Bald Men Sharing a Comb

War Veteran Subjectivity in the Documentary Play Minefield

David Jackson

In 1985, three years after the ending of the Falklands War (Guerra de las Malvinas), the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges said in an interview that he thought "the Falklands thing was a fight between two bald men over a comb" (Clarin 1983). To me, a former Royal Marine who experienced the war first-hand, the war was simply the result of two nations being thrown together by their individual political circumstances of the time. Regardless of the reasons behind the conflict, young men on both sides died and many returned home with life-changing injuries. It is something I have carried with me for the last 40 years. I am not alone in this; war changes you forever. As a veteran researcher, I bring to my writing, and to all my work, the messy entanglement of my subjectivity as a war veteran, academic, performer and a disabled person. My experience of the Falklands war has shaped all of those identities.

In what follows I explore my involvement in *Minefield* /Campo Minado, a piece of documentary theatre, which brings together veterans from opposing sides of the Falklands-Malvinas War. Through examining the creative modes of storytelling in *Minefield*, I argue that bearing witness to these stories through theatre can evoke a different, more empathetic understanding of war veteran subjectivity. At a broader level, in this chapter I engage directly with the messiness of my subjectivity and question what it might mean for military researchers to embrace their own multiplicity using creative methods.

HOW IS THE CANVAS PAINTED? HOW IS THE STAGE SET?

An experience of war undoubtedly changes veterans' and their families' lives forever, but the ways we represent such an experience have changed very little. Military research that specifically explores the lives of veterans and families is dominated by an overbearing prominence of research that objectifies veterans. Research from the early twentieth century talked of the impact of war on veterans in terms of insanity, lunacy, mental deficiency, shock, and neurosis (see for example Eder 1917; Adrian & Yealland 1917). This trend persisted throughout World War II, for example through exploration of the effectiveness of treatments for war neurosis (see Beccles 1942). In 1980, the term *PTSD* was formally recognised as a mental health disorder, which was a significant moment in the history of military and veteran's research. Since then, over twenty-eight thousand research papers have been indexed in The National Centre for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder under the Department for Veterans' Affairs in the USA. Whilst this research has undoubtedly had an impact on the treatment of PTSD from combat, it nevertheless looks at veterans through a very narrow lens as objects to probe and poke. The dominance of research that objectifies veterans feeds into the historical and cultural stereotyping already seen enshrined within the mass media, art and now social media representations. As Bulmer and Jackson (2016, 2) write:

> Representations of injured veterans as heroes (Kelly 2013; Woodward, Winter, and Jenkings 2009), symbols of national pride (Ministry of Defence 2014),or victims deserving of our sympathy (Kirkup 2013) all fail to acknowledge the complex

> experiences of those living with the embodied effects of war. Mainstream academic and policy research routinely objectifies veterans as "problems to be solved" (Ashcroft 2014).

I can fully understand why those seeking an alternative narrative might fly the white flag of surrender in the face of, quite frankly, staggering figures on trauma and PTSD among veterans. So, too, can I understand why a counternarrative might struggle when set against the huge body of work that identifies veterans as a "problem to be solved." However, I feel strongly that there has to be another way of representing unheard stories that do not fit comfortably within the dominant narratives surrounding post-military and post-war life. In 2000, I wrote the following in a journal entry: "As I gazed out of the window of the train, I realised I was tired. I was tired of hearing others speak for me. What do they know? What do they care? I realised that I had a voice and I could speak for myself" (Jackson 2000).

On reflection, I have realised that what set me out on my creative journey was an inability to find answers to existential questions of who I am and who I want to become as a war veteran, as a researcher, and as a human being. It has been a process of continuous reflection on my own experiences and how I might find a voice for them. Creativity became a central component of my research; my master's dissertation drew on song writing and lyrical analysis as a way of exploring my embodied experience of war and its aftermath, and during my doctoral studies I experimented with multimodal and creative ways of reflecting on and representing my experience of returning to the Falkland Islands on the twenty-fifty anniversary pilgrimage. The creativity at the heart of my work became a form of emancipation from the cultural identity scripts that have governed my identity as a war veteran with a mental health disability.

In 2015, I was approached by a member of the production team for the documentary theatre play *Minefield*/Campo Minado, to be interviewed about my post–Falklands War life. I was then invited to attend an audition and meet the director, Lola Arias. After investigating the director's work, I saw so much in her way of working that resonated with me. I realised that through telling my story I might be able to give voice to other veterans who fought in the Falklands War and, more poignantly, pay homage to those who did not return. My stories that were eventually included within the play were first witnessed by the director, and then went through a process of negotiation between the production team and myself before I performed them. This process revealed the messiness of my life story as a performer, a disabled veteran damaged by the experience of war, and a researcher who reflects on and writes about the life stories of veterans and their families. *Minefield* became a vehicle through which I was able to confront my own entangled subjectivities, which ultimately was productive and enlightening for my thinking as a critical military studies researcher. It is not always helpful to think about our positionalities in very rigid terms, as "researcher," "veteran," "artist," or "performer"; we never just wear one "skin."

There has been an increased focus on creative interventions in veteran studies over the last few years, with recent examples exploring the therapeutic functions of humour in group art therapy with war veterans (Kopytin & Lebedev 2015), photo elicitation as a method for recovery from substance abuse (Sestito et al., 2017), and art therapy as a mental health resource for veterans with PTSD (Lobban & Murphy 2020). *Minefield*, in contrast, is not an example of how creativity can be used for recovery or for therapy, but instead how it can be used to tell a different kind of story about (and crucially, with) veterans. Furthermore, what both this chapter and *Minefield* itself offer is the kind of engagement with these stories that prioritises empathy. I argue that through multimodal forms of representation including text and spoken word, digital photography and video, music, lyrics, poetry, and others, *Minefield* evoked multi-layered acts of witnessing in which empathetic engagement was central.

For me, creativity is not just about "research methods," but also about being curious (Bulmer 2021) and engaging differently with the world. What creative methods offer is a more meaningful and evocative way of centring this curiosity in our work. In the case of my creative practice, this is about retelling and (re)presenting what it is like to live in the world as a veteran and member of a veteran's family. Creative research, as Sinding, Gray, and Nisker put it, "moves in, rearranges our understandings of ourselves and the world, and goes home with us in ways that traditional social science research representations rarely do" (2008, 462). In what follows, I do not advocate for my audiences to replicate my version of creativity within military research, and neither do I provide a how-to account of theatre-as-creative-method. Rather, my aim is to show and tell. From the beginning of this chapter, I have started to walk you through my creative journey. This journey continues through an exploration of war veteran subjectivity through the play *Minefield/Campo Minado*. As you read, I am asking you to walk alongside me.

MINEFIELD/CAMPO MINADO

Minefield/Campo Minado is a contemporary documentary theatre production that brings together veterans from opposing sides of the Falklands-Malvinas war, and focuses on our lives before, during, and after the conflict. The cast is made up of three Argentine veterans (Ruben Otero, Marcelo Vallejo, and Gabriel Sagastume), two former Royal Marines (Lou Armour and me) and a former Gurkha soldier (Sukrim Rai). The play lasts for one hour and forty-five minutes, and we inhabit the stage for all this time. It was performed at the Brighton Fringe in May 2016, followed by ten shows at the Royal Court Theatre in London as part of the London International Theatre Festival. To date, it has been performed 190 times in twenty countries and thirty-eight cities.

Our performance is the culmination of our collective stories. These were created through a process of collaboration when they were told and retold to Lola Arias, the director, then edited and reedited into the final piece of theatre. This was a process that although necessary, "felt like a surgeon's knife removing a piece of my embodied self" (Jackson 2016). There is no backstage production crew on hand to facilitate compliance with the "norms" of theatre production, such as lighting and sound. We are the crew. On stage there is a white projection screen and props to the left and right including a drum kit, guitars, and amplifiers.

Figure 12.1 *Minefield*/Campo Minado stage set up.

Everything that happens during the performance is visible and open to scrutiny, which during the early performances gave me "a feeling of being naked under the eyes of the other" (Jackson 2016). We change our outfits, prepare the props for upcoming scenes, and operate the digital cameras that project the artefacts of war such as old letters, photos, and remnants from the battlefield. Those same cameras project our images, giving the audience an opportunity to form a connection not only to our stories but with the emotions and feelings we carry. In addition, we support each other as co-stars in our co-performers' stories, we play music "in confrontational punk mode" (Taylor 2016), become satirists, drag artists, and comedians, and over the years acted as technical crew members by resolving microphone issues and other multimedia technical idiosyncrasies. It is a complex representation of the experiences of former enemies, who do not speak each other's languages, across a stage and for an international audience. *Minefield* plays with that audience, through juxtapositions of time, place, and scale, to present a fractured and provocative account of war. It transcends simplistic accounts of national heroes pitted against belligerent enemy others, even those who can subsequently reconcile at war's end. The play falls uneasily within the genre of documentary theatre but has been described as verbatim theatre, testimony theatre, or theatre of the real (Finburgh 2017) and autobiographical documentary theatre (Tiechert 2020), where the physical co-presence of bodies is foregrounded "as the very site of the documentary claim to truth" (Garce and Wasserman 2006). Lola Arias describes the play as a social experiment that functions as a time machine (Sosa 2017).

Minefield has generated much academic interest. For example, (Maguire 2018) explores how the role of autobiographical body, narrative repetition, and formal reflexivity "demand, though ultimately confound, an empathetic connection between performer and audience" (Maguire 2016, 471), while Blejmar (2017) similarly considers how the autobiographical narratives foster empathy. Sosa (2017) reflects on how the "high risk, highly exposed public encounter" (179) changed perspectives about the war and those that took part in it. She suggests that it exposed both audience and performer to a common vulnerability beyond international boundaries. Tiechert (2020), who worked as a production assistant during the rehearsals, examines how drama therapy might provide additional theoretical understandings to conceptualise the play and its emotional aspects. Finburgh (2017) explores Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of "violence without violence," as set out in his essay "Image and Violence" (2003), and how *Minefield*/Campo Minado "disarticulated the spectacles of power, heroism and virtuosity that are often weaponized by leaders and by the dominant media for the purposes of fighting and winning wars" (163). Graham-Jones (2019) writes about the use of supertitles, their use throughout the play, and the consequences for the politics of translatability and untranslatability. Lastly, Perera (2019) explores how *Minefield*/Campo Minado challenges concepts of hegemonic masculinities where "the echoes of their own vulnerability, away from heroic bellicosity and proudly self-sufficient masculinities and violence" (95) are laid out. In contrast to this body of work, this chapter does not explore *Minefield* via the "detached" scholarly analysis of an outsider, but rather by centring the complexity of my own subjectivity, as at once a disabled veteran, performer/participant, artist, and researcher.

SO I STOOD AT THE BAR WITH A WORLD WAR II SPITFIRE PILOT: THE ACT OF WITNESSING

Minefield/Campo Minado is a collection of personal accounts which were negotiated through a process of storytelling by the cast and the production team. An important part of this process was the act of witnessing. Witnessing is never a solitary act, and it implies a relationship between the performers themselves, and between the performers and the audience, that is characterised by obligation. In these relationships, we are all obligated to engage with alternative "truths" in a way that is vulnerable and open to change.

The act of witnessing between performers was always carried out in a relationship of empathetic understanding and mutual respect. Our first meeting in the rehearsal space was "stage-managed" by the production team; the Argentine performers arrived whilst Lou and I waited in a café for a call. Later, I reflected in my diary about this first meeting: "What were they expecting? Another war? Another battle?" (Jackson 2016). My experience of meeting the "enemy" was no different to meeting other veterans who had been to war. We did not speak Spanish, and the Argentines did not speak English. But there was an unspoken connectedness, and I felt this very strongly. Gabriel (2021) similarly described how *Minefield* helped him to overcome his prejudices about British soldiers and identify common ground:

> Finding that opposite, "the enemy," was a person very similar to me, with the same pains or fears and the same joys (Questions for performers 2021).

The witnessing between performers during the rehearsal process and during the subsequent performances created an understanding of one another's experiences that was fluid and ever-changing. It is by listening and "hearing" these utterances that they "serve as a way to validate membership of some kind of community" (Rosen 1998, 60). We performed a kind of collaboration with one another by giving technical support as well as being part of each other's scenes, which, in turn, made each story all our stories.

The audience also take part in the act of witnessing. By witnessing the cast's stories, theatregoers are invited to look anew at the social and cultural processes that inform their way of knowing. By prioritising personal experience, the play offers freedom from the dominant discourses about war and its aftermath. For example, in the therapy scene where I perform my current profession as a psychologist and Marcelo is my client, he says:

> I mixed anti-depressants with alcohol and threw myself into the reservoir. I did not know how to swim. The veterans pulled me out of the water. . . . And now I'm a swimmer (Arias 2017, 56).

In this scene, Marcelo unshackled himself through sport from the "mad, bad, and sad" stereotype that is dominant in veteran research, the medical model of "veteran recovery," and popular culture. After throwing himself in the water, he decided to learn to swim and went on to be a successful triathlete, competing in the Iron Man world championships. In that same scene I retell how my understanding of my mental health disability complemented my current work as a psychologist working with veterans and their families:

> I get really angry because more people had committed suicide than were actually killed during the war. . . . I currently work with Afghan, Iraq and Malvinas veterans (Arias 2017, 57).

Scenes such as these have a powerful impact on audience members. Ann, whose husband fought in the war, said:

> The play brought to life the horrors, the unexpected humour and the bonding that came from extreme circumstances and I really understood why despite everything, he would

> do it all again. I have a real insight into why he has PTSD and what a special man he is, even more than I already knew! (Questions for families 2021).

Kate reflected on the aftermath of war as an experience:

> After watching *Minefield* (Campo Minado) you realise how war can destroy everything in its path. Men and their families, how everyone on whatever side you are on, we are all the same human beings, and all suffer the same emotions (Questions for Audience 2021).

Grace, an Argentine audience member, said:

> I also experienced deep pain over the consequences of the war. To imagine that this actually happened and that these men represent the thousands of men who suffered was devastating (Questions for Audience 2021).

From these extracts, we can see that the audience are invited into the world of the performers through the evocation of feeling, understanding, and reflection. Audiences come to the theatre as a meeting place of collaboration that can encourage connections and empathy, as well as emancipatory moments in which there are evocative and powerful insights into the lived experiences of others (Sparkes 2002). Sparkes goes on to say that this genre of performance tells, rouses, and disturbs by bringing to an audience's attention their own involvement in social processes about which they might not have been aware. *Minefield* gives audiences the opportunity to look inwardly so they can reflect on, understand, and connect with stories in their own lives. However, whether they are from within our circle, veterans, or "outsiders," no audience is a universal one bereft of their own resources, different tools, values, personal philosophies, and embodied experiences. All these factors play a role in the kinds of understanding that audiences take away. As a result, *Minefield* exemplifies how theatre can play with the multiple overlapping subjectivities of audience and cast as a way of developing multiple new critiques.

By witnessing our performances, war veterans in the audience were also given powerful new insights into their own experiences. Colin, a former Royal Marine who was diagnosed with PTSD following his involvement in the Falklands War, wrote:

> For me it gave me, quite simply, reconciliation and a better understanding of events. The beginning of your doctorate that resonated was of being a complete alien in civvie street. . . . Walking around in some parallel universe. . . . Since returning down south and then going to Argentina to see the play I have welled up a few times in those uncontrolled moments of emotional overload. However, it is not so much of a biggie this year as I understand it is okay to feel this way. It has only taken 39 of them (Question for veterans 2021).

John, a veteran who did not go to the Falklands but served in other conflicts, said:

> I think most Vets have seen death close up, whether, its civilian casualties of war or a friend dying by your side and those parts of the play that relived those moments were provoking and thought rendering (Questions for veterans 2021).

Antonia, who was an Argentine conscript serving with Compañía A, Regimeiento 7 de Infantería, replied to the question "how did the play connect with your experiences of the war?" as follows:

> The connection was immediate because the work reflects stories that identified within me. The play took care of the details that almost no one had dealt with and finally confirmed that similar things happened on both sides (Questions for veterans 2021).

Earlier in the chapter, I discussed the messy, entangled and incompleteness of my own subjectivity. From the extracts above, we can see that there is an equally messy and entangled process of co-production and witnessing taking place in the performance, in which the audience are implicated. This messy entanglement is not just about an empathetic engagement with the performer's stories, but also about what happens when the audiences leave the shared space of the theatre. How do they continue to connect, in their own lives, with the stories they have witnessed? To what extent do they think differently? It is often in the period after leaving the performance space that new knowledge and understandings are created. This is the power of theatre.

A further component to this process of co-production and meaning-making is embodiment. The term embodiment is a complex one; however, it is generally accepted to be both an existential condition and a process in which meaning-making is taken into or upon the body (Csordas 1999), relating to our existence within culture and our existence as cultural bodies. Embodiment consists of everything we can be aware of, especially our own mental states, our bodies, our environments, our physical and social interactions. This is the level at which we speak of the "feel" of the experience (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 103).

Our experiences of the Falklands-Malvinas War are distinctive to us. When we go on stage, we carry the spaces, interactions, and experiences of going to war within our bodies. The act of performance allows our embodied experiences to be present in that moment. Sometimes it is deliberate, and a way of "feeling" those experiences to tell them effectively, and sometimes they can appear suddenly from deep inside you triggered by a "moment" on stage. In one example, Lou discloses how the feelings of past experiences in his life were "remembered" through the rehearsal process: "During rehearsals some questions brought back memories of something in my past that I never told anyone about. I began to have sleepless nights, flashbacks. My mind would just go wandering off" (Arias 2017, 53). Similarly, in the therapy scene, Marcelo describes how the war was trapped in his body:

> It is not easy to get rid of that hatred. I couldn't listen to English music. I couldn't see English films. If my son spoke to me in English because he was taught at school, I'd chase him out of the house (Arias 2017, 56).

As we perform the play and the audience witness our testimonies, fragments of our embodied experiences become shared and resonate in different ways between performers, as well as between the audience and the cast. The laughter from the audience creates a sense of community, while their silence during some of the evocative and emotional scenes communicates the shared feeling of intimacy and connection. When audience members leave the theatre with tears in their eyes, it is not only an altered understanding of war veterans' lives that they take with them, but an altered understanding of their own.

MULTI MODAL REPRESENTATIONS: DEAR FLORENCIA, I FIND IT HARD TO TALK ABOUT THE LIVES WE LEAD HERE

Minefield/Campo Minado is a multimodal narrative that "allows discourses to be formulated in particular ways (ways which personify and dramatise discourses amongst other things)" (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001, 22). The play uses photography, audio, text, video, and visual imagery, as well as the artefacts of memory in the form of photographs, diary entries, letters, and old film. Put together as a whole, these fragments form different articulations and representations of our experiences that are often metaphorical or symbolic. The multimodality of the play and its impact on international audiences was commented on by Fara, the sound engineer. He said:

> Most of the people that have seen the play here in Argentina and in other parts of the world leave the theatre moved, most cried. They have told me that was a unique experience not only for the importance of the history told but also the importance to the technical way of telling this history (Questions for Production team 2021).

The images used, for example, have many meanings depending on how they are presented within each scene; it is the audience's personal experience that informs the meaning they take on. On the one hand, images were used which reference historical and cultural aspects of the past and, as with other media used within the play, are a form of communication. However, images were also used to evoke personal memories. Photographs that are both artefacts of our storied lives and taken from magazines and newspapers were chosen for their ability to evoke memories within both the cast and audience, and as such work to narrow the distance between the performer and the audience. For example, this included a picture of Lou in an act of surrender being led out of Government House, Port Stanley, by the Argentine forces on April 2nd in 1982. He talks about this photograph in the play whilst pointing at it projected onto a large screen:

> As we are escorted outside, a photographer from Gente6 stepped forward and took our picture. That picture travelled the world. . . . It was on the front page of The Sun, The Times, The Daily Mail. . . . And I felt ashamed (Arias 2017, 16).

Most importantly, the images have been essential to capture what was hard to put into words; this is akin to what Ong (1982) calls "orality" (as cited in Weber 2008, 45). There is a picture of a letter sent by Gabriel to his wife during the conflict projected on to the screen as he describes the poignance and intimacy of that moment many years later. Through this image, we offer the audience an empathetic encounter with a private moment in the life of a young man at war.

There are also several video clips used in the play, which are both artefacts of our lives and projected video from the cameras on stage. This includes news footage from both countries; a video Marcelo made during a return to the islands in 2009; an excerpt from the documentary The Falklands War: *The Untold Story* (Yorkshire TV, 1987), in which Lou was interviewed when he was younger projected images of toy soldiers acting out Gabriel's story in the scene *Minefield*, as well as a globe being manipulated to give a sense of Sukrim's post–Falklands War life. The globe is projected onto the screen and turned by Ruben as Gabriel describes Sukrim's life after the war. It moves from country to country with description of what role he was performing in each place. Video helps to tell a different veteran's story, evoking a sensory experience that makes it possible for the audience to differently understand the embodied and emplaced nature of war veteran experience as told through *Minefield*.

Within the play, there are several pieces of music. These are "Zamba de mi Esperanza" (Morales 1964). a well-known Argentine folk song sung by Marcelo; "Don't You Want Me Baby" by the Human League (Oakley 1981); "Get Back" by the Beatles (Lennon and McCartney 1969); a traditional Nepalese folk song called "Narou, Narou, Saili" (Dhruba n.d.)

sung by Sukrim; “Yo Nepali Sir Uchli” (Pradhan n.d.), a national Nepalese song; “Marcha de las Malvinas” (“March of the Malvinas”) (Obligado and Tieri 1939), and “The War Song” (Conti and Armour 2016). Lola Arias uses music to represent our wider stories in a way which goes beyond the spoken text, as each song offers a unique insight into our embodied experiences (Bresler 2008). Compared to the spoken word, music has a heightened ability to invoke emotion, and therefore add depth and resonance to the stories told, whilst at the same time generating new symbolic and metaphorical meaning. Music is affectively powerful and encourages the audience to bring their own meaning and experiences to the story, which subsequently works to break down the barrier between the cast and the audience. The use of music is also political. At one point in the play, Argentine cast members sing “Marcha de las Malvinas,” a song embedded in the Argentine culture. It maintains a strong political connection with the issue of sovereignty and provides a culturally and historically rooted sense of Argentina’s claim to the Malvinas. Still today this song is taught in schools from the age of six. Elsewhere, we see the irony of “enemies” singing “Get Back” at each other with emphasis on the chorus, as I sing “Get Back” looking at the Argentines and they sing it back to me. The chorus of the song represents the claim and counterclaim regarding the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, but it is told anew through the genre of pop music.

The piece of music that has had the most impact on audiences and the performers is “The War Song” (lyrics quoted in Arias 2017, 6):

Would you vote to go to war?

Would you send your sons and daughters to war?

What would you fight for: the queen? La Patria? Oil?

Would you go to war?

Would you? Would you? Would you?

Have you ever been to war?

Have you ever killed anybody?

Have you watched men die?

Have you? Have you? Have you?

Have you ever been ignored by a government that sent you to war?

Have you watched a friend commit suicide?

Have you held a dying man in your arms?

Have you? Have you? Have you?

Have you ever seen a man on fire?

Have you watched a guy drown in an icy sea?

And have you ever visited a dead friends grave with his mother?

Have you?

Have you ever been to war?

Have you ever been to war?

During our first run of shows at the Royal Court, the BBC 4 *The Saturday Review* (BBC 2016) described this song as "a bewildering, punky number played just about adequately and alienating filled with rage." I remember writing to the BBC feedback programme asking whom they expected to come on stage, the Rolling Stones? I came to the conclusion they did not get it. It is a representation of that anger war veterans feel and have felt historically about their experiences and the inadequacy of societies to respond to these experiences. As Gabriel describes, after playing the song: "[s]ometimes I feel angry, sometimes I feel emotionally tired, sometimes I feel happy because I feel good about the show. Angry at everyone, my country and the war" (Questions for Performers 2021). Ruben writes that: "[t]he last song is the anger unleashed. It is to release everything we have inside" (Questions for Performers 2021).

When Colin, a veteran of the war and a member of the audience, was asked, "What about the play had most impact on you?" he replied:

> The final song, being emotionally invested in the words combined with the overall intensity brought on a flashback and subsequent panic attack. If I could have felt my legs, I would have taken myself away from the situation. I would have run out of the theatre (Questions for Veterans 2021).

This final song, which ends the play, disrupts the empathetic relationship between audience and performers that had been previously established. The juxtaposition of connection and disconnection starkly and deliberately positions audiences as the "other." The lyrics shock the audience and force deeper and more honest reflection on the consequences of war for veterans on both sides of the conflict. In an interview for *The Observer* (2017), we all agree that the last song is a piece of supercharged catharsis that expresses our deepest frustrations. I described it as "the best stress-buster in the world. . . . The audience during that song represents both societies, British and Argentine. There are journalists who take it personally–suck it up, buttercup. It's a challenge about politicians and societies sending young men to war" (*Observer* 2017).

Through its use of multi modal representation and the prioritising of empathetic engagement, *Minefield* challenges dominant depictions of veterans. It illustrates how theatre, performance, and creative arts more broadly can help us wrestle with troublesome questions in military studies in a way that embraces feeling, emotion, and uncertainty. The immersive nature of the play enables an empathetic connection that blurs and sometimes breaks down the positionalities of audience/performer, veteran/non veteran, and us/other. Yet the final act presents a jarring and almost violent encounter with veterans' reality. In forcibly placing the audience in opposition to us through the final song, we reclaimed our collective identity of "veteran" and became united by our shared knowledge of war as hell (Lane 1974). Something that is missing from veteran research and wider cultural representations is a truthful engagement with veterans' anger, and with the fundamental problem of the violence of war. I have myself grappled with how to engage with and represent this violence and anger in my work. While there are no neat answers, working on *Minefield* has given me the space and opportunity to explore these questions through creative practice and performance. Something that critical military studies scholars might take away from this, therefore, is that creative modes of engagement can help us to wrestle with subjects that are by their very nature challenging, contentious, and multifaceted.

FINAL SCENE: YOU DO NOT LIVE IN MY SKIN

Minefield has played to international audiences to much critical acclaim. It was cited as one of the top ten plays in London by the Evening Standard(2016). We have played over ninety shows in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Every show has been sold out and received standing ovations every night. I was very lucky to be chosen to perform in *Minefield*, and I am very proud of what six non-actors have achieved. It has been a privilege to speak to so many veterans and their families after the shows around the world including Korean war veterans from the United States and the UK; many Falklands-Malvinas veterans and families from Britain and Argentina; Iraq, and Afghanistan veterans; veterans from the Troubles in Northern Ireland; veterans from Ukraine who fought against the incursion of Russia on their borders; and the grandson of a Russian soldier who survived Stalingrad. I have held many of these proud men in my arms as they shed tears of their loss and memories from war. These reactions to bearing witness to our stories by veterans shows the emotional and affective power of *Minefield*.

I am troubled by conventional modes of representation around veterans and their families, which often objectify "the veteran" as a social problem. The government estimates there are 2.7 million veterans living within the UK (Office for Veterans Affairs 2020), yet, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, Research focuses on a small minority of this community. What is needed to gain a more nuanced understanding of veterans and their families is for scholarship in this area to take a risk and move towards more engaging methods of research. Importantly it is not just about mobilising "creative methods," but rather finding new ways to prioritise coproduction, curiosity, and creative ways of knowing the world.

In this chapter, I have explored how *Minefield* contributes to societal understanding of veteran subjectivity (before, during, and after war) and how the use of creativity offers new and evocative ways to engage with veterans and their families. The play is made up of an amalgamation of thoughts, feelings, memories, sounds, and interactions that are felt, remembered, and embodied. These messy woven aspects of veterans' subjectivity are neglected within current research. *Minefield* poses questions about the representation of veterans as one-dimensional subjects and offers opportunities to examine the cultural production and reproduction of veteran identities and experiences. For example, its use of music can "allow for interpretation of the visible and invisible and the tangible and intangible" (Bresler 2008, 227) and presents a tableau of sounds that draws the audience into a different way of hearing, seeing, and feeling. The multiple sensory forms of representation give audiences permission to enter empathetically into the act of witnessing and "invites the cultivation of multiple forms of listening" (Speedy 2005, 289). Indeed, during the Performance our stories emerge from our living bodies as they interact with the space, the audience, and the cast. *Minefield* therefore plays with the status of veterans in cultural representations as "objects" of pity, scrutiny, and analysis, by putting the veteran subject on stage. In this way, veterans become both the performers and the performance; indeed, the play illustrates how the two cannot be separated. Furthermore, *Minefield* illustrates how new meaning and understanding about veteran lives and experience can be created at the intersection between cast and audience, and for me personally between my entangled identities of veteran, researcher, and performer.

Minefield provides an example of what the "deliteralisation of knowledge" (Eisner 2008, 5) through film, photography, music, lyrics, and poetry can offer us in military research. Neilsen (2008) suggests that the characteristics of this type of inquiry embrace "liminality, ineffability, metaphorical thinking, embodied understanding, personal evocations, domestic and local understanding and an embrace of the eros of language" (94). I argue that creative ways of knowing offer us more ethical possibilities for engagement with military communities, in that they can prioritise feeling, experience, as well as the freedom and agency of military subjects, in ways that other methodological approaches cannot. In this chapter, I have not presented

Minefield as an example of theatre-as-method at work. Instead, I have shown how the use of creative and innovative methods can give voice to unheard narratives in military research.

The responsibility to speak truth is one that I bear myself; however, I do not take it on wearing only one "skin." I am a military studies researcher, but I am also a war veteran who has a mental health disability, and I cannot cast these skins off. I come with a messy, fractured incompleteness. I am work in progress. At a more personal level, then, creativity allows me to embrace these entanglements, my own messiness and incompleteness, and bring this to my research in a meaningful way. This is something that we could all do more of, as critical military studies researchers. As academics, we are "trained" to think critically, but there appears to be no room for being critical of oneself, or acknowledging our own messiness, incompleteness, and fallibility. What are the prejudices, biases, and assumptions we bring to our work? What stories do we really want to tell, and what are our motivations for telling them? How much are we influenced by the politics of research institutions and academic publishing? Are we prepared to take risks?

For me, an important question relates to how we as researchers represent the violence of war and the anger that is felt by veterans and their families. Despite cultural and political efforts to make war and its violent impacts on people (in this case, veterans) palatable, the inherent violence of it will always be an insurmountable issue. Researchers need to move away from a model that attributes veteran anger to their being mad, bad, or sad, and towards one that more honestly and openly confronts complexity and uncertainty. I strongly believe as a veteran that scholars of veteran studies have an ethical responsibility to find new ways of speaking, listening, and seeing that prioritise empathetic engagement with unheard and silenced stories. As Speedy (2008) tells us, "'the truth' is a slippery and multi-storied customer and few of us know what is deemed to be good and what is deemed to be the 'telos' or ethical substance of other people's lives, except those with insider knowledges" (50). *Minefield* is a risky text with the potential for harm; it is a story of hesitation, a journey into the unknown, and we can never anticipate how our audience will respond. But in the moment that we walk onto the stage, the audience and cast become welded together as part of the same story. There is an ethical responsibility to come to this encounter with vulnerability, openness to changing your mind. You can craft your own meanings, and there is great power in that.

While I use *Minefield/Campo* Minado as an example of "creative methods at work," I want to end the chapter by highlighting that the ethical responsibilities that go along with acts of witnessing do not only apply to "staged" performance. This chapter is itself a part of my performance as "veteran," and in reading this you have become a witness. This performance may raise questions, perhaps uncomfortable ones, about sending young men to war and how the aftermath of that experience impacts the veteran, their families, and the wider community, but it is fundamentally about giving voice. A voice that is sometimes very difficult to set free.

As we pass the fortieth anniversary year of the Falklands/Malvinas War, the *Minefield/Campo Minado* journey is still not complete. In 1982, on my return home from war, I realised I had lost a part of me. My life in the Royal Marines was not about exercises with blank ammunition anymore: "I had lost my innocence" (Jackson 2000). I had changed forever. *Minefield* has become a part of my journey to find the essence of who I am:

> I have stood on stage in Argentina fighting back the tears. As I waited in line, I thought about my country's government's hand in this. The death of a young man fighting for his country. I felt the eyes of the sold-out audience staring into my very soul. Suddenly, I held in my arms an Argentine mother who had lost her son during the war. Tears flowed down my face as I felt I was fragilely holding all mothers who have lost sons

> and daughters from war. How can I put into words what happened last night? How does one represent those emotions I felt? Are there any words and are they sufficient to tell this story? (Jackson 2018).

When words alone fail, creativity may help us get closer.

Epilogue: The lights go off.