

***Playing War: Encountering Soldiers and Navigating Ethical Responsibilities in
the Creation of *Black Watch****

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Keywords: *Black Watch*, National Theatre of Scotland, post-verbatim, Levinas, responsibility

Introduction

The National Theatre of Scotland (NTS) and Gregory Burke's production of *Black Watch* has become an internationally celebrated documentary play, bringing Scottish working-class soldiers' perspectives to the forefront of the Iraq War debate. Fusing documentary materials based on interviews with fictionalized scenes, *Black Watch* departed from the hyperrealist trend of verbatim plays of the post-9/11 era, infusing music, projection, movement and song to contextualize the accounts of local soldiers caught amidst a foreign policy disaster. Despite the success of *Black Watch*, the concept of a play based on soldiers' narratives proved problematic throughout the development process. Part of the challenge for theatre practitioners working with material from face-to-face encounters with interviewees is balancing theatricality with ethical obligations that go hand-in-hand in making theatre from personal turmoil. While at times these ethical obligations can feel burdensome, I offer in the case of *Black Watch* that the ethical connection with subjects enabled new imaginings within the creative process, promoting the recognition of the soldiers' experience and using music, movement and text to make their stories more intelligible to an audience. Working from interviews with playwright Gregory Burke, director John Tiffany, musical director Davey Anderson, actor Brian Ferguson, who played Cammy in the original production this article focuses on how the creative team of *Black Watch* negotiated ethical responsibilities to ex-soldiers, and how these responsibilities in turn complicated and inspired new approaches within the creative teams' practice.

Departing from Verbatim: Re-imagining Soldiers' Testimony

Nicholas Cull marks the significance of international touring productions of *Black Watch* as a form of cultural diplomacy and Nadine Holdsworth writes of the ethos of the National Theatre of Scotland as a ‘theatre without walls’ indicative of an invigorated post-devolution Scotland, exemplifying the international acclaim of *Black Watch* as evidence of the world’s desire to hear the NTS’s distinctive voice (Cull 2007, Holdsworth 2010). As 2006 saw the launch of the NTS’s, artistic director Vicky Featherstone sought Scottish playwrights to develop works that celebrated Scottish culture and mark the arrival of the NTS, one of the playwrights was Gregory Burke (Holdsworth 2010). The idea for *Black Watch* began as a pursuit of ex-soldiers’ frontline accounts during the then rumored amalgamation of the Black Watch regiment—but the project, which would be produced for the NTS’s first season, proved initially an arduous undertaking. Despite the resources of the NTS, it took a series of researchers to find soldiers willing to give their accounts (Burke 2011, Cull 2007, Fisher 2008). A researcher found an ex-Black Watch soldier Kevin (for the purposes of this article I have changed the name to ensure privacy) in the local paper who invited the researcher to their typical ‘Sunday-sesh’ at a local pub in Fife (Ferguson 2011). It was Kevin’s enthusiasm for the project and his encouragement of fellow ex-soldiers to participate that spurred the project forward.

While gaining access to soldiers’ testimony was a breakthrough, upon Burke’s arrival the soldiers’ refused to allow their words to be tape-recorded, an obstacle that would shape the overall structure of the play (Burke 2011, Tiffany 2012). Burke (2011) had the advantage growing up nearby, understanding the locality of the soldiers and their suspicions:

No recording, cause it’s typical of where I’m from and where they’re from. It’s that whole thing of, you’ll talk to anybody about anything but as soon as you put it on record, are you going to hold this against me in court? And also they think its going to come back and haunt them. You just think it’s a police statement (Burke 2011).

Rather than conducting formal interviews, Burke would occasionally engage in the ex-soldiers’ conversations and observed the men as they discussed the match of the

day and the war in Iraq. Formal interviews were not effective as Davey Anderson explains as the former soldiers 'would just clam up and give them kind of modest answers' (Anderson 2011).

Without recorded interviews Burke (2011) had limited verbatim material to work from and began writing fictional scenes based on the pub session:

I kind of wrote down all of the things they were telling me and whenever I got to a part about Iraq, whenever I got to a bit about Iraq I'll just write that, rather than write them telling me about that, I'll write that scene happening. So when they arrived at Camp Dogwood—when we first arrived it was a shit hole, it was this it was that, I'll just write that with them arriving. It's a shit hole (Burke 2011).

The soldiers were not necessarily concerned about the overall political justification for their deployment or the political climate in Iraq, but rather the lack of glory upon their return home, the betrayal of 'the golden thread', the promise of glory and tradition, a 'lie' repeated throughout history that Burke was familiar with growing up near Dunfermline, an area with a high recruitment rate. As Anderson (2011) points out, it was Burke's familiarity with the world in which the soldiers grew up that enabled Burke to capture the essence of how the soldiers speak and behave—a unique voice that attracted the positive international reception of the production:

The reaction globally, just that fascination of that particular voice about something which is a global phenomenon and a big kind of world-wide news event but at the same time it's coming from a very local, that particular way of talking and thinking about things [...] Greg was able to capture that voice so authentically, in some ways that *is* his own voice. And I could have quite easily imagined him going into the army. That could have been one possible route in his life, and also he talks just like those guys, he's got the same accent, the same foul mouth (Anderson 2011).

While Burke's distinctive voice shaped the soldiers' stories, Anderson contends that the soldiers used Burke to send a message to audiences. When Burke returned to meet with the soldiers to enquire about the blast that claimed the lives of their fellow Black Watch soldiers (Sgt. Stuart Gray, Pte. Paul Lowe and Pte. Scott McArdle) and the Iraqi interpreter, the soldiers avoided discussing in length their friends' deaths (BBC Online 2004). The soldiers wanted to make it clear that they were not solely angered by the futility of the mission and how their friends died, but rather the lack of recognition and glory that had been promised to them upon their return home. Anderson (2011) explains:

They were very reluctant to talk about the friends who had died [...] they didn't want it to be a piece that was about the pure tragedy about how unfortunate it is to be a soldier and how much they are exploited. They had an argument that they wanted to convey through Greg [...] the only reason they were dissatisfied with the army was about the lack of glory maybe former generations had by serving in the armed forces, and they wanted that glory but they didn't get it, misled in some way, not really manipulated but used just a bit disheartened that they weren't going to be heroes (Anderson 2011).

While the soldiers did not have full autonomy over how Burke would construct their narratives, they did control the direction of the interview, setting parameters for how Burke would shape the play.

Part of the uniqueness of *Black Watch* is that it captured the working-class soldiers' words and language rather than relying on predominantly on middle-class voices, those in positions of authority to speak on behalf of those in *menial* positions. This is what Burke (2011) recognizes as part of the play's vast appeal as he reflected in an interview in *The Washington Post*:

I think that's what made the play ['Black Watch'] successful, to tell you the truth. Working-class people are inarticulate when you ask them about momentous experiences. They don't tell you those emotional

things, the big kind of things. They'll tell a great vivid story, but almost in a rehearsed, practiced way (Gregory Burke in Pressley 2011).

In Derek Paget's (1987) examination of verbatim techniques he notes that most informative material, 'tended to come, perhaps, from those not normally accustomed to having their experiences validated by having others seeking them out' (Paget 1987: 326). Paget's article features an interview with theatre practitioner Chrys Salt who says of verbatim theatre, '[o]ne of the interesting things about the genre [...] is that you actually bring working-class history to the stage. It's the language of the common man—something that would never in normal circumstances become material for the theatre' (Chrys Salt in Paget 1986: 236). In Paget's article director Rory Robinson observes '[m]iddle-class people [...] can't tell you things that've happened without theorizing about them' (Rory Robinson in Paget 1987: 326). Similar to Robinson's observations, Burke found a brute honesty in the soldiers' accounts free of sentimentality or a political/philosophical overview of the war in Iraq (Burke 2011).

So what began as an endeavor to gain word-for-word accounts of the soldiers' deployments ended up as a mixture of stories based on testimony and fictionalized scenes written by Burke. While many verbatim plays of the post-9/11 decade offered empathetic portrayals of subjects emulating the inflections and hesitations of subjects, *Black Watch* diverted from the hyperrealist trend, catering to a documentary style influenced by the approach of John McGrath and 7:84 Scotland's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* and Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop's *Oh What a Lovely War* using songs, music, montage and projection to enhance the testimonies shared (Anderson 2011, Tiffany 2012).

When Burke entered the rehearsal room he had two different scripts. The first script incorporated transcripts from what the soldiers said in the pub on Sundays. The second script dramatized the soldiers' experiences in Iraq.

What was quite strange in a way the transcripts from the interviews didn't have characters in them, but the fictionalized scenes did have characters in them and almost in a way the characters from the

fictionalized scenes became the characters in the pub. So in a way that kind of got rid of the guys—the actual real people. And that was kind of one of the things that made it effective (Gregory Burke in Fisher 2008).

Burke (2011) gravitated toward the fictional Iraq script observing, ‘what I then found was the Iraq script had characters, rather than in the pub where there were lots of similar voices talking at the same time about the same thing’ and used the material as a basis to create more diverse characters (whose names were inspired by highland clans illustrating the pull of the golden thread); such as Fraz as charming and brassy, Stewarty who suffers from PTSD, and Cammy open yet cautious, creating characters designed to make the soldiers more recognizable to an audience (Burke 2011). After embracing a more permissive representation of the stories, Burke found this approach more liberating as a writer enabling an active dialogue amongst characters free from the constraints of replicating the interview setting from verbatim accounts. The two scripts marked a turning point in the play’s development as director John Tiffany (2012) found the verbatim transcripts to be limiting whereas the active Iraq scenes offered more theatrical possibilities:

I had never really worked on anything based on interviews, we very quickly realized, how limiting it was so it’s not verbatim *Black Watch*, we realized how limiting it was because, just because it’s true isn’t to say it’s dramatic. And our responsibility is to tell their stories in a resonant way to a large audience, so although the kind of texture, the content of the stories and anecdotes of the interview are true, I would say the language—which is all Greg (Tiffany 2012).

Accepting that the verbatim transcripts were not enough to create a theatrical event, Tiffany trusted Burke’s interpretation of the stories as he was ‘from there’ and ‘could put it into their vocabulary, their language, their dialect and make them seem wittier’ (Tiffany 2012). This deviation did not detract from the potency of the soldiers’ stories. *Black Watch* is not so much a verbatim play, but rather a ‘post-verbatim’ play, departing from the constraints of emulating word-for-word accounts in favor of

channeling the essence of the stories through theatrical techniques as Anderson (2011) suggested in our interview:

It's a total post-verbatim [...] there was such a movement, a verbatim style. And quite quickly there was a desire to react against the strictness of trying to get it down to the inflection of the interview subjects and just wanting to be freed up artistically and the limitations of that I suppose. And also a belief that by being strictly verbatim, and being very true and honest to the interviews, wasn't necessarily, didn't equal great art but also didn't equal something that was truthful on a deeper level more than just being faithful to the words (Anderson 2011).

Although *Black Watch* did not end up a verbatim play, Burke (2011) still felt bound to use language and the storyline that fit within the parameters of the soldiers' accounts:

I found it frustrating that I couldn't put into their mouths the things that I wanted them to say, obviously things that I thought related to the conflict. You couldn't have them all the sudden talk about the history of Arab countries in the West, you know what I mean, cause you couldn't have that. They're just like "you point a gun at me and I'll shoot you. I didn't like anyone who'd point a gun at me" (Burke 2011).

Because Burke was working from his memory of the interview sessions, as he was not able to document the testimony, fragmented memory became the springboard for physicality as a means of expressing the essence of the soldiers' experience as Davey Anderson (2011) offers:

Verbatim implies such a kind of—the words are so central, and in this piece the physicality is as central as the words. I think there is an element of documentary which can be about observing body language, the way people move as well [...] getting the actors to move in the way that soldiers would move is a kind of one way of observing something

in a slightly different way that's not putting a tape recorder down to document someone's words (Anderson, 2011).

Negotiating fragments of narratives and Burke's text, the creative team lacked a clear vision as to how to shape the piece, as pressure mounted by the countdown to the play's debut—but these obstacles would inform the distinctive style for which *Black Watch* has been recognized.

Negotiating Relationships and Aesthetics in the Rehearsal Room

To enhance the creative teams' understanding of the soldiers' experience in the workshop of *Black Watch* Tiffany invited guests who had firsthand experience in a war zone to meet with the actors. The face-to-face interaction between members of the creative team and subjects (including those ex-Black Watch soldiers who spoke to Burke as well as those who had experience working alongside the Black Watch regiment) brought about new ethical considerations that would alter their practice (Ferguson 2011, Tiffany 2012). David Loyn, a journalist for the BBC who had been embedded with the Black Watch, provided a wider perspective on the political and social landscape of Iraq as the soldiers' memories and facts were, as Tiffany (2012) described as 'a bit hazy' (Tiffany 2012). Not only did Loyn provide an outsiders' perspective on the military operations, his expertise informed what scenes would work, as Tiffany (2012) recalls:

[T]here was one scene, a bit like in *Jarhead*, where the actors were playing volleyball in gas masks. Because I think Greg has a memory that one of the soldier's told him that. But David was like, "In Camp Dogwood? No way. They were being mortared all the time. There is absolutely no way they would have played volleyball in gas masks."

Tiffany (2012) said of Loyn's influence, 'he came and changed the whole thing' (Tiffany 2012). But Burke (2011) recognized a disconnect between Loyn and the

working-class Black Watch soldiers and Loyn appraising the economic and sociopolitical tension between the journalist and the soldiers, since Loyn had ‘spent most of his time with the officers, he’s the same as the officers really. He’s not really the same as the men’ (Burke 2011). According to Burke, Loyn was made aware of the soldiers’ reluctance in his presence when an officer told Loyn, “‘David you’re the three things that all of the men hate. You’re English, you’re middle-class and you’re tall’” (Burke 2011).

The first soldier to come to the workshop was Kevin, the character upon which Cammy was based. Tiffany gave the actors an assignment to bring in two questions that they wanted to ask him. The one question Tiffany was particularly curious about was, ‘What’s it like to kill somebody?’ as he felt that *this* is what audiences’ desired to know. But coming face-to-face with the soldiers he realized ‘it was the question I realized I had no right to ask’ (Tiffany 2012). I equate Tiffany’s reluctance and call of responsibility in the presence of the soldier with that of Levinas’ notion of ‘the face’. Levinas offers that the moment we recognize ‘the face’ of the Other—within this interaction an new ethical awareness for that life emerges as Levinas (1989) explains, ‘[t]he Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in doing so recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question’ (Levinas and Hand 1989, p. 83). In my view it is this interaction that is the heart of creating theatre based on personal experiences and sharing them with an audience. Tiffany’s realization exemplifies a newfound awareness of responsibility to combatants, a responsibility civilians often fail to comprehend in the presence of soldiers. Jill Taft-Kaufman (2000) who had worked with Vietnam veterans closely, using their narratives to create the play *Tracers* discusses how she incorporated the frustrations soldiers’ endure when discussing war with civilians into the script:

The powerful ending builds to what the play calls a ‘sardonic subtext’ to the kinds of questions veterans are often asked (when they are asked anything at all) about their having been in Vietnam and concludes with the repetition of, ‘How does it feel to kill somebody?’ While the play ends with a celebration of soldiers’ survival, it also stresses in a clear

and compelling way the anger these veterans feel toward nonveterans (Taft-Kaufman 2000, p. 18).

Actor Brian Ferguson perceived the alienation soldiers feel upon their return home. Ferguson (2011) recounts his experience meeting ex-soldier Kevin and how the conversation illuminated the complexities soldiers face upon their arrival home:

I remember, something that really kind of landed was that he had said [Kevin], who was the guy who Cammy was based on. When we met him he was back from his second tour. And he decided that was it. He wasn't going to go back. Which is kind of how *Black Watch* ends, or where his story ends, with him saying, "That's it for me. I'm not coming back". And Kevin had said the same. And then he had come home, and he was working, as a janitor in a primary school. And he was really struggling, I mean we didn't know this at the time but you do think how do you go from all of that excitement. And all that responsibility. And camaraderie to then being a janitor in a primary school. And he went *back* (Ferguson 2011).

Within the exchange between subject/performer Ferguson realized the invisibility soldiers feel post-deployment, identifying a sadness in Kevin's decision to return to the military. Although Kevin had felt betrayed by the lack of glory fighting in the war in Iraq, the military offered Kevin what he could not find among civilians, a more definitive sense of identity (Ferguson 2011).

Burke (2011) throughout the scripting process experienced an uneasiness working from people's testimony stating 'it feels very exploitative [...] whenever you appropriate someone else's experiences and use them for your own. There's a little bit of something inside you if you're a human being that goes "hang on a minute"' (Burke 2011). Burke raises a critical point about working with others' stories, questioning the underlying motivations that drive creatives to approach this type of documentary work. But rather than abandoning the process of recognizing others' stories, it is important for practitioners to confront these inconvenient truths and

question their choices throughout the creation process, as to what are their underlying motivations and to whom does the telling of this particular story benefit? By critiquing one's process and considering the ethical relationships to the interviewees, these healthy anxieties enhance the potency of the work.

Questioning the voyeuristic nature of work based on testimony, Burke and Tiffany incorporated a writer character into the script, introducing the process of representation for the audiences' consideration. Tiffany (2012) clarifies that writing the writer into the play was not necessarily about allowing the audience to scrutinize Burke's process but rather the middle-class writer character was created to be representative of the audience as the privileged voyeur:

It wasn't necessarily about the writer, writing himself into the play, the whole thing with the writer's story, is for me about the audience—I think we have this insatiable desire to hear these war stories. Almost to be voyeurs. And, “Did you *kill* anybody?” (Tiffany 2012).

The effect in the play allows audiences a more participatory role within the show, encouraging spectators to question their own ethical relationship and responsibility to soldiers' suffering. Though the writer serves as a means of raising questions of artifice, Anderson (2011) offers his criticism of the writer character as a false representation of Burke:

There's something quite disingenuous about the writer character in it. The writer character comes across as very middle-class, very well educated and mild-mannered and kind of nervous. And Greg is not like that at all, he's very much like Cammy or one of those guys you know, clever but mouthy and rough (Anderson 2011).

Tiffany wanted to present the physicality of soldiers at war, reflecting, ‘I've had some dry theatre experiences watching verbatim plays [...] I really wanted to avoid that because, my taste is theatricality. So that's why I brought Steven Hoggett and Davey Anderson to work with me on it’ (Tiffany 2012). Tiffany relied on

Hoggett's choreography that mined the inner feelings of the soldiers, using physicality to bring to the surface for the audience's consideration what soldiers feel but do not say, experiences that can not be articulated in words:

The whole point is there are no revelations. If you ask them [the soldiers] what it was like [...] "It was. It's alright." Anything to do with how did it *feel*? —anything that started with that it was like, 'It's a job. It's alright' [...] That became the tension for me and Greg, me and Greg against the play. Which is then why I expanded it to be the writer. To include Geoff Hoon and Alex Salmond [...] because Greg said rightly, "I can't put politics and emotions into their mouths" [...] so we had to find other ways to get them in particularly with the movement (Tiffany 2012).

The presence of the soldier also opened possibilities for the performance. One of the soldiers brought personal photographs from the deployment to share with the actors and creative team. While dialogue with soldiers helped inform Burke's text, there were words Burke could not say on behalf of the soldiers, and while most of the photographs showed soldiers in macho poses, one photograph in contrast illuminated the emotional state of the soldier, something that was missing from the dialogue generated from the interviews. The image in black-and-white, captured a soldier, unaware of the photographer, sitting in the back of a wagon reading a letter from home as Tiffany (2012) describes 'his face was absolutely transported somewhere' (Tiffany 2012). While the text inspired by the soldiers' narratives did not convey the emotional consequences of contemporary soldiering, Tiffany and Hoggett used movement sequences to express these private moments (Tiffany 2012). From the photograph Hoggett developed the Letters Home sequence in the scene *Blueys*, creating a window into the private moments of soldiers, where each would take a letter and mime a personal sign language demonstrating their private thoughts to loved ones as Hoggett explains:

My philosophy is to make it as clear and communicative as possible—
but never to shy away from the difficult. Movement can show

emotional states and narrative. It's easy for an audience to get their head into that world. Movement should be as thrilling and as exciting as possible, but there should be no compromise in the clarity (Hoggett in Molzahn 2011).

The development of the sequence brought about an ethical issue for Burke. During Burke's interviews with the soldiers, they said there was always one soldier in particular who never received letters. Burke's impulse was to show the lone soldier singled out amongst the others reading their letters, but upon second thought Burke omitted this from the script concerned it would point to one soldier who was subsequently killed by the car bomb, sensitive to the emotional repercussions should the bereaved family become aware of this implication:

In that sequence someone should have gotten no letters, there's always one guy who doesn't get any [...] when we were doing the play, we actually felt that if we did that, someone would come to see it then say because they were recognizable, it's supposed to be the character of Fraz who didn't get any mail, but because he was a real guy who died, his family would have come to see it, and say, "Are you saying we didn't write to him?" (Burke 2011).

Another challenge for the creative team concerning documents was how they were going to approach the explosion that killed three Black Watch soldiers during the deployment.

In the process of developing the piece the stage manager found a website containing footage of the blast filmed by insurgents. As part of the rehearsal process, Tiffany gave the actors the option to view the material. Actor Ross Anderson (2011) who played Rossco in the 2010-11 international tour felt he needed to watch the explosion that killed the soldiers and the Iraqi interpreter because of an ethical obligation as a performer to the soldier he would be portraying, 'I wanted to see it because, I knew at the end of the play when they get blown up, that's what I—the character would have been seeing so I felt that I had to' (Anderson 2011). While Tiffany (2012) encouraged actors to research the way in which soldiers moved, wore

their uniforms and spoke, he was adamant that the actors adopt a respect for difference when performing the soldiers, squashing any assumptions that any civilian actor could know what it is like to be a soldier at war:

I used to come down on them like a ton of bricks. And say, “I think that’s insulting because you really don’t know what it’s like to be there. Because you take off your uniform and go to the pub, and chat up pretty girls. They watch their friends die so do not let me hear you say that again” (Tiffany 2012).

In my interview with actor Brian Ferguson, Ferguson (2011) admits there was increasing tension in the rehearsal room as the play was created from a series of sequences rather than a complete text:

Well I had never been in a rehearsal process that was quite so, I guess, like a rollercoaster. And real tension. Creative tension, and kind of—Just because Greg came in with a big pile of verbatim interviews. And also certain ideas of ideas for the show that he thought he wanted in. So there was no order to it [...] And during rehearsals—there was tension. There was definitely a lot of tension between a lot of us [...] I think what was happening was people were all working really hard and just wanted to be sure that I guess everyone else was doing the same. And we could tell it was such a beast of a show. And it kept changing and kept changing (Ferguson 2011).

Mary Luckhurst (2011) writes of the ethical stress encountered by actors when portraying real people, their perspective often marginalized in the hierarchy of production privileging the experience of the director and writer, yet a voice that is vital to understanding ethical anxieties and responsibility within the creative process (Luckhurst 2011, pp. 135-152). Adding to the tension within the rehearsal room was the fact that the characters were not fully-defined but rather based loosely on the soldiers’ interviews meant that the actors had the task of finding and shaping their own character out of the text as Ferguson (2011) explains:

Something that happened out of that rehearsal process which I had never really known before was that the characters weren't really defined. So a lot of the lines that were in the script, it was much more about feeding these sentences being spoken but it wasn't all that important at first, which character said what. So there was a lot of shaping ourselves characters as we went along. So literally saying, "I don't think my character would say that." At the time I thought it was a weak point about it. That I would say, 'I don't want this line'. And John would go, 'Ok. Who wants that line? Ok. Well you have it' (Ferguson 2011).

Part of the tension arose from the episodic structure of the piece as Davey Anderson recalls, 'there was nothing of structure, or an overall narrative that was a big headache' and the team had to ask themselves, 'Why are we telling this sequence of events? What does it add up to and what is the climax of the story?' (Anderson 2011). Burke (2011) admits that he did not have an overall clear vision of the documentary play, rather the creative team relied on each others' techniques to make the episodic structure work:

I don't think I envisioned anything, that's how bad it was. I just thought John will work out what to do. And John thought, oh Steven Hoggett will work out what to do, and Steven Hoggett just thought get Davey – I think we just all felt, well, it'll be fine and then a couple days before we were all like, fuck! (Burke 2011).

Leading up to the first preview of *Black Watch*, during rehearsal runs the theatrical explosion scene *Casualties* was riddled with technical difficulties. Burke (2011) expressed his uneasiness watching the scene rehearsed:

I didn't like the explosion at the end. Every time we did it in rehearsal somebody would get stuck, so it was like *Spinal Tap* the movie where they're all trying to be poignant and somebody's swinging about in the air. And they're all trying to cut him down. And they're all trying to

bury the dead and this guy's floating above them all [...] And people will be thinking, "oh he's going up to heaven!" (Burke 2011).

Burke was apprehensive about allowing the scene to go forward, but after debating its inclusion with the creative team the explosion remained in the play. But as the performers continuously encountered difficulties in the explosion, becoming tangled in the strings that suspended them as they re-enacted the explosion when depicting the bodies of the dead Black Watch soldiers, Burke remembers 'we kept having run-throughs and they would all just descend into chaos (Burke 2011). The creative team never gauged in the rehearsal room what an international staple the National Theatre of Scotland's production would become, and leading up to the opening night both Burke and director Tiffany contemplated failure, anticipating that the ambitious project could potentially be a flop:

I'll tell you something else, one week before the opening, well a couple of days before, if you'd given us the option of scrapping [*Black Watch*] and getting the money back that we would have spent, I think everybody would have gone, "Yeah let's not do it." Because we all felt it was going wrong, you know what I mean? (Burke 2011).

For theatre practitioners, plotting and interweaving stories becomes an all-consuming task as researcher/practitioners carry the knowledge of the stories as a whole making it a challenge to filter through what urgently needs to be said. In the case of *Black Watch* the creative team were working within a six-week rehearsal period devising elements of the production in the room rather than working from a complete text. As Burke offers 'we never had any time to think about it. And when we did think about it, it was like *shit*, this doesn't work. And we were all so close to it, we didn't see what it was anymore' (Burke 2011). But Tiffany (2012) adopted an alternative attitude dealing with the chaotic runs and decided embracing the possibility of failure and taking big risks as a means of succeeding:

Oh it was a disaster! An absolute disaster [...] The thing with theatre is, I just feel you have to be ambitious. If you fail, like Samuel Beckett

says, “Fail better. Fail again, fail better!” And we were being ambitious. Yeah we did feel we were about to deliver the first turkey of the National Theatre of Scotland. But you know, we did something right (Tiffany 2012).

From Subjects to Spectators: Recognizing Ethical Responsibility through Performance

When Kevin, who came in several times during the development of the play, watched *Black Watch* for the first time, he shared with the creative team as Burke recounts ‘he said, “I didn’t think anybody cared about us. About me.” [...] That’s why it affected him cause he just thought, you know, this is about me, and my pals. And it was just that kind of thing, he felt that someone was acknowledging his life’ (Burke 2011).

During the 2008 international tour, director Tiffany was aware that two of the mothers of the Black Watch soldiers killed in the blast would be coming to the performance in Glenrothes. Tiffany (2012) found it necessary that the mothers knew what they would be witnessing:

I feel, very aware and sensitive, like when we performed it in Glenrothes and two of the mothers of the boys who died came to see it. But we make sure we tell them what the content of the show is before they sit in. And, of course they can’t watch it, they can’t watch that part of it (Tiffany 2012).

But Tiffany also recognizes that for some of those who have suffered loss find watching the performance can be ‘therapeutic.’ Burke (2011) too, reflects on the cathartic potential for subjects and their families watching the presentation of their experiences:

Grief is amazing and something like that helps you- it's like the Black Watch families, the one's whose sons died, they came to the play and they were like, 'This is the best thing that's happened since he died' [...] just because of the catharsis of it. To see it be recognized and to see people actually noticing that the person died (Burke 2011).

The responsibility a playwright feels toward bereaved family members can be an anxiety-ridden undertaking. While making *Black Watch* Burke resisted meeting the family members of the soldiers killed. This resistance, as Burke identified, came from his own anxiety over the recognition that his personal success from *Black Watch* was due to his capitalizing off of the traumatic experiences of others. Burke (2011) found a paradox within the process of writing a script based on personal testimony, as Burke reflects it was 'quite limiting as a writer and perversely it's your biggest success!' (Burke 2011). But Burke identifies the social benefits for those connected to the experiences. The play provided catharsis for the mothers' of the soldiers killed in the explosion, and also re-affirmed life experiences of the soldiers (not just the subjects involved who attended performances). Burke relayed the story of a Black Watch lieutenant (who had been in charge of the platoon which included the soldiers who died) who came with his wife to see the play. In the bar afterwards, the lieutenant shared with the actors his memory of the blast as Burke (2011) shares:

What happened was, the guys who were there all got blown up. There was twenty guys all together around it, right [...] [the lieutenant] was standing at the back of one of the wagons, and when the blast came, the door—the blast was so big, this car—it was like an enormous explosion and, the door of the wagon flipped around the back of the wagon and it crushed him against the back. And it closed on him, broke his legs, broke his arms, and he had crawled around to look, to see what had happened. And he said 'everybody was *gone*'. Cause all the guys who had also been there the blast had blown them so far away. And there was a little river- that ran past a little stream. And he said, "Everybody's gone, everybody's dead. I've lost everybody". And he's in the pub telling them all this, in tears, I've lost my whole

platoon and I'm still alive [...] And what had happened was they had all been blown into the river, everybody was lying in the river. And he crawled across and he looked down with his two broken arms and his two broken legs. He crawled over and looked down and they were all piled on top of each other unconscious and they're all dead. He thought they were all dead. And he just laid there until somebody came- it was ages before anybody even came and he says, "I was just lying there, and some of them started waking up and crawling out [...] They didn't even know what had happened" (Burke 2011).

While the play brought back the horrors of the explosion, it opened up a new line of communication between his partner, as his wife told the actors, "He's never told me anything about that until now, until he's seen that play'" (Burke 2011). In the 2010 publication of *Black Watch*, Matt Whitney (2010), a former Lieutenant Colonel of the US Army writes about experiencing the production from an American soldier's perspective:

What Gregory Burke and the creative team of the National Theatre of Scotland have brought to American soil is what a cavalcade of country singers and embedded reporters have completely failed to do for nearly eight years: to expose the hearts, hopes, triumph and pain of American soldiers to the people they serve. Soldiers like me want civilians to have this perspective but we don't know how to share it (Whitney in Burke and National Theatre of Scotland 2010, p. xiv).

Black Watch puts forth the 'face' of Scottish soldiers, demanding that spectators confront their own assumptions and everyday complacency while wars are waged in the name of nationalism. I refer in the case of *Black Watch* as soldiers being the 'Other', though soldiers are recognized through social imaginings of nationalism, memorials, war movies, these depictions silence their words that speak of the horrors of war. As Levinas (1990) developed 'the presence of the face is precisely the very possibility of understanding one another [*s'entendre*]', to see the 'face' of the Other is to recognize their humanity, a being separate from ourselves but one whose life we

are responsible, a potential ethical encounter that can be encouraged within performance (Levinas 1990, p. 9, Ridout 2009). As Judith Butler (2005) explains of Levinas' face '...The other's actions 'address' me in the sense that those actions belong to an Other who is irreducible, whose 'face' makes an ethical demand upon me" an exchange which might be fostered through the performance of life narratives' (Butler 2005, p. 90). Butler's recent work *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War* examine the question, whose lives are considered to be grievable and whose lives are not—highlighting how certain lives are framed as more valuable or worthy of living than others, particularly in times of war where civilian deaths are perceived as merely collateral damage (Butler 2004, Butler 2005). Stemming from Levinasian ethics, Butler argues that until we are able to recognize how our lives are implicated in relation to the Other, and until we bestow the capacity to value and respect all lives through an understanding of our own precariousness, the cycle of violence will continue (Butler 2004: Butler 2009).

Where the notion of the face in the context of *Black Watch* begins to fray is in David Archibald's (2011) assessment that Iraqi lives are invisible within the production, highlighting the exclusion of the Iraqi interpreter who died alongside the Black Watch soldiers as a result of the car bomb (Archibald 2011). Part of the potential of documentary theatre to raise awareness of the lives of others is also a contradiction—as the way in which practitioners frame the lives of others the form can never be entirely inclusive. But where *Black Watch* excels is in putting forth the moral ambiguity soldiers face in contemporary warfare and the invisibility soldiers feel amongst civilians so that audiences can consider their own relationality to soldiers, some who have been killed in war-torn Iraq. By making soldiers accounts accessible to theatre audiences, the production offers to audiences an ethical awakening in the spirit of Levinas, demanding, what is *our* responsibility as spectators/civilians to soldiers? How are we accountable for their lives? How are we implicated in the violence in Iraq? What of the civilians' dead—how are we as citizens accountable for the lives lost and shaped by war? As Nicholas Ridout (2009) puts forth, 'we might be able to develop a model of performance as an ethical encounter, in which we come face to face with the other, in a recognition of our mutual vulnerability, which encourages relationships based on openness, dialogue and

a respect for difference' to which performing war narratives may help us value the lives of others shaped by conflict and realize alternatives to violence (Ridout 2009, p. 54). The fact that *Black Watch* departed from traditional verbatim constraints did not detract from the weight of responsibility founded upon encounters with soldiers—rather these considerations enhanced the theatremakers' creativity. I argue that this ethical anxiety from creating plays invested in real people and their stories is fundamental; surmounting the slippery slope of ethical obligation is the basis for which theatre practitioners' realize and represent the 'face' of the Other in essence, fostering an exchange between actors, audiences and subjects where mutual vulnerability and ethical responsibility can be recognized through performance.

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