

Theatre of Operations / Operating Theatre:  
Medical Dramaturgies in Anti-War Plays, 1919-2019

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# Abstract

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This dissertation is about the ways in which modern war, modern medicine, and modern theatre have reciprocally shaped attitudes towards bodies. I argue that the rise of theatrical realism, taking models and metaphors from newly technologized war and medicine, gives viewers the power to see into others, and envisions this force as a mark of superior humanity. I show how this gaze is engaged in performance events that dramatize *war-as-medicine*: from WWI theatre-for-the-troops depicting enemy soldiers as microbes, to the 2003 televised medical exam of Saddam Hussein. I argue that the tools and rhetoric of realism are instrumental in imagining distanced killing as a medicinal and sanitizing act, thus naturalizing *violence-as-care*.

Over the same period, I study the work of military veteran theatre makers who have practiced theatre as an alternative medicine: healing not by distance and separation, but through a visceral connection between performers and spectators. Starting with Antonin Artaud's theatrical "surgery," I progress through chapters on Edward Bond, David Rabe, Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig, the Riot Group, and Sylvia Khoury. Taking theoretical frameworks from medical humanities and disability studies, and integrating methods from cognitive science and phenomenology, I explore how their theatre opens up corporeal space for resonance, receptivity, and transformation. I conclude by looking at current applied theatre projects bringing together groups of military service members and civilians, and healthcare providers and receivers. I argue that theatre is uniquely able to heal the selective numbing involved in military and medical training, by resensitizing bodies and relearning ways of caring for oneself and others.

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## **Dedication**

For my grandparents.

## **Introduction: Modern War, Modern Medicine, Modern Theatre**

When Army medic Stephan Wolfert came back from Iraq, the body he built for war returned with him. Not wanting to be “fixed” by VA psychiatrists and physicians, Wolfert self-medicated, spiralled, and soon became homeless and suicidal. He hopped off a freight train in Montana, wandered through a small town, and for the first time in his life, walked into a theatre. On the stage, a disabled veteran of the Wars of the Roses limped forward, saying something about winter and discontent. The “ill-formed” body and rhythmic speech of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, sent words and gestures straight into Wolfert’s gut, ensnaring his organs, and inviting something buried in his body to emerge. He decided to become an actor. While pursuing an MFA at Brown, Wolfert found that actor training mirrored and inverted his basic training in the Army, with synchronized breathing, movement, and cadence. He describes his military training as selectively “numbing” him — removing the impulse to care for himself and others — while heightening his sensitivity to other sounds and images, triggering knee-jerk reactions. By contrast, these theatre exercises reawakened senses that were closed down, while calming others that were hyper-alert — shedding the “body armor” brought back from war to safely take in, let out, and resonate with feelings. Today, Wolfert runs acting classes for veterans with his theatre company DE-CRUIT, which has partnered with NYU’s Applied Psychology program to develop methods that they call, following Indigenous performance scholar Yvette Nolan, “theatre-as-medicine.”<sup>1</sup> Wolfert believes that the “pathology-based structure” used to treat trauma in clinical contexts makes medicine feel like a continuation of war by other means, as doctors deploy an

<sup>1</sup> See Yvette Nolan, *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance*.

arsenal of medications and patients do battle with their illness (Ali and Wolfert 60). His theatre workshops reverse this way of knowing and healing: giving up the fight for mastery and control, and convalescing through a merciful surrender.

My dissertation is about the theatrical means through which the bodies of Wolfert and countless others have been disciplined by and for modern war and medicine; and the theatrical ways in which they have learned how to heal. I argue that, since the late 19th-century, the *tools of theatre* have worked in tandem with war and medicine to create new modes of embodiment — interdependent ways of watching, acting, thinking, and feeling about our bodies.<sup>2</sup> As dramatic realism offers disembodied subjects in the audience scopic knowledge of embodied beings onstage, and new military and medical technologies allow distanced killing and anesthetized procedures, medicine, war, and theatre exchange values, logics, and optics. It becomes possible to know, break, and repair the physical matter of bodies without physically feeling them; the intimacy of *touch* is converted into the separation of *sight*.<sup>3</sup> As war and medicine come to be

<sup>2</sup> This involves both material and imaginative dimensions, as technological and institutional collaborations between militaries and medicine gave rise to metaphors of war-as-medicine and medicine-as-war: each realm imported values, stories, and roles from the other to legitimize their enterprise. By WWI, doctors were presenting medicine as key to military efficiency. And conversely, military propaganda on both sides of the war seized on the popularity and moral high ground of medical science to describe the war in the language and imagery of medicine targeting a microbial enemy, dehumanized on racial grounds (Fiona Reid, *Medicine in First World War Europe* 10, 5). Old dogged suspicions of quackery, charlatanism, and incompetence were dispelled through association with the unquestionably serious enterprise of the military. And what might have seemed dubious rationales for war-making were bolstered by medical science's claims to both civilizational superiority and humanitarianism. Through metaphorical association, medicine and war each rhetorically shored up the other against charges of illegitimacy, error, and deception. Medicine adopted a military ethos to overcome feminized stigma, and militaries incorporated medical metaphors to inoculate troops and civilians against violence, by couching killing in language of curing. See Roger Cooter, "Medicine and the Goodness of War."

<sup>3</sup> These developments that were set in motion after the Franco-Prussian War, and burst onto the world stage in 1914-18, have only increased in the century since, as surgeons and drone pilots conduct operations penetrating bodies they only see represented on a screen.

seen as structurally analogous, theatre catalyzes their blending, giving rise to verbal and embodied metaphors of *war-as-medicine* and *medicine-as-war*. I read a selection of concretizing performance events that both reflect and produce this metaphorical blending, ranging from WWI theatrical revues for the troops and psychiatric roleplay exercises for shell-shocked soldiers, to the dramaturgy of statecraft choreographed in such events as the televised medical exam of Saddam Hussein. I argue that the *artform of theatre*, however, has been variously used to reflect, explore, and subvert this medico-military gaze. I study a range of theatre work — made mainly by military veteran playwrights, directors, and actors — that instead turns *sight* into a form of *touch*. Theatre is conceived as an alternative medicine that heals the body not by distance, separation, and objective knowledge, but by reestablishing a continuity between performers and spectators — apprehending the other as they touch, cut, and pass through one’s own body, and solicit reciprocal movements of muscles, nerves, and gut. From Antonin Artaud’s theatrical “surgery,” to David Rabe’s displacement of realist “diagnosis” in favor of “what the body knows,” these projects reject scopic mastery and instead open up corporeal space for resonance, receptivity, and sympathetic vibrations.

Taking theoretical frameworks from medical humanities and disability studies, and methods from phenomenology and cognitive science, I explore the ways in which theatre makes sense and *sense* (meaning and feeling) of bodies, and entrains performers and spectators to watch, feel, and act in certain ways. I view theatre as both a theoretical site that clarifies attitudes towards pain, violence, and healing; and a practical means of cultivating embodied knowledges that are carried forth into the world. I thus conclude by considering current applied theatre projects in medical and military contexts, reading Wolfert’s work with DE-CRUIT alongside the theatrical simulations used in counterinsurgency training; and contrasting the roleplay exercises

used for medical school “empathy training” with pedagogies developed in Columbia University’s Narrative Medicine program, which attune healthcare providers to their own inner resonance *with* the patient rather than external analysis *of* the patient. I believe that the epistemological tension running through modern drama — between making meaning through detached diagnosis or through aesthetic surrender — has a profound impact on the modern history, present practice, and future possibilities of medicine and war. Understanding these material and imaginative interchanges between culturally normalized ways of watching, healing, and killing, can point us towards promising sites and methods of intervention. The objectivist attitudes undergirding modern war and medicine are not innate but enacted; through theatre (on stages, in classrooms, in workshops) these mimetic and poetic processes are exposed, and other ways of being are rehearsed and made incarnate.

### **Staging “Physiological Man”**

In his manifesto for “Naturalism in the Theatre” (1881) — widely regarded as the ur-text of the realist movement — Emile Zola calls for a new theatre that investigates the workings, possibilities, and pathologies of “physiological man” (Zola, “Naturalism in the Theatre” 369).

Anxiety about understanding and improving the male physiology was widespread, after the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) had left the bodies of French men scarred, dismembered, defeated, and humiliated. Battlefield deaths were far surpassed by the number who perished of disease due to untreated infections. The war had been a medical calamity, laying bare the incompetence of French medical teams, whose unscientific and unhygienic methods often made things worse, hastening the demise of injured soldiers. As charlatan doctors were scapegoated for the French defeat, the state invested in new medical research and training, turning its attention,

like Zola, to physiological man (Pick 104). Robert Nye has shown that this emphasis on *literal* medicine — as the solution for national ailments — gave rise to medical *metaphors* for a wide range of social ills. Problematic bodies — weak, unclean, effeminate, delinquent, degenerate — were construed as disease, and the remedy was a medicine dealt out by an administrative state with increasingly centralized power and wide-reaching control over the lives of civilians (Nye xii). For Zola, medicine offers metaphors and models for a theatre that will perform the “thorough analysis of an organism,” thus furnishing the hard and objective knowledge needed to cure France of its social pathologies (Zola 363). Just as medical science and technology aimed to rebuild a stronger physiological man to prepare for a rematch with Germany, Zola avers that training French audiences to bring a medical gaze to the social world will give them the proper vision, spirit, and motivation to fight and win the next war. “It is by applying the scientific formula that you shall one day retake Alsace and Lorraine” (Qtd. in Garner, “Physiologies of the Modern” 75). The scientific knowledge of life gleaned in the theatre is naturally weaponized, because in Zola’s view, “war is life itself.”<sup>4</sup>

If claiming theatre as both an instrument of medicine and a weapon of war seems contradictory, it is made possible by paradox. Stanton Garner writes that in Zola’s “medical realism,” the “discovery of ‘physiological man’... [is accompanied by] a perceptual deactivation of the audience’s own physiological presence” (Garner, “Introduction” 318; Garner, “Sensing Realism” 118).<sup>5</sup> Honing our faculties to perceive and judge requires disavowing our faculties to

<sup>4</sup> Zola continues: “Only warrior nations have prospered; a nation dies from the time it disarms. War is the school of discipline, sacrifice and courage” (Qtd. in Pick 86).

<sup>5</sup> Garner describes the “complex symptomology of [realist] drama, in which the boundary between the body’s surface and interior becomes the site of spectatorial interpretive operation” (“Introduction” 324).

feel. Knowing the body means dissociating from it, to survey, shape, and control its malleable matter from the disembodied vantage points of our minds. Zola envisions a theatre that plays its part in cultivating the ways of knowing, watching, and feeling that are needed to engineer a better body. Writing of “*la machine humaine*,” Zola takes up the scientific vocabulary of “functionalist physiology,” which understood the body in terms of the mechanical metaphors offered by “industrial organization for mass production” (Qtd. in Garner, “Physiologies” 93; Cooter, *Surgery and Society in Peace and War* 154). As western society underwent a massive process of rationalization in the coming decades,<sup>6</sup> bodies were newly measured, assessed, designed, and corrected: from *within* (through standardized nutrition requirements, vitamins, vaccines, medications) and from *without* (through physical education and testing in public schools to meet military benchmarks). “Physiological man” was expected to *perform*.

Antonin Artaud was born into these accelerating changes at the turn of the 20th-century. His own body was shaped first in French schools and doctor and psychiatrist visits; then after joining the French infantry at age 19, through bootcamp drilling and theatre for the troops; then following his breakdown and hospitalization for “war neurosis,” through psychiatric treatment involving martial roleplay. In the years after the war, Artaud condemns the commercial fare of the Boulevard theatres as the “false theatre of the military” and the medical establishment, which creates and consumes body-machines (Artaud, *Oeuvres* 38).<sup>7</sup> He announces his project of

<sup>6</sup> Standardized time and the telegraph made all areas of globe uniform and surveyable, while “new theories of labor, management, and machinery” replaced or integrated working men with automated technology (Pick 168-9). Pick has also shown that the metaphor of war-as-machine — with bodies, armor, and weaponry as its component parts, all of which can be manufactured, repaired, and replaced — starts during the Franco-Prussian war, before becoming definitive in WWI (165).

<sup>7</sup> “un faux théâtre facile et faux, le théâtre des bourgeois, militaires...”

creating a new theatre that performs a “vital surgery,”<sup>8</sup> putting the spectator through “a real operation in which not only his mind but his senses and his flesh are at stake” (Artaud, *Oeuvres* 93; Artaud, *SW* 156-7). What Zola and Artaud understand (through from very different perspectives), is how the soft power of theatre works in concert with the harder power of medicine and war to shape bodies. Theatre, like medicine, like war, is a realm in which the body is “at stake.”

### **Feeling about Feelings**

Researchers in the emergent interdisciplinary field of the “history of the emotions,” have explored reciprocal changes, originating in late-19th and early-20th-century war and medicine, in how people have felt *about* and *as* bodies. Rob Boddice documents a new emotion coming out of the medical and scientific community in the late 19th-century, and disseminating throughout the cultural consciousness — which he calls a “callous” and “rationalized sympathy” (Boddice, *The Science of Sympathy* 72). With the rising use of anesthetics to numb patients and lab animals, the surgeon and experimental scientist enjoyed a reciprocal numbing: taking away “the pain of the witness” (Boddice, *A History of Feelings* 156). Callousness, which had previously been an accusation leveled at cruel and incompetent doctors, was revalorized as a mark of virtue and expertise. To unpack the metaphor, feeling is no longer a matter of the body’s surfaces (its rough *calloused* skin blocking sensation or penetration) but the preserve of an inaccessible interiority, that benignly envisions the teleological greater good. As Boddice puts it, “there was no higher mark of humanity than the feeling of nothing at all” (163). Susan Buck-Morss coins the term “anaesthetic subject” to describe new ways of feeling experienced by soldiers and civilians

<sup>8</sup> “une merveilleuse chirurgie vitale.”

during the First World War. As new technologies of weaponry and medicine simultaneously extended the soldier's capacity to inflict violence and ability to withstand it, methods of discipline and training were developed to numb or disregard bodily sensations and impulses, reducing inhibitions to killing at a distance. The willingness to injure other bodies extends as the "illusion of invulnerability" takes hold (Buck-Morss 40). In sum, a reciprocal promise emerged: that the bloody business of medicine and war can be executed without feeling anything — and that doing so is a mark of virtue, a faculty possessed by the more "humane," and implicitly, the more human.

I believe that these peculiar ways of feeling co-evolve with dramatic realism — that just as Zola borrows medical and martial models for his theatre, war and medicine deploy theatrical modes of meaning-making that were colonizing the popular stage. Erika Fischer-Lichte writes that the "spectator withdrew, as far as possible, into the boundaries of his own body... to become an observer in total darkness, at a distance from the object of his observation, the actor. He wanted to know nothing of the field of energy between himself and the actors" (Qtd. in Smith, *The Nervous Stage* 6-7). We step backwards while gazing forwards, gaining a penetrative and intimate knowledge of the embodied other's inner secrets, by moving further away. Our bodies recede as our minds advance. These interlocking conventions of watching, thinking, feeling, and acting can be variously defined: as an episteme, a mode of spectatorship, an emotional grammar, a set of interpretive principles, a gaze, a frame, a bodily *habitus*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> What I want to isolate here is a *theoretical stance* towards other bodies and beings that realist theatre makes available — certain conventions of watching, feeling, thinking, and acting that it participates in and promulgates. This is not to reduce all realist plays to this single feature. As Amy Holzapfel argues, from the start realist dramas have often troubled and undermined the very interpretive apparatus they set up, as the audience's stable and objective vantage point is shaken by sensorial tremors (Holzapfel 2). Nonetheless, I maintain that realism as a movement

My claim is that realism, blending the values of medicine and war, naturalizes *violence-as-care*. The viewer's unilateral gaze penetrates the other, while making the self impenetrable. To look at another human with the expectation of figuring out with certainty what they are about, is a violent act — turning the flux of life into the fixity of death. But the logic of realism is that doing so is virtuous and life-giving, a mark of superior humanity, and a step towards human advancement. Michel Foucault illustrates this paradoxical junction with his account of the ascendance of the “medical gaze” through practices of dissection and vivisection (Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* 102). As dispassionate men of science cut up live animals and deceased humans, violence is converted into the power to heal. The body under the gaze dies, to extend the lives of the gazers. Virtue and humanity are conferred on the viewer, who penetrates and judges this other *for their own good*. Natalie Alvarez sees this same “way of knowing” at play in the theatrical role play and simulation exercises used in military training: “predicated on the assumption that everything is accessible and knowable,” and privileging the “epistemic authority” of “the Western subject as the site of knowing and the point from which everything can be known” (Alvarez 164).

Whereas Boddice and Buck-Morss call this way of knowing *unfeeling*, I believe it is better described as a shift in ways of *feeling about feelings*. It is a localized anaesthesia, that shuts down certain sensory channels while privileging others, and most importantly, recasting these feelings as facts: objective appraisals of an external reality. Like the spectator of Zola's theatre, the doctor or soldier is not without emotion, but he [sic] is enjoined to understand his emotions as a detached diagnosis that authorizes him to operate on the “physiological man” and

can be fairly and usefully tied to the dissemination of a pseudo-scientific objectivism, promising knowledge of others through penetrative vision and neutral analysis.

his pathologies. As work by Donna Haraway and others in the field of feminist epistemology has shown, the supposed neutrality, objectivity, and dispassionate mastery of the medico-scientific gaze is itself a theatrical effect — an “as-if” that allows us to understand our perceptions *as if* our own bodies, senses, and subjectivities played no part in producing them.<sup>10</sup> “Objectivity” is a feeling that authorizes disregarding the feelings of others, and belief in the supremacy of one’s own. It is a rationalization of emotion, that ascribes internal feeling to external forces which can be analyzed, scapegoated, controlled, or failing that, annihilated.

Over the period of my study, as the asymmetry and separation between bodies allowed by technologies of medicine and war increases, dramatic realism’s separation of performing and spectating bodies is made absolute through televisual communication. As ever-advancing technologies promise to excise human fallibility (and remove human bodies) from medical and military operations, and from the representation of reality, objectivism becomes more deeply entrenched. Medical anthropologist Kenneth MacLeish traces the evolution of military embodiment from the “anesthetic subjects” of World War I to the “unfeeling, interchangeable bodies” cultivated in the U.S. armed forces today (MacLeish 49). As soldiers depend on increasingly “intimate bodily relationships with the technologies that alternately or even simultaneously keep them alive and expose them to harm,” they experience a more “profound bodily alienation” (49, 55). MacLeish argues that this “anesthetic habitus” — a kind of sensory re-wiring to “both take in and ignore” signs of violence and danger — extends to a “cultural anesthesia” in the civilian realm (61, 63).

<sup>10</sup> See Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.”

Similar trajectories have been traced in the material practices and imagined values of medicine. If general anesthesia made the surgeon “callous,” his metaphorically hardened skin permitting him to feel nothing in the act of penetrating the patient, then new surgical procedures performed without breaking the skin have further hardened this emotional armor.<sup>11</sup> Alex Mermikides has shown how medical imaging technologies, which provide a view of the body interior without breaking its borders, extend the asymmetry of the “medical gaze,” and further “divorce the medic from the patient and her subjectivity” (Mermikides 1). As technologies of war, medicine, and representation coevolve, they continuously blend in both practical and imaginative ways. The “pattern of life analysis” performed with military drones uses the same technologies as medical imaging, as it generates digital maps of a territory to scan for signs of dangerous agents, and authorizes “surgical strikes” (Mirzoeff, “War is Culture” 1739). While specific medical and military actions change, the metaphors of war-as-medicine and medicine-as-war consistently serve to validate two claims: that the operations are humane and necessary.

While the most visible consequences of war-medicine blending are of course seen in medicine and war, I argue that it insidiously spreads through metaphor to influence other social categories of privilege and oppression based on actual or supposed bodily difference: particularly race, gender, and disability. Daniel Pick writes that “medico-biological diagnoses” of the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War focused on racial differences between Celt and Teuton, as evidenced by their differing physiologies (Pick 93, 88). Further, the supposed degeneration of the nation’s racial stock through intermarriage with outsiders was blamed for sapping the “vitality of [French] blood” (104). As scientific hereditarianism developed in France and Germany in the

<sup>11</sup> For example, with “capsule endoscopies,” the patient only has to swallow a camera the size of a pill.

decades after the war, race was increasingly seen as a scientific fact located in the body, and its regulation as a matter of medicine (Hannaford 279, 287). Belief in this *literal* biological basis gave rise to widespread medical *metaphors*. Thus as metaphors of war-as-medicine and medicine-as-war spread across Europe and the United States, so did metaphors of racial other-as-diseased and as-disease. Ivan Hannaford writes that “racial impoverishment was [seen as] the plague of civilization—a disease,” responsible for “the insanity, epilepsy, deafness, blindness, and hereditary diseases that were contaminating civilization” (359). Symptoms of battle trauma, such as “nervous exhaustion” and “paralysis of will” were interpreted as being induced by the “crossing of races” (313). And war was posited as their cure: bringing “racial progress,” by eliminating weak racial stock” (Pick 75). War, Daniel Pick writes, was felt to be a “vital principle — like the rhythmic rise and fall of the lung, or the beat of the heart”; whereas “peace [brings] stagnation, decay, and death” (79, 80). Whether overt or implicit, war was widely imagined as medicinal, a healthy form of exercise that strengthens and boosts the immunity of both literal bodies and the metaphorical body politic.

This reciprocal racialization had hardened by WWI, with both the Allied and Central Powers seeing their enemies as constituting an inferior race, overtly described as a disease, and their own military actions as medicinal. The language of microbes, which had recently entered the public consciousness, was particularly potent for dehumanizing enemies. In the British newspaper cartoon below, a British woman is shown sweeping German microbes into concentration camps” (Reid 6). The practical and imaginative blending of medicine and war continued in the interwar period, borne most visibly and consequentially by the eugenics movement coming out of England and the surge of antisemitism starting in France. Both spread virally across national borders, reaching their greatest horror in Nazi Germany, where the

national medical service was put in charge of race hygiene (Hannafor 368). The exposure of death camps — in which torturous medical experiments were performed on prisoners in the name of scientific and racial progress — made medical war fall into temporary disrepute. It has been revived in the 21st-century however by the United States and Israel, with widespread medical metaphors to describe new asymmetrical operations made possible by UAV (drone) technology and Special Ops. While targeting different people, these metaphors once again correlate to race.

Feminist scholars have thoroughly exposed the embedded gender assumptions, hierarchies, and violence in the late-19th-century consolidation of the medico-scientific gaze. Tiffany Watt-Smith calls the medical gaze a metaphorical theatre, that “identify[s] the patient with *actresses* and the physician with spectators, whose silent and immobile gaze fixes and objectifies the ill body” (Watt-Smith 187). And Meredith Conti shows a reciprocal gaze deployed in the theatre — realism transfers authority from the actress to the “dramatist-as-pathologist,” and the “theatrical spectators as amateur clinicians charged with discovering the causes of staged medical conditions” (Conti 7, 3). The body onstage is feminine, unstable, and unable to speak her own truth, which can only be accurately gauged from the disembodied vantage point of a masculine spectator with a penetrative diagnostic gaze. Aaron Belkin traces a parallel transformation in the late-19th-c American military, through which a new “military masculinity” co-evolves with the medicalization of war. Whereas earlier in the century, soldiering was seen as an unseemly occupation characterized by fifth, degeneracy, and venereal disease, its image was rehabilitated to support expansionist and imperial objectives eventually codified in the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. Investments in military and medical science and technology helped reinvent the idea of the soldier as clean, upright, healthy, and

manly, his body trained to act with automatic proficiency, to eliminate potential fleshly interference with the mechanical execution of war. This was reinforced with new sanitation and personal hygiene protocols and regular medical exams, so that the “military’s apparatus for assessing bodies was more avowedly authorized to draw lines that distinguished the normal from the deviant” (Belkin 11). With new emphasis on science, discipline, and order came fear of “filth,” as anything “crossing and/or compromising boundaries that structure classification schemes” (54). Warrior masculinity meant an asymmetrical relationship between bodies of self and other, penetrating feminized others, while guarding one’s own “hard, sealed-up, leak-proof, impenetrable body” (85).

Some of the sharpest critiques of how a militarized medicine has marginalized, dehumanized, and done violence based on bodily difference has come from the field of disability studies. In *Recycling the Disabled: Army Medicine, and Modernity in WWI Germany*, Heather Perry describes the ways in which the “science and technology of the First World War simultaneously destroyed and re-created the male body” (1). Programs of “re-membering” soldiers aimed to make the disabled productive members of the national economy, measuring health in terms of productivity, efficiency, and military fitness (12). As the telos of medicine and war converge, people with bodies that cannot be fixed up in fighting form are dehumanized, institutionalized, sterilized, euthanized. Petra Kuppers has argued that the realist gaze, emerging through the study of physiological man, naturalizes normative physiologies, and makes bodies with disabilities the objects of pity, repair, or fear (Kuppers 69). This is enabled by the magic trick of the disembodied spectator, who is without impairment or limitation, inhabiting a theoretical body that gains omnipotence by leaving its fleshly matter behind. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes, a pathologizing gaze at non-normative bodies wards off fears of our

own vulnerabilities, denying the fact that “[e]ach one of us ineluctably acquires one or more disabilities” (Garland-Thomson 19). In his recent book on *Kinaesthetic Spectatorship in the Theatre*, Stanton Garner argues that the realist paradigm offers spectators the illusion of “a non-challenged *I Can*,” a “dream of omnipotence, the fantasy of a subject that observes no limits in a reality that yields to it at every turn” (90). These theatrical ways of watching have real world consequences. In medical contexts, the testimony of patients of color, women, and people with disabilities is less likely to be taken seriously, and to be met with the kind of care they request (Cooper-Patrick). It is as if marked bodies interfere with the frictionless operation of minds, rendering these subjects unable to know and say what their own bodies mean. Again: a disembodied viewer with superior technology is armed with a gaze that penetrates the embodied person before him [sic], and authorizes violence-as-care — assured that these actions are taken for the patient’s own good.

### **Methodology:**

I situate my theatrical case studies within performance networks — interconnected scenarios of watching and being watched, hearing and being heard — that include theatre art, the mundane theatricality of everyday life, and many gradations in between. By reading plays alongside performance events such as psychiatric roleplay exercises for shell-shocked soldiers, live action simulations used in Counterinsurgency training, and the televised medical exam of Saddam Hussein, I aim to show how they take up, deploy, and subvert culturally normative ways of watching and acting. I dig into these theatrical samples with the help of methods and perspectives from cognitive science, phenomenology, and affect theory that bring overlapping lenses to the bodily basis of thought and feeling. Foundational is the pioneering work of

cognitivist philosophers George Lakoff and Mark Johnson on metaphor, which identifies the body as the concrete “source domain” for meanings that are projected into the abstract realm of conceptual thought. For example, when we understand a scientific discovery as an *advancement*, what it means to “advance” is derived from our primary embodied experience of moving forward through space; when we understand environmental pollution as *harmful*, the meaning of harm arises from our bodily experiences of pain. The set of fundamental “image schemas” that Lakoff and Johnson have put forth has been criticized for its universalist pretensions. While some physical features of the body are universal, the meaning attributed to these features is culturally specific — constructed through iterative practices of learning, rehearsing, and performing culturally appropriate behavior. More recent research thus focuses on “situated image schemas,” the foundational meanings that are acquired through formative social practices in a given culture (Kimmel 83). Through a process termed “retrojection,” cultural metaphors are mapped into the body; as sociologist Michael Kimmel puts it, “discourse ‘goes under the skin’” (99). The basic point here is that the immaterial realm of imagination, and the material realm of the body, are mutually constitutive. For example, imagining one’s body as a fortress might cause the contraction of skeletal muscles to harden one’s borders, a shortening of breath to let less air in, a tightening of the face into an impassive stone-like expression. Beneath the visible surfaces of sensorimotor actions, metaphors have been shown to inform internal processes of autonomic arousal and cardio-vascular response. And these embodied feelings and actions are likely to influence feelings about larger metaphorical bodies, such as the nation, the family, or a religious group — which might likewise be imagined as fortresses needing defense against hostile outsiders (Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh* 313). In a feedback loop between the

facticity of the body and the fictive powers of imagination, the personal blends into the political, the concrete into the abstract.

I treat the theoretical lenses I employ as each presenting a partial view of phenomena that cannot be pinned down like a specimen on a slide and known in their entirety. I consider the ultimate barometer of the truth about bodies to lie not in external measurements, but in subjective experience. A useful corollary is the recent change in the medical community's view of what pain is. In the late 20th-century, brain imaging technologies seemed to objectify pain as a scientifically measurable fact, which could be observed and recorded without interference from the subject-in-pain, who might exaggerate or minimize her or his experience (Joanna Bourke, *The Story of Pain* 9). While stoking faith in the physician's objective judgment, this allowed differential belief in the reality of patients' pain, often correlating to race, gender, and disability. Today, the scientific consensus is that pain is not an externally observable physical condition, but a subjective emotion. Pain is whatever the pained person says it is. War and medicine blend through a process of bodily abstraction and rationalization, that hardens knowledge into fixed visual and verbal forms. But there is always much more that our bodies know, and theatre gives us an opportunity to cultivate this knowledge through aesthetic surrender, through being rather than meaning. I want to start, then, by grounding my own critical stance — not perched above with a clear-eyed view to pronounce a diagnosis, but enjoying the privilege of playing along.

This dissertation is about the elementary situation (to paraphrase Peter Brook) of one body watching another. It is about what happens when two or more people breathe the same air. When sound vibrations emanate from one body interior, cut across the air, and enter into other bodies, setting off sympathetic vibrations. When frequencies of light prismatically reflect off of skin, lips, hair; when breath and heartbeats are synchronized or syncopated. It is about what our

bodies know — knowledge that might visibly register through postural micro-adjustments, deepening or shortening of breath, an impulse to look or look away, but that is not reducible to any of these physical facts: felt instead as forms and degrees of life, possibility or restriction, connection or detachment, flow or blockage. It is about how bodies and selves harden to guard themselves against affective intrusions; and conversely, how they change, grow, and heal by opening to make space for the unknown within ourselves and others — to be touched, moved, roiled, ensorcelled, and hailed into being by the beings with whom we share this space.

Apprehending each other in this way is what our bodies are evolved for. And as cognitive developmental scientists have shown, it allows deeper learning and subtler communication than consuming abstracted information from a screen or a page. Researchers are still learning the myriad ways in which in-person acts of creativity and care have measurable effects on our bodies and health. The reinvented Cartesianism of modern medicine, subordinating the patient's body to the physician's mind, does not simply offer up objective knowledge of the body, but is itself a mode of bodily discipline, producing bodies in certain ways. And other ways are possible.

### **Chapter Breakdown:**

My first chapter begins with Artaud's early attempts at a "surgical" theatre after his release from a WWI psychiatric hospital. I first follow the ways in which Artaud's body was forcibly remade by war and medicine: in basic training and the trenches of WWI; in the hospitals where he was sent for mental and physiological maladies in the interwar period; and finally in the Rodez asylum where he was institutionalized for the duration of WWII, undergoing a course of electroshock therapy. I show how military training and psychiatric treatment for shell-shocked soldiers deploy a mimetic realist theatricality, emphasizing identification and imitation of a

“normal” healthy masculine body. Drawing on cognitive phenomenologist Shawn Gallagher’s work on external body-*images*, proprioceptive body-*schemas*, and internal *visceral intensities*, I demonstrate how these theatrical exercises engrain connections between images, movements, and feelings, executed with Pavlovian reflex. As Artaud puts it, the actor in the commercial French theatre, like the soldier in the “false theatre of the military,” is always mechanically aping an “image” (Artaud, *SW* 184). The wartime invention of modern plastic surgery captures Artaud’s imagination, however, and convinces him that our bodies can regenerate in new forms. Through surgical images, metaphors, and models, Artaud envisions and creates theatre that disrupts habitual connections between the body’s three sensory levels, and allows new ones to form: cutting like a knife between skin, muscle, and gut.<sup>12</sup> Focusing on “physically integrated” theatre work made by ensembles of disabled and non-disabled performers, and borrowing insights from Stanton Garner’s study of *Kinaesthetic Spectatorship*, I explore what is possible when spectators neither wholly identify nor disidentify with the bodies they see. When bodily difference renders a spectator unable to mimic the body-images on stage in her body-schema, a more complex response occurs: a partial incorporation through which something of the other gets into one’s body without creating a totalized identity. Confronting both the sameness and the difference in others, we become conscious of the otherness internal to ourselves. We experience our bodies not as a self-same fixed form, but as continually changing, belying any image we might hold, and joining with others in a dance that reciprocally invites dormant potentials to emerge.

<sup>12</sup> A theatre that “make[s] the eyelids dance in pairs with the elbows,” so that “the real organs of the human body [are] formed and deployed” and “bodies are renewed” (Artaud, *Artaud on Theatre* 193, 216).

Chapter two moves from Artaud's bodily remaking to Edward Bond's project of remaking "humanness" and society through theatre. After serving in the British Army during the early years of the Cold War, Bond developed new dramatic strategies couched in a medical idiom, likening the spectator to a "surgeon operating on himself" (Bond, *Lear* xv). Here I focus on the situated image schema used to understand the body as a "container." I demonstrate how scenes of medicine and war endow the container-schema with opposite entailments. For example, in Bond's play *Lear*, an early torture scene frames the body in militarist terms as a fortress that is penetrated and raided of physical and psychic content. Then during the autopsy of Lear's daughter, medical conceptual structures take over as Lear reaches his hands into her viscera, and notices for the first time the precarity of the soft inner parts beneath her hard exterior. We are called upon to view the body not as a fortress to attack or defend, but as a permeable membrane holding interconnected parts, in need of perennial care. Later, when Lear is captured as a prisoner of war, and strapped to an operating table to have his eyes excised by an army doctor, an act of war is performed with medical instruments. The audience grapples with incommensurable ways of watching Lear's body. Following Judith Butler's work on how the category of the "human" is ascribed by the "frames of war," I argue that Bond locates humanness in a dialectical movement between these martial and medical frames — between building borders of separate selves, and surrendering them to be invaded by others. Fracturing the armour of the self does not bring total dissolution, but like a surgical operation, inflicts a "wound" that heals in a different "shape" (Bond, *The Hidden Plot* 29).

From Artaud and Bond's optimistic efforts at change and healing, I move on to David Rabe's more resigned attempt to theatrically "diagnose" the ways in which bodies, selves, and societies are deformed through the blended logic and values of medicine and war. Rabe

conceived his “Vietnam Plays” while serving in a military surgical hospital, and wrote them to explore the bodily meanings undergirding war, which elude the objectivist epistemology of medical science and dramatic realism. “The anatomist,” he writes, “destroys what he seeks to understand.” Drawing on cognitivist philosopher Mark Johnson’s work on *preconceptual meaning*, I attend to the audience’s embodied processes of meaning-making that precede conscious thought. I demonstrate that through the anatomizing realist gaze, our own sense of interiority is constructed by seeing into the interior space of character objectified onstage. For example, in the bootcamp scenes of *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*, our gaze is aligned with the drill sergeant and doctor who survey and measure Pavlo’s performance. We engage in the diagnostic work of coming to know Pavlo’s “character” by matching his external *form* (his actions and words) to his inner *content* (our sense of his subjectivity). However, as we get closer to “knowing” Pavlo in this way, his inner space of subjectivity collapses, becoming a two-dimensional figure who mechanically repeats the same actions. The play’s realist trappings dissolve into a surrealist frenzy as Pavlo furiously kills over and over while saying his name — as he, like us, tries to realize and assert a perdurable self by penetrating others. Our anatomizing gaze destroys what we seek to understand. While work in cognitivist theatre studies has equated the dramatic concept of character to the container image-schema (an inner content held by an outer form), I show that perceiving character requires a *gap* between form and content, leaving space for an imagined interior subjectivity. The audience enacts the play’s meaning as we try to match what we see onstage to schematic structures, but their alignment is perpetually deferred. The experience of meaning thus requires an element of *not knowing*, not being able to pin down, survey, and consume a world of beings and things that are in perpetual motion. The promise of absolute knowledge and control dangled by modern war, medicine, and dramatic realism engages

us in a self-cannibalizing cognitive quest — as our own “interior space,” constructed by seeing into Pavlo, collapses along with him. I end by turning back to Johnson’s work, and show how the epistemology he terms “embodied realism” is built on unexamined theatrical metaphors that paper over the contradictions, gaps, and deferrals involved in our perception of the “real.” Whereas the authority of cognitive science has lately been used to make positivist claims about how theatre works, I argue that theatre might be used to trouble some of the positivist claims about how cognition works.

In my fourth chapter, I put twenty-first-century plays by Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig, The Riot Group, and Sylvia Khoury in dialogue with key political performances, such as the choreographed release of information about the assassination of Osama bin Laden in a “surgical operation,” and the televised medical examination of Saddam Hussein. I show how this dramaturgy of state craft literalizes the realist epistemology of violence-as-care. Saddam is constructed as both *disease* (called a cancer, surgically cut out of Iraq), and *diseased* (a lice-check marks him as dirty, crawling with bugs, before a tongue depressor and sanitary glove go in to administer some American medicine). The first metaphorical valence legitimates his execution as a life-saving act, and the second confuses exactly whose life is being saved, as Saddam is the beneficiary of medical care attending to *his* health. Cowhig’s 2009 play *Lidless* begins by looking at medicalized war, with a scene of “enhanced interrogation” performed with medical instruments, and monitored by a doctor. It then jumps forward ten years as the detainee, suffering from liver failure, tracks down his former torturer to ask for half her liver. The scenarios of torture and organ donation provide the basis for contradictory ways of watching, feeling, and knowing, both grounded in regarding the body: the first gains knowledge and control through unilateral penetration; the second sustains life through an exchange between bodies with porous

borders and precarious parts. I argue that these plays illuminate the peculiar emotional grammar of the latest permutation of Buck-Morss's "anesthetic subjecthood" brought by the American wars in the Middle East, while offering audiences and performers a space in which to awaken sensory channels that have been closed down.

In my conclusion, I take a look at current uses of theatrical simulation and roleplay exercises in medical schools and counterinsurgency training. I argue that by and large, these programs instrumentalize and weaponize empathy — participants are promised objective knowledge of the other's internal state by reading external bodily signs, and practice performing the appropriate gestures and projecting the appropriate image to win their trust. Medical and military professionals are thus trained to operate under the realist logic wherein occupying the position of knowing, seeing, and tending to bodies means not having a body oneself; viewing the vulnerabilities of others means becoming invulnerable. Surgeon Pauline Chen writes of the lessons learned in medical school dissection labs: "in knowing the cadaver in such intimate detail, we believe that we are acquiring the knowledge to overcome death" (Qtd. in Hermann 7). Former Marine tyler boudreau says that cultural sensitivity training casts American soldiers as "actors" saddled with an "unperformable script" that puts "empathy" in the service of killing (boudreau 57, 61). Medical students and military recruits are commonly counseled that they must harden themselves against the emotional intrusions of others, that feeling for these suffering people will impede their ability to do their job well, and harm their health through emotional "burn out." That, as Boddice shows over a century earlier, callousness is a higher form of sympathy. This does demonstrable harm to the health of service men and women, hospital workers, and medical students, evidenced by high levels of depression and suicide. I argue instead that those working on the borders of life and death, implicated daily in injury and pain,

cannot do their jobs in a healthy way without allowing it to touch, enter, and change them — without acknowledging and sharing their own visceral turmoil and bewilderment.

I then pivot to current applied theatre projects bringing together groups of military service members and civilians, and healthcare providers and receivers, that instead make space for a salubrious surrender. I start with DE-CRUIT, the theatre company founded by former Army medic Stephan Wolfert, which has developed a program of “theatre-as-medicine” for military veterans. Their methods emphasize physical resonance rather than realist representation. Through rhythm, breathing, and body awareness exercises, participants become more sensitized to vibration and let down “body armor.” Brain scans on vets before and after taking the course have shown transformations in neural networks, and personal testimonies of participants speak to lower levels of depression and violent impulses (Ali et al. 5-6). Their work bears out Artaud’s conviction, stated a century earlier, that theatre can remake bodies and minds, performing a kind of “brain surgery.” I next look at pedagogies practiced in the Narrative Medicine program in Columbia University’s School of Professional Studies. This growing field originated in part because of the recognition of “medical education[’s] parallels to military indoctrination, ” which program directors Craig Irvine and Danielle Spencer say “succeeds in blunting empathy” (Irvine and Spencer 7-8). Like DE-CRUIT, they practice a hermeneutics of *resonance* rather than diagnosis — interpreting texts not as stable external objects, but through taking them in to creatively co-mingle with our unique subjectivities, bodies, and histories. I end by weighing in on debates about *empathy*, traversing the fields of theatre studies and the ethics of warfare and medicine. I argue that realist empathy effaces its theatricality, mistaking the feelings of the self for those of the other, and thus makes possible the violence-as-care performed in “humanitarian” war. By contrast, an empathy of resonance embraces its theatricality: finding ways of feeling

*with* and *into* one another through a subjunctive as-if. The theatre and lives of Artaud, Bond, Rabe, Cowhig and others suggest that this partial and impermanent contact -- through playing along and being in touch -- is not only nonviolent, but healing.

## Chapter 1: Antonin Artaud's Surgical Theatre: War, Medicine, and Regeneration

Before cruelty, before the plague, and before the theatre found its double, Antonin Artaud imagined the power of performance in medicinal terms. “The spectator” Artaud announces in his first theatrical manifesto for the Théâtre Alfred Jarry (1926), “is to undergo a real operation in which not only his mind but his senses and his flesh are at stake. Henceforth he will go to the theater the way he goes to the surgeon or the dentist” (Artaud, *Selected Works* 156-7). Artaud knew something about surgeons and dentists. The Great War of 1914-18, in which Artaud served as an infantryman before being hospitalized with “war neurosis,”<sup>13</sup> brought together teams of surgeons and dentists to treat the unprecedented number of facial injuries incurred in trench warfare (Stark 512). Their collaborations gave birth to modern plastic surgery, as medical units pioneered methods of repairing broken jaws, noses, and eye sockets with bone, skin, and tissue taken from other parts of the body.<sup>14</sup> In the years after the war, one could not walk the streets of Paris without encountering the uncanny visages of the so-called *Guelles Cassées* (“Broken Faces”), which bear an unmistakable resemblance to Artaud’s post-war sketches of contorted

<sup>13</sup> *La névrose de guerre* was a catch-all diagnosis for the widespread mental breakdown of French soldiers, with symptoms ranging from agitation and exhaustion to uncontrollable trembling, visual and hearing impairment, speech disorders, and memory loss. For a history of psychiatric casualties in war, see Fiona Reid’s “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.”

<sup>14</sup> For a description of maxillofacial reconstructive surgery in WWI, which uses bones from pelvis and ribs to rebuild jawbones, see Jennifer S. Lawrence, *Allied Medicine in the Great War* 47-8.

patchwork faces.<sup>15</sup> Ensorcelled by the wizardry of plastic surgery, he took from it his first master metaphor for a theatre with bodily effects — performing, as he put it, a “vital surgery.”<sup>16</sup>

Artaud’s surgical metaphors have been noted, echoed, and widely interpreted by philosophers and theatre and literary scholars.<sup>17</sup> Much of this conversation has centered on Artaud’s enigmatic call in the aftermath of the Second World War to operate on “mankind’s” anatomy to create a “body without organs” (*SW* 571).<sup>18</sup> My essay does not take a side in these debates but rather returns to their somatic source, by grounding *metaphorical* surgery in *literal* surgical practice. I argue that Artaud’s imagination is captured by the specific inventions of wartime plastic surgery, which made it possible to rearrange body parts in new constellations of flesh and bone. “Plastic” did not mean “artificial,” but denoted the organic body’s plasticity: its capacity to morph, re-grow, and heal itself. While surgeons reconstructed blown off eyelids with

<sup>15</sup> These uncannily contorted visages can be seen in Artaud’s sketches and self-portraits in (*Oeuvres* 59) and *L’Écriture Griffée*. Florence de Mèredieu comments on the prominence of wounded and amputated bodies, and descriptions of the common symptoms of battle in Artaud’s early works (Mèredieu 41).

<sup>16</sup> In a rapturous 1925 newspaper review, Artaud praises Roger Vitrac’s *Les Mystères de l’Amour* for performing “a wonderful vital surgery” (*Oeuvres* 93).

<sup>17</sup> Susan Sontag, for example, writes that Artaud’s theatre performs “a kind of emotional and moral surgery upon consciousness,” so that “the audience should not leave the theatre ‘intact,’” (In Artaud, *Selected Works* 89, 87). In her study of theatre, disease, and medicine, Alexis Soloski writes that Artaud sees “performance as a kind of operating theater—an alternative and brutal surgery at once opposed and superior to conventional medicine” (Soloski 233).

<sup>18</sup> This phrase, uttered in the closing lines of Artaud’s final work, has achieved a robust critical afterlife is only tenuously connected to Artaud. Interpretations of the “Body-without-Organs” range from Derrida’s claim that it represents pure “self-presence” without the “intestine difference” and “interior fold of... repetition” that come with dividing the body into organs (Cull, *Theatres Of Immanence* 60; Derrida 248); to Deleuze and Guattari’s interpretation of the “body without organs” as the primary flow of “difference-in-itself” that propels a perpetual becoming (Cull, *Deleuze and Performance* 5).

borrowed skin,<sup>19</sup> Artaud's theatrical surgery, "make[s] the eyelids dance in pairs with the elbows," so that "the real organs of the human body [are] formed and deployed" and "bodies are renewed" (*Artaud on Theatre* 193, 216). What is so revelatory about surgery for Artaud is the discovery that the body can regenerate in a new form — and that its health, functionality, and survival might depend on it.

Artaud's perennial calls for a theatre that remakes bodies are interspersed with complaints that our bodies *already have* been remade by the forces of war, medicine, and industrial capitalism. This too is more than metaphor. Over Artaud's lifetime (1896-1948), the French state undertook unprecedented projects shaping and managing civilian bodies, to make them fit for the factories or the frontlines. This ranged from standardizing nutrition and physical education requirements, to voluntary and involuntary procedures to correct "deviant" bodies and minds. Artaud's body was coercively remade in basic training and the trenches of WWI; in the hospitals where he was sent for mental and physiological maladies in the interwar period; and finally in the Rodez asylum where he was institutionalized for the duration of WWII, undergoing a course of electroshock therapy. Artaud regarded medicine and psychiatry as the continuation of war by other means, decrying "the war that is being waged on me" by doctors (*Quarto* 595).<sup>20</sup> However, as Florence de Mèredieu has noted, Artaud is curiously keen on surgeons.<sup>21</sup> Like the

<sup>19</sup> The skin used to reconstruct eyelids would typically be taken from the inner arm, behind the ear, or above the collar bone. See John B. Roberts, *War Surgery of the Face: A Treatise on Plastic Restoration After Facial Injury*.

<sup>20</sup> "la guerre que l'on me fait à moi." Translations from Artaud's *Oeuvres Complètes*, *Oeuvres*, *Nouveaux écrits de Rodez*, and *Quarto* are my own. For his other writings, I have quoted from published English-language translations.

<sup>21</sup> In her article on Artaud and medicine, Florence de Mèredieu remarks that while Artaud vituperatively condemns doctors, he is surprisingly fond of surgeons (Mèredieu, *Médecine et chirurgie dans l'oeuvre d'Antonin Artaud*). Other noteworthy studies of the role of medicine and

later metaphor of the plague, surgery seems a kind of anti-medicine, unlocking sources of vitality and ways of being healthy outside the biomedical model. Artaud further avers that, whereas modern medicine collaborates with the military to produce docile mechanized bodies to send to slaughter, theatrical surgery heals war's wounds, and is a prophylactic against its recurrence.<sup>22</sup>

My chapter proceeds in two parts. First, I will consider how Artaud's *own* body — along with those of countless young French men — was forcibly remade by war and medicine. These transformations were cultivated with a mimetic, realist theatricality, emphasizing observation, identification, and imitation of 'normal' healthy male body. Second, I follow surgical metaphors and imagery in Artaud's writings — his poems, theatre theory, and two playtexts — and ask what they suggest about his theatrical project. My claim is that the surgical unlocks for Artaud a notion of theatre that makes the body bilaterally permeable and malleable, in contrast to the unilateral penetration, knowledge, and control promised by the technologies of modern war, medicine, psychiatry, and realist theatre. Rather than imitating and identifying with what they see, spectators are touched, moved, and cut up by it, the structure of their bodies ruptured so that they might regenerate in a new form.

To date, most Artaud criticism either views bodily remaking as a metaphor for something else or with a literalism that takes surgical language as a spur to actual violence. Adrian Morfee,

illness in Artaud's art include Stanton Garner's essay relating Artaud's "contagion" to contemporary (mis)understandings of germ theory. And Eleni Stecopoulos' *Visceral Poetics* gives an extended disability studies take on Artaud, foregrounding the importance of Artaud's painful body to his work, and his primary aim of alleviating this pain.

<sup>22</sup> His earliest writings after WWI contrast the "false theatre [of] the military" with a true theatre that performs a "vital surgery" (*Oeuvres* 93). During the second world war, he writes that men fight in this "false drama" because the "human anatomy [is] false" (*Oeuvres* (1091). And after its conclusion, he warns that a third world war between the United States and Russia can only be averted if we "remake [mankind's] anatomy" (*SW* 571).

in *Antonin Artaud's Writing Bodies*, takes the former stance: because Artaud's thoughts emanate from a "gut feeling," he commits "an amazingly simple conflation of the metaphoric with the literal," mistaking his thoughts for his "guts" (209). And Kimberley Jannarone's book *Artaud and his Doubles* exemplifies the latter, interpreting Artaud's "surgery" as a "desire to keep the violence of war alive" (35).<sup>23</sup> My aim is not to conflate the literal with the metaphoric, but to follow the feedback between them. As ample research has shown, the imaginative work of theatre can and does have physical effects on bodies. Artaud's intuition that theatre can perform a kind of "brain surgery" and reorganize our bodies is validated by research on neuroplasticity (Benedetto xii), and implemented through actor training techniques such as Catherine Fitzmaurice "Deconstructing & Restructuring" voicework (Fitzmaurice). As Artaud puts it in his first manifesto, our "senses" and "flesh" are always "at stake" (SW 157). Just as Zola's manifesto ushering in the realist movement takes its models from a rapidly militarizing medicine, Artaud's work — which will take the modern theatre in the opposite direction — is instigated by his encounters with war and medicine. But whereas the medical gaze and functionalist physiology persuade Zola that physiological man has a natural structure and truth that can be known from without, plastic surgery reveals to Artaud the body's *plasticity*. Theatre — on stages, in war, in psychiatric wards — does not realistically *represent* bodies, but creatively or coercively *makes* them. Our senses and flesh are at stake, and the stakes are high.

<sup>23</sup> Jannarone reads Artaud's activation of the body as a deactivation of the mind: the "physically and emotionally agitated" performers and spectators are thus "intellectually disabled" (95). From this premise, she concludes that Artaud's theatre is "inherently fascistic" (99) as it breaks the borders of "individual identities to merge into a fascist whole" (102).

## The False Theatre of the Military

In Artaud's first writings on the theatre — a series of newspaper reviews sampling the Paris theatre scene in the early 1920s — he condemns the popular fare of the Boulevard theatres as “a false theatre, easy and fake, the theatre of the bourgeoisie, the military” (Artaud, *Oeuvres* 38).<sup>24</sup> Artaud was not alone in seeing theatre as germane to militarism. During the war, famed director Firmin Gémier, dubbed “the panjandrum of melodrama,” was put in charge of developing and staging suitable plays and reviews for French soldiers in Army barracks (Brown 297).<sup>25</sup> One of Gémier's theatre troupes visited the Third Regiment, which Artaud had recently joined, in the Fall of 1916. On the whole, the French Theatre community was eager to play its part in the war effort, recognizing a special symbiotic relationship between the arts of theatre and war. Charles Dullin, a prominent actor and director who would take an interest in Artaud in the years after the war, described the war as “melodrama” come to life, and he threw himself into it with religious zeal, explaining that he had been well trained in heroism through theatre rehearsals to play his part in this “purgative struggle between good and evil” (Brown 279). The *literal* use of theatre as an instrument of war (for recruitment, morale, and civilian propaganda) helped give rise to widespread *metaphors* of war-as-theatre, by soldiers and civilians alike.

In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell argues that soldiers were led to understand the war in terms of the conventions of popular theatre, which helped impose structure and meaning on a disorienting and horrific experience and to instill faith that it would turn out

<sup>24</sup> “faux théâtre facile et faux, le théâtre des bourgeois, militaires” (Artaud, *Oeuvres* 38).

<sup>25</sup> The title of one of Gémier's first productions for the French army — *The Huns and the Others* — captures the plays' binarizing moral structure. For an account of the range of melodramatic plays and reviews produced for the troops during the war, as well as their institutional and material modes of production, see *Le Théâtre Monte au Front*, ed. Chantal Meyer-Plantureux.

well. But this close association with theatricality gave the war a kind of unreality, employing theatrical tropes to come to terms with the war: they left “real life” behind to live a “military life that must be pretense... only temporarily playing their ill-learned parts,” donning “costumes” and performing “rigid stage character-types” (191). Fussell sees this not as delusion or weakness, but self-preservation. “Seeing warfare as theater provides a psychic escape for the participant: with a sufficient sense of theater, he can perform his duties without implicating his ‘real’ self” (191-2). During periods of intense anxiety and combat, Fussell notes a “division of the psyche into something like actor, on the one hand, and spectator, on the other,” producing a sense of being “beside oneself” (192). He quotes a British Major testifying to a “feeling of unreality, as if I were acting on a stage.” This “feeling of unreality” sometimes crystallized into a firm conviction, as shown by the high number of “psychiatric casualties” in the infantry, diagnosed with a new catch-all condition of “war neurosis.” Surrealist poet André Breton, who worked in a psychiatric hospital during WWI and became Artaud’s friend and colleague in the 1920s, recalled a patient who insisted that “the pretend war was only a simulacrum, the semblance of shells could do no harm ... the dead were taken from the amphitheatres at night and distributed on the fake battlefields” (Qtd. in Mèredieu 93).<sup>26</sup>

Artaud became one of these psychiatric casualties just two months after his deployment,<sup>27</sup> and was sent to a military hospital.<sup>28</sup> Unlike Breton’s patient, Artaud does not appear to have

<sup>26</sup> “la prétendue guerre n’était qu’un simulacre, les semblants d’obus ne pouvait faire aucun mal... les morts prélevés dans les amphithéâtres étaient amenés et distribués de nuit sur les faux champs de bataille.” All translations from Mèredieu’s *Artaud dans la Guerre* are my own.

<sup>27</sup> Artaud’s biographers mostly assume that he probably saw combat, but none have found proof (Mèredieu 102).

<sup>28</sup> Artaud’s initial diagnosis of “war neurosis” attributed his malady to the war. But his diagnosis was later revised to call it a preexisting condition.

been confused about the reality of war's violence, but he does seem to have experienced the kind of alienation that Fussell describes, perceiving the conventions and clichés of popular theatre that drive, structure, and mediate perception of the war. When Artaud describes war as theatre in his later writings, he is not claiming irreality, but noting the artificiality of its roles and narratives, which produce real physical effects. In 1944, while institutionalized in Rodez, he writes that “an unnamed drama takes place over the entire globe and ... men fight without knowing why because they have never had the courage to descend to the bottom of the drama of their consciousness” (*Nouveaux écrits de Rodez*, 95).<sup>29</sup> And he claims to have devoted his life to dispelling this false drama, calling himself “a spirit who has never had any other thought than to pierce through the drama of consciousness.”<sup>30</sup>

In addition to being a “theatre,” the war was a laboratory for surgical and psychiatric medicine. As new artillery brought devastation on a previously unimaginable scale in the first “technological war,” medical and psychiatric technologies kept pace. New psychiatric treatments experimented with electric currents to treat the stress disorders that manifested through “tremor, paralysis, contractions, limping, or fixed postures,” viewing the brain and nerves as a system of wires conducting currents, which can be jumpstarted or retooled when the body malfunctions (Crocq and Crocq). Like the medical enterprise at large, psychiatric medicine was thoroughly militarized — not only serving the purpose of producing soldiers, but also adopting a martial

<sup>29</sup> “un drame sans nom a lieu par-dessus toute la terre et... les hommes se battent sans savoir pourquoi parce qu'ils n'ont jamais eu le courage de descendre au fond du drame de leur conscience.”

<sup>30</sup> “un esprit qui n'a jamais eu d'autre pensée que de percer à jour le drame de sa conscience.”

vocabulary for its own operations.<sup>31</sup> The psychiatrist René Allendy, a WWI veteran who treated Artaud in the early 1930s, wrote an essay playing on the homophony of the French words for “war” and “to cure or heal” — “guerre” and “guérir” — “with its etymology, cure implies the idea of war. It is war waged against the disease to drive it away... like a foreign enemy” (Qtd. in Mèredieu 175).<sup>32</sup> Along with torturous electricity treatments, psychiatric treatment involved military-style discipline, systematic surveillance and interrogation, and a strict protocol of isolation — designed to drill patients back into fighting shape. For the rest of his life, Artaud would use martial language describing doctors and psychiatrists, calling his treatment “the war that is being waged on me” (*Quarto* 595).<sup>33</sup>

The psychiatric treatment of “war neurosis” also involved a theatrical component, crafted with the view that it was a theatrical illness — manifesting through a histrionic acting out. Psychiatrist Jean-Athanase Sicard, who likely treated Artaud just before his deployment in WWI, calls the psycho-neurotic an actor who is “already in full possession of his role ... He has acquired through exercise a real mastery, capable of deceiving the viewer]” (Qtd. in Mèredieu

<sup>31</sup> Through metaphorical association, medicine and war each rhetorically shored up the other against charges of illegitimacy, error, and deception. Medicine adopted a military ethos to overcome feminized stigma, and militaries incorporated medical metaphors to inoculate troops and civilians against violence, by couching killing in language of curing (Cooter 6). Doctors present medicine as key to military efficiency (10). And conversely, military propaganda on both sides of the war seized on the popularity and moral high ground of medical science to describe the war in the language and imagery of medicine targeting a microbial enemy, dehumanized on racial grounds (Reid, *Medicine* 5). Old dogged suspicions of quackery, charlatanism, and incompetence were dispelled through association with the unquestionably serious enterprise of the military. And what might have seemed dubious rationales for war-making were bolstered by medical science’s claims to both civilizational superiority and humanitarianism.

<sup>32</sup> “par son étymologie, guérir implique l’idée de guerre (*war*). C’est la guerre faite à la maladie pour la chasser... comme une entité étrangère et ennemie.

<sup>33</sup> “la guerre que l’on me fait à moi”

95).<sup>34</sup> And he proposes a method of treatment through role-play, designed to bring the patient from a “simulation of fixation” to a “simulation of creation,” which the patient initially understands as playacting, but eventually, through repetition, accepts as his real world and identity.

As Tiffany Watt-Smith writes, the belief that shell-shocked men have regressed into a “compulsion to imitate” made them perfectly suited for re-education through theatre (169). Therapeutic exercises included re-enacting battles for patients to first observe as spectators and then take part in as actors (181). Like bootcamp training, the program took an outside-in approach to rebuilding character, as patients “relearn the ‘proper’ movements through copying” and coming to identify with healthy heroic masculine behavior (178). Artaud recognized the theatricality of this conversion, writing of the “elementary magical idea, taken up by modern psychoanalysis, which consists in effecting a patient’s cure by making him assume the apparent and exterior attitudes of the desired condition” (*TD* 80). An image of sanity is acted out, internalized, and identified with. Watt-Smith quotes the English physician William Carpenter saying that the soldier becomes an “automaton” or “biologized subject” controlled from without (184).

## **Body/Machines**

To be sure, war always remakes the bodies that it touches.<sup>35</sup> The body’s plasticity is exploited in military training — as troops learn to perform certain actions in response to certain

<sup>34</sup> déjà en pleine possession de son rôle... Il a acquis dans cet exercice, une véritable maîtrise, propre à tromper le spectateur.”

<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault claims that, since the mid-18th-c, militaries have been laboratories for producing “docile bodies” through technical, systematic, bureaucratic methods (Quoted in MacLeish 55).

sensory information, and these connections become deeply ingrained in neural networks. Kevin McSorley gives a first person account of the “entrainment of shared bodily rhythms and communal intensities” through “rhythmic practices of drill, marching together in time,” which fosters “muscular bonding,” and *esprit de corps* (112, 106). This synchronized intercorporeal bonding expands the limits of what the body can do, and reinforces a new bodily habitus through “mutual surveillance” and “performative regulation” (113). Bodies are remade through a theatrical feedback loop of watching, acting, and feeling. In the first technological war, however, new military and medical technologies affected the bodies of soldiers in contradictory ways. On the one hand, new medicine and surgical procedures (antiseptics, mobile x-ray units) made it possible to survive previously fatal injuries.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, hand grenades, machine gun fire, and poison gas increased the body’s vulnerability. In sum, the body was at the mercy of technologies for its deliverance or annihilation. The body’s own faculties were denied, as they were of no help in healing oneself or injuring others. As superhuman technologies took precedence, the body itself was seen as an instrumental apparatus, programmed to perform repetitive tasks, and if broken down, able to have its parts repaired.<sup>37</sup>

The wartime aesthetic and discipline of the male body carried over into civilian society after the war (Bourke, *Dismembering the Male* 16). For example, Joan Tumblety follows the burgeoning physical culture movement in France, in her book *Remaking the Male Body*.

<sup>36</sup> WWI was the first major war in which most deaths were not due to disease. See *War Surgery 1914-18*, eds. Scotland and Hayes, 39.

<sup>37</sup> The scientific rubric of “functionalist physiology” and the industrial managerial paradigm of ‘technological rationality’ gave medical and military realms a common understanding of the “body-machine” (Cooter 154; Harrison 2). The male body became a standardized unit to entrain, measure, and assess, making the body an “industrial component in industrial war” (Reid, *Medicine* 7).

Influenced by Lamarckian eugenics, the physical culturists continued and developed bodily practices, discourses, and technologies born in the war, subscribing to a mechanistic theory of the “male body as fatigue-resistant machine,” and promoting medicine, diet, and “rational exercise” (6, 52). Their publication, “*Régénération*,” advocated both literal and metaphorical bodily remaking, as calls for a revitalized French spirit appeared alongside ads for new medical procedures that promise, e.g., to increase one’s height by as much as seven inches by straightening the spine (22). Their ideas shaped policy in the Third Republic, as regulating civilian bodies became a concern of the state, measured in biannual medical exams sorting French men into those fit for military service and those not (38).<sup>38</sup> The great war had “shattered the collective nervous system” (45), broken down men’s body-machines; to prepare for the next war, one physical culture publication wrote, “man” must become the “master of his nerves (43).

Artaud’s post-WWI writings and drawings give claustrophobic descriptions of body-machines, whose “meticulous industry” gives off a “mechanical creaking,” as fixed “currents of thought,” run through “well-localized areas of their brains,” forcing them into “predetermined, circumscribed conceptual structures” (*SW* 85, 79).<sup>39</sup> And he criticizes the conventions of the popular French theatre in the same language he uses for psychotherapeutic roleplay, dismissing its surface-level imitation of “apparent and exterior attitudes” (*TD* 80). The bad actor is always aping an “image,” while the “real actor... feels and thinks directly, spontaneously, without performing” (Artaud, *SW* 184). This false “acting” in a “false theatre” produces a false body. A

<sup>38</sup> Tumbletee writes that the French looked over their shoulder anxiously at how the “male body and nation have been remade in Nazi Germany and fascist Italy” with admiration, fear, and mimetic desire (11).

<sup>39</sup> Artaud writes, for example, “Man on the earth is bored to death... He goes to bed, he sleeps, he gets up, walks around, eats, writes, swallows, breathes, shits, like a machine” (*SW* 459).

“photographic” emphasis on “character... as all of a piece and acting as a unit,” promotes a style of acting in which a superficial and monolithic image is mechanically mimicked (207).<sup>40</sup> In his first theatrical manifesto, Artaud announces his goal as a “Revolution” overthrowing the “mechanization” of consciousness, bodies, and society, which has brought “the insane externalization and proliferation of force” (162). These physical and mental habits will be broken when actors and spectators “go to the theatre the way [they go] to the surgeon” (*SW* 156-7).

When Artaud writes that bodies are “not impermeable and fixed organisms” (*Oeuvres* 399),<sup>41</sup> he knows this because he has seen it three times over. First, through military training to program reflex responses and override inhibitions, acting automatically with a body-machine. Second, through the physical and psychic injuries that made mutilated and shell-shocked bodies into broken or malfunctioning machines, performing involuntary movements, tics, and spasms.<sup>42</sup> Third, through the psychiatric treatments that bent bodies back into fighting shape. To understand the different kind of remaking Artaud wants to produce in theatre, we must understand what seemed so different about wartime plastic surgery. While most medical and psychiatric treatment aimed to restore function and efficiency to send soldiers back to the front, plastic surgery showed that bodies can be made differently. This surgery does not repair a broken-down body-machine with excision, implantation, suturing repair, or attachment of an

<sup>40</sup> Just as theatre for the troops seems to have imaginatively blended into the theatre of war, Artaud claims a similar isomorphism between theatre and life in Paris. Both the good and the bad actor does onstage “the same thing that he does in life” — the bad actor is always “acting,” while the good actor is always “living” (184).

<sup>41</sup> “des organismes imperméables et fixés”

<sup>42</sup> For footage of psychiatric casualties of WWI demonstrating symptoms of compulsively repeated gestures and twitches, then being subject to re-education through theatrical role play, see the British medical film recorded from 1917 to 1918 at Netley Hospital by Major Arthur Hurst. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21596724>

artificial prosthesis. Rather, the surgeon makes cuts, folds, and stitches to transport tissue and bone from one part of the body to another, but then he leaves the body to enact its own regeneration. As Marjorie Gehrhardt writes in her history of the “Broken Faces,” plastic surgery was “less about appearance, more about function and expressing emotion” (check quote 191). The impossible quest of imitating an *image* of perfect past wholeness is abandoned, in favor of finding new ways to move, feel, and communicate. In the following section, I explore what it means for theatre to do the same.

### **“A Wonderful Vital Surgery”**

When Artaud announced in his first theatre reviews that the “false theatre of the bourgeoisie and the military” was being challenged by an emergent “true theatre,” he found it in an unlikely place: Charles Dullin’s *Théâtre de l’Atelier*. Dullin had been one of the war’s most prominent and enthusiastic proponents in the theatre world, volunteering in 1914 for what he imagined as a real-life melodrama. Theatre historian Frederick Brown writes of Dullin, “As theatre had ‘called’ him, so did war, now that melodrama had spilled out of *théâtres de quartier* and become a national scenario” (Brown 270). And at first, the war seemed to meet his expectations, putting him in touch with a kind of profundity and complete experience he could only mimic onstage. He wrote in his letters home: “The war has above all stripped me of the artificiality that, willy-nilly, encumbered my spirit;” it “speaks in us through senses we know nothing of,” and produces “beautiful movements dictated by instinct... spontaneous gestures that lift men well above his condition and his state” (274-5). Dullin soon learned, however, that industrial warfare had made melodramatic heroism an “obsolete virtue” — there was little connection between the “beautiful movements” of his spirit and the material conditions of his

body (282). Like Artaud, Dullin was sent to a psychiatric hospital, treated for “war neurosis,” and discharged. But unlike Artaud, it appears that Dullin’s “madness” was feigned; while being evaluated at the hospital, he wrote to an actor friend, “I’m playing daft” (278). After spending some time in the United States, he returned to Paris and founded the Théâtre de l’Atelier, which Artaud, in his early rapt reviews, described as a theatrical “research laboratory” (*Oeuvres* 35).<sup>43</sup> Dullin went to war looking for what he couldn’t find in melodramatic theatre; he didn’t find it, and returned looking instead for new forms of theatre.

Describing the differences between the “two theatres,” Artaud uses fairly vague language of surfaces and depths. Whereas the false theatre substitutes images and imitation for life, in Dullin’s company, “The intonation is found within, driven to the exterior by an ardent impulsive feeling, and not obtained by imitation. ... The Atelier claims to invent nothing .... To feel, to live, to really think, such must be the goal of the real actor ... to exteriorize this [deep], real, and personal sensibility” (*Oeuvres* 38-9).<sup>44</sup> This “exteriorization” does not appear to be a direct revelation of psychic interiority, but rather a dynamic back and forth between images, movements, and visceral intensities. Artaud writes of the acting in a production directed by Aurelien-Maire Lugné-Poe, “a kind of voice... seems to snarl from a dark place” in the body interior and then erupts in “a succession of laughs followed by a cascade of expressions that travelled from the head to the feet” and back to the gut (Qtd. in Shafer 37). The spectators “participate” in the performance — not in the sense of physically interacting with performers, but sharing in the same visceral process: “The audience must have the feeling that they could,

<sup>43</sup> “laboratoire de recherches”

<sup>44</sup> “L’intonation est trouvée par le dedans, poussée au dehors par l’impulsion ardente du sentiment, et non obtenue par imitation. ... L’Atelier prétend rien inventer.... Sentir, vivre, penser réellement, tel doit être le but du véritable acteur... extérioriser cette [profonde] sensibilité réelle et personnelle.”

without a very skillful operation, do what the actors do” (*Oeuvres* 92).<sup>45</sup> Artaud’s highest praise went to a production of Roger Vitrac’s *Les Mystères de l’Amour*, which performed “a wonderful vital surgery... repartitioning the spirit... by making the [body’s] substance vibrate... [to effect the] shift of feelings, sensations, acts” (*Oeuvres* 93).<sup>46</sup> Theatrical “surgery” seems to cut pathways through the body and the spirit to reorganize their parts, leaving them more vital and alive. As Artaud started planning his own theatre company, he decided that Vitrac’s play would be his first production, and he aimed to emulate its effects in *all* his productions.<sup>47</sup>

Artaud does not elaborate here on what theatrical surgery entails. But his contemporary poems, drawings, and playscripts repeatedly take body-machines through an operation of cutting up, blowing up, or rearranging its parts, to recover a sense of bodily and mental wholeness and vitality. The first stanza of “Description of a Physical State” (1925) finds Artaud in an agonizing condition of mental and physical agitation and fragmentation. He complains of the compartmentalized structure of his body, which is meant to give order to world and self, but instead straightjackets them with the “instantaneous classification of things in the cells of the mind” (65). After a wide stanza break, Artaud abruptly changes focus and tone to evoke an image of, “A slender belly. A belly of fine powder, as in a picture. At the foot of the belly, an exploded grenade” (65). We appear to be looking at a battlefield scene, at an eviscerated corpse. As Artaud moves over the scene, poetically illustrating the organs, veins, and blood of the opened body cavity, his earlier anxiety is gone and he seems strangely serene. Whereas before he

<sup>45</sup> “Le public doit avoir la sensation qu’il pourrait sans opération très savante faire ce que les acteurs font.”

<sup>46</sup> “une merveilleuse chirurgie vitale... [affectant] la répartition de l’esprit... en fai[re] vibrer la substance [du corps]... [pour effectuer le] décalage des sentiments, des sensations, des actes.”

<sup>47</sup> As the theatregoers go to the theatre the way they go “to the surgeon” (*SW* 156-7).

complained of the “disembodiment of reality,” now as he contemplates the wounded body, he notices that it is “held together with columns and with a kind of architect’s watercolor wash which connects the belly with reality” (66). The color and structure of the body also lends shape and substance to Artaud’s previously fragmented mind. “The mind is firm. It has a foothold in the world. The grenade, the belly, the breasts, are like testimonial proofs of reality.” As he lingers on the image, he sees in it more than blood and guts. “The belly evokes surgery and the Morgue, the construction yard, the public square, and the operating table” (SW 67). A surgical view of the body’s anatomy slips into social, economic, and political structures and spaces, before returning to the “operating table.” As he continues to gaze into the body-interior, Artaud perceives a landscape as well: “There is a compartment for a mountain. The sky’s foam surrounds the mountain.” And Artaud, now calling this image a “painting,” snugly nestles himself into it:

In it I feel my thought unfold as in an ideal, absolute space, but a space whose form could be brought into reality. ... And each of my fibers uncurls and finds its place in fixed compartments. I return to it as my source; in it I sense the place and arrangement of my mind. (67)

Whereas the stratified classificatory compartments of Artaud’s body deform and straightjacket his thought and experience, when he gazes into *another* body, he finds his true “place and arrangement,” in compartments that are “fixed,” but do not box him in. He reaches towards their mountains and sky as towards “the horizon of something that constantly recedes” (67). Artaud escapes his own excruciating anatomy by projecting himself into the viscera of another, without quite landing there.

In *The Nerve Meter*, written the same year, Artaud again begins with complaints of the false perception of malfunctioning bodies and minds, evoking the “meticulous industry” and “mechanical creaking” of fixed “currents of thought” (85, 79). He announces, “I have only one occupation left: to remake myself” (84). In the first poem, Artaud healed his fragments and remade his self by imaginatively gazing and reaching into the constantly receding viscera of the other, which were blown open and rearranged to take on new properties. This time, addressing an unknown interlocutor, Artaud focuses on his own felt transformation. He describes his true thought, body, and world as potentialities trapped within current forms, and he imagines them being released and developed:

I really felt that you were breaking up the atmosphere around me, that you were clearing the way to allow me to advance, to provide room for an impossible space for that in me which was as yet only potential, for a whole virtual germination which must be sucked into life by the space that offered itself. (79)

Being in relation with this other person clears a space between them by parting the oppressive atmosphere, while simultaneously opening up a space inside Artaud. And it seems that the effect is reciprocal: Artaud and his addressee “create within ourselves spaces for life, spaces which did not exist and which did not seem to belong in actual space.” As when Artaud “unfurled” into the wounded soldier’s body, nesting into its internal landscape which paradoxically constantly recedes, Artaud approaches the other without ever reaching and holding them. The magnetic “suck” does not draw them together in an embrace, but pulls them into an “impossible space” in which Artaud’s pent-up possibilities can advance. Later in the poem, Artaud prophesies his own bodily transformation in a “geometry without space” (86). He begins in the possessive first person singular — “all my hairs, all my mental veins... joints... mental eyes” — then switches

to the plural, “all minds run dry, all tongues shrivel up, human faces will flatten and deflate as if sucked in by hot-air vents,” suggesting that *all* bodies around his are simultaneously transformed. What remains of Artaud is a “lubricating membrane [that] float[s] in the air” (87). This floating membrane could be described as a “body without organs:” the skin that used to seal off the body from the outer world has lost the organs it once contained, and turned itself inside-out so that its wet and raw underside faces the world, stretching, waving, and folding across space, in a gelatinous dance.

As Artaud begins work for his Theatre of Cruelty, the surgery imagined in his early poems and manifesto develops into theories of acting and spectatorship. Defending the term “cruelty” against the protestations of friends who found it too violent and off-putting, Artaud explains, “it is not the cruelty *we* can exercise upon each other by hacking at each other’s bodies, carving up our personal anatomies,” but rather the “cruelty which things can exercise on *us*” (Artaud, *TD* 79; italics added). By implication, it is the things of the theatre that carve up *our* anatomies. Eleni Stecopoulos points out that the Greek word for cruelty, *asplachnía* — which Artaud would have known well, having grown up speaking Greek with his mother’s family — translates literally to “being-without-innards” (x). So the idiom of “cruelty” is consistent with Artaud’s earlier and later formulations of what his theatre should do: remake our bodies, perhaps without organs.

In the essays collected and published in *The Theatre and Its Double* (1936), energy passes between performers and spectators, penetrating the body’s borders and slicing through muscle and internal organs to reconstellate bodies in a new form. Artaud writes that “[a] direct communication will be re-established... between the actor and the spectator,” that travels “through the skin” by means of gestures and sounds that are “unbearably piercing” and that

“fascinate and ensnare the organs” (96, 99, 95, 91). As actor and spectator take each other in through their eyes and ears, this sensory information sets off muscular contractions and visceral sensations in the gut, heart, and lungs. One sensory level transmutes into another: we face the world with our “undersides,” our bodies turned inside-out, as we are mutually “remade” (124). The “actor [is] entirely penetrated by feelings,” absorbed from his outer world “by means of breath,” and traveling through the “blood-route by which he penetrates into all the other [affective states] each time his organs in full power awaken from their sleep” (*TD* 24, 137).

Surgical metaphors slice across performing and spectating bodies. A “vitality,” Artaud writes, cuts “inside myself” with a “knife,” following “secret pathways of the mind in the flesh” down to the “marrow” (169, 109, 110). This is often described as a kind of synesthesia, as the sensation registered by one organ triggers another with which it is not normally associated. Artaud writes that in his theatre, “all the senses interpenetrate, as if through strange channels hollowed out in the mind,” and morph into one another, “join[ing] sight to sound, intellect to sensibility,” music to light, words to movements (*TD* 57, 55). Whereas Artaud’s military training and psychiatric treatment patterned certain reflexes and meanings into the body, Artaud’s theatre ruptures these connections and cuts new pathways between images, movements, and intensities, as gestures, gazes, and gasps turn “feelings into forms and forms to feeling” (37). Instead of imitating images of one another, bodies open to receive each other, and their own internal structure is altered as they pass through.

Artaud’s fantastical visions and outrageous metaphors can give the impression that his is an “impossible theatre.”<sup>48</sup> His fundamental claim however — that theatre can literally and

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., Finter, Helga, and Matthew Griffin. "Antonin Artaud and the Impossible Theatre: The Legacy of the Theatre of Cruelty."

physically change bodies and mind — has been validated by research in the cognitive sciences. In his recent book, *Kinesthetic Spectatorship*, Stanton Garner brings cognitivist and phenomenological perspectives to bear on the exchanges between performer and spectators. Taking up popular understandings of mirror neurons, Garner argues that a prevailing “mechanistic orientation” gives a false sense of objectivity and “automaticity” to this process, effacing subjective and cultural factors (229-30). This mimics and reinforces the epistemological aporias of realist theatre. We mistake our own feelings for objective knowledge of the others with whom we identify. And for the figures with whom we *disidentify*, we enjoy a “counter-empathy”: pleasure in their pain (155). This is the dynamic exploited in war, creating the intense group bonding moving soldiers to willingly die for their friends, and the dehumanization needed to kill their enemies.<sup>49</sup> Drawing on the work of Emanuel Levinas, Garner argues that “remov[ing] the Other’s alterity,” — by either incorporating them as an extension of the self, or excluding them as absolutely different — makes it possible to kill (234). To escape these binaries, Garner looks to “physically integrated” theatre work, made by ensembles of disabled and non-disabled performers that solicits empathic engagement while foregrounding bodily and experiential difference. Garner describes a partial incorporation through which something of the other gets into one’s body without creating a totalized identity. Unable to mimetically act out these movements and identify with these images, the spectator’s own “body schema and body image [are] disrupted,” in a “crisis of resonance” that can be deeply “visceral [and] uncomfortable” (99). This gives rise to a “dialectic of self and otherness,” both between and within bodies. Confronting both the sameness and the difference in others, we

<sup>49</sup> See Kevin McDonald’s “Grammars of Violence, Modes of Embodiment, and Frontiers of the Subject” in *War and the Body*.

become conscious of the otherness internal to ourselves. We experience our own bodies not as fixed forms, but as continually changing, belying any image we might hold. In contrast to realist drama and psychology, which per Artaud “works relentlessly to reduce the unknown to the known” (Artaud, *TD* 42), this opens us to the unknown and impermanent within our own bodies and those before us. As Garner writes, it makes performing and spectating a “form of exploratory touch, reaching for the other” without grasping them (247). And this touch goes deeper than the skin. Like Artaud’s theatrical surgery, the encounter with the other cuts across our borders and disrupts internal structures, leaving us to regenerate. We apprehend something of the other’s embodied experience not by internally mimicking it, but through and internal *resonance* that shifts the shape and feel of our own bodies — imaginatively, proprioceptively, viscerally.

With these theories in mind, I want to turn to Artaud’s first and last plays as case studies of bodily remaking in practice. *The Spurt of Blood* (written in 1925 for the Théâtre Alfred Jarry but never performed), opens with a Young Man and a Girl either offstage, in the dark, or otherwise unable to see each other, as they exchange vows of love. “I love you, I am tall, I am clear, I am full, I am dense,” the Young Man says, then shifts to the plural, “We are intense” (*SW* 73). The qualities of their bodies are unqualified: there is no limit or degree to their tallness, fullness, and clarity. They are pure *intensity*, an animating force that simply is and lives, without taking a certain shape. But as the Girl moves into the Young Man’s line of sight, they lose their undifferentiated wholeness, and are ambushed by images of anatomies made up of parts and systems. A sudden hurricane forces them apart, and “*a series of legs of living flesh fall [down between them], together with feet, hands, heads of hair, masks, colonnades, porticoes, temples*” (73). The lovers flee the stage as it is taken over by severed body parts. When the Young Man reenters, he says,

I saw, I knew, I understood. Here are the main square, the priest, the shoemaker, the vegetable market, the threshold of the church, the lantern of the brothel, the scales of justice. I can't stand it anymore! (74)

Seeing leads to knowing, which leads to understanding. And understanding means finding an order and differentiated parts in what was previously felt as a single intense body. So bodies are now structured by anatomies, and the world is structured by institutions that divide humanity into recognized roles, which parade across the stage on cue – “*A Priest, a Shoemaker, a Beadle, a Bawd, a Judge, a fruit and vegetable Peddler enter.*” The young Man has lost his lover, and when the Priest asks him, “to what part of her body did you most often allude,” he replies, “To God” (75). He persists in seeing her body as divinity and intensity – not physiology – but the Priest tells him such bodies no longer exist. “But that’s out of date... we must be content with the little obscenities of man in the confessional. And that’s it, that’s life” (75). Humans must now go to confession to know themselves, anatomizing their lives and opening themselves up for scrutiny and judgment. God is no longer imminent but positioned apart to watch, regulate, and judge with a perspectival anatomizing gaze, making our bodies profane objects to be controlled unilaterally by an invisible authority. The enormous hand of God comes down and seizes the Bawd, as a Gigantic Voice says, “Bitch, look at your body!” (75). And the Bawd’s “*body appears absolutely naked and hideous under her blouse and skirt, which become like glass*” — seen, known, and controlled, like a specimen on a slide.

God brings the same gaze as doctors, psychiatrists, and drill sergeants — making the body a fixed and measurable form, controlled from without. And as in Artaud’s experience in WWI, the body’s anatomization is concomitant with its dismemberment — announced with a blast of severed legs, feet, and hands. But the bodies onstage do not stay this way. The Bawd

rebels against God, biting his hand and setting off a *second* remaking, that ruptures these intelligible forms. The Girl drops dead and becomes “*flat as a pancake,*” and the Wet Nurse loses her breasts. Then, “*an enormous number of scorpions emerge from under the Wet Nurse’s skirts and begin to swarm in her vagina, which swells and splits, becomes vitreous, and flashes like the sun*” (76). Bodies split, morph, expand, and erupt — neither crystallizing into a new form nor dissolving to become formless, but left in a perpetual process of cutting up and regenerating. An analogous transformation seems intended for spectators. The Young Man and the Bawd look upon the opened bodies as audience surrogates, until they can take no more, and they turn and “flee like victims of brain surgery” (76). Artaud hopes that the theatre audience (who “go to the theater the way [they go] to the surgeon”) will stay seated for the operation.

With the start of WWII, Artaud began again to explicitly connect mechanical embodiment to the event and institution of war. “L’homme [Mankind]” fights wars, he declares, “Parce qu’au-dedans son anatomie lui fait la guerre [Because inside, his anatomy wages war]” (Artaud, *OC XXII* 131). The real “malades mentaux sont les fous au pouvoir / qui ont maintenu l’actuelle anatomie humaine qui ne cesse de perdre jambes et bras / au milieu de toutes les guerres / que depuis toujours / on lui fera / parce qu’elle est fausse [mentally ill are the madmen in power / who have maintained the current human anatomy that keeps losing legs and arms / in the middle of all the wars / that since forever / we have waged against it / because it is false]” (*Oeuvres* 1090-1). Our anatomies are maintained so that they can be perennially cut to pieces; and the reason we cut each other to pieces is that our anatomies are badly made. Artaud’s political pronouncements reflect his personal experience of the war, institutionalized and undergoing electroshock treatments in a Rodez asylum that he called a “concentration camp” (Mèredieu 248). Describing a struggle with his doctors over the terms of his anatomy, Artaud

writes,

Those who attack me  
are outside,  
and it's in the inside that they agitate  
it's in the inside of my body that they cut the wire of  
the nervous antenna  
with which I must berate their bodies (*Oeuvres* 1378)<sup>50</sup>

Artaud's external attackers try to rewire his nervous system to make him a mechanical instrument that they can control, and Artaud is determined to use this very system to fight them off. As Artaud and his doctors fight over the infrastructure of his nerves, at stake are the routes that feelings can take in traveling through the body. Bodies are mechanized not by replacing the organs with metal parts, but rerouting the organ systems to function as productive mechanical circuits. In 1947, looking back at the devastation of WWII, he condemned the "maintainers of the profit system,/ of social and middle class institutions," which are "[b]uilt upon the digestive mutilations of a body torn apart by ten thousand wars" (518). And looking forward to the coming "apocalyptic war... between America and Russia," he writes that he will not take a side in this conflict, but instead fight against "the maintainers of a digestive humanity," responsible for thrusting the world into perpetual war.

Artaud begins his final work, a radio play called *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*

50 ceux qui m'attaquent  
sont dehors,  
et c'est dans le dedans qu'ils s'agitent  
c'est dans le dedans de mon corps qu'ils coupent le fil de  
l'antenne nerveuse  
par où je dois tancer leur corps

(1947), with a warning of the coming American-Soviet war, and the hybridization of human and mechanical anatomies. He alleges that American public schools have started collecting the sperm of male students, and whisking it away to factory-laboratories, “to make and manufacture soldiers/ with a view to all the planetary wars which might later take place” (555). Artaud envisions medical, educational, industrial, and military institutions working in concert to produce and destroy bodies — their own structures mirroring the mechanical anatomy of the bodies they pass between them. “For it’s war, isn’t it, that the Americans have been preparing for,” Artaud continues, “In order to defend this senseless manufacture from all competition... one must have soldiers, armies, airplanes, battleships,/ hence this sperm” (SW 556). His tirade against the incipient American military-industrial complex imagines both humans becoming machines, and humans replaced by machines. “although I have seen many Americans at war / they always had huge armies of tanks, airplanes, battleships / that served as their shield. / I have seen machines fighting a lot / but only infinitely far / behind / them have I seen the men who directed them” (SW 557).

After Artaud’s opening imprecation against the American military-industrial complex, the voice of his friend Roger Blin comes on to complain of being straightjacketed and “suffocated” by a false body (567). As in *The Spurt of Blood*, the body’s anatomy makes it surveyable and controllable by a God who “squeeze[s]/ the spleen,/ the tongue,/ the anus,/ or the glans,” setting the mechanically connected organs and appendages in motion like a wind-up toy (561). The true body is anticipated in his desire to escape this anatomy, and is projected into a virtual space: “but there is a thing / which is something, / only one thing / which is something, / and which I feel / because it wants / TO GET OUT” (566). It does not yet have a shape — it is only an inchoate demand for a space in which it can unfurl, and “dilate the body of my internal

night, / the internal nothingness of my self / ... [in an] explosive affirmation / that there is / something / to make room for: / my body” (565). This recalls the description of bodily transformation in Artaud’s earliest works, in which a dormant “potential” within Artaud yearns to burst forth and virtually “germinate” in an “impossible space,” but must wait for someone to first clear the atmosphere around him and draw a path for his emergence. Towards the end of the radio play, the mode of bodily remaking shifts from internal eruption and external suction to a surgical laceration. Artaud’s voice returns to announce that, because mankind is badly constructed, he must be placed “on the autopsy table to remake his anatomy” (SW 570). Artaud’s description of this new anatomy, over the last lines of the broadcast, merits quoting in full:

When you will have made him a body without organs,  
then you will have delivered him from his automatic reactions and  
restored him to his true freedom.

Then you will teach him again to dance wrong side out  
as in the frenzy of dance halls  
and this wrong side out will be his real place. (SW 571)

To visualize this body emptied of its organs and then turned the “wrong side out,” we must imagine the wet and raw underside of the skin facing outward, an image that recalls the final lines of *The Nerve Meter*, in which the body is remade as a vitreous “lubricating membrane... [that] float[s] in the air” (86-7). This earlier iteration of the remade body unfurled in “a geometry without space (87); now Artaud calls the condition of being “the wrong side out” the body’s “real place”: the body’s viscera face the world, taking over for the external senses, as it sways, undulates, and shimmies. And as this body finds itself in a frenzied “dance hall,” its movements respond to those of other bodies. Julian Henriques describes the “transmission of affect” in

dancehalls as an “energetic patterning of frequencies” that travel across mediums (58), “breach[ing our] epidermal envelope” to “connect musical beats with heartbeats”(67, 64). Rhythms move from the music into the body interior, spread internally, and are danced out across other adjacent bodies, so that bodies get inside one another.

### **Viscerality and Vibration**

This sense of being yoked at the gut with a partner, of being penetrated by sounds and sights that grip and enliven one’s internal organs, is both familiar to feel and elusive to define. Dennis Waskul and Phillip Vannini have offered a preliminary definition of “affective dramas,” in which there is a “mutual, loop-like transmission” running between performer and spectator, creating a “web of mutual contagions... Your stomach comes to feel the pull... you feel the push of each other’s body” (206). More detailed theorizations of this visceral experience have come from the fields of phenomenology and affect theory. In his 1990 book *The Absent Body*, Drew Leder coins the term “viscerality” to describe the “visceral sensations [that] grip me from within,” exerting a force that “cannot be properly said to belong to the subject; it is a power that traverses, granting me life in ways I have never fully willed nor comprehended” (40, 65). Viscerality precedes and founds the subject, and periodically threatens to dissolve it. On the one hand, it is experienced as “vitality” or “life itself,” emanating from our “vital center” (45). But it is also a disruption of the smooth surfaces of life and a harbinger of death. We are usually unaware of the forces, processes, and organs that make us live when they are operating well; it is in periods of break down and insurgency that they rear up and make themselves known. Brian Massumi uses the term “viscerality” in the same vein, to describe the sensation of a possessing force that simultaneously emanates from beyond the body and self and rises from deep within.

Viscerality “jolts the flesh [into] an inability to act or reflect, a spasmodic passivity, so taut a receptivity that the body is paralyzed until it is jolted back into action-reaction by recognition” (61).

In an article on audience experiences of anatomy theatres from the early modern period to the current day, Ian Maxwell describes viscerality’s intercorporeal dimension as “a certain *reaching out* (literal, rather than figurative), enacted between the stuff of my own corporeality and that of the cadavers being revealed to me, that exceeds the epistemological sureties — indeed, the epistemological hegemony — of vision and sight” (61). Instead of holding the anatomized body apart from us as an object of knowledge, we experience it “approaching from within” in our analogous organs (63). As in Artaud’s early poem, when he gazed upon the disemboweled soldier and felt his body and mind unfurl and cohere in reaching towards it, there is a push and pull between the viewer’s viscera and the external object of perception, and also a simultaneous awakening and expansion of our “vital center” — the affective force that draws us out also approaches and grows “from within.”

This is experienced as a kind of synesthesia, as the sensation registered by one sense modality triggers another with which it is not normally associated. Artaud writes that in his theatre, “all the senses interpenetrate, as if through strange channels hollowed out in the mind,” and morph into one another (*TD* 57). “[I]nterpenetrations join sight to sound, intellect to sensibility,” music to light, words to movements (55, 95). This does not dissolve the body into an undifferentiated “intensity,” nor does it erase the boundaries between body and outside world. But it does create “channels” between them, and forge “interconnections in relation to all organs and on all levels,” as “reverberations [are felt] throughout the whole sensibility, in every nerve” (90, 80). In his early poem, “Description of a Physical State,” Artaud complained of being

unable to feel and think because sensory information was instantaneously classified in compartmentalized “cells.” But in this imagined theatre, sensations interconnect “all organs and... all levels” (90).<sup>51</sup> The “language [of the theatre] will pass from one sense organ to another, establishing analogies and unforeseen associations... call[ing] into question established relationships between objects” (Artaud, *SW* 301).

As affects travel across bodies in Artaud’s theatre, and “reverberate” differently in each organ, the instrument that cuts and carries them across space, skin, and flesh is a pulsing “vibration.” Affects move through “the muscles of our whole body, vibrating by areas,” leaving the “muscles quivering with affectivity [and] unleashing this affectivity in full force” (138-9). Leaping from muscles to organs to nerves, “they set up vibrations not on a single level, but on every level of the mind at once” (72). And as our entire body is worked over with a vibratory quality, a series of “pulsations of life,” our anatomy is remade: “our nervous system after a certain period responds to the vibrations... and is eventually somehow modified by them in a lasting way” (116, 26-7). The use of vibrations to remake bodies was something Artaud noticed in his early theatre reviews: praising Roger Vitrac’s play for performing a “vital surgery” that “repartitioned” the body and spirit, Artaud explains that this is achieved “by making the substance vibrate” (Artaud, *Oeuvres* 93).<sup>52</sup> As images, intensities, and movements slice through our bodies like a “knife,” the cutting edge is a vibration that carries them across modalities, slicing from skin to muscles to internal organs, and leaving our anatomies in a different form.

In a letter penned to the radio station director just weeks before Artaud’s death, he describes the intended effects of his radio play, which was cancelled the day before it was slated

<sup>51</sup> And the exteroceptive formation of mental images involves a proprioceptive process: “*the effort of thinking... has a physical effect on my whole musculature*” (Artaud, *SW* 288).

<sup>52</sup> “en faire vibrer la substance”

for broadcast:

I wanted a fresh work, one that would make contact with certain organic points of  
life,  
a work  
in which one feels one's whole nervous system  
illuminated as if by a miner's cap-lamp  
with vibrations,  
consonances  
which invite

man  
TO EMERGE  
**WITH**  
his body (SW 579)

Vibrations penetrate the listener's body from without, not to imprint it with a new form, but to draw it out into the light and give it space to unfurl: tickling, coaxing, and inviting the body "to emerge." Yet in this vibratory emergence of separate bodies, there is a kind of unity and mass mobilization. Artaud ends his letter calling for a new "rhythmic order of things" (576), and he makes clear what he believes to be at stake: "American capitalism like Russian communism are both leading us to war / so with voices, drums, and xylophonics I am alerting separate individualities so that they may form a body" (580).

### **"I shit on the dialectic"**

In the last weeks of his life, Artaud decided that the cancelled broadcast of *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* would not have worked anyway, because of its mechanical mediation. "I am through with Radio," Artaud wrote to a friend, vowing to "devote myself / exclusively / to the theater," and placing his hope in "those who are going to follow me and who are still not completely embodied" (Artaud SW, 584-5). When Artaud writes about bodily remaking, he is describing an experience that he has felt to varying degrees, through a certain theatricality. He does not, however, prescribe a repeatable formula for this theatrical surgery. Indeed, the

experience seems to require renouncing any attempt to explain, systematize, or predict. In this last section, what I offer is not a set of procedural steps, but observations about the conditions, triggering factors, and unfolding dynamics of surgical affects, based on how Artaud tried to produce them, and how he felt them thrust upon him.

Critics who have taken Artaud's call for bodily remaking literally have seen *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*, with its haunting prophecy of a "body without organs," as the place where it must occur. Stephen Barber calls Artaud's radio play "the most intensive realization of his plan to anatomize and recast the entire conception of the human body," through "spat out" sounds that inflict a "set of scars" on the listener (*The Screaming Body* 6; *Blows and Bombs* 154). In the same vein, Mihai Lucaciu writes that Artaud's "last recordings [are] seeking the method by which to operate on the body in order to change one abject matter into another higher kind of matter," by "perforating" the skin and turning it "inside out" (71-2). And Allen S. Weiss writes that with the "phantasmal prosthesis" of radio, "the body can be recreated through the 'surgery' of montage" (207). How this works, exactly, is unclear. Barber writes that the recorded sound "emerges" from Artaud's body, "visualizes the body," and then "projects" this body onto the listener — understanding the "body without organs" as the body that Artaud already has and transmits to his audience (*SB* 100). The body is "transmitted immediately and physically... bypass[ing] the mental processes" (102). This mimetic logic, that imagines Artaud as already having the correct body and persuading us to identify with and imitate it, is presumed by many of Artaud's critics. Ros Murray gives a more performative reading of the "body-without-organs," considering how Artaud's body might be remade rather than represented through performance. "[O]ne cannot help but think that breaking with all conventional-sounding vocal gestures is a way of reshaping the vocal chords and organs of speech in order to forcibly

reconstruct this badly designed anatomy; the voice on the recording becomes an attempt at creating this body without organs” (157). But Murray persists in understanding the transaction between performer and audience as “transmitting” or “conveying” something from the former to the latter. Artaud remakes *his* body, and serves it up to us to adopt as our own. By this logic, Artaud does not actually need theatre and an audience in order to remake his body — he could do it by himself in a recording studio, regardless of whether or not anyone ever listened to the tape.

I suggest that Artaud’s procedure for bodily remaking is not transactional, but dialectical — albeit an unusual kind of dialectic. While Artaud more or less endorsed a Marxist critique of capitalist exploitation, he also critiqued the Communist Party for trying to combat capitalism on its own materialist, mechanized, and militarized terms — thus reproducing the “capitalism of consciousness,” which he defines as “feel[ing] oneself live as an [autonomous] individual,” rather than opening oneself to the circulation of affects that make and unmake us (Artaud, *SW* 369).<sup>53</sup> He writes that “dialectical materialism is an invention of European consciousness,” which, like capitalism and militarism, deforms consciousness by investing in static representational “images” which it upholds with force (357). “In order to think, we have

<sup>53</sup> In the interwar years, Artaud denounced capitalism as a continuation of war by other means: “the patriotism of the artisan disgusts me just as much as that of the banker,” as it serves to uphold “a culture that is everywhere based on nothing but force and guns” (*SW* 345). But neither did he sympathize with the nationalists’ and capitalists’ declared enemy. He called Marxism “the last rotten fruit of Western mentality. A serious outrage visited on the mind’s indiscernibility” (Qtd. in Shafer 69). The Communist Party’s rigid materialism corrupted the collective consciousness it tried to form, by adopting the militarist and mechanized ontology of the ruling class — which imposes a stratified map onto society, bodies and selves to render them as hard units organized in relations of antagonism or affinity. As he calls for his own Revolution of “consciousness,” he explicitly warns that the “lazy man’s revolution” of the Communists, which “persists in relying on mechanization as a means of improving the lot of workers,” will end by reproducing the system it overthrows (162).

images,” Artaud explains, “[in] order to consider our consciousness, we are obliged to divide it” (357). But Marxism, by taking images of material and economic conditions for a totalized reality, shows us only “fragmentary life” rather than the “real movement of history” and life itself. He thus concludes that all of the “French, whether identifying with the Right or the Left, are all idiots and capitalists”; and he makes his own position clear, taking a “shit on the dialectic” (Qtd. in Shafer 150). Artaud claims, however, that hidden behind the false plot of dialectical materialism, “there is a human dialectic which does not accord with the facts” (Artaud *SW* 157).<sup>54</sup> He describes this “human dialectic” as a back-and-forth movement of thought and feeling across sensory levels: “Like life, like nature, thought goes from the inside out before going from the outside in” (362). He calls the intense internal state in which the movement of thought is initiated the “void,” and the external images that it crystallizes as the “plenum,” before dissolving back into the churning void. For “thought,” “nature,” and “life” to survive, they must keep moving, carrying it from visceral intensity through muscular movements to external images — and back. “To arrest thought from the outside and to study it with regard to what it can do is to misunderstand the internal and dynamic nature of thought” (362).

This dialectic between inside and outside, intensity and image, structures Artaud’s most theorized theatrical gesture: the scream. He writes, “Pour lancer ce cri je me vide. / Non pas d’air, mais de la puissance même du bruit. Je dresse devant moi mon corps d’homme. Et ayant jeté sur lui ‘l’oeil’ d’une mensuration horrible, place par place je le force à rentrer en moi. [To launch this cry I empty myself. / Not of air, but of the very power of noise. I stand my human body before me. And having cast on him the ‘eye’ of a horrible measurement, piece by piece I

<sup>54</sup> Artaud acted in Brecht’s *Three Penny Opera* in 1931, but makes no reference to Brecht’s “dialectical theatre” in his writings about the errors of Marxist dialectical thinking.

force him to return into me] (Qtd. in Mèredieu 153). Artaud's body explodes out of him as *sound*, leaving him "empty," and stands before him as an image, which is then apprehended ("measured") and taken back in through his eyes as *sight*. Like his prescriptions for the circulation of "feelings" through breath in "An Affective Athleticism," the actor lives in a synesthetic movement between sensory levels: a visceral intensity is thrust outward through muscular exertions to form gestural images, which are then sucked back into the visceral brew. Screaming was Artaud's chief tactic for piercing the veneer of bad theatre and the armor of social roleplaying — both onstage and in life. He had a habit of breaking into screams without warning in the middle of a dinner party, to fracture the smooth surface of its Goffmanesque social performances (Scheer in Cull 48). And he delivered three famous lectures that culminated in fits of screaming, meant to enact the ideas he had described. In a 1932 lecture at the Sorbonne, entitled "The Theatre and the Plague," (which appears similar in substance to his essay of the same title), Artaud suddenly interrupted his reading to enact the symptoms of the plague. One attendee describes, "He forgot about his conference, his theatre, his ideas... He was in agony. He was screaming" (Qtd. in Shafer 117). And his final public lecture, delivered in January of 1947 at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, again featured the delivery of text broken up by "volcanic eruption[s] of the bile, emotions and pain at the core of his being" (198). In a letter written to André Breton after the lecture, Artaud makes clear what he hoped to accomplish. "I appeared on a stage, *once again*, for the LAST TIME, at the Vieux-Colombier theatre, but with the visible intention of exploding its frame work, exploding its framework from the inside... [by] wail[ing] and yell[ing] fury to the point of vomiting [my] intestines" (Qtd. in Barber, *Blows and Bombs* 138-9). This repeated reference to the "framework" of the theatre, which Artaud infiltrates and

interrupts with another form of theatre, suggests another way in which Artaud's surgical affect is dialectical.

Each time that Artaud explicitly shows, projects, or enacts a "bodily remaking," he first thematizes the false body-machine and intensifies it to the point of suffocation, distortion, and incoherence. His early poems begin with complaints of a misfiring mechanized body and mind; the characters of *A Spurt of Blood* are first anatomized by a judgmental god before their bodies rebelliously deflate and erupt; and the sketches he drew while institutionalized at Rodez, which he called "anatomies in action," display bound-up and mechanized anatomies as the "before" picture to an explosive operation.<sup>55</sup> The recording of *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* also has a calculated dialectical dramaturgical structure. In rehearsals, Artaud called the sections of dialogue "the monkey's cage," insisting that they be pronounced in a distorted fashion to show how manners of speech, thought, relation, and embodiment perceived as natural are in fact constrictive and oppressive, blocking true experience and communication (Barber, *Blows and Bombs* 152). Interjected sound effects and screams then break out of the cage — suddenly leaving the flat, lifeless, and impenetrable screen-world conjured by the dialogue and thrusting outwards with perpendicular lines of force, rushing towards the listener.

The clearest example of this dialectic in Artaud's creative work can be found in a piece that he did not author. The 1931 film *Croix de Bois* tells the story of a unit of French soldiers in the WWI Battle of Verdun, in which Artaud had narrowly missed fighting, as he was sent to the mental hospital just before his Third Regiment went to the front. The film frames itself as a conventional "war film," starring Artaud as an idealistic intellectual-turned-soldier, who embarks

<sup>55</sup> This dialectical strategy is clearest in *Projection of the True Body*: on the left, we see Artaud's body tied up and executed by soldiers, while on the right, his double-body projects its inner content outside the skeleton in lines of force, erupting towards the viewer.

on an archetypal hero's journey, leaving his fiancée at home in the first act as he enlists and goes off to test and prove himself in war. Through the first act, Artaud turns in a measured and restrained performance, acting according to conventions of cinematic realism, as he plays the straight man to some of his comrades more hamish clowning. Then he comes under fire, and one of his comrades is killed. As the survivors pile into the bunker, and the unit regroups and plans their next move, Artaud stares into space and murmurs "Le sang [the blood]." A rhythmic digging sound starts faintly, and gets louder. The Germans are tunneling towards the bunker, bringing with them enough explosives to blow it up. Tension builds through a series of cuts between the bunker, the tunnel, and the crossfire above ground. The men realize there is nothing to do, no possibility for agency or heroism — they are straightjacketed in place as death approaches from above and below. Claustrophobically entombed by dirt walls, the soldiers (presumably like the film's viewers) brace themselves with a full-body clench. Without warning, Artaud climbs out of the bunker, mounts the parapet, and screams out into no man's land. It is unclear how much creative input Artaud had in the film, but it is safe to say that the scream is pure Artaud, following the directions he gave to actors in his contemporary writings about the "Theatre of Cruelty." He begins with a few short hops, which seem to shake loose a guttural bubbling sound that Florence de Mèredieu describes as "borborygmes [bowel sounds]" (152). The sound vibrates through his body — his arms wobbling akimbo then going stiff, and his face contorting into an inverted rictus, as he erupts into piercing howls (152).<sup>56</sup> Artaud is saved from death by his comrades, who tackle him and drag him back into the bunker, but he does not recover. He continues to mutter to himself and act out until, in the final scene, he is shot and

<sup>56</sup> Florence de Mèredieu notes that this scene is remarkable, as one of the only (and perhaps the earliest) WWI movies to show the mental disorders of soldiers (152).

slowly bleeds to death on the battlefield — his moans echoed by other wounded soldiers, as he calls out for a medic to take him to surgery.

Remaking the body requires first feeling the ways in which our bodies are constricted, alienated, and injured by daily combat and the armor we wear. For Artaud, this is taken to its extreme by war and medicine, but continuous with everyday social life in civilian society — war is not exceptional but exemplary. Our bodies can change when we respond to wounds not by hardening our defenses or mounting a counter-attack, but surrendering to really feel them. In my conclusion, I will examine some of these changes by looking at DE-CRUIT's with NYU's cognitive science lab, and Catherine Fitzmaurice's "Destructuring and Restructuring" voicework — which have shown, over time, to remap neural networks and "body organization" (Ali and Wolfert 5-6; Fitzmaurice). Their methods, like Artaud's, move participants back and forth between full-body clenching and release, in a dialectic of tension and ease. Becoming aware of tension in the body — instilled by daily injuries and stress, and guarding against feeling too much — is the first step towards letting it go. With practice, we can unlearn the callousness and let down the body armor we wear for survival. And with these physical changes, new thoughts and social relationships become possible. But first, in my next chapter, I move from Artaud's focus on the body to Edward Bond's dramatization of self and society. Bond takes the dialectic between armor and vulnerability as a foundational dramaturgical structure, as his plays move between militarist and medical frames.

## Chapter 2: Edward Bond's "Visceral Mathematics": Militarist and Medical Frames

"Society is a surgeon operating on himself and art is part of that operation."

—Edward Bond, "Preface" to *Lear* (*Lear* xv)

A still-warm corpse lands on the autopsy slab. There can be little question about her cause of death—we have just seen Fontanelle executed by a group of rebel soldiers, ending a short-lived reign that began with a coup d'état removing her father, the king. As the prison doctor makes a few perfunctory incisions, the deposed king pushes his way to the front for a better view. "Is that my daughter? . . . But where is the . . . She was cruel and angry and hard . . . Where is the beast" (Bond, *Lear* 73). Impassive, the doctor points out Fontanelle's internal organs ("stomach . . . liver . . . lungs . . . womb"), but Lear sees something else in his daughter's viscera. "I have never seen anything so beautiful. If I had known she was so beautiful . . . Her body was made by the hand of a child . . . If I had known this beauty and patience and care, how I would have loved her." Lear reaches his hands into his daughter's body cavity, and brings them out smeared with viscera and blood. "Look! . . . Look!" (74). Fontanelle is not the first to be wounded in Edward Bond's *Lear* (1971)—we have already witnessed several military executions and a scene of torture—but a new gaze is brought to bear upon the opened body. Decades after reading and seeing the play, actor and director Chris Cooper remembers the sudden reversal from execution to dissection:

Later in the play when the regime authorises the cutting up and opening of the dead body of one of those sisters—Lear's daughters—he begins to describe the nature of the presence of posthumous beauty in his daughter's body. That moment

had such an incredible impact upon me as a young man . . . the way that the body was used to connect to these incredible ideas. It actually opened up theatre for me in a way that I'd never experienced before. It opened up something very deeply in me as a person. (Qtd. in Billingham 157)

As the scenario shifts—from military interrogation and execution to medical autopsy—so does the meaning of the wounded body, and a corresponding visceral shift occurs within the spectator. Cooper attests that the vision “opened up something very deeply” in his “person,” and “opened up theatre” to enable new perceptions.

In this chapter, I continue to pursue the question of how theatre reciprocally *opens up* spaces within performers and spectators, in ways that are at once physical, imaginative, and medicinal. Cooper's experience resonates with Artaud's description of the affective current running between bodies that “create[s] within ourselves spaces for life, spaces which did not exist and which did not seem to belong in actual space” (*SW* 79). But whereas Artaud's surgical theatre aims to remake bodies and minds — performing a “brain surgery” and reorganizing our organs (Artaud, *SW* 76) — Bond focuses on social systems: “society is a surgeon operating on himself,” he writes, and theatre takes part in the “operation” (Bond, *Lear* xv). The violent worlds of Bond's plays, set in warzones and militarized civilian societies, frame bodies, selves, and groups as fortresses, and the world as a battlefield. Characters wear emotional armor to protect themselves from ubiquitous suffering. This frame is perennially punctured, however, by moments of radical vulnerability. In these moments, theatre performs a lacerating alternative medicine: healing not by knowing and defeating pathologized problems, but by surrendering to

be ensorcelled, ensnared, and yoked at the gut with beings we cannot fully fathom.<sup>57</sup> Just as Artaud's embodied techniques follow a dialectical pattern (tightening to then release; closing off to then open up), I argue that Bond's theatre moves dialectically between militarist and medical frames.<sup>58</sup>

By reading *Lear* as a case study for the dialectical deployment of militarist and medical frames, I aim to illustrate how Bond's idiosyncratic (and often enigmatic) dramaturgy offers a form of "dialectical theatre" that is distinct from Brechtian and "post-Brechtian" models. The concept of a "dialectical theatre" was first introduced in 1928, when Erwin Piscator described his adaptation of Jaroslav Hašek's World War I novel *The Good Soldier Schwejk* as "a true *dialectic*, that is, an oscillating interplay between dramatic and technical events" (Qtd. in Bryant-Bertail 23). Dramatic and technical events, for Piscator, seem to respectively designate acts that are human-directed, and acts that are coercively produced by a machine-like society—and learning to see dialectically means perceiving institutional and ideological forces not as naturalized facts that define our humanity but as what competes with our humanity to drive the course of history. Piscator concretized this with a set featuring two conveyor belts running across the stage, one carrying characters, objects, and images representing various social, military, and bureaucratic institutions, while the other carried the clownishly human protagonist, Schwejk. When Bertolt Brecht, who served as a collaborator on *The Good Soldier Schwejk*, began referring to his own

<sup>57</sup> Like Artaud, Bond is critical of the inhumanity and militarization of modern medicine — as we will see in a later torture scene, when an army doctor excises Lear's eyes.

<sup>58</sup> I use the term "theatrical frames" to denote the conceptual structures employed by audiences to organize onstage material into an intelligible whole, by activating a set of conventions that direct our attention, guide our interpretation, and dictate the ontology of the subjects before us, as well as our relationship to them. The term originated in the field of theatre semiotics: see, e.g., Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, 78.

work as “dialectical theatre,” he refocused the dialectic between the staged dramatic action and the road not taken. For an actor to produce the *Verfremdungseffekt*, “Whatever he doesn’t do must be contained and conserved in what he does. In this way every sentence and every gesture signifies a decision; the character remains under observation and is tested. The technical term for this procedure is ‘fixing the “not . . . but”’ (Brecht 137). Breaking their identification with characters, the audience fills in the “not” of Brecht’s “not . . . but” formulation by learning to see what the character cannot. The other half of Brecht’s dialectic occurs offstage, as an imagined alternative drama in which different actions and socioeconomic conditions create a better world. In *Anti-War Theatre after Brecht: Dialectical Aesthetics in the Twenty-First Century*, Lara Stevens demonstrates that post-Brechtian theatre from the 1970s to the current day tends to show greater “epistemological uncertainty” than Brecht’s critical realism (45).<sup>59</sup> While these plays use Brechtian dialectical stagecraft to fracture the apparent inevitability and permanence of our social reality, the dialectic is left open, creating a state of “dissensus,” Jacques Rancière’s term for the liminal zone of indeterminacy that foregrounds the “conflict between two regimes of sense, two sensory worlds,” in order to “change the cartography of the perceptible” and “generate new forms of relations” (Rancière 58, 72, 53). Rather than seeing the dialectical struggle of competing forces onstage (Piscator), or imagining a dialectical counterpoint to what we see (Brecht), we are suspended between multiple ways of seeing and imagining.

Bond’s dialectic between theatrical frames similarly moves us between contradictory ways in which single material events are given imagined dramatic meaning, but it works toward a different end. For Rancière, a theatre of dissensus performs the essentially negative task of

<sup>59</sup> Stevens builds on David Barnett’s concept of the “post-Brechtian,” laid out in David Barnett, “Dialectics and the Brechtian Tradition,” 6–15.

disrupting any singular, totalizing view of the world; it can clear the way for new connections, concepts, solidarities, and projects to emerge through the individual pensiveness and collective debate of “emancipated spectators,” but it does not in itself create them. Bond, however, does task his theatre with a positive act of creation, and what it creates is “humanness.” Before looking at how this works in *Lear*, I will untangle and elucidate some of Bond’s complex ideas about how drama—onstage and off—makes and remakes society and human subjects.<sup>60</sup>

The process of “becoming human” begins just after birth. The infant, Bond writes, is not yet a psychological self, but a “monad,” which is “indivisible [and] without parts,” and without an outside: it “is the entire world . . . [o]utside stimuli are to it internal” (Qtd. in Roper 140; Davis, 217). Not yet conscious of the borders and shape of its body, it “is on both sides of its skin” (Bond, *The Hidden Plot* 114). Not yet understanding dramatic logic, it is “both actor and act.” In Bond’s version of the Lacanian mirror stage, the child “learns that its skin is a barrier and beyond it are places and people,” and it “becom[es] conscious of itself as if it were its own other,” not through recognizing its self-image but through self-spectatorship, coming to understand itself as a dramatic agent interacting with a dramatic world: it is “the actor in the true play” (116, 115, 91).<sup>61</sup> This process marks the “origin of drama,” after which children keep “play[ing to] dramatize their minds” (14). Self and world are mutually constructed at this stage, sharing a dramatic logic and shape: “As the child enters the world the world enters it. . . . As it

<sup>60</sup> Much of Bond’s theoretical terminology is introduced and developed in essays published over a decade after *Lear*. Bond, however, reads his theory backward into his earlier works, which he cites as examples to illustrate a number of concepts. I do the same here.

<sup>61</sup> Lacan describes the mirror stage as a “dialectic[al] drama,” in which the individual moves from a “fragmented body image . . . of disjointed limbs [and] organs represented in exoscopy,” toward “the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity,” which is “symbolized . . . by a fortress” (Lacan, 4–5).

maps the world so as to exist in it, it puts itself in the map and maps the world in itself” (117, 120). The structural principles that organize the world as a coherent system are also mapped onto the internal structure of the child’s psyche and body, as her skin thickens, skull hardens, organs align, and brain forges neural pathways. “The psychological self, the human mind,” Bond writes, “is a dramatic structure” (Qtd. in Roper 141).

Bond insists that *drama*—as opposed to *theatre* or *performance* more broadly—is indispensable as a meaning-making paradigm and essential to the formation of human subjects and social systems: self- and world-making occur interactively with self- and world-dramatization.<sup>62</sup> For Bond, drama is a way of structuring experience as an organized and intelligible whole; it allows us to tame and come to terms with an unruly and unfathomable world, by turning it into a dramatic world that is responsive to human agency and that manifests human meaning: “Over chaos the mind throws an *invisible grid* of the symbolic and recognizes human intention” (Bond, “Commentary on *The War Plays*” 275; emphasis added). Bond sometimes uses the term “module” to describe a “cognitive and evaluative” apparatus that “precedes self-consciousness” and serves as the mechanism through which drama is perceived, processed, and understood. “Drama [both “real-life” and staged] presents situations to the module,” and the module receives and processes it to determine our “‘being’s’ method of being and the way it attaches itself to what is not itself . . . [and] makes possible the meaning which is given to reality” (180). I suggest that Bond’s “modules,” which take in and understand reality in

<sup>62</sup> Bond’s understanding of drama shares many features with Hans Thies-Lehmann’s theorization of “dramatic theatre,” as opposed to the “postdramatic.” Lehmann writes that drama represents a bounded world that is surveyable, manageable, and complete, and that gives a “logical structure to the confusing chaos and plenitude of Being” (Lehmann 11, 40).

terms of drama, and his “invisible grids,” which project a dramatic structure over material reality, are both ways of talking about “theatrical frames.”<sup>63</sup>

Bond believes we can recalibrate our modules and redraw our invisible grids to frame, experience, and enact our world as a different kind of drama. We have been conditioned to understand our selves and society in terms of a drama in which agonistic actions play out in a linear-progressive fashion between autonomous characters, within a bounded and consistent dramatic world. The border and structure of society’s drama are shaped by a “doctrine [that] slowly changes into dogma . . . the boundary becomes a barrier and is actualized in bureaucracy, financial devices, schools, police cells, and so on” (Bond, *Hidden* 12). Society’s “plot [becomes] law and order,” structured by “myth” and upheld by “force,” policing its internal order and guarding against external threats (*Hidden* 4; Bond, *The Activists Papers* 155). The world is a battlefield and life is war, as groups and individuals compete for dominance. I call this theatrical frame *militarist*.

Bond’s plays break the monopoly of the militarist frame and its configuration of the world by casting a different theatrical frame over the same material world to give it different dramatic meaning—to “show that at the horizon where light enters the world [another] world is still hidden” (Bond, *Activists* 144). We are allowed to escape our “present [world] so that for that moment we become ourself in both worlds” and “see our prison from the outside” (Bond, *Hidden* 169). This second dramatic world devalues character and story in favor of stage images and patterns, and action takes the form of circulation across permeable boundaries. The “prison of society-and-self” is “wounded,” Bond writes, and “our wounds and our recoveries take new

<sup>63</sup> While Bond does not use the term “theatrical frames,” I offer it as a way of connecting and clarifying some of his more idiosyncratic and inconsistent terminology.

shapes” (29). Like Artaud’s surgery, cutting up our encrusted mental and physical habits allows our regeneration. I call this theatrical frame *medical*.

The shift between militarist and medical frames happens during “Theatre Events (TE),” the central concept in Bond’s original theatrical vocabulary, which he defines as the moments in his plays that “invalidate received and ideological meanings and establish . . . new meanings in their place” (Bond, “Drama Devices” 84). One way in which this can happen is if “two worlds [are made to] meet in one room by basing each of them on a different form of theatre,” so that actors occupy two worlds at once and “perception is changed [so that] there has to be a new apprehension, a new choice of reality” (Bond, “Commentary” 323).<sup>64</sup> In a TE, the objects and actors onstage do not change; rather, “[m]eaning changes,” as the relationship between objects and actors “is broken or a new relationship established” (Bond, “Drama Devices” 86). Again, the concept of “theatrical frames” can connect and condense Bond’s terminology, here by denoting how two different “worlds” alternately appear through two “different form[s] of theatre.” During a TE, the dominant frame that the audience has employed is exposed as a contingent and constructed *theatrical* mode of perception, which frees audiences to adopt a different theatrical frame that reconfigures the elements of the dramatic world in new relationships, “as if for a moment the world knew itself to be different” (Bond, *Hidden* 18).

Many critics have noticed a dialectical tension animating Bond’s *Lear*, and his work more broadly. Peter Billingham locates the dialectic between materiality and imagination; in his

<sup>64</sup> When Bond writes about two “forms of theatre” competing to set the terms of the dramatic world on a single stage, he is thinking of genre, and gives farce and tragedy as examples. Farce and tragedy, of course, carry their own theatrical frames that determine how the audience understands the play through reference to generic conventions and expectations. But the theatrical frames of war and surgery are activated less through style of acting than by the patterned structures of verbal and visual stage imagery, and how we are cued to react to them.

reading there is a “dialectic between the externalized material reality, and its radicalized, transformative perception” in TEs that give stage objects new meanings (Billingham 62). Jenny Spencer suggests that the “dialectical learning process” followed by Bond’s characters “encourages an analogous process to occur in the observing audience,” who likewise develop an “enlightened perspective” that enables them to act (Spencer 124, 8). And Stanton Garner argues that *Lear* moves us between two different kinds of “worlds”: “the ‘world’ that power seeks to unify under its dominant operations” and the phenomenological “‘worlds’ [of] bodies,” with their pains, pleasures, and needs (Garner, *Bodied Spaces* 178). Bond himself simply states, “Drama is dialectical. It is ‘visceral mathematics,’” suggesting that dialectic occurs between gut-level sensation and abstract formalized systems (Bond, *Hidden* 21). I argue that the dialectic between theatrical frames combines these sets of features: in moving between the “visceral” sensations of the medical frame and the “mathematical” measurement and rational organization of the war frame, the audience is progressively enlightened in a way analogous to but not identical to the protagonist, and we arrive at a transformed perception of “material reality.” In *Lear*, this process is not linear but recursive, involving a back-and-forth movement between frames that gradually unsettles and reworks the audience’s mode of perceiving, interpreting, and relating to the action and world onstage. However, for analytical purposes, I will first consider the scenes in which the “militarist frame” is established, elaborated, and exposed *as a theatrical frame*, before turning to the TEs in which the fabric of this dramatic world is penetrated to glimpse an alternate, medically framed view of the world, opening a tear that widens over the course of the play. Finally, I will consider how the concept of “the human” emerges through this process—not as a category imposed on stage figures through either frame but as an ontology self-reflexively enacted by spectators moving between frames. This will make sense of Bond’s

repeated paradoxical pronouncement that in theatre, “we recognize humanness by creating it” (*Hidden* 14).

### **The Militarist Theatrical Frame**

Edward Bond’s childhood and early adulthood were shaped by war: during the German bombing of London, the 6-year-old Bond was evacuated to Cornwall and separated from his parents, and at age 19, he enlisted for two years of military service as an infantryman with the Allied Army of Occupation in Austria. At neither time did Bond directly experience warfare; instead he recalls how everyday life at the school in Cornwall and in the army were *framed* by the idea, threat, and atmosphere of war. The schoolchildren told each other “heroic” stories of the English battling an “inhuman, grotesque” enemy, spinning a melodramatic conception of war imbued with the playfulness and half-reality of children’s games (Bond qtd. in Coult 12). Bond vividly remembers the moment this frame was punctured:

I remember walking along a road and seeing two aeroplanes hitting each other, miles off. And I remember running down this hot road towards them, and suddenly out of the aeroplanes, two men appeared... it stopped me dead in the road, and made me realize that in fact what one had been talking about was human beings.” (12)

This image of a seemingly impenetrable and indivisible mechanical unit — the airplane — opening up to reveal something soft, vulnerable, and human inside, would become central to Bond’s stage imagery. Bond’s later experience in the army was one of perpetual *rehearsal* for war, without ever seeing combat. Drills, inspections, and strict disciplinary measures enacted a military structure, set of principles, and way of life, disconnected from its teleological goal — to

“fight” or “defend.” What Bond remembers most about the army is the way in which its hierarchical structure, through which the few at the top used the threat of violence to extract constant labor from the many at the bottom — clarified and magnified the workings of capitalist society. The army was a “parodied version of civil society” (Bond qtd. in Hay 15), a “prison” that lay the “class structures” bare (Bond qtd. in Coult 12).<sup>65</sup> Bond’s experiences in WWII and Austria left him with questions that were ultimately worked out through theatre. In 1946, having recently returned to London, he attended his first play — a production of *Macbeth* — which brought him a “feeling of total recognition... [of] the political society around me” (12). And soon after completing his service in the army, Bond began writing plays, he says, “to solve a puzzle” (13).

While the majority of Bond’s plays include military personnel and the presence or threat of war, none of them are traditional “war-stories,” in the sense of structuring their plot around a violent competition between two political bodies with a beginning, middle, and end. Jenny Spencer writes that, for Bond, the “cause and effect [of war]... is freed from the constraints of a linear chronology” (230). War is not caused by the intentional acts of dramatic agents with conflicting motives, but by the organizing principles that structure society into hierarchical positions, locked in a zero sum struggle for power. His theme is more accurately described as *militarization*, which refers to the material and discursive ways in which society becomes

<sup>65</sup> In the prefatory notes to his plays, Bond reminds his readers that “capitalism... is *as* destructive in peace as in war,” because these structural principles are “interiorized” in “law and order societies [which] are morally responsible for the terrorism and crime they provoke” (*Saved* 17; “Commentary” 294; *Plays: Three* 9). The “myth” undergirding this structure is that humans are “essentially violent but that there are scientific and technological means of controlling our violence” (*Plays: Three* 73). In war, this manifests as the sense of moral superiority and cleanliness associated with advanced technology and weaponry, which James Der Derian calls “virtuous war”; in peace, it manifests through a class-system in which the cultured few rule over the common “animals” (*Plays: Three* 293).

internally adapted for war: through its institutions, class structure, values and beliefs, behavior, thought, history, and popular entertainment. In a militarized society, the idea of war infiltrates and mediates human relationships through the metaphors and conceptual structures it makes available, providing the “idiom for heroism, valor and love” (Gonzalez 19). A reigning “fortress mentality” breeds mistrust of what is outside, and erects walls around nations, communities, and subjects (Giroux 51-2). Militarization, it could be said, is what happens when civilian society is *framed* by war — when everyday life is understood in terms of martial metaphors.

When *Lear* debuted at the Royal Court in 1971, the English middle class’s first-hand experience of war had steadily decreased since the end of WWII, hastened by the phasing out of mandatory National Service in 1960. However, domestic “peace” was increasingly militarized under the pressure of the Cold War nuclear threat, and an escalating series of proxy wars in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.<sup>66</sup> British political scientist Mary Kaldor has called this period the height of the “imaginary war,” in which the imaginative structure ingrained by WWII was kept alive through “the scenarios of military planners, in the games and stories of espionage and counter-espionage, ... in the hostile rhetoric of politicians and newspapers,” and through the “technological competition [and] war games and exercises” that impose a “framework” of war through spectacle and role play (*The Imaginary War 4; New and Old Wars* 152). A real war was waged between the U.S. and U.S.S.R in order to activate the theatrical frame of war, to mobilize and discipline the civilian population against an imagined enemy Other, and to extend the hegemonic reach of their blocs. This ongoing theatre of war generated global insecurity while promising security to those who played their parts in the drama.

<sup>66</sup> And the Troubles in Ireland were beginning to bring the threat of violence to England’s front door.

Borrowing Foucault's term, Kaldor calls imaginary war a "disciplinary technology": it is "a discourse which expresses and legitimizes power relationships in modern society" by using the "permanent anxiety of war" to implement "the forms of organization and control that are characteristic of war," aimed at creating internal "cohesion" (*The Imaginary War* 4). Bond says as much when he claims that the Cold War's omnipresent threat of nuclear holocaust, and the proxy wars between U.S. and Soviet-backed groups, do not "kill only third-world people so that the rest of us can live in comfort. They kill us in our communities... they cause the fear that eats into our morality, trivializes our emotions and narrows our mind," leading to "the irrationality and disorder that masquerades as discipline" ("Commentary" 285). Unlike many "anti-war" playwrights, Bond is not interested in showing the "reality of war," as he takes this to be self-evident: it is insensate slaughter. His interest instead is in war's dramatic mode of production — in the imaginative structures used to explain and legitimize war and reified *by* war, which shape everyday life and society, operating below the level of conceptual awareness.

Bond entered the British theatre scene with a new wave of young leftist playwrights and directors in the 1960s, who believed that developing new forms of political theatre could help "overthrow the capitalist system which they blamed for warfare," and "restructur[e] society along socialist lines," (Patterson 12, 13).<sup>67</sup> They took heart from the surge of independences that saw former European colonies reject Cold War ideologies and divisions to found socialist nations promising to uphold pluralist values — seeming to project a world outside the militarist frame. But by 1971, the revolutions had largely been co-opted by ethnic nationalists practicing

<sup>67</sup> See Catherine Itzen's *Stages of the Revolution* for a thorough discussion of the new theatre companies doing political work in 1960s and 70s Britain, Michael Patterson's *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights* for a more author-centered study of new plays from the period, and Michael Billington's *State of the Nation* for a combination of both.

an antagonistic identity politics – many instating military governments. To justify their authoritarian policies, “ruling politicians and aspiring opposition leaders began to play upon particularistic identities” and foment ethnic tensions, “creat[ing] scapegoats, [and] mobiliz[ing] support around fear and insecurity” (Kaldor 84). The militarist frame returned to order and discipline the body politic by maintaining a permanent “state of emergency” and sense of risk – through actual violence and its imagined threat. This is the kind of war depicted in *Lear*: instead of battles between enemy armies, acts of violence are directed toward civilians to make them take sides and keep them in line.

The play’s martial storyline is one of successive revolutions that seek to found a more just society, but end by reproducing the militarist state they overthrew. Lear’s daughters, Bodice and Fontanelle, oust the old king because he needlessly antagonizes his neighbors and spends wastefully on a towering wall surrounding his kingdom. But once in power, they keep building the wall, while terrorizing the civilian population to purge the state of internal dissidents. Their soldiers track down and capture the deposed king, and make an example of the peasant couple who gave him shelter, killing the husband and raping the wife, a woman named Cordelia. While Lear sits in prison, Cordelia becomes the leader of a rebel army waging civil war against Bodice and Fontanelle’s regime, using guerrilla tactics to launch assaults against the wall by night. The tide turns in the rebels’ favor: they recapture Lear and take him to their own military prison for interrogation, finally blinding him before letting him go. Finally, they execute Bodice and Fontanelle, and the revolution is victorious. But when Cordelia takes the throne, she too changes her mind, and keeps building the wall to guard against her enemies. The play ends with a futile gesture from the dying king: Lear scales the wall and digs into it with a shovel, before he is instantly shot dead and falls to the ground.

From the first scene, when the militarist frame is engaged it is exposed as a theatrical mode of ordering and interpreting experience, which depends on a set of dramatic conventions that selectively reorganize and jettison material to recast messy and multidirectional events as unified and intelligible action. The play opens on the construction site of the wall, which is nearing completion. An offstage crash precipitates the hurried entrance of a group of workers and soldiers carrying the body of a worker accidentally killed by a falling axe, which they hide beneath a tarp just before Lear arrives to inspect the worksite. When an officer uncovers the corpse, Lear demands to know who dropped the axe, brands the man a “traitor,” and orders his execution. The accident is reframed as an intentional act of war, and placed within a narrative that Lear authors and has the power to conclude. Political anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom notes that this is a common strategy for dealing with events that undermine the epistemology of the militarist frame, with its strict logic of cause and effect: “To avoid giving the appearance that they don’t have power, leaders often prefer to act as if they intended ground-level actions” (Nordstrom 80). Writing out lives and actions that do not fit the war’s script is followed by writing them back in, but with a reattribution of authorship. Actors are cast and made visible within a militarist frame in the dramatic roles of villain, victim, or warrior, while their status as human lives is pushed outside the frame, dramatizing the need for violence while hiding its effects. Nordstrom calls this “the magician’s trick: the production of invisible visibility” (34). As the worker is shot and unceremoniously carried offstage, we see what the militarist theatrical frame selectively jettisons in order to maintain its intelligibility and legitimacy.

Having brought the mini-drama of the worker to a satisfying end, Lear turns his attention to the borders of his garrison-state. “I must build the fortress,” he says, “to keep our enemies out,” so that “they won’t take my country and dig my bones up when I’m dead,” and “my people

will live in freedom and peace” (Bond, *Lear* 17, 19, 21). The wall illustrates and reinforces the structural and narrative logic of war—erecting and defending a barrier between homogeneous self and foreign other leads to a teleologically projected “peace”—while also standing as a perdurable surrogate for Lear’s mortal body, promising to continue his work when he is gone, and to guard his “bones.” Its impermeable sides reflect and support Lear’s conception of his kingdom and his body as a fortress, the ramparts of which must be defended. Satisfied with his kingdom’s borders, Lear turns to the military apparatus surrounding the wall, which he manipulates like surrogate appendages. “The officers must make the men work!” he says; “I must do something to make the officers move” (16, 18). Lear outlines a highly structured chain of command that can be animated only by the man at the top—the theatre of operations is depicted as a kind of puppet theatre, with Lear pulling the strings.

But already, in the moments when Lear looks away, the puppet show threatens to consume the puppeteer. As the firing squad prepares to execute the worker, Lear wanders into the line of fire and narrowly misses an accidental assassination. In the following scene, when Lear is deposed by his daughters Bodice and Fontanelle, he fittingly describes his loss in bodily terms. “My daughters have taken the bread from my stomach. . . . They lock the door of my coffin and tell me to die” (31). The walls of his body are penetrated and his interior pillaged, yet at the same time he is sealed up and isolated from the outside world. The self-contained security and self-extending influence over others that Lear exercised through the artifact of the wall and the apparatus of the army is reversed—walls now imprison him, while limbs violate him. The military structure that Lear built proves able to run without him, with his daughters taking his place at the top. Within the militarist theatrical frame, Lear is no longer the dramatic agent directing the action but—like the executed worker—becomes a disposable prop.

Back at the daughters' military headquarters, it is now Bodice who claims a position of comprehensive sight and agential control over her subordinates, her enemies, and her kingdom: "My spies have learned more about you than you know yourselves" (61). But alone onstage, sitting at a trestle table and moving figures around a map of the military zone, her jurisdiction is inverted:

They say decide this and decide that, but I don't decide anything. My decisions are forced on me. . . . it's like a mountain moving forward, but not because I tell it to. I started to pull the wall down, and I had to stop that—the men are needed here. (*She taps the map with the fingertips of one hand.*) And now I must move them here and here—(*She moves her index finger on the map.*)—because the map's my straitjacket and that's all I can do. (62)

The relation between leader and military structure is reversed—instead of Bodice manipulating the space and the army like extended limbs, the structure becomes a straitjacket, restricting and directing her movements. Bodice is directed by the spies who are directed by her; all parties are bound together in a circle of command, with no room for individual initiative. The theatre of operations, like the map, seems to run of its own accord, following the ruthless logic of the militarist theatrical frame.

This alienating system of command resembles the structure of war as delineated by Foucault, wherein the model of sovereignty is replaced by a pervasive governmentality. The relationships of subjugation embedded in the network, and not the individual subjects, are the actual producers and guardians of power, and those at the top and the bottom are equally dispossessed: since the king's knowledge of his subjects is formed by the "administrative machine," the administration in fact rules the king (Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* 29, 128–

29. But whereas Foucault presumes a correspondence between how the war is rationally “administered” and how it plays out, Bond reveals that these are two different wars: the former a simulated “map” war, visible in its entirety and comprehensible in dramatic terms of character-driven action; the latter an imbroglio that no party can view in its totality, where sides and objectives are unclear and accidents abound. When the rebel army interrogates a captured soldier to find out where the enemy is stationed, he replies nervously, “‘Ard t’ say . . . We never come straight an’ the maps is US” (Bond, *Lear* 57). His spatial disorientation is compounded by his arbitrary allegiance to an identity group invented by the war: “I’m more afraid a me own lot than I am a yourn. . . . If I lived out in the sticks I’d be fightin’ with you lot” (58). Judith Butler likens the “frame of war” to dramaturgy without a dramaturge: “To imagine the state as a dramaturge, thus representing its power through an anthropomorphic figure, would be mistaken” (Butler, *Frames of War* 73). Such “power is non-figurable as an intentional subject,” but rather resides in “the staging apparatus itself, the maps that exclude certain regions” (74). A complex relationship emerges between the theatrical frame of war and its material reality. Through the frame, actors perceive the war as a drama, with contending parties in ordered formations, performing linear rational actions to defend and assail fortress-containers, and this vision determines how they act. But the material consequences of their actions cannot be seen through the military frame; they stumble through one world while gazing upon another.

The incongruence of what the militarist theatrical frame shows, and the material reality it refigures, reaches its peak when Lear himself comes under the knife. To prevent him from interfering in its operations, the rebel army has another prisoner excise his eyes, in a pseudo medical operation. The prisoner, playing doctor, straps Lear to his chair and speaks matter-of-factly about the procedure: “[T]his isn’t an instrument of torture, but a scientific device” (Bond,

*Lear* 77). The cutting-edge medical equipment seems to remove human subjectivity, fallibility, and agency from the act of wounding. Lear is literally effaced as a metal frame is lowered to cover his face, and the prisoner narrates the actions of the machine, seeming to observe rather than perform the procedure. “Note how the eye passes into the lower chamber and is received into a soothing solution of formaldehyde crystals.” Like the maps that promise transparency and order, advanced technology gives a sterile and infallible aura to acts of injury—the war is not executed by humans, so it cannot be vulnerable to human error. As Lear howls in pain, the prisoner-doctor is completely without affect, spraying an aerosol in Lear’s bleeding eye sockets to prevent scabbing, and instructing him to “Hold still” (78). Within the rational and procedural world of the military frame, the mechanical workings of the plot direct the characters, emptying them of volition and responsibility—their violent acts are connected not to the suffering they cause but to their strategic objective.

As the violence perpetrated by Lear’s former surrogate appendages disfigures his own body, he realizes that he is trapped within the structure he built, and concludes that there is no way out: “There’s a wall everywhere. I’m buried alive in a wall. . . . There’s nothing I can do! The government’s mad. The law’s mad” (93–94). He cannot change the course of action within the militarist theatrical frame, because it only recognizes dramatic conflict between discrete characters; the cries of insurgent subjects who challenge the frame’s logic are heard as cries of war from antagonists who must be defeated and expelled. Bond has done the work that Butler calls for from artists “during times of war . . . to thematize the forcible frame, the one that conducts the dehumanizing norm, that restricts what is perceivable, and indeed, what can be” (Butler 100). But thematizing the militarist frame does not dismantle it. Instead, war’s dramatic mode of production churns on, conscripting, consuming, and spitting out actors who have only

the illusion of dramatic agency. There are no alternate actions within this drama; there is, however, an alternate drama, enacted by “a theatre of new meanings,” in the TE-moments when the military frame is surgically punctured (Bond, *Hidden* 38).

### **The Medical Theatrical Frame**

We recall that Bond locates the original moment of drama in the Lacanian mirror stage, when the infant, living “on both sides of its skin” and lacking internal structure and external differentiation, “learns that its skin is a barrier and beyond it are places and people” and comes to regard itself as “the actor in the true play” (Bond, *Hidden* 114, 116, 91). Lacan describes the mirror stage as a “dialectic[al] drama,” in which the individual moves from a “fragmented body image . . . of disjointed limbs [and] organs represented in exoscopy,” toward “the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity,” which is “symbolized . . . by a fortress” (Lacan 4-5). This “Social I,” as an armored fortress, resembles the self produced through the militarized frame of “society’s drama,” in which Bond writes that “society-and-self” are “prisons” (Bond, *Hidden* 29). Bond alludes to this process with the names of Lear’s daughters—“Fontanelle” denotes the soft membranous gaps between the skull’s cranial bones, which allow growth during infancy before hardening during the mirror stage; “Bodice” reminds us of the continued corseting of the body in adulthood.<sup>68</sup> The medical theatrical frame in *Lear* is most clearly activated when bodies are opened and organs are examined, touched, and altered, whereby Lacan’s dream-drama of “disjointed limbs” and “organs in exoscopy” is made material, recalling “a memory . . . of totality,” from a time when the borders of self and world were coterminous (Bond, *Hidden* 135).

<sup>68</sup> The name Bodice also alludes to Boudicca, the first-century Celtic warrior queen.

Key to Bond's method is that this medical frame should not remain exclusively around the body, but should extend to structure the containers of selves, and of social and political groups. When the medical frame displaces the militarist frame, the container's border goes from armor to membrane, its content from unified and static to differentiated and fluctuating, and its relation to others from lines of antagonism or allyship to cyclical exchange: containers are no longer made by what they hold in and keep out, but by what they let in and part with. Their precariously bound parts are prone to breaking down, and survival depends on a mutually supporting relation with the other, who penetrates their borders to repair their internal order—through excision, implantation, and the mending of damaged parts—in a perennial surgical operation. While the militarist theatrical frame allows visibility, control, and vicarious engagement from a safe spectatorial distance, the medical frame fosters a visceral connection between performing and spectating bodies, so that “dramatic action” plays out not just between actors within the drama but in the transaction between drama and audience. Like the “viscerality” of Artaud's surgical theatre, there is a “*reaching out*” between the body onstage and “the stuff of my own corporeality” (Maxwell 61). Instead of holding the anatomized body apart from us as an object of knowledge, *the body* seems to know something about *us*, and we experience it by “approaching from within” in our analogous organs (63).<sup>69</sup> The spectator is

<sup>69</sup> Ian Maxwell's observations here echo the spectatorial dynamic described by scholars of early modern drama, who have traced the influence of the popular anatomy theatres in the development of new dramatic strategies and forms—which perform a “moral surgery” on characters and spectators alike, opening “wounds” and revealing “mysteries” that brought a “slow undoing of the bounds of the self.” Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*, Oxford UP, 1997, p. 121; Patricia A. Cahill, *Unto the Breach: Martial Formations Historical Trauma, and the Early Modern Stage*, Oxford UP, 2008, p. 143. See also Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*, Routledge, 1995; and Hillary M. Nunn, *Staging Anatomies: Dissection and Spectacle in Early Stuart Tragedy*, Ashgate, 2005.

simultaneously subject to a kind of medical operation, altering her sensory experience and conceptualization of her own body. Bond suggests a similar dynamic in his preface to *Lear*, likening his theatrical practice to “a surgeon operating on himself” (Bond, *Lear* xv). In this section I will look at five moments in *Lear*—which Bond would doubtlessly call TEs—in which the militarist frame showing bodies and subjects as fortresses falters, and the medical frame breaks through.

The first such scene begins as a military routine, when Bodice and Fontanelle’s soldiers capture and prepare to execute Lear’s counselor, Warrington. To this point, acts of wounding have been studiously hidden and ignored in the play—corpses concealed beneath tarpaulin, condemned prisoners taken offstage to be shot—following a coldly rational and instrumental military logic that frames killing in terms of strategic objectives. But Bodice and Fontanelle break from this logic when they reverse the initial directive of letting Warrington “die in silence,” and opt instead to cut him open, to satisfy a certain visceral curiosity. The soldier offers to turn Warrington “inside out,” and Fontanelle eagerly asks, “Literally?” (27). As the soldier starts to hit Warrington, the daughters choreograph his actions for visual, acoustic, and tactile effect—“Throw him up and drop him. I want to hear him drop. . . . I want to hear him scream! . . . Look at his hands. . . . I want to sit on his lungs!” (28). Warrington’s mutilation breaks the barriers of his body to reveal his hidden inner content in a dramatic exposition. Not content to remain spectators to the operation, the daughters begin to script themselves into its enactment before an imagined audience: “I wish my father was here,” Fontanelle cries, “I wish he could see him” (28). Bodice and Fontanelle’s violent act is driven by an inchoate desire to communicate something to their father by crafting a spectacle before his imagined gaze, exposing the raw interior of the helpless Warrington, and playing the role of anatomists in the drama of dissection.

Warrington's eviscerated body doubles the absent body of the king; as Fontanelle jumps up and down on Warrington's hands, she chants, "Kill him inside! Make him dead! Father! Father!" (28). The scene begins to engage a medical frame, establishing a visceral connection between the opened body, the audience, and the performer—Warrington's viscera mediates between the daughters and their father, allowing them to experientially "know" something they cannot put into words.

But the medical frame does not displace the militarist frame completely. In this TE, two "forms of theatre" bring two "worlds" onto one stage, and they compete to frame the action, producing contradictions and starts and stops. Warrington is placed on the figurative operating table to allow the sisters to glimpse and touch the inner secrets of the body and the self, while still being viewed as an inhuman enemy to be subdued and expelled. Just as the promise of turning Warrington inside out nears completion, the sisters abruptly halt his disembowelment, and their military objective returns to overrule their curiosity. They will let him live, so that his disfiguration can serve as a warning to their political enemies. When Bond writes of multiple worlds crossing the same stage, the movement is not one of linear succession, but a flickering imbrication. A character "speaks in one world [and] it echoes in another," so that we "feel worlds searching for themselves," through "the repetition of words, and the use of developing images and structures" (Bond, *Hidden* 34, 36). Medical words, images, and structures strive to break through the military frame of the torture scene and realize a different dramatic world—but the effect is partial and perverse.

These medical moments break through a little further once Lear has been captured, stripped of his power, and put on trial—now shifting from the anatomy of the body to frame the psychic structure of the self. No longer recognizing the people and places that supported his

impenetrable identity as king, Lear stares blankly at his daughters, and when he looks into a mirror, insists, “No, that’s not the king. . . . This is a little cage of bars with an animal in it” (Bond, *Lear* 49). The image evokes surgery—the animal is “cut and shaking and licking the blood on its sides,” gasping for life like a failing organ, as it paces within Lear’s ribcage. Lear’s new self-image does not transform him from powerful ruler to powerless victim—swapping roles within the military drama—but brings a change in ontology: the “container” of his self is no longer a fortress guarding an immutable inner content but a prison entrapping a vulnerable and innocent creature that desires intercourse with the outer world—and needs this to survive. In this self-dramatization, the animal is not Lear’s “self” but a vestigial substratum of being that precedes selfhood. Instead of identifying with it, he is compelled to care for it. When the Usher tries to take the mirror away, Lear protests, “Not out of my sight! What will they do to it? O god, give it to me! Let me hold it and stroke it and wipe its blood!” Lear’s identification is not wholly with the position of the animal, the cage, or the outside viewer, but in the movement between them, in a gaze and a gesture that, like a “surgeon operating on himself,” penetrates the cage from without to cradle and heal the inner wounded creature, while simultaneously feeling the cuts and sutures from within. In the previous scene, Bodice and Fontanelle were perceptually divided between medical and militarist frames—seeking self-understanding and social connection by probing the body of an other, but also maintaining a military logic by wounding the other in the hopes of healing the self. But now the militarist frame can no longer tell Lear who he is, and the medical frame emerges to structure his self as a different kind of drama: rather than trying to comprehensively know and control the inner animal (a militarist attitude), he regards it with wonder, and treats it with care.

It takes another scene of bodily dissection for Lear to transport this frame from his self to

an other. When Fontanelle is executed by the rebel army, Lear insists on bearing witness to her autopsy, repeating “Look!” as Bodice tries to distract him (73). Fontanelle is turned inside out, and the interior of her body bears no resemblance to the hard and cruel personality Lear knew. Like his own reflection in the mirror, he perceives Fontanelle’s inner being as an innocent animal, and the landscape surrounding it as similarly peaceful: “She sleeps inside like a lion and a lamb and a child. Where is the beast? The blood is as still as a lake.” In this autoptic drama, the discrete positions of spectator, actor, and stage are bound in circulation: Lear goes from audience to performer, reaching his hands into Fontanelle’s body and bringing them out covered with blood and viscera. “I must become a child, hungry and stripped and shivering in blood,” he declares, taking upon himself the properties he perceives in his daughter. In the militarist theatrical frame, Fontanelle was both a possession to guard within Lear’s body-fortress and an outside threat that penetrated his skin to steal “the bread from [his] stomach” (31). Now he reaches across the borders of her body in a gesture of recognition through mutual transformation—like the “cut” and “shaking” animal, Lear partially becomes what he sees before him: a “shivering” child, covered in blood. While it is too late to recover his daughter, Lear vows to take this discovery forward and “begin again”: “I must walk through my life, step after step. . . I must open my eyes and see!” (74).

Lear’s vision continues to expand after his blinding, as he takes refuge in a farmhouse and tells parables to audiences of strangers, which project alternative landscapes and communities. In one story, a bird steals a man’s voice, and the man captures the bird and brings him before the king, hoping to be rewarded with riches and fame. But the caged bird—like the wounded animal Lear saw in his ribcage—will only cry, so the king whips the man and sets the bird free. “The king’s a fool,” the man thinks to himself, and as he does the bird sings it aloud

until all the other creatures of the forest learn the song and sing it in a round. The king arrests the bird and tortures him for slander, “And just as the bird had the man’s voice the man now had the bird’s pain. He ran round silently waving his head and stamping his feet, and he was locked up for the rest of his life in a cage” (89). Like Lear’s autoptic visions revealing himself and his daughter as vulnerable and injured animals locked in a cage, the kingdom is now envisioned as a web of creatures linked with one another and with their environment, in a precarious circulation traversing space and skin—voices and pain travel from lips to lips, body to body, so that wounding and healing are not unidirectional, but shared. The militarist logic of injuring the other to strengthen the self, and imprisoning the other to protect the self’s freedom, only serves the king—for his subjects it is mutually destructive. And the medical frame that recast Fontanelle’s body and Lear’s self as precariously connected parts in circulation across permeable membranes now extends to structure the political body of the kingdom.

After failing to persuade Cordelia to stop building the wall, Lear has one final vision, in which body, self, and space are overlaid. He reflects, “I see my life, a black tree by a pool. The branches are covered with tears. The tears are shining with light. The wind blows the tears in the sky. And my tears fall down on me” (100). Lear’s self-image is a landscape, which divides him into multiple positions—tree, pool, sky, tears—bound together in circulation. In this dual vision, he stands outside himself to see this picture of his life, but also inside, to be touched by its tears. Like the interior landscape of Fontanelle’s body, Lear becomes a kind of stage, which he watches himself perform upon—locating his “life” not in the objects or actors onstage or in his spectatorial viewpoint, but in the movement between them.

With Lear’s final gesture, he becomes a “surgeon operating on himself.” He climbs the wall and tries to knock a hole in it, attacking a partition that was originally built as a defensive

barrier for his aging body—but instead of using a *weapon*, like the revolutionary armies, Lear repurposes one of the worker’s shovels, cutting into the wall with a *tool*. Seen through the medical frame, the wall is the skin sealing off an ailing body, which can only be cured by splitting open to let outside elements in and inside elements out. But for the baffled group of soldiers and workers who watch Lear dig, the wall retains its militarized ontology. During a TE, Bond writes, it is “as if two objects occupied the same space,” and “two forms of theatre” coexisted on one stage (Bond, “Commentary” 322). As military and medical theatrical frames come into focus around the wall, it flickers between a fortress protecting the body politic and a membrane surgically punctured to repair it. Within the military frame, Lear’s gesture is visible as an act of war, and punished as such. He is shot dead before an audience of soldiers and workers, and the mini-drama of his revolt comes to its conclusion. But as the workers are perfunctorily ushered offstage, one of them pauses to look back. This brief pivot shows the spectatorial division that arises from staging two “forms of theatre” on one stage. The worker’s body occupies the military frame, marching in step with the other workers and soldiers, embodying a rational regime that recognizes Lear’s act as an assault on its order. However, gazing through the medical frame at the arresting sight of an old man giving his life to dismantle the structure he built, a certain “viscerality” reaches out to grab hold of the worker, pulling him out of the geometrical marching formation and toward Lear’s wounded body. The dialectic between theatrical frames does not just *show* the worker different worlds; these frames involve him cognitively and corporeally in the production and perception of worlds. As the dramatic action comes to a halt, and Lear’s body is left alone onstage, the site of dramatic conflict shifts to the audience’s cognition, as different theatrical frames compete to organize sensory and perceptual material into conceptual understanding. When this happens, Bond writes that the “audience are

superior to the actors: they are on the real stage,” not as “passive victims or witnesses, but interpreters of experience . . . restoring meaning to action by recreating self-consciousness” (Bond, “A Note on Dramatic Method” 136). Bond calls this the “drama in the mind”: a dialectical struggle over *how* we think and feel, through which we become “human” by recognizing our “humanness.”

### **Be(com)ing Human**

This is one of Bond’s most enigmatic and persistent pronouncements: in drama, he writes, “we recognize humanness by creating it,” paradoxically positing the “human” as something we must *become*, by recognizing it as something we *already are* (Bond, *Hidden* 14). Judith Butler approaches a similar paradox of “the human” in *Frames of War*. Within the frames that legitimize war, “the human” is employed as a “differential norm” that is always set against the “non-human” — this how the liberal paradox between “reverence for human life and its legitimate destruction” is papered over (76, 160). Degrees of humanness are determined by racial and civilizational norms, as well as what could be called dramatic norms: “humans” are seen as agential subjects who direct intentional actions, which follow a logical chain of cause and effect — the non-humans acted upon become the inert stuff of stage props. While Butler opposes and exposes this use of the term “human,” she repurposes the term to denote the part of a human life that does *not* fit the norm. The “human,” in Butler’s formulation is the “double or trace of what is human that confounds the norm of the human... [it is an] incommensurability... between the norm and the life it seeks to organize” (95). Challenging the liberal-humanist notion of an autonomous human subject, Butler asserts that the ontology of the human is a “social ontology” that involves perpetual making and unmaking: “we are not only constituted by our relations but

dispossessed by them as well” (*Precarious Life* 24). This is physical: “The boundary of who I am is the boundary of the body, but the boundary of the body never belongs to me,” as it is subjected to varying forms and degrees of “physical coercion” (*Frames of War* 54). It is also psychic: “if I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you. . . . You are what I gain through this disorientation and loss. This is how the human comes into being, again and again, as that which we have yet to know” (*Precarious Life* 49). Bond exposes how normative notions of humanness are propounded through the dramatic conventions of the militarist frame (with agential autonomous characters rationally directing a linear-progressive action), to erase the human casualties of state-directed violence. And he locates humanness in a process of breaking and traversing the physical borders of the body and psychic borders of the self, to show how we are made by and of each other — construing the human subject not as “a discrete substance, but something enacted through a “transitive set of interrelations” (*Frames of War* 147).

But Bond and Butler see “the human” in different parts of this process, suggested by the different parts of the body they foreground. Butler follows Levinas in emphasizing the “face of the Other,” which has a way of capturing and binding us in a pre-subjective bond that whispers the injunction: “thou shalt not kill” (*Precarious Life* 138). The other’s “humanness” is not *recognized* in her face, however, but *apprehended* in the dialectic between the recognizable image presented by the face, and the awareness of something that does not quite go into it: “the human is not *represented* by the face. Rather, the human is indirectly affirmed in that very disjunction that makes representation impossible” (144). For Butler, the human is asserted by being deferred, by recreating the gap between the human forms we are able to “recognize,” and the elements of humanity we sense beyond their edges. But for Bond, the human *can* be

recognized, not through the icon of the face, but through looking beneath the skin into the opened body of the other. The human is not recognized in *what* we see (organs, tissues, and a lot of blood), or in what we cannot see, but in *how* we see. Humanness is not an identity or property of the body we look at, but something that happens as we look at it — and through this affective and cognitive process, we *enact* our humanness. Whereas Butler’s humanness requires acknowledging the final barrier between self and other that prevents true recognition, Bond’s dissolves this barrier, so that the “humanness” recognized by the spectator is that of one’s self *and* the other.

I suggest that this is made possible by the dialectic between theatrical frames. Within the militarist frame, the “human” is employed as a differential norm that is always set against the “nonhuman.” But when the medical frame is activated, the human becomes not a differentiating form but a shared content: we are recalled to the presubjective and premirror stage state of living on “both sides of our skin” and seeing “organs in exoscopy,” a state that Bond calls “radical innocence,” where all the newborn knows is that it exists, has the right to exist, and that “each human is everyone else” (Bond, *Hidden* 114; Lacan 4; Bond, *Hidden* 65). However, the “human” that is *enacted* in these dialectical moments is neither this infantile state of undifferentiated being nor the hardened and discrete “selves” that we assume in society’s militarized drama but the recognition of the surviving traces of this shared being from the position of separate selves. This kind of humanness is “created” in the act of “recognizing” something we knew before we knew who we are. Neither discrete form nor shared content, the human is found in an encounter with the other that fractures the armor of the self, not to bring total dissolution, but in Bond’s words, to inflict a “wound” that heals in a different “shape” (Bond, *Hidden* 29). The militarist frame that divides, individualizes, and structures is not permanently replaced by the medical, but is

perpetually punctured by it. In the cyclical process of breaking forms to spill and share contents that congeal into new provisional forms, our humanness occurs.

Although I have focused on *Lear*, the dialectical structure that I've outlined can be seen in virtually any one of Bond's 50-plus plays. Bond continually recycles images, scenes, and lines from his other works, as if he were perpetually revising the *same* play: trying to get right the drama of humanness. What I wish to draw from this chapter is a way of making theatre, a set of dramaturgical principles that Bond has refined over 50 years.

While *Saved* (1965) is remembered as the baby-stoning play, this infamous scene in fact occurs relatively early, and is shielded from the audience's gaze. It is instead Len, perched in a tree, who passively watches the infant being injured within the proscenium arch of the carriage. Over the rest of the play, Len wrestles with how to frame what he has seen, and the frame he settles on will guide the kind of home and world he decides to build.<sup>70</sup> What is most unsettling about the baby-stoning scene is not the shocking barbarity of the act, but the way in which it logically escalates from the young men's play-fight. In his preface to *Saved*, Bond compares the stoning to the "strategic bombing of German towns" (310-11). Rather than sadistic abuse, it is framed as a war game: the men call the baby by racist epithets ("Looks like a yeller-nigger... 'Onk like a yid"), and reassure themselves that it has "no feelin's" and can't be hurt, as they launch projectiles at their non-human target, like boys with toy soldiers. As Len moves in with Pam's family, he sees their world of domestic violence framed in similar militarist terms; but he is haunted by the scene of the stoning, which he perpetually revisits and turns over in his mind.

<sup>70</sup> Jenny Spencer notes that Len (his name a near-homonym for *lens*) experiments with different ways of looking and "angle[s] of vision... [which] implicate the viewer" (32). Bond's first play, *The Pope's Wedding* (1962), also has a protagonist whose name connotes the act of watching: "Scopey."

“Wass it feel like when yer killed it?” he asks Fred, and gets an indifferent shrug. In the penultimate scene, as Len prepares to leave, he is visited by Pam’s father Harry, head bandaged from his latest domestic row, and plotting revenge on his wife. Len asks Harry what it felt like fighting in WWII, and inquires whether he killed anyone. “Must ‘ave. Yer never saw the bleeder, ‘ceptin’ prisoners or dead” (128). Len points to Harry’s bandage:

LEN. ‘Oo tied your ‘ead?

HARRY. I managed. I never arst them.

LEN. I’m good at that.

HARRY. No need. (128)

In the final wordless scene, Len makes up his mind to stay with the family, and sets himself to work mending the broken leg of a chair. While the act seems trivial and has been criticized as bathetic (what will fixing a chair leg possibly change in this world of violence and cruelty?), Bond calls it “almost irresponsibly optimistic” (309). This is because, unmasked and facing heavy resistance, Len projects an alternate drama to restructure his world, and begins to enact it by mending its wounds.

In a number of Bond’s plays, the dialectic between militarist and medical frames involves briefly enacting a alternate society, usually built from the rubble of a militarist state that has destroyed itself through war. Act one of *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom*, Bond’s 1978 rewriting of *The Trojan Women*, consists of alternating scenes on either side of the walls of Troy, which guard the prize of Helen (who in Bond’s rewriting is not a human but a statue). Within the fortress-city, dividing walls separate social classes, so that a deadly plague ravishes the poor without touching the ruling class. At the end of the act, the Greeks blast a gap in the wall and Troy is pillaged in a scene of pandemonium before blackout. When the lights come up on act

two, Hecuba, now blind, is living with Ismene on an island, after the boat carrying them to Athens was shipwrecked. They live symbiotically with their environment and with each other, each filling in the functions that the other's body cannot perform: "You're my eyes," Hecuba says, "and I make you eat, and wash, and rock you to sleep when you're afraid" (*Plays Three* 226). Their society is short lived, as a Greek ship arrives to take them back, and to colonize and civilize the island by imposing a militarist frame. Flanked by a team of Greeks wearing "ceremonial military dress," Heros promises to "replace... violence with law, chaos with order," and to protect them from the primitive natives by reproducing the internal grid of the demolished city ("We'll divide the sea into squares") and by kindling class antagonism ("From time to time the people must be afraid — not of [the ruler] but of each other — or the city falls apart") (239-241).

In part one of Bond's 1985 trilogy *The War Plays*, a young man enlists in the army, and while his parents dress him in a bullet-proof army jacket and combat helmet and give him a rifle, he sings:

I am the army  
My legs are made of tanks  
My arms are made of guns  
My trunk is made of nukes  
My head is made of bombs  
...  
When a soldier heaves a grenade what does he see: a body explode like a bottle on  
a wall  
When a soldier slits a belly what does he see: guts spill like clothes from a  
suitcase (27-8)

His body becomes an invulnerable and all-powerful weapon, as the bodies of his enemies become inanimate objects. Part two follows an apocalyptic nuclear blast, and shows a camp of survivors rebuilding their society with a different bodily and human ontology — now porous and messy, prone to spilling out of themselves and into each other. Two women share the nursing of

one infant, and they sleep curled together, sharing body heat in a circulation that traverses skin not to injure but to nurture: what is given is not lost but conserved and returned.

### **Watching War, Performing Medicine**

In *Watching War*, Jan Mieszkowski argues that the principal factor determining a war's outcome is no longer its material acts of violence but the struggle to control the terms of the war's frame. Noting that "modern war is as much a virtual as an actual struggle," he urges us to consider and critique "war as a set of signifying practices . . . organized by semantic systems designed to regulate its visibility" (Mieszkowski 158, 33). Bond's *Lear* performs this kind of critique, and further shows that the frames we engage in "watching war" do more than shape our perception of what is happening "over there," but self-reflexively shape who we are right here. Bond has long been a stubborn apologist for theatre as a form, site, and medium uniquely able to manifest the ties between how we watch and who we are. He calls the theatre a "laboratory" in which we "test or prove" our humanness and "rewrite human consciousness," and then validate the results in the "drama" of the real world (Bond, "Note" 129, 131). As the audience encounters similar "situations, accounts and characters . . . in their daily life," they gradually come to interpret them through the frame employed in the theatre (130).

While Bond's plays have fallen out of favor in the United States and the United Kingdom, his dialectical dramaturgy continues to be used to contest militarization. This was the tactic employed by the Military Peace Movement, a group of Iraq War veterans that organized demonstrations in which wounded soldiers, dressed in uniform, passed out flyers with information about veteran PTSD and suicide. The militarist frame's oppositional identities, which persuade the public to "support" one party by rooting for them to injure the other, are

cited, dismantled, and then reconceived through a medical frame in which wounding is not unidirectional, and the visible wounds of the body are overlaid with the invisible psychic trauma through which the self comes undone. This is an activist dramaturgy that practices advocacy not as a fight, but as a courageous vulnerability, working to heal communities by exposing their wounds.

Edward Bond's efforts, however, have moved elsewhere. Shortly after the 1985 RSC production of his *War Plays* trilogy, Bond went into self-imposed exile from the professional theatre. He has since migrated to theatre-in-education, working with schools and youth groups.<sup>71</sup> Like Artaud, Bond has always viewed *actor* and *spectator* not as fixed roles but as temporary positions that we all cycle through. And he sees theatre as intervening in social reality by suspending its rigid order to allow for playful recombination. This is best accomplished, Bond has concluded, not in the partitioned space of professional theatres, but the integrated and interactive realm of education. If Bond's plays yield conceptual insight into the stories, structures, and attitudes that produce relationships of antagonism or care, guardedness or vulnerability, their practical payoff comes not through watching but doing. While the argument I am developing in my dissertation is conceptual, in my conclusion I will follow Bond into the worlds of applied and educational theatre, seeing what is possible when these dramaturgical and performative principles are put into practice by groups that act, watch, reflect, and revise together. In these spaces, theatre becomes an education in how to be human and how to respond to the inevitable pain, loss, and uncertainty this condition entails.

<sup>71</sup> See *Edward Bond and the Dramatic Child: Edward Bond's Plays for Young People*, ed. David Davis.

### **Chapter 3: David Rabe's Diagnosis: Vietnam and Embodied Cognition**

“The more an anatomist, scalpel in hand, explores, the more he destroys what he seeks to understand.” –David Rabe, *The Orphan*

“The knowledge comin’, baby. I’m talkin’ about what your kidney know, not your fuckin’ fool’s head.” –David Rabe, *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*

“You body know that and you body smart.” –David Rabe, *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*

Getting a graduate degree in theatre – David Rabe learned – is not what it’s cracked up to be. So he dropped out after a year at Villanova, looked around for other career options, and was promptly drafted and sent to Vietnam. While serving in surgical hospitals with the 68th Medical Group, Rabe wrote in his journals with growing frustration about the disjunction between language and embodied experience. He recalls staring at the scribbled phrase “artillery rounds,” and suddenly being acutely aware of “the existence of language as mere symbol,” and detesting the impotent words in “an utterly visceral way” (*Vietnam Plays* xvi). So too did theatre lose its connection to reality. “[T]heater seemed lightweight, all fluff and metaphor, spangle, posture, and glitter crammed into a form as rigid as any machine geared to reproduce the shape of itself endlessly... theatrical form seemed artificial” (xii-i). Upon returning from the war in 1967, Rabe swore off the theatre; until, six months later, he was offered a Rockefeller grant in playwriting – enough money to support him while completing his master’s degree. So he wrote some plays: dashing off drafts of *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*, *Sticks and Bones*, and *The Orphan*

within a year, which Rabe called his “Vietnam Trilogy.”<sup>72</sup> Theatrical form was what he had to work with, and he would have to surgically operate upon it to suit his needs.

He was only able to start writing, he says, when he stopped “thinking about the stage in realistic terms,” and “discovered that there were different forms of metaphoric-levels that I could create” (Baughman 194). He goes on to describe this as discovering performativity – that a play “creates its own reality, rather than imitating or describing a reality” (200). The theatre does not represent meanings that are elsewhere (it cannot “capture the experience of Vietnam on stage”), but enacts meanings in and about its own process of enactment – which can get at the “reality” of the war “in a metaphoric way” (194). The metaphors Rabe uses are medical: his plays seek not to “cure” but to “diagnose” phenomena he observed about the war, in Vietnam and back home (Rabe, *Vietnam Plays Vol. 1* xxiv). Like Antonin Artaud’s “vital surgery” that sends piercing affects slicing from skin to muscle to viscera and back, and Edward Bond’s “Theatre Event” in which a “surgeon operate[s] on himself,” leaving a wound that heals in a different shape, Rabe’s theatre reverses the epistemology of modern medicine (Artaud, *Oeuvres* 93; Bond, *Lear* xv). The scopical mastery of a disembodied mind is dethroned — naturalized by dramatic realism, modern medicine, and modern war — is surrendered and replaced by, as one character puts it, “What you body know” (Rabe, *Basic Training* 87).

While Rabe, like Artaud and Bond, critiques dramatic realism as naturalizing war and militarized medicine, he is not so optimistic about theatre’s power to heal or stimulate social change. Whereas Bond believes that drama makes humanness, Rabe maintains that all dramatists can do is “diagnose” the perverse dramaturgy of “the eternal human pageant” (Rabe, *The*

<sup>72</sup> Today, critics have replaced *The Orphan* with Rabe’s later play *Streamers* (1976) as the third in the trilogy, but Rabe has not.

*Vietnam Plays, Vol. 1* xxiv-xxv). He adds: “I believe war to be [a] permanent part of that pageant” (3). In this chapter, I will use his plays to dive deeper into the theatrical apparatus of dramatic realism, and to consider how it is engaged by modern war and fuel a self-perpetuating quest for meaning — pointing us towards an unachievable telos of invulnerability.

Bristling at critical attributions of “meaning” to his plays, Rabe maintains that, “I don’t know—or perhaps don’t want to know—anything about them” (ix). But he is equally adamant that his plays are not “meaningless,” and he vaguely alludes to a bodily “meaning,” through which we come to “know” something about or through war that cannot be articulated as a propositional statement. I argue that Rabe’s plays are interested in “preconceptual meaning,” the term cognitive scientists use for the nonconscious and nonpropositional meaning that is immanent in embodied activity, and only secondarily elaborated into language, concepts, and conscious thought (31). Preconceptual meaning involves simultaneous thought, feeling, and action, and dissolves the ontological barrier between these modes. For example, when experiencing the meaning of “doubt,” one’s body undergoes neural, chemical, and behavioral changes creating a felt tension and restriction, which precedes and is inseparable from the conceptual-propositional thought that “X is false.”<sup>73</sup> The sometimes preferred term “embodied meaning” is a misnomer, since all meaning is embodied, but it is experientially resonant. Whereas the proposition “X is false” seems valid irrespective of one’s bodily state (and sometimes is), the physical uneasiness that led one to this propositional knowledge is inseparable from the body. So Rabe, like Artaud,

<sup>73</sup> When we experience meaning, we are simultaneously recognizing and creating our relationship to a perceptual object: mentally, by relating and balancing observations; neurally and chemically, by releasing hormones, accelerating our metabolism, or speeding our heart rate; and behaviorally, by minutely adjusting our posture, shortening our breath, or hardening our musculature.

Bond, and many other theatre makers, invokes a mind-body dualism to describe a theatrical practice that denies this very dualism.

Third generation “enactivist” cognitive science gets its name from the thesis that meanings are not forms or contents *in* the brain, body, or world, but interactions *between* brain, body, and world. The meanings we enact are enabled and constrained by “image schemas,” the recurrent structures of embodied, sensorimotor experience that are patterned into our “neural maps.” In *The Meaning of the Body*, cognitivist philosopher Mark Johnson emphasizes three primary schemas: “container” schemas (deriving from our experience of being and having bodies with insides and outsides, which can themselves dwell in and outside of containers), “trajectory” schemas (from our experience of moving forward through space), and “causation” schemas (from the physical effort it takes to move an object from one place to another) (21). Through conceptual metaphors, schemas from the “source-domain” of embodied activity are projected into the “target domain” of abstract concepts (e.g. understanding the self, the family, and the nation as “containers”), and used for abstract reasoning.

As many cognitivist theatre scholars have noticed, considering bodies that hold an “inner” *content* as they move along *trajectories* crossing in and out of a *bounded* space, and *cause* things to happen, is a pretty apt description of the fundamentals of theatre – at least the theatrical conventions of modern realism. Much of the work in this subfield of theatre studies has thus focused on matching the “image schemas” that structure cognition with the dramatic structures of plays. Bruce McConachie pioneered this approach in his 2003 book, *American Theater in the Culture of the Cold War*, and he has developed it through four subsequent books; going so far in his most recent as to advocate for a comprehensive paradigm shift in theatre and performance studies (McConachie, *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* 19-26). In its

interdisciplinary zeal however, the exchange between cognitive science and theatre studies has become methodologically muddled. Rather than using cognitive science to interrogate meaning making in theatre, McConachie and others have used the interpretive conventions of realist drama to *misinterpret* the results of cognitive scientific research, and then used this misunderstanding of cognition to interpret realist drama, now stamping their arguments with the imprimatur of “science.” McConachie describes this as finding “scientific confirmation for common sense” (*Engaging Audiences* 8).<sup>74</sup> But he mistakes the conceptual *products* of cognition for the preconceptual *process*. It is true that spectators’ “common sense” conceptual understanding of a play can be expressed in terms of container and trajectory schemas, mapped onto dramatic units of character, action, and world. Indeed, cognitive scientists often use drama as a metaphor for conceptual thought. But the process of meaning-making is not a mirroring of what happens on the stage “in” the mind – rather it is a dialectical interchange between body, brain, and world in a process we call “mind,” which creatively *engages* image schemas, but does not programmatically follow them. The slip might seem minor, but its consequences are not, as it gives a false ontology and confident objectivism to what spectators know (as Rabe would put it,

<sup>74</sup> McConachie makes two important errors. First, in spite of employing the terminology of “embodied” and “enactivist” cognition, his understanding of spectatorial meaning-making is undergirded by the “representational theory of meaning” that cognitive science debunks, which construes meanings as quasi-objects that exist in the world (or on the stage) and are reflected in the mind. This seems due to his enthusiasm for “mirror neurons,” which he claims give spectators “the cognitive information to read [characters’] minds directly” (79). Second, McConachie assumes that, cognitively, the way in which we understand dramatic characters, actions, and worlds “on the stage is fundamentally no different [that] in real life” (66). Using his own medical metaphor, he writes that, “Theatre-going, of course, is a kind of placebo; the ‘pill’ we swallow as spectators when we engage in a performance allows us to believe in certain realities” (30). But this is of course what makes theatre *different* from life: that we are not asked to *believe* but to play along, to grant what I will argue is a preconceptual form of *consent*. If we actually believe that we are seeing reality, then the pill we swallowed was definitely not a placebo.

mechanically producing “rigid forms”), and excuses the perceiver from any complicity in the act of meaning-production. This, as I will later show, is the slip that occurs in war.

In this chapter, I redirect the insights of enactivist cognitive science towards the embodied work of the audience in producing a play’s meanings. Rabe took an interest in first generation “computational” cognitive science while writing his Vietnam Plays,<sup>75</sup> and he explores its implications most directly in his third play, *The Orphan*. Together, he says that his three plays offer “three shifting but interrelated lenses onto the subject matter they shared” (190). This seems to apply to both the aspects of war that they focus on, and the theatrical elements they emphasize. *Basic Training*, which follows Pavlo from physically transformative bootcamp, through tending to injured soldiers in a surgical hospital, to shooting, stabbing, and blowing up enemies during his infantry deployment, focuses on soldiering, and the production and perception of character; *Sticks and Bones*, set in the living room of a family whose son has just returned from Vietnam, focuses on the militarization of everyday civilian life, and on the constellation of “dramatic worlds”; and *The Orphan*, which retells episodes from the *Oresteia* out of order, interwoven with scenes from the Vietnam War and the Manson family murders, focuses on the historical and mythic role of war in the culture, and the movement and perception of dramatic action. Each play engages a central image schema, and ponders its meaning-making role in theatre and in war: *Pavlo Hummel* uses the container-schema to structure the concept of character; *Sticks and Bones* uses the container schema to conjure and demarcate the domestic

<sup>75</sup> First generation cognitive science had been developed by the British military during WWII, modeling its understanding of the human brain on early computers. The brain inputs information from the external world, and then performs “mathematical and logical computation[s]” using “intrinsically meaningless internal symbols” (Johnson, *MB* 120). In this early model, the separation between mind, body, and world, deeply entrenched in Western philosophy, was largely maintained.

world; and *The Orphan* employs the trajectory and causation schemas to understand actions playing out in time.

In each play, Rabe brings to light the contradictory ways in which the theatrical apparatus of dramatic realism engages these schemas, promising meaning in matching them to the units of characters, worlds, and actions, but perpetually deferring their alignment. And war manifests as an attempt to erase this gap, by importing the rigid forms of conceptual thought into the preconceptual realm of embodied perception and action. Spectators watching the play reach for the absolute objectivist meaning that realist drama dangles just beyond our grasp, and find that the very act of achieving it – making schema and experience cohere – annihilates meaning by demolishing its cognitive supports. This process is not a conceptual-propositional meaning that the plays *represent*, but a preconceptual meaning their audience *enacts*.

The “meaning” of war is an oft-pondered paradox – encapsulated contrapuntally by the title of Chris Hedges’s *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*, and the catch-all maxim tossed around by U. S. troops in Vietnam: “Fuck it, it don’t mean nothin.” Understanding why the pursuit of meaning through war is self-cannibalizing, but also self-perpetuating, requires diagnosing its catalyzing theatrical rhetoric. Rabe writes that theatre must get at war “in a metaphorical way,” and the central metaphor he engages is war-as-theatre, a ubiquitous and complex conceptual blend, with actional, performative, ontological, and epistemological dimensions, that has structured the “meaning” of war in politics, media, and art for centuries. I will thus end by considering how the war-as-theatre metaphor operates in Carl von Clausewitz’s seminal treatise *On War* – still the most influential and debated text on the subject – and suggesting how embodied cognition in the theatre can help make sense of Clausewitz’s paradoxical pronouncements. As inquiries-through-practice into the relationship between theatre,

cognition, the body, and war, Rabe's Vietnam Plays enable us to "diagnose" the subtle, intersecting, preconceptual ways in which war's meaning is theatrically enacted, and the ways in which it enacts *us*.

### ***The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel***

In his author's note to *Basic Training*, Rabe offers some tips to the actor cast in the lead role: "It is Pavlo's body that changes. His physical efficiency, even his mental efficiency increases, but real insight never comes... he will learn only that he is lost; not how, why, or even where" (89). What Pavlo learns, he learns with his body, and his knowledge is his ability to *do* things, physically and mentally, towards specific operational ends within his environment. But this learning is also an unlearning of the basic things that war is supposed to teach – he is unruddered from meaning, unsure of where and when he is, and why. Pavlo is introduced as an opaque and amorphous figure, a compulsive liar with an unknown background (Pavlo is not even his real name), who has entered the army to find meaning in his life by acting within a meaningful world structured with binaries of comrade and enemy and absolute values of patriotism, honor, and stoic masculinity. In an interview, Rabe says that Pavlo is "lacking in an authentic self... lacking any personality, or sense of identity, he's forever trying to devise one" (Baughman 196). In other words, Pavlo is a dramatic character trying to acquire some character.

In realist drama, the concept of "character" mediates between the external forms the *dramatis personae* take (through words, gestures, etc.), and their supposed internal subjectivity. Laminated onto the bodies of actors, character is metaphorically structured by the body, to be understood as a kind of container, with appearance and behavior as the visible surface covering an inner subjective content. Surfaces and depths are cast in a reciprocal relationship: an inner

content is the supposed source of external actions and forms, and it is through these forms that we glimpse the inner content. Pavlo, however, has a container problem: his own psychic and physical borders are soft and porous, and he fails to respect the borders and internal structure of the institutional, ideological, and social containers that he inhabits. He also violates the integrity of the other schema that Johnson sees as central to cognition: the linear trajectory. Pavlo's own life path has been circuitous, looping, lazy, and indirect, as is his mode of self-expression. Throughout the play, Pavlo and the other characters scrupulously observe his exterior, and articulate questions and propositions about what is "inside" him. And they engage different bodily and theatrical modes through which this immaterial "inner" content might be revealed, produced, or altered – to match the container and trajectory schemas that give military character meaning.

Act one is couched within a fairly familiar dramatic structure for war plays and films, beginning with Pavlo's moment of death, then flashing back to the beginning of his story, as he arrives at boot camp. After getting blown up by a grenade in the kinetic opening scene, Pavlo finds himself in a kind of purgatorial limbo, with his old commanding officer, Ardell, appearing as an unangelic Saint Peter type, who guides Pavlo in looking back and taking stock of his life. Taking a bodily inventory, Ardell inquires about Pavlo's cause of death, and scoffs at his clinical answer: "Abdominal and groin areas, that shit. It hit you in the stomach, man, like a ten-ton truck and it hit you in the balls, blew 'em away" (8). From this purgatorial framing scene, we look back to Pavlo's first day of basic training, which we are told will make him "straight," "clean," and "hard" (21) – promising the kind of "meaning" we experience when leaky containers are patched up and squiggly lines straightened out. As the recruits march through daily drills and exercises, the remaking of Pavlo's "inner self" is orchestrated through various bodily techniques

of enacting rigid container and forward trajectory schemas. This involves muscular posture and comportment: “That’s heels on a line or as near it as the conformation of your body permit,” the drill sergeant commands, while inspecting troops at attention (13); the regulation of internal organ systems: “you gonna be doing everything from now on—by platoon and by the numbers,” he says, “includin’ takin’ a shit” (13); and an anatomized performance of hyper-masculinity: “YOU HAVE BALLS!,” he barks, “NO SLITS! BUT BALLS” (12). The emphasis on guts and balls – inner bodily content metaphorically (and physiologically) connected to external borders, aggression, and strength – is ironized by the framing knowledge that Pavlo will end up with neither.

As Pavlo’s training progresses, there is a growing divergence between his performance in military drills (he fumbles his rifle, and futzes around during guard duty), and his “performance” of military identity. Echoing and exaggerating the discourse he hears in the camp, Pavlo develops a lurid fascination with ways of killing (gas, biological weapons) and he brags of increasingly violent sexual exploits. In *Bring Me Men*, Aaron Belkin argues that the military motivates soldiers to fight, and ensures their obedience and conformity, by simultaneously constructing them as the ideal of “military masculinity,” and its feminine/queer opposite, thus generating deep insecurity. The models of masculinity that Belkin examines are structured by underlying “container” and “penetration” schemas. Troops’ “hard impenetrable bodies” and selves are supposed to penetrate others while fending off attacks – war is framed as a “penetration contest” (85). But in basic training, recruits constantly lose this contest: they are penetrated physically and psychically, and raided of their inner content. The bodily examples that Belkin catalogues include routine inspections of orifices, and punishment upon the detection of filth; prevalent male-male rape; and initiation rituals in which new recruits are made to ingest

excrement and vomit. The abject feminized, weak, and queer identity that the recruit is made to occupy is not experienced as a different or mutable self, but as a terror of nonbeing that must be repressed and denied at all costs. As a result of the “ambiguity sketched on bodies,” the “self” is “erased,” “absent,” “collapsed” (34, 39). Spectacularly failing to embody the military ideal, as Pavlo does, does not represent the failure of his “training,” Belkin would argue, but its successful fulfillment. While Pavlo’s performance of military masculinity is not convincing, neither is it clear that this is a put on “act,” in contradistinction to some underlying essential true self. Rather, we are unable to relate Pavlo’s form to his content. He registers as that which cannot be seen, as nothing, a black hole. Looking at Pavlo quizzically, Ardell concludes, “You black on the inside... you can’t see yourself no way” (37).

The culminating point of Pavlo’s training comes when the other recruits, to punish him for stealing from his bunkmate, ambush Pavlo, wrap him in a blanket, and give him a severe beating. The boot camp logic of drilling character into the self through the body is taken to a violent extreme: the men call Pavlo names (“thief!”) as they deal him blows, which are of course intended to make him embody the *opposite* of the identity that is being ascribed to him (i.e., to stop being a thief) (35). But as the ocularcentric project of character formation through discipline and surveillance reaches its apex, Pavlo disappears from view beneath the blanket; as the other men try to beat a shape into him, all that we see is a writhing and yelping lump, who of course cannot see anything. This marks the end of the dramatic arc of character cultivation – which has kept the audience’s attention and managed their expectations with the promise that the character under our gaze will gradually become intelligible. We will not become acquainted with Pavlo in this way, nor will anyone else. Pavlo crawls out from the blanket, bruised and bloodied, and he limps to the yard in time for bayonet practice. As the men parry and thrust, the drill sergeant

barks orders: “You got to get inside that big long knife that other man got. ... You got to want to put the steel into a man. You got to want to cut him... You got to want to feel the skin and muscle come apart with the push you give” (37-8). The objective now is to get inside the other before he gets inside you. The axis of self-making is abruptly reversed. After offering up his body before an all-seeing and judging authoritative gaze for most of act one, Pavlo gets his first taste of penetrating the borders of an other, and asserting his selfhood in controlling and destroying their inner content.

In the next scene, Pavlo remembers a story he heard from a Corporal back from Vietnam. Walking down a road with his squad, the Corporal was approached by an old Vietnamese man and a young girl, smiling and waving. Without warning, a Sergeant in his outfit shot them both in the head; he sensed correctly that they were wearing satchel charges beneath their clothes with enough TNT to blow up the squad. Pavlo is deeply impressed by the incident, and he marvels at the thought of:

Just knowin’. Seein’ nothin’ but bein’ sure enough to gun down two people. ...  
What is it? I want to know what it is. The thing that Sergeant saw to make him  
know to shoot that kid and old man. I want to have it, know it, be it. ... if I could  
be a bone. In my deepest part or center, if I could be a bone. (39, 45)

Pavlo is captivated by the prospect of knowing without seeing – being able to pick up on invisible signs to perceive the inner truth beneath people’s exteriors (here, the threatening truth beneath their clothes). Having this x-ray vision would redound back on his self, making him a “bone”: the stable core in the “deepest part” of his body, rather than being a shifting series of positions and postures, observed and known from the outside. Again, character-perception (observing someone from without to discern who they are “within”) is physicalized – but now

Pavlo is the observer. Whereas before, we were directed to see Pavlo's character as a container being progressively filled in, organized and hardened, now Pavlo is the one observing and judging character. And his ability to break into, demolish, and empty out other containers – in thought, feeling, and act – confers a kind of “content” on and in him. Since he cannot see himself, controlling other's physiological interior will give him a psychic interiority – his depth will come from his ability to pierce others' surfaces.

Pavlo yearns to reposition himself as the spectator to a drama with the structure elaborated by W. B. Worthen in *Modern Drama and the Rhetoric of Theatre*. Worthen argues that the rhetoric of realism, which positions audiences in the privileged vantage point of “seeing into” objectified characters onstage, while remaining invisible themselves, constructs a particular kind of “self” for audience members. There is a complex connection between “interiorized characters... [and] a similarly interiorized interpretive practice identified with the absent audience,” through which both dramatic characters and spectators are constructed as containers holding an inner content (77). The claim of realism that dramatic characters are “like us,” and that we can empathically mirror their thoughts and feelings, is predicated on this seeming symmetry of container-bound interiorities. But Worthen reveals that this relationship is in fact one of subjugation and inversion – the spectator builds her private container housing an “inner self” by penetrating and raiding the container of the character before her. Pavlo's military training has reified and hyperbolized this theatrical rhetoric, making Pavlo into a character who must perform his “content,” before a spectator perched high up on the drill sergeant's tower, whose power, freedom, and supposedly stable and substantial self are acquired through his piercing, unreciprocated gaze. At the end of act one, Pavlo gets to switch positions; his training

complete, he dons a military dress uniform, climbs the drill sergeant's tower, and, from behind a pair of sunglasses, looks out across the stage.

Pavlo's anticipated apotheosis – going from building and defending his “self” as a container offered up for surveillance, to surveilling, attacking, and destroying other containers – is delayed however, as he does not receive his desired assignment to the infantry, and instead works as a medic. Pavlo learns to tend to broken body-containers, patching up their holes, reconstructing their internal structures, and administering to their needs as they regenerate. He receives detailed instructions for how to do this in the field: “you find a man wounded in his chest. You gotta seal it off. That wound workin’ like a valve, pullin’ in air, makin’ pressure to collapse that man’s lung...” (56). And in the hospital, Pavlo himself must step in to perform the functions of their damaged or missing organs. Inspecting the hospital, an Army Captain praises Pavlo's work: “Those invalids you care for, you feed them when they can't, you help them urinate, defecate, simple things they can't do for themselves but would die without” (71). But Pavlo finds that the intermediate states of bodies in the hospital – not dead, nor fully able to live; precariously holding on to enough of their form to contain and support aided functioning – compromises and makes relative the things that Pavlo wants to be pure and absolute.

One of the invalids in his ward, a landmine victim called Sergeant Brisbey, whose injury closely resembles Pavlo's fatal blast, rejects overtures of sympathy. “You're glad it's me, you're glad it's not you” (69). He asks another soldier rhetorically, “You ever think to yourself, ‘Oh, if only it wasn't Brisbey. I'd give anything. My own legs. Or one, anyway. Arms. Balls. Prick’” (68). To the soldier's “no,” he replies, “Good. Don't. Because I have powers I never dreamed of and I'll hear you if you do, Henry, and I'll take them. I'll rip them off you” (68). Brisbey refuses the interconnected bodily ontology wherein caregivers are metaphorical organ-donors, stepping

in to complete his damaged organ systems. And in denying the possibility of a caregiving relationship, he reinstates the military's theatrical rhetoric, configuration, epistemology and ontology, with himself in the dominant position. He professes the psychic "power" to pierce the container of the soldier's mind and hear his thoughts, paired with the physical power to destroy his inner content – to rip off his balls. Before asking Pavlo to kill him, he repeats the act one reversal, from offering one's body to be pierced and judged from a god's eye view, to having the god's eye view that can pierce and judge others. Calling Pavlo "cruel" in the same way as "God," he explains,

God's always that way because it's never him, it's always somebody else. Except that once. The only time we was ever gonna get him, he tried to con us into thinkin' we oughta let him go. Make it somebody else again. But we got through all that shit he was talkin' and hung on and got him good–fucked him up good–nailed him up good... (69)

The bizarre "meaning" of Brisbey's story comes from wrestling with a force that tries to know, control, and penetrate the "container" of his self, and reversing their relation, making the force materialize as a container that he can pin down and penetrate. Pavlo's time in the surgical hospital reinforces his conviction that there are only two possible positions, and that he wants to be the one doing the nailing.

Finally reassigned to the infantry, Pavlo revels in the god-like ability to see and cut into the inner content of others. Like the Sergeant in the Corporal's story, Pavlo can take one glance at the Vietcong and instantly "know what he's got under his clothes" (79). The instantaneous junction of feeling, thinking, and acting combines to create a pure and confident "meaning" – enacted directly by his body without being alienated into conceptual thought. But it is not only

enemy bodies that are destroyed. Scouring the battlefield for fallen comrades, Pavlo notices that the corpses that have been out there for a few days “fall apart in your hands” (75). Then, while carrying the body of a dead soldier from his unit, Pavlo is dealt his first injury, stabbed from behind. “The blood goin’ out a hole in your guts, man; turn you into water,” Ardell narrates from the purgatorial frame (76). Pavlo is injured three subsequent times in the next few minutes, struck by bullets. In the 1972 production at the Theater Company of Boston, starring Al Pacino, a hospital bed remained as a set piece in the corner of the stage, and each time that Pavlo was wounded, Ardell would carry him over and lay him down in the bed; only to spring back up, grab his rifle, and return to battle. Through this rapidfire sequence of injuries and hospitalizations, the play’s narrative logic breaks down into a disorienting montage – we cannot place Pavlo’s actions within a spatial and temporal structure to orient them within the dramatic arc of the war.

But “meaning” is not lost along with its conceptual form; to the contrary. As Pavlo’s blood spills out of his body, and he struggles under the weight of his dead comrade, Ardell says, “The knowledge comin’ baby. I’m talkin’ about what your kidney know, not your fuckin’ fool’s head” (76). Another Sergeant within the flashback frame continues, “livin’ breathin’ people disappear. Walkin’ talkin’ buddies. And you gonna wanna kill and say their name... It what you are and do” (77). Gaining the visceral knowledge that all bodies are perpetually at risk of falling into pieces and disappearing, comes with the visceral injunction to keep them present and whole by tearing enemy bodies apart while stating the existence and identity of the person he wants to preserve: to “kill and say their name.” This becomes “what you are.” Physically dismantling the body of another serves to psychically preserve the “self” or “life” of oneself or one’s comrade – its wholeness and stability is substantiated by what is torn apart in its name. Like Brisbey’s God, Pavlo furiously crucifies others in order to assert and manifest his self. And his injuries, rather



combat montage, grenade explosion, and deathbed scenes as bringing a total “psychological disintegration,” as both Pavlo and the audience are no longer able to perceive “cause and effect, logical progression, or chronological order or continuity” (291). But losing conceptual coherence is not the same as losing meaning. And the last moments of the play invite us to dwell in a different kind of meaning – what, as Ardell puts it, “you body know” – as we take an extended look at Pavlo in pain.

In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry argues that pain itself is without conceptual “meaning” – it “has no referential content” (5), and it acquires meaning when it is made to refer to verbal issues in a causal relation. But the ways in which Scarry describes pain can in fact help us understand its “preconceptual” embodied meaning(s), as her metaphors engage the image schemas that cognitive scientists offer as structuring tools in meaning-production. She writes that pain is pictured as damage to the body (a container schema that has been penetrated), caused by an imaginary external agent (a trajectory-schema pointed at the body). The “meaning of the body” here is in the recognition of the damage to the container, and the threat of the incoming force, and the simultaneous effort to defend the container and repel the threat with a counterforce. These image-schematic meanings are not a secondary process of abstract reasoning about pain; they *are* pain (we do not first feel a “stabbing pain,” and then think that the pain is like being stabbed – rather the feeling is felt *as stabbing* the instant we feel it). It is thus only conceptual meaning that is destroyed by pain, overwhelmed by a ravaging preconceptual meaning. Scarry cannot decide what happens to the “self” when the body is in pain. At one point she writes that “the self become[s] coterminous with the edges of the body” (33); at another that the self and body are separated, “split[ting] the human being into two” (48); and yet again that “the psychological and mental content that constitutes both one’s self and one’s world... ceases

to exist,” leaving *only* a painful body behind (30). As the “container” of the body is violated by a pain we do not will and cannot control, we lose the “source-domain” that metaphorically structures the self as a container, with an inner space of subjectivity both guarded against and in relation to what is outside. And since pain resists expression and objectification, spectators know that the external forms they see cannot capture the inner subjective content — and thus cannot perform the cognitive operation of perceiving and empathizing with “character.” As Pavlo’s self cracks, dissolves, or takes leave of his painful body, we lose the shielded “inner space” of interpretation that Worthen identifies as the privileged possession and dwelling of the spectator of modern realist drama.

But Pavlo lost his inner space long before he got hurt. In *Philosophy in the Flesh*, Mark Johnson and George Lakoff show that the “inner life” of the self is constructed through several kinds of bodily experience. First, through our perpetual failure to control our bodies. Second, through conflicts between our conscious values and our behavior. Third, through the disparity between how other people see us, and how we see ourselves. As we saw in Pavlo’s training during act one, the military tries to erase all of these gaps – recruits are to control their bodies completely; their behavior must totally embody the military’s values; and they are to uncritically adopt the external viewpoint of the drill sergeant telling them who they are. The fact that it inevitably fails to coerce this perfect congruence does not leave space for a healthy recognized “inner self,” because it cannot accept these failures. As Belkin argues about “military masculinity,” failure to embody the norms is not seen as fallible humanness, but feared and blocked out as abject nonbeing – resulting in a “collapsed,” “empty,” “absent” self (39). For Lakoff and Johnson, we experience and pursue selfhood in trying to make the body cohere with various ideals of comportment – trying to translate inner content into outer appearance – but the

production and maintenance of an “inner self” is in fact predicated on the continual deferral of their coherence. Interiority comes from our failure to be what we want to be, our ability to perceive the gap, and our persistent effort to close it.<sup>76</sup>

In his essay for *War and the Body*, cognitivist philosopher John Protevi cites studies showing that 98% of soldiers are only able to kill when in a “precognitive” and “desubjectified state” (128).<sup>77</sup> Subjective agency is overridden by a “non-subjective controller of bodily action,” which Protevi calls “basic emotion,” and which Johnson would call the preconceptual “meaning of the body” (130). Through training regimens, soldiers learn to suspend their selfhood, obliterating the “inner space” of deliberation and reflection; this loss of “self” is not a casualty of war, but a strategic objective. While Protevi’s description of the “affective entrainment” that leads soldiers to operate automatically without conscious reflection resonates with Pavlo’s “Pavlovian” conditioning in basic training, Protevi’s dichotomy between moments of being or not being a “subject,” seemingly activated with an on and off switch, is complicated by Rabe’s play. Pavlo does not *have* a stable, coherent, autonomous self before joining the military which he then *loses* – rather his training and service are the simultaneous making and unmaking of his self. War is a promise, structure, and practice of subjectification that destroys what it builds. Processes and states that Protevi sees as opposites are recast by Rabe in mutual production – as Pavlo furiously “kill[s] and say[s] the name[s]” of his comrades and lets the Vietcong “know the

<sup>76</sup> The fourth and fifth bodily experiences that Lakoff and Johnson list are predicated on the first three. Because we recognize a gap between how we see ourselves and how others see us, we are able to step “outside of ourselves” to take an external viewpoint on our actions. And in the space opened up by all of these gaps, we engage in “inner dialogue and inner monitoring” (267).

<sup>77</sup> This figure correlates with the general population – estimated to be 2% sociopaths.

reason why,” his attempts to assert and make himself both succeed and fail at once, in a way that accelerates their assertion (77, 79).

Rabe realizes that war’s promise vis-a-vis character is essentially the promise of realist drama, taken to its logical extreme. The spectatorial process of perceiving and becoming acquainted with dramatic characters involves speculatively relating their words, appearance, and actions to an inferred inner content. And the inability to do this brings, as Elinor Fuchs says, the “death of character.”<sup>78</sup> But the total *equivalence* of form and content also kills character. As Lakoff, Johnson, Belkin, and Protevi demonstrate about “selves,” we are only able to understand ourselves as containers with an inner content because not all of this content goes into our external acts and formal manifestations. Similarly, perceiving “character” is predicated on the conviction that there is more to these figures than meets the eye, that they guard a reservoir of character-potential that can surface in different forms. Without this, they would be cardboard cut-outs. The conceptual ways in which we think and talk about character (as a stable known form-and-content), bely the preconceptual ways in which we enact it – through continual observation, guessing, and revising, imaginatively crossing in and out of a container that cracks and recongeals with each utterance and action. Realist drama papers over the contradiction that fuels and sustains it: we experience the “meaning” of character by trying to match the forms that stage figures take to their imagined content, and this meaning comes into sharper focus as they get closer to matching, but were they ever to completely coincide, “character” would dissipate into thin air.

<sup>78</sup>The postmodern theatre that Fuchs surveys in *The Death of Character* divides into plays that aim to enact presence-without-form (e.g., Joseph Chaikin’s Open Theatre), and others that stage form-without-presence (e.g. The Wooster Group’s deconstructionist work) (38, 70, 87).

War promises to consummate this character strip tease, by making form and subjectivity perfectly cohere. It casts individuals as simultaneous spectators (with “impenetrable bodies” and selves, and an all-seeing gaze), and *dramatis personae* (whose bodily and subjective containers are penetrated, probed, and pillaged by this gaze). And as Belkin argues, the contradiction between the omnipotent penetrator and the abject penetrated is disavowed, collapsing the inner space of the “self” and ensuring soldiers (and civilians, as we will see in the next section) obediently play along. This is *represented* most acutely with Pavlo’s rapid-fire montage of killing and saying the names of his comrades – ecstatically reaching for an absolute knowledge that disappears the instant he gets it – and resetting to reach again. Pavlo loses the deliberative inner space of character, and behaves automatically, as a killing-machine.

But more importantly, war’s self-cannibalizing theatrical rhetoric is *enacted* by the theatre audience. Initially couching itself in dramatic realism, *Basic Training* prompts its audience to pursue meaning in looking for character. And the audience’s inner space of interpretation is created by shifting around to try out different character-hypotheses, and revising them in light of subsequent action. When we are no longer able to relate the form and the content of the characters onstage, either because they are totally equivalent or totally severed, our *own* inner space of interpretation collapses. This collapse is not an empathetic mirroring of Pavlo’s experience, but the shutting of the gates of empathy through which we thought we could share in it. So while spectators and critics might well give the play the conceptual meaning that war is meaningless, or that it destroys the meaning it promises, what has actually happened, on a preconceptual embodied level, is that *we* have destroyed the meaning we pursued by finally getting it.

## *Sticks and Bones*

As the curtain rises on Rabe's second Vietnam Play, the audience looks into the familiar living room of the popular American sitcom *Ozzie and Harriet*. The show, which aired from 1952 to 1966, starred the real life Nelson family, comprised of the titular couple and their sons David and Rick, who epitomized the early Cold War white suburban nuclear family. In *Sticks and Bones*, the Nelson family has lived on past their cancellation date, and the elder son David has gone to Vietnam. The play begins with David's return; wounded in active service, he is now blind, and exhibits symptoms of what would soon begin to be clinically diagnosed as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. He does not recognize his home and family, and they do not recognize him. The action of the play, broadly construed, consists of each one struggling to assimilate the other to their values and worldview: the family tries to restore David to his former happy-go-lucky self within their sheltered home, while David tries to confront his family with the horrors he has witnessed and perpetrated, to tear apart the moral fabric of their domestic world. While the Vietnam War remains offstage in this single set domestic drama, criticism of the play has noted that it illuminates how the social and cultural norms, values, and institutions of civilian society promote and naturalize militarization.<sup>79</sup> The relationship between the military drama of *Basic Training* and the domestic drama of *Sticks and Bones* is one of co-production. But whereas *Basic Training* focused on the dramatic element of character, the emphasis in *Sticks and Bones* is on world-building. Attention and intrigue are generated not so much through seeing who these people are and what they do (they are characterized archetypally, like their sitcom

<sup>79</sup> See Nora Alter, *Vietnam Protest Theatre*; Richard A. Sullivan, "The Recreation of Vietnam; C. W. E. Bigsby, *Modern American Drama* (386).

prototypes, and rigidly reproduce predictable actions), but where they live, and how this dwelling dictates the answers to the first two questions.

Like character, a play's "dramatic world" is generally conceptualized as both a container and its content. It has a border marking inclusion and exclusion; and an internal structure that operates as both a grid of intelligibility (determining what can be perceived and understood), and closely correlated channels of possible action (determining what can be done). Bert States defines a play's "world" as both a "picture frame" bracketing the play's action, guiding our attention, and enforcing the play's organizing principles, and an "atmospheric viscosity" that hovers and clings, seeming "to infect and limit all actions and characters within it" (62). Hans-Thies Lehmann describes the stage world of dramatic theatre as a "closed-off fictional cosmos" that is "surveyable" and "manageable" in its totality (3, 11). Ric Knowles calls the world of the play "a theatrical structure in which significance is determined," which involves epistemological, ontological, logical and social dimensions: the structures and conditions through which "meaning" can occur (133, 135, 181). And in *Theatre and Phenomenology*, Daniel Johnston invokes Maurice Merleau-Ponty's evocative account of "the flesh of the world," to describe a play's dramatic world as a "textured fabric that hits us all at once", and that we wear as a second layer of muscle, sinew, and skin: our "body is the heart of an organism" (36). I view these varying definitions as complementary systems of metaphor that both describe and enact our experience of perceiving a "world." A world is an inhabited physical space; a world is a bordering "frame" that shapes the action of the space's inhabitants; a world is a semantic system; a world is a palpable, tactile atmospheric substance that clings to bodies; a world is itself a body.

Also like character, dramatic worlds are structured by conceptual metaphors projected from the "source-domain" of the body. When we use conceptual metaphors to understand

abstract concepts (e.g. selves, nations, worlds) in terms of primary sensorimotor experience, they generally carry multiple “entailments” from the source domain to the target domain, which function as sort of sub-schemas – as evidenced in Merleau Ponty’s sense that the containers of worlds carry a sort of “flesh.” The dramatic world of *Sticks and Bones* is structured by the entailments of two key processes through which our body-containers are sustained and reproduced by opening themselves to what is outside: eating and sex. These are both the literal preoccupations of characters, and the metaphorical structuring principles of their world, which is periodically penetrated from both directions by trajectory schemas that bind the container in circulation with an “outside” that is a place of desire and nourishment, but also of bodily abjection and waste.

Ozzie and Harriet’s interactions with their younger son Rick, establish the parameters, possibilities, and logic of their world through a ritual routine. When Rick enters, the family exchanges cheerful greetings (everyone is always “fine”), then Rick announces that he is “hungry and thirsty,” promptly receives some fudge and milk from Harriet, and gobbles it down, before taking off again (141). The single set living room and dining room shows the Nelson family happily eating and enjoying the use of their consumer products; but it does not show us where they come from or where they go after use – characters disappear into the kitchen and bathroom just offstage. And while Ozzie and Harriet winkingly share 1950s TV-family moments of sexual coupling as perfect reproduction – “something of me joined with something of you and became [David and Rick],” Ozzie says (118) – the acts of copulation, conception, gestation, and birthing are pushed outside of their domestic world, both spatially and discursively. Ozzie wonders where Rick goes when he leaves, and finally learns that his younger son has been getting “a beautiful piece a ass” (162). Rick’s entire existence as a dramatic character consists of

coming into the house to eat, and going outside to have sex with women whom he cannot bring back into the house: “it wasn’t any decent girl” (162).

Over the course of the play, Ozzie elaborates the logic and process of world-building through containment and conquest, consumption and virility, in a series of soliloquys that recount the mythic origin story of Ozzie-the-man, and of the family’s foundation. As an adolescent growing up during the Great Depression, Ozzie was the fastest boy in town – a distinction he regularly proved in foot races against visiting challengers. The farmers would gather “at the edge of town” to place bets on Ozzie each time he took on a “runner from another county,” and cheered for him as he sprinted off across the untamed landscape (“We cross rivers and deserts; we clamber over mountains”) – and always won (120). “I was myself [then],” Ozzie says (119). And he became himself by charging out of the container of his home town with masculine vigor, to compete and prove his dominance, before returning to the town to be recognized and celebrated. “In the fields and factories, they speak my name. If there’s a prize to run for, it’s me they send for. It’s to be the-one-sent-for that I run” (120). Venturing out of the container-home to manifest himself as a force-trajectory enables Ozzie to inhabit the container with a sense of belonging and possession, and it also confers on him an “inner content.” While performing spectacular feats and receiving lavish attention, he maintains that his content was internal and indiscreet: “my strength was in me, quiet and mine.” But there came a time when this was no longer sufficient. “A man proved himself by leaving, by going out into the world; he tested himself” (132). So Ozzie took off and rode the rails from town to town. To be at home in an ordered and contained world, he must paradoxically leave, to drift homeless through an inhospitable outside.

One day, a brakeman caught Ozzie in a cattle car, and threw him off the train. After rolling down a stony incline, Ozzie looked up, battered and bruised, to find himself “at the outskirts of this town” (133). Entering town, he “turn[s] to see Harriet, young and lovely, weaving among the weeds. I feel the wonder of her body moving toward me. She’s the thing I’ll enter to find my future, I think” (133). His reward at the end of his trials is to “enter” into Harriet, and erect a new container around them, as a young family nestled into a little town. Ozzie expected that, as breadwinner and head of household, he would continue to manifest as a force-trajectory, imposing himself on the world, defeating the competition, and reaping the spoils; but this has brought diminishing returns. He ruefully accuses Harriet of gradually entrapping him: “I was so innocent, so childlike in my strength, never seeing that it was surrendering I was doing, innocently and easily giving to you the love that was to return in time as flesh to imprison, detain, disarm and begin... to kill” (159). After freely entering into the town, the family, and Harriet’s body, he has become imprisoned by the “flesh” of body and world. As David observes, the “house” has become “a coffin” (152). “I keep having this notion of wanting some... thing... some material thing, and I’ve built it. And then there’s this feeling I’m of value, that I’m on my way—I mean, moving,” Ozzie opines, before abruptly concluding, “But its a... wall that I want... I think” (131). His rambling recitation of denied desires shifts from movement and making, to guarding and preserving – the outward thrusting force-trajectory schema that propels him into an expansive space to make his mark and win battles, bends back into a container schema, constructing a fortress to guard what he has and is.

Ozzie’s world was thus already starting to calcify and close in on him before David returned from Vietnam, but the homecoming of his eldest hastens its dissolution. David brings with him “outside” material that the family-container excludes: violence, rapacity, and a

polluting sexuality. Upon learning of David's ongoing relationship with a Vietnamese prostitute, Ozzie responds with a flicker of envious pride ("attaboy") that quickly resolves into revulsion. "Dirty, filthy diseases. They got 'em. Those girls. Infection. From the blood of their parents it goes right into the fluids of their bodies. ... An actual rot alive in them... He touched them. It's disgusting" (118). Sex with a foreign and racial other has infiltrated David's solid body-container with "fluids," contaminating and degenerating his inner content – and now David, coming home, has done the same to the fortress-container of their domestic world. As Ozzie feels that his world, and his patriarchal position atop it, are ever more under siege, he lashes out at Harriet, describing her body interior in the same terms as the Vietnamese "yellow whores." "YOU MAKE ME WANT TO VOMIT! HARRIET! YOU! (*And he whirls on Harriet.*) YOU! Your internal organs—your internal female organs—they've got some kind of poison in them. They're backing up some kind of rot into the world" (137). Whereas the "rot" inside the bodies of Vietnamese women used David's body as a Trojan horse to get inside the walls of Ozzie's family, the rot in Harriet's viscera flows directly into their "world."

David continues to disturb the integrity of their white suburban world by violating the integrity of bodies, in his acts and his speech. He interrupts family movie night to show a film he took in Vietnam. While we see only a greenish flickering on the TV screen, David narrates images of atrocities: Vietnamese corpses hung in trees, and violated pre- and posthumously – lingering with excruciating detail on the corpse of a pregnant woman (125). He horrifies his parents with talk of his Vietnamese lover. And he uses his cane to beat the Priest that Harriet sends to counsel him; then later slips the cane under Harriet's dress and up along her leg, making his mother cry. Each time David forces a crisis in the smooth fabric of the domestic world, it is met with bodily insurrections: insides exploding outward, bordering membranes breaking down.

Harriet vomits when she learns of David's lover, Zung. Ozzie takes aspirin to cope with the stress of David's behavior, which "make[s his] stomach bleed" (129). And – in perhaps the play's most puzzling moment – Ozzie storms into the living room, visibly shaken, and declares that he has been hit by an egg. He was walking down the street, minding his own business, when someone pegged him in the head with a soft-boiled weapon: hard enough to hurt, and goeey enough to leave a mess. A white container holding an inner content that is both food and sexual-reproduction-without-sex (the egg is presumably unfertilized), smashes against Ozzie's body, leaving a bruise, and its runny yoke now drips down his jacket. Ozzie is certain that David threw the egg – an impossibility, since his blind eldest son has been in his bedroom all afternoon – but that nonetheless has a certain logic. Ozzie's world is cracking up because of David; the egg cracks like the world, and injures Ozzie's body; ergo David threw the egg. Rabe exaggerates and makes visible the ways in which the ruptures in the "world" one inhabits register in and on the body, as well as the bodily contingency of logical meaning-making.

While we never leave the living room of the Nelsons' domestic world, we notice that it is limned by an offstage space – a stratosphere beyond the radius of the world's "atmospheric viscosity" – which it both takes from and guards against.<sup>80</sup> The places where characters go when they exit – Vietnam, Rick's car (where he takes his "pieces of ass"), the outskirts of town expanding out into mountains and streams – open into a space of sexual desire and bodily abjection; a wilderness in which men get lost, and from which they take limitless resources; a battlefield full of enemies (racialized, feminized, foreign) who threaten to subjugate, emasculate,

<sup>80</sup> William Gruber's book, *Offstage Space*, treats this theatrical dimension in largely literary terms, understanding it as a "diegetic space" opposed to the "mimetic action" on stage, through which we receive information about events we cannot see, in modern day "messenger speeches" (8).

and disappear white American men, but who also invitingly wait to be conquered. The “flesh of the world” is fed by this outside material, but it is also poisoned by it. And as the poison sets in and spreads, it is the characters who feel sick.

Many theatre scholars have noticed a dialectical relationship between characters and worlds, through which properties of the dramatic world impinge upon the characters’ possible actions, and the characters’ actions challenge, extend, and alter the external borders and internal structure of their world.<sup>81</sup> This process is seen in *Pavlo Hummel* – the rigid world of boot camp is designed to saturate the characters, imprinting its structure of disciplined linear actions and geometric formations on Pavlo in act one. But as it fails to stick to him, and Pavlo’s character remains opaque, amorphous, and inconsistent, the fabric of the play’s world dissolves into a rapidfire montage of disconnected vignettes. And so in *Sticks and Bones*, when David returns to his childhood world with a changed “character,” his presence warps the world, which in turn makes the other characters feel invisible or deformed, unable to recognize themselves and each other. Harriet, warning David about the hazards of interracial coupling, tells him, ““it is we who disappear, David. They don’t change and we are gone... our whiteness” (164). “I can no longer compel recognition,” Ozzie laments, “I can no longer impose myself; make myself seen” (159). Bits of “outside” material that David was seeped in abroad, and has carried back into the domestic world as part of his “character,” release into the atmosphere of the Nelson family’s world to be breathed in by his parents, polluting their bodies and characters.

Clinical psychiatrist Jonathan Shay began his career working with veterans returning from Vietnam, and he helped develop the new clinical diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which was added to the DSM-III in 1980. Shay wrote one of the first books to bring

<sup>81</sup> See my article, “Character-World Dialectics on the Contemporary American Stage.”

the new diagnosis to public consciousness, entitled, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*.<sup>82</sup> As Shay's subtitle suggests, the collection of symptoms grouped together under PTSD combine to cause the larger, less clinical-sounding symptom of "undoing character." Shay describes the moment of traumatic injury as rupturing the "moral world" that is understood as "binding" and determining what is "legitimate" (6). This tear in the "world" causes character to crumble, as traumatized soldiers lose confidence in the "trustworthiness of perception," and the ability to express and recognize themselves; the "horizon" of their social and moral world contracts to corset the body (34, 23). Describing a dialectical relationship between character and world, Shay makes the surprising observation that it is the soldier's *world* that is injured first, and that in turn injures his character. Focusing on the aftermath of war, and framed by a medico-psychiatric attention to "disease," Shay's study only tracks decline, from a prior health (the "ease" that preceded the "dis-ease"). But had he interviewed his patients before their deployment, he would likely have found that many viewed leaving home and going to war as a way of *building* character.

This is what Vietnam vet and novelist Karl Marlantes describes in his autobiographical account of *What it is Like to Go to War*. Marlantes argues that war (both training and combat) is a means through which young men acquire "character," by testing their limits outside of the comfortable "world" of their childhood. War brings young men out of the container of their "mundane" homes to face the "infinite" outdoors, where they are no longer bound by "rules" and "must instead rely on 'character,'" which for Marlantes seems to connote a way of wrestling and

<sup>82</sup> The book takes an unusual approach, interweaving clinical research studies and stories shared in support groups, with literary analysis of *The Illiad* – which both corroborates and counterpoints the experience of Vietnam vets with the ways in which "combat trauma" is experienced, expressed, and dealt with by Greek and Trojan Warriors (Shay also has a PhD in English).

mediating between violent passions and honor-bound duty (176, 60). “You can’t be a good person,” he writes, “until you observe how bad you are” (107). Per Marlantes, the PTSD epidemic, along with a host of other social ills, is due to the hypocritical values of a society that disavows the masculinist and militarist desires that it engenders. American society has “sham[ed] the masculine principle,” and pushed it into “the jungle so it wouldn’t bother us at home” he explains, invoking a civilization-container defined against the savagery without (186). And this exiled masculinity inevitably returns with a vengeance through “gangs, drug wars, and increased violence.” For Marlantes, insensate savagery is not an innate part of war, but a consequence of hypocritically pretending that we do not desire its violence. “The more you deny the shadow warrior, the more vulnerable you become to it,” he explains (86). Shay and Marlantes both structurally describe soldiering as breaking out of the “containers” of civilized society and selves and dipping into a dark and hostile territory without – but for Shay this brings disease and character’s ruin; whereas for Marlantes, when fought right, war can cultivate a robust and healthy character.

Taken together, they outline the contradictory principles of the character-world system in *Sticks and Bones*. Young American men must venture out of the safe and ordered world of their home to acquire character through combat in a dangerous and disordered “outside,” which gives them the strength of character to build new container-homes, and install themselves as patriarchs. But stepping outside of the frame and structure of their “moral world” inflicts a wound on character, which festers and spreads within the container worlds to which they return. Whereas realist drama’s continuous world is sustained by a preconceptual process of breaking and remaking its structure as characters change, in *Sticks and Bones*, the rigid domestic world will not bend to accommodate and reintegrate returning soldiers. Ozzie’s triumph – winning Harriet

as his prize for racing through the wilderness, and founding the family by “entering” into her – was also his defeat: the fortress-container he built to guard his spoils of war morphs into a “prison,” restraining him from the combat through which he strove to make his “self.” Characters are in a double-bind: going outside brings destruction, but staying in means suffocation. What has happened to David by going to war, and Ozzie by staying home, was not an avoidable accident, but the inevitable consummation of a world-character system structured in this way.

On the verge of total dissolution, Ozzie realizes that his world and self can only be salvaged and restored through swift and drastic action. He marshalls the furniture in his living room for a rally, addressing a large chair as “Harriet,” another chair as “David,” and a footstool as “Ricky,” as he lays out his battle plan “to COMBAT the weariness beginning in me... the feeling of being nothing” (166). Passing out papers with itemized inventories of his possessions (“davenport-\$512.98”), he orders his furniture-family to carry the lists at all times, and distribute copies to random passersby: to “Let people know who I am, what I’ve done” (167). His wife and children must go out into the world to repair its damaged fabric, to right its degenerated structure and logic – and this is to be done by externalizing Ozzie’s inner content, in the form of his possessions. And reciprocally, once the world is repaired in this way, Ozzie will no longer be “nothing” inside. One more thing must be done. David’s contaminated character is too poisoned and poisoning to be restored within the TV-family world; so his family presents him with a razor, and, with soft and understanding smiles, counsel him to kill himself. In the play’s final moment, Ozzie, Harriet, and Rick gather around in a family tableau as David slits his wrists. “I like David like this,” Rick pronounces, his TV-sitcom teenage buoyancy coming back, “Too bad he’s gonna die” (175). And Ozzie, again the benevolent family patriarch, reassures his younger son, “he’s not gonna die, Rick. He’s only gonna nearly die. Only nearly.” The play’s conclusion

parodies an Aristotelian ending: the world rights itself and restores its order by expelling the polluting character and returning to the status quo. “Catharsis” is given its original medical meaning of bloodletting – literalizing the bodily cost of suturing a ruptured world back together.

In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry relates bodies and worlds in negative terms: “the presence of pain [in the body] is the absence of world” (37). We acquire a world by “making” things (whether material objects like chairs, or immaterial concepts like God), that relieve our pain and take us out of our bodies, making us forget for a moment that our bodies exist and that we are them. For Scarry, the dialectical opposite of pain is not pleasure, but disembodiment. However, in her recent book, *Thermonuclear Monarchy*, Scarry suggests a more positive relationship between bodies and worlds. In a chapter entitled “Consent and the Body,” she argues that these two terms have always been “inextricable” in western civilization – to the point that it is impossible to understand the abstract concept of “consent” without reference to concrete knowledge of “the body” (267). Social contracts, institutions, and states are understood as “bodies” that we consent to enter into *with* our bodies. And conversely, the body itself comes to be understood as a bordered “territory” (a naturally demarcated piece of land) and as a “state” (an assemblage of organized parts governed by our “executive functioning”). For Scarry, consent is the permission to cross the borders of a container, which is always understood as a body; it is also the action of constellating and cohabiting certain kinds of containers. For example, when consenting to sex or to surgery, we are allowing the borders of the body to be penetrated by entering into an implicit or explicit contract designed to mitigate potential harm, by stipulating internal rules about what the border-crossing parties may or may not do. And the contractual containers we invent through consent in turn “reinvent us” (299). With her focus on consent as an embodied act, and social contracts as creating “worlds,” we see how the body, through the

positive (even pleasurable) acts that we consent to, is dialectically bound to the world(s) it inhabits in a constant process of unmaking and remaking. Just as nonconsensual pain destroys one's "world," having and inhabiting a world involves some measure of consent, as our body-brain (re)commits to reside within and adapt itself to its environment. Rabe dramatizes this consensual body-world dialectic, as changes to the dramatic world cause visceral reactions and bodily insurrections, inciting characters to retract their consent to cohabit this world, and attempt to escape, redraw, or stop participating in it.

In a recent talk, Scarry suggested that theatre is *par excellence* the artform of consent. Spectators perform an act of "threshold consent" by purchasing a ticket and entering the theatre building, then enact ongoing "tacit consent" by remaining in residence in this space, and finally signal an "express act of consent" with their applause (Scarry, "Consent and the Body in Theatre"). Throughout this process, they are entered into a "social contract" with the theatre-makers, who likewise have consented to be in a certain space at a certain time to enact, inhabit, and share a certain "world." The theatre event is thus framed and sustained by consent, and it attunes us to this social contractual agreement, in an embodied way that is largely preconceptual (for the most part, spectators and performers do not consciously contemplate the fact that they *could* bolt for the exit). I would add that within this larger framework of consent, there are many smaller moments of consenting to go along with the play's subjunctive "as-if" – in which consent is figured as being absorbed "in" the drama – and here audiences *do* frequently withhold consent if the fiction is judged false, and direct their attention to more interesting matters "outside" of the world of the play. Since this consent is not a conscious choice, it seems that we are simply observing properties of a drama, that we are positioned "outside" of, and empathically enter "into." As Worthen argues about the interpretive conventions of modern realist drama, a

“self-effacing” theatricality persuades spectators that their embodied cognitive action plays no role in producing and validating the play’s world – that it objectively exists independently of their thinking-feeling-acting.

As with character, the world-perception catalyzed by the theatrical rhetoric of realist drama engages audiences in *trying* to know the world as a bounded and organized container, but *never quite achieving this*. Our conceptual understanding of worlds as bounded containers holding a constant content (described by States, Lehmann, and others), belies the continual preconceptual process of breaking and rebuilding world-containers. The conceptual continuity of characters and worlds is a way of holding-together-while-breaking, and the tissue holding them together is an ongoing, reiterated consent. As Scarry shows, every act of consent breaks a container and makes a container – the breaking and making are inextricable and mutually authorizing. Watching a play, we do not simply give threshold consent to its dramatic world, and remain contractually locked within it until the curtain call. Rather, we are constantly asked to re-consent to the world’s changing terms and parameters; the borders we imagine are constantly being breached, and we are invited to consent to enact a slightly different world. Without our consent, the dramatic world ceases to exist.

War torques up the worlding rhetoric of realist drama, importing the structure of its “rigid” conceptual products into its preconceptual process, to turn the world into a fortress-container that keeps danger, disorder, and filth out, while perfectly ordering and controlling its inner content. So even with a formal declaration of war, and congressional approval, war is by its very nature a violation of consent. On the level of physical acts and conscious choices, this is obvious: people suffer injuries they did not consent to. But it occurs more insidiously on the preconceptual level of imagining that the terms and structure of the world can be unilaterally

dictated by one party through force. If this wish is granted, the result is not a world but a jail cell – as the Nelsons’ home becomes: coercing characters into the same repeated actions, and collapsing the “inner space” produced by the gap between form and subjectivity, which constitutes “character.” Cognitively and phenomenologically, “having a world” is consenting to share and enact a world; without consent, the “world” ceases to exist, as Scarry argues about non-consensual pain. This is not conceptual-propositional knowledge that the audience learns from *Sticks and Bones*, it is what they *do*. Dutifully looking for the fixed and intelligible world that realist drama sends us in search of, we build our own cognitive prison.

### ***The Orphan***

If *Basic Training* and *Sticks and Bones* are couched within realist dramatic structures and conventions, that gradually self-destruct, *The Orphan* begins with these structures already blown to bits. In place of a recognizably realist set, a cargo net stretches across a black stage, hooked up to a system of ropes that are rearranged and tethered to various characters and set pieces over the course of the play. Eight white godsheads hang like planets from the ceiling, and fragments of a busted statue are scattered across the stage. Even the plays’ characters have split into pieces: there are two Clytemnestras onstage, a younger and an older one, who shadow, haunt, and speak to one another. We seem to look upon the aftermath of an explosion – corporeal, cognitive, and cosmic. The play’s dramatic action consists of the assassinations from the *Orestiea*, reenacted out of order and on repeat, interwoven with the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam, and the Manson Family murders. Earlier murders in the house of Atreus are not reenacted but remembered, each time with variations. The series of revenge killings is framed and interrupted by narration from The Figure, a Charles Manson look-alike, and from The Speaker, an elegant young woman with

a microphone, who also uses a flashlight to direct our attention to different points across the dark stage. Both read aloud passages that could be lifted from science textbooks – with bits of information about nuclear physics, chaos theory, cognitive science, and physiology.

Like *Basic Training* and *Sticks and Bones*, the play signals its interest in the paradox of war as both creator and destroyer of meaning, in a way that deceives conceptual thought and speaks directly to “the body.” Near the start of the play, Clytemnestra Two, preparing to stab Agamemnon with the knife he used to sacrifice Iphigenia, proclaims that, “The death it gives is meaningful” (111). Near the play’s end, after Orestes has killed Clytemnestra, he is told, “You have killed your mother and it means nothing and you have seen the nothing that it means” (175). As the titular character, Orestes is “orphaned” in more ways than one, as he tries to emancipate himself from both his genetic and historical inheritance. Piecing together his family history through academic study and diligent journaling, Orestes pursues a pure, formal, disembodied knowledge, which he plans to share in a lecture series addressing, “what I know that no one else knows. ‘What is the basis on which people do brutal cruel things to one another? And how can it be stopped?’” (144-5). Of course, Orestes does not cast off the curse of the House of Atreus, and he repeats his ancestors’ crime. The short explanation is that his body makes him do it.

Rather than dramatizing the cognitive scientific ideas that characters quote, the play complicates them and marks their limitations for humanistic inquiry. As Orestes concludes after going on a self-guided tour of his mind, “Science doesn’t know” (161). If read as a critique of the “computational model” of first generation cognitive science, the play is remarkably astute, anticipating the key revision that would be made by the second generation of “embodied cognitive science” just around the corner. The characters’ bodies behave in ways that are not

controlled by top-down orders issued from a cranial command and control center, but by the interaction of body, brain, and environment. The netting that stretches over the stage binds, thrusts, and drags characters from place to place; and Agamemnon, lurching forward, ponders the fact that his knees will only bend in one direction, while his elbows bend the other way. As cognitive scientists would soon discover, abstract thought is structured by the body's motoric capacities: Agamemnon continues to think and move "forward" towards his fated crime because that's the way his joints bend. And as characters weave their way across stage pursuing intentional actions, they rearrange the system of nets and ropes, leaving behind mazes that are re-navigated when their actions repeat. Memory is not stored information held in the brain, but synaptic alterations caused by repeated meaningful experiences, that affect future responses of the brain-and-body to similar signals (McConachie, *Theatre & Mind* 47). But to understand the play as a prescient dramatization of "enactivist cognition," would be to submit it to a representational logic that it roundly rejects. What I want to focus on instead, as with Rabe's other Vietnam Plays, are the built-in affordances for enacting preconceptual meanings; ways of, as Johnson puts it, "knowing through the body," as the audience makes meaning in and of time, and perceives certain movements *through* time as dramatic actions.

I will attend first to "lived time," the moment-to-moment experience of being "in" the flow of time; before turning to "historical time," the projected structures that spatialize the past as a "timeline" of events, arranged in causal relations to culminate in the present, and gesture with momentum towards the future. The sensation of theatrical "presence" is generally explained as being in a state of "flow," which David Wiles suggests is experienced when the rhythms of our bodies synchronize with the rhythms of the play. Our ability to perceive rhythm is enabled and delimited by the natural rhythms of the body – heartbeat, respiration, walking and running

strides. We “cannot hear sounds as part of a rhythmic unit” if they are separated by more than two seconds or less than a quarter of a second: “the possible timespan of a heartbeat” (Wiles 34). *The Orphan* begins by seeping us in these bodily rhythms. Before the lights come up, we hear a “rhythmic breathing” in the darkness (89). As the stage is gradually illuminated, The Speaker welcomes us: “In a place like this we all begin. Deep within the dark of another’s belly. The smallest and largest cells collide and multiplying ten thousand times possess one beating heart” ([sic] 90). Rhythms connect the body-interior, “external” actions performed through voluntary muscular exertion, and cosmic structures – and they reverberate across space and time. The Figure continues: “I feel in my pulse the movement of each star” (99). Wiles writes that because of the “innate human propensity to synchronize,” audiences naturally want to “fall in with the rhythm of the stage action” (37). This creates the spectatorial relation of being absorbed “in” the dramatic action; and through playful variations in “timing,” the play and its audience enact an alternately synchronized and syncopated temporal dance, creating expectation and deferral so that our hearts rush to keep up, or overstep and backtrack. As long as we are not totally cut loose, and remain in “relation” to the play’s rhythms, we keep experiencing meaning. *The Orphan* offers many opportunities for such synchronization, as it emphasizes and amplifies inner bodily rhythms, particularly at moments of key actions (i.e. assassinations) to establish a sort of patterned flow to the action that the audience partakes in.

Phenomenologist Shawn Gallagher points out that “being in the present” – a much vaunted theatrical effect – is a cognitive impossibility. Our “*primary impression*” of an object is constituted by a “*retentional aspect*” of the object’s recent past, and a “*protensional aspect*” which anticipates its immediate future (*Phenomenology* 103). This backward and forward looking structure is essential not only to the “meaning” ascribed to the object, but of one’s own

“self-identity” while perceiving the object – one’s “sense of being the perspectival origin of one’s own experience” through the “changing flow of consciousness” (Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* 201). Both object and subject acquire meaning by being in this “flow,” which has a from-to structure, moving to an embodied rhythm from past to future. As patterned actions are ritually and rhythmically performed in *The Orphan*, they are experienced and described as joining the past to the future through “logic” or “reason.” When Agamemnon is assassinated for the first time, The Figure flings the cargo net over him, and announces that this net belongs to “Apollo, God of Reason” (93) – and the net earns its appellation as it guides characters’ “reasonable” revenges. The most common verbal formulation of “reason” is a tit-for-tat formula: a character identifies a past injury, which should logically cause future retaliation. “We have been violated and threatened,” Agamemnon declares on learning of Helen’s abduction, “they await our reaction, which must come” (104-5). Reason is a way of structuring time, and being in time, by positioning oneself and one’s perceptual object as trajectories moving from a past cause to a future consequence.

Cognitive scientific research has shown that human reason is not a formal logic, but sets of connective principles through which we live as embodied organisms “in” time and space: it is what gets us from point A to point B. Our experience of reasoning begins with the rhythms of the body – it is reasonable that an inhalation should be followed by an exhalation – and our sensorimotor experiences of navigating and interacting with our environment towards certain purposes (as Ozzie does when he “reasons” that David must have thrown the egg). In *Philosophy in the Flesh*, Mark Johnson and George Lakoff demonstrate how the image schemas that structure our sensorimotor experiences of moving through space and time are taken as the “grammar” for abstract conceptual reasoning (e.g., we “follow an argument,” which “leads to a

conclusion”) (183).<sup>83</sup> The structure of reason, at its most atomic and general level, is equivalent to the structure of an “event,” which Lakoff and Johnson outline in skeletal form – an action driven by a “cause” moves us from an “initial state” to a “resultant state.”<sup>84</sup> Events generally engage the categorical metaphors of “states are locations,” “actions are self-propelled movements,” “causes are forces,” “causation is forced movement,” and “purposes are destinations (186-190). Thus our perception of what an event is – whether physical or mental, and whether observed or enacted – is structured by our experience of moving purposefully through space (against the resistance of friction and gravity) to get to another location (because it has something we want).

*The Orphan* spatializes this process: as characters enact mental, emotional, and physical “events” (bringing them from one state to another), they follow a net of “reason” that guides their trajectories and binds their bodies. On the one hand, this unsettles reason’s claim to apriori validity, and subjects its connective principles to questioning. Clytemnestra protests to her husband that “There is no reason for this war,” nor for Iphigenia’s sacrifice: “between the departure of Helen and our daughter’s death, nothing real exists—do you see—unless you put it there” (110, 108). But it also locates “reason” on a deeper level, more difficult to surface and challenge. Something “real” *is* there – and we know it by feeling it in the body: a rhythm that

<sup>83</sup> The source-path-goal trajectory is primary, but many other schemas (and their entailments) are engaged, such as the force-counterforce schema, which arises from “knowing” that when we are dealt a blow, or encounter a force working against us, we must meet it with an equal or greater force in order to maintain equilibrium or continue moving forward. This is the schema that makes retribution “reasonable,” supported by our bodily knowledge that it is “good” to not fall down.

<sup>84</sup> Event-structures are thus determinative of our understanding of causation, and can engage many different verbs as causal metaphors (“hurl, tear, fling, drag”), to shape our understanding of how and why we get from the initial state to the resultant state (186).

drums out a forward marching beat, a binding push and pull, made visible by the set's system of ropes and netting. Reason is real, but it is not universal and formalist, and it is inseparable from the bodies that experience and enact it. Thus, when Clytemnestra Two assassinates Agamemnon for the second time, she says, "For no reason you can ever know, I am going to cut the life out of you" (123). The murder can only be "reasonable" *to her*, because for her it completes the logical arc of retribution beginning when Iphigenia was slain. Its meaning does not exist outside of this "event-structure," which makes Clytemnestra the vector connecting the initial and resultant states (111).

While the moment-to-moment experience of being in time involves drawing and identifying with vectors connecting past to future, the structure of historical time in the play paradoxically yokes a linear conceptual form with a recursive preconceptual enactment. We are told by The Speaker that Agamemnon won Clytemnestra by killing her first husband and their infant son (96). Then subsequently, at key moments, characters recall this past incident in ways that give their present actions meaning. As Agamemnon prepares to sacrifice Iphigenia, and Clytemnestra fears losing another child, she accuses him of rape: "You stood over me, like a beast dreaming that his prey adores him" (115). But Agamemnon, needing to support the "meaning" that violence in the present can produce the power needed for longer term peace, recalls the event differently. "You reached to bring me to you, as you draw me even now with your eyes and breath. You wanted me. ... You gave me permission" (115-6). And Orestes later rationalizes the episode with academic detachment: "regarding my father's murdering of infants—the accounts all show he fought difficult, dangerous campaigns—no doubt some child one time or the other..." (148). This does not amount to an epistemological relativism, through which there is no way to get at the "truth" of what happened — clearly Clytemnestra's description of the event

as murder and rape is correct, rather than Agamemnon's memory of "seduction," or Orestes's rationalization of the inevitable "collateral damage" accompanying an essentially progressive war. But it does show how history is shaped by different forms of "reasoning" in the present: a mother's "reason" to protect her children; a King's "reason" to claim and keep what is his with force; and a philosopher's "reason" that the course of history can be explained by abstract forms and principles, rather than mercurial bodily drives. The conceptual meaning characters make of their history (understanding it as a causal series of linear events) belies the preconceptual process through which this meaning is produced (perpetually revising memories in light of current conditions). The "cause" of the past is in the present.

More often, however, the play's transactions across time remain on a preconceptual level, without being transubstantiated into conceptual meaning. In the opening moments, the two Clytemnestras, each inhabiting a different time, strain against the net to reach towards each other. "When there is a thing that I must touch," Clytemnestra Two explains, "I reach" (90). Later, as they vainly attempt to dissuade Agamemnon from sacrificing Iphigenia and to slow his progress, the Clytemnestra's embrace and cling to each other, protesting, "Who takes my time away from me?" (106). In *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, Rebecca Schneider uses the expression "touching time" to describe negotiations with history that blend thinking, feeling, and doing.<sup>85</sup> As opposed to the senses that are more conventionally connected to "knowing" (visual first, auditory second), touch is associated with bodily knowledge that is nonconscious: like laying one's fingers on a piano keyboard and finding that they know how to move, or retracting one's hand from a stovetop before realizing that it has

<sup>85</sup> Schneider's term is inspired in part by noticing that the Civil War reenactors she interviewed most often used the sense of touch to describe their relationship to historical events.

been burnt. The body knows through touch in a way that precedes or bypasses conceptual-propositional knowledge. Schneider turns to affect theory to think about touching time and being touched by time – a tactile sensation that collapses the active-passive binary. In the conceptual gaps of history, she writes, affects allow us “to *touch*... something that might actually get the historical matter right” (70).<sup>86</sup> It is unclear, throughout Schneider’s book, what it means to get history “right” – but this is perhaps the point. If to get something right is to understand its “meaning,” then this is not a stable object but an iterative action that shifts with each reenactment. Affect offers Schneider an alternative way of knowing that enacts and touches “meanings” outside of the objectivist epistemology supporting most historical claims to “knowledge” – which I take as the preconceptual meanings that enactivist cognitive science recuperates.<sup>87</sup>

Schneider describes the “jump or the touch of affect” as creating a “viscous affective surround,” that leaves us “sticky with the past and the future” (36). Her language recalls Bert States’s description of a play’s “dramatic world” as an “atmospheric viscosity.” But whereas States takes a synchronic view of the play’s world as something that is always all there at once, Schneider attunes us to the temporal dimensions of affective worlding. This affective transfer connects past to present not with the linear logic of cause and effect, but with the framing logic of “worlds” – construed as the containers “surrounding” the scenes we act out, and the

<sup>86</sup> Affect, as discussed in chapter one, while defined differently by different researchers and theorists, is generally understood as denoting sensations of being *moved* or *touched* that collapse active/passive binaries – we can’t tell if we are actually the ones doing the touching and moving. And it is distinguished from emotion by its refusal to resolve into “meaning” – at least conceptual-propositional meaning, which we use to characterize emotions as “sad,” “happy,” etc.

<sup>87</sup> Touch is the modality emphasized by cognitive scientists in describing enactivist cognition. Alva Nöe writes that, rather than “optical-projective” metaphors for thinking and knowing, “we should think of perceiving in terms of touching” (Qtd. in Polvinen 28).

containers' "viscous" content. While *The Orphan* visualizes the way in which the structure of the present world bears the marks of past actions with the continually altered patterns of the net, it also evinces an invisible atmospheric residue. When the Greeks' world is penetrated by a sound from the Vietnam War plot, Agamemnon and the two Clytemnestras frantically "paw the air" around them, trying to touch and feel this interruptive force (102). As Orestes educates himself in a history of conquest and exploitation, The Figure tells him that, "the air... is a fungal place," holding and hatching the spores laid there in the past (149). Struggling to decide whether to kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, Orestes eventually rejects competing narratives of the past, and declares his present freedom: "There is only the air in which we float and talk" (161). But as we've seen, there are centuries of particles floating in the air, which Orestes cannot help but breathe in. The fumes given off by characters' actions in one time linger to frame and infect characters' actions in other times. The character-world dialectic recurs here, but with greater attention to intertemporal cross-pollinations.

So while *The Orphan* has been seen as a drastic stylistic departure, it in fact continues and intensifies the project of Rabe's first two Vietnam Plays. *Sticks and Bones* and *Basic Training* retain the basic realist trappings and cognitive supports that normally allow audiences to believe that "character," "world," "narrative," and "meaning" are external properties of the stage's "reality;" while they dial up the rhetoric of realist drama to its logical – and cognitively cannibalizing – extreme. These supports are stripped away in *The Orphan*, as figures with wildly inconsistent behavior (decrying war one moment, butchering family the next), are lit up against a black background, with few if any clues to orient them in space in time. The audience must struggle to make "meaning" of the action onstage, to find the appropriate structure that will

position ourselves in relation to it.<sup>88</sup> And in our efforts to synchronize with the play, we are most successful when it is most warlike – when we feel the bodily rhythm of responding to a wound and retaliating with violence; when we place an act within the historical narrative pattern of crime-conflict-restorative justice, which of course sets in motion the next “dramatic event” as it is perceived by someone else as the initiating “crime.” Actions become meaningful for us as we relate them to trajectory schemas, and, as Wiles writes, try to “sync up” with them to march in step along an unswerving path.

However, if we sync up completely, if the rhythm is perfectly repeated and the path perfectly straight, “meaning” suddenly dissipates. Just as perceiving character and worlds involves relating our experience to container-schemas without ever quite cohering with them, perceiving and performing meaningful actions requires that the trajectories we follow come out a little crooked. Were characters and worlds stable forms and contents, then they would reproduce the same actions over and over (as happens at the end of *Sticks and Bones*). The slips through which characters and worlds dialectically remake each other are actions that swerve. Without this swerve, actions become “rigid” and “mechanical,” and characters and worlds “artificial” – Rabe’s opprobrious terms for dramatic realism (*Vietnam Plays* xii-xiii).

Plotting and pursuing revenge-assassinations, the characters and audience experience meaning in trying to perform a linear, causal action against resistance, in trying to know and control the character they target, and trying to set the terms of their world’s structure, logic, and boundaries. But the moment the act is completed, its meaning dissipates: the intentional object is no longer a character but a corpse; the resistance to motion that gave meaning to action is

<sup>88</sup> As a number of confused and frustrated reviews of original production at The Public Theatre testify, audiences were not necessarily disposed to this struggle.

removed; the world is no longer negotiated and enacted through consent. This Sisyphean drama of reaching towards a perfect and complete meaning, only for it to slip out of our grasp as we plummet through empty air, is a drama of the mind. But it is not *in* the mind, as a closed container filled with images, ideas, and emotions as quasi-entities. Like Bond and Artaud, Rabe relocates the “site” of theatre to the spectator’s embodied mind, understood as a continual interaction between brain, body, and environment.

To consider the paradoxical workings of the “theatre of the mind,” I want to look at the role of theatre in Mark Johnson’s account of embodied enactivist cognition. While Johnson does not discuss the artform of theatre (instead he analyzes literature, visual art, music, and dance), he uses theatre and drama as recurrent metaphors for cognition – both to describe the way in which it occurs, and ways in which we have mistakenly believed it to occur. Given the centrality of conceptual metaphors in Johnson’s work, it is surprising that he does not acknowledge his own guiding metaphor here. He repeatedly characterizes the traditional “representational theory of mind,” which cognitive scientists challenge, as locating thought in the “inner theatre of the mind” – a mental space populated by concepts that mimetically corresponds to objects and events in the “outer” world (*Meaning of the Body* 131). He continues, “ideas parade on the stage of consciousness, to be seen by the mind’s eye” (131).<sup>89</sup> In Johnson’s parody, the erroneous “drama” of cognition follows the rhetoric of realism. The mind is a bounded dramatic world that mimetically represents a world that is elsewhere (“outside”) and is populated by bounded characters whose form matches their content, as they stand in for an external reality, and are related through linear-rational actions – all while a detached “eye” objectively observes the

<sup>89</sup> This metaphor is not an idiosyncratic turn of phrase, but prevalent in the field of cognitive science more widely. Teemu Paavolainen writes that, “mind and self do not unfold on some privileged stage marked out by the good old-fashioned skin-bag” (78)

drama. While Johnson's work overthrows many of the traditional tenets of Western philosophy, here he upholds its longstanding suspicion of the theatre as a deceptive medium that separates us from the truth. Theatre does this not in the images it presents, however, but in its own operating principles – its rhetoric – which unconsciously structures how we understand the mode of production of thought, meaning, and truth.

However, in Johnson's own enactivist theory of mind, theatre is everywhere, as the medium and form of cognition. Arguing that "we acquire 'minds' through our coordinated sharing of meaning [through] symbolic interaction," Johnson quotes John Dewey (whom he sees as the philosophical forebearer of enactivist cognition). "[A] person dramatically identifies himself with potential acts and deeds; he plays many roles, not in successive stages of life but in a contemporaneously enacted drama. Thus mind emerges" (151). The basic unit of analysis and comprehension that an image-schema allows us to grasp, Johnson writes, is "a particular scene," in which we recognize ourselves and others as "human actors" (139, 40). And when the other artforms that Johnson writes about are experienced as "meaningful," they seem to become dramatic theatre. Analyzing the music of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" independent of its lyrics, Johnson finds meaning in the "dramatic" movement between notes, which "creates a tension" in the body, experienced in terms of our own sensorimotor capacities (#). He concludes that the song "has a dramatic character realized via image schemas that structure our purposeful motion toward a destination, along a path that can be difficult and dangerous" (258). It seems that meaning, for Johnson, is always dramatic meaning. Actors identify with discrete "roles," and perform intentional "actions" to overcome obstacles and work towards goals – both at the level of the overarching through-action of a drama, and the micro-actions of "scenes" and "beats." And we perceive and act in this drama through our own theatrical mimesis. Johnson writes that

“spontaneous imitation [is] central to human abstract cognition” – both at the level of behavioral mimicry, as we tend to mirror the expressions, posture, and gestures of the person we are talking to, and at the mirror neuronal level of simulating actions in order to understand them (148). If we come to understand our selves as actors, and our world as drama, then we come to know this *through* theatre.

So what do we make of the fact that, per Johnson, theatre deludes us as to how cognition works, yet Johnson cannot explain how cognition works without theatre? It is not that Johnson is talking about two different types of theatre, with different conventions and ontologies; both theatrical analogies engage the rhetoric of realism. Rather, it seems that the mind is a drama-making machine, but its own operations are *not* dramatic. And understanding the mind as realist drama gives a false ontology to the “drama” it perceives – something that externally exists “out there” and is reflected “in the mind,” rather than something produced in the interaction between body, brain, and environment (social, cultural, physical), through a process we call “mind.” The conceptual products of thought construe worlds and characters as containers and actions as linear trajectories, but the largely preconceptual process of *thinking* does not. When we think, we are not moving fixed forms and contents in straight lines from one container to another. Image schemas map onto the *products* of cognition, not the *process*. This distinction has perhaps been insufficiently emphasized, as this is precisely the conflation that McConachie and other theatre scholars have made – thus taking cognitive scientific research as “proof” of the “common sense” about realist theatre that it in fact debunks (McConachie, *Engaging* 8).

Orestes makes the same conflation, employing what Johnson might call “the representational theory of theatre” to understand his world, his story and his character. In his scholarly zeal, Orestes announces his “belief that there are great good lessons in the sky, and the

wise know them while all others struggle throughout their lives to move toward some understanding of these great good lessons. I will move toward them” (134). He believes in an abstract and disembodied logic that shines clearly on a celestial stage above the material and bodily entanglements on the earth – and he does not notice that his own propositional statement (“struggling” to “move towards” the lessons) only has meaning through the bodily labor of exerting force to move through space. Lessons, we will see, are not written in the sky, but in the flesh. The bookish Orestes alternates between being a spectator to an historical drama, and the dramatic hero of his own story – both dramas structured by separation and representation rather than “sticky” affective interchange. Looking for the “great good lessons in the sky,” he transcribes what he learns into his journal – an extension of his mind-as-container. And he acknowledges no act of creation in acquiring this knowledge: the lessons exist “out there,” and they are simply recorded “in here.” His lecture cycle will repeat the transaction, now with Orestes positioned on the elevated stage, dispensing knowledge to be contained in other minds. And when Orestes does decide to take action beyond absorbing and dispensing knowledge, it is to smooth out the kinks that have come up in the mimetic replication of conceptual knowledge. Scheming to slip into Aegisthus’s palace at night, Orestes proclaims, “I will break into the mind of Aegisthus and sweep aside the ignorance encrusting his heart and soul, which are not unlike my own, for we are both men, both human!” (138). This is a slight reorientation: rather than seeing his mind as a stage containing and displaying knowledge, and his self as an actor that performs this knowledge for his audience to take in, he rotates 90-degrees to reposition himself as the vector carrying this knowledge from the stage into the container-mind of his intended audience, which mimetically reflects his own (“we are both men”).

But Orestes learns that representational theatre, which presents and transmits “meanings” as quasi-objects, cannot reach and “affect a man who thinks he is the source of all meaning” (143). At an impasse, Orestes takes some mushrooms to relieve his stress, and he suddenly finds himself inside his “mind.” The ropes crisscrossing the set begin to light up with an ethereal glow, and Orestes dances joyously between them. “I am in my brain! ... I am seeing what I am thinking” (160). Urgently, he searches for “certain things that, if I am to remain a human man, I must not ever cease to know them. What are they?” (158). But he does not see any “things” – any thoughts as quasi-objects. Nor is he able to ascribe the psychological realist terms of “motive” and “excuse” to the figures and bits of action that flicker before his eyes. Instead, a chorus of voices tell him that, “It’s the structures” (160). Orestes concludes that the “structures... show you directly where to look while making it impossible for you to see anything should you look in another direction” (161). Thus people slaughter each other, “Logically... [based on r]easonable conclusions based on a sound and logical premise based on other conclusions and a still more distant, unremembered premise” (160). Having this conceptual-propositional knowledge, however, does not free Orestes from the bodily beat of its visceral, preconceptual meaning. Moving as if hypnotized, Orestes kills his mother. But as the event-structure is completed, the “meaning” driving it dissipates. “You have killed your mother and it means nothing,” The Figure tells him, as Orestes, impassive and automatic, scrawls a misspelled “Helter Skeelter” on the wall.

### **Theatre-War Blending**

In his most recent book, *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance*, Bruce McConachie argues that, evolutionarily, performance and theatre have promoted altruism by cultivating

empathy. Performances, he writes, typically represent “agonistic action,” and spectatorship consists of “taking-sides” in the conflict, through which the audience forms the “social cohesion” needed to resolve the real-life conflict that the performance represents (92, 100). In cultures that form strong altruistic bonds through symbolic performances, he notes that “soldiers in combat [will] willingly die for their buddies” and for the abstract concept of “the nation” (100). The “agonistic action” of theatre slips easily into the agon of war, putting the emotions and bonds built through play to the ultimate test of killing and dying. As we’ve seen in the earlier chapters, the notion that theatre is a rehearsal for war is longstanding. War is *like* theatre in the way it produces meaning and feeling: in its narratives, roles, and dialogical conflicts playing across a contested terrain. I want to briefly consider the *performativity* of this metaphor — what it does and why it works. I argue that war is metaphorically blended with a specific *kind* of theatre that effaces its own theatricality, promising an absolute meaning, knowledge, and control that it cannot deliver. Or as Artaud puts it more succinctly: the “false theatre [of the] military” (*Oeuvres* 38).

Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz is frequently credited with coining the term “theatre of war” to denote the territory in which the Napoleonic wars were waged – but largely unremarked upon has been Clausewitz’s direct and indirect invocation of dramatic theatre as a metaphor for war. In his treatise *On War*, he writes that “battle [is] almost like a play” (113).<sup>90</sup> The double qualifier that he puts between “theatre” and “war” (“almost like”), emphasizes the transformation brought by emancipating a certain theatrical rhetoric from the contained, consent-bound space of the theatre. Clausewitz warns that war, when left to follow the natural

<sup>90</sup> His French counterpart, Napoleon, similarly wrote that, “A battle is a dramatic action which has its beginning, its middle, and its end” (Qtd. in Mieszkowski 39-40).

progression of its own internal laws, always tends towards “absolute war” – a self-escalating fight to the last man standing, that dissolves civilian-combatant distinctions and obliterates its own political pretexts. Because of “the psychological forces peculiar to [war],” it is “less difficult to go on than to stop,” as all parties are carried away by “the sweep of motion,” picking up speed (Clausewitz 572). If realist drama teases us with an absolute meaning that we cannot have, war, as it “advance[s] relentlessly toward the absolute,” is determined that we shall have it ( 606).

The theatrical apparatus that generates this self-accelerating suicidal thrust – and metaphorically structures Clausewitz’s account of war – is complex. Expanding on Clausewitz’s oft-quoted description of war as a duel on a larger scale, Elaine Scarry pithily defines war as an “injuring contest,” which determines belief (Scarry, *The Body in Pain* 137). However, given that by Scarry’s reckoning, the ultimate aim of war is to set the terms of a people’s belief, rather than to injure the greatest number of people, we might reverse her formulation: war is a contest of belief, which determines the meaning of injuries. The dramatic action, by one means or another, must be “performed” before an audience of civilians, politicians, and military personnel alike, and the ultimate prize is not the highest body count, but spectatorial “belief.”

In *Watching War*, Jan Mieszkowski dates the “performance and interpretation” of the “spectacle of war” to Clausewitz himself. Since Clausewitz, accounts of war have been problematized by the injunction to see a comprehensive and ordered totality from a “god’s eye view,” frustrated by the inability to ever see more than fleeting glimpses of parts of an unfathomable whole – which Mieszkowski describes as a “form of theatricality” (69). Here theatricality denotes the way in which partial images, gestures, sensations, and words conjure an imagined whole that gives the individual parts meaning. And it applies to both the dramatic structure of a war (seen as unfolding within “precise spatio-temporal parameters, as if the

Aristotelian unities were being observed”), and the performative means through which information about it reaches an audience (deploying the sentimental tricks of “melodrama,” Mieszkowski writes) (64, 77). Theatricality is not only a feature of the spectacularization, interpretation, and dissemination of war after the physical fact; as centuries of soldiers’ diaries show, theatricality structures war as it is fought moment-to-moment, in the infinitesimal gaps between perception and action.<sup>91</sup> And crucially, theatre involves more than action, performance, and spectatorship, but also the semantic conditions through which performed actions are able to acquire certain meanings. For Clausewitz, Mieszkowski writes, “war is always a struggle over what will count as war, and in this sense it is always a contest about the meaning of a metaphor” (185).

Taking Scarry and Mieszkowski’s arguments together, we can identify four distinct ways in which the structure of war is understood through the metaphors of theatre and drama. War is the drama of an injuring contest. War is the theatrical spectacle of this injuring contest. War is the semantic system governing the intelligibility of this spectacle (what I have termed a “theatrical frame” in chapter 2). War is the dramatic contest to control the terms of this semantic system. Conventionally, when the war-as-theatre metaphor is engaged (consciously or nonconsciously), it is assumed to only pertain to the first and inner ring of these concentric circles, and to operate according to the logic of representational realism: the structure of the dramatic action through which war is “known” corresponds to the structure of the military actions that occur elsewhere. This theatrical metaphor acquires its meaning by effacing its medium, belying preconceptual processes of meaning-making that engage *all four* levels of theatricality. The meaning ascribed to the inner ring is produced by its interaction with the other

<sup>91</sup> See Paul Fussell, “Theatre of War,” in *The Great War in Modern Memory*.

three. War must be understood as an autopoietic system that intertwines these four levels – deploying theatricality, dramaturgy, and performativity – to blend the material and the imaginative, action and ideology, affects and concepts.

Clausewitz writes that the drive towards mutual annihilation unleashed by war is only constrained and delayed by politics and social contracts – which throw wrenches in the gears of the war machine, by debating its meanings, roles, narratives, and the world it aims to produce or defend. The counterforce and tempering companion to war is a process of negotiating and consenting to contracts – imperfect agreements (perpetually renegotiated) that allow the breaching of certain container-borders within the larger shielding container of the contract and its internal rules. This replaces “belief” in a fixed world with “consent” to enact a contingent one. From the French *con-sentir* (feeling together or feeling with), consent mandates that *sense* be shared in common. But seeking “scientific confirmation of common sense” (8), McConachie would replace *sense* (subjective, fallible, fluctuating bodily faculties) with *science* (supposedly objective, permanent, and disembodied truth). This erases the very sensory and bodily contingency of meaning-making that cognitive science reveals.<sup>92</sup> And it makes of theatrical form, as Rabe complains of realism, a “machine geared to reproduce the shape of itself endlessly” (*Vietnam Plays, Vol. 1* xii).

<sup>92</sup> The formula of “scientific confirmation for common sense” has of course been used to legitimize some of history’s worst atrocities, as it gives ontological cover to racism and nationalism, construing the empathetic “taking sides” as natural fact rather than human creation, erasing deliberation and negotiation and “sense,” to grease the gears of (dis)identification, “rational” action, and war.

Rabe, like Artaud and Bond, models a more fruitful exchange between theatre and science, taking from science not an objectivist epistemology, but a performative metaphor.<sup>93</sup> And understanding that metaphor is not a superficial figure of speech that evades direct meaning, but is often the most direct access we can get, because it is, quite literally, how meaning is (re)made, by transforming one thing into another. To use Rebecca Schneider's term, Rabe puts us in "touch" with the ways in which war's meaning is theatrically enacted, and how it enacts *us*. Seeing may be believing, but touching puts us in closer contact with what we know. Rabe's diagnostic inquiry into the relationship between theatre and war thus challenges the ocularcentric and representational assumptions through which they have traditionally been linked. He says, "The very term *realistic* lays a certain claim on the truth and validity, which is spurious because its simply a convention," and he insists that theatre must "get at [war] in a metaphoric way" (194). This is apt, since war gets at *us* in a metaphoric way, and a theatrical way, and an embodied way.

This is difficult to recognize, however, as it goes against the common sense and good taste naturalized by a realistic theatricality of empathy, through which disembodied spectators watch and pity the bodily fates of characters in an agonistic drama. The qualitative "embodiment" of American civilians is so different than that of combatants and civilians in a war zone, that it is tempting to draw a mind-body dualism like Scarry does, in which the individuals in pain are embodied, and the others are disembodied. While it is certainly correct to insist on the ethical centrality of the bodily precarity, pain, and death that war brings to some, this

<sup>93</sup> As discussed in the introduction, theatre has been understood in terms of medicine for as long as it has been understood in terms of war — going back to Aristotle's use of the medical term *katharsis* to evoke the sense of affective energies passing through and out of the spectator's body, purging them of a harmful element and leaving them in better health.

commitment should not come at the cost of buying into the spectatorial “disembodiment” of the rest. The meaning of war is embodied, and the meaning of war is enacted – by and for everyone. It shapes the parameters and fills the atmosphere of the world that is our bodily dwelling, syncing up with bodily rhythms, theatrically mediating bodily practices of character cultivation through exercise and observation, “sticking” to our bodies, and hovering in the air to breathe in and exhale. War is a bid to make form and subjectivity perfectly cohere in the “character” of self and other; to make “actions” rationally controlled, following a linear trajectory to demolish resistance; and to remake the “world” with fixed borders and an internal hierarchy. But for those consumed by war, all three of these concepts are destroyed; indeed the loss of a stable sense of character, world, and volitional rational action are defining symptoms in the clinical diagnosis of PTSD. When container and trajectory schemas are equivalent to meaning (rather than supportive of it), we perceive not a character but a mask; not a world but a prison; not human-driven volitional action, but the automatic operating or breaking down of a machine.

Bound up with the telos of modern medicine and science, and deploying the theatrical apparatus of realism, war creates vulnerability and deals death in a perverse attempt to escape both. As I move forward to the post-9/11 American wars in the Middle East, I will integrate insights from Artaud, Bond, and Rabe about bodies, society, and the pursuit of meaning. And in my conclusion, I will develop two concepts introduced in this chapter: empathy and consent. I will argue that realism, medicine, and war all crucially deploy these concepts unilaterally. Empathy, as McConachie puts it, is understood as a kind of mind-reading, and consent signs away one’s intersubjective rights to responsiveness and accountability (epitomized by the hospital vernacular of “I consented the patient”). While Rabe views this drama as “part of the eternal human pageant” (*The Vietnam Plays, Vol. 1* xxv), I will explore current applied theatre

projects that enact different forms of empathy, consent, and humanness — through feeling with, being in touch, and playing along.

## Chapter 4: “Organ Failure”: Watching American Wars in the 21st-Century

December 15th, 2003, the day after the capture of Saddam Hussein, news networks played a one-minute video looped on repeat. Beginning in media res, we see a dirty, disheveled, and tired-looking man – barely recognizable as the former President of Iraq – getting checked for lice, his overgrown hair teased out and probed. Our gaze is aligned with the doctor, looking over his shoulder, past his bald white head, latex gloves, and medical instruments, to examine his patient. Ten seconds in, we get to the main act. The doctor sticks a tongue depressor into Saddam’s mouth, and coaxes him, with gentle coercion, to open wider. He pokes around with the tool, presumably looking for dental or periodontal rot, while shining in a flashlight with his other hand. The camera follows the confident beam of light into the dark maw of the deposed dictator.

Many critics have noted the bizarre and unprecedented nature of this video, which instantly became the most-watched medical exam of all time.<sup>94</sup> While it is standard procedure to give a basic physical exam to captured enemies, the exam is not typically filmed and released to the media. As many outraged doctors protested at the time, it violated the oath of doctor-patient confidentiality, turning medicine into theatre. The scene’s “theatricality” can be seen in two ways. First, there is an *unreality* in giving medical care to a man who will be executed; the act is evacuated of its normal telos of promoting the patient’s long term health, and becomes an acted-out charade. But acting it out also performs a powerful function of *making real*. Saddam’s

<sup>94</sup> A prominent queer studies reading interprets the scene as symbolically “sodomizing Saddam” by penetrating his orifices with phallic tools (see, e.g., Mitchell; Mirzoeff). I don’t dispute this metaphorical valence, but I also think it’s important to note that the “medical” here is also *not* a metaphor, and as such gives literal grounding to substantiate the ways in which acts of war not pictured are metaphorically structured by medicine.

medical exam was the most visible (and visceral) substantiation of the enabling metaphor for the United States' wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the more nebulous "War on Terror": war-as-medicine.

As the case for "preemptively"<sup>95</sup> attacking Iraq was debated in 2002, its proponents used a medical analogy that had been tested out during the first Iraq War, and proved highly successful. Saddam, as it was put in press releases in 1991, was a "tumor" that needed to be "excised" from Kuwait (Nixon 207). Now, a decade later, it seemed that the earlier operation had only driven him into remission. "Prophylactic" measures were needed to take him out before he metastasizes and hurts the American body politic.<sup>96</sup> When the war did not bring the quick and easy cure that its planners had hoped for, a new policy for gathering "intelligence" was authorized, under the *nom de guerre* of "enhanced interrogation." Doctors, cognitive scientists, and psychiatrists were enlisted to design torture tactics that would inflict maximum pain without, ostensibly, doing long term harm to the detainee's health. As the infamous "Torture Memos" repeatedly reassure: each interrogation session is "monitored by a medic" (Cole 28). And along with the "surgical strikes" dropping bombs from the air (which had entered the popular vernacular during the first Gulf War), the "surgical" took root in the military's vocabulary for

<sup>95</sup> The war was not preemptive, as Iraq had neither the intent nor the capacity to launch an attack on the United States. By the most charitable estimates, it was a "preventive war" (which assumes that Iraq would *eventually* attack the US, some years down the line). More likely, it was a war of aggression. The rhetoric of preemption, however, and its medical correlates were crucial to legitimizing the campaign as a "just war." For definitions of preemptive, preventive, and aggressive war, from the perspective of just war theory, see Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 74-85.

<sup>96</sup> The rationale for the new U.S. doctrine of "pre-emptive" strikes was vigorously defended in a book by Alan Dershowitz, whose legal analysis is built on the metaphor of war-as-medicine. He quotes Machiavelli, writing that it is easier to cure "the disease [before it] is too far advanced" (63).

ground operations as well. Taking medicine as its master metaphor, the 2006 Counterinsurgency Field Manual notes: “counterinsurgents are like surgeons cutting out cancerous tissue while keeping the other vital organs intact” (1-23).

Saddam’s doctor’s office drama crystallizes and makes visible the metaphorical transmutation that was playing out on a scale both wider and subtler, as the binary conflict fundamental to war was reconfigured as a unilateral operation. In it, Saddam is both *disease* (he is the cancer, surgically cut out of Iraq), and *diseased* (the lice-check constructs him as dirty, crawling with bugs, before the tongue depressor and sanitary glove go in to administer some American medicine). The first metaphorical valence legitimates his execution as a life-saving act, and the second confuses exactly whose life is being saved, as Saddam is the beneficiary of medical care attending to *his* health.<sup>97</sup> The metaphorical association of war and medicine is not new, nor is this the first time that “medical war” has been so explicitly promoted. But historically, it has been a rhetorical tactic of fascism – embraced by Hitler, Mussolini, and some Latin American military dictatorships.<sup>98</sup> This marks the first time that the metaphor has been so openly espoused by a democracy.

My first three chapters took deep dives into the work of a single military veteran theatre maker, that makes visible the co-implication of theatrical realism and medicalized war — attending respectively to bodies, selves, society, and the real. In my introduction, I argued that the rise of realism interacts with newly technologized and metaphorically blended war and

<sup>97</sup> His later trial and execution were carried out by Iraqi gov’t they installed, with much less media attention in the US. No cameras allowed.

<sup>98</sup> In her performance studies analysis of techniques of oppression and resistance in Argentina’s “Dirty War,” (1976-83, backed by CIA), Diana Taylor writes that the junta’s reign of terror was carried out through a blended triumvirate of “Medicalization, Militarization, and Theatricality” (96, 99).

medicine. The institutional partnerships and technological and material exchanges that cement from the late-19th-century to the first world war, and build to the present day, have been amply documented.<sup>99</sup> Less well documented are their *imaginative* interchanges. How have the changing realities of the art and science of killing and healing influenced everyday thoughts and feelings, ways of watching, acting, and experiencing the bodies of oneself and others. I have argued that realist theatre both demonstrates these imaginative changes and helps to *produce* them, naturalizing the perspectivalism that places the body of the spectator outside of the frame of knowledge. From Emile Zola's "medical realism," that arms French spectators for a rematch with Germany by diagnosing the pathologies besetting "physiological man," realism has been infused with the optics, values, assumptions, and narratives of medicine and war (Garner, "Introduction" 318). Following the work of cognitive scientists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, I have argued that there is a three-way "conceptual blending" of war, medicine, and realist theatre during this period: rather than one realm unilaterally projecting its properties onto another, attributes of all three circulate back and forth in continuously shifting constellations. This blending made theatre a potent tool for producing *and* contesting nascent modes of medical and military embodiment. In this chapter, I take a wider angle view, panning between recent American plays and political performances of medicalized war, in order to draw more explicit connections between them. I thus aim to more concretely ground the utility of these theatrical tools — asking what leverage contemporary war plays give us for thinking and feeling about the current theatre of war.

Recently, the term "watching" has been preferred to describe war spectatorship that is less disciplined and deliberate than a steady "gaze." In Jan Mieszkowski's book on *Watching*

<sup>99</sup> See, e.g., *Medicine and Modern Warfare*, eds Roger Cooter, Mark Harrison and Steve Sturdy.

*War* in the modern era, theatrical “watching” connotes an interplay of looking and not looking, never getting more than a partial glimpse, as we cognitively constellate a composite mental picture of events and structures that we cannot directly see. In *Watching Babylon*, Nicholas Mirzoeff’s study of American visual culture during the second Iraq War, Mirzoeff, too, invokes theatre as a metaphor for a kind of “watching” that is situated, interactive, and dependent on the spectator’s embodied conditions. Just as important as the points of visual focus are the “moments of drift in which the attention is not fully engaged” (*Watching* 30). Mirzoeff coins the term “vernacular watching” to describe the way in which certain images and scenes are retained as flashpoints and constellated into a drama we do not directly witness, nor see represented as a continuous story. Drawing on cognitive neuroscience, he writes, “seeing is not believing. It is something we do, a kind of performance. What this performance is to everyday life, visualizing is to war” (*How to See* 14). Watching is a “multimedia site-specific performance of everyday life” (*Watching* 31), and the “vision” we enact in turn produces and positions us as “visual subjects.”

If we employ Mirzoeff’s theory of “vernacular watching,” we might understand the first year of the Iraq War as a five-act drama, composed of the following widely circulated and rebroadcast media images. Colin Powell’s UN speech, in which he made the case for war by brandishing a vile of “yellow cake” uranium, as supposed proof of Iraq’s WMD capacity; the shock-and-awe bombing campaign at the start of the war, broadcast in HD; the carefully choreographed and stage-managed toppling of Saddam’s statue; the “liberated” Iraqi women taking off their veils; George Bush landing on an aircraft carrier, dressed in a *Top Gun* costume, to declare “Mission Accomplished;” and finally Saddam’s medical exam. This enacts a particular kind of war drama, in which the legitimizing telos of the medico-scientific (starting with a

chemistry demo, and ending with a doctor's visit) allows us to enjoy the Hollywood war movie fun of explosions, macho posturing, and women undressing (not, of course, in a speaking role). That the narrative logic fails to "make sense" (the US invaded Iraq and overthrew Saddam in order to... give him Western medical care?) is precisely the point. It works through an oversaturated visual logic, in which contradictory discourses, rationales, and emotions collide, and defy reconciliation. It is not that the medical telos is "believed" (in the sense of an exclusive foundational reality) but that it takes roost in our minds associationally, while we are thinking about other things. It is more like theatre, in that spectatorial engagement does not involve *belief*, but *consent* to go along with an "as-if."

The medical plays no small role in Mirzoeff's analysis of American "vernacular watching" of the Iraq War. He writes that selves, bodies, homes, and the nation were understood through a "corporal metaphor as a fortified body" guarding against "infectious diseases" (*Watching* 51). Attending to situated and embodied scenarios of watching, from within military-style SUVs and American "hyperhouses,"<sup>100</sup> Mirzoeff notes affinities with theatrical realism. The "tinted windows and height off the ground" of SUVs gives drivers a privileged theatrical viewpoint of seeing without being seen; and the armoured sides ensure their invulnerability, bringing a favorable asymmetry to any collisions with smaller vehicles (36). And the "house becomes a body, which in turn can only be understood as a state at war" (52); "their eyes are 'theatre'-style television screens," which allow residents to look out at the drama of a dangerous world that cannot get in (50).

<sup>100</sup> A new architectural design defined by fortress-like borders, and an internal structure of living spaces organized by electronic media, connected by a nervous system of wires and cables.

I argue that in post-9/11 American war spectatorship, the medical is the key term mediating between a cool technological distance and a racializing fervor; between a detached callousness and intense passions of anger, hatred, and fear.<sup>101</sup> James Der Derian argues that new technologies of representation and destruction, which bring an unprecedented asymmetry to American warfare, also introduce a new ontological and ethical system which he terms *Virtuous War*. I contend that technology's automatic association with "virtue" (as well as assumptions about the right of those with technology to decide what is best for those without it) depends on medicine. Medical technology is perhaps the one realm in which technological advancement has been widely viewed as an unquestioned virtue – increasing life spans, eradicating illnesses, and bringing relief from suffering. Looking at technological "progress" in other realms (e.g. weaponry), the virtue of increased capabilities is less self-evident, and largely dependent on perspective: whether one is on the firing end or receiving end of the gun.<sup>102</sup> And when weaponry is medicalized, its targets are pathologized; racial and civilizational Others are constructed as disease.<sup>103</sup> Like the double metaphor engaged in Saddam's medical exam, this works through a

<sup>101</sup> Studies of contemporary American war spectatorship can be broadly divided into two categories. Those that focus on *technological* factors: imbricated weapons and communication systems, virtuality, speed, image saturation (Der Derian; Virilio; Mirzoeff); and those that focus on *social* factors: racist and Orientalist "civilizational" norms, that feminize, infantilize, criminalize, animalize, and queer the Middle Eastern Other (Butler; Puar; Singh).

<sup>102</sup> Der Derian describes this unilateral view and power as a hyperbolized "realism," through which total vision brings total control: fulfilling Baudrillard's prophesy of a "miraculous correspondence of the real to their models, and therefore of an absolute manipulation" (83). He warns, however, that "[R]ealism [has a] long, intimate history with violence... reproducing a world it claims only to record" (38), and reminds us of the medical definition of mimesis: "the appearance... of symptoms of a disease not actually present (238).

<sup>103</sup> Medical science, of course, has a long history of giving scientific cover for bigotry, and an objectivist ontology to subjective biases. By the end of the 19th-century, modern medicine had been used to construct and persecute the category of "the homosexual" as a medically classified illness; to legally establish the "one-drop" racial definition, reifying race as a scientific fact in

bifocal blend of racial other-as-*disease* (afflicting the white public body) and racial other-as-*diseased* (pathologized black and brown “bodies,” innately aberrant, afflicted with social ills).<sup>104</sup> The unresolved contradiction between these metaphorical valences supports the contorted logic of capturing, incarcerating, and killing people for their own good. The second metaphor is the key to semantically transforming an oppositional relation of war, into a unilateral action of paternalist “care.” Recent books by Nikhil Singh and Aaron Belkin have shown the reciprocity between this medicalization of social “issues” at home (race, gender, sexuality) and the spread of American empire abroad, starting in the late 19th-century, not incidentally with the rise of medical-military metaphors.

The prominence and potency of medical-military blending has waxed and waned at certain historical junctures; it is currently on the rise, catalyzed once more by the convergence of new medical and military technologies. Over the last decade, a number of articles and book chapters have debated the aptness of medical metaphors to describe new military operations.<sup>105</sup> These fall into two categories. Linguistic analyses critiquing militarist “doublespeak” that cloaks killing with lies. And publications from the “defense intellectuals” at the RAND Corporation and neoconservative think tanks that promote “surgical war,” claiming it saves lives, and hence is

Plessy v. Ferguson; and to pathologize “women’s issues,” with particular emphasis on reproductive and mental health.

<sup>104</sup> I use the term “body” advisedly, to denote a specific dehumanizing focus on “the body” as passionate, emotional, and dangerous, implicitly dichotomized to (and surveilled by) white disembodied “mind.”

<sup>105</sup> To date, there has been no thorough study of the origins, development, and consequences of the medical turn in contemporary asymmetrical war. This is likely because the conceptual blend is subtler than Orwell’s doublethink dictum “war is peace,” which perhaps allows it to more effectively make this distortion. While I do not offer one here, I hope if my synthesis and suggestions are necessarily incomplete, the ellipses can indicate areas for needed historiographic research. Genealogy sketch: Neocons, Evangelical, Rand Corporation

quite properly understood in terms of medicine. Both treat medical metaphors as describing a reality (either accurately or inaccurately) rather than producing a reality. By contrast, I am interested in the performativity of the metaphor – asking not whether it is true or false, but how and why it is felicitous or infelicitous, and what it does. I have argued that *theatre* can help us diagnose the performativity of this conceptual blend, by illuminating visual, embodied, embedded, and enacted processes of sense-making not touched by a purely linguistic analysis of metaphor. Further, in addition to *revealing* the primary embodied metaphors that shape abstract thought, theatre practice can *rework* these systems of metaphor. My fourth chapter is divided into two sections, the first reads Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig’s *Lidless* (2009) in dialogue with medicalized torture; the second reads The Riot Group’s *Pugilist Specialist* (2003) and Sylvia Khoury’s *Against the Hillside* (2018) against surgicalized drone strikes and Special Ops commando raids. These plays make tangible the subtle and abstract ways in which medical blending shapes how war is seen and enacted in the post-9/11 era, and reciprocally, how these way of seeing *enact us* as spectatorial subjects.

### **Torture: *Lidless***

Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig’s *Lidless* (2009) is set in an imagined future, the year 2019, in which the Guantanamo Bay detention camp has been closed for nearly a decade.<sup>106</sup> Alice, a former Guantanamo interrogator, now working as a florist in Texas, is tracked down by Bashir – a Pakistani-Canadian man whom she tortured. Bashir contracted hepatitis while imprisoned at

<sup>106</sup> The play has historical irony today. When it was written, Obama had promised to close Guantanamo, so this imagined future was probably not supposed to be counterfactual. The play was likely written in the spirit of retrospective reckoning with sins of last decade, rather than an ongoing practice and debate.

Gitmo, and his liver is now failing. He remembered that Alice told him, during an interrogation session, that they have the same blood type. He wants half her liver. The play is devised around the central metaphor of organ transplantation. Cowhig's dramatic focus on the fate of a failing organ, and an organ taken out of its body, is likely inspired by two revelations about the "enhanced interrogation" program that had recently been brought to light. The first, in the documents published as the "Torture Memos," was a criterion for defining "torture," stipulating that the level of pain must be equivalent to "organ failure" (Cole 47).<sup>107</sup> The second, a rumor that Abu Ghraib detainees' organs were being harvested in operating rooms – apocryphal, but serving to inspire further terror in Iraqi "combatants" and civilians (Mitchell 36). In the play, the scenarios of torture and organ donation provide the basis for contradictory ways of watching, feeling and knowing, both grounded in regarding the body: the first gains knowledge and control through unilateral penetration; the second sustains life through an exchange between bodies with porous borders and precarious parts. I will argue that as Cowhig engages medicalized ways of watching and enacting war, she integrates the conceptual, preconceptual, and affective systems that I elaborated in my first three chapters through the work of Artaud, Bond, and Rabe.

Historian Alfred McCoy, a leading chronicler and critic of the American use of torture from the early Cold War to the current day, writes that what most distinguishes American torture from techniques used by its enemies is a "theatricality," supported by medical, psychiatric, and cognitive science (117). Both the theatrical and the medical, we will see, are used to draw and then blur boundaries between the "real" and the "imaginary" – for the tortured, the torturers, and the public. In the 1970s, the CIA began to develop techniques of environmental and sensory

<sup>107</sup> As paraphrased by a character in Christopher Durang's 2009 play, *Why Torture is Wrong, and the People Who Love Them*: "It isn't torture unless it causes organ failure" (47).

manipulation, designed to destroy and remake the prisoner's perception of what is real – with regards to his or her world, self, and actions. These experiments, which located the “mind” not inside the skull, but distributed across one's living space, and enacted by moving through it, were instrumental in moving the field of cognitive science towards the “extended” and “enacted” mind hypothesis. And they guided the scripting and mise-en-scene of what McCoy calls a “psychological drama crueler than physical pain.” This is not to say that physical pain was diminished. Methods of dealing blows that leave no visible surface bruise, and holding positions for hours on end, were engineered with the explicit goal of causing physical pain without permanent “medical” damage. What “theatricality” does here, is manipulate a reality/illusion dichotomy that dismisses any suffering that leaves the body basically intact.<sup>108</sup> The “reality” of torture is determined by the objective perspective of the medic who is required to be present during the “interrogation” to make sure it does no medical harm; not the subjective perspective of the tortured. This is the theatrical logic used to justify, e.g., waterboarding: because the detainee only *imagines* he is drowning, and is not *really* drowning, no torture occurs.<sup>109</sup> The ontological uncertainty of theatricality, and professed certainty of medical science, conspire to perform a double operation of making-real and making-unreal. As cognitive scientists and medical researchers were learning that no mind-body duality is possible in studying cognition, this very duality was used rhetorically to disavow the reality of the torture they perpetrated.

<sup>108</sup> Darius Rejali writes that so-called “clean tortures” allows democratic regimes to torture without accountability, as they avoid monitoring systems that emerged after WWII and the 1949 Geneva convention (13).

<sup>109</sup> This is not to say that those who authorized waterboarding believed it was medically safe. To the contrary, before practice was started in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, the CIA's medical office issued a memo stating that: “waterboarding is neither efficacious nor medically safe” (Cole, 26).

Along with the blurring of real and unreal, the “theatrical” tortures manipulate the dramatic structures and norms deriving from realist theatre – worlds as stable and totalizing, characters as bounded agential subjects, and actions as intentional and linear. The torture victim is forcibly cast in a role and made to act against his will, within a world with bounding parameters and an internal logic that is foreign and inhospitable. Particular focus has been placed on perfecting methods of “self-inflicted pain,” and sexual tortures in which the victim is physically manipulated so as to become aroused. The “psychological drama” that McCoy claims is crueler than “physical pain,” is so because the victim *enacts* (involuntarily) his own suffering and degradation. In a moral-ontological sense, the victim is of course in no way responsible for his suffering, and has no agency to prevent it. But in a *dramatic* sense, the crucial act is not done *to* him, but *by* him, with his body acting beyond the conscious control of his “mind.” The norms for understanding muscular movements, and sexual arousal, as being controlled by a “mind” that is equivalent to the subject, are exploited to divide the torture victim against himself, and destroy the structural supports on which the “self” is built. This perverse dramatic logic has proven pivotal in “breaking” detainees – as humans are able to withstand a remarkable level of pain when they are positioned as adversaries to their tormentors; but their psychic supports crumble when this binarizing dramatic structure is reconfigured.

Diana Taylor has shown that the double consciousness of theatricality is not just a rhetorical tactic used to sell and hide torture, but enables the act of torture to be carried out by normal people. Shielded in the armor of a theatrical role, the torturer is able to disidentify with the act of torturing, which “makes the action ‘safe’ for the torturer” (129). However, in the recent American context, it is not just that torturers understand themselves as “actors” – it is that they are cast and oriented within an entirely different play than their victims. The “Torture Memos”

legitimate the violence of “enhanced interrogation” on the grounds that it is an act of “self-defense.” The tortured logic of this legal rationale works through theatrical surrogation. The interrogator stands in for the United States of America (and any threat to the USA is a threat to his “self”), and the detainee, supposedly possessing information that could reveal terrorist plots, or the names and locations of other militants, is a sign pointing to an invisible threat. So enhanced interrogation is a drama of “self-defense” in which both the “self” and the threat that it “defends” against, are offstage.<sup>110</sup> Torture is authorized as a diagnostic drama, in which the detainee is not a character, but a specimen, tested and examined for signs of a dangerous disease that can be “pre-emptively” wiped out, to protect the health of the body politic. The stipulation that a medic should be present at the interrogation, watching the detainee’s body for any signs of “serious” injury, reinforces this diagnostic frame.<sup>111</sup>

While the American public did not read the “Torture Memos” during the early years of the Iraq War, they did watch television. A number of cultural critics have argued that the Fox TV show *24*, and its epigones, were instrumental in normalizing torture as a policy option.<sup>112</sup> As representations of torture proliferated on television and film in the years after 9/11, the protagonist was no longer tortured by the villain, but was doing the torturing. Led by Jack Bauer, exuding the gritty confidence and authority of a TV-doctor as he pumped terrorists with syringes

<sup>110</sup> As the unarmed and bound detainee clearly poses no *personal* threat to his torturer, the torture stands for and is authorized by a different imagined drama – one that pits its protagonist (both hero and potential victim) against an invisible villain.

<sup>111</sup> While the “Torture Memos” go to great lengths to argue that various tactics of “enhanced interrogation” do not constitute torture, they also offer a carefully crafted definition of what torture *is*. Among the criteria are that torture is defined by the “subjective intent” of the torturer, and not the experience of the tortured. See Nikhil Pal Singh, *Race and America’s Long War*, 103.

<sup>112</sup> See Richardson, McCoy.

filled with colorful liquids, “enhanced interrogation” took on a medical valence and scientific legitimacy in the public imaginary.<sup>113</sup> And it gave the American public permission to root for the torturer-hero, secure in the conviction that he is doing no actual harm, any more than a doctor who submits his patient to a painful course of treatment to cure a greater disease.

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The first scene in *Lidless* flashes back to the year 2004. Riva, a Guantanamo Bay Army medic, steps into an orange spotlight, and mimes the medical examination of an invisible detainee. As she speaks into a recorder, we realize that he has been subjected to “clean tortures” – designed to leave minimal external signs of the “internal injuries” that Riva notes (5). “Detainee complains of severe abdominal pain,” she reports, “and should be tested for liver disease.” But the passages carrying material in and out of the detainee’s body have also been damaged: directing him to breathe in and out, Riva notices “problems in respiration,” likely due to wearing a hood restricting his air supply. The play thus begins by evoking a body, without its thick presence onstage, thus allowing us to consider the body in schematic terms: as a container with an outer surface, an inner content, and passages in between. As the container schema is engaged to structure this imagined body, it entails contradictory principles. The detainee’s body has been penetrated without breaking the skin — the lack of “lacerations” bely his internal wounds. And he is also claustrophobically confined within his body, blocking intercourse with the outer world to the point of suffocation.

<sup>113</sup> See, e.g., Michael Richardson, *Gestures of Testimony: Torture, Trauma, and Affect in Literature*, 14.

While acts of torture are always penetrative in the sense of violating a protective circle of rights around human subjects,<sup>114</sup> it is noteworthy that the torture tactics designed and executed under the policy of “enhanced interrogation” exploit the container-schema in a more complicated and dialecticized way. The “Torture Memos” mandate a strategy that alternates between extremes of containment (confining the detainee in a small box with a restricted air supply), and exposure (stretched out and strapped in place, helpless to resist bodily penetration) (Cole 5; Mitchell 114).<sup>115</sup> This is part of what McCoy calls the “theatricality” of American torture, replacing blunt acts of injury with choreographed manipulations of the detainee’s sensory world.

Alice, Bashir’s interrogator, is unsatisfied with penetrating and occupying the physical space of his cell, and the corporeal space of his body. Somehow the detainees “can shut you out. Go anywhere in their heads” (8). She has not yet breached an interior “mental space,” a sort of inner sanctuary. Performing the role of torturer in this penetrative project has kindled in Alice a determination to enter, occupy and own this inner space, to “make ‘em stop believing” (8). A new interrogation tactic offers her an alternate, and highly theatrical, means of gaining entry. Termed “Invasion of Space by a Female,” this tactic was based on supposed anthropological insights into the mind of Muslim men, and sought to exploit religious taboos in order to, as Alice puts it, “damn their souls” (8). Women interrogators were cast in a sexualized roleplay, costumed

<sup>114</sup> Diana Taylor writes that torture is centrally “about making the body penetrable,” in a “masculinist drama” of “male individuation and supremacy” (152). There is an inverse relationship between the “container” of the torturer’s body and self, and that of the torture victim; absolute penetrative control over the other renders the perpetrator invulnerable, holding an unassailable “individualized” inner content. The goal of torture, Taylor writes, is to “penetrate others, while remaining invulnerable to penetration” (115).

<sup>115</sup> This recalls the torture scene in Bond’s *Lear*, in which Bodice and Fontanelle’s efforts to turn Warrington “inside out” suddenly reverse course, as they opt to shut him up “inside himself” (28).

in skimpy dresses and made up with lipstick and blush to accentuate their “femininity,” while using red paint as a prop to stand for menstrual blood. The “space” that is penetrated and invaded, then, is at once physical, corporeal, and psychic – the inner sanctum that Alice failed to reach through pain alone. And it is achieved through a cruel theatrical calculation of the cognitive relay between material acts, the body, and imagination. Smearing red paint on her hand, Alice slinks into the interrogation chamber – signified abstractly by another spot of light – and starts another session with the detainee, who is still invisible. Touching herself, she shows him the red on her hand, and then starts to caress him. She discovers that breathing lightly beneath his left ear gives him an erection. His involuntary bodily response makes him complicit in the roleplay: “You like this. Our heads and hearts try to trick us, but our bodies never lie” (10). And Alice starts to veer off script. “I’m bleeding, and there’s nothing shielding you from my twenty-five-year-old cunt” (11). She takes off her shirt, and straddles his erection, as the lights go out.

While sexual humiliation was an officially sanctioned tactic of the “enhanced interrogation” program, and it not infrequently led to rape, in all documented instances, it is the detainee who is sexually penetrated by an interrogator – or else forced to penetrate another detainee. The way in which Alice rapes Bashir does not, of course, change the total asymmetry of the abuse, but it does trouble the conceptual structures through which we *understand* abuse as penetration. Psychically, morally, and physically, she is invading his space (penetrating his container), but anatomically, he penetrates her. This does two things. It disengages the audience’s expectation of realism, and corresponding ways of looking, thinking, and feeling. We know that we are not witnessing a realistic rendering of the tortures at Gitmo, which are referenced only indirectly, through the forensic evidence of “internal injuries” recorded by Riva.

We are thus freed from the documentary impulse of witnessing, and the ethical imperative to try to imagine what torture is “like,” and we instead attend to structures and exchanges, barriers and flows, that do not map onto an objectivist vision of reality. Second, it sets up the dialectical movement between contradictory structures, that recurs and develops over the course of the play. As in Bond’s theatre, bodies, selves, and groups are first framed in militarist terms, as fortresses to defend or assault, gaining control and security through unilateral penetration of the other. And then they are reframed in scenes of vulnerability and care, turning borders into permeable membranes that allow bilateral exchanges of taking in and letting out.

The subsequent scenes repeat the scenario of “invasion of space,” breaching the container-borders of territorial spaces (houses, rooms), corporeal space, and the “inner space” of the self. Moving forward to the “present” of 2019, the detainee walks through the front door of Alice’s flower shop in Texas, introduces himself as “Bashir,” and, after recounting his history and his illness, asks for her liver. Alice kicks him out of her shop, but on the threshold of the doorway, he turns to face her, pulls a “*black plastic bag over his head,*” and “*gasps and screams and wails*” (22). It is clear, in the next scene, that he has also penetrated, occupied, and dismantled the “inner space” of Alice’s self. At home with her husband Lucas, and 14-year-old daughter Rhiannon, Alice relapses into PTSD symptoms that she hadn’t experienced for years. And their home world, structured by careful boundaries and containment, starts to come undone. Rhiannon becomes inquisitive about her mother’s military service, after first discovering Alice’s army jacket in the attic, and then receiving a package from Bashir, containing his orange jumpsuit from Guantanamo Bay. Rhiannon upsets her mother by wearing the jacket around the house, and is upbraided by Lucas. “Remember when we talked about boundary violations? Wearing that jacket would be a violation of my boundaries” (51). To which Rhiannon retorts,

“What if my boundary ends in your stomach?” (51). After being rebuffed by Alice a few more times, Bashir eventually shows up on her doorstep and lets himself in. Lucas tries to kick him out, in similar terms: “It’s called a front door. It separates this family from the rest of the world, and if someone wants to cross that barrier, they knock” (58). “Your wife raped me,” Bashir says, stepping inside, “She didn’t knock, she didn’t ask for permission. She just came into my house” (58).

Like in Rabe’s *Vietnam Plays*, characters are caught up in a self-cannibalizing quest for meaning, like an “anatomist [who] destroys that which he seeks to understand” (Rabe, *The Orphan* 116). In the first scene of *Lidless*, Alice penetrates Bashir to extract an informational content he holds inside. But this ostensible goal is forgotten, as she gets carried away in the pursuit of a bodily knowledge in a self-escalating performance of dominance. Unsatisfied with the “knowledge” she has gained by penetrating and occupying Bashir’s living space and body, she still feels “shut out” of the inner space of Bashir’s self, and she is determined to get in. Trying to know detainees through this asymmetrical, penetrative project has undone the structure of Alice’s “self” – evidenced by her recurring PTSD symptoms. She confesses that when Rhiannon’s pet chicken wouldn’t stop squawking at night, she pulled out one of her feathers, without knowing why. “She didn’t fight back, which made me furious. She sat on my palm, just watching, while I pulled out another feather, and another, until she was bloody and bald” (24). The bodily meaning that she pursues, which eludes conceptual explanation, operates through a self-escalating system, in which the asymmetry of the exchange and totality of Alice’s dominance simply heightens her fury and accelerates her actions. Rhiannon meets Bashir when he comes looking for Alice, and she eventually asks him to be the subject of her oral history project for school. In their conversation, Rhiannon admits to “suffocating” a goldfish. “I was just

holding it in my hand, watching it. ... Watching it try to breathe,” studying the fish “gasping for breath” (28). “Sometimes I like killing crickets,” she later blurts, to which Bashir responds, “You just want to understand how they sing” (46). This scenario of “watching” in order to “understand” engages the epistemology of dramatic realism, connected to an objectivist scientific gaze – but here, the pinning down of animal test subjects on a slide to see and know them destroys the subject it seeks to know. And we see that this epistemology is not unique to the scenario of torture, or adolescent sadism. As Rhiannon interviews Bashir to get to “know” him, she engages the same penetrative system, and uses many of the same terms. She tries to see “inside” him, to extract the story that she senses he is holding “in”; but this conceptual structure belies a preconceptual pursuit of meaning that she can describe only as bodily and visceral: she wants to know him with her “gut” (13). The play’s nonrealist attention to structure and pattern brings to light these continuities between the theatrical epistemology of torture, and the ways in which we “know” our selves, others, and world in everyday life.

As the medico-military paradigm fails, characters experience unexpected sensations and involuntary bodily responses. Like Artaud’s surgical theatre that cuts new pathways across the sensory levels, mental images trigger bodily actions and vice versa. Rhiannon gets the hiccups when she first meets Bashir; he tells her “we get hiccups when our body knows something our mind doesn’t understand” (27), and then frightens her to make them go away. The symptoms of Bashir’s childhood asthma went away, he explains, when he changed the conceptual meanings that he gave it: “I made myself think: ‘I want this. I love this. I’m happy.’ My breath came back” (29). The involuntary movements of hiccuping and breathing are dialectically bound to the conceptual images used to understand them. This physiological symptom is explained not by medicine, but by metaphor.

Rhiannon's asthma is similarly triggered by an unpredictable feedback between thoughts, movements, and the involuntary working of internal organs. In their interviews, Bashir reveals that he too had asthma as a child (our first hint that he is Rhiannon's biological father). After eventually learning the true story of Bashir and her mother, Rhiannon, while home alone, puts on his orange jumpsuit and blackout goggles, handcuffs herself, and tries out a stress position. Acting out these motions, she is overcome with a sudden asthma attack. Unable to find the key to her inhaler, and unable to breathe, she dies. Through theatrical roleplay, something of Bashir gets into her, but it is not a "content" transported intact from one body or self to another. It moves in a more surgical manner; and something of Rhiannon subsequently gets into Bashir, through literal surgery. We learn in the last scene that after Rhiannon died, Bashir received her liver, a perfect match (paternity hints confirmed). Alice visits Bashir in the hospital, and touches his incisions as she speaks to her daughter. She goes home, and finds Rhiannon's inflatable globe on the floor. "She's in here, still. This is her breath" (71). She pinches open the valve, and slowly, with pauses to breathe out, inhales her daughter's breath. In the last scene, Bashir is visited by his daughter, Zakiyah (played by the same actress as Rhiannon), who comforts him in his distress. "Soon your new liver will eliminate the toxins that have poisoned your body, and everything you're thinking will change" (73). Coming full circle, the visceral changes brought by his new organ will change his conceptual thoughts.

In my conclusion, I will revisit the question of what exactly travels between bodies here, what it means to get "into" one another. I will argue that *Lidless* models a non-realist form of empathy, that works not through unilateral mind-reading, but bilateral resonance. First, however, I want to turn to another medical drama, brought by new technologies.

## Special Ops and Drone Warfare

On Barack Obama's second day in office, he signed an executive order banning enhanced interrogation; on his third day in office, he ordered a drone strike that killed an estimated 8-15 people: all civilians (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism). This tactical pivot masked a strategic continuity in the American wars in the Middle East, and it rescued and revamped the war's medical metaphor. The images Americans saw of US torture, when the Abu Ghraib photographs leaked, did not look medical. There were no photos of detainees being waterboarded, "monitored by a medic" assuring the safety and scientific validity of the procedure.<sup>116</sup> The obviously gratuitous sexual humiliations in the photographs did not look like what Jack Bauer was doing to terrorists on 24. Obama's tactical shift to rely more heavily on drones and Special Ops missions salvaged a medical metaphor that had been very successful in legitimating the wars, while decoupling it from an association that was no longer tenable. It was calculated, of course, not for operational but for dramatic effect: how it would play for an American audience. Torture was too sordid a show for the majority taste (at least when confronted with photographic evidence); surgical strikes neutralizing anonymous terrorist targets proved more palatable – a less messy medicine.

While the iconic images of war under Bush's tenure featured choreographed melodramatic spectacles, both of cowboy heroics and of wanton cruelty, the key event in Obama's wars is memorialized by a photograph of an audience *watching* the event from thousands of miles away. The men in the "situation room" photo of the Osama bin Laden assassination could easily be surgeons watching an endoscopic operation on a video monitor –

<sup>116</sup> In retrospect, it seems unlikely that images of waterboarding (the most prevalent, and widely considered the most severe torture perpetrated) would have inspired the same public outcry, as they better fit the medical rhetoric and narrative already in place.

their stoic and steely expressions indicating the seriousness of the procedure, while also projecting a professional calm. Only Hillary Clinton's face – eyes wide and mouth covered with her hand – lets slip that they are watching something horrific. In fitting with the shift from medicalized torture to surgicalized bombing and commando raids, the operation, from the perspective of the American public, was closer to the modern experience of surgery.

Anesthetized, we see nothing (no blood or body interior), and trust that the professionals, with privileged knowledge, technology, and control, will execute the penetrative project while we sleep, sewing the wound back up before we wake.<sup>117</sup>

Extreme measures were taken to ensure that *this* would be the only image available – so as to avoid a repeat of the cell phone video of Saddam Hussein's execution, which showed a scene belying the official narrative. Along with the absence of visuals, information about the details of the operation has been kept under tight wraps.<sup>118</sup> We know that after bin Laden had been located, there was a protracted debate about whether he should be killed in a “surgical” drone strike, or by a “surgical operation” carried out by a Special Ops commando team. The transcripts of these conversations are not available, and so the rationale for going with the second option cannot be known. But we can reasonably infer that bombing the compound to the ground would seem less “surgical” than sending a Special Ops team to cut like a scalpel into the compound, taking out the agents of disease (bin Laden and his sons) while leaving other vital tissues intact (women and children). While this was clearly the better option, it must be pointed

<sup>117</sup> Not incidentally, the turn toward the “surgical” in military rhetoric coincided with the introduction of new surgical technologies ever less invasive and dangerous.

<sup>118</sup> There is much debate over the specifics of the bin Laden assassination, and good reason for scepticism of the “official” story (see Hersh). Here I am interested in the representation in popular imaginary, have no special insight into its truth claim.

out that when assassinating lower profile targets, Obama and the JSOC brass had few qualms about the “collateral damage” of women and children. It was because this operation would receive much more intense media and public scrutiny that they departed from what was by then the standard operating procedure of dropping a bomb from a UAV, without lingering around afterward to verify who had been killed. Ironically, in order to legitimate the “surgical” assassination program, and to continue using drones with impunity, it was important that the most high profile execution not be conducted with a drone. It would have risked opening the door to a critique of the war’s medical rhetoric, at its climactic moment, reaching a telos ten years in the making.

The new forms of visuality, and visual subjects, enacted with drones are evoked by the names of the technology they use: the “Unblinking Eye,” the “Eye of God,” and the “Gorgon Stare.” While the first two confer on the visual subject an omniscience, omnipotence, and presumed justness, the “Gorgon Stare,” in emphasizing the fearful punishment the drone doles out, reverses the direction of the gaze. Medusa and her Gorgon sisters did not kill by *looking* at their victims; instead, it was by *looking at the Gorgons* that victims were petrified with terror. In this metaphor, the drone need not see *anything* in order to carry out its purpose of inspiring asymmetrical and deadly terror. Further, in Greek mythology and culture, while live Gorgons were able to kill, *representations* of Gorgon faces were supposed to have the power to *heal* illness, and to ward off evil, and were associated with Asclepius, the god of medicine. Images of a Gorgon head (usually sticking out her tongue), were worn as amulets on the body, and carved into the doors of prominent households, to keep evil spirits out. The metaphor of “Gorgon Stare” thus helps to reconcile the contradictions of “surgical strikes” – killing as an act of medicine, in order to defend the borders of the body and the home (understood as a metaphorical body). What

“Gorgon Stare” and “Unblinking Eye” technology are used for, is called “pattern of life analysis” – a system of mapping the habitual activity of all the people within a given space, to determine which ones are likely “militants,” or are complicit in aiding those deemed likely militants.<sup>119</sup> It has been noted that the technologies and modes of analysis used share much in common with medical imaging, generating digital maps of a territory to scan for signs of dangerous agents.<sup>120</sup> It also shares a medical diagnostic ontology, and a tendency towards overaggressive action to wipe out the threat.

This points to the most significant feature of drones: the conversion of vision into action. The definition of a “drone” is any technology involving a feedback loop between “sensors” and “actuators” (Gettinger 2). This means that sensory information (predominantly visual) triggers actions, without any intervening process of human deliberation and judgment. The “kill chain,” in military parlance, refers to the time between getting intelligence, and the bomb or missile impacting (Cockburn 137). It is composed of both technological processes, and human deliberation (evaluating the intelligence, authorizing the strike, flyer the bomber jet, pushing the button). As Alexander Cockburn notes, drones “shrink the kill chain almost to zero” (138). Harun Farocki writes that the technology of military vision produces not representations, but “operative images” (17). Rather than vision producing information that is then evaluated to

<sup>119</sup> All of these individuals are then valid targets for “Signature Strikes,” under a policy that approves targets for assassination *without* positive identification *or* specific intelligence connecting them to a past or future crime (Scahill 249). What this means is that, for the majority of people targeted for drone strikes (a figure that excludes the civilians killed “collaterally”), we do not know who they are, nor whether they have done, or intend to do, anything wrong. It is simply determined that these are likely, and no specification is given about the degree of likelihood (99%? 51%?). So, while drones promise “all-seeing” capabilities, what they bring is a particular *kind* of seeing, scotomized with selective blindness. Specifically, they cannot reliably recognize the individuals they survey as distinct humans, but only as possible threats

<sup>120</sup> See (Mirzoeff, “War is Culture” 1739).

determine a course of action, the image is already the operation, the eye is a weapon. Yet, while the technological systems of drone warfare may excise human factors and judgment from the kill chain, the humans positioned as the ones who see through this apparatus are not “excised,” but rather constructed as particular sorts of visual subjects. Grégoire Chamayou writes paradoxically that, the “extinction” of subjectivity “becomes the main task of subjectivity” (207). Benjamin Noys adds that to enter the “kill chain” is “to be enchained as a particular kind of subject,” an “automatic self” (7). Chamayou’s verb, “enchained,” suggests the reciprocal production belied by the asymmetry of drone warfare, and its realist epistemology. Drone warfare legitimizes itself with the claim of dramatic realism – that what and how we see has no bearing on who we are (because we are merely observing an “external” objective reality). But – as studies of the “situation room” photograph suggest, endlessly poring over details of body language and the microphysiomy of faces – how we watch plays no small part in who we are.

### ***Pugilist Specialist and Against the Hillside***

The Riot Group’s 2003 play, *Pugilist Specialist*, considers the kind of self that is produced and “enchained” through ways of watching. The play tells the story of a covert operation carried out by a Special Operations unit in the Marine Corps, consisting of the surveillance and remote assassination of a militant leader, referred to with the code name of “the Bearded Lady.” When the play was written, “Special Ops” were just starting to take on a larger role in the wars, and their existence was not widely known. They have since moved to the front line of an increasingly global war, and they have adopted and extended the war’s medical

metaphors.<sup>121</sup> “These guys are scalpels,” says an aide to Special Operations commander Bill McRaven; former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of staff Hugh Shelton adds, “[t]hey are a surgical type of unit” who infiltrate their target, and then “blow it up from the inside” (Scahill 261, 52). The play has four characters: Lt. Emma Stein, a demolitions expert who specializes in “pre-demo structural contamination”; Lt. Harpo Studdard, a communications technician; Lt. Travis Freud, a sniper, and Col. Johns, who sets the objectives for the mission, but is not involved in carrying it out. Their complementary roles are metaphorically understood as different organs within a larger body: a nervous system gathering sensory information and relaying it to the brain (Studdard); an executive command and control center that evaluate info and issues orders (Johns); and muscular functions divided between the deliberate labor of laying foundations to execute the plan (Stein), and the reflexive action of pulling the trigger (Freud). As Lt. Freud says to Col. Johns, “Sir, our true interests are for you to know and me to fire at the target” (30). This division of labor is predicated on the outmoded assumptions of first generation cognitive science, with its ontological metaphors of mind-as-computer and body-as machine – which understand the thinking, feeling, and acting that go into cognition as made up of discrete and separable functions.

Rather than realistically dramatizing the operation, the play directs its focus away from what the Marines *do*, and towards the mode of spectatorship they engage in doing it. The four actors remain seated on a bench, facing forward. While they make some gestures to indicate to whom they are speaking, they do not make eye contact with each other and there is no

<sup>121</sup> Special Ops are distinguished from “conventional” fighting forces in several ways. One is the lack of oversight – taking orders directly from the Secretary of Defense and the President, their missions often remain unknown to commanding officers in the five “conventional” branches of the armed forces, as well as the Senate Armed Services Committee. And another is, as the play’s title notes, they are made up of “specialists” who perform highly technical tasks.

“naturalistic movement” (12). As the “action is expressed as audio,” we get verbal information without its corresponding embodiment; we are denied the alignment of word, thought, and gesture that dramatically produces the sense of a whole human subject. As Lt. Studdard says of his work in communications, “I take care of words when they lose their bodies. That’s my job” (43). The characters sit like a theatre audience, parsing images and maps on unpictured screens as they draw up their plan and launch the operation. This is a drama about watching, and how the ways in which we watch – gathering “information” and constellating it into images and meanings – produces us as particular sorts of subjects. Piecing together bits of data and photos of the Bearded Lady, and drawing up an assassination plan, the Marines engage the objectivist theatrical apparatus of dramatic realism; placing them above and apart from a subject to penetrate and know. But organizing and carrying out this “surgical strike” in fact performs a kind of surgery on *them* – their metaphorical group body is divided into different organs; and their individual bodies cut off from the actions and meanings they perceive and enact.

The medical metaphors that characters use to surveille, interpret, and “know” the Bearded Lady redound to infiltrate their own subjectivity and group organization. As they plan to excise the “malignant opposition” to “remedy the sickness” in the Middle East, the same terms attach to their own outfit (68, 62): they need “proper planning” to guard the mission against “contagions,” and to be “inoculated against the consequences of dissent” (25, 30). The disease is not just the human enemy they target, but their own humanity, understood as the messy and mysterious embodied feelings and actions that interfere with an objective technical knowledge, and rational mechanical execution. “Don’t use your instinct,” Lt. Stein scolds Lt. Studdard, “employ the goddam rational method of analysis outlined in the CENTCOM brochure” (45). As Chamayou writes, the “extinction” of subjectivity “becomes the main task of subjectivity” (207), since

subjectivity interferes with the pure and frictionless task of gathering intelligence to compose an image that instantly converts itself into action (an “operative image”). This epistemology does not succeed in excising subjectivity and embodiment from judgment, but it permits people to make judgments *as-if* they were not subjective and embodied. In relation to the people being surveilled, targeted, and assassinated, Special Ops warriors, like American civilians, are not *disembodied* but *differently embodied*. It is not that the characters are automatons, but that they are authorized to act *as-if* they were — simply following the intelligence they receive and executing the actions they have been trained to perform. Elsewhere, the play emphasizes their embodied conditions and activities (with, e.g., a hot dog eating contest, followed by flatulence). This is how spectators of realist drama are reciprocally made to “act,” perceiving the drama as-if their embodied conditions and actions play no role in what they perceive — while conflating this as-if with an “is.”

As they narrow in on the “Bearded Lady,” Col. Johns realizes (for reasons that are not made clear) that the target must survive in order to continue receiving congressional funding for this pilot Special Ops program (63). So he arranges for the mission to fail, setting Lt. Stein up as the fall guy. But due to a technical snafu, Stein makes it through and lays the explosives. Ready to detonate, Col. Johns must make a split second decision; rather than killing their target, he orders Lt. Freud to fire on Stein, killing his own comrade. Were the play rewritten today, now that Special Ops assassinations have become the tactic of choice, the mission would not need to fail in order to continue. It has become clear that assassinating targets from the air proliferates, rather than reducing, the number of targets. Even the most optimistic assessments in the Defense Department claim only that the program is “breaking even,” i.e., the number of new recruits radicalized by the bombing is equivalent to the number of targets killed.

Sylvia Khoury's *Against the Hillside* (2018) dramatizes the new normal of a surveillance and assassination program has lost its exceptionalism — for American soldiers and civilians, and for Pakistani civilians in rural areas who live beneath the constant buzzing of drones. The first act follows a drone plot, interweaving the perspectives of an American pilot and the Pakistani community he surveils. The second act follows a surgery plot, as the protagonists of the drone story disappear and the focus shifts to the medical treatment and surgical options of the injured. The first scenes alternate between Pakistan and Nevada. Reem, a Pakistani woman living in Waziristan with her husband, Sayid, and son, Abdul, is being surveilled by an American RPA drone, piloted by Matt. Some men who are targets on the “kill list” frequent Sayid’s shop; Matt’s job is to track and analyze the “patterns of life” of Sayid and his family, to determine whether they should be classified as “militants” and added to the list. As we move between either end of a unilateral gaze, the objectivist epistemology of dramatic realism is belied by other affective modes of exchange — tactile, thermal, atmospheric, visceral, erotic — that reaches the body-interior, beneath the skin-level imaging of “pattern of life analysis.” “I can feel their eyes on me,” Reem repeats (11). Civilians in areas surveilled by drones often testify to a “psychic imprisonment,” feeling walled in, “locked in a room” (Chamayou 45). But they are simultaneously totally exposed, with no shelter in homes, bodies, or even the inner space of the self, as private moments are watched and recorded. As in Edward Bond’s militarist theatre, individuals are at once locked within themselves and turned inside out, completely vulnerable to penetration.

Reem tries to counter this paralyzing dialectic of confinement and exposure (the extremes exploited in torture), by guarding an interior space, that is psychic, bodily, and domestic. She refuses to sleep with Sayid during the days of the month around her ovulation, because she

doesn't want "a child born under their watch" (11). She explains that this is not for fear of violence, which has been a constant presence in her life. But she won't say exactly why it is — only that she doesn't want "them" to watch her "belly swell" and see her "sick in the morning": "I won't let them have that." The unilateral sight and knowledge that Matt, the drone pilot, has over Reem, is felt as an invasive, appropriative threat to her bodily "insides."

Matt's asymmetrical vantage point does not leave him untouched, however; rather he feels his home, body, and psyche penetrated and possessed by Reem. He cannot stop thinking about her when he is at home with his pregnant fiancée, Erin. "So you feel like you know her," Erin says, to which Matt replies, "I know that I know her" (21). He has somehow intuited her name, calling her "Reem" on a whim. And he is convinced that, separated by thousands of miles, there is nonetheless an affective current that runs between them. He is sure that she can feel him watching her, in the way that you "feel someone's eyes on your back," through "[s]omething in the atmosphere that shifts" (56-7). He is sure of this because, sometimes, he sees her go out to the hill behind her house, "press herself flat against the hillside," and stare straight up into the drone's camera (57-8). Though she cannot, of course, see him, Matt has the same atmospheric and penetrative sensation of sight landing on his body, infiltrating his interior as it transmutes into different senses.

Halfway through the play, after a nearby drone strike has killed several neighbors, Reem runs off with her son Abdul, without telling Sayid where she is going. Shortly thereafter, Matt disappears too. We see neither of them again, but eventually learn that Reem and Abdul have made it to London, and Matt has killed himself. The story shifts to the long aftermath of the drone strike. Sayid's cousin was killed in the explosion, and his body is brought in pieces back to Sayid and Reem's house (before she has run off). The men lay his limbs and torso on a table in

the background, cover him with a sheet, and perform ritual ablutions. Sayid's niece was also injured: she will live, but needs facial reconstructive surgery. As Sayid describes the wounds of her unseen body, and worries how they will pay for her operation, the body onstage, beyond medical help, is washed and wept over. Eventually, after Reem has left, enough money is raised for the niece's surgery. But it is too late: the hospital has been destroyed by another bomb (it is unclear if this was a drone strike, or the work of a jihadist group). The niece will have to live with a permanent, and unconcealable, deformity. The lights go down and come back up for the scene transition: we find ourselves in a hospital. An older Middle Eastern man with a British accent and hearing loss is having a medical exam. We eventually figure out that we have traveled 50 years into the future, and the man is Abdul, Reem's son, who escaped with her to London. Abdul's hearing loss, which began shortly after leaving Pakistan, was originally diagnosed as a viral infection. But after endless and fruitless testing, a different non-scientific diagnosis emerged. It seems that in Pakistan, during the most intense years of the American drone program, children under the age of seven started to lose their hearing. While at the same time, the children of the drone pilots lost their vision. Here the play's realist aesthetic is punctured by pure metaphor. The ways of watching in *Pugilist Specialist*, which severed the senses and faculties that work together in a whole human subject, effected a metaphorical surgery; here, they cause metaphorical illness. Seeing humans as nodes, and cutting off affective reciprocity, causes blindness. And hearing the perpetual buzzing sound of drones flying high up out of sight, an invisible threat that cannot be evaded, has caused deafness. Abdul's ailments cannot be treated with tools and procedures that understand medicine as war, killing an invasive enemy virus. Instead, he must live as best he can with his disability, through perennial adjustments and

occasional operations. He has come in for this check up to see about getting new implants, and the play ends with Abdul and the doctor scheduling the surgery.

*Against the Hillside* and *Pugilist Specialist* enact the sensory disseverance of modern war — seeing without being seen, hearing without being heard — which mimics the asymmetry of theatrical realism. Like dramatic spectators, drone pilots are not sensorially accountable for the people they see, in the way they would be if these people could look back and see them. In Khoury's play, however, the distance and separation of unilateral sight collapses, and seeing and hearing turn into a kind of touch. Characters separated by thousands of miles get inside each other, and resonate in their organs. As Rebecca Schneider points out, the sense of touch collapses the active-passive binary: to *touch* is simultaneously to *be touched* (Schneider 70). In my conclusion, I will explore how being touched by the beings we see and hear allows a kind of knowledge and accountability belied by the apparent separation of sight and hearing. And I will argue that this synesthetic tactility is the most honest form of empathy — of feeling *into* other people.

## Conclusion: Empathy, Consent, Resonance

During a pause in the action of *Pugilist Specialist*, Col. Johns declares that, “You need empathy to fight a war” (51). This sets off a debate.

LT. FREUD: I don’t have empathy.

LT. STEIN: Even I don’t have empathy.

COL. JOHNS: Trust me, you’ve got empathy.

LT. FREUD: Not Studdard though. He definitely doesn’t have it.

LT. STUDDARD: I couldn’t even define it.

LT. FREUD: Well sure! I can’t *define* it.

LT. STEIN: You can’t define empathy?

LT. FREUD: I’m a sniper, not a playwright. Can *you* define it? (51-2)

In theatre studies, the concept of empathy is both widely invoked and loosely defined. In *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance*, Bruce McConachie argues that evolutionarily, empathy is what theatre and performance are *for*: they provide empathy training, forge group bonds, and promote “social cohesion” (100). McConachie agrees with Colonel Johns that you need empathy to fight a war: “soldiers in combat” must love something more than their own lives in order to “willingly die” (McConachie, *Evolution* 100). The flipside of this empathic formula is of course that it also makes soldiers willing to kill. As Stanton Garner writes, intense empathy for people with whom we identify is often accompanied by a “counter-empathy,” dehumanizing and taking pleasure in the pain of Others (Garner, *Kinesthetic* 155). Recently, cognitive neuroscientific research on “mirror neurons” has excited some theatre scholars by seeming to validate a realist conception of empathy — knowing the thoughts and feelings of an other by feeling the same things — with objective scientific proof. But mirror neurons do not reproduce the *same* experience in the observer, any more than a mirror generates a fully formed clone of the gazer. Rather, as any cognitive scientist will tell you, they *simulate* one aspect of a complex embodied experience that involves much more than neurons. More apposite terms to take from cognitive science are “neural resonance” and “motor resonance”: watching an other act and communicate,

our bodies resonate as their vibrations pass through our own unique cognitive and anatomical instruments (Uithol et al.). The knowledge we gain is of the same ontological order as theatrical role play – acting out the part of an “other” within the parameters of our own embodied conditions. The science of mirror neurons does not replace the soft knowing of the humanities with the hard objectivist knowing of science – rather it reveals an ineradicable bedrock of theatricality in the way we know other people: there is nothing more solid beneath it.

Historian of the emotions Rob Boddice argues that the concept of empathy has always involved this misattribution of emotion, mistaking solipsism for generosity. An early 20th-century German neologism, empathy (*Einfühlung*) literally means “feeling *in*,” and is thus distinct from sympathy’s “suffering *with*.” Boddice traces empathy’s origin as “an aesthetic category used to explain how the viewer of a work of art *projects* his own feelings into the painting, receiving them back as if emerging from the work itself” (Boddice, *History of the Emotions* 56). As its objects shifted from art to other humans, Boddice suggests that empathy remained a closed circuit, giving the subject an “experience *as if* replicating the emotions of another, but actually being drawn from the individual’s own experience” (56). Like Garner, Boddice’s historical view of empathy sees it as both strengthening the bonds of in-groups, and heightening animosity towards outsiders. The “cohesion, reciprocity and community building” enabled by empathy are counterbalanced by “social disintegration, exclusion, stratification and chauvinism” (128). Using a phrase evocative of Bond’s *Lear*, Boddice writes of the “empathy wall” that holds an identity group together, while blocking other identities out (184).<sup>122</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Boddice takes the term “empathy wall” from Arlie Hochschild’s *Strangers in Their Own Land : Anger and Mourning on the American Right*.

Polemics for or against empathy tend to privilege one of these consequences over the other: social cohesion or social disintegration, inclusion or exclusion, equality or hierarchy. Rather than taking a side, I want to consider what is embedded in Boddice's "*as-if*." While Boddice takes this as-if to mean that empathy is an error — illusion rather than fact — I find it more apt to conclude that empathy is an essentially theatrical phenomenon. There are thus as many varied ways in which empathy can work as there are ways of making and experiencing theatre. In this concluding section, I consider four examples of how theatre is currently being used in medical and military contexts, with the explicit goal of cultivating empathy. The first two engage the epistemology of theatrical realism, which I have argued mistakes the feelings of the self for those of the other, and authorizes violence-as-care. The second two, in the spirit of theatre work I have studied from Artaud, Bond, Cowhig and others, practices empathy as a bilateral movement between self and other that breaks borders and puts us in touch with an otherness that we cannot fully know.

The US Military uses a combination of virtual and live action simulations to prepare troops for the demands of counterinsurgency warfare.<sup>123</sup> In chapter three, we saw how this is used to inoculate torturers against emotional harm (Benedetto 178). The torturer's sympathetic feelings are directed away from the detainee and towards an idea of America, which is imagined to be in danger. At the same time, doctors watching the interrogation vouch with the authority of science that no serious harm is being inflicted, no matter what the tortured says. The thoughts and feelings of the empathetic spectator are objective testaments to the reality of the observed

<sup>123</sup> See Phillip Auslander, "Rehearsing the Warrior Ethos."

other, while the experience of this other disappears.<sup>124</sup> This follows and intensifies the warped emotional grammar that Boddice first showed coming out of turn-of-the-century medical science, with “callousness” as a higher form of “sympathy” and “humanity” (Boddice, *Science of Sympathy* 72). Through a sensory rerouting, surgeons and torturers learn to feel not for the embodied being present before them, but for an abstract future humanity.

Former Marine tyler boudreau reveals similar contradictions underlying cultural sensitivity training. In his essay, “Soldier Street Theater,” boudreau describes the “self-conscious theatricality” troops experience as they “smile broadly and wave at [locals] from our gun trucks” (156). Through role play exercises, they practice improvising within different scenarios to perform “one central task: delight the audience... win their hearts and minds” (158). Building empathic bonds with civilians at the same time as they try to identify and kill possible insurgents in their midst, gives soldiers an “unperformable script” (157). Learning to kill necessarily involves “dehumanization,” it is not driven by a desire to win “hearts and minds,” but by the denial of the hearts and minds of one’s enemy. “Training recruits to turn away from their own humanity and the humanity of the enemy is simply the most efficient way to get more soldiers to fight, kill, and ultimately win battles” (161). In the oxymoron of “humanitarian war,” the soldier (like Boddice’s humanitarian man of science) learns to deny the humanity of the people present while he or she imagines and defends a virtual humanity. They experience a perverse fusion of “desensitization and empathy,” killing and “compassion” (161). boudreau concludes that the real audience for this theatre is not Iraqi civilians, but the American public, who must be sold on an

<sup>124</sup> The absurdity and obscenity of purporting to empathically know what torture “feels like” is exemplified by Donald Rumsfeld’s claim that, because he stands at his desk every day for longer than detainees are forced to stand in stress positions, he can vouch that this is not torture (Waas). This statement wields empathy as a weapon, by making a metaphorical association between self and other, then forgetting that it’s a metaphor.

idea of war mandated by the consent of the local population and showing sympathy for their suffering. “The narratives and performances of American domination must generally resonate with its citizens’ sense of national identity” (168). In this theatrical deployment, empathy purports to give us knowledge of how the other feels, but instead makes *us* feel better about their suffering, believing that it is in the service of a greater humanity. In a recent book on theatrical simulations in U.S. Military training, Natalie Alvarez argues that empathy does not simply *mask* violence but *enables* violence. She writes that “empathy unavoidably entails the ‘consumption of the other.’” (2). The claim to “know” the other provides “the safety of a ground that makes possible and justifies the other’s annihilation” (105). These military simulations engage the epistemology of realism to produce “actionable intelligence,” literalizing violence-as-care.

Medical schools have long used theatrical roleplay to rehearse standardized patient (SP) interactions, with an actor playing the patient. The goal, writes Dr. Gretchen Case, is that students’ “verbal and nonverbal interactions with patients will arise from their empathetic imaginations” (160). But Case observes that these pedagogical goals often backfire, as students diagnostically interpret the patients’ performance, and focus on the technical elements of their own performance (saying the right words, with the right vocal inflection) rather than noticing how they *feel*. Instead of humanizing healthcare, this can make caregivers seem like mechanical extensions of medical technologies, uncannily “[m]iming empathy” (161). In her essay “The Empathy Exams,” Leslie Jamison describes her experiences of the clinical encounter as both an actor role playing the SP, and as an actual patient. Jamison can “feel the mechanics of [the physician’s] method,” as he tries to “to say the right words to get credit for compassion” (Jamison). She writes of the medical students playing doctor: “They never stop seeking my gaze. Wrestling me into eye contact is the way they maintain power, forcing me to acknowledge their

requisite display of care.” Like the simulations used for counterinsurgency training, this role play instrumentalizes and weaponizes empathy — the physician gains objective knowledge of the patient’s internal state by reading her external bodily signs, and performs the appropriate gestures to win her trust, so that he might act upon her body with impunity. Like Boudreau’s “Soldier Street Theatre,” a projected image of mutuality masks a coercive relationship of unilateral power.

In the above examples, empathy is shaped through a system of metaphor that effaces its metaphoricity: the theatrical *as-if* that joins self and other is mistaken for a factual *is*. In *Lidless*, we see this realist model of empathy fail, as characters attempt to “get inside” each other through penetration and possession, but end up, like Rabe’s anatomist, destroying what they seek to understand. However, characters do eventually experience a kind of getting inside each other — a feeling *into* — achieved not through a unidirectional gaze, but a bilateral process of cutting, breaking, and regenerating. This too is a form of empathy, gaining partial access to the inner feelings of the other through the feelings of the self. I turn now to this second form of empathy, modeled by Artaud, Bond, and Cowhig.

In their article “Unmaking Militarized Masculinity,” Sarah Bulmer and Maya Eichler argue that veterans’ post-war healing and reintegration into civilian society is made difficult by the deep internalization of martial metaphors and corresponding “fear of ... ‘leaky,’ porous, and vulnerable bodies” (170). While vets’ minds and bodies have been trained to perform the operations mandated by modern war, there is no parallel system in place in which they are “‘untrained’ or unprogrammed from soldiering” (168). This is the founding mission of DE-CRUIT, an NYC-based theatre company founded by former Army medic Stephan Wolfert, which has developed methods of “theatre-as-medicine” for military veterans. Their weekly

workshops create a “holding environment” that safely permits “admissions of weakness” (Ali and Wolfert 61). Each participant works on a Shakespeare monologue that resonates with his or her experiences — for example, a vet grappling with guilt about killing might be given Lady Macbeth’s “Out, damned spot” speech. Vets then write a “personal trauma monologue,” sharing a significant event that haunts them, and give it to another member of the group to rehearse and perform. They thus connect through *resonance* rather than realist representation. Words pass through another person, rather than sticking to and defining the writer. Instead of intellectual interpretation of what the monologues *mean*, DE-CRUIT uses physical exercises emphasizing rhythm, breath, and body awareness to notice how the words *feel* and what they *do*. For example, Catherine Fitzmaurice’s “Deconstructing and Restructuring” techniques explore physical postures that induce a “tremor” setting off the body’s neurological “fight or flight” response, while decoupling it from any danger, and asking participants to breathe and speak through it (Fitzmaurice). This helps to release inhibitory tensions, let down “body armor,” and loosen muscles so that one’s body becomes more sensitized to vibration. Language is practiced as a physical act that involves a consensual penetration. When speaking and listening, we literally share what is inside our bodies’ borders, as air passes through the vocal folds and turns into soundwaves that enter into the body interior of another, which resonates with sympathetic vibrations. Fitzmaurice says that through “feeling into your own vibration [and] listening to yourself... you become more empathetic, you understand people better, you can hear what they’re saying, and you can respond to it better” (Fitzmaurice). In this view, empathy is a motion that passes through and changes both speaker and listener, rather than transmitting a piece of information *about* one person *to* the other. With practice, these initially conscious methods become automatic responses. Brain scans on vets before and after taking the course have shown

transformations in neural networks, and personal testimonies of participants speak to lower levels of depression and violent impulses (Ali et al. 5-6). Their work bears out Artaud's conviction, stated a century earlier, that theatre can remake bodies and minds, performing a kind of "brain surgery."

This practice of empathy — as a bilateral exchange between self and other rather than unilateral knowledge of the other — is foundational to the field of Narrative Medicine that has grown out of Columbia University over the last two decades. The field originated in part because of the recognition of "medical education[']s parallels to military indoctrination," which "succeeds in blunting empathy" (Irvine and Spencer). Through abstraction and rationalization, patients are turned into virtual bodies, and medical students into disembodied minds. The militarization of medicine is equally injurious to patients, as Audre Lorde attests when she writes that, visiting her oncologist, she "felt the battle lines being drawn up within my own body" (Qtd. in Irvine and Spencer). This medical epistemology extends the asymmetry of Zola's realist manifesto, promising knowledge of "physiological man" by deactivating doctors' "own physiological presence" (Garner, "Sensing Realism" 118). Narrative medicine methods reverse this vector of knowing, focusing on how our own visceral, affective experiences participate in the creation of the "reality" we assess. Instead of reading the external signs of a body or text to diagnose its inner meaning, medical students, doctors, and nurses become attuned to their own emotional and bodily conditions and changes when giving care to an other. Program founder Rita Charon states their mission as making "[t]he boundaries between clinician and patient ... more permeable," by learning how to witness and feel "that which cannot be subsumed within an explanation," like the "chorus of classical Greek drama" (Charon). Rather than teaching people *how* or *what* to feel, narrative medicine aims to "reduce fear" of feelings, and thus "develop a

greater capacity to be present to self and other,” physically and emotionally, through embodied acts of giving and receiving attention (Spiegel and Spencer). Among teachers of narrative medicine, there is some ambivalence about empathy. On the one hand, Maura Spiegel and Danielle Spencer observe that, “[w]e have not found empathy to be a useful term,” and they cite the “misguided assumption that one can enter into or know another’s experience” (Spiegel and Spencer). Elsewhere, however, Spiegel has argued that narrative medicine calls for “reconceptualizing empathy,” in a way that is attuned to the operations of metaphor and analogy through which we simultaneously learn things about others and ourselves (Spiegel). This is what I will briefly attempt here.

Empathy, *feeling into*, is by definition a penetrative act: it breaches the borders of another person to touch something they hold “inside.” It thus requires (or creates) vulnerability, the ability to be wounded. Clearly, if understood in an absolute and objective sense, empathy can be violent; however the opposite (feeling *nothing* of the other’s internal experience) is just as violent. It is the other side of the same coin, as shown in war, when total identification makes comrades willing to die for each other, and total disidentification makes it possible to kill enemies. The plays that I’ve studied — by Artaud, Bond, Rabe, Cowhig, Shaplin, Khoury — explore ways of getting *into* an other by simultaneously letting them into one’s self, a kind of penetration through surrender, a consensual cutting, reverberation, and regeneration. Actor Elizabeth Hostetter and director Melanie Stewart, who teach theatre courses in the Cooper Medical School of Rowan University, write that “[t]heatre is an empathy gym,” in which it is “safe to risk entering... under [each other’s] skin” (Hostetter and Stewart). What makes it safe to take this risk? How does one pierce through the skin without doing harm? I want to suggest that

these divergent practices and consequences of empathy depend on the enactment of a second and related term: *consent*.

Elaine Scarry reminds us of the etymology of consent: “to feel with,” or in other words, to experience a “continuity of feeling across persons” (*Thermonuclear Monarchy* 122). For Scarry, consent is always the permission to cross the borders of an actual or metaphorical body. Whether consenting to sex or to surgery, feeling *with* authorizes entering *into*. However, in modern medical and military contexts, this tie is often broken. Patients who sign waivers indicating their consent may do so without a sense of real agency or choice. This is exemplified by the bizarre grammar of the medical parlance, “I consented the patient.” The physician is no longer obliged to feel *with* the patient, because they have obtained their consent in the fixed form of writing. Similarly for American soldiers and those deemed “combatants,” deciding to participate in a war is taking as a binding act of consent that signs away freedoms and rights. Both involve *threshold consent* — a one-time action that creates a binding contract — rather than *ongoing consent*. This kind of weak threshold consent is also characteristic of realist theatre. I have argued that participation in theatre— whether as actor or audience — is more accurately described not as *belief* (or suspension of disbelief), but as *consent* to play along in a subjunctive *as-if*. Realist theatre effaces this ongoing consent: audiences give threshold consent when purchasing a ticket and entering the auditorium, but they are then urged to understand themselves as neutral observers of the play rather than active participants in its creation. We gain the illusion of feeling *into* the people onstage as we lose awareness of feeling *with* them. By contrast, in the plays of Artaud, Bond, and Cowhig, feeling *with* permits feeling *into* — consent is the precondition for a healthy and vivifying empathy. How should we understand this

conjunction of penetration and distance, entering into an other while also remaining side-by-side? Instead of offering an explanation, I want to flesh out a metaphor.

Describing his “visceral, uncomfortable response” to a performance by the physically integrated AXIS dance company, Stanton Garner calls his experience a “crisis of resonance” (*Kinesthetic* 99). I suggest that *resonance*, on both literal and metaphoric levels, integrates feeling *with* and feeling *into*. All feeling is vibration. When we see or hear something, vibrating waves of light or sound enter our bodies, and resonate in our sensory organs. When we want to guard ourselves against feeling something painful, we clench our muscles so that we vibrate less, blocking resonance. Wearing this kind of “body armor” protects us from hurting (Fitzmaurice). When we instead open ourselves to experience more resonance, we do not gain objective information about the world and beings around us. If someone’s words resonate with you, you do not feel the *same* thing as them, but rather the way their vibrations pass through your unique anatomy. Our bodies do not simply receive and read a message from the other, but play it on our own instruments, sending signals that effect chemical and neurological changes throughout our own bodies — a soft surgery that doesn’t break the skin. Resonance requires both sameness and difference, and denies that they can be disentangled. If something resonates with you, then it both enters your body and stands apart outside. Feeling *with* permits feeling *into*, and vice versa.

I have argued that the institutions of war, medicine, and theatre — which respectively constitute and reflect culturally normalized ways of *killing*, *healing*, and *sensing* bodies — are inevitably connected. Modern war and medicine have been driven by a telos promising that knowledge and technological supremacy will lead to invulnerability. The ability to know, control, and stage “physiological man,” as Zola predicts, will inoculate us against his pathologies (Zola, “Naturalism in the Theatre” 369). But if theatrical realism naturalizes the abuses and

illusions of modern war and medicine — with its promise of seeing into others — so can theatre help heal this damage, by attuning us to resonate *with* and *into* ourselves *and* others. Whereas the first kind of empathy effaces its theatricality, the second embraces its theatricality. In contrast to an “empathy wall” that creates total identification between those inside and disidentification with outsiders, an empathy of resonance places us on both sides of a wall made permeable. Rather than delivering another form of commodified knowledge — giving troops and medical students a chance to earn their empathy certificates — theatre’s value is in unsettling what we think we know, opening the armor of identities forged in the competitive and violent worlds of hospitals and warzones, to explore feelings that cannot be diagnosed and rationalized, but can reverberate through the serious work of play.

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