

Anthology Introduction

First, the name: when I founded The Civilians in 2001 I wanted a name that would suggest an outwards-looking theater company, one that would go beyond the familiar to investigate the world. I knew that vaudevillians described the people outside of show biz as “civilians.” Apparently models use the term in a similar way as do many other insiders describe those on the outside. And outside is where my interest lay. I had grown weary of a theater that seemed to be a place where you went to get reassured, a place to get a message we already all believed in. I wanted a theater of discovery, a theater where I’d get surprised, feel the limitations of my ways of knowing, and hopefully leave with a sense that the world is a bigger and more complex place than what I had previously believed. I wanted to meet the people I didn’t already know, those outside of my own experience, the others: the civilians.

But the idea behind The Civilians is more than a name. The company exists to make a different kind of theater possible. We would create original shows, and each project would begin with some sort of creative investigation into real life. For *Gone Missing* that meant interviewing New Yorkers and asking them about lost and found stuff. For a historical show like *Paris Commune*, Michael Friedman and I sought out first person accounts and transcripts in an effort to see this revolution through the varied perspectives of its players. Each of these investigations is then a leaping off point for a creative process. There is no set method. Some of the shows draw more on the contributions of a group, using verbatim interviews as the main source of text. Other projects such as Anne Washburn’s *The Ladies* or Neal Bell’s *Shadow of Himself* are playwright-driven. And hopefully future works will continue to evolve with new variations. But whatever the method or aesthetic, this combination of research, investigation and creativity serves to compel the artists involved to shed old ideas, recalibrate perceptions and hopefully discover the new forms and new stories that will keep theater a dynamic part of contemporary life.

—Steve Cosson