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Review

The Journal of Dramaturgy

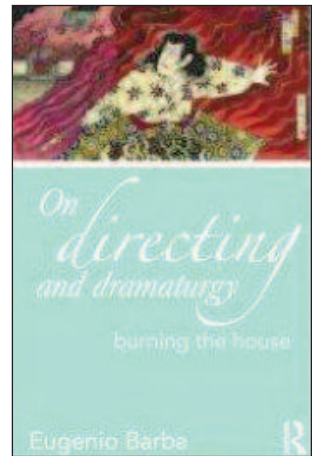
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1986 – 2011
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF REVIEW
1986 – 2011

- 3 On African American Dramaturgy
Martine Kei Green responds to *Review's* Special Issue (21.1)
- 6 “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised,” But Can It Be Theatricalized?
by Dalia Basiouny
- 10 Excerpts from *Tahrir Stories*
by Dalia Basiouny
- 12 Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret, Holstebro, Denmark
An introduction to the work of Eugenio Barba
by Annelis Kuhlmann
- 14 Eugenio Barba’s *On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House*
Reviewed by Amy Jensen and Shelley Orr
- 19 *Servant of Two Masters — or 3 or 4 or More...*
Business Advice for Dramaturgs Working in Virgin Territory
by Sydney Cheek O’Donnell



PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

- 22 Bryan Doerries’s *Theater of War*:
A New Incarnation of an Ancient Ritual
by Heidi Nelson



Theatre of War in performance.

Photo: Phyllis Kaufman



**LITERARY MANAGERS
& DRAMATURGS
OF THE AMERICAS**

1986 – 2011
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF REVIEW
1986 – 2011

The word “conversation” has long been a keyword for dramaturgs, and this issue feels especially “conversational” to me. Not in the sense of “chatty” — far from it. Rather, the conversations in this issue tend toward the profound, reaching across time and distance.

Martine Kei Green responds to the last issue of *Review*, a special issue featuring articles on African American dramaturgy. I’m so pleased that Martine is extending the discussion of this important subject, and that she’s doing so in a way that is at once analytical and quite personal.

In one of this publication’s signature two-author book reviews, Amy Jensen and Shelley Orr have an actual conversation about Eugenio Barba’s book *On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House*. Amy and Shelley’s joint exploration of this new title is preceded by a wonderful introduction to Barba and his legacy by Annelis Kuhlmann, a Norway-based scholar and dramaturg. Annelis’s essay provides a valuable international perspective on an artist whose work isn’t as well known in North America as it should be.

Joining this international dialogue is Dalia Basiouny. As I mentioned in Denver at the annual LMDA conference, Dalia is writing from Cairo, talking about her experience making theatre during the Egyptian revolution of January 2011. Months later, she was finishing this article during what she calls “the second revolution,” as Egyptians were trying to ensure that the rights they fought for last winter are in fact granted.

Review

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On July 20, Dalia wrote to me: “It’s an interesting and intense time of change worldwide. Here Egyptians are witnessing and shaping their future, and carving their path with daily decisions.” Though the experience has been “overwhelming and sometimes depressing,” nevertheless Dalia said that she and other Egyptians are taking their new political reality “one day at a time.” My thanks to Dalia for taking the time to write this article *in extremis*.

These pieces are joined by Sydney Cheek O’Donnell’s witty and practical guide for the fledgling dramaturg. And our inaugural peer-reviewed article is Heidi Nelson’s substantial discussion of the Theater of War project: this article considers the unexpected relevance of ancient Greek tragedy for returning soldiers during our current war-time crises.

I will repeat here my thanks to all those who have contributed to *Review* during the years that I have served as editor. Receiving the 2011 Elliott Hayes award for my work on this journal was humbling and moving, and a real thrill. My acceptance speech is available at the LMDA website. I look forward to including the much more profound speeches related to DD Kugler’s Lessing Award in the next issue of *Review*.

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Inquiries from prospective contributors are welcome. All inquiries should be directed to D.J. Hopkins: <dhopkins@mail.sdsu.edu>. Review Volume 21 number 1, Winter 2011.

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ON AFRICAN AMERICAN DRAMATURGY

One Professional's Personal Response

by **Martine Kei Green**

Reading *Review's* Special Issue on African American dramaturgy brought up several thoughts that I have long pondered, considering that I identify as an African American dramaturg. For example, I have spent time searching for other dramaturgs of color, wondering what projects they were working on, where they were working in American theatres, and if our place in American theatre is evolving? Ironically enough, exploring this issue has brought forth more questions than it has answered.

Beginning with Sydné Mahone's introduction, "Shifting Boundaries: Perspectives from African American Dramaturgs," her point of view on being a minority dramaturg in a majority-run field reminds me of the questions, ideas, struggles, and concerns that I have surrounding my own journey as a dramaturg. However, the idea that Mahone gracefully plants which parallels my own thoughts is her tie between the shift in the American political landscape and the participation and impact on minorities in the arts. I find Mahone's introduction a very thoughtful contemplation of these ideas. After reading her article, I chastised myself for not being a more visible dramaturg of color. Maybe I should make an effort to be in more places where dramaturgs gather so that more people in the field are aware of my existence, especially if the current numbers state that I am a member of a very small group? Then I began wondering why I only recently made myself more accessible and known as a dramaturg in larger circles (such as within LMDA and other conferences in which we are known to gather), despite the fact that I have trained and worked as a professional dramaturg since 2002? I must admit that my only answer is that I was busy! However, I also realize that everyone is busy and that is not the best excuse for my absence.

Debra Cardona's article, "Classics in a New light: Dramaturgy at the Classical Theatre of Harlem," highlights themes very close to my heart. For example, how do African American productions of classics (both African American and otherwise) challenge and enhance the racial and political landscape of American theatre? Also, what does it mean for an African American body and mind to be the dramaturgical expert on a show that was written without that person's cultural and racial heritage in mind? And, does that even matter in the whole scheme of being the "questioner" in the rehearsal hall? As I thought

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about these questions, I kept coming back to a statement of Cardona's early in the article. "Innovation happens in the stories we choose to tell, and the first conversation must always be about how we see fit to tell them." (12) That statement frames the conclusion to which I resigned myself: Part of the power that comes from theatre is its ability to tell stories, and one of the more exciting things that we can do as theatre artists — and more specifically dramaturgs — is to tell a story that makes sense both in the context in which it was originally set and also in a more recent setting into which the story can be transplanted. In reading about the productions of *Three Sisters* and *Waiting for Godot*, whether or not each play's setting was changed, there were themes present in the plays that could resonate with an African American audience and company as well as with any other racial and ethnic group. The challenge is not necessarily finding those correlations, but effectively using those themes to tell an honest and compelling story.

I am excited by Faedra Chatard Carpenter's article "The Innovation of Inclusion: Dramaturgy in the Mythos of a 'Post-Racial Era.'" The article provoked thoughts of the ever present issue for African Americans of "double-consciousness," a term coined by W.E.B. DuBois in *The Souls of Black Folk*, the issue of "authenticity" in a theatrical production, and collaboration across racial boundaries. As DuBois states, double-consciousness is "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." I wholeheartedly agree that all African American productions do not need an African American director, but if such a production does not have an African American director, I think it does serve the production to employ an African American dramaturg. However, I wonder if that particular scenario unintentionally limits African American dramaturgs to African American productions — if only to acknowledge a very extreme example of the possible fallout of this idea. This is not to say that Carpenter's essay does not address this same pitfall, in her conclusion she warns against this. Essentially, her article resulted in a more thoughtful rumination on my part about this very issue. I began to think about the idea of "double-consciousness." For the African American community, double-consciousness mostly manifests as we attempt to retain our sense of self-respect, worth, and culture in a society that has values that both parallel and diverge from our own. In addition, African Americans cope with this situation by "code-switching" on a regular basis to successfully integrate ourselves into society. With this in mind, I began to wonder what opens up for dramaturgs in understanding the stories of other racial and ethnic categories when we "see" the stories we present onstage through the eyes of others? I am not asking this to advocate for manipulating African American plays (or those of any other racial and ethnic category) so that they placate a white audience, rather, I am advocating for theorizing about what happens to our understanding of a play when we deconstruct the story with the understanding of how double-consciousness affects the way that these stories are constructed by the author.

I am questioning if multi-racial and/or multi-cultural dramaturgy might be a way to enlighten one person to the cultural and racial heritages of a race which he or she did not previously understand or identify with, as in the manner Carpenter mentions in her anecdotes about the productions of *Fabulation* and *Cloud Tectonics*? I recog-

nize that the circumstances around those productions are different, considering that (in the case of *Cloud Tectonics*) no Puerto Rican artists were associated with that production. However, branching out from that story, could multi-racial or multi-cultural dramaturgy be the opportunity for dramaturgs of color to be seen as viable resources for both plays that represent their own racial and ethnic heritage as well as those of other races (as in the case with me and my specialization in contemporary African American theatre and the English Renaissance)? In addition, could multi-racial (or cultural) dramaturgy exist as an opportunity for white dramaturgs to learn more about another race? Through combating the issue of "absence" and "presence," could we as dramaturgs develop several consciousnesses? Having said that, maybe I just talked myself out of future work, since I am sure that part of my career has been built upon being an authentic voice in a rehearsal hall when working on plays about the African American experience.

Or maybe I have opened up future opportunities, such as the recent production of *Measure for Measure* that I worked on at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. We have a white playwright, a white director, a Latino assistant director, a white dramaturg, two assistant dramaturgs (one African American and one Asian), and a white voice and text director, all working on a show that has been set in a Latino neighborhood in 1970s America. The Duke was played by a white actor and Isabella and Angelo were played by Latino actors. Was it strange to have a dramaturgical team that did not ethnically or racially represent anything related to the new setting for the play? Or was that inadequacy made up through the other members of the artistic team working on the show? Was having such an ethnically diverse cast and production team a formula for success or failure? What could I learn as an African American woman from transplanting Shakespeare's Jacobean *Measure for Measure* into a 1970s American setting? I think we all struggled with that question on a regular basis as we worked on this production. However, I can say that I did walk away with a broader Spanish vocabulary and more knowledge of Latino culture than I had walking into the rehearsal room.



The Classic Theatre of Harlem production of *Three Sisters*.

Photo: Troy Hourie

I think that part of my concern and questioning stems from my thought that the term “black play” is evolving. Black writers are still writing plays that point to the injustices found in everyday life, but we are now also writing plays that are existential in nature, abstract, philosophical, etc., that do not necessarily point to an inherently African American identity. Do these plays require an African American dramaturg? Director? I find these are interesting questions to grapple with, and questions for which, I will admit, I still harbor conflicting answers.

“Back to Black: A Response to Contemplations on the Dramaturgical Landscape for African American Theatre (in a time of Obama)” by Otis Ramsey-Zöe continued this line of questioning as I reflected on his idea of “playing black,” and on the rising instances of “racelessness” that are pervading the American theatrical landscape.

I, myself, have been in the circumstance that Ramsey-Zöe playfully incorporates into a scripted moment in his article. Knowing that my presence in a rehearsal hall is to validate or to authenticate an artistic choice, and that I am put in the awkward position of attempting to wade through thought out but misguided ideas of how my own people should be represented onstage. Yet, I feel in that circumstance that I am doing what any other dramaturg in my shoes (racial, gendered, etc.) would do, which is question ideas, think out the potential responses to these ideas, and strategize how to tell the story through the actors and choices being made during the process. Yes, I do bring a different set of experiences, skills, sensibilities, and ideas to the table as a result of my background, but then again, those differences may be the reason that I am optimistic (maybe to the point of delusion) about the evolving role and use of African American dramaturgs.

I find myself both agreeing with and being horrified at the idea that our presence as African American dramaturgs is necessary. However, I would be remiss not to acknowledge that the potential is always there to unintentionally misrepresent or offend a racial and ethnic group if one is not careful of the sensitivities of that group. Yet, is it the responsibility of a (potentially) lone African American dramaturg to police all of those moments? I find my own vacillation — between desire for a moment in which I am not a commodity as a result of my skin color and thankfulness that some theatres are responsible enough to realize that they may need my presence — disturbing and scary. I agree with Ramsey-Zöe that as dramaturgs we can elevate the national discourse on race, and I would go as far as to say that it is our responsibility to do so when we consider producing or working on any shows of any specific racial or ethnic identity.

I am excited about the opportunity these articles provided to begin a conversation about African American dramaturgy. I love the avenues that these articles opened, and I sincerely hope that as we gather together for our next LMDA conference (which, because of my rehearsal schedule, I cannot attend), we continue to push forward and put words to the successes, challenges, opportunities, and discoveries that are part of being an African American dramaturg.

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“The Revolution Will Not Be Televised,” But Can It Theatricalized?

BY DALIA BASIOUNY

DALIA BASIOUNY is an Egyptian writer, theatre artist, and academic. Her theatre work includes directing fifteen plays performed in Egypt, England, USA, and Morocco. Basiouny's first play as a writer, *Solitaire*, received the theater award from the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) 2010. It had its world premiere in Rawabet, Cairo on March 2011 before traveling to Iraq (April 2011) and Morocco, (June 2011). Her PhD from CUNY Graduate Center examines the political theatre of Arab American Women after 9/11. She is the editor of the *Arab American Women Theatre Anthology* (forthcoming) and a recipient of many awards including the Fulbright Arts Grant (USA) and the British Council Chevening Scholarship (UK). She teaches theatre at Helwan University, translates, and writes fiction and art reviews. She is currently writing a film script and greening a piece of land in the Egyptian western desert.

As the Egyptian revolution was unfolding in January and February 2011, Tahrir Square was changing from day to day. There were countless stories in the crowds that sometimes exceeded three million people. I was participating in the demonstrations. I wanted and needed to be there, because the change that I desired and believed in could only happen if the number of people demonstrating continued to be large enough to place pressure on the regime. As I stood or sat in different parts of the square, I started to hear the stories. Many, many accounts of what happened on this day or that, or how the youth entered the square or failed to enter it on “Anger Friday.” Some of these accounts had the urgency of the adventures that each of us had to deal with: in the morning, diverting the thugs to bring in food or medicine; and finding a safe way to exit the square that night. While others had the magnitude of how this friend or fellow demonstrator was shot and how he or she passed away or survived.

As a theatre artist I felt the need to collect the myriad of stories, for people in Tahrir (and in other parts of Egypt) to know what their fellow rebels went through, for non-demonstrators to get a feeling of what was going on, and for the future. I started collecting first person accounts through taped interviews, and I also distributed a set of questions through email and Facebook. Whenever I heard someone talking about a specific experience, I was ready with my small camera, and I asked permission to record the story. I collected and transcribed an increasing number of stories from the Egyptian Revolution.

I used these accounts in a documentary performance, *Tahrir Stories*, that was performed during February and March 2011. During that time, the demonstrators were still applying pressure to change the regime, not just the head of state.

To date our group, “Sabeel for the Arts,” has performed this documentary piece four times. Each performance had a very different feel and atmosphere — not only because of the locations and times

of day, but also because we added testimonies and adapted to the changing situation in a country that is still going through a revolution. This account is an attempt to document my experience of creating theatre about a revolution that is still happening — and of theatre being interrupted by the revolution — in the hope that we'd have a better understanding of the complicated processes involved.

As I write these lines there is a call for a “Return to Tahrir Square to Complete the Revolution.” On May 27, 2011 millions returned to demonstrations to ensure that the revolution's demands are truly met. And at the time this article is being completed, in summer 2011, the revolution is continuing in Egypt, with demonstrations in different cities, and rebels taking control over Tahrir Square and closing it again.

FOUR STORIES ABOUT TAHRIR STORIES

1. The Premiere

The first performance of *Tahrir Stories* took place on February 23rd, 2011, in Hanager Art Center. The revolution was still under way. The president was ousted on February 11th, but the regime was still in power, through the leadership he appointed before he was forced out. Demonstrations continued, in Tahrir Square and other locations, to ensure that the demands of revolution are being met. Cairo traffic on February 23rd was exceptionally difficult. At some traffic lights, it took an hour or more to get through an intersection. A couple of people who were supposed to help in preparing the performance arrived after the performance had ended, and many audience members were stuck for hours and returned to their homes. We learned that a fire was set in upper floors of the building of the Ministry of the Interior, causing this traffic mayhem.

Hanager Arts Center, in the Opera House grounds, is half a mile from Tahrir Square. The Center has been undergoing major renovations for two years and is expected to open in a few months. Dr. Hoda Wasfy, the manager of Hanager, suggested that the independent artists who are interested in presenting work representing the spirit of the Tahrir could use the open area in front of the building. We did. I organized a series of five events under the title “Evenings from the Square,” which included music and theatre performances. They were very well attended, and the audience didn't mind standing to watch performances or the site's background of sand and gravel, which unintentionally recreated the atmosphere of Tahrir Square.

On Feb 23rd, it was the turn of my group “Sabeel for the Arts” to present our piece. We had very little time for rehearsals, as most of us were going to marches, and running from one political meeting to the next, in an attempt to activate the revolution in our respective fields.

Our main challenge in the rehearsals was how to organize the material we had. We decided on a chronological order, though most testimonies tackled more than one event. Testimonies about the marches of January 25th and 28th came first. These were followed by accounts of the horrors that demonstrators faced in order to take over Tahrir Square and to defend the Egyptian museum. Then a testimony about the attacks by the armed thugs against demonstrators on February 2nd, in what was named the “Battle of the Donkey.” These were followed by stories of the lost and the martyrs, leading to the bitter-sweet celebrations at the ousting of Mubarak. Some of the accounts

overlapped, but each presented a unique piece of the mosaic of narratives of the Egyptian Revolution.

For the set, I brought two cotton rugs and some straw chairs from home. Hanager provided three microphones to help with sound in the open air space.

I set up the evening as a ritual, utilizing candles, incense, voices, and sound. We delineated the performance space with the rugs, and surrounded both “the stage” and the “standing auditorium” with tea light candles in transparent plastic cups. We started the incense burning and waited for the construction workers to stop so we could start our sound ritual. They ignored us and continued mixing cement and moving wood (they had work to do under a deadline, and performances were seen as a distraction). So we started our ritual performance honoring the names of those who died and the stories of those who survived the eighteen-day revolution.

Using a singing ball (a Tibetan musical instrument) and an Egyptian flute, we attempted to create a soundscape to transform the space and take the audience on a journey that follows the steps of the rebels in Tahrir Square and other locations.

At the end of the performance, each of the performers read some of the names of martyrs. There were 196 names identified at that time (later the number exceeded 800). Each name was followed by a drum beat. At the end of the naming ritual, the performers hummed together, and their voices joined in one big, loud scream that reverberated in the air, and its resonance kept going on for a while as they exited the “stage” to walk toward the audience and merge with them, refusing to create space for an ovation.

The power of that performance was its raw quality and its immediacy. In addition, many of the performers were recounting their own experiences in the demonstrations. The first person accounts had a strong impact on the audience and many of them were emotionally moved, and a lot of the audience members broke into tears as the names of the martyrs and their age were read out loud.

2. The University Performance

The Faculty of Arts at Helwan University was preparing an event to welcome the students back after the extended mid-term recess, and delays caused security problems propagated by the head of the University to create “insecurity” on campus. The provost is part of the old regime, who wanted to create a sense of insecurity by hiring thugs to scare students and faculty. One of the theatre professors who attended the first performance of *Tahrir Stories*, suggested that the deputy dean of the Faculty of Art invite our play to be a part of the celebrations.

Since this was a mid-day performance, we couldn't utilize candles and incense. I decided to rely on the human voices to create the ritual aspect of the performance. I recruited a number of theatre students in my department and trained them for a couple of hours on the day of the performance. Their humming and tone of voice created a musical background as well as the connection between the testimonies.

The elevated stage was set in the middle of the main walkway of the university, near the foodcourt and photocopying stores. They had a DJ playing nationalist and revolutionary songs. The organizers

wanted to introduce us by name and were surprised when we refused that “honor.”

Our group looked impressive, with eight performers and twelve chorus members all in black, walking single file with intent to the stage area. The performers were on the stage, while the chorus members stood in rows on both sides of the stage, close to the audience. This open air festivity attracted many university students passing by. As our show progressed, in the heat of mid-day, with no loud music or beats, only a few dedicated audience members were keenly following the accounts.

The organizers of the event approached me a couple of times during the performance, while I was conducting the chorus, asking me what will happen next, hoping for a “dramatic” response. When I said that we’d continue to present testimonies, they asked me to “take a break” so that they can play loud music to attract the passers-by.

More than one of them repeated that request, and I realized that the organizers were not interested in our performance, as it didn’t fit their bill of “celebrating the revolution.” I decided to cut the performance short and signaled to the actors on stage to stop after the current testimony.

After we left the stage, we realized that a number of the audience had left to join the protest against the President of the University. Some of the group members thought that the timing of our performance and the whole event was scheduled to distract students from marching and protesting. We joined the protestors under the offices of the President, channeling our energy and our preparation to more overt political cause: removing the head of this institution who was planted there by the previous regime, and who still refuses to leave in spite of regular demonstrations and marches demanding his ousting.

3. The Third Performance at Manf Theatre

Our theatre group, with three other independent groups, was invited to participate in an event celebrating the revolution, organized by the government-run Manf theatre, one of the Ministry of Culture’s Cultural Palaces. Our simple technical requirements were met by a number of worried phone calls and email messages, because of our request to use candles.

The Egyptian theatre had experienced a major tragedy in 2005, when more than 100 audience members died in a fire in a government-run theatre. Since that date the theatre authorities refuse to allow any open flame on stage, though most workers in the theatres do smoke inside the theatre buildings, on stage, and in the workshops.

Since no candles or incense would be allowed in the theatre, I had to go back to the human voice as the safest tool to create ritual. I invited a large number of people to join the chorus. There was a strong sense of uneasiness in the group, as the results of the referendum on the constitutional amendments had come out the night before and upset many of the group members who were very active during the revolution and were hoping for a majority refusing the amendments. The results were frustrating to many activists, but what was more frustrating were the tactics and political schemes used to manipulate the population, exploiting the illiteracy of the majority of Egyptians and manipulating them through religious appeals.

I used the rehearsal as an opportunity to work through that frustration. The cast members, and the chorus and some of their friends did a number of voice exercises, channeling the frustrating political news into creative energy to carry us through the performance. It was an exciting process as most of them had never sung or even raised their voices before. They were learning to liberate their breath, their voices, and their bodies for the first time. Some of them cried, while many were relieved as their voices soared above the open air theatre. We played a number of voice and energy games, and our voices reverberated through the space before and after the performance.

Manf Theatre is an open-air space, surrounded by other theatre buildings, including Balloon theatre and the National Circus. Many of the employees of the theatre hang out in the open auditorium, having conversations and arguments reflecting the current political changes and the implementation of the revolution in the various sectors of society. They continued to have their loud conversations and arguments during the performance!

We set chairs on stage for the performers and placed the standing chorus in the auditorium behind the audience in an attempt to surround the space and close it vocally. We used two microphones, hoping that they would carry the voices of the performers into the open air space and be louder than the atmosphere created by the theatre employees and the surrounding theatres.

The stage was not close to the audience, and that created a sense of separation between the performers and audience, and the voice of the chorus was partly lost in the air. What saved this performance was the ritual energy that continued from before the audience entered, till after they left. Making the section on stage just a part of a larger ritual that the actors and chorus were intent on doing, regardless of the presence of an audience.

4. The Fourth Performance: Manf Theatre

The following day was another turbulent day in Cairo. Traffic was worse than all expectations. It was Mothers’ Day, but the culprit was another fire in the Ministry of the Interior which paralyzed Cairo. Most of the chorus members were not able to come to the theatre. Most of the actors were very late, and a couple of them arrived as we were ready to go on stage. Without a chorus and with an incomplete cast I felt it would be better if we cancelled the performance, and I left the decision to the group.

A number of the actors were keen on performing, while some of them understood that this is not just a play where actors perform their monologues, but a ritual that transforms our energy as a group of artists first, before it moves to transform the energy of the audience. Since the group wanted to do the performance, and a few audience members braved the horrific Cairo traffic and made it to the theatre to watch the performance, I decided to create a new performance to suit the changing circumstances. I moved the audience onstage to separate them from the hubbub of the Manf Theatre employees. I created a semi circle with the seats of the audience to engulf the performers, who sat on the floor closing the audience’s circle. With no musical instruments, no chorus (only two of the chorus members managed to come to the theatre that night) and no microphones, I used the copper singing bowl to evoke the sense of ritual

and to act as a connection between the testimonies. Since the actor who started the performance was still stuck in traffic, we needed a different way to start the performance. Luckily, I had the text of my other play, *Solitaire*, a one-woman performance that also dealt with the revolution, and decided to use it.

Without the power of the twelve people-strong chorus, and the energy of the ritual, I started the performance by explaining to the audience our situation and the fire that is blocking traffic, preventing us from presenting the performance as we had planned. Then I proceeded to perform part of my own testimony. The physical closeness to the audience created a very powerful sense of connection as the audience surrounded the performers, and the actor presenting stood in the center of the audience. This closeness encouraged some audience members to engage more fully with the performers, asking them questions, etc.

Stripping theatre to its bare bones worked in this performance that had no pretences, or theatre magic; just the actor, the audience, and the power of story. The close proximity of actor and audience created an intimate feeling, and the strength of the authentic stories moved many in the audience to tears as the testimonies recreated the sense of urgency that prevailed in Tahrir. This simple performance was a message of hope to the audience, reminding them that change is possible, and that the people who succeeded in creating the revolution would continue to demand, and achieve, change.

Four Stories

The four performances of *Tahrir Stories* presented in February and March 2011 were different from each other — in the energy, the overall tone, the general aesthetics, and the relationship between actors and audiences. Regardless of the changes in the set-up and aesthetics and even the testimonies presented, *Tahrir Stories* had a powerful impact on its audiences. It worked as a reminder of the events of the revolution through the detailed accounts and testimonies that mixed the personal and the political. The authentic first-hand accounts helped audience members who did not demonstrate have a taste of the Square, while refreshing demonstrators' memories to the events they witnessed and experienced.

After watching the performance, some audience members wanted to share their own stories and testimonies of the revolution, blurring the line between audience and performer, as both become part of a society that is waking up to a new wave of activism in which each voice counts.

Tahrir Stories

EXCERPTS FROM A VERBATIM THEATRE PROJECT COMPOSED
AND PERFORMED DURING THE 2011 EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION

BY DALIA BASIOUNY

Testimony of Nada Ibrahim, about Friday 28th January

I participated in the demonstrations on January 28th, because when I saw the marches on the 25th, I thought that I have been talking about the corruption and bad government, and decided it's time to do something, not just talk.

I went out after the midday prayers. It was the first time I ever participated in a demonstration. Suddenly and because many of the young women around me were still afraid, I found myself leading them, and chanting and they are repeating after me. And everyone is looking at me in surprise. It was the happiest day of my life, because I felt that I really love my country, and I am really active.

At the beginning my mum and my sister went with me to the demonstrations in our town, Portsaid, because they believed in fighting the corruption. But after that we had big arguments because I wanted to travel to Cairo to be in Tahrir, and of course they rejected that. Like many other households, they were convinced by the presidential speeches. At the beginning, I too was swayed by them. I said why not wait and see the change he promised. But when I started seeing the photos of the martyrs I decided that he has to go. He has to step down.

Testimony of Nabeel Bahgat, about the attack by Mubarak thugs on February 2nd

The first attack was by the entrance to the Museum, and it was starting to affect the museum. We headed to the army, who is supposed to protect the square. The leader of the platoon didn't respond. But one of his officers went to him and put his gun in his own mouth and told him "If you don't order me to protect the rebels, I will kill myself," so he let him.

Mubark thugs used Molotov cocktails, tear gas bombs, camels and horses, and live bullets. They broke the doors of the buildings facing the Egyptian Museum, and used them [as shields] to throw Molotov and rocks at us. But we were adamant about facing them and protecting the square. After a while we advanced and were able to capture

some of the thugs who were on top of the buildings. We held them as prisoners, without hurting them. The thugs took over the roof tops, and we caught fifteen of them. Some of their IDs indicated that they were security officers and police, while others were registered criminals. It was obvious that some of them were drugged, as some of the doctors in the square could testify. The rebel who got hurt would go to any of the makeshift hospitals in the square, get treated, rest a bit, and return to fight to protect the square. None of us left without a wound that night. We laughingly decided that from one to ten stitches you were not considered "injured." What hurt us the most was the cold-blooded killing of some of us, by the government snipers. They fired live bullets at our hearts and heads.

But the dawn broke, and the day light came with the hope that more demonstrators will come to support us. We fulfilled our promise to them and to Egypt, that Mubarak won't get the square unless it's over our dead bodies.

Testimony by Dalia Basiouny, on Friday 4 Febraury

I went to the "hospital."

A small mosque is made into a make-shift hospital.

Many head injuries, from the rocks thrown at them.

Lots of broken bones.

Those with severe injuries are lying on the rugs of the mosque, plastered and bandaged.

Volunteer doctors and nurses.

Many citizens coming in with medicine and medical supplies

I saw a doctor with a white coat covered in blood. She was stitching up the injured.

I heard about the young men who were killed by the bullets of the snipers, and died in this hospital mosque.

The other demonstrators threw pieces of rocks at the snipers to distract them in order to be able to carry the bodies of those who were hit.

These youths were risking their own lives, going under fire, to carry the body of someone they didn't know.

They only knew that he is Egyptian, and he was killed because he was defending his country's dignity.

Going to the Hospital made my heart ache for those killed and injured,

But it gave me great faith in the Egyptians' understanding, heroism, generosity, and bravery. I knew they will not be duped ever again.

I went to the area around the statue of Omar Makram

And met the youth of the 25th of January revolution.

Many men and women, young and old. From every age and background.

They live in Tahrir Square...

Sleep on the pavement...

Learn democracy, live...

Discuss political issues and items in the constitution.

Egypt should be really proud of her sons and daughters.

Then Friday prayer started.

A million Egyptians prayed together.

They prayed *Goma* then *'Asr*, then the martyrs' prayer.

The second they finished the prayer,

A million voices, at the same moment, and without prior agreement shouted

"Asha'ab Youreed Esqaat al Ra'ees... Asha'ab Youreed Esqaat al Ra'ees... Asha'ab Youreed Esqaat al Nezam." (The People Want the President to Step Down... The People Want the President to Step Down... The People Want to Topple the Regime.)

Hassan Abu Bakr's Testimony on the last day, February 11

I didn't spend the nights at the square, because I had to check on my daughter who was very pregnant and past her due date.

On February 11, I was standing in front of the operating room. They called me to watch the speech of the vice president on TV. The president stepped down, and my daughter gave birth.

I saw baby Laila, then went down to the street. I saw a porter and his son. I said, "Congratulations." They were really scared. They have never known another president apart from Mubarak. I told them "Don't worry. Tomorrow we will have a better president. And it doesn't matter who comes next, what matters more is how he is chosen."

I walked in the streets alone, shouting: "Viva Egypt. Viva Egypt. Egypt is Now Free. Egypt is Free." I walked toward the Nile, and I was shouting "The Egyptian people toppled the regime." Suddenly I found a number of young people shouting behind me. It became really busy. Everyone was going to the sacred heart, "Tahrir," and we were all shouting "Viva Egypt."

EUGENIO BARBA AND ODIN TEATRET HOLSTEBRO, DENMARK

Introduction to the review of *Burning the House: On Directing and Dramaturgy*,
by Eugenio Barba

By Annelis Kuhlmann

ANNELIS KUHLMANN is Associate Professor at the Section for Dramaturgy, Department of Aesthetic Studies, Aarhus University, Denmark.

EUGENIO BARBA's authorship not only consists of theatre productions, but also of books and editorial input to scholarly journals such as *The Drama Review*, *Performance Research*, *New Theatre Quarterly*, *Teatro e Storia*, and *Urdimento*. Among Barba's most recent publications, translated into many languages, are *The Paper Canoe* (Routledge), *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt* (Black Mountain Press), *Land of Ashes and Diamonds: My Apprenticeship in Poland, followed by 26 letters from Jerzy Grotowski to Eugenio Barba* (Black Mountain Press), *Arar el cielo* (Casa de las Americas, Havana), *La conquista de la diferencia* (Yuyachkani / San Marcos Editorial, Lima), *On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House* (Routledge), and *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*, with Nicola Savarese (Routledge).

Eugenio Barba has been awarded honorary doctorates from the Universities of Aarhus, Ayacucho, Bologna, Havana, Warsaw, Plymouth, Hong Kong, Buenos Aires, Tallinn as well as the *Reconnaissance de mérite scientifique* from the University of Montreal and the Sonning Prize from the University of Copenhagen.

Barba is a Danish Academy Award winner, recipient of a Mexican Theatre Critics' prize, and of the Pirandello International Prize.

It is rare to meet a theatre person who embodies the artistic knowledge of a director, the organizational capacity to run a theatre group for almost fifty years, and, finally, the scholarship to have produced an impressive number of books and articles. Eugenio Barba is such a person. He was born in 1936 in the south of Italy. This chapter of Barba's early life has often been depicted as an artistic childhood when the young Barba began to develop his self-acknowledged traits of humbleness, discipline, loyalty, and innovation in time and space. These qualities were met with endurance, revolt, and solitude, to paraphrase one of his books, *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt* (1999). This example illustrates the close connection between descriptions of biographical traits and many of the metaphors in Barba's writings. Barba left Italy for the North of Europe as a young man, and he ended up in Norway. It was here that he attended university, where he studied French and Norwegian Literature as well as History of Religion, which together opened the way for a consideration of different forms of myth-related behaviour. In 1961, a scholarship took Barba to Poland to learn directing at the State Theatre School in Warsaw. He soon decided to join Jerzy Grotowski, who at that time was the director of the Theatre of 13 Rows in Opole. For three years Barba studied in Poland, and this study provided the foundation for his deep interest in Eastern theatre styles such as Kathakali theatre, which in those days were not well known outside India. Barba's studies in Kathakali resulted in one of his first publications, which came out in Italy, France, the USA, and Denmark. This journal-length essay was followed by his first book in 1965, *In Search of a Lost Theatre*, which was about Grotowski and was distributed in Italy and Hungary.

These experiences stimulated Barba's interest in theatre directing. But his application to the State Theatre School in Oslo was rejected. This did not, however, deter Barba who decided to form his own theatre company along with other students whose applications to the state theatre had also met with rejection. And so Odin Teatret — named after the God Odin in Norse Mythology, representing wisdom, magic, hunt and prophesy — was born.

The ability to turn around situations seems to be a common thread through Barba's professional life. When one door has shut, another has opened – even if it was invisible at first.

Odin Teatret existed for two years in Oslo where it toured. Barba then took the theatre group to Denmark. The small provincial town of Holstebro in the west Jutland invited Odin Teatret to settle in its municipality in 1966. The theatre was offered an old farm and a small sum of money. From today's perspective one would probably call this quite a risky venture from the perspective of the city — to invite a group of young foreign actors to work on their own artistic ideas without demands for concrete results. There was no precedent for this kind of gesture or the style of theatre. But the "risk" was later to be perceived as visionary, as it led to an entirely new model of cultural policy.

The organizational talent of Barba and his colleagues became legendary. Some of Odin Teatret's first results in Holstebro in the mid-1960s were realized through workshops with masters like Dario Fo, Etienne Decroux, Jean-Louis Barrault, and Jerzy Grotowski. Journalists, scholars, artists, actors, psychologists, etc. were invited to join the workshops like an ancient notion of *academia* that was here transformed into a living laboratory of the performing body. The participants would obviously write about what they had seen and thought during the workshops, and in this way information about the company and its artistic research and working methods was spread around the world. An integral part of Odin Teatret's mission was to tour, and to this day the group often does up to eight or nine months of touring per year. In 1979 the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) was founded on similar conditions as the earlier workshops, but with the remit to focus on the concept of "theatre anthropology." Inspired by methods in cultural and anthropological ways of perception, Eugenio Barba sees his theatre as an anthropological expedition, where everybody who plays or watches a performance takes part in a cultural encounter here and now. In 1979, Barba defined theatre anthropology as a study of human behavior when it uses its physical and mental presence in an organized performance situation and follows principles that are different from their daily use.

ISTA oversaw many cross-disciplinary endeavours and intercultural stagings, which were held at different places in Europe and in Latin America, and which became the foundations for the *Theatrum Mundi* Ensemble. This ensemble, which consists of a permanent core of artists, has presented performances from many professional traditions.

Today Odin Teatret is still in Holstebro, although the old farm has been expanded, and there is now space for scenic design and construction, festival administration as well as an archive for study. Being located almost in the countryside, far away from big cities, has given the theatre the laboratory space in which to concentrate on artistic research. This location has also provided a platform that is on the edge of society, so to speak. While the remote location is a practical challenge on a daily basis, it provides insight into the roots and benefits of being on the periphery of a cultural and social consensus; a situation which has characterized much of the Danish welfare society since the 1960s. With Odin Teatret almost a parallel society has been created. The company has not isolated itself from society, but it has insisted on working out other ways of how to be a theatre group

in constant dynamic contact with the surrounding world. Examples of Odin Teatret's events are numerous, but to name a few: the Festuge (Biennale Festive Week) in Holstebro has realized surprisingly extravagant artistic ideas over the years, as has the triennial festival Transit, devoted to women in theatre. Furthermore, children's performances, performances with senior citizens, along with exhibitions, concerts, round tables, cultural initiatives, and community work in Holstebro and the surrounding region have all been part of the theatre's activities, where its location "on the edge" has proved its cultural capital.

Over the years, Odin Teatret has had a close relationship with the Section for Dramaturgy at Aarhus University, Denmark. This collaboration was formalized in 2002 through the Centre for Theatre Laboratory Studies (CTLS). In August 2011, the first collaboration on a summer university, The Midsummer Dream School, will take place.

Eugenio Barba has directed more than seventy theatre productions with Odin Teatret during the almost fifty years of the theatre's existence. Among the best known are *Ferai* (1969), *My Father's House* (1972), *Brecht's Ashes* (1980), *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus* (1985), *Talabot* (1988), *Kaosmos* (1993), *Mythos* (1998), *Andersen's Dream* (2004), *Ur-Hamlet* (2006), *Don Giovanni all'Inferno* (2006), and *The Marriage of Medea* (2008). In this writing moment (April 2011), the ensemble prepares a piece entitled *The Chronicle Life*. All performances by Odin Teatret deal with losses in our lives, some way or another. One can perceive an archival thread during all the performances, where the artistic behaviour and layers of physical expressions of the actors have created a heritage of their own. Many of the actors have developed within the Odin Teatret fold. Over the years, this knowledge has also been disseminated and many new independent theatre lives have been born. The way this influence was spread makes it difficult to speak about the evidence of an institutional heritage as such. One could say that "Odin fever" has lasted for half a century, during which time it has shaped and reshaped memories of expressivity that echo around the world.

EUGENIO BARBA'S *ON DIRECTING AND DRAMATURGY: BURNING THE HOUSE*

reviewed by Amy Jensen
and Shelley Orr

AMY JENSEN is a freelance dramaturg and theatre artist. She has written for *TYA Today*. She has done production dramaturgy on productions with the New York Neo-Futurists, Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew, the Bonderman Festival, East River Commedia, Sintroca, Geva Theatre, and the Goodman Theatre. She has an MFA in Dramaturgy from Stony Brook University. Amy was a Fulbright scholar to Denmark and wrote her thesis on Danish company Gruppe 38's use of theatricality as it shapes the dramaturgy of their productions. She is the NYC regional vice president for LMDA.

SHELLEY ORR teaches theatre history and dramaturgy in the graduate and undergraduate programs in the School of Theatre, Television, and Film at San Diego State University. Her publications have appeared in *Theatre Journal*, *TheatreForum*, and *Theatre Topics*. She co-edited a collection of essays entitled *Performance and the City* (Palgrave 2009). Her professional theatre credits include serving as a dramaturg for New York's Classic Stage Company, La Jolla Playhouse, and the PlayLabs New Play Festival at The Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis. Most recently, she was the dramaturg for the reading of a new play by Native Alaskan playwright Holly Christine Stanton during the Festival of New Plays at Native Voices at the Autry. She holds an MFA in Dramaturgy from University of California – San Diego, and a PhD in Theatre Studies from the UCI / UCSD joint doctoral program. She is past president of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA).

Today, for me, the director is rather the expert of the theatre's subatomic reality, a man or a woman who experiments with ways of overturning the obvious links between the different components of a performance.

Eugenio Barba (*On Directing and Dramaturgy* xviii)

Gradually I began to assume that what I called dramaturgy was not the thread of a narrative composition, the horizontal sequence of the various phrases in the evolution of a theme. My dramaturgical work began with a particular way of looking which focuses upon the layered nature of the performance.

Eugenio Barba (*On Directing and Dramaturgy* 9)

AMY JENSEN: Eugenio Barba is the director of Odin Teatret, the editor and first publisher of Jerzy Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre*, and the author of many articles and books, including *The Paper Canoe* and *The Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*. I was introduced to Barba by a fellow graduate student, Robert Colpitts, whose return from attending an intense weeklong training with Odin Teatret corresponded with my reading of *The Paper Canoe* in a class on theories of acting. Then, when I was studying in Denmark, I audited classes at the Department of Dramaturgy in Århus, which has a partnership with Odin Teatret. Through that relationship and a few of my own trips, I saw several performances by Odin performers and heard Barba speak.

SHELLEY ORR: You have had a lot more exposure to his work than I have. Before picking up this book, I had read and taught Barba's essay "The Deep Order Called Turbulence: Three Faces of Dramaturgy" in my dramaturgy course.

AJ: With the exception of that article, prior to *Directing and Dramaturgy*, Barba's extensive publications primarily focus on the training and work of the actor. During a question and answer session, I asked Barba when he was going to write about directing, and he announced that he had attempted it several times and had not liked the result, but that he had just completed his last and final attempt, (the eighth, I believe), and that it would be published in the fall, if all went well.

SO: Interesting. So we have the results of his eighth attempt to write about directing here in *On Directing and Dramaturgy*. The book does seem to be the result of a life's work.

AJ: *On Directing and Dramaturgy* is organized around what he has defined as three types of dramaturgy: Organic Dramaturgy, Narrative Dramaturgy, and Evocative Dramaturgy. Barba introduced them in "Deep Order" as:

1. An organic or dynamic dramaturgy, which is the composition of the rhythms and dynamisms affecting the spectators on a nervous, sensorial and sensual level;
2. A narrative dramaturgy, which interweaves events and characters, informing the spectators on the meaning of what they are watching;
3. [A] dramaturgy of changing states, when the entirety of what we show manages to evoke something totally different.... (60)

Barba has now redefined the third as "*evocative dramaturgy* [...]" which distils or captures the performance's unintentional and concealed meaning, specific for each spectator" (10).

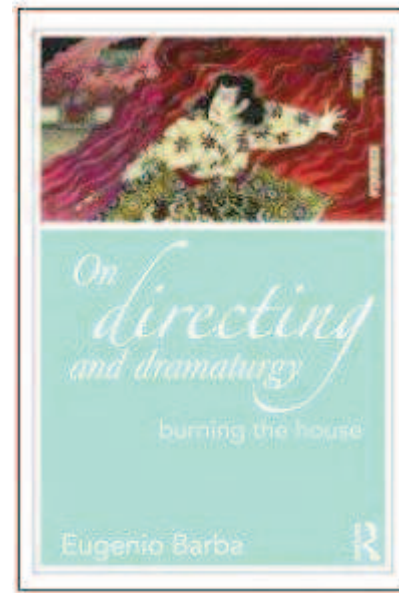
SO: Barba's book balances a consideration of heady philosophical questions that lie at the heart of theatre with tangible examples and metaphors to help convey these ideas. One of the things that I most admire about his "The Deep Order" essay and this book is Barba's fearlessness about addressing the aspects that are difficult (impossible?) to catalog and quantify about creating and seeing a theatrical performance. His "narrative dramaturgy" is the one with which our field is most familiar and conversant. And this is but one in his list of three dramaturgies. It is not even listed first. Since he is not necessarily talking about the practice of production dramaturgy, and not often talking about narrative structure, how is he using the word "dramaturgy"?

AJ: Barba acknowledges that his definition of dramaturgy breaks from a traditional understanding of the term:

Usually, in the European tradition, dramaturgy is understood as a literary composition whose model is: proposition of the theme, development, peripeteia or reversal, and conclusion. Dramaturgy is a horizontal narrative thread which holds together the handful of glass beads which is the performance. (8)

But Barba began to realize that "what I called dramaturgy was not the thread of a narrative composition, the horizontal sequence of the various phrases in the evolution of a theme." Instead, returning to the etymology of dramaturgy as "drama-ergon, the work of the actions. Or rather: the way the actor's actions enter into work," Barba came to define dramaturgy "not a procedure belonging only to literature, but a technical operation which was inherent in the weaving and growth of a performance and its different components." This definition corresponded to his practice:

My dramaturgical work began with a particular way of looking which focuses upon the *layered nature of the performance*. My dramaturgy also dealt with the multiple relationships between the many parts of the performance. But it concerned the relationships between the various components in a *vertical dimension*. It was a way of observing the different layers or



levels of the work, independently from the performance's meanings. I distinguished these levels and developed them separately, as if they were unrelated. (9)

Odin Teatret performances are, by nature, layered because a piece is not structured around a primary text but on the improvisations and material — songs, movements, texts — that each actor has created. Barba shapes each actor's work separately and then together, arranging their total composition based on "peripeteias — turning points," which he also calls "incidents" and "hindrances," and simultaneity (93). Barba is rarely interested in creating narrative clarity. However, although the meaning may not be clear, he still seeks to create meaning:

A performance which is based on the simultaneity of situations which have nothing to do with each other can easily fall into meaninglessness and boredom resulting from arbitrariness. It must prove that it is able to live in the spectator in spite of its deliberate unintelligibility. Success depends on the living roots which the scenic materials have developed in the body-mind of the single actors. (105)

The performances are very dense because each performer has her or his own dramaturgy, even though they do interact with one another.

SO: He seems to want to generate more than a narrative for the audience to follow. Barba asks his readers (and presumably, his spectators) to enter the theatre piece on all levels: intellectual, emotional, spiritual. He clearly focuses on the possible intersections among layers in a production. Thoroughly describing the dramaturgy of changing states that he creates with this layered structure is one of the major contributions of the volume. Correct me if I am wrong, but it sounds as though the pieces he and his company create allow or ask or require the audience to make connections among the layers. In this way he enlists the audience members in creating an individual resonance within each of them.

AJ: Yes, and Barba conceives of dramaturgy as central to this process:

For me, the performance too was a living organism and I had to distinguish not only its parts, but also its levels of organisation and, later, their mutual relationships. “Dramaturgy,” then, was a term similar to “anatomy.” It was a practical way of working not only on the organism in its totality, but on its different organs and layers. [...] I was looking for the effectiveness of a way of seeing which took into account different and overlapping logics. (9)

SO: He does not conflate the personal, non-narrative response with the audience’s emotional response nor does he short-change it by calling it a mystery and moving quickly to other, more quantifiable topics. He gives Evocative Dramaturgy serious consideration. When a theatre piece successfully reaches spectators in this evocative way, I believe that is what theatre is all about or what it is for. I know that I personally would not be making a career in the theatre if a few, select productions had not affected me in ways that, to this day, I can’t easily explain. As Barba puts it, Evocative Dramaturgy is: “the faculty of the performance to produce an intimate resonance within the spectator. It is this dramaturgy which distils [sic] or captures the performance’s unintentional and concealed meaning, specific for each spectator” (10).

AJ: I would suggest that by nature of his three-part definition, Barba implicitly suggests that theatre artists, whether directors, writers, or dramaturgs, would do well to consider not just one but all three dramaturgies. That said, it is not a prescriptive book on dramaturgy or directing; Barba, who has given his life to creating “unrepeatable theatre,” dislikes the idea of his work being applied or practiced by others (164). He shares techniques of directing with the caveat that “no technique is exclusively a biographical peculiarity,” and that “any technique when applied assumes personal, even autobiographical features” (160). And he foregrounds the book with this explanation:

There are technical procedures which can easily be passed from one person to another and be condensed into clear principles. In our craft, these constitute the field of objectivity. At the opposite extreme there is the personal heat that distinguishes every individual, an inimitable temperature which belongs only to him or her and which, when imitated, turns into parody.

In the middle, between the two, lies the field of poppies. Here we find techniques with a double character. On the one hand they have all the features of a set of data and skills which define technical know-how. On the other, they depend to such an extent on the milieu in which they have developed that we cannot extract absolute precepts from them.

The techniques of directing belong to this type. (xviii)

SO: The book itself dances between these two poles of ideas that are accessible and / or portable and those that are rooted in the specific context in which they originally grew. It is useful that Barba includes voices other than his own in the book.

AJ: Yes. Barba may be an auteur director, but it’s important to recognize that Odin performers — particularly Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Roberta Carreri, Else Marie Laukvik, Torgeir Wethal, and Julia Varley — are also creators, which is clear in the Second Intermezzo. Their accounts of working with Barba ground the book in practice; their

perspectives help translate Barba. Yes, the intermezzos stand out from the rest of the piece. What do you feel these add, overall?

SO: I found that the individual chapters, intermezzos, and even the two- or three-page sub-sections within the chapters could stand on their own. I like that the perspectives provided by other people added nuance to many of the ideas and examples that Barba is floating. Do you see aspects of his writing corresponding to moments in his performances? Or do you perceive a disconnect there?

AJ: Do you mean his writing about work on the performances? Or an application of his writing to the performances?

SO: Perhaps both, but my query is tending more toward the latter, with the following spin: can one perceive the principles that are raised in the book in action in the performances?

AJ: I’ve seen two Odin performances live: *Andersen’s Dream*, and *Ode to Progress*. Yes, there was an organic dramaturgy but I would have difficulty describing it. I can’t give specific examples of principles like simultaneity and peripeteias in the performance, but but the Second Intermezzo offers a glimpse of that, particularly in the section on developing *Andersen’s Dream* is particularly intriguing (78–81).

SO: I appreciate that in his Prologue he shares a quotation from Niels Bohr that has informed the work of the Odin Teatret: “What is contrary of truth? A lie? No, it is clarity” (xv). This motto is clearly important to Barba, his theatre, and carries through the book. Barba resists making ideas accessible when doing that would reduce or alter the character of those ideas. That does mean that the text is impenetrable at some points, but Barba often provides several ways into an idea to increase the likelihood that one of them will resonate with the reader.

AJ: I think *On Directing and Dramaturgy* is Barba at his most accessible. It draws upon and summarizes his philosophy and work up to this point in such a way that I think that someone who has not read any of Barba and knows nothing about Odin Teatret will still be able to follow his arguments and ideas. Do you agree?

SO: Absolutely. It sounds as though the more one knows about him and his work, the deeper the nexus of connections one can perceive among the points in his writing. We could see this book as Barba tracing the origins of his theatre: the elements of his process and the features of the performances that he has created with his company.

AJ: Yes. He uses the metaphor of the red thread in the last section of his book: “My questions about origin are a means to detect a red thread in the events of my life. In other words: to capture the elusive order. Today I know it is an error to trace my origin by going back to the beginning. I must alter the chronology, the succession” (207).

SO: Can you provide a definition for the red thread?

AJ: I asked one Danish playwright who said that the red thread is not the narrative but the essence of the play.

SO: That’s appropriate to Barba’s approach to theatre. I certainly found his book to be a useful meditation on theatre’s constant attempts to directly and personally engage spectators.

AJ: What do you feel is the book’s greatest strength?

SO: To me, in addition to his description of how he connects with spectators, Barba's discussion of the "disorder" or "turbulence" that he identifies as a necessary part of the creation of theatre is useful. His book reminds us that creation rarely happens in a straight line. This is one of the first books I have read to carefully consider the importance and contributions of unplanned and even unintended elements in creative work. He also provides specific examples (though some seemed a bit opaque to me, without seeing the productions described).

AJ: Who do you think will find this book most inspiring? Helpful? Frustrating?

SO: Judging the book just by its title, one may think that the practice of dramaturgy is a main topic. I think it is important to note that the book is not about practicing production dramaturgy in a conventional way. However, this is a book with a lot to offer dramaturgs and theatre artists of all kinds. It strikes me as one part memoir of Barba's life and work, one part manual for how to create compelling theatre, and all interesting. In his last section, which is similar to a personal list of acknowledgments, he notes: "If it has taken me fourteen years to finish this book, it is also because I started imagining dramaturgy as a theatrical technique" (215).

AJ: I think that individuals or ensembles devising performances may be inspired by some of the techniques that Barba has used.

SO: I agree. The section of the book most relevant to my own work is the small section on "The spectator's dramaturgy." At first glance, one might think that this is an oxymoron. Barba explains:

I wanted the spectator to watch stories of fictitious characters, and at the same time, glide into a world of her own. I had seen that it was possible. When this happened, the performance not only had succeeded in whispering a secret to her, a premonition or a question, but also in evoking another reality. The performance was no longer an appearance, but an apparition visiting her inner city. This evocative experience involved a leap of consciousness in the spectator: a change of state." (183)

Barba then goes on to identify the conditions that were most conducive to producing this state in the spectator, carefully considering how to reach each individual spectator in that intimate way. I find this investigation immensely helpful to understanding how theatre works. It seems to me that creating theatre pieces capable of connecting with and moving spectators in compelling and individual ways is the holy grail of theatre. Barba's book is an achievement in that it goes a long way toward understanding how this can be done.

AJ: If you want to know more about Odin Teatret's work, particularly from the perspectives of the performers, I suggest *Odin Teatret 2000* (Ed. John Anderson and Annelis Kuhlmann. Aarhus: Aarhus UP, 2000) and *The Actor's Way* (Eric Exe Christensen. Trans. Richard Fowler. London: Routledge, 1993), and any number of the films that Odin Teatret has used to document their training and performances since 1971 (see <<http://www.odinteatret.dk/>> or <<http://shop.odinteatret.dk/shop/frontpage.html>>). I highly suggest watching performance demonstrations in which actors present how they rehearse and create their work, such as *Traces in the Snow* by Roberta Carreri.

or three or four or more...

A Servant of ~~Two~~ Masters

Business Advice for Dramaturgs Working in Virgin Territory

By Sydney Cheek O'Donnell

SYDNEY CHEEK O'DONNELL is Assistant Professor of Theatre History and Head of the Theatre Studies program at the University of Utah. She teaches the History of Theatre, Dramaturgy, Theatre and Theory, and Directing. Dr. Cheek O'Donnell's ongoing research interests include feminist performance analysis and Italian theatre. Her essay "Barbarians and Babes: A Feminist Critique of a Postcolonial Persians," has just been published in the volume *Political Performance*, eds. Avraham Oz and Susan Haedicke (Rodopi, 2009). Other articles and reviews have been published in *Theatre Journal*, *New Theatre Quarterly*, and *Seattle Opera Magazine*. Professional dramaturgy credits include *Miss Saigon*, *The Heiress*, and *Chicago* (Pioneer Theatre Company), *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (UW Summer Arts Festival), *Archangels Don't Play Pinball* (Capitol Hill Arts Center), and *The Chekhov Project* (Frank Theatre). She earned a BA at Carleton College and a PhD in Theatre History and Criticism at the University of Washington.

About two years ago, I was invited to serve as the dramaturg on a new play premiering at an established local theatre company. This was pleasing to me both because the playwright had specifically requested my support, and because the offer provided me the opportunity to work with a company that I admired for its commitment to producing new plays. The company was applying for grants and wanted to add my name to the list of collaborators. I agreed to participate.

At the time, nothing was said of compensation or specific responsibilities. The grants to support the production had not yet been secured, so the production budget had not yet been firmly established, and a director was not yet on board. But all that would be sorted out eventually, I was assured. There was plenty of time before pre-production and rehearsals.

Or so I thought...

I'm writing now to dramaturgs working with companies not accustomed to dramaturgical support. Here I will lay out some specific guidelines to help you steer clear of the business-related pitfalls into which I — and I'm sure others before me — have fallen when working with dramaturgy virgins.

#1: Who's the Boss?

Clearly your key creative collaborators are the director and the playwright (if working on a new play). But who is the person writing your contract and paying your fee? Who is the person to whom you can turn if something goes awry in your communications with the production team or theatre staff? Who will decide whether to hire

you again or not? That's your "boss." Make sure you know who this is and specifically what he or she expects of you in exchange for your fee.

#2 Lunch Special or A la Carte?

Before you go to meet with your prospective employer, draw up a list of services you can provide in support of a theatrical production. This "menu" should be no more than a page long, provide a short description of each service, and be free from any ambiguous 'turg jargon. Use your menu to establish clear expectations, and ensure that these expectations ultimately match the terms of your contract. (See appendix for sample List of Services.)

#3: Get It in Writing

Although it may seem formal, getting a written contract that outlines your specific duties on a particular production is absolutely essential — even if the theatre doesn't usually "do" contracts for designers. I say "designers" because, in general, theatre companies understand what a costume designer or set designer does. They do not necessarily understand what a dramaturg does. Nor do they know how you work. Therefore, I strongly recommend formalizing, in writing, the services you will provide and the fee you expect to be paid for said services.

In some cases, the theatre might know exactly what it wants from you, unilaterally set the fee it is offering, determine the deadlines, and say, "Take it or leave it." In other cases, you will need to negotiate both your responsibilities and your fee. (Here's where the list of services comes in.) More services will mean you should demand a higher fee (equivalent to a designer), fewer services will mean you can accept a lower fee (equivalent to, say, a dialect coach).

The contract itself — whether penned by the theatre company or by you — should include the following: your fee and when it will be paid, a list of specific responsibilities, and deadlines. (See appendix for sample contract.)

#4 Make Friends with the Stage Manager

Once you have been hired, introduce yourself to the stage manager and ask her or him to put you on the email list for the purposes of production meetings, rehearsal reports, rehearsal schedules, and other important communications. Let the SM know that if dramaturgical questions appear in the rehearsal notes, you'll be happy to respond to them via email or in person, as appropriate. (If you play your cards right, the SM may even include a dramaturgy section in daily reports.) This will help you stay in the loop and remind your collaborators that you are on-the-job even when you are not in the rehearsal room.

#5 Get that Copy on My Desk by Five!

Be sure to get hard deadlines for drafts and final versions of anything that will be published, such as program notes, study guides, and lobby displays. To that end, make a point of touching base with the folks in marketing (or whoever oversees printed matter for the

theatre). Introduce yourself, ask them about the program production process, get specific deadlines, and find out how they will approach editing your materials. If there is any question about who will have control over the text of your program note, you might want to explain (politely) the idea that your program note is like a design. Like any designer, you are happy to make changes to benefit the production, but you would prefer to make those changes yourself. In other words, make sure they understand that if substantial changes to your program note are necessary or desirable, you would prefer to execute them. This will spare you the shock of opening the printed program and discovering that your work is no longer recognizable as your own — or worse, contains spelling and grammatical errors that you didn't make! (Being ahead of the game on deadlines will help considerably.)

Are these life-changing ideas? Maybe not. But rarely do we address in practical terms the very real problems that dramaturgs face on the business side of theatre making. We theorize better ways to analyze plays and to communicate with artistic collaborators, but we don't spend much time thinking about how to negotiate the administrative framework of our collaborations. As long as we fail at that fundamental task, our work will continue to be undervalued, misunderstood, and poorly compensated.

APPENDIX

Sample Contract

Dear Ms. X:

The following letter shall serve as a letter of agreement between you and Theatre Company Y:

1. You agree to serve as dramaturg for Theatre Company Y's production of Z (1st rehearsal 1 March 2011; opening night 28 March 2011). You will receive a bio in the playbill and be identified as "dramaturg" (Marketing will contact you for your updated bio).
2. You agree to discuss the specific dramaturgical needs of Z with director A by 1 September 2010.
3. You shall provide research / dramaturgical materials for the director and actors. You will review a draft of these materials with the director by 15 December 2010. One clean copy of these materials is due to B by 1 January 2011. While you may provide additional materials for use in rehearsals, the clean copy delivered for reproduction should not exceed 100 pages (200 double-sided).
4. You shall provide a study guide for use by high school students and their teachers. This is due to the Marketing Department by 15 January 2011. The study guide should include a mix of information, images (with copyright information), suggested activities, and discussion questions. Length should not exceed four single-spaced, typed pages. Formatting of the study guide will be executed by a member of the marketing staff. (A sample study guide from a previous season will be provided for your reference.)
5. You shall write a program note and provide a relevant image (with copyright information) for use in the theatre's playbill, due to the Marketing Department by 15 January 2011. Content of the note should be agreed upon with the director in advance. Length should not exceed three typed, single-spaced pages (approx. 750 words).
6. You shall participate in "table-work" rehearsals (roughly 1–6 March, times to be determined) and attend designer runs, dress rehearsal, and 1st preview, providing feedback to the director.
7. You shall moderate two post-show discussions with student audiences on 30 March and 5 April 2011. The discussions will begin immediately following the performances. Please arrive at the theatre 30 minutes before the closing curtain — contact Stage Management for the run time at imastagemanager@tcy.com.

In consideration of the above services, you shall be paid a fee of \$XXX.00, payable in one installment on 7 January 2011.

Please sign both copies of this agreement, return one copy to me and retain one for your files.

For Theatre Company Y:

B, Producer

Agreed To:

X, Dramaturg

Sample List of Services

- Documentation: document the production process and generate a casebook for archival purposes.
- New Play Development: read and respond to script drafts; consult with playwright; consult with director; facilitate workshops; moderate post-show discussions.
- Production Meetings: attend conceptual meetings; attend production meetings before rehearsals begin; attend all subsequent production meetings.
- Rehearsal Support: participate in table work; observe runs and provide feedback to director and / or playwright; provide on-site, instant textual support during rehearsals (frequency of attendance to be agreed-upon in advance).
- Research Support: for director, actors, designers, or marketing team; developing print or online materials; individual research packets or shared casebook for rehearsal room; content to be determined in consultation with director (and playwright, if applicable).
- Lobby Displays: conceptualize lobby display; generate original content for lobby display; produce lobby display (concept, content, layout, produce).
- Play Guides: generate educational content for students, teachers, or patrons.
- Program Content: contemporary, historical, theatrical, literary, or biographical (playwright or subject) context; information on the production process; edited interviews with director, playwright, or other members of production team; image research; other content to be determined.
- Talk-backs and Panels: facilitate post-show discussions with audience, cast, and production team; organize and moderate special panel discussions, workshops, or symposia relevant to production.

Bryan Doerries's Theater of War

A New Incarnation of an Ancient Ritual

BY HEIDI NELSON

HEIDI NELSON is Dramaturgy and Outreach Fellow for the 2010/11 inaugural season of ArtsEmerson: The World On Stage (Boston, MA) and also a freelance dramaturg in Boston and New York. Heidi has lectured at Harvard College, Boston University, and Northeastern University. Dramaturgy credits include *Ajax in Iraq* (Flux Theatre Ensemble); *The Tempest*, *Macbeth* (Gurnet Theatre Project); *The Good Negro* (Company One); the world premiere of *Ajax in Iraq* (American Repertory Theater / Moscow Art Theatre School Institute for Advanced Theatre Training); *Endgame*, and *Copenhagen* (American Repertory Theater). Heidi earned her MFA in dramaturgy at the A.R.T. / MXAT Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard in 2009. Her class participated in a year-long workshop with playwright Ellen McLaughlin which culminated in the 2008 premiere of *Ajax in Iraq*. The project inspired her master's thesis, "Soldier Stories Onstage," which also examines Bryan Doerries's Theater of War and National Theatre of Scotland's *Black Watch*.

"You're not a coward." This was one marine's response to a young civilian man's expression of shame and guilt for not volunteering to serve in the military, as many of his friends and family members had. "This is our job" the marine continued, declaring that it is not everyone's duty to serve in the armed forces. Then, a woman asked how she should help a friend about to deploy. "Be there for him," said one veteran, "just talk to him." Several other marines spoke about their experiences coming home to a civilian population that could not understand what they had gone through overseas or in some cases simply pretended they did not exist. Meanwhile, civilians piped up about the challenge of not knowing how to relate to those who have served. It was an unusual conversation — a couple hundred people, both civilian and military, gathered in a theatre to talk about the experience of war, the hardships experienced by combat veterans, and civilians' reactions to those in uniform. What prompted this rare and illuminating discussion? A staged reading of selections from two ancient Greek dramas by Sophocles: *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*.

The evening was one of many organized and presented across the US and abroad by Theater of War, a program headed by theatre director and translator Bryan Doerries that includes play readings, a panel discussion, and a town hall-style conversation. Doerries organizes these sessions for military service members, the medical community (usually at universities or military medical centers), and mixed groups of service members and civilians in an effort to help communalize soldier experience, de-stigmatize combat trauma, and begin the healing process for those suffering from the psychological and emotional effects of warfare. The exchanges described above took place at the second of two Theater of War readings (guest

directed by Ellen McLaughlin) in March 2011 at the American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but my initial experience with Theater of War was in the spring of 2009 while working on my master's thesis — an examination of plays about combat soldiers. On April 2, 2009, from the back of a large, raked lecture hall at Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS) in Bethesda, Maryland, I watched as four actors gathered around a small table at the front of the room. Doctors, nurses, and military personnel milled about, many in uniform, several in scrubs, and some casually chatting with the performers — three with prominent film and television credits (Michael Ealy, David Strathairn, and Lili Taylor) and one former marine lance corporal, studying acting at Juilliard (Adam Driver). Eventually, a crowd of around fifty people amassed and seated themselves behind the long tables of the classroom, as the actors looked over their scripts. After being introduced by one of his military hosts, Doerries began the afternoon by explaining the format of the gathering and its intended purpose.

Though presenting plays to a military audience may seem an unusual goal for an American theatre practitioner, ancient Greek dramas often dealt with some aspect of warfare, whether it was conflicts between warriors and their commanders (*Philoctetes*), sacrificing familial duties for soldierly ones (*Iphigenia*), or the toll of warfare on non-citizen, civilian members of society (*The Trojan Women*). According to Thomas G. Palaima, a classics professor at the University of Texas, “Homer’s *Iliad*, Greek tragedies [...] and the comedies of Aristophanes [...] portray war, political opinions about war, and the effects war has on citizens and combatants on both sides with graphic and frank honesty” (Palaima 14). After all, classical Greek plays were produced, performed, and watched by soldiers and veterans, because military service was compulsory for all citizens — free, adult males (Goldhill 109), who dealt with almost constant military conflict. Soldiers also served as playwrights — the great tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides all fought in battle — and would frequently compose dramas on war and its repercussions.

What is unusual about Doerries’s position on these plays is that he believes the ancient Greeks practiced and watched theatre not as entertainment or political commentary but as purification after combat, acknowledging psychiatrist Dr. Jonathan Shay’s writings on this subject. Shay specializes in treating post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Vietnam veterans and has written two books (*Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America*) relating ancient epic poetry to contemporary experiences of combat trauma. While many scholars have written about the prevalence of war-related themes in ancient drama, Shay has a bold theory on why the Greeks wrote, performed, and watched plays about war so frequently. He states in an article for *Didaskalia* that “the ancient Athenians re-integrated their returning warriors through recurring participation in rituals of the theater” (“Birth of Tragedy”). Shay’s research and work with veterans suffering from PTSD has shown that “the process of healing from combat trauma lies fundamentally in communalizing it” (“Birth of Tragedy”). Through performing and watching theatre, Shay proposes that ancient Greek combat veterans were able to share in one another’s traumatic experiences, promoting communal understanding and a degree of psychological healing. He explains how the chorus of Greek tragedy — the voice of morality, piety, and reason —



Reg E. Cathey playing Ajax at 29 Palms.

Photo: Phyllis Kaufman

“comprised the polis’ innocent nineteen-year-olds who had not yet seen heavy, prolonged combat [...]. They chant words of the settled moral consensus of their community” (“Birth of Tragedy”). He cites the research of John J. Winkler who interprets “the role and movement of the tragic chorus as an esthetically elevated version of close-order drill” (Winkler 22) and establishes evidence “that the chorus members were young men in [...] military training” (Winkler 57). Shay finds significance in the fact that the lead actors in tragedies were more mature soldiers and their characters’ actions in the play were usually transgressions — possibly the consequences of unhealed combat trauma.

In answer to Shay’s call for “our own new models of healing which emphasize communalization of the trauma” (“Achilles in Vietnam” 194), Doerries is using an old form in a way entirely new to today’s soldiers and civilians. Shay wishes that “combat veterans and American citizenry [could] meet together face to face in daylight, and listen, and watch, and weep, just as citizen-soldiers of ancient Athens did in the theater” (“Achilles in Vietnam” 194), and through Theater of War, Doerries creates community events that bring people together for these activities.

During his introduction for the USUHS audience, Doerries likened these plays to a message in a bottle that the ancient general, Sophocles, wrote down for subsequent generations. In America’s time of crises, its soldiers and citizens are discovering what that message means. Doerries then swiftly introduced the first play: *Ajax*. During the ninth year of the Trojan War, the great warrior Ajax is angered by his commanders, Agamemnon and Menelaus. The two generals have awarded a great honor — the armor of the fallen Achilles, who was the greatest Greek warrior — to the sly Odysseus, rather than Ajax, whose talent for fighting is now unrivaled. Doerries fleshed out Odysseus’ character by drawing a contemporary parallel: Odysseus was secretive and cunning, more like a CIA strategist than a military man. In a rage over the sleight, Ajax plots the murder of his commanders, as well as Odysseus; however, the goddess Athena inter-



Gloria Reuben, and Jeffrey Wright performing *TOW* at St. Vincent's Hospital (NYC).

Photo: Paxton Winters

venes, dims Ajax's sight, and deceives him into slaughtering a herd of sacrificial animals, instead of his intended targets. Sophocles' drama begins with an encounter between Athena and Odysseus.

The goddess (read by Lili Taylor) calls to Odysseus (David Strathairn), who has followed a trail of blood to Ajax's tent, and tells him of Ajax's intentions, boasting of the madness that she inflicted upon him. As Odysseus, Strathairn was horrified by Athena's tale and moved to pity for Ajax's predicament. On the other hand, Taylor's Athena was cold and commanding — a powerful goddess exacting vengeance on the mortal who displeased her and warning Odysseus of the consequences of hubris. Doerries translated Athena's description of the slaughter in vivid and gory terms, favoring a raw and straightforward style, rather than poeticism. Because fighting and death are a horrid business, the words used to describe them are suitably free of ostentation: "He descended upon them with full fury, ripping out horns with his hands, slitting throats and snapping spines, at one point squeezing the life from a general, then taking the lives of other officers, or so he thought, trembling with contamination" (Theater of War 5). Doerries rendered the disturbing events in appropriately gruesome terms for an audience of combat veterans who know firsthand the hideousness of warfare.

Such interpretations of Sophocles' language are also intended to make the material more accessible to members of the audience unused to hearing the heightened, theatrical language into which ancient verse is often translated. Of his renderings of the dramas, Doerries noted:

I used "shell-shocked" and "thousand-yard stare" and all kinds of things that are [...] liberties [...] but they're not gross liberties. In the Greek it's "his mind is plagued by a tempestuous disease," and I say "he sits inside the tent, shell-shocked, glazed over, gazing into oblivion"[...]. I'm fully conscious of what I'm doing, translating for this audience [using] our idioms. Why be relegated to (and this is the problem I have with almost every production I see) a 19th century idiomatic linguistic structure

simply because that's when the lexicon was codified for Greek? I mean it all sounds [...] Victorian. It didn't sound Victorian to [the ancient Greeks] (Doerries, telephone).

While the characters and subject matter of ancient dramas may be relatable for contemporary audiences (after all, they are still performed after over two thousand years), older translations begin to sound dated as speech changes, but the language of Doerries's versions is both clear and provocative.

In the subsequent scene, Taylor, as Ajax's wife Tecmessa, tearfully divulged Ajax's ensuing actions — torturing several animals inside his tent — to a shocked Adam Driver, as the chorus of Ajax's troops. Driver's anxious reactions emphasized the chorus's twofold dismay — not only has their friend and leader gone crazy, but as Ajax's subordinates, they are in danger of retribution from the Greek commanders. Explaining that Ajax's fit has passed, and he now sits in horror of his own actions, Tecmessa brushes aside the chorus's anxiety and implores them to focus on helping Ajax. Taylor took a pleading tone, as she begged Driver to speak to Ajax and try to ease his pain. Again, Doerries used contemporary phrasing in his translation of the ancient tale, particularly in Tecmessa's lines. For instance, Tecmessa recounts that when Ajax left the tent to commit the slaughter, she questioned him: "'Where are you going? No messenger has come calling for help. All of the soldiers are asleep. Please come back to bed.' He turned to me and firmly said: 'Woman, silence becomes a woman.' I've heard him say that before, and I know what it means, so I quit asking questions" (Theater of War 18). Doerries's words contrast more stylized renderings, such as John Moore's: "'Ajax, what are you doing? Why do you stir? No messenger has summoned you: you have heard no trumpet. Why, the whole army now's asleep!' He answered briefly in a well-worn phrase, 'Woman, a woman's decency is silence.' I heard, and said no more; he issued forth alone" (Moore 18). Doerries's version of these sentences in particular proved significant to one of his first audience members, Marshelle Waddell, the wife of a Navy SEAL with PTSD. In a post-performance discussion, Waddell said of Ajax's demand for silence, "I've heard that — in other words" (Perry).

In the next scene, Michael Ealy as Ajax railed against his fate, ashamed of his slaughter and desiring his own death, yet still fuming at the generals and Odysseus — Ealy spat their names out, as if they were vermin. Though his troops (a concerned but still apprehensive Driver) try to comfort him, Ajax remains inconsolable. Ealy declared with an ominous determination: "When a man suffers without end in sight and takes no pleasure in living his life, day by day, wishing for death, he should not live out all his years. It is pitiful when men hold onto false hopes. A great man must live in honor or die an honorable death" (Theater of War 28). Resolved to take his own life and unmoved by Tecmessa's frantic pleas, Ajax commands his servants to have his brother, Teucer, take care of his son, then shuts himself in his tent. Taylor's heartrending cries were met with harsh snarls from Ealy's desperate Ajax. In a choral song of grief, Driver shifted from war-weary homesickness to compassionate sorrow over Ajax's plight.

When Ajax later emerges, he tricks Tecmessa and his troops into thinking that he wants to wash the gore off his body and bury his sword in the ground, while his real intention is to "bury" the sword

in his own body, killing himself by falling upon the blade. Suddenly after Ajax's exit, a messenger arrives to warn the chorus and Tecmessa of the hero's true intentions, as prophesied by the Greek seer Calchas. Meanwhile, Ajax speaks his final words, praying to the gods and saying farewell to earthly life. He invokes Zeus and Helios, asking them to bring news of his death to Teucer and his parents, entreats Hermes for a quick and easy death, and implores the Furies to plague Agamemnon, Menelaus, and their armies. Lastly, Ajax says goodbye to the beauty of the earth, the comfort of home, and his friends and family. Ealy exquisitely balanced Ajax's combination of calm resoluteness about his decision, persistent bitterness over the generals' sleight, and momentary reluctance to leave the joys of earthly life. He gave a touching and simple delivery of Ajax's final lines: "Death oh Death, come now and visit me — But I shall miss the light of day and the sacred fields of Salamis, where I played as a boy, and great Athens, and all of my friends. I call out to you springs and rivers, fields and plains, who nourished me during these long years at Troy. These are the last words you will hear Ajax speak. The rest I shall say to those who listen in the world below" (Theater of War 44). Though these words marked the end of selections from *Ajax* included in the Theater of War reading, they occur only about halfway through Sophocles' play.

In the ancient drama, the conclusion of Ajax's earthly troubles coincides with the beginning of conflict between his family and the generals. Agamemnon and Menelaus forbid the burial of Ajax's corpse, as punishment for his attempted murder of them, while Teucer insists that his brother's wrath and madness should not detract from his bravery in battle, fighting for the Greeks for the past nine years. Finally, Odysseus intervenes and convinces the generals that desecrating the body of even a despised man is dishonorable, no matter how ignoble the man's actions in life. Doerries chose not to include the second half of Sophocles' play in his reading, as the first half achieves his purpose of "[painting] a portrait of the psychologically wounded combat veteran, as well as his wife's struggle to keep her family from disintegrating" (Doerries, email). The crucial message Doerries wishes to give his military audience — that psychological trauma has afflicted combat soldiers and their loved ones for thousands of years — is conveyed in the first several scenes.

Selections from *Philoctetes*, the tale of an injured fighter abandoned by the Greek army, comprised the second half of the performance. First, Doerries explained Philoctetes's background. Before the Trojan War, he was a valuable asset to the Greek army because he knew the sea route to Troy. When bad winds forced the fleet to land and camp out on a little deserted island called Lemnos, Philoctetes suffered a poisonous snakebite at a shrine to the island's nymph. The resulting wound began festering, smelling foul, and causing Philoctetes great pain, and because it was caused by a supernatural creature, the bite would never heal. The annoyance of the stench and Philoctetes's persistent cries of agony drove the army to desert him on Lemnos, leaving him with only his special bow and arrows — gifts from Heracles that never miss their mark. At the beginning of Sophocles' play, the Trojan War is in its ninth year, so Philoctetes has been marooned for a long time. Betraying his own people, the Trojan seer Helenus has told the Greeks that Troy will never be captured unless Achilles' son Neoptolemus wields the bow of Heracles. Odysseus and Neoptolemus arrive on Lemnos with a plot to deceive Philoctetes into giving up the bow.



A staged reading on a large scale: A view from the back of the audience at the amphitheater in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Photo: Phyllis Kaufman

The Theater of War excerpts from *Philoctetes* open with the first scene between Odysseus and the reluctant young soldier Neoptolemus. Ealy, this time as the clever veteran Odysseus, immediately asserted control of the expedition and, knowing Neoptolemus (played by Driver) to be compassionate and easily moved to sympathy, sternly advised his subordinate, "Whatever strange things are said here today, always remember you came here with me" (Theater of War 78). Odysseus then commands the youth to befriend Philoctetes and pretend to hate the other Greeks to gain his trust: "When he asks who you are, say, 'I am the son of Achilles.' That much is true. No need to hide it. Then you should say you're sailing for home, deserting the army that begged you to come in the first place, their 'only hope' of taking Troy. But when you arrived and asked for the arms of Achilles, they said you weren't worthy of such a birthright and dressed Odysseus in your father's suit" (Theater of War 79). Capturing Neoptolemus's eagerness to please yet bewilderment at this request, Driver looked at his scene partner dubiously. Such trickery is against Neoptolemus's noble nature, and he protests: "...it hurts to hear of things I hate to do. It's just not in me to lie, not in my blood, not in my father's blood....They sent me to help you, sir, but I would rather die honestly than win deceitfully" (Theater of War 80). Odysseus eventually convinces Neoptolemus of the wisdom of this plan, then hides out of sight to avoid discovery by Philoctetes.

Wailing in pain as Philoctetes, seasoned stage and screen actor Strathairn read the next scene with the young, innocent-looking Driver. When Driver as Neoptolemus feigned ignorance of Philoctetes and his fate, Strathairn despairingly cried out one of the most memorable lines in the performance: "I am wretched, hated by the gods, if men don't know my story" (Theater of War 87). This line holds particular significance for Doerries who asserts that

part of the value of the [Theater of War] project is both disinhibiting your audience to tell their stories [during the post-performance discussions] and capturing those stories and bringing them to a larger audience [...]. The nine national [news] stories

we've had [in 2008–09, reported by *New York Times*, *LA Weekly*, *LA Times*, Associated Press, *Washington Times*, *USA Today*, *All Things Considered*, *The Atlantic*, and *Stars and Stripes*] have been really important for the project, but I also think they've been important advocacy pieces for the US Armed Forces, not so much for their commitment to the conflict but in terms of compassion for those who have fought and returned [...], telling and sharing of stories is the integral component of the performance (Doerries, telephone).

While the ancient Greeks (as demonstrated by the content of their dramas and epic poetry) valued the sharing of war stories, Doerries hopes Theater of War will promote discussion of military experiences in American culture. Placing value on their stories is a simple but important way of appreciating soldiers and their sacrifices. Ignorance of these efforts can increase a sense of isolation, just as Philoctetes's anguish over his situation is magnified by the idea that the Greeks never speak of him. As Ajax's resentment of the generals further demonstrates, ancient Greek soldiers took great offense when their labors or suffering went unacknowledged. For Philoctetes, being both forgotten and left behind adds insult to injury.

Neoptolemus listens patiently to Philoctetes's troubles, then offers him news of the Greeks and their fortunes at Troy, using Odysseus' ruse about being angry with the generals over their seizure of his father's armor. When he finishes this narration, Philoctetes asks Neoptolemus to take him home on his ship. Strathairn pleaded piteously, "Put me wherever you like, the bow, the stern, the hull. I won't disturb your men. In the name of Zeus, god of beggars, do this for me" (Theater of War 93). After Neoptolemus agrees to help the poor man, thereby gaining his trust, a messenger disguised as a merchant arrives with news of Odysseus' intentions to bring both men back to Troy to fulfill Helenus' prophecy. Strathairn became agitated and frantic, emphasizing Philoctetes's eagerness to escape the Greeks and sail off with Neoptolemus. Philoctetes gathers his few belongings and grants Neoptolemus permission to hold his bow: "You alone I trust to handle it, and then return it. Your actions, son, are as noble as this weapon, for it was won through kindness, and so you will be the only man to touch it with your fingers" (Theater of War 101). Just when Neoptolemus's goal of obtaining the bow is in sight, Philoctetes's foot is wracked with pain. Strathairn howled in misery, begging the youth to have pity: "it cuts straight through me. Do you understand? It cuts straight through me. I am being eaten alive. There is no I, only it. If you have a sword, chop here. Take my foot. I want it off, I want it off" (Theater of War 103). Strathairn's sharp wails and low growls electrified the air, driving home the wounded soldier's anguish, while Driver's alarmed responses intensified the action. Though effortlessly compassionate at first, Neoptolemus struggles with the dilemma of how to respond to a person driven out of his mind with pain. When his agony finally subsides, Philoctetes beseeches Neoptolemus to take his bow and guard it from Odysseus, as sleep overwhelms him. The chorus encourages Neoptolemus to abscond, bow in hand, but he refuses, determined to find some way to help Philoctetes.

The remainder of the play, detailing Neoptolemus's admission of his deception and Philoctetes's resentment of the betrayal, is not included in the Theater of War selections. In guilt and shame for his lies, Neoptolemus offers the bow back to Philoctetes, hoping he will

be persuaded to willingly sail with his fleet to Troy: "You will never find a cure for the snakebite until you return with us to Troy and meet with the sons of Asclepius. There — at long last — you will receive relief from the burden of your illness, and together, with your famous bow, you and I will topple the Trojan towers" (Theater of War 127). Philoctetes stubbornly refuses, abhorring the idea of seeing those who abandoned him face to face once more. He convinces Neoptolemus to flee the Greek army, upholding his original promise to take Philoctetes home. Doerries explained for the audience that the situation ultimately gets resolved through a *deus ex machina* — Heracles appears and commands Philoctetes to sail with Neoptolemus to the Greek forces, promising the healing of his wound and glory for both men in bringing down Troy.

As with *Ajax*, Theater of War only covered approximately the first half of Sophocles' drama. Though Philoctetes's bitterness and stubborn mindset are perhaps better conveyed through his insistence on avoiding the Greeks at all costs and in spite of Neoptolemus's promise of healing, Doerries favors the earlier, more expository scenes between the two characters. The turning point at which Neoptolemus agrees to betray the Greeks by honoring his promise to take Philoctetes home also raises the stakes of the situation (both would be deemed traitors), but is omitted from the readings. Doerries's justification is twofold. He showcases only "the first half [...] of *Philoctetes* to paint a portrait of the physically wounded and abandoned combat veteran. The scenes [that he and the actors] present also foreground Neoptolemus's inner-conflict as Philoctetes's unwitting caregiver" (Doerries, email). Philoctetes's suffering, Neoptolemus's initial struggle to obey orders, and the tenuous alliance that these two men form are more critical elements to Doerries than the most emotionally intense scenes of the play. Portraying the outcome of the characters' situation is less crucial to Doerries than establishing the relationship between them. He also cites an equally important reason for cutting the readings short — time constraints would not permit him and his colleagues to read all the plays' scenes: "If we performed the plays in their entirety, we would not have time for the town hall meeting [which] is the most important aspect of the event [...]. We are using these ancient plays to create the conditions for a conversation that otherwise would not be possible" (Doerries, email). The ancient Greek plays are a means to an end; therefore, presenting them in their entirety is unnecessary. As long as the sections performed facilitate audience dialogue, they serve their intended purpose.

Another element that makes these readings so provocative, despite their brevity and simplicity, is the high caliber of actors that Doerries enlists to present the readings. In addition to the four mentioned above for the April 2009 reading at USUHS, Theater of War performers have included: Bill Camp, Reg E. Cathey, Larry Coen, Patch Darragh, Nathan Darrow, Keith David, Charles S. Dutton, Jesse Eisenberg, Giancarlo Esposito, Frankie Faison, Peter Friedman, Paul Giamatti, April Grace, Josh Hamilton, Brent Harris, Arliss Howard, Terrence Howard, Elizabeth Marvel, Brian O'Byrne, Linda Powell, Maryann Plunkett, Gloria Reuben, Jay O. Sanders, Tamara Tunie, John Ventimiglia, Isiah Whitlock Jr., and Jeffrey Wright, among others. Involving accomplished, respected, and recognizable actors from both theater and film adds weight to the event, especially when audience members are not frequent theatergoers. Also, with the actors'

high levels of professionalism and talent, they can quickly render fully dimensional characters and deliver emotionally rich performances without the aid of full-scale production. Sans extensive rehearsals, lighting effects, props, sets, or staging, these actors paint vivid portraits of their characters, making stories about soldiers and their loved ones from thousands of years ago come to life as if they had happened yesterday.

Equally important as the staged reading portion of Theater of War, the subsequent town hall-style forum begins with a panel discussion. The actors quietly leave the stage, as the panel members take their places at the table. Doerries is careful to focus the conversation on the panelists' reactions to the play, rather than having the actors stay and discuss their experiences performing the material. While traditional post-performance talk backs often include curious audience members' questioning of actors about the rehearsal process or their interpretations of the play, Theater of War discussions are driven by the listeners' experiences and responses. The panel at USUHS included two members of the university's community: Dr. Lyuba Konopasek, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, and Dr. Glenn Burns, Assistant Professor in the Department of Military and Emergency Medicine. Dr. Burns also served combat tours in various locales, including Iraq, and spoke touchingly about how the plays had moved him. Once the momentum of a discussion had been established by the comments of the panelists, spectators (made up of military doctors, officers, and soldiers) began joining in. They talked about the need for companionship among those who have been in combat — several agreed that only other combat veterans are capable of understanding one another's emotions. Others compared Neoptolemus's decisions about obeying or disobeying Odysseus' orders to modern dilemmas of insubordination — sometimes disregarding orders is the more ethical decision. One speaker cited as an example the case of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib, where soldiers unquestioningly adopted immoral interrogation tactics from military intelligence officers (White). Others recognized the prevalence among psychologically distressed troops of Ajax's attitude that the only way to deal with humiliation is death. A military man and scholar in the audience reminded everyone that Tecmessa was not Ajax's honored wife, but rather his war bride and therefore a slave, but several soldiers responded that her low social status does not detract from her closeness to Ajax, love for him, and suffering over his distress. They found Tecmessa and Ajax's interactions analogous to a contemporary familial relationship. This dialogue lasted for just an hour, which is atypical. While Doerries's usual audience consists of greater numbers of lower-level enlisted men or infantry veterans, who might be willing to stay and talk for hours, the crowd at USUHS was mostly made up of higher-level officials with busier schedules.

In contrast, the civilians and service members who made up the audiences at two Theater of War sessions at A.R.T. last March continued each conversation for around two hours. Topics ranged from stress that family members undergo when a loved one is deployed, to service members' frustrations upon coming home, to civilians' difficulties



Elizabeth Marvel and Bill Camp perform TOW at Juilliard.

Photo: Howard Korn

with knowing what to say (or what not to say) to those in uniform. Gillian Snowden, panelist and spouse of combat veteran First Lieutenant Evan Bick (also a panelist), shared the fear and anxiety that she felt for her husband while he was deployed, her guilt over not being stronger for him, and her frustrations with her friends and medical school classmates, who often failed to offer support or even acknowledge her situation. Panelist William Donoghue, a Vietnam veteran and father of a marine on a tour of duty, spoke of how a line from *Ajax* had moved him. When addressing the chorus, Tecmessa declares that “twice the pain is twice the sorrow.” For this father, harkening back to his own painful experiences in combat and knowing firsthand the psychological and emotional impact of witnessing casualties made his fear for his son's safety and wellbeing even greater.

The way Donoghue used a line from the play to articulate his own experience demonstrates how Theater of War creates an environment in which difficult topics can be shared, acknowledged, and communalized. To encourage soldiers and military families to voice their experiences or thoughts about the plays, Doerries's post-performance panels always include military service members or veterans from the surrounding community who function as a “quasi-chorus,” speaking onstage shortly after the readings to offer their own comments to get the discussion going. Doerries emphasizes the importance “that the chorus [functions] in a similar way to a Greek one, which is to say it allows the audience or invites the audience to lens their experience through the chorus and into the play [...] to help draw those connections” (Doerries, Telephone). Though these comments are often very personal, Doerries never asks anyone to share anything outside her or his comfort zone — the discussion is framed by questions about what participants think about various aspects of the plays, such as “Why would Sophocles, a general, present a play about a soldier's madness and suicide to an audience of combat veterans and cadets?” Or, in the case of Donoghue's response, “What does Tecmessa mean when she says, ‘Twice the pain is twice the sorrow?’” If participants wish to share personal information as Donoghue did, they are free to do so, but Doerries is careful to guide the discussion in a safe way,



David Strathairn, Gloria Reuben, Jeffrey Wright, and Bryan Doerries.

Photo: Paxton Winters

keeping the lines of communication open by using the plays as a focal point and also a filter — if the conversation veers off topic or becomes very tense, Doerries can redirect it to a line or aspect of the drama. On the other hand, those who do wish to speak more deeply about their personal experiences can articulate their thoughts by relating them to circumstances and dialogue in the play, rather than through sharing details that might be too painful. When these sessions are successful and audience members relate to the readings, “a reticent, stoic, completely cut-off military population, seemingly unwilling to admit these issues [of psychological and emotional trauma], now are facing [them] all of a sudden, connecting the words and stories of these plays, connecting with larger ancient warrior culture to which they obviously belong in terms of their values of sacrifice and courage” (Doerries, Telephone).

Though Doerries has developed specific facilitation guidelines and an effective structure for Theater of War events, he did not initially design the project for a military audience at all. The readings evolved from sharing his translation of *Philoctetes* with medical students. The first time Doerries held a session with a non-theatre-going audience was at the prompting of a doctor, who had seen a staged reading of Doerries’s version as a part of the Culture Project in New York City. Another doctor (Lyuba Konopasek, who was also on the USUHS panel) arranged a reading for medical students at Cornell, and Doerries was amazed at the response. While he had known that the play “was about care-giving and [...] chronic illness” (Doerries, interview), the Cornell students saw a parallel between the characters’ situation and how doctors-in-training “are being desensitized to the larger aspects of doing things that are good for the hospital, potentially not great for the patient psychologically, and learning to adopt the detachment that most doctors develop as a defense mechanism over time” (Doerries, Telephone). Neoptolemus was compared to a medical student in a quandary over whether to do what is best for his bosses or for his patient, *Philoctetes*. The response was a revelation for Doerries, who had never before noticed this contemporary parallel.

The Health section of *The New York Times* ran an article about the Cornell reading, and shortly afterward, in February 2007, a scandal broke surrounding circumstances at the Army’s main medical facility, Walter Reed Army Medical Center. The media reported on appalling conditions, disorganization, and understaffing in Walter Reed’s outpatient facilities (Priest and Hull). Suddenly, the experience of *Philoctetes*, an injured man abandoned by his own army, had new resonance in American society. Convinced that soldiers would respond to the play, Doerries was determined to find a military audience. It was not until he read a *New York Times* article stating that “in an online course for health professionals, Capt. William P. Nash, the combat/operational stress control coordinator for the Marines, reaches back to Sophocles’ account of Ajax” (Sontag and Alvarez) that Doerries recognized the connection between Ajax’s story and PTSD. He composed his own translation of that play and then contacted Nash about finding a military audience for both *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. Nash offered Doerries a plenary session at the US Marine Corps

Combat Operational Stress Control Conference in San Diego, and the play readings had such an impact that the *LA Times*, *LA Weekly*, and Associated Press all ran stories on the event.

Over the following six months, Doerries received more and more requests from military personnel to bring the Theater of War sessions to their bases. The response from the military community grew so much that in 2009 Doerries and his actors were offered an opportunity to perform two Theater of War readings at Fort Drum, sponsored by the Deployment Health Clinical Center (DHCC) and RESPECT-Mil, which stands for Re-engineering Systems of the Primary Care Treatment (of depression and PTSD) in the Military. One performance was presented to battalion commanders and their spouses, while the other was for primary care physicians in an effort to engage

primary care physicians at the front lines of response to PTSD. The premise is primary care physicians are the first ones to see it because, for a number of reasons [...] many of the men and women who come back, sort of like *Philoctetes*, are a little reluctant to accept medical treatment from the army and don’t go to the VA hospital, so it’s their primary care physician who sees the symptoms, but unfortunately the general civilian primary care physician population is not versed in psychological injury diagnosis [...]. We [came] together [...] to really provide these primary care physicians with some context and some resources (Doerries, Telephone).

The two performances at Fort Drum were also a pilot for a much larger tour — Theater of War received a contract from the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE) for 100 performances at military sites across the United States and Europe. Because every base has a medical command, those in leadership positions at each site can mandate the attendance of their own military medical communities. Engaging with civilian primary care providers initially proved a more difficult task, but Doerries has begun engaging local health organizations as

presenting partners for the readings, as a way to reach an audience of non-military doctors and nurses as well.

The importance of recognizing psychological injury and dealing with the consequences of combat stress has long been neglected by the American military, and the negative stigma associated with psychological and emotional distress is deeply entrenched. Treatment of PTSD symptoms is often inadequate, if provided at all. Doerries notes that

In the last hundred years, we've gone from ice-pick lobotomies as a therapy for PTSD and combat stress to electroshock therapy. The ice-pick lobotomy in World War I and II was basically removing the faculties for speech from those who would speak about their psychological injury, and [...] we've gone from that to electroshock therapy, which is removing the memories of those who would speak about their psychological injuries, to incredibly high levels of sedation and medical treatment, to total marginalization and homelessness and abandonment, to finally crawling up out of the sludge at the end of the 20th century with the naming of Gulf War syndrome, after the Vietnam vets at least paved the way for the use of more iconic and common terms like "thousand-yard stare" [...]. We finally have an acronym [PTSD] to describe what [psychological injury] is (Doerries, Telephone).

For decades, those with combat trauma were suppressed, mistreated, or ignored, until a substantial population of Vietnam veterans began to vocalize their experiences and draw attention to the issue. Large numbers of Vietnam veterans suffer from PTSD: 35.8% met the full criteria during the 1980s, and about twice that many had at least one of the symptoms, according to the *National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study* ("Achilles in Vietnam" 168). Even today, veterans not wanting to be perceived as weak, cowardly, crazy, or unfit for further service might ignore, deny, or self-medicate (sometimes with drugs or alcohol) the symptoms of psychological injury. Still others who do admit their symptoms may deal with overbooked military psychiatrists and doctors, who lack the time to thoroughly diagnose or properly treat them with effective medications and counseling. The Army has also been criticized for misdiagnosing hundreds of soldiers as having pre-existing personality disorders — a condition for which the military is not legally obligated to provide care — instead of PTSD (Associated Press). Furthermore, increasing rates of military suicide since the start of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have alerted American society to the consequences of unhealed combat trauma. With a profession in which some level of psychological and emotional stress is inevitable and acknowledging such stress can result in misdiagnosis and negative consequences, service members have learned to be tight-lipped about such issues.

Fortunately, the US military branches are establishing measures to change the stoicism of the culture, raise awareness about PTSD, offer better treatment to veterans, and keep the lines of communication open. Doerries cites an "incredible cultural shift within the military [...]" that's resulted in 900 million dollars being allocated



David Strathairn, Terrence Howard, and Adam Driver performing TOW at the Shakespeare Theater (Washington, DC).

Photo: Paxton Winters

by Congress to be used by the Pentagon to deal with this issue" (Doerries, interview). Supported by its contract with the DCoE, Theater of War strives to be part of the solution. Though just one of many vehicles that the Armed Forces utilizes to spread awareness and promote healing, Doerries's project is unique because in few (if any) other contemporary public forums do soldiers "pour out their guts" or "say things that are controversial [...] speaking and communalizing [their experiences] in a large setting" (Doerries, Telephone). The play readings create a safe atmosphere for soldiers to both admit traumatic experiences and perhaps begin to heal from war. Speaking about these issues helps de-stigmatize the psychological and emotional stress endured by so many combat veterans. The more psychological injury is discussed, the more veterans recognize that they are not alone in their suffering and that symptoms of trauma are nothing to be ashamed of.

Doerries declares that for the Greeks, "even the act of sitting quietly through [the] play and tacitly empathizing with the characters [was] also a tacit empathy with everyone else in that audience, and no matter what divisions those people felt, no matter how isolated they might have felt before they came to the theatre, there's no question that they were plagued by psychological injury" (Doerries, Telephone). Because all combat soldiers either witness or endure the physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of battle, plays about these kinds of suffering resonate with military men and women of different backgrounds and beliefs, united by a common experience. Even those who have not undergone physical or mental injury themselves can relate to such characters as Neoptolemus and Tecmessa — the friends or loved ones of combat soldiers. Doerries emphasizes the potential of his play readings to "unify diverse viewpoints within the military and communalize the experience of war. They can de-stigmatize psychological injury, and they can validate that psychological injury is [...] treacherous and dangerous if untreated" (Doerries, Telephone). Just as the ancient Greeks used theatre to promote purgation and healing in its citizens, so Doerries utilizes

play readings and discussion to spread awareness of the need for healing among members of American society affected by PTSD and combat stress.

To that end, Theater of War also deals with knowledge of soldier experience within the civilian community. While the entire citizenry of an ancient city-state was affected by war, just a fraction of the United States population serves or has a family member who serves in the military — veterans and their families make up only twenty percent of Americans (Kelly). As a larger community of civilians, Doerries believes that “we have so much work to do in terms of that other part of the communalization process within a democracy” (Doerries, Telephone). Rather than ignoring veterans’ issues, civilians can facilitate the reintegration of soldiers into everyday life by “not passing judgment on those who’ve served because they’ve served, but accepting alongside them the pollution of what they’ve brought back” (Doerries, Telephone). To include ordinary citizens in the scope of Theater of War, Doerries engages the help of community and resident theatre companies across the country to draw mixed audiences of civilians and military. He hopes that through experiencing these plays together and engaging in discussion afterwards, audiences will “begin to bridge that seemingly unbridgeable gap in culture and viewpoint and come to some common understanding of what the impact of this current conflict is” (Doerries, Telephone). Because leaving all the consequences of war for veterans to deal with can anger soldiers and inhibit their ability to reintegrate into civilian life (Palaima 21–23), educating civilians on soldier experience is a central goal of the project.

The March 2011 discussions at the A.R.T. provide an example of how Theater of War achieves this goal. About half-way through the town hall discussion, the conversation naturally turned to the civilian participants’ difficulty with knowing how to relate to veterans and service members. Some asked the panelists or service members in the audience what kinds of questions were helpful to ask and which topics were off limits — the biggest prohibition of all was asking the sensitive and upsetting question of whether a soldier had killed anyone in battle. During this dialogue about military-civilian interactions, one marine mentioned that even the civilians that come up to say “thank you” to him do not even look him in the eye as they say it. Another spoke of civilians acting put off and intimidated simply by seeing him and fellow cadets in uniform at a Dunkin Donuts. Shortly after, the young man mentioned at the opening of this article piped up to say that while many of his friends and family served in the military, he felt that he was a coward for not doing so himself. He stated his belief that fellow civilians do not often speak to men and women in uniform or cannot look them in the eye out of shame for their own cowardice. This comment and the marine’s conciliatory response to it seemed for a moment to bridge the military/civilian culture gap in the room. Several other civilians expressed that their gratitude toward the armed forces is mixed with guilt over not sharing the burden of warfare. On the other hand, the marine emphasized that he bore no ill will towards those who do not volunteer to fight — he saw his job as protecting and defending the civilian citizenry of the United States. What he and his colleagues asked in return was to be acknowledged and spoken to in an open and respectful manner by others in the community, whether in uniform or out. Though these two hours of conversation did not solve all the problems of reinte-

grating combat veterans into American civilian life, they undoubtedly opened a door to freer communication and raised the level of mutual understanding between the service members and civilians present. And the more people that Theater of War reaches, the more new perspectives that can emerge from these conversations.

The primary value of two ancient plays to today’s society, as conceived by Theater of War, is threefold: to foster awareness of PTSD in the medical community, to engage soldiers and veterans directly by providing them with a forum for discussion and perhaps a degree of healing, and to promote greater levels of understanding among American civilians of soldiers’ combat experiences. Doerries points out that raising awareness of PTSD and combat stress in all levels of society can be a constructive way to respond to the suffering caused by warfare. He observes that “the data set of people coming back with traumatic brain injury and psychological injury from this conflict, which is in the hundreds of thousands, is now informing our medical understanding [...] of these issues [...]. There’s never been a data set of this magnitude, so understanding other types of trauma and their effect on civilians [is] one of the positive offshoots of this really awful situation” (Doerries, Telephone). Through Theater of War, Doerries has revived the practice of confronting the psychological and emotional wounds of war through theatre and breathed new life into *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. The simple act of sharing stories can have a powerful effect on community, and by performing and discussing these plays, Theater of War builds bridges across communities and across time, today’s soldier stories echoing those from thousands of years ago.

A Note from the Author

Since 2009, when much of this article was written, Theater of War Productions has presented over 150 performances to military sites in the United States and Europe under its contract with the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE). Around 30,000 service members, veterans, and their families have participated. Performances at universities and theaters for combined groups of military service members and civilians are supported by a grant from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation in collaboration with the United Service Organizations. In addition to Theater of War, Bryan Doerries and his producing partner Phyllis Kaufman offer presentations and forums on coping with terminal illness (*End of Life*), imprisonment (*Prometheus in Prison*), and addiction (*The Addiction Performance Project*), and the scope of their projects continues to expand. Information on these productions and Theater of War can be found at <www.outsidethewirellc.com>.

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