

Deputy Mayor Buery, Brooklyn Borough President Adams, (Council Member Van Bramer), Commissioner Sutton, Commissioner Finkelparl, and Brooklyn Public Library: on behalf of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation's Board of Directors, particularly its Co-President, Andreas Dracopoulos, who regrets that other obligations have not allowed him to join us, as well as on behalf of all my colleagues who are here today, I would like to thank you for hosting all of us in announcing this important project.

In 1994, Jonathan Shay, a clinical psychiatrist working in a VA clinic in the Boston area published *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. Shay's work with Vietnam veterans allowed him to argue that the *Iliad*, Homer's famous epic poem, depicted, among many other things, very accurately and vividly, a fundamental and critical truth about warfare across many centuries. That combat trauma is a persistent and defining consequence of a soldier's experience of war, one that inflicts devastating damages on a person's mind and psyche. Shay made the point, that Achilles' famous fury and the savagery it unleashed all around him was the direct outcome of combat trauma, similar to the one consistently observed by mental health professionals in contemporary veterans that has resulted in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Shay's goal is not only to draw parallels between Achilles' furious behavior and that of Vietnam veterans.

He understands clearly that our society, as sophisticated and advanced as it may be, it lacks the fundamental tools to understand combat trauma and consequently to effectively address its heavy toll on veterans, their families and the communities they return to. Shay not only identifies in the *Iliad* social practices that help soldiers deal with the heavy emotional toll combat trauma imparts upon them, but also recognizes the importance of narrative and story telling in creating a collective framework and environment that allows a community to embrace veterans and create a compassionate space that allows for a healing process to unfold.

This is where the work of Bryan Doerries and Theater of War comes into play. As a classicist, Bryan understands the concept of ritualized catharsis and the role of ancient Greek tragedies as tools that collectivize grief and create a compassionate, neutral environment that entices healing. *Theater of War's* staged readings of specific Greek tragedies, give war veterans a voice by allowing them to indirectly tell their stories to the community, in a narrative way that effectively creates a state of immediate, collective, ritualized healing and communal embrace and acceptance.

As a philanthropic organization, all of us at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation have been privileged to collaborate with Bryan from the very beginning. Our support of Theater of War goes back to 2009 when the

Foundation provided support that allowed the project to reach a much broader audience. Since then, my colleagues and I have witnessed numerous performances for military and civilian audiences as well as health professionals in New York and around country, and I was personally privileged last year to experience the pioneering *Antigone in Ferguson* project and performances in the late Michael Brown's community in Ferguson Missouri.

So, we are deeply honored and proud of the opportunity to support Bryan's residency as the city's newest Public Artist in collaboration with the City of New York, and specifically the NYC Department of Veterans' Services and the Department of Cultural Affairs, as well as the Brooklyn Public Library. The scale of this project, over 60 performances across all five boroughs, is such that the magnitude of its impact for thousands of veterans, their families and their communities can be extraordinary.

The ability of performances of Greek tragedies to induce ritualized catharsis, rests upon the elemental fact that the ancient theater functioned as a truly public space, a space where the community convened to debate and collectively share experiences. This had to become, by definition a non-polarized space. And this is something for all of us to consider in today's political and social environment.

In closing, I want to thank Commissioners Sutton and Finkelpearl and their colleagues for their work and collaboration in helping this project materialize, and congratulate Bryan on his residency.

Thank you!