The aide said that guys like me were ‘in what we call the reality-based community,’ which he defined as people who ‘believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.’ I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. ‘That’s not the way the world really works anymore,’ he continued. ‘We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors… and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.’

Ron Suskind

Between the truth and lies there is a hair, and I am trying to cut this hair and as I do this I remember the words of the poet Al Akhtal Assaghir: ‘He cries and laughs not for sadness or joy like a lover, no he draws a circle in the air and then erases it.’

Rabih Mroué

Tom laughed uneasily, ‘Well, maybe like Casy says, a fella ain’t got a soul of his own, but on’y a piece of a big one – an’ then –
‘Then what, Tom?’
‘Then it don’ matter. Then I’ll be all aroun’ in the dark. I’ll be ever’where – wherever you look. Wherever they’s a fight

C. Martin, Theatre of the Real
© Carol Martin 2013
So hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Wherever they’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, I’ll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I’ll be in the way guys yell when they’re mad an’ – I’ll be in the way kids laugh when they’re hungry an’ they know supper’s ready. An’ when our folks eat the stuff they raise an’ live in the houses they build – why, I’ll be there. See? God, I’m talkin’ like Casy. Comes if thinkin’ about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes.’

John Steinbeck

One evening in the fall of 2008 I attended the three-part participatory theatre piece Surrender: A Simulated War Deployment in Three Acts directed by Josh Fox of the International WOW Company. Putting aside my antipathy for audience participation, I was certain that in order to really experience this work I had to go alone. I thought being by myself would, to a certain degree, disable my critical apparatus and allow me to more fully participate in what I understood was to be a simulated war experience. Not something I typically sign up for, Surrender began with every audience member putting on army clothes. As I stood there in fatigues and boots I felt ridiculous. I was so happy no one I knew was there; and, contrarily, unhappy that I was alone. My feelings of trepidation soon changed into astonishment at what I was asked to do, and then rapidly deteriorated into half-tearful murmuring as the evening wore on. As newly enlisted soldiers, we theatregoers had to undergo basic combat training: marching, yelling, doing push-ups, jumping jacks, sit-ups, saluting, and, finally, shooting guns. US Army National Guardsman, Jason Christopher Hartley (Fox’s coauthor) took us through these drills. Hartley’s voice carried absolute authority, determination, and intention. He scared the … indolence right out of me (Illustration 6.1).³

Audience members attending Surrender who did not want to put their bodies on the line, on the ground, or in military fatigues could be observers. While waiting outside the theatre in the induction line, individuals were approached by ‘enlisted persons’ and informed of their choice. We were strongly encouraged to participate. Observers were ushered to the back of the Ohio Theatre warehouse space in New York, while participants were issued uniforms and boots and taken to a designated area closed off from view by hanging sheets, and ordered to change – FAST. My colleague Jim Ball saw Surrender with Gelsey Bell