that our mirror neuron networks are sensitive to taking on new subjects and experiences to mirror: "The brain changes throughout a lifetime and learns to relate the experiences of the individual to the experience that we witness in others. . . . This gradual learned coupling of the witnessing of experience with the observer's own experience eventually allows neurons to adopt mirroring functions."²⁶ This means that a certain action or person that might not have triggered a mirror neuron response a few years or even days ago has the capacity to do so now or in the future, based on our changing levels of identification, attentiveness, and sensitivity to another's lived experience.

In theatrical terms, VR-AOT operates through a sensorial suspension of disbelief that moves participants toward new, previously impossible capabilities. The VR rendering of a subject's hands performing tasks that she cannot do in real life at once cues and represents the mirror neurons that would be firing in her mind, creating what we might think of as a theatrical spectacle of a not yet possible act. The VR representation of the "improved protocol" is actually happening in the present moment (in the mirror neurons of the subject) and, at the same time, representing an aspirational future. However, unlike the physically passive suspension of disbelief that attends spectatorship in illusionistic theater, this model of observation is paired with physical action on the part of the observer as well, thus anchoring the theatricality of the "improved protocol" in an interactive and embodied rehearsal process of repetition and revision.

Studies of mirror neurons resonate with aspects of kinesthetic empathy—or the affective knowledge we gain from moving with and in response to others. Neuroscientists have hypothesized that mirror neurons are the basis for the human capacity for empathy, as we perceive the emotional states and physiological experiences of other beings by physically experiencing mirrored reflections of these states in our own neurons.²⁷ In other words, as Sklar cannily puts it, "the connection between motion and e-motion is not just linguistic play."²⁸ Annie Murphy Paul explains this process: "When interacting with other people, we subtly and unconsciously mimic their facial expressions, gestures, posture, and vocal pitch. Then, via the interoception of our own bodies' signals, we perceive what the other person is feeling because we feel it in ourselves."²⁹ While Paul's description assumes some level of neurophysiological normativity and an innate ability to accurately perceive one's interoceptive senses, her argument is supported by neuroscientific studies that link interoceptive sensitivity to cognitive and affective empathy.³⁰ Researchers have found that people with higher degrees of interoceptive awareness—for

example, being able to accurately sense one's own heartbeat—have a higher tendency to unconsciously mimic others when listening or witnessing.³¹ These mirroring actions in turn yield higher levels of empathy, as subjects that mimicked their partner's body language could more accurately detect—that is, both sense and name—the emotional states of others.³² In effect, tuning into one's own interoceptive bodily cues, or even deliberately mirroring the expressions and gestures of another person, can hone emotional intelligence about both oneself and others, enacting what some psychologists call “social interoception.”³³

Kinesthetic empathy, and the affective and cognitive information it yields, thus provides insights that cannot be accessed through intellectual cognition alone. As Paul summarizes: “The body acts as a critical conduit, supplying the brain with the visceral information it lacks.”³⁴ Taken in concert with AOT, these theories suggest that the interplay of observation, interoceptive awareness, and movement involved in mimetic performance practices such as somatic drag might play a significant role in how we, as humans, can develop—or repair—our capacities for caring about the lived experiences of others.

Role-Playing as Social/Ethical Therapy in *Situation Rooms*

While *Situation Rooms* was not designed or marketed as therapy, the similarities of the piece's dramaturgy to VR-AOT suggests that the immersive, kinesthetic performance might have reparative potential for impaired social/empathetic systems of responsiveness to the violent effects of war. The use of prerecorded film to navigate a material set puts *Situation Rooms* closer to augmented reality (AR) than VR, but, as in VR-AOT, the participants of *Situation Rooms* were cued to observe and then enact the kinesthetic movements of a given protagonist as they navigated the same set.³⁵ Zofia Smolarska, a Polish assistant director of *Situation Rooms*, could have been describing a VR (or AR)-AOT session as she detailed the kinesthetic cues of the performance:

By comparing the frame with the reality of the studio space, the spectator-player guesses the position of the camera operator and by following that path may get the impression of viewing the world from that operators' perspective. At times the spectators must kneel, bend or climb a ladder, connect a USB device to the computer in order to transfer data, pour borscht or wear a bulletproof vest. In [this] way, the player takes on the role of his or her guide,



Fig. 15. A participant experiencing Rimini Protokoll's *Situation Rooms*. (Photograph by Jorg Baumann, used by permission.)

recreating their route and activities, including interactions with other participants in the game.³⁶

We can assume that, as in a VR-AOT session, this method of pairing observation and action in *Situation Rooms* via the iPad screens and the shared set would have engaged participants' mirror neuron networks to successfully mirror the kinesthetic movements of their protagonist guides. The set within which the participant was moving was the same set within which the video was recorded and would thus accentuate the process of the mirror neurons in the brain making a match between experiences. Likewise, the first-person perspective of the video sought to connect the two disparate bodies, creating a visual-haptic relationship between the hands of the prerecorded protagonist and the participant's own hands.

Multisensorial elements further sutured participants' experiences with details of the narratives that animated their journey through space and time. Differences in temperature, smells of disinfectants and food, and the taste of borscht became theatrical methods of further immersion. For example, while playing a surgeon from Doctors Without Borders who was reading through a

briefing on an upcoming mission in Sierra Leone, Wilmink experienced what she described as the experience of travel to another country:

I was asked to get up and walk into the next room, passing through a brightly patterned African wax-cloth curtain and appearing in a temporary medical field office. In this brightly lit room, the plastic walls moved softly as a fan blew warm air back and forth. Although I cannot be certain it is true, I distinctly remember this space feeling warmer than other areas of the building. The air drifted on my skin, and I immediately felt as if I had moved through space and time into a different country.

The sensory locatedness was intensified by what she felt as the “punctum” of the role-play experience:

Further aiding this sensation was the striking smell of Dettol, which permeated the space. . . . Although its usual function is merely as a cheap antiseptic, Dettol is imbricated into my personal experience and childhood growing up in South Africa. Because it is cheap and easily accessible, this chemical was used everywhere from households to medical clinics, and its powerful odour immediately grounded me in the sense of place that *Situation Rooms* was trying to replicate.³⁷

The role-play/reenactment of *Situation Rooms* thus engaged kinesthetic and proprioceptive senses to communicate with participants, prompting a theatrical suspension of disbelief that made time, space, and identity porous.

While the performance occurred in a seemingly consequence-free frame, the mirror neurons that were triggered in the process could, we can assume, have lasting effects in real life beyond the theater. *Situation Rooms* was potentially stimulating participants to build new mirror neuron networks between themselves and previously unfamiliar subject positions, or to connect empathetically with others through new experiences of social interoception. Rather like the “rewiring” of DE-CRUIT combat veterans described in chapter 2, participants of *Situation Rooms* were potentially rewiring their own sensory, emotional capacities to respond to other humans who held vastly different positions on the sprawling web of contemporary warfare.

Drama therapy explains this capacity for change, or “rewiring” of intersubjective networks, through role theory. As described in chapter 1, role-play has been a part of drama therapy from its inception and provides another way

of understanding the therapeutic aspects of mimetic enactment, or somatic drag for social groups and intersubjective relationships. J. L. Moreno, an early founder of modern drama therapy, began developing role theory through what he called psychodrama and sociodrama.³⁸ These drama therapy techniques, designed for individuals and groups, respectively, utilized the enactment of roles to aid participants in repairing their internal self-conceptions and relationships to others in their lives. Intentional role shifting—that is, moving through a range of social roles—is frequently used as an exercise to facilitate recognition of prejudice in a social group experiencing conflict and to build kinesthetic empathy for the experiences of others in the group. Antonina Garcia, a drama therapist who works internationally on conflict resolution, argues that physically *moving* into other roles is crucial to this process: “Although we are capable of reversing roles with people in our minds, actually changing places and stepping into the other’s shoes provides us with information and empathy in an even more profound way.”³⁹ In Developmental Transformations Therapy, a highly physical drama therapy designed for trauma treatment, role-play is likewise significant: “Unlike real roles, imaginal roles can be reversed, transformed, played with, giving the client experience in questioning and experimenting with new behaviors.”⁴⁰ Embodied role-play thus becomes a tool for exploring differences between self and other, as well as experimenting with the capacity for change within oneself. Indeed, the aim in Developmental Transformations Therapy is to “invite [participants] into the theatrical playspace, where they can play *with difference*.”⁴¹

Beyond clinical trauma-focused therapies, the physical dynamism and change that is engendered through role-play is at once a sign of and a pathway to health for a social group. As Garcia states: “Healthy groups provide access to many roles so that no one is role locked into any single position.”⁴² Just as mirroring an avatar or another person in AOT can aid in regaining physical mobility after traumatic brain injury, playing the role of another person in a drama therapy exercise, or in a performance, can provide opportunities to experience shifts in perspective and behavior—and ultimately to create personal and communal growth within a larger social framework.

Combining the “protocols” I have introduced so far (clinical AOT, kinesthetic empathy, role-play theory, and the physical dramaturgy of Rimini Protokoll), I return to surmise the reparative potential of somatic drag in performance frameworks like *Situation Rooms*. Might a performance like *Situation Rooms* begin to do for audiences composed of “implicated subjects” what these reparative somatic therapies do for trauma survivors? If AOT can

help survivors of traumatic brain injury rebuild fine motor skills, and if drama therapy can support trauma survivors in learning to connect to others in trusting, intimate relationships, might somatic drag help to address paralysis of ethical action in audience-spectators in Western centers of power? *What moves within us when we are asked to move with other people's experiences in performance?*

A Kinesthetic Map of Contemporary War

Although they were not trying to rehabilitate mobility or improve the ethics of their participants, Rimini Protokoll did have a conceptually reparative goal for their audiences. As they described in their promotional materials, the group sought to tell a “story of war [that] has no beginning and no end. The old war in which soldiers fought against soldiers has given way to a war that spreads and gradually involves increasing parts of our society. . . . The new monstrously-intelligent war of the 21st century . . . is everywhere at the same time.”⁴³ Their title—*situation rooms*—deliberately pluralized the seat of power of contemporary warfare: the famed “Situation Room” of the U.S. Pentagon.

The Situation Room creates a situation. Where previously there was only incoherent information, now various sites are linked in space and time . . . Simultaneous events are live-streamed into a room where various perspectives become a single gaze. Despite the complexity of the global space, this one site [is the only] place where it is possible to get an overview and make a decision, resulting in a linear chain of action leading to the Commander in Chief.⁴⁴

In contrast to the singular center of power of the U.S. armed forces, Rimini Protokoll's *Situation Rooms* presented a plurality of sites and subject positions, connected through a vast global network of weapons trading and the multiple fracture points of war.

Considering *Situation Rooms* as an Action Observation Therapy or drama therapy session gone theatrical, the somatic drag experienced by the audience-participants was far more than conceptual. While compressing the complex network of the global weapons trade into a theatrical space is seemingly reductive, Rimini Protokoll created a kinesthetic, traversable map of contemporary warfare, extending an intellectual argument into the sinews



Fig. 16. Doctors Without Borders room, in Rimini Protokoll's *Situation Rooms*. (Photograph by Jorg Baumann, used by permission.)

and musculature of a ticket-holding body politic. The kinesthetic actions passed from protagonists to participants contradicted dominant perceptions of contemporary war as disembodied, remotely controlled, impersonal, intangible, and so dispersed as to be untraceable, untouchable, and out of reach. By creating an individualized, sensorial register through which to bear witness, *Situation Rooms* opened the door for new channels of experiential knowledge about diverse experiences of warfare to arise in participants.

Rimini Protokoll thus also played at physically distributing the actions involved in ongoing global warfare. The piece made palpable something of what it felt like to be a nodal point—at once an actor and a witness, a player and a producer—in an interconnected economy of militarism. Observation and action within *Situation Rooms* rendered physical the concept that no singular subject is the origin point or the destination of affective exchange in contemporary war; it is instead a shared project, *a coproduced, coenacted situation*.

Wilmink recalls the feeling of coproduction as a participant in *Situation Rooms*. Recounting an interaction with another audience member, whom her iPad cued her to outfit in a bulletproof vest, Wilmink remembers: "I made eye contact with the other spectator, and for a moment we were bound in the gesture of 'acting together,' of play-acting along with the narrative, but also knowing that we were looking at it from the outside at the same time and remembering our role as theatre-goers within the strange immersive fiction."⁴⁵ As she struggled to balance the iPad and the heavier-than-it-looked vest, Wilmink and her co-collaborator balanced between reality and representation, kinesthesia and cognition, role-play and material production. Even as she noted something of a knowing wink exchanged in this moment, an acknowledgment of the fiction of somatic drag, she also drew deep meaning from the immersive role-play experiment. As Wilmink concluded in her review: *Situation Rooms* "calls attention to the viewer's actions within the context of the work and their roles and responsibilities as a participant. Within the broader themes of the production, the spectator is implicated in the same processes of the global arms race as the figures we see on screen."⁴⁶ Wilmink's analysis points to the sociological effects of the somatic drag enacted in *Situation Rooms*, suggesting that the mimetic role-play was more than just shared choreography between bodies: it was a rehearsal for an ethical contract between diverse humans.

As If . . .

Still, there are notable differences and gaps between AOT and *Situation Rooms*, and applying a therapeutic framework to *Situation Rooms* remains largely aspirational. It is difficult, after all, to believe that spending seven minutes playing a child soldier will yield meaningful shifts in the psyche or body of an audience-participant. And, despite Wilmink's positive response to participating in the piece, other audience-participants that I have spoken with felt more ambivalent about their experiences. Others that saw the same production that Wilmink saw in Toronto have described it to me as "a little chaotic by the end" and "super ambitious and interesting but not in a way that felt ethically responsible."⁴⁷

Indeed, some critics have interrogated the work as colonialist dramaturgy, by which the lived experiences of the protagonists came to visibility only through the bodies of the largely Western, privileged audience-

participants.⁴⁸ The byline of “live action video game” that Rimini Protokoll used to promote the theater piece as it toured to cosmopolitan urban centers around the world could certainly be read as an example of this attitude. Zofia Smolarska, the Polish performance theorist mentioned above who assisted the directors, has pointed out several ethical missteps in the process. She critiqued the lack of agency given to the protagonists in the tightly edited production and translation of their stories, as well as their physical absence in the performance environment. The synchronized uniformity of the protagonist videos precluded the idiosyncrasies and personal aesthetics of individual protagonists from meaningfully shaping the videos that represented them. Participants do not see, for example, the Sudanese mother who struggled to keep her young children, bored and restless in their family’s assigned attic room, from sneaking into the rooms of the other protagonists and raising general havoc. Or the reporter who chafed against the rustic props and set décor that the production designers have chosen for his journalist office in Sudan, despite his descriptions of the computers, air conditioning, and fresh paint. Or the husband who, when filming his dialogue with his wife about their children’s disrupted educations, kept focusing the camera on her hands, nervously touching one another in perpetual motion; instead we see her face, which the German filmmakers insisted would be a clearer focal point for the audience-participants to engage with.⁴⁹

How, without these vital details and idiosyncrasies of lived experience, can a participant’s experience of kinesthetic empathy be complete? How can somatic drag be ethically reparative if it only mirrors aspects of another’s life that are likely to play well across international borders and languages? Can somatic drag be at once accessible, like a video game, and effective, like therapy, across difference and distance?

To be sure, theatrical productions must inevitably leave things out, fit in a given time frame, rely on recognizable aesthetics and cultural conventions, and are bound by legal, logistical, and financial constraints. And the sheer feat of choreographing twenty stories and twenty enactors in a dance of somatic drag is no small undertaking. However, if Rimini Protokoll’s goal was to guide audience members to sense their own subjecthood and agency on the map of global warfare, to have them grasp the thread of another subjective experience and through this connection to sense the size of the cloth, then it was necessary to add additional support—ethically, somatically, and intellectually. The piece was billed as a “live action video game,” and the pace and intensity of the experience followed suit. Like a tightly curated live video game expe-

rience (think a “live event” on *Fortnite*, for example), the participants were not able to choose at what pace they played or to modulate the timing based on their own sensory experiences or personal interest. The representational impulses of the protagonists in the filming process were sidelined in favor of the uniformity and legibility of the films. In short, the embodied processes of representation and reception involved in the production of *Situation Rooms* could have been practiced in slower, more agentic, and ultimately more effective ways for both the protagonists and the participants.

Most fundamentally, *Situation Rooms* would have benefited from more time and somatic processing skills for all involved. Somatic therapists frequently emphasize slowing down as one of the most important skills to learn when listening to bodily sensations and being guided by them. For protagonists, a pace determined by their own embodied and narrative rhythms would have better supported them in somatically representing their own stories in video form. In somatic psychotherapy, a slower pace is a purposeful counterbalance to the overwhelming speed and force of the initial traumatic event. As Mary I. Daly explains, trauma is typically defined as a violent event that occurred too quickly or intensely for one’s body to mobilize a sufficient defense response.⁵⁰ Having to represent one’s experience of trauma into a concise narrative story can likewise feel too fast or pressured. This suggests that, instead of tightly edited seven-minute narrations, allowing the protagonists to represent their stories in whatever idiosyncratic time frame and using any symbolic, nonlinguistic forms that they chose would be a more supportive process and likely a more accurate representation of their experience.

On the audience side, the somatic drag of *Situation Rooms* could have been better supported with the addition of somatic awareness breaks for audience-participants that cued them to tune into their own interoceptive senses. Action could have been paused for somatic inquiry as in a somatic therapy session: “You just opened your eyes; are you aware of something new?” or “How does your body know that?”⁵¹ Before transitioning immediately into the next protagonist’s story, participants might be offered time to make note of their sensory experiences of being in a given space in present time—such as Wilmink’s personal association with Detoll—thus highlighting sensorial connections to and differences between their experience and that of the protagonists. Such pauses and shifts in attention could have been dramatically rendered and built into the “game play” of the piece, thus adding an important layer to the intersubjective dramaturgy and further communicat-

ing Rimini Protokoll's message that we are all active players on the stage of global warfare.

These speculative suggestions notwithstanding, I still believe that the somatic drag that *Situation Rooms* asked of its participants was a step in a positive direction, toward necessary reparative work. In Western centers of power like the U.S., the majority of civilians receive international news of war through smart phones and computer screens. These virtual, linguistic, and visual channels are consumed in largely passive positions, leaving the bodies of those consuming the news unmoved, untouched, and physically undisturbed. The somatic and multisensory modalities of engagement in *Situation Rooms* offer valuable alternatives to these habits of consumption, inviting movement and the opportunity for somatic processing of one's own relationship to contemporary systems of militarism and war. Even as I see the missteps of the production, I remain intrigued by the therapeutic, reparative potentials of theatrical (re)enactment. With care and dramaturgical support, could somatic drag function as a kind of reparative social therapy? Might performatively "passing as" someone else serve to pass along some of the weight of global warfare that we all, in reality, help produce?

Somatic Drag and Intergenerational Antinuclear Activism

The next case study invests in precisely these questions in relation to intergenerational war trauma in Japan. Practices of somatic drag, kinesthetic empathy, and intergenerational surrogation bear particular cultural urgency in Hiroshima. There, the growing temporal distance from the end of World War II and the deaths of remaining atomic bomb survivors are motivating new strategies for passing the torch of antinuclear activism. Hiroshima has been a global epicenter of antinuclear activism and what civic leaders call "peace education" for over eighty years, since the detonation of an atomic bomb over the densely populated city on August 6, 1945. For many people born in Hiroshima as second- and third-generation atomic bomb survivors, intergenerational war trauma and the ensuing commitment to antinuclear activism is something of a birthright. Their elders are known as *Hibakusha*, the Japanese word for survivors of the atomic bombs, literally meaning "bomb affected person." The Hibakusha, as a community, have been prominent and dedicated leaders of the antinuclear movement and the peace education programs in Hiroshima. A central strategy of Hibakusha antinuclear activism

is to keep alive their embodied memories of the suffering caused by nuclear warfare by sharing their testimonies, stories, drawings, and other artworks with younger generations in Japan and international visitors to Hiroshima.

Hibakusha and their personal testimonies have been instrumental in the formation of international nuclear arms treaties and movements against the testing of nuclear weapons around the globe. Their efforts have been internationally lauded, as exemplified by two recent Nobel Peace Prizes: several Hibakusha were honored as part of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons that won the award in 2017, and in 2024, the prize was wholly awarded to the group Nihon Hidankyo, a grassroots organization of Hibakusha from Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The Nobel committee specifically uplifted Hibakusha strategies of embodied testimony about nuclear war trauma. As the Nobel Prize press release in 2024 stated, Nihon Hidankyo “is receiving the Peace Prize for its efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons and for demonstrating through witness testimony that nuclear weapons must never be used again.”⁵² Within the larger context of antinuclear activism, the committee wrote, “the testimony of the Hibakusha . . . is unique” because “these historical witnesses have helped to generate and consolidate widespread opposition to nuclear weapons around the world by drawing on personal stories [and] creating educational campaigns based on their own experience.”⁵³

The value placed on personal, descriptive testimony of the Hibakusha and the compelling delivery of that testimony in live, co-present spaces is palpably evident in Hiroshima. On a research trip to Hiroshima in 2019, I had the opportunity to meet with and listen to several Hibakusha and many of their descendants working as artists and activists (or “artivists” as they called themselves). I stayed in the World Friendship Center, a simple and welcoming guest house in a residential neighborhood not far from the Peace Memorial and Museum, which has been run by American peace activists since 1965.⁵⁴ Throughout the decades, the World Friendship Center has been a community home to Hibakusha, where they tell their personal stories of the bombing and its aftermath to school children from Hiroshima and other parts of Japan, and to the many international visitors who come to Hiroshima throughout the year.⁵⁵ A recurring theme in my conversations with Hibakusha and with the numerous artivists I met in Hiroshima was mounting anxiety about the passage of time, as those with living memories of the atomic bombs have dwindled radically in number. The Hibakusha who are still living were young children at the time of the atomic bomb and are now entering nursing homes and hospice care. Thus, practices of intergenerational surrogation and ques-

tions about how to effectively pass along commitment to antinuclear activism bear particular weight in Hiroshima.⁵⁶ The issues are made all the more pressing in Japan with a national government that has shown signs of returning to militarized strategies in regional conflicts with China and Korea. Indeed, everywhere, from Vladimir Putin's aggressive military campaign in Ukraine, to Donald Trump's eagerness to flex U.S. military control over other nations, our world is tuned, once again, to threats of nuclear war.

The community-based performance strategies of Hiroshima activists are thus motivated by a specific and urgent mission: to provide those without living memory of the horrors of atomic warfare with memorable, affective experiences of survivor testimonies that can fuel future generations of antinuclear activism. In variations on somatic drag, these activists employ kinesthetic and mimetic strategies for *passing along* embodied memories of atomic war. The annual theater production of *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* is the main case study that I will use, although there are several other community-based groups that similarly connect Hibakusha testimony with intergenerational participants through movement.⁵⁷ Inaugurated in 2015, *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* is re-devised each year with a new cast of participants from the Hiroshima community, most of them school-age children. These community participant-performers take part in a far more in-depth rehearsal and performance process of somatic drag than do the audience-participants in *Situation Rooms*, but there are important parallels to be drawn between these processes—and the effects that such movement-based research practices have on intergenerational postmemories of war.

Grandchildren of Hiroshima

Audience members sit along the two long sides of a large, open playing space. They are a mixed bunch: many Japanese families, young children, grandparents, as well as a large contingent of visitors from around the world that have come to Hiroshima for the seventy-fourth anniversary of the atomic bomb dropped on that city. There is no physical barrier or level change between the audience and the playing space. Cast members enter in a line: there are many children, ranging between elementary and teenage years, as well as adults that could be their parents and grandparents. They all carry objects of personal importance to them—stuffed animals, blankets, books. They arrange these personal objects in shapes on the wooden



Fig. 17. Presenting a Hibakusha interview in *Grandchildren of Hiroshima*, by London Bubble Theatre Company and the community of Hiroshima, 2015. (Photograph courtesy of London Bubble Theatre Company.)

floor until they have constructed a physical representation of the city of Hiroshima. Blankets and clothing form the seven rivers that flow through the city, stuffed animals and books created neighborhoods and surrounding hills. The cast members then move through the audience, asking each audience member where they live or are staying while visiting in Hiroshima. As the places within the city are identified, the cast members place a paper crane on that spot on the handmade map until everyone in the room has been located on the map of Hiroshima.

Lights shift and the recorded voice of a Hibakusha begins to play. One of the children on stage lifts a microphone and plays their role in the recorded conversation, asking aloud, “What were you doing that morning? Did you have to go to school?”⁵⁸ The entire company, actors and audience alike, listen for the answer.

The *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* has become something of a community ritual in Hiroshima. The performance piece, which is created anew each year with a new cast of community members, began in 2015 with the seventieth anniversary of the atomic bomb. As with the 2019 production that I

began to describe above, the performance joins the many other events that mark the annual commemoration of the atomic bombing on and around August 6: paper lanterns that visitors light and float down the rivers; the displays of hundreds of sets of one thousand paper cranes folded by children from around the world; stories and speeches by Hibakusha; and the ancient circle dances of the Obon festival, a traditional Japanese festival honoring the spirits of ancestors that falls only a few days after the anniversary of the atomic bomb.

Grandchildren of Hiroshima initially emerged out of an international collaboration with London Bubble Theater, a community-based performance group from the U.K. London Bubble Theater was formed around the mission of using “vernacular theater,” which employs ethnographic interviewing techniques to connect young people with their city’s or country’s history. A few years before the Hiroshima collaboration, the company had produced a similar performance project called *Grandchildren of the Blitz* in London, in which children in London interviewed the now elderly survivors of the World War II aerial bombings.⁵⁹ For *Grandchildren of Hiroshima*, several facilitators from London Bubble Theater came to Hiroshima in 2014; they gathered a group of fifteen young people who had grown up in Hiroshima and coordinated interviews with Hibakusha. The facilitators paired Hibakusha who were the same age when the bomb dropped as the present-day children interviewing them.

While in Hiroshima, I interviewed two of the original 2015 cast members, who were fifteen years old when I met them in 2019. The two cast members, Leona and Maila, are twins and were ten years old at the time that they participated in creating the first version of *Grandchildren of Hiroshima*; they were also performers in the 2019 production that I was able to view by video while there. Their mother, Mirei, works as a translator and host at the World Friendship Center; she is part of the Hiroshima activist community and greatly enriched my connections with all the activists I met while there. Mirei and her daughters emphasized that, while the theater process was unique for Hiroshima youth, there was already a well-established local tradition of “Peace Education,” centered around the practice of Hibakusha telling their memories of the atomic bombing and its horrific aftermath to schoolchildren. Most frequently, the relationship that Hiroshima schoolchildren have to Hibakusha is that of listening to their stories in a large school group. Sometimes Hibakusha show paintings or drawings they have made to help the children picture their memories. However, the children are not typ-

ically prompted to respond by enacting or responding to these stories with their own bodies.

The facilitators from London Bubble Theater thus added to these established practices what I have been calling somatic drag through a process they describe as “vernacular theater.” Vernacular theater making is a deeply embodied, intergenerational process, “made from local materials, by local people.” They explain:

We use the term Vernacular in the same way it [is] used to describe a type of architecture. Vernacular architecture describes a style of building that is made using local materials, built by local people, often without a formal design to start from and using a local style. . . . Sometimes specialist engineers are brought in to do specialist jobs, but most of the work is done by the people and the process is social as well as constructional. It results in quite humble buildings—houses and barns rather than cathedrals. The practice is handed down through generations.⁶⁰

Houses and barns, as opposed to cathedrals, are spaces to touch, to live in; they are often messy, idiosyncratic, and hold within them particular smells, textures, and traces of movement.

As Leona and Maila told me about their experiences in 2015, they recalled London Bubble Theater facilitators centering the company’s early work on mundane objects, movements, and social bonding. The facilitators emphasized the significance of sensorial memories as they prepared the children participants to interview the Hibakusha, asking the children to describe their own sensory experiences and memories of mundane life as a way of helping them imagine what they might ask the Hibakusha about their long-ago childhoods. Most of all, they encouraged the children to ask questions of the Hibakusha that they really wanted to know the answer to, thereby foregrounding, and validating, the curiosity of present day ten-year-olds about ten-year-olds seventy years earlier.

The interviews, along with historical research that the company conducted, became the foundational material for the theatrical devising process. The 2015 play text, written by Japanese playwright Misaki Setoyama, was constructed nearly entirely of stories from the interviews that the children conducted with Hibakusha. The verbal testimonies of Hibakusha were represented in various ways in the rehearsals and in the performance, most often as prerecorded voices, sometimes with the child that had interviewed them

speaking their question aloud again or simply holding up a microphone to index the interview as source. Occasionally a recording would be doubled with the voice of a live performer, or sometimes a Hibakusha's words would be voiced by a live performer in the piece. Maila recalled that speaking along with the voice of a Hibakusha speaking was the most technically challenging. (Mirei, her mother, said that those were some of the most stirring moments, to hear a young voice speak along with an aged voice.)

The rehearsal process and performance also leaned heavily on imagistic, nonverbal, and movement-based methods of representation. This was in part to transcend language barriers in the communication of the piece for young audiences and non-Japanese speakers. The commemoration events of August 6th annually draw large numbers of international visitors to Hiroshima, and London Bubble Theater has also hosted iterations of the piece in other international locations.⁶¹ Moreover, though the performance remains grounded in the specific accounts of the Hibakusha as they recall what they experienced on August 6, 1945, the physical rehearsals allow present-day cast members to explore what they hear through embodied response and interpretation. Playing on their feet while listening to the recordings of their interviews and re-membering the sensory experiences that Hibakusha described to them, the stories reemerge each year anew through the bodies of the participating performers. Leona and Maila recalled the physical explorations as "a good way for the group to bond and come up with ideas together," as well as a transformational process in which the Hibakusha interviews gained deeper personal significance to each company member.⁶²

While much of the choreography was based in individual memories of surviving the bombing shared by Hibakusha, some moments reflected iconic remains of the atomic bomb. A famous artifact of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima is a white shadow cast upon the concrete wall of Sumitomo Bank, marking the precise stance of a person that was incinerated by the heat flash.⁶³ In the 2015 production of *Grandchildren of Hiroshima*, the company found a way of physically marking such absences: early in the performance, one of the young performers curled up on the ground, laying still as other children sprinkled white dust over and around her prone figure. The girl was then carefully lifted up and carried off by the other company members, leaving the imprint of her body in white on the theater floor. The dust that outlined her body imprint remained throughout the production, gradually becoming disturbed and less distinct as the actors continued their movements. However, the dust and the memory of what it represented never disappeared and



Fig. 18. Dusting of a young performer in *Grandchildren of Hiroshima*, by London Bubble Theatre Company and the community of Hiroshima, 2015. (Photograph courtesy of London Bubble Theatre Company.)

instead became part of the material environment of representation and bodily movement. Performance scholar James Thompson was similarly struck by this dramatic action in his account of the 2015 production: “The play is literally staged over the top of this iconic dust print—almost suggesting that this is the heritage on which this work is based.”⁶⁴ As Thompson notes, the motif of embodied imprints of absent bodies haunted many of the artworks exhibited at the seventieth commemoration of the atomic bombing.⁶⁵ However, the theatrical rendering offered a different way of interacting with the famous image, by moving with it and watching it change over time in shared space. As Thompson describes, “The image is worn away by the performance as it is slowly trodden on throughout the play. The kicking and scattering of the

dust . . . hinted that the play was situated within a tradition, but also started to wear it away; part of a representational legacy attached to the shoes of the actors, but also pushed aside in the act of being walked over.”⁶⁶

Each year since its inception, more Hiroshima residents have joined the *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* process, adding their imaginations and actions to the communal memories of atomic war. The casts have ranged in age from second graders to seventy-year-old community members, and the cast size has expanded from fifteen, in 2015, to thirty in the 2019 production (although the cast size dropped again during the ensuing pandemic years). As in the 2015 process, though no longer with direct facilitation by Bubble Theater, each subsequent cast has conducted interviews with Hibakusha and collaboratively built new stage pictures and movement vocabularies to physicalize the stories they heard. The process of communally devising the work thus remains at the center of the piece, as each year’s performance is created from the collective imaginations and creative responses of a new group of participant performers. The twins, Leona and Maila, continued to participate in the devising process each year since 2015 and reflected on the value of rebuilding the piece anew each year. As Leona said:

It is different every time. And that is what is important. I might really like the way it happened the first time, I mean, I do like that the best, but I also know that I am getting older, I am not the little ten-year-old girl anymore so maybe my role has to change. I can’t say or do all the things I did then, because I am getting older and there are other younger kids.⁶⁷

Leona and Maila said that, especially in the last couple of years, they purposefully let others offer ideas first so that these newer participants could have the experience of finding the stories in their own bodies. Mirei, who has also taken part in multiple performances and restagings, likewise emphasized that the piece is most valuable for its process-based methodology. She said that each iteration has included moments of deeply moving imagery, but that the goal is not to cement any one idea, or to impose a stage picture or movement vocabulary on any new group. It is about each new group finding and shaping their own physical relationship to the material.

True to form, the 2019 production had many stirring sequences. In answer to the child’s questions about the morning of August 6, 1945, articulated in the opening, Hibakusha voices described the everyday activities they had been engaged in on that morning. They had been going to school, helping

to clean their house, reporting to work to help the military forces (as many schoolchildren did in Hiroshima during the war). The company created physical tableaux and movement sequences onstage that mimicked the narrative details. At the point at which the bomb dropped at 8:15 in the morning, a line of children with large floor brooms processed slowly across the length of the stage toward the “map” of Hiroshima they had built at the beginning of the performance. When their brooms reached the personal objects and paper cranes that dotted the landscape, the brooms slowly destroyed the map and pushed everything into unrecognizable disarray.

In a later scene, a Hibakusha who had been a young schoolboy at the time of the atomic bomb told in visceral detail of the destruction that he witnessed as he walked from his school through the city, to his home where his mother and sister had been. Rather than miming any of the horrors, the cast played children’s games throughout the Hibakusha’s story, silently tagging and chasing one another even as the recorded narration told of the extreme suffering that the man had witnessed as a schoolboy after the bomb exploded. In this instance, somatic drag was not used in an attempt to comprehend the incomprehensible, but instead to physically impart that which had been lost in the shocking violence: play, the foundational rhetoric of childhood and community. Later, toward the end of the performance, the company members rebuilt the city, with kimono fabric and scarves giving shape to the rivers. The paper cranes, which had initially symbolized the homes and guest houses of those present in the room, were brought again to repopulate the landscape. Rebuilding the representational landscape of Hiroshima not only symbolized physical reconstruction but also embodied the value of collective stewardship and communal care in the aftermath of atomic war. As with the opening map, everyone had a place in reconstructing Hiroshima, too.

While *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* did not involve as tightly choreographed a form of mimetic enactment as *Situation Rooms*, it amplifies other important aspects of somatic drag that were missing from the Rimini Protokoll production. Workshops focused on physical responses to the descriptions of embodied experiences of war violence, allowing for the Hiroshima participants to find their own versions of somatic drag, making the performances their own. The iterative rehearsal process gave time for those movements—based on the lived experiences of others—to merge with the bodies and imaginations of the participant-performers. Most of all, there was time and community with which to somatically process these experiences, all of which aided the participants in Hiroshima in developing deep

and personal relationships with the testimonies of Hibakusha. Recalling the importance of role theory in drama therapy, the somatic drag reinforced connections between Hibakusha and non-Hibakusha initiated in the interviews, physically transforming the latter from spectators of wartime trauma to stewards of the Hibakusha legacy. As Leona put it, “The feeling that comes of this work is that each performer has a way to play a part in what it means to be Hiroshima, to be one of the grandchildren of Hiroshima.”⁶⁸ Technically, it is the twins’ mother, Mirei, who is a grandchild, generationally, of a Hibakusha; Leona and Maila are great-grandchildren. Still, the statement reveals the powerful shifts in identity that can emerge through embodied role-play and somatic drag.

As time goes on, the performance may need to be renamed to account for more generational recipients of the legacy of Hiroshima—Leona, Maila, and Mirei continue to participate in the annual productions, including the tenth anniversary of *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* in 2025. They have become stewards of the performance methodology itself, carrying forward not only the story of the atomic bomb for visitors to Hiroshima, but also the embodied rehearsal process that can help Hiroshima community participants remember for themselves.

Somatic Dramaturgies of Intergenerational Repair

When practiced across numerous generations, somatic drag can offer a reparative layer to a process that Akiko Hashimoto has called the “intergenerational project of biographical repair.”⁶⁹ Hashimoto compassionately yet sternly notes the dangers of “biographical repair” within intergenerational narratives of war trauma. She explains these as the “interpretive reconstruction of traumatic experiences across generations that often involve selective remembering, strategies of concealment, and assigning guilt to others so that a victim family biography can be constructed, and recovery from trauma can proceed.”⁷⁰ Kinesthetic strategies for telling, witnessing, and processing intergenerational trauma are thus crucial for creating dynamic, multisensory understandings of received stories of war trauma, allowing for meaning to emerge beyond words.

For this reparative process to occur—in excess of spoken narrative and extending beyond the specific experiences of Hibakusha—the *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* had to go beyond *passing as* Hibakusha and negotiate what had

been *passed along* to them. As in Action Observation Therapy, this process was not so much conceptual as it was rendered through physical actions that emerged from observation. Then, over time, the movements could become the participants' own, extending their conceptual and physical understanding beyond what they had previously known. The kinesthetic process was at once a means of learning something of what another person had experienced during the atomic bombing and, at the same time, an exercise in discovering what oneself, as a contemporary recipient of this understanding, might do with that inheritance today.

Indeed, this learning process was extended to local and international audience members. Even though audience members remained seated during the performance of *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* and did not participate directly in the physical dramaturgy of the piece, the performance called their bodies into the space. In the 2019 production, this was dramatically represented through the placement of paper cranes on the map of Hiroshima, each one symbolizing the place where an audience member had slept, woken up, and had tea and breakfast that morning. Beyond this, audience members joined the performers in bearing witness to the stories of Hibakusha. The physical and emotional suffering that Hibakusha recount are designed to carry a somatic charge: their explicit goal is to *pass along* a memorable understanding of the extreme horror of atomic war. I can attest from my own experience of witnessing various Hibakusha share their stories that these survivors do not shy away from sharing their memories in vivid detail.⁷¹ Narrative descriptions and hand motions, often coupled with paintings and drawings they have made to help communicate their memories, are unsparing in their visceral specificity of the suffering that was borne and witnessed. Listening to Hibakusha, it is challenging *not* to have strong, somatic responses to their testimony. The challenge comes in making sense of what you feel and hear.

Having witnessed Hibakusha testimony at various points in my life, I have felt a profound tension between the feeling of empathy for the horrors they suffered and of ethical responsibility for the use of atomic weaponry by the U.S. military. Although the events occurred before my birth, the war between the U.S. and Japan and the use of atomic weaponry by the U.S. military to kill Japanese civilians has shaped international politics and conflict negotiations throughout my lifetime. My own inheritance as an American citizen in relation to the watershed event of atomic war is called up when I listen to Hibakusha testimony, expressed as strong tension in my core, tightness in my throat, an accelerated heartbeat, and sweating palms. The sensations bespeak

a mix of guilt, horror, sorrow, and rage over the embodied effects of the bombing, and also over the fact that the complexities of this history are rarely, if ever, discussed in American education systems or mainstream culture. I first consciously experienced this mix of sensations as a high schooler, living in Japan for a summer when I was sixteen. I had gone to Hiroshima on a day trip by myself to visit the Hiroshima Peace Museum—my mother was teaching in the nearby city of Kanazawa and had my much younger sister with her, preventing them from accompanying me. I recall speechless shock gripping me as I made my way through the museum and had my first encounter with a Hibakusha in one of the rooms there. The sensation of total horror over the human suffering experienced in Hiroshima, compounded by the knowledge that it was my country that had wrought it, descended on my inner organs like a dam breaking. Though I didn't have words for it at the time, I was reckoning with my own postmemories of World War II and identity as an implicated subject of nuclear war.⁷² Further complicating this awakening was the cognitive dissonance between what I heard and saw in Hiroshima and the sanitized representations I had previously read in U.S. textbooks that justified the decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan as a means to "end the war."⁷³ Though it would be another decade before I would read Joseph Roach, the encounter produced for me a counter-memory that awakened me to the "disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences."⁷⁴

Throughout his account as a participant observer of the 2015 production of *Grandchildren of Hiroshima*, Thompson describes what I would call his own process of somatic witnessing. It began with probing at his own post-memory as a child of World War II. His father had served in the British military, serving with the Allied forces in the "Pacific Theater" of that war; he had spent several years in a prisoner of war (POW) camp in Thailand where, toward the end of the war, he and his fellow POWs had been forced to dig their own mass grave. Told since a young age that, had the atomic bombs not been dropped, his father would have been killed as a POW by the Japanese military, Thompson felt himself negotiating contradictory framings of the effects of the atomic bomb: he was, "by one questionable version of history, . . . a person whose life was made possible by the bombing of the city."⁷⁵ For Thompson, these contradictions and tensions coalesced in a somatic rush, an "embodied flash" of recognition of both indelible connection and difference between his own lived experience and that of other participants in the production. The moment occurred for him while riding in an elevator with one

of the children participating in the performance—as the child counted the numbers on the elevator buttons in Japanese, his father’s mnemonic devices for counting to five in Japanese found their way back into his own mouth: “itchy knees, sun, sea . . . go!”⁷⁶ It was simple, mundane, a childhood chant, but for Thompson it was the “punctum” for a much larger project of personal and political repair. “It took a moment in a lift as my dad’s Japanese words were heard through the counting of a young girl, for the implication of a narrative that justified the massacre of a city’s population—and its children—to be felt by me for all its shattering, gut-wrenching reality.”⁷⁷ He avers that “from that moment on,” he sought to “seize hold of that embodied flash [in the elevator], and painstakingly engage with the process not as a bystander but as a participant, fully involved in a tiny program of careful, captivating repair.”⁷⁸

To be clear, while Hibakusha testimonies are rich in sensory detail, their telling of these memories is devoid of blame toward national governments or citizenry of any nation or group of people, Japanese, American, or otherwise. Yuki Miyamoto defines this dramaturgical impulse as a “Hibakusha ethic,” as their personal testimony “is resolutely oriented towards the well-being of others, regardless of their nationalities and other attributes.”⁷⁹ The performers in *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* carry forward that ethic of retelling and reanimating past suffering as part of a collective commitment to antinuclear messaging. In place of a search for blame, the focus is on receiving and transmitting memories of horrific suffering in service to ensuring that it does not happen again. Given the divisive rhetoric, litigious practices, and retaliatory strategies that attend political discourse in the U.S., it is rather astonishing as an American to hear such experiences shared and passed forward without an acrimonious spirit.

As Hibakusha biographer Lisa Yoneyama notes, this approach is accomplished through the dramaturgical structure of Hibakusha narratives, which “always display two contradictory impulses, to factualize and to allegorize.”⁸⁰ That is, the testimonies are at once historical records of embodied experience *and* allegorical evidence for the future: that such suffering must never be allowed to happen again. The seemingly apolitical politics of this method of storytelling are in fact strategic: to expand beyond nationalistic narratives—or biographical repairs—that have sought to defend the use of nuclear weaponry as contingently warranted, such as to “end the war” with Japan, and also beyond a generalized anxiety over nuclear futures. As Thompson notes, images of nuclear warfare already circulate as allegory, as most adults around the world “have grown up with the mushroom cloud as a warning for

the future rather than as evidence of terror inflicted at a particular time and on a particular people.”⁸¹ When bearing witness to Hibakusha accounts of nuclear warfare, however, the allegory of the mushroom cloud is grounded in factual, historically located human experience, drawing an unavoidable connection between the historically contingent decisions that produced that suffering and the choices that will condition our nuclear futures. Indeed, one need not have grown up with a World War II POW or have visited the Hiroshima Peace Museum in their youth to have this relationship to atomic weaponry. “While there are many victims [of atomic bombing] there are also beneficiaries,” Thompson writes, “historically, as suggested by the accounts of the prisoners from Hell Fire Pass” where his father was a POW, “and as contemporary citizens apparently protected by the deterrent capabilities of our new warheads.”⁸² Thompson concludes that, in witnessing legacies of nuclear warfare, “there are no bystanders, no transcendent ethnographers, in atomic critique—there are only people addressed as participants who have a relationship to the material that needs to be realized and acknowledged.”⁸³ *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* provided such a space in which to consider the contours of one’s own relationship to nuclear warfare, not as a bystander but as a witness to the past and steward of the future.

There was no effort toward mimetic realism, or *passing as*, in the somatic drag of *Grandchildren of Hiroshima*, although certain iconic images were quoted in the performances (like the white shadow of a body imprinted on a surface). Instead, the process extended an invitation to each participant and audience member to engage in a reflective self-examination of the specters of history, the inherited stories and postmemories that already inhabit each of us. This mode of somatic drag involved a process of *passing*—but not as anyone other than oneself. The piece *passed along* a methodology: a process for candidly exploring personal relationships to the allegories and facts of atomic bombing, first modeled by the Hibakusha, then performers, and inviting in the audience to do the same. As philosopher Edward Casey argues in his phenomenological study of remembering, “body memory,” or the felt sense of a past experience is categorically—and sensorially—different from “memory of the body,” which places the body as an object of a visual depiction.⁸⁴ Both forms of memory are powerfully employed in the dramaturgy of *Grandchildren of Hiroshima*, but “body memory” is, I contend, the more significant and impactful. By encouraging personal, embodied reckonings with the legacies and harsh realities of atomic war, the piece was trying to pass along—to re-

member— the past as a felt sense that could be carried into a future of anti-nuclear activism.

Passing as, Passing Along, and Passing Through

As in the practice of drag as gender play, referenced at the beginning of this chapter, somatic drag as a way of re-membering history can be risky and controversial. Butler observes that gender drag performs differently in different spaces: while a transgender body onstage in a drag performance holds a kind of performative agency, to ride a city bus in drag can be a far more precarious act.⁸⁵ Recognizing the ghosts and postmemories of war trauma we carry within our own bodies is likewise not always a welcome practice. Doing so often involves disrupting cultural and familial narratives about war, and attendant values of patriotism, sacrifice, and national identity, and thus can provoke discomfort, resistance, and hostility. However, making history available to being re-membered—that is sensorial, tangible, and kinesthetically accessible to living bodies in the present—is a vital practice. In her “Manifesto for Dead and Moving Bodies,” Susan Leigh Foster contends that individual and collective bodies alike write their histories through movements.⁸⁶ Within her framework of kinesthetic historiography, “writing bodies demand a proprioceptive affiliation between past and present bodies” – that is, moving bodies of the past (now dead) demand to be made apparent to and through moving bodies in the present.⁸⁷ Foster describes “a kind of stirring that connects past and present bodies. This affiliation, based on a kind of kinesthetic empathy between living and dead but imagined bodies . . . is redolent with physical vitality and embraces a concern for beings that live and have lived.”⁸⁸

Attuning to bodies in motion—bodies of others and one’s own, of the living and the dead, from near and far away—can thus be, in itself, an activist practice, the stirring of a political movement. This holds true within the designated time and space of (a) formal performance, as in the above case studies, as well as in more transient spaces that are marked by *passing through*. These include public sites of commemoration in city parks, museums that represent histories of war and other atrocities, as well as marches, protests, sit-ins, and temporary encampments that organize bodies in activist traditions of assembly. Rather like riding in gender drag on a city bus, practicing somatic drag in such spaces is precarious; and yet it is no less vital to the slow

process of repairing intergenerational, collective war trauma. What moves within us when we move with others?

To be sure, somatic drag is by no means an easy fix or answer to the complexities of re-membling and advocating for bodies already disenfranchised by historical forces. Indeed, empathy itself can risk replicating colonial power dynamics. For Saidiya Hartman, “empathy is a projection of oneself into another in order to better understand the other,” and yet this projection can reinscribe violence: “the slipping on of blackness or an empathetic identification in which one substitutes the self for the other” reproduces the racial violence of slavery and its legacy in this country.⁸⁹ Kinesthetic empathy, by which one “slips on” the experience of another via virtual or embodied role-play can thus be a tool of recolonization and oppression. This becomes an even greater risk in theatrical “as-if” environments of virtual gaming and war simulations, as I discuss further in the following chapter on virtual somatic experiences of war. Lisa Nakamura warns of the risks of “identity tourism,” particularly when a spectator-participant is of a racially, sexually, or economically dominant class in comparison with a more politically precarious or structurally marginalized protagonist.⁹⁰

However, I contend that, like children learning to play fairly with others, we can learn to use the powerful tools of somatic drag and kinesthetic empathy skillfully and ethically. The evidence of this chapter supports that *more* role-play, *more* drag, *more* somatic awareness, *more* kinesthetic responsiveness rather than less is needed to repair intergenerational and intersubjective war trauma. Returning to Moreno’s role theory, drama therapist Antonina Garcia considers the practice of role reversals to be “the most valuable technique that Moreno developed to maximize the chances of helping us realize that we are more alike than we are different, a factor necessary in establishing a truly peaceful co-existence on the planet.”⁹¹ Role-playing—and more of it—can be a conduit for strengthening connections within and between social groups, as well as for exercising skills needed to create and expand beyond stagnant social and political roles.

Certainly, skill and guidance are necessary to role-play effectively and ethically. But, as the case studies of this chapter evidence, the skills and guides are out there: they come in the form of testimonies by war survivors like Hibakusha; the “vernacular theater” practices of London Bubble Theater; and drama therapists like Garcia, Davis, and Johnson who utilize role-play in group sessions. There are models for using somatic drag in one’s own scholarship, as exemplified by Thompson and Wilmink. These resources can be

emulated and adapted—that is, *dragged*—in museums and schools, across city parks, college campuses, and performance halls.

Throughout these examples of somatic drag, a common theme prevails: what we learn, remember, witness, hear, feel, and sense may not always be immediately visible, even to ourselves, nor ever made legible in archival documents. Postmemory and surrogation are, after all, subcutaneous practices of lived history, shards of embodied knowledge that may remain dormant until an encounter, sometime in the future, when they erupt with an “embodied flash” of recognition and insight. Somatic drag, like role-play, like reenactment, like surrogation, like empathy, like theater, is not an exact science, but that is where its radical potential lies. It is in the inability to ever fully complete the merger between self and other, then and now, here and there—that is, the “failure” of somatic drag—that marks a potential for imaginative play and intersubjective growth. The prompt that initiates audiences to the *Situation Rooms*—“my hand and your hand will merge. My situation will become your situation”—is the farcical lure of theatrical play: impossible, messy, and yet inbuilt into our very neurons. As Schneider puts it, the invitation carries with it an old yet seemingly unblunted razor’s edge of antitheatricity: “Theatricality’s temporal register is cloaked or visored at best, and hounded by the term’s inordinately vexed relationship to the imagined borderlands where war is waged between those who would police an ‘authentic’ and those who find critical promise in the history and lineage of masquerade—critical promise, in fact, in error, and mistake.”⁹²

Rather than moving in lockstep with the “as if” of a reanimated past, somatic drag plays at the meeting point of present-day bodies encountering what we thought we knew and what we can feel changing. Somatic drag creates space for play, doubling, and productive uncertainty about the past, the present, and perhaps most importantly of all, the future. It produces questions that can live in our bodies as past becomes present, providing a tangible practice with which we can live into some answers, as the future demands our presence. Even—or especially—when engaged in theatrical play about war, we encounter new (and old) aspects of how war and militarization live in our bodies. Indeed, as James Ball and Gelsey Bell, writing about *Surrender*, another theatrical example of somatic drag, astutely suggest, “It may be that when our focus is elsewhere, the traumas of our recent history are most likely to reappear.”⁹³

A chapter in so much motion is difficult to bring to a closing posture. Perhaps it is best to simply glance back at these pieces—their successes, failures,

and potentials—and look at them as cultural mirror neurons of the present moment. The terrain they reflect is tangled, contradictory, uncomfortable, and reverberating with urgency: here and there, then and now, and now, and now. Yet inviting our ghosts in as players—that is, acknowledging the post-memories that we intentionally or unintentionally mirror in the roles we play in contemporary networks of war—is part of the necessary work of recognizing and beginning to heal collective war trauma.

Virtual Somatics

“Okay, who wants to read the role of Michael? He’s a combat veteran back from Iraq and undergoing a new kind of virtual reality therapy for his post-traumatic stress symptoms.” A hand goes up. “Great, thanks. And now, someone for Hanna? She is the military therapist who controls the VR. She has her own trauma in relation to her military training . . . well, you’ll see.” Another hand. “Awesome. And we need a Zaynab. She is a teenager, an Iraqi girl living with her family in Fallujah during the war—in 2003 when Michael was there. She appears through a video blog she is making, so she has a lot of monologues.” A third student volunteers. It is the second day of my class on “Theater and Therapy after War” at Yale and we are ready to begin reading.

“Does this feel right? Look familiar?” The student playing Hanna voices the first line of *Closer Than They Appear* by Christine Evans.¹ The student playing Michael pauses for the stage directions that describe the veteran scanning the virtual landscape presented to him through the virtual reality (VR) headset he would be wearing in a staged performance. The scene he observes would be represented by *Virtual Iraq*, a Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy (VRET) produced and employed in the real world by the U.S. military to treat service members diagnosed with PTSD. Christine Evans, the playwright, indicates in the script that Michael’s viewpoint would be projected onto screens across the stage or, if the producing theater has the funds, into VR headsets worn by individual audience members. “Yeah, this is—Yep,” the student/Michael responds, breathing faster in emulation of the character’s rising inner tension.² A student reading stage directions describes Michael, virtually positioned as the driver of a Humvee, as he watches himself traveling through a desert landscape. He looks to his right to reveal the legs of a gunner seated beside him, then flinches as an explosion goes off far in the background.

As the students read on, Hanna, the clinical therapist, continues to adjust the scene that Michael observes. Through her programming interface, she customizes the landscape and sequence of events to resemble Michael’s



Fig. 19. An early scene deploying *Virtual Iraq*, in *Closer Than They Appear* by Christine Evans, directed by Joseph Megel with media design by Jared Mezzocchi, produced by HERE Arts Center, 2013. (Photograph by Lana Duiverman, used by permission.)

memories of Iraq. We learn that the particular focus of Michael's VR-assisted exposure therapy is to represent the attack that killed his patrol partner and left Michael with a head injury—the diagnosed cause of his PTSD. Under Hanna's guidance, a VRET scenario depicting this event would thus be run again and again until the traumatic scene could be witnessed without triggering an intense post-traumatic reaction.³ Hanna frequently checks Michael's level of distress by asking him to rate his anxiety on a scale of one to ten, noting his biological indexes like heart rate and skin temperature, and mirroring the assessment measures used in VRET clinical settings to modulate the intensity of sensorial triggers. As the intensity of the virtual scenario builds, Michael resists Hanna's efforts to create an accurate virtual rendering of the scene of his trauma: "I don't care about the motherfucking road! I never want to see that road again! Ace was blown to bits. His hand landed in my lap. You want to animate that?" The scene ends with Michael avowing that the course of therapy Hanna has planned for him, in which he will not be able to "drive" or control the virtual program for himself, "sounds like Hell."⁴

So begins *Closer Than They Appear*, a fictionalized account of a military veteran struggling with the effects of wartime traumas he experienced during his time in Iraq, circa 2003–4. Evans and her design partner Jared Mezzocchi put onstage the actual digital interface of *Virtual Iraq*, the VRET program funded by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency and developed by a team of VR designers for clinical therapists working with U.S. military veterans returning from Iraq in the mid-2000s.⁵ After a developmental residency at HERE Arts Center in New York City in 2014 (at which time the play was titled *You Are Dead. You Are Here.*), *Closer Than They Appear* was produced in Chapel Hill, North Carolina in 2017. In my conversations about the development of the piece with Evans and Mezzocchi, several of which have involved various groups of my students at Yale, they described the unwieldy process of taking a technology that was purpose-built for an individual VR therapy experience and adapting it for a theatrical audience to witness.⁶ Expanding Michael's first-person viewpoint in the VR interface for a larger audience, for example, had to be counterbalanced with the sense of haptic intensity and intimacy that characterized his VRET experience. Furthermore, from their developmental residency at HERE Arts Center in 2014 to the publication of the script in 2017, the capabilities of VR continued to mature. VRET expanded to include vibro-tactile elements to accompany the visual haptics and the available programming landscapes changed. As the virtual ground continued to shift, their theatrical design evolved along with these challenges and the published script deliberately left the technological design options open for future productions. As noted above, one design solution they suggest would be for audiences to don their own VR headsets during Michael's therapy sessions so that they can see/sense what he experiences in the VRET session. That option has never yet been utilized in a production, given the cost and logistics of providing VR headsets. Instead, Evans and Mezzocchi have utilized an array of screens and projection surfaces to impart the immersive visual effects of VRET. In the 2017 Chapel Hill production, for example, low frequency subwoofers were placed under the stands to create something of the effect of the vibro-tactile sensory elements that bumped along with the jeep on the road and rumbled with the explosions. Audiences would thereby sense something of the somatic experience of a virtual exposure therapy session.

However, their goal was never only to mimetically replicate the function of VRET onstage. While Evans and Mezzocchi were the first artists to gain permission from the U.S. military to use the actual VRET program in a stage production, the theatrical mise-en-scène they created soon disrupts the real-

world functionality of the military therapy interface. Immediately after the first scene, the screens that display the carefully controlled virtual landscape of Michael's VRET session are taken over by a perspective not programmed into the *Virtual Iraq* system: a teenage Iraqi civilian named Zaynab has a video blog that she sends out to the world via her spotty internet connection. Like Michael, the character of Zaynab is fictional, though based on Evans's extensive research and interviews with real people in Iraq and the United States. Zaynab and her extended family struggle to survive the U.S. military siege on their home city of Fallujah and she wants *someone* to hear her. Appearing on the same screens that had returned Michael to "virtual Iraq," Zaynab offers vivid descriptions of life in her war-torn city; violent acts committed against girls not observing hijab; the surreality of classmates killed or injured in the battles; her joy at having a full-moon picnic on her roof with her family; her concern for her beloved younger brother who sells DVDs on the city streets for extra cash; and her frustration at being trapped in her apartment with her baby cousin and aunt, neither of whom will stop crying. Her intimate video blog counterbalances the "first-person shooter perspective" of the VR interface, stealing screen time from Michael's exposure therapy as he returns for more sessions with Hanna. In the fictional narrative, Michael and Zaynab do not meet face to face, but her virtual interface begins to affect him. Items and people from Zaynab's life appear unbidden in *Virtual Iraq*, confounding Hanna as programmer and pushing Michael to reckon with his war trauma. As a virtual force, Zaynab moves Michael in a different direction than the VRET intended, as her perspective challenges the singular vantage point of the VR therapy interface.

Virtual Somatics: Closer Than They Appear

As the first case study of this chapter, *Closer Than They Appear* raises complex questions about the techniques, technologies, and ethics of representing war trauma, via virtual media, onstage: How do immersive virtual technologies condition users to engage with contemporary warfare? What might the screens of war be able to do onstage that they do not do in real life? Given the prevalence of virtual war-gaming in both military and civilian cultures, can the martial ideologies and embodied rhetoric of first-person shooter games be overwritten to enact a different script? Can VRET and other virtual-assisted trauma therapies show that the lives of others—the ones you shoot at in first-



Fig. 20. The character Zaynab in *Closer Than They Appear* by Christine Evans and directed by Joseph Megel, HERE Arts Center, 2013. (Photograph by Lana Duiverman, used by permission.)

person shooter games—are also valuable, sacred, worthy of healing? As in the dramaturgy of *Closer Than They Appear*, these questions reach beyond the boundaries of VRET and other military uses of virtual technologies of war. My attempts at answering them have brought me back, time and again, to Evans's play, to conversations with various student groups over my years of teaching her work, and the questions that those students presciently raise about the play, about VRET, and about the prevalence of virtual technologies in both real and representational theaters of contemporary war.

At the center of my queries is a form of contemporary embodied experience that I refer to as “virtual somatics.” While a Google search for “virtual somatics” will turn up advertisements for somatic experiencing therapy sessions held online, I employ the term to mean embodied, sensory experiences of using virtual media. Virtual somatics, in my usage, are sensations, emotions, postures, and movements that arise while engaging with immersive VR interfaces or other virtual platforms of communication and representation, including social media, remote meeting platforms like Zoom, or online

gaming, shopping, and messaging. Virtual somatics emerge in response to the haptic assets programmed into immersive, virtual scenarios: coming to the edge of a steep cliff in a VR environment will likely produce a series of embodied responses in a user; wearing 3D glasses in an iMax movie theater experience about flying may make viewers physically dodge or duck to avoid prerecorded branches that appear to be about to hit them; or navigating a VR environment makes some users, like myself, motion sick within minutes. In a first-person shooter perspective, which is the default viewpoint for a player across most battle simulator video gaming and VRET interfaces like *Virtual Iraq*, a visual-haptic rhetoric sutures the user's point of view to that of a singular protagonist, conditioning the user's virtual somatic experience. Virtual somatics shape more mundane scenarios as well, showing up in the physicality users develop when engaging with social media on personal devices. Picture the bowed head, rounded shoulders, and scrolling thumb of the physically isolated, yet remotely connected smart phone user. Virtual somatics have a physical cadence, as the rhythms and flows of usership are conditioned by the affordances of social media platforms—new posts appear rapidly and constantly in a 24/7 stream, while algorithms sort existing content into seemingly fresh and bottomless wells of consumption. In other words, while social media communications may seem to be disembodied, they too have material, physical impacts. These extend to the felt sense of connection (or disconnection) between those who send and receive the texts, and to political and social movements that are organized through social media and can manifest in real-world action and change.

VR-assisted trauma therapies, such as VRET, add an important piece to my study of virtual somatics, as they investigate the reparative potential of virtual-somatic experiences. As investigated in the previous chapter, VR-assisted Action Observation Therapy (VR-AOT) activates mirror neuron networks in concert with physical movements to rehearse and rebuild motor skills that have been lost following traumatic brain injuries. Similarly, in VRET treatments like *Virtual Iraq*, an immersive VR scenario is meant not only to mirror a patient's memories of a traumatic event but also to respond accurately to the user's movements, thereby deepening the realism of the virtual-somatic experience. As in the various somatic trauma therapies that I have described throughout the book, VR-assisted trauma therapies utilize virtual-somatic experience to heighten embodied awareness of trauma triggers and to rehearse healthy, sustainable somatic responses to embodied trauma.

As I have already indicated, virtual somatics are conditioned by the ideol-

ogies that structure virtual representations of war, for both military and civilian populations. Virtual media that migrate to civilian markets often remain patterned by their original military usages, extending and normalizing militarized ideologies that undergird them.⁷ For example, there is a long history of partnerships between civilian and military programmers of interactive video gaming and VR: An early prototype of what later became the virtual reality industry emerged from U.S. Air Force flight simulator research initiated in the mid-1960s by Thomas Furness.⁸ Subsequent military funding promoted new generations of flight simulators and fueled the development of technologies used to create modern virtual reality. VR games marketed to civilians not only frequently invoke scenes of military or paramilitary battles, they are nearly always structured around narrative goals of survival, competition, and winning, rather than alternative experiential modes of being in a world.⁹

Within military contexts, drones and other “unmanned” forms of surveillance and lethal weaponry have earned twenty-first-century warfare troubling monikers such as “remote control war,” “war at a distance,” and even “virtuous warfare,” creating dangerous perceptions of heroism without (meaningful) bloodshed.¹⁰ The interplay of virtual representation and embodied training in military preparation for and enactment of warfare produces what performance scholar Sara Brady calls the “soldier cycle—a trap of war and game where time and space collapse and difference between play and not-play becomes distorted.”¹¹ Such distortions between representation and reality can accrue to the degree that co-present experiences of war might seem less “real” than virtual representations of war, producing the sense in participants that “the live felt less real than the mediated.”¹²

These tangled relationships between war and gaming can be understood as part of a military strategy to keep soldiers—and a broader civilian public of implicated subjects of war—in a cycle of military ideology and participation. Brady illustrates this through her field research, which included an excursion to the Army Experience Center, an interactive military gaming center for civilians located in a mall outside of Philadelphia. Under the guidance of a female military recruiter-cum-gaming instructor, Brady recalls entering an immersive video simulation of a Middle Eastern combat scenario where she is told to “shoot at the enemy” through a gunning console on a replica Black Hawk helicopter: “How will I know who the enemy is?” I ask her (loudly). “You’ll know,” she says calmly. “Just shoot at all of them.” Then she walks away.¹³ So Brady shoots, noting how “realistic” the virtual somatics of the simulated gunning feels, even though she paradoxically has nothing “real” to compare it

to. "At the end of what seemed like a long five minutes, a message appeared: 'Mission Accomplished,' the screen told me. Then: 'What is your mission?'"¹⁴ The answer, it seemed, was already there ahead of the question. "War, the video game," as Brady titled her essay about the experience, at once repeated and preceded the (imagined) reality upon which it was based. The virtual somatics concretized the battle simulation as cultural memory even as it prepared participants for more of the same in the future.

The virtual somatics of VR-assisted therapies are likewise affected by the ideologies that have influenced their programming. Many VR therapy programs developed to treat war trauma, including *Virtual Iraq*, have been funded by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, the U.S. government agency responsible for developing emerging technologies for military use. Harun Farocki's documentary video installation *Serious Games I-IV* (2010) vividly illustrates the history of U.S. military uses of virtual reality and video gaming in both waging and recovering from war.¹⁵ The large screens of his installations show VR simulations on computer screens that train soldiers in making decisions and working together in combat scenarios; drone pilots operating drones from interfaces thousands of miles away; and VRET programs that treat returning service members with PTSD. As Farocki's film points out, the digital assets of *Virtual Iraq* were drawn directly from those of the first-person shooter video game *Full Spectrum Warrior*, itself modeled after actual military combat experiences.¹⁶

The geographic and ethnic tropes of virtual warfare also play into the affects of virtual somatics in training, gaming, and therapeutic contexts. Middle Eastern landscapes and Arab-Muslim enemy combatants have come to be the standard visual domain of modern war games and military therapies.¹⁷ Yet these bodies and places are routinely flattened by what Lisa Nakamura calls "networked racism."¹⁸ They are not given the weight or substance of dimensional, grievable human life. In a rather shocking revelation, Farocki calls attention to one of *Virtual Iraq*'s early design (and ethical) flaws: the Iraqi avatars in *Virtual Iraq* were programmed to cast no shadows.¹⁹ Among other things, this reveals that even therapeutic virtual software is delimited by military ideologies. As techno-cultural theorist Wendy Chun insightfully puts it, "Software and ideology fit each other perfectly because both try to map the material effects of the immaterial and to posit the immaterial through visible cues."²⁰

The case studies of this chapter illuminate and attempt to remake the virtual somatics of participation in social media, online gaming, and digital

representations of war. Evans and Mezzochi begin with Michael's embodied experience of VRET, then, through a series of theatrical glitch ethics, blow open the virtual somatic field of the VR program with Zaynab's personal vlog. Interactions on social media platforms produce what I describe in the second case study, Ivo van Hove's Twitter-assisted *Roman Tragedies*, as "performative text acts" that project a user's social "character" in virtual spaces of discourse. The 2012 production of *Roman Tragedies* that I study occurred concomitantly with what has been dubbed "the first Twitter war," an outbreak of violence between Israeli military forces and Palestinian Hamas fighters.²¹ My analysis of audience participation in *Roman Tragedies* examines how Twitter (now rebranded as X) rehearses virtual-embodied participation in real-world theaters of war and politics. Wafaa Bilal's *Domestic Tension*, the final case study, blurs the line between virtual and embodied consequences even further in the form of a live first-person shooting game set against the backdrop of the second U.S. led war in Iraq.

Mirrors and Stages of VRET

Evans has long tuned her keen writerly senses to the devastating effects of war on civilian populations and service members around the globe in an oeuvre that includes war plays, novels, and, most recently, opera.²² Her works are characterized by multiperspectival accounts of soldiers and civilians caught in what she describes as the "mirror ball of virtuous warfare," which at once projects and distorts myths of purity, heroism, and victory to justify suffering caused by military violence.²³ Similar to Brady's "soldier cycle," the "mirror ball" of militarism that Evans investigates in her work reflects and refracts across various stages of participation in contemporary war machines, including military trauma therapies such as VRET. The VRET interface of *Virtual Iraq* places *Closer Than They Appear* firmly in the twenty-first century, but it replays the historical military goal of "salvaging" traumatized soldiers for further military service rather than holistically healing them. As described in chapter 1, the dramaturgy of "salvaging" has been a long-running theme in military psychotherapy and has conditioned military therapeutic practices for centuries. My analysis of Evans's play thus looks at how virtual somatic experiences in VRET keep military personnel on the "mirror ball" and in the "soldier cycle," and, conversely, how the dramaturgy of her play seeks to shatter the mirror and break the cycle.

Beginning in 2004, VR designer Skip Rizzo and his team at the University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies began work on a Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency-funded VRET program called *Virtual Iraq*, the same one that Evans would later feature in her play. The program was intended to support military service members who were returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan with high rates of PTSD and head injury.²⁴ In prolonged exposure therapy, the form of therapy upon which VRET is patterned, a patient tells and retells the story of a traumatic event until, through a process known as "habituation," the memory and its associated "triggers" lose their overwhelming power to disturb the patient's current physical and psychological reality.²⁵ The sensorial content of *Virtual Iraq*, which includes visual and sonic representations as well as vibro-tactile and olfactory stimuli, was designed to re-create elements of the locations and wartime events that would have characterized a service member's combat tour in Iraq. A twenty-four-square-block "city" featured a marketplace, check points, mosques, shops, houses, and rubble-strewn lots. Building interiors and rooftops could be entered and explored, and various military vehicles could be used for transport, with selectable positions such as driver, passenger, or turret post, based on the service member's actual experience. Together, these selectable attributes were designed to provide a "navigable exposure zone [that] creates the illusion of being embedded within a section of a sprawling densely populated desert city."²⁶ In a theatrical echo chamber in which reality returns in the visage of a video game, service members who use *Virtual Iraq* as therapy for PTS are prompted to rehearse the traumatic events of their pasts again and again in the immersive environments.²⁷

Intrigued by the theatrical dramaturgy of VRET protocol, which reminded Evans of Guilio Camillo's Renaissance "memory theatre" due to its similar cycles of representation, repetition, and revision,²⁸ Evans and Mezzocchi applied to study with Rizzo. They joined the clinicians that Rizzo and his team trained to customize scenarios and immersive sensory stimuli to fit the individual experiences of combat veteran patients. Through the trainings, they learned that virtual somatic experiences are central to the function of the therapy. In trauma therapies such as VRET and VR-AOT (from the previous chapter), the haptics of VR respond accurately to the user's movements, thereby deepening the believability, or realism, of the virtual-somatic experience. Because the perspective that a user sees onscreen changes when they move their head or hands, perception is linked to sensation, creating what feels like an accurate mirror of these physical actions. Together, the

VR motion sensors and user's kinesthetic/proprioceptive senses partner in a sensory-neurological "suspension of disbelief" necessary for the therapeutic protocol of VRET.

The suturing of perspective in VR produces emotional-social affects for users as well. A responsive VR avatar aids in what researchers call "social immersion," which includes a felt sense of connection to what is being experienced in a VR environment. For successful "social immersion," the virtual avatar must be able to provide "credibility of emotional expressions (their adequacy compared to the situation, within the context); reflexivity of the interaction (the character must, in real time, have the capacity to adjust simultaneously their facial and bodily emotional expressions) and indexicality (the gestural expressions must depend closely on the references that the user makes to the external world)."²⁹ Successful "social immersion" has been shown to accelerate a patients' recovery timeline in VR-assisted therapies. The therapeutic interface of VRET places participants in the socially immersive position of a first-person shooter, modeled on the standard viewpoint of battle simulator gaming and training. Adding details of the environment, and physical attributes of characters, actions, and scenarios specific to the past experience of a given user further deepens the social immersion.

The result is an intense immersive experience, so vivid in its effects that it can be at first difficult to see the therapeutic benefits. Indeed, the students with which I read Evans's play aloud uniformly expressed suspicion of VR as a modality for potential healing. Their doubts only deepened after watching a scene from Farocki's *Serious Games*, which featured footage of an actual VRET session with a combat veteran. Several students watched through partially covered eyes as the combat veteran undergoing VRET physically flinched, cried out, and begged to stop the therapy. "Wouldn't people actually get *worse* using VRET?," they worried. And besides, these digital natives reminded me, VR has been predominantly associated with first-person shooter war games. "The first thing you see is your own hands holding a gun. How can that be scrubbed away?," one asked. "Can VR be legitimately used to heal war trauma when it is also used to train soldiers to practice and wage war?" I hold many similar skepticisms about VR, militarism, and the effects of virtual somatics in gaming and therapy, as described above. But I have also talked to enough therapists and clients of exposure therapy to believe that what might appear horrific from outside is in fact a way of meaningfully addressing the inner horrors of post-traumatic stress. As I assure my students, exposure therapy gets results and continues to be a leading form of trauma therapy.

Instead, I emphasize that I am, like Evans, a technological materialist when it comes to including social technologies in theatrical work. Indeed, this was the topic of many of our conversations when I was in graduate school with Evans at Brown University, and central to the topic of my dissertation-cum-first book. In technological materialism (as opposed to technological determinism), technologies built for a certain purpose within a certain ideological structure can, with bold reimagining and thoughtful reprogramming, be employed to critique those purposes and even dismantle the ideological structures that originally produced them. Within the context of military technologies, this means that artists and activists might appropriate technologies that seek to keep war contained, one-sided, and “at a distance,” and reuse them to critique those ideologies and effects.

Applying a technological materialist viewpoint to VRET reveals that, although the immersive details may aid with the efficacy of the exposure therapy, the user’s embedded perspective produces ideological limitations. First-person shooter perspectives may appear individuated, as the eye-line and hands move according to a player’s actions; however, that perspective has the paradoxical effect of universalizing this singular point of view, as if it is the only perspective to take on war. In VR gaming, that singular viewpoint becomes a uniting factor among all players, mandating that all players are haptically aligned with the perspective of a military combatant protagonist. In the hands of technological materialist artists like Evans, VR can be manipulated to instead reveal landscapes of human suffering, of resilience, and even of peaceful coalition building. By approaching *Virtual Iraq* from the perspective of technological materialism, Evans used the virtual somatics of VRET to reimagine what could be felt, sensed, and discovered through a technological interface of contemporary war.

So I urged my students to think past the programmed landscapes of VR, as Evans had done, and name what else they saw—even if the shards and fragments fell out of the expected dramatic arc of the play. They observed that the sanitized military acronyms used by Michael to share his experience of the war stood in stark contrast to Zaynab’s sensual descriptions of her home life: a full moon picnic on her roof with her family, sugar cakes that fell apart for lack of honey and dates, a baby that would not stop crying, her utter heartbreak when her younger brother is shot by a sniper. We continued to query together the degree to which a piece of theater can free military-funded tools of their ideological origins in militarism. Or, for that

matter, if a soldier indoctrinated into the goals and practices of military conduct can rewire their minds and bodies through the theater. (A few weeks later, we learned about the DE-CRUIT program, described in chapter 2, in a visit with Stephan Wolfert, who would answer an emphatic yes to that question.) Eventually we arrived at the question: “Is Evans saying that VRET leaves something missing in the process of healing war trauma for a veteran? Like Zaynab’s perspective?”

Glitch Ethics and the Ghost in the Machine

I like to think that when Evans and Mezzocchi took *Virtual Iraq* to the stage they were aided in their techno-materialist interventions by a “ghost in the machine” of VR, one that hails not from military origins but from counter-cultural, theatrical ones. Theater maker/playwright/actor Antonin Artaud described his famous mid-twentieth-century concept of a “theatre of cruelty” as a disruptive force that he called “virtual reality.”³⁰ Although Theater of Cruelty predated contemporary VR, Artaud passionately argued that his theatrical version of virtual reality “causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world; it shakes the asphyxiating inertia of matter.”³¹ His eerily prescient coinage of “virtual reality” runs counter to the “soldier cycle” reinforced in our VR gaming systems today. Instead, Artaud’s virtual reality carries with it a clarion call to awaken the masses through a revelation of truth: life as it is actually, viscerally experienced. Evans and Mezzocchi seem to adhere to Artaud’s vision of VR, as they mobilize Zaynab’s visceral descriptions of her life under siege to shake the “mask” of Michael’s military training and its perspectival/ethical limitations.

In a process that certainly could be described as a kind of Theater of Cruelty, Evans and Mezzocchi show Michael’s trauma triggers appearing and reappearing in the virtually re-rendered landscape of *Virtual Iraq* onstage: an exploding pile of trash by the side of the road, an overturned car on fire, a boy selling DVDs who gets shot by a sniper, Michael’s patrol partner getting killed beside him. While the virtual triggers produce visible agitation in Michael, what seems to trouble him most is the eerie effect of the VR environment, which resets itself back to the beginning after the completion of each devastating event: the boy appears to return to life with his DVDs, waving, smiling, dying, waving, smiling, dying.

MICHAEL: Why is it quiet?—Didn't we just see that kid?

HANNA: Oh the basic set-up's all on a loop.

MICHAEL: That creeps me out. That kid coming back.

HANNA: Why's that?

MICHAEL: He reminds me of something. Like déjà vu.³²

Unlike Artaud's Theater of Cruelty, however, the repetitive and rigid dramaturgy of VRET could not make the mask of militarism fall or reveal the ideological distortions of war hardwired into the software. The VR scenario instead doubled down on the "asphyxiating inertia of matter," turning life and death into a digital loop. As Evans saw it, the theatricality of the system was haunted by the ghosts of military ideology that would need to be exorcised for real change to occur.

Indeed, some such "ghosts" were actually programmed into the virtual somatics of *Virtual Iraq*. As introduced earlier, *Virtual Iraq* was populated by Arab-Muslims that cast no shadows, an ethical/design failure that Michael could have been subconsciously responding to. Veiled Iraqi women, children, street vendors, and other civilians moved as though they were already ghosts, gliding eerily along without a shadow to give their bodies a sense of substance or weight. As Evans puts it, "The absence of shadows alerts the viewer to something missing: dis-remembered, amputated from *Virtual Iraq*'s dream-like memory theatre."³³ The *Virtual Iraq* programmers have purportedly now added shadows, taking a step toward pulling the digital representations of Iraqi people out of the uncanny valley and toward a chance at (virtual) reality, although the depth and humanity of their characters remains severely limited in the VRET interface.

As the techno-materialist creator of *Closer Than They Appear*, Evans took up the razor's edge between reality and representation and applied it to Michael's virtual somatic experience. Within the play world the signs and symbols of the VR system are real enough to cause Michael to flinch and viscerally recall his experiences in Iraq, and yet artificial enough to reveal themselves as merely signs.³⁴ When the real-world referents—for example, the boy with DVDs waving by the side of the road—reveal themselves as theatrical signifiers that can be killed and brought back to life with the click of a button, Michael's inner discomfort points him in a new direction. He begins to see the distance between the artifice of the system and the reality it fails to represent—namely, the reality of the Iraqi people whom he saw living and dying in the streets of Fallujah. Michael's frustration with the limits of what he calls the "kid's video game" interface initiates his character's trajectory of

embarking, however unwillingly, on a deeper journey of ethical reckoning, one that Evans tacitly suggests approaches the true root of his post-traumatic suffering.³⁵ Whereas the first-person shooter perspective of *Virtual Iraq* was designed with only one inhabitable subject position in mind, that of a U.S. military service member, Evans unsettles Michael as the primary protagonist in his story. In a twist of magical realism, using what I call “glitch ethics,” Evans animates a ghost lurking in the ethical shadows and uncanny valleys of the VRET interface: Zaynab.

Given that *Closer Than They Appear* was built around a functioning military technology it is significant that Evans employs the motif of technological glitch to enact her ethical intervention. A “glitch” is the result of a miscommunication between receiver and sender during the transcoding of information, and is typically understood as an undesirable hiccup in the intended function of a preprogrammed system. In a countercultural fashion, glitches have become pop cultural artifacts that digital artists have taken up as a visual- and sound-based aesthetic. Rebecca Jackson employs theatrical terminology as she analyzes what has come to be known as “glitch aesthetics” in digital art: “Glitches index the physical world and break the fourth wall [of the virtual] by jolting the spectator from the intended experience.”³⁶ In Jackson’s terms, glitches manifest as “the trickster archetype, creating random pass-ways between two very different worlds. . . . Trickster glitches accompany the user, randomly wreaking havoc while reminding our virtual-selves of the physical world.”³⁷ It is just such a feat of trickster contortionism that Evans’s magical realism inserts into *Virtual Iraq*, and by extension into the experiences of her characters and audiences.

The trickster glitch, or ghost in the machine of *Virtual Iraq*, is Zaynab, replete with shadows and joys and loss. Zaynab’s blog creates a “pass-way” between the real Iraq (one that includes complex experiences and multi-dimensional shadows of its inhabitants) and the virtual, sanitized one that Michael enters for medical treatment. The pass-way is a chaotic one, slipping out of the controls of Hanna, the clinician who seeks to order the virtual landscapes according to their programmed borders. But it is also a pathway to a more holistic, ethical reckoning with war trauma. As Zaynab’s video blog purloins more and more screen time from *Virtual Iraq*, her stories gain gravitational pull in the world of the play and Michael is not the only one thrown off course. Hanna’s control as a military clinician begins to slip as the VRET interface becomes riddled with glitches she cannot understand or fix. Unprogrammed explosions, the relentlessly looped death of the young boy selling DVDs, the incessant sound of a baby crying, and a moonlit view of Fallujah

from a residential rooftop haunt the VRET screens. Hanna simultaneously recalls a sexual assault she experienced in boot camp and begins to panic over her daughter, a recent military recruit, who will not return her phone calls. Michael's memories of Fallujah expand beyond his carefully rehearsed trauma narrative, allowing him to virtually access more of the city's interior spaces, come face-to-face with Iraqi civilians there, and grapple with his most difficult and repressed traumatic memories. The corruption of the VRET system becomes proportional to the multidimensionality of the characters and perspectives that the program can represent. Zaynab's vivacious teenage hopes and her bitter sorrow over the death of her younger brother Mahmoud (who, it turns out, was the boy killed while selling DVDs on the street in the scene Michael witnessed on repeat) breach the borders of the contained, sanitized landscapes of the military-sanctioned *Virtual Iraq*. In turn, they challenge the military logic of Michael's first-person shooter perspective and the course of his therapy.

By the end of the play, Michael has gained the ability to see Zaynab's face, aided by the VR glitches and the appearance of another character: Hanna's new assistant Nadia, who is played by the same actor who plays Zaynab. Nadia possesses a mysterious ability to enter Hanna's locked clinician lab and takes the liberty of brewing her own tea for patients; she becomes Zaynab's proxy in Michael's present-day reality, meta-theatrically linking the two and planting shards of Zaynab's life in Michael's VR therapy. In a penultimate scene, we learn that Michael carries a trauma so deep that he has not been able to articulate it to anyone, even himself. A chaotic nighttime raid during his time in Iraq brought him to the door of Zaynab's apartment. They met, face-to-face, and a brief violent encounter changed them both forever. The closing moments of the play bring Michael and Nadia face-to-face in the therapy room. They don't speak, only share a cup of tea. The dream-like moment does not offer a cathartic resolution, but the brief respite from the suffering incurred by war allows the two to regard each other as humans, with the time, space, and dignity they were not afforded in their real world theater of war.

Dropping the Mask of Militarism

By manifesting a glitch in *Virtual Iraq*, Evans and Mezzocchi liberated the military software from its preprogrammed commands, narrative assump-

tions, and prescribed virtual somatic regime. In so doing, they also unsettled the militaristic ideologies of heroism, exceptionalism, and agonistic worldview that underpin the program. By breaking (glitching) the fourth wall of the immersive first-person perspective of the VRET interface, Zaynab could re-member herself to the audience as well as to Michael. Through Zaynab/Nadia, the dramaturgy of the play lays out an evolution of virtual somatics from self-reinforcing logic toward a face-to-(inter)face encounter. Zaynab's vibrant, sensorially descriptive monologues challenge habits or inclinations that audience members might have to settle too comfortably into Michael's perspective or that of the military technology of *Virtual Iraq*, or both. In this uncomfortable yet productive disequilibrium, the characters—and the audience that witnessed them—could begin to experience something of Artaud's virtual reality. The “mask” of militarism dropped away, at least momentarily. The “inertia of matter” had been reanimated, determined to cast its own shadow. The “slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world” had been laid bare. By cracking open the singular perspective of Michael in the VRET interface, Evans detached the trajectory of Michael's healing from military scripts of self and other and the limitations of a first-person shooter worldview. In the space opened up by the glitch in the system, alternative pathways toward recognizing and treating war trauma could emerge.

The glitch that Evans cannily planted in the VR interface makes available insights that could have real-world impact in the redesign of VR therapy programs like *Virtual Iraq*. For example, it suggests that true rehabilitation cannot be achieved if the digital interface only offers the viewer a first-person perspective of a U.S. military combatant. In her own words, Evans introduced “an Iraqi civilian perspective as counter-narrative to the soldier-centric viewpoint hardwired into *Virtual Iraq*, thus challenging that viewpoint's dominance” in technological and cultural registers.³⁸ By breaking the fourth wall of the carefully controlled VR landscape, Evans (via Zaynab) insisted that multiple perspectives of war trauma, fleshed out and humanized, must be part of a course of true healing from PTS after war. As mentioned above, newer versions of *Virtual Iraq* have corrected initial representational limitations by adding shadows to the Iraqi avatars. While this was one small step in ameliorating the system's narrowness of perspective, it suggests that more substantial adjustments in design are not beyond the realm of possibility. That is, if audiences, VR users, designers, and trauma survivors take seriously the effects of virtual somatics in a theater.

Still, for all its techno-materialist successes, Evans has been candid about

the play's shortcomings. As she describes it, "The play was built as an aesthetic Trojan Horse designed to pass as a 'hero's journey' that would crack open once inside the walls, so Zaynab could jump out. But the Horse was too sturdy, and the door did not fully open."³⁹ I maintain that the play effectively employs glitch ethics and virtual somatics to vividly express the ethical problems of VRET, but I can see what she means. Despite the vividness of Zaynab's stories, the narrative remains anchored to the project of Michael's healing. And while audiences bear witness to Michael's and Zaynab's journeys, we are not asked to shoulder a burden of responsibility of our own. We are not asked to negotiate our own relationship to the mirror ball—or mask—of militarism.

This is a problem of form rather than content. Screens that simulate battle, control lethal weaponry from afar, or, in an ironic cycle, rehabilitate injured veterans have become part of the expected *mise-en-scène* of a growing number of plays about twenty-first-century warfare.⁴⁰ In mirroring the conditions of contemporary war and military trauma therapies, theatrical productions run the risk of normalizing martial uses of virtual, remotely controlled technologies, along with the virtual somatic habits of engaging with them. Interactive performance pieces that get audiences *moving* as part of the stage world have the capacity to disrupt and varietate virtual somatic experiences, thereby more deeply troubling the smooth surface of the "fourth wall" that structures spectatorship in militarized virtual media.

Closer Than They Appear intervenes in the virtual somatics of first-person shooter perspectives used in VRET and the military ideologies that undergird them. But the piece falls short in moving its audiences into unfamiliar somatic terrain. This is because the piece positions audience members as voyeurs of a sealed dramatic narrative, firmly located outside the fourth wall of the stage and yet empathetically sutured to a protagonist's journey. In contrast, as I have argued earlier in the book, dynamic dramaturgies that move audiences "beyond the fourth wall" have a greater capacity to unsettle—"glitch out," in techno-materialist terms—habitual spectatorial relationships to theaters of war.

The case studies that follow directly engage virtual somatic experiences of their audience participants. Toneelgroep Amsterdam's *Roman Tragedies* and Wafaa Bilal's *Domestic Tension* explore, in very different ways, how greater levels of interactivity and dialogue on the part of audience-participants can disrupt the user interface of digital technologies that represent warfare. These strategies in turn expand audience options for ethically responding to

suffering caused by war. In so doing, these works engage the possibility for ethical collective action through what Butler termed “virtual assembly,” as bodies, even when separated by great geographic distance, can come together through “mediated transport.”⁴¹ By shifting the conditions of virtual somatic experience within spaces of performance, these works make manifest ethical responsibilities and possibilities for creative intervention within interactive virtual media platforms.

War and Tweets

Toneelgroep Amsterdam’s production *Roman Tragedies*, directed by Ivo van Hove, toured internationally to great acclaim following its premiere in 2007. The immersive theater piece, spanning nearly six hours, covered three of Shakespeare’s tragedies: *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Couches and ottomans placed onstage invited audience members to sit alongside the actors, who themselves performed throughout and even outside of the theater space. In a now familiar trope in Van Hove’s work, the action, wherever it occurred, was followed by a video crew, with the live camera footage appearing on a large screen hung above the stage as well as on smaller screens placed throughout the house and stage. The roving action, fluid seating, and an onstage bar, encouraged the audience to circulate and change their vantage point throughout the production. Van Hove’s version of the plays focused on the power-suit-clad elites, cutting out the starving crowds in *Coriolanus* and the mob in *Julius Caesar*. This meant that the voices and bodies of the lower-class, ordinary people, the crowds through which Shakespeare indexed the effects of the ruling elite’s political games, went missing. However, the absence of a mob of extras to shout “read the will” in *Julius Caesar*, for example, created space for another form of crowd commentary to take the stage. Ticket-holding audience members were prompted to contribute their own responses to the onstage action via a mundane technology of audience participation and contemporary warfare: Twitter.⁴²

Signage at the top of the show invited audience members to “tweet” their responses to the action and post them to the hashtag #RomanTragedies.⁴³ A long, scrolling news ticker stretched across the proscenium and displayed the messages in red-lit letters as they came in. Interspersed with the Twitter posts were news headlines from the day of the performance pulled from sources such as CNN, MSNBC, and the BBC, as well as orienting information



Fig. 21. Scene set in Antium with audience immersed during Ivo van Hove's *Roman Tragedies*, produced by Toneelgroep Amsterdam, in the 2012 production at Brooklyn Academy of Music. (Photograph by Dan Dinero, used by permission.)

about the Shakespearean narratives, such as the number of minutes until significant events (like assassinations) would occur. The mixture of contemporary newsfeeds, audience commentary, and Shakespearean plotlines created an electrifying, almost overwhelming flow of information, in which ancient political battles mingled with contemporary ones. As one audience member of a 2017 Barbican Theater performance blithely noted, "Off to #romantragedies. Slightly pissed off about missing football. But then remembered @tgamsterdam will probably LED scroll the scores!"⁴⁴

Twitter has not commonly been framed as a technology of war (although President Trump has worked hard to prove otherwise). However, as performance scholar James Ball insightfully pointed out in his review of a 2012 Brooklyn Academy of Music production of *Roman Tragedies*, Twitter had in fact played a prominent role in the fresh outbreak of violence between Israel and Palestine.⁴⁵ During a weeklong offensive in November 2012 that has been dubbed the first "Twitter war," the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) mounted an

offensive against the Gaza Strip, called Operation Pillar of Defense. @IDF-spokesperson (the group's official Twitter handle) tweeted its threats of violence and intended targets. In response, Hamas, the Palestinian political organization that has administered Gaza since 2007, returned fire in cyberspace via the Twitter account of its military wing, the Al Qassam Brigades. @AlqassamBrigade tweeted messages like "Liberation of occupied #Palestine started . . . we are coming #IDF" and used Twitter to challenge the IDF's characterization of events whenever it could.⁴⁶

Much has changed in the intervening years since 2012—the name of Twitter itself, the scale of violence between Hamas and the Israeli armed forces, and the worsening plight of Gazan civilians caught in very material crossfire. The politics of civil discourse, spectatorship, complicity, and protest regarding the decades old conflict have likewise become more fraught and fractious. Still, the role of Twitter in the 2012 conflict between Israel and Palestine evidences the capacity of the social media platform to function as a technology for declaring and even fueling acts of violence. The virtual exchanges exemplify assertions by a number of cultural theorists that Twitter, and other social media platforms like it, constitute a forum for "performative text acts."⁴⁷ The texts posted to the Twitter-verse by IDF and Hamas were, to borrow a term from J. L. Austin, distinctly performative: they were speech acts delivered with intended consequence to affect the material realities of their recipients. Tweets and status updates on social media platforms perform similar, though usually less violent, labor in social contexts. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other popular platforms have proven their capacity for facilitating what Judith Butler has called "virtual performative assembly" and political action in numerous social protest movements, most notably in recent times in the Occupy Wall Street movements, Egypt's "Facebook Revolution," Iran's "Twitter Uprising," the "#metoo" movement, and Black Lives Matter, among others.

The role of Twitter in the 2012 round of Israeli-Palestinian violence may not have been known by many audience members at the Brooklyn Academy of Music at the time, and it was not overtly emphasized by the production. Even so, Twitter was functioning as a virtual stage for performative text acts emerging from at least two theaters of war—one in Brooklyn and one in the Middle East. Without warning or fanfare, announcements of events from within the Shakespearean dramas—such as "5 mins until the death of Coriolanus"—were counterbalanced by news reports of military offensives and civilian deaths in the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. During one break in the



Fig. 22. Audience witnessing a scene as “small boy killed in crossfire” scrolls on the ticker, in Ivo van Hove’s *Roman Tragedies*, produced by Toneelgroep Amsterdam, 2012. (Photograph by Dan Dinero, used by permission.)

stage action, for example, a headline from the conflict in Gaza announced, “Small boy killed in the crossfire.”⁴⁸

Mixing in such posts that indexed real-world, real-time violence, *Roman Tragedies* offered audience members the opportunity, via Twitter, to respond with performative speech acts that were, in effect, a rehearsal of “performative ethics.” Maurice Hamington, an ethics professor, coined the term performative ethics as part of his commitment to “reconceptualizing the teaching of ethics as an embodied activity rather than a purely intellectual, scholarly study.”⁴⁹ Building on theories of performativity by Judith Butler and Erika Fischer-Lichte, he argues that the “inclusion of corporeal dimensions in the teaching of ethics” can encourage individuals to “treat the actions of their bodies as public artifacts of their morality and identity to be studied, understood, and shaped.”⁵⁰ To be clear, rehearsing performative ethics with their ticketed audiences was not the goal of Toneelgroep Amsterdam’s production. But the architecture for such a social experiment was there, as audiences

kept their phones at the ready to post responses to events represented in the theater. As stand ins for the mobs of ordinary citizens in the Shakespearean tragedies, the audience were cast as a temporary body politic, bound together in both real and virtual space.

In their 2015 book, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Judith Butler asserts that contemporary understandings of political assembly must expand to include remote, virtual methods of communication, congregation, and action.⁵¹ “The virtual dimension of assembly is not an aftereffect of the physical gathering, but is already part of the very definition of assembly itself. Assemblies are always already mediated and even virtually disseminated, and so the distinction between a gathering in physical space and its virtual elaboration is necessarily unstable.”⁵² Practiced across distance and remotely organized, “virtual assembly” has become an effective form of collective action that can have politically significant, material consequences, Butler argues. Virtual assemblies can organize concrete actions through virtual channels of communication and make visible the embodied experiences of diverse individuals and groups through what they call “mediated transport.”⁵³ So common is this mode of political assembly and action that Butler asserts that contemporary “ethical relations are mediated” and require a shift in conceptions of space: “If what is happening ‘there’ depends on the event being registered in several ‘elsewheres,’ then it would seem that the ethical claim of the event takes place always in a ‘here’ and ‘there’ that are in some ways reversible.”⁵⁴ In other words, virtual assembly includes physical experiences in spaces that are physically far removed from one another, but that in a virtual platform share the space of a screen, a situation, and a felt sense of ethical responsibility.

To think of political assembly occurring across virtual networks reframes social media and other remote communications platforms *as spaces* that can be felt, occupied, and acted within and through. Virtual platforms facilitate “mediated transport,” rather like Zaynab’s vlog cameos in Michael’s VRET sessions, or the reports of violence in Gaza during *Roman Tragedies*. Of course, as Butler acknowledges, mediated transport cannot change the materiality—or precarity—of certain geographic spaces: “The fact [remains] that the body cannot be relieved of its locatedness, its exposure, through its mediated transport. In one sense, the event is emphatically local, since it is precisely the people there whose bodies are at risk.”⁵⁵ However, mediated transport in virtual space is nonetheless significant as an ethical action: “If those bodies on the line are not registered elsewhere, there is no global response, and also no

global form of ethical recognition and connection.”⁵⁶ The performative ethics of virtual assembly thus hinge upon the *recognition* of the “bodies on the line” and of one’s own capacity to respond, even virtually and through mediated transport, to those lives that are “elsewhere” and *also here*.

Mediated transport, virtual assembly, and the possibility of performative ethics haunted the slick machinery of *Roman Tragedies*. The digitally mediated reports on the red ticker boards linked multiple spaces and times, stretching the audience’s borders of awareness beyond the physical theater space to include contemporary war zones around the globe. By layering in real world referents to wartime violence, *Roman Tragedies* punctured theatrical representation with sobering artifacts of real life, at once emphasizing and collapsing the distance between the theater and active zones of war. Statements like “small boy killed in crossfire” offered audiences the opportunity to register this far-away human loss in the “elsewhere” of a posh theater. Not unlike Michael’s VRET, though without a clinician prompting them, the audience was invited into a virtual somatic experiment in which they could repeat or revise their habitual behavior within theaters of war.

As I have scoured the Twitter feeds from various performances of *Roman Tragedies*, however, few responses registered the reports of wartime violence or national aggression that were brought to the stage. A few make note of the real-world events that punctured the Shakespearean fictions, as in the tweet that read “#RomanTragedies live news of Israel/Hamas during Coriolanus.”⁵⁷ Others quipped political insights that applied the production to our world today: “Lessons Julius Caesar taught me: Don’t try to be a god and people won’t try to stab you. #RomanTragedies.”⁵⁸ From the Barbican production earlier that year came: “You realise we haven’t changed that much when you feel everyone shifting slightly to get a good view of the assassination #RomanTragedies.”⁵⁹ No one, to my knowledge, responded substantively via Twitter to the split second that a small, unnamed boy’s death shared the stage with global elites. To be fair, it may have been missed by many, and, honestly, it is difficult to imagine what I would have “tweeted” in response had I been there. The flip, clever rhetoric of the Twitter performances in the theater was not suited to responding to such a sobering announcement. Instead, the headline passed by like a momentary glitch, a ghost in the machine that was not granted enough power to rupture the virtual somatic habits of Western theatergoers.

Some have argued that *Roman Tragedies* strove to show precisely that: the difficulty of conducting consequential ethical discourse via social media plat-

forms. As Christian Billing saw it, director Van Hove “explore[d] how technologically mediated channels of political representation militate against meaningful dialogue between social groups in the modern world.”⁶⁰ In this view, the piece was dramatizing some of the techno-social forces that can impede the efficacy of performative ethics in the context of virtual assembly. Indeed, the fragmented flood of our digital news cycles more often inundates and distracts its participant-spectators than it encourages meaningful assembly and action. Jacob Gallagher-Ross, reviewing Dutch theater company Dood Paard’s *MedEia* in 2009, summed up the postmodern, intermedial adaptation as a vivid expression of “postdramatic stress syndrome.” Deploying the term “postdramatic stress” differently than I do in chapter 1, Gallagher-Ross nevertheless makes a similar observation about distanced spectatorship of contemporary war: “We have entered into a new age of the chorus: a post-modern plurality no longer defined by political enfranchisement, but rather by paralyzed spectatorship as a basic condition of everyday experience.”⁶¹

Cast as the Twitter “chorus” of Shakespeare’s tragedies set in Rome, the audience-participants of *Roman Tragedies* had to negotiate the cultural forces of “paralyzed spectatorship,” both as theater goers and as “a basic condition of [their] everyday experience.” Even as they were given rare permission to move throughout a theater and add their thoughts to the action in real time, the freedom to respond via Twitter was curtailed by the strictures of virtual somatics that surround social media platforms. These likely included feelings of social scrutiny and pressures to perform cleverly via their text acts. Within the theater space, the bar, couches, and festive atmosphere of the production connoted leisure rather than political assembly. The “small boy” from Gaza was not on the guest list to the party, despite the appearance of his ghost via mediated transport. James Ball summed up the ambivalent tensions of the production: “Neither dangerous nor safe, desirable nor undesirable, media like Twitter extend the space in which war is fought while amplifying the theatrical strategies of those who wage it.”⁶² Indeed, the theatrical strategies of the Shakespearean political elites resonated with those of current political figures whose personal dramas and despotic ambitions hold sway over virtual and material spaces around the globe. More to the point of my research, the inclusion of Twitter as a platform for performative text acts highlighted the theatrical strategies—and virtual somatic habits—of the audience: the implicated subjects of contemporary war.

The mix of news and tweets on the LED ticker of *Roman Tragedies* mirrored the oversaturated, underwritten, and ethically paralyzed commentary

that has come to characterize contemporary spectatorship—and implicated subjecthood—of war. For the most part, the virtual somatics exhibited by audiences in the theater followed suit with these conditions. But I continue to hope that, for some participants, the real-world headlines of human suffering half a world away provided something of an ethical punctum, delivered via mediated transport from a beleaguered, precarious real-world theater of war to a posh theater in Brooklyn. Perhaps for some, the performance left a small Palestinian boy-shaped crack in that mirror of mediated war, a somatic prick in the side of spectatorship. And perhaps it was just that no one knew quite how to speak, let alone act, about it.

Virtual Assembly and Performative Ethics in Theaters of War

The final case study, Wafaa Bilal's *Domestic Tension* (2007), delves further into the relationship between the virtual somatics of online gaming and meaningful dialogue about war violence. In his 2007 durational performance, Bilal, an Iraqi-born Shia Muslim, lived for a full month in a small room in a gallery in Chicago that was outfitted with a bed, a desk, a large paintball gun, and a computer. Bilal streamed real-time footage of his performance/living space on the project's website and invited local visitors to come to the space itself. Originally titled "Shoot an Iraqi," the project invited participants from anywhere in the world to log on twenty-four hours a day to view, chat with, and shoot paintballs at Bilal in real time through a first-person shooter interface on his website. While on the website, participants could discuss the project directly with Bilal through the project's online chat room. (Bilal's own computer was protected by a small plastic shield in the gallery space to facilitate these live chats.) Bilal's stated reasons for embarking on the performance were grounded in his personal and political relationship to the then ongoing U.S.-Iraq war. He was mourning the recent deaths of his father and brother due to the war and, as he describes on the project's website, his "self-imposed confinement [was] designed to raise awareness about the life of the Iraqi people and the home confinement they face due to both the violent and the virtual war they face on a daily basis."⁶³

Bilal structured *Domestic Tension* to highlight these consequences of globalized warfare and to reappropriate some of the mediated channels that are typically used to represent war. At its most straightforward, the *Domestic Tension* website linked the online actions of participants to material conse-



Fig. 23. Wafaa Bilal's *Domestic Tension*, 2007. (Photograph courtesy of Wafaa Bilal.)

quences in Bilal's corporeal reality. Although he remained far from the actual drone strikes landing in Iraq, Bilal made his own body vulnerable to the attacks (verbal and paintball) of participants from around the world. He was no avatar, but instead a live human in concrete space dodging paintballs and taking hits. The scene never magically "reset" to a clean restart, as in a video game: Over the course of the thirty days that the performance piece ran, the material walls of the gallery became increasingly saturated with yellow paint, and the virtual walls of the online chatroom became an archive of the fears, anxieties, and concerns of an impressively wide swath of participants from around the world. By the end of the month, the website had received over 80 million visits and some 65,000 shots had been fired from the paintball gun by participants from 136 countries.

In addition to raising awareness about the effects of the U.S.-led war in Iraq, Bilal's design showed the first-person shooter interface to be what Robin Bernstein calls a "scriptive thing"—a material entity that evinces its cultural history in the form of behavioral "repertoires" that determine how it per-

forms socially.⁶⁴ As in the theatrical saying that a gun over the mantle in act 1 is destined to go off in act 4,⁶⁵ aggression, competition, and violence are prescribed into online gaming scenarios. Bilal's website presented a visual rhetoric and set of controls familiar to video gamers, from the crosshairs that would pop up on a user's screen when scanning the room through the remote controls of the paintball gun to the images of Bilal ducking and scurrying to seek cover from paintball hits. Bilal declared that "*Domestic Tension* will depict the suffering of war not through human displays of dramatic emotion, but rather through engaging people in the sort of playful interactive video game with which they are familiar."⁶⁶ In this, Bilal's work recalls Bruno Latour's argument that "sociologists have a lot to learn from artists" when it comes to understanding the material effects of ideological weaponry.⁶⁷ Interrogating the maxim that "guns don't kill people; people kill people," Latour argued that artists can insist upon the material consequences of cultural symbols by casting "solid objects" like guns as agentic forces within social scenes. Rather than perpetuating myths of technological neutrality, Latour insisted that holding a gun fundamentally changes the social role that a person plays: "You are another subject because you hold the gun; the gun is another object because it has entered into a relationship with you."⁶⁸ In other words, within a scenario of gun violence—in real life, onstage, or online—both gun and human are translated into a third term: a techno-human actor cast into a culturally scripted behavior of aggression or defense. Bilal rightly anticipated this, as users knew what to do with the paintball gun interface: they aimed and fired.

If this had been all of the piece, then the potential for performative ethics may have stalled in the same place as *Roman Tragedies*. Bilal might have proved that virtual guns (even the paintball variety) are scriptive things that transform participants into first-person shooters, but the piece would not have done much to intervene in or alter the virtual somatics of online violence. However, Bilal added a plot twist in the form of his chat room, displayed beside the first-person shooter view of the gallery. As the month went on, Bilal spent more and more time at his computer screen, engaging participants from around the world and at all hours of the day and night in dialogue about the reality of his experience and about his reasons for performing the piece. He shared his experiences as an Iraqi in America, told stories about his family and friends living and dying under real gunfire, drone surveillance, and missile attacks in Iraq. He asked his online interlocuters about their thoughts and experiences in relation to the war in Iraq. In his retrospective writing on

the project, Bilal shared numerous examples of how he engaged hostile or careless participants in conversation in the chat room, shifting the virtual, anonymous game of online target practice toward interpersonal dialogue that recognized each participant's shared humanity.⁶⁹ Recalling one encounter from midway through the performance, Bilal wrote:

For the past two nights three young women from the UK who heard me on the BBC had been online until 4 a.m., teasing me, telling cute jokes and talking about flying to Chicago for a visit. They were all in different towns, but they were having a party together in my chat room. One of them was crazy or maybe drunk. She kept saying 'KILL KILL MAIM KILL.' Then 'Yr a hadsome bloke! Don't b coy.' I wanted to cut through the ridiculous banter and talk to her as a normal human being. Finally, when I told her about my brother's and father's deaths I was able to engage her in real conversation.⁷⁰

In exchanges such as this, Bilal sought to counteract what he identified as "the brutality of anonymous internet culture" by engaging his verbal assailants in dialogue via the chatroom. As he put it, his gaming scenario and "sensational approach to the war [was] meant to engage people who may not be willing to engage in political dialogue through conventional means."⁷¹

Bilal's approach to the "text acts" he encountered in the chatroom constitutes an enactment of Dwight Conquergood's dialogical performance. "One does not have to delay entering the conversation until self and other have become old friends," Conquergood asserted. "Indeed, as the metaphor makes clear, one cannot build a friendship without beginning a conversation. Dialogical performance is the means as much as the end of honest intercultural understanding."⁷² The interactive design of *Domestic Tension* depended upon the improvised dialogues in the chatroom to at once instruct and enact dialogical performance. The chat room at once exposed and intervened in viewers' expectations of anonymity, distance, and lack of material consequence that pervade cultures of internet gaming and contemporary war. Some online visitors asked what address they should use to send him a pizza. Others spammed the chat with ethnic insults. Participant responses, or lack thereof, to Bilal's vulnerability, to the gaming interface, to the invitation to dialogue, were represented back to online participants through the virtual mirror of the website. Through his candid online dialogues, Bilal insistently showed that, unlike an avatar in a game, he could not transcend his locatedness or his unique position on the map of contemporary war. The "mediated

transport” and virtual actions of online players from around the world had material consequences in Bilal’s corporeal reality. The piece indicated that anonymous online interactions—often trivialized as casual scrolling or entertainment gaming—were also part of the global war machine, with material consequences.

The process was an uphill battle and took more than a fair share of Bilal’s energy and psychological well-being. After the monthlong performance concluded, Bilal reported symptoms of PTSD. The experience had been harrowing, physically and psychologically—reaching extreme expressions of virtual somatic violence, as when a user hacked Bilal’s system and programmed the paintball gun to produce rapid machine-gun fire. While chatroom participants often asked Bilal questions about himself or the project, the forum also played host to violent tirades. These vitriolic performative text acts shocked and sickened him, adding to the physical beatings from the paintballs.

Without diminishing the traumatic toll on Bilal, I want to highlight the last week of the performance, which offered a particularly inspiring example of performative ethics. In the later days of *Domestic Tension*, when news of Bilal’s online experiment had spread through international media sources and the yellow paint had soaked the room he was living in, a group of participants spontaneously formed a collective they called the “Virtual Human Shield.” These anonymous individuals, who had not met prior to the performance event, organized through the chat room and assembled online to protect Bilal from taking direct hits by the paintballs. The “Virtual Human Shield” attempted to maintain a schedule around the clock such that at least one of their members would be present to remotely control the cursor on the website and aim the gun away from Bilal so that other users who wished to shoot at him could not do so. Mobilizing themselves through “virtual assembly,” the community of spectators formed what Clio Unger termed “a community of action”: a group of actors that, through a structurally open network of interactivity, has the potential to affect the outcome of a series of events within a system.⁷³ The coordinated effort of the “Virtual Human Shield” actors arose out of unscripted, open dialogue and is an inspiring example of performative ethics. The virtual collective intervened in the technological determinism of the “first-person shooter” interface, instead using the gun’s controls to shield Bilal from attacks. In so doing, the group also rewrote the script of virtual somatics, not only for first-person shooter gaming, but for participation in the largely anonymous and disconnected population of the world wide web. The members of the “Virtual Human Shield” were unconnected to one

another prior to Bilal's online platform of virtual communication, yet they virtually assembled and collectively performed a physical script for sustained ethical action.

Bilal's *Domestic Tension* and the participants in the "Virtual Human Shield" reveal that the virtual somatics and casual cruelty of online war games can be re-formed and utilized toward different social scripts. With investment in dialogical exchanges, ethical recognition of humanity within virtual networks, and some technological materialist problem-solving, virtual somatic habits can give way to ethically engaged forms of assembly and action. As in Stephan Wolfert's DE-CRUIT program, studied in chapter 2, military models of "unit cohesion" can be replaced with "virtual assemblies" that strive to protect rather than harm others, even across great geographic distances.

To be sure, this is a steep uphill battle. The internet and virtual battle gaming are not known for producing a sense of ethical responsibility. In large part, this is due to the myth of disembodiment in virtual spaces that I discussed at the opening of this chapter. To counter these assumptions, it is thus vital to bring sensorial awareness of bodies—one's own and others'—back into play. Bilal's performance dramaturgy cannily blended virtual and material spaces, connecting the various somatic experiences produced by his performance through dialogical performances in his chat room. Although I have been unable to track down the members of the Virtual Human Shield that protected Bilal, I can imagine that these individuals were guided by their own embodied responses to witnessing the paintball attacks on Bilal. That is, their own virtual somatic experiences played a role in the performative ethics they undertook. Flinching along with Bilal, these participants did not simply minimize the web page or close their computers. Instead, they decided to articulate what they felt in their bodies to be ethically intolerable and, when they found likeminded others, to take coordinated action and change the virtual-material conditions of the game. Some kind of a virtual somatic shift likely also occurred for the three women from the U.K. as one went from typing in all caps KILL MAIM KILL to the group having what Bilal described as a "real conversation" about the human cost of war.

The particular changes in virtual somatics will of course vary between individuals, but neuroscientific studies of intersubjective perception show that such somatic changes are measurable. As discussed in the previous chapter, individual mirror neurons fire in recognition to another being that is perceived as somewhat similar to oneself. Facial muscles may likewise respond,

breathing may deepen, hand muscles might uncurl and open. Such changes to virtual somatic experiences *matter*, in both physical and ideological ways. When experienced in context of the sprawling world wide web or the centuries of militarism that construct national identities, sensory shifts in individual people may seem impossibly small and isolated. But if virtual somatics serve as an embodied register for the ways in which virtual media condition user behavior and worldviews, then virtual somatic *awareness* plays a crucial role in changing those habits and honing ethical responsiveness to war trauma. In other words, deepening one's abilities to sense their own virtual somatic experiences could be a conduit to awakening to one's own role as an ethical actor in real and representational theaters of war.

With this in mind, the final section looks at an emergent design in VR trauma therapies that hones users' abilities to sense and modulate their own virtual somatic experiences. While these innovations have not yet, to my knowledge, been taken up by performance artists, I offer them here as potentially useful guides for further developing performative ethics in theatrical performance.

New Frontiers: Stimulation versus Simulation in Virtual Somatics

A new generation of VR therapies for PTSD are being developed by mental health technology companies, and with them new frontiers in virtual somatics are emerging. Recent innovations in VR therapy focus on dynamizing the somatic interactivity between user and virtual environment. For example, PRISM for PTSD, an FDA-cleared medical device created by Grey Matters Health,⁷⁴ features VR environments that are responsive to a patient's somatic responses, rather than the other way around as in VRET. In a PRISM therapy session, a patient dons a VR headset that is paired with biosensors that monitor their biofeedback, or psychosomatic responses, such as heart rate, temperature, sweat, breathing, and stress hormone levels. The biodata that the sensors gather in real time creates a feedback loop between the VR simulator and the patient's embodied responses to the environment they experience in VR: the sensory inputs of the user's biodata readings in turn modify the visual-sensory assets of the VR environment itself.

A specific scenario will help clarify. One scene used in the psychiatric trials of PRISM was an airport, replete with the varying levels of activity that

characterize these heterotopic spaces of transit. As a user's somatic responses to the airport scene changed, the scene would respond in kind: if a user's bio-data indicated stress, with heartbeat accelerated, breathing becoming shallower, and sweating, for example, then the airport scene would follow suit, accelerating from orderliness to chaos. When the user employed somatic therapy strategies to shift their own internal somatic state, by deepening their breath, meditating on a single sensation, and other forms of embodied mindfulness, then their biofeedback signals would de-escalate, causing the VR airport scene to likewise become more tranquil. The therapy thus strengthens self-modulation of neurobiological states, as a patient learns to regulate their own somatic responses to stressful or triggering environmental stimuli.⁷⁵

PRISM for PTSD, which was cleared for prescription-based usage in 2024, is notable among existing VR trauma therapies in that it is "non-trauma-based."⁷⁶ This means that the VR experience that patients engage with in PRISM, like the virtual airport described above, is not a simulation or recreation of a scene of past trauma, as in VRET. Instead, the scene and the intensity of stress it triggers are shaped by the current somatic cues of the patient. That is, the virtual somatic experience of a user directly influences the VR system's representational landscape, in real time. The user and interface are collaborators in perception/representation.

While we are in the early days of responsive haptic technologies like PRISM, I see great potential in this therapeutic evolution and its effects on virtual somatic experiences of users in therapy, digital theater, and virtual culture at large. I make sense of the evolution as a shift from *simulation* to *stimulation*. VR exposure therapies like *Virtual Iraq* are designed according to a principle of *simulation*, wherein environment, actions, and perception are purpose-built to re-create a sensory experience of the past. Similarly, virtual war games and military training simulators pattern responses to conflict based upon the behaviors and perspectives of the past. As Scott Magelssen argues, participants in militarized simulations, or *simmings*, embody past conflict situations—such as border crossings or war scenarios—and through simulation, build patterned repertoires of possible future responses based on historical behaviors and perspectives.⁷⁷ Taken together, the effects of simulation are reproductive rather than revisionary. Although simulation is often framed as a necessary practice for crisis preparedness, simulation reinforces ideologies and embodied practices of militarism from the past by replaying them in the present and projecting them into the future.⁷⁸ As rehearsals for the future that are also reprises of the past, simulations occur in what Tracy

Davis has called “performative time.”⁷⁹ According to Davis, simulations and reenactments are not merely representations of past events but operate within “performative time,” a durational moment that allows the past to be experienced in the here and now. That is, simulations “predict” the future by actively reproducing the past as present experience, thereby rehearsing a predetermined repertoire of future behaviors.

In contrast, PRISM for PTSD operates on a principle of *stimulation*. As the VR system interfaces with the real-time somatic responses of a human user, the VR environment and human user *stimulate* one another. A focus on stimulation grounds a process entirely in the present moment; whereas simulation is about what *could* happen (future), or what *has* happened (past), stimulation *is* happening right now. Stimulation can occur in response to imagined circumstances from the past or future or can conjure up fears or traumas from other times, but, as a physical experience, stimulation lives only in the present moment. While the VR environment of PRISM is still a simulation of a real-world scenario, as in the airport described above, the therapeutic process has little to do with the scenario itself: the goal is not simply to help a user better navigate an airport in the future. Instead, the program focuses on the user’s ability to sense and modulate their own biomarkers of stress or relaxation, as a means of changing their perception and experience of external environments and relationships. Put simply, the drama is located in the senses, not in the simulation. When a PRISM user’s body sends stress signals, the world as they perceive it becomes more chaotic; when the user uses somatic strategies to calm their bodies, thereby producing a different bodymind state, they effectively also bring their environment back into orderliness. The virtual somatic experience of the user *stimulates* the simulation and becomes the site of the therapeutic intervention.

What I have been calling virtual somatics are, in the language of neuroscience, sensory stimulants registered in the amygdala portion of the brain. Neuroscientists have found that even as the amygdala registers automatic, or unconscious, responses to stress, it can also consciously regulate these responses through somatic techniques described above: deep breathing, mindfulness, focusing on the felt sense of one’s heart beating, and so on.⁸⁰ The clinical trials that led to the development of PRISM used EEG (electroencephalogram) medical sensors to measure amygdala activity in the brains of participants. The researchers allowed some participants to view their own “neurofeedback” in real time as they used the VR system (using EEG data run through an integrative system called EFP, or EEG finger-print). They did

not share any “neurofeedback” with another “control” group of participants. They found that being able to see one’s own neurofeedback, as represented through the EFP, improved stress regulation by participants, whereas it was worsened for participants that did not have access to the feedback.⁸¹ The researchers concluded that “neurofeedback training . . . improves emotional resilience under stressful ongoing life conditions.”⁸² In other words, by teaching patients to “read” their neurofeedback signals (both visually onscreen and through their own felt senses), VR programs such as PRISM can build virtual somatic tools for improving resilience and well-being under stress.

High attunement to internal sensory perception, or interoception, appears to offer numerous advantages. Science writer Annie Murphy Paul presents a wide range of scientific studies that positively correlate subjects’ interoceptive sensitivities—such as their ability to accurately feel their own heartbeat—and their demonstrated propensity for emotional resilience, trauma recovery, and even good decision-making in the workplace.⁸³ A 2016 study at the University of California, San Diego, measured the emotional resilience of a pool of participants that, in a separate test, had measured their ability to detect their own heartbeat. By combining the results, the study found that “on average, low resilience individuals exhibited poor interoception . . . while the high-resilience people possessed a keen sense of their internal world.”⁸⁴ Another 2016 study found that professional stock market traders who could accurately sense their own heartbeats demonstrated a tangible advantage in making successful decisions in their notoriously volatile, fast-paced work environment.⁸⁵ While unexpected, the correlation indicates that individuals with strong interoception possess a decision-making edge over their less sensitive colleagues, regardless of level of education or traditional workplace training.⁸⁶

The ability to sense interoceptive events like heartbeat and blood flow without the feedback from an EEG reading varies from person to person. Some people easily tune into a felt sense of their heartbeat, breathing rhythms, and digestion, while others struggle to feel anything at all. However, embodied cognition and interoceptive awareness can be cultivated, learned, and improved through virtual feedback systems and somatic attunement practices. Although most mainstream Western educational models, medical systems, and professional trainings do not emphasize or teach such skills, somatic intelligence has been central to ancient spiritual movement and mindfulness practices, such as yoga, tai chi, and various forms of meditation.⁸⁷ Bringing together neuroscientific research on stress and trauma with

embodied mindfulness practices, Elizabeth A. Stanley has developed a technique she calls Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training for exercising one's mindfulness muscles in preparation for high-stress, potentially traumatizing situations, such as military combat. A military veteran with PTSD, political scientist, somatic therapist, university professor, and Buddhist nun, Stanley has trained numerous cohorts of military personnel before they deploy for active combat.⁸⁸ The studies that she has conducted in partnership with the Department of Defense show that her Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training methods—many of which are physiologically similar to the self-neuromodulation techniques supported by PRISM—have supported more mindful, less reactive, and needlessly violent behavior in conflict zones, as well as greater bodymind resilience upon return from combat.⁸⁹ In short, practicing somatic awareness before, after, and during stressful events produces measurable positive outcomes for the well-being of individuals and communities.

Performance forums, both co-present and virtual, could likewise play an important role in honing embodied cognition and interoceptive awareness for audience-participants. Incorporating EEG machines for audience-participants to get real-time readings of their responses to onstage action would likely be even further out of reach for most theaters than Evans's suggestion of VR headsets for each attendee of *Closer Than They Appear*. However, building skills of interoceptive awareness does not require high technology and could be integrated into co-present and virtual performances as a means of offering audiences basic training in self-neuromodulation and interoceptive awareness. For example, at a conference on "Spatial Computing" that I attended in 2024, I participated in a "tactile sound" workshop led by sonic-dance artist Jessica Rajko.⁹⁰ Rajko began the workshop by handing out earplugs, then sent each of us off for five minutes of "interoceptive listening." Each participant found a spot in the room and tuned their attention to their internal senses. My heartbeat loomed large in my ears and I began to feel the pulse of it in various parts of my body: my throat, my palms, my forearms. I could hear conversations filter in from the hallway, but my heartbeat remained in the foreground, layering on top of anything else I could hear. Other participants reported their own sensory layers coming into focus: feeling caffeine-accelerated blood coursing through their veins or a vibrational sense of their thoughts in their skulls. The workshop happened first thing in the morning of a full day of academic presentations and discourse, and we were mostly seated and cerebrally oriented in our communications from

there onward. However, for me and several other participants I checked in with later in the day, the morning's interoceptive biofeedback training set a rare tone to the scholarly conference. As we went through the day, we each continued to notice our internal sensory signals, from heartbeats to sonic overwhelm to buzzing brain activity, and to give credence to what those signals were telling us. Did I need to take a step outside of the room for a moment of quiet? Take a walk around the nearby quad to get some mental clarity on a topic I was about to present? Was a particular idea that I had just heard making my heart beat faster, my body lean forward, signaling a new horizon of research in my work?

While interoceptive awareness and emotional resilience do not automatically lead to taking ethical action, the indications that neurofeedback training can support users in making positive change in their own lives are encouraging. This means that learning to sense and regulate one's own somatic signals can have measurable effects on one's well-being in co-present and virtual spaces. Strengthening the ability to respond to external stresses mindfully—that is, with care and awareness for oneself and others—can support taking actions that are in line with one's inner values. Though he was writing about embodied cognition in the context of stock market trading decisions, John Coates makes a broadly applicable point: "Good judgment may require the ability to listen carefully to feedback from the body."⁹¹ Virtual somatics, as a growing category of human experience, could thus become a domain for enhancing, rather than eroding, interoceptive intelligence, self-regulation, and embodied knowledge about self, other, and world. Then, even stressful, triggering virtual simulations in war gaming or military therapies could become potential spaces for rehearsing performative ethics.

Performative Ethics and Somatic Feedback Loops

Without a doubt, virtual media have supported and reproduced ideologies of state-sponsored violence and militarism. The various case studies in this chapter demonstrate that virtual platforms of performance also have the capacity to recast technologies of war as tools for ethical responsiveness and communal action. As established earlier, programming a singular warrior perspective in virtual representations of war, even and especially in "gaming" scenarios, is a central strategy in perpetuating military ideology across martial and civilian communities. This fuels the "soldier cycle" and keeps

the “mirror ball of militarism” spinning. Offering a range of vantage points and supporting individual participants in sensing and modulating their own, idiosyncratic somatic responses in virtual spaces could thus constitute an act of counter-militarization. Using one’s virtual somatic information to guide decision-making within virtual gaming scenarios might even become a rehearsal of performative ethics.

Although biofeedback tools and somatic awareness practices may not be the norm in contemporary virtual participation, theater makers can construct interactive scenarios that promote virtual somatic awareness in participants. This might take the form of a period of interoceptive listening before beginning to watch a piece, as in Rajko’s earplug exercise, or inserting such introspective moments into the dramaturgy of an event as part of a spectatorial journey. As in the PRISM neurofeedback study, becoming aware of one’s own somatic responses can bolster embodied cognition and emotional resilience. If heightened interoceptive sensitivity can support successful decision-making in high-stress, interactive scenarios like financial trading, how might somatic awareness training better support audiences of performances about the harrowing effects of war? Might somatic awareness be a tool for moving beyond the virtual fourth wall in online gaming and social media used to represent contemporary warfare?

Virtual media producers, users, and performance makers have the tools to intervene in monolithic narratives of war produced by military-influenced media, if they choose to use them. The effects of such work could, in time, extend beyond their virtual containers. Digital technologies of war and of performance, submitted to materialist interventions and reshaped by performative ethics, could begin to produce valuable cultural feedback. In electronic terms, this means outputs that, through rewiring, become inputs that reenter and influence a system, thereby producing feedback that might in turn warp the dehumanizing ideologies of militarism toward more just and ethical interactions in real-world theaters of war.

RESOLUTION

Making Peace

A line of peace might appear
if we restructured the sentence our lives are making
peace, a presence,
an energy field more intense than war,
might pulse then,
stanza by stanza into the world,
each act of living
one of its words, each word
a vibration of light—facets
of the forming crystal.

—FROM “MAKING PEACE” BY DENISE LEVERTOV

War is an embodied habit that we humans seem unable to break. We can claim no intellectual or ethical innocence when it comes to war: We have centuries of proof of the destructive effects of war and the horrendous suffering it incurs. As I have argued throughout this book, our repetitive enactments of the choreographic scripts of war are themselves outcomes of collective, inherited, and embodied war traumas, repeated and refracted across bodies politic around the world. Acknowledging war trauma as a driving force behind war—and taking steps to treat and heal those acute and inherited traumas in our bodies and communities—are the essential first steps to breaking our habituation to war as a “resolution” to conflict. However, we will need to do more to sustain a change. We need to replace the scripts of war with physical dramaturgies of peace. We need to “restructure the sentence our lives are making,” as Denise Levertov puts it.

Peace has proven to be an elusive performance modality for human societies thus far. For Philip Metres, editor of a volume of peace poetry that includes Levertov’s poem “Making Peace,” the problem is both linguistic and

cultural: “Our lexicon for peacemaking is poor, not because we have no experience of peace or peacemaking but because the language of violence and war has been ubiquitous in our culture, and enormously profitable for those in power. . . . If ‘peace’ seems abstract, foggy, weak, and utopian, is this a problem of language or the poverty of our culture?”¹ Levertov avers that “peace as a positive condition of society, not merely as an interim between wars, is something so unknown that it casts no images on the mind’s screen.”² So versed are we in the language, choreographies, and logics of war that peace as anything other than a concept is quite foreign, almost drawing a blank. In a material sense, the word “peace” conjures clichés—a dove, a two-fingered V, a paper crane—images and gestures that, while inspiring, remain trapped in the realm of the symbolic, too paper-thin to carry a new world into being. Symbols of peace, while certainly not meaningless, must be backed up by collective, embodied practices of *making* peace.

Conscientious change happens by actively performing a positive, new habit, rather than focusing on ceasing an old one. It is far more difficult to stop engaging in an old, bad habit than it is to replace the outdated behavior with another behavior—one that is similarly embodied, visceral, graspable. In the case of peace, this would mean building behavioral practices for conflict resolution that are guided by an ethos of harmony rather than harm. For peace to become an embodied practice that can replace our embodied habituation to war, we must, as Levertov suggests, restructure the “sentences”—the languages, movement vocabularies, decrees, and verdicts—of war to which we have all, consciously or unconsciously, become habituated.

In truth, it feels rather disingenuous, if not impossible, to offer a conclusion to a book about embodied methods of resolving war trauma as wars continue to rage and ruin lives in local and global communities. In this final chapter, I do recapitulate the significant ideas raised in the previous chapters—such as similarities between embodied trauma therapies and interactive performance strategies that can support audiences in processing our own implicated subjecthood and post-memories of war, the value of communalizing war trauma through testimonial theater, and somatic methods for bearing witness in performance. However, this “conclusion” is, in practice, more of a “resolution.” It is a series of future-oriented pledges and principles that can be drawn from the courageous case studies that have populated the previous chapters. In the spirit of a resolution, these final pages offer aspirational, yet also achievable declarations of healthier habits that the individual bodies and bodies politic of our global community might adopt going forward. With a handful of final examples, I thus venture into the lesser-known territory of how artist-



Fig. 24. Taiki Arita's *Orizuru No. 10*. Acrylic paint, spray paint on canvas. 140 × 180 mm, 2019. (Photograph by Linda Cummings. Reproduced by permission.)

activists might do more than deconstruct and intervene in representations of violence. That is, how they—how we—might instead go on to make peace an embodied, habit-forming practice.

Making Peace with the Ashes of War Trauma

This painting of a paper crane by a Hiroshima-based artist named Taiki Arita hangs on a wall beside my writing desk. The painting is a small square of

hand-stretched canvas with thick layers of paint that have begun to crack over time. It has a modest profile, simple and elegant—but the most important thing about it to me is invisible. The painting holds a secret in the slight metallic sheen of its paint: Arita rendered this representational paper crane with paint mixed with ashes of real paper cranes from the Hiroshima Peace Park. This may not seem radical or significant at first—but when I look at that painting, I see one methodology for restructuring war trauma into an embodied practice of peace.

The symbol of the paper crane, and the practice of folding 1,000 of them, has become synonymous with the regeneration of Hiroshima and the nexus of peace activism that has flourished there since an atomic bomb detonated over the city on August 6, 1945. The practice began when twelve-year-old Sadako Sasaki, a girl who survived the Hiroshima atomic bomb at two years of age, folded 1,000 paper cranes from her hospital bed. It was a physical act of hope for her own recovery from radiation-induced leukemia ten years after the atomic bomb. Sadako died from the acute onset of her cancer just months after completing her 1,000 paper cranes. However, her story—and more specifically, her hopeful practice of folding 1,000 paper cranes—lived on, becoming an international ritual to express aspirations for world peace.

Arita is an official “grandchild of Hiroshima.” His grandparents survived the bombing as young children and Arita grew up hearing their stories and participating in the “peace education” curriculum that all Hiroshima school children were raised on. While the annual ritual of the intergenerational play *Grandchildren of Hiroshima*, described in chapter 4, hadn’t begun yet when Arita was a child, he was well versed in the stories, paintings, and other material representations of postatomic Hiroshima. He grew up hearing Hibakusha stories, visiting the peace park, and folding 1,000 paper cranes with his classmates each year. In his adulthood, he has become a dedicated artist-activist for nuclear deproliferation and peace.

Arita’s work suggests that the first step toward making peace a habit may involve acts of vital materialism. Jane Bennett’s theory of “vital materialism” describes how seemingly passive objects, when viewed within their broader sociopolitical or ecological networks, express agentic force in their spiritual and psychological links to humans that engage with them.³ Extending from the context of postwar Hiroshima, paper cranes possess vital materialism of world peace. Of course, folding paper cranes is not equivalent to dismantling nuclear weapons arsenals or investing in diplomatic resolutions to conflict that uphold international peace treaties or even documenting the biologi-

cal harm caused by acts of war—all facets of actually implementing world peace. And yet, the act of folding paper cranes teaches participants, many of whom are children forming their understanding of interpersonal relationships and the consequences of violence, to speak with their bodies through symbolic languages of peace. If we set the practice alongside playing popular first-person shooter video games, for example, folding paper cranes is a clear step in a different direction, one that leads away rather than toward embodied rhetorics of militarism and war.

That said, the vitality of materialist acts like this appear to have a shelf life and require revision in order to regain agentic power as time and human cultures evolve. The Hiroshima Peace Park reportedly receives approximately twenty tons of paper cranes each year from around the world, far more than can be displayed or stored in the peace park or museum. In conversation with Arita, he concurred that the practice of hand-folding paper cranes has, at least among Hiroshima youth, become somewhat stale and overburdened by tradition. The vital materialism of the paper cranes needed new life.

When I met Arita on a warm autumn day in 2019, he had recently moved back to his hometown. After a decade of studying and exhibiting in the U.S., Berlin, and Venice, the then thirty-two-year-old Arita had decided to move home to set up his own studio. He told me that when American and European artists, collectors, and gallery owners learned he was from Hiroshima, they would often lean in to look more closely at his work, as if looking for traces of atomic radiation or a legacy of nuclear warfare in his brushstrokes or subject matter. While it used to bother him—and he deliberately avoided depicting images from Hiroshima or atomic bombs for many years—he eventually felt a pull to return to Hiroshima and to investigate his inheritance of atomic war trauma and peace activism through his painting.

A few years before I met him, Arita had learned that a large portion of the masses of paper cranes sent to Hiroshima each year were ritually cremated in a ceremonial fire at a temple on the nearby island of Miyajima. He went about requesting permission from the city of Hiroshima and the monks of Miyajima Island to use the ashes of the cremated paper cranes in his painting. He is currently the only artist that has been granted permission to use this material in his work. In his paintings, immersive installations, and performance work, the partially burned cranes are sometimes still visible, in arcs of color that mark the prayers for peace that flood into Hiroshima. At other times the ash is thoroughly mixed into paints with which he depicts images of suffering, rebirth, and contemporary political critique.⁴ Arita uses the cremated



Fig. 25. Taiki Arita's *White Fall*. Acrylic paint, ash of paper cranes, paper cranes, spray paint on canvas. 1167 × 910 mm, 2019. (Reproduced courtesy of Taiki Arita.)

cranes as metaphor and materiality of the dialectical conditions that shaped his upbringing as a Hiroshima-born grandchild of two atomic bomb survivors: death and rebirth; war and peace; antinuclear activism in the face of ongoing nuclear proliferation, meltdowns of nuclear power plants, and bomb tests. Arita creates imagery and choreographies that bring together such dialectics of our postatomic world, aesthetically synthesizing material remains of peace and war, while at the same time leaving the components of the dialectics visible such that the pieces remain open for spectator-participants to create their own meanings.⁵

Inspired in part by Zen Buddhist philosophy, Arita's works are structured around dialectical philosophy, imagery, and embodied practices. These are also tenets of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), the final pairing of art and trauma therapy that I offer in this book. Both emphasize the value of approaching life (and death) dialectically—on one hand, radically accepting pain, loss, and imperfection, and, on the other, using wise thought and action to make positive change and build a more equitable life. Together, these approaches offer practical approaches to constructing Levertov's "facets of the forming crystal" of peace.

Dialectical Philosophy for Social Change

Marsha Linehan, creator of DBT, found that dialectical philosophies were essential to treating her suicidal and bipolar patients, nearly all of whom carried complex PTSD and lived on the "borderlines" of personality disorders, destructive relationships, and harmful behaviors. Dialectical philosophy, Linehan discovered, could "bring balance and save clients and therapists from all-or-nothing concepts and behaviors."⁶ Lane Pederson, a DBT therapist, describes the dialectical philosophy of DBT:

Dialectics recognize inherent contradictions and tensions that arise within us, between us, in situations, and in the world. Rather than allowing these oppositions to negate each other, the philosophy seeks synthesis, balance, and flow, transforming the crystallization of opposites into fluid movement. This movement represents the second assumption, that change is continual and will lead to new contradictions and crises. . . . Thus, dialectics require constant attention to and (re)orientation toward context as each moment evolves into the next.⁷

Importantly, dialectics hold contradictions side by side as a means of recognizing and living with them. Whereas paradox is a puzzling situation that seems to leave no logical way out of its opposing elements, dialectical thinking incorporates opposites into a sustainable form that acknowledges contradiction and synthesizes the seemingly irreconcilable ideas into a livable truth. In other words, two things can be true at the same time: I can recognize that I am doing the best that I can *and* accept that I still need to enact behavioral changes in order to live a healthy and sustainable life. I have agency in my own life *and* I need help from others in order to survive and

thrive. I can throw myself into achieving my goals while dialectically letting go of ever fully realizing them.⁸ As Pederson put it, “accepting what is painful is not incompatible with working toward change.”⁹

The concept of acceptance in this matrix is a challenging one. As Pederson writes: “For some, the word itself conjures up the idea that an unwanted reality is approved of or is something to be resigned to, being static and unworkable. For painful emotions, physical sensations, and events, the natural inclination is to reject the reality, as if fighting what is will somehow lead to escape and avoidance of the pain.”¹⁰ However, as Linehan insisted, acceptance of one’s given circumstances is not the same as approval of them.¹¹ Instead, the mindful practice of acceptance can be a pathway to making realistic change, which often exists in the gray areas of lived experience. In DBT, acceptance is a form of “validation that communicates the inherent sense in emotions and behaviors that are otherwise misunderstood, rejected, and pathologized.”¹² That is to say, the practice of acceptance is a means of validating—taking seriously and learning from—lived experiences of suffering that have come from specific circumstances, even if the circumstances themselves were/are “unacceptable.”

Linehan identified in her patients a reduced capacity for tolerating dialectical tensions—that is, they would get locked into black-and-white thinking, or interpret a small backslide or misstep as total failure and revert back to suicidal thoughts and behaviors.¹³ She saw these patterns as directly inhibiting the process of positive change. So she began to introduce practices based in Buddhist mindfulness that could hold both acceptance *and* change. Bringing sensorial awareness to “touch points,” as I described in the practice of somatic witnessing in chapter 3, to the embodied experience of breathing in and out, or to sounds or objects in one’s immediate environment can ground a practitioner in life as it exists here and now. When paired with dialogue about life sustaining goals, these somatic techniques can provide a platform upon which a practitioner can hold their experiences of suffering and discomfort alongside a growing trust in their “wise mind” to know the difference between healthy and unhealthy behaviors. This process supports clients in making realistic plans for improving their own lives and relationships and navigating the imperfect ways these plans may play out in reality. The DBT approach thus validates experiences of trauma rather than immediately trying to pathologize, fix, or mute them, even when those experiences create difficult and painful circumstances. Simply put, “when clients feel validated, movement toward change can be made.”¹⁴

To my ear, this approach to treating and transforming post-traumatic stress resonates directly with the forms of cultural war trauma that I have been tracing throughout this book. Acknowledging that repeated enactments of state sponsored violence create a wide range of trauma responses across human communities—and accepting that cultures of abuse, rage, and dissociation that attend militarized responses to conflict are outcomes of untreated war trauma—are necessary steps to making meaningful change away from war as a way of life. Said another way, peace is not the binary opposite of war. Peace is instead a dialectical practice of accepting the brutal lessons of war, of keeping them in hand and under our feet, as we take steps that lead us collectively towards healthy and sustainable life on this planet.

Walking into Arita's studio was an encounter with dialectical philosophy in material form. When I arrived with my local guide, Mirei Tashiro, we were immediately immersed in a blend of chaos and precision, destruction and regeneration. A large work in progress was still dripping black oily paint onto the newspaper-lined floor; boxes of ash and partially burned cranes sat amid jars and tubes of paints; and scores of finished pieces were stacked against the walls, paintings that I recognized from his website that have been shown in local and international galleries. The more I looked at any one surface, more details—and paper cranes—revealed themselves. A heap of partially burned cranes rose into an articulated arc of flight, like a collective phoenix reshaping itself into a brighter future. A portrait of Donald Trump, face twisted with familiar bluster was, upon closer look, unexpectedly composed of colorful paper cranes. Everywhere I looked, alternative futures seemed possible, even out of dark and deadly political realities. Arita cheerfully navigated the clutter as he led us into a tatami-lined back room where we sat on the floor, drinking tea and talking about coming of age as an artist in a world stretched thin by divisive politics.

Arita was inspired to use the ashes of the paper cranes in his paintings precisely because they are dialectical philosophy put into material form. They conjure the burned remains of people, buildings, trees after the bomb fell, the ashy black rain, or nuclear fallout, that fell in the hours and days following the bomb. At the same time, paper cranes themselves are the result of embodied rituals for healing and peace. They thus symbolize the dialectic of Hiroshima: the city is the site of atomic devastation and a thriving center for antinuclear activism. Although he is religiously agnostic and suspicious of coalitions of religious and political power, Arita shared that he is inspired by Zen Buddhist philosophies and contemplative practices such as Zen gardens. According to

Zen theorist and historian Nakagawara, Zen gardens are created according to metaphorical and material dialectics: “in its use of ‘dead’ materials to represent living forces [sand and rocks that conjure mountains and oceans], the *sekitei* garden embodies a Zen spiritual paradox: the unity of opposites. . . . the spectator is meant to experience an enlightening ‘apprehension of the world as a dialectical continuum’ rather than a set of binary oppositions.”¹⁵

As conceptual as Zen philosophy can be, it is an embodied form of contemplation and witnessing. In other words, there is not a “fourth wall” separating an observer from that which they are observing in the natural world. Making, tending, or spending time in a Zen garden invites embodied, nature-based contemplation of the dialectical continuum of being and nonbeing, of self and other, and the lack of actual divisions between any of these categories. Although the movements of tending or beholding a Zen garden may be slow and minimal, Nakagawara describes the ancient practice, known as *sekitei*, as “a highly interactive form of art, where the beholder is permanently summoned . . . to participate in the creation of meaning.” In the act of witnessing, one also witnesses oneself: “observing the outside world [is] a means of looking into one’s own nature.”¹⁶

Arita sets forward material evidence of the dialectics of the atomic bombing for his viewers’ contemplation. His paintings, like a Zen garden, are constructed with “dead” materials, even as they point toward regeneration and survival. The ash from the paper cranes as well as the images he creates with them point in two directions: to human suffering and ecological destruction on one hand, and, on the other, physical proof of subsequent efforts toward peace, healing, and rebirth. In *Black Rain*, a semi-immersive installation Arita had staged the year previous to my visit, he brought the effects of atomic fallout and radiation out of the canvas and into the gallery itself. Two large canvases filled with sticky black streaks signified the black rain that fell after the atomic bomb, blanketing the people and landscape with viscous, irradiated liquid. The black rain was later determined to be the cause of much of the radiation sickness and deaths that followed in the weeks, months, and years after the bombing, affecting survivors and aid workers who rushed to Hiroshima after the bombing. To indicate the ways in which the irradiated water indiscriminately poisoned all organic elements of life in Hiroshima—humans, animals, and environment—Arita used a mixture of media to create the black rain itself, including ash from burned clothing, plants, chicken bones, books, pencils, hair, skin, and plastic.

He described to me how the installation theatrically extended the black rain into the space of the gallery. A ground cloth, splattered with the same



Fig. 26. Taiki Arita's *The Black Rain*. 100 percent carbon black ink, mixture of dirt, water, ash (dust, clothes, chicken bones, vegetables, fruits, paper, pencils, burned plants, hair, skin) on cardboard. 1000 × 1400 mm (*left and right*), 1000 × 2000 mm (*bottom*), 2017. (Reproduced courtesy of Taiki Arita.)

black residue on the canvas, stretched along the floor, toward the viewer. The extension of the painting wordlessly communicated that none of us are temporally or spatially far removed from this poison as long as nuclear weapons exist in our world. The installation thus stretched between dialectics of vulnerability and responsibility, between empowerment from historical knowledge and our human impulse to repeat disasters of the past. Behind the semi-immersive *Black Rain* installation, Arita had built a huge column of paper



Fig. 27. Taiki Arita's *A Storm of Prayers*. Paper cranes (delivered to Hiroshima city from all over the world), threads. 5600 mm high × 2500 mm deep, 2017. (Photograph courtesy of Taiki Arita.)

cranes, curling upward in a helix of bright color and dynamic movement. Like a mythological phoenix rising from the ashes, the helix started with partially burned paper cranes, curled on the floor of the gallery, then extended upwards from there with unburned cranes that rose several stories in the air. The individual paper cranes, both burned and whole, formed a body politic of their own, physically expressing the DNA of a hopeful, brighter future that was at once out of reach *and* made by human hands.

Arita-san paired his rich imagery with educational information about nuclear weaponry: the exhibit included placards that offered facts about the numbers of nuclear bombs that exist (approximately 15,000), along with information on when and where the most recent nuclear tests have occurred

around the world. He also posed questions about what we might do to avoid the destructive forces of existing nuclear bombs, which are several orders of magnitude stronger than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The spatial dramaturgy placed viewers within our global genealogy of nuclear weaponry and handed us the dialectical realities we face as we contemplate our future as a species. Positioned between evidence of the suffering and contamination caused by nuclear weaponry (the black rain) and the decades of peace activism that have emerged from this knowledge (the paper crane helix), the need and potential for behavioral change was made palpable.

From Arita's perspective, only someone in his generation—a grandchild of Hibakusha (atomic bomb survivors)—could have had the gumption to use the cremated remains of paper cranes to make paintings like these. He admitted that his use of the ashes has been controversial, particularly among older generations that feel that the ashes are sacred and should not be disturbed or recycled for other purposes. However, Arita argues that his paintings are not only a way of honoring but also a way of fulfilling the prayers for peace that went into the creation of the paper cranes in the first place. He believes that he is transforming—what Brecht would call defamiliarizing—the traditional symbolism of the paper cranes into new messages, images, and embodied practices of peace. Mirei, my guide in Hiroshima, had also grown up in Hiroshima and had two school-age daughters that had participated in many iterations of “peace education” in Hiroshima (see chapter 4). She shared that some of her friends and her children's friends were tired of peace education, even though they feel guilty saying it. Inured by the received scripts of peace education, many saw the act of folding paper cranes as an act of duty rather than a creative, activist practice. “But this way of painting he is doing,” Mirei said, “is good because it is a shocking use of the cranes. The cranes are usually beautiful but here they are not beautiful.”¹⁷ She imagined that Arita's paintings might be a way of asking young people to consider what they can do *after* they are finished with the assigned work of folding paper cranes. To ask, “Now what?”

Indeed, Arita's paintings are post-peace-education in nature. They make visible the evolution of Sadako's “1,000 paper cranes” into our contemporary world: The cranes carry with them the abundant hopes and prayers for peace that flow into Hiroshima from around the world, an abundance so great that it must be destroyed, transformed in a ceremonial fire into ash. The cremation of the cranes, and Arita's re-use of their ashes, dramaturgically suggests that both radical acceptance and radical change are going to be required of us in order to build a world structured around peace rather than war.

A Line of Peace Might Appear

In her poem “Making Peace,” excerpted at the start of this resolution, Denise Levertov describes the work of peacebuilding as an invention of a new way of speaking; a conscientious act of linguistic and behavioral restructuring: “. . . peace, like a poem / is not there ahead of itself, / can’t be imagined before it is made, / can’t be known except in the words of its making, / grammar of justice, / syntax of mutual aid. / A feeling towards it, / dimly sensing a rhythm, is all we have / until we begin to utter its metaphors, / learning them as we speak.” She suggests that peace can become tangible, durable, and actionable through putting creative imagination into practice: “peace, a presence, / an energy field more intense than war, / might pulse then, / stanza by stanza into the world, / each act of living / one of its words, each word / a vibration of light—facets / of the forming crystal.”¹⁸

Where Levertov’s “syntax of mutual aid” and “grammar of justice” are metaphorical, the words with which we might learn to speak peace will indeed matter, in body and in spirit. Robin Wall Kimmerer connects recovering near-extinct Indigenous languages to reviving harmonious relationships between human and more-than-human beings that share ecological homes. She has committed to learning to speak the Potawatomi language of her ancestors, the Anishinaabe people, that, due to colonialist, genocidal practices of “Indian Removal” and government boarding schools that stripped Indigenous children of their mother tongues, had been lost to her and countless other Native Americans.¹⁹ In her chapter “Learning the Grammar of Animacy,” Kimmerer gives many examples of Potawatomi words that express an understanding of the natural world that surpasses the precise, measured, scientific language of botany, speaking instead in what I have called “soma time.”²⁰ As Kimmerer argues, the path toward harmonious rebalancing of interspecies and human to human relationships, what we might one day be able to call Peace, depends upon our abilities to listen to and learn to speak the multisensory languages of life on earth. Indeed, she considers Indigenous mythologies and the lessons from the natural living world they contain to be “instructions for the future” of life on earth.²¹ They are not commandments or rules, “rather they are like a compass: they provide an orientation but not a map” for a sustainable and sustaining future for all species.²²

Peace is an embodied language of harmony, tolerance, and compassion that must be learned by listening deeply and *with a difference*. We humans

have the capacity to learn to speak Peace—at first in stumbling fragments, no doubt with some errors and miscommunications that we can hopefully see as a natural process of gaining fluency in a new language. There are, as Kimmerer suggests, existing languages that we might turn to and revive as guides in this process. We will also no doubt need to invent new syntax and imagine new gestures as we go because, “peace, like a poem, is not there ahead of itself.”²³

Sociologist and international conflict resolution expert John Paul Lederach emphasizes the crucial role of what he calls “moral imagination” in developing peaceful, just, and sustaining methods of conflict resolution. In *The Moral Imagination*, a book he wrote late in his career, Lederach argues that, to move beyond the habits of violent conflict, we must invest in the “art and soul” of peacebuilding, exploring creative, imaginative means by which old habits of violent thoughts and actions can be broken and restructured. Moral imagination, for Lederach, is the “capacity to perceive things beyond and at a deeper level than what initially meets the eye . . . [an] attentiveness to more than is immediately visible” through the engagement of creative process.²⁴ At the heart of “moral imagination” is a dialectical tension between what can be seen and what can be imagined, between the recognition (acceptance) of suffering caused by war, on one hand, and, on the other, the capacity to envision just and equitable landscapes of peace. “The moral imagination has a quality of transcendence. It breaks out of what appear to be narrow, short-sighted, or structurally determined dead-ends.”²⁵ The concept of “moral imagination” shows up in the rhetorical and practical strategies of numerous community-engaged activists and artists working for social change, including Martin Luther King Jr., Toni Morrison, T. S. Eliot, Immanuel Kant, John Dewey, and Hannah Arendt.²⁶ The collection *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict* catalogues performance makers that strive to activate the “moral imaginations” of their community participants. These artist-activists define moral imagination as our human “capacity to be in touch with, and grounded in, the limitations and suffering of the real world, and simultaneously to imagine and work toward a more just and more life-enhancing imagined order.”²⁷ Moral imagination is, in essence, dialectical creative practice for social change.

The capacity of Arita’s dialectical artistry to engender moral imagination is most vividly expressed in his collaborations with community organizer and dance artist Masako Kushima. The two have created several public dance performances with residents of Hiroshima, using Arita’s blended ash-paints



Fig. 28. Taiki Arita (*kneeling at right*) and Masako Kushima (*leg extended*) live-painting collaboration, Hiroshima, 2019. (Photograph courtesy of Taiki Arita.)

in a process they call “live-painting.”²⁸ Masako’s creative movement practices, which she shares freely with community residents of Hiroshima, put Lederach’s concept of “moral imagination” into action.

Masako, whom I met with a few days after I visited with Arita, had had an established career as a professional dancer in Japan. Rather like Arita, she experienced a mid-career awakening that led her to move to Hiroshima and dedicate her time to creating peace-activist movement pieces with intergenerational groups of Hiroshima residents. Though not as formalized as the annual productions of *Grandchildren of Hiroshima*, her community-based work likewise brings together young, school-age children with elderly populations in collaborative, devised movement workshops and performances. Her first step is getting her participants to trust their intuitive imaginations and engage their own bodies expressively, two things that she sees as culturally entrenched challenges for Japanese people. She says that many participants are at first bewildered by her process: “Japan is the same as 150 years ago: students face the teacher in a line, don’t speak to each other, follow the

teacher's rules and what is modeled for them."²⁹ While they are well versed in the stories and imagery of postatomic Hiroshima, they are unaccustomed to physically trying experiences on their own bodies and physically improvising their own futures. (I assured her it was not only Japanese people; we have a paucity of expressive, community movement practices in the U.S. as well.)

As *Acting Together* authors avow, there must be a process for warming up and engaging participants' bodies, as it is through the body that imaginative representation and personal/collective transformation is possible: "In most practices of socially engaged theatre, rehearsals and workshops start with exercises designed to allow participants to access their bodies as expressive tools, vessels where imagery and knowledge are stored."³⁰ Masako soon found a key to unlock her participants' bodies as expressive tools in a set of traditional movement practices, so baked into Japanese life as to be almost invisible. Beginning around 1925, *Rajio Taiso* (literally, radio exercises or radio calisthenics) have been broadcast over radios, loudspeakers, and television channels from 6:30 and 6:40 every morning in all forty-seven prefectures of Japan. People participate in their homes, at school, at work, or in city parks. *Rajio Taiso* exercises serve as familiar movement vocabularies for Japanese people: they have been incorporated into a national agenda of physical health and fitness and serve as a unifying choreography among Japanese citizens. Masako told me that "there is no Japanese person who doesn't know this set of exercises; it is close to us, like the war."³¹ And so Masako thought to link those two things—collective exercises and war trauma—as "two things that are so close we almost forget we know them."³²

Masako began holding workshops in the public Peace Park at the atomic bomb memorial museum, beginning at the conclusion of *Rajio Taiso* exercises for which many community members gathered there. Smoothly transitioning from the calisthenic movements of *Rajio Taiso* into her own movement prompts, Masako stealthily recruited participants into her creative dance workshops. She simply kept the movement going with the assembled group, stepping in as a leader at the end of the *Rajio Taiso*, then gradually transitioning to her own workshop. Masako would ask her participants, who might range in age from four years old to seventy-four, to collaboratively create stage pictures based on an element from something they could see in the Peace Park: the waterfall with names of victims, the statue of Sadako (the Hibakusha who folded 1,000 paper cranes), or the "Genbaku dome," the only structure at ground zero that remained standing after the A-bomb blast. If Hibakusha were present on a given day, as they often were, Masako would ask

them to offer an image or posture from their memories. Following this exercise, Masako would ask her participants to create collective tableaux based on a thematic question she posed, such as “what does peace look like for you?”³³

The dramaturgy of her process mirrors that of Arita’s paper crane paintings, beginning with a kind of “somatic drag,” patterned on the known and received past and moving into the yet to be imagined and enacted future. Indeed, somatic awareness is central to Masako’s movement explorations. She finds it essential when asking participants to grapple with such large conceptual questions to ground their explorations in the senses and movements of their bodies. In her workshops, she frequently asks her dancers to check in with different body parts and senses as they explore and express scenes of suffering and enactments of peace. Masako described one exercise in which she gave her dancers a soft rope and asked them to find a way to constrict or tie parts of their bodies. Then she put on upbeat music and asked them to dance to it. Inevitably, she said, they had to find new ways to move, bound as they were by the ropes they tied themselves. She correlated this to the immediate aftermath of the bombing, saying, “after the bombing, people’s bodies suddenly couldn’t move as before: they lost their eyes, were trying to put eyeball back in socket, their skin was peeling off, their legs or arms were amputated, yet they were still trying to move.”³⁴ By translating these debilitating injuries into a movement exercise that was paired with physically animating music, Masako created a dialectical dramaturgy for creating new modalities of moving forward, one that accepted and built upon the impairments and scars of war trauma.

That exercise ended up informing the choreography for a live-painting-dance that Masako and Arita collaborated on in 2019. Maintaining elements of the movement developed in the rope binding exercise, dancers caught a canvas coated in Arita’s colorful ash-paint that was released from above. While it first seemed to descend on them as the bomb had, the canvas was embraced and turned into a puppet-like figure that the dancers moved with, creating tableaux that expressed peaceful coexistence and care for one another. Importantly, the physical assemblages they created never fully left behind the traces of the binding and impairment that symbolized the physical damage and suffering of the bomb. In other words, their embodiments of peace carried within them the traces of war trauma, as if to say: we can and must start from where we are. With the fire of transformation, the warmth of moral imaginations, it is possible to create something other than more violence from violent trauma.



Fig. 29. Students perform during Taiki Arita and Masako Kushima's live-painting collaboration, Hiroshima, 2019. (Photograph courtesy of Taiki Arita.)

Masako works to spread this creative spark from participants to spectators in her performances, moving her process beyond the fourth walls of spectatorship for the tourists that flood Hiroshima around the anniversaries of the atomic bombing. In a performance on August 6, 2019 (the seventy-fourth anniversary), her community dancers molded thin wire sculptures of the “Genbaku dome,” commonly called the “A-bomb dome.” Manipulating them almost like puppets, the dancers shone a red light above to represent the bomb, and candles inside to memorialize lives lost and symbolize the persistence of peace efforts. They danced with these physical elements in a circle, surrounded by the gathered audience in the Hiroshima Peace Park. The dancers wore all white and danced with flashlights covered in white cloth

to resemble lanterns like the ones that are traditionally released to float on the river. Toward the end of the piece, the performers passed the candles on to the audience and brought them in to join in a circle dance. That dance turned into a reinterpretation of the traditional dance forms of the Obon festival in Japan, which immediately follows the atomic bomb anniversary on August 13–15. Known as the “festival of the dead,” Obon traditionally honors ancestors and includes large, durational community circle dances, performed by any and all attendees, that represent the past efforts and lives of ancestors. Rather than the traditional shamisen and taiko drum compositions that accompany Obon dances, Masako blasted reggae music to reference other international peace movements. To further defamiliarize the tradition and refocus on the creativity of the individuals partaking in the ancient ritual, Masako’s circle dance occurred around a platform on which different participants were invited to stand and dance. The person in the middle would lead the group movements with whatever inspired them, and everyone on the outside would follow their lead. Traditional Obon dance movements mixed with various other dance traditions and quotidian movements improvised by whomever was on the center platform, thereby collectively creating new movement rhetorics. Masako put her goal simply, albeit dialectically: “How can we think in new ways about our ancestors and about peace?”³⁵

The Martial Art of Peace

These examples, along with the case studies from throughout the preceding chapters of this book, constitute what cultural theorist Bill Brown has termed “martial art.” Brown appropriates the term “martial art” to describe artist activists that appropriate martial technologies and interfaces, performatively using them to “calibrate the war machine differently.”³⁶ Martial artists, for Brown, “rework traditional arms to bring persons and things into a new proximity.”³⁷ Instead of mirroring the dehumanizing shapes that war machines make—“geometric squadrons of aircraft, spirals of smoke from burning villages”—Brown’s examples of martial artistry rearticulate the human-technology interfaces of war and repurpose them toward supporting and rehumanizing communities affected by war. For example, the Peace Art Project Cambodia, conceived by Sasha Constable, transforms weaponry discarded by the Cambodian military into materials for making chairs, candlesticks, and glass top tables.³⁸ In the U.S., John Ricker’s “Guns in Art” project melts down weapons

from civilian and military communities into park benches, bicycle racks, and altars for homicide victims.³⁹ These projects bring awareness to the pervasiveness of military weaponry in spaces that are seemingly removed from active warfare. They awaken “implicated subjects” to our roles in state-sponsored violence while materializing alternative social structures. As Brown puts it, martial art “stages the presence of weaponry in the city of peace, reminding us of how our daily lives are sustained by violence, while dislodging guns and ammunition from their roles as actants in a violent narrative.”⁴⁰

Dramaturgical strategies of martial art have likewise structured many of the case studies of this book. Stephan Wolfert’s DE-CRUIT repurposed collective movement strategies of military unit formation in his ten-week theatrical boot camp; instead of getting “wired for war,” participants cohered around physical and vocal techniques to effectively express inner emotions and represent the effects of war trauma on their lives and relationships. Members of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War flipped the script of their own war trauma, using their intrusive memories, physical rage, and difficulty sleeping as source material for public actions aimed at awakening the American public to the unacceptable horrors of the Vietnam War. Christine Evans and Jared Mezzocchi’s techno-materialism and “glitch ethics” reconfigured the military VR exposure therapy interface, *Virtual Iraq*, pushing beyond the limited perspective of war trauma that had been programmed into the system. And Wafaa Bilal shifted the stakes of online first-person shooter gaming, using a live performance framework to illuminate the ethical dimensions of remote-control violence and urging his anonymous participants to exercise their own enunciative power in virtual assembly.

In “dislodging” military tools from their prescribed roles in militarized cultures, these martial artists also reconfigure the embodied approaches that humans might take toward legacies of war. In Jonathan Wei’s *Telling Project* and Bryan Doerries’s *Theater of War*, dramatic accounts of war open the floor for dialogue about where war, trauma, and militarization sit in the bodies of audiences today. Tania El Khoury’s *Gardens Speak* quite literally has audience-participants put their ears to the ground as they unearth personal accounts of political violence in Syria. Rimini Protokoll’s *Situation Rooms* and the Hiroshima-based *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* utilize mimetic role-play—what I called “somatic drag”—to create kinesthetic, empathic connections between self and other, even across great differences, distances, and time.

As in dialectical behavioral therapy, these projects do not disavow the violent effects of weaponry or the militarization that these objects and inter-

faces, in their vital materialism, have proliferated. Instead, they demonstrate that the structures of military violence that are supported by civic societies and bodies politic the world over must be viewed with clear-eyed recognition. We must accept—though not approve—that militarized violence and war trauma persist in cultural, embodied habits. Only then can we make meaningful and sustaining change, with effort, imagination, and collaboration. Only then can we truly move beyond the fourth wall of war to create genuinely *post-war* performance.

In another of Brown's examples, martial artist Klara Sax created massive installations of B-52 bombers in the Nevada desert. Setting up her outdoor studio in the "flyover" spaces that border U.S. military training fields, Sax gathered local communities and other artist friends to repaint the retired (grounded) aircraft in bright colors and antiwar slogans. In an interview, Sax described her embodied approach to the human and machine collaborations she led: "See, we're painting, hand-painting in some cases, putting our puny hands to great weapon systems . . . we're trying to *unrepeat*, to find an element of felt life, and maybe there's sort of a survival instinct here, a graffiti instinct—to trespass and declare ourselves, show who we are."⁴¹

Resolutions for Unrepeating

At this point in human-world history, the best we might be able to do is *unrepeating*. To *unrepeat with a difference*, to embody a new syntax of performativity, a different language of peace so that we might become who we want to be. At the end of her book *Stages of Emergency*, Tracy Davis puts the aspiration of "unrepeating" into theatrical terms. After over 300 pages of detailed description of drills, manuals, and cultural programs that guided civilians to physically rehearse for nuclear preparedness in the Cold War U.S., Canada, and U.K., Davis concludes with two questions: "Will there ever be a rehearsal—and at last a performance—of peace? Would that be the ultimate breach in the—as yet—unbroken tradition?"⁴² Her succinct articulation of this centuries-old stalemate urges readers to imagine how theater, performance, and culture makers might offer models of rehearsing for peace. Where Davis recounts "duck and cover" drills that had North American elementary school students rehearsing for the tangible possibility of nuclear attack in the 1950s and 1960s, my own elementary-age children rehearse monthly "active shooter" drills, preparing for the egregiously common event

of a school shooting in the U.S. To be sure, such emergency preparedness drills are vital for immediate survival in a crisis, yet they also serve to normalize cultures of violence and militarization. They lock us into physical habits that perpetuate rather than address the unhealed traumas that fuel them. Simply put, these embodied rehearsals repeat rather than *unrepeat* existing repertoires of violence, fear, and hatred. They work against the creation of new repertoires of peace.

The stakes of rewriting scripts of militarism and war are as high today as they have ever been. Every day, news reports evidence embodied habits of intolerance and violence toward bodies that are perceived as dangerous or unwanted because they are different. Justifying and normalizing such attitudes and actions in political discourse is, according to Hannah Arendt, the foundation of genocidal politics. In her biting ethical critique of Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann, Arendt maintained that Eichmann was not only committing mass murder, but was picking and choosing who was worthy of cohabitating the earth.⁴³ Arendt's ethics expand to any totalitarian regime, as she insisted that no one has the prerogative to choose with whom to coinhabit the earth. She argued that, as ethical beings, humans are required to live with all beings that already exist: this is the first measure toward treating all lives as intrinsically valuable, worthy of protection, and grievable when harmed.⁴⁴ Any other approach, she asserted, leads to genocidal politics: deciding who may or may not live on this earth.

Genocides, mass shootings, political violence, and hate-filled nationalistic rhetoric rule the airwaves and lived experiences of too many around the world. We must, in the face of our robust habits of human-generated violence, make intentional "resolutions" for change, for unrepeatable our habituation to warfare. We must then enact these new repertoires with determined resolve. Replacing rehearsals for violence with embodied, creative practices of peaceful conflict resolution would be the deepest form of healing and resilience from age-old war trauma.

This is a future worth changing for. This is a future worth moving toward. This is a future that, as light and as heavy as a paper crane, is, quite literally, in our hands.

NOTES

Introduction

1. George Brant, *Grounded* (London: Oberon Books, 2013), 32.
2. Brant, *Grounded*, 51.
3. Brant, *Grounded*, 70–71.
4. Elise Morrison, “Ambushed by Empathy: George Brant’s *Grounded*,” *TDR/The Drama Review* 58, no. 4 (224) (December 1, 2014): 168, https://doi.org/10.1162/DRAM_a_00409
5. Judith Lewis Herman, *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 2023), 36. Herman introduces “implicated subject” as an additional subject position that expands the long-used quadrant of trauma roles: victim, perpetrator, collaborator, and bystander.
6. As Mantoan and Brady argue, representational cultural apparatuses that function at a seeming remove from military technologies in fact directly contribute to the widespread “militarization” of culture: “Militarization takes place in conditions where the gun need no longer be present for hearts and minds to live in a constant state of military preparedness as well as a more invisible and insidious surrender to the military machine. . . . Militarized cultures encompass both occupied territories and those subsisting there, and societies not currently under threat of war but that nevertheless put the concerns of civil society in the service of an increasingly powerful military culture.” Sara Brady and Lindsey Mantoan, “Introduction: In the Absence of the Gun,” in *Performance in a Militarized Culture*, ed. Sara Brady and Lindsey Mantoan (New York: Routledge, 2018), 2.
7. Roland Barthes juxtaposes the “studium,” or the culturally familiar aspects of a photograph, with the “punctum” that pricks the viewer awake with something unexpected. “A photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).” Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 27.
8. Diana Taylor, “Afterword: War Play,” *PMLA* 124, no. 5 (October 2009): 1888, <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.5.1886>
9. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. J. J. Graham (London: Nicholas Trübner, 1873), <https://clausewitzstudies.org/readings/OnWar1873/BK5ch02.html>
10. See Sara Brady, *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror: Whatever It Takes* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), particularly “War, the Video Game”; Scott Magelsen, “Rehearsing the ‘Warrior Ethos’: ‘Theatre Immersion’ and the Simulation of Theatres of War,” *TDR/The Drama Review* 53, no. 1 (201) (March 1, 2009): 47–72, <https://doi.org>

/10.1162/dram.2009.53.1.47, and *Simming: Participatory Performance and the Making of Meaning* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); Lindsey Mantoan, *War as Performance: Conflicts in Iraq and Political Theatricality* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). Brady and Mantoan's edited volume, *Performance in a Militarized Culture*, "examines militarization as a vital concern for 20th and 21st century performance" and posits that "performance is and has to be understood as key to this militarization"; Sara Brady and Lindsey Mantoan, *Performance in a Militarized Culture*, ed. Sara Brady and Lindsey Mantoan (New York: Routledge, 2018), 2. Harun Farocki's *Serious Games I–IV*, created during 2009–10 was exhibited in Europe and the United States in an immersive photography and video gallery staging; see <https://www.harunfarocki.de/installations/2010s.html>

11. Taylor, "Afterword: War Play," 1888.

12. Taylor, "Afterword," 1892–93. See also Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

13. As Joseph Roach observed, Denis Diderot's eighteenth-century Encyclopedia project illustrates that ballet choreography and close-order drill formations emerged contemporaneously: "The deployment of moving bodies in exactly the right places at exactly the right times, and in the right relationships to one another . . . constitutes a technology of power of the utmost importance in military and theatrical history," Joseph Roach, "Power's Body: The Inscription of Morality as Style," in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 48.

14. Taylor, "Afterword: War Play," 1890.

15. Diderot articulated the idea of an imaginary wall separating the actors from the audience in his essay "De la poésie dramatique" (On Dramatic Poetry), first published in 1758. See: Denis Diderot, "Discourse on Dramatic Poetry," in *Diderot's Selected Writings*, trans. Lester G. Crocker (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 239–68.

16. Jacques Rancière uses the phrase "intellectual emancipation" throughout his lecture, "The Emancipated Spectator," originally delivered at the Fifth International Academy of Arts in Frankfurt on August 20, 2004, and published in revised form in *ArtForum*. Jacques Rancière, "The Emancipated Spectator," *Artforum International* (Los Angeles: Penske Media Corporation, March 1, 2007), 271–81, 341.

17. Rancière, "Emancipated Spectator," 280. In this lecture, as in his eventual book, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), Rancière argued that cultural critiques of theatrical spectatorship must relinquish the false opposition between active performers and passive spectators, which have been used to challenge the sociopolitical value of theater from Plato through Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud. Instead, Rancière reframes theater as an interactive process of "linking what one knows with what one does not know, of being at the same time performers who display their competences and spectators who are looking to find what those competences might produce in a new context, among unknown people" ("Emancipated Spectator," 280). That said, Rancière remains focused on intellectual activation of an audience and is broadly skeptical that sensorial or participatory tactics in theater lead to "emancipation" of audience members.

18. See "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction" and "Alienation Effects in Chi-

nese Acting” in Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

19. The primary model for processing human tragedy in these classic dramatic tragedies is known as a “catharsis,” or release of difficult or negative emotions. As theater theorists such as Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal have argued, the risk of audience experiences of catharsis is that the release of emotion within a theater stands in for or remains unconnected to making material changes to dominant sociopolitical structures of militarism or rehearsing alternative methods of resolving conflict.

20. Nisha Sajani, Christine Mayor, and Julian Boal, “Theatre of the Oppressed: Drama Therapy as Cultural Dialogue,” in *Current Approaches in Drama Therapy*, ed. David Read Johnson and Renée Emunah (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 2021), 468.

21. For Boal, the goal of the spect-actor is ethical action within the theater in order to rehearse ethical action in the greater sociopolitical world: “to safeguard, develop and reshape this human vocation, by turning the practice of theater into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions.” Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. McBride and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985), 14–15.

22. Formerly titled *You Are Dead. You Are Here*. (during arts residency at HERE Arts, 2013–14).

23. Bessel van der Kolk, “The Doctor Responds,” Magazine, *New York Times*, June 13, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/15/magazine/reply-all-the-6-114-issue.html>. As Van der Kolk put it in the same letter, clarifying his then still marginalized position on trauma and embodied therapies: “Trauma is much more than a story about the past that explains why people are frightened, angry or out of control. Trauma is re-experienced in the present, not as a story, but as profoundly disturbing physical sensations and emotions that may not be consciously associated with memories of past trauma.”

24. Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking, 2014), 64.

25. van der Kolk, *Body Keeps the Score*, 64.

26. van der Kolk, *Body Keeps the Score*, 217.

27. As described by Robert Landy, a founder of modern drama therapy, “action refers to the therapeutic application of drama, play, and nonverbal expression in the service of engaging the body, mind, and emotions of clients in a process of healing.” See Robert J. Landy, *The Couch and the Stage: Integrating Words and Action in Psychotherapy* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 2008), 2. See also Peter A. Levine and Ann Frederick, *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1997).

28. Quoted in Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), 2.

29. See Dan Tomasulo and Andrea Szucs, “The ACTing Cure: Evidence-Based Group Treatment for People with Intellectual Disabilities,” *Dramatherapy* 37, nos. 2–3 (2015): 100–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02630672.2016.1162824>. As Tomasulo and Szucs elucidate, the “ACTing cure” is an important practice of inclusivity in psychotherapy: “For those whose capacity for language is often diminished, the ACTing cure through its use of playful creativity may provide an untapped resource for personal growth and healing,” 100.

30. See Daniel Feldhendler, “Augusto Boal and Jacob L. Moreno: Theater and Therapy,” in *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism*, ed. Mady Schutzman and Jan Cohen-Cruz (London: Routledge, 1993).

31. See Sajnani et al., “Theatre of the Oppressed.”

32. The initial criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder—specifying “a recognizable stressor outside the range of usual human experience”—appeared in the DSM-III in 1980. The authors pointed to extreme events—including war, torture, sexual violence, the Holocaust, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as both natural disasters like earthquakes and hurricanes and human-caused catastrophes such as industrial accidents and plane crashes—as examples of the kinds of trauma that could lead to PTSD. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1980). For full criteria and subtypes, see pages 236–37.

33. See, for example, Jack Saul, *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing: Promoting Community Resilience in the Aftermath of Disaster* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Eva Leveton, ed., *Healing Collective Trauma Using Sociodrama and Drama Therapy* (New York: Springer, 2010); Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

34. tayla shanaye, “Being in Our Bodies,” Center for Humans & Nature, September 25, 2023, <https://humansandnature.org/creating-a-new-culture-from-the-body/>

35. Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press, 2017), 39.

36. Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 6.

37. Akiko Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 26.

38. There are numerous cultural, historical, and structural reasons behind the hesitancy or reluctance of Black Americans to seek therapy and mental health services. Studies on this in mental health literature include Earlise C. Ward et al., “African American Men and Women's Attitude toward Mental Illness, Perceptions of Stigma, and Preferred Coping Behaviors,” *Nursing Research* 62, no. 3 (2013): 185–94, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/NNR.0b013e31827bf533>, and Ezra E. H. Griffith et al., eds., *Black Mental Health: Patients, Providers, and Systems* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2019).

39. As Nisha Sajnani and David Johnson note, “the trauma movement began in the 1970's with veteran rap groups and women's consciousness-raising groups.” Nisha Sajnani and David Read Johnson, “Issues in Trauma-Informed Drama Therapy,” in *Trauma-Informed Drama Therapy: Transforming Clinics, Classrooms, and Communities*, 2nd ed., ed. Nisha Sajnani and David Read Johnson (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 2024), 15. For more on moral injury, see Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Scribner, 1994).

40. For Emmanuel Lévinas, the heart of ethical recognition is pricked, like a punctum, by a “face-to-face” encounter between self and “other.” See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

41. Peggy Phelan, “Marina Abramović: Witnessing Shadows,” *Theatre Journal* 56, no. 4 (2004): 569–77, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2004.0178>
42. Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 14. Along with Elizabeth Freeman’s “temporal drag,” Schneider invokes a chain of resonances, including Homi Bhabha, after Frantz Fanon, on “temporal lag,” and David Roman’s “archival drag.”
43. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 187.
44. Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 8.
45. Maurice Hamington, “A Performative Approach to Teaching Care Ethics: A Case Study,” *Feminist Teacher* 23, no. 1 (2012): 31, 42, <https://doi.org/10.5406/femteacher.23.1.0031>
46. Jill Dolan defines “utopian performative” as “how utopia can be imagined or experienced affectively, through feelings, in small, incremental moments that performance can provide” in Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 39.
47. *Grounded*, the opera, premiered at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, in the fall of 2023.
48. There is a large body of work on music therapy, in which somatic experiences that range from communitas to emotional expression to vibrational “toning” therapy are used in service of healing. See Peter Payne et al., “Somatic Experiencing: Using Interoception and Proprioception as Core Elements of Trauma Therapy,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 6 (February 2015), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00093>; Marko Punkanen et al., “Vibroacoustic Therapy in the Treatment of Developmental Trauma: Developing Safety through Vibrations,” *Music and Medicine* 9, no. 3 (2017): 3, <https://doi.org/10.47513/mmd.v9i3.539>; Charlotte Fooks and Oliver Niebuhr, “Effects of Vibroacoustic Stimulation on Psychological, Physiological, and Cognitive Stress,” *Sensors* 24, no. 18 (2024): <https://doi.org/10.3390/s24185924>
49. Personal conversation with George Brant, at the Yale Opera Studies Today conference, convened by Gundula Kreuzer, at Stoekel Hall, Yale University, on December 6, 2025.

Chapter 1

1. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 2nd ed., ed. A. R. Braunmuller, The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), II.ii.38–46, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9780511810381>
2. See the informative analysis of this event in Franny Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep: The War for the Mind and the U.S. Military* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2019).
3. For documentary footage of the event, see archival film shorts gathered in “Operation Dewey Canyon III (ODCIII)—Vietnam War Protest,” Film archive, MPI Stock Footage Archive, accessed July 24, 2024, <https://www.mpistockfootage.com/videos/159409>. While gathering, demonstrating, and occupying the National Mall was a form of free speech, “sleep activities” on the grounds after 4:30 p.m. were not legal, due to laws regulating homeless populations and limiting sustained political protests; Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep*, 124.

4. Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep*, 125.
5. See argument offered by Kenneth Bass, *Quaker v. Morton*, “Proceedings,” VVAW Records, quoted in Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep*, 127–128.
6. Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 72.
7. According to historian Kay Redfield Jamison, military psychology coalesced as a field in World War I, as a condition known as “shell shock” became a prevalent symptom experienced by soldiers during and after the war. Kay Redfield Jamison, *Fires in the Dark: Healing the Unquiet Mind* (New York: Knopf, 2023), 58.
8. “Deep or ‘continuous’ sleep therapy employed barbiturates to put soldiers to sleep in the hope that they would awaken restored and calm. Easing traumatized soldiers into sleep that would last for days and sometimes weeks, psychiatrists . . . used the regenerative properties of rest to rehabilitate—or, as they put it, ‘salvage’—the soldier so that he would be ready to return to combat.” Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep*, 15.
9. William Claire Menninger, *Psychiatry: Its Evolution and Present Status* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948), 308.
10. Menninger, *Psychiatry*, 308.
11. Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep*, 25.
12. Menninger, *Psychiatry*, 308.
13. Jamison, *Fires in the Dark*, 48. In an act framed as medical support, military psychologists at times had to pin a white square of cloth over the heart of a soldier so that the firing squad could aim more accurately.
14. Freud compared such clinical observations with colleagues such as Josef Breuer. Freud and Breuer first published their findings on resolving physical symptoms of “hysteria” through verbal expression in 1895: Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, “Studies in Hysteria,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 2 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 6, 17.
15. Rivers was instrumental in developing “exposure therapy” to treat what he called the “mental wounds” of war. Exposure therapy, which employs graduated re-exposure to sources of trauma, continues to be a highly effective treatment for PTS today. As he developed tools of exposure therapy, Rivers “use[d] the controlled reflection of horror to understand what the patient has been through, to allow him to meet the horror in his own strength.” As biographer Jamison chronicles, Rivers believed that “the soldier must stare at it straight on until there is ‘familiarity which breeds indifference, if not contempt.’” Jamison quoting Rivers, *Fires in the Dark*, 61.
16. As Jamison writes, Rivers “had argued vehemently against the censorious views, often expressed by the British military and elite classes, that shell shock patients were cowards.” Rivers preferred to refer to the cumulative effects of wartime stress as “trauma,” or in the more common parlance of the time, as a “mental wound.” Rivers presented this argument in a 1920 testimony to the War Office Committee of Enquiry into Shell-Shock, reframing wartime trauma as an illness, rather than as a character flaw or deficit in the strength of a soldier. See Jamison, *Fires in the Dark*, 58–59.
17. Rivers quoted in Jamison, *Fires in the Dark*, 102.
18. Jamison, *Fires in the Dark*, 102.
19. Menninger, a psychiatrist on the front lines of narcoanalysis, acknowledged the

pressure that formed the technique: “Psychotherapy under sedation was a short-cut, a time saving device” forced by “the circumstance of the war.” Quoted in Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep*, 34. Nudelman avers that military psychiatrists using narcoanalysis found they could “intensif[y] therapeutic dialogue in an effort to unearth repressed memories more efficiently and quickly heal traumatized veterans.” Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep*, 36.

20. Menninger, quoted in Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep*, 35–36.

21. Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep*, 36.

22. Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep*, 36–37. She observes that “practitioners agreed that imagined experiences worked as well as—sometimes even better than—actual experiences to produce the desired effects.”

23. Alan Akers, from the film *Winter Soldier* (1972), quoted in Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep*, 105. *Winter Soldier* is a collectively produced documentary film of the 1971 VVAW hearings held in Detroit; *Winter Soldier*, directed by Winterfilm Collective (Winterfilm in association with Vietnam Veterans Against the War, 1972).

24. As trauma therapist Jonathan Shay observed in his extensive work with military veterans, “moral injury,” or the psychological wounds from “a betrayal of what’s right, by someone who holds legitimate authority, in a high stakes situation,” was a leading factor in the war trauma expressed by veterans, from the Vietnam and Iraq Wars alike; Jonathan Shay, “Moral Injury,” *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 31, no. 2 (2014): 183, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036090>. Shay coined the term “moral injury” in his 1994 book, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 12. Brett Litz et al. expanded this definition to consider moral injury as “perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations”; Brett T. Litz et al., “Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy,” in special issue, “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 29, no. 8 (2009): 700, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2009.07.003>

25. Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep*, 117.

26. Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep*, 113.

27. Nudelman, *Fighting Sleep*, 117.

28. American Psychiatric Association, *DSM III*, 236–37.

29. See Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006).

30. See Elinor Fuchs, “Review: *Postdramatic Theatre* by Hans-Thies Lehmann,” *TDR/The Drama Review* 52, no. 2 (198) (2008): 178–83, <https://doi.org/10.1162/dram.2008.52.2.178>

31. Lehmann identifies postdramatic aesthetics in works by avant-garde theater makers such as Tadeus Kantor, Heiner Müller, The Wooster Group, Builder’s Association, Robert Lepage, and Pina Bausch. For a nonexhaustive “panorama” of the field of “post-dramatic theater,” as Lehmann saw it at the time he published his book, see *Postdramatic Theatre*, 23–24.

32. Luce Irigaray, quoted in Emma Brodzinsky, “‘Her Painful Legs Joined in the Conversation’: Dramatherapy and the Space before and beyond the Talking Cure,” in *Performing Psychologies: Imagination, Creativity and Dramas of the Mind*, ed. Nicola Shaughnessy and Philip Barnard (London: Methuen Drama, 2019), 104.

33. Drama therapist Emma Brodzinsky makes an effort to recuperate Freud as an early adopter of body-based therapy, citing Freud's work with women clients. Brodzinsky writes, "In all our attention to bodies within the practice of dramatherapy, while Jung is often cited, Freud isn't really acknowledged as an influence on the discipline. . . . While there are many problems with Freud's work—such as his less than rigorous methodology and his gender blindness—I am fascinated by the fact that he listened to women's bodies in an era when that was not the cultural norm and how his work may have opened up the clinical potential of the attention to the somatic." Brodzinsky, "Her Painful Legs," 103.

34. Freud's case notes, quoted in Brodzinsky, "Her Painful Legs," 103.

35. Freud's well known "Oedipus complex" referred to the repressed sexual longings a male or female child have for their parents of the opposite sex. The logic for this "complex" stems from the plot of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, in which Oedipus fulfills an oracle's prophesy by unwittingly marrying his estranged mother and murdering his father. See Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 4 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 224. Freud's emphasis on Aristotelian "catharsis" as the goal of his psychoanalytic therapies provides further evidence of the impact of classic theater on his praxis. Freud explained that the therapeutic speech process removes the "operating force of the pathogenic idea" by enabling the "strangulated affect" to be discharged through speech. See Breuer and Freud, "Studies in Hysteria," 17.

36. See Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence, from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (Basic Books, 1992), 14.

37. In 1896, Freud published "The Aetiology of Hysteria" in which he argued that at the root of every case of "hysteria" in adult women, there is "one or more occurrences of premature sexual experiences"; Sigmund Freud, "The Aetiology of Hysteria," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 3 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 203. Judith Herman has been instrumental in reviving these theories in her recent decades of research on incest, rape, and sexual abuse trauma.

38. As Herman reasons, "Hysteria was so common among women that if his patients' stories were true, and if his theory was correct, he would be forced to conclude that what he called 'perverted acts against children' were endemic, not only among the proletariat of Paris, where he had first studied hysteria, but also among the respectable bourgeois families of Vienna, where he had established his practice. This idea was simply unacceptable." Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 13–14. Notably, "hysteria" was only removed from the official manual of psychological disorders (DSM) in 1980, the same year that PTSD was first included; see Cecilia Tasca et al., "Women and Hysteria in the History of Mental Health," *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health* 8 (October 2012): 110–19, <https://doi.org/10.2174/1745017901208010110>

39. Jonathan Kahana and Noah Tsika, "'Let There Be Light' and the Military Talking Picture," in *Remaking Reality: U.S. Documentary Culture after 1945*, ed. Sara Blair et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 14, https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/12/edited_volume/book/58186

40. In a 1955 address to the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama, Moreno laid out three psychiatric revolutions: the first was at the turn of the eigh-

teenth century in France, led by Philippe Pinel, who rejected punishment of the mentally ill in favor of treatment. The second was led by Sigmund Freud. The third, Moreno proposed, was the shift to group psychotherapy, action-based psychodrama, and sociometric “role theory” that he had pioneered. Scott Giacomucci, *Social Work, Sociometry, and Psychodrama: Experiential Approaches for Group Therapists, Community Leaders, and Social Workers* (Singapore: Springer, 2021), 32, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-6342-7>

41. Quoted in Paul Holmes, *The Inner World Outside: Object Relations Theory and Psychodrama*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 11.

42. See Jonathan D. Moreno’s biography of his father: Jonathan D. Moreno, *Impromptu Man: J. L. Moreno and the Origins of Psychodrama, Encounter Culture, and the Social Network* (New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2014).

43. Jacob Levy Moreno, *Preludes to My Autobiography: Introduction to Who Shall Survive?* (Beacon, NY: Beacon House, 1955), x.

44. Patrick Barone, “Jacob Levy Moreno and Psychodrama,” Michigan Psychodrama Center, April 6, 2023, <https://www.michiganpsychodramacenter.com/jacob-levy-moreno-and-psychodrama/>

45. See Jacob Levy Moreno, “The Role Concept, a Bridge between Psychiatry and Sociology,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 118, no. 6 (1961): 518–23, <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.118.6.518>. According to Moreno, treatment of groups became possible only after the development of sociometry, which allows the group therapist to identify and characterize the constellation of relationships existing within a group.

46. Although the two have historically been held as separate, with Jung looking inward and Moreno operating in a far more extroverted manner, recent scholarship has explored the synergistic thinking between the two. See Craig E. Stephenson, ed., *Jung and Moreno: Essays on the Theatre of Human Nature* (Hove, East Sussex: Routledge, 2014).

47. Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 108.

48. This process, also known as sociometry, is at once a descriptive and prescriptive technique that can reveal current choices being made by members of a given group and, with some reflection and improvisation, invite group members to experiment with choices that will bring greater interpersonal harmony and fulfilment of group goals. See Antonina Garcia, “Healing with Action Methods on the World Stage,” in *Healing Collective Trauma Using Sociodrama and Drama Therapy*, ed. Eva Leveton (New York: Springer, 2010), 17.

49. Even in “narrative exposure therapy,” in which clients will describe their story of trauma again and again, the body is considered the index for measuring healing. Narrative exposure therapy has proven to be highly effective for treating PTS, particularly when paired with somatic methods of regulating embodied trauma responses while retelling or recalling the trauma. See Tuvia Peri et al., “Embodied Simulation in Exposure-Based Therapies for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder—a Possible Integration of Cognitive Behavioral Theories, Neuroscience, and Psychoanalysis,” *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 6 (January 2015): n.p., <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v6.29301>

50. Tomasulo and Szucs, “The ACTing Cure,” 112. As American drama therapist Robert Landy discusses, “Action approaches to psychotherapy grew out of Western verbal methods and [Eastern] traditional shamanic practices, eventually coalescing into a theory and practice that is creative and holistic.” Landy, *The Couch and the Stage*, 2.

51. Levine and Frederick, *Waking the Tiger*, 3.
52. Though this research is still nascent, there may be links between high levels of cortisol and the development of autoimmune disorders and other post-traumatic illnesses. See, for example, Gretchen N. Neigh and Fariya F. Ali, "Co-Morbidity of PTSD and Immune System Dysfunction: Opportunities for Treatment," *Current Opinion in Pharmacology* 29 (August 2016): 104–10, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.coph.2016.07.011>
53. From personal interview with Mary I. Daly conducted at her home on July 16, 2023, in Branford, Connecticut.
54. Sajnani and Johnson, *Trauma-Informed Drama Therapy*, 278.
55. Personal interview with Mary Daly, 2023.
56. Levine and Frederick, *Waking the Tiger*, 103–11.
57. Margie Pankhurst, "Imizimba Yesikhumbuzo/Bodies of Memory: The Noise of Silence," in *Trauma-Informed Drama Therapy: Transforming Clinics, Classrooms, and Communities*, 2nd ed., ed. Nisha Sajnani and David Read Johnson (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 2024), 318.
58. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3–4.
59. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 55.
60. Amanda Stuart Fisher, *Performing the Testimonial: Rethinking Verbatim Dramaturgies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 3. Emphasis in original.
61. Primo Levi, quoted in David Read Johnson, "Performing Absence: The Limits of Testimony in the Recovery of a Combat Veteran," in *Healing Collective Trauma Using Sociodrama and Drama Therapy*, ed. Eva Leveton (New York: Springer, 2010), 62.
62. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3–6.
63. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 62.
64. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 62.
65. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 73.
66. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 73.
67. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 62–63.
68. See James Harding, *The Ghosts of the Avant-Garde(s): Exorcising Experimental Theater and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).
69. Butoh was founded by Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno over the course of the 1950s in Japan. Although it is considered a traditional Japanese dance form, Butoh is distinct for its grotesque imagery and movements that explore human experiences often deemed unrepresentable, due to their extreme suffering or taboo. See Sondra Horton Fraleigh, *Dancing into Darkness: Butoh, Zen, and Japan* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).
70. See Rosa Van Hensenbergen, "Moving with Words, 1950–1980s: Language, Notation, Choreography," University of Cambridge, PhD diss. (2020), <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.48223>
71. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 57.

72. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 57.
73. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 62.
74. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 64–65. Johnson ran this unit from 1988 to 1994, though the program continued after he transitioned to other work. Marylou Lauricella, whom I have talked with on several occasions, worked with this program after Johnson, forming a company of veteran-actors under the name "Homefront Theater." For more about the organization's drama therapy and public-facing theater work, see *No Unwounded Soldiers*, directed by Rebecca L. Abbott (RAbbott Media, 2007), 59:00.
75. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 64–65. This process is based in a model called "Relationship Lab"; see Miller James and David Read Johnson, "Drama Therapy in the Treatment of Combat-Related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," *Arts in Psychotherapy* 23, no. 5 (1996): 383–95, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0197-4556\(96\)00045-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0197-4556(96)00045-7)
76. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 57.
77. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 57–58.
78. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 64–65.
79. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 66–71.
80. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 73.
81. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 77.
82. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 77.
83. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 56.
84. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 56.
85. Jones only performed *Rat Piece* once, at the Union Gallery on the campus of California State University in Los Angeles, on February 17, 1976. For detailed description see Martin Harries, "Regarding the Pain of Rats: Kim Jones's *Rat Piece*," *TDR/The Drama Review* 51, no. 1 (2007): 160–65, <https://doi.org/10.1162/dram.2007.51.1.160>. See also Peggy Phelan, "Violence and Rupture: Misfires of the Ephemeral," in *Live Art in LA*, ed. Peggy Phelan (London: Routledge, 2012), 1–38; for analysis of Kim Jones, see especially 22–27.
86. Harries, "Regarding the Pain of Rats," 163.
87. Jones quoted in Harries, "Regarding the Pain of Rats," 162.
88. Phelan, "Violence and Rupture," 26.
89. Harries, "Regarding the Pain of Rats," 162.
90. Jones, quoted in Harries, "Regarding the Pain of Rats," 162.
91. Susan Swenson, "Conversation with Kim Jones: April 25, 2005," in *War Paint*, exhibition catalog, with Kim Jones (Brooklyn, NY: Pierogi, 2005), 14.
92. Phelan, "Violence and Rupture," 26.
93. Harries, "Regarding the Pain of Rats," 163.
94. Johnson continues: "there are limits placed on testimony and limits to what the audience is willing to bear," and a "veteran receives immediate feedback if he moves outside these boundaries and, more likely, anticipating them, never wanders into disturbing territory" when sharing with a public or private audience. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 62–63.
95. Phelan, "Violence and Rupture," 26.
96. Phelan, "Violence and Rupture," 28.

97. Phelan, "Violence and Rupture," 26.
98. Lindsay Goss, *F*ck the Army!: How Soldiers and Civilians Staged the GI Movement to End the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 2024), 6.
99. Brady, "The Soldier Cycle: Harun Farocki's *Images of War (at a Distance)*," in *The Performance Studies Reader*, 3rd ed., ed. Henry Bial and Sara Brady (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016), 193–202. See also "War the Video Game" in Brady, *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror*.
100. Harun Farocki, *Serious Games I-IV*, created during 2009–10 and exhibited in Europe and the United States in an immersive photography and video gallery staging, is available at <https://www.harunfarocki.de/installations/2010s.html>
101. Taylor, "Afterword: War Play," 1891.
102. Sajnani et al., "Theatre of the Oppressed," 568.
103. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 74.
104. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 74.
105. Harries, "Regarding the Pain of Rats," 162–163.
106. Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 185–86.
107. Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy* (London: Routledge, 1995), 73.
108. Abbie Hoffman, *Steal This Book* (New York: Pirate Editions, distributed by Grove Press, 1971), 17.
109. That said, critiques of Punchdrunk's dramaturgy point out that, despite the immersivity of their productions, audiences are not actually given agency to intervene in the story or the flow of the performance. Some have argued that the masks worn by all audience members at *Sleep No More* create something of a "mobile fourth wall." See Kathryn Hamilton, "Punchdrunk and the Politics of Spectatorship," Culturebot, November 14, 2012, <https://www.culturebot.org/2012/11/14997/punchdrunk-and-the-politics-of-spectatorship/>
110. Johnson, "Performing Absence," 76.
111. See David Read Johnson et al., "Towards a Poor Drama Therapy," *Arts in Psychotherapy* 23, no. 4 (1996): 293–306, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0197-4556\(96\)00036-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0197-4556(96)00036-6)
112. See Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968).
113. Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, 255–56.
114. David Read Johnson and Rebecca Davis, "Trauma-Centered Developmental Transformations: Dismantling the Hold of Illegitimate Power," in *Trauma-Informed Drama Therapy: Transforming Clinics, Classrooms, and Communities*, 2nd ed., ed. Nisha Sajnani and David Read Johnson (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 2024), 31.
115. Johnson and Davis, "Trauma-Centered Developmental Transformations," 29.
116. Johnson and Davis, "Trauma-Centered Developmental Transformations," 31–32.
117. See Rosa Van Hensbergen's forthcoming book on Butoh Scores, yet to be titled.
118. See Craig Haen et al. "Exquisite Corpse: On Dissociation and the Intersubjectivity of Racialized Trauma in Drama Therapy," in *Trauma-Informed Drama Therapy: Transforming Clinics, Classrooms, and Communities*, 2nd ed., ed. Nisha Sajnani and David Read Johnson (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 2024), 78–109.
119. There are notable, if not widely known, exceptions to this. Groups such as Veterans

for Peace and About Face Veterans actively voice antiwar viewpoints today. See also David Moser's *The New Winter Soldier* (1995), David L. Parsons's *Dangerous Grounds: Antiwar Coffeehouses and Military Dissent in the Vietnam Era* (2017), and reissues of films: David Cortright's *Soldiers in Revolt* (1972, 2005) and Ziger's documentary *Sir! Yes, Sir!* (2005).

120. Jonathan Wei, "Activism on Stage: The Telling Project: An Interview with Jon Wei, Founder and Director," interview by Manuel Luis Martinez, *American Book Review* 34, no. 5 (2013): 8.

121. Wei, "Activism on Stage," 8.

122. The full Beckett quote: "Try again. Fail again. Fail Better. Fail worse again. Still worse again. Til sick again. Throw up for good." From *Worstward Ho* (1983) in Samuel Beckett, *Nohow On: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 85.

Chapter 2

1. *Telling: New Haven*, also billed as *Voices from the Long War*, was originally produced at the Yale Cabaret on April 28 and 29, 2016, directed by Kevin Hourigan in collaboration with Jonathan Wei. Unable to get into the sold-out Cabaret run, I arranged for a remounted production the following week on May 3, 2016, at the Ballroom of 220 York St, supported by the Yale Theater Studies Program and Interdisciplinary Performance Studies at Yale.

2. Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 4, italics added.

3. Doerries, *The Theater of War*, 76–77. Shay reminds us that Athens was highly militarized at all ranks: "The city was engaged on six fronts during the year that Aeschylus produced the *Oresteia*. . . . Aeschylus fought at Marathon . . . Sophocles was elected general at least twice." See Jonathan Shay, "The Birth of Tragedy—Out of the Needs of Democracy," *Didaskalia: The Journal for Ancient Performance* 2, no. 2 (1995), <https://www.didaskalia.net/issues/vol2no2/shay.html>

4. Shay, "Birth of Tragedy." Emphasis in original. He suggests that the "novice" status of the chorus offered tactical counterpoint to the military veteran actors who would have played the principal characters. The chorus offered a norming perspective to counterbalance the "transgressive" memories and traumatic symptoms that principal characters carried from war.

5. Shay, "Birth of Tragedy."

6. Doerries, *Theater of War*, 76.

7. According to Veterans Affairs and Demographic Data sources from the past decade, active-duty military service personnel constitute approximately 0.4 percent of the U.S. adult population. See U.S. Department of Defense, "DoD Data/Reports," US Government, Defense Manpower Data Center, accessed June 19, 2025, <https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/data-requests>. In contrast, approximately 8.5 million men, or about one-third of all eligible males, served in the U.S. armed forces during the Vietnam War era, according to *Vietnam Veterans' Income in Retirement* (Congressional Budget Office, 2020), <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/56696>

8. Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 94.

9. Doerries, *Theater of War*, 77.

10. Dwight Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance," *Literature in Performance* 5, no. 2 (1985): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462938509391578>

11. “DE-CRUIT—Treating Trauma through Shakespeare and Science,” company website, DE-CRUIT, accessed July 19, 2025, <https://www.decruit.org/>

12. Jonathan Wei, “Notes to Performers” in “Telling: New Haven,” unpublished script, 2016.

13. See Herman, *Truth and Repair*, 3.

14. Johnson, “Performing Absence,” 63.

15. Alisha Ali and Stephan Wolfert, “Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress in Military Veterans: Exploring the Psychotherapeutic Potential of Mimetic Induction,” *Arts in Psychotherapy* 50 (September 2016): 58, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2016.06.004>. See U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2014), “Veteran Homelessness since 2010” (HUD No. 14-103). See also Janet Kemp and Robert M. Bossarte, “Surveillance of Suicide and Suicide Attempts among Veterans: Addressing a National Imperative,” *American Journal of Public Health* 102, Supplement 1 (March 2012): 4–5, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22390579/>

16. Ali and Wolfert, “Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress,” 59. See Gill Green et al., “Exploring the Ambiguities of Masculinity in Accounts of Emotional Distress in the Military among Young Ex-Servicemen,” *Social Science & Medicine* 71, no. 8 (2010): 1480–88, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.07.015>. The sense of isolation and vulnerability that accompany veterans have been identified as psychological markers for traumatic stress response; Nick Caddick et al., “Male Combat Veterans’ Narratives of PTSD, Masculinity, and Health,” *Sociology of Health & Illness* 37, no. 1 (2015): 97–111, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.12183>; and Rasul A. Mowatt and Jessie Bennett, “War Narratives: Veteran Stories, PTSD Effects, and Therapeutic Fly-Fishing,” *Therapeutic Recreation Journal* 45, no. 4 (2011): 286–308, EBSCOHost 70479912.

17. Specifically, DE-CRUIT members “engage in experiential analysis of military trauma through verse. The veterans write their own personal trauma monologues to be performed by the group, and they practice breathing and voice techniques necessary for the recitation and performance of spoken verse.” Ali and Wolfert, “Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress,” 59.

18. Ali and Wolfert, “Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress,” 59.

19. In Ali and Wolfert, “Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress,” 60.

20. Ali and Wolfert offer an example of the tenacity of camaraderie in DE-CRUIT units, describing a participant-driven practice that invoked “a ‘no man left behind’ mentality to the treatment sessions wherein group members use the first part of the treatment session to cover material missed by a member who was absent at the previous session.” Ali and Wolfert, “Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress,” 61.

21. Stephan Wolfert, “Cry Havoc!,” unpublished script, 2017.

22. Drew Wiggins, “Veterans Find a Path to Healing through Shakespeare,” *Mad In America*, October 13, 2019, <https://www.madinamerica.com/2019/10/veterans-find-path-to-healing-through-shakespeare/>

23. Wolfert and Ali have found that their sessions frequently bring up trauma from earlier in life. They note that early trauma can influence decisions to enlist in military service in adulthood: “Trauma occurring earlier in life can both precipitate the decision to join the military (e.g., as a means of escaping an unsafe or abusive home environment) and also

cultivate a need for some of the central elements of military training (e.g., building physical strength, learning to protect oneself and feeling a sense of belonging and camaraderie)." Wiggins, "Veterans Find a Path to Healing"

24. Wolfert has toured *Cry Havoc!* extensively around the country and internationally and has developed several other performances connecting Shakespearean text and trauma with his wife and fellow actor Dawn Stern. For more information, see <https://www.decrut.org/shows/>

25. Ali and Wolfert, "Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress," 59. See also Keith Oatley, "Shakespeare's Invention of Theater as Simulation That Runs on Minds," *Empirical Studies of the Arts* 19, no. 1 (2001): 27–45, <https://doi.org/10.2190/H5DU-QEMY-JNHQ-MV8N>.

26. Ali and Wolfert, "Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress," 59. Wolfert and Ali have developed an algorithm for matching PTS symptoms with Shakespearean monologues. For example, if someone is experiencing insomnia or sleep disturbances, they might get Lady Macbeth's "Out damn spot" monologue.

27. Magelssen, "Rehearsing the 'Warrior Ethos.'" After the U.S. military withdrew from Afghanistan and Iraq, and since Russia invaded Ukraine, Fort Irwin has shifted to simulations of "near-peer" enemies like Russia and China. See Lolita C. Baldor, "U.S. Army Using Lessons from Ukraine War to Aid Own Training," *AP News*, April 16, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-us-army-training-54e76eba46f9bf79542dd3f872456e67>

28. Magelssen, "Rehearsing the 'Warrior Ethos.'"

29. Ali and Wolfert, "Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress," 60.

30. Ali and Wolfert, "Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress," 61.

31. Ali and Wolfert, "Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress," 61; glossing Green et al., "Exploring the Ambiguities of Masculinity in Accounts of Emotional Distress."

32. See Ali and Wolfert, "Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress," 61. Participating veterans have the EEG and heart rates monitored, with results showing increased EEG (cognitive functioning) and regulated heart rates by the end of the program; Wiggins, "Veterans Find a Path to Healing."

33. Ali and Wolfert, "Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress," 61.

34. Ali and Wolfert, "Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress," 61.

35. Emunah, *Acting for Real*, 6.

36. Class visit with Johnson, November 2023. Sanford Meisner and Dennis Longwell, *Sanford Meisner on Acting* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 4.

37. Renée Emunah, *Acting for Real: Drama Therapy Process, Technique, and Performance* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1994), 6.

38. Ali, quoted in Wiggins, "Veterans Find a Path to Healing through Shakespeare." Many other scholars find measurable increases in levels of confidence and optimism in survivors of multiple kinds of violence who participated in dramatic reenactments of trauma; see, for example, Michael Balfour et al., "Protecting into Emotion: Therapeutic Enactments with Military Veterans Transitioning Back into Civilian Life," *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 19, no. 2 (2014): 165–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2014.911806>. The design of the DE-CRUIT program is now being developed in New York City public high schools for students who have experienced trauma, as well as with Rikers Island Correctional Facility inmates.

39. Wolfert holds informal “de-cruit” sessions each week that, rather like addiction support groups, offer attendees a chance to gather in small, trusted communities.

40. Tagline of *The Telling Project*. “Homepage: The Telling Project,” company website, *The Telling Project*, accessed July 20, 2025, <https://thetellingproject.org/>

41. Wei, “Activism on Stage,” 8.

42. The words of one of the veterans from a *Telling Project* production in Florida serve as a good example: “You will never find a bigger pacifist than a deployed service member. It’s not Hollywood. . . . It’s the reality of the day-to-day grind, the reality of taking someone’s life and defending your own.” *Veterans: The Telling Project*, produced by Florida Humanities Council and WEDU PBS, Tampa, 2016, 55:25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqilVw2fNcs>.

43. Personal interview with company of *She Went to War*, November 7, 2019, Arlington, Virginia.

44. As Finton Walsh writes in his volume *Theatre & Therapy*, the direct address theatrical monologue resembles a therapeutic encounter, even as it is not equivalent to it. Finton Walsh, *Theatre and Therapy* (London: Methuen Drama, 2024), 62.

45. *Veterans: The Telling Project*.

46. *Veterans: The Telling Project*.

47. Personal interview with company of *She Went to War*.

48. Minor, an Army mortuary-affairs specialist who served in Iraq from 2006 to 2008, participated in *The Telling Project* in Orlando in 2016. She is quoted in Matthew J. Palm, “Veterans Take to the Stage to Heal, Educate in ‘The Telling Project,’” *Orlando Sentinel*, September 29, 2016, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/2016/09/29/veterans-take-to-the-stage-to-educate-heal/>

49. When Wei and Rayneard began recruiting refugees and immigrants (as they did in New Haven, as described in the opening of this chapter), they often partner with immigrant and refugee resettlement agencies, such as Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS) in New Haven.

50. *The Telling Project* does not require that participants have worked with a psychologist or trauma therapy professional, but they do ask participants to discuss their trauma background and assess their own ability and comfort with “safely” sharing these stories in the group. Director and drama therapist Lisa Powers Tricomi, who worked with *The Telling Project* in Florida, referred to this quality as “ego strength.” Personal interview with Lisa Powers Tricomi, July 9, 2024.

51. Wei’s scripts always include a note that the text he arranged for performance remains “as told to” him from the transcribed interviews.

52. Tricomi, a theater director and certified drama therapist, teamed up with *The Telling Project* through the Florida Arts and Humanities Council, directing a total of three *Telling Project* productions in Pensacola, Tampa Bay, and Orlando between 2016 and 2018. When she first reached out to Wei about bringing *The Telling Project* to Pensacola, one of Tricomi’s concerns was about the therapeutic obligation to participants during and after the process. Knowing how powerful testimonial theater could be for participants, she wondered if the program offered support after the testimonials had been performed. She said that Wei was very clear that this was a theater production and not therapy, although he

appreciated that she was a drama therapist, and that there was typically no therapeutic follow-up. That said, performers tended to stay in touch with one another and often with Wei and his team. On occasion, productions have been remounted, or participants from one *Telling Project* production have joined other, national (non-region-specific) productions like *She Went to War*.

53. Personal interview with Lisa Powers Tricomi, July 9, 2024.

54. See Phil Jones, *Drama as Therapy: Theory, Practice, and Research*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007). See also Emunah, *Acting for Real*.

55. Personal interview with Lisa Powers Tricomi, July 9, 2024.

56. Katrina Samyal, “Opening the Jar of Feelings: Drama Therapy and Trauma-Centered Approaches for Short-Form Stress Reduction Sessions with Refugee Children,” Eastern Symposium, National Drama Therapy Conference, CUNY Graduate Center, June 1, 2024.

57. A “table read” is a standard practice in scripted theater work, a moment when a company gathers to “meet” the characters and theatrical world they will be bringing to life together in a group reading of the script.

58. Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 36.

59. Auto-ethnography and Self-Revelatory (Self-Rev) performance are two other methods of drama therapy, developed by Renée Emunah. Both emerged out of J. L. Moreno’s psychodrama methodology, another “action method” designed for individuals to better understand their own life events and sense of identity. Auto-ethnography and Self-Rev typically culminate in a performance, for a closed therapy group or in a semipublic or public setting, and thus closely resemble the testimonial performances featured in *The Telling Project*. See Emunah, *Acting for Real*.

60. Personal interview with company of *She Went to War*.

61. See Gary Rauchen et al., “Self-Revelatory Performance That Bridges Personal and Social Healing,” in *Trauma-Informed Drama Therapy: Transforming Clinics, Classrooms, and Communities*, 2nd ed., ed. Nisha Sajani and David Read Johnson (Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas, 2024).

62. David Sewell McCann, “An Introduction to Storying,” company website, Sparkle Stories: Original Audio for Children, accessed July 20, 2025, <https://www.sparklestories.com/blog/post/an-introduction-to-storying/>.

63. Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 36. “Restored behavior can be put on the way a mask or costume is. Its shape can’t be seen from the outside, and changed. That’s what theater directors, councils of bishops, master performers, and great shamans do: change performance scores. A score can change because it is not a ‘natural event’ but a model of individual and collective human choice. A score exists . . . in the subjunctive mood, in what Stanislavski called the ‘as if.’ Existing as ‘second nature,’ restored behavior is always subject to revision.” Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 37.

64. Wei, “Activism on Stage,” 8. The prompt book of *She Went to War* that I received from Wei shows frequent changes in wording as the women worked their way through their stories on their feet.

65. Amanda Stuart Fisher, “Trauma, Authenticity and the Limits of Verbatim,” *Performance Research* 16, no. 1 (2011): 112, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2011.561683>

66. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 9.
67. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 7, emphasis in original.
68. Fisher, "Trauma, Authenticity and the Limits of Verbatim," 112.
69. See Laura A. Lodewyck, "The Potential of Pain: Conflict Dramaturgy and Transformation in the Theater," in *Theater and Human Flourishing*, ed. Harvey Young (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197622261.003.0003>.
70. Lodewyck, "Potential of Pain," 44.
71. Fisher, *Performing the Testimonial*, 17.
72. Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, ed. John P. Leavey Jr., trans. Elisabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 75–83.
73. Derrida, quoted in Fisher, *Performing the Testimonial*, 17.
74. Liza-Mare Syron describes the centrality of *Ngara* or *Daddirri*, or "deep listening," to rehearsal and performance development practices of Indigenous women in Australia and North America. See Liza-Mare Syron, *Rehearsal Practices of Indigenous Women Theatre Makers: Australia, Aotearoa, and Turtle Island* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 11.
75. Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 8.
76. Fisher, *Performing the Testimonial*, 2.
77. Lola Arias, *Minefield: Based on the Stories of Six Argentine and British Veterans of the Falkland War*, Lou Armour, David Jackson, Ruben Otero, Sukrim Rai, Gabriel Sagastume, Marcelo Vallejo, trans. Daniel Tunnard (London: Oberon Books, 2017), 42.
78. Fisher analyzes this moment from *Minefield* as well, suggesting that the direct, if rhetorical, questions invited the audience into the process of "interrogating the ethics and politics of using other people's lived experiences and testimonies to make theatre" and the ethical question of "whose stories are being remembered in the play and whose are being forgotten"; Fisher, *Performing the Testimonial*, 1–2.
79. "Every instance of severe traumatic psychological injury is a standing challenge to the rightness of the social order." Judith Lewis Herman, 1990 Harvard Trauma Conference; quoted in Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 1.
80. Herman, *Truth and Repair*, 3–4.
81. Wei, "Activism on Stage," 8.
82. Quoted in Lodewyck, "Potential of Pain," 48. Regina has expanded her use of performance as a mode of activism and critique in a project called *Fatigues Clothesline*. In this performance she likens military sexual assault to incest, because of the intense pressure not to betray the "family" structure of military unit life.
83. Nicholas Peter Ridout, *Theatre & Ethics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 15.
84. Wei, "Activism on Stage," 8.
85. Wei, "Activism on Stage," 8.
86. Wei, "Activism on Stage," 8.
87. Wei, interviewed in *Veterans*.

88. As Tricomi told me, the most meaningful discussions between audiences and performers that she observed occurred in the period after the post-show discussions, when the performers “enter the house and the audience comes to them.” In small, self-selecting clusters, personal conversations about the stories shared unfold, forming intersubjective bonds that are established in less public, performative form. Personal interview with Tricomi, July 9, 2024.

89. “The questions can be really, you know, in good faith, and the answers are in good faith; but because it’s extemporized, you can end up forgetting things that you wanted, that you might later have wanted to say; or even worse, saying things that you ultimately ended up uncomfortable as having as public knowledge.” Wei, quoted in Lodewyck, “Potential of Pain,” 46–47.

90. As she explains, “the deliberate formation of a script as the basis of *Telling’s* format allowed individuals the security of prepared statements.” Lodewyck, “Potential of Pain,” 46–47.

91. Doerries, *Theater of War*, 3–4.

92. See Bryan Doerries, trans., *All That You’ve Seen Here Is God: New Versions of Four Greek Tragedies: Sophocles’ Ajax, Philoctetes, and Women of Trachis & Aeschylus’ Prometheus Bound* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015).

93. See Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*. In chapter 3 of that book, Shay describes the berserk state as a dissociative, hyperviolent, and unrestrained state of rage experienced by soldiers under extreme trauma, drawing parallels to Homeric warriors such as Ajax and Achilles.

94. Doerries, *Theater of War*, 3.

95. Doerries, *Theater of War*, 4.

96. Doerries, *Theater of War*, 86.

97. Doerries, *Theater of War*, 3–4.

98. After the initial forum-style dialogic performance that erupted in San Diego, Doerries officially established his company. In 2009 the Department of Defense scheduled him to produce a multicity, one-hundred show tour titled *Theater of War* (which became the name of his company and the title of his 2015 book, *Theater of War*).

99. Doerries, *Theater of War*, 76.

100. Doerries, *Theater of War*, 74.

101. Doerries, *Theater of War*, 74.

102. Johnson et al., “Towards a Poor Drama Therapy,” 298.

103. Doerries, *Theater of War*, 74.

104. Doerries, *Theater of War*, 74.

105. These are all questions I have heard Doerries pose. The last one was from *Conversations during Air Raid Sirens*, about the Ukraine War, featuring poems that were written by civilians during the past two years, collected by Ukrainian poet Ilya Kaminsky. I attended this performance on June 20, 2024.

106. See Doerries, *All That You’ve Seen Here Is God*.

107. This idea was speculatively proposed by Daniel Sack in an American Society for Theatre Research working session at the 2023 annual conference, in which he imagined the potential of a company of spectators that works (spectates) together for years, like a theater company of the Living Theater sort.

108. I facilitated one such discussion following the Yale screening of David Gutnik's recent documentary about artists living in Ukraine, *Rule of Two Walls* (2023), on November 5, 2024.

109. Notes I took during *Conversations during Air Raid Sirens*.

110. As I learned in the Act II dialogue following *Conversations during Air Raid Sirens*, "D-E-M" spells out the word "home" in Ukrainian.

111. These fragments of Kaminsky's poem are from notes I took during the Theater of War performance. The poem, currently unpublished, was composed by Kaminsky.

112. A woman in the audience said that hearing the poem's personal details helped her understand, because she didn't understand the numbers anymore, or the battle plans and videos her husband watched on YouTube.

113. Doerries, act 2, *Conversations during Air Raid Sirens*, WNYC, June 20, 2024.

114. Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act," 9.

115. Ridout, *Theater & Ethics*, 10.

Chapter 3

1. *Your Voice Came Out Through My Throat*, directed by Chikako Yamashiro, 2009, Installation, 00:06. On view at "The History of Okinawa's Fine Arts" exhibit at the Okinawan Prefectural Art Museum, July 13–October 13, 2019.

2. After the Battle of Saipan (June 15–July 9, 1944), Saipan was occupied by the U.S. military and, at the conclusion of World War II, became a commonwealth territory of the U.S. It remains under U.S. occupation and, like Okinawa, hosts U.S. military bases in the region.

3. Yamashiro Chikako, interview with Soni Kum, *Zansho no oto II (The Sound of Lingering Wounds II)*, DVD, 2009. Quoted and translated in Laura Hein and Rebecca Jennison, "Against Forgetting: Three Generations of Artists in Japan in Dialogue about the Legacies of World War II," *Asia-Pacific Journal* 9, no. 30 (2011): 14, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S155746601101165X>

4. Annie Murphy Paul, *The Extended Mind: The Power of Thinking outside the Brain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021), 41–42.

5. Van der Kolk, *Body Keeps the Score*, 217.

6. Manuela Mischke-Reeds, *Somatic Psychotherapy Toolbox: 125 Worksheets & Exercise to Treat Trauma & Stress* (Eau Claire, WI: PESI Publishing & Media, 2018), 9. Peter Levine developed somatic experiencing therapy based on the relationship between body and mind, beginning with body and sensation as a means of working toward meaning. He called this the SIBAM model, distinguishing five channels of investigation that build upon and work with one another to foster integration and healing after trauma: sensation, image, behavior, affect, and meaning. Sensations are physical messages processed through internal sensory receptors: kinaesthetic (tension of muscles), proprioceptive (positional

information), vestibular (reception of movement), and visceral (viscera and blood vessel) receptors. Image refers to sensory impressions of the environment beyond the body: sight, smell, hearing, taste, and tactile senses. See Peter A. Levine, *In An Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 70–74.

7. Mischke-Reeds, *Somatic Psychotherapy Toolbox*, 5.

8. See Johnson and Davis, “Trauma-Centered Developmental Transformations.”

9. Resmaa Menakem, “Resmaa Menakem: ‘Notice the Rage; Notice the Silence,’” interview by Krista Tippett, June 4, 2020, podcast, <https://onbeing.org/programs/resmaa-menakem-notice-the-rage-notice-the-silence/>

10. Paul describes numerous tactics for self-regulation of somatic states in her chapter “Thinking with Sensations,” (*Extended Mind*, 21–43). See also Mischke-Reeds, *Somatic Psychotherapy Toolbox*.

11. Phelan, “Marina Abramović,” 577.

12. As Lévinas argued, seeing the “face of the Other” invites recognition of a mutual humanity and need for dignity and safety. Lévinas framed ethics as “the first philosophy” for humans (contradicting Aristotle’s argument that metaphysics should be the “study of being qua being”) and argued that ethics—or human interactions across inevitable differences between self and other—are the grounds of traumatic encounter, as well as the recognition and repair of those traumas. See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), and Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being: Or, Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Boston: M. Nijhoff, 1981); see also Adriaan T. Peperzak, ed., *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Lévinas for Philosophy, Literature, and Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

13. Deidre Sklar, “Remembering Kinesthesia: An Inquiry into Embodied Cultural Knowledge,” in *Migrations of Gesture*, ed. Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 87.

14. As Sklar notes, “Aristotle divided the ‘intellectual’ or distanced senses (sight and hearing) from the affective and proximate ones (smell, taste, touch).” Sklar, “Remembering Kinesthesia,” 87.

15. Sklar, “Remembering Kinesthesia,” 87.

16. The Okinawan sense of being sacrificed for and treated as “less than” the Japanese mainland was articulated in several interviews I conducted and also in the museums I visited commemorating the Battle of Okinawa. These included the Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum, the Himeyuri Peace Museum, and the Battle of Okinawa Museum.

17. Hein and Jennison, “Against Forgetting,” 13. Mass suicides by civilians and Japanese military service were significant to the death toll in both Okinawa and Saipan during the final months of World War II.

18. Unique among Japanese prefectures for the burden it bears of U.S. military bases (75% of all U.S. military bases in Japan are located on the Okinawan prefecture that comprises 0.6% of Japanese soil), life in Okinawa is conditioned by systemic and daily encounters with a militarized economy, combat training operations, and land use.

19. Yamashiro Chikako, “Anata no koe wa watashi no nodo wo tota” (Your voice came out through my throat), Video work, Artist’s Statement, Exhibit at Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 2009. Translated and quoted in Hein and Jennison, “Against Forgetting,” 13.

20. Yamashiro Chikako, interview with Soni Kum, *Zansho no oto II (The Sound of Lingering Wounds II)* (DVD). Quoted and translated in Rebecca Jennison, “Unspeakable Bodies of Memory: Performance and Precarity in Recent Works by Chikako Yamashiro,” *Journal of Kyoto Seika University* 44 (2014): 192.

21. Jennison, “Unspeakable Bodies of Memory,” 192.

22. Hein and Jennison, “Against Forgetting,” 13.

23. Developed in the early 1990s by Marsha Linehan, DBT is a clinically successful therapy for complex PTSD and attendant symptoms of suicidal ideation, mood disorders, self-harm, substance abuse, and other maladaptive behaviors. See Regina Steil et al., “Dialectical Behaviour Therapy for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Related to Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Pilot Study in an Outpatient Treatment Setting,” *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 9, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2018.1423832>

24. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 17. See also Erin Hurley’s short introduction to the topic, *Theatre and Feeling*: “Feeling provides theatre’s raison d’être. Excursuses into theatrical form and into the neuroscience of spectatorship allow me to conclude that doing things with feeling is the primary reason for theatre’s existence. Furthermore, feeling carries theatre’s communicated meanings and informs its significance to theatregoers. In this way, theatre’s solicitation, management, and display of feelings—what I will call its ‘feeling-labor’—is the most important aspect of theatre’s cultural work. It is what finally makes theatre matter.” Erin Hurley, *Theatre & Feeling* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4.

25. Joshua Chambers-Letson, “‘A Weak Messianic Power’: Yamashiro Chikako’s ‘Your Voice Came Out Through My Throat,’” *Trans Asia Photography* 5, no. 1 (2014): n.p., https://doi.org/10.1215/215820251_5-1-105

26. Film voice-over, *Your Voice Came Out Through My Throat*, from personal research notes.

27. See Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

28. Holley Anderson, personal correspondence, July 19, 2024.

29. Other researchers have investigated how therapists use their own interoceptive awareness in deepening their understanding of their patients. See Robert Shaw, “The Embodied Psychotherapist: An Exploration of the Therapists’ Somatic Phenomena Within the Therapeutic Encounter,” *Psychotherapy Research* (United Kingdom) 14, no. 3 (2004): 271–88, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ptr/kph025>

30. As Sajnani and Johnson write: “Every psychotherapy session risks repeating, overtly or covertly, the dynamics of privilege, bias, marginalization, and white supremacy that cause the suffering in the first place”; thus “ethical trauma treatment entails revealing and acknowledging these obscured power dynamics, not just in the client’s family/culture of origin, but in the therapeutic relationship itself.” Sajnani and Johnson, “Issues in Trauma-Informed Drama Therapy,” 4.

31. Sensory-friendly theater productions modify environmental elements such as lighting and sound levels, reduce startling effects, and provide quiet spaces and flexible audi-

ence protocols that allow for movement, vocalization, and reentry during the performance. See Alice Wood, *Relaxed Performances: Accessibility, Ethics, and Engagement in Live Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022); Lindsay Price, *Theatre and Autism: How Do You Present a Sensory Friendly Performance*, episode 176, with guest James Lekatz, Drama Teacher Podcast, 2017, MP3, 38:49, accessed July 21, 2025, <https://www.theatrefolk.com/blog/theatre-and-autism-sensory-friendly>; Allison Considine, “Extra Sensory: Crafting Autism-Friendly Performances,” *American Theatre*, October 13, 2017, <https://www.americantheatre.org/2017/10/13/extra-sensory-crafting-autism-friendly-performances/>. I also credit my learning in this area to a former student, Naomi Schwartzburt.

32. In New York City, for example, the piece was performed at The Public Theater as part of the Under the Radar Festival, January 2019.

33. Tania El Khoury (LB): *As Far as My Fingertips Take Me*, produced by ANTI Festival, 2018, 00:03, <https://vimeo.com/304320633>

34. Tania El Khoury, *As Far as My Fingertips Take Me*, artist website, Tania El Khoury, accessed July 21, 2025, <https://taniaelkhoury.com/work/as-far-as-my-fingertips-take-me/>

35. Rajko has developed numerous projects with Detroit-based dance artists, using what she calls “sound-driven touch.” Employing tactile speakers, such as “butt kicker” subwoofers and tactile transducers, Rajko creates “4-D” dance experiences. *Memento Mori*, developed in collaboration with the Center for Performance Research in Brooklyn, staged tactile engagement through cardboard boxes; *Devil’s Shoestring* featured Detroit-based Krump dancers and large amounts of garden soil that were animated by both the dancers and by the butt kicker subwoofers placed beneath the earth. See Jessica Rajko, “Homepage,” artist website, Jessica Rajko, accessed July 21, 2025, <http://www.jessicarajko.com>

36. Interviewed in Dave Tavani, dir., *As Far as My Fingertips Take Me—Ear-Whispered: Works by Tania El Khoury*, 2018, 00:02, <https://vimeo.com/290356567>

37. When I participated in the piece, Zarea was in Birmingham, England; I was in New Haven, Connecticut; and the Zoom room location was hosted by Bard College in Annondale-on-Hudson, New York, producer of the performance run, where El Khoury was an artist in residence that year.

38. Jesse Green, “Review: Your Arm Is a Canvas, in ‘As Far as Isolation Goes,’” *Theater, New York Times*, March 4, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/04/theater/as-far-as-isolation-goes-review.html>

39. Green, “Your Arm Is a Canvas.”

40. Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 8.

41. Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 169–70.

42. First recorded in 1775 as meaning “a remembrance or memory,” the noun souvenir stems from the French souvenir “to remember, come to mind.” By 1782, souvenir was used to denote a “token of remembrance.” Douglas R. Harper, “Souvenir,” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed July 23, 2025, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/souvenir>

43. Dave Tavani, dir., *Stories of Refuge—Ear-Whispered: Works by Tania El Khoury*, 2018, 00:02, <https://vimeo.com/288980282>. As a first-generation Iranian refugee, this audience-participant had grown up hearing stories of her parents, and recalls being particularly impacted by a line at the end of the films: “I have lost everything, but I have managed to save my life.”

44. Tavani, *Stories of Refuge*.

45. Tavani, *Stories of Refuge*.
46. See Giovanna Colombetti, *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014). See also Francisco J. Varela et al., *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).
47. Ezequiel A. Di Paolo et al., "Horizons for the Enactive Mind: Values, Social Interaction, and Play," in *Enaction: Toward a New Paradigm for Cognitive Science*, ed. John Stewart et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), <https://direct.mit.edu/books/edited-volume/3346/chapter/109294/Horizons-for-the-Enactive-Mind-Values-Social>
48. Tania El Khoury, "Gardens Speak," artist website, Tania El Khoury, accessed July 22, 2025, <https://taniaelkhoury.com/work/gardens-speak/>
49. El Khoury, "Gardens Speak."
50. As El Khoury explained, "Funerals in Syria often lead to more deaths: there have been incidents of the shelling of cemeteries while funerals are taking place, and in some instances before the burial can take place the families are asked to sign documents exonerating the Assad regime of their loved one's death." In Lyn Gardner, "Gardens Speak: The Sound Installation Unearthing Syria's Backyard Tragedies," *The Guardian*, September 29, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/sep/29/gardens-speak-tania-el-khoury-syria-civilians-fierce-festival>
51. Gardner, "Gardens Speak."
52. Gardner, "Gardens Speak."
53. Gardner, "Gardens Speak."
54. Johnson and Davis, "Trauma-Centered Developmental Transformations," 31.
55. Johnson and Davis, "Trauma-Centered Developmental Transformations," 31.
56. Johnson and Davis, "Trauma-Centered Developmental Transformations," 32.
57. Gardner, "Gardens Speak."
58. Gardner, "Gardens Speak."
59. Quoted in Gardner, "Gardens Speak."
60. Quoted in Gardner, "Gardens Speak."
61. El Khoury, "Gardens Speak."
62. El Khoury, "Gardens Speak."
63. Matty Weingast, *The First Free Women: Original Poems Inspired by the Early Buddhist Nuns*, with Bhikkhuni Anandabodhi (Boulder: Shambhala, 2020), 13.
64. Ann Weiser Cornell, *The Power of Focusing: A Practical Guide to Emotional Self-Healing* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 1996), 9.

Chapter 4

1. Rimini Protokoll, "Situation Rooms," script, 2014.
2. Melanie Wilmlink, "Staging the Gaze in Rimini Protokoll's Situation Rooms," *Performance Matters* 5, no. 2 (2019): 58–59.
3. See <https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/> for list of productions and mission statements.
4. Rimini Protokoll, *Rimini Protokoll: Situation Rooms. A Multiplayer Video Piece [English Language Program]* (Bochum, Germany: Turbinenhalle, Jahrhunderthalle Bochum, 2013), https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/media/situationrooms/programmhefte/Situation_Rooms_englisch.pdf

5. I introduced the term “enactivist dramaturgy” in the previous chapter to describe the work of Lebanese installation artist Tania El Khoury. With her immersive, interactive installations, El Khoury creates environments that audience-participants must enter, inhabit, navigate, touch, and be touched by as they access the stories they have come to hear. See Colombetti, *Feeling Body*; see also Varela et al., *Embodied Mind*.

6. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 187.

7. Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 520, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>

8. As Roach puts it: “The social processes of memory and forgetting, familiarly known as culture, may be carried out by a variety of performance events, from stage plays to sacred rites, from carnivals to the invisible rituals of everyday life.” Joseph R. Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xi.

9. Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, xi.

10. Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 2.

11. Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 14.

12. Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 14, emphasis added.

13. Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 2. Schneider goes on to argue that, through these disruptive yet obdurate citational forces of theatrical reenactment practices, “performance remains”; that is, that embodied, mimetic knowledge transmission practices preserve and reproduce cultural and individual lived experiences through performance, and in ways that exceed archival methods of capture and preservation.

14. Sklar, “Remembering Kinesthesia,” 87–88. As Sklar puts it, “Body consciousness’ has come to refer not to somatic awareness but to creating ourselves as images, often enhanced by cosmetics, fashions, and body-shaping classes. Even in dance scholarship, both aesthetic and historical studies tend to display a visualist bias, even though the primary media of dancing is movement. Ballet, the most memorialized dance genre of the European diaspora, emphatically privileges visual display and a set of detailed formal and aesthetic conventions concerning spectacles of shape” (88).

15. Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (London: Routledge, 2011), 10. My understanding is that the “art” being described was painting or sculpture: not a form of art, like participatory, immersive theater, that could actually be “moved into” or “inhabited,” as in *Situation Rooms*.

16. Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 10. The “domain of psychology” that Foster references is the same traditional mode of psychology critiqued and revised by Bessel Van Der Kolk, Peter Levine, and the other somatic therapists called upon in this book.

17. See Deidre Sklar, “Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses?,” *Journal of American Folklore* 107, no. 423 (1994): 9–22.

18. Sklar, “Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses?,” 15.

19. Scott Magelssen includes many such examples in his 2014 book *Simming: Participatory Performance and the Making of Meaning*. James R. Ball III and Gelsey Bell wrote an excellent review and analysis of Josh Fox’s participatory military experience, *Surrender* (2008). See James R. Ball III and Gelsey Bell, “‘What Was the War Like?’: Experiencing *Surrender*; Talking with Josh Fox,” *TDR/The Drama Review* 56, no. 2 (214) (2012): 56–80,

https://doi.org/10.1162/DRAM_a_00167. As Ball and Bell describe *Surrender*, “Over the course of the epic three-and-a-half-hour (at least) event, audience members learn basic combat training, are deployed through an elaborate set to use their training, and return ‘home’ to an episodic drama on a proscenium stage, in which selected participants are asked to perform in scenes with the aid of a karaoke-like teleprompter” (57).

20. I invoke Deidre Sklar’s use of the term “re-member,” which she describes as a sense-based method of “letting the memory’s kinetic sensations claim the body and awareness”; Sklar, “Remembering Kinesthesia,” 86.

21. Mirror neurons were first observed and recorded by Italian neurological researchers studying the frontal lobes in the brains of macaque monkeys in the early 1990s. These researchers observed that visuomotor neurons in the premotor and parietal cortex would fire (that is, be triggered into responsive action) not only when “the monkey performs object-directed actions (grasping, tearing, manipulating, holding) but also when the animal observes somebody else (monkeys or humans) performing the same class of actions.” That is, these same “premotor visuomotor neurons,” which were subsequently dubbed “mirror neurons,” were triggered at the same rate and pattern regardless of whether the monkey was observing a goal-oriented action performed by a trainer or other monkey or performing the action itself. Comparable mirror neuron systems were soon observed in humans as well, using electrophysiological and neuroimaging techniques. María Lucila Morales-Rodriguez and Bernard Pavard, “Design of an Emotional and Social Interaction Paradigm for the Animation of 3D Characters: The Case of a Therapy for Brain Injured People (the Mirror Neuron Paradigm),” *Virtual Reality* 11, no. 2 (2007): 176, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10055-006-0063-1>

22. Morales-Rodriguez and Pavard, “Design of an Emotional and Social Interaction Paradigm,” 175.

23. Morales-Rodriguez and Pavard, “Design of an Emotional and Social Interaction Paradigm,” 176.

24. Morales-Rodriguez and Pavard, “Design of an Emotional and Social Interaction Paradigm,” 179–80.

25. See Caroline Catmur et al., “Associative Sequence Learning: The Role of Experience in the Development of Imitation and the Mirror System,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 364, no. 1528 (2009): 2369–80, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2009.0048>

26. Cecilia Heyes, “Automatic Imitation,” *Psychological Bulletin* 137, no. 3 (2011): 463–83, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0022288>; quoted in Margaret Steward, “Empathy and the Role of Mirror Neurons” (MA thesis, Regis University, 2017), Regis University Student Publications (comprehensive collection) (820), 23.

27. See Marco Iacoboni, *Mirroring People: The New Science of How We Connect with Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).

28. Deidre Sklar, “Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses?,” 11.

29. Paul, *Extended Mind*, 40.

30. See Yuri Terasawa et al., “Interoceptive Sensitivity Predicts Sensitivity to the Emotions of Others,” *Cognition & Emotion* 28, no. 8 (2014): 1435–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080>

/02699931.2014.888988. See also Delphine Grynberg and Olga Pollatos, "Perceiving One's Body Shapes Empathy," *Physiology & Behavior* 140 (March 2015): 54–60, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physbeh.2014.12.026>

31. See Vivien Ainley et al., "Heartfelt Imitation: High Interoceptive Awareness Is Linked to Greater Automatic Imitation," *Neuropsychologia* 60 (July 2014): 21–28, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2014.05.010>

32. See David T. Neal and Tanya L. Chartrand, "Embodied Emotion Perception: Amplifying and Dampening Facial Feedback Modulates Emotion Perception Accuracy," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 2, no. 6 (2011): 673–78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550611406138>

33. See Andrew J. Arnold et al., "Interoception and Social Connection," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019): article 2589, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02589>

34. Paul, *Extended Mind*, 40.

35. Also known as mixed or blended reality, AR overlays 3D-rendered computer graphics onto a user's view of their real world surroundings through a display, such as a handheld device or head-mounted display.

36. Zofia Smolarska, "Blind Alleys in Documentary Theatre: An Analysis of the Production Process of Situation Rooms, the Multiplayer Video Piece by the Rimini Protokoll Collective," *Polish Theatre Journal* 1, no. 2 (2016): n.p.

37. Wilmlink, "Staging the Gaze," 60.

38. A precursor to Augusto Boal's "playback theater" techniques, sociodrama is "an action method in which people spontaneously enact social situations as a way to understand the situations more fully." Patricia Sternberg and Antonina Garcia, *Sociodrama: Who's in Your Shoes?*, 2nd ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000). Moreno developed numerous techniques within group sociodrama to deepen exploration and insight, such as role reversal, doubling, future projection, magic screen, soliloquy, freeze frame, and aside. (If these sound familiar to readers who have played "improv" games in theater courses or comedy sports troupes, now you know: Moreno's sociodrama is part of your artistic genealogy.)

39. Garcia, "Healing with Action Methods on the World Stage," 19. As Garcia elucidates, multiple studies have shown that even deep, generational racial and ethnic prejudice can be transformed into mutual respect and understanding using embodied, sociometric methods. See Benedict Carey, "Tolerance over Race Can Spread, Studies Find," *New York Times*, November 7, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/07/us/07race.html>, which describes a study conducted by Art and Elaine Aron from Stony Brook University studying racism, role-play, and trust building.

40. Johnson and Davis, "Trauma-Centered Developmental Transformations," 39.

41. Johnson and Davis, "Trauma-Centered Developmental Transformations," 39, emphasis added.

42. Garcia, "Healing with Action Methods on the World Stage," 10.

43. Nikolaus Hirsch, "Theatrum Belli," in *Rimini Protokoll: Situation Rooms. A Multiplayer Video Piece [English Language Program]* (Bochum, Germany: Turbinenhalle, Jahrhunderthalle Bochum, 2013), https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/media/situationrooms/programmhefte/Situation_Rooms_englisch.pdf

44. Hirsch, "Theatrum Belli."
45. Wilmlink, "Staging the Gaze," 62.
46. Wilmlink, "Staging the Gaze," 62.
47. Personal conversation with theater scholars at the University of Toronto, October 2023.
48. Writing about her experience, for example, Zofia Smolarska offers detailed assessments of the politics involved in the creation process: as she delicately phrases it, "By observing the participation of people without full citizenship or coming from former colonies, I examined the level of participatoriness of the project and the possibilities of self-representation given to those participants." Smolarska, "Blind Alleys in Documentary Theatre," n.p.
49. See Smolarska, "Blind Alleys in Documentary Theatre," n.p.
50. Personal interview with Daly.
51. Mischke-Reeds, *Somatic Psychotherapy Toolbox*, 17.
52. Norwegian Nobel Institute, "The Nobel Peace Prize: Announcement," October 11, 2024, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2024/press-release/>
53. The statement goes on: "The Hibakusha help us to describe the indescribable, to think the unthinkable, and to somehow grasp the incomprehensible pain and suffering caused by nuclear weapons." Norwegian Nobel Institute, "Nobel Peace Prize."
54. The World Friendship Center was created by Barbara Reynolds, a Mennonite peace activist who established the center on August 7, 1965, on the twentieth anniversary of the atomic bombing. Her husband Earle Reynolds was a physical anthropologist studying the effects of nuclear radiation on the people of Hiroshima. Barbara Reynolds founded the World Friendship Center with the mission of "serving the Hibakusha community and providing a place where people from many nations can meet." See her memoir of the process: Barbara L. Reynolds, *The Phoenix and the Dove* (Nagasaki: Nagasaki Appeal Committee, 1986).
55. Hibakusha are also regularly hosted at the Peace Memorial and Museum in Hiroshima, where they tell their stories to groups of students and visitors from around the world. The Peace Memorial and Museum opened in 1955, but Hibakusha began sharing their testimonies at the Peace Memorial site in 1950.
56. This concern is echoed across numerous accounts of Hibakusha testimony, appearing consistently in recent writing on antinuclear activism in Hiroshima. See for example, Yuki Miyamoto, *Beyond the Mushroom Cloud: Commemoration, Religion, and Responsibility after Hiroshima* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012). As Miyamoto explains, "The fact that the number of Hibakushas decreases each passing year makes more urgent the question of the responsibility of non-Hibakushas in learning from Hibakushas' experience" (147). See also Hashimoto, *Long Defeat*. Hashimoto writes that a "growing number of cultural institutions . . . play a pivotal role in producing generational memory as the wartime generation passes on and stories of direct war experience become less available at home" (85).
57. Masako Kushima leads community dance projects, discussed in the resolution chapter; see also Cannon Hersey's *The Zero Project*, which gathers contemporary artists and performance makers exploring postatomic politics, imagery, and experience in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and internationally.

58. While in Hiroshima, I was able to view a video recording of the 2019 production of *Grandchildren of Hiroshima*. Access to the recording, as well as translation and commentary on the process, was provided by Mirei Tashiro, along with her daughters, Leona and Maila, who also performed in the production.

59. For more on *Grandchildren of the Blitz*, see London Bubble's website: <https://www.londonbubble.org.uk/>

60. Jonathan Petherbridge, "An Introduction to Vernacular Theatre," company website, London Bubble Theatre Company, November 2014, <https://www.londonbubble.org.uk/library/an-introduction-to-vernacular-theatre/>

61. Even as the Hiroshima-based process and performances now continue without direct contact with their London-based collaborators, London Bubble Theater has developed additional performances for international locales, *The Hiroshima Project* and *Hiroshima Dispersed*. These have been performed around the world, furthering the company's mission of increasing global awareness, particularly among children, of the devastating effects of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

62. Research notes from conversation with Leona and Maila at World Friendship Center, September 12, 2019.

63. The Hiroshima Peace Museum has preserved the actual concrete wall with this shadow, and the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art has the original photograph taken by journalist Katase. This is also the topic of Hibakusha poet Toge Sankichi's poem, "The Shadow."

64. James Thompson, "No More Bystanders: *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* and the 70th Anniversary of the Atomic Bomb," *TDR/The Drama Review* 61, no. 2 (234) (2017): 95, https://doi.org/10.1162/DRAM_a_00649

65. Thompson describes several such pieces in Hiroshima's Museum of Contemporary Art 2015 anniversary exhibit *Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness*; Thompson, "No More Bystanders," 92–93.

66. Thompson, "No More Bystanders," 95.

67. Conversation with Leona and Maila at World Friendship Center, Sept. 12, 2019.

68. Notes from conversation with Leona and Maila, Sept. 9, 2019.

69. Hashimoto, *Long Defeat*, 27.

70. Hashimoto, *Long Defeat*, 27.

71. I am choosing not to retell any of the stories here in detail, but many Hibakusha stories and paintings can be accessed through the Hiroshima Peace Museum website, as well as through other digital and historical archives.

72. Recalling Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, described in the introduction, I was encountering the cultural memories of a war that I had not experienced but that I grew up influenced by, in both conscious and unconscious ways; see Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 6. Applying postmemory to a Japanese context, Hashimoto adds that postmemory "shows how personal and intimate connections shape the moral evaluation of war for postwar generations in ways that are more real and intimate than school textbooks and cultural representations"; Hashimoto, *Long Defeat*, 26.

73. The following year, an intrepid social studies teacher would assign Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, which began to open my eyes, in vivid detail, to these and other horrors that remain in plain sight in U.S. contemporary life, under the

veils of national biographical repair. Similar methods of biographical repair continue to be employed as justification for nuclear weapons testing and uranium mining in Southwestern states, most often on the small tracts of tribal lands apportioned for Native American nations (spaces built on other entrenched practices of national “biographical repair”).

74. Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 26.

75. Thompson, “No More Bystanders,” 103.

76. Thompson, “No More Bystanders,” 88.

77. Thompson, “No More Bystanders,” 103.

78. Thompson, “No More Bystanders,” 103.

79. Miyamoto, *Beyond the Mushroom Cloud*, 9; “Hibakusha ethic” is Thompson’s term for this concept; Thompson, “No More Bystanders,” 100. Some have surmised that this “apolitical” politics of the Hibakusha are a response to pressure from the Japanese government to not use their experiences of suffering to critique Japanese war strategies in World War II.

80. Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 212; quoted in Thompson, “No More Bystanders,” 91. Thompson observes the ways that storytelling in *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* created productive tensions “between Hiroshima as history, where accounts of the bombing insist on its particular facticity, and Hiroshima as broader allegory, where creative response enables the story of the bombing to claim a more general significance”; Thompson, “No More Bystanders,” 91–92.

81. Thompson, “No More Bystanders,” 101.

82. Thompson sums this up with an argument that recalls Richard Schechner’s consideration of 9/11 as a work of terror-art: “the [atom] bombs performed and continue to perform for all of us”; Thompson, “No More Bystanders,” 103.

83. Thompson, “No More Bystanders,” 89. As Thompson puts it, *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* was thus an experience of “being brought into relation, and perhaps *back* into relation, with a history to which we are already intimately connected”; Thompson, “No More Bystanders,” 103.

84. Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 146.

85. Butler, “Performative Acts,” 527.

86. Susan Leigh Foster, “Introduction: Manifesto for Dead and Moving Bodies,” in *Choreographing History*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 4–5.

87. Foster, “Manifesto for Dead and Moving Bodies,” 7.

88. Foster, “Manifesto for Dead and Moving Bodies,” 7.

89. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18–19.

90. See Lisa Nakamura, “Race in/for Cyberspace: Identity Tourism and Racial Passing on the Internet,” *Works and Days* 13, no. 1–2 (1995): 181–93.

91. Garcia, “Healing with Action Methods on the World Stage,” 19.
92. Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 30.
93. Ball and Bell, “What Was the War Like?,” 57.

Chapter 5

1. Christine Evans, *Closer Than They Appear* (Carlton, NSW: Australian Script Centre, 2017), 2. The play was originally developed under the title *You Are Dead. You Are Here*, through a residence at HERE Arts Center in New York City in 2013–14.

2. Evans, *Closer Than They Appear*, 2–3.

3. Exposure therapy is based on clinical findings that link repeated exposure to anxiety or fear-producing stimuli to lessening of the anxious/fear response. These include “habituation theory” and “extinction theory,” both of which posit that repeated exposure to anxiety/fear-producing stimuli in a context in which no actual harm occurs will, over time, dull and eventually eliminate the anxiety/fear response. See Michelle G. Craske et al., “Maximizing Exposure Therapy: An Inhibitory Learning Approach,” *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 58 (July 2014): 10–23, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2014.04.006>

4. Evans, *Closer Than They Appear*, 5–6.

5. See Robert N. McLay et al., “Development and Testing of Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Active Duty Service Members Who Served in Iraq and Afghanistan,” *Military Medicine* 177, no. 6 (2012): 635–42, <https://doi.org/10.7205/milmed-d-11-00221>; and Albert “Skip” Rizzo et al., “Development and Early Evaluation of the Virtual Iraq/Afghanistan Exposure Therapy System for Combat-Related PTSD,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1208, no. 1 (2010): 114–25 (especially 120, 121–22), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.2010.05755.x>

6. Evans and Mezzochi shared their production designs and development of the play with a group of Yale students on April 16, 2018, at the Center for Collaborative Arts and Media. Much of the information I share here comes from that presentation, as well as follow-up conversations I have had with Christine Evans.

7. Scholars have extensively documented how military research and development has historically served as a primary incubator for technologies that later migrated into civilian and commercial markets. See Manuel DeLanda, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* (New York: Zone Books, 1991). See also my analyses of military surveillance technologies adapted for civilian markets in Elise Morrison, *Discipline and Desire: Surveillance Technologies in Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), particularly in chapter 3, “Screens,” 101–41.

8. Thomas A. Furness, “The Super Cockpit and Its Human Factors Challenges,” *Proceedings of the Human Factors Society 30th Annual Meeting*, Human Factors Society, 1986, 48–52.

9. See Amy Sherlong Lu, et al., “The Effect of Narrative Element Incorporation on Physical Activity and Game Experience in Active and Sedentary Virtual Reality Games,” *Virtual Reality* 27 (2023): 1607–22. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10055-023-00754-7>

10. James Der Derian writes of “virtuous warfare” as the contemporary military capacity to “actualize violence at a distance” and “clean up the political discourse as well as the battlefield”; see James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-*

Entertainment Network, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), xxxii. The progression toward increasingly automated, machinic warfare has been theorized by many. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that materialization of the war machine is a root cause of war more fundamental even than aggression: Deleuze Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 421–22. The “machinic essence” is a militarized figure that “asserts itself as non-human for-itself”; Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 38, 54. Paul Virilio theorizes an unhuman state of “pure war”: the endless war of deterrence, of “infinite preparation,” a “nuclear monorachy” in which “there will be no more man, there will only be weapons”; soldiers will disappear “in the technology and automation of the war machine”; Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), 104, 72, 33.

11. Brady, “The Soldier Cycle: Harun Farocki’s *Images of War (at a Distance)*,” 200.

12. Brady, “The Soldier Cycle: Harun Farocki’s *Images of War (at a Distance)*,” 196.

13. Brady, *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror*, 65.

14. Brady, *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror*, 65.

15. Harun Farocki, *Serious Games I–IV*, created during 2009–10 and exhibited in Europe and the United States in an immersive photography and video gallery staging, available at <https://www.harunfarocki.de/installations/2010s.html>

16. See Rizzo et al., “Development and Early Evaluation,” 116.

17. Janina Schupp analyzes how war simulations—ranging from board games to digital military shooters—consistently deploy Middle Eastern landscapes and Arab/Muslim combatants as the dominant setting and opponent. See Janina Schupp, “Wargaming the Middle East: The Evolution of Simulated Battlefields from Chequerboards to Virtual Worlds and Instrumented Artificial Cities,” in *Media and Mapping Practices in the Middle East and North Africa: Producing Space*, ed. Alena Strohmaier and Angela Krewani (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 95–116.

18. Lisa Nakamura argues that anti-Chinese ethnic profiling was structured into the game design of *World of Warcraft*, thus producing a kind of “networked racism”: “though it is the case that players cannot see each others’ bodies while playing, specific forms of gamic labor, such as gold farming and selling, as well as specific styles of play have become racialized as Chinese, producing new forms of networked racism that are particularly easy for players to disavow.” Lisa Nakamura, “Don’t Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in *World of Warcraft*,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26, no. 2 (2009): 130, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295030902860252>

19. Harun Farocki, “A Sun with No Shadow,” the final film in *Serious Games*.

20. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 44.

21. See James R. Ball III, “Staging the Twitter War: Toneelgroep Amsterdam’s *Roman Tragedies*,” *TDR/The Drama Review* 57, no. 4 (220) (2013): 163–70, https://doi.org/10.1162/DRAM_a_00309

22. See *Trojan Barbie*, *Mother Gun*, and *Slow Falling Bird*, in Christine Evans, *War Plays*

(New York: NoPassport Press, 2013); her intensely affecting war novel: Christine Evans, *Nadia* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2023); and a heartwrenching opera about forced migration following war, *Three Marys*, with music by Andree Greenwell, libretto by Christine Evans. The world premier at Sydney Opera House (2023), directed by Angela Chaplin, can be viewed here: <https://stream.sydneyoperahouse.com/videos/green-room-music-three-marys-2023>

23. Christine Evans, “Drones, Projections, and Ghosts: Restaging Virtual War in *Grounded* and *You Are Dead. You Are Here*,” *Theatre Journal* 67, no. 4 (2015): 683.

24. Rizzo et al., “Development and Early Evaluation,” 116.

25. Sue Halpern, “Virtual Iraq: Using Simulation to Treat a New Generation of Traumatized Veterans,” *The New Yorker* 84, no. 14 (May 2008), 32–37.

26. Rizzo, et al., “Development and Early Evaluation,” 116. Employing a similar design process, the group later created “Virtual Afghanistan,” adding environments with more mountainous terrain and adjusted building structures in order to provide accurate imagery for service members from that front.

27. See McLay et al., “Development and Testing of Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy”; and Rizzo et al., “Development and Early Evaluation.”

28. See Evans, “Drones, Projections, and Ghosts,” 678.

29. Morales-Rodriguez and Pavard, “Design of an Emotional and Social Interaction,” 178.

30. Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, reprint, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 9.

31. Artaud, *Theater and Its Double*, 32.

32. Evans, *Closer Than They Appear*, 11.

33. Evans, “Drones, Projections, and Ghosts,” 684.

34. I am drawing here on Erika Fischer-Lichte’s definition of *theatricality*, which she centers around the knowing production of “signs of signs”; see Erika Fischer-Lichte, “Theatricality: A Key Concept in Theatre and Cultural Studies,” *Theatre Research International* 20, no. 2 (1995): 85, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0307883300008294>. Similarly, Janelle G. Reinelt has pointed out that the play of signs is a fundamental process of theatricality: “Spectators must perceive that the process of using signs as signs prevails over their customary semiotic function in order for the process to be theatrical”; see Janelle Reinelt, “The Politics of Discourse: Performativity Meets Theatricality,” *SubStance* 31, nos. 2/3 (2002): 208, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3685486>

35. Evans, *Closer Than They Appear*, 32.

36. Rebecca Jackson, “The Glitch Aesthetic” (MA thesis, Georgia State University, 2011), 11, ScholarWorks@Georgia State University, available at <https://rbccajackson.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/the-glitch-aesthetic.pdf>

37. Jackson, “Glitch Aesthetic,” 11–12.

38. Evans, “Drones, Projections, and Ghosts,” 678.

39. Evans, “Drones, Projections, and Ghosts,” 683.

40. For example, Linsey Ferrentino’s *Ugly Lies the Bone* (2015), George Brant’s *Grounded* (2013), Paula Vogel’s *Don Juan Comes Home from Iraq* (2014), and Rajiv Joseph’s *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (2010) all dramatize experiences of war trauma and, in some

cases, VR-assisted trauma therapies, in the context of post-9/11, U.S.-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

41. Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 8; 104–105.

42. As of 2024, the platform was renamed X, but for posterity and clarity, I will continue to call it Twitter in this analysis.

43. Twitter was in fact a later addition to the production; while digital contributions from the audience were part of the Toneelgroep's design from the work's premiere in 2007, these were originally solicited via computers stationed throughout the space. Between the 2009 and 2012 international tours, Twitter became broadly accessible on most audience members' smartphones, becoming the dominant form of computer-mediated communication in the production.

44. @StephensSimon, March 19, 2017. <https://twitter.com/hashtag/romantragedies?lang=en>

45. Ball, "Staging the Twitter War"

46. @AlqassamBrigade, November 14, 2012, quoted in Ball, "Staging the Twitter War," 165.

47. For example, see Caleb T. Carr et al., "Speech Acts within Facebook Status Messages," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 31, no. 2 (2012): 176–96, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X12438535>

48. Ball, "Staging the Twitter War," 165.

49. Hamington, "Performative Approach to Teaching Care Ethics," 31.

50. Hamington, "Performative Approach to Teaching Care Ethics," 31, 42.

51. Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. See chapter 5, "Virtual Spaces in Performative Assemblies," especially 121–124.

52. Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 122.

53. Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 104.

54. Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 104–5.

55. Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 104–5.

56. Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 104–5.

57. @hkanthou November 17, 2012, quoted in Ball, "Staging the Twitter War," 165.

58. @niccilor, November 17, 2012, quoted in Ball, "Staging the Twitter War," 165.

59. @HelenCliff, March 19, 2017, <https://twitter.com/hashtag/romantragedies?lang=en>

60. Christian M. Billing, "The Roman Tragedies," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2010): 415, <https://doi.org/10.1353/shq.2010.0006>

61. Jacob Gallagher-Ross, "Postdramatic Stress Syndrome: Dood Paard's medEia at P.S. 122," *TDR/The Drama Review* 53, no. 1 (201) (2009): 129, <https://doi.org/10.1162/dram.2009.53.1.129>

62. Ball, "Staging the Twitter War," 168.

63. Wafaa Bilal, "Domestic Tension," artist website, Wafaa Bilal, accessed July 11, 2025, <https://wafaabilal.com/domestic-tension/>

64. In Robin Bernstein's theory of "scriptive things," she argues that object-human formations are determined by cultural-historical scripts; see Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011). Scripted objects carry their historical uses in the form

of gestural “repertoires” carried between bodies and spaces as somatic memories and embodied cues that make certain actions and uses of certain objects far more likely than others; see Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

65. This dramaturgical “rule” is attributed to Anton Chekhov and is known as “Chekhov’s gun.” See Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, *Letters on the Short Story, the Drama, and Other Literary Topics*, ed. Louis S. Friedland, trans. Sidonie Lederer (New York: B. Blom, 1964).

66. Bilal, “Domestic Tension.”

67. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 82.

68. Bruno Latour, *Pandora’s Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 179.

69. Wafaa Bilal and Kari Lydersen, *Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance under the Gun* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2008).

70. Bilal and Lydersen, *Shoot an Iraqi*, 74.

71. Bilal, “Domestic Tension.”

72. Conquergood, “Performing as a Moral Act,” 10.

73. Clio Unger, “‘SHOOT HIM NOW!’ Anonymity, Accountability and Online Spectatorship in Wafaa Bilal’s *Domestic Tension*,” *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 11, no. 2 (2015): 202–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14794713.2015.1084808>

74. “Prism for PTSD,” corporate website, GrayMatters Health, <https://www.graymatters-health.com/prism-for-ptsd>

75. Correspondence with Pam Schwartz, vice president of marketing, Grey Matters Health, July 30, 2025.

76. As the PRISM website describes it: “During Prism treatment, a computer simulation and EEG headset create an environment where patients engage in a non-trauma-based experience to help them learn to control their PTSD symptoms.” “Prism for PTSD,” corporate website, GrayMatters Health, <https://www.graymatters-health.com/prism-for-ptsd>

77. Magelssen, *Simming*, 3–5.

78. As Magelssen puts it, “These events do not simply educate or entertain, but rather ‘purport to save the world’ or, alternately and even simultaneously, ‘function as intensive propaganda’ toward cynical and partisan ends”; Magelssen, *Simming*, 3.

79. Tracy C. Davis, “Performative Time,” in *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography*, ed. Charlotte M. Canning and Thomas Postlewait (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/yale-ebooks/detail.action?docID=843268>

80. Jakob N. Keynan et al., “Electrical Fingerprint of the Amygdala Guides Neurofeedback Training for Stress Resilience,” *Nature Human Behaviour* 3, no. 1 (2019): 63–73, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0484-3>

81. The researchers found that “emotional resilience, as measured via a psychological questionnaire of alexithymia and by a behavioral emotional-regulation test, improved after amygdala-EFP neurofeedback [. . .] and was worsened in participants who did not receive any form of feedback.” Keynan et al., “Electrical Fingerprint of the Amygdala,” 69–70.

82. Keynan et al., “Electrical Fingerprint of the Amygdala,” 70.

83. In her chapter “Thinking with the Body,” Paul discusses interoception—our ability to sense internal bodily states like heartbeat—and its benefits to personal well-being and professional work; Paul, *Extended Mind*, 21–43.

84. Paul, *Extended Mind*, 33. See also Lori Haase et al., “When the Brain Does Not Adequately Feel the Body: Links between Low Resilience and Interoception,” *Biological Psychology* 113 (January 2016): 37–45, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biopsycho.2015.11.004>.

85. See Narayanan Kandasamy et al., “Interoceptive Ability Predicts Survival on a London Trading Floor,” *Scientific Reports* 6 (September 2016): article 32986, <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep32986>

86. See John Coates, *The Hour between Dog and Wolf: Risk-Taking, Gut Feelings, and the Biology of Boom and Bust* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 98. Paul discusses all of these studies in *The Extended Mind*, 21–43.

87. Paul describes the meditation and yoga practice of “body scans” and somatic therapy exercises such as “affect labeling” that can support individuals in cultivating interoceptive sensitivity; Paul, *Extended Mind*, 27–28.

88. Elizabeth A. Stanley, *Widen the Window: Training Your Brain and Body to Thrive during Stress and Recover from Trauma* (New York: Avery, 2019), 6–7.

89. Elizabeth A. Stanley, “Mindfulness-Based Mind Fitness Training: An Approach for Enhancing Performance and Building Resilience in High-Stress Contexts,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Mindfulness*, ed. Amanda Le et al. (Malden, MA: John Wiley, 2014), 964–85, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118294895.ch50>

90. Rajko, associate chair of theater and dance at Wayne State University, opened the *Interpolations 2* conference on “Spatial Computing” at Washington University, St. Louis. Organized by Elizabeth Hunter, the event took place on October 25, 2024.

91. Coates, *Hour Between Dog and Wolf*, 119.

Resolution

1. Philip Metres, introduction to *Come Together: Imagine Peace*, ed. Philip Metres et al. (Huron, OH: Bottom Dog Press, 2008), 14. In searching for a more robust lexicon or the ideological and practical grounds upon which such a language could be built, Metres sifts through centuries of attempts to ground humanity in names for peace: the Latin *Pacem*, the Greek *Eirene*, the Hebrew *shalom*, an Anglo-Norman term that shares a root with “fasten,” and finally, Gandhi’s notion of *satyagraha*, or “truth force.”

2. Quoted in Philip Metres et al., eds., *Come Together: Imagine Peace*, 15.

3. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 10, 13.

4. See online exhibit photos, description of media, and discursive text on Arita’s website (accessed October 4, 2019): https://www.taikiArita-san.com/pages/2643098/page_201902261232

5. Artia’s blend of artistry and activism has earned him inclusion in the next iteration of the Hiroshima Nagasaki Zero Project, a high-profile international exhibition curated by visual artist Cannon Hersey (grandson of John Hersey, author of *Hiroshima*, the 1946 internationally acclaimed account of the aftermath of the atomic bomb). The Zero Project artists, most of whom were born long after World War II, collectively demonstrate how the

next generations of Hiroshima powerfully translate their inherited legacies of postatomic trauma and their commitment to abolish nuclear weaponry into arts activism.

6. Lane Pederson, *Dialectical Behavior Therapy: A Contemporary Guide for Practitioners* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 4.

7. Pederson, *Dialectical Behavior Therapy*, 31.

8. These examples of DBT phrases come from personal correspondence with DBT therapist Holley Anderson, January 11, 2025.

9. Pederson, *Dialectical Behavior Therapy*, 34.

10. Pederson, *Dialectical Behavior Therapy*, 33.

11. As DBT psychologist Dr. John Grohol explains, “Although the stance advocated here is a nonjudgmental one, this does not mean that it is one of approval: acceptance of reality is not approval of reality.” John Grohol, “An Overview of Dialectical Behavior Therapy,” Psych Central, June 19, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20191027212200/https://psychcentral.com/lib/an-overview-of-dialectical-behavior-therapy/>

12. Pederson, *Dialectical Behavior Therapy*, 33.

13. Pederson, *Dialectical Behavior Therapy*, 39.

14. Pederson, *Dialectical Behavior Therapy*, 33.

15. Nakagawara, quoted in Mai Kanzaki and Jennifer Wise, “The Japanese-Garden Aesthetics of Robert Lepage: *Shukukei*, *Mitate*, and *Fusuma-e* in *Seven Streams of the River Ota* and Other Works,” *Theatre Research International* 38, no. 3 (2013): 198, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0307883313000308>. A zen garden was, in fact, one of the structuring concepts of Robert Lepage’s 1994 *Seven Streams of the River Ota*, one of the most widely known post-dramatic performances about postatomic Hiroshima. Made for and by an international community of artists, *Seven Streams* was built around the history and geography of Hiroshima, a city built around seven rivers; the piece is an eight-hour-long performance that braids together seven loosely related stories of human suffering (ethnic genocide in Nazi concentration camps, atomic bomb detonations over two cities in Japan, and the global AIDS epidemic). Despite its length, distressing subject matter, and epic half-century, three-continent scope, it is contained within a serene rectangle modeled after a Zen rock garden.

16. Nakagawara, quoted in Kanzaki and Wise, “Japanese-Garden Aesthetics of Robert Lepage,” 209–10.

17. Personal conversation with Mirei and Arita, September 12, 2019.

18. Levertov in Metres et al., *Come Together*, 38.

19. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 57–58.

20. See Kimmerer’s chapter “Learning the Grammar of Animacy,” in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 55–66. See also Elise Morrison, “Healing in Soma Time: Interspecies Collaborative Performance in Post-Crisis Ecologies,” *TDR/The Drama Review*, Cambridge University Press; accepted for publication, expected in fall 2026.

21. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 9. Kimmerer begins her book with the Indigenous story of “Skywoman Falling,” which imparted the “original instructions” for living harmoniously and respectfully on earth for the First Nations peoples of the Great Lakes region (14–15). In contrast, the myth of Eve and her exile from the Garden of Eden instructs through submission: “In order to eat, [Eve] was instructed to subdue the wilderness into which she was cast” (19).

22. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 7.

23. Levertov in Metres et al., *Come Together*, 38.
24. John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27.
25. Lederach, *Moral Imagination*, 27.
26. Lederach, *Moral Imagination*, 26.
27. Cynthia Cohen et al., eds., *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict* (Oakland, CA: New Village Press, 2011), 162.
28. Their first collaborative piece was performed at the Blue Lab festival in Hiroshima, an annual arts festival with various interarts performances, many of which seem to focus on what Arita referred to as “live painting,” or action paintings. Arita and Masako collaborated on several other works in 2019, including one that was performed at the Peace Park on August 6, 2019, as part of the annual commemoration of the bombing.
29. Conversation with Masako Kushima at International Peace House, September 13, 2019.
30. Cohen et al., *Acting Together*, 166.
31. Conversation with Masako at International Peace House, September 13, 2019.
32. Conversation with Masako at International Peace House, September 13, 2019.
33. Conversation with Masako at International Peace House, September 13, 2019. Exploring their moral imaginations through movement and sharing that movement in public performances has been empowering for many of her participants. Masako recalled a conversation with an elementary-age schoolchild after a community performance-making workshop, in which he expressed with delighted shock: “What I said was exactly what became the dance; the dance I had imagined in my mind.” When she heard this, she realized that she was offering a creative skill set that was not being developed in mainstream peace education.
34. Conversation with Masako at International Peace House, September 13, 2019.
35. Conversation with Masako at International Peace House, September 13, 2019.
36. Bill Brown, “Martial Art,” *PMLA* 124, no. 5 (2009): 1791, <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.5.1787>
37. Brown, “Martial Art,” 1791.
38. Brown, “Martial Art,” 1791. See <https://www.peaceartprojectcambodia.org/>
39. Brown, “Martial Art,” 1791. Though Ricker’s website is no longer functional, it is archived and accessible at <https://web.archive.org/web/20080418235731/http://www.meltguns.com/index.html>. In addition to those listed, Sandra Bromley and Wallis Kendal built *The Gun Sculpture* (a five-ton assemblage of deactivated guns and ammunition), shown at the Nobel Peace Prize Celebration in Seoul in 2000.
40. Brown, “Martial Art,” 1791.
41. Sax, quoted in Brown, “Martial Art,” 1793.
42. Tracy C. Davis, *Stages of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil Defense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 337.
43. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (rpt., New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 279.

44. Arendt, herself born Jewish, notably refused to separate the Jews from the other groups persecuted by the Nazis because she insisted on a plurality coextensive with human life in any and all of its cultural forms. This took particular historical form when she argued against the formation of Israel as a state based on principles of Jewish sovereignty. As Judith Butler put it, Arendt “objected to the founding of any state that required the expulsion of its inhabitants and the production of a new refugee class, especially when such a state invoked the rights of refugees to legitimate its founding”; Butler, *Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 114.

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