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Representing Soldiers to Soldiers Through Dance: Authenticity, Theatricality, and Witnessing the Pain of Others

Matthew Reason

Representations of war recur throughout art, whether celebrating the glories and heroism of conflict or depicting its horrors and follies. Typically, such representations are consumed by audiences who were not there—civilians, politicians, those who remained safely at home—enabling them to bear witness to war, albeit at a remove. This paper shifts this discussion by considering soldiers' own responses to the representation of soldiers, specifically through considering questions of authenticity, theatricality, and witnessing in response to choreographer Rosie Kay's dance performance *5 Soldiers: The Body Is the Frontline* (Rosie Kay Dance Company 2010, 2015, 2016).[1]

In her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Susan Sontag explores how attempts to represent war raise multiple questions, not least the potential to glamorize, sanitize, or aestheticize conflict through its transformation into art. Meanwhile , according to media and communication researchers Katy Parry and Nancy Thumim, the past decade has seen a "burgeoning" of depictions of the military that seek to represent "the complexities of the lived experience for soldiers fighting the war in Afghanistan" (2016, 96). Kay's *5 Soldiers* can be considered in the context of this: first performed in 2010 against the backdrop of the British army's involvement in the conflict in Afghanistan, it seeks to represent the military experiences of such embedded, on-the-ground conflicts. This paper enters into dialogue with Sontag, drawing upon the conceptual discourses of authenticity to explore the impact and meanings of Kay's *5 Soldiers*, specifically in terms of the performance's presentation to army and ex-army spectators. It asks: what is the impact of representing soldiers to soldiers through dance?

My own involvement in the research began in 2015 when I was approached by Kay and invited to conduct audience research into responses to a new tour of the production. My work includes using qualitative methodologies to explore audiences' experiential, interpretative, and affective responses to performance, including dance. Although I had worked with Kay previously, I had no relationship to the work itself, giving me an independence and distance that is essential in conducting audience research as it allows the researcher to approach spectators in as neutral a position as possible. This article draws upon some of the qualitative interview and focus group material produced through the research, especially from interviews conducted with military spectators.[2]

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The following discussion explores how these particularly invested spectators framed the dance representation in terms of questions of authenticity and the ability of the production to satisfy what one respondent described as his "institutional norms." At the same time, however, these perceptions of authenticity were accompanied by a strong degree of theatricality and abstraction as the military experience was translated into a choreographic and aesthetic form. This produced a simultaneous sense of aesthetic and empathetic engagement among both army and ex-army spectators. Finally, the role and value of the outside artist in representing soldiers to soldiers is explored in terms of its ability to bear witness to the experience, without narrowly representing (or even reliving or recreating) that experience.

Context and Methodology

5 Soldiers was developed by Kay following a period of field research, first as a participant in two weeks of full battle fatigue training with the 4th Battalion The Rifles and later a secondment at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre Headley Court, Surrey, England. This degree of immersion into soldiers' training was essential to the development of the work and, as will emerge through this paper, to military spectators' subsequent experience of the performance. Reflecting on the impact of the field research, Kay writes that the experience:

> Pushed me far beyond what I had reasonably expected of myself. The very act of touching the rifle, then learning how to fire, reload and zero it, was a step change in the experience. Then I truly went from one observing, to one participating—in effect I then went "native." The touching of the rifle changed my internal relationship with war, and with myself and the object, but it also changed the soldiers' perceptions of me. (Kay 2015)[3]

In describing the processes through which the work was developed and her objectives in wanting to stage the embodied experience of soldiers, Kay writes that "There have been war artists, war photographers, war poets, but the medium of soldier's profession is their body—perhaps a war choreographer could get under the skin of a soldier and portray how it actually feels to be a soldier" (Kay and Reynolds 2016, 246). Prior to the research presented in this paper, Kay had collaborated with dance researcher Dee Reynolds in exploring audience experiences to the first tour of *5 Soldiers*, particularly in terms of the effectiveness and impact of this attempt to represent the embodied experience of soldiers. The results are presented in a chapter titled "The Body Is the Frontline," which explores how aspects of the performance, including movement and the use of sound, encouraged spectators to evoke "lived, felt, in-the-body experiences that can open up memories of war and [a] complex sense of identity" (Kay and Reynolds 2016, 265). In their chapter, Kay and Reynolds only briefly touch upon questions of authenticity (while never actually using the word) when they describe how "because of its detailed re-enactment of specific military details, *5 Soldiers* is deceptively realistic to a military audience" (2016, 245). While the impact of these "military details" is also examined in this paper, the use of the phrase "deceptively" does not do justice to what I would describe as the reflective and multilayered manner with which the spectators engaged with questions of authenticity. It is the nuanced analysis of the interplay between the experience of authenticity and theatricality among invested spectators that is the particular contribution of this article.

In exploring this theme, this paper braids qualitative research data with analytical discussion of the key conceptual frameworks that emerged from the empirical material—discourses on authenticity and how these relate to audiences. This methodological section therefore introduces: first, the work itself; second, the qualitative audience research; and third, discourses of authenticity.

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5 Soldiers

In any textual exploration of a dance performance the work itself can become a kind of ghostly presence, discovered at a remove through words and memories. For readers of this paper, the principal way in which the performance will become known is through the recollections and responses of the audience research participants. In many ways this is appropriate, as this article focuses on their perspectives. However, it is also useful to give a general sense of the performance, its form and character (Photos 1 and 2).

5 Soldiers is performed by one female and four male dancers, all young, fit, and dressed in military fatigues. The work is performed in a confined "waiting space," the dancers starting already on stage with the audience on three sides. The back wall is used for projections, which consist of a digital double clock, military admin coding (see photo 2), abstracted land contouring, and documentary Afghanistan landscape footage. The work consists of four parts. The opening section, introducing the audience to the world the work inhabits, consists of reenacted moments of military training, the dancers as soldiers performing complex drill maneuvers and quick double-time marching. The beginnings of roughly sketched characters begin to emerge, such as a relationship between a non-commissioned officer and the ranks.

The second section depicts some of the waiting that soldiers endure, the boredom between periods of action and evokes the military experience as simultaneously one of action and of endless waiting. This includes elements of camaraderie, the humor that underpins friendship, the fighting that is produced by enforced proximity and building tensions, and a scene where the male soldiers prey with increasing sexual violence on the single female soldier (see photo 3). The third section is the only one that presents actual conflict: worth noting in itself as conflict is only one element of the broader military experience. Here the soldiers are parachuted by helicopter (represented by the stage being entirely filled by Afghan Chinook footage) into a war zone and a patrol scene. This patrol builds up to the inevitable IED attack or explosion, in which the youngest soldier is injured.

Photo 1. Rosie Kay Dance Company, 5 Soldiers *(2015). Dancers: Duncan Anderson, Sean Marcs, Oliver Russell, Shelley Haden, and Chester Hayes. Photographer: Tim Cross. Photo courtesy of Rosie Kay.*

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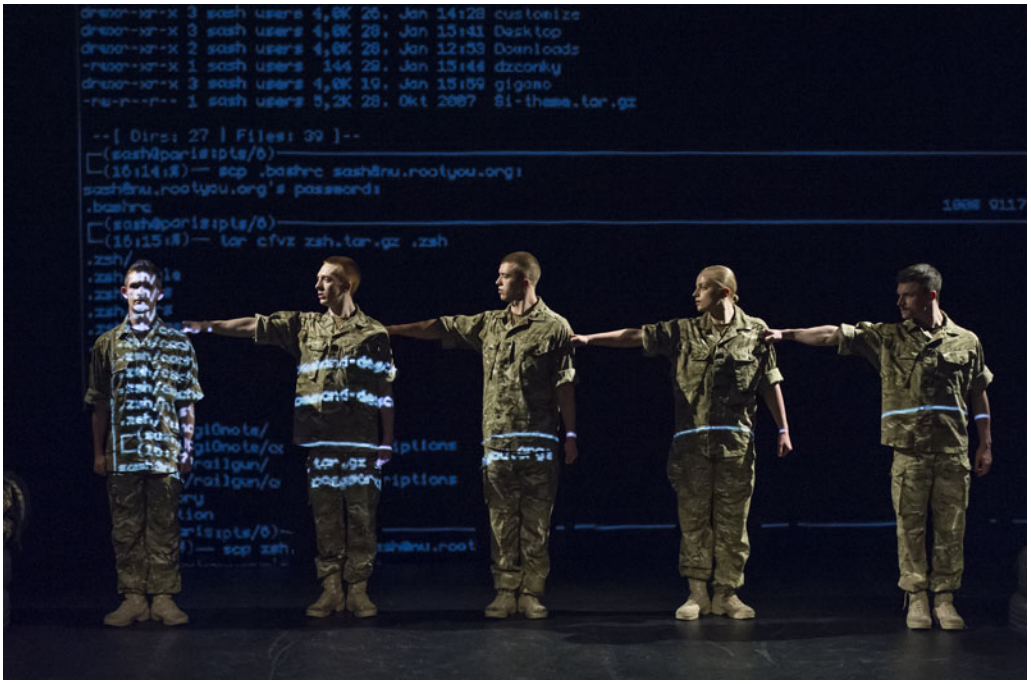
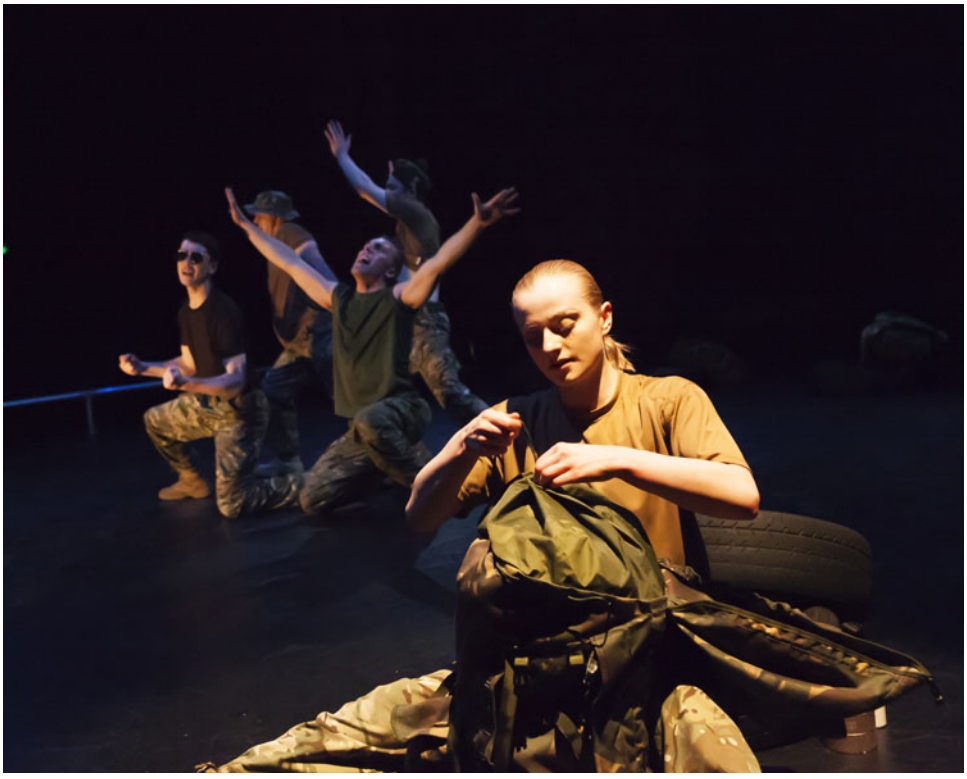


Photo 2. Rosie Kay Dance Company, 5 Soldiers *(2015). Dancers: Sean Marcs, Duncan Anderson, Oliver Russell, Shelley Haden, and Chester Hayes. Photographer: Tim Cross. Photo courtesy of Rosie Kay.*

Photo 3. Rosie Kay Dance Company, 5 Soldiers *(2016). Dancers: Reece Causton, Duncan Anderson, Oliver Russell, Luke Bradshaw, and Shelley Haden. Photographer: Maria Falconer. Photo courtesy of Rosie Kay.*



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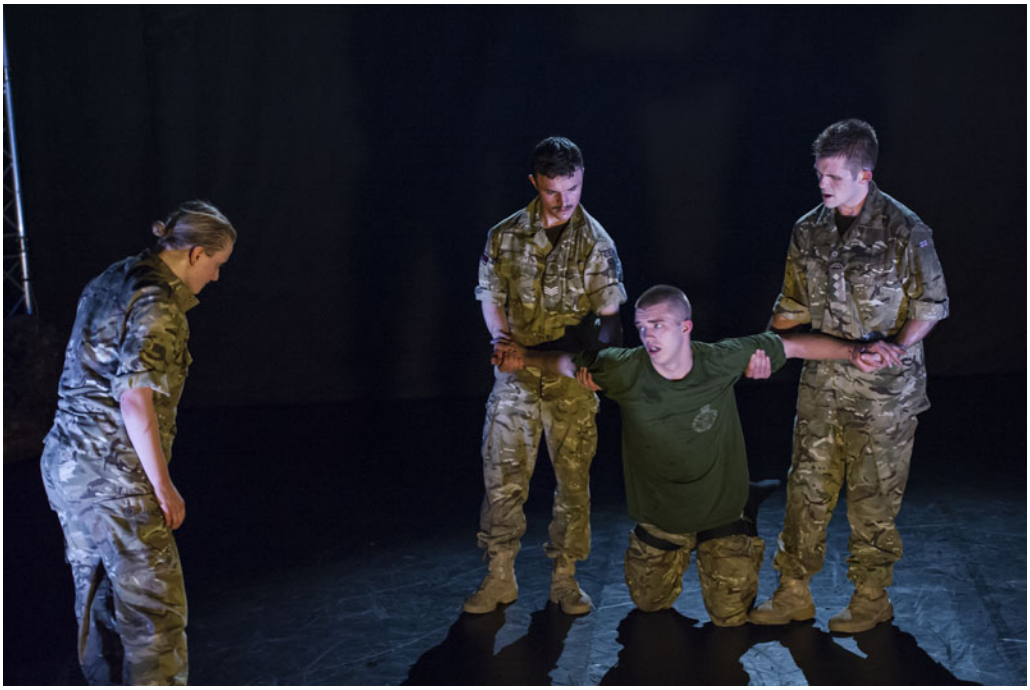

Photo 4. Rosie Kay Dance Company, 5 Soldiers *(2016). Dancers: Shelley Haden, Chester Hayes, Oliver Russell, and Sean Marcs. Photographer: Maria Falconer. Photo courtesy of Rosie Kay.*

The final, and shortest, section of the work is a portrayal starting in a rehabilitation center and focusing on the injured male in a solo, his legs strapped calves-to-thighs behind him so that he appears to be a double amputee (see photo 4). The other soldiers return to waiting on the sides as he struggles to find ways to move with his new body; the work ends as he attempts to march on his stumps toward the audience.

Qualitative Audience Research

The audience research sought to gather army and ex-army response to *5 Soldiers* following its performance in York in 2015 as part of a wider tour of England and Wales. The research was qualitative in nature, following the objective of engaging participants in wide-ranging, reflective conversation about their experience of the performance (see, for example, Barker 1998).

The research described here consisted of two main elements. First, six telephone interviews were conducted with serving or retired military personnel, consisting of commissioned officers, commanding officers, and a commander-in-chief, all of whom had seen *5 Soldiers* and taken part in post-show discussions about the performance. Each interview lasted for between 30 to 60 minutes and followed a semistructured format with particular emphasis on personal expectations and experiences of the performance, the issues and topics raised by the production, its relationship to wider representation of the military, and its potential impact on both civilian and military audiences. The objective of these "expert interviews"[4] was to explore how the interviewees' professional experience and knowledge informed and shaped their perception and response to the production. These participants will be identified anonymously as CO1 to CO6.

Secondly, a 90-minute postperformance focus group was held with three military veterans, recruited through a local veterans' community support group.[5] The same structure of questions

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was followed as with the telephone interviews. The veterans' military service ranged between six and twenty-four years, including operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans, Germany, Rwanda, and Northern Ireland. None were commissioned officers. All the veterans described themselves as having physical and/or mental health difficulties resulting from their military service. All were men. One of the veterans described himself as an occasional theater/dance spectator; one of the participants had never seen a live dance or theater performance before. These participants will be identified anonymously as: Veteran A, Veteran B, and Veteran C.

Both interviews and focus group were recorded, with the material subsequently transcribed verbatim.[6] The semistructured question format then enabled a grouping of responses by theme and for different or unexpected themes to emerge. In the initial analysis of the material themes described included: expectations, authenticity, the portrayal of the female soldier, the representation of camaraderie, the representation of injury and soldiers as victims, and the relationship with the audience (both military and nonmilitary). Among these, authenticity was prominent both as something discussed in its own right and as a prism through which other themes were discussed or evaluated, and for this reason it is the focus of this paper. The next section will therefore briefly examine authenticity as a prominent and problematic discourse within the arts. The specific focus here is on authenticity as it has been framed in relation to spectatorship in order to provide a conceptual framework through which to consider how the military spectators used the term within their responses.

Discourses of Authenticity

There are few critical concepts as fraught as the notion of authenticity. As theater researcher Helen Freshwater writes in her exploration of "the complex relationship between performance and authenticity," "The term *authenticity* is supremely slippery, as well as being over-stretched. Its association with genuineness, honesty, integrity, and uniqueness meant that it was widely adopted as a term of approbation at both ends of the cultural spectrum during the twentieth century" (2012, 155). Most famously, Theodor Adorno declares that judgments of authenticity are largely without content: "Whoever is versed in the jargon [of authenticity] does not have to say what he thinks, does not even have to think properly. The jargon takes over this task and devaluates thought" ([1964] 1986, 9). According to Adorno, the thoughtlessness of assertions of authenticity is perhaps most visible in the manner in which "authentic" and "inauthentic" can become reducible, fundamentally, to judgments of quality in a manner that can be applied across almost any domain of art and culture: from personal identity to news media to food and drink.

Writing in the specific context of dance and spectatorship, Clare Dyson (2009) similarly exposes the problematic nature of the term. Drawing on discourses from dance improvisation and the "authentic movement" tradition, Dyson describes how the "authentic dancer" is constructed as a performer who is "in-the-moment" and "being themselves." The difficulty here, as Dyson discusses, is that "however real or authentic a performer is at any given moment on stage, she is still on stage and within a constructed environment" (2009). For Dyson, there is a tension between discourses of the authentic dancer and the requirements of the form in which the dancer has trained her body as an instrument.[7] For Dyson authenticity in dance is "most often discussed in terms of interpretation: 'She dances that role so well, she is so believable'" (2009).[8]

Such sometimes problematic utilizations of ideas of authenticity can also be seen in terms of the representation of the military and, specifically, the lived experience of contemporary soldiers. Parry and Thumim, for example, examine how high-profile representations of the Afghanistan conflict have sought to utilize soldiers' self-representations specifically because of their ability to claim to be representing soldiers' authentic self:

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> The distinct appeal of the genre of self-representation is in the claims to authenticity through personal narratives and individual lived experience. In foregrounding personal stories through the soldier's own footage and objects, the projected "portrait" of the soldier carries the symbolic weight of that which is deemed valuable and comprehensible about the recent wars. (2016, 106)

To illustrate this, Parry and Thumim (2016) draw upon the Imperial War Museum's 2011 exhibition "War Story: Serving in Afghanistan," which tells the experience of the conflict from the perspective of service personnel and their families and asserts the stories came "direct from the men and women who have been serving in Afghanistan, and is often described in their own words and voices" (100). Parry and Thumin's critique of this evocation of authenticity is its ability to mask the inevitable curatorial framing of such exhibitions through the claim to "direct" personal experience.

In a very different context, it is possible to see how representations of war as diverse as computer games (*Call of Duty 2* is promoted as "The Most Intense and Realistic Combat EVER") to feature films (the film *Lone Survivor*, set in Afghanistan , for example, was praised in *Empire* (2014) as "the most authentic gunfight you'll see and most affecting view of combat since *Black Hawk Down*") utilize concepts of authenticity as a primary marketing strategy. That these representations typically measure their degree of authenticity against other representations —as in the *Empire* review above, *Lone Survivor* is praised as the most authentic "since *Black Hawk Down*"—is just one of the critiques of this trope of authenticity as it slips into manifesting Jean Baudrillard's (1983) procession of simulacra by which representations can be seen as copies for which there is no original. In relation to war, which for many people is known *only* through representations, each representation is a copy that references back to other representation in an endless sequence of deferral. An observation that might encourage us to adopt the skepticism of Guy Debord, who in *The Society of the Spectacle* declares that "all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation" ([1967] 1997, section 9). The vibrant tension of this observation—that we measure both reality and representations by the extent to which they imitate prior representations—is starkly disrupted in the context of presenting a representation of the military to the military: that is, to spectators who have direct lived experienced but simultaneously exist in a society where there is a tendency for such experience to be subsumed by the representational.

For Rosie Kay, a desire for authenticity was not her starting point in making *5 Soldiers;* rather, she was interested in her relationship to the subject as an outsider and whether she could "even begin to understand, to interpret and to perhaps translate onto the stage" the subject matter (Kay 2015). However, while she felt no compulsion or motivation to document details simply in order to reproduce them, the experience of being an outsider while training with The Rifles forced her to pay attention to details as a kind of survival mechanism:

> I certainly picked up that this is a particular world, closed to and distrustful of outsiders, highly observant and vigilant. Through observance, compliance and repetition, I picked up some skills—physical, verbal, behavioral—that showed I was vigilant, switched on, trustworthy and aware. This in itself led to my initiation into the inner sanctums of military behaviors. I did my best to fit in, but more than that I did my best to be a good soldier and have the qualities expected of me. Authenticity was not the goal—participation was. (Kay 2015)

Through this process, the details were not just observed, but learned, with Kay describing herself as a "participant-observer" who went "native."[9] In choreographing *5 Soldiers* Kay was very conscious of the importance of communicating to the particular and encoded world of the army and of the challenge of constructing a representation that could successfully play back to army audiences:

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> The military audience was always going to be a tough crowd. They criticize each other constantly, each squad, each company, each battalion have a different and particular way of doing things. The military audience is vigilant by its very training, with an attention to detail seeped into their every pore to mark themselves out from one another (as well as from civilians). I knew that there was a big danger of turning that audience off, and you can't win them back once they are lost. This was at its core for me: making an effort to get the detail right, being vigilant of the attention to detail. This would make or break that audience and make them sit there, make them believe, so that they could then come on a journey with us artistically, and be able to take the dance amidst the military details. (Kay 2015)

While not the starting point, therefore, Kay had a clear sense of the importance authenticity to her potential military audiences. The impact of this upon spectators will be explored next, with expectations being considered first and then experiences of the performance.

Expectations and Experiences

> To be honest, I had no idea what I was going to be seeing. I didn't know what sort of format it would take. I hadn't seen anything else about it. I didn't really see anything that had been written about it. So I was going in blind, as it were. I was slightly intrigued before I actually saw it as to how they were going to manage to translate that kind of experience and environment into the medium of dance. (CO1 2015)

The analysis of responses to *5 Soldiers* begins with consideration of spectators' expectations to reflect how our engagement with dance "begins" prior to the event itself. As Martin Barker notes, being an audience "is a process that begins in advance of the actual encounter" with spectators bringing their prior encounters as well as social and personal histories with them (2006, 124). In this context, the relevant personal histories included the respondents' army backgrounds and crucially also their prior encounters with external representation of that background. In this setting, "intrigued" was one of the more neutral responses received when serving army officers and veterans were asked about their expectations before seeing *5 Soldiers*.

In framing their research into soldiers, identities and representation at the Military Research Group at Newcastle University, Neil Jenkings, Rachel Woodward, and Trish Winter note that "In our conversations with serving and former soldiers, talking about news coverage of military operations and personnel, we'd often been told that 'the Army isn't really like that'" (2016). Their findings also suggest the existence of a "disjuncture" between public representations of the military and soldiers' own self-representation and "of a lived experience that is, variously, mundane and frightening, stressful and injurious" (Jenkings, Winter, and Woodward 2008, 105).[10]

Echoing such perceptions of a representational disjuncture, the military and exmilitary spectators to *5 Soldiers* frequently asserted a sense of trepidation when asked about their expectations of the performance. Their responses ranged from the curious ("I wasn't sure what I was expecting," CO3 2015) to the skeptical, wondering how a dance performance could possibly represent the military experience ("I was hoping it wasn't all fluffy and silly," Veteran A 2015). CO2 asserted this bluntly "Probably I expected I wouldn't see anything authentic, really, because, you know, it's a dance performance, how is it possibly going to capture what regimental life is like" (2015). For CO4 this skepticism was the result of the sense of identity produced from being within a community and "how can somebody, how can dancers, represent this highly professional, regulated family of people? Anybody from outside who tried to represent you is automatically suspicious" (CO4 2015).

This trepidation was also caused by the sense, described by Jenkings, Woodward, and Winter (2016) above, that the military often feels ill-served by media representations, which depict narrow,

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inaccurate, or biased representations. CO2 commented that his concern was that portrayals of soldiers tend to "focus on a human story and don't situate the story within the context of military life and what military life is actually like" (2015). While for Veteran A "my perceptions of shows like that and my experiences in the past have… It never really lives up to what they're trying to do" (2015). One fear for several interviewees was that the production would depict soldiers as victims in one way or another. One clear sense was that there is a fundamental difficulty in representing the military in a manner that isn't a "sort of pastiche and it's not very accurate and it's a little bit of mockery and caricature, because that's how you sell stories" (CO2 2015). For the veterans, there was concern that it would be "taking the piss out of us" (Veteran A 2015) or be what they described as "a piss-taking show" (Veteran B 2015).

As demonstrated here, these cautious or outright skeptical expectations were sensitized by prior encounters with other representations of the military and awareness of how easy it is to slip into parody, pastiche, caricature, or piss taking and present something that is narrow, inaccurate, or communicates particular perspectives. All these concerns circulate around questions of representation and, particularly, ideas of authenticity. The extent to which these expectations were allayed, realized, or transformed by the production were largely the result of the extent to which *5 Soldiers* satisfied a sense of authenticity for these invested spectators. Indeed, it is telling that the "scholarly circumspection" that Freshwater describes as inflecting discussions of authenticity has had "no discernible impact upon its popular use" (2012, 156). In their analysis of the factors audiences utilize to assess the quality in the performing arts, audience researchers Susan Radbourne, Katya Johanson, and Hilary Glow list "authenticity" (which they define as "a form of truth within the performing arts event") as one of the four key indicators of the audience experience: "The greater the authenticity of a performance perceived by audience members," they write, "the greater their enjoyment of the experience" (2010, 362). As Anna Wilson observes, the result is that authenticity is "employed as a marker of judgments by audiences who often use the term as a synonym for 'good work'" (2015, 341).

Certainly, among the army and ex-army spectators to *5 Soldiers* there was a direct correlation between perceptions of authenticity and judgments of quality: those who responded positively to the performance identified *5 Soldiers* as powerfully authentic to their own experience of the military; those perceiving it more ambivalently did less so and those seeing it negatively not at all. However, this masks the complexity of the perceptions, which are worth exploring in detail.

These spectators' relationship to the performance was continually assessed against a standard of authenticity originating from *within* their own military experience. This is present when one the veterans said the performance felt "real to life" (Veteran C 2015) or when another commented that "it did show you what it's like when you go out on patrol" (Veteran B 2015). For CO2 the show presented "what soldiers go through and really what they're like" (2015). Here, the strength of the production was its authenticity, and the authenticity of the performance was its strength.

This authenticity was achieved in part through what CO5 called observation of details and CO1 described as "recognizable hooks," that is, moments of behavior or action that "anybody who has gone through would see or recognize" (2015). The spectators described this in terms of "tradecraft," giving examples such as the use of hand signals in the patrolling scenes and the probing of the ground for landmines. These details were important because they evidenced research, investment in the process, and respect for the subject matter.

One particularly striking example of how details underpinned a sense of authenticity came up in the veterans' focus group when participants discussed the drill scene. This they first noticed in terms of its precision: "And the marching, they were in perfect step; the quick march, everyone was in perfect step, which must have taken some training you know. We couldn't do that when we were young" (Veteran C 2015). Then another veteran commented "there was only one teddy bear in

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the whole act wasn't there? One teddy bear in the whole drill" (Veteran B 2015) followed by a discussion whether this "teddy bear"—British army slang for a moment when your arms and legs do not swing in a coordinated way—had been inserted deliberately:

> I thought, has he done that deliberately to show, because they were doing the marching part in the training phase, to show that, that's what happens, that happens, people do that all the time, and it's part of training. You see people doing tick-tocking or a teddy bear or whatever you call it, yes, so that's . . . . (Veteran A 2015)

This awareness of how authenticity is constructed, even down to the deliberate planning of mistakes, indicates that this was not a naïve or single-faceted sense of the authentic. Rather, a complex interplay existed between the representation, a sense of military identity, and experience. That it felt like a genuine and committed portrayal was vital to these spectators' willingness and ability to engage with the production:

> It gives it more authenticity. . . . some of the movement was very accurately portrayed, which is good. The way they held the weapons, the way they did the fire maneuver, things like that. Those drills and skills, when other people try and do it and they haven't, you know, you can see that they've been away and done some training somewhere and that really does, it makes it more real and for me it's like right okay, I get that and I appreciate the fact that you've made it real for me. If you had made it silly, I would have walked after ten minutes, and you know what you're taking the piss out of us and that's the difference. I didn't feel that, I actually felt this is really good. When we finished it was like, yes, I get that. (Veteran A 2015)

Here, with these detailed and invested perceptions of the importance and impact of authenticity, it is valuable to return to theoretical discourses and seek to go beyond simple judgments of quality and formulate a more nuanced understanding of the concept in the light of audience experiences.

Two Authenticities

It is therefore worth pausing here to consider exactly what is going on in these expressions of authenticity. First, it seems clear that while a perception of authenticity was a prerequisite to a positive engagement with the performance, the responses go beyond a simple equation of authenticity with quality as described by Wilson, Radbourne and colleagues, and others. Equally, it would also be difficult to agree with Adorno and accuse these spectators of employing ideas of authenticity unthinkingly as a substitute for critical engagement. Rather, what is revealed is a complex and subtle personal and intersubjective relating of lived experience to the dance representation, one in which the spectators frequently travelled through doubt to acceptance, to full empathetic investment in which they placed themselves—imaginatively, kinesthetically, emotionally—within the body of the performers on stage. Some of the articulations of this were strikingly absolute. CO1, for example, described the performance as a "little bit like doing six months in one hour" (2015). The concept and claim of authenticity, therefore, needs to be more subtly understood than simply an assertion that the performance looked the part or was a realistic portrayal.

A useful starting point is Rudolf Arnheim's description of two authenticities; like Sontag's discussion in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), it was proposed in relation to photographic media but can be applied to representations more broadly. Arnheim's first authenticity is the extent to which a depiction "does justice to the facts of reality" (1997, 53). For the army and ex-army spectators of *5 Soldiers* this was an essential assessment: did the performance have a factual accuracy, did it look right, did it have the details right, did it satisfy a sense of institutional norms and expectations?

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As has been seen, meeting this threshold of authenticity enabled these spectators to watch and relate to the performance. However, it in itself does not explain the level of investment that followed. Here we turn to Arnheim's second authenticity, which he describes in terms of a depiction "expressing the qualities of human experience by any means suitable to that purpose" (53). This second authenticity, for Arnheim, is greatly helped by the first, and it is possible to see this with *5 Soldiers*. Authenticity to the "facts of reality" enables—or perhaps in this instance was the prerequisite to—investment of authenticity of "qualities of the human experience."

The importance of authenticity for these invested spectators in relation to *5 Soldiers* was therefore twofold. First, it satisfied that sense of military identity and allayed fears that what was being presented was a pastiche or caricature. This, fundamentally, enabled these expert spectators to watch, to see the performance rather than see a set of clichés—as Veteran A put it, the sense of authenticity made him able to think "for me it's like right, okay, I get that and I appreciate the fact that you've made it real for me" (2015). Second, once recognized and appreciated, this authenticity enabled these spectators to place themselves within the performance in various, sometimes very intense, ways. For CO4 the authenticity was as much emotional as anything else:

> I think what I found was that I went from a position of trying to stand off, to one where one was completely part of the performance, if that makes sense. You sort of . . . one began to sort of almost sort of participate with them. . . . So I found it, when one watched the patrol scene, it was very . . . one was with them. It became much more realistic. And therefore, one's emotions became less inhibited, I think is what I'd say. I'd say you were, you know, you were with them, rather than watching them in a [unclear] sort of way. (CO4 2015)

Meanwhile for several other respondents it was another scene—depicting a helicopter transfer into conflict—that particularly invited them to place themselves within the performance. Veteran C, for example, commented "I actually felt like going, okay yes, I wanted to get in time with them, and it made me reflect and made me think back to when I was doing those journeys . . . I felt sick" (2015). Or Veteran A:

> The helicopter ride that brought back the flights to and from Baghdad to Ashram and brought back some of that and it brought back some of those feelings of being in. . . . And when they were shaking I was actually getting ready to sit up and say, whoa stop. (2015)

This narrowing of the gap between watching and participating was therefore dependent on the spectators' internal sense of authenticity being satisfied, but it was not produced by this alone.

From Authenticity to Theatricality

Even considering Arnheim's concept of two authenticities—one about the facts of reality and the second about the human experience—it is interesting that authenticity should be so central to responses to such a stylized and abstracted piece of contemporary dance. In her discussion of authenticity and music theater, Freshwater notes a similar paradox, writing that "performance theory often casts theatricality and authenticity as 'theoretical antagonists'" (2012, 156) but that assertions and experiences of authenticity are often accompanied by elements of theatricality that appear paradigmatically opposite. In common usage we can easily see how theatricality might be the antithesis of authenticity, and in the specific context of the depiction of war Sontag observes that while war is a canonical subject in art, representations of war are often criticized if they are perceived to aestheticize conflict or make it seem "too much like art" (2003, 68). In this discourse, Sontag continues, the perception is that beauty—and considerations of aesthetics more broadly—turns attention away from the subject and to the medium itself. Rather than considering the experience of

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pain, the suffering of the subject, we find ourselves appreciating the craft of the artist. Sontag describes this in terms of the perceived "inauthenticity of the beautiful" (69).

Reflecting on the process of creating *5 Soldiers*, Kay observes that she was interested in "finding the right tension between the reality (real things that real soldiers do) and the theatricality (will this work on stage? How can I present it? And importantly, how can it be developed into a choreographic mode?)" (Kay 2015). Kay was explicitly seeking a choreographic language through which to represent the world of the military experience, and this process of translation was vital. Indeed, the proposal that emerges from the audience responses is that the choreographic form constructs a kind of aesthetic lens that enables a new kind of vision of the authentic—one where the authentic and the theatrical are combined. Interestingly, at the end of *Regarding the Pain of Others*, the representation of war that Sontag isolates for particular praise as being "exemplary in its thoughtfulness and power" (2003, 111) is an image that is the antithesis of a documentation but has rather been made, posed, and constructed in the studio (the work is Jeff Wall's *Dead Troops Talk*, 1992). While theatrical in its form, it nonetheless possesses Arnheim's second authenticity of "qualities of the human experience" and in terms of the impact of representations of conflict it is potentially this that is essential. For military audiences of *5 Soldiers* recognition of authenticity was in itself important, enabling recognition and investment; yet, such authenticity by itself would not have been enough to provoke affective resonance and impact. Instead, there is a particular power in experiencing a direct, truthful, physical, but also aesthetic and abstracted representation.

For CO3 there was an extent to which the abstraction of dance challenged and undermined the factual reality of the depiction. For her, dance was "less shocking and less immediate" than the depiction of conflict through more naturalistic forms (2015). For illustration, she contrasted it with the film *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg 1998), commenting that dance could never achieve the emotional impacts of the opening scenes of the film depicting the D-Day landings on the Normandy beaches. This remark, however, was immediately followed by the observation that she felt that the need to invest "your imagination a bit more" in *5 Soldiers* meant it "probably goes that little bit deeper because you've had to invest a little bit more thought and imagination into what they're trying to portray" (CO3 2015). There is an interesting tension here that allows us to interrogate further the affective impact of this interplay between authenticity and theatricality.

With *5 Soldiers* one of the elements of the dance representation that was commented on frequently was its unfamiliarity and—echoing CO3 above—the requirement this made on the viewer. For CO5 dance felt different from "more normal" (meaning familiar) representations on television or in the media. For him dance communicated in a "very emotional, in some ways frightening, way" (2015). Similarly, for CO4 part of the power of *5 Soldiers* was that it felt new, felt like it was working without any conventions that make other representations of war seem familiar and therefore more distanced (2015).[11] For members of the veterans' focus group what they termed the more "abstract" form of dance, particularly in comparison to film, meant "you had to think what was going on. You had to think and watch what was going on which made it better I felt" (Veteran B 2015). The benefit of this was that, "I think for me it allowed a lot of interpretation, personal interpretation, and I don't think any other media can do that" (Veteran B 2015). The result was a more open experience, rather than something that felt like it had a particular agenda:

> It had a slight structure to it, a flow, but the movement gave you room to make your own interpretations, which I don't think a lot of mediums can do. There's not many, if any others, that can allow you to do that. (Veteran A 2015)

To explore this knotty relationship between authenticity and aesthetic abstraction further, it is worth focusing on a specific moment within *5 Soldiers*.

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Representing Trauma

One of the climactic moments of *5 Soldiers*, discussed by all the respondents, was the depiction of a soldier's injury at the end of the performance. In fact, the aspect most commented on was not the moment of injury itself but the aftermath: with the soldier depicted as an amputee, with only stumps remaining for legs, and beginning the process of rehabilitation and relearning to walk.

For the army spectators, their emotional connection to this moment is exemplified by this comment from Veteran B:

> I think at the end of it where the lad got injured, I think that to me brought home. . . . I was at Headley Court for a long time, a rehabilitation center, and I saw lads coming through which . . . yes. (2015)

Or Veteran A, who asserted a strong resonance with the image of isolation depicted in this moment, saying, "and what brought it back for me was when the lad was crawling and all his friends were separated and he couldn't get back in touch with them" (2015).

While prompting some discussion about the political implications of this scene—particularly what it might imply about how the military treats injured service personnel and whether the scene's place at the end of the performance could be considered as positioning soldiers as victims—it was largely recognized by the interviewees as powerful and necessary, even as it caused disquiet and discomfort:

> The bit with the injured guy was a very clever and powerful representation of the emotions surrounding injury. And they were . . . it was a fair reflection of the sort of . . . the way that the injured had to overcome their difficulties and the reactions of the others around them. (CO4 2015)

> I think it was seeing the person struggling to get to grips with effectively being on stumps and being reduced to the lowness of being on the floor. You know, as low as you can possibly get in many different ways. (CO3 2015)

In terms of the discussion here, what is crucial about this scene is that it came at the end of the performance when the production had already "earned" the spectators' acceptance and investment. And it was at this point that the interplay between authenticity and theatricality also became central to the choreography, as Kay sought a way of representing the trauma of injury. Kay recalls how in the rehearsal studio they had been improvising using scarves and rehab elastics to tie the dancers' limbs up. One dancer tried arms and legs, another tried two arms. Then:

> Quietly, the youngest dancer, Chris Linda, tied up both his legs and began walking around on his "stubs." It was an incredible moment. His young body still looked fit, agile, strong and military, yet he was missing his lower limbs. He stumbled to begin with, but then started to dance, quite beautifully.
> I knew right then that it was a remarkable image. We suspended disbelief as we watched him: we saw both the trick, of his legs tied up behind him, we didn't try to hide those lower legs, but we also saw the double amputee. It made me see both the fully able-bodied soldier *and* the injured soldier all at once.
> It didn't feel over emotional. It felt practical and real. He's lost part of his body and he has to readjust. Not symbolically, or mentally, but physically: his center of balance is lower, his lower back has to initiate more movement, his knees hurt with the pressure on them, his shoulders rise and he picks his legs up from his hip flexors. I saw the battle in his body. I knew that this was the ending: it was both beautiful, it was dance, but it spoke of how the body can be reduced, broken up, and readjusted

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> into another type of body, a body we see as shocking, disabled, but still a young man, a fit strong young man. (Kay 2015)

In this extended reflection, the mutuality of authenticity and theatricality comes to the fore. Here it is possible to grasp the particular impact of the relationship that aestheticizes ("it was beautiful") but by doing so also constructs a new relationship between ourselves and the world we are contemplating. For philosopher Elaine Scarry the contemplation of the beautiful produces a radical decentering of the self that alters our consciousness in relation to ourselves and to others. Such moments of beauty act "like small tears in the surface of the world that pull us through to some vaster space" (2006, 112). In the context of *5 Soldiers*, this moment acted as a tear that enabled us enter into a relationship with the otherwise unknowable trauma of the pain of another.

In her discussion of the theatrical representation of trauma on stage, Anna Harpin examines the function and impact of the aesthetic representation of violence and pain—a form that with its portrayal of conflict and devastating injury, *5 Soldiers* certainly falls into. Part of the nature of trauma, for Harpin, is the inability to witness and make sense of it: "the traumatic event inhibits the very possibility of witnessing owing to its inassimilable and sudden psychic violence" (2011, 105). The unknowableness of trauma produces a tension between "the impossibility of telling" and the "impossible silence" and it is into this space that the aesthetic representation of traumatic experience—which is able to speak without being the thing itself—inserts itself. It is able to do so precisely because as an aesthetic representation it is abstracted, stylized, potentially beautiful, certainly *theatrical*. It wears, as Harpin puts it, "its unreality on its sleeve" (105). The parallel between this and the staging of and responses to *5 Soldiers* feels significant.

One of the impacts of theatricality, therefore, is to make it *possible* to *see* by making the artifice of the representation impossible to forget. The result is that the spectators have to take responsibility for their own presence, for their gaze, for their own individual act of looking.

With army and ex-army spectators this relationship was doubled through the prism of their own experiences. The power of the performance was in its ability to represent back to them their experience *at a distance*. It was authentic, yet removed—abstracted, beautiful, theatrical, and thereby suddenly very articulate.

Conclusion

The engagement of the army and ex-army spectators with *5 Soldiers* was deeply provoking. As CO4 noted "it forces you to sit for, you know, just over an hour and watch representations of the full military experience and reflect on it a bit" (2015). For those spectators with a connection to the military—whether veterans or serving personnel—the nature of this representation was immediately significant, relevant, and deeply personal.

The work resonated powerfully for these spectators because its representation was underpinned by a pervasive and embedded sense of authenticity, which was utterly crucial to those with a relationship to the world portrayed. This authenticity was underpinned by the appearance of the dancers themselves—young and athletic, they looked like they could be soldiers. It continued with the inclusion of observed details, "tradecraft," and "recognizable hooks" that signaled to the audience that the production had done its research and had respected its subject. The centrality of this perception of authenticity to these spectators' responses cannot be overstressed; for military audiences this perception almost literally *allowed them to see* the performance. Without it they would not have engaged, literally, in terms of walking out, dismissing, or rejecting the work out of hand.

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The notion of authenticity, however, was not naïve. It was accompanied by an understanding that this was a representation, that the performance was in different ways exaggerated or abstracted, that it was working through conventions or (perhaps importantly) constructing its own conventions. There was always awareness that it was a construction of authenticity. The suggestion in this paper is that this very aesthetic stylization and theatricality—produced through a consciously choreographic language—was what in paradoxical conjunction with its authenticity gave the work its impact. The combination of authenticity with theatricality made the performance an *articulate witness*: giving it the veracity of witness (and therefore earning respect, earning a hearing) through its satisfaction of a sense of authenticity and at the same time being audible, being speakable, being articulate through its theatrical and choreographic transliteration, which included, but was not limited to, its representational beauty.

For military audiences of *5 Soldiers* recognition of authenticity was itself important, and yet authenticity itself is not enough to provoke the powerful and affective impact the performance had. There is something about seeing a direct, truthful, physical, but also aesthetic and abstracted representation that has a particular power.

Notes

1. This discussion of *5 Soldiers: The Body Is the Front Line* (2010, 2015, 2016), directed by the British choreographer Rosie Kay, refers to the 2015 Rosie Kay Dance Company tour with dancers, Duncan Anderson, Chester Hayes, Sean Marcs, Oliver Russell and Shelley Eva Haden. Composer Annie Maharani. Visual Artist David Cotterrell. Set and Video Designer Louis Price. Lighting Designer Mike Gunning. The most relevant in the context of this article is the performances in Imphal Barracks, in York, United Kingdom, June 5–6, 2015. http://rosiekay.co.uk/5-soldiers/.

2. In addition to the material engaging with military spectators, a parallel focus group with nonmilitary spectators was conducted along with an online survey of the general audience (see www.whereinyourbody.com).

3. The quotations from Rosie Kay presented in this article emerged following a discussion with her about the emergent themes from the research, particularly about the importance the military spectators placed on perceptions of authenticity.

4. An "expert interview" is where the interviewee has specialist or professional knowledge and perspectives that are the explicit focus of the interview.

5. Three is a small sample. Consequently, no claims are being made here that these veterans are representative of the military experience more broadly. Schoenmakers, for example, responds to the difficulty of extrapolating from qualitative data to wider application by writing that "empirical research is not per se aiming at general propositions. A lot of empirical research in fact describes and documents audience participation and the reception of spectators at a special time and at a special place" (1990, 102). Moreover, as Crouch and McKenzie write in their discussion of sample size, qualitative research is often interested in the drawing out of concepts through the fine-grained analysis of specific situations in the social world, "to discover what features there are in them and to account, however partially, for those features being as they are. Since such a research project scrutinizes the dynamic qualities of a situation (rather than elucidating the proportionate relationships among its constituents), the issue of sample size—as well as representativeness—has little bearing on the project's basic logic" (2006).

6. The interviews were transcribed by a graduate intern and subsequently checked for the meaning of any unclear or obscure expressions.

7. Dyson notes that while choreographers might want "rawness" or "realness," they typically want a preconceived construct of what these are, continuing to suggest that "If they had really wanted those things on stage the choreographer could have worked with an untrained performer, entirely removing the virtuosic training and its resultant 'performance'. As one dancer said to me:

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'it's hard to be "angry" or "sad" when you are doing an attitude turn'" (2009). Of course, some choreographers specifically work with untrained dancers for this very reason.

8. There are further discourses around authenticity in dance that are beyond the focus of this article, such as questions of appropriation and authenticity in the context of dance anthropology and intercultural performance.

9. Colloquially "to go native" is to take on and even internalize some of the traits of the people around you, particularly if they are culturally, ethnically, or socially different from you. In research this might have negative connotations, implying a loss of objective distance. Reflecting on this, Kay observes: "Where the artist greatly differs from the anthropologist is that the artist has no fear of 'going native'—that they go into the experience fully, with body, mind and soul, unafraid of getting emotionally involved and investing personally into experiences. This of course makes it more dangerous to the artist, less scientific, and also means that the artist has less control over how their very presence affects the group they are studying. However, it does seem to build trust quickly; people are pleased to that you are not there to study them as specimens, but to join in and try to fit in and you seem to care as a human, which is picked up quickly in stressful environments" (Kay 2015).

10. Titled *Negotiating Identity and Representation in the Mediated Armed Forces*, this project sought to explore how soldiers talk about themselves and their military lives using two main materials: print media photographs of conflict and the military and soldier's own photographs. There is an interesting reflection here of Sontag's assertion that the photograph is our dominant medium for the representation of war and of the different kinds of authenticities that are implicitly and explicitly claimed. For further information visit: https://research.ncl.ac.uk/military-research/themes/soldiers-itentities-representation.html.

11. Although unusual, *5 Soldiers* is not unique as a dance-based representation of war; two other notable examples in the last few years include *In Contact* (Royal Danish Theatre, 2014) and *Young Men* (BalletBoyz, 2015). None of the participants, however, had experience of seeing any other example of dance-based depiction of war.

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