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# Making Home: Directing Reintegration Plays

Katherine Alaina Skoretz  
*Wayne State University,*

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**MAKING HOME:  
DIRECTING REINTEGRATION PLAYS**

by

**KATHERINE SKORETZ**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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2018

MAJOR: THEATRE

Approved By:

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mom and dad who taught me that  
a home is something you make.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There have been so many incredible humans who have helped me complete this project. I have to thank my family for supporting me throughout the process with love and sometimes money. Thanks to Dr. Jennifer Goff, Dr. Michael Butterworth, and Dr. Katie Wagner for going before with excellence and dedication. Thank you to my generous and kind committee as well as all the professors who spent time with my work on the page and stage. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to Dr. Megan McDonough and (soon to be Dr.) Julie Moriarty for being the foot soldiers. Together we checked in, cried, comforted, and encouraged each other. I could not have done this without either of you. Finally, thank you to Dr. Mary Anderson without whom this dissertation would never have been researched or completed and whose kind and enthusiastic engagement has brought rigor, depth, and joy to some of the strangest parts of this process.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	v
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2 TIME STANDS STILL.....	25
INTERCHAPTER TIME STANDS STILL IN PERFORMANCE.....	62
CHAPTER 3 AMERICAN SOLDIERS.....	107
CHAPTER 4 OOHRAH!.....	154
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION.....	181
REFERENCES.....	201
ABSTRACT.....	210
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT.....	211

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Time Stands Still at WSU .....	67
Figure 2: The set from Time Stands Still at WSU .....	70
Figure 3: The scenic elements from Time Stands Still at WSU .....	70
Figure 4: James and the downstage window .....	72
Figure 5: Costume Rendering 1: Sarah by Melissa Hall .....	80
Figure 6: Costume Rendering: Sarah's Wedding Dress by Melissa Hall .....	81
Figure 7: Angela (Sam York) and Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) 1.3 .....	113
Figure 8: Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) waits for Angela 1.1 .....	116
Figure 9: Junior (Allen Wiseman) tries to get Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) to bed 1.1 .....	116
Figure 10: Angela (Samantha York) .....	116
Figure 11: Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) waiting for Angela 1.1 .....	119
Figure 12: Angela (Samantha York) and Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) 1.3 .....	122
Figure 13: Angela (Samantha York) and Junior (Allen Wiseman) 1.1 .....	123
Figure 14: Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) considers suicide 2.3 .....	125
Figure 15: The set at the top of the show (American Soldiers) 1.1 .....	137
Figure 16: Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) and Junior (Allen Wiseman) 2.1 .....	140
Figure 17: Angela (Samantha York) and Hutch (Garett Harris) 1.2 .....	144
Figure 18: Kadijah Raquel and Samantha York .....	145
Figure 19: Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) and Angela (Samantha York) 2.3 .....	147
Figure 20: Oohrah! at WSU first set during lighting cues .....	170
Figure 21: Logan Hart and Amelia Gillis in rehearsal .....	171
Figure 22: Bedroom Scene original configuration in rehearsal .....	173

Figure 23: Oohrah! first set during tech week .....	173
Figure 24: Oohrah! Final set configuration before props .....	174



## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

“Veterans just need to be received back into their community, reintegrated with those they love, (sic) and thanked by the people who sent them.”

-Karl Marlantes What It Means to Go to War (1995)

Reintegration, re-entry, and transition are three words used to describe experiences, depictions, and enactments of veterans' homecoming. Richard and Sandra Taylor chronicle the history of American veterans from the Revolutionary War through Operation Iraqi Freedom by writing, “Homecoming is not a Norman Rockwell cover on The Saturday Evening Post; it is a real test of human endurance, an elusive quest, containing both troubles and joy” (xi). With this statement, the Taylors reveal how complicated the process of reintegration is and how the United States has consistently failed to reintegrate its veterans satisfactorily.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the country's unwillingness to provide veterans with pensions after the Revolutionary War (13); its refusal to recognize the hugely increased divorce rates and widespread unemployment after the Civil War (50); its ridicule and humiliation of veterans returning from Vietnam (134); and, these days, the public act of co-opting returning soldiers for commercial marketing purposes.

For soldiers, reintegration is the meeting point between war and home. After a tour of duty or a short combat operation, veterans return from a place of life-and-death to a comparatively safe and peaceful home and must readjust to civilian life. Lieutenant Colonels Michael Doyle, MD, and Kris Peterson, MD, call this period of readjustment reintegration (or re-entry which can be used interchangeably) and define it specifically

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<sup>1</sup> As a representation of how this struggle continues today, military.com reports that 22 veterans commit suicide every day due to service related mental health issues. On February 12, 2015 President Obama signed the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for Military Veterans Act which aims to assist veterans who return with mental health issues by making \$22 million available for veteran suicide prevention programs (Bryant 1).

as “the return home and reunion with family and community” (369).<sup>2</sup> This process is undertaken by a veteran and success is measured through official assessments of mental and physical fitness for combat re-deployment and informally assessed re-inhabitation of a perceived previous civilian self-image and role. For Doyle and Peterson, “the effectiveness of the reintegration process strongly impacts level [sic] of individual and unit readiness” (362). The United States Army finds that reintegration is successful if the veteran is “ready” to return to combat.

While the various branches of the military acknowledge the role that the armed forces, military families, and broader communities play in making this happen, the military is most interested in preparing the soldier for further combat than “transitioning” him or her to healthy civilian engagement. After a tour in Vietnam, Karl Marlantes, a combat veteran and scholar, wrote about being a veteran coming home. In one part of his book, *What It Is Like To Go To War*, he argues that society denies something essential and human when it demands that a veteran alone is responsibility for moving through and beyond his/her war zone experience. To illustrate this, Marlantes offers his own experience as a veteran. He describes the desires he had for ceremonies of acceptance to facilitate his reintegration such as being “hugged by every girl [he] ever knew” (195), being ritually bathed by his girlfriend to “bring [his] body back from the dead” (185), and a “ceremony and counseling to help [him] move from the infinite back to the finite” (202). The responsibility of moving to reintegration

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<sup>2</sup> Even though Doyle and Peterson acknowledge both the extended time required for reintegration and the many problems associated with it, they limit the boundaries of reintegration to the time between the initial arrival of a veteran and that veteran’s redeployment. They do so by using the terms “return” and “reunion” which imply only the first moments of reintegration rather than the long process of readjustment. Accordingly, in *Once a Warrior Always a Warrior*, Retired Colonel Charles Hoge, MD, refers to the process of coming home as “transitioning” because it “does not mean giving up being a warrior but rather learning to dial up or down the warrior responses depending on the situation” (x). Avoiding the term reintegration altogether, “transition” makes room for the specifics of individual experience. Hoge stresses the shift from war zone to home as a shift in contextual expectations noting that important survival skills from a war zone are problematically labeled as “symptom[s]” at home (xii).

often falls implicitly on each veteran individually as each of them is expected to shed the contextual identity built up for combat service in order to conform to the socially-sanctioned behavior of home.

Unfortunately for the veteran, this 'home' that they are meant to re-adjust to is difficult to locate and join. As Shauna M. MacDonald notes, "homeplace is ironically, frustratingly, difficult to locate" in our postmodern, globalized context (26). Technology has advanced to support a constant flow of ideas and people around the earth. Since the Vietnam War, the American civilian experience of war and its relationship to home has become increasingly mediatized. Today, less than half a percent of Americans serve in the military compared to the nearly nine percent during World War II (Pew Research Center).<sup>3</sup> In its report, "The Military-Civilian Gap," the Pew Research Center notes that "never before has [America] waged sustained warfare with so small a share of its population carrying the fight" (preface).<sup>4</sup>

This gap is drawing attention from military personnel and public pundits alike. Hoge quotes a veteran marine, "Truth is, many marines are lost when they get home; there is a gap between us and civilians, which is having an effect on each other understanding one another" (quoted xv). Retired Army Lieutenant General Karl W. Eikenberry describes the gap between the military and civilians as "a disturbingly novel spectacle: a maximally powerful force operating with a minimum of citizen engagement and comprehension." In the absence of direct contact, Eikenberry suggests that civilians have lost understanding. For him, this is a dangerous condition in which an

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<sup>3</sup> In "The Tragedy of the American Military," James Fallows notes that the disconnect between the American people and its military has led to a largely expected, continual military action from both the regular populace and government bodies. He cites public figures "formulaic and routine" pontification of the soldier's prowess and nobility, citizen's vague interest in military news, and the ease with which our government bodies pass legislature to dole out military time, resources, and money (1). Fallows points out that this leads the country to wade dangerously into conflict after conflict with a costly consequence in lives, money, and reputation.

<sup>4</sup> This quote appears on the third page of the report, but the page numbers in the report do not begin until the document proper.

independent military potentially acts without oversight. Liberal journalist and commentator Rachel Maddow wrote a book about it called *Drift: The Unmooring of American Military Power*. In this book, she describes being a civilian witness to this spectacle as being in a car where “the steering’s gone wobbly [and] the brakes have failed” (8). Each of the above sources are people who either have extensive experience in or have done significant research on this topic. The general population is less informed.

In her article “Disposable Wars, Disappearing Acts,” Jeanne Collier examines contemporary trends in news media war coverage and argues that news media obscures civilian understanding with embedded reporting which, rather than helping the stateside audience understand the situation, makes it a “challenge for citizens to gather sufficient factual evidence with which to inform judgment” (615).<sup>5</sup> This has resulted in the seemingly paradoxical situation in which a comedy program like *The Daily Show* has won journalism awards while it has become commonplace for mainstream news outlets to broadcast retractions and apologies for reporting incorrect information too quickly.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The campaign and election of President Donald Trump in 2016 brought the rise of the term “fake news” to social and media prominence. As the period of my study and research refers specifically to plays and events in or before 2010 and 2011 and was conducted primarily between 2011 and 2015, I have not discussed Fake News as part of the relevant context of these plays. In a future study, it would be worth exploring.

<sup>6</sup> *The Daily Show* won the Peabody Award (“Peabody Award Winners”) in 2000 and 2005 for their election coverage and was nominated for the Television Critics Award (“TCA Awards”) for Outstanding Achievement in News and Information three times, winning the award in 2003-2004. Previously, these awards have been given to more standard programs like “Nightline” on ABC, “Persian Gulf Coverage” on CNN, and “Frontline” on PBS. During the same time span (2000-2013), mainstream news programs came under fire. CNN, *Fox News*, and the Associated Press were scrutinized for reporting incorrect information about the Boston Bombing arrests in 2013. CNN and Fox incorrectly reported on the Supreme Court’s ruling on the Affordable Care Act in 2012; and CNN came under more fire in 2012 when they misidentified the shooter in the Sandy Hook elementary school massacre. Significantly, Brian Williams, chief news anchor at NBC, was fired in 2015 “for falsely claiming that the Army helicopter in which he traveled while covering the 2003 invasion of Iraq was shot down by a rocket-propelled grenade” (Folkenflik). Further internal review revealed this type of exaggeration was a trend in his reporting. In sharp contrast, a study released in 2012 found that people who watched only *The Daily Show* for their news were better informed than viewers of Fox News, MSNBC, CNN, and Talk Radio in terms of both international and domestic news (Cassino 3-4).

The combination of an overabundance of war images, a 24-hour news cycle, frequent military action, and a military-civilian divide result in social anxiety about how US veterans fit into our national consciousness. This unease induces the creation of fictional representations about reentry and reintegration., When asked about where the idea for *Time Stands Still* came from, Donald Margulies replied:

Often my plays come out of a “troubled place”—where there is something that I can’t get out of my head. When I was waking up each morning to the clock radio NPR report of the latest car bombing in Iraq. It was like *Groundhog Day*. The reports of violence were daily and seemingly relentless (“Program” 20).

Operation Iraqi Freedom was reported and shared through television and internet which created witnesses to the conflict in American homes. The ease with which Americans were now witness to military conflict could be seen in the stories of American authors who wrote about it. In “The Surge in Plays about Iraq,” an article published in the October 31, 2008 in the *Wall Street Journal*, Alexandra Alter wrote that “[o]ff-Broadway venues and regional theaters across the country [were] flooded with works about Iraq,” and further projected that “a planned withdrawal will likely ignite a rush of “homecoming” plays, as the end of the Vietnam War did.” Alter mentioned eight plays that were in production or development at the time her article was written and pointed to one theatre that received 20 submissions to produce war plays in 2007. As predicted, the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq did induce many homecoming narratives—both real and fictional. A simple Google search for “soldiers coming home” provides evidence of the ubiquity of these narratives: this search turns up links to viral videos of returning veterans surprising their spouses and children. Limor Schiffman

situates viral videos<sup>7</sup> and other internet memes as “cultural information that passes along from person to person, yet gradually scales into a shared social phenomenon” (qtd in Marwick). Homecoming videos have become a particularly ubiquitous meme with over 190,000 videos fitting that criteria on YouTube. In May 2015, the most popular homecoming video was “MY FAV BEST SOLDIERS COMING HOME MOMENTS”—a 13-minute, 48-second compilation of homecoming videos posted by Zunigas King. At the time the writing of this dissertation, this video had 10,518,394 views.<sup>8</sup> King’s video is only one example of the influential position which homecoming stories have in current American culture.

While internet memes and viral videos are relatively new social artifacts, films provide a more traditional artifact. Since 2001, the Internet Movie Database has catalogued over 190 films, TV episodes, and shows about veterans. It has named 47 digital narrative artifacts about Iraq War veterans and 29 about veterans from Afghanistan ([IMBD.com](http://IMBD.com)). In 2008, *The Hurt Locker*, a film about a sergeant returning from the Iraq War, won six Academy Awards including Best Picture. It is interesting to note that both amateurs and well-known professionals have been working on reintegration narratives. *The Hurt Locker* combines Sergeant First Class William James’s experiences of diffusing bombs during deployment in Iraq with his troubles functioning at home once he has returned. In the “cereal scene”—a particularly famous scene that captures the uncanny nature of homecoming for the traumatized veteran—James stands in the cereal aisle of a supermarket staring completely overwhelmed by the rows of boxes.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Kevin Nalty, a prominent YouTube critic and personality, a viral video is a short online video which “gets more than 5 million views in a 3-7-day period” (qtd in O’Neill). Viral videos are characterized by an extremely rapid rise in number for times viewed and, presumably, number of viewers.

<sup>8</sup> This video can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzCaA6IazFA>. It was accessed on March 25, 2015.

The image of a veteran standing, at a loss, among a myriad of items that fill a home is arresting. If veterans and their experiences are at the heart of reintegration, the homes, families, communities, and country form the texture and shape of the home into which veterans reintegrate. This insertion of veterans into home locations disrupts the stasis of living that has developed to cover their absence. While both veterans and their families have expected the veterans' return, the roles and activities of home and the roles and activities of combat zones are radically different. The resulting reintegration inserts the veteran—including all his or her experiences, memories, and traumas—into the stasis of living that developed to cover his or her absence. Nancy Sherman eloquently describes this particular impact: “When soldiers return home, war lived vicariously becomes intimate, with nightmares, flashbacks, and unhealed wounds often commandeering a house and its rhythm” (216). In other words, the veteran's body, behavior, and memory interrupts homes and communities with lived experience of the conflicts in which they participated.

Contemporary methods of war make this return especially complicated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century because wars and conflicts are fought differently. This means that the veteran of wars and conflicts today experience both combat and return with unique challenges.<sup>9</sup> Hoge writes about the new challenges of the post-9/11 generation of military conflicts in which soldiers:

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<sup>9</sup> The type of war and return that 21<sup>st</sup> century soldiers have participated in is markedly different from wars in the past. Faris R. Kirkland gives a detailed military account of what he calls Postcombat Reentry in *War Psychiatry* (291-317), published by the Office of the Surgeon General of the United States, where he notes three different types of wars in which the United States has been engaged: major wars, limited wars, and rapid deployment operations<sup>9</sup> (294-298). Operation Iraqi Freedom and other conflicts of the current era resist conforming to one type of conflict in this model. Rather, they exhibit characteristics of all three types of war as Michael E. Doyle and Chris A. Peterson explain:

This conflict is framed as a major war against a great evil [terrorism], executed as a limited war by an increasingly professional or full-time (18-month mobilization orders for National Guard, 2–3-year mobilizations for Reservists) military that must plan its return to combat as it is planning its return to the home-front. (363)

As Doyle and Peterson point out, the Iraq and Afghan wars include elements from each type of war. Conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have been publicly described as part of a mass war on terror against evil and inhuman

have experienced the lack of a clear front line . . . and missions involving simultaneous and overlapping duties—combat, security, humanitarian, training of local nationals—going on in the same sectors of the battlefield. They have also faced multiple deployments, in-theater extensions in deployment length, recalls to active duty, stop-loss (the “hidden draft”), single parents deploying, and dual military families (with deployments of both partners), along with many other challenges. (xvi-xvii)

These challenges are unique to recent military conflicts. As most soldiers work full-time in the military, “[s]oldier life exists on a continuum for deployment” (Doyle 369) which means that veterans and their families exist in a deployment cycle: pre-deployment—the time during which the soldier prepares to enter combat; deployment—the time during which a soldier is deployed into a combat zone; and post-deployment—the time during which the soldier readjusts to civilian life. Hoge explains the logical conclusion of this cycle: “in recent years the military has considered the ‘resetting’ of a warrior’s health after combat in much the same way that it considers the resetting or refitting of equipment and vehicles” (xvii). Instead of facilitating a transition of the veteran’s skills and responses from combat to home, the military is continually assessing the fitness of soldiers for return to combat.

Thinking of reintegration as pre-deployment preparation points to the connection between war and home in contemporary conflicts as soldiers are always on their way to and from a conflict zone, and families and civilians are connected to war by more than the veteran’s presence. Dora Apel writes in *War Culture and the Contest of Images* that there has been a contemporary “erosion of the line between

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terrorists which seems very much like Kirkland’s major war. Nonetheless, like his limited war, much of the public has not accepted this description as a credible basis for the mass commitment of troops and resources. Unlike a major war, there has currently been no conscription; therefore current military forces are composed of professional soldiers. This professional army experiences through both long-term deployments (eighteen months or more) and rapid operation deployments (anywhere from several hours to a few days) means that contemporary soldiers return home with an inherent expectation of both short and long deployments in the future. These distinctions lead to differences in the return experience of veterans, especially because, instead of reintegrating one time after a war or conflict, veterans are reintegrating many times.



public and private, civilian and soldier, or, put another way, between the peaceable domestic sphere and the perpetual militarization of domestic space” (18).

Since technology has made war and its side-effects readily visible through television and computers, war and home overlap each other through information and images. Apel maintains that while news coverage allows war to enter the home, the internet allows civilians to “interact” with the war through the uploading and downloading of content; and thus, civilians have the potential to be directly affected by digital participation in the war. This is helpful when considering the relationship of a veteran’s family to the war zone. While the primary concern of reintegration is whether or not the veteran can cope with remaking his or her civilian identity at home, the family into which they are reintegrating also has more direct lines of engagement with the war zone than at any other time in history. Specifically, American civilians and families have a relationship to conflicts as civilians of an invading nation which is facilitated by technology.

This erosion between home and war in the public sphere complicates the relationship between families of veterans and the broader civilian population who have no personal interaction with veterans. Screen-writers, filmmakers, playwrights, and theatre makers have stepped into this space and created an overwhelming number of narratives in response. Most of the reintegration film narratives focus on the veterans—their social difficulties and traumatic experiences—while the family or community are victims and bystanders to the process of reintegration.<sup>10</sup> These narratives contain stories about veterans who fail to shed ineffective behaviors induced by their traumatic war-time experiences and, while there are also veteran

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<sup>10</sup> A short list of film narratives covering this topic includes: *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Deer Hunter* (1978), and *Hurt Locker* (2008), *Stop/Loss* (2008), *Brothers* (2009), *Return* (2011) and *American Sniper* (2014). Additionally, books like *Catch-22* (1961) and *The Things They Carried* (1990) and television shows like *Homeland* (2011) and *The Unit* (2006) focus on the particular, individual trauma of veterans.

focused plays, there is a distinct trend among theatre-makers that sheds light on the social responsibilities of war as opposed to the sole responsibility individual .

Plays like John Lichtenstein's *The Pull of Negative Gravity* (2006), Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (2009), and Richard Montoya's *Palestine, New Mexico* (2010) examine the communities left behind by soldiers during the Iraq War and how those communities experience and respond to the troubled minds and bodies of veterans coming back from that war. In their immersive theatre production titled *Surrender* (2008), Josh Fox and Jason Christopher Hartley invited audiences to experience a fictionalized armed raid that soldiers might conduct in Iraq after which they, the audience members, are returned home to a family dinner. Theatre of War is a professional company that performs readings of Greek war plays for audiences of veterans and their communities to facilitate discussions about reintegration. Quiara Alegria Hudes's play, *Elliot, a Soldier's Fugue*, considers the origins and cycles of veteran deployment and was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in drama (2007). The sequel, *Water by the Spoonful*, won the prize in 2012.

In many movies, home is shaped around the veteran. James Fellows describes the focus in this kind of narrative saying that they "emphasize [the soldiers'] suffering and stoicism, or the long-term personal damage they may endure." ("The Tragedy of the American Military"). Lisa Silvestri Carlton calls this focal image of the damaged veteran the troubled vet archetype (293).<sup>11</sup> These narratives often tacitly imply that veterans shoulder the whole of the responsibility of war and, in doing so, lose the ability to connect to the unchangeable home. In *Hurt Locker*, the veteran returns to war

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<sup>11</sup> This is certainly not to say that all film examples of reintegration narratives include a violent troubled veteran or do not include family. Most of the films mentioned above do include family. For example, *Brothers* is mostly about the veteran's brother and wife engaging in an affair. Nevertheless, the primary role of the troubled veteran eclipses any wrong doing or need to change on the part of families who, by and large, play supporting roles to the veteran's inability to live comfortably in a civilian world.

because he cannot handle being in his perfect home in spite of the fact that there is anything wrong with it. His psychic state is the focus of the narrative; and while family and friends are important figures in the movie, they are secondary to the veteran's disorientation in the domestic realm. As I encountered these narratives, I was drawn to the practice and concept of home as a dynamic response to the veteran's return. While the troubled vet paradigm includes families trying to wrest soldiers away from war and towards home, I found that the theatrical narratives tend to include complicated dialogue that expands and questions the role of families and society in reintegration. Rather than war redefining the veteran, these narratives depict examples of home redefining families.

In her article, Carlton frames war as a social responsibility: "When war is framed as a cultural trauma, however, accountability shifts outward, off the individual and onto a shared plane of civic responsibility" (288). She does this specifically to counter a contemporary tendency to treat war as a personal trauma only for those who were physically in the combat zone. Carlton argues that United States civilians have placed the burden of recent wars largely on soldiers by focusing on PTSD as a veteran's illness that needs correction rather than a natural outcome of a nation participating in a war or conflict. This has resulted in an abundance of research and discussion on how to help veterans come to terms with war and has included little discussion on what reintegrating them means for their families and American communities. I noticed that the theatrical narratives were deliberately taking on this idea by asking the question, "What does reintegration mean for families, home, and American communities?"

I share Carlton's view that war is a social responsibility. At a time when the general population is so out of touch with the experience of reintegrating soldiers and when the public's relationship to war is filtered through mass media, "theatre can,

against media hegemony, offer itself as a critical alternative, addressing issues and enacting perspectives that are otherwise unavailable” (Colleran 622). I believe that these critical alternative narratives are significant and generative. While critics and dramaturgs have largely passed over these narratives, I sought to answer the following questions: What kind of critically alternative narratives of social responsibility do reintegration play scripts explore? How is home the foreground as a negotiated site of social action? How does producing a play impact the alternative narratives that can grow out of the script of a play in rehearsal and performance?

As stated earlier, there are many play scripts covering reintegration with a sense of social responsibility to war. To allow for more focus for my purposes, I decided to narrow my scope to explore three similarly constructed contemporary American plays about reintegration. While many plays fit the bill for critically alternative narratives,<sup>12</sup> I chose three plays written, produced, and published for the first time between 2010-2011: *Time Stands Still* by Donald Margulies (2011), *Oohrah!* by Bekah Brunstetter (2010), and *American Soldiers* by Matt Morillo (2010).<sup>13</sup> The three plays share several key dramatic elements including the fact that each play has a returning or reintegrating veteran as at least one of the main characters.<sup>14</sup> I use Hoge’s definition of veteran in making my designation: “Veteran also refers to anyone who has ever

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<sup>12</sup> American plays about veterans span from Thompson Buchanan’s 1920 play *Civilian Clothes* a jaunty comedy that explores the marriage between an upper class nurse and a lower class captain after the war divests them of their uniforms, to Rose Franken’s 1945 play *Soldier’s Wife* in which a soldier’s wife becomes famous for publishing a book of her letters to her husband while he is readjusting to life at home, to Rajiv Joseph’s celebrated 2009 play *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* which is a darkly comedic look at the effects of war on the soul and compares American veterans of the Iraq War to ghosts. Recently more plays featuring veterans have been published and produced such as Mark Medoff’s *Gunfighter: A Gulf War Chronicle*, Quiara Alegria Hudes’ Pulitzer prize nominated *Elliot. a soldier’s fugue*, and William Electric Black’s *Welcome Home, Sonny T.*

<sup>13</sup> While many playwrights are currently producing new work on this subject, I have selected three out of the many in order to narrow my field of inquiry.

<sup>14</sup> Whether each play’s veteran is the protagonist is a question I pursue in that play’s chapter. Additionally, I explore the significance of the protagonist as a character.

deployed to a war zone” (xxiii).<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, the veterans in these plays include a combat photographer, a combat journalist, and several post-deployed and discharged US Army veterans. The dramatic time of each play covers a single post-deployment period for the returning veteran, meaning that he or she arrives home at the start of the play and re-deploys or leaves the family at the end of the play. Additionally, the primary dramatic location for each play is the dwelling that the veteran recognizes as home, and as play scripts, all three conform to stylistically psychological realism<sup>16</sup> which means that their dramatic time is in chronological order and that their rules of reality and behavior conform to those we expect on a daily basis.

The body of critical work on *Time Stands Still*, *American Soldiers*, and *Oohrah!* is diminutive. While all three plays have been produced and received reviews, none of them has received significant scholarly attention. Of the three, *Time Stands Still* is the most well-known and critically reviewed piece. In this play, a combat photographer and her journalist partner negotiate their ongoing relationship and career choices. *Time Stands Still* was nominated for two Tony Awards in 2010: Best Play and Best Performance by a Leading Actress. It appeared on Broadway twice in 2010, has been produced in most major theatre centers of the United States since, and was reviewed

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<sup>15</sup> Hoge deliberately includes those who are not in the armed forces in his definition because non-combatants deployed into war zones consistently experience direct combat. He elaborates that “most people change as a result of wartime deployment”; hence, the war zone affects everyone in it.

<sup>16</sup> Anna Miller begins to chart Realism and Naturalism as stylistic developments that began in the 1800’s in Germany and Scandinavia and specifically notes one example as the “*Familienkatastrophe*, the tragedy of the family” (102). These movements began as attempts to showcase daily life, specifically, as Emile Zola put it, “with the exact reproduction of the environment” (358) indicating social and physical surroundings. Over time, realism and naturalism came to be used beyond describing an aesthetic movement. As William W. Demastes notes in *Realism and the American Dramatic Tradition*, “realism is a term identifying a rich and varied confederacy of theatrical products bound only by a limited set of prescriptions and utilized by a heterogeneous group of artists” (x). The use of these terms is wide and varied and sometimes references the particular nineteenth century aesthetic movements, and occasionally describing particular elements of acting, design, playwriting, and concept. That said, there are a few characteristics associated with the title realism that these plays arguably share, including operating on contemporary “rules of reality” (Demastes xi), requiring meticulous domestic sets in the stage directions (Zola 360), describing a social issue in their action, and having an emphasis upon psychological conflicts (Brockett 331). These characteristics will be discussed in detail in the chapters of the dissertation.

twice by Charles Isherwood who hailed it as “handily Mr. Margulies’s finest play since the Pulitzer Prize winning “Dinner with Friends”” (1 “What’s Really Fair in Love and War?”). Upon the play’s reopening and a third viewing, Isherwood remarked, “[T]he play’s subtly accumulating power struck me with unexpected force” (1 “Wounds of War Run Deeper than Ever”). The play has had runs in most major cities across the country and is also the only play of the three that has a non-combatant veteran as the main character is a combat photographer. I explain more fully in chapter two how this character both qualifies as a veteran and presents a critical alternative narrative.

The second play in my study is the least well-known of the trio: *American Soldiers* by Matt Morillo. *American Soldiers* has received little critical attention and virtually no scholarly attention. In one of two relevant<sup>17</sup> reviews of the show, Mark Peikert writes, “[T]here’s little reason to root for this family.” The play is difficult to handle because the dialogue is less like kitchen conversations between family members and more like political debates between ideologues. I interviewed Matt Morillo as part of my production research. Morillo also directed two of the first productions of this script both of which were produced by veteran groups. The collective viewpoints in this play do not create a warm family connection with which an audience can sympathize. They do, however, create a reflexive space in which to explore the ideas involved in this specific reintegration narrative.

The third play in my study is Bekah Brunstetter’s *Oohrah!* In this play, a captain returns home after his fourth and final tour of duty and his family must negotiate what that means. Brunstetter describes the play as “an ensemble piece about this family, and what it is emotionally to be a soldier, to have a soldier as a husband, or to have a soldier as a brother” (“Ooh, Ooh, Oohrah!”). Brunstetter is a young but prolific

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<sup>17</sup> The second relevant review is about my production and will be discussed more fully in the dissertation.

playwright. At the age of 32, she listed 22 “longish plays” on her blog which is whimsically titled “I Care Deeply: About a lot of things. Like really, really deep. Ow.” Her sense of the strange ironies in everyday life appears in the classifications she uses for her writing as well as in her plays. She lists “longish” plays, short plays, moving picture plays, and “Bekah’s Homemade Monologues, baked just for you”—which she writes on commission. *Oohrah!* is her most well-known play, and it elicited a brief interview with Vogue magazine as well as an initial run at the Atlantic Theatre Company. Perhaps because of the combination of whimsy, irony, and family tragedy, the play is complicated and unsettling in both its development and ending. When it debuted, the play received a very bad review from Charles Isherwood who deplored “the lapses in writing,” which could not be made up for by successful performances (“Back from War”). *Oohrah!* certainly is not “well-made” in the sense of Eugène Scribe who pioneered the formula by which many plays are still compared (Brockett 335). There is no last-minute plot twist, revealing letter, or satisfying denouement to bring the story to a harmonious conclusion. I believe this unresolved structure creates critical space for alternative narratives.

The stories we tell about reintegration impact the way we view the relationship between veterans and their families. This is particularly relevant because the return of soldiers—who hold an iconic place in American mythic space—implicitly intersects with the rigorously investigated<sup>18</sup> notion of home. As Roberta Rubenstein writes,

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<sup>18</sup> Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* examines the locations of intimate lives, from cellars to wardrobes and attics while Carol E. Kelley explores the “interrelationship between immigration and individual perceptions of home” through the lives of women who have immigrated and struggle with concepts of home. Discussing American Superheroes, Gary Engle notes that, at its immigrant roots, the American home includes not only the sense of a home elsewhere, but also the desire for mobility. In “Home as a Region”, T.S. Terkenli discusses the methods that people use to turn geographical locations into homes. His work exists in conversation with both Yi-Fu Tuan’s treatise, *Space and Place*, which examines the experiential knowledge of people and their environments, and Doreen Massey’s *For Space*, which discuss the social relationships that define locations and spaces. Literary examinations tend towards the treatments of home as women’s space. Helen Levy looks at representations of home created by female authors as locations of power and importance. Roberta Rubenstein

“home (emphasis in original) is among the most emotionally complex and resonant concepts in our psychic vocabularies” (1). As Taylor and Taylor note of soldiers remembering home:

Battlefield visions of an idyllic haven spring partly from distorted reality imperfectly remembered and partly from glorified fantasies based on hope. Flawed perceptions become the movie played over and over again in the mind’s lens, starring the returning warrior as hero with his loved ones waiting. But reality falls short of the advanced billing; home is more than a place with actors in a scene. Home is a complex concept that changes over time from where it started to where it is on that day. (160)

Narratives and play scripts about reintegration engage the “glorified fantasies”, the flawed movie, and reality that is sometimes more like a play. Jesús Martín Barbero explains that stories function as “a dimension of living and dreaming” through which people “construct their present” (281). This idea is particularly useful in understanding what is happening in the plays’ plots and through the plays’ production. Within the play characters are collecting, repeating, and enforcing narratives about what their homes should be like during and after reintegration. Stepping back a layer to the reality in which the fictional narratives occur, the plays function as similar narratives about what reintegration could or should be with each fictional narrative becoming another example from which the present can be constructed. With so much of America’s attention on reintegrating veterans of the Iraq War, these sets of narratives are significant areas of inquiry.

This means that I am consistently engaging a double layer of narratives between reality and fiction which are interacting to (re)create the present as possibilities and reflections. In order to help clarify this distinction, I utilize two separate sites of study, specifically the written text of the play and the live performance and

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offers a similar literary exploration of women writers and the sense of home in *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women’s Fiction*.



production of the play. These two sites are intimately interrelated, and, by distinguishing them, I hope to make room to reveal and explore both their interactions and their differences. Diana Taylor writes on the tension between text and performance in *The Archive and The Repertoire*. She explains that, over time, written text has eclipsed performance as the location of knowledge and power while in the process denying the knowledge built, retained, and transferred through the acts of life (16). In the study of dramatic literature, there has been a preference for the written text of a play as the primary, if not only, site from which to extract knowledge and experience. One only has to look at the vast body of criticism on and teaching of Shakespeare's plays as literature which is in contrast to the plays' initial existence as performance texts to demonstrate the preference critics have for literary analysis of theatrical scripts over performance texts. These literary analyses of the script run the risk of imagining an ideal but "virtual staging" of the text (De Marinis 15). Because performance has a distinct experiential nature, artistic form, and semiotic structure from written play scripts, Marco De Marinis argues that the script and the "real staging" (15) deserve to be considered distinctly (50). In light of this, the real staging of the plays I produced give unique value to my study as additional autonomous sites of meaning developed in relationship to the analysis of the play scripts as literary narratives.

By investigating the plays as both literary and extra-literary sites of meaning, I lean towards a New Historicist view of the texts<sup>19</sup> which treats literary works "not as autonomous objects but as material products emerging out of specific social, cultural, and political contexts" (Leitch 27). This means that I frequently consider the intersection of the narratives of script, production, and performance in order to identify

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<sup>19</sup> Here meaning both the scripts and the performance texts.

the “key images—and the values, beliefs, practices, and social structures that those images point toward—of a particular cultural moment” (Leitch 2250). In this study, there are two specific cultural moments: the moment of the plays initial productions—2010 to 2011—and the moment of my productions—2012 to 2014. There are two cultural periods that are significant to this study. The first cultural period is one in which, as I have described, the image of the returning veteran loomed in the cultural consciousness where it spawned narratives in film and theatre. The second is the time period in which I and my casts and crews interacted with the texts to produce and perform them.

I believe that a useful tension exists among the scripts, the productions, and the performances of each play, especially regarding the content of the plays. This tension creates a productive intersection in which the ideas discovered through textual analysis can be tested by comparing and contrasting them with the discoveries made in rehearsal and performance. In order to describe these tensions and discoveries, I utilize tools from a New Historicist tool kit including “textual explication, exegesis, aesthetic appreciation, and personal response” (Leitch 28). The resulting chapters have a non-traditional form as a result. They move between analysis, personal reflection, exegesis, and reports of artistic creation and rehearsal, performance, design, and written texts. The New Historicists have been criticized for blurring the line between literature and art and the everyday world in such a way as to devalue the former (Petković 140). Keeping this criticism in mind, I hope to treat the texts in my study both in conversation with their contexts and as autonomous artistic pieces. I treat them as both completed texts and as blueprints for performed narratives.

In order to accommodate the range of texts that I analyze in my study, I turn to the method of script analysis outlined by Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and

Designers for language to describe the active parts of narrative, production, and performance. In this text, Dr. James Thomas bases his language on the understanding that “literature uses words to illuminate actions and events, while drama uses actions and events to illuminate words” (xxviii). Thomas’ approach provides my study with vocabulary that can bridge the literary to the performative. Cleanth Brooks wrote that “The dynamic nature of drama, in short, allows us to regard it as an action rather than as a formula for action or as a statement about action” (Brooks 1360). In this way, I also treat the production and performance processes as active.

Because I am using the production and performance of these plays as enacted by myself and undergraduate students, it is important to acknowledge the use of this practice and performance as research. Shauna MacDonald notes, “Performance is at once a call to knowledge and a way to get there” (27). Though she does not cite them directly, MacDonald’s understanding of performance is built on a foundation established by prior scholarship on place and performance (Tuan), performance and everyday life (Goffman), and the development of performance studies as a discipline (Schechner). Cumulatively, my study understands the performance and production of a play to be both an artistic expression and a mode of inquiry; along these lines, enacting and embodying theatrical narratives in performances generates new knowledge. Shaun McNiff, an artist and scholar, defines “direct art-making” as a form of “systemic inquiry” that is considered art-based research (385). Art-based research is one name among several (including artistic inquiry, practice as research, and performative research) that refers to an alternative research paradigm defined by practitioners as both experiential and scholarly. John Baldacchino explains:

[B]y its distinct nature arts research calls for a different set of categories where the arts do not search for stuff or facts, but they generate it . . . then unlike any form of empirical data, the data that the arts make never set out to prove

anything. Rather, art's data set out to make a case by how the arts emerge as such in their acts of doing and making. (4)<sup>20</sup>

In this study, I acknowledge that the plays I analyze are theatrical texts written to be performed. At the same time, I also consider them to be incomplete without the act of doing and making which is inherent in the embodied production of theatre.

Dora Apel performs a similar analysis. She writes about cultural representations of war narratives arguing that “All war experience is publicly understood only through representation” (3). Apel’s study examines contemporary art—including photographs of veteran amputees and cardboard cut outs of absent soldiers for their family members (126)—as representations that frame experiences and images of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for the public. By both examining the internal narratives and situating them in the broader cultural and social spheres, her analysis presents a model for my own. Namely, while my work follows similar structures and avenues of inquiry, it moves beyond Apel’s work.

Apel does not contend with any traditionally scripted plays but focuses on performance art and cultural artifacts. She does not move deeply into reflective personal analysis or create any art herself, and in this way my work moves into a different territory. My art is collaboratively created with a student population where the

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<sup>20</sup> This has led to considerable debate about the emerging methods and value of art-based research and specifically, how its methods demonstrate rigor and where those methods exist in the realm of academic research. A sampling of views towards the situation of practice as research reveals some of the conflicts that have emerged. Brad Haseman sets performative research in opposition to traditional qualitative and quantitative methods by emphasizing performative research’s rejection of “narrow problem-setting and rigid methodological requirements at the outset of a project” (100) as soaring above the confines of traditional paradigms. Ben Spatz argues that practice as research cannot be performed with real academic rigor until it amasses a multimedia archive, distinct from the textual archive, against which to compare and situate its developing forms in a community of knowledge. Mark Fleishman argues against this position, proffering instead for “compossibility” (30), a combination of multiple possible investigatory methods, in part why art-based research is so often termed interdisciplinary. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole illustrate another popular view: situating art-based research within the social sciences. McNiff found his way to art-based research through psychology and notes that it is a method suitable for the social sciences. However, Baldacchino, responding to Knowles and Cole, argues that arts research must maintain is aesthetic autonomy as art or risk essentialization and diminution.

personally involved work that Apel pursues is that of professional artists. These differences create a specific niche that has not been previously explored.

Although “War and Theatre” is a common topic for both academic and artistic inquiry,<sup>21</sup> reintegration is most frequently treated as a problem for individual veterans. Beginning with Colleran’s hypothesis that theatre can create critical alternatives, I use chapters 2, 3, and 4 to address each play and examine and explicate the scripts one by one to discover what critical alternatives they offer to the veteran’s individual responsibility for war. Building on James Thomas’s assertion that play scripts are more than literature, I produced and directed each play allowing the earlier literary analysis to influence the ways in which the concrete theatrical productions explored reintegration as both theme and content. This permitted me to explore the critical spaces and practices that these plays opened up in production. The following chapters contain close readings and analyses of both the play scripts and productions I directed.

When I began this dissertation, the structure was straightforward: textual analysis of the play scripts was juxtaposed to cultural analysis of reintegration and then followed up with an explication of production data., The more I worked, on each play from analysis to production, however, the more interconnected the different paths of research became. By adding art practice enquiry to my other methods of analysis, a discursive web developed between these three plays in both performance and text. The literary analysis impacted my script analysis which impacted my production practice which, in turn, impacted further literary and script analysis. My reflective explanations will attempt to track this circular research pattern in order to share the complex web of these analyses.

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<sup>21</sup> See the following for a few examples of contemporary scholarly studies of war and theatre: Jeanne Colleran’s book, *Theatre and War: theatrical responses since 1991*, Michael Balfour’s edited collection *Theater and War, 1933-1945: performance in extremis*, and *Theatre is more beautiful than war* a collection edited by Marvin Carlson.

In order to draw together the various threads represented in my research—including close reading, script analysis, cultural research, and practice as research—I chose to use the production narratives as the main structure for Chapters 3 and 4. As a result, the chapters are arranged chronologically by production dates as follows: *Time Stands Still*, *American Soldiers*, *Oohrah!*. Despite having analyzed the scripts simultaneously and prior to the productions, the preparatory research and the practical data generated by producing the art make the most sense when pursued in this order. Additionally, because the productions were not only an application but also a culmination of previous analysis, the distinctions between close readings, cultural context, and artistic investigation overlapped. Chapter 2 follows the traditional structure as I initially planned. It describes the close readings, script analysis and cultural engagement of the *Time Stands Still* script and is followed by an interchapter which explicates how the preceding analysis impacted and culminated in the production. (Merriam-Webster defines an interchapter as “an intervening or inserted chapter”). I have included this content as an interchapter because the production explication of *Time Stands Still* was sufficiently different from the analytical material to merit its own section; and while it warranted a separate section, it didn’t warrant a whole chapter because it is still about *Time Stands Still* and not reintegration plays generally. The interchapter is inserted as an intervening chapter which bridges the traditional and the non-traditional chapter formats.

*Time Stands Still* is the only play with two separate sections of analysis that are dedicated to close reading and production individually. The other two plays combine exegesis of the performance process with close readings and contextual analyses. Rather than insert disjointed narrative accounts into the theoretical analysis, I build the theoretical analysis into the narratives of production research that most organically

influenced those script and performance texts which in turn instigated an evolution of the analyses and readings. Because each play treats the reintegration process and the recreation of home in a unique way, each of these body chapters elucidates the unique treatment of reintegration and includes the theoretical research that applies most directly to that treatment.

In Chapter 2, I explore *Time Stands Still*. This research is organically suited to studying home as a type of performance negotiated among the characters in the play. I chose and developed the term polylogue to describe a contrapuntal dialogic structure in which an ensemble of major characters problematizes the central conflict with their specific points of view. The chapter is dedicated first to explaining the idea of a dramatic polylogue and second to explicating how the play exemplifies it and what is revealed by viewing the play through this lens. I offer extensive discussion of the characteristics of the polylogue form—which includes at least two possible protagonists—an ensemble cast of characters with unique viewpoints, and the conflicts that engage the characters' views. Each character has a distinct definition of and disposition towards home as an imagined social space, and the chapter explores the way that these different views drive the dramatic conflicts of the play. The interchapter reflects, explicates, and discusses how my production of *Time Stands Still* developed, benefited, and clarified the idea of polylogue through production, practice, and performance. I use reflection and explication to discuss the directorial and design adoptions. This interchapter serves as a turning point in my research.

Chapter 3 is devoted to *American Soldiers*. This script directs the responsibility of reintegration away from individuals in the role of family members and towards individuals in the role of citizens. The tension created between familial and socio-political responsibilities highlights the discourse used by civilians and veterans. In this

chapter, I contend both with the way that the script focuses on discourse and the way that myself and my cast and crew contend with discourse through the production process. The text of this particular chapter moves between rehearsal explication and scriptural explication to support the analysis of political and social roles imagined for veterans and citizens. Specifically, this chapter looks at how I attempted to address these issues which appear in the text through direction and design.

Chapter 4 addresses *Oohrah* and explores the isolation and deterritorialization of veterans and families throughout the script and production. The themes of the play include looking at cultural narratives juxtaposed with the intimate practice of home which is where my analysis moves into performance and production. Caren Kaplan defines deterritorialization as “the displacement of identities, persons, and meanings that is endemic to the post-modern world system” (358), and my production of *Oohrah!* experimented with the effect of deterritorialization on the reintegration process in rehearsal and performance.

The fifth and final chapter concludes the research by pulling together the common themes and observations that rose to the top in all the productions as well as noting the places where they differed. It includes reflections on the completion of the three productions, noting patterns, idiosyncrasies, and overall conclusions drawn from the previous chapters’ analyses and practices. Additionally, I reflect on the avenues of research that I did not get a chance to pursue during the research period, the interstices and interactions among these plays and my studies of them. Part of my conclusion will invite readers to continue thinking about the reintegration narrative and conceptions of home in the social imagination by pointing to issues that warrant further research.



## CHAPTER 2 TIME STANDS STILL

*Time Stands Still* begins in a loft in Brooklyn as James and Sarah arrive home from a German hospital where James has kept agonizing watch over her. Sarah is a combat photographer and the primary veteran of the play. She returns from a stint covering the war in Iraq after a car bomb seriously injured her and killed her fixer.<sup>22</sup> James, a freelance combat journalist and Sarah's long-term boyfriend, was home in the United States when she got injured happened and was dealing with his own response to combat trauma. As the play progresses, the couple must navigate the awkward experience of rebuilding their relationship and remaking home. In an interview with *The Economist*, the author of this play, Donald Margulies, said he did not intend to write a piece about the war in Iraq; rather, in his play "[w]ar is the backdrop for what is essentially a domestic love story—a relationship drama—in which the characters happen to have high stakes professions" (Ramchandani). It is this focus that makes the piece such an effective exploration of reintegration. As a transition from war zone to home, reintegration's purview is domestic in nature, and these plays transpire in kitchens and living spaces where characters determine their roles and relationships. In scene three of *Time Stands Still*, James proposes to Sarah, and throughout the rest of the play they must together determine what home means to them in light of his proposal and their combat experiences.

The second pair of characters in the play provide a domestic counterpoint for Sarah and James. In this scene, Richard Erlich—who is older than James and Sarah by at least ten years, is a close friend of James and Sarah, a former romantic partner

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<sup>22</sup> A fixer is both an interpreter and a personal assistant who helps a photographer or a journalist navigate through unfamiliar terrain and customs for their stories. During *Time Stands Still*, Sarah reveals that she fell in love and had an affair with her fixer, Tariq, who was killed in the explosion that wounded her (1.3). This becomes a major point of contention between the couple and further complicates Sarah's conflicting allegiances to her job and her relationship.

of Sarah's, and the photo editor at the magazine that serves as the primary publisher and employer for Sarah, James—and Mandy Bloom, his young and pregnant girlfriend, arrive to welcome Sarah home. Their new relationship develops in sharp contrast to Sarah and James' eight-year partnership. During the one-year time period that the play covers, Sarah and James get married and try to work through their differences. James wants to quit covering war zones and stay home while Sarah remains committed to returning to Iraq despite her injuries. The revelation that Sarah had a meaningful affair with her fixer, Tariq, complicates and deepens James and Sarah's struggle. At the beginning of act 2, the couple marries, and, by the end of the play, they divorce while Sarah prepares for her next overseas assignment.

Even though James was not with Sarah during the roadside bomb attack, both James and Sarah are veterans. Through exposition, we know that both characters were combat journalist for several years before the events recorded by the play. We also know that they worked together for eight years before James suffered a psychological breakdown when a bomb exploded near him while on assignment causing him to leave Sarah to return to New York for therapy, and that after he returned to the US, a period of several months elapsed before Sarah was injured by an improvised explosive device which is the inciting incident of the play. Sarah's pivotal recovery and potential reintegration is fueled by and predicated on James' reintegration following his own trauma. Even so, it is her return home after a violent war-related injury that is both the catalyst to which the other characters respond and the main external action of the play; accordingly, Sarah is the focal point of my discussion.

The play follows Sarah and James dealing with the traumas they've both encountered and the reintegration process of recovering and making a home in the

US. As their editor and close friend of many years, Richard is a civilian member of this non-traditional family. It is significant that, as he says in the play, Sarah's brush with death has been the catalyst for him to seize life in the form of pursuing a relationship with Mandy. The contrast of Richard and Mandy's relationship, which was started because of Sarah's injury and return, provides an important counterpoint to Sarah and James because both couples decide to marry during the course of the play. Mandy and Richard even have a baby during this time. Both couples are in the process creating homes in the context of Sarah and James' war traumas: Sarah and James are reintegrating Sarah, while Mandy and Richard are beginning and developing a relationship.

The dialogue in the play also shows both couples dealing with the knowledge of faraway conflict that Sarah makes visible. The scenes between the four characters feature negotiations of the behaviors and dialogues about the homes they are creating. For example, the climax of act two scene one (hereafter 2.1) of *Time Stands Still* finds James defending an important freelance article that he wrote about foreign war and its effect on refugees—people whose homes have been torn apart by combat. At the height of his anger, Mandy, who is visibly pregnant in the scene, asks, "But what am I supposed to do with this information?" (knowledge, and experience of foreign conflicts). She asks this question specifically in relation to home-making for herself and Richard, for each other personally, and for their potential and actual children. Mandy wants to know how the trauma of far-away war should impact her life since she has relatively no personal contact with refugees or, in her mind, any way to help them. Mandy's question lays out one of the biggest themes of *Time Stands Still*: creating home in the context of far-away war trauma. In the play, four relatively middle-class

American characters confront the effects of far-away wars in their homes, and the protagonist, Sarah, explores reintegration as an answer to Mandy's question.

### Polylogue

This chapter analyzes and describes the words and actions of this play as negotiations of home in face of war. To that end, I employ the term polylogue as a tool to analyze the interactions of the characters. I define polylogue as a contrapuntal dialogic form in which an ensemble of major characters problematizes the central conflict with their specific points of view. In this case, contrapuntal describes the characters as four melodic lines playing together and against each other to create a more complex conversation from text and action. Thinking of each character as a line of melody rather than harmony highlights the content of their conflict as Sarah, James, Richard, and Mandy each approach the central conflict of the play with an individual melodic point of view. Using the prefix poly- rather than dia- is meant to indicate the importance of each character in the play in relation to the central conflict.

Each character has a unique perspective on his/her relationship to the ongoing wars in the world and the relationship of those wars to their sense of home. Throughout the play, their views create conflict and provoke events and interactions which shape the individual character expectations and behaviors. This is what James Thomas calls role conflicts which "arise from characters' opposing images of themselves and each other" (178). As a result of Sarah's experiences, she views James, Richard, and Mandy in specific ways and they do the same with her. Their differences in views and expectations of each other lead to conflicts. These role conflicts are due in large part to the given circumstances of the world of the play (178). In the following sections, I will describe each character's role and the ways that they create and complicate the play's conflicts. Because Sarah is the protagonist whose potential reintegration is the

main action, the role conflicts are most meaningful when considered in conjunction with Sarah.

### Primary Conflicts of Time Stands Still

Sarah says in 1.2 that her job as a journalist is to “capture” not “change” the violent reality she witnesses. In this way, Mandy believes that Sarah allows violence to continue and perhaps even sanctions it through photographs. Michael Balfour writes that “the ontological impact of engaging in legitimized acts of violence, authorized and sanctioned by the nation, places an individual in a complex and confusing moral and immoral, legitimate and illegitimate weave” (2). Specifically, Balfour is discussing the repercussions of sanctioned violence on soldiers and argues that the violence is also harmful to those who commit the sanctioned violence. Hodge notes that this active violence also creates trauma when soldiers are haunted by having killed brutally, killed civilians, and destroyed property (21). When these acts of violence are state sponsored and celebrated, the trauma is uniquely complicated. It is this very weave that the characters must navigate since, by capturing rather than changing, Sarah and James have engaged in legitimizing acts of violence by believing that documenting and sharing through their pictures the violence will help to end it.

By not only documenting but also broadcasting these often-private pains through news discourse, Sarah struggles with the fear that rather than helping these people, she is, as she says, “a ghoul” who feeds on their pain and a profiteer. Along these lines, Sarah states, “I am making a living on the backs of their suffering” (50). Mandy’s question— “[W]hat am I supposed to do with this information?”—is a direct challenge to the legitimacy of Sarah’s and James’ attempts to help the people they document. Mandy wants to know what the use is documenting these tragedies and

sharing them with people not directly affected by the war as she feels she can do nothing to help.

In the play, Sarah and James make this question not only rhetorical but also literal as they are both corporal veterans of foreign conflict and trauma. Sarah was the victim of an IED explosion, and James was close enough to a different explosion to have the brains of its victims in his mouth. It is important to note that the trauma is not only happening somewhere far away; it is also happening in the play. Sarah and James bring the trauma into the story directly with both their psychological and physical injuries. Using sociological knowledge about the recovery and reintegration of military veterans, we can chart how the characters create families by navigating through the complex weave that Balfour describes.<sup>23</sup>

While Sarah and James do not occupy the exact double role of perpetrator and victim that soldiers fill (i.e. they don't work for the military and don't perpetrate physical violence) their professions allows them to witness, capture, and relate pain as they profit from the wars and conflicts. Specifically, Sarah's photographs and James' articles are a product of the suffering, and the money they make from it is profit. By documenting instead of taking sides, they arguably become culpable for the acts they witnessed as they do nothing to change the situation. Mandy directly accuses Sarah of simply standing there instead of doing something to help the subjects of her photographs and thereby causing harm through inaction. "You could have been helping them," Mandy says (Margulies 29) which implies that since Sarah was photographing these events, she could not possibly be helping them.

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<sup>23</sup> It's important to point out that both Sarah and James are civilian veterans and not military veterans. Although neither reporter is a soldier, their experience of the deployment cycle and reintegration is similar enough to warrant examination. As I pointed out in the introduction, civilians and military personnel who work in war zones suffer the residual effects of violence and have to reintegrate on their return home (Hoge xxiii).

Because Sarah and James occupy a space and role between soldier and civilian, their attempts at reintegration are accessible to those familiar with military reintegration and to those who, like Margulies and most Americans, are neither military veterans nor immediate family. The features of post deployment and war zone trauma are present, but not the establishment of the military and its training. Additionally, the characters' views and goals are in conflict as Sarah wants to continue documenting the war zone, and James wants to stop. These responses help broaden our understanding of the reaction different people have to this kind of trauma and to reintegrating.

The protagonist/antagonist conflict in the play is between James and Sarah because they respond differently to their trauma: James suffers a psychological breakdown, and Sarah is physically wounded. In 1.3, James says that he was near an explosion which killed several school aged girls. Their blood and brains ended up in his mouth which traumatized him and made him unable to remain where he was. As a result of his trauma, he returned home, got a counselor, decided to stop reporting in war zones, proposed marriage to Sarah and thus became a fairly normal guy.

Sarah continued working after James left and had an affair with their fixer, Tariq. An improvised explosive device blew up the car that Sarah and Tariq were traveling in which caused her severe physical trauma and killed Tariq. James picked Sarah up from the German hospital that she was airlifted to while in a coma and believes that she will respond to her injuries like he responded to his injuries; instead, Sarah's enforced year out of the field solidifies her desire to continue photographing foreign conflicts.

What are Sarah and James supposed to do with the knowledge and experience of trauma in regard to moving forward with their home? Both characters believe they

have the answer. As they pursue their answers, it becomes clear that their individual solutions do not line up. In 1.2, Richard reveals that his relationship with Mandy was a result of Sarah's injuries. In response to her near-death experience, he decides to live life to the fullest even if people (i.e. James and Sarah) ridicule him for dating a younger woman because she "delights" him (22); therefore, his relationship to Mandy as well as their pregnancy and marriage are all direct responses to Sarah's injury which is a result of foreign conflict being made personal through Richard's friends bodies. While Sarah and James have individual responses to their physical and mental trauma, both Richard and Mandy are forced to come to terms with the foreign conflicts through the effect it has had on their friends.

James and Sarah's mental and physical wounds were received in course of their reporting. James' came in an explosion of that blew-up women while he was working on an article. This was compounded by the fact that although he wrote articles with the hope of changing the situation and suffering he witnessed, James also experienced indifference from both publishers and his intended audience. Sarah was blown up while taking pictures of war events and also experienced the contempt of those she photographed while she witnessed their suffering. These events and traumas force the characters, who are all engaged in some kind of homemaking, to answer the question that Mandy puts to James: What do they do with their knowledge of war and the suffering it produces? The characters must deal with the memories and this knowledge while they try to make homes which means that their homemaking occurs within the context of these war-time events.

Margulies doesn't focus on Sarah as a veteran-patient who must readjust to her role in America; rather, he uses the action of the play to push the characters' missions and viewpoints into a polylogue. I use the term polylogue here to indicate that this



conversation involves more than two different points of view. By expanding the points of view from two major sides to four, Margulies creates a broader negotiation in which the decisions made by single characters are interpreted by the other three affected characters. This makes each viewpoint more transparent because it is placed clearly alongside the others, and each character's viewpoint changes in some way because of the events and dialogue of the play. In a sense, they don't just converse. They negotiate<sup>24</sup> their understanding of America as a home.

Sarah

Sarah is the focal point of the action and conflict in the play<sup>25</sup>. As a civilian veteran, she brings the content of war written in her injuries as a physical presence. *In Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Judith Butler eloquently describes the way that combat photographers have similar roles and experience to soldiers: “[V]ery often the one who uses the camera is positioned within the perspective of battle and becomes a soldier-reporter who visually consecrates the destructive acts of war” (xi). In this quote, Butler is discussing how the frames of photographs craft our understanding of the wars that we watch but she situates the photographers as combatants because they capture and reproduce the violence of these foreign conflicts. By virtue of her job as a combat photographer, Sarah is a veteran who visibly displays the effects of war through both her photographs and her injuries.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Here “negotiating” means searching for some kind of compromise that will advance each character’s own mission while incorporating the other.

<sup>25</sup> There is some contention about whether Sarah is truly the main character in the sense of protagonist since she does not have a change of direction at the end of the play. The classical protagonist arc in a play requires a character that undergoes some kind of transformation by the end of the play. In this case, the suggested change is to leave her freelance war zone reporting; but, in the end, she loses her relationship with James in order to maintain her course of action. She doesn’t change, her relationship does. James is the other option of a protagonist as he is the one who ultimately lets go of the relationship. He changes his course of action; and, arguably, tries to create a life with Sarah in order to pursue his mental peace. Regardless, Sarah remains the central character of the play both by remaining the focus onstage at the end of the show and by being the central conflict driving character of the play.

<sup>26</sup> For example, it is immediately clear when Sarah comes onstage that she has experienced war trauma because—as the stage directions proscribe—her scars are visible and her injuries make simple tasks difficult. 1.2

Sarah's behavior is based on a complicated view of the space and situation which are part of her role as a veteran. She is undoubtedly influenced by her physical trauma, but, like many veterans of conflict there are numerous layers to her experiences. Sarah experiences a high level of satisfaction from her job; thus, she defends her photographs to Mandy, saying that she considers them her children. The script suggests that Sarah is an excellent photographer and Richard and Mandy confirm this when they describe being moved by the photos graphic potency. In addition to her job, Sarah is also grieving the loss of Tariq, her fixer and lover. This loss is one that James will deliberately not share and that none of the other characters understand. Her relationship with James is strained not only due to her affair with Tariq but also due to James' trauma and absence from Sarah's recent experiences. In addition to her physical and emotional trauma from the explosion, the knowledge that the events she covers continue to occur compounds her struggle to reintegrate. Sarah is defined by these circumstances which drive her conviction that her job is critical and important, and her actions and dialogue in the apartment contain a nuanced emotional experience that put her role as a veteran in direct conflict with the other characters.

Sarah's actions arise out of this role of veteran. She uses her experience in conversation to urge others to take responsibility for their lack of action in relationship to conflicts abroad. The photographs, which are her livelihood, cause her to come back to the knowledge that she wants to re-deploy. Susan Sontag explains the power and efficacy of war photographs this way: "The understanding of war among people who have not experienced war is now chiefly a product of the impact of these images. Something becomes real—to those who are elsewhere, following it as "news"—by

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and 1.3 further develop this knowledge through the dialogue by revealing more about the explosion that injured her.

being photographed” (21). Sontag is writing about images of the pain of others and how these images affect those who see them which is a primary reason that Sarah wants to re-deploy. Her photographs make conflicts across the world real in a particularly impactful way which help people understand these foreign battles. As a photojournalist, Sarah is a professional witness. She is paid to go overseas and into conflict in order to observe it and transmit what she observes to those, who like Mandy, have not experienced war. Thus, what she does is both a calling and a well-paid job.<sup>27</sup>

The role of veteran combat photographer raises questions about spectatorship, responsibility, and action because Sarah cannot stop others from witnessing war. Judith Butler notes that in photographs, “the frame does not simply exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality” (xiii). The idea of containment helps us understand the complication that Mandy presents in 1.2 regarding a photograph of a mother and dying child. Mandy complains that the photograph does not contain the aid workers that Sarah claims were there (Margulies 29). She also points out that Sarah participated in the child’s death by taking the photograph and choosing what was inside its frame instead of performing more tangible kind of aid. To this Sarah replies, “[Y]ou can’t expect photographers to step into the frame and fix things they don’t like” (Margulies 29). This choice of what goes into the frame of the photo and whether or not to photograph becomes an ironic and uncomfortable conflict which arises later in the play. What exactly is the purpose of reporting these images? What action is required of the spectator? How are those present (in combat) responsible for their actions and those of the spectators at home?

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<sup>27</sup> We know that she is well paid because she is able to survive with only one other photography shoot (mentioned in the play) during the year of recovery that the play covers. In 2.1, James brings up that her job as a photographer is stable because “You’re a star; somebody will always publish your pictures” (Margulies 46), and in 2.2 Sarah laments that she “live(s) off the suffering of strangers” (Margulies 50).

The play does not presume to answer these questions; instead, it uses the characters roles to tease out the complicated nature of the questions and explore the topics. Within Sarah herself, there is a particularly interesting conflict. This conflict becomes most clear in 2.2 after Sarah and James have been married for a while. Sarah returns from shooting some photographs of a women's prison daycare. While working on the shoot, she has a flashback to a market bombing that she witnessed in Mosul which leads to Sarah vulnerably explaining the hardest ethical dilemma of her work: photographically shooting vulnerable people for her livelihood.

It is important to understand this scene in terms of role conflicts because each character sees this revelation in a fundamentally different light due to their role conflicts. James sees this revelation as a crack in Sarah's determination to re-deploy and as such he siezes the moment to lay out his dream for Sarah's complete reintegration. Sarah, on the other hand, sees it as a necessary experience to express and validate her desire to re-deploy and do the work that she finds so meaningful. I will return to this scene later to discuss the role conflict between the characters. However, at this point of the discussion, I want to elucidate Sarah's internal struggles as she tries to come to terms with her role as a combatant who sanctions violence and her role as a witness who works to reveal violence in the hope of ending it.

The scene begins with Sarah describing her flashback to James. Sarah was photographing an explosion which had just happened, and a burned and bleeding woman pushed Sarah away with her hand, leaving blood on the camera. She says, "There was blood on my lens. (Moved.) Her blood was smeared on my lens. (She breaks down.) I feel so ashamed . . ." (Margulies 50). Understanding this moment is pivotal for both the play and the character. The notion that Sarah built her career on the suffering she has witnessed brings up how fraudulent she feels when she says

that she is helping the subjects of her pictures when she can give them no immediate, tangible relief. She feels shame for her disconnection from those who are suffering, her inability to stop the suffering, the profit she makes from their suffering, and, thereby, the culpability she feels as a witness. Susan Sontag writes in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, “Being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience” (18). As a photographer trying to capture the truth, Sarah is firmly situated as a spectator of the suffering that she photographs. Her commitment to truth keeps her from engaging and changing what she sees in front of her, but her goal as a photographer is to galvanize others to respond to the calamities that she serves up to them. She feels no shame for exposing terrible acts to people who can help stop them.

It is useful to understand Sarah’s point of view by recognizing that she is driven by what Dora Apel terms “an ethical responsibility to respond to the appearance of others, especially to their ‘cry of suffering’” (8). The character continues to perform the job of professional witness and, in doing so, presents her photographs to a broader audience so that this audience will be faced with the ‘cry of suffering’ and be forced to respond. When discussing this with Mandy, Sarah argues that if she didn’t get those pictures and share them, “Who would know? Who would care?” (29).<sup>28</sup> By crafting and distributing these images, Sarah believes that she can make a difference. Because of this vocational frame, the shame and internal conflict that Sarah experiences both complicate and ultimately fuel her desire to continue her work and re-deploy.

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<sup>28</sup> In “On Sentimentality: A Critique of Humans of New York”, Melissa Smyth points out that in spite of claiming to capture universal truths, Brandon Stanton’s collections are by nature framed by the photographer. While his refugee photographs were claimed to have done more to “humanize” Middle Eastern refugees than many other efforts, the responsibility of humanizing implies that the photographer has a divine ability to change a person and their suffering from inhuman to human. Sarah’s claims of making people know and care about these struggles have a similar fallacious weight as she believes her work to be the only thing making the subjects of her photographs visible or important.

In the final scene, Sarah is preparing to travel overseas and back into combat. This is the culmination of her role-conflict with both James and Richard who want Sarah to give up combat journalism to work in the United States. Her role as a dedicated combat photographer on assignment is highlighted next to Mandy whose role as a mother and an event planner are totally different from Sarah's. While Mandy and Sarah's roles occupy staying and leaving positions, respectively, they reach an understanding and a peace that rests on their shared vocation in the service of others: Mandy for her baby and Sarah for the subjects of war that she witnesses. Even though Mandy does not deliberately create conflict with Sarah, she is an example of a woman working in the US, at home, successfully which means that she is aligned, by virtue of that role, with Richard and James who also are at home. Because James, Richard, and Mandy fill roles of post-deployment family living at home, Sarah's role as the pre-deployment veteran represents the primary disruptive force in the play. Her role presents a challenge to the other characters because their role is to help her reintegrate and her role is to prepare for deployment. As such, she "commandeer[s] the] house and its rhythm" with her presence as she tries to make her home family understand their relationship to war (Sherman 216).

The conflict between Sarah and the three other characters takes place throughout the play. A poignant, early example occurs in 1.2 when Sarah, Mandy, and Richard look through Sarah's most recent photographs and discuss the content. The content of the images is from her most recent deployment and include violence and trauma that happened far away in an unspecified Middle Eastern country<sup>29</sup> which are

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<sup>29</sup> Margulies is purposefully vague in order to keep the play relevant to the particular locations of conflict occurring during future productions of the play. In the Setting, he specifies the time of the story as "The present" (5) and in the final scene when Sarah says where her next deployment will take her, there is an asterisk with a remark from Margulies that says, "Permission is given to substitute "Kabul" and/or "Kandahar" with current areas of conflict" (60).

brought into Sarah and James' Brooklyn home through the viewing. In the scene, James protests viewing the pictures: "Now? . . . Why don't we wait until next time? . . . Next time. Okay? When Sarah's not . . . I really don't think this is a good idea." His desire to keep from showing the pictures stems from his role as an advocate for reintegration. In a role that tries to keep Sarah at home, reminders of the excellence of her work and the powerful content of her reporting, especially so soon after her arrival home, represent a threat to the argument that home can be as important as deployment. James protests for half a page with Sarah becoming increasingly combative. Her role as pre-deployment veteran forces her to argue back because she values the work and wants it to be seen. It is a justification of her desire to redeploy. Specifically, she says, "It was his idea! . . . Why are you being such a dick? . . . I'm fine; you're the one who seems upset. . . . No, we're doing it" (Margulies 27). The power of the photographs' content being physically in their home brings on the climax of the scene when Mandy erupts over a photo of a mother crying over her child. James doesn't speak for the entire final exchange about the photo. This example occurs in the first act and helps to lay out the role conflict for the rest of the play. In the following sections, I will describe and clarify the role conflicts between pairs of characters.

#### James and Sarah

Chris Hedges writes, "The enduring attraction of war is this: even with its destruction and carnage, it gives us what we all long for in life. It gives us purpose, meaning, a reason for living" (3). James and Sarah have spent the nine years of their relationship working together in combat zones and documenting war through image and word. For both characters, it has been a mission. Before the play begins James has a breakdown and returns to New York. As he explains it, "Those women, those girls, blew up right there, right in front of me! . . . Their blood and brains got in my eyes!

In my mouth!” (Margulies 34). James’ injury and breakdown are important because they lead to the shift in his behavior and goals. At the start of the play, James no longer feels driven by the purpose of war. That enduring attraction has left him.

This creates the primary role conflict between Sarah and James: they are united by the ethical imperative to change the suffering they witnessed; however, they no longer agree on how to accomplish that goal. In 2.1 during a colossal argument about an article James wrote about refugees, he storms, “Hundreds of thousands of lives are at stake. That’s why I write these / fucking things. People need to know” (Margulies 46). Then, one scene later, he argues that “[w]e [Sarah and I] don’t have to do this . . . There’ll always be something, some reason to put our lives on hold. The war du jour. Well, fuck it. It’s our turn now” (Margulies 50-51). While remaining passionate about the ethical imperative of responding to others’ pain, James has decided that he and Sarah no longer need to report that pain. This difference of opinion is the heart of the role conflict between these characters.

Their opposing views are ultimately irreconcilable. They do marry, because it is what James’ wants, but by the final scene they’ve divorced. James and Sarah each expect that the other will come around to his/her point of view if given time and a few concessions. This creates the beginning of a dialogue about home set against the backdrop of the wars and conflicts that the couple covered. By this I mean that the characters—in the wake of James’ breakdown, Sarah’s injuries, and the affair—are trying to recreate a sense of home and develop behaviors which will heal them and recreate a new functioning relationship.

In a short article, bell hooks writes passionately of homeplace as a site for African Americans to “grow and develop, to nurture our spirits” (384). hooks is making a specific statement about black women and their role in resisting oppression through



creation of safe space. Building on this idea, I connect her definition of home as a place of healing from trauma and of preparation for activism which Sarah clearly believes she is doing. As James and Sarah interact during the play, their sense of home, self, and togetherness is in flux. James wants home to be an actively created site of resistance and Sarah wants to continue to go out to resist. They must work to stabilize their home together before they can redefine themselves and move forward.

In the first scene, Sarah and James arrive at their apartment from the airport. They are returning from Germany where Sarah was medevacked after the explosion and where James comes to be with her and bring her home. Sarah is on crutches and struggling from climbing the stairs to their loft. The couple interacts awkwardly as they try to understand how they fit into the apartment together once more. Despite having shared experiences, James is as awkward and unsure of how to make Sarah feel at home. He spends the first several minutes of the play joking, offering food, water, and other physical comforts. He speaks in incomplete sentences—“Almost there . . .,” “Let me get the uh . . .,” “Water, or uh . . .?,” “Unless you want me to run down / now . . .”—and uses joking phrases like “The Eagle has landed” and “Gonna need dental records to identify this one” (Margulies 7-8). Sarah uses terse one- to three-syllable replies like “I know,” “Let’s,” “Thirsty,” “That’s fine,” and “No” (Margulies 7-8). Their phrasing doesn’t match; Sarah responds weakly to his jokes and tersely to his questions.

James’ behaviors with their home are interactive: checking the fridge, getting the drinks, and beginning to unpack. When Richard calls to check on their progress, James is ready to report, but Sarah urges him not to speak with him. “I don’t want to talk to anybody . . . [n]ot even Richard” (Margulies 8). Her behaviors are experiential rather than interactive: she sits, responds to James, drinks what he gives her, and tries to stop James’ interactions. She says, “Don’t worry about that now,” and is happy to

sit in silence and observe the new dynamic (Margulies 8). Sarah simply reacts while James performs duties of being at home such as getting food and drink and making things comfortable. He is anxious to establish home interactions while Sarah wants to rest.

We discover through the dialogue that James has not only been at home for several months as he has left his job to recover from his own trauma but is also seeing a therapist to help him readjust to life at home (Margulies 9). There is never any indication that Sarah does the same. As a veteran James gives us insight into the realm of hidden injuries and the changes that these emotional scars leave on veterans. While Sarah also has emotional wounds, her physical injuries change the visibility of her recovery. James returned to the states four of five weeks before Sarah was injured. The event that triggered his return is never explicitly described. His response to that event was to withdraw from the field, return to America, and see a “shrink” (Margulies 9). Richard calls James’ response to the trauma a “fucking break down” (Margulies 23).

In 1.3, James proposes to Sarah. He explains that he wants to move on to the next phase of their lives: “When a couple gets to be our age, and has been together as long as we have, and witnessed what we have, and survived what we have, it’s time to call this what it is: a marriage” (Margulies 32). Part of what James is responding to is their collective trauma. Part of it is also the affair between Sarah and Tariq which James discovered while he was in New York before Sarah’s accident. In response to the things that have happened to him and to Sarah, his vision of home has changed to something that will protect them from the wild ups and downs of trauma and infidelity. Sarah’s response to the proposal is less than ideal: “I thought we didn’t need marriage” and “You’re changing the rules on me!” (Margulies 31).

She wants to get back to work as soon as possible and marriage and a home life in the United States is not part of her vision of home. She projects optimistically to Richard in 1.2 that she might be “back by spring,” meaning back in the field just a few months after she came home. Initially, James says that he will go back to work with her (Margulies 23), but over the course of the play he reveals that his dreams for the two of them are connected with them making a home in the United States.

James’ revelation comes in 2.2 when he tells Sarah, “We don’t have to do this. We can stay home. We can make a home” (Margulies 50). This revelation stuns Sarah into silence. It is one of the few times that she has no response to someone else’s views. Usually, when Mandy or James disagrees with her, she quickly replies with her own argument or a sharp retort. In contrast, at this point Sarah listens to James’ desires and expectations.

James confesses that he no longer feels as though his journalistic endeavors are a viable vocation. He says:

I don’t need to dodge bullets to feel alive anymore. Or step over mutilated corpses. Or watch children die. I want to watch children grow. And take vacations like other people. . . . I don’t want to be on a goddamn mission every time I get on a plane! I want to take our kids to Disney World and buy them all the crap they want. . . . It’s our turn now. (a beat) Let’s stop running. (Margulies 51)

James reveals here the role conflict between his view and Sarah’s. For James, the reporting job can be temporary. Wars and the resulting atrocities will always be there, and someone will always cover them. His time reflecting on the horrors that he has seen has created a sense of meaning for him, and the sense of meaning is the value of life. His response is to desire it and expect that he will help create and nurture that safe and comfortable home which he believes every human is entitled. He reveals that he used to believe he had a “mission” to travel and record atrocities which is the vital “purpose, meaning, [and] reason for living” that Chris Hedges describes in soldiers

and combat journalists (3). James also notes a change in his view towards this purpose: that he doesn't want to live with it anymore. As he says, "I just want to be comfortable! There! I said it! Does that make me a bad person?" (Margulies 50).

It takes four sizable scenes to get James to reveal this. He is pushed not only by Sarah's actions but also by the magazine's failure to print his most recent story—written during Sarah's hospital stay about his last trip with her. We discover in 1.2 that Richard is the photo editor at the magazine that provides the majority of Sarah and James' employment, and, while we learn that Richard mostly decides which of Sarah's photos are published, we learn in 2.1 that he is part of an editorial committee that decides what content the magazine publishes issue by issue. This leads to a quarrel when James accuses Richard of caring more about the magazine's quota of "bummer" articles, as Mandy calls them, than about making James and Sarah's work meaningful by publishing it (Margulies 47). While he feels passionately about the people's need to know, James has grown to believe that his articles no longer make a difference. He is burned out and can no longer sustain the active work that Sarah is still compelled to perform. This difference leads to James and Sarah getting a divorce.

James and Sarah split in 2.3 during a fight that Sarah provokes over the memoir text James has written. Their memoir is a book that Richards has helped them pitch and edit. It is a collaboration of Sarah's photography and James' text that seeks to make meaning out of the record of their most recent war experience and traumas. After reading James' text, Sarah picks a fight over the absence of her lover from the memoir. The resulting fight grows to encompass their relationship, their marriage, and their duty to global suffering. He tells her that he can live with himself not continuing his job "Because I know what goes on out there—and on and on—whether you and I are there to cover it or not (Pause.) So, you actually believe what you do can change

anything” (Margulies 56). The last statement is not a question as he no longer believes his articles or any combat journalism he might write will help. During 2.1, James points out that he has neither a steady market for his articles nor the freedom to accurately describe the situations he’s seen because of editors and word limits while Sarah’s pictures are printed and remain intact (Margulies 56). He believes that even if people read his articles, they are in danger of being old news to those who are informed and an “anthropologic curiosity” to those who aren’t (Margulies 37). The best that James can see to do is to “stop running” as he puts it and fly in the face of the life destroyers by making life and living one.

In 2.3, James realizes that Sarah still believes that she can change something when she says, “It’s got to” (Margulies 56). In his treatise *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes digs into the nature of a photograph as an object that “reproduces to infinity [that which] has occurred only once” (4). To Sarah, each of her photographs reproduces to infinity by becoming a living reminder of the events she witnessed. Instead of moving past what the photographs mean, she is haunted by them. As referred to earlier, when Sarah recounts the market bombing, she says, “[T]here was blood on my lens. Her blood was smeared on my lens” (Margulies 50). The blood on Sarah’s lens informs us of how she sees her job and the photographs she sells: as if the blood is integral to her own worldview and her vocation for making the world see and respond to it.

James claims that all he wants is a life with Sarah. Nonetheless, when Sarah says she can’t live the type of life that James wants to live, their different expectations of home become clear. A life with Sarah is not all James wants; he wants a specific type of life with her. He wants to trade the intensity and meaning of the combat zone along with its horrors for things that Sarah still does not want: children, vacations, and

work in the United States. Sarah's response to James makes it clear that she is not willing to change her life for the life that James wants. "Do you see me pushing a stroller and going to play dates? . . . You want a playmate. That isn't me . . . You want a Mandy, . . . [someone to] kick back and watch movies with you" (Margulies 55). It is a low blow. This fight occurs after they've known Mandy for some time as Richard's fiancé and baby's mother. By saying this, Sarah not only separates herself from James' dreams of children and home but also suggests that his dreams are naïve and ignore the realities that James and Sarah have been reporting. She whittles down his experience to a caricature of Mandy.

Given time, James and Sarah each expected the other to come around to his/her way of thinking. Each assumed the other's current role was short term. 2.3 is a complex scene that arises from their conversations and interactions with Richard and Mandy as well as their individual traumas and the culmination of their work in the memoir of their time together. When Sarah reads the text that James has written that caption her photographs in the memoir, she picks the fight that ends their marriage. The audience has received more complete understandings of both James and Sarah which enables them, through the knowledge gained during the play, to see that the ways James and Sarah describe each other at the end are essentialized and incomplete descriptions of their views and desires.

Sarah had assumed that once she healed and married James some change would happen either in him or in her. She tries to compromise in order to maintain the relationship and hopes that James will reintegrate into the role that she expected from him based on experience. Thus, she marries him, takes a photography assignment at home, and silently assents to have children. Even so, when confronted with his memoir that leaves out her lover, she explodes as she is unable to follow through in the roles

that she believes he expects: "I wish I could. But I can't. There's too much going on. I can't sit still" (Margulies 55).

She says, "I thought marriage would change me. If I said and did all the right things, . . . I would feel it; it would be so" (Margulies 55). James assumes that as Sarah heals and processes her trauma, she too will realize that it's time to get out of the business. He says, "What do you mean this life I want? If I remember correctly, we just got married" (Margulies 54), but Sarah fails to reintegrate into the specific role and conditions which James desires: a wife and mother who has safe career at home. This role conflict highlights their differing views of each other and home. James sees home as something you build together. He tries to persuade Sarah, "We can make a home" (Margulies 50). But she sees home as a war zone. As she explains to Mandy, "War was my parents' house all over again; only on a different scale. . . . It's so automatic" (Margulies 24). Home for Sarah is the work that she does. Rather than see the different ideas of home, James believes that Sarah is addicted to war. "Well here, I am: Jack Lemmon on the wagon. But you . . . [y]ou need it. The whole fucking mess of it. The chaos, and the drama. You need it" (Margulies 56).

James does not see what Sarah does in her job, "When I look through that little rectangle, . . . [t]ime stops. It just . . . All the noise around me . . . Everything cuts out. And all I see . . . is the picture" (Margulies 24). The stillness that she experiences in her work creates a need in her for action which ironically drives her desire for the stillness of the photograph. Her incessant movement throughout the play becomes the focal point of the actions of the people who are closest to her.

There are two other characters that are close to Sarah and James in the play. Richard and Mandy function as second and third foils to Sarah's point of view and enrich the conversation. The text of the play makes reference to a fraught and distant

relationship between Sarah and her parents—the war zone. She has no siblings or other close relatives and her closest personal relationships are with James and Richard. The three of them together are the family that Sarah has chosen over the course of her life.

#### Richard and Sarah

Richard represents the social implications of war through an economic lens. As Sarah's editor, he profits from her photographs as product. While he is concerned for her personal safety and would prefer for her to stop endangering herself, he reaps the benefits of the suffering she photographs through the products that she creates. When Sarah shows her photographs to him and Mandy in 1.2, his response is "You can't just sit on them, they're too good" (Margulies 28). He immediately sees them as a product that must be used. Unlike Mandy, who is concerned for the subjects of the photographs, Richard tells Sarah "Great shot" (Margulies 28) when he sees the photograph of a mother crying over her dying child. He is immediately aware of the artistic and economic value of the photographs because his job is to choose the photographs for the magazine that Sarah works for; hence, Richard has either answered the questions of his culpability through profit or ignores the questions. Margulies is not clear on which it is. What is obvious is that Richard assumes a more detached view toward the photographic subjects than the other characters do.

This detachment is due in part to his position of safety. He does not live or work near the subjects of Sarah's pictures. He has job security a productive and enlivening relationship with Mandy which has turned into a marriage and a family. During 2.1, Richard toasts James and Sarah at their wedding reception, "I've lived vicariously through you for years; I got to see the world without jet lag" (Margulies 41) which references the fact that Sarah and James have lived through sickness, parasites,



uncomfortable and dirty sleeping arrangements (Margulies 50) as well as explosions and the conflicts and sufferings that they report. Richard gets to see their photographs and articles—the products of their uncomfortable, intense work—and he makes his living through their addition to the magazine.

To say that Richard reaps the benefits is an over simplification in light of how much he cares for Sarah. As one of Sarah's oldest friends, he comes into the picture in 1.2 and is deeply concerned for her safety. Like James, he believes that Sarah may eventually settle in America and continue her job either as a teacher or a working photographer. His point of view, however, is complicated by the profitability of her photographs as product. Even though Richard does profit from Sarah's photographs, he fights with Sarah's desire to go back to war zones. In 1.2, and he lets her know that he believes her "calling" is actually a "death wish" (Margulies 23).

Richard enters in 1.2 as a good-humored man who is concerned for both James and Sarah. He shows his concern by asking how James' therapy is going, inquiring after Sarah's journey home, and fighting with Sarah to get her to take care of herself. He has a second motive for coming: introducing these dear friends to Mandy who he began dating because of Sarah's injury. Specifically he wants to share with them the change that she has created in his life—"like going from black and white to color" (Margulies 22). His concern for Sarah and James shows in his sharing, his willingness to argue with them so that they care for themselves and his desire and work to advance their careers.

When thinking about the four characters as a kind of family unit, Richard is a paternal figure. He is, of course, having a baby with Mandy and is excited to be father despite his age, but he is also a paternal mentor to both Sarah and James. Dialogue reveals that Richard got Sarah into the business and helped her become successful.

He also, according to both himself and Mandy, works hard to get James' article published even though Richard is a photo editor and not a written content editor. He is loyal to the characters in the play and consistently tries to help them find local jobs to keep them close together. By making Richard the most family-oriented character in the play, Margulies problematizes his point of view and forces the audience to understand him as more than a corporate "suit" that James describes in 2.1.

While Richard's attention is centered on his family, Sarah and James each have concern for the world at large which they display by compassion for suffering far and away. In Sarah's case, this often eclipses the compassion she might have for her immediate circle; even so, Sarah is sensitive to the repercussions of her actions and her ethical responsibility. Richard, on the other hand, displays compassion for his immediate friends but seems to ignore or avoid those outside his immediate circle. His concern appears as economic favors like finding them local assignments with the magazine and facilitating their book deal. When Sarah and James announce in 1.2 that they are going back overseas, Richard offers Sarah a job teaching at ICP for a year to keep her home. When Sarah announces that they will still be going back, Richard yells at them, "You're the Sid and Nancy of journalism! What more has to happen?" (Margulies 23). He exhibits more care for their safety than for the people they might be helping.

When Mandy argues with Sarah about the responsibility of a photographer toward his/her subject in 1.2, he makes only soothing noises and motions: "Honey . . ." "Oh, sweetie . . ." "Oh, baby . . ." (Margulies 29-30). He does not try to solve the argument; he tries to soothe the emotions of the woman in front of him. He repeats this with James regarding his article in 2.1. He explains his nuanced perspective more clearly by describing the different sections of the magazine, "fashion people, the style

people, . . . We're all fighting for the same goddamn space" (Margulies 46). Richard fights to get space for photographs and articles about the world's atrocities, but ultimately, as he notes, has little power since he's just a photo editor (Margulies 46). Spending two pages of rapid dialogue trying to make James feel better, Richard's primary argument is about the social and economic milieu of his workplace. He explains that they couldn't publish James' article for a variety of reasons including the fact that they wanted to cut it more and to keep the length they bumped it a week:

Then it had to get bumped three weeks, 'cause the week after that was a special issue, . . . [t]he annual Hollywood issue . . . the ad revenue for that one issue helps us stay afloat all year. But then we realized your story couldn't run the week after that . . . '[c]ause we'd already committed to a cover story on relief workers in Africa. (Margulies 45-46).

Altogether Richard navigates a host of economic, personnel, scheduling, and editorial issues to publish James' and Sarah's reports.

In light of Sarah's near-death experience, Richard is anxious for both James and Sarah to make a life in the safety of America. In 1.2, he asks, "How many close calls before you say, 'Fuck this, I'm staying home'?" (Margulies 23). While James tries to keep Sarah home by getting married, trying to start a family, and emphasizing comfort, Richard tries to provide her with lucrative job opportunities. He attempts to show Sarah that there are jobs available for her that will continue her mission without risking her life.

In James and Sarah, Richard's choices tend to be for the betterment of his family. In 1.2, he offers to help James publish his article, and even though he ends up unable to publish it, he has offered and done his best. He also suggests "[a] dual memoir: [Sarah's] pictures, Jamie's commentary" (Margulies 28) and facilitates its production and publication, encouraging James along the way: "Gave you plenty of time to get [the book] together. Well now I'm cracking the whip" (Margulies 42). He

tries to negotiate a teaching position for Sarah at ICP (Margulies 23). He offers Sarah a job photographing the daycare at a women's prison (Margulies 43). In the end, he supports Sarah's decision to continue working overseas and reminds her to "[s]end me great stuff" (Margulies 59). In each case, his actions better James' and Sarah's careers and continue their economic success.

The most central offer Richard brings them is the memoir with Sarah's photographs and James' text. Richard sees the book as a lucrative way to both advance their careers and help them process their trauma. Richard tells James, "Maybe you should; maybe it would be good for you," (Margulies 28) hinting at the therapeutic value of the book for both characters, while still making sure that their therapy is a public product produced close enough to Sarah's *Fifteen Minutes of Fame* to capitalize its value.

By contrasting Richard's personal care and economic support, to the passionate work that Sarah and James have performed and argue for, we are able to access multiple parts of the conversation about social responsibility. On the one hand, Richard loves his family and his two friends very much. Mandy describes him as "Probably the nicest man I've ever known. He's smart, and kind and caring. . . . All that matters—to me, anyway—is that he takes care of me. He makes me feel safe" (Margulies 25). She describes him as an informed and caring character, and his actions back that up. He tries to both get Sarah and James' work published and get them to stay home and work in New York. This care is complicated because he also appears more concerned for his immediate friends and family's welfare than for the welfare of people of the subjects of Sarah and James' reporting, and he gets paid whether or not the article or photograph goes to print. The audience has the

opportunity to both see through Richard's eyes and to see him in contrast to the active roles that Sarah will continue taking and that James has taken.

### Mandy and Sarah

Mandy is the fourth ingredient in Margulies' polylogue. While James and Richard understand and take Sarah's job for granted, Mandy is another matter. Initially, to avoid conflict, Richard only introduces her as his girlfriend, though in fact she is also his fiancé and pregnant with his child. Mandy, through her spunk and lack of professional knowledge of journalism or current events, challenges the legitimacy of Sarah's career and life choices both openly in dialogue and through her values and choices as a character.

The other three characters can be off-putting in their intelligentsia, but Mandy seems to draw the audience in with her relatable awkward streak and optimistic joy. Sarah refers to her as "embryonic" (Margulies 22) for her naïveté; however, Mandy displays serious passion, poignant observation skills and has the ability to stand up for herself. This is a part of her because she has a job that requires social skills instead of travel skills. In this way, she becomes a more familiar character and helps the audience into the conversation.

Margulies effectively juxtaposes Sarah and Mandy. This can be seen in the gloomy nature of Sarah versus the sunny nature of Mandy. For the first several scenes, Sarah is distanced, gruff, and, mocking, while Mandy, for example, brings balloons in 1.2 for Sarah that say Welcome Back and Get Well Soon just because, as she says, "they have this amazing way of cheering people up" (Margulies 16). In their first conversation, we see that Mandy is not only young but also uncertain of words like "sarcophagi" and "pro bono" (Margulies 18). Sarah regards this with contempt calling her "darling," a "changeling," and "embryonic" (Margulies 21). She even goes so far as

to claim that Richard is not dating her: “[W]ho are you kidding? You’re screwing this girl!” (Margulies 21). As James and Sarah’s apartment is very small, it is very likely that Mandy heard the comments. To smooth over the awkwardness, she deftly directs the two men out of the room with a request for ice cream. While Mandy’s knowledge and experience are low, her emotional intelligence is very high. She navigates a conversation with Sarah and encourages her to open up about what happened. We get to see just how kind and careful Mandy is in her own right. She tells Sarah, “Look. I know I have a lot to learn . . . I know that. I’m totally provincial. My world is like this big. (She makes a small globe with her hands.) And yours is like . . . (She enlarges her imaginary globe)” (Margulies 25). Mandy is self-aware and her honest discussion of her relationship to Richard wins over Sarah and melts away her ire.

After the men return with the ice cream, Mandy asks to see Sarah’s pictures. Upon viewing an image of a mother and the mother’s burned, dying child, another difference between the women becomes apparent. Mandy responds immediately to the image. She is very connected to it and feels both the emotion of the mother in the photo and the implicit culpability of Sarah having taken the photograph. Mandy argues, “But how could you just stand there?! . . . You could have been helping them” (Margulies 29). By this Mandy means that Sarah could have helped them instead of taking their picture which Sarah counters stating she is helping them by taking their picture. Whereas Mandy is free to feel the emotion associated with the event captured in Sarah’s photograph, Sarah “must” disconnect from her emotions to do the job she is passionate about. Sarah explains to Mandy, “I wish I could cry like that. But I can’t; I can’t let it get to me. If I let it get to me, . . . [h]ow could I do my job?” (Margulies 30). Their different roles help to expose the weaknesses in each other: Sarah helps to show

how naïve and uninformed Mandy is while Mandy exposes the lack of impact that Sarah's work has on society at large.

In this conversation at the end of 1.2, Mandy sparks an intense discussion about the value of Sarah's role as photographer or witness to foreign suffering. While Sarah was viciously joking about the value of Mandy's event planning job earlier in the scene by comparing it to her own job— "I guess you can say I'm into events, too . . . [w]ars, famines, genocides" (Margulies 19)—it is Mandy who most directly challenges the value of witnessing suffering. By challenging Sarah for photographing suffering without helping to end it directly, Mandy points a finger of shame at Sarah for reproducing someone else's suffering for magazines. She accuses Sarah of not helping the child who died moments after the photograph was taken. Susan Sontag articulates the argument in *Regarding the Pain of Others*:

Perhaps the only people with the right to look at images of suffering of this extreme order are those who could do something to alleviate it—say, the surgeons at the military hospital where the photograph was taken—or those who could learn from it. The rest of us are voyeurs, whether or not we mean to be. (42)

Sontag points out that the ethical response to pain is to help alleviate it which begs the question: what is the value of looking at or capturing images of pain instead of alleviating it or showing it to people who cannot alleviate it? Sarah manages to combat Mandy steadily in this argument as Mandy's close connection to the subject of the photograph has caused an extreme emotional response brought on by the fact Mandy is pregnant and acutely aware that she also is a mother whose child could die. As Sarah explains, she was helping: "by gathering evidence. To show the world. If it weren't for people like me, . . . the ones with the cameras, . . . [w]ho would know? Who would care?" (Margulies 29). Mandy becomes more and more distressed until she begins to cry and ends the scene. Sarah explains her job to Mandy in rational terms and uses detached language: "gather evidence" "record life" "capture truth" (Margulies

30). She ends by maintaining that she can't cry as she must remain disconnected in order to do her job effectively.

Sarah feels keenly that the spectator, herself included, has a "responsibility toward what is visible" (Azoulay 130). She is rational and confident in her argument with Mandy though she acknowledges that she has seen "what bravery looks like" and knows that she is not brave for her injury. Nonetheless, in 2.2 Sarah describes having a flashback to photographing women after a market bomb which killed children. The fears that she had during the event show that Mandy's argument is one that haunts her. Sarah describes a woman in the market whose clothes were burned and melted onto her skin trying to wave her off and stop her from photographing the incident. Sarah felt "like some kind of ghoul with a camera shooting away" (Margulies 50). Margulies cleverly reveals the depth of Sarah's commitment and the nuance of her response to her work throughout the length of the play. Sarah's choice to separate from James stems from feeling that she cannot stop her work to live at home and raise a family. To her, the mission that she feels in response to war is more important than a traditional sense of home and comfort.

Sarah is responding to what Karl Marlantes calls the hole of trivia: a sense that "nothing, absolutely nothing, could stack up against the intensity of war and war's friendships" (204). After the extreme purpose of war, things at home seem worthless because they don't carry the life and death meaning or weight like wars. For Sarah, the purpose of what she does is still incredibly strong, so things like being married, going on play dates, being stylish (like Mandy), sitting still, and writing books about fake horror instead of real horror all become trivial.

During their final fight in 2.3, Sarah accuses James of wanting to be married to "a Mandy," instead of wanting to be married to Sarah. She aligns Mandy with things



that she can't do or doesn't want to do because Mandy is the queen of these things. Sarah describes these things she is not willing to give as "pushing a stroller and going to play dates," "a playmate," "[s]omeone young, who adores you, and will give you all the babies you want" (Margulies 55). These are categories, features, and activities that Sarah associates with Mandy, and Sarah highlights these differences as things that James wants. They are activities that Sarah associates with building a home in the way that James has laid out: marriage and children.

In the play, Mandy and Richard are one of two examples of homebuilding to which James and Sarah respond. The first is Sarah's parents whose relationship, Sarah tells Mandy, was like war on a smaller scale (Margulies 24). In 1.3 when he asks her to marry him, James tells Sarah. "We are not your parents" (Margulies 32). The "happy marriage and kids" relationship example that James and Sarah draw on is Richard and Mandy. When James tells Sarah that Richard and Mandy are getting married and having a baby, Sarah's response is "Oh, my God. Poor Richard," to which James replies, "When he told me . . . (A beat.) I was jealous" (Margulies 31). James wants to get married and have children while Sarah does not see that as either a happy or a helpful addition to their life.

While Mandy is naïve, she represents a socially adept and emotionally joyful alternative view of marriage and home that challenges Sarah's notion of what home could be. For Sarah, home is war both from her childhood (Margulies 24) and in terms of her profession which keeps her living in war zones for most of the year. James describes motherhood as Mandy's calling (Margulies 60), and in a conversation with Mandy, Sarah reveals that she sees herself as the "mother" of her photographs (Margulies 25). War is the home that Sarah has built and where she finds meaning

while Mandy creates home with Richard and their child who appears in the final scene of the play, 2.4.

In 2.4, Mandy reports that Sarah makes her feel like “there’s something wrong with me, like I must not be a serious woman, because I want to stay home and raise my child” (Margulies 59). Sarah has been unaware that she makes Mandy feel incompetent. Mandy’s astute observation points to her unique social skill set in this group. Mandy is knowledgeable, assertive, and clearly adept at reading social cues and smoothing social situations. In 1.2, Mandy reads the room clearly, and after retreating to the bathroom, she returns and asks Richard and James to get them some ice cream. The men need to leave the apartment to accomplish the task which gives Mandy time to have a compassionate and bold heart to heart with Sarah. It is a particularly adept social move. Another moment of social skill, early in the play shows Mandy excitedly suggesting that Sarah and she have babies together. Sarah insists that she doesn’t even believe she can have children, and rather than pushing the idea, Mandy drops the subject. Once Mandy and Richard’s baby is born, Mandy grows in confidence. While Sarah consistently eschews even the idea of motherhood, Mandy expresses comfort. She says, “You don’t know, you can’t know what it’s like till it’s your child you’re holding” (Margulies 58). While Mandy is unsure what to do about the atrocities she has seen in Sarah’s pictures, she is sure of what to do with the other characters and with the baby. Sarah, as Margulies writes, “([a]dmires the baby as if for the first time and is moved. A beat.) She’s beautiful” (Margulies 59). The juxtaposition of their roles as mother of photographs and mother of a child complicates the idea that life outside the war zone is trivial and unimportant. Seeing these two women in polylogue complicates both Sarah’s vision that war is the locus of purpose and Mandy’s vision that she can’t do anything.

Mandy's most significant alignment is with the audience. In a pivotal moment in 2.1, while Richard and James are reaching the climax of the argument, Mandy jumps in and asks:

But what am I supposed to do with this information? Me: An ordinary person. It's not like I can do anything. Besides feel bad, turn the page, and thank God I was born in the half of the world where people have food to eat and don't go around hacking each other to death. (Margulies 47)

Her question is essential to the play. While these characters live out a domestic drama—love, marriage, divorce—in the name of helping the world at large, Mandy puts her finger on the largest problem for the American audience posed by war and by the show. What is the ordinary person to do, if anything?

#### Conclusion

By using role conflicts based on their different views, Margulies draws the audience's attention to think about the complexity of home in the context of foreign war. Sarah remains committed to her active duty in conflict zones while James chooses to make and foster a home in the United States as a gesture of resistance. Richard continues to provide platforms for Sarah to broadcast her images while Mandy commits to fostering a brand-new life and sends pictures to Sarah to bolster Sarah's spirits as it represents the hope of new life. The frame of polylogue as a literary device has allowed me to turn each character's action into a line of argument in a polylogue. The benefit of this exists within its multiplicity. Where dialogue as a frame sets up a false binary, polylogue adds complexity by including more lines of argument. In most reintegration narratives, the dialogue between the soldier as physical war and the family as physical home can present a similar false binary. But in *Time Stands Still*, the conflict between James' desire to stay home and Sarah's desire to go back to war is expanded with Richard and Mandy's actions. By reframing my analysis as polylogue, the multiplicity of home and war issues becomes accessible to my

discussion which means that each character represents not only a distinct action in the play but also a distinct argument about the central topics.

The characters of this play are complicated and relatable, and this helps the audience to identify and wrestle with the individual views each character acts out. By limiting the number of characters to four, Margulies also has the opportunity to develop each character into an individual and distinctive view that resists stereotyping.

The final scene of the play shows that, despite conflicting actions, these characters and their trajectories are able to coexist. They create a kind of synthesis and balance in the final scene which provides a hopeful resolution that values the individual characters. I believe that complicated dramas can be analyzed literarily using this principle in order to dispense with the false, and often arbitrary, binaries that are so easily introduced via analysis. Polylogue does have a limit in regard to how many characters can be considered in the discussion. When viewing the story as a polylogue, more voices are allowed a place at the table which creates room in our narrative analysis for many views that stand side-by-side. That being said, the more voices present in the dramatic action of the play, the more difficult it is to make each voice distinct. I think that four characters worked extremely well. Five might start to strain the metaphoric value of the polylogue as side characters begin to be painted more broadly and some of the specificity that makes *Time Stands Still* such a strong example for this kind of analytic frame would be lost.

The frame of polylogue was also helpful as I began to think about producing the play as I could think of the audience as part of the conversation. Martin Esslin argues that drama requires the audience members to make up their own minds by making them a spectator to action (*Anatomy of Drama* 18). While I have mostly employed polylogue as a literary tool, I believe it also makes room for the audience to

become part of the discussion when we are specifically applying it to a play. As Esslin notes, the audience is in the same position as the listening character for each line of dialogue. In other words, the audience sees what the characters see. Thus, by situating the audience as members of the polylogue, the term could potentially be used to frame the entire theatrical experience. I make no such argument here, but the possibilities of the frame are exciting. When the audience joins the conversation, their interpretation helps them challenge their own views about what home in America is when the veterans—civilian and military—challenge us with the context of war.

## INTERCHAPTER TIME STANDS STILL IN PERFORMANCE

In this interchapter, I share both the production narrative of directing *Time Stands Still* for Wayne State Universities PhD Directing Series and describe the ways that producing the play furthered my understanding of the script. My first interaction with the play was at its production at the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago in March 2012. I was deeply moved by this production and felt that there was more to be explored. While producing this play myself, I had three significant questions that drove my desire to see this play come alive on my stage. The first question was one of design. I wanted to know what other, less literal design choices could arise from the play's content. The section on design walks through what kind of ideas were both played with and implemented by myself and my production team. Second, I wanted to know what knowledge arises about the characters from working with actors. The section on acting discusses the methods of exploration and the results of those methods with my actors. Finally, I wanted a chance to see what reactions an audience would have to the artistic production resulting from my analysis of the play. I conducted two separate talkbacks: a larger audience in a post-show talkback and a small selected group of respondents. This section chronicles those two selections. This interchapter is divided into sections on design, acting, and audience and I share my production narrative and reflections on the aforementioned questions.

I submitted my proposal to direct this show in March 2012 and was delighted when I was approved to direct it in the PhD Director's Series<sup>30</sup> in the Studio Theatre for the 2013 season. The Director's Series included a two-week run in the Studio Theater and six weeks of rehearsal with a student cast and crew. The beginning of the

<sup>30</sup> The PhD Director's Series was part of the course catalogue of required work for PhD students when I entered the program at Wayne State University in 2011. Each PhD student was required to direct one show per season during his or her three years of course work.

year included a series production meeting to which we brought a short document detailing our basic needs for the show (cast, design, scripts) and any other special requirements (i.e. guns or specific character needs etc.). After that meeting, I met with my directing advisor, James Thomas, every other week to discuss my analysis of the show as well as my work with the production team and the actors in rehearsal. The work that I did for this production included active analysis, production meetings, rehearsals, and journal reflection.

This narrative presents my first attempts at and explorations of the production process as a locus of research. It also represents the beginning of the shift in my research from primarily literary to equally production oriented. As such, it is important to explore the processes I went through during the work, and I have left the narrative primarily in chronological order by section to reflect the evolution of my ideas as I examined them. The latter two plays in this study were produced during and through their literary analysis period. Because the production research of these plays was concurrent with the literary research on those two pieces, I have described and reflected on them without interchapters.

## Design

As I discussed in Chapter 2, the script for *Time Stands Still* is firmly realistic and includes no surreal elements. The set of the play that is described in the stage directions is a place that might actually exist in Brooklyn, New York. To understand my desire to explore design choices, it is important to know a couple things about me. First, my background of practical theatrical work is largely in acting and writing. Directing this play meant that I had a direct impact on the design, and I was curious about the ways that focusing on those elements would impact the design. The second important thing to know is that I was introduced to the play when I saw the Steppenwolf

production in Chicago. Although not all of Steppenwolf's plays are realistic, the design of this play closely followed the realistic style described in the script which meant that this production directly followed the company's mission statement to "tell stories about how we live now" (Steppenwolf "About Us"). Their stage space represented, in every detail, Sarah and James' loft apartment as presented in the script. There were pipes in the ceilings, books on the shelves, a working refrigerator light, and running water in the faucets and toilet. The cast also contained age and type appropriate actors. The production values were very high and the show itself was compelling.

While realism is a well-established theatrical style in the United States, it can neglect the creative potential of the reflexive theatrical space which is a potential that other styles can maximize. When the audience and performers suspend disbelief, non-realistic styles allow for a denser visual onstage tapestry. In preparation for this production, I began to perform active analysis on the play and wondered if I could use non-realism to intensify the tapestry of images. What non-realistic design elements might arise from the seed and theme of the play and how might those elements impact reflexive space created by the performed narrative?

I wanted to explore the themes of this play in the visual and auditory mise-en-scene. For example, I wondered if Sarah and James' disagreement over what their home should be like could be developed in the set through both its structure and with set dressing during the dramatic time on stage which would allow the visualization of the characters negotiation of home. I also wanted to play with representing the home and war locations through the sound design of the show. Instead of just using songs to cover scene changes, I thought that the iconic sounds of home and war could give an auditory image. Additionally, photography is discussed so richly in the play that I wanted to somehow develop a visual framing within the design. While realism can also



be a rich communicator of ideas, non-realistic ideas interested me far more, and I spent several months on active analysis before meeting with my production team.

This team included me, five undergraduate students and a graduate publicity manager. Cassandra Maniak was my stage manager. She was young but assertive and very excited to be working on the project. Lois Bendler was my scenic designer. She was a returning student in her 80's who was unafraid to bring ideas to the table and work through problems. Amy Schneider was my lighting designer and, as an upper-classmen, was experienced and hungry to try new things. Michael Hallberg, a freshman, designed sound for my show and was very excited about the idea of a soundscape rather than just music. Melissa Hall designed costumes for the show and was tireless when hunting things down and orchestrating the visual look of each character. Lastly, Felix Le was my graduate student publicity manager and was thorough and flexible with my feedback.

I was very lucky with my production team as they were pro-active and engaged designers. This is in contrast to experiences I have had with student designers who were hesitant and brought little to the table. When I began to approach my team about the surreal design track I wanted to take, I also approached them to ask if there was something that they wanted to try to do as well. Said in another way, I offered them the ideas that I had been playing with and then invited theirs. In discussions with Michael Hallberg, I asked what he was interested in and he immediately said that he wanted to build a "soundscape." He was drawn to arranging a series of sounds rather than just music to fill empty space. I asked him about the continuum between war and home and whether or not that continuum could be the soundscape for this piece. He told me he would find some sounds and play around with them. When I asked Amy Schneider what she was interested in for the play, she immediately asked if we could

work a cyclorama into the set so that she could use it for light painting. I liked the idea, partly because it had never been done in the studio before and partly because of the surreal aspect of the colors being visible in the space. The Steppenwolf production had only naturalistic lighting and very little mood lighting. I was curious how this could influence the piece especially since lighting was not an area I had much experience in. I asked Lois what she was interested in and she said the play, so we discussed the play specifically as a physical space that represented an emotional experience. Margulies describes the set this way:

A loft in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The present. The space is raw, unfinished, resourcefully furnished, with nothing slick about it. Its décor reveals a good eye, wide travels, and limited budget. Shelves are crammed with books; foreign graphics, postcards and pictures are push-pinned to the walls. Two bicycles may be stowed. The space is open: cooking, dining, living, sleeping, working; a bathroom and the front door. When the play begins, the house-keeping is wanting; someone left in a hurry. (5)

My sense was that Sarah and James' apartment is a location with two discordant identities in conflict which was a reflection of the characters. The loft that Margulies describes fulfills the use and identity that Sarah and James had for it before they were injured: the use and identity that Sarah still wants. The loft described is a launch pad or retreat from which to deploy into the field and is unfinished because Sarah and James have had no time for projects. It is filled with books and paraphernalia from their travels and thus functions as a storage place for things they cannot carry with them but which are, nonetheless, of value and related to their work. The space is open with everything easily accessible and little privacy making it efficient rather than comfortable. I do not remember who first said the word, but Lois latched onto identifying their home as a nest. I loved the term because it clearly represented the two different views: Sarah's launchpad vs James' cozy home. Like a bird, Sarah

continues to treat the loft apartment as a nest where she can recuperate and store the non-mobile objects of her life.

I admitted to Lois that I wasn't sure what this might look like especially since I had the very realistic looking loft with its high ceilings and pipes, Steppenwolf's image, in my head. I asked Lois what she thought, and she started to sketch a frame for the back wall of the loft which left it exposed to the world. I loved this. Lois also disclosed that she also had another idea that would make the first idea difficult: she was interested in showing Sarah's identity as a photographer by using the back wall of the apartment as a collage of images of conflict and attaching the photographs to the wall frames.

I brought up the continuum between war and home and wondered if there was a way to get that continuum as part of the photography. Lois suggested putting images of war that Sarah could have taken and images of home. I loved this too and suggested that we extend this selection of photographs along the wall of the studio theatre and into the lobby to include or invite the audience into the performance. This was important to me, and I explained that I wanted this continuum to include the audience. Extending it to the lobby offered a chance to draw the audience into the piece by taking them from home, in the lobby, to conflict in the space of the performance. Lois suggested that we use photos of the actors in the mix of photographs in the lobby. I was drawn strongly to this idea as I felt like it would allow us to blur the lines between home and war as well as audience and performance within the set. Lois stated that she would find the photos and organize them.

Lois and I had a couple meetings, but I never had any problems with her image selection. She had an excellent eye even though it was extremely difficult to locate images of conflicts that we could use. We tried to use public domain in order to avoid

the extra time commitment of seeking rights release.<sup>31</sup> This caused difficulties because there are not many contemporary combat photographs in the public domain; in spite of this, Lois persisted and was able to collect several photographs to put on the wall. When Lois arranged the images themselves, conflict and war time images went onstage, and, in order to represent the bleed-through of war and home, she continued the collage by moving the photographs along the wall offstage and into the lobby. As the photos moved into the lobby, the students involved in the production and other images of home were added until the lobby was just images of home and families.

It was important to me to invite the audience into this discussion through the *mise-en-scene*. By starting the photographs in the lobby with images of the performers and their families, the first thing the audience saw was familiar images of home and family. The first images they saw of the performers were of them as themselves and as individuals with families. Thus, the continuum which led into the play space and onto the stage functioned as a trail connecting the audience to the production. They followed that trail in gradually getting more images of conflict until they reached the stage where the context of war colored home. By leading the audience to war images, I hoped, to connect the audience's home to war—. I also hoped to connect the fictional story to images of real conflict and real families. You can see the photos continuing off the set here:

Fig. 1. Time Stands Still at WSU

While we focused on the non-realistic and symbolic elements of the play, there were also some realistic elements that were required by the script. We agreed that including those elements would not detract from the slightly surreal elements we had

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<sup>31</sup> In retrospect, I wish that I had reached out to some female photographers such as Lynsey Addario who wrote a book about her experiences photographing in Iraq where she was kidnapped twice. It could have been an incredible addition both to the production, to myself, to my research, and to the students.

in the set. We included kitchen implements, such as coffee making equipment and a refrigerator, which were necessary according to the stage directions from the play. At the top of the stage was the back wall of the apartment, but, instead of covering the flats to complete the walls, we just built the frame of the wall. This frame made the cyclorama (hereafter referred to as cyc) visible. During the play, we lit the cyc with washes of colored light that peaked through the frame to add emotion during the scenes to highlight moments and show the world of the loft. The photographs on the walls as well as the open walls themselves created a space open to the influence of the things James and Sarah experienced before the start of the play.

Lois first brought a piece of paper with the studio stage sketched out and a bunch of cut outs of furniture, walls and other pieces to move around, and we looked at several configurations which was really fun. We discussed whether we needed or even had space for an actual bed and would a couch be needed. The studio stage really wasn't big enough for both so we looked at getting rid the bed even though we needed it textually. After Lois told me she was looking at what was in stock, I remembered that my roommates and I had an extra futon which excited me as I realized the futon could both double as a couch and represent space that was less comfortable and homey and built for crashing and leaving. Lois and I played with the cut outs and experimented with different ground plans. After we were finished, Lois left me the piece of paper and cut outs and told me to let her know which ground plan I liked the best. At my next meeting with Dr. Thomas, we talked about ground plans and I took the paper and cut outs with me.

I have an excited entry about this meeting in my journal. Dr. Thomas pointed out that there are usually two groups of furniture which immediately led me to the image the two characters arguing about the purpose of the space. These two furniture

groups, I wrote, would be “Sarah’s space + James’ space.” I drew the ground plan with two large windows on the edges of the down stage right corner with a tree next to them and a little rook drawn off the stage left side. I wrote:

“[the stage right] space is home as nest. We fly from it and return to recoup, rest up, process. It’s cozy, it’s mobile, it’s utilitarian, but ultimately (replaceable?) less important as a thing than as its function. You can’t raise babies in a loft. / (the stage left) space is the castle, where work and play come together and the space has its own permanence. It defines the people living in it instead of being defined by them.”

This sense of a bifurcated living space affected the ground plan. The futon (as mobile and replaceable) and the trunk (as a coffee table and storage) lived stage right with pillows and blankets to form the nest. The table (as a more permanent fixture with multiple structure uses) was on stage left and represented a work and necessities of life location. Looking back, I wish that I had thought to switch those sides as putting the bed next to the stage left bathroom door and the table between Sarah and the door sets up a dynamic of James standing between her and exiting the apartment for her job. It also gives more weight to Sarah’s line “My world is here to the bathroom” since that would no longer cover the whole apartment as it did in the ground plan from the production.

In addition to the two groups of furniture, Lois suggested that James could use blankets and throw pillows to add comfort and hominess to the whole loft. If the aesthetic Sarah added was that the loft was not a place to live long term, James could fight that by trying to make the loft a cozier place with objects. I loved this because it suggested that with active blocking choices, the actors could align with their less tangible actions; for example, Sarah could interact with the pillows physically in ways that mirrored or foreshadowed ways that she would interact with James while James, who tries to create a home by marrying Sarah and planning for babies, could actively make the space more suitable for those activities. With this in mind, I gave Lois an

unequivocal green light to choose blankets and throw pillows for James to move around the space to create a homier feel throughout the play.

Before the play begins, James' character has begun to see the loft as a potential site to build a home and create something more comfortable and permanent. He describes this shift to Sarah in 2.2. Whether or not James wants to move to pursue the making of home is never discussed, and I told Lois that it was important to me that the space physically reflected James' desire for comfort and homemaking which was seen as a sharp contrast with Sarah's desire for a sparser space. Lois decided that modern styled furniture and rugs with clean sharp lines and geometric patterns would suggest their foreign work and would have the benefit of resisting comfort.

Fig. 2. The set from Time Stands Still at WSU

Fig. 3. The scenic elements Time Stands Still at WSU

In the above photo, you can see the ground plan I used. To choose specific set pieces, Lois walked through stock and pulled items she believed could work in our space, and I came in one day to look at the individual pieces. There were a couple tables and chairs with less severe angles or colors. But the chairs pictured in Fig. 2 and Fig. 3. were mostly metal bars and the table was square with sharp edges and more bars for legs. I requested furniture with sharper edges in this particular style in order to contrast with the pillows and blankets that had been chosen. Lois brought the other pieces down and we walked through them together. The rug beneath the table was chosen because it was a firm and not soft. The small downstage table was a rectangle with sharp edges as well which fit nicely into what I wanted for the stage. The second rug on the stage right side, which you can see the corner of in the photo, was also a rectangle.

I requested that part of the set be properties that could be moved by the actors so that James and Sarah could use pieces of the comfortable house items as stage

business in their negotiation of the home space; hence, Lois brought the items seen in the picture. As can be seen, a blanket is on the back of the futon and more soft items can be found in the gym bag standing on the table. These items help the story as James tries to introduce homey touches and Sarah, rejects them, moving them aside and creating a physical action that is both a symbolic representation of their differing attitudes and views of the space as well as their relational conflicts.

There was only one element of the set that I really pushed for against Lois's advice. When it came to constructing the walls of the apartment, I really wanted a physical representation of the windows of the loft to be somewhere down stage. I had talked with my directing advisor, James Thomas, about the frame of Sarah's camera, and the idea of having a window that Sarah could look out at the end of the show was important to me. Initially, I suggested that the window have Plexiglas or something similar that looked like actual window panes. Lois was aghast. Because of the thrust stage with audience on three flat sides, she told me that sightlines would make this extremely difficult. I had to decide whether I wanted the audience to see the performers. I scaled back and decided that maybe there did not need to be anything in the frames. Having a large window frame across the front of the stage or even several medium ones connected in a descending patten from stage right to stage left would be fine. Lois still advised against my idea and reiterated that the sightlines would be disrupted by something on any side of the stage.

We continued to argue over this throughout the production process. I would suggest something a little less intrusive but still big and she would show where it was still creating visual problems. She brought different sketches of different windows. Finally, Lois suggested that we move the window to a corner frame downstage right.



It was important for me to reflect the sense of Sarah and James' space as one with a window looking onto a bigger world. Lois believed that putting things between the audience and the performers would inhibit that sense. I have no recollection about having a clear idea at the time of why this window frame was so important intellectually but recall a deep sense of its aesthetic rightness. A large part of the disagreement between Lois and me probably lay in the fact that I could not explain why this set piece was so important. I liked it, and in my mind, it fit. In retrospect, I can say that the conversation between home as a comfortable safe space and home as an open launch pad is embedded in the downstage window. The loft apartment needed something to balance the opening we had created with the back wall and photos otherwise there would be no sense of the enclosed comfort that James wanted to make. I think having this corner window frame suggested a closed space on the downstage side of the set. The frame back wall and photographs reaching out to the lobby tried to dispel that sense, and it was important that both ideas were represented physically. This created visual balance in the mise-en-scene between the stark furniture and the soft throw pillows and blankets. In the photo above, you can see the window set piece in the far down right corner of the stage. Below, you get a closer look as James sits on a chest just inside the corner.

Fig. 4. James and the downstage window

Because of the cyclorama that my lighting designer, Amy, devised upstage, I believed we needed the downstage piece to anchor the set. In talks with Amy, she told me that she wanted to highlight and reflect the emotional landscape of the play, specifically Sarah's, using the colors achieved with a cyc (See the cyc upstage in figure 4). The effect was photographs arranged vertically and suspended in front of a colorful cyc that reflected the emotional tone of the scene. The visual image of the photographs

against the wall of changing color symbolized the larger changing context of world events within which these characters are playing out their drama. One of the strengths of this text is, as Margulies pointed out, that it is a personal drama with higher stakes of war and international conflict (Ramchandani). We were able to make war part of the backdrop of the play visually; thus, the downstage window did not end up being a window onto a faraway war. Instead, it was part of the bulwark that James wanted to keep between him, Sarah, and the conflict. The window represented comfort, privacy, and a life away from the conflict.

Sound design was another element that contributed to the context of the characters' conflicts. My sound designer, freshman Michael Hallberg, was both talented and interested in the soundscape of the world of these characters. We had several conversations about what a soundscape might mean in contrast to a sound track. Michael explained that a sound track would generally be the list of songs played between scenes as well as at the top and bottom of the show. This kind of a selection might include music that would be thematic in terms of content or add to the mood of a given moment. As an alternative to this, Michael proposed creating a soundscape by putting together different sound effects. These soundscapes would take the place of a scene-transition song in order to help move the story. In my mind this was like an aural painting or map. I was immediately excited by the idea, and we began to brainstorm about what kinds of movements that would happen between scenes.

Michael and I discussed the way that the character's bridged Home and War as locations. He was still interested in pre-show music and in creating a playlist, so he took the concept of home and created a Pandora station that would play songs about home. He agreed to research possible song choices found on that channel and send me song titles to approve. The song that stood out to me the most was "Home" by

Phillip Phillips, so Michael created another Pandora station and began to refine his search. I made several journal entries of song titles that he suggested and from this list, I made decisions about what would be used in the play.

While discussing pre-show music, we also discussed the pre-show announcement that would announce the play and give the audience general safety information. I was concerned about this announcement because we were building a soundscape and I felt like this generic set of information would disrupt that unique creation. Michael asked if the announcement could be made show specific, and I had an epiphany. We could use Tariq, Sarah and the IED explosion moment to transition the audience from the real world to the world of the play. Using this scenario, I would write a brief text for Sarah and Tariq that covered relevant material and have the actors perform it. Michael would meld this performance with sound effects from the car and the explosion. I thought the idea was ingenious as it gave me the opportunity to create a space for Tariq, the fixer, to have a moment in the play. This did mean, however, that I needed another actor. Luckily, we had an actor in the department, Laith Salim, who was happy to record the section with Sydney Machesky, our Sarah. The following is the text that I wrote:

Tariq: Welcome to the Studio Theatre and our Performance of Donald Margulies's Time Stands Still.

(she laughs and we hear the sound of a camera taking photographs, it stops)

Sarah: Tariq! Give me back my panoramic! (she laughs)

Tariq: The taking of photographs and the use of recording devices is strictly prohibited.

Sarah: Sorry.

Tariq: Also remember and turn off your Cell phones and all noise-making devices that might distract the actors.

(sound of a phone powering down)

Tariq: There will be sound effects of gunfire and explosions as well as lighting changes. So please look around and notice your exits in case you need to leave during the performance for any reason. In case of emergency, instructions will be providence (sic).

Sarah: Provided?

Tariq: Thank you. Instructions will be provided. Enjoy our production of Time Stands Still.  
(explosion)

I chose to include her camera and mistakes in language because they are referenced in the text of the play. I chose to have Tariq deliver the information since one of his tasks as fixer was guide. He, presumably, would have told Sarah when it was appropriate to take photos or make phone calls and what her exit options would be. I also chose to include a playful manner between them and included the laughter and language correction for two reasons: first because they were long-term friends who had recently become lovers, and second, because it is a side of Sarah that we rarely see in the play itself. This background contrasts sharply with the explosion. By making the audience's first encounter with a laughing and happy Sarah, they have some context for her gruff and pained arrival in 1.1. The sound of the explosion thus frames the first scene in which James brings Sarah home.

During tech week, Michael and I worked the explosion several times. Specifically, we asked what the correct volume for the explosion was. With the speakers that we had—one on either side of the audience—we could make the explosion sound significant; nevertheless, at higher volume levels, it began to hurt. I took into consideration anyone in the audience who might have been triggered by the sound but still wanted the explosion to be impactful. I wanted the audience to be as surprised and frightened as James is at the top of the show since he was so close to losing Sarah and believed that the jolt would help bring the audience into the middle of the story instead of just the beginning. I used myself as a guinea pig and sat next to the speakers at decibel levels that probably weren't particularly safe. While Michael changed volumes. I moved around the space to test the different experiences from different audience seats and finally settled with a level seemed perfect. This particular

explosion sound was jarring and then faded into a ringing that felt difficult to get rid of; hence the sound effect had to be adjusted to begin softly and gradually get a little louder before fading away. Once we found the right volume, Michael adjusted the effect. It was perfect.

When we met to discuss the scene transitions, Michael suggested that he could take war sounds and merge them with city and home sounds. I enthusiastically agreed to this suggestion. We mapped the movement from scene to scene and discussed whether the transition moved them closer to home or closer to war. This discussion led to scene transition sound compilations which helped to communicate the progression of the story as well as juxtapose sounds of war and home which gave the audiences another sensory experience. Since theatre is visual, physical, and aural, these transitions added a richness and density to the aural experience. By using sounds like gunfire and a baby's laughter, places and emotions could be evoked between the scenes and stories could be expanded through the progression of the sounds.

An example of this comes between 1.2 and 1.3, the second transition, and was a transition from Sarah and Mandy's argument about capturing the horrors of war to James announcing Mandy and Richard's engagement and pregnancy before he proposes to Sarah himself. Since we had opened the show with an explosion, Michael and I treated this transition as a step away from war and towards home. The sound cues used were less intense than the explosion—gunfire, air raid sirens, and small explosions—that gradually transitioned into sounds of home—city sidewalks, laughter, and babies. Adding the soundscape allowed us to foreshadow the proposal and Sarah's acceptance and added depth while preparing the audience without giving a big tip-off. We treated the play like a mirror because the play begins with war, goes

home, and ends on the way back to war. The first act shows James and Sarah moving toward building a home and the second act shows them moving away from that home. We used the cues between scenes to show this progression. Assuming a forward progression through time, we began the transitional cue between 1.1 and 1.2 with gunshots, helicopters, and explosions then progressed to sounds of city streets, car honks, and children laughing. On the other end of the play, we reversed that progression from city sounds to the gunshots mixed with camera clicks. By reversing the order, we foreshadowed the end of the play in which Sarah once again deploys.

These transitions provided a rich guide through the scene changes that was more creatively rewarding and interesting, at least for the designer and the director, than musical transitions. The work that Michael and I did was the most rewarding sound design I have ever worked on. By framing the design as a soundscape which could, through choice of sounds and progression, help tell the story through aural expression, I found that the time—rather than simply waiting for the actors to move themselves, change costumes, or move props between scenes—became active. Instead of waiting during scene changes, these interludes were something to pay attention to since they commented on and developed the action of the play.

The final moment in the play is one in which Sarah, following James' departure, takes out her camera and raises it to take a photograph before the lights go out on her. Michael and I decided to add a song into the scene after Sarah closes the door. We used a song by the Indie rock band Fun called "Carry On," the lyrics and music of which are a contemporary youth ballad. It begins with a warm guitar chord and major piano fifths then builds with power to the conclusion "Carry on, Carry on." The lyrics that we started from James' final exit to our black out were the following:

"Well I woke up to the sound of silence  
And cries were cutting like knives in a fistfight

And I found you with a bottle of wine  
 Your head in the curtains  
 And heart like the Fourth of July

You swore and said,  
 "We are not,  
 We are not shining stars."  
 This I know,  
 I never said we are

Though I've never been through hell like that  
 I've closed enough windows to know you can never look back

If you're lost and alone  
 Or you're sinking like a stone.  
 Carry on.  
 May your past be the sound  
 Of your feet upon the ground.  
 Carry on.

Carry on, carry on" (fun. "Carry On")

While the song in its entirety is a youth anthem about partying in a city, there were several things in this song, especially in the beginning lyrics, that seemed appropriate for the end of the play. The initial image of waking to silence and screams as well as the image of a partner with a bottle of wine seemed to call back both the characters' time at war as well as their conversation about "Days of Wine and Roses." The question of identity is also important because Sarah and James disagree on the essential quality of their roles as combat reporters. At the end of the play, both characters have decided to carry on with their chosen paths and wish each other well.

For the most part, costume design was carried out by my designer; hence, it was the mise-en-scene element in which I was the least active. At our first meeting, the designer, second year undergraduate Melissa Hall, and I discussed a continuum of changes between characters. This was where the polylogue could live in the costume, and I thought that each character envisaged a spot between utility and decoration with Sarah representing the most utilitarian, followed by James, then

Richard, and finally Mandy as the most decorative. Melissa came prepared with questions but no solid aesthetic or concept for the show. Questions that Melissa had for me included: What is Sarah's wedding dress? Is Mandy going to breast-feed? And who is Richard? I wrote in my journal that I wanted her to help "flesh out the types" of each character for their journeys.

As mentioned above, I wasn't as active about this element which is a fact that is clearly seen in my journal as there is one entry about the costume meetings while there are pages dedicated to floor plans and scenic elements. I admit that I might have been more disinterested because the clothing was contemporary and realistic. Melissa and I did, nonetheless, meet to discuss costumes. I recall discussing the characters, their interests, and what they might wear. I am not sure what Melissa thought of the whole thing. She decided early on that we would pull most if not all of the show from stock, and I agreed due to budget considerations<sup>32</sup>. After a meeting in which we discussed what characters might wear and identified types of clothing, we moved to looking at items from stock.

Costumes ended up being the most realistic design element of the show. The first costumes we looked at were quick pulls for our promo photo shoot. I did not want Sarah's clothing to be fancy, but this desire, combined with stock pulls, resulted in a truly heinous tan sweater which neither flattered the actress nor made her look like an active photographer. The choices that Melissa pulled from the department's costume stock were based on Sarah's active lifestyle and the character's dialogue that mock Mandy as a cute and stylish young woman. I thought the justification for the choices was spot on, but I hated the actual design choice that the actress ended up wearing.

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<sup>32</sup> The department budgeted \$500 for each show in the director's studio series. Most of our budget had been assigned to scenic and lighting because of the kitchenette and cyclorama respectively.



I neither wrote about it in the journal nor mentioned it to Melissa. The journal mentions being pleased with my lighting designer's work and my pleasure with the scar patterns and make up for the actress playing Sarah. The experience I gained while directing the three plays of this study tells me that this lack of communication probably led to later difficulties. The emotional response to the sweater, which was on all of our promo photos, remains with me while other elements of the shoot do not.

Sarah's clothing was consistently utilitarian—she wore cargo pants and layered tanks with long sleeve shirts—which was boring to me. I wonder if that was something Melissa noticed without my saying anything or if she was actually picturing something different than I was. I am not sure which of these scenarios is correct because my notes about the costumes meetings taper off sharply as I started to pay more and more attention to the rehearsals and other design elements.

Fig. 5. Costume Rendering 1: Sarah by Melissa Hall

There were a few interesting clothing pieces, nonetheless. The first was Sarah's wedding dress. Margulies describes it as "a smart dress [not a bridal gown]" (37). This felt like Margulies gave us a little more room to play with, and I set Melissa loose. I didn't have any particular ideas about what Sarah's dress might be, so Melissa came to me with the idea that it was a geometric tribal print in a conservatively fitted dress. Melissa designed the piece while thinking about Sarah's job as a photographer and the person who had objects from foreign countries all over her apartment. Melissa located a tribal print that she liked and designed and made the dress herself. Looking back, the wedding dress being a random geometric print now seems to be out of character. In later discussions, Mary Cooney observed that because it was made by Melissa and had some obvious visual marks of median construction, it didn't look quite fancy enough for a wedding dress. While the word Margulies used was "smart" and

not “fancy,” I did agree that we may have missed the mark on a dress that was truly smart. There was also a question about the sensitivity of the dress’s pattern to global culture and whether it would have been better to go with a more deliberate print or no print. Although I recall feeling ambivalent about it on stage, I have a print out with two options for the dress fabric and a little star next to the geometric pattern.

Fig. 6. Costume Rendering: Sarah’s Wedding Dress by Melissa Hall

Sarah’s scars were the second really exciting thing to work with since Margulies directions state that they should be visible and disturbing. The design images that Melissa brought to work with were definitely disturbing: face changing third degree burns and badly scarred twists of skin. Because the scars needed to heal up over the course of the play, we decided not to distort the actress’s face too severely but wanted to use something that would pucker the skin. The first substance we used was a liquid that dried and pulled the skin in such a way that the skin puckered. It looked like a very realistic scar. In discussing it with undergraduate costume faculty, Mary Copenhagen, we were strongly urged not to use this product as performers could have a bad reaction to it. We tried it anyway, and it is visible in the promotional photos which was when we tested it. I was very excited about the look and so was Melissa until our actress had a reaction, and we had to scrap the idea. We then turned to latex to which we continued to apply make-up to between scenes to gradually take the color from red and raw to closer to her natural skin tone as an indication of the passage of time.

The last costume bit that was really exciting to me was when Melissa got excited that I thought James would wear graphic tees under sweaters. The graphic tees were a gesture to his love for horror stories and contemporary culture, and Melissa had fun finding different graphic tees for James. My favorite was the batman tee-shirt that Melissa found to put under his button-up for the wedding scene. Richard was dressed

business casual, and Mandy wore business chic. I was less concerned with these characters and mostly let Melissa make decisions as she saw fit. She pulled several pieces to try, and for the most part her first picks were good. I vetoed a couple suits that she picked for Richard since the cuts were too far out-of-style. Generally, however, when I didn't like something she'd pulled, she didn't like it either and had brought it for variety just in case I wanted something else. As far as colors, the only suggestion I contributed was that Sarah be primarily in utilitarian neutrals and Mandy in primarily decorative colors.

After the production, it was brought to my attention that the actors' attire was, for the most part, for a younger aesthetic. This was problematic for at least one viewer since three out of the four characters are over 35-years-old. As the actors were all under 35 though, I do not necessarily consider this a bad thing. It might have even helped to bridge the experience gap for the actors to have clothing between their age and the character's age. It wasn't something that I gave much thought to during the design and production process, and looking back, I don't think it hindered the production in any significant way.

#### Actors

In addition to my desire to work with the mise-en-scene, I also wanted to get a chance to work with the characters in the play. I felt a strong connection to the characters and the domestic question regarding the creation of home. I have often, like Sarah, felt that home is a difficult location where I struggled with dissonance between images of home and what I wanted it to be. Sarah feels a distinct vocation that inhibits her ability to make home in certain ways and leads to some destructive behaviors. For her, home is a fraught location. In this play, both Sarah and James struggle simultaneously with evolving in different directions from someone they love a

great deal. While I have neither been a combat photographer nor involved in violent trauma, I identified with growing apart in ideology and goals because I have grown apart from my family in this way. As I prepared to direct the piece, I wanted to know how the characters would evolve from textual creations to breathing performances. What kind of new understanding of the characters and home would arise from exploring them with actors?

I had been working on the text and in production meetings before I began to work with the actors. In all, the actors and I had six weeks of rehearsal. In my journal, I broke those weeks down in a plan, as follows: one and a half to two weeks of play, two weeks of scene work, one week of runs and polishing, one week of tech rehearsal, and then performances. I planned to use etudes and action analysis as the methods to build characters, relationships and actions through improvisation and active experimentation with the given circumstances. I wrote by way of explanation:

As we experiment, I will assess truthfulness to given circumstances, character, and action. → Remember to let them figure it out, (sic) but provide them with guidance like bowling bumpers. It will be stronger to the actors if they discover the truth in their circumstances. (Skoretz)

Next to these remarks is a drawing of a bowling alley with bumpers instead of gutters. The goal was to get the performers up and acting as soon as possible. I had spent so much time with the given circumstances of the play that I wanted to give the actors space to explore them where I could see and provide reflective guidance without dictating what should or should not be in the play. My aspiration was that the actors would perform the play, and afterwards we could compare to the script. I wanted to do this instead of working from any images in my head.

Our first rehearsal consisted of a read through and discussion. It was the only rehearsal in which the cast was seated the entire time. We read through the whole script together and filled the rest of the time with discussion about the play and

process. The actress playing Sarah, sophomore Sydney Machesky, did not participate in the first week of rehearsals because she was performing in another show at the time. I had a discussion with Julia Moriarty, one of my PhD student colleagues, about this as I was worried that my lead would be absent for the first week of play. Julie pointed out, however, that this was similar to the character and might provide some useful dynamics for the performers to play with.

In my pre-rehearsal notes, I wrote that I wanted to discuss the given circumstances of the play, how I planned to work in rehearsal, what I expected of the actors in the form of outside rehearsal work, and the themes of home in the play. We began with a read through and I made a lot of notes. These notes run the gamut of profound and silly. For example, I note that Mike Fisher, the third-year actor who played Richard, did not want to say the ‘goddamns’ in his lines. After the read through, I noted that Mandy is a *raisonneur* type character in the script. Several other small notes describe surprises that the audible reading of certain lines by these actors brought out to me; for example, I wrote “Richard really is excited about Mandy and the baby” and later I wrote “James’ rant is a rant!” with a smiley face. I also note references to look up and small observations about actors’ instincts such as “Carl’s instinct is to be very intimate and gentle in this scene.” Much of this includes observations, questions, and ideas to pursue in late rehearsals and scene work.

After the read through, I asked for first impressions which led naturally from observations about the given circumstances, such as the time of the play and the emphasis on home in the script, to a discussion of the theme of the play. I asked each actor if they would speak a little about what home meant to them. This was important to me because of the polylogue of each character. I wanted to take time to recognize that not only each character, but each of us, as artists, had distinct views and

relationships to home. I included the stage manager, freshman Cassandra Maniak, and myself in the discussion.

Throughout the majority of the rehearsal period, my rehearsal practice had very little seated reading or discussion without playing with the physical life of the story in some way. I did not ask the actors to memorize their lines as quickly as possible. I defined given circumstances for the performers using James Thomas's definition, "the specific conditions in which the action of the play occurs" (42) and asked a series of questions based on his given circumstances in Script Analysis. From these questions, we created a working understanding of the story together. My questions, as written in my notes, were the following: "Who are the characters to themselves, to us as artists, to each other, and to others?" "Where are we: what is this psychic space/local/place?" "What are we to ourselves, to each other, to others?" [and] "When are we? →Story: reconstruct". These questions functioned as a condensed set of conversation starters and were reminders for me because I expected the discussion to function less like a lecture in which I explained the play and more like a creative process to build a foundation of group understanding about the play.

I told the performers that I planned to work with etudes and action analysis. Most of the cast had worked with etudes before. Maria Radu, a freshman and the actor playing Mandy, was the exception. I explained to them that I wanted them to be able to create their work through experimenting. Georgi Tovstonogov describes the value of Action Analysis and Etudes this way: "The shortest way to organic action on the stage is to introduce the physical life of the role at the very first stage of work" (238). Hence, from the second rehearsal on, we worked by performing etude experiments. I tasked the actors in the first week with using the script to suggest six dreams or deleted scenes about the characters that they wanted to act out and experiment with. From

what the actors brought in, we compiled a list of 18 experiments to play with. It was more than enough for the two weeks of rehearsal, and we continued to add etudes to the list as we discovered more moments and circumstances that we wanted to explore.

At that first rehearsal, I highlighted three main jobs for the actors. First, I wanted them to identify what happens for the first or last time in each scene. Second, I wanted them to be researching their character and bringing experiment ideas based on that research. Third, I asked them to locate what their character wanted from the other character(s) in each scene.

The structure rehearsals would take would be as follows: we would choose a scene or etude and take five to ten minutes to prepare and perform the scene. After the performance, we would discuss the scene and compare the facts and events of the performance with the given circumstances. The actors would take five to ten minutes to study the scene and decide what they wanted to do and determine some course of action. After this five to ten-minute period, we would improvise the scene and discuss it. We asked questions—What happened? What seemed more right? And how did it differ from the text and why?—then would try experiments, i.e. games or exercises, to explore and clarify different aspects of the given circumstances in order to get closer to what felt right.

The first time we etuded through 1.2, we found that the actors had a hard time working with the dynamic of Mandy as a new person. We first identified a progression of French scenes<sup>33</sup> in the section: Richard and Mandy arrive, Sarah enters, Mandy exits, Mandy returns, James and Richard exit, James and Richard return, and the scene climaxes. We identified the largest events: introducing Mandy to Sarah, Richard defending Mandy, Sarah bonding with Mandy, and Mandy crying over the lost

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<sup>33</sup> A French scene is one that is defined by the entrance or exit of a character or characters.

elephant. Then we identified some things that the characters are trying to do: Richard is trying to invite Mandy into their group; James is trying to take care of Sarah; Sarah is trying to dislodge Mandy; and Mandy is trying to enter the group. This was an extensive chunk to tackle.

After we created the above lists, the actors were unanimous in saying that most of the events or actions that they had identified as happening in the script of this scene did not occur during our first improvised movement through the scene. The biggest concern that Mike (Richard) articulated was the missing given circumstance of the in-group dynamic. He pointed out how Richard accuses Sarah and James of not giving Mandy a fair chance and wanted to find a way to create that feeling of balancing new love, old friends, and the awareness of Sarah's injuries. I was captured by the idea of balance and formulated a physical experiment to help foster a physical manifestation of this awareness. I asked the actors to imagine themselves walking around the edge of a giant plate balanced on a stick and asked them to improvise just the portion of the scene in which Richard introduces Mandy. During this scene, I asked Maria (as Mandy) and Sydney (as Sarah) to move towards the characters they were speaking to or pursuing in the scene. This meant that Mike (as Richard) and Carl (as James) were forced to keep the balance of the plate and the group dynamic was a physical task which the actors improvised.

The experiment succeeded. Initially, movements were hesitant, and we had to stop and restart to define the imagined plate and clarify how it worked. When we restarted the scene, the actors' attention was fixed on each other. They reacted to each other's movements with a variety of directional adjustments. Sometimes they stopped abruptly as Maria and Sydney moved towards what they wanted, and it occurred to me that the girls' rhythms, as veteran and newcomer, drove the action of



the scene. It was interesting to see that Carl and Mike sometimes began to preemptively move toward the girls. This purposeful movement redefined their physical space and relationships as they progressed through moments in the scene. We finished the experiment when Maria decided she was ready to leave the scene (as Mandy exists to the bathroom).

After this experiment, we talked through what happened. Mike remarked that he found the outburst that Richard has to Sarah and James in defense of Mandy made a lot more sense to him after having to physically pay so much attention to keeping the balance. It was difficult, he reported, to keep up with the girls when their movements deliberately or quickly unbalanced the imaginary plate. This was why he had sometimes used his own lines or speech to move towards them and try to keep them from unbalancing the plate. Sydney said that she had fun taking opportunities to try to deliberately upset the plate, and the other actors stated that they had noticed this. Overall, this experiment succeeded by making the activity something corporal that helped us to articulate and experience the action in that section of 1.2.

We used these types of exercises as physical etudes which helped us to define the events and conflicts in the scenes. As Tovstonogov states: “[T]he etude is simply a means of gaining a better understanding of the action” (239). In 1.2, we understood Richard’s desire to make Sarah stop bullying Mandy as well as Sarah’s pleasure in doing so. Instead of relying on the text and a cerebral understanding, the physical improvised scene manifested these actions and emotions. In this way, we introduced physical life at the beginning of working through the scene and, while we did not keep that blocking as it was expressive rather than realistic, the physical awareness of the relationships, actions, and events that we discovered continued to influence and enliven the scene through rehearsal and performance.

Tovstonogov goes on to point out that etudes help to determine the correct sequence of action, event, and conflict in the play. Another notable etude occurred during the first rehearsal day that Sydney attended.<sup>34</sup> At her first rehearsal, we did two etudes (deleted scenes from before the beginning of the play) with her and James. We began with James and Sarah meeting because it was a good introduction for the actors and it is also a mentioned given circumstance in the script. I wrote in my journal that this etude was “productive”<sup>35</sup> because they nailed the moment that two people meet and fall for each other. Additionally, they exhibited character traits that were “on target” like Sarah’s preoccupation with her job and James’ focus on Sarah. As a scene, Carl and Sydney explored given circumstances about the characters and elongated their arc from the beginning to the end of their relationship.

The second scene that Carl and Sydney picked to etude and explore was the moment when James tells Sarah that he is going back to New York. This scene is discussed in the play as occurring after James experienced a suicide bomber killing several women in front of him. We had previously etuded James discussing the event with a therapist, but Carl felt that there was more to explore in his response to the event. James’ trauma was a difficult given circumstance for Carl to understand, and this trauma led to James abandoning Sarah before the start of the play. Both Sydney and Carl were drawn to how and why James had left Sarah. They saw it as a big part of their characters’ ultimate conflict. While working on this etude, I began to understand

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<sup>34</sup> When I cast Sydney to play Sarah, she was attached to another show that, due to performance schedules, meant she would miss the first week of our rehearsals. I was initially very worried about the cohesiveness of my ensemble. I was worried that the cast would not be able to bond as quickly and would therefore have difficulty with the scene and etude work as this type of work requires some trust and comfort with the cast. I discussed the issue with one of my cohorts, Julia Moriarty, who suggested that it might prove beneficial since Sydney would literally have to reintegrate into the cast after having worked with them briefly in auditions.

<sup>35</sup> This word occurs many times in my journal regarding moments in rehearsal. Interestingly, it’s used just as frequently for rehearsal moments that left me feeling good about the process and those that left me feeling frustrated. Often, I insist upon it more and give more details when using it to describe a difficult moment. I suspect ‘generative’ would be a more accurate word.

just how much James and his trauma as a veteran co-define the question of home in this play.

For the etude, we set up a couple set pieces for Carl and Sydney to play around with: a bed and a couple chairs. They performed the etude, but I wrote that it was “very inactive,” that Carl lay on the bed and that they both looked a little lost. After this etude, we began the discussion about what happened. The actors were discouraged, and when I asked them what bothered them, they said that they did not feel as if they had accurately created the conflict of the scene. I asked the question we started with: “What happens in this scene?” Carl started to describe his given circumstances, and stated specifically that the experience led him to want both Sarah and James to move back to New York. Sydney then began to describe why it was important to Sarah that they both stay. I asked them to describe what it is their character wanted from the other character in the scene. Most of the comments they addressed towards me as the director, but they got passionate and began interrupting each other. Building on this, I gently side-coached to Carl, “Tell Sarah.” They turned seamlessly and began aiming their arguments at each other in character. The scene ended organically with Sydney saying, “I’m not going.” Through trying to explain why their character was right, they discovered the conflict at the heart of the scene.

The deleted scene of James leaving Sarah didn’t end up being a particularly physical etude, but, as Tovstonogov notes, it helped to define the conflict between James and Sarah which really is the heart of the conflict in the play. Carl and Sydney improvised through this conversation and worked through the reasoning and given circumstances of the events. They discussed James’ trauma, Tariq the fixer, Sarah’s vocation, James’s need for Sarah, the desire for home and safety, and their relationship. A couple of highlights from their dialogue that I wrote down include the

following:

Sarah/Sydney: "Everyone matters."

James/Carl: "Really? Everyone." (subtext: What about me?)

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Sarah/Sydney: "Having been a victim should make it more important to stay!"

James/Carl: "Someone else can do it!"

Sarah/Sydney: "Not with what you can bring to it." (subtext: No one can replace you)

Through this etude, the verbalized and recreated dialogue exposed the given circumstances in a new way that analyzing the text could not do. The dialogue that the actors improvised was based in their understanding and expression of the given circumstances, but it was new and ephemeral. The etude happened only once, but the echoes of it remained in their performance of the arguments and conflicts of the play. It laid the foundation for their later work on scene 2.3 in which Sarah and James decide to divorce.

The climax of the play was built from these given circumstances and the application of the circumstances was given in active dialogue. Sydney and Carl were initially able to use our discussion of their first etude to flesh out the ideas that they had been processing from the characters; specifically, what Sarah's job meant to her as vocation; what the trauma James experienced led him to expect of Sarah's trauma; what James wanted out of life; and the conflicts between those points of view. By turning the discussion into a second etude, we were able to transform the intellectual discussion into a heated and active scene.

We used etudes of deleted scenes, scenes alluded to but not written by the playwright, to explore given circumstances for the first two weeks of rehearsal. These were brief improvisations of moments, arguments, and conversations that the actors wanted to explore. We kept a running list and tried to do a couple of them every night.

These included James discussing his trauma at therapy, Sarah and James meeting,

Richard and Mandy meeting, Mandy telling Richard she was pregnant, Richard telling James that he and Mandy were getting married, etc.<sup>36</sup> There were only two requirements for these etudes: first, they needed to have an event or moment in the scene in which something changed; and second, they needed to be explorations of the characters. I let the actors brainstorm this list and bring in their own suggestions of what to add. Some of these worked better than others and most of them were very enjoyable. Using them also gave the actors more opportunities to play with the characters, relationships, actions, and their knowledge of important given circumstances.

In the second half of the second week of rehearsals, we moved from etudes of dreams and deleted scenes to etudes of scenes in the play. The process was mostly unchanged except that we read the scene or unit over before running the etude. I asked that the actors choose a goal for the etude and then we began. After the run, we discussed the scene and the given circumstances, actions, and events. We then tried the etude again. At the beginning of the third week, I discovered that Given Circumstances effectively helped us locate the most important event of a scene. In working scene 1.2, unit 3, which I titled “Sarah Meets Mandy,” I describe Sarah and Mandy as strange cats meeting for the first time. As such, this part of the scene drives towards the event of Mandy losing her cool. Each mini-event in the units relates to that event. In working this unit, I asked Sydney, “Is Sarah the kind of girl who doesn’t want to make a scene?”. For her, the answer was no, and this led to an abundance of direct behavior as she absorbed the given circumstance. In particular, Sydney was now free to needle, to explode, and to say harsh things. Sydney’s freed up behaviors drove the etudes toward unit events and included Mandy leaving to compose herself; Mandy

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<sup>36</sup> See appendix for complete list

coming back; Mandy eliciting intimate sharing from Sarah; and, ultimately, Mandy breaking down after seeing the elephant photo. Each of these events was tied to Sydney knowing that Sarah did not mind making a scene.

The week before tech rehearsals began we switched to run-throughs of the show coupled with movement and space exercises. I wrote several times that energy was often low at the beginning of rehearsal. I also wrote multiple times that Sydney, particularly, was concerned with the body of her character. Because Sarah had been in a vehicle that encountered an improvised explosive device, she had serious physical injuries; in spite of this, Sarah is also an extremely vibrant character. Sydney wanted to find some way to stay active even though she had a lot of physical injuries that were at various stages of healing throughout the play. In order to address this, I asked if the actors would like to do a goofy run of the show as animals that exhibited characteristics of the characters they were playing. They agreed, and I asked the actors to choose their own animals. Carl chose to play James as a Golden Retriever. Sydney chose to play Sarah as a shark. Mike chose to play Richard as a vampire bat<sup>37</sup>. Maria picked a flamingo for Mandy. This exercise was really lively and filled with frequent pauses for laughter. Some of the discoveries were purely entertaining. For example, I noted afterward that Mike's shoulder lifts and micro movements evoked the bat effectively and that Carl's leg work evoked the floppy grace of a Golden Retriever. Other discoveries were particularly useful for character. In particular, Sydney's deep core motion and inclusion of shoulders in her movements effectively contained and exposed the constant movement that she picked her animal, the shark, to explore: the movements were powerful but also kept her in one place. Sydney wanted to see what

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<sup>37</sup> When I expressed concern about the bloody thirsty vampire part of this. Mike said that he picked the animal because of Richard's job in advertising and also because the vampire bat is an extremely social creature with strong family group ties.

she could do physically regarding Sarah's desire to keep moving and her inability to do so. Maria developed a physical response to being nervous in a scene: a head tilt and a lifted back foot. We took time after the exercise to debrief our favorite moments. It was an effective exercise to revive the play as we used an exaggerated physical exercise to explore some of the small problems such as Sydney's movement concerns.

### The Audience

The audience was an important component to this line of inquiry. As discussed in the introduction, performed theatre creates a space in which ideas and actions can be considered with the audience. In writing about the theatre, Keir Elam notes that each audience has to interpret and make meaning of the theatrical texts that they encounter: "The final responsibility for the meaning and coherence of what he constructs is his" (85-86). The audience, therefore, is responsible for interpreting and creating meaning for the theatrical webs of signs they encounter. One of the strengths of this script is the ambiguity of the ending—the play neither condemns nor celebrates Sarah's choice to leave James and go back to work. As the play is ambiguous, I was curious about the audience's response. I believed that our design and acting work would impact the audience's understanding of Sarah's actions and the confluence of Home and War within the play.

*Time Stands Still* also piqued my interest in its audience impact because it contains direct mention of the audience. In 2.1, James discusses a play that he and Sarah attended which had Middle Eastern characters that described "some horror story, you know, some atrocity that took place in his village" (Margulies 37). James complains about the commodification and the artistic appropriation of the lives of people he knew, lived with, and reported. The culminating critique of the imaginary

play, however, directly addresses the audience who watches not only the play within the play but also, by extension, the audience watching *Time Stands Still*. In 2.1, James says:

People trick themselves into thinking they're having an authentic experience [in the theatre] when it's completely manufacture! Hell on earth made palatable—packaged—as an evening's entertainment. . . . These people don't need to be informed. . . . They read the paper, they listen to NPR . . . The ones who should be seeing it, the mujahideen and the Taliban, let's face it, don't get to the theater much. So it's that favorite lefty pastime: preaching to the choir! They sit there, weeping at the injustice, and stand at the end shouting "Bravo!"—congratulating themselves for enduring such a grueling experience, and go home feeling like they've actually done something, when in fact all they've done is assuaged their liberal guilt! (Margulies 39).

While James describes the audience watching the imaginary play, the audience watching *Time Stands Still* hears the challenge. As James notes, those who most need to grapple with an issue are unlikely to ever attend. The problem that Margulies notes here is one that Susan Sontag describes this way, "Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers" (101). It was important for me to assess, even informally, how the audience was impacted by the content, design, and performance. In Chapter 2, I have posited that the central question of the play is "What am I supposed to do about it?". This is a question that applies not only to the characters but also to the audience. By deliberately calling out an informed audience during scene 2.1, the play naturally invites the audience into the discussion. In order to collect data about the audience's experience, I decided to hold a talkback after one of the performances.

I based the structure of the talkback on Liz Lerman's methods of artistic inquiry. Lerman's method includes four distinct stages. In the first stage, the responders make statements of meaning. This which means they can state what they thought was meaningful, moving, exciting about the piece. In the second stage, the artist can ask the responders open questions about the piece in order to better understand the



effects of his/her work and start a problem-solving dialogue. In the third stage, the audience can ask open questions of the artists. The final stage is one in which the responders ask the artist if s/he would like to hear his/her opinion on something in the piece. This structure is designed to help the artist enter into a generative dialogue about his/her work.

There are three roles to this evaluation process: the artist, the facilitator, and the responders. As director and researcher, I took the role of the artist. I also felt that since this was my first of three produced plays, I was ready to question the work publicly and to generate a better understanding of the work so that I could bring more knowledge to my next two productions. I asked Dr. Mary Anderson to act as facilitator for both talkbacks. As my dissertation chair and professor with experience facilitating collaboration and feedback, I felt that she was in an excellent position to help guide these talkback sessions. Lerman describes the facilitator as the individual whose role includes “initiating each step and managing the transition to the next” (15). I was confident that Dr. Anderson could do this.

I decided to use two groups of responders for this piece. The first was an audience who had seen the show. It was important to me to have a group of responders who were not close to my project or research to give feedback. I wanted to cast a broad net of audience and see what kinds of things arose from the performed event. To collect this data, I held a talkback immediately following one of the performances, and asked audience members to stay if they felt interested or able to participate. The group self-selected, and I did not collect any demographic data, but a quick glance showed that the majority of the audience of (about 50 people) remained. Since, this data was not a primary research point, I was comfortable with an informal and random group of responders. I also wanted some response from an audience

who were knowledgeable in the field and who were aware of my project. I pre-selected the second group of responders with this in mind and asked them to see the play on their own. We scheduled a separate talkback with this small group at a date after they had each had a chance to see the production. This group included three professors from the theatre department and two graduate students from my directing cohort: Dr. Mary Anderson, Dr. Mary Cooney, Lavinia Hart, Julia Moriarty, and Jennifer Goff<sup>38</sup>.

In my preparation for the talkbacks, I developed questions for step two: artist as questioner. Lerman writes that this is the time for the artists to “clarify their focus” in order to deepen the dialogue with the audience. I built a list of questions, which were both general and directed. I tried to keep them open not only to allow for a broad variety of responses but also to keep the topic focused in my areas of inquiry. I organized the questions by categorizing which ones focused on concept; which focused on art or aesthetic qualities; and which focused on both. The following is the list of questions I created for the talkback with the audience:

1. Where did you see war in this play? What did you see? (Concept and art)
2. Where did you see home? Reflect back on particular response. (Concept and art)
3. What did you notice about the photographs? On the stage? With the actors? (Art)
4. What parts of the play struck you as abstract/realistic? (Art)
5. What resolution(s) did you see? (Concept)
6. Where is your voice/idea in this conversation? (Concept)
7. What conflicting views are in the play? Where did you see them? How did they interact? (Concepts)

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<sup>38</sup> I asked each of these women because I thought that their views would uniquely contribute to this process and because none of them had been very close to the process of the directing the show. While Mary Anderson had worked closely with me on my theoretical analysis of *Time Stands Still*, I had been working on the actual production with Dr. James Thomas, my directing advisor. Dr. Mary Cooney was on my committee and an expert in devising theatrical work of sociological import. Lavinia Hart is head of the graduate acting program at Wayne State and also a director. I felt that she would have a helpful view as a performer, director, and professor. Julia Moriarty was in my cohort and, in addition to being an actor and director, had been in dialogue with me about the project while I was working on it. Jennifer Goff is a director and performer with a lot of experience with etudes as a rehearsal and teaching tool. With her unique background in production and study, I was excited to have her join this group.

These questions hit on several of my focuses: home and war as concept versus physical manifestation in the space; the mise-en-scene elements of the photographs; the scenic and lighting design elements that were non-realistic; the audience's relationship to the play; and the polylogue of views through characters. I narrowed these questions down and made them more general. I did this because some of the language and focus of the questions was more specialized than I expected my general audience respondents to be prepared to discuss. The audience watched the show, and that was the only familiarity with the material that I could rely on. Hence, I simplified and made the questions more general in order to take advantage of the broad cross-section of views and experiences that might be found in the audience. This led to the following four questions:

1. What particular moments stood out/shocked/surprised you visually?
2. Where did you see/feel Home in the play?
3. What stood out to you about the photographs?
4. What stood out to you about the stage?

With these questions, I aimed at understanding how the physical world of the play, as the audience experienced it, affected them. I decided, that in relation to the production, that was the most useful thing to ask questions about since the analysis of text could be done at any time.

On the night of the show in question, I announced the talkback at the top of the show and again after the curtain call. I let the audience know that they could stay if they wanted to and that this was for my dissertation research. I was surprised that most of the audience stayed. After a brief break of five minutes, Mary Anderson and I took the stage and began the talkback with the basic rules of Lerman's structure and afterwards began with statements of meaningful images or ideas.

One of the first things that became clear to me immediately was the diversity of meanings that the audience saw. One man insisted on how he noticed the

“separateness” of Sarah and James, and the woman next to him commented on Sarah’s need to be working full-time as selfish.<sup>39</sup> One audience member identified himself as a veteran and remarked that Sarah’s anger at the top of the show was real; his wife agreed. Another audience member said that the explosion at the top of the show and the repetition of gunfire between scenes pulled them into the show and made the bleeding of war to home internal to the production itself. I was particularly pleased with comments from audience members about being pleased with the frame of the set’s upstage wall, the depth of work that the young performers had created in the characters’ relationships, and the way that the sounds foregrounded war in the home of the set.

When we moved on to my question about what the audience was visually struck by, I was surprised that two of the major comments were about the lighting. One audience member mentioned the side lighting of characters during softer moments because it helped them to feel the emotions of the characters. Another commented that she enjoyed the television light cue that Amy created for the top of scene 2.3 when James is watching a horror movie in the dark. Amy created this cue on her own and it effectively evoked the patterns of light from a television in a dark room. The cue cast a flickering pattern of blue lights across Carl’s face from a single LED lamp while he directed his eyes in its direction. Other comments included the hemispheric division of space between the down left and down right spaces: the futon down right was cozier, and the table was sharper. The commenters noted that these two spaces were particularly distinct for them. One of my favorite comments was about the scars on Sydney’s face at the top of the show and how the make-up slowly faded through the

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<sup>39</sup> This man and woman were particularly intrusive. I wrote in my notes that “he’s so sure of what he wants out of the production” (Skoretz 10). She was extremely adamant about the play’s trouble residing in Sarah’s independent life and her career. When we reached the portion for opinions, their opinion was that Sarah’s career should not have been celebrated by the production.

show. This commenter found it an effective time-indicator and also gross. I liked this because it was one of my favorite costume elements.

In response to question four about the stage and to question two about where they saw home, the audience mainly noticed set dressing. I received comments noting the effective attention to detail with the making of coffee, the tiny fridge, and the bookshelf. Another several comments mentioned the two different homes created by the laptops being in different arenas: the futon and laptop visually separated from the laptop and TV. This comment erroneously attributed two laptops to the top of scene 2.3 before Sarah starts a fight about what she reads on James' laptop while James watches a movie with a pad of paper. The important thing for the commenter was the differentiated home spaces. There was also a comment about the invisible walls upstage. I was very excited about this comment because the responder noted that for them the photos on strings represented how life is a hanging thread and that Sarah was holding on to what she sees. Lois and I had not talked about the significance of hanging the photos on strings. We had, instead, focused on seeing the cyclorama upstage of the walls and the fact that I thought permeability of the walls integral to seeing the home as a nest for Sarah.

After the talkback with the audience, I reformulated my questions for my small respondent group. Because this group was much more familiar with the conceptual and production processes, I felt that I could be more specific with my questions and that their feedback could be more useful in the areas of production and process. Thus, I developed four questions for this group in particular:

1. Where did you see tension in the stage picture?
2. I tried to work with different "scripts" of Home. Did this come out in the mise-en-scene?
3. What stood out to you about the photographs?
4. How did War and Home interact?

5. What developments could I look to make in mise-en-scene communications?  
Develop what I have?

These questions used specialized language like ‘stage picture’ and ‘mise-en-scene’ because I trusted that these respondents would know those words and be able to speak directly to those ideas. This conversation deepened and allowed the respondents to interact with each other’s ideas since there were only four of them. We were in a smaller space and seated around a table during this discussion<sup>40</sup>. In this group, I worked with Dr. Mary Cooney—an advanced lecturer and head of the Undergraduate Major program in the WSU Theatre department at the time; Dr. Mary Anderson—my committee chair and associate professor in the WSU theatre department; Lavinia Hart—then head of the MFA acting program at WSU; Jennifer Goff—who was then a PhD student in my cohort; and Julia Moriarty—another PhD student in my cohort.

We gathered in a small room around a table which was very cozy. I began by asking for statements of meaning. I wanted to know where this group saw meaning and what they saw. Mary Cooney (MC) responded that she saw meaning in James’ realization that he could lead a sane life without Sarah and that this meant he was the protagonist. Lavinia Hart (LH) noted that the setting was inviting and that she felt she could live in it. She also felt that the music choices kept curiosity burning. She noted that the twists were handled well because the actors did not play the end of the scenes. She also felt that the staging had “moments of unforgettable returning images”. Jennifer Goff (JG) remarked that Sarah’s consistent motion was like a caged animal and the pre-show moment gave her the expectation that we would meet Tariq. She said she felt very sad when she realized that, although she had heard Tariq’s voice in

<sup>40</sup> My complete notes of this conversation are transcribed in Appendix B.

the pre-show announcement, the character was dead. She had expected to see him in the play. Dr. Mary Anderson (MA) said that the tender relationship towards Tariq stood out as an innovative choice, and JG agreed that the incidentals, like Tariq and the set changes, deepened the story. Julia Moriarty (JM) said that the show set tones and maintained themes in the moment to moment action creating a sense of a perpetual world for her.

I spent the vast majority of this feedback session taking notes. After initial impressions, I asked my specific questions. I began with “Where did you see tension on the stage?”. JG answered that the photos traveling off the stage created tension. JM added that the photos seemed to explode off the stage. MA said that this demarcated instability because the walls were empty except for the photos which created a visual tension in their hanging before the colored cyc. JG added that the lighting designer’s use of red light on the cyc during scene and transitions about war was especially evocative. LH noticed that the blocking of packing and unpacking bags consistently led to a sense of instability of home in the space because someone was always coming or going. MC noted the futon as a bed in the center of the room indicated no privacy and no comfort which increased the tension. JM pointed out that the non-traditional shelving in the set indicated a non-traditional home, and MA agreed that by using individual bricks and drawers instead of a bureau, the set evoked the rubble of war.

When I asked about how different scripts of home came out in the mise-en-scene of the play, I got some interesting answers. The group seemed to take it as a question of the ways that the actors used the space to create or be at home. LH noted that the distinct movement choices of the characters stood out, and JM noted that Mandy, specifically, seemed to confront the space by doing things like sending the

men for ice-cream and picking up the trash. JM said that Mandy made home, dispelled tension, and created a counter-script to the Sarah's dominant script and James' wished for script. JG said that Mandy makes home while Sarah is at home.

Because we had already discussed the photographs and War and Home in the initial statements of meaning, I moved on to what kind of developments I might pursue. LH said that the differentiation between the flashbacks and real time were a little muddy and that there might be some more specific and interesting ways to use technology to differentiate those moments. JM asked what significance there was in Sarah as a photographer. JG noted that Sarah reintegrated into James' relationship but that James' didn't reintegrate towards their former job. He abandoned that connection of purpose that the two characters shared. MA pointed out that James' reintegration journey is over at the top of the show and that his job is to connect to Sarah. Then MC noted that each character is trying to encounter his/her own trauma in separate ways: James encounters his psychological trauma while Sarah encounters her physical trauma. JG offered silent moments that can reveal a lot and suggested that this would be an avenue of further exploration. MA asked who we should identify with, James or Sarah, and JG noted that this tension was part of the play. JM agreed, calling the play post-modern because the change is not meant to be onstage and so the theme of reintegration might be the protagonist. LH translated that into "Will Sarah lay down her war?"

This led to very strong statements from both LH and MC who repeatedly stated that Sarah, the character, clearly had a dangerous addiction to war and specifically that this stood out to them in the show. MA interjected that there was some question as to whether or not the play was a tragedy. Perhaps, she posited, there are some people for whom there is no conventional home. They might be mobile. This could be



a commentary on gender being that men are often seen as on the move while women are centered in a home. JG remarked that the show didn't judge Sarah for not staying home.

Overall, this conversation was very heartening to me specifically because there were such varied opinions and observations on both the different elements and meaning of the show. The text stood up really well and the design elements enhanced the text in ways that provoked discussion and allowed for the engagement of interesting points of view. I am aware that this was the most specifically chosen group of respondents and that they were expressly asked to see the show and told that I would be asking questions about the structure of the show. It is still my favorite post-show discussion.

A third type of audience response is the critical; thus, my show had a couple reviewers. The critical response to the show was positive overall, and the design elements and the professional quality of the acting were cited as strong elements. The New Monitor, a weekly publication that covers Detroit local news, sports, business, and community events, published a review including the following statements: "Ph.D.-candidate director Katherine Skoretz, working with some very fine undergraduate acting talent, has given us a production of this play that would stand up to any professional yardstick" and "Besides being a triumph for Skoretz and her cast, this is also a show of which scenic designer Lois Bandler, costume designer Melissa Hall, lighting designer Amy Schneider and sound designer Michael Hallberg can be justly proud" (Delaney). In another review, Sue Suchyta wrote about the believability of the actors' portrayal of their characters and the issues and conflicts of the play. However, the most interesting review was published in the Examiner and stated, "[T]his thoughtful production of "Time Stands Still" raises important questions without forcing

answers” (Nolan). I appreciated the three different reviews as each focused on different aspects of the show: acting, mise-en-scene, and directing. Overall, I felt very confident in my work after the performances, the talkbacks, and the critical responses.

Directing *Time Stands Still* taught me a great deal about reintegration. I found that the design could be a fruitful and exciting avenue for the exploration of narrative content. The progression from home to war and erosion of the distinction were clearly manifested by the photograph wall from lobby to the set and by the soundscape of city, home, and war zone audio elements. Things like flashbacks could be suggested with the lighting or sound, which enriched the texture of the audience perception of reintegration. I also discovered a lot of information about the characters by watching the actors work through exercises and scenes. I saw dynamics and tensions more clearly than I had while reading, and the physical and ephemeral realities of renegotiating home solidified, for me, impacted how I saw Sarah and James as a couple, and how I understood their traumas. For example, I hadn’t even thought of James as a veteran until Carl started suggested that we explore his trauma. It was important for me to see what reactions an audience would have to the artistic production resulting from my analysis of the play. This is now well-documented in the audience response collection. Overall, this production was extremely generative as an exploration and addition to the analytical work I had done on reintegration, narratives, and the script itself. It left me very excited to produce *American Soldiers* and *Oohrah!*

### CHAPTER 3 AMERICAN SOLDIERS

American Soldiers takes a hard look at the narratives and expectations that different social groups have about reintegrating veterans. The first scene of Matt Morillo's play has an excellent example in which Carlo Sr. (hereafter referred to as Carlo), widowed patriarch of the Colletti family and his son, Carlo Junior (hereafter referred to as Junior) a local politician running for Congress, have an argument about how best to welcome home middle child and Iraq veteran, Angela. After noticing his sister hiding in the yard and discovering his father drunk in the kitchen, Junior fights with Carlo to get him to go to bed. After this, he fights with Angela when she comes in. When Carlo re-enters the scene, Angela leaves to go drinking. Carlo then tells his son, "Did you see what I just did? "Yes, honey." "Have fun." "See you tomorrow." That's how it's done" (Morillo 21). In this scene, Carlo draws attention to the differences between his methods and Junior's methods of trying to welcome Angela home. Carlo is a veteran of the Vietnam War and tries to give her every kind word and measure of respect that he didn't receive when he returned. By doing so, he demonstrates a narrative aimed at showing a veteran his or her value. By contrast, Junior tries to involve Angela in the social experiences that she's missed by being gone with his main focus being to convince her to run for his vacant local city council seat. He represents an exploitative view of veterans as heroes of society. At the end of the scene, the men sit together as both having failed to keep her in the house.

Matt Morillo wrote American Soldiers as a kitchen sink drama: the action occurs between family members in their kitchen on Long Island. This drama, however, problematizes this genre with ideological dialogue about the connections between religion, politics, family dynamics and war. Angela arrives home at the top of the show

with bag in hand and begins a tirade against the social and political forces in her family that led her to enlist. By the final scene, she leaves with the same bag to start a new life apart from society. Throughout the play, she consistently argues that implicit narratives harm the family by encouraging soldiers to go to war, celebrating war trauma, and obscuring the role that the society plays in perpetuating trauma. She accuses her father and siblings of complicity by their failure to challenge their social narratives. Because Morillo's script engages these social issues so directly, my analysis and work with the production focused on the social impact of reintegration as represented by these characters. Each character embodies an archetype and exhibits a distinct opinion about Angela and her reintegration.

The tension between how different characters treatment Angela rises over the course of the play. Like *Time Stands Still*, the family of characters embodies different points of view about both the veteran and the community, and even though the characters in *American Soldiers* make up a more traditional family structure, one character is not related nuclear family by blood. It is interesting to note that the characters in *American Soldiers* are more broadly archetypal than the characters in *Time Stands Still*. For example, Marie, the youngest sister in the Colletti family, is a party girl; Carlo Jr., the older brother, is a politician; and Hutch, the high school boyfriend, is a trouble-making hippie. Each one has a specific opinion about Angela and the opinions come create conflict.

This internal tension is complicated by Angela because she deliberately tries to disrupt her homecoming by convincing her family to abandon their own social narratives. She blames her family, community, and society for the narratives of patriotism and religion that led her to enlist and, consequently, for the trauma she suffered and witnessed during

her enlistment. She wants her family to accept guilt for sanctioning war. When I directed this play, my understanding of the characters' archetypes and the direct challenge to social issues led me towards producing a performance with a more symbolic, nonrealistic style than I had used with *Time Stands Still*. In this chapter, I record my analysis of how the text tackles the social roles imagined for veterans and citizens and pay special attention to how the play weaves these broader themes into the actions and dialogue of the characters. After this, I discuss the production goals that my analysis suggested before diving into how I worked with the actors and designers to experiment with stylistic choices that could foreground the social issues in the script. Finally, I examine the audience and critical response to measure whether or not I succeeded in embodying the themes.

## I. REINTEGRATION IN AMERICAN SOLDIERS

Reintegration narratives most frequently frame the action as the treatment of a soldier's war trauma while he/she "transitions back to peace." This was clearly seen in many of the narratives that I read for this study. According to Dr. Faris R. Kirkland, reintegration includes relearning ways of "relating to families, friends, and coworkers; dealing with social and material situations from a civilian rather than a military perspective; and perceiving the former enemy as neutral or even friendly" (Kirkland 293). Kirkland's list of relearned behaviors can be seen as expectations verbalized by the characters in *American Soldiers* during their arguments with Angela: they hope she will relearn these skills and rejoin their community. This reintegration process is one that the civilian characters in *American Soldiers* are increasingly anxious for Angela to go through as she continues to resist suggested changes. The characters believe that she needs to

participate in civilian activities that will help her shed the military influenced behavior that she displays before and during the play. These people try to help her relate to them as a part of her life as she deals with her problems and softens towards her perceived enemies. Carlo Sr. tries to make her feel welcome, Junior tries to involve her in politics, Hutch tries to rekindle their relationship, and Marie tries to get her to talk about her trauma. Each character is invested in the transition back to peace and each believes that they know how to help her reintegrate.

The script contains eight big debates around which the characters attempt to help Angela and in which she addresses the social implications of patriotism, war, religion, and family. It's a heavy set of ideas which are used as levers by the characters to try to create action. For example, in Act 1, scene 1 (hereafter 1.1), Angela and Junior debate whether she will join his political campaign and its relationship to veterans. In 1.2, Angela debates Hutch to convince him to move away with her; she argues about the conservative nature of their community and Hutch's role as a contrarian. In 1.3, Angela and Carlo Sr. have their first big debate about their family and war which is followed by Angela and Marie discussing Angela's war trauma. In 2.1, Carlo Sr. takes Angela's side in a debate with Junior about the same issues as he tries to get Junior to admit that Angela has a valid point of view. This is followed by a debate where Marie uses his health as a bargaining chip for investing in their family. Scene 2.2 contains two short conversations between Angela and Junior and Angela and Hutch in which both fail in their attempt to get her to stay. The final scene, 2.3, consists of the second debate between Carlo Sr. and Angela which covers the personal trauma of veterans and their relationship to their home communities. Angela is trying to get Hutch, Marie, and, if he wants, Carlo Senior to move

with her to Colorado. Carlo Senior, Junior, Marie, and Hutch are trying to get Angela to stay and be part of their community again.

Angela's active resistance to Carlo and the other characters means that the major climaxes of the play occur in moments when Angela is closest to deciding to stay. This is typical in reintegration narratives as the internal role conflict between civilian and soldier is foregrounded in the veteran character. *Time Stands Still* and *Oohrah!* also focus on how the family helps their veterans try to stay and reintegrate by shedding their military identities for civilian identities; in fact, all three plays in this dissertation (*Time Stands Still*, *American Soldiers*, and *Oohrah!*) begin with a return and end with an exit. Like *Time Stands Still*, there are two veterans at the heart of the play: Angela and Carlo Sr. In my analysis and production of this play, determining which veteran was the protagonist was extremely important because it framed the way that the play worked.

It is important to note that either character could be the protagonist and that choosing who will be the protagonist can change the focus of the play. Angela is a dynamic veteran in her late twenties who has traveled for several months after getting out of the army and before coming home. The events of the play occur the first time she has returned home after her deployment and her entrance and exit are the beginning and ending scenes of the play. She was an idealistic youth who enlisted after the September 11 attacks, and over the course of her deployment, she experienced a lot of emotional trauma including the deaths and severe injuries of close friends and her fiancé. She is the veteran whose choice to stay or leave drives the play's external action. The second veteran in the play, Angela's father, Carlo Sr., is an ailing, alcohol-dependent patriarch and, most importantly, a Vietnam Vet. Rehabilitated, reintegrated, and isolated, he lives

as a widower with his youngest child who is rarely home. He has made the transition to home so completely that he does not leave the house. He is onstage before Angela arrives and after she leaves. Carlo makes choices to keep his family near him, and these choices drive the internal action of the play. In the end, he also leaves the house; but, unlike Angela, he leaves to go be with his family. One of these veterans is the protagonist and the ramifications of that character changes the dramatic question.

Angela's control over whether she stays and her ability to disrupt the household rhythms make her a powerful character. She is, like Sarah in *Time Stands Still's*, the veteran the characters are trying to influence. These two features would normally make her the protagonist; however, choosing Carlo Sr. as protagonist means selecting the character whose through-action is actually to help Angela reintegrate. This puts him in line with reintegration as the seed of the play and, because he's considered a successfully reintegrated civilian, focuses the story on civilian efforts to help reintegration. To consider the question in another light, Carlo also more accurately fits the Aristotelian definition of complex plots because he experiences recognition and reversal while Angela leaves town without coming to a change in perspective. Carlo begins and ends the play in the same location, alone and waiting to see if Angela will come back although he changes his behavior at the end of the play and begins to move into his community for support. For the purposes of this study, I decided to treat Carlo Sr. as the protagonist.<sup>41</sup>

The selection of the protagonist doesn't change the action or the climaxes of this play, but it crucially changes the way that civilians are considered in the process of reintegration. Unlike many reintegration stories, the script is concerned first with what the

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<sup>41</sup> Incidentally, Matt Morillo considers Carlo Sr to be the protagonist of the play because he is the one trying to hold the family together. (Interview)



family and, thus, the community can do to help Angela reintegrate instead of what she can do herself. Framing the issue this way helped me to deal with the social implications of the dialogue to generate new avenues of knowledge from the text. It is useful to look at what Lisa Silvestri Carlton writes about the implications of framing veterans as inherently wounded or sick in “Together We Stand, Divided We Fall” to help understand the difference between centering the veteran in community for reintegration and ignoring community to pathologize the veteran. Many studies have shown that a strong family and friends support network helps with the reintegration process. Carlton points out that communities use philanthropic discourse to discuss veterans and calls this the rhetoric of pathology: a rhetoric that treats war trauma as an isolated medical “disorder” for which a veteran must accept help in order to “cure” him/herself (285). This type of discourse is used in the play by the Colletti family to talk about helping Angela. Carlo Sr.’s unique double identity as civilian and veteran ultimately allows him to understand Angela’s arguments about the way that this discourse ignores the community responsibility by locating the burden of war trauma in the veteran’s body as a disease.

Both Angela and Carlo Sr. have a role which they are expected to fulfill. Carlo Sr. is the patriarch of the family and the only remaining parent, but he does not assume the role easily or well as he is an unhealthy drunk. Angela is expected to come home and settle into her previous role in the family. Junior wants Angela to go into politics in order to follow her idealistic dreams from before she went into the army. Hutch wants her to settle down with him. When these roles/expectations are not fulfilled, arguments ensue. The other characters try to force both veterans to accept the citizen roles prescribed for them.

In *American Soldiers*, the Colletti family employs dialogue to frame Angela's arguments as a disorder. Junior protests, "I was beyond nice. She's not well" (Morillo 21) and "I advise you to not talk this way in front of Angie. You'll only enable her craziness" (Morillo 60). Marie diagnoses Angela's behavior as "acting out and hating on everyone" before prescribing a cure: "Maybe if you talked about it" (Morillo 52). Even Hutch describes Angie as "bat-shit crazy" (Morillo 35). Like many veterans, Angela's behavior is stigmatized as an illness. Angela refuses to accept this definition as she insists, "I am not suicidal. I am not sick. I'm not crazy and I'm not suffering from any post-traumatic stress. I have just opened my eyes and I see things differently now" (Morillo 44).

Fig. 7. Angela (Sam York) and Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) 1.3

As Carlton points out, the burden for reintegration is usually firmly laid on the shoulders of veterans. As a Vietnam vet, Carlo Sr. has reintegrated into his home and now, like the other civilians, tries to help Angela reintegrate as well. Unlike the other civilians, he has experience with the reintegration process. Carlo Sr solicits Junior and Marie to "have a little patience" with Angela because "she's been through hell and she's behaving . . . as expected in a way" (Morillo 33). Carlo Sr., as the protagonist, tries to hold the family together as a civilian and a veteran. In scene 1.1, Carlo Sr. tells Junior how to perform his part of the reintegration process including what he should do, how he should talk to Angela, and what he shouldn't do in light of Angela's veteran experience. When talking to Angela, he counsels her about the other side of reintegration in light of his experience after the Vietnam War: "When I got back from Vietnam I did the same thing as you . . . But then I cooled off and realized that everything was ok, and it was time to start my life" (Morillo 40). Throughout the play, Carlo Sr. works to bridge the divide

between Angela as a veteran and the family as civilians. His goal is for Angela to stay home.

Unfortunately, as a veteran himself, he also faces the stigma that arose out of his own trauma and difficulty with reintegrating. Marie and Junior consistently question his judgment based on his alcoholism, poor health, and the years of post war difficulty. In 1.1 Junior tells Carlo “You’re going to bed and I’m going to wait up for her . . . You look like shit, you smell like booze and...what happened here? Did you run out of razors?” (Morillo 10). In trying to send his father to bed, he points out pathologies which he later describes to Angela euphemistically as “Dad is not in the best of shape . . . It’s worse” (Morillo 15). Marie later accuses Carlo saying, “every time we get hit with something hard, you go in the tank. Every time . . . You can’t take it. You can’t deal” (Morillo 67). Even Angela questions his judgment based on how reintegration has compromised him in her eyes. She accuses him of raising them with “super-patriotism . . . doing anything in the name of patriotism justifies anything in the name of patriotism” (Morillo 45). These accusations are leveled to justify behaviors like ignoring Carlo Sr.’s familial leadership (in Junior’s case), enforcing systems of care without his consent (in Marie’s case), and ignoring his advice and wisdom (in Angela’s case).

Structurally, the beginning stasis of the play has Carlo Sr. at home and Angela away at an indeterminate location between war and home. Her impending arrival is the inciting incident of the play which puts her in an antagonistic position to the stasis. Angela’s dramatic function aligns with her stated goal: to bring Hutch and Marie away and create a new society. She debates the other characters’ using arguments of religion, society, citizenship, and politics. Her methods are irreverent and sharp. While the other

characters want Angela to stay, Carlo Sr. is the central character with whom to deal before she will consider staying.

When I broke down Carlo Sr.'s dialogue and action, I noticed that he is not immune to pathologizing veterans. In the beginning of the play, he also treats Angela as if she is sick. This brought me back to Lisa Silvestri Carlton's insights regarding discourses that treat veteran experiences like illnesses by using rhetoric to specifically pathologize them. In the text of this play, Carlo Sr. uses his language to suggest that Angela is sick and, by doing so, he rhetorically minimizes her arguments by pathologizing her. If she is sick from her war experience, she needs to be helped to wellness which implies that her current opinions will change with treatment. Angela, as the reluctant recipient of this rhetoric, antagonizes him and challenges his rhetoric with her own to claim that society encouraging military action is sick. She is also set against him by dramatic action as she declares early in the play that she intends to leave thus, setting herself in opposition to Carlo Sr. who wants her to stay. Over the course of the play, Carlo shows flexibility and finally recognition—which is signaled by a dramatic change in his behavior. Ultimately, he confesses that his own behavior should change so that he shares and teaches what he learned in his own war experiences. This signals a literal reversal from textually pathologizing both his own and Angela's experiences to valuing those experiences as leading to sane and valuable thought.

The rhetoric of pathology has a very particular view of veterans that I found important in understanding how the other characters view both Angela and Carlo. Carlton notes that this social dialogue relies on a view of veterans that she terms the "troubled vet" archetype: an image of returning veterans as a character "deeply disturbed by his

war experience, left powerless without an expressive outlet to provide the cathartic, transformative process that will ultimately lead to reconciliation and acceptance” (Carlton 295). It is a prevalent trope in many reintegration narratives. Carlton cites award-winning movies like *Taxi Driver* (1976), *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *The Hurt Locker* (2008) which all perpetuate the “troubled veteran.” This archetype is the view of veterans that the rhetoric of pathology supports and is the view established by the first half of the play. This view is characterized by four major markers: anger, violence, trauma and powerlessness which, Carlton notes, American culture translates to voicelessness (295). In the first act, both Angela and Carlo Sr. are defined by these characteristics.

Fig. 8. Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) waits for Angela 1.1

In scene one, Junior finds Carlo Sr. drunk and waiting for his daughter in the middle of the night. In the stage directions, we learn that he’s a struggling widower. During this scene, Carlo acquiesces to Junior’s commands to go to bed. Junior tells him repeatedly to calm

Fig. 9. Junior (Allen Wiseman) tries to get Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) to bed 1.1

down, but Carlo Sr. belligerently repeats that he should greet Angela: “It’s best if I’m the one to greet her” (Morillo 10). He yells at his son, asserting that he knows best, and questions Junior’s authority—“Seriously. I’m staying right here. My house. My kitchen. Did you ever think I might want to have a celebratory toast with my daughter when she walks in?” (Morillo 10). The stage directions tell us that he tries to push Junior out of the kitchen and fails. In that first scene, he exhibits anger, violence and powerlessness. He is unable to assert his will.

Fig. 10. Angela (Samantha York)

When Angela enters in the same scene, she says, “fuck you” more than once—both behaviorally and textually. For example, she is terse in conversation with Junior, who buddies up to her and tries to discuss what he believes are mutual family and political interests. Angela badgers him about his ulterior motives. She crescendos into “I am not you. I am not Mom. Keep your phony policies and your talk of change away from me. It insults my intelligence” (Morillo 19).

In a second scene conversation with Hutch, she venomously says of the people who honor veterans publicly: “Of course. Doing their part of the war effort. Where would we be without them?” (Morillo 25). Hutch asks her about the trauma she experienced: “I heard that you met a guy, and you were engaged, and that you both were involved in an ambush, and . . . [h]e was killed” (Morillo 26). In order to make her feel better, Hutch begins to make love to her. She violently stops him, “grabs his arm, twists it around and puts him face down onto the table in a hammerlock” (Morillo 27). Angela uses her physical prowess to extort a promise from Hutch to take her seriously. The violence is surprising both due to its suddenness and its juxtaposition to lovemaking.

These first two scenes align Angela and Carlo Sr.’s behavior with the troubled veteran trope. I found this particularly interesting because unlike the voicelessness that Carlton writes as an outcome of the archetype, both of these veterans can’t seem to stop talking. Like Carlton writes, when the characters pathologize Angela by blaming her arguments and ideas on her trauma, they are free to ignore their culpability in the war. Pointing out this culpability is a huge part of Angela’s arguments against the society that her family embodies. In 1.3, Angela explains to Carlo Sr.:

ANGELA. See you may not go to church and kneel for a prayer or genuflect in front of the crucifix, but no matter what wrong your country does you’ll stand for that

anthem and recite that pledge of allegiance. Because that is your religion. And that's the one you raised us in. Mom did the Catholic thing, you did the America thing. One way or another, we were taught to follow orders from some pretty high authorities, weren't we? If we question the church, we're blasphemers. If we question our country, we're traitors. Either way, you guys raised us to follow orders, didn't you? (Morillo 45)

Angela constantly points to the social, religious, and political structures that shape the characters' behaviors as citizens. She wants them to abandon those structures. At the end of the play, when she is unsuccessful in luring them away from their civilian lives, she leaves them behind. Her goal is to get her family to abandon the corrupt democracy that ignores the losses experienced by soldiers under a banner of reintegrated civilian "oneness." She connects her experiences as a soldier back to the cultural traditions that made her enlistment possible. By speaking out in such a way, Angela defies the powerlessness and voicelessness associated with "troubled veterans."

Angela's big realization was that despite Carlo's experience and reintegration: "nothing changes" (44). She argues that she watched her father acquiesce to the civilian mode, and as a result, his mental and physical health continue to deteriorate. Rather than being able to share his knowledge and prevent wars, she believes that he raised Angela to be the same kind of citizen that he was: religiously patriotic. She tells him in the final scene, "You gave up when you came home!" (79). Despite his efforts to nudge Angela towards resuming her civilian life in Long Island, Carlo Sr.'s status as both an isolated drunkard and a sick man (established in scene one) undermine his position with his daughter. Veterans are expected to return from war to the role of civilians. According to Carlton, when they fail to acquiesce to that role, they are pathologized as sick, mentally ill, or otherwise handicapped. When veteran experiences of war are expected to give way to the civilian experience in order to be considered healthy, veterans' experience are

devalued, and their social power is belittled. Faris reports that many veterans make “comments such as, ‘Down there we were men; back here they treat us like children’” (301).

In her book *Talking with Strangers*, Danielle S. Allen examines and redefines democratic citizenship using classical frames and the case study of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Allen identifies “two etiquettes of citizenship—the one of dominance, the other of acquiescence” that have been prevalent in the United States’ citizenship practice (5). Allen specifically uses systemic racism and *Brown vs Board of Education* as a case study for democratic citizenship to extrapolate a power model that she argues is inherent to the democratic structure. I found this model useful in understanding citizenship relations between civilians and veterans in the reintegration process in question in *American Soldiers*. Carlo Sr. returned from his war and, as he tells Angela, “checked [him]self into a hospital. . . . I spent a lot of days with a gun in my hand . . . as I got really close, I decided to go get help” (Morillo 79). He tells a tale of acquiescence to the pathological rhetoric. A story in which he ended up getting help, getting over it, and hiding his experience in a civilian life. The beginning of the play shows us the failure of this system which required his participation in accepting a pathologized role of his experiences. This has left him isolated and, at the top of the play, drunk in the middle of the night. By starting from this place of isolation and social exclusion, the first scene creates and breaks a stasis that explores a new approach to reintegrating veterans.

Fig. 11. Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) waiting for Angela 1.1

Angela inadvertently points out that Carlo Sr. aligns with the narrative of acquiescence when she accuses him of giving up and accepting what society told him he had to do to fix himself. Junior’s repeated insistence that Angela’s ideas are insane and



that she should be handled rather than listened to aligns with the dominant narrative. Because Junior has never been to war and because he is able to help veterans through legislation, he has the privilege of defining the veteran's role in society which seems to be part of the reason that Angela rails so hard against his ideas. Even Carlo Sr. works to change Junior's opinion or at least to get him to consider Angela's opinions.

Carlo Sr. as protagonist is in the best position to recognize the need for a new approach because he has acquiesced to the narrative that he is sick and needs help, and he tries to complete his own reintegration process with Angela. Even so, as we discovered through rehearsal, Carlo's main goal is not to get Angela to admit illness but to keep his family together so that he can take care of them. Throughout the play he uses three major tactics to convince Angela to stay at home. These three tactics reflect his willingness to adopt new methods as he searches for a way to keep Angela from leaving the family. As antagonist, Angela challenges the private scope of the rhetoric of pathology initially used by Carlo Sr. and Junior. Angela refuses to let the question of reintegration remain a personal, healing journey to civilian identity which pushes Carlo and the play away from what could easily have been a private family story by recasting reintegration in the broader realm of citizenship.

As a Vietnam veteran who reintegrated to his family, Carlo Sr. has a unique view of Angela's position. He brings it up often, frequently telling Angela, "I once felt everything you're feeling" (Morillo 46). He is the oldest character in the play, and throughout the play he insists that the other characters benefit from his experience and knowledge. Early in the play, his primary tactic is to help Angela "get over it, too" (Morillo 47). Carlo Sr.

suggests that she see a therapist, that she is suicidal, and that her desire to leave society behind is irrational.

While Carlo Sr. tries to Angela towards believing that society has her best interests at heart, Angela refuses to believe him. Danielle Allen describes the effects of this kind of mistrust in her book *Talking to Strangers*. She points out that democracy functions because minority groups believe that the majority will take care of them and that this belief allows the minority to acquiesce to majority rule. Angela believes that the greater democracy is broken precisely because the majority, who are not serving in the military, continue to send soldiers to war without acknowledging the consequences: “No one’s looking out for us,” she tells Marie. “That’s why we have to take care of ourselves. That’s why I want you to leave here with me” (Morillo 53). Angela believes that majority rule, to which the other characters want her to acquiesce, is neither in her best interest nor in the best interest of those who continue to believe in them. Carlo Sr. attempts to convince her that he and the other dominant civilians do have her best interests at heart and can help her to solve “her” problems. The focus of the rhetoric remains on Angela and her problems rather than on any problems with the citizenship’s habits or structure. In scene three, the two veterans hold an extended argument about the objectives of civilian society and this society’s capacity to help or harm veterans and civilians alike.

In this first discussion, and as part of his second tactic, Carlo Sr. does something unique: he listens to Angela’s arguments even though he does not agree with her conclusions. He repeatedly tells Angela that he wants to hear what she has to say and encourages her to explain her beliefs more fully. His listening is an important tactic in a citizenship of shared experience. This is seen when Danielle Allen argues that “habits

stabilize and shape the public sphere” (10) which means that the larger political spheres are built with habits of citizenship in daily life. She goes on to describe how the myth of American democracy is one of “oneness” and argues for a different vision of “wholeness” which erases the various roles of compromise and sacrifice that make the democracy of majorities and minorities function. Using the term wholeness makes room for citizens’ “mutual implication in one another’s experiences” (49) that is the basis of a citizenship of shared experience. By listening, Carlo Sr. expresses a willingness to understand the ways in which Angela perceives and experiences their shared citizenship. It helps to build trust between them.

Fig. 12. Angela (Samantha York) and Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) 1.3

Carlton argues, “As civilians, we can begin taking responsibility for war by refiguring the way we talk about the bodies/minds of warriors in our shared civic space” (289). This is what Carlo Sr. is doing. His actions can be understood in the context of Danielle Allen’s concept of citizenship, and, as a veteran, he understands and navigates the currents of Angela’s actions. Because Carlo Sr fills the role of father and veteran, he represents both home and war and symbolically bridges Angela’s and Carlo Jr.’s arguments about what the family should do with Angela’s proposition. In dramatic terms, he fulfills Aristotle’s third kind of recognition in which Angela is able to awaken Carlo Sr.’s memories of his own veteran experience which mingle with his civilian experience as a father and lead him to choose a new path over the course of the play. By virtue of their isolated roles in the play Angela and Carlo Jr. do not perform this change. Angela, as an adult, has only been a soldier and veteran. Carlo Jr., as an adult, has only been a civilian and parent; hence, Carlo Sr. has been all four of those things in his adult life which leads him to recognize the truth in Angela’s argument and his own as he works to find a third

path which acknowledges the failures of the majority as he tries to repair the damage. In the script, this manifests through Carlo Sr.'s listening to others which we see when he repeats and rephrases his children's points of view over the course of the play.

While I watched the play in production, I saw this much more clearly than when I analyzed the script. Carlo Sr. changes tactics and language after his conversations with Angela. The script contains what appears to be the same couple of arguments repeated between Carlo Sr., Angela, and Carlo Jr. which seem to be the same lines of thought punctuated with insults. It wasn't until I watched the performances that I saw that Carlo Sr.'s language progressively changed from the beginning of the play to the end.

Fig. 13. Angela (Samantha York) and Junior (Allen Wiseman) 1.1

In looking for a new way to frame the relationships between veterans and civilians, Silvestri-Carlton eloquently describes "a rhetoric of belonging" based in relational conversations that plumb the depths of historical context and relationships with an emphasis on love instead of hero worship (298-299). Carlton rejects jingoism, such as "support our troops", and aligns this rhetoric in favor of the hard work of friendship-based citizenship. Carlton concludes that in order to heal the shared war trauma, we must collectively release the rhetoric of pathology in favor of a "rhetoric of belonging". For Carlton, this means the particular skill of listening to both the words and silences of veterans in order to accept and deal with the experience together (298-304). Carlo Sr. does this when he listens to Angela's arguments and tries to clarify her words and silences.

He also tries to partner with both Angela and his other children to create new habits of behavior towards each other that will foster a home in which Angela will stay. He insists to Angela that, "while we're here, we can work on everything together" (Morillo 43). Carlo

Sr. goes from Angela to his other children and tries to get them to engage in and develop new habits of interaction with Angela. Carlo Sr. introduces Junior to Angela's arguments and ideas and asks him to tell Angela that he agrees with her. He compromises with Marie, agreeing to change his drinking behavior to promote better social relationships within the family. It is this rhetoric of belonging, the desire he has to challenge the previous habits of the family to bring them together, that ultimately leads him to experience change in the final moments of the play.

The dramaturgical structure of *American Soldiers* supports a rhetoric of belonging by making Carlo Sr the protagonist instead of Angela. While Angela's dramaturgical role is to voice the shared trauma of war that is brushed aside by the rhetoric of pathology, Carlo Sr.'s role is to challenge the habits of behavior and rhetoric that the family uses to interact with Angela. In the final scene, Carlo Sr. has accepted Angela's insistence of shared experience and the need to change the habits of citizenship. She does not believe that the habits can be changed: "The minute we go against what they believe in, they'll hate us. Our service will be worthless." Carlo Sr. responds to her pessimism with hope in the change that they can affect together, but Angela replies that she is too tired to try. He insists, "I can't do it by myself. And trust me, you're not going to ease the pain out there by yourself. But we can do it together, here, with family" (Morillo 82). His final words to Angie are not about "reintegration", "curing" herself, "getting help" or "dealing with" her experiences. Instead, they are a vulnerable plea for what Carlton calls a coalition: alliances (298) and interactions built on trust and collective ownership of trauma. She is specifically discussing the difference between treating veterans as sick people and

treating veterans as partners. He asks her to help him change things. Instead, Angela leaves.

Structurally, Angela's leaving appears to be the moment of highest tension as it is the moment in which she decides to stay or leave. But it is a false climax. In this moment, Angela does not experience recognition or reversal; she maintains her previous view and action. It is Carlo Sr. who, after she leaves, experiences an Aristotelian protagonist's "change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune" (Butcher 72). As Angela leaves, too tired, as she says, to fight for a better democracy, Carlo Sr. faces the knowledge of his failure to keep Angela home. The knowledge of this failure is the true climax of the play because it reverses the situation of the play. Instead of seeing that Angela needs to change, Carlo Sr. has accepted that something about what he and other civilians are doing needs to change. He is forced to make a decision about what he will do.

Fig. 14. Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) considers suicide 2.3

The decision he makes is described in the stage directions—he goes from the whiskey bottle, to his gun, to his phone (Morillo 83). Each object represents a response to Angela leaving. The whiskey is a return to the opening stasis of the play: the continued slow self-destructive status quo. It is a reminder of where he was at the start. The gun is the catastrophe. It represents the violent end that so many veterans choose as a solution to their position. The phone represents connection to his community and is a lifeline to the difficult, relational work that his actions have supported and to which his recognition leads him. He picks up the phone, calls his daughter-in-law, and tells her that he's coming over: "Why not? . . . Sure . . . I'll be there in about ten minutes" (Morillo 84). This ending may seem anti-climactic, but for me it ended up being empowering as it is the first time in

the play that he leaves the house to be with his family. Carlton writes that the rhetoric of belonging defines power as “a network of caring relationships” that work through a lens of love and collective ownership (297-298). Despite his failure with Angela, Carlo Sr. chooses to reinforce the network of caring relationships that he has neglected previously.

In *Talking to Strangers*, Allen offers a way to understand this change as the beginning of healthy democratic citizenship. She frames this practice in terms of personal interaction and responsibility and contends that citizenship is not simply a matter of duties to institutions but also of habits of behavior toward other citizens that “stabilize and shape the public sphere,”—a sphere which is decidedly heterogeneous in the experience of rights and privileges within the democracy. Angela insists that treating interpersonal behavior as an arena for reintegration means that citizenship must be more than loyalty to an institution. Like Angela, Allen defines healthy democratic citizenship as ‘a set of hard-won, complicated habits that are used to bridge trouble, difficulty, and differences of personality, experience, and aspiration’ (xxi). These habits are the ones that Carlo Sr. begins to develop through conflict with Angela and which he solidifies with his phone call at the end of the play.

Allen founds healthy citizenship on the cornerstone of shared social experience: “shared elements [as] (events, climates, environments, imaginative fixations, economic conditions, and social structures)” (xxii)<sup>42</sup>, which create social responsibilities and relationships from which habits of behavior rise. In the context of shared experience, the rhetoric of pathology that Junior, Marie, and Hutch foster cannot function because war is

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<sup>42</sup> Incidentally, Allen also says that citizens see themselves as a singular entity which is often conceptualized as one body politic of citizenry. Allen explains that the trouble with “one” is that it cannot be a synonym for “multiplicity” (Allen 17). The word she prefers for democratic citizenry is “wholeness” (Allen 11-17)

no longer treated as an individual trauma. It is a trauma shared through the social web and democratic ties of citizenship. While civilians do not actively fight in war or visit combat zones, they share in the events through news media, economic conditions created by the war, imaginative fixations of wartime, and social structures that vote to send troops into battle. Carlton writes, “When the combat experience is pathologized, we are free to overlook our civic obligations to one another” (288). She suggests that placing the burden of reintegration on veterans feels philanthropic and thus eases our feelings of distress. Another way to say this is that civilians who pathologize veterans become the dominant citizens and the veterans acquiesce and carry both the individual and social trauma of war. Carlo Sr. experienced this system and tries to complete his process by giving Angela the things he missed as he reintegrated, but he doesn’t have a model for a healthier process. He ends up at sacrifice. As Danielle Allen notes, “Discourses identifying and recognizing sacrifice are common for soldiers” in order to honor this behavior (39). Carlo Sr. repeats this discourse by explaining to Angela, “[T]hat’s what makes us soldiers. We can take it. They can’t. We’re tougher. We’re better. We face what they can’t in order to make the world a better place” (Morillo 81). This rhetoric ultimately leads to his isolation and near suicide at the end of the play. Angela’s call to action, however, in the final scene ultimately causes Carlo Sr. to recognize that his work is with the people in his reach. They are where he can share the experiences and bridge the distance to social action.

## II. CHOOSING A STYLE

American Soldiers’ dialogue foregrounds social issues through family relationships. This examination of the social structures and arguments is different from both *Time Stands Still* and *Oohrah!* in that the text is heavy with ideas which to my mind



was an ill fit for a kitchen sink drama. I thought that the text itself leaned towards an intellectual examination of the circumstances of reintegration and that the form of the play could reflect this. Particularly, I wanted to draw attention to the social debate happening within the play and to try to keep the audience from feeling with the characters so that they engaged more fully with the ideas presented. Every scene contained at least on one significant argument, and I was emotionally exhausted from the constant battering and worried that the audience would be too. Thus, it was important to me to highlight the intellectual discussion while managing the emotional involvement of the audience.

Because each character has a distinct and different view in his/her approach to Angela as a veteran, this play can be read as a polylogue of societal responses to veterans. The five characters each represent a set of ideas about the role of veterans in American society, and their interactions function as multiple melodic lines to flesh out the conversation of the play. At its simplest, the characters can be labeled as archetypes: the politician, Junior; party girl, Marie; hippie, Hutch; ailing patriarch, Carlo Sr.; and idealistic veteran, Angela. As the characters can be types creating their viewpoints and the text uses these views to add complexity with their differences, the categorization of the play as a polylogue was possible. The dialogue is structured in wordy, emotional, and idea-driven debates which highlight the conflicts of the play as the characters have such different ideas about how to accomplish reintegration. While in discussion about this, my directing advisor, Dr. James Thomas, suggested that I could afford to take this play into a non-realistic style. This suggestion resonated with me, and I agreed to it.

Trying to downplay the audience's emotional connection led me to draw on some of Brecht's ideas for the Epic Theatre. As previously stated, I wanted to take advantage

of the debates within the text to engage the audience to think about the culpability of community in reintegration. I theorized that if I could force the audience into the conversation via stylistic choices in the actor's portrayal of the characters, the play would not allow the audience to be swept into the emotions of the characters and instead put them into a position that required their judgment as the audience. Brecht's early Epic Theatre work seemed like the ideal style. In his essay "The Modern Theatre Is Epic Theatre", there is a famous list of innovations or differences between dramatic and what he initially called Epic Theatre. Among these is a called for form of theatre that rouses the spectators and forces them to make decisions (37). Methodologically, this involves disrupting the audience's empathy through "a radical separation of the elements" (37) which means that instead of a synthesis of performance, mise-en-scene, and narrative, the mechanics of performance and theatrical production should be exposed and interrupted. For my production, I chose to physically structure the set as a debate forum and to stylistically block the actors to plead their cases not just to each other but also to the audience. By doing so, I sought to interrupt the realistic narrative structure of the scenes and force the audience to be aware that the performers were not involved in a disagreement just with each other but also in a conversation with implications for the audience itself. As Brecht writes, "[O]nce illusion is sacrificed to free discussion, and once the spectator, instead of being enabled to have an experience, is forced as it were to cast his vote; then a change has been launched which . . . affect(s) the theatre's social function" (39). I hoped to push the audience into just such a role by turning the kitchen into a debate sphere with the scenic design.

The second way that I sought to keep the audience from empathizing with the characters was to give the set an extremely apparent opinion or feeling towards the content of the play. In this case I wanted to expose Angela's idea about a corrupt American culture of war by making that part of the design of the set. In "Indirect Impact of the Epic Theatre (Extracts from the Notes to *Die Mutter*)," Brecht says of the stage in the production of *Die Mutter* that it "took up an attitude itself towards the incidents shown; it quoted, narrated, prepared, and recalled" (57). In this case, his set was minimal and included apparatus for projection of referential texts and images to contextualize the content of the play during production. In the world of *American Soldiers*, I sought to 'America' the stage up by using a red, white, and blue color palette with stars and an American flag which hung upstage. I also favored the dramatically dim lighting that my lighting designer, Tyler Ezell, gravitated towards as it suggested that all was not well in this world. I also asked my scenic designer, Beth, to drape the flag messily, rather than open, strong, and square. During act one, the stage was covered in household garbage. The attitude of the space was one of degenerated patriotism and debate. This gave the space an obvious viewpoint which, by nature of its deliberateness, could put the audience on guard and required them to decide whether they agreed or not.

My desire to make the audience judge the content of the debates originated from two different sources. First, after *Time Stands Still*, I was aware of wanting to include the audience in the discussion as a social function of the play specifically because the content of this play is so much more community oriented than *Time Stands Still*. Where *Time Stands Still* implicates personal responsibility through Mandy's critique of Sarah not interfering with the subjects of her photographs, *American Soldiers* deliberately

challenges social structures and the people in them to accept culpability for causing and maintaining war. I concluded that this should be something that challenged the audience directly. Additionally, I needed a way into the social interactions of the play. I felt disconnected from the social behavior of the characters—their New England style family ribbing was very difficult for me to grasp. Unlike in *Time Stands Still*, it was incredibly difficult for me to relate to most of the characters. As a debate, these conversations made sense to me; as personal kitchen table interactions, they baffled me. By reframing the interactions as debates in the performance style, I was able to grasp the dynamics more clearly.

I was still baffled by the amount of verbal teasing and harsh dialogue in the text. I was also uncertain about the decision to pursue a non-realistic design. In my research, I learned that Matt Morillo, the playwright, had also directed the play; and in my quest to understand the characters and justify my stylistic choices, I decided to see if he would consent to an interview with me about the script and the play. He did. On September 26, 2013, I conducted a 45-minute phone interview with him. We spoke about the family dynamics, which character was the protagonist, the influences that led to his writing the play, and, briefly, the style.

We began the interview with introductions, and I asked about the writing of the play. He said that he wrote it after a series of bar-room conversations with conservatives on Long Island that he called “chicken-hawks.” Having never heard the term, I asked him what it meant, and he explained it indicated someone extremely and vocally pro-war who has never served. For Morillo, these people hypocritically favored the war without seriously considering about the effects of the war on individuals and society. Morillo gave

the example of him asking these “chicken-hawks” to explain why, if they really thought of veterans as heroes, they did not try to protect them by making war a last resort and demanding investigations into why wars were pursued. I found it interesting that the play grew out of the playwright’s engaging in conversations and dialogues similar to those that appear in the play. These conversations led Morillo to want his play to call out fake patriots; a play could do this for a larger group of people than a conversation could.

Morillo spoke about two figures who inspired him. First, he cited Noam Chomsky’s thoughts on propaganda saying that he thought it was true the “support our troops” statement had become analogous to “support our policy.” He found this important because he was sickened by what he perceived as nominal support although he did not go in depth on whether he subscribed to any other but this supporting idea from Chomsky. He wanted to challenge the idea that nominal support, and, in regard to his thoughts on methods, cited Bill Maher’s debate and interview style as a major influence which was clear to me when I interacted with the sharpness of the debate text between characters. In the play, the characters seem to go for the jugular. For example, Angela speaks sharply about the ways that her parents raise her and her siblings and thus connects those methods directly to the pain, distress, and devastation of war.

As mentioned previously, the sharpness of the characters’ dialogue, both in and out of the debate sections of the text was difficult for me to understand, so I asked Morillo about the family in the play and their dynamics. He said that he believed that ordinary people would be the best way to challenge the propaganda that he had encountered in the bars of his native Long Island. The teasing, he explained, was comedic banter, elements that he inserted to lighten the discussion which was deliberately idea heavy.

I had a hard time understanding these digs and teases as anything but further violence. To me, they did the opposite of lightening the text or making breaks in the tension. Those moments, I felt, seemed to heighten the tension and create a sense of real danger between the characters. I was not able to articulate that clearly during the interview but again voiced my concern to which he offered the explanation that this banter was a very New York dynamic. Specifically, insults from your family, in this world, didn't matter because they were considered "bullshit." For him, Angelica's actions were deliberately "manipulative" because she wants to talk about the issues. Everyone else in the play says, "[Y]ou don't talk about it."<sup>43</sup>

### III. DIRECTING THE SHOW

Directing this show was a difficult learning experience. *American Soldiers* was the third show that I directed as part of WSU's Director's Series in the Studio Theatre and the second out of my three dissertation plays. I directed this show in fall of 2013 immediately following my Month in the Moscow study abroad program. I had a cast and crew of students to work with. My scenic designer, Beth Ottoson, was a first-year student with experience building sets in high school but little interest and no experience in design. Four out of five of my actors were freshmen: Samantha York played Angela, Allen Wiseman played Carlo Jr, Kaylen Ivory played Carlo Sr, Kadijah Perkins played Marie, and Garrett Harris, a junior, played Hutch. My costumer, Marky Sharrow, was also a freshman but very experienced as he had designed and run costumes for several shows in high school. My lighting designer, Tyler Ezell, was an experienced junior who had designed several

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<sup>43</sup> Incidentally, Morillo mentioned that the title of the show was inspired by people who tacitly follow societal, political, and religious rules. *American Soldiers* refers to all Americans as soldiers who follow these rules implicitly. Just like Angela, Morillo believes the statement "you guys raised us to follow orders" (45).

shows at WSU. My stage manager, Patrick Lienemann, was also an experienced junior who had stage-managed several shows. He was also 27 and a veteran of the Iraq War.

After the engagement of *mise-en-scene* in *Time Stands Still*, I wanted push the abstraction further in this production. I thought about the polylogue of the characters representing and activating different voices through the text itself and wanted to take that polylogue and see if it could be engaged as a production tool. In particular, I had couple of questions I wanted to explore—Could the design elements be as much part of the conversation as the dialogue or acting? Could the design elements function as melodic lines in the performative melody of the piece and subsequently add to a sense of multiple voices in a visual and aural way? To explore these ideas, I decided to try using etudes in the style of designer and director Dmitry Krymov and in conjunction with Elinor Fuch's questions on "A Visit to a Small Planet" to work with my designers on the world of the play.

Early in the production process, I set up a meeting with my three designers to explore the tone of the play by using some design etudes. The new head of undergraduate scenic design, Sarah Pearline, also attended this meeting. To prepare, I gathered a collection of craft objects from a trash and craft store. The collection included but was not limited to: beads, pipe cleaners, cardboard shapes and boxes, pieces of fabric, tubes, ribbons, magazine pages, and scissors. I planned a discussion of the play in terms of some of Elinor Fuch's questions followed by all of us making things together in order to get our creative juices flowing. I also thought it was important to work through some physical images in the show.

The discussion at the time was rather awkward and a little truncated. I got the sense that the designers were uncertain about what I expected from them out of the interaction since the normal work of designers in their program was separate from that of the directors. I set out some questions to begin with such as—What does the play feel like? What is it about? And what moments strike you as being important to the heart of the play? My goal at the time was to make the moments or the world of the play using the crafts that I had brought.

The responses to the discussion were interesting. The designers said that the play felt resembled a wheel, a political debate, and a house like Goldilocks: too big and too hot. When responding to what the play was about, they mentioned that they thought in terms of legacy, responsibility, family, and America. In the discussion of iconic or important moments, they listed the following: sex on the table, not going anywhere at the end, connecting generational experiences, compartmentalization, religion and patriotism debates, the defaced poster, the line “Do you think I didn’t want to go?”, Dad in his uniform trying to shoot himself, and the dog tags at the end. Some remarks that I wrote down included the following: feeling hit over the head with war and soldiers, feeling uneasy, and it didn’t matter that she left.

In this play, I wanted to try a form of design etudes to start thinking about the play in images rather than text. I used Dmitri Krymov as inspiration. In Dr. James Thomas’s interview with Krymov, “My Manner of Telling the Story,” he describes using etudes for the designers:

“[DK: The design students] began to do etudes just as actors often do. Sometimes it was good; sometimes it was awful.

JT: By etudes, you mean improvised sketches based the events in a play?



DK: Yes, and we decided to do etudes for Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. However, I saw how beautiful it was when they did not simply talk about something on stage, but when they had something in their hands, something material. To explain what they wanted to say, they began to create another language. Sometimes it was surprisingly interesting. When they began not to use words in their etudes, I immediately recognized the border line between something new and genuine and something worn-out and false. It was clear that it was possible to say something about love, friendship, men, women — without words. It was a more visual, more symbolic style of theatre, and it was the first hint of our future work." (7-8)

In this exercise, I did not want to replicate Krymov's method but rather explore the tangible creation that Krymov described when he says that "something in their hands" led to the ability to "create another language". After the discussion, we spent time building things together. I hoped that by making time for us to create things with our hands and discuss the images in the play while we explored them physically that we could, as a design team, come closer to a similar linguistic or image vocabulary as a starting place to work forward from. As Krymov says of his process, which results in stunning performances, sometimes it is good and sometimes awful.

The pieces that the group of us built during mini-abbreviations of etude play were influenced by the discussion and extremely varied. None of them ultimately became elements in the design of the show in any direct way, though I appreciated the shapes and the images as well as the exploration. The set designer created what looked like a stars and stripes rosary bracelet, and Sarah Pearline used small cardboard tubes that were glued alongside each other to create different levels atop a strip of plastic green turf. The lighting designer used a vinyl record as the base for a cross curled round with ribbons in red and blue. The costume designer used a cork board to attach disparate squares of tile and a sphere of wood with cut outs of people, and I put beads and stones in a small

glass bottle then tipped the open mouth of it into the lid, so it would rotate around like a wheel.

The result of the experiment was not awful, but it was also not exactly etudes either. I did not ask the designers to look at scenes from the play and to build scenes through improvisation as Krymov describes. I also was not teaching designers with either the methods or structure or syllabi that Dmitry Krymov describes. As a tool to gain a level of design language and play with my team, it was a fun ice-breaker that led to some interesting concepts, but it didn't develop further and, frankly, could have used more thought and preparation than I gave it. I ended up having a much more difficult time with the design than I believed I would in the moment due to the optimism and excitement I harbored for this early, playful design encounter; nevertheless, I felt like the play time gave me the chance to get to know and feel comfortable with the other designers and their understanding of the play so that communication about the design went both directions.

Fig. 15. The set at the top of the show 1.1

I wanted very much for the mise-en-scene elements to be part of the conversation. In the case of the scenic design, that meant letting the set have an opinion about the content of the show. Instead of just having a kitchen, I could have a kitchen that said something about whether kitchens are good, bad, safe, or dangerous. I could make the patriotic nature of items on the set corrupt or jingoistic. While trying to decide between these opinions, I spent a lot of time thinking about how the audience could be brought into the character's conversations about society as I believed the audience should engage with the ideas about the impact social structure has on our treatment of veterans and war. As I brainstormed, I kept thinking about the political and social stage of these ideas. The

debates felt less like intimate family discussion and more like presidential debates. I believed that the stage could represent this view of the ideas.

I had the idea that the kitchen could have a counter instead of a table. Growing up, I ate breakfast at the breakfast counter when with my grandparents. We grandkids were required to stand after eating for recitations of the dinner menu, poetry, and speeches. Theological, philosophical, and cooking arguments happened around the counters of islands. I believed that the counter could both be a gathering place and split apart into podiums that could simulate a political debate in order to emphasize both the intimate and the broad nature of the arguments as well as the debate structure of the play. In this way, the audience could be brought directly into the action by being made aware of their identity as audience members and therefore witnesses who have a political and social relationship to the play's content.

In the end, it was the set design that was the most difficult for me in this play. I was extremely insecure about my initial ideas and hopes for the scenic design: I had had excellent experiences with designers in my first show and expected that my scenic designer might have better ideas or better ways to play with these ideas. I had discussed some of these themes and ideas briefly. For example, I wanted a set that would highlight the debate and bring it to the audience. Having previously worked on *Time Stands Still* with Lois Bendler, who was an active scenic designer, I had been privileged that she came to meetings with visual ideas that she wanted to try and opinions about the text. My designer for this show, however, was very different.

I struggled at the first scenic meeting with my freshman scenic designer when she told me that her experience was mainly in building sets and not in designing them and

was comfortable in that role. At that point, I still felt really positive and told her that I was interested in her ideas and would like to see some sketches and/or thoughts. I also told her, thinking that I was helping, that she could sketch anything she wanted that connected to the play because I wanted to pursue a non-realistic set. I felt like I was releasing her from any preconceptions or need to conform to anything.

At our second meeting, Sarah Pearline, her faculty mentor was in attendance. This meeting was slower, and Beth still didn't have any sketches. When I asked if she had any thoughts about the set, she said she really wasn't sure. I was surprised. A little imagination, I thought, would give you some ideas about what a kitchen might look like. When Sarah suggested I should volunteer some ideas of my own, I pulled out my notebook and showed her a couple of my sketches. The cleanest of these, my first rough sketch of a political debate sound stage, ended up being the final design. When we met again, Beth brought a cleaned up and scaled version of the sketch I had loaned her which was precisely what I hadn't wanted. While I liked the initial idea of the sketch, I felt the idea was better than my design and that she could contribute ideas that would change, refine, or develop the design. I liked the set-in sketches but felt frustrated with it through the process of the show<sup>44</sup>.

Beth did an incredible job of building a set from the sketches, and one of my favorite parts of the set was something that I tasked her with creating. I went to see a play at University of Detroit Mercy about veterans. Against the broken walls of their set was a

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<sup>44</sup> After working on *Oohrah!* the following summer, I hypothesized that because the set of this particular play facilitated the actor's activity instead of getting in the way, it did not help to create tension in the action of the play. My work on *Oohrah!*, as the following chapter discusses, resulted in my use of the set to make the actor's activities more difficult and thus raising the tension in their scenes with a deliberately intrusive on-stage environment. My hypothesis on the ease of the *American Soldiers* set was supported by remarks in a conversation about the play with Dr. Magidson, professor of dramatic theory at Wayne State University, who said that in this show I had dampened the sense of suspense in the play by giving away the undertones with my overtly political staging.

rippling flag. I asked Beth if we could put something like this upstage and tasked her with creating the hang. For me, the most consistently interesting and effective part of the set was the rumpled American flag draped across the upstage wall which my lighting designer, Tyler Ezell, used like a cyclorama to reflect the emotional tone of the piece. Tyler's lighting design for the show ended up being particularly low and moody except for during the debates. We discussed the debates as being similar to presidential debates which translated to Tyler deciding to bring up the front lights in contrast to the side lighting during the more intimate scenes. The lighting in this play -was extremely dramatic and the changes often noticeable.

This worked together with the deliberate point of view that the mise-en-scene displayed. To demonstrate Carlo Sr.'s changing views, we also decided to fill the stage with trash in Act 1 which he cleaned up as stage business. This worked as a symbolic and literal act since he was taking charge of the space and accepting responsibility for his own actions within the family.

The counter that I sketched at center stage became two podiums, and I asked the actors to work with this as a stylistic choice. Each discussion was, textually, structured like a debate with the introduction of a subject, elaboration, and rebuttal in large paragraphs. Instead of letting the performance style remain intimate, I pushed immediately towards the use of the podiums to create debate staging. The characters were trying now to convince the audience of their points of view. It was a very difficult concept to communicate as I wanted the actors to interact directly with the audience. The idea was to highlight the polylogue and to force the audience to participate in the conversation.

Fig. 16. Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) and Junior (Allen Wiseman) 2.1

During casting, I was busy dealing with the national family visual of the cast. I was uncertain about this choice as I was totally unfamiliar with the very particular Long Island Italian-American family dynamics of this specific regional setting and character. I wanted the visual of the performers to reference the broader conversation and decided to embody this diverse polylogue in my casting by casting a group of multi-ethnic actors instead of looking for performers who looked like a homogenous Italian-American family. I wanted the cast to look like an American family.

I now suspect that this was a particularly short-sighted view and the text was stretched beyond what it meant to be. The text dealt with specific cultural and religious issues from Long Island Italian-Americans and did not deal with the broader ways that veteran and political issues intersect with systemic racisms or regional differences. I cast the actors thinking about how, during the cold reads, they each portrayed the archetypes—politician, party girl, idealistic soldier, aging patriarch, and hippie—without grappling with the statements made by these bodies at the time of telling this story. As a result, there is a large set of statements and assumptions that my production and my research ignored.

My cast was particularly talented, and I was very excited. Even so, in my excitement about the look of the cast and the archetypes, I failed to ascertain the performers' ability, familiarity, and willingness to play in heightened styles or to interact with an audience. This did not mean that they were not able to perform at this level but that I had not bothered to figure out how they communicated this concept. Instead, I had, based on my experience with *Time Stands Still*, assumed, that I would have smooth

sailing with the cast and had not bothered to try to figure out how to create or rigorously define the style of acting I hoped that we would achieve.

In thinking about drawing the audience into the debates, I asked the performers to allow themselves to be aware of the audience and to make their arguments not just to each other but also to the audience. I did not think to describe it using Brecht's specific story about an actor telling you about a car accident which shows how an actor can have a dual identity to the audience of character and actor in the same way that someone describing a car accident they have seen might both narrate and act out parts of the story. Having only asked the actors to involve the audience, I observed them begin to act with extreme performativity but without much connection to people sitting in the rehearsal audience. This translated into difficulty in building relationships between the characters which I found jarring and not at all reflective of the in-between actor-character that I wanted. In my imagination, the debates were as powerful with audience interaction as a political debate between participants who know each other well.

By changing the style, I did not want to erase the family dynamic but to draw attention to the action of these specific characters. The actors found it extremely difficult to understand the concept for stylization<sup>45</sup> which resulted in a lot of one-dimensional performances. Samantha York had particular difficulty with responding beyond anger and resentment. She took the fight against voicelessness as the central conflict for her character, and her performance frequently displayed anger which came across as a wall. While it may have been a choice, it was flat when combined with the repetitive text of

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<sup>45</sup> It is entirely possible that I had more trouble explaining the style than the performers had in grasping the concept. I was uncertain at the time about the relationships between the characters which may have been a large part of why the style did not make sense to the performers.

arguments and in the debate forum it became even more obfuscating and caused me, as a viewer, to want to shut down. I was hoping for and continued to try to direct more nuance and transparency into her performance.

In order to build complexity and help the actors connect the rest of the story, I took them to my house to run rehearsal in an actual kitchen. This exercise proved very effective. Here, the actors were released from the style and blocking we had put in place which meant that they were not required to use the podiums or address anyone but each other. In order to add more dimensions from the characters, I gave the actors individual post-it notes with a given circumstance to focus on during the running of particular scenes. The given circumstances were individual and secret. During the scenes, I would occasionally remind actors of their given circumstance by saying “post-it.” We also rotated between different given circumstances. Some examples included “your daughter looks like her mother,” “hemorrhoids,” and “late to pick up kids.” We used some silly things and some more serious ones to create a multiplicity within the tone of action.

This exercise helped the actors have a lot of fun and relax during scene work. The one-dimensional rage went away, and the dynamics of speaking about the issues addressed in the play became more nuanced. Looking back, I wonder if I should have kept the setting at that point instead of coming back to the concept. Perhaps beginning with a natural style of rehearsal and then laying the stylization over it later in the rehearsal process would have worked better.

Scene two was interesting to work with in rehearsal because there had to be a mix of affection, drunken sexual excitement, and of course the violence and rage undermining Angela’s motives. It was difficult to achieve the sense of intimacy and discord. We used



exercises like singing the lines and funny voices to help Garret and Sam build a rapport while the violence was choreographed by David Sterritt. Garret proved particularly excellent at selling the viciousness of the arm twist.

Fig. 17. Angela (Samantha York) and Hutch (Garrett Harris) 1.2

In order to discover the characters' main objectives as well as to play with their archetypes, we spent a rehearsal working through relational poses. This was something akin to Michael Chekov's Gestures. In his book *To the Actor*, Chekov writes that a gesture can be small, but that "the sharp, clear, definite aim of the Will expresses itself in well-formed, plastically molded Actions and Gestures," which the actor can use as vehicles of his/her character's will (38). Because our stylized acting focused so much on the ideology, I wanted to work with the actors to develop the actions of their characters. Thus, I asked each actor to improvise several poses (each to be held for a couple minutes) that they felt typified a major action their character tried to perform. I then asked the other performers to spend a moment finding poses in relation to the frozen actor that typified their relationship to that action. While I really loved this activity, the actors had a difficult time with it. They had trouble coming up with poses and even actions for their characters which might inspire physical gestures; nevertheless, some interesting things came out of the exercise.

Sam York, who played Angela, went first and Garrett Harris, who played Hutch, stepped up to create a revealing collaborative pose. Sam's pose was inspired by Angela's desire to lead others to a better situation. This intention prompted her to stand with one foot in front of the other and reach both arms up and forward. Her eyes looked up and away. This created both a sense of idealism and of disconnection. The other actors had a difficult time relating to this pose which was in alignment with the story. Angela's dream

to create a self-sustaining cabin in the woods rejects the context in which these characters live comfortably. She is blind to any of the good things that are experienced in their day-to-day lives; she sees and talks about dangerous elements to the exclusion of the good. Even though Hutch and Marie are receptive to Angela's dreams and discussions, they ultimately want to stay where they are. The pose above (fig. 17) with Garret and Sam illustrated the intimate desire to reach Angela as well as the desire to keep her in one place. Garret tangles between her legs and yet the position of his body is curved and soft. He reaches for her, extending dramatically, but cannot actually touch her. Kadajah, the actress who played Marie, had a difficult time figuring out what to do and finally ended her relational pose with the below (fig. 18).

Fig. 18. Kadajah Raquel and Samantha York

It was an interesting physical exploration because she ended with her legs tangled around Sam's legs while leaning backward on her hands. She looks as though she has given up on being able to stop Angela, or as though Angela has pushed her off unwittingly. By the end of the play, this isn't an inaccurate representation of their interaction since Marie has decided to stay home and care for Carlo Sr.

Junior was another interesting archetype to witness. Allen Wiseman, who played this character used particularly political gestures. In earlier rehearsals, Allen and I had discussed at length how politicians use their bodies to communicate trust-worthiness in hopes of helping him embody that given circumstance more effectively. We'd looked at videos and selected gestures to play with. During this particular exercise, he used some of those gestures. Later, I worried that I interposed too much by having pointed him to some videos, but asking him to try political movements hadn't resulted in any new acting choices. In fact, it was difficult to solicit new choices from Allen, Sam, and Kaylen. I was

often uncertain about how to get them to experiment with their own ideas the way that Kadajah and Garret did. I still wonder if the difficulty was a by-product of my directing or if it had to do with the group of actors or was a combination of these.

Unlike Junior, Marie, and Hutch, Carlo Sr.'s main priority is making Angela feel understood. As protagonist, Carlo Sr. has a super-objective, what James Thomas defines as "the main character's all-inclusive goal" (22) of keeping Angela home. What we discovered through the poses exercise was that it came out of need to protect her and his other children. The unique combination of given circumstances makes him a veteran, father, and widower. Because of his perspective and experiences, he feels that her "craziness" is understandable and legitimate. The super-objective and given circumstances inform Carlo Sr.'s major actions which can be thought of as his through-action which is defined by Thomas as a "description of the main conflict and expresses what the character does in the play to accomplish his/her super-objective" (23). Carlo Sr.'s three tactics are convincing Angela that he is an avenue of help, listening to her ideas, and partnering with her. The tactics are not restricted to certain acts, scenes, or portions of the play but are fluid over the course of the play as he discovers and applies them toward his super-objective.

During production, I told the actors that the final scene was to be the most realistically styled scene in the whole show; looking back, I thought it was. On reflection, it's obvious to me that it was not the most realistic but rather the most blatantly emotional. The other actors were all onstage in frozen observational positions to watch Angela and Carlo Sr. talk, down stage, about their experiences in a vulnerable way for the first time. To me, the vulnerability of this scene was the most striking in the show. It was so different

from the belligerent discussion of the other scenes. We lit the scene in a low blue that played up the isolation of the characters despite the stylized observation and witness of the other actors as well as the audience. In Brechtian fashion, it served to remind the audience that they were watching a play.

Fig. 19. Carlo Sr. (Kaylen Ivory) and Angela (Samantha York) 2.3

In working on this moment with Kaylen Ivory, the actor playing Carlo Sr., we focused on the steps that the character walks through as he considers suicide at the end of the play. In doing so, we discussed the isolation and the burden that the character had taken on by taking responsibility for what other characters could not. Despite Carlo Sr. being sick, drunk, and ignored or opposed throughout the play, these are character issues that crop up throughout the show. He is left alone for the final scene as Angela exits. Kaylen had a very natural sense of the weight of each step of the process. Once we defined what each step was, he needed little else to give weight to and focus each step. Morillo lists the steps very deliberately in the script: sitting, opening Angela's gift, letting the gift affect him, pacing, alcohol, discarding the alcohol, the gun, discarding the gun, and getting the phone. Kaylen and I worked through each thought by addressing its defining action.

Instead of leaving him alone onstage as the script suggests. I decided to highlight the isolation and the group culpability by keeping all the other actors onstage. I had the actors arrange themselves onstage in observing positions making them culpable witnesses along with the audience. It was a decision that I felt was important at the time. I wanted to highlight the illusion that is isolation. The ending was not satisfactory to me because Carlo Sr. ultimately calls someone offstage who was not a character portrayed in the show. He reaches out and doesn't connect with any of the characters from the

show. I wanted them to be present for this moment so that they could participate. I liked that each of the characters and their different points of view could be present for the final moment as witnesses like the audience is. I do think that aligning the characters with the audience at this point may have caused a homogenizing of them instead of calling attention to the isolation by tacitly supporting the idea that it was the veteran's job to reach out and not the audience or citizen character's job to reach back. I hoped that seeing the actors in costume as their characters and as witnesses like the audience would remind the audience of their heterogeneous make-up and of their role as both witnesses and participants.

The goal of inviting the audience to make a decision about the content led me to another Brechtian trope: jarring musical addition. Rather than have the actors bow to the applause of the audience, I decided to play "At This Point in My Life" by Tracy Chapman while the actors exited one by one into the audience to shake hands and thank the audience. We began with Carlo Sr. finishing his phone call and exiting into the audience, followed by Junior, Hutch, and Marie. Finally, the actors turned to where Angie was upstage and in a hopeful gesture, she turned around and came down from the stage to thank people as well. I wanted to include the audience in the idea of relational coalition for the piece. The actors loved doing this every night. The audience had mixed responses which I will discuss in the next section. Like Brechtian music, this was a marked departure from the NPR stories and patriotic music played during scene transitions in the rest of the play. It served to distance the audience at the moment of highest emotional investment and forced them to consider the events of the play.

#### IV. THE AUDIENCE AND REFLECTIONS

I had several responders to the piece remark that the characters seemed unlikeable and that the message seemed overwhelmingly heavy handed. At the time, I attributed this to my clunky directing and my difficulty with the piece in terms of emotional connection. I wonder now if it was actually a successful execution of the alienation effect. The actors never fully embraced the idea of debating directly with the audience, despite repeated attempts to get them to engage that way, and I wonder whether pushing for further non-realism in their acting choices would have added or enhanced the Brechtian effect of the actor-character which pushes the audience to see the actors as both performer and character simultaneously. Brecht's description of epic acting is as follows: "The actor used a somewhat complex technique to detach himself from the character portrayed; he forced the spectator to look at the play's situations from such an angle that they necessarily became subject to his criticism" (Willet 121). For my production, I wanted to create a sense of detachment so that the audience was invited to discuss the situations in the play; accordingly, I emphasized the debate structure within the mise-en-scene and acting style in order to try to create that sense of detachment. In gauging the audience's responses to this show, I am forced to conclude that I succeeded in keeping viewers from empathizing too deeply with the characters during the meat of the show and crammed a big request for empathy into the final scene and the conclusion. This made my audiences uncomfortable.

The reception of this piece was very mixed. In one review, by [modoreview.weebly.com](http://modoreview.weebly.com) the show was called "clunky and preachy." The reviewer went on to say of the style and the ending:

Director Katherine Skoretz highlights the arguments as if they were political debates – making the heavy-handed decision of literally placing characters at

podiums and on soapboxes, rather than in any sort of relationship with each other. It's an idea that might have worked had it been done with a degree of subtlety, but Skoretz strips the characters of their connections to one another, preferring that they speak to the audience instead of each other, which keeps the audience from forming an emotional connection with the family. In an already preachy play, Skoretz magnifies the rhetoric and ends up presenting a series of rants and lectures instead of a cohesive story. And the final moment of the play, which follows up an unearned emotional barrage with the cast individually shaking hands with and thanking each audience member for their attendance in place of a curtain call, is a little intrusive and a lot self-indulgent. The sad fact is, this is a play that asked for a straightforward, emotionally truthful exploration of some tough ideas, and instead got a faux-deep, overly-stylized treatment that does little to illuminate or humanize the script.

This was a really difficult review for me, especially because most of these choices were deliberate. I spoke with Cheryl Turski, a professor at WSU, after the production as well, and she also commented on the way the script needed to be balanced by the emotional connection with the family. In order for the audience to care, she said, the characters needed to be emotionally invested in each other rather than in the ideology of the rhetoric. At the time that I read the review seen above, I felt like an utter failure. Since then I have developed some perspective and wonder if it was in fact the precise response that my style was intended to generate. I approached it with a Brechtian sensibility and wanted to make it clear that these were actors engaging ideas and to make that the audience's problem. I continued to think for a while that I hadn't gone far enough. Even though I wanted the audience to feel able to respond or be involved in the production, I also wanted the audience to question the narratives that they were being given. I was aware that we were firing a barrage at them, and I wanted the actors to have a chance to thank them for sitting through it and listening.

The MODO reviewer felt that the actors' thanking the audience was intrusive and the emotional climax unearned. The reviewer was disappointed that they didn't get to

have the emotional connection with the characters. I know that Brecht's characters were shown to be awful and that the context was presented through story. I wonder if perhaps this script didn't support the stylistic choices I made. Or perhaps the viewers' expectations were opposite to what they saw. I am still not certain whether I view this as a successful production or a valuable failure. It was certainly an uncomfortable one.

Matt Morillo was able to attend one of our performances and was gracious enough to hold a talkback after the show. I was terrified because he had told me about his own very realistic productions of this piece, which he had directed twice, and while I was upfront during our phone call and let him know that I was going to direct the play with a less realistic style, I was extremely anxious that I had directed the play against his authorial intentions for the show. I don't remember much of the talkback itself. I do remember that a lot of the audience stayed to ask the author questions.

My performers were in awe and stood staring at him from the wings while he sat on a stool on stage. After the talkback, he kindly spoke with both the actors and myself and offered to hook the actors up with auditions or work if they ever moved to New York where he was living at the time. The one moment that really stuck out to me in the talkback was when someone asked him about whether productions have the right to change things in plays and whether he thought this was an accurate representation of his play. He looked at the person who asked the question very directly and said that productions don't have the rights to change things; and if they want to, they need to write to the authors and ask permission. I don't recall what he said about my play. I recall mostly a sense of terror. He expressed interest in reading what I wrote about his play. I have not followed up due to crippling anxiety.



Dr. Mary Cooney, a senior lecturer in theatre and education, once told me that in the journey toward social change, the in-between step from status quo to the ideal is often the most difficult step to visualize. It is easy to imagine the end that we hope for but difficult to find the middle steps that will take us to that end. With this protagonist and this ending, Morillo opens the avenue of Carlton's rhetoric of belonging and Allen's friendship in citizenship and portrays a possible in-between step. The end is not a neat solution. The work laid out is complex and unfinished. The final act is a phone call to off-stage to characters we have not seen. By ending with a phone call offstage, Morillo opens the avenue of relational citizenship to the audience who are also off-stage and, like the daughter-in-law, not an active part of the on-stage drama. This similarity allows the audience to imagine themselves as possible partners in accepting the experience of veterans. The play opens this kind of relation-based solution to the audience and seeks not a reintegration of the veteran but a reintegration of society into a new democratic whole.

## CHAPTER 4 OOHRAH!

Oohrah! opens on Sara and her sister, Abby, assembling care packages to send overseas (1.1). The sisters ruminate on their lives, as military wife and flight attendant respectively, and Abby questions Sara eagerly about the exploits of having a soldier for a husband in comparison to her geeky fiancé. The scene ends with Ron, Sara's husband, calling from offstage that he is home and Abby lamenting that she wishes she had a soldier.

As the play continues, Ron's return is complicated by the expectations of his extended family. His wife wants him to get a job and help her throw a party. His pre-teen daughter, Lacey, wants his approval for her dream to join the Marines. His sister-in-law, Abby, wants to continue avoiding her fiancé by living at Ron and Sara's. Chris, the video-game playing fiancé, wants to be part of the family. Sara's veteran father-in-law wants to impart the wisdom he learned from his own reintegration, and Chip, an asthmatic, imposter Marine that Abby brings home, wants Ron's help to get into the army. Everyone seems to expect something from Ron. Altogether, the family creates a 'perfect storm' around Ron who just wants some time to readjust.

The play's dramatic time spans approximately one week, leading up to Lacey's fifteenth birthday party which means there is neither time nor space for Ron to settle into civilian life. Consequently, at the climax of the play, Ron flees from Lacey's party to guard some municipal water towers with Chip. He confesses to Chip that no matter how badly he wants to do another military tour of duty, the army doesn't need them. The epilogue offers a brief view of the women—Sara, Abby, and Lacey—left alone in the kitchen, and the play ends in a state of unresolved tension with all of the characters out of place.

When talking about the displacement that exists in this play, Caren Kaplan's discussion of deterritorialization is useful. Kaplan borrows the term deterritorialization from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to describe the disruption of identities, persons, and meanings. Both Kaplan and Deleuze/Guattari locate the expression of this displacement in textual literary analysis, noting how displaced peoples use the margins, both formal and stylistic, in order to create new space for discourses. Deleuze/Guattari are discussing literatures that are outside the canon authored by women, people of color, refugees, and groups that have been displaced by war and persecution over generations. Expanding this idea, Kaplan moves from literature to social groups to note that displacement is endemic to the postmodern condition because of the globalized world that we inhabit. She points out that the rapid exchanges of information and ideas across the globe via the many pathways of human and digital movement destabilize the stable sense of reality especially for people at the margins of power (188). While I only briefly discuss the unusual form of Brunstetter's play, it is useful to think about the position that veterans hold in post-deployment and to point out that they are displaced from civilian society by their training, their mandated deployments across the globe, and their experiences during conflict. Additionally, they inhabit a position in the margins of a dominant society because they make up such a tiny percentage of the American population and are legally obligated, trained, and culturally pressured to follow orders whether or not they understand or agree.

In this study, I have discussed the ways that veterans either resist or attempt to conform to civilian roles despite those roles no longer being comfortable. I find the term deterritorialization particularly apt for *Oohrah!* in two ways. First in the literary sense—the

script contains many examples of language and image being used to destabilize identities, persons, and meanings. For example, Sara consistently uses language to enforce social roles by telling Ron what to do or say. Second, the playwright, Bekkah Brunstetter, foregrounds the women who participate in reintegration. Like *American Soldiers*, the play begins and ends with someone other than the central veteran except this time the characters are wife, sister-in-law, and daughter. As women, they navigate different roles in relationship to Ron which move between supporting, managing, taking advantage of, and waiting. The role of the women in this play are complex and resist the type of archetypes that occur in *American Soldiers*. For this reason, they can also be seen as deterritorialized because they must constantly reinvent their relationship to both existing narratives and to Ron and other soldier and veteran figures.

A poignant example occurs in the penultimate scene of *Oohrah!* when Ron, the play's central veteran, says, "It's just I got other things to give. . . . Somebody better give me something to do real soon, Chip" (Brunstetter 87). The frustration he expresses revolves around his inability to do another tour and the displacement he feels at home. He feels that his talents, the things he must give, are different from what is asked of him at home. The irony is that since he enters the play, the other characters repeatedly give him things to do, yet he continues to feel alienated in his home.

Ron exhibits something that Kaplan says about deterritorialized individuals. Specifically, their experience of "defamiliarization enables imagination, even as it produces alienation" (188). Ron both imagines possible homes and in doing so feels alienated by the differences and similarities between reality and imagination. Our stage manager, a veteran of the Iraq conflicts, pointed out that in the process of reintegration

this is an extremely common occurrence. Because home is familiar and unfamiliar, imagined possibilities become important touch points to the individuals going through reintegration, and the characters play this out. The familiarity and strangeness of reality alienate them from themselves and each other.

This chapter and the production that it describes asks what are the imagined and assumed identities and meanings—produced in response to the deterritorialization that the characters’ experience—and how do these identities and meanings conflict with and give rise to the action and performance of the reintegration scenario in performance? Through the process of directing this show as part of The Underground Theatre’s<sup>46</sup> first season, we explored these identities and expectations through rehearsal games, etudes, and ultimately through the creation of space and design. Before I describe the production of the show, I will discuss the concept of “scripts of home” as it relates to and manifests in the conflicts of the play text in order to lay the groundwork for the record and reflection of producing this show in rehearsal and performance. Finally, I will return to the question of deterritorialization as an aesthetic strategy.

#### Scripts of Home—Expectations vs Reality

The primary conflict in this play is between the expectations of home and the reality of home. Like *Time Stands Still* and, in fact, most reintegration narratives, this manifests in whether or not and how well the primary veteran reintegrates her or himself into the home to which s/he is returning. In *Time Stands Still*, the question is whether Sarah’s view of home will allow her to reintegrate with James and his changing view of home. In *Oohrah!*, the question is whether Ron’s expectations of home will allow him to reintegrate

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<sup>46</sup> The Underground Theatre is the student run summer theatre that I co-founded in 2014. *Oohrah!* was directed there with a cast of undergraduate students in the Studio Theatre.

into the home that Sara has spent her time creating for him.

The meanings and identities that Sara expects Ron to assume exist as the familiar and unfamiliar psychological space of this reintegration scenario. The first scene of the play introduces Sara and Abby. The sisters spend the scene defining their expectations of a soldier coming home. The activity they pursue is the creation of care packages of cookies for soldiers who, Sara dreams, will “eat them like hot potato chips!” despite the lack of freshness these homemade cookies are likely to have upon arrival (Brunstetter 7). Sara has made these cookies, a symbol of home, to give to the soldiers, and she expects them to appreciate them and eat them. Through the rest of the play this trend continues—she expects that Ron will enjoy and appreciate the home that she creates, but she agonizes that he does not. Abby, on the other hand, explores her sensual connection to the soldiers by rubbing a baby wipe up and down her arm and ruminating on whether the baby wipes in the care packages will be rubbed on the soldier’s “nuts” (Brunstetter 8). The expectations that the sisters discuss are explored in later scenes. Ron does come home and scene 1.3 explores Sara and Ron’s first opportunity for alone time. Abby ignores her fiancé and picks up Chip at the airport believing that he is a marine. She spends the rest of the play pursuing sexual fulfillment from Chip. Neither Sara nor Abby’s encounter goes as they had imagined or hoped.

The social narratives that the sisters are drawing from exist in what might be called the cultural reintegration scenarios. Diana Taylor describes a scenario as a “pattern of cultural expression . . . that do not reduce gestures and embodied practices to narrative description” (16). In this case, I suggest that the roles and behaviors that Sara and Abby ascribe to their imagined reintegration moments are embodied practices that they draw

from a cultural reservoir about such return encounters. Sara casts herself as a helpful caregiver, providing the space and comforts that the soldiers don't have away from home; she makes them cookies and tries to make her house a perfect Martha Stewart home. Meanwhile, Abby imagines herself a sexual provider that the soldiers don't have away from home. These two roles have their roots in long-standing patterns of cultural expression about soldiers needing home comforts or sexual comforts.

Sara and Abby move through the play with identities they have constructed in conjunction with these possibilities. They also frame their responses to conflict, crisis, and resolution based on these expectations. The trouble is that the actual interactions that occur when Ron and Chip arrive do not live up to these expectations. Sara and Abby expect the men to behave in certain ways; however, their behaviors are both familiar and unfamiliar which creates conflict. In addition to everything else, Abby has a non-military fiancé who complicates her interactions with her family. Sara brings up Abby's fiancé, "So how's Chris taking all the wedding plans . . ." (Brunstetter 11) and Abby dives into a discussion about how sexually inadequate she finds him. Both sisters share a sense of fulfillment in their lives that is based on the absence of a hyper-masculine male partner. Sara's husband is absent due to his role as soldier and veteran and Abby's fiancé is not masculine enough. Their focus on this lack blinds them to the actual experiences of the men around them. One example of this in the first scene is when Sara mentions their brother Danny, who never appears in the play. Because he doesn't appear and hasn't emailed in months, Sara makes up a dialogue for him to excuse his behavior: "He's in a war, okay, he's not sittin around like ooh, I got a lot to say to my sister! I better say it!" (Brunstetter 8). In doing so, Sara excuses not only Danny, but her husband, by projecting

a sense of importance and secrecy on their deployments. Neither Sara or Abby really knows what goes on for the soldiers.

The sisters are like many civilians in their lack of knowledge of the day to day experience of soldiers. In place of actual communication, they create fantasies. Later in the scene the girls imagine sexual experiences with returning soldiers. Abby, dissatisfied with her sexual relationship with Chris, her fiancé, interrogates Sara about what it's like to have a soldier for a husband. "And the waiting is - when you wait for him - I bet the waiting's good, right? Sitting by the window, waiting, all full of - lust - I guess -" (Brunstetter 15). Sara responds that it's "kinda good," but Abby continues to push her to build up an image of a strong sexually aggressive soldier: "Like when you're 14 and you're day dreamin about somebody, some senior with green eyes and big arms, like the first time you dream that he—pushes you up against your locker—" (Brunstetter 12). Together they construct a particular identity for a returning soldier: brawny, dominant, virile, and silent.

In 1.3, Ron and Sara have their first night alone together after his return. When they finally do have sex at the end of the scene, Brunstetter's stage directions read, "He picks her up like a paperclip, carries her to the bed, tosses her on it. Their actions are dirty and awesome" (25). He seems to match the description Sara and Abby created, but it takes six pages of awkward conversation and conflict to get to that stage direction. Abby, longing for this kind of action, is in the stage directions at the end of the scene: "ABBY watches with wide, hungry eyes" (25). In search of this kind of sexual experience, Abby tries her luck by recruiting a young man in a marine uniform from the airport, offering to sleep on the couch and let him use of her bed for the evening 1.8. After everyone else



goes to sleep, Abby sneaks into her room to seduce Chip and succeeds in giving Chip a blow job that is not really consensual and borders on assault. It is hardly the fantasy that she has imagined, nor is it the activity she witnessed between Ron and Sara.

Neither Ron nor Chip responds in the way these women imagine that they will, and both seductions are awkward, humorous, and sad instead of sexy which is disappointing to the women as the reality did not match the expectation. Sara begins 1.3 in a “wifey and slutty nightgown,” and Ron ignores it entirely while he unpacks. She starts by telling him the dishwasher is broken to which he responds that he will take a look, effectively ending that discussion. Sara expects him to come get her for sex like the encounter she described in 1.1 to Abby. In some ways, her initial approach in the scene is a bit like a trope in a pornography film in which a woman in a lingerie admits a strange man into her house to fix her dishwasher and ends up having sex. Instead of responding to her bid, Ron says, “I just want space, that’s all” (Brunstetter 20). The scene proceeds in fits and starts of conversation in which Sara tries to draw Ron out and he finishes the line of inquiry. They try to navigate this familiar and unfamiliar encounter. It is familiar in that they know each other and remember each other and have had conversations like this before. It is unfamiliar because the bids for each other’s attention or understanding continue to go awry.

Throughout the scene, Sara continues to suggest behaviors and make bids for sex as Ron tries to adjust to being home. She suggests that he can finish renovating the living room and grill for their daughter’s birthday party. When Ron is terse or disagrees with her, Sara asks, “Why you gotta be mean to me tonight?” (22) and tells him, “Be sweet . . . you’ve barely said a word to me since you got home. You never say enough things” (22).

Ron tries to modify his behavior, but the conflict comes to a climax in the scene when Sara suggests that Ron get a job as a regional manager at Krispy Kreme. This provokes a furious exchange about the suitability of that position:

Ron. You want me to fuckin sell doughnuts, Sara?

Sara. They're not JUST doughnuts RON, they're the best doughnuts ever!

Sides, You love doughnuts! It's a good job!

Ron. (hard, loud) I like to eat em, I don't wanna work for em! Fuckin shit, Sara, just gimme a minute!

Sara. HAY! Don't bring those words in here, leave that out there! I asked you not to bring that in here! This house is a sanctuary of nice things!

Ron. I—'m sorry, I'm sorry-

Sara. I'm sorry. (beat) I just think you'd be real good at a job like that. (Brunstetter 24)

The interaction really blows up in the middle when Sara attacks Ron's use of language and separates his behavior from what she has created in the house: a sanctuary of nice things. Sara is explicitly defining what words and behavior belong "out there" and "in here." By making this distinction, Sara situates herself as the primary controller of what is and isn't home. Throughout the scene she tries to seduce Ron and guide his behavior toward what she wants. Ron's request to "gimme a minute" goes unheeded, punished even, as it doesn't fit into Sara's expectation of his behavior at home. This exclamation from Sara curbs Ron's disagreement. Sara turns out the light and initiates sex and Ron obliges.

As they finally begin to kiss at the end of the scene, Sara is caught up in a memory and thoughts of the house. Despite pursuing sex, Ron has to bring her attention to it as it happens. Sara can't shut up about how scared she was that he wouldn't come back. She is unable to actually focus on this event that she spent the whole scene trying to make happen and says instead "Last week I dreamt I made love with a baby in a car seat" and "Did I turn the oven off?" (Brunstetter 20). The moment becomes comical as he has to physically stop her from speaking, and despite the sexy stage directions the moment

remains strange and off-kilter.

Abby's situation is no less awkward as she barely gets consent from Chip to engage in sexual activity. When Abby sneaks into her bedroom in 1.8, Chip tries to put her off by saying, "I'm pretty tired" and "I've got a lot on my mind – I'm not really looking to –" while Abby says things like "When was the last time you had – had a girl?" and "I'm not wearing any underwear" and "Don't you at least want me, or it?" (Brunstetter 52-53). Chip is unenthusiastic at best and unwilling without much of a stretch. Whereas it takes Sara six pages of text to get Ron to have sex with her in the third scene, it takes Abby four scenes of interaction to get Chip off a plane, out of the airport, into Sara's house, and into her own bedroom before she can get in his pants. When Abby meets him on the plane, he is having a panic attack about turbulence. She ignores his fear and his disinterest because he has a marine uniform on. Predatorily, she offers him a place to stay at Sara and Ron's house. She opens with "Nothing like the sight of a man taking of his blues" (51), and proceeds to offer him a shower and a shot of whiskey. She then explains that she doesn't love her fiancé:

ABBY. Can I talk to you about something?

CHIP. I'm pretty tired.

ABBY. It's pretty important.

CHIP. Alright. What you want to talk about?

ABBY. Lust.

CHIP. Lust?

ABBY. Yeah, lust, you ever heard of it?

CHIP. Yeah.

(She sits down next to him on the bed.)

ABBY. I really liked talking to you on the plane. I feel like we had a real good conversation, one of the best I've had in a long time.

CHIP. We did.

ABBY. I'm not wearing any underwear. (Brunstetter 52)

Abby keeps pushing. He protests that he's "got a lot on my mind—I'm not really looking

to—” (52), but she argues until Brunstetter writes “She is near tears”, She touches him before he agrees and his only dialogue of acquiesce is to ask if the door is locked (53). This is hardly the virile, dominant soldier who pushes her against the locker. In pursuing this image, Abby entirely reverses sexual roles as she assumes the dominant and predatory role she imagines.

In both cases, the difference between Sara and Abby’s expectations and the reality of Ron and Chip creates tension in the scenes as Sara and Abby attribute identities to Ron and Chip that neither man feels comfortable inhabiting. The dramatic question is will the soldiers assume those identities or reject them, and the conflict arises from Ron and Chip’s resistance to these behaviors and identities. The sexual identity of soldiers is only one example of displaced identities and meanings that create conflict throughout the show. Ron’s deterritorialization and alienation in the household can be tracked through the identities different characters expect him to take on and the meanings of home that each character fights to establish.

Arjun Appadurai creates a framework that is useful to understand the social narratives that each character draws from in order to create these expectations. In his book, *Modernity at Large*, he discusses “imagined worlds, that is, the multiples worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe” (33). Appadurai describes “imagination as social practice,” specifically as “a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility” (31). While Diana Taylor does not specifically tie Appadurai’s imagination as social practice to the idea of scenarios as cultural imagination, using Appadurai’s discussion helps to understand or construct how these socially imagined scenarios and

possibilities are part of active behavior. He describes these imagined narratives as a social practice. Sara and Abby put their expectations into practice by insisting that Ron and Chip behave according to the sets of behavior they expect.

The characters who make up this home have been displaced globally over time: Ron has been in the Middle East for four tours; Pop Pop, Sara and Abby's father, was in Korea and Vietnam as a soldier; Chip has been traveling the country trying to get into the armed services; Abby is a flight attendant, whose travels Sara participates in vicariously; Lacey imagines herself as a soldier with her father; and Chris is located at home in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Their fields of possibility and experience are globally defined, and the form of their negotiations in relation to the nature, relationships, identities, and meanings of home are structured through the imagined interactions they develop based on the ideas, images, narratives, and experiences they have and hope for. In other words, the imagined identities and meanings form the "organized field of social practices" (Appadurai 31) that each character performs on the other.

Sara has a particular imagined ideal for what home is and should look like. She pulls from the mediascape and from her memories in order to create it. Appadurai defines mediascapes as the media forms and content which:

tend to be image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places (35).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> As an additional layer, Pierre Nora writes about how memory is converted into patterns for life in his short piece "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*." He writes, "Memory is life . . . a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present . . . insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it" (8). This can be a useful context to view Sara behavior in as she will not allow words or

Mediascapes, then, include advertisements, movies, television shows, news stories, and other products of the media that describe narrative portions of reality and provide a set of possibilities for how interactions and homes might appear. Appadurai discusses these as practical applications of the social imagination. This means that the narratives can be practiced in action by the people who consume the narratives.

The theoretical mediascape is particularly useful well when discussing Sara's concept of home. Sara is a consumer of social narrative about home. As an example, she is unpacking wine glasses for her guests that look fancy but are made of plastic. When Abby questions the glasses, Sara exclaims: "They're thick durable PLASTIC so they break less. It's what Martha freakin STEWART said to do so just lay off, you wanna tell her she's wrong?" (Brunstetter 57). Martha Stewart is both a producer and a narrative product in our mediascape. Her narrative content has to do with the creation props, activities, and images of ideal homes, entertainment, and housekeeping. Sara cites Rachel Rey and Martha Stewart as if they were gods, and in doing so she pulls from that mediascape narratives of home and family in order to build her home. Sara is even conscious of this active creation. In the course of the conversation about the plastic glasses, she tells Abby "I make my FAMILY" (Brunstetter 58). By asserting that she is the author of her family and her home, she acknowledges that her role is to define and enforce the behaviors of the home. The home that she is creating is one that she has drawn from magazines and TV shows. Into this image, she slots the people in her family and polices

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actions that do not match the narrative of home that she's constructed from memories of Ron and the pieces she pulls from the mediascape. Because the memories and narratives become her life, she refuses to make room for alternate objects, language, and behavior. For example, she tells Ron that she moved his guns out of the house (Brunstetter 74), she rejects Ron's use of swear words (Brunstetter 24), and she kicks Abby out for cheating on Chris in her house (Brunstetter 57).

their behavior like a stage manager rounding up actors for places at the top of a show. In 1.1 she laments “I just want him to get back and stay back so I can start my damn life finally, start our life together” (Brunstetter 15). Sara acts as if the show cannot go on without her leading man.

Part of making this “life together” includes props, set pieces, and activities. Sara is constantly preoccupied with these objects and behaviors in her dialogue. Some examples include asking Ron to pick up a ficus (sic) and put carpet in the living room (Brunstetter 23, 44), throwing Lacey’s birthday party (Brunstetter 23), making a “complete kitchen” (Brunstetter 56), and getting a family picture and a “father-daughter slow dance” at Lacey’s party (Brunstetter 73, 75). Sara constructs an imaginary home out of these elements that she is pulling out of the mediascape, and these elements are huge in her dialogue and actions. In the climactic scene, she accuses Ron of saying that they were going to have “PICTURES AND TRIPS” (Brunstetter 74). These elements become Sara’s narrative and include props like the glasses, characters like the husband who does the floors, and events like trips and successful dinner parties. Sara’s expectations of home are most obvious in the play because she is the central character and the most insistent with the narrative that she tries to force on the other characters.

#### In Performance

This was the third of the dissertation plays that I directed, and I produced it as the first show of the Underground Theatre at Wayne State University. Each PhD candidate gets three shows to direct over the course of their study, and *American Soldiers* was my third show with the PhD Director’s Series. I started looking for alternative venues and spoke with the Elizabeth Theatre in downtown Detroit about booking some date for space

during the summer of 2014; however, my then partner and I had been working on creating a student summer season in the studio as well. We proposed a summer season to the department which would include *Oohrah!* as a contemporary along with two classics. Our proposal was approved with a loaned budget of \$1000 seed money which was to cover the needs of three shows. By the time we were approved, we were late into the winter semester and managed to get 25 students in total to act, design, and manage the entire season. Everyone was pulling double duty.

At the start of the production for *Oohrah!*, my entire show budget was going to secure rights for the play, and I had seven actors that I shared with the other shows. I was lucky to have Patrick Leinemann decide to stage manage for this show. He had proved invaluable in *American Soldiers* and, despite undergoing chemotherapy and sharing management duties with a second stage manager, he was still one of the most consistent theatre artists on the project. His experiences as a veteran of the Iraq war and his work to keep us up to date and in touch with each other through email consistently benefited the production and enabled us to delve more deeply into the show than would have been possible without him.

I was working with a recently graduated MFA scenic designer for this show, Leazah Behrens, who was living out of state and agreed to work with me remotely. Very early in our process, we discussed the lack of budget and how to work on the design with that in mind. After some discussion with the department chair and the heads of costume and scenery, the department stock was opened to us for use. Between the stock scenery and contemporary costumes, I wasn't particularly worried about what the lack of funds meant for mise-en-scene. I was more worried about my choices in terms of actors because this



show called, very deliberately, for two stereotypical soldiers, and I knew that there were very few male actors in the undergraduate program who physically fit that description. As it turned out, none who were able to audition for me.

I thought perhaps I should consider casting against type here. As I look back after the production, I can see how my biases led me towards casting against type. I wanted to highlight certain elements of the play and casting male actors who didn't fit the soldier stereotype helped to do that. For example, Ron is a strong character—he's a captain in the army, a quintessential soldier, and Sara henpecks him throughout the play. He feels inadequate. So, I cast an actor who didn't look like a soldier. This actor actually can't physically stand at attention. I cast a really strong actress as Sara—she was feisty and all over the stage. I cast against the type because Sara is a neurotic character consistently on the edge after her husband has been on four tours of duty, and she has been alone with her angry pre-teen daughter. I cast a dreamy girl as Abby even though Abby is a rapacious and assertive sex-driven character who longs to be manhandled, and I cast a stiff, short and earnest actor as Chip, who is a buff and charming young man and, as the script says, "All-American."

I kept thinking about how my casting choices highlighted the fact that these were performers pretending because the actors didn't fit the age or type of their characters. Specifically, the male actors playing soldiers were not particularly muscled, tall, or able to perform the posture of soldiers, and the actor playing the grandfather was very young. I tried to think about how that could be a good thing as it makes the narrative something we can discuss. I think one of my main hiccups in the process here may have been not actually relying on this performative device. The script, though it has farcical elements, is

fairly realistic in style. I directed the actors through realistic staging and performance styles even though the designer and I never meant the set to be realistic. Looking back, I think that had I encouraged a more performative style it may have heightened the events in the narrative and invited the audience to discuss the social content of the play further, through the Brechtian theatrical style. A less realistic style might have put the focus on why each actor did what he or she did and asked the audience to judge for themselves. When I thought about the play, I approached the characters as if they were stylistically performative, but, like my work with *American Soldiers*, I was unsure how to frame the acting style. After *American Soldiers*, I didn't trust myself to push too far into a non-realistic performance style either.

In rehearsal, we began with etudes to try to discover the particular scripts and narratives each character was building from and trying to impose on the other characters. We worked to identify these ideal events first. Unlike *Time Stands Still*, we did not read the play first. Instead, I asked the actors to look over scenes and create ideal versions of scenes, identify important deleted scenes, and dream scenes for characters. We then ran etudes of these scenes as well as scenes in the play for each character and then tried to identify what was going wrong in the scene recorded in the play script. We ran these etude variations several times, pausing after each one to discuss what happened in the performance and what it did.

This process was difficult for the students initially and met some resistance since it did not follow traditional rehearsal structure.<sup>48</sup> But the major dreams we delved into had to do with the characters' ideal visions of home and what that looked like for them. Sara's

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<sup>48</sup> Traditional structure means here a read-through followed by table-work and blocking.

is a Martha-Stewart House and Home coming out princess party for her daughter that will impress the adults coming to the party. In the climactic scene of the play, she is screaming at Ron to wear an apron, get the dip ready, find the camera, dance with his daughter, and stop looking for his guns. Abby on the other hand wants a man's man—a virile, masculine man with whom anticipation is just the appetizer for sex. She kidnaps Chip from the airport and yells at or ignores her fiancé, Chris. At home, she peeps in on Sara and Ron's love-making and awkwardly seduces Chip. Chip sees the armed services as the home he cannot get to and so when he is kicked out of the Marines for his asthma, he steals a uniform and wears it around until Ron realizes that he "didn't earn those blues" and makes him remove it. Ron wants home to be a place where he feels his skills are used and where he can take care of the family—for him that place is in the army, on tour. He takes his daughter shooting, tries to help Chip into the army, and tries to do everything he can for Sara before running away. In the end of the play, Ron and Chip are guarding a water tower because neither of them can get onto a tour. It is the closest they can get to the Home they imagine.

Initially, while I realized that the characters were trying to make versions of Home come true, I didn't perceive how strong the need was to make these Homes reality. The set initially was a representation of the different dreams of home: we took different pieces of furniture, like chairs, stools, and tables and stacked them haphazardly with appliances, plates, and other small household items in order to represent the way that the family was struggling to put themselves and their ideas of home back together.

Fig. 20. Oohrah! at WSU first set during lighting cues

I wanted the set to be a physical representation of the negotiation of home: Ron wants this and Sara wants that so they each put things here or there or somewhere. The set

was co-created as actors brought pieces to create each new scene. As we continued through the rehearsal process, I discovered that this was a very kind and optimistic representation of the homemaking that was happening in the script. As we worked, the gentle and amenable structure of the space was not compatible with the actors who were in situations that were both hilarious and extremely dangerous emotionally.

In scene three, Sara and Ron are getting ready for bed and we see the awkwardness inherent as they learn to be together again. The act of preparing for bed is physically intimate but as they discuss his time over there, questions of soldier's fidelity ("Jeanie says her husband got herpes from an Arab prostitute" (Brunstetter 23), their pubescent daughter's changes, jobs that Ron might get, and additions to the house, they move in bursts of dialogue that slow down and end as they get close to solutions and then step on each other's toes causing them to need to start again. Finally, they get close enough to have sex and as the scene ends, we catch a glimpse of Abby watching them.

In our production, our Sara—played by Amelia Gillis—was strong and sassy and demanding. Amelia's performance exhibited such a strong need for Ron to be everything she wanted him to be. Because he was cast against type, our Ron very clearly could not be what she needed. You can see them below during a discussion in rehearsal.

Fig. 21. Logan Hart and Amelia Gillis in rehearsal

In some ways, this was fortuitous because the disparity of dreams of Home versus reality of home was very clear both visually and actively. Logan Hart is a bean pole of a youth—he's skinny and tall, just a bit taller than Amelia though she is built more solidly than he is. He's not a pushover in any sense of the word, but he had to work hard to get Amelia to hear him. The dialogue in the play is set up to give Sara an advantage in terms of argument. They both want to be Home and Sara is currently both mistress and gate-

keeper of what Home can be. Ron has been out on four tours of duty, and he has left unfinished projects all over the house. He has missed his daughter turning into a young woman. He is out of place in the house and needs work. Sara has been working on the house, dreaming up their family outings while he's been away.

In rehearsal, we used an exercise from Declan Donnellan called the message exercise. In this exercise, the rules are that “once decided, the words of the message can in no way be altered” (139). The actor uses the words to try to get the other actor to understand his/her message and get through the scene. The words that we chose were: “No, there's you, me and this space,” which they can use to do the scene. Donnellan's example is Romeo and Juliet's balcony scene where they have to convince each other to see the situation their way. In this scene, we used the exercise because Sara has been living in the space on her own, and in many ways, it is her space. She expects Ron to be in it a certain way and Ron –repeats at least twice in the play, “I need space.” So, I gave them the lines and asked them to try to get the other actor to see it their way.

The purpose of this exercise is, according to Donnellan, “to be used rather than understood” (139). His entire theory of acting has to do with placing the emphasis of what the characters see and how they try to change what they see. The focus of this production had to do with how the characters try to change their reality to match the scenario possibilities and identities they have created in their imaginations, and this exercise and point of view seemed particularly apropos. The characters want their space and home and reintegration to happen a certain way, and what they see and enact does not match that; hence, the characters must change their interactions and environments. The

Donnellan exercise allowed the actors to focus on what they saw onstage and try to actively change that without worrying about the dialogue of the script.

It took a couple minutes before they started to really use the lines. The exercise lasted ten minutes, and the words really did start to mean something other than their dictionary meaning. After those first couple minutes, the actors really began to disagree. They were saying the same thing, but they really needed and meant something different. Eventually they came to some kind of settlement, but it was not a comfortable ending. I was surprised and didn't realize it at the time, but the surprise was for the vehemence of the conversation. The actors did not come to blows, but 'negotiation' was not the word that I could use for what happened.

Fig. 22. Bedroom Scene original configuration in rehearsal

I was embarrassed by the frustrations I was having with the set. The actors had trouble with the material because the lines are humorous. But they're funny because the characters are at the end of their rope. When Sara tries to get Ron to stay by yelling "I'm pregnant!" (Brunstetter 79) but a moment later she admits she's not—it comes from a very real need. As we repeated throughout the rehearsals, Amelia and Logan were polite to each other in the scene instead of pursuing their conflicting objectives. I focused on the set as part of this at the time—the set did not create conflict. When everything was easily available, it made it simple for them to make things happen which was neither helping the actors nor myself. All the set pieces and props were pushed neatly against the back wall and stacked against and into itself until it was pulled forward.

Fig. 23. Oohrah! first set during tech week

Declan Donnellan makes the point that the space is always in the characters' way. He writes, "The space through which we move always resists us. . . . These resistances

create friction and friction produces fire, with both head and light” (131). His point is that this resistance creates generative conflict for the performer. When watching the actors, I noticed that the space was empty in the middle which always gave them a location to which they could physically come together. Somehow this seemed as though the house itself was holding back, clinging to the wall, getting out of the way instead of in the way. But I didn’t know how to talk to my designer about it. We got all the way up to tech week before I finally, agonizing with my partner in the theatre after rehearsal, found a solution. He told me to move things. I said, “It’s tech week!” He said, “They’ll have a week to get used to it.”

So, I moved things. I dragged set pieces up and down the set, new ones, old ones, and otherwise. I put the set in the way of the actors’ performances. I moved pieces downstage until they stood between the audience and the actors. I made a wall between them and the audience and between them and backstage. I fortified the location and realized that the home they were all fighting for was under some kind of siege. It was something that Ron had been away from for so long that he didn’t know how to be in it anymore, and it was something Sara had defended alone for so long that she didn’t know how to have another defender at the post. Their home was a bunker.

Fig. 24. Oohrah! Final set configuration before props.

Turning the set into a bunker proved particularly productive. When we ran the show, Ron’s first entry was through the door upstage center. It framed him in the center of the stage and meant that the audience heard his boots and saw him upstage before he was actually in the set. He stepped in from upstage through the curtain pictured above. Alexis Barrera, who played Lacey, had spent the last two minutes defending the stage from outsiders with a broomstick gun. The image was like a commander coming to check

on a lookout post. He was welcomed in and Lacey invited him to participate in her game, and she says that she had a dream they were fighting together. The scene ends shortly after and Lacey exits. Amelia, as Sara then entered and began to move the set pieces around inside of the bunker to create the bedroom for 1.3. The stage business of actually making the home made the scene work. While Sara tries to seduce Ron as he tries to put his gear away, they both try to negotiate and move the space. The scene felt claustrophobic as they took things down from inside the set to create an intimate space from what had previously been a kitchen. It didn't feel intimate; it felt cramped. And as both Sara and Ron tried to create expansive dreams about what their lives would be now, this tiny space didn't have room. Ron/Logan tried to unpack and find space for his gear. There wasn't much room and. Suddenly his line that he "needs space" felt right.

When soldiers go to war, they are framed as fighting for their homes, fighting for their families, fighting for freedom and to protect those things at home which are most valuable. Coming home is often thought of as a release from the tension of battle. They no longer need to fear that they will be killed by insurgents, and they no longer need to be on guard every moment. Through directing this play, I learned that homecoming is not just a renegotiation of images, memories, and hopes of home; rather, Home can be a kind of battlefield too even if the tools for fighting are different, and the enemy is much less clear. Both Sara and Ron are fighting to be a family, fighting for home to feel like home again. But each of them has a different vision of what that looks like and trying to make that image come true can be devastating and hard. The protection and preservation of the home that we create through our memories, hopes, dreams, and behaviors is



something people readily defend. *Oohrah!* became an unsettling homecoming in which Ron doesn't feel there is a place for him in the home that he has defended.

In the second to last scene, Ron and Chip leave Lacey's party to defend a totally different location while Sara smokes and Abby tries on her wedding dress. In the script, these are two scenes in chronological order. But up until he left, Ron never moved anything on stage, Sara moved things and Abby moved things. This was when we had Ron finally move set; he moved the border of the house. He pushed the outside line in to make space for the water tower outside the house where Sara, Abby, and Lacey sat waiting. The final scene of the play is the women's epilogue and it mirrors the first scene of the play in which Abby and Sara put together care packages for soldiers and Sara complains that while waiting for Ron, she smokes so many cigarettes that she can feel her heart move. At the end, she's smoking again.

We kept Ron and Chip onstage during the epilogue; the final image that the audience saw was Ron and Chip guarding the water tower/house, in self-imposed deployment, away from the women in limbo. The choice was incidental, a happy accident, but it felt right and so it stayed. This meant that rather than the problems being isolated, they were presented together and in relationship.

Something magical happened with props. In the first scene, Sara had colored tinsel for the party. The tinsel got everywhere and at the end of the play, as Ron moved the set around with Chip, he consistently got tinsel on the end of his gun. In the final moment, he was guarding with tinsel dripping off the tip of his gun barrel. The tinsel and gun created a beautiful image of displacement that highlighted the deterritorialization that Ron physically imposes on himself in the final scenes. The tinsel stuck to the gun by static

cling. As mise-en-scene, it was a lucky accident that embodied the rise of the conflict of home and war and the celebration or complications of the reintegration of those two images.

## Conclusion

In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai writes that “the homeland is partly invented, existing only in the imagination of the deterritorialized groups, and it can sometimes become so fantastic and one-sided that it provides fuel for new ethnic conflicts” (49). While he is talking about displaced groups on a macro scale, the same holds true in *Oohrah!* for the micro group of deterritorialized family in the narrative. Each character to some degree has fantasized and invented the idea of home to the point that their imagination of what home should be provokes conflicts when the characters are brought together again. I found, as a director, that space itself could physically manifest this internal process. I asked the characters to assert their will to move the blocks to actively create their space and defend the things they wanted in that space. When I changed the shape of the blocks in the final week of rehearsals to be a barrier between the audience and the performers, the world of the play began to reflect not only the characters’ struggles over the imagined home and the physical space but also their attempts to protect the imagined home space. In the end, because of Ron and Sara’s disagreements, the single room turned into two rooms, which was an image of the rupture in which their conflicting images of home resulted.

I discovered space as conflict through the rehearsal process. Doreen Massey compares and contrasts the modern hegemonic view of space with a contemporary understanding and notes that while “the ordinary notions—persistent and everyday—that

'place', or locality (or even 'home') provides a safe haven", space in practice has "its multiplicities, its fractures and its dynamism" which resist stability in the everyday (65). By populating the world of the play with mobile, multi-use set pieces arranged as a barrier, I activated this notion of space. In a more realistic production, the set might have provided the illusion of stability and a safe-haven. Instead, the space was in constant negotiation which highlighted the displacement of the characters and their imagined ideas of home.

I do wonder if a more realistic set might have worked better as a foil to the conflict. Appadurai, writing about materialism, points out that "material wear cannot disguise social rupture" (76), and he makes a good point. Looking at other realistic plays set in homes, the location has served as a stark backdrop for interpersonal conflict. However, in this case, I wanted to look at the deterritorialization specifically. It is hard to see or understand the displacement felt by a character in a familiar space, and the added conflict created by a mobile space that shared traits of home and the structure of a bunker created an image with moving points of displacement. For example, making Ron find storage space for his things, or being able to actually change the space to separate himself from the women at the end of the play.

The strange result of the late change in set design was a displacement for the performers. The actors were surprised and informed of this large change in their performance space, blocking, and character locale as they arrived one by one at rehearsal during tech week. This meant that our final week of rehearsals focused less on polishing the scenes in a traditional sense and more on discovering what conflict and character meant in this location. I did not intend for the performers to experience displacement in the process; however, as an added dimension of experience, it brought

cast attention to bear on their loci in the space and world of the play during final rehearsals and performance. I was extremely proud of their performances.

As a director, the production moved me along the spectrum of image and mise-en-scene, further developing a sense of space and structure as central to the content of the play in active production. *Time Stands Still* was primarily a stationary concept set with small props business for mise-en-scene conflict; the stage space was a nest within which the characters explored their conflicts. *American Soldiers* was a mobile concept—the stage as combined kitchen and debating podiums—but it lacked an active purpose. The pieces of the set served the characters in their conflicts. *Oohrah!* took the set an act further in making it a deliberately conflict inducing manifestation of the conflicts between characters over home.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

“The performance of these scripted representations were furnaces that forged metaphors circulating back to society, marking a kind of figure-eight movement society to theater and back to society again.” –Jeffrey C. Alexander (544)

This study began with the conflict of war and home embodied by theatrical narratives of veterans reintegrating into their families and societies. As a performer, director, and scholar, I believed and continue to believe that theatre is, as the Greek’s called it, a seeing place where we can hold the mirror up to nature. With this in mind, I wanted to explore three significant things. First, what kind of critically alternative narratives of social responsibility existed in the three scripts I selected for study. Second, I wanted to assess how the scripts foregrounded home as a negotiated site of social action. Finally, I wanted to understand how putting these dramas into a theatre impacted the alternatives narratives I found. The first two questions were explored as I have both found and written about both the critically alternative narratives existing in the plays and the ways in which they navigate home as well as other concepts associated with the social responsibilities of war and reintegration.

I was most excited about the third question because I have a serious background in performance theatre. I hypothesized early that directing the plays would shed additional light on the narratives within these plays. In brief, I was both right and wrong. Through directing these plays, I discovered a great deal about negotiation and the process of reintegration that I did not know before. It was significant that the academic and intellectual knowledge that I gained through research and analysis transformed into embodied knowledge. Though difficult to articulate, much of the knowledge and experience generated by practice was reflected deeply in my own growth and practice as an artist rather than as specific knowledge about reintegration

and theatrical narrative. As such, much of the new knowledge generated does not fit easily into the original frame or questions of the dissertation study which is a fact that I will discuss in depth later in the chapter.

The three plays that I worked with both resembled and informed each other in particular ways. All three plays contained critically alternative narratives that considered communities and combat veterans' attempting to navigate the double experiences of war and home; specifically, the plays look at the ways in which the community is forced by the veteran to grapple with the social responsibility of war and thus reshape the traditional vision of home. Additionally, while all three plays foreground the joint effort of family and veteran to reimagine, reconfigure, and restore the "reality of home", none of them succeed in offering a stable answer to the dramatic question: how can society be somewhere that a veteran wants to stay? Sometimes, as in *American Soldiers*, the question was simply 'can society be home again?'

The kinds of critically alternative narratives included the difference between veterans themselves. Each play had at least two veterans with different opinions about how to reintegrate and whether reintegration was a good idea. In *Time Stands Still*, James wanted to reintegrate, and Sarah wanted to redeploy. In *American Soldiers*, Carlo Sr. wanted to find a way to help Angela reintegrate and Angela wanted to cut out and run. In *Oohrah!*, Pops was a figure of uncomfortably incomplete reintegration and Ron was unwilling to follow Pops' path. By having multiple veterans on both sides of reintegration, the three plays included a complex and critical space for dialogue about the costs of reintegrating successfully, unsuccessfully, or not at all.

All three plays a female main character with a significantly large portion of dialogue and action. I don't think that this is an accident as home is historically associated with women while war is historically associated with men. The inclusion

and foregrounding of women in these narratives, either as veterans—in the cases of Sarah and Angela—or as crafters and actors of narrative and role enforcement—in the cases of Sara and Abby, created critical space for new and alternative narratives in the stories. Because Sarah is a woman and a combat photographer, she occupies a particularly nuanced space in the dialogue of home and war. She must contend not only with whether she wants to return to her job, but also with the roles of mother and nurturer that staying home might demand of her. *American Soldiers* puts a middle daughter in direct conflict with the men in her family and opens a critical space by placing a female advocate for home as a veteran who now criticizes both home and war as complicit partners. The critical narrative is one in which a woman rejects both war and home. By making Sara and Abby main characters, *Oohrah!* opens a critical narrative about the power that women wield in trying to create, maintain, and enforce the home to which classical male veterans return. The play discusses the ways in which home is as much an act as it is an idea and how that act and idea can shut out the veteran and his experiences.

Structurally, the three plays contained many of the same elements of critical alternatives; however, like siblings, their structures varied in element usage and particular focuses. For example, all three of plays exhibit something of polylogue. While *Time Stands Still* is the clearest example by virtue of its small cast size and interdependent characters, both *American Soldiers* and *Oohrah!* could be analyzed by the same metric. *American Soldiers* appears to more strongly embody polylogue because its characters are more starkly drawn in archetypal lines and the structure of dialogue is frequently that of debate. The play is read best as a polylogue in theory, however, because its structure so frequently defaults to duologue by having primarily two-person scenes. *Oohrah!* can also be read as a polylogue of voices although it

becomes unwieldy very quickly due to the number of voices and the unequal distribution of importance to those voices. *Time Stands Still* contains several scenes in which all four characters create a polylogue, and while there are two main characters, these scenes do not privilege those voices. These scenes also contain the most nuanced and complex polylogue of the three plays especially as they blur the lines of responsibility and different characters echo each other's motifs while creating variations.

All three plays used societal scripts as negotiated methods of creating, contesting, reproducing, or enforcing home. In *Time Stands Still*, James wants to live a 'normal' life, which he spends monologues explaining and clearly references mediascapes of what that could and should look like while Sarah accesses a similar cultural vocabulary to which she has no interest in conforming. Out of love, Sarah and James practice creating this kind of life and ultimately find that the script they are reproducing is more *Days of Wine and Roses* than the comfortable paradise that James wants. *American Soldiers* is a direct discussion not just of mediascapes but also ideoscapes that cross political and social lines. Rather than practice these scripts, like Sarah and James, Angela contests the merits and physical results of the scripts of home and war that exist in the cultural pool. She debates the existing scripts with every character and deliberately resists reproducing them while the other characters try to find a way to convince her to participate. *Oohrah!* is the play that, out of the three explored, is most about enforcement of societal scripts. From the beginning of the play, Sara and Abby are discussing their ideas of what being married to a soldier is like and what home they imagine and strive to create. Ultimately, the play climaxes around frustration between the script that Sara is trying to enforce and the reality of



Ron as a human who carries his own lived experiences and skills with him. Unfortunately, his skills fit his experiences as a soldier, not as a civilian.

Finally, each play confronts the discourse surrounding veterans with a critical eye by calling out the way that we conceptualize and discuss veterans, war, and their relationship to families and society. In *Time Stands Still*, the script makes a point of discussing how combat photographs and journalism fit into the news cycle. Richard's role as an editor, James' unpublished story, and the humanitarian aid that Sarah forgoes in order to photograph atrocities without changing them are all points of deep discussion. Additionally, the play discusses the role of theatre in the discourse, calling it into question as a form of discourse that produces feelings instead of action. *American Soldiers* is entirely consumed with the language and effects of discourse. The content of the play script's debates is the form, function, and effect of the way that religion, politics, and families discuss war and veterans. In *Oohrah!*, characters participate in the discourse by way of the stories and scripts that they want to fit into: Chip laments that he fits the soldier discourse in every way except a single physical ailment (asthma) which keeps him from fulfilling this discourse while Abby and Sarah participate in using the discourse and stories of veterans to frame their interactions with the men in their lives. Unlike the first two plays, *Oohrah!* does not discuss the discourse itself during the opening scenes, but the characters use pieces of the discourse to generate actions.

The three plays also dealt directly with the idea and practice of home both by being set in homes and also by following the disruption and re-creation of those homes. The scripts of behavior, veterans, and war that I mention in the above paragraphs all cluster and intersect with the idea of what home should be or could be. In *Time Stands Still*, Sarah and James attempt to practice and work through James'

dreams of what kind of home they could make. In *American Soldiers*, Angela and Carlo Sr. face off with each other and the other characters to debate about whether the current ideologies of home need to be scrapped entirely or whether they can be improved. Finally, *Oohrah!* contains literal actions of building or making a home which Sara believes can't be done without Ron but which she enacts without his consent. While none of the plays arrive at a clear solution of how veterans should reintegrate, each one exposes the critical problems of treating home as a stable and positive default into which veterans must fit by accepting and cleansing themselves of the moral stain of war. The plays expose these problems by making home an unstable concept and experience with which each character grapples regardless of their role as civilian or veteran.

Grappling with these critical spaces was one thing in the scripts. Nonetheless, as I began to produce them, I ran into interesting and unanticipated issues. Through the process of directing each show, I found that my field of collected data grew significantly larger and more varied. For example, I now had to contend with student actors and designers who were expecting both directorial leadership and instruction in theatre making. Additionally, few of them had even a little familiarity with the research or analysis that I had been doing on the plays and their social contexts. I also found that the work I was doing on the active portions of the play—the action analysis, the blocking, the design concepts, and production management—was significantly more complex than my analysis of the scripts themselves. The knowledge and skills often had little to do directly with reintegration as more than concept and active action.

This also meant that my documentation process differed for each show as I worked more and less closely with Practice Based Research as a methodology. When discussing Practice Based Research and Performance as Research, quantification

comes up again and again. The knowledge generated by this type of research is often sensory and cognitive and results in the creation of art and experience which are types of knowledge that resist the traditional methods of research documentation. The process of documenting this study has largely occurred post-practice which means that when I notated and documented my directing practices, I assembled and reflected, sometimes for years, after the product of my research had ephemerally passed. As Rose Parekh-Gaihede notes in *Activating Knowledge: Organic Documentation as Ethical Endeavor*, “I [found] myself dealing not with a product but rather moments of insight, which leave traces of various forms (pictures, notes, audience experience and response etc.)” (166). During the years when I directed the shows, moments like this would come and go in waves of activity, discussion, and creative engagement on multiple levels of directing, teaching, adjudicating, designing, talking, and scribbling notes. While working on recording and reflecting, it is difficult to meaningfully order and communicate these ‘moments’ of insight while the work that gave them birth resides in memory.

I focused to a greater and greater degree on the actors’ bodies in space and the action of the space in relationship to the actors, the audience, and the image. My use of the *mise-en-scene* was heavily influenced by my study in Russia at the Moscow Art Theatre. I spent one month there in 2013 studying acting, acting pedagogy, and contemporary performances. I was deeply impacted by two directors: Dmitri Krymov and Yuri Butusov. Their styles are very different, but both place the primacy of image and action above text, order, and script-defined structure. Their productions can feel chaotic in terms of the mobility and impermanence of the set, the breaks in text and realism, and the broad, eclectic nature of performance and narrative. When watching their productions, I often swung wildly between complicated awe, delightful curiosity,

and sudden deep emotion. In study and discussion of these directors with my directing advisor, Dr. James Thomas, I engaged in the idea of central action, theme, and given circumstances in the explorative search for the images which best communicated the impact of a given play through body and space.

Throughout the development of my directing processes, I began to lean more heavily towards spatial explorations and the way in which they developed or generated images for the stage. I find it useful to refer to D. Ohlandt-Ross's article "Rehearsals of Cartography," where Ohlandt-Ross writes about rehearsal as an exercise similar to mapmaking because of the integral and complex exploration of space and place inherent in the rehearsal process. Ohlandt-Ross's map-making metaphor helps to describe the interplay of ideas and physical practice: "[T]he notion of rehearsal as map-making emphasizes that a spatial analysis of rehearsal is an analysis of the processes by which real is related to imagined and experience to experience process of decision-making, construction, and alignment" (117). At the beginning of my research, I worked exclusively with the imagined scripts and scenarios that I theorized from my sociological and contextual research and the play scripts. As I began and continued to produce the plays, the image and the actions began to overwhelm these ideas as they interacted. Rehearsal proved to be the locus of most of this action. The practice of rehearsal functioned as an experimental ground on which the ideas that I had worked with could interact before my eyes. Ultimately, this process of spatially working through the ideas was the most active and exciting part of my research.

My rehearsal processes gradually began to reflect a sorted chaos in which I left space for long ruminations and vigorous play with space and imagery. The knowledge generated is difficult to discuss precisely because of the way it morphed. In reflecting on these rehearsals, I began to see the performers, designers, and myself charting

new territory in imagined and emotional social spaces which corresponded to the physical locations of rehearsal and performance as well as to the narrative locations in text and practice. We frequently ran up against problems, either in the text itself, with the space, social or physical aspects that needed to be resolved. As Ohlandt-Ross writes, "Rehearsals provide an opportunity for artists to identify and hopefully resolve the difficulties they themselves have with both space and place" (109). Questions arose: How long is the time period of Oohrah!? What happened? Why is Mandy so upset about the baby elephant? What if we...? What is the difference between a kitchen and a debate forum? What does this look like? How can the actors change the scene without making a break from the narrative? What if Mandy and Richard decorate for Act 2 Scene 1 during intermission? Where does this take us? Is this vehicle or content right for this moment in this story? Etc.

The time I took arranging and re-creating the set during Oohrah!'s rehearsal process is an example of the physical manifestation of this thinking process. I spent a substantial amount of time physically making and remaking the space in order to try to solve questions like the ones discussed in the previous paragraph. I can, as I did in Chapter four, chart the final product and the effects of that set construction in comparison to the previous one; however, it is another thing entirely to try to capture the process of the practice of moving through the space. One afternoon, I dragged blocks across the painted surface of the stag, and in lifting, dropping, hearing the blocks and pieces of the world in the empty space of the theatre that afternoon, the world and actions of the play took on a sensory aspect which no amount of thinking or researching could have generated.

Similarly, rehearsing American Soldiers in the square and sparse rehearsal room with debate styled delivery produced a very different engagement with the text

and content than I experienced with the actors in the comfy kitchen of the three-story brownstone I lived in at the time. Performing the scenes in a real kitchen induced a kind of intimacy so interesting that I, for a moment, considered trying to ask the department to let me produce in my house. We were so close to each other that the acting couldn't help but be charged by the intimacy. There was a lot of laughter and a lot of sudden intrusion of real house issues: the oven, a timer, a ladle, roommates coming and going, the creak of the stairs, backpacks, and bodies. The experience informed the depth and sparseness of the set when the performers returned to the theater. The style was still problematic, but the relationships and knowledge of the family story beneath the rhetoric of the text was clearer to me and, I believe, to the actors.

The spatial style of the designs evolved through different experiments of the interaction between social and physical space. *Time Stands Still* had the most elegant and sophisticated design while *American Soldiers'* design was like a blunt instrument. *Oohrah!*'s design was a little cluttered.

With each play, I performed a unique stylistic and tonal experiment. *Time Stands Still* was symbolism defining the form of the loosely realistic set: each of the elements of the loft was present, but the structure of it was meant to reflect the space as a nest that was at risk of becoming a home. *American Soldiers'* set was meant to be directly symbolic, where *Time Stands Still* was elegant and understated with empty walls and photos without frames. *American Soldiers* used a crumpled flag and debate podiums to hammer home the inner arguments of the play on a political field while *Oohrah!* specifically sought to make the set a mobile active force which ultimately included movable set pieces and deliberately obstructionist elements in scene design.

Throughout the process of mapping and generating, much of my understanding about reintegration shifted from theoretical to practical. In *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance*, Alan Read writes that good theatre is intimately subject to everyday life and vice versa. By this he means that good theatre reflects the material and content of life; thus, while theatre may have a point of view, audiences can see themselves and their social contexts within a play. I did not expect to find this to be so true. I worked to analyze the scripts of home used in these plays and how those scripts were problematized by the individuals involved meeting and trying to make home. In the process of analyzing, I spent time with the scripts as they should be and then imagined what I would like them to be. I had to negotiate what these plays would and could be in performance as much as the characters had to negotiate what their homes would and could be. I was moving between living ephemeral performances and dictated scripts. I came to realize that reintegration, like play production, is a process which requires communication to renegotiate ideal or imagined encounters.

As a process similar to the renegotiation of space between performers, rehearsal hall, and stage, the concepts I worked with seemed to bend back and forth on each other and, while I worked with the performers and not with reintegrating veterans or civilians, I noticed that the processes spoke the same language: Pre-show, Show, Post-Show like Pre-deployment, Deployment, Post-Deployment. Even the way that casts and crews create specific bonds include negotiating of backstage and onstage spaces and relationships. All the artists involved were able to interact with the scripts on their own and develop their own ideas of what the performed play ought to look and feel like. After this process, we came together to recreate the play.

My ideas and analysis did not always translate into useful material in the rehearsal room. When walking into the room, I found I had to set aside most of my

ideas and engage directly with what was before me: the actors and their ideas or the designers and their ideas. I responded to etudes in the ephemeral moment with the weight of my research and ideas and continued to dialogue about those ideas and the work itself. This meant that in a very real way the work that we performed in the making of the plays was similar to the work that the reintegrating characters were doing.

I chose to look both at the content of the plays and the process of product and this meant that the scope of this project often felt larger than I anticipated. Because the scope was unwieldy, it is important to point out the limits on both the scope and the process as specifically as possible. I find Susan Sontag's language on frame useful in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, "to frame is to exclude" (46).<sup>49</sup> I framed this study into the intersection of home and war inherent in reintegration as a textual and production exploration of the narratives within the frames of these three plays and my production of each play. It is, for all its depth, a narrow frame that excluded many plays, biographical and sociological narratives as well as personal data. There were many avenues that my research could have taken.

The first major limitation of this study, as discussed above, was the failure to design or implement consistent qualitative data gathering methods. This stemmed from the lack of early knowledge about the type of data I wanted to collect from directing the productions. I kept regular and thorough journals during all three productions as well as reflective essays and my design and blocking notes. As I moved into processing and writing up the research, nevertheless, I found that I wished I had decided to interview the casts and crews or perform extra feedback sessions as I sought feedback inconsistently. I used the Liz Lerman system to collect feedback for *Time Stands Still*, and it proved particularly useful; I, furthermore, wish I had used this

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<sup>49</sup> Sondheim is directly noting the narrative nature of a photograph's frame.



system on both of the other shows. Feedback on the production of American Soldiers was collected by interviewing professors who had seen it individually and used Lerman to devise questions to ask. This, however, was not as formal nor did I perform the type of audience talkback done during the first show. There was a night when playwright, Matt Morillo, came to see the show. He did a talkback after the show, and I did not take notes at that event. Oohrah! had no formal data gathering process for feedback on the performances.

The second major limitation of this study was in choosing not to seek out feedback and data from many of the living veterans and veteran organizations in Detroit. When I began working with Patrick Lienemann as a stage manager, his experience as a reintegrated veteran deeply impacted our shows. While it could have been incredibly valuable to the productions to have veteran or family consultants, it was an avenue that I did not choose to pursue. This study does not include any interviews with veterans or direct veteran consultants nor does it include research questions about the impact of this type of theatre on veterans and their families. There is a performance group called Theatre of War in New York City that present stage readings of Greek war plays followed by talkback workshops for veterans and family members. As far as I know, they are not cataloguing or collecting data and research on the effects of this practice.

The third limitation of my research is that I decided that I would research my practice as director and as instructor rather than as performer. This was a difficult limit for me as I am also a performer and remained curious about the knowledge generated by the students playing the roles in the plays. In researching methods and practice for PAR, I found that many researchers working this way are using their direct experience of performing narratives, ideas, and images. I decided to limit the scope of this study

to my practice as a director because it gave me the most similarly structured data sets. By interacting with each play in the same way, I hoped my role would function as a constant so that I could compare and contrast the knowledge generated about each play more directly and clearly. This didn't happen. Each play presented new student artists to work with and my own frame of reference to the plays changed as I continued the project.

The fourth limitation of this study was the theatrical genre of realism. In this study, I read a huge list of plays dealing with reintegration. In an effort to narrow my topic, I not only left out all but three of those plays, I also left out a vast amount of film and television media dealing with reintegrating veterans either as main characters or significant side characters. The three plays I chose to work with were all realistic kitchen sink dramas. While I absolutely pushed the production worlds toward symbolism and surrealism, the texts were all firmly realistic which is not the case for most of contemporary reintegration plays. The more consistently produced and more critically acclaimed plays such as *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* and *Palestine, New Mexico* have distinctive non-realistic elements to their scripts. The decision to use only realistic play scripts was one that was meant to function as another constant by limiting the number of variables that I dealt with in the plays. This meant leaving out large and prominent portions of reintegration narratives.

In further projects, I recommend including non-realistic plays. Restricting the study to realistic narratives meant that I was unable to do more than point to the extensive patterns between all reintegration narratives. A further project should create a dramaturgy and definition of reintegration as a narrative sub-genre. It should include explication and examples of the troubled veteran trope, a collection of theatrical styles, explication of different choices of dramatic time, different communities as the sites of

reintegration, and different types of veterans. I did not encounter any critical work that specifically examines or catalogues the narrative structure of reintegration as its own genre. Lisa Silvestri Carlton was closest to a discussion of genre when she talked about the troubled veteran as an archetype in media narratives. I spent time in this study discussing similarities that reintegration stories share but stopped short of deliberately defining the sub-genre. This was in part because of the scope of this study and the practice as a research component. In the future, it would be important to assemble information about reintegration as a sub-genre because of its cultural prevalence in the aftermath of the Iraq and Afghan conflicts.

Another avenue I propose for further research is to perform roles in a reintegration narrative and record the knowledge generated by performing in this kind of narrative. A researcher might access this particular method for gaining knowledge, by interviewing performers before during and after production, or by performing the roles themselves and keeping journals and writing reflective essays. After the data gathering portion of this study, I devised and performed a reintegration narrative. That research exists in another project (“Reintegration Narratives”) that I performed after directing the three plays in this study and remains a useful addition to this study’s work.

The final avenue I propose would be further analysis and production of non-realistic reintegration plays in order to compare and contrast how those alternative styles and script structures reveal critical alternatives and to explore how those alternatives differ from the ones in realistic narratives. I predict that the data would be as varied as what arose in this study. I also suspect that this data would be particularly useful as non-realistic plays tend to be more critically acclaimed and are produced more often. Any critical narratives in the plays would be more directly integrated into

conversation with mainstream reintegration narratives and therefore might have particular relevance to national conversations about veterans.

Although many projects and avenues were not followed in my research, the avenues I did pursue generated a significant and interesting body of data. One of the largest pieces of knowledge that came up repeatedly is that the burden of the director is not to create the play but to research and be ready to see it when it happens. This is, admittedly, a vague metric. By way of clarification, Anne Bogart writes about the job of the director as a First Observer whose presence allows for the creation of the ephemeral performed play and whose gaze catches the moments the performers create so that they can be repeated and developed for performance to an audience: “Watching over a rehearsal means to be present with sensitivity and acute attention to the differentiation and change that happens moment to moment” (52). She specifies a distinct depth and quality of attention that are excited, engaged, and delicately focused in order to allow and encourage performers and not to pre-judge the work of rehearsal. This type of attention, she says, makes the difference in both the type of work that actors are willing to bring and the quality of their performances.

In *Time Stands Still*, I had a crystal-clear idea about the characters and the story, but when I came into rehearsal I dropped my ideas and paid attention without trying to force the actors toward my preconceived ideas. Instead, I watched to see what came up and responded to the moments and actions that felt right. The flux of that production felt much more natural and there was a clarity about when it was right and when it wasn't that American Soldiers did not have. In *American Soldiers*, I was fundamentally confused with the source material and tried to mask that by focusing on a concept. This showed as both I and the actors floundered and rarely seemed to hit on anything that felt good for everyone. Although I was specifically trying to find ways

for the set to be an active player while the performers worked, when Oohrah! came around, I had spent far more time with the source material. I was a little distracted with the process during this play which created some problems for the performers; nonetheless, this ultimately meant that I left more space for them than I did in American Soldiers, and by the end I had helped to craft a world to which they could respond.

In the midst of studying directing and performance theory during my first year of graduate study, I spent the majority of my time researching and reading plays as well as researching reintegration. I did this while building a knowledge base and familiarizing myself with the conversation around reintegration. During my second year of study, I began directing my chosen plays and documenting the process. As I continued to direct shows, a drastic shift occurred in my work. I began to move away from primarily textual analysis and literary understanding to production-based experimentation that highlighted images and style. Trial and error often moved me forward through implementing directing methods and acting coaching to elicit new understandings of material that I had spent time working on and thinking about in a textual medium. This led me to ask, “what kind of knowledge was generated by this shift?”

My directing style before I started directing my dissertation plays drew its structure from more traditional western forms of actor guidance and blocking patterns. But with Time Stands Still, as I discuss in the inter-chapter, I worked heavily with etudes and relied on the actors to help develop and understand the active movement of the play. I discovered that different actors responded differently to the process based on their familiarity with etudes, their age, and their personalities and experiences. Moving through each show, I developed and discarded different

techniques and experimented with space and performativity in different ways. The longer I worked, the more important image became in my production process.

As a researcher engaged in practicing theatre as research, I was excited by the immediacy of the content when in rehearsal. I also felt that my role as director narrowed my research as a performer. I frequently wondered what knowledge I lost by directing these narratives instead of performing in them. At the same time, I reflected on the fact that I was generating a broad knowledge about the spaces of these worlds and the intersections of performance depth and emotional interplay across space, sound, and tactile images. I felt that by framing my exploratory role as director I had excluded myself from the particular knowledge created by performing and rehearsing the reintegration conflict with my own body. I could observe the results of experiments with space and performer; for example, the results of the Oohrah! rehearsal exercise reducing text to “There’s you, me, and this space” manifested before me and generated data that led to the adaptation of scenic design towards an imposing space. Without that exercise and the specific knowledge about the space learned from watching the performers, I would not have been able to adapt a set which functioned as the third body in the visual and physical triad. The performers’ work in making the space grew out of the spatial exercises, yet I did not experience my body performing the difference between a compliant space and a disruptive space in front of a director and ultimately an audience. Throughout the process of study, I felt this was a large blind spot in my research.

As I reflect on the process of this study, I am pleased with the growth of the project even though I am frustrated with the way that the changes disrupted my data collection. The data that I required shifted during each production which makes the chapters function more like three related articles than like one in-depth book style

study. That being said, producing the plays led to the development of a range of skills and understanding which brings to actualization thoughts and practices that I have been wrestling with through both my master's and doctoral studies. I had been curious about performing the creation of home in a literary narrative and performing in a theatrical narrative. Using reintegration as a specific lens through which these actions can be studied, I tried to develop an understanding of these modes of inquiry.

By continuing forward with practice as research, I plan to pursue the experimentation that I did in using *mise-en-scene* as a deliberate and challenging part of on-stage action. As a director, this inclusion of physical world in the development of the play's dramatic action was one of the most interesting and effective tools I discovered for creating a fuller production and giving the performers something to interact within besides their imaginations. Influences like Dmitry Krymov and Yuri Butusov as well as the Russian *etude* training that I received have led me towards a directing style that emphasizes the performers' creative processes while seeking to give them an onstage world that functions as an organic part of the action which deepens and develops symbols. By this I mean that I value design such as that seen in the set in my production of *Oohrah!* which was something that the actors contended with and that led to physical and visual images on the stage; but I also value the kind of design created in *Time Stands Still* which was symbolic and left locations for the performers to contend with while not being intrusive on the action.

In the work that I did, I consistently experimented, but, as Anne Bogart discusses in *and then, you act*, I thought of the audiences as witnesses who changed by observing. This meant that every experiment I tried had the goal of being something worth witnessing. In *Time Stands Still*, James argues against plays about war and those far-away places where the trauma of war happens and says it's "[f]ake,

sentimental shit that passes for truth!” (Margulies 39). He argues from a place of his own trauma about seeing pain represented on stage in a way that changed neither the world nor the audience. In working with this material, I was aware that the content of reintegration is something that touches on contemporary issues and real trauma in my audiences. While my research was not of a sociological nature regarding the audiences’ responses, I remained aware that the act of observing these narratives was important. As Bogart puts it, “Once an observer, you have become a participant” (56). In the future, I hope that these plays continue to be produced, because witnessing narratives of reintegration is part of how we culturally come to terms with the divide between civilians and military in our rapidly changing world. The work of understanding these relationships and developing empathy as we recreate and create a sense of American home in the light of international conflicts remains vitally important as our country changes under new leadership.



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**ABSTRACT**

**MAKING HOME:  
DIRECTING MILITARY REINTEGRATION PLAYS**

by

**KATHERINE SKORETZ**

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**Advisor:** Dr. Mary Elizabeth Anderson

**Major:** Theatre

**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

This doctoral study explores three American post-combat reintegration plays written and produced in 2010 and 2011 in the United States. Using script analysis and production research, the dissertation describes some of the major themes of reintegration and strengths of theatrical production as revealed by the critically alternative narratives in the scripts and performances of *Time Stands Still* by Donald Margulies, *American Soldiers* by Matt Morillo, and *Oohrah!* by Bekah Brunstetter.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Katherine Skoretz is a theatre-maker and instructor from California. She has received conservatory training in performance from East West Players in Los Angeles, the Stanislavsky Summer School at Harvard, and the Moscow Art Theatre in Russia. Ms. Skoretz has studied French Mime, Lecoq, and Aerial Silks, and obsessively takes notes on teaching techniques as she is a proud pedagogy wonk with an eye toward making training and skills acquisition more accessible and healthy for students and teachers. Her research topics have evolved to include: devising, non-monogamous and queer narratives, post-dramatic and image-based theatre, theatrical pedagogy, and performance as research. She is currently living in the Twin Cities with her two cats and while preparing to go on the job market full time. She enjoys writing songs on the guitar and piano, cooking ramps and garlic scapes, and reading voraciously at work. Rain, and podcasts, and screen-free Thursdays are giving her life. Some of her favorite roles have been Juliet, the Bi-Sexual Bi-Polar, and various characters in Twilight: Los Angeles. She likes the White Stripes Doorbell Song too much and is looking forward to getting her first post-doctoral tattoo.