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“What Makes the War”: Everyday Life in a Military Community

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“What Makes the War”: Everyday Life in a Military Community

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Dedication

For my parents

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“What Makes the War”: Everyday Life in a Military Community

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This dissertation investigates the various levels at which the multi-scaled dynamics of war take shape in the everyday, embodied lives of the people whose job it is to produce it—soldiers and their families and communities at and around Ft. Hood, in central Texas. As the largest military installation in the world and the single biggest point of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan for all U.S. forces, Ft. Hood and its surround may represent the greatest single concentration of Americans directly involved in the production of global military force outside of Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan. The repercussions of war and routinized war-making extend throughout the lives of the people who inhabit, serve and surround the base.

The length, scale and distinct character of the Iraq War have exposed these soldiers and their family members to new and chronic hardships and forms of vulnerability, including the stresses of longer and more frequent tours, unprecedented rates of posttraumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, overburdened institutional supports, and an abundance of extreme characterizations of soldiers in

American public culture. These vulnerabilities are bodily and affective, intersubjective and shared, and bases for scrutiny and recognition.

I base my analysis on the difficult and distinctive role that the soldier occupies as at once the agent, instrument and object of state violence. The soldier's life is simultaneously shaped by discipline, empowered by the right to kill, and allowed to be exposed to harm and death. I use soldiers' "exceptional" status as a starting point for understanding the dense sets of material, institutional, discursive, and social relations in which they are embedded. The dissertation chapters are organized around broad themes that emerged from my informants' words, actions and experiences and that capture the impacts of war across diverse arenas of everyday life. I treat each theme as a field within which to explore not merely the effects of war, but its *lived affects*—the "feelings" of war that are the variously sensory, psychic and emotional imprints of the everyday, organized production of military violence.

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Prologue: Everyday Life and Death

“DON’T FUCKIN’ LEAVE ANY OF THIS SHIT OUT”

I met Dime¹ when a friend at the volunteer soldier service organization where I worked and did research told him who I was and what I was doing. Dime is in his mid-thirties, white, tall and broad-shouldered. In conversation he engages people with an intensity that is alternately charming and unsettling, veering back and forth from between enthusiasm and vehemence. When he talks he calls you “brother” and his chalky blue eyes lock straight on to you. He had enlisted late, and at 35 he was only four years in, an E4.² He immediately began to recount for me stories about his most recent tour in Iraq. He was a tanker, a driver, and spent much of the last of his two tours on patrol in the Sunni Triangle, sitting almost prone in the cramped, bathtub-like cockpit of an Abrams. The Sunni Triangle insurgents constructed extremely powerful roadside bombs out of explosively formed penetrators (EFPs), antitank mines and artillery shells, he told me, often in quantity and combination. The whole situation seemed crazily askew from Dime’s description: his unit’s mission was purely terrain denial: maintaining exclusive control over the space. The only threat came from bands of lightly armed insurgents and these tank-killing IEDs, typically set off by wire or cell phone by paid-off but otherwise unaffiliated civilians. “Peasants and farmers were taking out tanks with the push of a button, man!” There were no big or dangerous military targets for the tanks to engage, and when they did respond to small arms and IED attacks, the effects were wildly

¹ All names in this dissertation not quoted from news media sources are pseudonyms. Other identifying information has also been omitted or altered to protect participants’ privacy and confidentiality.

² In the Army, people just as often refer to their uniformed services pay grade (followed in common across the service branches) as to their rank. “E” stands for “enlisted” (officer pay grades are “O” 1-10), and the 4 indicates rank. E4 indicates a rank of Specialist or, as in Dime’s case, Corporal. See Appendix for a chart outlining Army rank structure, including terminology and typical responsibilities.

disproportionate and absolutely devastating. The lightest weapon on an Abrams is an M240 machine gun, which can fire a dozen or two 7.62 mm rounds in the length of time it takes to squeeze and release the trigger. Dime's unit's rules of engagement (ROE) permitted them to respond when threatened or attacked, and they responded with everything they had. They leveled whole city blocks, and it was all according to the rules. Dime had survived two direct IED hits. The second one, he was the only survivor, and he was trapped inside the tank for four hours as it burned. A third time he had a near miss and watched the tank in front of him get ripped apart by an explosion that lifted all 67 tons of it into the air. The driver was his best friend and his body was just gone.

Dime's tiny apartment was in a mid-sized building a quarter mile off Killeen's former main drag, a neighborhood of run-down bungalows, lots full of trailers, dollar stores, and no-name gas stations. There wasn't much that you could easily (or pleasantly) walk to, but Dime was stuck without a car because his traumatic brain injury (TBI) made it impossible for him to concentrate on the road, the traffic, the signs. The apartment was crowded with furniture from the much larger house he moved out of when he returned from his first deployment to find that his now-ex-wife had left him. An armoire and an upturned armchair and a box spring crowded the entrance to the tiny kitchen, an ACU tunic³ and a tangle of nylon webbing draped over them. Across the room, an amp and electric guitar kept company with a wall of cardboard boxes. A TV fuzzed with dust faced the two chairs where we sat in the blue afternoon light talking and drinking beer—or rather, Dime talked, I listened.

Next to the front door was a retro-looking rifle with a blonde wood butt stock and a slim bayonet folded under the barrel. It looked antique but it was a new, Chinese-made

³ Army Combat Uniforms (ACUs) are the standard all-purpose, digital print camouflage uniforms worn by American soldiers beginning in 2005.

copy of a Soviet SKS carbine. Because of his head injuries, Dime was on a “no weapon” profile,⁴ but he had gotten the SKS plus 600 rounds of 7.62 mm ammo for \$339. It was a great deal. “I’m gonna turn a whole lot of people onto these fuckers.” He handed it to me and enjoined me to check it out, but I don’t know much about guns—where to hold them and what to look at—and its nine-pound mass rested awkwardly in my hands. He took it from me and opened the breach and worked the action to show me. He said he hadn’t fired it yet, but a few weeks later he used it to shoot over the heads of two fleeing robbers who had broken into his neighbor’s apartment. Living in Killeen, you need a gun, he said.

Dime walked away from each of the IED blasts and served out his full tour. But now he had been diagnosed with and was being treated for multiple complex orthopedic injuries (the result of concussive, whiplashing forces), TBI, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Sitting on the toilet tank in his bathroom was a basket full of dozens of prescription bottles. There were antidepressants, anticonvulsants, antipsychotics, sedatives so he could sleep, pain meds, muscle relaxers—so many chemicals to stop his brain and his body and his nervous system from doing what they were doing. “As far as medications go, man, ... they throw so many of them at you and then hope to god one of them sticks.” His doctors were still looking for a combination that worked. He was getting medically retired from the Army, but the process of diagnosis and treatment and evaluation that was to determine his disability pension and shore up his battered body in the meantime seemed like one extended Kafkaesque convolution of appointments and briefings and treatments and “Army red-tape bullshit”—“it’s like they don’t wanna let you go!”

⁴ Army Regulation 40-501, Chapter 7, outlines a system of “Physical Profiling” for “classifying individuals according to functional abilities.” A soldier’s individual “profile” doesn’t restrict or excuse him on its own, but is meant to indicate to his commander what sorts of tasks he can and cannot perform. Soldiers suffering from the depressive or bipolar symptoms of PTSD or TBI were often placed on what they called no-weapon profiles.

War had made him into a different person. “I mean look at me Ken, dude, do I look normal to you? ... After you’ve been through all this bullshit, everything about you changes, man! You can't go back, that’s the problem.” He was tired of being hassled, bullshitted, ignored, talked down to, made a spectacle of. He was tired of people. But he was proud of what he had done. “You know what? I’m prejudiced as shit! I hate everybody that ain’t me. But you know what? ... I went and fought for every goddamn one of ya.” He turned to me:

Don’t fuckin’ leave any of this shit out. You tell the fuckin’ truth. [...] Say, ‘Listen, there’s some fucked up fuckin’ veterans out there who did their goddamn job and did it to the best of their goddamn ability. They did what they were supposed to do.’ Give ‘em that. At least give ‘em that much. I’m not asking for anything from anybody. Just give us ... [*he trails off*]. Goddamn it, we did what we could. We did it so you didn't have to go over and do it.

In all this anger, resentment and pain, Dime stalled out when he reached the point of asking for something: “Just give us ...” what? This dissertation begins from this blank and questioning space, the space that opens up when we realize that we don't know as much as we think we do about what the violence done by and visited on soldiers means for them and for us. As a soldier, as someone who enlisted to take care of his family, as a soldier wounded in combat, as an angry and wounded and traumatized and “crazy” and potentially violent combat vet with a broken personal life, as someone who followed orders and protocol and likely killed civilians through the indiscriminate use of high-tech force, as someone who watched his friend die a gruesome death right in front of him, Dime is an utterly overdetermined figure. This is a condition he shares with all soldiers and with all people who are close to soldiers. Every one of these features lends itself readily to a story we have heard before: the noble hero, the burned out victim, the unrepentant killer, the crazy and dangerous burnout who rages equally against foreign enemies, oblivious civilians, and the indifferent Army. But the point is not to edit Dime’s

story so that it fits one of these molds or proves the truth of one account over another. The point is to see what happens when, as he urges, we don't leave anything out. This work of recognition, of acknowledgment, begins by foregoing bigger stories and grappling with the place where Dime finds himself: having done “what he could,” “what he was supposed to do,” and with only that to hold onto.

THREE STORIES ABOUT STATE VIOLENCE

This dissertation hinges on the figure of the soldier. It is concerned with what that figure reveals about the operation of power and the disposition of bodily and affective life, not only for soldiers and those close to them, but for all those who brush up against regimes of war-making, which is to say, in various ways, everyone, everywhere. Indeed, it is civilians, including many children, not soldiers or other combatants, who make the vast majority of modern war dead. In World War I they were 15 percent. In World War II they were 65 percent. In the wars of the 1990s and 2000s, they are 90 percent or more of the casualties.⁵ Despite this horrific disproportion, it is soldiers who remain in many ways at the center of war, of its production, its representation, its discourse. War happens to civilians by accident—that is the conceit, at least—while it happens to soldiers on purpose. For this reason, this direct address between soldier and war, and despite the overdeterminations heaped upon both entities, there is a certain frankness to the way the soldier, as a human, relates to the inhumane undertaking of war. When it comes to war and the people touched by it, there are always stories involved, myths to be forged,

⁵ These figures are from UNICEF (<http://www.unicef.org/graca/patterns.htm>) (more cites). As of this writing, 4,377 members of U.S. armed forces have been killed in the Iraq War. According to figures compiled by Iraq Body Count (iraqbodycount.org), 104,481 Iraq civilians have been killed by violence since the beginning of the war.

biographies to be commodified, absences—like the civilian dead—to be sutured over.⁶ But in the figure of the soldier, that figure dominates stories about war, lies embedded the common lot of all war-ravaged human life. Stories of the *actuality* of the soldier’s labor and suffering can exert a profoundly destabilizing effect on the narratives that leave some killing dying overstuffed with meaning and neglect other killers and other dead altogether.

The simplest story about war is that soldiers produce and endure violence in a rational way for straightforward ends: to destroy an enemy, or to defend a population, or to promulgate an ideology or ensure the security of a way of life, or various of these in combination. Soldiers are sent into zones where law and order and right are endangered or have broken down. They respond to exceptional circumstances. By their disciplined exercise of and selfless exposure to violence, they rectify these exceptions and reestablish order. They are able to perform these difficult and dangerous tasks by virtue of their training and individual strength of character. The violence that they participate in is a series of isolated deeds and experiences that is limited to the space and time of far-off battlefields, and their exposure to it makes them heroes. They come home from war and are recognized, rewarded, praised, compensated, and life goes on.

A second narrative likewise treats war as exceptional, but for this reason recognizes the profound transformative effects that war violence, something far outside the normal range of experience, can have on soldiers. In this story, soldiers fight on a foreign battlefield, but the effects of the violence they experience there can follow them home in the destructive forms of nightmares, flashbacks, posttraumatic stress, drug abuse,

⁶ As Benedict Anderson, remarks of the Tomb of the Unknowns, for example, the harm befalling soldiers is never not “saturated with national imaginings” (Benedict Anderson 1983, 9). Allen Feldman suggests that “No ideology of just war can function without the biographical totalization” of those who fight it (Feldman 2004).

domestic violence, alienation, and so on. The figural stereotypes of such pathologies are familiar from popular culture. Indeed, the first, heroic story calls to mind the “Greatest Generation” narrative, while the second pathological one might be dubbed a post-Vietnam narrative. These stories are not meant to be periodizing, but it is instructive I think to read them in terms of the legibility of trauma in relation to American soldiers: invisible in the first one and overdetermining in the second one.⁷ Soldiers in the second story are as much tragic *victims* of war as they are its heroic protagonists, deserving of recognition, assistance and compensation not just for their bravery, as in the first narrative, but for their continued suffering. Their contamination by war provokes a range of emotions in the civilian public, from guilt and pity to fear and revulsion (Sturken 1997). As in the first narrative, war as a general phenomenon remains something distant and exceptional in nature, natural and inevitable in origin, and intrusive in its results: the soldier’s traumatic suffering is the disruption of a prior benign normalcy.

Caricatures though they may be, these two narratives point to some significant limiting assumptions in the frameworks available for thinking about war. In both, the empowerment, construction and shaping and the death, injury and physical wearing down of the soldier and the terrorizing and extermination of civilians—the productive and destructive violence of war—are all the exception rather than the rule. This assumption holds a powerful sway over perceptions and interpretations of war. All the harm that comes with war appears as tragedy or side effect, something that should not have happened. The ostensible necessity of violence gets chalked up to a kind of facile

⁷ Indeed, it is also worth reflecting on how such narratives do and do not translate into other national-historical settings and mesh with narratives like those of the European post-World War I “lost generation” (Graves 1929) or the young North Vietnamese veterans of the “American War” (Bao Ninh 1993). Nor is the American focus here meant to foreclose attention to how the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are conceived and debated in other countries to have sent significant numbers of troops, including the UK, Canada, Australia, and Germany. On the psychodynamics of post-war sociality more generally, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s *The Culture of Defeat* (2003).

metaphysics in which the roots of war are reduced to platitudes about greed, primordial aversions, hunger for power, human nature. Saddam Hussein invades Kuwait in 1991 for no reason more complicated than the fact that he is greedy and megalomaniacal. The U.S. invades Iraq in 2003 because Saddam is somehow a threat to American safety. Sunni and Shi'as commence to sectarian devastation shortly thereafter because of hatreds that extend back centuries. The U.S. soldiers and Marines who torture prisoners or terrorize civilians or gun down confused but innocent drivers at checkpoints are a few bad apples, or they are stressed out by chaos of the combat zone, or they are callous and indifferent killers, maybe constitutionally, or maybe made that way by the malign discipline of the state.

Such notions make it possible to critique individual wars, or to validate them as necessary, or to avoid having to think about them altogether. But they say little about the enduring significance of war itself as an integral practice of history and social and political life. They make possible a dangerous displacement of responsibility for violence—onto History, onto obscure but essential identities, onto human nature, onto soldiers and the state. All of this starts to look quite different, however, if one takes seriously the violence against human life that lies at the heart of all state power, however ostensibly benign—the violence that makes and maintains life-preserving law on the ground of human bodies. States exist only through and because of their capacity to wage sovereign violence. For militaries, the production of violence is normal, not aberrant. Violence is not something the soldier is exposed to only by accident or act of God or the malice of enemies. It happens systematically and on purpose, through the apparatus of the military.

Such an approach suggests a third, more complex story about what the soldier does for war and what war does to the soldier. It is a story in which, per Dime's appeal,

nothing is left out. Instead, all the effects of war violence inhabit the same plane, as in journalist Evan Wright's observation of the allied invading force entering Iraq in March 2003.

Though at the small-unit level all I see is friction among the moving parts—Marines shouting at other vehicles to get out of the way, guys jumping out to hurriedly piss by the side of the road, people taking wrong turns—the machine works. It will roll across 580 kilometers to Baghdad. It will knock down buildings, smash cars and tanks, put holes in people, shred limbs, cut children apart. There's no denying it. For certain tasks, the machine put together in this desert is a very good one. (Wright 2004, 30)

The way Wright tells the story makes a point of not assigning different levels of intentionality or moral value to these certain tasks. There are narratives that tell us how we should understand the things that this machine—ultimately our machine—does: some as necessary and worthy, others as exceptional and avoidable. But the machine does not seem to make this distinction: rule and exception are a backward-looking projection upon its welter of indiscriminant effects. To cast any unwanted excesses of war's violence as second-order, peripheral, or “collateral” to its “necessary” violence is not only to misunderstand war, but to conspire in a confusion of means and ends (violence for the sake of ideology, or is it the other way around?) such that the “tautologically self-evident centrality of the act of injuring [is] itself steadily minimized” (Scarry 1987, 77). This machine cannot be “fixed” because it already works perfectly. Nor can it easily be turned off. The typical mythological narratives of war do not recognize this and embrace only the narratives of how things are meant to happen, either in glorious validation or tragic breakdown.

If war is flattened out in this way, rendered without recourse to retrospective narrativization, the people producing its violence emerge as something more than caricatured tragic heroes or anxiety-provoking victims. In such an account, the civilian

citizens of liberal democracies, though they rarely experience war violence firsthand, may find themselves entangled in an uncomfortable complicity with and responsibility for the violence done and endured by soldiers, because that violence always serves the norm with which civilians are accustomed to living. It is a story in which violence *makes* the social, makes the rules, makes nations, and makes people, rather than simply corrupting, undermining or destroying these things. It is a story in which war does not simply find its way from some foreign elsewhere as an exceptional and intrusive menace, but rather comes at human life from all sides, destructively and productively, to color even the deepest layers of what normalcy is or could be.

SOLDIER AS SOVEREIGN BODY

To tell this story, this dissertation proceeds from the unique and exemplary position, the exceptional status and the bodily experience of the soldier. The human body is perhaps the most taken-for-granted and the most essential piece of equipment of the day-to-day labors of war-making. While recent prominent critiques of American war violence have emphasized the technologically facilitated withdrawal of American bodies from combat zones in favor of air strikes, smart bombs, remotely piloted drones, and proxy fighting forces (Virilio 1989; Baudrillard 1995; Singer 2009), the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan could not carry on without the physical presence of tens of thousands of such bodies. Even more than combat, the disciplined, functional body lies at the center of what it means to be a soldier, in the most practical and concrete sense, and at the center of sovereign state power, in the abstract, theoretical sense—the soldier abides at a particularly acute intersection of sovereign and disciplinary power (Foucault 1979; Chappell 2006). A soldier is a body that, in addition to its capacity to kill and be killed, harm and be harmed, can show up for work, do PT, shoot weapons, carry heavy loads,

perform monotonous, repetitive tasks, comply with orders, stand at attention, occupy a place in formation, fill a uniform. Soldiers' experiences are shaped by dramatic extremes of life and death, but also by such mundane bodily demands of military life.

The physical depredations of combat thus cannot be separated out from the system of bodily discipline that trained and produced the soldier in the first place—his training, his reflexes, his skills and capacities—and the system of maintenance and care that manages and evaluates the integrity of the soldier's body, both in the immediate wake of violence and over the long term. The significance of a soldier's lacerations and broken bones and traumatic brain injury from an IED blast are not just the result of that bomb exploding in that time and place. They are also the product of the strategy and tactics that placed the soldier in the target area; of the protective gear that kept the soldier alive and in so doing subjected him to injuries he would not otherwise have lived to endure; of the ways these injuries were recognized, diagnosed and treated; of the Army's judgment about whether the soldier could still do his job and was therefore still useful; of a family's ability to care for and live with a loved one who is impaired or even just altered. It is not just the violence of the enemy, but how that violence is bookended, anticipated, accommodated, forestalled, or aggravated by the Army itself, by the lives that surround it, by the prerogatives that drive it and the discourses that make it intelligible, that determines the sum and shape of living in and with war.

The soldier is a distinctive, even paradigmatic figure of biopolitical power, the power of sovereign entities over life and death. The soldier is at once the agent, instrument and object of state violence, simultaneously protected from and exposed to the manifold shades of sovereignty's sway over life and death by both the circumstances of war and the institution he or she serves. The soldier is shaped by a discipline that is both coercive and empowering, discipline that, as Michel Foucault writes, subjects a docile

body to countless microtechnical compulsions (Foucault 1979). The soldier is permitted to go outside the law—to kill—in the name of upholding the law, under conditions closely circumscribed by the law. In this respect the soldier *is* the sovereign, “he who decides on the exception,” he who decides when life can be taken (Schmitt 1985), though he acts only as the final point of articulation for the vast armature through which this authority over life is vested. At the same time, the soldier is expected to place himself in harm’s way and is allowed to be harmed and killed. In this respect, he falls into the category that Giorgio Agamben deems *homo sacer*, human life that is outside the law and therefore can be killed without committing homicide or celebrating a sacrifice (Agamben 1998, 83). (For while soldiers’ deaths are celebrated as sacrifices, the decisions that lead to those deaths have their basis in the unadorned calculus of rational, strategic violence.) And finally, the soldier is the subject of extensive measures to protect and maintain life, to keep him alive and able to continue fighting and killing effectively. Through means ranging from the armor and medical technologies that make previously fatal injuries survivable, to the psychiatric counseling and medication and community services that are meant to ameliorate the impact of deployment and combat on soldiers’ mental and emotional wellbeing, to the economic subsidies that provide housing and healthcare and even employment and education for the soldier and his spouse and children, the soldier is not merely allowed to live, but “made to live” (Foucault 2003).

The power to kill and expose, to make live and let die, is of course treated as an exception in liberal democracies. Instances in which the laws protecting life are suspended or thought not to apply are generally regarded from the liberal perspective as atrocities, scenes of scandal and evil that lie safely in the past or that represent nightmarish backslidings in the steady progress of history: Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, internment camps, wars of colonial dominion, police brutality and extrajudicial

execution, slavery, the Holocaust (Agamben 1998; Agamben 2005; Mbembe 2003; Chappell 2006). Through the politics of life and death, however—the frame that Achille Mbembe articulates as “necropolitics” (Mbembe 2003)—the various violences wrought or abetted by states and other centers of power appear as normative conditions for the exercise of power over human beings rather than regrettable exceptions to enlightened ideals. Indeed, what defines the sovereign entity is not its rule-bound, rational constancy, but its capacity to declare states of “exception” and “enmity”: to identify external enemies and internal undesirables who are subject to its right to kill, and to arrogate yet more power to itself by invoking or actively producing states of emergency.

The conceit that rationalized violence against living persons is a regrettable exception to the normal order of things is thus at best naïve and at worst fatal. As Talal Asad observes, the violence carried out by liberal states in the name of the universal value of all life—humanitarian intervention, preemptive military actions to establish security and public safety and “fighting terror”—inevitably entails subjecting human life to a cost-benefit analysis (Asad 1996; Asad 2007). In each of these settings, entire populations were deemed not merely enemies or inferiors, but unworthy of protection by the law and legally unfit for life. From such a perspective, the Holocaust is not an aberration, but rather the ultimate logical extension of the idea that some kinds of lives are more worthy of being allowed to live than others (Agamben 1998). And now we ask, how many Iraqi civilians was it deemed acceptable to kill, for example, in the course of “liberating” Iraq from Saddam’s homicidal regime? How many lives not lost to future imagined acts of violence by Al Qaeda will justify the civilians slaughtered in artillery strikes and drone attacks across Afghanistan and western Pakistan? What level of safety, security and democracy in Afghanistan will validate the instrumental brutalization of human life that is required to deploy and maintain a hundred thousand U.S. soldiers and

Marines there? These questions too have the ring of scandal, but my point in asking them is not to scandalize. It is rather to draw attention to the fact that the value of life really is variable and constantly negotiated, whether it is spoken or not. For even humanitarian settings (increasingly militarized), bare life is differentially politicized under the auspices of its “universal” value (Pandolfi 2008). And even in so-called “just wars,” in which killing by inhumane means is forbidden and enemies’ rights are enshrined in international conventions, it is still the case that anything is permissible in the name of necessity (Asad 2007).

The soldier is hemmed into an especially fraught piece of territory deep in the center of this logic of life expended in the name of life. He is neither exactly its author nor quite its victim, but he is the living, bodily fulcrum by and through which it is executed. In the soldier—in what he does and in what is done to and for him—we can read the limits of what can be done to human life at the level of flesh and biology, and thence ask what the experience of living with such interventions is. The comprehensive frame afforded by biopolitics provides a way of reading the operation of power at the most mundane and granular levels of the human experience of war. One risk that goes with such a framework is that actual people disappear, both because the analysis works at a pretty high level of abstraction and because it foregoes talking about “people” in any straightforward way in order to talk about the exercise of power directly on *bodies*—not even subjects, but raw biological material as it takes the form of specimens and political categories. A second risk is that even as these theories so convincingly demolish the distinction between exception and rule, war and politics, from the comfortable vantage of the contemporary U.S., figures like the concentration camp, the torture victim, and the executioner appear exotic or archaic. The whole point, however, is that the violence of sovereignty and exception is both embodied and pervasive. The schemes elaborated by

Agamben, Foucault, Mbembe, and others can be moderated, made granular and ordinary, understood at the finest and most banal levels of operation. Indeed, my approach aspires to what Allen Feldman has dubbed the “ethnographic critique” of biopolitics (2006): not merely the search for examples that validate or disprove such theories, but the mobilization of such theories as a starting point for making sense of thick, contradictory, feelingful scenes in which the politics of life and death are played out at the level of the everyday and the mundane.

LIVED AFFECTS OF WAR

The spectacular violence of a foreign battlefield and the routinized violence of the military apparatus bleed by various and complex routes into one another and into the everyday lives of soldiers and those close to them. Nowhere is this dense and contradictory layering more apparent than in, on, through the body, the labile and unruly matter that is war’s most necessary tool and most necessarily expendable weapon. These bleeds are at once obvious and subtle, shocking and routine, but always deeply social and rarely confined to the superficial spatiotemporal limits of combat and deployment. For while it is simple enough to read the biopoliticization of bodies explicitly linked to scenes of spectacular violence—the soldiers who are offered up to die at the same time as they are empowered to kill—it is also important to remember that those bodies are, as Foucault suggests (1979; 1988; 2003), not endpoints for power, but relays through which it moves on to other bodies and still others. Power—the capacity to expose bodies to burden, stress and harm—insinuates itself through such relays into the most private spaces of perception, memory, emotional expression, intimate relations, and sense of self.

All of this is to say that war does not simply shape and shepherd bodies or undermine psyches in a unidirectional fashion. Through countless contradictory and

incomplete processes, war excites bodies, provokes subjective interpretations of surprising behaviors, cultivates capacities, gives value to things, and forms connections. War unleashes affects. The space of intense institutional subjection and horrific necropolitical abjection that soldiers occupy is not a final analysis, just as the soldier's body is not the place where power begins or ends, even if it is especially visible there at many moments and in forms as basic as his posture and his haircut. Rather, the soldier's exceptional position is a stepping-off point for understanding the affective currents and exchanges in which soldiers are enmeshed: the *lived affects of war*. Soldiers are bound up tight in the middle of some of the most restrictive and overdetermining and glaringly vulgar power structures of which it is possible to conceive. And yet to simply describe these structures is not to describe soldiers' lives. As Katie Stewart suggests, "The notion of a totalized system of which everything is always already somehow a part is not helpful (to say the least) in the effort to approach a weighted and reeling present" (Stewart 2007, 4). Instead, moving by lateral and incidental routes—not just an IED or an insurgent's bullet, which are lateral in their own ways, but a nightmare, a cold sweat, a doctor's suspicion, a lover's incomprehension, a bureaucrat's obstinacy—the structure of power framing war takes shape in affects: in leaps, increments, sedimented layers, and sudden upheavals nestled amongst other concerns and stresses and relations (Sedgwick 2003; Thrift 2005).

Sovereign power may in theory be composed of one life-or-death decision after another, spooling out in a distinct and consequential chain of causes and effects. But consider even one aspect of the position the soldier finds himself in: he goes to war and labors hard at it for months and months. At the end of it, though things may seem to have changed for better or worse wherever he was, the war has been neither won nor lost. Indeed, though the war is articulated in political terms as a thing that will have an end,

the returning soldier may already have orders for when he is to return to the fight a year later. The life of the soldier belies any neat telos of political outcome. And this ambiguity is reproduced on multiple scales: as an individual actor, the soldier is both the decider and the decided-on; as a body, he is kept alive while being slowly ground down.

The way that life actually transpires in the account offered here resembles less the forward movement of decision than it does Stewart's "weighted and reeling present": ambiguous, distinctly *indecisive*, and spread out messily in space and time. The "spectacle of decision" over individual lives that is at the center of analyses by authors like Agamben and Mbembe ignores this "variability of life itself" (Berlant 2007, 755). Any purported "clean division" between life and death may at worst be a "wish-fantasy" that, Elizabeth Povinelli points out, forecloses inspection of the vast and knotty array of varieties of human suffering and their spatiotemporal unfolding (Povinelli 2006). Povinelli suggests that there is a vast range of "temporalities for how power is invested," some rapid and transparent and efficacious, and others moving more like "the temporality of diarrhea, slow, debilitating and blurred" (Povinelli 2006, 204). In the case of someone like Dime, who is alive but injured in obscure ways, forever changed both psychically and somatically, war is injuring and killing slowly—like diarrhea—just as it also injures and kills with great speed and efficiency. The lived affects of war are not only spread out variably in time, but distributed across social and interpersonal space. Like all bodies, the body affected by war exists "out in public," to use Judith Butler's words, visible, linked to others (Butler 2004). The effects of war are not confined to individual bodies, but communicated among many bodies—by words, movements, waves of nervous energy. The lived affects of war are about living in and with bodies that are instruments and objects of violence.

There is a deliberate effort in this formulation of lived affects to steer away from any overly strict notion of *trauma*. The clinical definition of trauma presupposes the existence of a single and often spectacular originating event, a distinct chain of cause and effect that unfolds over time, and a specific disease etiology complete with symptoms (intrusive thoughts, numbness, and avoidance of flashback-triggering stimuli), possible treatments, and even neurobiological pathology. This logic of etiological eventfulness is so overdetermining that, given the appropriate symptoms and evidence, diagnosticians may posit the existence of a traumatic event even if the patient does not recall one (Young 1995). The medical pathologization of trauma is reproduced, in a sense, in public and political discourses, for psychologistic understanding of trauma pushes war experiences out of the realm of the social and into the black box of incommunicable subjective experience, at the same time as it renders them publicly assimilable. In such assimilated forms, critics like Allen Feldman argue, “trauma tropes” risk signifying no more than “the irruption of the abnormal and pathogenic”—whether in medical terms or social ones, or both—and a subsequent recovery of normalcy and the status quo (2004, 185). Trauma, in other words, makes violence into an exception, even in situations like war where it is the rule. For the effects of violence to be legible, they so often have to be “first legally processed or therapeutically processed and treated” by the same organs of official power that promulgate violence to begin with, as Feldman notes (Feldman 2004, 169). This circularity is especially acute for soldiers, who are diagnosed, treated and compensated (or not) by the same institution that exposed them to harm in the first place. The contemporary notion of trauma is in fact an “historical product” (Young 1995), the result of more than a century of efforts to medicalize experiences of violence.⁸

⁸ Trauma is deeply interwoven with the genealogy of modern warfare, from the medicalization of “soldier’s heart” in the American Civil War and “shell shock” in World War I to the enshrinement of posttraumatic stress disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in the wake of the

But expanded from this limited medical sense to a broad category of social experience, trauma offers a framework for conceptualizing the disturbance of rational, orderly, “everyday” experience by irruptions of the excessive and unrepresentable—literally the sudden intrusion of the present by a chaotic and terrifying past. This is an understanding of trauma that goes beyond its conventional, neatly contained psychiatric etiology and treats it “instead as social and cultural discourse that emerges in response to the demands of grappling with the psychic consequences of historical events” (Cvetkovich 2003, 18). Ann Cvetkovich’s analysis of trauma and sexuality seizes on trauma as an “affective language” that works within national discourse to name haunting and inassimilable presences, to make claims on the “shape” of the “contemporary moral economy” (Fassin 2009, 8). The conflict that arises is over whose experiences are recognized as traumatic, and in what way, and to what end. The concept has the salutary effect of breaking down the distinction between exceptional, catastrophic events and the everyday life into which they irrupt, and between individuals and the structures of power and meaning in which they are implicated. Trauma locates the effects of war violence not only in the situations of extreme danger and disorder that war generates, but in the textures of daily life, and it traces them back not just to isolated situations, but to the generalized shock effects of modernity (Cvetkovich 2003, 42). It suggests that we are made no less in open wounds than in the social abstractions that give the appearance of wholeness and closure.

As vital and inescapable as this notion is for taking account of the effects of war on human experience and also for making sense of life at and around Ft. Hood, I am interested in seeing what sort of image emerges if the residuum of war is framed in a way

Vietnam War (Fassin 2009; Young 1995); some scholars even trace the notion of combat stress as far back as Homer (Shay 2002).

that is broader still. This frame—lived affects—includes but does not depend for its definition upon trauma’s logic of victimhood and eventful disruption. Affects, in contrast to the compulsions and drives that define trauma, have far greater “freedom” in time, aim, and most of all, object: quoting Silvan Tompkins’ insight that “any affect can have any ‘object,’” Eve Sedgwick writes that “Affects can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects” (Sedgwick 2003, 19). Untold affects attach to war—idiosyncratic concatenations of anger, fear, hope, pride, pleasure, disgust, shock. But they lack a “proper,” predetermined subject-object connection, nor, as Michel de Certeau remarks of the “tactics” by which power is accommodated in everyday life, do they possess “a spatial or institutional localization” (Certeau 1984, xix). These features give affects an unruly, real-time empirical concreteness. Through the lens of affect, things can suddenly snap into place without intention or volition, and then they can drift off as attention wanders. And affect’s appeal to the subjectivity of “feeling” has a certain traction in American settings that objective, affiliative notions like culture and identity, quick to be disavowed by Americans, lack (cf. Varenne 1986). Affects elaborate the feelings associated with the exposure to and practice of violence, and even its broader cultural circulation—not just terror and pain, but disgust, fascination, excitement, curiosity, comfort, and even pleasure—without necessarily pathologizing or normalizing them.

In all these ways, affect casts a wider net than the linear structure of trauma. People at and around Ft. Hood and across the U.S. military are often invested in claims for public and institutional recognition, for instance, based on the distinct suffering born of military service, but such claims reside in uneasy tension with people’s work of constructing everyday normalcy, a condition that cannot easily accommodate the heroism

or martyrdom conjured by traumatic exceptionalism (cf. Wool 2009). While trauma focuses on the bringing to light of occluded subjective experiences, much of what preoccupies people in Killeen is already, as it were, sitting on “the surface of things” (Foucault 1988): it is spoken of openly and it passes between and through people as a shared condition. The feelings of war are as much transpersonal and relational as they are individuating. Perhaps most importantly, the forces that are shaping people’s lives in Killeen often don’t take the form of “visible and punctual events” (Cvetkovich 2003, 43), but instead unfold in ways that are episodic, slow or static—as waiting or endurance, the “temporality of diarrhea” or the feeling of being stuck. Just think of Dime in his apartment, waiting to find out what was wrong with him, waiting for the last hangover of pharmaceutical withdrawal and side effects to wear off, waiting for the Army to let him go. Trauma hinges on the same eventful timeline of eventfulness as the drama of sovereign decision. The temporality of being stuck, however, is one in which there is only present, “weighted and reeling.”

VULNERABILITY

It is this present, more than anything else, that is the object of this dissertation. And to capture it, I turn not to the condensed and pathologizing flash of trauma but to an adjacent concept: *vulnerability*. Much of the fear, anxiety and horror of war that was recounted to me in my fieldwork, along with many of the pleasures, satisfactions and other positive affects associated with it, did not stem from single, discrete events. These feelings arose instead from the condition of existing for long periods of time, and in various modes of exposure, in harm’s way. Vulnerability ties the lived affects of war together. Vulnerability does not demand a before and an after or the exception of a disrupted psyche. It signals a condition that is permanent: the always precarious and

susceptible nature of the human organism itself. As Judith Butler suggests in her extensive meditation on vulnerability, this variable and relational bodily susceptibility is what defines human beings' relationships to power as well as their intimacies, attachments and desires (Butler 2004). War constitutes one extreme of that relationship. As Elaine Scarry (1987) has written, war is at bottom a contest based on the wounding of the individual bodies that make up armies and populations. Beneath the historical, material and political circumstances and the ideological discourses that surround any war lay the brute facts of the assault on human life; killed and wounded bodies are the foundation upon which the political and ideological aims of war are materialized. While this rather obvious fact is something that those of us who experience war secondhand may struggle to remind ourselves of, it is a basic feature of daily life in military communities.

In addition, vulnerability points to the inescapably collective nature of bodily harm: public, visible and social, the body, in Butler's words, "is and is not mine." This statement calls to mind the way that the soldier, even as the ultimate embodiment of sovereign power, has surrendered his bodily autonomy to the military disciplinary power that in turn surveils, manages and produces the soldier at a bodily level (Foucault 1979). This fact animates the concept of vulnerability not as some elemental condition, but as a thing generated from patterns and practices of sociality and power relations. And it does so not merely through institutional domination, but through intimacy as well. In their always already socialness, bodies live, says Butler, "attached to others, [and thereby] at risk of losing those attachments" (2004). A body does not have to be subject to dangerous extremes or heavy-handed discipline to be vulnerable, though such conditions unquestionably exacerbate it. Rather, it is vulnerable simply because it is biologically and socially alive, and only alive because it is vulnerable. Vulnerability casts the sense of risk

and endangerment that spreads outward from the soldier to the persons and institutions linked to him or her in as a sort of productive contamination, less a strain on or disruption of attachment than it is the stuff of attachment itself.

Finally, vulnerability presents a fundamental problem of recognition. “A vulnerability must be perceived and recognized in order to come into play in an ethical encounter, and there is no guarantee that this will happen,” says Butler. “Vulnerability takes on another meaning at the moment it is recognized, and recognition wields the power to constitute vulnerability” (Butler 2004:43). The intelligibility of pain and its recognition are not separable from its political consequences (Scarry 1987; Markell 2003)—hence the stories, commodified biographies (Feldman 2004) and “national imaginings” alluded to at the outset. Butler is interested in interrogating the chauvinism in the saturation of national imaginings that in war makes it impossible to mourn the foreign dead and compulsory to mourn the American dead. But this logic is productive turned inward as well as outward, to the zones of exception that exist *within* national imagining. And it is the basis for the political stakes of this dissertation, stakes that hinge on the question of what is involved in recognizing the harm done to those whose job it is to produce war on the nation’s behalf? Soldiers and their families are iconic national avatars, and the losses they experience are valorized and fetishized in media representations and political discourses. At the same time, people I met frequently insisted that so much of the actual harm they experience is rendered invisible at myriad levels: not just on the public and political agora, but in the form of injuries undiagnosed by doctors, work insufficiently compensated for by institutions, traumatic experiences opaque to spouses and children. Turning the logic of vulnerability to the exceptional spaces of routinized war-making highlights the ways that violence exists not just in the relationships between states or populations, but within them as well: it shows the violence

that lies within our own relationship to those who produce violence on our behalf, within our own links to each other and the structures that sustain us.

METHOD AND ORGANIZATION

The chapters of this dissertation are organized around broad themes that emerged from my informants' words, actions and experiences and that capture the impacts of war across diverse arenas of everyday life. These themes are, by design, wide-reaching, porous and extensible. They operate as fields within which it is possible to carve out distinctions between things that might otherwise seem identical and to posit connections between things that appear remote from one another. I am inspired in this approach by the potential, as Foucault suggests in *The Order of Things*, for idiosyncratic and discontinuous taxonomies to “[break] up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things” (Foucault 2002, xvi). Both internally and as a group, these themes offer categories that speak to one another but that extend into infinity and non-correspondence rather than necessarily adding up to a coherent whole.

War is overburdened with precisely the ordered surfaces and planes to which Foucault refers, and I could feel them pressing in on the work from all sides when I sat down to begin it. In my early notes for the dissertation, there are grids and outlines meant to cross-reference different sites, events and theoretical entities, full of redactions, corrections and blank spots. So many of the objects I was seeking to describe seemed to seep over the categorical boundaries of these neat arrangements, to zigzag from cell to cell on the grid, to insist in promiscuous and contaminating connections among themselves. Having laid these preliminary efforts aside, the taxonomy that arose in their place is not the neat carving up of some extant whole object—war and its everyday—but

rather an effort to assemble that object through anecdotes, examples and exceptions. It follows what might be called, after Gilles Deleuze, a logic of *concept*, *connection* and *multiplicity* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). It is an approach to theorizing that must be thought anew in the face of each new problem, so that what emerges is not a confirmation of an established idea—“militarization,” “trauma,” “Army culture”—but a newly immanent way to think that is native to the problem and its “circumstances” (Deleuze and Foucault as cited in Massumi 1987, xii; Rabinow 2004). Concepts enable the construction of an ethnographic *multiplicity*, an array of tendencies and possibilities with a contingent perimeter and a dynamic shape and a thick sense of the texture of everyday life. They proceed by creative and promiscuous *connection* rather than the arrangement, hierarchization or revelation of things that were already there (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 6). This impulse and its concomitant “toolkit” approach to arguing and theorizing through description (Clifford 1983) are of course indigenous to the ethnographic project, for “The anthropologist really does have to find something out she doesn't already know, and she has to do it in terms that ethnography permits in its own developed form of empiricism” (Marcus 1998, 18).

Concepts in this sense are not transcendent intercessors, but ethnographically grounded tools to be employed at the specific points most suited to their use, “forms of address appropriate to the form” of the lived affective specificities (Stewart 2007) that I seek to elaborate here. This is, coincidentally or not, a form of address that speaks to the form of sovereign violence, to its rule-making and rule-breaking and the way that the exception, as that from which the ordering rule has been withdrawn, reveals the character of the generality that it is included in and excluded from at the same time (Agamben

1998).⁹ One of the effects of the excessive taxonomizing of war is a profusion of geographical, experiential and discursive domains within which violence can be safely compartmentalized and isolated from other domains of life.¹⁰ My arrangement here is an attempt to “decompartmentalize” the everyday imponderabilia of war and place them in novel configurations that implicate ostensibly innocent spaces and actors—that implicate those of us who in our actions, values and political practices might prefer to keep war at arm’s length. The methodology of connection and the uneven multiplicity that result, then, also speak to the heterogeneous and unequal distribution of the work and the effects of violence, even—especially—in a setting in which violence is meant to be nothing more than an instrumental means to a transcendent end.

The work as it stands now is still bound by categories, of course—the conceptual starting points I have spent the previous pages outlining and the thematic categories described in the chapter summaries below. But within and across these categories it seeks to give voice to a long series of examples, of exceptions: things that belong in some ways and stand on their own in others, things that describe generalities by drawing attention to what is incomplete, excessive, wrong, true, real, and mad about those generalities. So I would ask the reader’s patience, and entreat them to regard any vagueness as part of a method, albeit one that surrenders the clarity of closure.

The first chapter, “Sites of Exception,” provides some background on the field site and describes the generative ambiguity of the Army’s presence in everyday life

⁹ “The exception does not subtract itself from the rule; rather, the rule, suspending itself, gives rise to the exception and, maintaining itself in relation to the exception, first constitutes itself as a rule” (Agamben 1998, 18).

¹⁰ As Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson observe, the global spatialization of difference—its compartmentalization in foreign and “dangerous” lands—is “part and parcel of a global system of domination,” creating spaces “zoned,” as it were, for violence (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 17). Similarly, writes Carolyn Nordstrom, “The assumption that there are centers and margins of politics and power” is “dangerously misleading. ... [The] whole notion of local wars, whether central or peripheral, is largely a fiction” (Nordstrom 1997, 4-5).

there—as something that is both experienced as natural and constantly commented on and critiqued by the people who live with it. Chapter 2, “Heat, Weight, Metal, Gore—The Aesthetics of Exposure,” analyzes the corporeal “feelings” that soldiers associate with being in Iraq and in harm’s way and the particular bodily sensibilities engendered by the natural and material environment that soldiers find themselves in. Chapter 3, “Phone Calls, Back Pain, and Other Problems in the Reproduction of Life,” describes how vulnerability to violence spills over from individual soldiers and is communicated through shared space and intimate bonds to constitute a generalized condition in military communities. Chapter 4, “Vicissitudes of Love,” takes on the overlapping and conflicting forms of kinship and intimacy that exist between and among soldiers, spouses, and the Army as a whole. And Chapter 5, “War Economy,” examines the simultaneously bodily, economic, affective, and ideological modes of *obligation* and *exchange* that colors many aspects of Army life and that serve as a language of critique through which soldiers negotiate the various sorts of value attached to their labor. An epilogue, “So-Called Resiliency,” briefly discusses the November 2009 shooting at Ft. Hood against the backdrop of the various chronic traumas that the community has endured over the past seven years.

A NOTE ABOUT GENDER

The Army is a profoundly gendered institution that places men and women and masculinity and femininity in compulsory intimacy with, and in highly structured opposition to, one another. The Army, the profession of soldiering and the making of war are all decidedly masculine domains. They encourage and rely upon connotatively manly practices, traits and dispositions, including physical discipline, mastery over one’s own sensitivity to pain and discomfort, and the suppression of care and empathy in order to be

able to command and inflict violence (Buck-Morss 1992; Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002; Mosse 1996). This physical and emotional hardness is one of the key features distinguishing soldiers from civilians' feminized "softness" and sentimentality (Lutz 2001), both in soldiers' own discourse and in public and political culture. Militaries also depend on and institutionalize in various ways the reproduction of largely male military labor by a vast array of female household, service and sexual labor—often in ways strongly inflected by violence (Lutz 2001; Lutz 2009; Enloe 2000)—and the modern U.S. Army has for almost a century served as a sort of biopolitical laboratory for state experiments in the regulation of heteronormativity (Canaday 2009).

Approximately 13 percent of active duty U.S. soldiers are women, however.¹¹ Combat arms occupational specialties¹² remain closed to women, but in the current strategic environments in Afghanistan and Iraq, the distinction between combat and non-combat functions is increasingly blurred. Women soldiers—including many whom I met during my fieldwork—are routinely in the line of fire and even drawn on as a tactical resource precisely because of their gender, even as current Department of Defense protocols make it difficult to formally recognize some of the labors performed and risks taken by military women.¹³ Many of these women soldiers have civilian male spouses or partners. This heterogeneity poses fundamental problems—of analysis and of nomenclature—for any effort to speak of the Army as a generalizable mass. This challenge is compounded by the fact that the Army's masculine homosociality is

¹¹ Women are also enlisted in higher proportions than this in the Army Reserves and National Guard, sectors of the Army that have in the last ten years been drawn upon in unprecedented proportion for foreign combat deployments.

¹² Combat arms military occupational specialties (MOS) are those dedicated to direct land combat, and include infantry, tankers, scouts, artillerymen, combat aviators (attack and air cavalry pilots), combat engineers, and Special Forces.

¹³ Meg McLagan's documentary *Lioness* (Room 11, 2008), for example, describes the use by Marine combat units of U.S. women soldiers to "soften" search and checkpoint interactions with local Iraqi populations.

something in which the women soldiers I met were deeply invested. They often both espoused the desire to be treated as equals by their male peers and also professed the same negative stereotypes of (other) women soldiers—“females,” in military argot—that I heard from many male soldiers: that they were disruptive of good order, relied on their femininity as a crutch, and were generally less capable. “I hate females so much,” Dana told me; she was an engineer who, though she ended up in the Army, had originally wanted to join the Marines because they were even more disciplined and hard-core. These disavowals and self-exceptions also complicate any effort to generalize about a sense of sorority among women soldiers, and to insist throughout this analysis on particularizing all experiences of women soldiers would be essentially to except them altogether from the masculine homosociality of soldiering, a sociality they firmly aver.¹⁴

The male Army spouse is in some ways an even more obscure and slippery category, for while the woman soldier can be figured (correctly or not) as a feminist trailblazer, there is no such celebratory equivalent for the Army husband. On several occasions, informants of both roles (soldier and spouse) and both sexes remarked on the “emasculatation” felt by men who were the husbands or boyfriends of deployed women soldiers. The infrastructure set up by the Army to support the spouses of soldiers, primarily in the form of Family Readiness Groups (FRGs), is both connotatively and demographically feminine. So just as women can be made and make themselves masculine through their affiliation with the Army, men can make themselves and be made to feel feminized by their peripheral or proxy attachment to the institution.

The Army is thus a scene in which is possible to observe the unmooring of masculinity from men, to see it taken on by women and to see its opposite foisted onto

¹⁴ For firsthand accounts of military gender integration and the experiences of women soldiers, see, *inter alia*, Brodie 2000 and Williams 2005.

men (Halberstam 1998). It is an environment in which the aggressive biopolitical reproduction of straightness (Canaday 2009)—due in no small part to its very aggressiveness—gives rise to highly visible queerings of heteronormativity (Berlant and Warner 2002). These things happen not just in the inversion posed by the woman soldier, but in the “manly” independence that military wives take on in their husbands’ absence, or the increasingly “feminized” peacekeeping and caretaking roles that soldiers are asked to play in contemporary military interventions (Lutz 2001). And this is all without even engaging the highly vulnerable queerness of non-heterosexual soldiers themselves or the homoeroticism of military corporate culture.

This simultaneous unmooring and retrenchment also happens, in a far darker and more violent form, in the fratri-sexual assaults visited upon women soldiers by their male comrades, what the Army calls “blue-on-blue” rapes (Moffeit and Herdy 2004; Goodman 2007; Benedict 2009).¹⁵ For just as heteronormativity extends throughout and beyond the boundaries of the Army as a fraught but banal totalizing field, it also spirals in on itself in an ultimate involution of institutionalized violence in which the soldier’s capacity to harm with impunity meets his (though in this case really *her*) utter and unqualified vulnerability to violence. Some of these dynamics are hinted at or addressed outright at various junctures throughout the dissertation, and they are also engaged in other ways in other new ethnographic work on militaries in the U.S. and elsewhere (Wool 2010; Finley 2009). In all instances, however, what remains most striking about the Army’s gendered bifurcation and heteronormative structure are *both* their crushing totality *and* the way they seem to except themselves *en abyme* at every juncture and level of scale.

¹⁵ In military exercises and wargames, the protagonists are always the “blue” team and the enemies the “red” team.

Because the overwhelming proportion of soldiers are male, it makes little sense to switch evenhandedly between masculine and feminine pronouns or to resort to “he or she” and “his or her” when referring to them. Such a move would also, I think, import a misplaced sense of gender equivalence into Army homosociality. Such equanimity in referring to spouses would also be misleading. So throughout the dissertation I use the gender-connotative but still gender-neutral terms “soldier” and “spouse,” and when invoking these terms as the names of generic figures, I use masculine pronouns for the former and feminine ones for the latter. In cases where I am speaking about specific individuals, I always refer to their actual gender. My intention with this approach is that, within the makeup of my utterly unrepresentative assortment of anecdotes and quotations taken from an utterly unrepresentative sample of informants, the smattering of gendered exceptions will convey some hint of how such exceptions—exceptions that nearly always cling fast to the rule—are present in real life. Treating gender in this fashion, I hope to show how it is forged rather than simply carrying it through the analysis.

Chapter 1: A Site of Exception

MIDDLE AND MARGIN: A ZONE OF INDISTINCTION

The Army's Fort Hood, in central Texas, where I conducted a year of fieldwork and met dozens of soldiers, military spouses, veterans, activists, and advocates, is at the center of the U.S. war-making apparatus. It is one of the world's largest military installations, and many of the 55,000 soldiers stationed there have served multiple tours in Iraq. Fully ten percent of all US troops deployed to Iraq have departed and returned through this single site (Fort Hood Public Affairs Office 2007; Fort Hood Public Affairs Office 2009).¹⁶

Fort Hood is named for a Confederate general and was established as Camp Hood in 1942 as a World War II tank destroyer¹⁷ training center. Today it boasts "10 miles of tanks"—the world's biggest concentration of armored military vehicles (when it's not dispersed across the Middle East) in the form of a miles-long (not quite ten) row of chain-link pens full of Abrams tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, and other tracked and armored vehicles of all sorts. On post you drive right by them—and all the trucks and Humvees and Strykers, all painted a uniform desert tan, look just as at home parked on arid central Texas asphalt as they do in the sand in Iraq.

Ft. Hood is the only U.S. Army base that is home to two combat divisions: the 1st Cavalry and the 4th Infantry.¹⁸ The 1st Cav, the largest division in the Army, did not take

¹⁶ See also the Ft. Hood Public Affairs Office web site at <http://pao.hood.army.mil/>.

¹⁷ While tanks are designed to engage a range of personnel, built and vehicular targets, tank destroyers, an antique collection of which can be found in the 1st Cavalry and 4th Infantry Division museums on Ft. Hood, are armored vehicles designed with the sole purpose of attacking other armored vehicles. In the wake of World War II, standard tanks (the official designation is "main battle tank") became more versatile and tank destroyers were rendered obsolete.

¹⁸ A military division is an organizational unit consisting of 10,000 to 20,000 soldiers in a combination of combat and support troops designed to allow it to operate independently; it is the largest-scale military unit capable of independent operation. A division is typically composed of four to six brigades. The last several years have seen a doctrinal shift in large part initiated by the Bush administration and former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld toward deploying combat troops on a brigade (or Brigade Combat Team, BCT)

part in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, but was deployed there for most of 2004 and again beginning in the later part of 2006; at the time of this writing, much of the division is wrapping up a tour in central Iraq, and their insignia—a shield with a diagonal bar and a horse’s head silhouette, is a familiar sight in media images from Iraq. In its first 12-month deployment in Iraq, the 4ID participated in the later part of the invasion and carried out various security and combat operations across northern Iraq; its 1st Brigade was responsible for the capture of Saddam Hussein in December 2003. The division’s second 12-month deployment began in January 2006, and consisted of security and Iraqi security forces training in central and southern Iraq. And from March 2008 to March 2009, much of the division was in central Iraq. Fort Hood is also home the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, which has served several combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, the 13th Sustainment Command, an array of logistics and transportation units; and to numerous smaller units, many with extensive deployments.

Almost every deploying unit that I was aware of at Ft. Hood has been following some version of the Army’s grueling rotational schedule: 12-month tours frequently extended to 15 months, separated by a minimum of 12 months of “dwell time” (and often no more) back in the U.S. in between. A significant portion of this respite is devoted to training in advance of re-deployment, including days of overnight field exercises at Ft. Hood and multi-week periods at the National Training Center (NTC) at Ft. Irwin, in California, and the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Ft. Polk in Louisiana,

basis. BCTs are structured to function independently and their smaller size allows for more versatile deployment arrangements. Over the past several years, 4ID’s brigade structure in particular has seen extensive changes, with one brigade relocated to the Army’s Ft. Carson and another “re-flagged” to 1st Cav. While in my experience soldiers did not talk much in everyday conversation about such restructuring on the macro level, the more aggressive and rapid deployment schedules and exigencies of re-flagging and reassignment that BCT restructuring facilitated unquestionably affected people’s long-term experience of military life. The guaranteed 12 months of dwell time between deployments, for example, could be cut short for subsidiary units that were reassigned from a brigade that had just returned to one that was getting ready to deploy.

further shrinking the window of time actually spent “at home.” Since these schedules apply to units and not individuals, a unit reorganization or a transfer from one unit to another can further shrink soldiers’ time between deployments. And some units simply deploy more frequently: during my time at Ft. Hood in 2008, for example, the 96th Transportation Company, the Army’s most deployed unit, left for its sixth tour in as many years. Lengthy and repeated absences are a defining feature of life here, and a revealing indicator of the disproportionate burden borne by the Army, among the four service branches, in the war in Iraq.

The greater metropolitan area of approximately 220,000 people, including the population of the post, is a place constituted in overwhelming proportion by the presence of the Army. Ft. Hood may be the largest single concentration of the 1.8 million American military personnel who have participated in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—outside of the Middle East, of course. Indeed, the worldwide distribution of the U.S. military means that the “American military community” is as much a global phenomenon as it is a national one.¹⁹ Almost 10,000 civilian government employees and private contractors work on the base as well, doing everything from filing paperwork, to serving meals, to guarding the gates. And yet Ft. Hood and the towns in its orbit—Killeen, Texas, is the biggest—are still just ordinary places where ordinary people live, with many of the same churches, the same apartment complexes, the same malls and chain restaurants and pop radio stations, as countless other American cities. It is the institutional home of a massive organ of legitimate state violence and the literal, physical home of those people whose labor directly and indirectly makes that apparatus, that violence, it is a site where

¹⁹ On the global distribution of U.S. military presence, see Lutz ed. 2009, and on the relationship between the former and military community demographics, see Lutz 2001. Rajiv Chandrasekaran’s journalistic account of the Coalition Green Zone in Baghdad (Chandrasekaran 2006) and Anthony Swofford’s novel *Exit A* (Swofford 2007) provide evocative, in-depth descriptions of overseas U.S. military presences.

the abstraction of war becomes both concrete and mundane. There is something uncanny about this unremarkable visibility of a thing one never expects to really see up close or that one is not really supposed to see (Freud 2003), a thing that is easier to handle at a remove or in the form of a projected image. The town is a sort of zone of indistinction, the “exception” of state violence blending into the rules of its production and the normalcy of everyday life. It is off on the margins of some national imaginings and right at the center of state structure. There are other indistinctions too. The place is provincial and cosmopolitan, homogeneous and diverse. On the one hand, it is bound by its isolation in central Texas and by the conventionalism of Army life and of the working-class, middle-American populations that the military draws disproportionately from. On the other, it is also shot through with distinctive forms of diversity and cosmopolitanism: the military population is drawn from all over the country and even the world (resident aliens can enlist); many soldiers and sometimes their families have lived for extended periods in Germany, Korea, and other places with American military presences; and correspondingly, the town is full of people drawn from Korea, Germany, the Philippines, the South Pacific by marriages, friendships, family connections, and business opportunities.

The presence of war and the Army are visible at every turn in Killeen, marked out in the minutest details. Such details show how the organized production of war is simply a normal part of everyday life. And they show how war can nevertheless traumatically disrupt any sense of normalcy. They show the broad and intrusive reach and frequent incoherence of hyper-rational Army regulation. And they show the intense identifications, perverse excesses, unintended consequences, and life-and-death stakes that this rationality produces. It is these details, these traces of indistinction, this way of living affected by war and its institutions, that this dissertation documents and analyzes.

IMPRESSIONS

Before I moved to the Ft. Hood area full-time for the twelve months that comprised the bulk of my fieldwork, I had visited Killeen a couple of times: hanging out with a friend from Austin and meeting her family there, chatting with a couple of elderly Korean War vets at an American Legion bar, and driving around looking for apartments. I had seen just a little of it, but the images took hold: a downtown defined by a four-lane highway, lined with busy and constantly expanding shopping centers and subdivisions, chain restaurants, pawn shops, bars, and liquor stores that cater to the people brought to town by war. Compared the prosperity and greenness of Austin's gentrified downtown and park-like university precincts, here the landscape seemed painfully exposed: brown, sunstruck, vaguely hostile. In stores and waiting rooms and bars, there were people wearing camouflaged uniforms adorned with tags and patches as they went about their daily errands. You could overhear bits of jargon-laden small talk that would catch the ear but were hard to decipher, things about deployments, numbered regulations, unit names, paychecks, a bossy Sergeant, an incompetent Major. These snatches of talk bore the ring of the exotic for me, but I had little to ground them in. There was an atmosphere of growth, even boom, but not especially of wealth. In all these things are the traces of a recent history dominated by war and the Army, a visual and built and social environment that betrays their reach deep into everyday life.

Arriving from Austin, from the south, the town comes up on you rather suddenly. One minute a quiet highway crossing green and pretty ranch land—cows, hay bales, blue smoke of burn piles, the three traffic lights, and war memorial murals of the tiny town of Florence. And then the town is suddenly there, on the other side of a low rise and an overpass that lifts you up so you suddenly take it in, a low, flat mosaic of subdivisions,

chain restaurants, big churches, used car lots, evacuated downtown blocks. The country highway becomes Hood Street. Grey sheet metal pole barns housing a flooring supply company, a custom car shop. A billboard advertising a local lingerie shop that changes with the seasons. Guns Galore, “CHOOSE FROM 1,200 GUNS ON DISPLAY.” Starlight Station, a warehouse-sized country music club done up to look like an old-timey train station on the outside, complete with railroad crossing lights and gates. An IHOP. Gas stations. A Korean Pentecostal church. A vacant lot on which for months was parked a late-model Caprice sedan mounted monster-truck style on 36-inch white alloy rims. A pawn shop, its sign a weathered, sci-fi starburst of painted steel and neon over the slogan “We Love to Loan Money” and a flashing digital zipper: “WE BUY BROKEN GOLD!!” “BEST PRICES FOR YOUR STUFF!!” “WE LOVE OUR SOLDIERS!!”

Down the side streets, older blocks of houses in red brick and white trim from the 1940s, ‘50s, ‘60s, when the base first really started to grow, some yards neat and green, others disheveled, all cordoned off with chain link. Newer blocks that are really just spurs, cul-de-sacs, lined with identical four-plexes: two apartments up and two down, eight blank windows behind a black metal staircase, an asphalt slab in front for the cars and garbage cans, home to lots of single soldiers and young families. Lots of asphalt in fact, swathes of it in different shades running one to the next: the road blends into the shoulder, the parking lot, the cross street, the drainage way. The newer stuff, the shopping centers with shiny windows and bright brick, has verges of green, irrigated grass. No sidewalk for much of it, but people on bikes and on foot pick their way up and down the side of the road, just a foot or two from four lanes of indifferent, whooshing traffic—people in store uniforms on their way to work, kids drinking soda and listening to headphones, tiny bodies made tinier by giant-sized t-shirts and fitted caps. You are moving too fast to see the expressions on their faces.

As the road swoops further into town, it crosses Route 190, a newer span of east-west elevated highway that connects Killeen to the base and the neighboring towns. It bypasses the old downtown, but is nevertheless the city's main commercial artery, its frontage roads serving the mall, the movie theater, the Wal Mart and Home Depot, the furniture stores, Applebees and Texas Road House and Hooters, the Holiday Inn and Best Western, the car dealerships. Just north is a parallel strand, Business 190, the old highway that is a sort of shadow of the newer one: lots full of used cars instead of new ones, strung with shiny, multicolored pennants; cheap motels; no-name pizza and Chinese restaurants, and next to a Taco Bell, a Puerto Rican place, some of the best food in town; tattoo parlors; The Grillist, selling gold teeth; a VFW and an American Legion post; body shops with open garage doors, partially assembled street racers and massive old Cadillacs and Buicks with exposed chassis and cutaway body panels, parts stuck in here and there, parked practically out in the street. They are like the wrecked cars one sees in photographs of war zones, except slowly coming back to life rather than decaying into further wreckage.

Compared to the weird, untouchable middle distance of the highway frontage road, buildings here loom in close. Again, road, gutter, sidewalk, parking lot, alleyway are all one surface, the edges between them worn away by weather and sun, a sea of asphalt on which the buildings and cars are afloat. Places that have gone through various incarnations, no longer the old thing but not completely a new thing, multiple lives and uses marked with improbable agglomerations of signage: neatly painted on a cinderblock wall next to a silhouette of a steer, Black Angus Meat—TRUCKS; in an old gas station, a palette of bricks sitting untouched under the sun canopy, Drive-Thru Liquor and Propane. Every few blocks are traffic lights, so there is more time to look around, to take in the surroundings and fellow drivers. The cross streets are numbered, and they extend from

the old downtown a few blocks north but don't make it all the way down to the highway. Compared to the banal newness of the highway, things on this road feel both denser and emptier, the product of an overstuffed history that had been cut suddenly short by a displacement and explosion of growth somewhere else, full of places that seem to have been used up and moved on from but are nevertheless still hanging on. What remains continues to be determinedly lived in and put to work, and people stay in it or keep coming to it.

Go north again and it's ghostlier. Main Street, the old downtown. Raised sidewalks, awnings, diagonal parking, storefronts, planters, some with shrubs and trees hanging on. Like many of the houses, the architecture is marked as belonging to the first decades of growth, from the 1940s to the 60s: steel aprons under big picture windows tinted against the sun, stores of a size that has become obsolete. A small square of park with a mural, an historical marker recounting the origins of the town, a war memorial decorated with a Sherman tank and a Vietnam-era helicopter. The Greyhound station and the official-looking brick tower of the police department. There is little here now: a couple of furniture and appliance shops, a Korean grocery, some storefront churches, a drop-in clinic and services center for the homeless. A cluster of businesses with signs only in Korean. Barely a car or a person on the street. On the holidays, this is where the parades go, and within twenty minutes of the last fire truck and marching band passing, the streets empty to an almost tumbleweed desolation.

Traveling from the outside, penetrating the layers of the town one by one, you would end up here, a center with almost nothing in it. The curious outsider, the anthropologist, is looking for a place to get to, a place where he will finally be *there*, and what he finds is a place with no one in it. Like the base, the town feels oddly both porous and closed off, impossible to arrive at, everywhere you could go just one temporary

destination after another. This hollowing out of centers and the building of shiny new peripheries is certainly not unique to Killeen, or to military towns. Indeed while the Army can take credit for the growth, it is the plain old nameless flex of capital that has only done here what it does everywhere else. But to an outsider trying to know this place, trying to locate where and what it is, the hollowing out fits with the story of people coming from elsewhere, staying a brief while, and then moving on, their existence in a place governed by the rapid and arbitrary tempo of military prerogatives, of orders.

Hood Street ends at a T intersection. To the right is Rancier Avenue, another dense and run-down drag similar to Business 190, extending east into the center of Killeen. To the left it approaches Ft. Hood's east gate and becomes Tank Destroyer Boulevard, one of the post's main east-west arteries. It faces onto the rolling lawn of one of the post's two golf courses, perched on the edge of which, just above the intersection, is an Abrams tank, its low-slung, angular mass parked at a slight angle, the turret, emblazoned with the ivy leaf insignia of the 4th Infantry, cocked just to one side, like it is pausing in its charge across a battlefield to take aim at a distant enemy. It is painted a dark forest green, this un-desert color a reminder of wars real and potential that came before the ones in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Several miles of highway later, on the other side of the base, you reach the town of Copperas Cove. It is a smaller sister to Killeen with most of the same landmarks: an old downtown of quaint wide streets and covered, elevated sidewalks that these days is mostly an afterthought. Out on the road, the HEB Grocery and Applebees and Wallgreens and 7-11, the drive-thru taqueria, the cleaners with military insignia decorating their windows and advertising ACU alterations and Class A setups, AutoZone and the Chevy and Ford dealerships facing one another across the lanes, the Korean restaurant and German bakery, You-Pawn and Lucky's Bingo and the Heartland Credit Union and a

couple acres of self-storage units. There was the tiny duplex where I stayed, on a wide street lined with similarly tired-looking houses, between a Catholic church and a courthouse. A couple more miles, a couple more stop lights lead to open countryside, and very quickly the Army seems once again far away.

There is plenty more, too: block-long trailer parks and streets of small old houses with pretty yards; pockmarked shopping centers full of off-brand stores and Chinese restaurants; neighborhoods of comfortable houses, turned in on themselves with their high backyard fences facing the main streets; parks and schools and community centers. The landscape and architecture bear the imprint of a particular temporality of growth and decay, with old things dilapidated but still holding up and things still new but gone ragged and worn out before they are even finished. There are abandoned places next to newly built ones, places busted enough that you can't tell if they're open or not. There are strips of houses that look new and hard-used at the same time, identical brick and limestone and white concrete driveways, but with shaggy lawns and busted cars in the driveways. It all bespeaks some kind of accelerated aging, like that visited upon the hard-used body of the young soldier.

Somewhere in all this, all the movement, the sense of loss and impersonal distance, the proliferation of temporary destinations and the absence of stable ones, and my own ethnographic Xeno's paradox of seeming to get perpetually closer to something that remained out of reach, something more coherent takes shape. The routes and places in which lives are lived show themselves. The place becomes a place, becomes less inscrutable, more familiar. But this took me time.

THROUGH THE GATES

The base is right there, but it is hard to see. The first thing you see of it, miles away on the approaching from any nearby big city, is a standard green highway exit sign directing you off the interstate; traveling up or down 195, these signs are complemented by others dubbing the road “The Phantom Warrior Highway,” after the III Corps headquartered at Hood, “The Phantom Corps.” Again, there is the uncanny sense of seeing plainly named a place, home to weapons and warriors and drama and official secrecy, that one would never expect to get close enough to touch. But this is part of what the war apparatus looks like up close—secured behind gates and fences, sure, but still just another destination. Once you are in Killeen, more green signs direct you west from downtown on 190. The speed limit climbs, and the road is in a constant state of reconstruction. The Ft. Hood Military Reservation is X thousand acres, approximately the size of the state of Rhode Island. The highway cuts a tangent across the southern edge of this huge area. The most significant feature to the south is Robert Gray Army Airfield, which shares a runway with the Killeen airport, and via which the post’s soldiers depart for and return from Iraq by the thousands. Just off the highway’s other edge is the main built-up area of the post, visible from the road as little more than grassy verge, chain-link fence, and the shapes of low grey and tan buildings. Again, a green exit sign directing you to the main gate and the Visitor Control Center. But I didn’t take it, not at first—I had nowhere to go and no reason to be there. You are driving right through one of the densest concentrations of American military might, and you barely see a thing. Seven miles across military land, little but low green hills on either side. At night you can see a little more, but still not much—the sky lit with orange fluorescent glow, spangly fields of light, the shapes of water towers.

The base provides its own idiosyncratic array of insides and outsides, of thresholds and temporary destinations, things exotic and banal. It starts at the visitor's center, a small, low building, neither welcoming nor unfriendly, isolated in a nest of cloverleafing ramps and overpasses just outside the main gate. You swoop in along the exit from Route 190, past a concrete and limestone sign adorned with unit insignia welcoming you to Ft. Hood, "Home of America's Armored Corps." Anyone is allowed to just walk onto the post just by displaying a government-issued ID, like a driver's license. It's hardly practical, as most of the gates are located off a four-lane highway; only one directly abuts downtown Killeen, in a commercial district that hardly facilitates pedestrian access.

For the visitor, the implication of this fact is that it is not you yourself, but your car that requires a pass in order to enter. Soldiers, resident family members and other base employees need these too, but they come in the form of longer-term Department of Defense window decals, distinctive because they are placed in the very top center of the windshield. Indeed, the visitor's center parking lot is full of people renewing their permits or freshly arrived from another installation, leaning awkwardly across the fronts of their cars, perched on the front floorboards with the driver's side door open, going about the awkward task of scraping off an old decal and affixing a new one. It can be more or less busy there: unit departures and returns in particular bring surges of soldiers, spouses and visiting family. This is on top of the stream of folks relocating to Hood from other installations, soldiers arriving for training or temporary duty, civilian workers who need to drive onto post: cable TV, construction, delivery.

Upon entering, you press a button on a machine by the door indicating what category of visitor you are; you receive a number from a machine, like at a butcher's counter, and wait to be served. A disembodied recorded voice calls out the turns at a desk

with numbered stations that runs the length of one wall. The civilian staff manning it are almost all black women, dressed like any ordinary office workers. But behind one end of the desk sit of bored-looking MPs: they are soldiers in uniform, regular ACUs, but they also sport black-and-white “MP” brassards and wear black nylon web belts of standard police gear, including pistols and tasers—most soldiers you see around post are not carrying weapons.

The cramped waiting area, with seats for perhaps three-dozen people, is furnished with a couple of large, flat-screen TVs showing FOX News or CNN. I remember some of the things that were in the news during the times I spent sitting there: oil prices, offshore drilling, the housing crisis, the Republican and Democratic primaries, Iranian nuclear reactors, the Russian invasion of Georgia; little about Iraq or Afghanistan, though. Between the TVs is a massive aerial photograph of the base, and flanking them, a couple framed prints of paintings of Indian War-era battle scenes. You sit and wait for your number to be called, clutching, like everyone else, a little pile of documents: for a civilian visitor, this consists of just an ID, an auto insurance card, and a letter from the volunteer organization I was working at, or even just the name of the place I was visiting—the hospital department where a friend worked, one of the several museums or memorials on the base. Most of the people waiting with you are men (and a few women) in ACUs. Especially if it’s your first visit, or one of your first, it’s probably more uniformed soldiers than you have been around in one place at one time before. You aren’t wearing one and almost everyone else is, and the sense of bodies collectivized and made similar and your own conspicuousness among them can be a little unsettling. But the soldiers’ actions betray the fact that they are there as individuals—for *their* cars, *their* orders, *their* new housing assignments. They come and go and get into line one at a time. Their posture is relaxed as they sit waiting, reading the free Ft. Hood weekly newspaper that

sits in stacks by the door or frowningly thumbing through text messages. There are people in civilian clothes too: more soldiers, spouses, moms and dads, retirees updating their DoD stickers so they can get to the commissary and the PX. Usually there are some little kids too, fidgeting around a cluster of toys in one corner or crying in the laps of aggravated parents. Your number is called and one of the ladies behind the desk inspects your documents and keys your information into a computer with lacquered nails. A document is printed, stamped with red ink, embossed with a seal, and then endorsed with your own signature. The receptionist's manner as these things are done cordial and efficient, but not warm. You can ask questions, but the brisk answers and the seats full of people and the robotic voice calling numbers all remind you that you are not welcome to linger here chatting. You have not reached any sort of final destination.

Pass in hand, you return to your car, leave the parking lot, and follow the signs through another series of ramps that lead to the main gate. The gate is a like a highway toll plaza, perhaps a dozen lanes wide. Signs tell you to slow down and not to talk on your cell phone while driving. For several years now, the gates have been staffed by private security guards from a company called Walden, and in any case, many of the MPs based at Ft. Hood regularly deploy to Iraq. The guards wear blue police blouses with reflective stripes sewn into them. They take your pass and inspect your ID. A lot of them are ex-military, or so I figure when I hear them read my license plate number aloud to themselves in the NATO phonetic alphabet: "Zulu Papa Echo ... seven nine niner." Sometimes they roll a mirror on a long-handled dolly underneath your car to make sure nothing dangerous or illegal is riding in with you. Sometimes they flag cars off to a canopied enclosure on the right-hand shoulder and search them thoroughly. And then they raise the gate and wave you through.

If there were a single place where the outside world—the military outside and the civilian outside, people from other places and belonging to other categories—could be observed entering the base, passing between the civilian into the military domain, it would be here at the visitor’s center. But it is not so absolute as that, because for one thing, all you see here are people entering. The Army is not interested in checking in with you when you leave, though you are instructed to destroy your temporary visitor’s pass. More importantly, though, the regular traffic of families and civilian workers and contractors, and of soldiers themselves, just flows in and out briskly through the gates, uninterrupted by a stop, a wait in line, a visit to the desk. So despite the gates, the guards, the fences, the surveillance cameras, the collection of personal data, there is also a curious porosity to the place, a nervous tension of aggressive control and seeming indifference, a dramatic incompleteness to its intrusive disciplinary grasp. “No one knows I’m here,” I thought to myself the first time I drove on—for no reason I could put my finger on, it made me both exhilarated and paranoid. The way that all this institutional apparatus makes one feel both closely monitored and largely invisible resonates eerily with the way that soldiers, when confronted by personal problems or breakdowns of bureaucratic order, may find themselves “felling through the cracks” of the institution and its mechanisms of care, maintenance and support.

In fact, it’s remarkably easy to get onto Ft. Hood once you give up your name, address, social security number, and insurance information. You can drive right on and go, it seems, just about anywhere you please—you can drive right up to the open gate of a motor pool full of Abrams tanks or Patriot missile batteries, and you can walk right in the front door of the 1st Cav or III Corps headquarters buildings—or at least I could, white, male, clean-cut, innocuous.

The internal layout isn't too different from that outside—low, sprawling, designed to be navigated by car. The main, built-up area of the base is strung out along more than three miles, from the Warrior Way PX and the 4th ID offices and barracks at the east end, to the Clear Creek PX and the 1st Cav and 13th COSCOM areas at the west end. Though it wasn't always this way, I've been told, soldiers routinely have to go a couple miles from where they're billeted, to where their command is, to where they need to be to train or work. There is no public transportation. So you need a car, a truck—in the Army everyone just calls them “vehicles”.

When my friend Stan showed me around post, he described the layout along two axes, Battalion Avenue and Hood Road. The base is divided north-south between administrative and operational functions—the further from the highway you go, the closer you are to the people and facilities responsible for actual fighting, while those closer to the front are responsible for bureaucratic management, the command of the garrison, and so on. People on this side have not deployed. Stan, who is a recently retired combat vet, sums it up: “Oh yeah, the war? I knew someone who went.” If you go further north, past the long row of motor pools, you can drive for a good 40 or 50 minutes through a vast swathe of rolling upland that is home to artillery ranges, training areas with little stage-set villages, and, paradoxically, places for recreational fishing and boating. Along the other axis, to the west are 1st Cav and 13th COSCOM, east is 4ID. But there is so much movement, some of this arrangement has broken down. There are brigades of the 1st Infantry Division and various other units here, units moving around from place to place, giving up their barracks and headquarters buildings when they deploy. One of the 1st Cav brigades moved their memorial monument when they were relocated. Everywhere there is new construction, and old facilities that are closing down, subsiding into decrepitude as their occupants move out of them a few at a time.

There are big, wide, four-lane streets but low speed limits. There is a stadium, baseball diamonds, football fields, chapels, gyms, garages, warehouses, a family life center, two movie theaters, hospital, police station, Army and Air Force Exchange Service shopettes that look like any civilian mini-mart but advertise “Class Six”—liquor and cigarettes—and sport unfamiliar, proprietary brands. It’s classic government architecture, like the campus of a giant and somewhat sleepy state university, but decorated here and there with decommissioned war machines, old tanks and helicopters. There is the same built temporality as in town, with buildings that are brand new or still in the process of being right next to others that are in the process of being abandoned or are being kept barely functional and habitable. The uniformity is disorienting—this gym with a barracks across from it and a big field behind it looks so much like that other gym with the barracks next to it and a big field behind it. I keep a map in my car.

ALTERITY

When I came to Killeen at first I knew basically no one. I busied myself setting meetings with the few contacts I did have and doing chores around my apartment there—cleaning, stocking the kitchen, trolling the goodwill stores for furniture. And I drove around a lot. The road was my way into things, and sometimes it was the only thing I had. There was no “public space,” no square or plaza for an itinerant anthropologist to camp out at and be noticed and strike up some conversation. At least part of my problem stemmed from the fact that people are incredibly transient. Some soldiers I would eventually meet later told me that they made a point of avoiding contact with neighbors, not wanting to nor interested in getting attached when one or another party would soon enough be moving on. Sitting at my newly assembled Ikea desk and typing away at my notes of initial impressions, I thought of Amitav Ghosh’s *In an Antique Land*: in his reminiscences of

fieldwork in a small agricultural village in the Nile valley in Egypt, every anecdote seemed to begin with him alone in his rented room, writing, when one or another acquaintance would burst through the door and drag him off to some new encounter or adventure (Ghosh 1992). He seemed to spend a lot of time alone in his room, but then he also had no trouble being kept busy by his subjects. Neither compulsively writing nor making friends—indeed, with barely a soul to talk to at points—I felt not only frustrated, but also inauthentic, a little un-anthropological, a prospecting social scientist unable to get my hands on any *anthropos*.

I had a whole set of images and accounts to guide these initial impressions, too—things relayed by friends, acquaintances and professors, from news stories and statistics. I read news stories about the high schools full of traumatized kids of absent military parents. Made anxious by tales of the city’s high violent crime rate, I spent hours on the internet scouring incidence data for burglaries, rapes and murders mapped by zip code. I had been told almost since I first began to consider Killeen as a site that it is simply not a “nice” place, and I had even caught myself referring to it that way. A cousin in the Army who spent three weeks there told me there was nothing to do except get drunk, cruising around town from the bars to the drive-through daiquiri place out on Old Route 190 to the keg on ice back at the barracks. A friend from North Carolina warned me off of military towns with tales of “Fayettenam”—Fayetteville, the town next to the Army’s Ft. Bragg. A professor told me I didn’t want to go there. At my prospectus defense, my advisers wondered aloud if I should get rid of my earrings, if my clothes and haircut (combined I’m sure, though they didn’t say it, with my nervous, educated speech and my unassuming physique) would land me in fights, as if any tweak at the edges of masculine convention and heteronormativity would be some sort of magnet for violence. Just about everything people had told me about Killeen suggested that people there were poor, miserable,

violent: crazy Army guys, made that way by Iraq if they weren't beforehand, beating up their wives and girlfriends, smoking meth and raising hell in the barracks but not getting kicked out because the Army couldn't afford to lose bodies. Teenage Army brides away from small-town homes for the first time in their lives, lonely and scared, spending the paychecks of husbands away Iraq, doing drugs and going out to the clubs every night, getting pregnant by other men and not looking after their kids right. Young vets drove like maniacs because they were used to it from Iraq, where speed makes you a more difficult target, or maybe just because they craved some sort of stimulation. Guys crashed their cars racing back up 195 to the base for early-morning PT after drinking all night in Austin.

Anthropologist Catherine Lutz's offers some explanation for how to make sense of this set of images, meditating on how a similar site, Fayetteville, is perceived and framed.

[It is] viewed through the class- and race-inflected fantasies of people around the state who have never seen the city or met a resident. For it suffers the fate of all victims of poverty and racism, which is to be seen as the complete master and architect of their own sad fate. Working-class enlisted soldiers suffer from the class prejudice as well, sometimes erroneously assumed to be a main source of the city's crime, at worst, it's "lack of class," at best. The city's notoriety and neglect also result when people conflate the city with the wounds of war themselves or turn away from them in revulsion or fear. (Lutz 2001:7)

Accounts like the ones above combine in a sort of bourgeois liberal nightmare of a place that was debased, out of control, violent, beyond the pale of respectability, tainted by trauma and violence. And worst of all, it was a place heedless of its own excess and dissolution, where bad behavior was expected, where damaged people reveled in bad behavior: fighting too much, driving too fast, getting too drunk. There were different frames that could be put around this excess. A liberal perspective might see the residents of a military town as some blend of ignorant dupes and exploited victims, abused by the

state they were mindlessly devoted to. Others might see moral pathology and deficient character as an unfortunate appendix to the military institution rather than a product of it, like the UT professor who suggested to me that the Army “must have been scraping the bottom of the barrel” when it recruited Lyndie England and the other Reservists charged with the Abu Ghraib abuses. A third perspective could look down haughtily at the jingoism and retrograde sincerity of people’s politics in this place, at the banality and backwardness of their country music and sentimental religiosity and the generic pop culture they consumed, at the foolish acquisitiveness that led to debts taken on for fast cars and big TVs they don’t need and couldn't afford.

Even more intense than any of these on its own was the simple overwhelming despair of a place where people simply got hurt and hurt one another over and over again, where one hurt delivered them to the next. It was this latter perspective I heard from one of my introductory guides to Killeen, an acquaintance my age who had worked for the county Child Protective Services there for a year and a half, repayment to the state of Texas for covering some of the cost of her social work degree. She told me about one- and two-year old kids showing up at the hospital with broken bones, damaged young parents holed up in filthy houses, depressed or high or both, 20-year old soldiers who came back from deployment to be dads for the first time and couldn't do anything with a crying baby but slap and shake it. Like the soldiers, obligation to the government had brought her there. Like the soldiers, she confronted a horrifying array of double binds and wreckage of unintended consequences. And like the soldiers, she endured not only the trauma of her own work experiences, but also the secondary trauma of the over-stressed institution she worked for. The social workers she knew all drank and smoked and ate excessively, she said. She cared deeply about her clients, but there were far too many of them, and she hated Killeen. She was glad to be gone.

This barrage of real and secondhand images that I found myself confronted with, the built-up and vacant and degraded and lived-in streets that I could get to easily without feeling like I had gotten anywhere, all left me feeling “caught in the space of alterity itself,” as Katie Stewart writes, citing Levinas: “that process of always approaching from without but never arriving (Levinas 1981), a state of being in between where things are neither fully present nor absent but linger and echo in a simultaneous lack/excess” (Stewart 1996:67). Stewart is setting off into her own “landscape of lack and excess,” the remote West Virginia coal camps, having been warned by her own guide—coincidentally or not, also a social worker—to stay away from them.

Although she had worked daily with clients from the camps, she had never herself ventured out to this place that began five miles from her doorstep in a protected middle-class enclave. For her it was an imagined landscape beyond the pale—a place given over to dirt and violence, lack and excess. In the landscape of lack there was not enough money, not enough schooling, no lawns, no police, no fire stations, no paint on the houses, no city water, no cable TV, bad plumbing. It was unsanitary. There would be no one for me to talk to. There was nothing out there. In the landscape of excess there was the insanity of ecstatic fundamentalism, the danger of wild bars where drunken men cut each other with knives, the filth of pigs and chickens, the smell of wildness and dirty bodies and unwashed hair, the piles of junk on the porches and in the yards, the spreading junkyards of rusting trucks and washing machines, the excesses of talk and story, the obvious eccentricities of people, the bald stares of people who notice a stranger passing. (Stewart 1996, 67)

In these horror stories, Stewart reads the figure of “an absolute ‘Other’ ... that contained lack and absence within itself like a personal flaw” (ibid.). Her anthropologist’s gaze takes in the dense and “dizzying” landscape of the coal camp hills when she visits them for the first time the next day, and finds this alterity “more haunting and sublime than monstrous, more thickly imagined than unimaginable. But for me too, as for the social worker, it was encased in a powerful code” (ibid., 69). The social worker’s code of bourgeois discipline and propriety, Stewart suggests, is not so different from the

anthropological code of interpretation and “meaning,” of classifying and naming the alien and the exotic, of imposing order on the unruly and unfamiliar from an outside observer’s safe, untouchable vantage. In both cases, one’s contact with the other is mediated by an interpretive scheme that reduces the contingency of encounter to a foregone conclusion of meaning.

On first entering the field then, and as I try to make some more conclusive sense of things now, I keep returning to Stewart’s passage about the West Virginia hills. Killeen and Ft. Hood—everything I had heard about them and everything I was seeing of them now—likewise presented a landscape of lack and excess. There was too little money, education, restraint, compassion, political reflection, bourgeois self-discipline. And there was too much violence, sentimentality, debt, consumption, religion, flag-waving, ugliness. The question of what to do with Killeen then is not separable from my own arrival there on the one hand, and my own effort to render some useful description of it on the other. All I had to go on was this collection of stereotyped images and my own struggle to “arrive.” I just wanted to talk to soldiers, so my project wasn’t even really about this particular place, was it? The litany of horrors I had been absorbing, no matter how believable, left a bad taste in my mouth. There had to be more to the place, to life there. Though I already knew that it wasn’t my mission to redeem, purify or celebrate it either, to debunk the stereotypes and reveal something “real.” And I took no pleasure, at least none that I would admit at first, in going someplace that so many others seemed like they would rather avoid. But still, what kind of place is Killeen, with its emptied center and crowded margins? It is intensely banal and normal, but also intensely exceptional. It is at some kinds of center: of state power and technical apparatus, of a certain kind of conservative American “normalcy” but also of a distinctly American kind of cosmopolitanism. But in other ways it is incredibly marginal: pathologized, stereotyped,

avoided, ignored. It has some of the character of a place “the center” looks to with “nostalgia and fear” (Stewart 1996, 46), especially as the media fills it in with ever more images of Americans affected by war and by its contagion of violence and dysfunction.²⁰ This is beyond the tension between center and periphery and the mutual construction of each. I see it instead as a breakdown in the distinction between the two, an involuted inability to distinguish one from the other, each seeming to contain the other under, layers of alternating skins that keep getting pulled back. This is not only what makes Killeen such a difficult place to think about. It is also indicative of the intense ambiguity that surrounds the production of violence, the ambiguity that allows the location of the great protecting, law- and right-making entity, the military, can be cordoned off as a space of madness, lack/excess, violence, danger. This ambiguity does not yield to schemes of “meaning” or cause and effect; it is a space of affects, of living and living with and dying.

With no one to talk to and no place to go and having foresworn the aforementioned conceits, I too drove around, took myself on random errands, just taking in the landscape and the people, letting the images build up behind my eyes. I tried to make a sign of everything I saw, make it all a clue that I could read hard to find out what the place was all about. Seeing everything from behind the windshield of my car gave it a sort of silent, arm’s-length distance; I wanted to take it in, to wonder at its strangeness and feel its dangerous and exotic and traumatized edge. The whining candy-colored imported street bikes and the cop cars, the parents yelling at little kids at the supermarket, the overflowing trash cans in ragged little apartment courts and the new houses with nice lawns and colonnaded front porches, the packed melee of the parking lot at the church or

²⁰ I am thinking in particular of the November 2009 shooting of 13 soldiers and Army civilian employees at Ft. Hood by Major Nadal Malik Hasan, and by the much-publicized cluster of murders and other violent crimes committed by soldiers who were all members of the same brigade at the Army’s Ft. Carson in Colorado.

the Wal Mart, the newspaper stories about murders and car crashes and new schools being built in Iraq and a strip club closed for decency violations the next town over, the distant silhouettes of Black Hawk and Apache helicopters overhead. What were all these things trying to tell me about war, what it did to people and what it was like to live with it?

There is a risk to reading too hard. Under the weight of stereotype and the pressure of encasing interpretive code, the unruliness of “emergent things” (Stewart 2005) can seem to collapse, to be too easy to interpret and to look too flat when they came out the other end. If I could look around and imagine that every car crash was about the war, that every parent yelling at their child in the supermarket was stressed because of a deployed spouse, that every church was full because of the existential dread lurking in desert lands on the other side of the world, I didn’t have anything to learn here that I didn’t know—or simply assume—already. Even a description of the landscape of Killeen—like mine, above—can fall readily into this trap. It can have the effect of saying, there is a military base, so therefore there is a degraded city full of pawn shops and used car lots and damaged people. This assertion may not be untrue, but neither is it particularly interesting. It appears to be the beginning of analysis—the background, the setup—but is in fact the end, an end overdetermined by the “meaning” of things.

And yet the war and the Army are never not there. The newspaper stories tell that the people crashing their cars are soldiers. Anywhere from a third to a half of the over 50,000 soldiers stationed at Hood are deployed at any given time, and those who aren’t currently likely will be soon, so of course military spouses are stressed out. And the prayers offered in church services I went to always included petitions for the soldiers deployed overseas and words of welcome for those who had returned.

THE VIEW FROM INSIDE

One additional wrinkle was that within a week or two of being in town, I had heard soldiers, veterans, military spouses, and other residents voice their own versions of every single one of the ostensible stereotypes recounted above—the anxieties about indiscipline, contamination, criminality, violence, ignorance, the absence of “culture.” In a way this magnifies the sense of alterity, the notion that “these people” are always right there, just around the corner, they just weren’t the people you were talking to, or sometimes they were. Even if I had wanted to perform a simple juxtaposition of false image and real, on-the-ground fact, it would have been impossible, as all these stereotypes circulated with energy and vigor throughout people’s own experience of the place—as tainted with criminality and trauma, devoid of class and politically retrograde, unlovely to look at and uninteresting to live in. Killeen was afflicted with racialized and class pathologies: dangerous and “ghetto,” “not nice” and full of “white trash”; “the kind of people” that the Army tended to attract were suspect and dangerous. The folks themselves experienced this sense of alterity about their own world, that it was infused with this intense lack/excess that they were both intimately bound to and fearful of.

Killeen’s curious alterity could be understood as a form of what Michael Herzfeld dubs “cultural intimacy” (Herzfeld 1997), a group or community’s collective sense of self-consciousness and even embarrassment at how it is perceived from the outside. Ethnography, of course, is the project of working across and along this imagined divide between an inside and an outside, not just opposite but in conjunction with the people who are the ethnographic subjects. As George Marcus and Michael Fischer write, the project of anthropology is no longer “the simple discovery of new worlds, and the translation of the exotic, or the defamiliarization of the exotic. It is increasingly the discovery of worlds that are familiar or fully understood by no one”—researcher or

native—“and that all are in search of puzzling out” (ibid., xvii). It was this nervous surface tension, this limning of the horizon between in and out, that I often felt caught up in in the conversations I had with people, as if they were drawing me not *into* something, but along its edge or across its layers. I remember one early, informal interview, for example, with Susan, my landlady, a warm and chatty woman in her mid-thirties who became a regular acquaintance. Her husband was deployed at the time, in Iraq fixing helicopters. In addition to managing a couple of rental properties, she worked a full-time office job. It had already come up in conversation several times that she lived in Army housing, and I was eager to ask her about it, my head full of images of nosy neighbors, dull architecture and inflexible rules. She had been raised in a military family and lived near Army bases most of her life, so in that sense there was little that was foreign or novel about military settings and routines. But I got the sense as she described them to me that she did not feel fully in them.

Near the end of the discussion I ask at some point if the Army is an important part of her identity and she says it's really not. "I don't embrace it"; she rarely goes on post, doesn't go to family day events or FRG meetings. There is a practical dimension to this: Steve is away and he is her major link to it, and most of her attachments and obligations, like her work, are off-post. Even when Steve is around, though, she says, she doesn't really engage a lot with the community. She doesn't have kids and the attachments that that would entail—to the physical environment of the place, to the schools, to other parents even simply as a thing in common. She "doesn't fit"—she's not a mom, and all the single women are younger. She contrasts this with a friend, who she describes as in it "as a wife." This woman has four kids and is very involved in the community, including in her husband's unit's FRG and as the "mayor" of the Army housing area where they both live.

It's in this context that I remark on how the military really does begin to seem like a "whole other world" that from the outside seems very contained, very different, very specialized, and even exotic. She agrees, but notes that (I think especially due to having grown up around it almost constantly) she never really thought of it that way until a civilian friend made a similar observation. And it is a very contained and perhaps provincial world. If you are really absorbed in it—

*linked through it to your job, your spouse, your friends, your children's school, the places where you shop—it is easy not to leave, never to leave. Again this is in contrast to her own more cosmopolitan inclinations—she talks about moving to Austin if she could.*²¹

Looking back on these notes later, I wrote more notes to remind myself of the sense of an inside and outside, of the military as world, with ways and degrees of being in or out of it. Somehow Susan and I talked together as if we are both on the outside of this world, as if there was enough of something shared between us—some quantum of bourgeois worldliness and alienated detachment, perhaps—that our shared view into it, hers guiding mine, could be somewhat aligned. This was the most striking in the classed and ‘cultured’ analysis she offered of the “type” of people who were attracted to the military to be soldiers and the spouses of soldiers: people who are very young and of limited prospects and experience, people who are literally teenagers or at least “act like” them. She did not “fit” with people like this. Her description signaled the normative or desirable opposites of this type’s characteristics: hard work, worldly experience, aspirations, financial independence (i.e., not simply living off a spouse’s paycheck and free housing), moderation. This listing perhaps gives the misimpression that her account was all grim and condemning—and it is hard not to see it as an exercise in distinction—but it was in fact offered in a tone of observation and explanation.

This bit of conversation illustrates the extent of the self-consciousness among many of the people I met about the military itself. The talk of inside and outside both points to an awareness of the military’s enclosing and totalizing nature and posits the broader civilian world as a “normal” baseline against which the particulars of the Army, good and bad, are understood. It’s there in the way that people talk about “playing the game” of inhabiting a military role but not “really believing in it.” There is the mocking

²¹ Throughout the dissertation, the use of italics indicates long passages taken directly from fieldnotes.

of those who inhabit their roles too fully, who take them too seriously—who are too gung-ho and thereby too far “in.” And there is even just the simple conscious awareness of the extent and capacity to which people are “in”: Susan’s friend who is “in it as a wife” and who, when I met her later on, gave a very frank and self-conscious description of her proud and invested relation to her husband’s soldiering.

The whole business of being “in,” and there being a specific interior in mind—“being in *it*,” “believing in *it*”—is illuminating for what it suggests about the visibility and discreteness of the Army as an institution and even, if it can be said, as a culture. It is so totalizing, so obviously present, but in this curiously illusory way: one moment it is as in-your-face and obvious as a Humvee on the highway or the heraldic code of a shoulder patch, and the next minute it recedes into deep background as simply the way things happen to be. In some ways it seems far too easy a game for an anthropologist. A professor once told a story in seminar about visiting a military academy. The uniformed senior official showing her around the grounds asked about what exactly she was interested in, and responded to her mention of “culture” with, “Well, we’ve got a lot of that here.” In my own experience, it was never difficult to get soldiers talking about the initiations, symbolic codes and ritual objects that comprise unofficial Army tradition. Nor were they ever shy about discussing the highly technical proscriptions surrounding work and daily life—the procedures, protocols and regulations they were compelled to follow. And lucky me, all this stuff was already written down, the former category chronicled in an array of formal and informal sources, and all the rules laid out in a library of Army Field Manuals and Department of Defense regulatory documents. But even the components of this apparent *it*—the rules to be followed and the history and tradition that gave them life—are so obvious in presence, intrusive in experience and arbitrary in content as to be constantly remarked upon and referred to that they could be thought of as

themselves a distinctive sort of *it* within even the most restrictive understanding of the *it* of everyday Army life.

I would argue that it is not simply a matter of these things being naturalized, of folks being acculturated to them, precisely because the most arcane rules seemed to be both readily available for commentary and reflection—as things that the Army should improve or get rid of or that were just especially idiosyncratic—and at the same time taken for granted, referred to by opaque shorthand, taken as given and usual. One way of thinking about the ethnography of an institution is to look at the thing only within its boundaries. But those boundaries are porous, and there is all sorts of traffic in and out, so a second way is to look at their limit conditions internally, their emergent development, and their traffic with other domains of life, producing an object of analysis defined by the borders it in practice exceeds rather than the ones it may superficially appear to follow.

But I wonder if it might be helpful to tweak things one notch further, guided by Timothy Mitchell's insight that the single most important feature of state power is its capacity to shape-shift, to create the effect of coherence while in practice defining its boundaries at will for various ends (Mitchell 1991). For, as the chapters that follow will demonstrate in various ways, the Army is more than capable of defining and re-defining the boundary between its institutional obligation and the personal accountability of the individuals who labor on its behalf. And for their part, soldiers and the people close to them and all the other people living with the Army constantly assert, with words and actions, their own boundaries, their own notions of what the Army is or ought to be responsible for, what they do or do not owe it, what it can and cannot claim of their lives. If such boundaries cannot be taken for granted, then it is the constantly shifting and melting, looming and receding edges of one or another *it* that call out for attention, that actually define the object in question. This agitated and sprawling “nervousness” is

central to the blatant visibility and hyper-rational excess of “the system,” proliferating boundaries, thresholds, divisions between inside and outside, and productive effects at every scale and level, drawing lines that bind and divide between a thing and its observer, between an institution and its servant.

SITES OF EXCEPTION

I came at a lot of what I found laterally. The bulk of my interviewees and subjects and acquaintances in the field were people I met through other subjects and acquaintances. I met people in a running club, at restaurants and bars, at vets groups meetings, through volunteer organizations. By far the most significant of these sites, a place where I got my some of my first and most intimate experiences of day-to-day military life was a volunteer organization that I refer to here as the Foundation. The Foundation was started by a local woman named Debbie who began attending departure manifests and handing out cookies to departing soldiers from the back of her car in 2003. As she met more and more soldiers and heard their stories, she took on an increasingly complex role as a caretaker, advocate, organizer, and patriotic booster. With her considerable charm, persistence and resourcefulness, she talked the garrison commander into providing her a permanent space on post. She wrote grants and solicited donations that she used to purchase everything from basic care package supplies—snacks and toiletries—to household goods and children’s Christmas presents for the families of soldiers who had fallen on hard times or had to relocate suddenly as the result of injuries. She secured donations of furniture, computers, TVs, and groceries to furnish the increasingly larger spaces that the Army made available to her. When I met her, the Foundation had for the previous several years been headquartered in a house-sized building on the west end of the post. Inside there was a kitchen with a food pantry, lounge areas where soldiers

gathered, napped, watched TV, and used the internet. Outside, beds of decorative plants lined the narrow concrete patio; Debbie and some of the soldiers who hung out at the Foundation had planted them together. It was one of a few facilities on post that was open 24 hours, at times the only one, and this at an installation where thousands of people regularly work early, late and overnights shifts or depart to or arrive from overseas at all hours of the day.

As a civilian organization operating at the pleasure of the base commander, the Foundation was outside of military structure and the Army chain of command. It duplicated some of the functions of the USO—another guest organization—and of the Army’s Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command, which is responsible for maintaining shopping, dining and leisure facilities on Army installations, so Debbie had to be careful to avoid stepping on toes. But this exceptionalism afforded her a lot of freedom as well, especially in her capacity to advocate for soldiers who had been cut loose by their command or exhausted their available avenues for complaint and recourse in matters ranging from financial distress to medical treatment to disciplinary sanction. She had a vast supply of outrageous stories: soldiers in casts denied entry to DFAC²² by civilian contract workers because they weren’t wearing shoes; a soldier on crutches marooned for weeks on the third floor of a barracks; a suicidal soldier turned away from the post hospital’s Resilience and Restoration mental health clinic; a soldier with testicular cancer about to be discharged from the Army with no disability compensation and no healthcare; a soldier trying to support four kids on a salary too small to make the car payment and buy groceries and keep the lights on; a soldier who hadn’t been paid in months and couldn’t get it fixed and now was drowning in Army Emergency Relief loan debts. Debbie, a civilian completely unattached to the Army, had no compunction about

²² DFAC: dining facility.

approaching senior officers to relay complaints or difficulties she had heard from junior enlisted soldiers. Between her charisma, persistence, and obvious dedication, she amassed an impressive cohort of high-ranking allies and supporters, so that when a distressed soldier asked her for help, she was often able to bypass entire strata of bureaucracy, the mid-level functionaries who, it often seemed, were more concerned with keeping their desks clear of cases or covering their own missteps, and who were often as helpless as the soldiers to intervene.

Debbie's own personality and operational style mirrored this sort of exceptional logic, this unformalized capacity to go around rules and invoke them at the same time. She had an excessive energy and wandering attention, and sometimes seemed deliberately to refuse any gesture at standard organization. Instead she relied on a near-constant font of affective intensity and personal conviction. She would change from task to task at a moment's notice, dropping everything to attend to someone in crisis who showed up at the door or giving twenty dollars out of her own pocket to a soldier who was hard up. She radiated maternal warmth, and those soldiers who knew her well and weren't afraid to appear sentimental would call her "Mom" and wax poetic to me about her loving presence. Sometimes she slept at the office, other times she would be hard to reach and wouldn't come in for days.

Thus the Foundation was a place existing and operating by exception, between rules and jurisdictions, and able to be effective precisely because of this interstitial position. So it was also a sort of collecting place for things that had overrun standard categories and procedures, people who had fallen through cracks. Some people warned me that Debbie's credulity and indulgence had made the Foundation a magnet for "troublemakers" and "bad apples," but by the time I began to hear these warnings I had already become acquainted with the ways that the categories of "bad" soldier, sick

soldier, hurt soldier, and simply unlucky soldier all bled into and co-produced one another (about which more in Chapter 3). But it was the case that the Foundation, this place dedicated to care and giving, was vulnerable to exploitation, and some people worried that Debbie's generosity and good will made her too easy a target for the unscrupulous or the desperate. If the exception proves the rule, the Foundation was a place to see the rules and their effects and excesses, a place where rules were experienced as having full, formative force but also as things alien to "normal" life and thus as objects of commentary and critique and reflection. Much of the work it did was oriented toward disconnects between technocratic institutional prerogatives and the priorities and burdens of "real" life, like family, debt and health. It was a place that seemed at times to lend itself to cynicism and a violent suspicion of Army solidarity and fictive kinship, but its very existence was motivated by the desire to care for and value soldiers and the work that they did. Even the most jaded and embittered soldiers I met there remained in many ways devoted to or invested in the Army and their leaders and fellow soldiers. In some senses, it was simply a place that threw dynamics present throughout all of Army life into sharp relief because it was a place where people come when they had problems or when they didn't fit comfortably into other structural domains. And because it was so irregular and dynamic, the Foundation was a place where my presence made sense without being particularly restricted or drawing a lot of attention.

Like so many other encounters in which I seemed to find myself during fieldwork, the Foundation was perched on numerous incremental thresholds: not just the life-and-death, illness-and-wellness, struggle-and-survival thresholds of the soldiers that it served, but between civilian and military, guest and gadfly, cynicism and devotion, disrepute and celebration. As an object, the Foundation takes its form not from being one thing or the other, but from the uneasy force generated at the site of exception, the site of passage

from one space into another. It is illustrative of the more general problem of thinking Killeen ethnographically, for the Foundation is an easy enough place to get access to, but it is so permeated with distinctions, and with people riding the edges of those distinctions, that getting access to it does not translate into being straightforwardly “in” anything in the classical immersive ethnographic sense of solidarity and rapport (Geertz 1973; Marcus 1998). Being at the Foundation, and much of the field work in general, felt instead like constantly skating along an edge of inside and outside, an edge that tracked across multiple sites, people, encounters, and indeed ways of being “in.” I am convinced that there is more than coincidence or cleverness behind the resemblance between this ethnographic object in which a generality can be defined by the things that transgress and defy the tyranny of categorization and the structure of sovereign power described by Agamben in which the capacity for exception is meant to seem isolated but in fact “coincides with the normal order” (Agamben 1998, 38). For these thresholds and distinctions that defined my ethnographic fields so often seemed to hinge on differential exposure to harm and violence and the vicissitudes of power: distinctions between soldier and civilian, enlisted and officers, those who had deployed and those who hadn’t, the injured and the healthy, the green and the experienced, the ignorant and the wise, the dedicated and the shamming, those who saw combat and those who stayed inside the wire, soldiers and spouses, men and women. These categories don't line up or nest neatly; they fold unevenly into one another from moment to moment and circumstance to circumstance, claims of often high-stakes difference carved from broad field of possibility. The generalized condition of exception plays out across all these and other distinctions.

AN EXAMPLE: READING SIGNS, SEEING BODIES, LEARNING RULES

I learned to read uniforms. Even before I started spending a lot of time on the post, I observed and read them avidly when I saw soldiers in the supermarket, the mall, the bar. I schooled myself on patch and rank insignia and would go home and scour the internet when I spotted unfamiliar designs. I learned that the patch on the left shoulder indicated a soldier's current unit, and the patch on the right shoulder the unit he or she had deployed with. Those who haven't deployed wear no patch on the right. I looked for the insignia of Ft. Hood's combat divisions, insignia familiar from media images of soldiers from these divisions deployed in Iraq: the diagonal bar and horse-head profile of the 1st Cavalry Division and the four-pointed clover of the 4th Infantry Division. Then there were the 13-pointed star for 13th Sustainment Command, the three-pointed insignia of III Corps, the command group, the draped bugle of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, the T framed in an arrowhead of the 36th Infantry Division, part of the Texas National Guard, the simple numeral 1 of the 1st Infantry Division, and others. Army unit organization is a confounding welter of designations, hierarchies and terminology that vary with unit makeup, role and history. Soldiers wear their rank insignia on a small velcroed square in the center of the chest, and I learned to identify these too. A single chevron is a Private, a chevron with a rocker underneath it is a Private First Class, two chevrons is a corporal and a filled-in chevron-and-rocker shape a Specialist, equivalent ranks. Three chevrons is a Sergeant, with the addition of one or two rockers and other insignia moving up the line to Staff Sergeant, Sergeant First Class, First Sergeant, and Sergeant Major. Officer insignia begin with a single bar for the two grades of lieutenant, two bars for captain, and then on to the stylized oak leaf and eagle for the Major and Colonel ranks, and stars for Generals. In formal interactions, soldiers address one another by rank, though typically

only officers receive the honorific “sir”; indeed, forgoing “sir” is a point of pride among noncommissioned officers, a sign of their demotic solidarity with junior enlisted soldiers.

The more of these details I learned, the closer I began to read soldiers whenever and wherever I saw them. I would look at their shoulders to see if they had deployed, and if it had been with a combat or support unit. I would look at their chests and read their rank. And eventually I learned that soldiers do this too, and have it done to them, all the time—this is the point of the insignia, after all, to offer up these institutionally salient details at a glance, along, of course, with the soldier’s last name, printed in block caps on the right breast. But it happens in myriad informal ways, and soldiers complain about “seeing someone’s eyes go to my chest” where the rank insignia is worn or being told what to do by someone who has “nothing on their right shoulder”—someone who hasn’t deployed. In these formal and informal ways, soldiers are connoisseurs of symbology, and I could pepper acquaintances with one question after another on the subject without them tiring of it. This also means that it is a space open to considerable play and subversion. Once in the Dallas airport during my fieldwork period I saw a soldier wearing the stripes of a Staff Sergeant with a tab—a small arched banner that goes over the unit patch, usually designating Airborne or Ranger training—that read “INFIDEL.” I looked it up online—it was a novelty item from a military supply catalog, and not the sort of thing, I don’t think, you could get away with wearing on post.)

And again, even, or especially, as an outsider, it was often hard for me to see past the uniform. With all those identifying details laid out for you, you get used to having them available, and seeing someone without them can put you at a loss—you have to remember their name instead of reading it off their chest. Plus the confusion of often being introduced to someone by their first name but them hearing them referred to and addressed by others, especially other soldiers, by their last name. Conversely, I often,

embarrassingly, had trouble recognizing even familiar acquaintances who I was accustomed to seeing in civilian clothes when I saw them in uniform for the first time. Visually homogenized, they receded into a mass of superficially identical bodies and for an instant somehow ceased to be recognizable as the person I was familiar with.

It doesn't take the extremes of combat for war, in its institutionalized form, to imprint itself on soldiers' bodies. It goes far beyond the not untrue stereotype of stiff posture and high-and-tight hair. A few days of hanging around is all it takes to see that there are intense and far-reaching standards in place. At first, it's hard to see past the uniforms. But it goes beyond them, so that there is a type, a set of physical features, that becomes at least somewhat recognizable without it, especially for men, for whom the regs are in some ways more strict. The hair is the biggest giveaway, shaved to the scalp or buzzed close, or clipped into variations of the basic high-and-tight, some quite conservative, a gentle fade from shorter to longer stubble from the sides and back to the top of the head, others almost exotic, with a longer, forward-swept patch perched above the forehead like a sort of decorative cap or the crest of a tropical bird. This in combination with a clean-shaven face or a carefully groomed moustache that doesn't obscure the upper lip or extend past the corners of the mouth. (Several acquaintances who left the Army during my fieldwork immediately grew goatees.) No facial piercings or earrings. Little to makeup on women. Other things too, none of them definitive but all of them common: dark, bug-eyed Oakley sunglasses, upright posture and stiffness of carriage and gait, a neutral flatness of expression, a certain amount of muscular bulk. I started seeing soldiers in civilian drag everywhere—or rather, knowing that I was seeing them, or seeing them in a different way. And not just at and around Ft. Hood, but in parks and shops and on campus in Austin, in airports. This according, at least, to the typology

that I assembled for my own private use, my own rendering of the body itself as a uniform that I could read.

Some of this came from my own experience. One day I went to eat lunch with my friend Danny, an E6 medical tech, at one of the post PX food courts. I had noticed two older soldiers, which is to say in their late 30s or early 40s, in the relatively empty seating area. They seemed to be watching us as we passed by, but I thought nothing of it and continued my conversation with my friend. When we sat down a few minutes later, he broke from the subject and said, “I don’t know if you noticed this thing that just happened, but it’s funny.” He pointed out the two NCOs, an E7 and an E8 he told me—I couldn't even remember being close enough to them to see their rank, but for him it seemed automatic. They had been glaring at us, staring us down with the kind of look you get from a superior when you’re doing something out of reg. So he mentally reviewed his uniform: was his rank patch fucked up? Was he still wearing his medical nametag, which he was not supposed to wear outside of work? Had he left his beret on indoors? Was something else amiss? But everything was correct. And then he realized what it was: they were looking at me, because they thought I was a soldier and I was wearing earrings. I had just gotten a haircut the day before, and it must have been short enough to pass. Earrings are strictly forbidden, on post or off. You’re allowed to have holes in your ears, but only if you came into the Army with them.

It happened another time, too. I had showed up at the foundation office one morning, as usual, and spent a couple hours moving and organizing cases of chips and candy in the store room. As I passed through the office, a new soldier on the staff, an E-6, had seen me. Again, I was in civilian clothes but my hair had been cut recently enough to pass for Army, so my earrings caught this Staff Sergeant’s attention. When Tommy introduced me to him later in the day, he mentioned that this new guy had thought I was a

soldier and was ready to smoke me over the piercings. I told them I would have had a field day putting that in my notes.

I wasn't surprised to learn that the Army grooming standard is folded into the very first pages of the voluminous (362 pages) Army Regulation 670-1, *Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia*. Wearing the uniform begins with the condition and appearance of the body that is wearing it. The Grooming Standard governs the hair and fingernails and physical adornments, those things occupying the space between the flesh shaped by physical training (PT) and the clothing and equipment that hangs on the body; indeed, the regs on hairstyle refer repeatedly to the importance of noninterference with "headgear." These rules are limited to when the soldier is "on duty," whether in uniform or in civilian clothes, but effectively extend to whenever he is on post. Male soldiers, for example, are allowed to have their ears pierced, but they are prohibited from actually wearing anything at all in them on the base. In any case, despite the limitation to "duty," the rules have a far-reaching hold: one cannot un-shave one's head. AR 670-1 is exhaustively detailed and explains itself with a practical-sounding Foucauldian frankness: "The Army is a uniformed service where discipline is judged, in part, by the manner in which a soldier wears a prescribed uniform, as well as by the individual's personal appearance. Therefore, a neat and well-groomed appearance by all soldiers is fundamental to the Army and contributes to building the pride and esprit essential to an effective military force" (AR 670-1 P1-7, p.2). There is no scandal to pointing out the operation of disciplinary power here where it is operating with a transparent, instrumental generativity, a straight line connecting uniform bodies and uniform uniforms to "effective military force." So that is what you are seeing when you spot a guy with a distinctively crew-cut head and clean-shaven face. And that is what I think merits attention, what this imposed discipline looks like and, going off soldiers'

words and actions, what it feels like from the inside, to live in a body subjected to these 362 pages of regulation, and thousands more pages too.

The rules allow for considerable variation and interpretation. As the document itself states, “It is not possible to address every acceptable hairstyle, or what constitutes eccentric or conservative grooming. Therefore, it is the responsibility of leaders at all levels to exercise good judgment in the enforcement of Army policy” (AR 670-1 P1-8, p.3). Thus the variation in styles may have as much to do with a platoon sergeant’s insistence that it is time for a trim as it does with individual preference. Nevertheless, the regs are thorough. AR 670-1 devotes two full pages of dense, ten-point type to male and female hairstyles. For facial hair, no beards or long sideburns, only closely groomed moustaches that don’t extend beyond the upper lip. Hair can’t be dyed unnatural colors or cut in “extreme, eccentric or trendy” styles. It must be “tapered” so that it converges naturally around the back of the neck, and short enough that it doesn’t fall over the ears, eyebrows or collar. Unsurprisingly, “Hair that is clipped closely or shaved to the scalp is authorized” (ibid., 26), and variations on the shaved head, the crew cut and the high-and-tight abound, some quite unremarkable, the whole head clippered to one length with a number 4 guard, for instance, and others perhaps unintentionally distinctive and exotic, close-cut sides faded into a narrow, longer patch on top that swoops toward the forehead, giving the appearance of a sort of decorative cap. People joke about asking barbers in town to leave it “a little longer” and coming out with everything buzzed to a quarter of an inch. The regs for women allow for a bit more latitude, but are similar in spirit: hair worn conservatively, symmetrically, close to the scalp, and not extending “below the bottom of the collar.” Dee told me that in her experience, Air Force women were the “prettiest” of all the service branches because they are allowed to wear their hair longer and wear earrings.

The uniform makes possible the visual, tactile and impressionistic effect of massed bodies that you encounter almost anywhere you go on Ft. Hood. The obvious of course: soldiers in formation on a parade field or in front of a command building. But also soldiers in groups of three or four carrying banners or cardboard boxes from one building on Battalion Avenue to another. Soldiers in t-shirts or mechanic's coveralls crowding around a vehicle in a sun-bleached motor pool. Soldiers driving a line of trucks or Humvees across the post. Soldiers picking up trash from an empty parking lot or assembly room. Soldiers sitting around an office waiting for a phone to ring. Soldiers in line for vaccinations or legal paperwork or ear exams. Soldiers piling giant canvas duffels next to a box van. Soldiers with canes leaving the hospital. Soldiers smoking cigarettes outside an emergency exit door propped open with a cinderblock. Soldiers doing PT. Soldiers standing in line to get on a bus to the airfield. Everywhere, these regularized bodies.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE: THE ROAD

You can see the war moving in and out of the post along the roads that pass through the base and link it to the world. The Army uses the road all the time. One morning, on a stretch where the highway was being torn up and repaired and the lanes were hemmed in by high concrete barriers, a wall of metal reared up around a bend in the lane in front of me: a slow-moving flatbed truck carrying a MLRS, a huge, boxy rocket launcher on crawler tracks. Another day, another huge crawler-tracked desert-tan metal box, and M113 armored personnel carrier, was being hauled on a truck in the morning rush of cars past Wal Mart. A woman I met who had lived in the area for much of her life told me that for Desert Storm they suddenly had to paint all the Humvees tan, but they didn't get the color right at first and it came out slightly pink: dusty rose Army trucks on the road

everywhere you looked. Helicopters pass over all the time—Blackhawks, insect-bodied Apaches bristling with weapon mounts, the wide whale bellies of Chinooks. They move slowly, gracefully. The presence of these things is another sign by which to measure proximity to war—there isn't fighting here, but there are these other things, these machines with a singular purpose.

This makes the road an uncanny place, its unquestioned utility and utter banality bleeding into and mingling with the thrill and shock and terror of what is possible on it. It is a place where soldiers are vulnerable, and where they themselves are known to be a source of danger. It's where they go wild and forget where they are or go looking for some thrill of movement and danger to which deployment accustomed them. The road as a place that is especially dangerous for soldiers, and that is made especially dangerous by them, is one of the single most prevalent pieces of folklore there is about the base and the town; I had heard it plenty before I even got there. It is a featured chapter in the narrative on the challenges of adjusting after deployment. The soldier comes home flush with cash, ready to reward himself, still wired for nonstop action and dazed by the abruptness of his arrival back where everything is normal. He buys a motorcycle first thing—maybe doesn't even know how to ride it, maybe doesn't even put on a helmet—and then slams it into an overpass at 90 miles an hour. Or he gets in his car on 3 hours of sleep and nine time zones of jet lag to drive to Oklahoma or Louisiana or Arkansas and drives into a ditch before he even reaches the interstate. It's common enough that after a while I start to lose track of how many actual stories I've heard about it and how many times I've just heard the generic narrative recycled.

Anyone who spends time on the base is reminded of this, in case they needed to be, by the signs just inside the exit lanes at each gate of the post. At each is a gigantic sign: YOU SURVIVED THE WAR, NOW SURVIVE THE ROAD—DRIVE

CAREFULLY. Big red digital numerals indicate [X] DAYS SINCE THE LAST TRAFFIC FATALITY beside a blinking light that goes from red to amber to green as the number of safe days rises. I only saw it change from red a couple times while I was there; often the number never got higher than 10 before being reset by competing vectors of acceleration. Positioned next to each sign, so that you can see just what those vectors do, is a wrecked car on a concrete platform, at some gates a motorcycle as well—a car like the one you are sitting in as you drive by, maybe going a little too fast. Or like an evil twin of your car. The staved-in roofs, bent wheels, crumpled panels, paint that looks blistered by fire: did someone die inside that car? Would your car do that, turn against you as it rips apart or folds in on itself and its fragile passenger, your benign and trusty conveyance become torture chamber or tomb? What could be more uncanny than that?

People talk about the signs and the ticker, and the economy of violently extinguished life they point to. They make predictions and tell little one-line stories about this actuarial eternal flame. (Many of the “Most E-mailed Articles” on the Killeen Daily Herald’s web site were about fatal car crashes.) Talking to an acquaintance, a retired NCO, the week before Thanksgiving, I remarked that I had just noticed the number climbing into the twenties. “Yup,” he said, “it’ll probably be back down to zero this weekend.” Another friend told me that he had seen it all the way up above 100. “And then the Cav came home,” ten thousand soldiers back from 15 months in Iraq.

The signs are really just an epiphenomenon of something everyone already knows in a deep way about the road but that they still talk about and remind each other of. With such gruesome numbers to report, it is worth wondering, what is the sign even for? What is it doing? (And think about the office somewhere, where there is a switch or a click of a mouse, a reset button that someone is charged with pushing at the right time.) Is it too dramatic to call it a state of emergency, complete with red warning light, become

permanent? By the Army's straightforward logic of discipline, perhaps the reasoning is that the worse the news and the more dire the condition, the more necessary the warning then becomes. Until the red warning light just recedes into the roadside scenery, that is, when you should be keeping your eyes forward anyway. There is no one good way to name this particular way of relating to sudden, violent death, a thing that just shows up some days, like the weather, and that like the weather is real and tangible and a thing you feel every day. It is both important enough and common enough that it is always there to talk about.

The road takes on the qualities of those other roads, the ones in Iraq that, as anyone will tell you, are the most dangerous place, and the most unavoidable. Like those roads, it is always necessary but never to be trusted, and people always advise you to drive carefully. That is the kind of place this is: a place always shadowed by another place, the two of them merging into a single scene of everyday life and death.

Chapter 2: Heat, Weight, Metal, Gore—the aesthetics of exposure

IN THE PARKING LOT

When I went to meet Chad for our interview, he was waiting for me on the porch, antsy because I was ten minutes late. “Grab you a hat,” he told me. “We’re going fishing.” He had a lot on his mind: his wife lived several states away, kept there while he was in Texas by a bitter custody battle with her ex-husband. She was having medical problems and she was jealously inquisitive about how he spent his time and with whom. He was working odd landscaping jobs in addition to his Army duties to be able to support her and her kids from a previous marriage. His unit was being reconfigured—he was a 91-bravo, a mechanic—and he was searching for a billet with another unit that would potentially move him to Ft. Campbell in Kentucky, closer to his family. He was taking college courses to get his civilian mechanic’s certificate, thinking ahead to his planned separation from the Army in a year and a half, but the instructor kept getting on his back. His tight-jawed and cautious way with words—letting out a few at a time and pausing as if to consider the next ones—seemed to telegraph the weight of these stacked-up worries.

It was a Sunday afternoon and no one was around. Ft. Hood was all quiet, dusty, late winter sunlight and empty lanes of asphalt. Chad needed to get to the creek and just sit there, he said. So we hopped in his truck and he drove us to the post rod and gun club to pick up some bait. And that was when it happened. We parked and he trotted across the lot at speed ahead of me. As I was getting out of the truck I heard the *pop-pop-pop* of small-caliber fire from the sport shooting range just on the other side of a fence from us. Before I even registered the sound or processed it as something remarkable, I saw Chad’s startled response, a sort of jig in which he appeared to leap into the air and pull himself into a crouch simultaneously. As his feet found the ground again he didn’t even break his

stride, just shook his head and gave the air a half-hearted punch with his right hand. “You okay?” I called after him. “Yeah,” he said without turning around, registering discomfort, embarrassment, I’m not sure what. A second later I caught up to him inside waiting in line to buy night crawlers, and he told me about the right way to prepare chicken liver and hot dogs for catfish bait. I left it with that small talk. We headed back out to the car and again there was a shot, two, half a dozen, but he didn't jump. “This time I knew what to expect, I was ready for it,” he said without looking up. “I saw you jump,” I told him as we buckled our seatbelts, my tone light, unsure of where to go from there; I just wanted him to know I noticed but that I didn’t rate it as something freaky or shameful.

As we pulled out of the parking lot and headed for the creek, he pointed to the corner of a building about fifty yards away. “In Iraq, where we slept to the edge of the FOB²³ was from here to there.” They heard shooting routinely, several times a day. Sometimes it was the FOB being attacked, and sometimes it was insurgents fighting with American patrols, with IP²⁴, with each other. It became familiar enough that they learned to identify who was shooting at whom just by sound and direction, whether it was American 5.56 mm rounds or insurgents’ AK-47s or RPGs and where the fire and counter fire were coming from. Sometimes there were the loud booms of bombs in the distance and then the rattle and roar of Black Hawks taking off for casevac.²⁵ He heard it every day, the sounds of people, unseen but nearby, shooting and getting shot at, and nothing but a high wall and some empty space between you and them. You would go to your room after working all day and be ready to relax, “and then you would hear this:

²³ FOB: Forward Operating Base, a fortified, forward-located military installation that serves as a base of tactical operations. Cf. a larger and rear-located Logistic Support Area or a smaller, often less secure and more forward-located Observation Post.

²⁴ IP: Largely U.S.-trained Iraq Police Service.

²⁵ Casevac: casualty evacuation, the transport (usually by air) of the wounded off the battlefield for medical treatment.

'Bam! Bam! Da-da-da-da-da.' And all you could do was sit there and listen to it.” At first they would throw all their gear on and go charging back outside, but there was nothing to do, no one to shoot at, and so they stopped.

Was this his explanation to me for his sudden startle in the parking lot? Especially after what I had just seen, I don't think you could say he ever became at ease with the constant shooting. His body retained a pre-conscious vigilance, a sensitivity to danger that had made sense in Iraq, that pointed to a concrete, identifiable stimulus, even if it was oddly deadened. Now, here in Texas, he may not have been thinking about Iraq. In fact he was thinking about everything but Iraq: his wife, his future, his income, the stress and boredom of being a marooned in Texas as a “geographical bachelor”; all were things that had plenty to do with the Army and the burdens it placed on him but little to do directly with the war itself. In the midst of all that, though, his body was reminding him of it anyway. Its response was one stress among many, out of place, misdirected, unruly, and socially confusing. And his response to that remembering twitch was to offer me a story, one short on feelings but long on detail: this is what it was like there, in the place where that sudden rebellion of his body came from.

VULNERABLE BODIES

The conventional image of the American soldier at war is of a lethal and heavily armored agent of violence: feet in rugged, calf-high boots, legs in pocketed canvas, a sidearm holster strapped to one thigh, torso bulked out by body armor and LBE vest laden with pouches of ammo and equipment, a face hidden by black wraparound ballistic sunglasses and recessed, turtle-like, behind a bulky armor collar and the shadowing dome of a Kevlar helmet, and all swathed in the obscuring, broken grids of digital print camouflage. These soldiers travel around Iraq in armored vehicles: retrofitted Humvees with boxy,

bulletproof turrets, tank-like Bradley and Stryker fighting vehicles. Some drive yet more advanced MRAPs, mine-resistant, ambush-protected trucks, newly designed for the specific conditions of counterinsurgency warfare in Iraq, with extra layers of armor and high-riding, V-shaped undersides that deflect the force of IED explosions. Soldiers sleep in FOBs (forward operating bases) protected by checkpoints, gates, perimeter towers, and massive barriers of concrete and concertina wire; the modular buildings in which they sleep are bunkered behind tiers of steel and earth hesco baskets.²⁶ They carry powerful weapons; their trucks are mounted with .50 caliber machine guns and MK 19 grenade launchers, and a quick squeeze of the trigger can rip a human body in half or level a building. At the beginning of the war, Iraqis attributed supernatural capabilities to the protective items girding soldiers' bodies: sunglasses that gave them x-ray vision, boots that could disarm mines (Rieckhoff 2006). But it is true that they can see in the dark and see their enemies offering themselves up as glowing green shapes against black. They can get up and walk away from powerful explosions. They can call bombs and artillery from the sky. With their scopes they can pick out targets miles away.

We are also familiar with various images of the kinds of harm that befalls American soldiers: scars, missing limbs and prosthetic replacements, disfiguring burns, and even the hollow eyes and prematurely aged faces born of traumatic stress. But such obvious and visible injuries are only the most apparent features of the deep background conditions of vulnerable bodily exposure to which *all* soldiers are subjected. Soldiers' vulnerability may be most apparent in the spectacular violence of the battlefield or the grim bodily evidence of its aftermath, but it does not end nor even necessarily begin there. The human body is perhaps the most taken-for-granted and the most essential piece

²⁶ HESCO bastions (hesco baskets) are large, collapsible steel baskets that are unfolded and filled with earth to form barriers and fortifications. They are used extensively by U.S. and allied forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

of equipment of the day-to-day labors of war-making. While recent prominent critiques of American war violence have emphasized the technologically facilitated withdrawal of American bodies from combat zones in favor of air strikes, smart bombs, remotely piloted drones, and proxy fighting forces (Virilio 1989; Baudrillard 1995; Singer 2009), the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan could not carry on without the physical presence of tens of thousands of such bodies.

In the lives of soldiers and those close to them, there is a falseness, a precariousness to the techno-magical invincibility afforded by body armor, high-tech sensors, and life-saving military medicine. Perhaps it should not be surprising that despite or even because of these technological marvels, the inescapable fact of biological precarity is an essential feature of war and its insinuating and contagious effects. The soldier is at once the agent, instrument and object of sovereign violence. As the agent of violence, the soldier is empowered to kill. As its instrument, he is trained and equipped for the task of killing. And as its object, he will, as a function of his work, be placed in harm's way, and it is expected that he may come to harm. Simultaneously protected from and exposed to sovereignty's shades of power over life and death by both the circumstances of war and the institution he or she serves, the soldier is a sort of paradigmatic biopolitical figure (Agamben 1998; Foucault 2003). In this doubly indeterminate zone, terrible power and terrible vulnerability hinge on the fulcrum of the soldier's body.

Great lengths are undertaken to keep soldiers alive, but these measures are fundamentally linked to the logic that endangers him in the first place. As Walter Benjamin observed in the wake of World War I, the technological "progress" of modern warfare does not ensure the protection of the human body, but rather subjects it to previously unimaginable forms of harm and exposure, levels of violence that confound

past experience and present description (Benjamin 1969). I would often learn about the thickness of the ceramic small arms protective insert (SAPI) plate in a soldier's vest or the number of layers of armor surrounding the passenger compartment of an MRAP or the ceramic-steel composition of the front slope of the Abrams tank through a story of how it had been pierced by shrapnel, or ripped apart by an IED blast, or failed to stop a sniper's bullet. "The more improvements we make to the Humvees, the more these guys make to the IEDs," an infantry senior NCO told me of the insurgent bomb makers. In photographs, in the news, and driving around Ft. Hood, one sees the Humvees whole and normal, fresh paint and glassed turrets and armored solidity. But the soldiers are thinking about the bombs that reduce the trucks to knots of smoking black metal. They have seen those knots firsthand, or been stuck inside them, or know people who have. To the outside observer, weapons and armor that signify invulnerability and lethal capacity; but for soldiers these objects are material, bodily environments through which they understand their *vulnerability* to violence just as much as their ability to produce and withstand it.

New protective and medical technologies have made previously fatal traumatic wounds survivable, and many soldiers returning from Iraq confront complex brain and orthopedic injuries that in previous wars they would likely not have lived to experience. I met soldiers who were the sole survivors of catastrophic IED strikes—bombs powerful enough to totally destroy a Humvee, tank or Bradley armored fighting vehicle. The soldiers' armor plating and Kevlar helmets and fireproof Nomex coveralls, along with the quick action of their comrades and the Army's cutting-edge trauma medicine, had kept them alive through the concussion and fire and flying metal. But they survived to confront unprecedented conditions: damage to whiplashed joints and limbs that is difficult to diagnose and treat; the psychic shock of being the only one left alive of a crew

of four or six or more; and perhaps most pernicious of all, traumatic brain injury, the symptoms of which are oblique, complex and debilitating but often unmarked by physical pathology. The conflicts in Iraq have produced such elaborate constellations of orthopedic, neurological, psychic, and other forms of injury as to prompt military doctors to coin the term “polytrauma” to describe them (Veterans Health Administration 2005). Between the technologized destruction and psychic overload of such conditions, as Benjamin commented, the body itself, sensate and vulnerable, remains the only constant ground, even as it is yanked into disconcerting new domains of experience (Benjamin 1969). As one soldier said to me as he related his doctors’ efforts to manage his TBI, the symptoms of which had completely upended his life, “We are the research group.”

This chapter is about the felt vulnerability that accompanies living in and with bodies that are instruments of violence. The acute and nameable afflictions from which so many soldiers suffer—burns, lacerations, posttraumatic stress disorder, orthopedic damage and limb loss, traumatic brain injury—can only be understood and alleviated when considered against the more general ground of embodied and emotional states in which they are produced and experienced (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Csordas 1993). In my fieldwork, as I heard soldiers speak again and again of their experiences of deployment in terms of endangerment and vulnerability, I came to think of this ground in terms of an *aesthetics of exposure*. This aesthetics comprises various sensory, affective and bodily dimensions of the experience of military life and deployment to the combat zone: from the sheer physical burden of working long hours in a hot climate while wearing heavy equipment, to the intimate and ambivalent relationship of the laboring and fighting body with the weapons and armor that both protect it and expose it to harm, to the vivid, often tactile firsthand experience of gory dead bodies.

Commenting on the always encultured but nevertheless “involuntary” character of the human senses, Nadia Seremetakis suggests that through such curious and often unremarked-on intimacies between people and their things, “we can begin to see how material culture functions as an apparatus for the production of social and historical reflexivity” (Seremetakis 1996, 7). Soldiers’ preoccupation with the armor meant to protect them and the weapons meant to kill them exemplifies this reflexivity, not just with regard to specific sensory experiences but with the basic condition of *shock* that, as Benjamin noted, is the inheritance of all modern embodied subjectivity and is so acutely epitomized in warfare (Benjamin 1969). Shock itself might be too dramatic a term, even given the dramatic stakes in play. Perhaps the most fitting category is something like Michael Taussig’s notion, borrowed from Benjamin, of *tactility*: not the literal sense to touch, but the peripheral, sensuous knowledge that forms the ground of everyday experience (Taussig 1992).

The soldier is a sort of ideal type of what Susan Buck-Morss describes as the *anaesthetic* subject produced by the simultaneous extension of bodily capacities and the numbing of distracting sensory inputs. This decidedly masculine figure is disciplined, rational and autonomous, and can act effectively and decisively upon the material world while remaining hermetically insulated from it, “impervious to all his sense-giving information of danger” (1992, 9; Mosse 1996). This neat compartmentalization is a crucial aspect of the production of the kind of abstract, generic body that can usefully be sent to war. On an aesthetic level, however, there is a palpable, even tactile uncanniness to the intimate relationship of flesh and metal that soldiers live. The two substances are so unlike, one warm and vital and yielding, the other hard and inert and cool. Their interrelation is not without ambivalence, though: the flesh is flesh that is vulnerable and weary but that has also been turned into a tool and a weapon, while the metal is metal that

destroys and incinerates but that also shields and protects and enables. The remainder of this discussion is an attempt to objectify this material and sensory ambiguity through a series of examples. It offers itself as part of what Allen Feldman advocates as “*a secret museum of sensory and historical absence*” (Feldman 1994, 104), as a fragment of an object—war—that is all too easily flattened into discourse and ideology. The absent or neglected sensory traces of the material production of war form the background against which more acute forms of suffering, both physical and psychological, emerge. The interrogation of the phenomenological relationship between flesh and metal thus not only indexes the brute biological precarity with which soldiers live but also helps outline a subjectivity at the intersection of state power, medical intervention, and individual experience (Good et al. 2008). This condition—excessive and routine, overpowering for those who live it and hard to see for those who do not—poses distinct challenges to both social and medical practices of recognition, empathy and care (Breslau 2004; Luhrmann 1998).

By beginning with this phenomenology of battlefield violence and exposure, I certainly do not intend to reproduce the division between combat in Iraq and other domains of institutional and personal experience. Indeed, the entire argument above is pitched explicitly against the notion that exposure to danger in Iraq is the privileged origin of the effects of war. But one has to begin somewhere, and at Ft. Hood at the time of my research—and very much since then as well—things inexorably revolve around time in Iraq. Soldiers who enlisted in their teens or early twenties after 9-11 and have remained in the Army, for instance, will have by the current moment spent a third of their lives regularly deploying to Iraq. Deployment is the thing from or toward which life is moving, even if only virtually or potentially, for folks who haven’t or may never actually go. It is hardly the only force impinging and producing bodily experience, but it is the

largest-looming entity around which “normal” life is periodized, structured and conceived. And since for me and for most of the people reading this, deployment is the most exotic domain of military experience, it makes sense as a place to begin, if not an origin than at least a background for the more far-reaching effects to be described and analyzed later on. Like Chad’s leap in the parking lot, the specificity of these broader effects is only intelligible through the specificity of the sensory and material entailments—the lived affects—of the body’s direct exposure to war.

HEAT AND WEIGHT: THE FEELING OF BEING THERE

People don’t know how it feels to be there, they would tell me. They meant physically, on your body. It’s hot. The breeze is like a hairdryer in your face. The heat lets you know where you are. When the plane lands in Kuwait and the doors open, you feel the heat waft in and up the stairwell. “That’s when you know you’re there,” one soldier told me. To understand what it’s like for soldiers, he continued, “you have to look at, ‘What makes the war?’” He listed a long series of things: the tiny anxieties and uncertainties, the loss of control and individual autonomy. And then there is the heat and the weight. One of the things that is hardest for someone who hasn’t been to Iraq to understand about what it’s like, soldiers would say, is the grinding physical burden of simply being there moving around. Long hours of demanding work—fighting, driving, patrolling, building—are aggravated by the relentless heat, routinely over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and the mass of body armor and other gear. There are a lot of bad times, my friend Stan told me, but even the good is shaded by the fact that everyone is simply “miserable for long periods of time.” This part of “what makes the war” is where I want to begin, the sensory “everydayness” of it. This register of everydayness, lodged deeply in the privacy of individual sensoria, elides easy representational framing, and the soldiers know this—

they know that it is what is hardest to understand. It is what Taussig, in his definition of tactility, calls “not so much sense as sensuousness, an embodied and somewhat automatic ‘knowledge’ that functions like peripheral vision, not studied contemplation, a knowledge that is imageric and sensate rather than ideational” (Taussig 1992, 141).

The heat is deceptive because without feeling it yourself, it is very difficult to describe, to imagine, to see. Perhaps this is what makes it so difficult to understand from a distance. Sometimes photographs of Iraq at least show a stereotypically “hot” desert scene—blue sky, sand, camels, palms, men in blindingly white dishdashas, sun flaring across the lens. But most of the time they don’t: there is vegetation, or a busy city street, and maybe the sky is overcast. You see American soldiers and Iraqi civilians wearing long pants and long sleeves, the women in headscarves and abayas that reach the ground; often people aren’t close enough to the lens, or the light isn’t quite right, to be able to see darkened armpits or a sheen of sweat on skin. ACUs are made of a nylon-cotton blend that is supposed to breathe and wick sweat away better than the old cotton Desert Combat Uniform (DCUs—uniforms in the older three-color desert camouflage pattern), but it’s easy to imagine how any extra layer of fabric close to the skin and its wear mandated by rules, no matter how carefully engineered, just becomes another annoyance in the unremitting heat. Or so I gathered when Dime caught my eye one afternoon while he was in the middle of a rant about something else, and pinched the front of his ACU blouse between two fingers. “By the way, put in your book that these things are fucking retarded!” They sucked in the desert, he said.

The obvious practical effect of the heat is sweat and the moldering of the body’s drenched and suffocated corners and crevices, the friction—the rasping heat of the strapped and swaddled and loaded body’s own mechanical action on itself: in the armpits, between the toes, in the crotch and the cleft of the ass, in the scalp, on the shoulders or

the lower back or any other place that the gear presses fabric against skin with no room to breathe. There is foot fungus, blisters, sores, rashes, insect bites that fester for days. I heard this litany various times, including in an Army doctor's pre-deployment hygiene lecture. Between every line she admonished, "It's the desert! It's hot!" The soldiers, many of whom were deploying for the first time, laughed—of course they knew the desert was hot. But what does this mean for your body, after a week, a month, a year of such abuse? They tell you to change your socks as often as you can, always use foot powder, carry baby wipes. For women, change your menstrual pad twice as often as you would otherwise. And don't forget sunscreen. If you don't have clean underwear, you may not want to wear them at all.

As base and universal as these things are, nor are they ever far from the threat of violence. In his Desert Storm memoir *Jarhead*, Anthony Swofford describes his own body's reaction to a rocket attack:

I stand in place and piss my pants, this time not just a trickle but piss all over and running into my boots, clear piss I know because of hydration, no underwear and piss everywhere, thighs both, knees both, ankles both, bottom of my soft wet feet both, clear piss and no underwear because otherwise chafed rotten crotch and balls from humping because Vaseline only works to mile ten and all wars and battles occur farther than ten miles from all safe points, and bloodrottenballs if you don't remove your underwear at mile ten, and rockets landing red glare and more rockets, hitting everywhere around us, but they haven't hit us, so far they have only caused great amounts of terror and forgetting. (Swofford 2003, 197)

So heat isn't separable from the stress of combat, from the fact of having to move your body, under its own power, across vast and dangerous distances. Even as he is thinking about dying, Swofford is remembering what he has done with his body in order to keep it alive. Another example: a double-page image in photographer Ashley Gilbertson's account of the war shows a young soldier sprawled in the back of a Bradley in Karbala in the midst of heavy fighting, his eyes closed, his face stricken, his forearm

spattered with his own blood. An IV runs into his arm, but he isn't wounded: it is saline, and he is being treated for dehydration (Gilbertson 2007, 131). The simple fact of needing to consume water quickly becomes interwoven with assaults on comfort, health, and personal safety. The thing itself has hidden properties that can hurt you: "the water they make over there—it has all those minerals in it." This infantry soldier had gotten kidney stones from it and was in the field for months before he could get treatment. Of course they warn soldiers about this. But you can't not drink it.

In the FOBs are ice and cold things to drink. But for long convoys or units out on patrol or overwatch for days at a time, such comforts are absent. The water you have to drink is bath-warm. Dime told me,

We lived on MREs and hot water. And to get the hot water cold you take a sock, a big green sock that they issue you and you put the hot water bottle down in there and then you wet the sock and then you tie it to the side ... of the tank so when you're going down the road the [air and] cool water would cool the water so you'd have something cold to drink.

They would pay locals five or ten American dollars for ice when they could get it. The need to relieve a body full of water presents itself too:

It's hot, you go to the bathroom in a plastic bottle, which takes a little getting used to, but once you figure it out, it's second-nature. ... You're afraid to get off the tank cause you don't wanna step outside, you know, step on the ground or anything, hit something, blow up. So you use the bathroom on the tank, you take a crap on the tank. You don't even dare get off of it.

Sometimes, other folks told me, you do find IEDs this way—find them the good way, that is, before they go off. Cautiously picking your way away from the roadside to take a dump, you spot a bomb covered in grey-painted Styrofoam that looked like a rock from five yards out.

Going for a piss means exposing yourself—to IEDs, to attack, to the gaze of your fellow soldiers. Privacy is impossible, especially for women soldiers. You have to adjust.

When the convoy stops, learn to squat between the hulking tires of a HEMT, or behind the door of a Humvee, or against a wall, and don't take your armor off. Or you cut the top off an empty bottle and relieve yourself in a moving vehicle full of men. Because a lot of the time the convoys don't stop. Fran, a Vietnam vet and veterans advocate, described it to me:

"I'm in a convoy, and we're hell-bent for Baghdad from Kuwait. It's a long way! And at some point we're going to have to stop for a pee break. Well the men can all get out and water a tire. But where do the females go?" They can't go behind a tree, because there aren't any. So often they end up holding it in until they get to someplace where they can have privacy. Sometimes that is a day or more, and the result can be a kidney infection. If you think you're sick, these smaller units don't have the medical capabilities to diagnose something like that. They can take a urine sample, but there is one lab, it's in Baghdad, and it takes six weeks for results, by which time you could be dead. I remark on the contrast between that and the fact that you can go from being blown up on the battlefield in Iraq to being put back together again at Walter Reed in 24 hours, but you can also die from a kidney infection for want of a place to pee and a lab. It's incredible, I say, such a minor thing. "It's not minor to me!" she says. There are small, simple devices you can get that help women pee standing up, she continues, little plastic funnels called freshettes. Why can't we get these for women soldiers? It's not like they cost a lot of money. It's just not recognized as a serious problem.

Add to this another danger that women soldiers face when going to pee: for tactical reasons, the FOBs are pitch black at night, and male soldiers wait in the dark to sexually assault their women comrades when they go to relieve themselves in the middle of the night. Women soldiers died of dehydration because of it, abstaining from water later in the day so they wouldn't have to leave their rooms at night.²⁷ The line between what is harming—the heat and what it does to you—and what is keeping alive—water,

²⁷ This is a claim made by Colonel (formerly Brigadier General) Janis Karpinski, who was in command of the U.S. Army detention facility at Abu Ghraib in 2003-04 when the prisoner abuse scandal there broke. In statements at the Bush Crimes Commission Hearings, an activist tribunal, Karpinski claimed that "in fear of getting up in the hours of darkness to go out to the port-o-lets or the latrines, were not drinking liquids after 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon. And in 120-degree heat or warmer, because there was no air conditioning at most of the facilities, they were dying from dehydration in their sleep." Karpinski also stated that her commander, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, ordered that dehydration not be reported as the cause of these deaths (Goodman 2007; Cohn 2006).

medicine—blurs, reverses, folds in on itself, a Möbius strip entwining the thirsty, chapped body. But the line shows up only if you pay attention to the heat, which again, is hard to see.

What is heat *about*, then? It emerged suddenly in a conversation with Ernie, and infantry NCO, in the midst of one of his wry and free-associating explications, talking about the importance of having his conscience be at peace with the things he did in Iraq.

As long as you go to bed with a clean conscience, like I said, when I look at myself in the mirror, that's all cool. ... Cause I don't wanna go to hell. I hate the fuckin' heat! [*his wife and I both laugh*] I'd rather be out there shivering because it's cold, just put on some warm jacket or something like that. But I've been in Iraq and Kuwait: it's 140 degrees and you're in your underwear and can't do shit else but sit there and sweat your balls off, just sit there in 140 degree weather, can't do shit about it, in the middle of the desert. That freakin' sucks. And I've been in Japan, with snow up to our waists, people getting frostbite and shit. But I'd rather take the snow and the ice than the freakin' heat. So that's why I don't wanna go to hell.

Heat equals futility. It means being in the desert, far from home, where your orders have taken you, but then not being able to do anything. Cold can be acted against—put on a coat. But heat is totally overwhelming. You've done all you can do, stripped down to nothing, and still it hammers you, shit else to do but sit there and sweat your balls off. Heat renders you passive, a decidedly unsoldierly posture. It's not what you're there for. Mastery of the environment, sense of purpose, the ability to deny pain, deny the intrusion of the senses, all dissolve. Is it too literal-minded to see an allegory here? For the more general experience of the work of making war in Iraq, of trying to impose some form of order on conditions that appear to be ungovernable and often seem to remain that way no matter what you do? Because heat is part of the climate, it is natural, suggesting that there is just something about that place, an intransigence that seeps into you from the environment and is physically oppressive. The problem of not knowing what to do with or in the heat is an imperialist's malady, one that reduces the Englishman to the idiocy of

the mad dog: as Noël Coward wrote in 1931, they two are the only ones dumb enough to go out in the noon-day sun:

It's such a surprise for the Eastern eyes to see,
That though the British are effete, they're quite impervious to heat.
When the white man rides, every native hides in glee ...

Heat brings out the colonizer's ambivalence, the absurdity of his endeavor (Taussig 2004, 40). Except the soldier is not the one calling the shots, the one making the decision to be there. Someone very far away, someone who himself doesn't have to go, has cursed the soldier's body with the madness of going out in the heat. His orders make no accommodation for the angle of the sun, and he sweats and chafes under the imposed madness of a higher logic.

Weight and heat compound one another, imposing a synergistic burden. Weight is similar to heat in its invisibility. The helmet and I-vest give the soldier super-human proportions—a massive, powerful torso, a bulbous head. The harness slung with gear and pouches, the bulging pockets, the M4 carbine in hand all suggest preparedness and enhanced capacity. But the body armor weighs 33 pounds. The rest of the gear can easily be another 30, so the soldier labors in the oven heat under 63 pounds of dead weight. This is like a bag of concrete mix on your back and chest, or a 10-year-old child riding on your shoulders, all the time, while you run around trying not to get killed. It slows you down, limits your range of motion, making you, paradoxically, more exposed. Then there are the weapons. One afternoon I chatted with National Guard soldiers at a pre-deployment picnic; they were doing “in-theater” training, which meant that they were in uniform all the time and had to carry their weapons everywhere, even as they waited in line with their families for plates of barbecue. One guy had two M16s slung over his shoulder instead of just the one. Why? “I just got lucky I guess.” They weigh eight pounds apiece, unloaded. A few others here and there were saddled with a squad automatic weapon, or SAW, the

M249 light machine gun. One guy shorter and thinner than me, stooping slightly as the weapon hung from a shoulder sling in a low diagonal across his waist, its barrel dipping almost to the ground. He smiled shyly and hefted it to show me its weight—18 pounds empty.

So like heat, the weight is inescapable and involuntary. Like the heat, it wears you out, intruding on your health, comfort and safety. Advocates for the wounded told me numerous times about what they saw as the absurdly high rate of degenerative disk diagnoses among soldiers no older than 22. The Army slates it as a preexisting condition and tries to discharge them without compensation, but at that age it's utterly unnatural. It's from marching, crawling, driving, shooting, in training and deployed, under 60 pounds of weight. But aside from that, it's simply exhausting. Depending on where you are, you have to wear your I-vest all the time: certainly out on patrol, but also driving a truck or even in the relative safety of your FOB or CP. Especially in the Guard and Reserves, soldiers ended up with "hand-me-down gear," older, heavier and ill-fitting. One soldier I met had a debilitating shoulder injury from this, sitting in a too-big vest while driving convoys that lasted a day or two or more, one after the other, the axillary plate in his armpit and the collar around his neck working on his shoulder until his arm was almost immobilized with pain. The earlier generation of body armor, the stuff they had in '03 and '04, didn't have these axillary plates, and soldiers died from it. The chest and back plates protected the big target surfaces of their bodies from small arms fire, but not from clouds of IED shrapnel erupting out of the ground beneath them. Again, what saves the body is wrapped up with what harms it. Even barring serious injury, it means that you come back worn out, your body aching and abused. "A lot of people don't realize the toll that a deployment takes on you. Like physically, yeah: everybody gets

hurt, everybody feels like shit, they're tired." And again, we all know exhaustion. But what do weeks of exhaustion do to you, or 12 months, or 15 months?

As much as the gear, the uniform itself becomes heavy, they say. In a literal way. They would touch their bodies as they told me this: "The uniform adds weight to my body. It presses into my shoulders." You feel it in the chest and the shoulders, or it makes you tense up and curl in on yourself, makes you physically uncomfortable. It's an overdetermining, excessive sign, one that clings to you and that you yourself have to put on. Physical burden and immobility spill over into the metaphorical weight of responsibility and discipline. Dime sniffed with emotion as he described it to me: "Do you know what it takes for me to put on the goddamn uniform every week? It ain't easy brother. There's a lot of responsibility to putting that fucker on." This responsibility is to higher ideals, and to one's fellows, but it is also the responsibility of being surveilled, monitored, told what to do, and being infinitely accountable for everything. You cannot choose not to put it on. Again, the everydayness of it, the automatic sensory knowledge of the constant effort that is required to subject oneself to constant burden, and the alienation from one's own body that is required to make that body an effective instrument.

That is what I would like to suggest that heat and weight index, that they mean. Heat and weight have what Nadia Seremetakis, in her meditation on the anthropology of the senses, calls an "involuntary dimension" (Seremetakis 1996). They are things that are imposed and intrusive, that free-acting persons choose to avoid and bodies themselves rebel against, the kind of subtle and unremarkable pain in response to which a free and unencumbered body shifts, moves, makes itself more comfortable (Scarry 1987). The involuntary dimension, the fact that heat and weight impose themselves from the outside, "points to their encompassment by a trans-individual social and somatic landscape"

(Seremetakis 1996, 9). This landscape isn't just a foreign, dangerous desert, but a material-historical conjuncture; the sense-impressions of heat and weight tell the story of the soldier being here at this place and time, the literal "structure of feeling" (Williams 1977) composed of the little things that "make the war."

To put it another way, heat and weight tell a story about the biopolitical subjectivity of contemporary war. Heat and weight both index the ways the soldier's body is subject to sensory assault, but an assault that is the synergistic product of the actual enemy and setting of the war on the one hand, and the military institution's management, constraint and compulsion of the soldier's body on the other. Heat tells us the story of the hostility of the foreign environment, but it also tells about the orders and tactical imperatives that force the soldier out into that environment. Weight tells the story of the technology that protects and empowers the soldier's body, but also of the violence that body is exposed to and the slow pains of injury and exhaustion it is made powerless against by rules. The physical miseries of heat and weight, which seem to end at the boundaries of the body and are therefore relegated to the private incommunicability of pain (Scarry 1987), are nevertheless linked to the soldier's utter *lack* of autonomy over or privacy for his own body. Heat and weight occupy a particular spot as a thing that people don't understand because of this peculiar structural immobilization and individualization—of *not being able to move*. It is not quite true what they say, that "the Army owns your body," because while the Army owns its capacities and labor and potentials, you are forced to own its pains and breakdowns and its simple exhaustion. Soldiers are subjected to heat and weight as a mass, by orders and protocols. But they are then made accountable for them as individuals: drink water, wear your vest and Kevlar, change your socks, don't complain, don't get hurt. Heat and weight are foundational

conditions of the soldier's instrumental subjectivity: mostly subjected, but not completely, mostly a subject, but not completely that either.

What they reveal is the fraying, nervous edge of the modern phenomenon that Buck-Morss identifies as anaesthesia, the capacity demanded by modern life, and above all by modern war, to dull the body's susceptibility to its own senses (Buck-Morss 1992). The soldier's senses remain his property even if his body does not, and they are inevitably too open to the harsh world the soldier finds himself in. To be effective they have to be shut down, disciplined into submission, and this insensitivity to pain is what can make the soldier powerful. But it's not perfect or infinite. It degrades, it breaks down, it surrenders. The "black box" (Jameson as cited in Buck-Morss 1992) of the modern sensorium—a strictly disciplined apparatus for translating environment into perception in a neat and orderly fashion—"cracks open". In the senses reside the unruly outer limit of human being, domesticated and acculturated but still marked by "an uncivilized and uncivilizable trace" (Buck-Morss 1992), the trace of the feeling of embodied vulnerability.

THE SHRAPNEL IN BULLARD'S POCKET

The first conversation I really had with Bullard was while we were loading scrap wood into the back of his truck. Out behind the building housing the volunteer soldier support organization where I spent a lot of my time at Ft. Hood, under the semi trailer used for storage of donated goods, were some old two-by-fours and damp, ragged-edged sheets of plywood; it was just sitting there and they said he could have it. Bullard is wide, carrying extra weight that came with the immobilization of serious injury, though at the time I didn't know what had happened to him. He speaks in a slow Texan drawl. He sports dark, bug-eyed Oakleys all the time, against the light sensitivity that is a symptom of TBI—

only once did I see his eyes, coming into a darkened office one early morning while he hunched over a computer. His truck was new, shiny, well cared-for, with Purple Heart license plates, chrome brush guard and roll bars, and tinted windows, the latter another measure against light sensitivity, one that the VA compensates TBI sufferers for. But he had been a scout—technically still was—and he moved deliberately and with purpose and awareness that belied his size. We loaded the wood into the pickup bed and tied it awkwardly in place with some scraps of yellow nylon line.

What did he need it for? He's working on a chair, one he can leave outdoors and recline in; he and his wife have a lot of barbecues, but his injuries make it hard for him to sit in regular patio chairs. That and he was building a shadow box. They're big with soldiers, and you see them a lot in their homes and offices, full of badges, medals, coins, and banners. But this wasn't for that, or not just that. The medics and doctors had saved the plate from the vest he was wearing when he got blown up by an IED. He was driving a Bradley, a tracked vehicle with a turreted cannon and room for half a dozen soldiers inside. A piece of shrapnel had gouged through it and was stopped by the layer of Kevlar fabric underneath. He showed me with his fingers how far it had gone through the ceramic slab that was protecting his chest, how close it had come to entering his body. Another time, when he told me more of the story, he showed me where other pieces of shrapnel had pierced unarmored places on his face and arm. The metal was still in him and he sometimes snagged his shirt getting dressed. He handed me a tiny piece of metal that he carried around in his pocket: smooth, glossy, almost black, less than three quarters of an inch long, a squared-off rod gently rounded at one end, cut at an odd angle at the other. That was the bit that almost got him, that they pulled out of the lining of his vest. It was an uncanny thing, not particularly heavy or sharp, and its carbon sheen didn't look like any familiar metal, as if the same rush of heat and velocity and friction that had

turned it from inert junk into a deadly projectile had also physically transformed it. They didn't know what it was so they sent it to a lab in D.C. for testing, perhaps to make sure it wasn't depleted uranium or something else radioactive. But then they gave it back to him, and he always carries it. "I used to complain about wearing gear," he said, "but no more." He has these two reminders to touch and to look at: the thing that almost killed him and the thing that barely kept him alive. They both did their job, the latter edging out the former only slightly.

Seremetakis writes of the way that socially embedded objects remain behind in narrative and consciousness, the way that, even in its absence, an object's "body persists within persons" (Seremetakis 1996, 2). The shrapnel in Bullard's pocket and inside his body and the lesions on his brain from the concussion of the bomb blast that elude detection by MRI and CT scan but nevertheless make their presence felt, these things bear out Seremetakis' point to an unexpectedly literal extent. They are the bodily imprint of the conditions of counterinsurgency war in Iraq, the traces of particular formations of ordering violence written into a human body.

THE POLITICS OF ARMOR

Indeed, ever since the beginning of the war, soldiers' equipment and its limitations have been a point of fascination for whatever portion of the public was paying attention. Especially early on, in 2003 and '04, news stories abounded of units being deployed with insufficient or outdated body armor. The New York Times published an article with charts and diagrams showing the exact number of casualties attributable to the lack of axial plates in the vests. Families spent their own money—hundreds of dollars—to send body armor to their soldiers. Humvees were deployed as the tactical vehicle of choice, but their thin skins did little to stop bullets and RPGs; some even had open tops and no

doors. Soldiers constructed “hillbilly armor” for their Humvees out of scrap metal. But then these out-of-reg improvisations were forbidden—no homemade armor or self-supplied vests, in case they were defective. Donald Rumsfeld came to Iraq to address the troops, and a junior soldier stood in front of an audience of thousands and dozens of TV cameras and asked the Secretary of Defense why soldiers had been deployed without sufficient equipment. The Humvee themselves, even when armored, proved to be highly vulnerable to IEDs, their wide, flat undersides absorbing the full force of explosions underneath them; new vehicles were designed and fielded to address the problem—the Rhino, the Stryker, the Buffalo and the various other forms of MRAP—though by this point the public was paying less and less attention. The state possessed the technological means to protect soldiers, but between its own negligence and the resourcefulness of the enemy, American soldiers were being killed at a rate that the public found too high. The media and political discourses on war and military technology circled around and around this curious phenomenon: it was a problem that could be fixed, a sacrifice that was necessary, a harvest of the government’s shameful neglect, or the result of an enemy whose cleverness had been underestimated. What all these things talked around was more basic. The promise or misapplication or insufficiency of these technologies managed to remind the public of what soldiers already know, reminded us of the bare fact of human bodies being offered up to die that was shaped, managed and mediated by these technologies.

Both the rhetoric and the material logic of armor is that of an impenetrable surface, a hermetic seal between inside and out. Armor surrounds, protects and insulates a fragile, sensate body, extending that body and making it powerful and reflecting destructive force. This was the scandal of the improperly armored soldier that played out in public discourse. There were chinks and soft spots, things that could be protected and

weren't. These soft spots offered an ascending metonymic scale in which the exposed places under the arms or around the neck of individual bodies pointed to the ways that whole units were rushed off before their equipment was gathered or updated, and from these isolated insufficiencies to the notion that the entire invading and occupying force was endangered because it was too small, too hastily assembled and rolled in. From Normandy to the Tet Offensive to Somalia, the Balkans, and the bombing of the USS Cole, the deadly exposure of American military bodies is always inevitable, but it is never acceptable, and the fantasy of the armored body inured to pain and harm helps to quash this tension, to hold out the promise of exerting military might without putting flesh and blood on the line. But when pain and bodily vulnerability do erupt, they constitute a sort of "scandal" to modern liberal conceits (Asad 1996). From the ground, though, it looks different. Ernie, an infantry platoon sergeant, told me that there were big improvements, "from flapping vinyl doors" on the Humvees in 2003 to increasingly hardened armor kits. But, he continued, the politicians who come to Iraq know their audience; over there they tell the soldiers all about how they're going to get them everything they need. Then on CNN you see them back in Washington saying that we need to cut funding and withdraw. Ernie erupted in exasperation and then trailed off: "Motherfucker, I thought you just said when you were over here..." In Ernie's account there is a double elision: the politician lies to the soldier that he will be cared for and lies to the public that the soldiers will continue to be endangered in the first place.

It is this distinctly modern and politically soothing fantasy of the uninjurable soldier body that Buck-Morss locates in the writing of German author Ernst Jünger, who had himself been injured in World War I. According to Jünger, "*Technology is our uniform*" [...]. In the 'great mirror' of technology, the image that returns is displaced, reflected onto a different plane, where one sees oneself as a physical body divorced from

sensory vulnerability” (Buck-Morss 1992, 32). Protection and vulnerability, the objectification of pain and the ability to deny or overcome it, all go together. “The armored, galvanized body with its metallic surface and sharp-angled face provides the illusion of invulnerability” (ibid., 38). But this illusion is shattered by war. What appears to be a hardened, hermetic, impermeable, and reflective surface turns out to be quite porous and peculiarly susceptible. The absolutes posed by the idea of armor are like the absolutes of the dramatic language of sovereign violence: life or death, invincible or exposed. But the lived experience of armor—of its political charge, its physical specificities, its salience for military doctrine and tactics—is often partial and contingent: partial penetration, partial protection, partial recovery, or partial use of an injured limb.

ARMOR AND ITS DISCONTENTS

It’s not surprising that the weapons and protective gear that are soldiers’ tools—and that threaten them when wielded by enemies—are objects of great preoccupation. But what is surprising is the amount of anxiety and ambivalence that seems to surround these things. This is not least because they are cumbersome, uncomfortable, exhausting burdens—they chap your skin and stiffen your joints and slow you down. This itself has a historical dimension: on more than one occasion, I heard soldier talking among themselves or with elder veterans about the comparative advantage in mobility enjoyed by American soldiers in Vietnam, their bodies armored only lightly or not at all. It has serious consequences for the laboring body, too: the 33 bulky pounds of the I-vest must be borne by the soldier’s body for days, weeks and months at a time, contributing to the orthopedic and repetitive strain injuries from which many soldiers suffer, even if undiagnosed or only at sub-clinical levels.

But the discomfort has another root: soldiers' own knowledge—some of it technical, some of it personal, some of it folkloric or secondhand—about the true limitations of the technology meant to protect them and the true lethality of the weapons used against them. A lot of talk I heard from soldiers about their gear had to do with its actual or possible or anticipated failure to protect them. Body armor, Kevlar, the plating on the Humvee and Bradleys and tanks, and the American military's formidable bomb detection and disposal and electronic countermeasures might, from a certain angle, appear to stand on their own, signs of tactical and technological superiority, and of the safety and inviolability of American soldiers' bodies. But in practice, and in soldiers' talk, all these things existed in relation to insurgents' armor-piercing bullets and RPGs and the artillery shells, antitank mines, shaped charges, and triggering mechanisms from which IEDs are fashioned. Bullard's souvenir piece of shrapnel goes with the gouged chest plate that let it get close to him, but not too close. It goes with the five Bradleys and several more armored Humvees that his troop used up and the dozens of IED strikes they rolled through. His story of survival and grievous injury goes with the story of the other soldiers in his vehicle when the bomb hit, all of whom were killed. This is the uneasy obverse of the invincible-looking armed and equipped figure of the soldier invoked at the beginning of this discussion.

So the spectacle of the technologically enhanced and protected body is interwoven with the spectacle of its extreme vulnerability. While the drama of sovereign violence surges just beneath the surface of public discourse, for soldiers it is both a far more immediate preoccupation and also a matter of course, the stuff of anticipatory fears and practical concerns in a way that it doesn't for those not facing direct exposure to war. Take, for example, an ad in *Army Times* for Revision "Mission Critical Eyewear"—ballistic glasses. Accompanying the warning "IN JUST THE BLINK OF AN EYE, YOU

CAN LOSE AN EYE” is an image of a soldier’s darkened face covered by plastic lenses, one of them reflecting a menacing fireball. The text reads,

April 2006. Nighttime mission outside Fallujah. “That blast was so strong it threw me around like no tomorrow...” This gunner was ready with Revision Sawfly™ Eyewear. His vehicle was rocked. Shrapnel flew. His sight was saved. IEDs don’t come with warning signals. You have to be ready. Ready for the worst. Ready with the best. And that’s Revision Eyewear. Powerful ballistic protection. Flawless distortion-free optics.

“It’s funny how just one little piece of plastic can keep you in the fight for another month or the rest of your life...”

—J.B. USMC, 5th Marine Regiment

In the photo, the IED’s fireball spreads its reflected likeness across the soldier’s protected eyes. When we look at him we see him looking at it, apart from it, safe, shielded—“great mirror of technology” indeed. Though of course this image is not for us, civilians, but for the soldier who read *Army Times* and who are the market for ballistic glasses, invited to see themselves, as Buck-Morss writes, “as a physical body divorced from sensory vulnerability” (Buck-Morss 1992, 32). An exhibit in the 1st Cavalry Division museum at Ft. Hood offers a similar display: a pair of Wiley-X™ sunglasses with a piece of shrapnel lodged in them. On the wall next to them is a photo of the soldier who was wearing them, his face lacerated and running blood—even superficial head wounds bleed profusely—but his eyes presumably intact and his mouth in a tight grin. Even as the Revision ad casts the soldier as a consumer responsible for his or her own bodily safety, the museum image elides the fact that stocks of military protective equipment are being worn out and depleted at a rate that leaves soldiers under-equipped. But both images hold out the redeeming promise of protective technology, its ability to keep the soldier prepared, safe, whole, and “in the fight.”

Sitting around the lounge at the Foundation, I would routinely hear soldiers declaiming the fallibility of body armor, voicing their skepticism of its spectacular promise. Frank, a truck driver who was getting ready for his first combat deployment, complained to me at agitated length one day about the newer, lighter, more effective armor that Blackwater private security contractors had but that the Army was unable to provide its soldiers. Another time, I remember sitting out on the Foundation porch talking to Frank and Petey, who had not deployed either, as the two traded a series of authoritative tidbits about the weaknesses of the I-vest. Sure, they said, it would protect you from 7.62 mm AK rounds at range. But not necessarily a 9-mil up close, even though the fabric alone was supposed to—there had been news stories about that, about the plates giving way—and definitely not a .45 or an armor-piercing round. And what about knives? As for wearing your vest inside the FOB while you were working or going about your business, what you had to worry about in there were mortars, and if one hit near you, well, there was only so much the vest could do for you. Even then, there were all those parts of you that weren't covered.

There was something mildly sensational about the way they handed these secondhand facts back and forth, something arguably more powerful than the precise truth or accuracy of their technical claims about the armor. It was a frisson of scandal, of speaking a suppressed truth: they tell you to wear this vest to protect yourself, but what exactly it can protect you from is unclear, and at any rate probably isn't what they say it is. Like the Ernie's jaded, distrusting exasperation with the visiting politician: "Motherfucker...." Underneath the government's armor and the enemy's bullets, it's your own flesh on the line, and some actuarial calculation has been made about how much pain and damage your body can be expected to endure. Even though Frank and Petey were sitting safely on a porch in Texas, months away from being deployed, all this talk

about the chinks in the armor helped give shape and logic to the threat that lay over the horizon, in the future. And there was maybe a trace of excitement in it too, a dramatizing force. These guys had far more immediate problems that they talked about all the time: anxious wives, cars to fix, bills and debts, grinding pains in their joints, and dickheaded, venal bosses who didn't treat them right. It revealed the way that even then, on the porch, smoking cigarettes and bullshitting, they were already vulnerable, already exposed, time and circumstance bringing them ever closer to danger.

Armor protects you, but not completely. Bombs, bullets and mortars can kill you, but not unerringly. You and your body are somewhere in the middle. It is as if, when things are operating smoothly, the gear and weapons are like a part of you—this is the point of all the discipline after all, always wearing your I-vest, always carrying your weapon. When their function is suddenly called into question, though—when they fail, or when their capacity hasn't yet become second nature to you—suddenly they seem alien, no longer part of you. There is just you, naked and exposed, surrounded by indifferent or hostile machinery. And there is the uncertainty, resentment and simple curiosity that this exposure calls up. At least that's what I thought when I was sitting with a group of soldiers one day and BJ, an E-4 scout who had done a tour in Iraq, started talking about turning in his TA-50, the whole lot of gear that he had been issued when he joined his unit and thus was now accountable for. TA-50 includes everything: clothing, rucksack, cold-weather gear. As is often the case, a lot of this stuff had just sat in his closet unused for his entire enlistment. In the shuffle between units and assignments, he had taken a different set of body armor and Nomex to Iraq. But now he was laughing about turning this stuff in. He and some buddies from his unit had abused a bunch of the equipment to see what would happen to it. They shot the shit out of the SAP-I plates—though it barely left a scratch—and tried to set the Nomex on fire—not much happened. One of them

made his gas mask into a bong. The other guys sitting around smiled knowingly as he talked. The product of boredom, sure. They would say they were doing it for fun. But it was like they were trying to turn these miraculous technologies inside out, to subject them to the forces they were supposed to withstand and see if they really could handle it: shoot what is bulletproof, burn what is fireproof, fill with poisonous vapors the thing meant to purify your air. It's hard to imagine not having some aggression toward the technology that, for better or for worse, makes it possible for your body to be exposed to bullets, fire, fumes.

This logic is not new: even in liberal democracies, as Talal Asad points out, the exposure of soldiers to violence has always been balanced against an indefinitely extensible notion of “military necessity” (Asad 1996, 299). But at the meatier level of the body, there has also long been an experimental dimension to exposure as well, the flip side of BJ and his friends’ “experiments” on their protective equipment: soldiers’ subjected bodies serve as both means and ends for testing the limits of human biology. The horrific experiments of the Nazi doctors subjected Jewish prisoners to extremes of temperature and pressure and to the ravages of hepatitis, all in the name of determining the limits to which the bodies of German soldiers, sailors and pilots could be subjected as they parachuted from planes, swam through freezing waters, or were injected with vaccines—how to keep the soldiers alive, as they themselves were being killed, so that they could continue killing (Agamben 1998). Now, in a poignant biopolitical conflation, soldiers are their own guinea pigs: whole battalions wear sensors inside their helmets to track the force of the explosions to which they are exposed, data that can be cross-referenced with TBI symptom rates or used as a basis for performing further screening

when the soldiers return.²⁸ The damage to the soldier becomes more data, more technology, for the instrumental maintenance of his body, for keeping him alive and “in the fight.” In an inversion and extension of Foucault’s biopolitical axiom that “one has to be capable of killing to go on living” (Foucault 1988, 137), the soldier has to be capable of surviving in order to go on killing.

The body is an unstable, fleshy fulcrum between the apparently opposing but actually complicit forces aiming to destroy it and to carry it forward intact into the next moment of killing and being able to be killed. But this is the starting point, the condition of possibility, not the end of things. That is, it’s not a question of whether armor does or doesn't work, whether soldiers are being deliberately neglected or unnecessarily exposed or carelessly underequipped. The armor *does* work. Wileys protect your eyes, vests stop bullets and shrapnel, and armored Humvees can weather IEDs with nothing but a flat tire. But the work is complex and contingent, enabling and constraining, protective and terrifying. Instead of protecting the soldier unequivocally, it encapsulates him in the nervous tension between the phantasmagoric technological empowerment of the body and the felt vulnerability that technologized “invincibility” only intensifies. In this sense it is not so much the definitive facticity of claims about equipment—by soldiers, or their superiors, or the manufacturers, or commentators or politicians—that is significant as the precarious state that it engenders. Because circumstances are so changeable, so many elements are involved, and the capacities of weapons and equipment may not be known until they are tested to their limits, until potential becomes kinetic and then comes to rest again. What soldiers say with their fearful or descriptive or playful talk is an articulation of this ambiguous, suspended, vulnerable position.

²⁸ See, e.g., <http://www.army.mil/-news/2009/09/01/26829-helmet-sensors-providing-data-that-may-decrease-brain-injury/>; <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=48660>.

OPERATING EXPOSED

In the combat zone, there is a balance to be struck, a cultivated operational knowledge, one that comes in large part from firsthand experience, about what can hurt you and what can't. If that control isn't mastered, or if it is demolished by trauma or chaotic circumstances, out comes the anxiety and terror of being utterly unprotected despite the physical burden and techno-superior claims of armor. So you need an intellectual knowledge of what the weapons and armor can do for you and do to you, but it also demands a kind of bodily *habitus* as well, an ability to take in the sensory indications of danger and act on them without having to think too hard about it first. When you hear a shot, is it passing close by? Is it accurate or random? Is it of sufficient caliber to penetrate your vest, the window of your Humvee, the side of your tank? That RPG—they move slow enough to see and sometimes to dodge—will it come straight toward you, or will it loop to one side because its fins are bent from being carelessly stashed in some cellar? And when you don't do that and you get hurt, a medic from one of the 1st Cav brigades told me, all it means is that “you forgot to duck.”

Dana, an engineer, was in a small village in Anbar Province building a road the first time she heard a mortar strike. She told me the story in a tone of anxious, grinning hilarity. She had been added to her unit late and everyone else there had been around for a while, was used to the sound. The mortar screamed in and exploded and she dove to the ground, and her friend just looked at her and smirked, unperturbed: “Dude, that was like fifty feet away!”—out of range, on the other side of a wall of hescos and sandbags. “Dude, welcome to hell!” Dana exclaimed to herself. She laughed as she related the story amused by her former self's overreaction even as she performed it in the telling. After a while, she said, she got used to the constant and inaccurate mortaring. They would play a

game, trying to tell the incoming from their own outgoing fire. The explosions became domesticated, no longer a new and unthinkable hell. Instead they were a source of practical knowledge—when to dive and when not—and even of distracted speculation.

Lacking this knowledge can render you ineffective as a soldier. Ernie had a new guy as his driver one day when his platoon found itself charging into a firefight. Small-arms fire pinged against the side of their truck and the kid started to freak out.

They started shooting and he heard *dink dink, dink dink*. And he says, “Hey sarge, what’s that?” And I says, “That’s the engine cooling down, man.” You know how engines make a noise when they cool down like *dink, dink?* [*Ernie and I both laugh*] “That’s just the engine cooling down, the metal shrinking back down.” He goes “Really?” I go, “Yeah, don’t worry about it.” His knuckles were white. He’s a dark-skinned—he’s a Mexican, he’s like darker than me, and his knuckles were white. He wouldn’t let go of that steering wheel for nothing. And the rounds are going *dink dink dink*. We got out, took care of business, came back in. “Y’aright man?” He goes, “Yeah, I’m fine.” I said, “All right, let’s go.” He goes, “OK.” I go, “Let’s go.” He goes, “I can’t move my legs!” [*more laughter*] “All right, don’t worry about it. Take a couple deep breaths, drink some water.” The dude, his hands were cramped like this and he couldn’t let go of the steering wheel. I said, “All right, you’re no good no more.”

It was important to understand the *dink dink dink* as the sound of the Humvee’s hardened steel and armored windows *stopping* enemy rounds. It was the sound of safety. But Ernie’s soldier didn’t know that; or if his brain knew it, his body didn’t. It hadn’t accustomed itself to the specifics of its enabled and vulnerable state. Like Dana diving to the ground because she didn’t know, her body didn’t know, that she was safe.

Operating in conditions of exposure demands a complex synthesis of intellectual knowledge, emotional discipline and bodily disposition. Ernie said that every time his platoon went out on patrol they would play the Blue Öyster Cult song “Don’t Fear The Reaper” over the radio. “If you go out there scared, you’ll make fuckin’ mistakes. But if you go out there and you know that there’s a chance, you’re not scared no more. So don’t fear the reaper, baby!”

MOVEMENT TO CONTACT

The problems of vulnerability posed by small-arms fire and IEDs only *become* problems within the greater frame of how the kind of violence that happens in Iraq is structured, whether it is called terrorism, counterinsurgency, guerilla warfare, asymmetrical warfare, or whatever else. The commonplace for it is war with “no front line.” In what may be the most galling and unnerving vulnerability of them all, easy targets are everywhere, as are the weapons that can destroy them, and the enemy is nowhere. This vulnerability is foundational to the kind of counterinsurgency war prevailing in Iraq, one that combines conventional combat, including armed patrols, armored vehicles and air strikes, with “security”—the maintenance of safety and order—and the reconstruction of physical and governmental infrastructure. Like the technologically extended soldier’s body that becomes more vulnerable and requires more protection the more its capacities are enhanced, the occupying military force needs a massive sustainment apparatus to supply, shelter, feed, maintain, and equip its “kinetic” operations at the same time as its corresponding logistical and reconstruction tasks demand a massive amount of security if they are to carry on at all. Simply moving supplies and people across the landscape is essentially a tactical operation, requiring armored vehicles, armed escorts and extensive planning. The surveillance and compartmentalization of the native people, the barbed wire, Jersey barriers, checkpoints, and watchtowers that all serve this end constitute what Achille Mbembe calls “the spatialization of colonial occupation,” a landscape in which space itself is “the raw material of sovereignty and the violence it carried with it” (Mbembe 2003, 26). But in spreading itself everywhere in order to control and reconstruct the landscape, the occupying force paradoxically offers a vast plethora of targets to insurgent fighters.

While the kinds of targets that the occupiers present are ostensibly manifold—vehicles, buildings, installations, roads, construction sites, and even intangibles like “security” itself—these things are all made targets by the presence of soldiers’ bodies. Occupying space, the soldier becomes vulnerable, a part of that “raw material of sovereignty” and its attendant bodily destruction. Bullard said that right in the middle of their area of operations was a one-mile stretch of road that was constantly mined with IEDs. They had to drive up and down it all the time, not only to get places, but just to “clear” that stretch of highly-trafficked road, making it, in the process, an ever-easier target for insurgents who wanted to kill U.S. troops. He said it was stupid, wasting lives by sending people up and down the roads just to clear them. “Once you leave a spot, it’s no longer clear.”

This vulnerability has an offensive as well as a defensive aspect. Space itself becomes the strategic objective under tactical doctrines of “terrain denial”—making it impossible for the enemy to occupy a given area—and “movement to contact”—finding the enemy, making “initial contact with the smallest force possible, consistent with protecting the force,” avoiding “decisive engagement,” and maintaining “maximum flexibility” (FM 3-90 Ch. 4). Such practices entail their own forms of vulnerability for soldiers. Scouts—like Bullard, BJ, Buck, and others I met—call themselves, with no small amount of pride, “bullet catchers,” and they described their terrain denial and movement to contact missions as “driving around waiting to get shot at.”

There’s a bit of hyperbolic Army folklore that says that the scout’s average lifespan in combat is twelve minutes—or five minutes, or 13 seconds, etcetera, depending on who you ask. Hyperbolic, but the point is that movement to contact is a deliberate exercise in vulnerability, a fact implicitly acknowledged by the Field Manual’s dry phrasing, which recommends limiting the size of the engaging force—the scouts—to an

expendable quantity in order to “protect” the main force. The task of movement to contact is not just to survive in order to be able to find, surveil and kill the enemy. It is also for soldiers put their own bodies on the line, to offer themselves up as targets. But even this suggests a somewhat straightforward division of means and ends, a decision over how much exposure is worth risking in the pursuit of a larger objective. The thing is, scouts are trained to operate aggressively, undetected, and in small numbers near or behind enemy lines. Despite the morbid absurdity of “catching bullets,” scouts set out to do it on purpose. But in the insurgent/counterinsurgent geography of Iraq, all soldiers become bullet catchers. Engineers, logistical personnel and truck drivers all expose themselves to attack just to accomplish the mundane support tasks—delivering fuel, food and water, repairing roads and vehicles—on which combat operations depend. In this sense, anyone out on the road—and not least the Iraqi civilians—is engaged in a sort of movement to contact merely in the process of trying to get where they’re going in one piece.

Elaine Scarry, following Carl von Clausewitz, usefully defines war as a “contest of injuring” (Scarry 1987). But her framework—like Benjamin’s interest, after Marinetti, in the invincible “metallization” of the soldier or what Mbembe calls the “metallic” fusion of body and weapon that characterizes the suicide bomber (Mbembe 2003)—is concerned with the subjectivity and the logic of the party doing the injuring. It seems clear, though, that there is also a lot of important work involved in being the party who is *available to be injured*—on catching the bullets, as it were. The discourse of strategic warfare tends to regard injury—“collateral damage” done to noncombatants, but also harm to soldiers themselves—as something secondary to the true strategic objectives of war. As Scarry points out, though, this inevitable damage can’t be organized into a neat separation of means and ends. The injured are not “accidentally” in the way of objectives;

they are the means of achieving objectives, and by extension, an objective in and of themselves (Scarry 1987, 74). This is no less the case for soldiers themselves than it is for civilians on the battlefield, and its subjective implications for soldiers are, I would argue, just as complex and just as hard to see.

METAL

Soldiers are generally familiar—comfortable, even—with a certain level of instrumental objectification of their bodies and the enabling *anaesthesia* of bodily discipline. But the kind of felt vulnerability that counterinsurgency war in particular seems to entail takes that shock of exposure to a particularly acute point of intensification that finds its outlet in soldiers' preoccupation with the hardened plates and high-velocity fragments that surround their bodies and structure their vulnerability, even if metal never touches skin. Ernie's story about the reassuring, metal-on-metal *dink dink dink* of small-arms fire bouncing off the side of the Humvee, for example, segued into a second tale: the insurgents began using armor-piercing rounds, which the Geneva Convention outlaws for use against human targets and which are thus forbidden to U.S. and Coalition forces. These rounds sound like a sledgehammer hitting the side of the truck, Ernie said, and they just go right through. One day they took apart the gunner's shield from their turret after it had been hit by one of them.

The bullet itself, the actual penetrator, is still intact. It's like tungsten [much harder than the lead of a conventional bullet]. You pull it out, it's not even bent. It's like, went through all that metal and didn't even bend. And they're using that against people, against soldiers, not against equipment and vehicles.

Like Bullard's SAPI plate and shrapnel fragment, you could look at the gunner's shield and the tungsten core of an AP round side by side, see the force each had unleashed on

the other, and imagine the body, your body, hunkered just on the other side of that riven metal, or in place of it. *They're using that against people.*

Several steps up the scale of destruction is the explosively-formed penetrator, the deadliest component used for IEDs in Iraq. An EFP is a round, open-topped canister packed with explosive and capped with a shallow dish of copper, steel or tantalum—dense metals with high melting points. It looks like a soup pot with the lid on upside down. The physics of detonation transforms this thin metal lid into a compact, white-hot, high-velocity slug. Armor can absorb or deflect bullets and fragments of shrapnel, but EFPs go right through layers and layers of it, in one side and out the other and through whatever is in between. They are for use against armor. Unlike the grenades and AKs and conventional explosives that can be turned against a neighbor or a thief or a sectarian rival, EFPs are specifically for killing American soldiers. No one else in Iraq is surrounded by so much hardened metal—hardened but not impermeable. Extension and new vulnerability and new protection swarm and leapfrog past one another. In the current state of things, an EFP strike is a “catastrophic kill,” not the couple of casualties that a conventional IED will produce. The vehicle is destroyed, the people inside die. “Brother, there ain’t nothing in our inventory that’ll stop that thing,” Dime told me.

[A]fter I’ve seen what happened to friends of mine, and what happened to heavily armed vehicles, you think you’re in a suit of armor, it’s a goddamn façade! Are you kidding me? [...] It goes right through an Abrams [tank], it’ll go right through it like a hot knife through butter. And I’m talking about 64 inches of depleted uranium, one of the hardest substances known to man—that’s why we use it on a tank. That goes right through it, brother. [...*P*]hew—all the way through it, and whatever’s next to it, whatever’s around it gets burned to shit.

The first IED that Dime lived through, sitting almost prone in the driver’s hole beneath the front slope of the tank, a massive slab of ceramic and depleted uranium composite, he said he felt the penetrator slide past his legs. Everyone else in the tank, in the main

compartment, was killed. Metal that cuts through metal, the EFP totally destabilizes the armored form and turns it against itself and its fleshy, human contents. It fills the insides of a vehicle with the fractured bits of its own armor and structural members—this is called backspall, the armor that protects you becoming a cloud of shrapnel that will kill you. And it ignites whatever will burn or explode—the bullets and rockets and grenades that you would turn against the enemy cooking off inside a confined space. It is a truly dire exposure.

Benjamin's assessment of the human fragility birthed at the dawn modern warfare is no mere coincidence or poetic leap. Military historian John Keegan notes that it was the beginning of the twentieth century that saw the rise of "'thing-killing' as opposed to man-killing weapons"—anti-tank mines, armor-piercing and explosive munitions—that "invalidated the restraints" that had just recently been inscribed in internationally agreed-upon rules of war. While international law seeks increasingly to moderate wars impact on human bodies, military technology conspires to the opposite end, Keegan argues, producing "wounding agents deliberately conceived to defeat the skills" of military doctors (as cited in Asad 1996, 298). Though perhaps this overstates the intentionality of such innovation. It is true, as Keegan points out, that napalm and antipersonnel mines and numerous other weapons are designed, in their way, to inflict the maximum possible amount of damage on the human organism. But the deeper logic to be read here is the way that exposure to "thing-killing" weapons indifferent to the distinction between people and things makes the soldier himself into a thing, a sort of back-projected, highly vulnerable extension of the armor that the AP round or the EFP is meant to pierce.

A unit from Ernie's brigade found a massive weapons cache during their 2006-07 tour, including 2,500 EFPs. The things are so decisively lethal that they said for each one they found it was two lives saved. Of course it's an average: an array of half a dozen will

go off, only one will find a target, but it will kill ten soldiers. But the candor of this numerical equivalence is staggering, the reduction of a life to a thing in this way. Like how Bullard's gouged SAPI plate is a life saved, and you can look at it hanging on the wall. The way that a pair of sunglasses with a metal splinter wedged into it is a pair of eyes that remain whole. The purpose of each bundle of steel pipe, TNT and copper, sitting in rows by the hundreds in a dusty, secret warehouse seen so clearly: each one two lives, as if they had the names of their future victims written on them already, the way that American servicemembers wrote aggressive jingoistic slogans, vulgar jokes, and patriotic memorials on the cannons, bombs and missiles unleashed on Iraq in the first months of the war. It's easy to look at something like that and see nothing but the straightforward dehumanization of the enemy other, but is there not also something else going on that makes these little metal epistles suddenly seem as personal as a postcard, a love note, an epitaph?

The armor—the metal, but also the Kevlar and Lexan windowpanes and ceramic plates and Nomex fire suits, the helmets and vests and Bradleys and Humvees—is what makes movement to contact—this intentional vulnerability, this offering up of the body as a target—a tenable exercise. In movement to contact, in the whole peculiar, technologically mediated state of vulnerability that soldiers find themselves in, apparently clear distinctions between who is doing the injuring, who is suffering it, what its goal is, and how final or effective it is against its victims all break down. Mbembe contrasts the conventional soldier to the suicide bomber, noting that conventional weapons—a tank, a missile—are visible and separate from the body, whereas the suicide bomber's weapon is so intimately linked to his or her own body that the body itself becomes a weapon. “The body is transformed into a weapon, not in a metaphorical sense but in the truly ballistic sense,” not a person but moving, lethal matter (Mbembe 2003,

36) that “becomes a piece of metal” (ibid., 37). Indeed, the initialism G.I., which evolved into shorthand for soldiers themselves, came originally from the abbreviation for “galvanized iron” stamped on pieces of Army equipment. In World War I, soldiers called German artillery rounds “G.I. cans” after the barracks garbage cans that bore this stamp. This now slightly outdated descriptor lives on in “G.I. Bill” and “G.I. Joe,” so that even these soldierly artifacts far removed from the battlefield still carry with them a palimpsest stamp of abject, instrumentalized and weaponized metal: in this curious polysemy, the soldier becomes metal, the same indifferent substance that is put to work in various ways to kill him and to keep him alive.

Thus while Mbembe’s contrast between soldier and suicide bomber is evocative, it sells short the vulnerability of the soldier’s own “metallized” body, the sort of vulnerability revealed in Bullard’s story or Dime’s or Ernie’s, the experience of being intentionally subjected to attack in the name of higher tactical demands. Clad and sheltered in armor, the soldier’s body is a weapon and a target at the same time; it is only one because it is also the other. And in the very act of “catching bullets” as an offensive tactic, the distinction between weapon and target breaks down. Beneath the spectacle of the armored surface, visible through its cracks and fissures of technical limitation and fallibility, lies the vulnerability of sovereign power itself.

This theoretical ambivalence translates, for the real bodies inhabiting it, to practical, experiential contingency. That is, sometimes, in some circumstances, against some things, the armor protects you, and other times it doesn’t. Indeed, the soldier hangs on the horns of a peculiar iatrogenic dilemma, suffering in ways only possible because of the technology that keeps him alive. There is no good word available to describe the complex provisionality of the kind of protection that the soldier enjoys and is subject to. The dramatic language of sovereign violence tends to reduce things to absolutes that then

have to be debunked or qualified—total vulnerability or complete invincibility—but that brook no ambiguity. It is not even necessarily helpful to understand these two extremes as opposites or poles on a continuum, for as a soldier can be killed or severely injured while aggressively patrolling the landscape or driving a tank, his dramatic empowerment and traumatic exposure are arguably simultaneous. This ambiguity, however, is something with which soldiers are intimately familiar. Even at the most practical level, a working and experiential knowledge of the capacities and limitations of weapons and armor is essentially a metric for thinking about your own body's vulnerability: what forces you're exposed to, what you need to be ready for, what you can or can't withstand. Bullard's experience took him to the limit of what a body could tolerate—everyone else in his Bradley was killed. But he himself was far from unscathed. There was no invulnerability, not even the illusion of it. And obliterated in the process is any clear division between flesh and metal, armored form and hostile world. The barrier of invincibility is broken. The shrapnel still harbored in Bullard's flesh is testament to his mastery over violence but also his fundamental vulnerability to it. But it testifies not as high drama but as something ordinary.

At the Foundation office Bullard would snip the tiny shafts off of thumbtacks and hide them in the cushions of the office chairs at the Foundation for people to sit on. It struck me as a brutal prank until I sat on one myself and it barely even stung; it didn't break the skin. It was a curious mimesis of the metal prickling out of his own skin.

SPAGHETTI (GORE, MADNESS)

At one end of things are heat and weight, which are felt but cannot be seen and which therefore are thought to be nebulous and mute in their meaning, which aren't talked about because you had to be there for them. At another end are those things that are talked

about cagily or held back because they are too easy to see and to understand and their meaning is too obvious and too terrible. They are the things that everyone, civilians and soldiers alike, already knows about war but would never bring up in polite conversation: the dead bodies in all forms, the things you cannot not see. As Carolyn Nordstrom points out in her ethnography of the Mozambican civil war, the terror of the grotesque is not the terror of secrecy and uncertainty, as with disappearances and kidnappings, though Iraq is also full of this kind of terror and soldiers do talk about it (Nordstrom 1997). With the grotesque the problem is being able to see exactly what happened, having too much information about something that ought to have remained secret, the uncanny terror of the return of the repressed (Freud 2003). This is what gives the grotesque the nervous salaciousness, the taboo, of sex: revelatory and obscene, in isolation it's shocking, but too much of it is numbing.

Mikhail Bakhtin celebrates the grotesque as a demotic subversion of a neatly bounded and hierarchical world (Bakhtin 1968; Stallybrass and White 1986). In its classical formulation, the grotesque is all about opposition—license versus oppression, low versus high, the open, earthy and honest grotesque body versus the closed-off, hypocritical classical body. The grotesque body is a relational body, open to the world and to the inspection and response of others (Bakhtin 1968); it is social and susceptible and thereby also symbolically flexible. The meaning of dead bodies is highly malleable, but once out there in circulation, they are so charged with significance that they cannot *not* mean, even if that meaning is unstable and fiercely contested (Verdery 1999). Through image and imagination, the dead are assimilated into narratives (Klima 2002; Feldman 1994; Feldman 2004). Nordstrom, for instance, describes how in Mozambique, for example, “the grotesque ... is a double-edged sword: it is used by military and paramilitary forces to effect terror and thus control; and it is used by the citizenry as a

way of defeating the holds of terror” (1997, 156). The spectacle of abused and destroyed bodies is a powerful means of domination, but its excess is also a basis for critiquing the wrongness and inhumanity of war itself. Media images can marshal bare life into scenes of “moral pedagogy” and national suffering (Caton 2006; Allen 2004). From the safe, mediating distance of the news or a movie screen or a political discourse, even the most gruesome death in war can and almost always is cast as sacrifice. The grotesque is by its nature political, even moralizing.

For the soldier there is no such neat division between what gore might mean for a perpetrator and what it might mean for a victim, because he is both at once. He is stuck in the middle of this relation because this relation is the empty, undetermined center of the play of sovereign violence: sometimes the terror is meant for the soldier, sometimes he is merely an incidental witness to it, and sometimes he, or his side, is the one responsible for it. Even though gore and bodily destruction are not to be spoken of in polite company, “taboo” doesn't really capture their force here. Agamben’s assertion that taboo is a sort of ethnological mystification that “dissolve[s] the specificity of *homo sacer*”—life that can be killed—“into an assumed originary ambiguity of the sacred” (Agamben 1998, 74) provides some useful ethnographic traction here. As they appear on the battlefield, in the zone of exception, gory bodies do not carry a meaning that is mysterious or transcendent or sacred; instead, they are a vulgar illustration of the material subjection of life. For the soldier in Iraq, the grotesque is a story about power that does not offer closure or redemption; it is not about freedom or resistance. It is about living in a body that is stuck in the messy, often horrific middle of things, in a place of simultaneous opposites.

Like heat and weight, being face to face with dead bodies and their parts is a difficult thing to understand: not many people have to see dead bodies, spectacularly ripped apart, they say. Not many people *get to*, is how Dime said it. But even for soldiers

for whom it becomes routine, gore seems is a spectacle, albeit a horrifying one, or at least a point of interest. Tim told me somewhat abashedly one day that seeing bodies on the relieved the boredom of long, uneventful patrols: “It sounds fucked up, but you’re like, ‘Cool!’” It’s the opposite of the silence and invisibility and banality of heat and weight, dramatic and in your face. It’s far easier to describe, given the vocabulary of images and associations available for death and violence, but fraught with taboo as well, a thing that must be kept back and perhaps that can be enjoyed as secret knowledge among those who have seen it firsthand.

Soldiers say that a body that has been blown up looks like spaghetti. I heard this again and again, its ring of texture and sheen, abject, undifferentiated mass, of forms that clump into knots or collapse into loose bits. “It was all Spaghetti-Os” when they went into the blown-up Bradley to pull out one of his fellow scouts, Buck told me flatly. We were drinking beer as he flipped through photos on his computer: “This is Baquba ...,” click. “That guy died ...,” click. “That’s the grove I told you about ...,” click. “He’s dead ...,” click. “He’s dead...,” click. These are—were—his friends.

Ernie kept his calm and jovial tone as he related some pretty gory stories, stories skating along whatever line separates humor and horror, fascination and fear. Suicide bombers trapped inside fortified checkpoints would just “paint the walls with red” when they exploded, he said. “And then you go through and clear and spray ‘em off, and 20 minutes later you’re back in business again.” When an IP standing next to him got shot through the chest, Ernie saw “ketchup” squirting out of him.

Dee was responsible for checking and recovering the electronics from vehicles that had been hit by bombs. This one, they knew everyone was dead inside, so she was the first one in, pulling the door open to find a rack of radio gear splattered in gore. She vomited on the spot, doubled over while one of her soldiers held the strap on the back of

her I-vest, and then she got to work. That night in the DFAC some of the guys from her unit brought her a plate of pasta with red sauce—a joke. I thought it seemed cruel but she said no, they did it to let her know it was okay, they only fucked with her because they considered her an equal, it was what they would have done to anyone. Confronted with a disintegrated, dead body, a living, whole body turns its own self inside-out for a moment: vomit. In a perverse way, the plate of pasta closes the gesture, gets everything moving in the right direction again. But maybe the spaghetti gets transformed, too, by having its name attached to this other thing—a reminder of the body’s capacity to invert suddenly and without warning. And it lingers, because in the wake of such destruction, nothing will ever be the same again.

What is spaghetti, this peculiar grotesquerie about? Does it domesticate the violence and loss? Is it a critique? Gallows humor? Is it a reminder, perhaps, that you are ultimately nothing more than the dumb matter that you eat, made whole and held together only by changeable circumstance? Despite all the armor, the body is open to a hostile world and can collapse into bits in the blink of an eye, at the speed of radio waves and electrons and pressure plate springs and hot metal. The pasta and red sauce are a reminder that nothing is normal and everything has become possible. Some body—your body—has been placed in a position where it is allowed to die.

Dime invoked spaghetti too, the pure horror of it, when he told me through tears about what had happened to his friend. “He hit an IED, and it was a considerably bad one. And the whole goddamn tank went up. And it turned him into goddamn mush.” As they left the FOB, they had raced to the gate, and the friend’s tank was just a little faster. Otherwise Dime would have been in front and would have taken the hit.

And that was supposed to be my tank. He ran over it and it hit right underneath his driver’s hole, and everything above his knees was turned into fucking spaghetti. Whatever was left, it popped the top hatch, where the driver sits, it

popped it off and it spewed whatever was left of him all over the front slope. And I don't know if you know ... not too many people get to see a body like that, and it, and it ... It destroyed the fucking tank, if you can imagine that. It was sitting on its hull, it blew the goddamn road wheels off, blew the fucking skirts off the side of it. [...] We went up there and I can remember climbing up on the slope, and we were trying to get everybody out, cause the tank was on fire and it was smoking. And I kept slipping on—I didn't know what I was slipping on, cause it was all over me, it was real slippery. And we were trying to get the hatch open, to try to get X out. My gunner, he reached in, reached in and grabbed, and he pulled hisself back. And he was like, "Holy shit!" I mean, "Holy shit," that was all he could say. And he had cut his hand. Well what he cut his hand on was the spinal cord. The spine had poked through his hand and cut his hand on it cause there was pieces of it left in there. And we were trying to get up and I reached down and pushed my hand down to get up and I reached up and looked up and his goddamn eyeball was sitting in my hand. It had splattered all up underneath the turret. It was all over me, it was all over everybody, trying to get him out of there. Trying to get him out of there, you know, before the tank burned up. We put what was left of him in a bag. And I don't know if you've ever taken a trash bag, and just taken like a wad of shit and just put it in the bottom of it and then tied it—and that's what we sent home to his mom and dad. Everything that was below his kneecaps was there because it was sitting down in the nose of the tank, but everything that was above it was pretty much mush, it was just shredded mush.

There is nothing comic here, only horror. Even in the middle of the event, it's insensible, unspeakable: "and it, and it..." "I didn't know what I was slipping on." The person is still there, and you have to "get him out of there," but he's everywhere and he's gone at the same time. The whole is gone, and the parts—the eye, the spine—aren't where they should be. A person reduced to a thing: *it* was slippery, *it* was all over, *that* was what we sent home. *He* wasn't simply killed, but literally destroyed. Through a horrific physics, there was somehow less of him than there had been before, transformed from person into dumb and impersonal matter. Death itself is different, the dead having been altered so dramatically. Dime was going to a funeral the next day.

It's bad enough it's a closed casket. Most military funerals are closed casket. They don't open them up anymore cause there's not a whole lot there anymore, brother. If there is, they don't even look like ... they don't even look right. They

look like dolls with as much makeup and stuff that they put back on 'em to make 'em look sorta human.

It might not be true, Dime's claim that "most" military funerals are closed-casket (though since he is in combat arms, he likely saw more than his share of them). But what matters is the overwhelming impact. Even in death you can't be human: the artifice meant to cover the excess of the body's destruction—the mortician's makeup—takes on an obscene and inhuman excess of its own. What does this say about life?

Gore is about the horror of a person being replaced by stuff that just a moment ago was a person. Ernie again—the first time out on patrol for one of his soldiers, so young he turned 18 on the flight to Iraq. A massive car bomb went off in the middle of Baquba.

We go up to the roof and start securing the area. And my boy Getz is like trying to throw up. Cause he says, "What's on the wall?" I said, "Don't worry about it, just calm down." "Is that a person? Is that a person?" Cause you know it looked like the outline of a person just got thrown against the wall like this. It was just ... all it was was wet. There wasn't nobody else. It was just wet. So when you got up to the roof you could see everything that happened, cause from the roof you could see a like perfect circle of just body parts and just explosions everywhere. And that was the first time he went out with us, the kid was throwing up. He's a hardcore infantry, Getz [...]. He came back, "Hey, I don't wanna go out with you guys no more. I don't know how you do it! I don't know how you do it!" Cause he knew. He knew we'd been hit before.

And then he trailed off. "Is that a person?" is the question, and he doesn't really answer. It looked like a person, "but there wasn't nobody," just sheen, texture, liquid. Getz's shock, his other question—"How do you do it?"—isn't just about the horror of witnessing something like that, to the extent that it's about that at all. It's not about the grief of Dime's story. It's about being exposed to the same kinds of forces that did it, because "He knew we'd been hit before." In this sense it doesn't matter if the body is Iraqi, American, whatever. What matters are the questions. If that can happen to you, are

you still a person? Will you still be one once the bomb goes off? Again, it's the zone of exception: anything can happen, and it can happen to you.

The soldier inhabits a bodily reality in which his own physical form could be extinguished at a moment's notice, and in which, under the burden of heat and weight, every step and breath is a further reminder of that destructibility. There is no symbolism or allegory in the disintegrated bodies the soldier sees, acts on, or finds himself suddenly touching. They just happen, unceremoniously, and the only narrative to which they can be assimilated in the immediate context is one of continued movement, action and perseverance, because grief and mourning are not safe, desirable or even possible there in the moment. The abjection of the spaghetti'd body, the entropic raw material of ordering violence, does not symbolize anything; law "comes to life" as "force without signifying" (Agamben 1998, 152). Indeed, because contemporary sovereign power insists on continuous exception to the law, thus "[draining] meaning and intelligibility from the law" (Caton 2006, 118). In this incoherence, a certain madness takes hold. Soldiers routinely invoked insanity to describe what being in Iraq was like: "Crazy is the best word for it"; "It's crazy—anything can happen." The zone of exception lends itself to certain madneses, as when, say, a car full of civilians speeds directly into a checkpoint and the terrified American soldiers kill everyone inside. Neither party to the encounter can make sense of the other's reasoning, and any sense of rational agency at work disappears into the "absent center" of this relation (Aretxaga 2004). The destroyed bodies are evidence of such craziness, of the things that can happen to you for no apparent reason.

Spaghetti is a way of mediating this madness in order to live with it. It doesn't have the grotesque's decodable representation and valuation on the one hand, and it's not about utter subjection to politics categorization on the other hand. It's somewhere in the

middle or off to the side, the nervous embodied abjection of being on what Begoña Aretxaga calls the “abject” side of the law (2004). *Standing for* nothing, spaghetti *is* the soldier’s abjection in the face of the law-making violence in which he participates. As Aretxaga writes of the Basque police officers who, even in full-body riot gear, feel themselves profoundly vulnerable to rock-throwing youths, soldiers both embody the law and are alienated from it. They can be punished for breaking it while those who seek to harm them—criminals, civilian collaborators, enemy combatants—remain protected by it. Soldiers, like Aretxaga’s police, are “the law’s abject side,” necessary for the order of the law to exist but outside of its recognition—they are its “phantasm” (Aretxaga 2004, 149).

“OUR JOB IS NOT TO DECIDE”

I have made a deliberate decision here to steer clear of direct engagement with the subject of killing—what soldiers say about it, how they feel about it, what it means, and so on. This is in a sense simply an outgrowth of the ethnographic material: soldiers spoke far more about feelings of vulnerability and exposure than they did about killing. It makes a certain kind of sense: while all only some soldiers find them in the position of exercising the right to kill, they all experience the defining condition of being able to be killed simply by virtue of being in a combat zone.

But there is also a sense in which the right and responsibility to kill carries a form of vulnerability within it that stems from the soldier’s abjection from the law, another peculiar involution of the calculus of bodily expendability for which the soldier is the currency. Chip, a retired scout and MP who done two tours in Iraq, told me he would always tell his soldiers, “‘Don’t never fear,’ because that’s the number one thing that gets soldiers killed.” Unlike Ernie’s injunction to “not fear the Reaper,” however, it wasn’t fear of the enemy he was talking about, but fear of sanction and punishment from one’s

own side. Soldiers were afraid to shoot when their or their comrades' lives depended on it because they feared violating one or another rule of engagement or law of war. "Soldiers are getting confused because they're scared they're gonna get prosecuted" and officers second-guess what's going on "because of the politics." Soldiers cannot be afraid of the consequences of their actions. Just as Ernie described the habitus of operating effectively while exposed—that you have to develop an alternative sense of your own bodily vulnerability, of your ability to be killed—Chip seems to suggest that this habitus also demands a certain detachment from any excessively strong sense of moralistic consequentiality about your ability to kill. Soldiers have to be able to do the mission without thinking twice about it, he said. Of course you take precautions: Chip described cordoning off a building where two shooters were hiding and clearing the whole surrounding area of bystanders so they could level it with an air strike. Still, the soldier's job is execution, not choosing the right targets or the right way to take them out. "Our job is not to decide."

All the same, you can't just make yourself into a cog in someone else's machine. This curious vulnerability of killing brings us back to Berlant's notion that "decision" is an inadequate model for how people actually inhabit their own actions and sense of agency. Even if ultimate authority lies elsewhere, as a soldier you're still invested with more than a little of that power. You might be a docile, disciplined body but you're not an un-sentient instrument. As that power flows through you, it leaves something behind, some excess or remainder that is not captured or fully dissipated by the sovereign mechanism. It doesn't show up as anything as obvious as guilt or remorse or regret. But it is there, and it lingers. "You dream about the targets you were issued," Chip said, his flat, earnest, run-on talk shifting not at all. "I have nightmares because I've killed people because that's my job." Sovereign is he who has no fear and no bad dreams.

Chapter 3: Phone Calls, Joint Pain, and Other Problems in the Reproduction of Life

STUCK

This chapter is about scenes that are, in one sense, at a level of remove from the visceral immediacy of the impacts of heat, weight, metal, and gore outlined in the previous chapter, because they are set at Ft. Hood, far from the combat zone; in another sense, they are on the very same plane as them because they hinge on the same raw material—the body kept alive and offered up to die—and the same problem of the often unremarkable labor of carrying on under such conditions. They are all scenes of what vulnerability looks like “at home” at Ft. Hood. I emphasize here as I do at the outset of the previous chapter that this is not to attribute cause and origin to the violence that happens in Iraq, as if the combat zone unleashes havoc on the previously whole and innocent world of Army life. After all, the violence of war is not some demon, a rampaging and metaphysically coherent entity that just needs to be banished back to where it came from; it comes from many things at once and is many things at once. But dividing the sensory imprint of deployment from the daily labor of accommodating the shadow and aftermath of war back in Texas does draw attention to the deep implication of these two sites 10,000 miles away from one another.

All three scenes are manifestations of the dense interrelationship between soldiers’ exposure or, for those who had yet to deploy, their imminent future proximity to combat violence, their subjection to institutional care and coercion, their intimate and interpersonal attachments, and their own sense of self. As with heat, weight, metal, and gore, this interrelationship hinges on the vulnerable raw material—the organs and sinews

and synapses, the twitches and senses and comportment—of the soldier’s body. They are problems of biological precarity, of how that precarity is accommodated and responded to in everyday life in scenes far from the actual battlefield. These scenes present the vulnerability of a body that “is and is not mine,” to use Butler’s words (2004). The bodies in these scenes are the instrument and property of a state institutional apparatus. They are interpersonally, intimately bound to other bodies. And they become alien and rebellious to the people inhabiting them. These are also scenes of the problem of the recognition of vulnerability, the struggle to make a felt, bodily precarity legible and communicable on a range of registers: subjective, intimate, diagnostic, institutional, and even as social, political and cultural problems worthy of attention. It is a set of conditions that make sense only against the background of state violence and the sovereign’s sway over life and death. But extreme scenes of life-and-death decision possess the concision of a trigger pull and the crude obviousness of a concrete T-wall. As Berlant suggests, *more ordinary* materializations of sovereign violence of the sort sketched here are actually *more complicated*, refusing to yield to any straightforward sense of agency, action and decision. As crazy as things are in Iraq, as soldiers would often remark, they are simpler there than they are back home in Texas. And that old saw about war being composed of long stretches of boredom punctuated by brief episodes of terror applies as much to the home front as to the combat zone. This chapter is an effort to attend, through a performance of these slow-moving and sometimes dull scenes of being stuck, to what Berlant calls “practical sovereignty”: “better ways to talk about activity oriented toward the reproduction of ordinary life: the burdens of compelled will that exhaust people taken up by managing and contemporary labor and household pressures” or day-to-day activities “that do not occupy time, decision or consequentiality in anything like the registers of autonomous self-assertion” (Berlant 2007, 757). The previous chapter

addresses vulnerability at the level of the senses—or rather, of shock, sense, tactility. Here I address give form to the way it is accommodated and molded in “the reproduction of daily life” in modes of practice and agency that are “interruptive,” “lateral,” “negative,” or “experimental,” in “stuck” temporalities where the action has ground to a halt and people are carrying the nervous and distracted business of living while they wait for the action to happen to them (Berlant 2007; Povinelli 2006; Taussig 1992).

HEAVINESS

I asked my friend Sarah one of my standard interview questions: did her husband, an Army logistics NCO, seem changed by his time in Iraq? He had just finished a 15-month tour. When she and I first met, he had just been extended, home by Christmas instead of by Labor Day. To my question she said yes and no. She could tell that certain things bothered him more, that certain things stressed him out, even though he hid it well and didn't talk about it. He could be pretty quiet anyway so she didn't worry about it much. But one thing she remembered: a few weeks after he got back, they were at the science museum in Chicago, where they had gone to visit his family. They crowded into a huge dark room with dozens of other visitors to watch an elaborate new weather simulation exhibit: there was wind and lightning and sudden peals of thunder. She didn't see him move or start or do anything and it was only minutes later, after they had left the exhibit and were walking down a crowded corridor, that she noticed how uncomfortable he seemed—tense, jumpy, quiet. Was something bothering him? Yes. Was it the sound from the exhibit that did it? Yes. And she left it at that. I asked her what it made her think. She said she just didn't want to think about what it was that he might have been reminded of. She didn't want to know what had instilled that lingering and disruptive bodily sensitivity to signs of violence and danger.

By way of contrast, she told me about a close friend, also a spouse of a frequently deployed NCO. Every time this woman returned home from work or running errands when her husband was gone, as she rounded the carefully planned curve of her street in an Army housing subdivision, she would picture in her mind a car with government plates parked at her front door and a chaplain and a couple of soldiers in shiny shoes and class As there to notify her that he had been killed. Every time. “Why would you think that?” Sarah wondered. “Why would you do that to yourself?”—a question that highlights, with the notion that a feeling is something that one “does” to oneself, the uneven and partial sense of agency that obtains when it comes to feelings. Sarah kept herself on an even keel by assiduously not allowing herself these kinds of horrific fantasies, not thinking the worst, indeed trying not to think about the whole thing at all—by no means a simple feat. “I’d rather not go there,” she said.

It is thus that the terrifying vulnerability of the human body that Benjamin so poetically noted (Benjamin 1969) extends beyond the individual soldier and the foreign battlefield. It is not the soldier alone who endures the vagaries of exception as agent, instrument and object of state violence. This precariousness also afflicts the soldier who has returned home and the spouses and parents and friends who remain bound to soldiers while they are away. The logic of such precarity lies not just, as the previous chapter elaborates, in the sensory imprints of bodily exposure, but also in the affective proximity of death as it travels through intimate attachments and the sorts of responses that it demands and provokes. While the state of exception may be above all a political condition (Agamben 1998), the bodies that are its currency are always social, always attached, always intimately implicated with others. Even—and perhaps especially—when it is thousands of miles away from home, the soldier’s vulnerable body, exists like all bodies “out in public,” to use Butler’s words. In its relation to other bodies, it

communicates by its visible presence, its terrifying absence, or the humming waves of tension it telegraphs along intimate bonds. We are, according to Butler, “attached to others, [and thereby] at risk of losing those attachments” (Butler 2004). A body does not necessarily have to be subject to extremes to be vulnerable, then—it is vulnerable simply because it is biologically and socially alive. The peril of vulnerability spreads outward from the soldier to those linked to him or her in a sort of generative contamination (Stewart 1991) that mingles attachment and exposure to the point of indistinction.

This is what Army spouses like Sarah and her friend mean when they say that “they also serve” or invoke their status as “the silent ranks”: that there is a state of war that happens in the sudden sense that your easygoing and implacable husband is silently crawling out of his skin as he stands next to you, or that violent death may reach you through the thing you value most and find you out of nowhere on the way home from the grocery store. This vulnerability is also a constant preoccupation. When I met soldiers and told them about my project, they would routinely enjoin to talk to the spouses—theirs or anyone else’s—because “they have the harder job.” When I talked to Army couples together, they would routinely remark that while the burdens were different for the soldier and the spouse, it was hard to say who had it worse. Lena, who worked in media and public affairs, said that deploying felt like leaving everything behind. When she got up from the table and left the room, her husband Harry told me, “She said she left everything behind. But *I* lost everything—she was *everything* to me!” Not that his end of things was necessarily worse, he said, but still, it was impossible to convey the stress of knowing that she was about to go run missions for five days and not be available. “How do you not talk to someone for five days when they’re going to war?” he demanded. “She knows she’s alive, she knows I’m alive,” but when she was out of reach, he had no such assurance. Kristen, whose boyfriend Simmons was a truck driver, said the same thing:

“You know they’re going on a mission, they can’t tell you where. ‘I’ll call you when I get back.’ ‘Well when are you gonna get back?’ And if they don’t call...” The possibility of loss—of a loved one’s life, of the reliability of connection that lets you know you can expect to hear from them, of, indeed, everything—hovers constantly. Kristen told me, “in regular everyday life you don’t have to sit around and wait to hear whether or not your husband’s dead.” Except that in this regular everyday life you do.

The main vector of this vulnerability, paradoxically, is knowledge and information: what information do you seek out about what is happening where your loved one is, what information does he or she share or hold back from you when you speak, what do you hold back from them? And more than anything else, how long do you have to wait between the moments of affirmation that let you know that everything is ok, the phone call or online chat message that lets you know, I’m alive, nothing happened today? How do you manage your anxiety and your imagination in the vast spaces of everyday life in between those brief moments? This endurance of separation is a major feature of Army life: waiting for a call, an email, a visit, for leave or the end of the tour or a PCS²⁹ that will bring you closer to home. We all know what it is like to wait, of course, or to endure an absence. But my informants said that even they themselves didn’t know “how long” a deployment of 12 months or 15 months really was—how it felt—until they were in the middle of it, or until they were preparing to face it for a second or third time. Normalized and stretched over this length, waiting becomes something qualitatively different, a defining feature under which life is reproduced rather than the unremarkable dead time breaking up the steady unfolding of meaningfulness and eventfulness.

The soldiers in Iraq can call, but they can’t receive calls, so wives and husbands and girlfriends and brothers and kids wait to hear from them. In a *Doonesbury* cartoon,

²⁹ PCS: permanent change of station, an assigned transfer from one installation to another.

Ray, one of the soldier characters, gets yelled at by his wife for missing their chat date because he got caught in a firefight out on patrol. During Desert Storm there weren't even affordable phones, just faxes and \$1000 phone bills. Now there are Defense Switched Network (DSN) phones set up in Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan—they call through a switchboard at Ft. Hood or whatever installation and then out to the handset hanging on a kitchen wall down the street in Killeen. Or there are phone cards, burning 85 cents a minute. Gene, an NCO who has done a couple of tours, spent thousands of dollars to call his fiancé Danielle three times a day from Kuwait when he was there. For the very lucky, satellite phones. And there is skype and Instant Messenger and various other text, audio and video internet chat options. Even on big FOBs with established infrastructure, access to all these things is limited: you have to find time in your own schedule, and then you have to wait in line for the phones or the computers. If there is an emergency—if the base or one of the units stationed at it has been attacked and people have been hurt or killed—there is a communications blackout for several days while the Army establishes the identities of the dead and wounded and notifies the families. The blackouts are especially scary, because the sudden lack of communication lets everyone at home know that something bad has happened without revealing what. You can call up the rear detachment command but they will say nothing; you can watch the news and speculate about what might have happened; rumors abound.

All this attention to phones and computers is noteworthy: in that classic muddling of medium and message, all the fears and fantasies about what news may come accrete around the technology itself, so that there is nothing so terrifying or so exciting—or both at once—as the sound of the phone ringing or the new message chime of the chat program or the email inbox. Other technologies can bring only bad news: the if-it-bleeds-it-leads TV news, they say, brings only news of IEDs and ambushes, scenes of disaster

and body counts; it cannot tell you anything good. The doorbell is similarly overdetermined, for in the right (or wrong) frame of mind all it suggests is the arrival of a notification detail there to let you know that your husband or wife is dead. Charlotte, married to a combat arms NCO who did three tours, served as the community-elected “mayor” of her military housing area. Since she worked at home, people were always stopping by, but when her husband was away she was adamant: call before you come over. The worst were the MPs, who would stop by to check in during their rounds: she couldn't bear the brief moment of terror that came with having a uniformed soldier as an unexpected guest.

In its ambivalence, though—its ability to bring good, bad or simply boring news—the telephone is the most potent avenue through which power's indifference to human vulnerability is apparent. Roland Barthes describes this thrall of the anticipated phone call: “The lover's fatal identity is precisely: *I am the one who waits*. [...] To make someone wait: the constant prerogative of all power” (1979, 40). This temporality of power is very different from any quick and showy spectacle of violence and decision (Povinelli 2006), though it is still “fatal,” it is still death that is awaited. The lover in Barthes' *Lover's Discourse* waits by the phone, unable to call, impatient with anybody else tying up the line. “The anxiety of waiting, in its pure state, requires that I be sitting in a chair within reach of the telephone without doing anything” (1979, 39). There is no space of agency or ‘resistance’ or effectuality to be found here; other categories are needed: the ability to defer, to endure, to make oneself forget that one is waiting, to maintain oneself in the empty space between irregular episodes over which one has no control.

You're waiting whether you want to or not, keeping yourself alive in this killing state. The excess of waiting can eat you up, binding you to another in a way that makes you not yourself.

We're sitting on the theater steps after an FRG meeting, setting June sun making long shadows across the landscape of vast, dusty lawns and sharp-edged brick buildings that faces us. Her husband's field artillery battalion is about to deploy, his third tour since they've been together. A friend introduced us; she is pretty and earnest and very sharp. The hardest part of deployment is that you can't just sit by the phone, she says. His first tour, she was at home with her family in Ohio, and their first child hadn't been born yet. But the second, she was here at Hood with a toddler and another on the way. "I was isolated. It was bad. I hadn't made many friends. I would just sit around, I wouldn't leave the house." I imagined her dressed in pajamas, hunched under a blanket in an unlit living room with mid-day sun creeping around the edges of the drawn shades—cocooned. But you can't just do that, you have to get out. Now she always tells people, you have to make sure you have time to do things, time for yourself, time with people understand what you're going through. You have to have time that is not waiting.

This attendance is always delicate territory. Sometimes you wouldn't hear from a soldier for weeks—because they were busy or had no access, or maybe because they were freaking out. Sometimes there really is a problem. But most of the time, it's waiting itself that is the problem. Everyone is waiting together, so you have to be careful with what you say. Lydia is married to a senior NCO who had just finished up his last tour in Iraq before retiring. After almost two decades as an Army wife, she had certain ideas about how such dilemmas should be handled, and because of her husband's seniority, younger wives often turned to her.

You don't ever ask, "Have you talked to your husband?" You have a lot of [spouses] that [say], "I talk to my husband every day!" [And someone else will say,] "Well I haven't heard from mine in three weeks, shut up!" Cause it depends on their job, and it depends on their location. Yeah, that's like an Army thing, you don't. The young ones will ask you, "When's the last time you talked to your husband?" I won't even tell 'em really. I might have talked to him yesterday, but she hasn't heard from her husband in a week. So I didn't wanna upset anybody. So [I say,] "I haven't talked to him yet. When was the last time you talked to your husband? Oooh, ok. Well it's ok, he'll call soon." That's all that they need. [...]

It's my rule. I would never tell them. After they say something ... I will always say, "I haven't heard from my husband either." And they say, "Oh." And you know what? It will ease them down. It will calm them. Just the knowing that, ok, she's like me. And I know, Ken, that it will not be three weeks for them. I know it'll probably be about a week, week and-a-half, tops. But if they knew that I had spoken with [my husband], first of all they'd be pissed at me, and they'd be pissed at their husbands. But I don't know what Steve has the guys doing. Or ... you just don't know. Maybe your husband doesn't wanna call you! It happens! ... And I always tell them, if something happens, you're going to know. You're going to know. The only difference is, do you wanna know? And I told you this earlier—do you wanna know for every little frick and frack? My husband hit an IED. ... I didn't know. Which was the best thing he could've done for me. I'm pissed he didn't tell me, don't get me wrong. But he didn't want me to worry for a whole year and a half. He did good.

It wasn't that Lydia herself was indifferent to Steve's calls: she would wake at 4 in the morning to await a call so that he could go to the phones when the lines were shorter and not waste time standing in line. In her account, the problem of waiting for the call, the problem of talking about the call, and the problem of what the call might be about all slide into one another. Telephonic communication is not just about the words and thoughts traveling up and down the wire; it is about the way that everyone—all the soldiers, all the wives in Lydia's account—is "jacked in" to this same "central nervousness" (Massumi 2005, 32). It is a currency of nervousness and reassurance that is being shared over the phone along with the conversations and professions of love and longing. We say that these things are "transmitted" and "communicated"—the same terms that one would use to describe the spread of a contagious disease. And contagious dis-ease is indeed what comes out of it, spreading in a curious web of vectors that are both transglobal and densely intimate, zigzagging wildly between and within camps in Iraq and neighborhoods in Texas. Because everyone is connected and everyone is in the same situation: if it wasn't your husband who died, it was someone who could have been your husband, or it was someone in his unit, or a similar unit, or a unit in the same area,

and someone whose wife might be your neighbor or your best friend. The pressure caves you inward on your own individual horror of loss, and at the same time it spreads you out, so that your hurt and fear cut you off but someone else's hurt and fear are yours also.

It is only with hard-won experience that Lydia exerted some semblance of control over the radiating and rebounding waves of anxiety and fear. Information is as much the cause as it is the cure for this uncomfortable condition: while Harry was dogged by the possibility that Lena might not be alive when he didn't hear from her, Lydia found virtue in having been protected from the knowledge of her husband's brush with death. The solution is to barricade yourself off from many aspects of the news you so desperately crave, to deal with the uncertainty by knowing less, to accept the silence, in itself a bad thing, as a sign that nothing bad has happened. In this way, intimate relationships are the scene of hundreds and thousands of moments of selective sharing and not sharing. Like Lydia being angry but pleased that Steve had not told her about the IED that hit him. Like Sarah seeing her husband quietly freak out in the museum but not pressing him on what was happening, for his own good and for hers. One's own exposure to information, as well as its release to others, is carefully policed. There is no perfect management of this vulnerability, and indeed its management is built around inevitable transgressions or overheard rumors or glimpsed news stories, all the things you later wish you did not know. Like the systemic vulnerability it nervously responds to, it is a collective phenomenon: Lydia's friend knew about Steve hitting the IED and didn't tell. Sarah's friend bent her ear about a rocket attack near where Sarah's husband was. Soldiers try to talk their parents and their spouses and kids and girlfriends into not watching the news. If something happens, if they have a close call, they wait to talk about it, or they don't say anything at all. They try to keep the vulnerability to themselves. The emphasis is on try,

for these boundaries are perpetually breached by circumstance and overactive curiosity and slips of the tongue.

Civilians take for granted the ease of living without this looming, daily shadow of loss, of waiting for news of death or for news that it has been forestalled a few more days. They don't understand the “heaviness” of living with such constant constraint, Cheryl told me—her husband had been in for a while but was about to leave on his first deployment. I asked her what she meant by heaviness, and she said that “the Army has a lot of control over you” and that people in the military and their families “give up a lot of freedoms to protect freedom.” Just as the Army “owns” the soldier, it “owns you” too, said Cindy. Just as it weighs down the soldier’s body with arms, armor, equipment, and responsibilities, making the soldier’s body not his own, it weighs you down too. The Army explicitly controls where you live now and where you will go next, the house you will live in, the people you will live and work with. As it moves you around and isolates you in its communities and installations, it controls your opportunities, your privacy, your comportment and conduct, your access to the rest of the world, your sense of what’s possible. The very pace and transience of Army life makes you vulnerable as it imposes both an intense intimacy and a sense of bunkered-off isolation. You meet new people and bond over your circumstances, but you fear the loss that comes with moving on again and so you close yourself off to new friends. As a soldier’s spouse, you, like a soldier, “operate under conditions of fear” shaped by the pace of bureaucratic decision, alternately ponderous and quick as an ambush. Both the speed and the slowness have a dulling effect, because in all this waiting, you are ultimately waiting for next shock, the next moment when “the rug will be pulled out from under you” with a change of orders or a deployment extension. Jerked along in these fits and starts, there is no opportunity to

even come to terms with the ways that you are being exposed. Instead there is endurance, maintenance, attrition, opting out—protecting yourself so that you can carry on.

The *weight-ing* means *waiting*. There is no transcendence in living with nothing in this way: it is a kind of discipline, perhaps, but not an asceticism or a mortification or anything else that promises peace at the end of it. Rather it is a constant and incremental labor, accomplished in the endurance of an unbearable loss—“I lost everything”—one moment at a time. Cindy, whose husband is a Blackhawk pilot, put it thusly: “we don't get a break.” “Heaviness” gets at something beyond the vulgar literalness of “fear” and “control.” Fear can be “overcome” and control can be “resisted,” but heaviness must simply be borne even as it wears you out, the labor of endurance that is punctuated by the ringing of the phone. So waiting is a temporality of power that can be interminable and sudden, chronic and acute, as it moves through a variety of relays and intermediaries. Its slowness is made crueler still, perhaps even defined, by the lightning speed “jacking” of the phone call. In all cases, there is power: your husband may be too tired to call, and the civilians may have no clue what you're going through, but as you wait for the phone to ring or not ring, it is the Army that makes you wait. That heaviness is the feeling of the Army.

If these circumstances confuse any effectual understanding of agency or resistance, they also wreak havoc on the linear eventfulness of trauma. Does it even make sense to talk about this exceptional condition of vulnerable life as a pathology, a problem, when it is so persistent and so ordinary? Can one even speak of trauma in any meaningful way when to be soldier or to be attached to a person who happens to be a soldier is to subject oneself to an often-terrifying psychic drama that plays all day, every day? For at the same time that death is there, life goes on, husbands and wives and parents and friends love each other, and most of them love the Army, too, in their way, and with

qualifications. This is not redemption, it is just the way things are: a daily reproduction of life and death and bodies bound together that are only alive because they can die.

WORN-OUT BODIES

The soldier lives at the intersection of sovereign, disciplinary and biopolitical power. While in some instances these various modes seem to work at cross-purposes to one another, they generally possess a certain concordance, even a synergy. Beyond and before the extremes of combat, routine soldiering in garrison and during deployment can take a massive physical toll. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that in the service of the greater goal of combat and its exigencies, soldiers spend weeks, months and years exercising, marching on rough terrain, lifting heavy loads, performing repetitive tasks, climbing in and out of tanks and the backs of trucks, sleeping on the ground, enduring heat and cold and the elements, waking in the middle of the night, going without sleep.

The physical wear and tear of these obligations can naturally and sometimes suddenly work against the capacity of the body to fulfill them: in performing the labor of soldiering, the soldier can work his bodily equipment to the point of ruin, pitching himself into a state of precarious unsoldierliness. The possibilities of such ruin are built into the conflicting and concordant regimes to which the soldier is subjected. The relentless laboring of soldiering can jeopardize his ability not only to perform his job in a practical sense, but also to support himself and his family economically and to understand himself as a physically and socially whole individual. Routine bodily burdens get transmuted and recirculated as illness, injury, complaint, bureaucratic control, psychic and emotional stress, and the retelling of stories that make sense of present conditions. It is a preoccupation not just for soldiers, but also for the institutions that manage and

support them and for the intimates with whom they share their daily lives, all of whom depend in various ways on the lability and integrity of the soldier's body.

One sunny June afternoon, I chatted with Simmons out in the Foundation parking lot. Simmons served three tours in Iraq as an 88-mike, a truck driver, but now he was a medical hold due to a busted knee. The knee isn't what brought him home from Iraq, though—in a fit of pique one day during his last tour, he made a passing, sarcastic reference to slitting his wrists, and the next day he was on a plane back the Ft. Hood. It is a telling biopolitical irony, of course, that the Army would be so quick to respond to this nonexistent crisis and so slow to treat his damaged leg. We perch now in the slanting afternoon sun on the front of his car, which a fender-bender has folded into a cock-eyed beak. Petey, another soldier, sits facing us on the bench with a broken slat, the remaining three narrow boards holding up his considerable bulk. Simmons is skinny and rangy, with an angular face, a shorn scalp and an efficient dark bristle of regulation moustache. The combination of him and Petey has an almost Laurel-and-Hardy aspect to it, but I don't know that they would appreciate the comparison; their bond is one forged in boredom and circumstance and shared discontent rather than any sort of mutual affection. Simmons breaks the filters off his cigarettes before he lights up, having acquired an idiosyncratic taste for unfiltered menthols; Petey has recently quit the more convenient tobacco high of dip.

Like a lot of the other soldiers who worked at and patronized the Foundation, Simmons and Petey were injured and had been assigned to the Warrior Transition Unit.³⁰ The WTUs were set up Army-wide in the wake of the 2007 Walter Reed neglect

³⁰ WTUs are more formally know as Warrior Transition Battalions, or WTBs, but WTU was the term of common usage during my fieldwork, so I retain it here. Ft. Hood's WTU was organized as a battalion, commanded by a full-bird Colonel, and during my research period it increased in size from four to five companies, a total of about 1,100 soldiers.

scandal³¹ in a much-publicized bid to intensively manage the care and treatment of injured soldiers. While the soldiers treated at Walter Reed are typically severely injured, soldiers are transferred into WTUs at their home installations across the Army when they suffer from any of a range of physical and psychic injuries and illnesses that prevent them from being able to perform their normal duties, everything from PTSD and shrapnel wounds received in Iraq, to back injuries from training activities, to cancer and respiratory conditions, to broken bones from car accidents just down the road. In the WTU, these soldiers' "mission is to heal," in the words of the Army's oft-repeated motto: separated from their old units, they perform none of their previous regular duties and instead followed a tightly managed and sometimes confusing and contradictory schedule of briefings, meetings and appointments with physicians, specialists and case managers. Through these interventions, their conditions were evaluated and treated. Removing the temporarily or permanently disabled from the ranks of active line units means that they can be replaced with the able-bodied and the units can stay ready to deploy. Eventually, WTU soldiers are either found fit and returned to duty, or they are pronounced disabled, their worthiness for compensation is judged and quantified, and they are discharged from the Army.

In the meantime, they could no longer perform their accustomed duties nor do much else that they or other soldiers recognize as worthwhile work, and with cynical and frustrated humor they referred to themselves and one another by Army slang terms for slackers and malingerers: turds, brokedicks, shammers, shitbags. For the bulk of the wounded soldiers I met, even those who found themselves proceeding through WTU at a

³¹ In February 2007, the Washington Post published an account of the decaying facilities and substandard care at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. The hospital's patients, many of whom are soldiers who were seriously wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan, and their families described disinterested and incompetent staff and dangerous and unsanitary buildings plagued by rats, roaches and mold (Priest and Hull 2007; Hull and Priest 2007).

relatively reasonable pace, their jobs and therefore their lives had become organized around the experience and institutional management of their injuries and the nervous anticipation of an uncertain future. Would they be able to heal and return to duty? Were their agitation and stress the product of a frustrating system, or of an unsympathetic spouse or friend, or of undiagnosed posttraumatic stress, or all of these things? Would they be treated with sympathy by their caseworkers, or with suspicion? Would one doctor consent to approve the treatment that another doctor said was necessary, and would it be successful? Would the Army recognize its culpability for an otherwise healthy 22-year-old's ruined ankle or bad back or illness exacerbated by the stress of deployment and provide them with medical retirement, pro-rated pension and continuing medical care? Or would a soldier struggling with physical pain or psychological trauma find himself cut loose with only a couple thousand dollars in severance pay, no health insurance, few marketable skills, and even debts or a spouse or family to provide for on top of it all?

That afternoon, Simmons had just been to the doctor for his knee and is worked up about it, complaining, so naturally I begin furiously taking notes. He pulls the leg of his fatigues tight around the knee to show us what it looks like: even with a brace on the joint looks puffy and inflated, especially on his lean form. His right ACL is practically torn, but the Army deems the necessary surgery to be elective. His left MCL is injured too, and he has a torn rotator cuff and TBI. So he is consigned to the WTU. Running, walking, getting in and out of his car are all painful. He's on a "dead man's profile." Profiles are the Army's "system for classifying individuals according to functional abilities" (AR 40-501, 7-1) and provide an official set of medically mandated limitations on permitted physical activity. With a "dead man's profile," even if Simmons wasn't in pain, he's not allowed to do anything. He bought a motorcycle, but in order to ride it on post he needs to take an Army safety course, which his doctors forbid him to do because

of his injuries. “If I were to throw my back out I’d get an Article 15!” “Article 15” is shorthand for the non-judicial punishment authorized by Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the punishment he would face because the doctors and his WTU command would assume that he had violated his profile limitations. There is a lot of apocryphal soldierly folklore about Article 15s for ill-gotten sprains or sunburns or hangovers or other minor injuries: messing yourself up unduly, they say, constitutes “destruction of Army property.” While this may be hyperbole, the larger point holds. For Simmons, as for all soldiers, his hurt body and the institution both constrain him, the latter in the name of protecting the former.

Nothing about Simmons’ medical treatment seems logical or straightforward to him, and he shares the complaint of other WTU soldiers I met that their doctors only focus on injuries one at a time rather than treating them comprehensively. The result is that “I feel stupid on a daily basis because of the Army.” Nothing seems to have gone his way, he complains with his typical acidity. “I’ve earned everything I’ve gotten in the Army, including not getting surgery! I don’t wanna make it seem like, ‘Oh, the Army medical system is against Derek Simmons.’ But it feels like if there’s a shitty doctor, I’ve had him.” It’s soured him on the whole enterprise, including the war itself. On a recent trip home, a family acquaintance told him he was thinking about enlisting. “I literally grabbed [him] by the throat and told them not to do it, because you’ll never be the same. People see the soldiers coming home, getting off the planes, [and they say,] ‘Ooh, you’re so great!’ But we’re all thinking, ‘This shit sucks!’” How many of you are, I ask him. “Oh, a good 60 to 70 percent,” he says assuredly.

Petey agrees. He complains about the weight gain that has resulted from the medications he is on, exacerbated by the exercise limitations that result from back and shoulder injuries that are painful, sometimes to the point of immobilization. He’s gone

from 195 pounds to 285—Jimmy, a Staff Sergeant from WTU who ran things at the Foundation, calls him “Big Country” and “Cornfed.” Petey is from a decidedly rough East Texas background. Both his parents are drug addicts and his brother is in prison for assault; his father once sold a classic Thunderbird they had been working on together to buy crack and liquor, and Petey missed his own high school graduation because his brother had recently given Petey’s name instead of his own when he got busted. His stories of relatively recent adolescence (he is 22) often revolve around scenes of intense racial avarice—times that “these black guys” or “these Mexicans” started a fight with him—but he is genial and funny, if indelicate, and gets along with everyone. He jokes, as I’ve often heard him do before, about his breasts: “I got bigger tits than my wife, man! I hate it! I used to love to take my shirt off at the pool. Now I’m embarrassed.” His injury and his medical care have literally feminized him. He shows me a picture on his phone from when he enlisted. He is dressed in Class As, his body a hulking, broad-shouldered V and his legs slim and proportional, all of it so unlike his present massive roundness. In the photograph his babyish face is distinctly recognizable, but dramatically different nonetheless, his jaw far more defined and set in a theatrical snarl. He squints menacingly at something or someone just outside the frame, leaning slightly forward, his arm in the middle of a sweep and a cigar or blunt in his hand leaving a wreath of smoke. It’s in a bedroom, maybe—hospital-white walls, a milk crate on the floor, full-length mirror propped against the wall. Despite the low-light graininess and harsh fluorescent tones, he looks good, and very different from how he looks now.

Petey was approved for surgery when his injury occurred, when he was in infantry AIT. But then he came to Ft. Hood and the doctors there denied the operation. He got assigned to 4ID and then they kicked him into WTU. No one doctor or administrator has his complete medical records. When he complains, the surgeon tells him, “It’s not all

about you.” Simmons chimes in sarcastically, “Yeah, it’s not all about you!” Other doctors refuse to look at the MRIs that show how damaged he really is, he says. “I went to get a second opinion and they didn't even look at my MRIs! They’re just a bunch of dicks, man.” He says this sadly, with a shake of his head and a wistful, almost sweet tone of resignation—I hear him talk this way a lot. “I haven’t even been to Iraq but I feel like I have,” he says. “I feel like I have PTSD” just from having to deal with bullshit of the WTU. But perhaps being stuck here is for the best; he speculates that maybe “God hurt my back, because if I went to Iraq I would go crazy. I wouldn't be the same person if I went.” Or maybe it’s too late for things to be properly sorted out: “From how I grew up, my mental state is messed up.” He took three loans to cover the debt he incurred with his landlord when his housing allowance was delayed by an administrative error. Nothing he does seems to work out right. “I’m a big-hearted guy, but my life is always full of getting yelled at. I’m already stressed out from life completely. I knew the Army was hard on you, but I thought it was only if you are an ass, but I’m nice! I help people! I still get yelled at, get into trouble. I don’t wanna go to Iraq, shoot people and blow them up, get blown up, do stuff that don't make any sense.”

The incoherence and apparent hostility of Army medicine have thrown Petey into a double-bind that is both grave and unremarkable. Things ought to proceed logically: the Army should evaluate his injuries and treat them. If he recovers well enough, they will return him to duty. If he doesn't, they will decide how disabled he is and how much of that disability the Army is responsible for, and then compensate him accordingly and pass his medical care off to the Veterans Administration. The system should decide for itself how he is to proceed and what is to become of him. But in both his and Simmons’ case, and in the cases of many other soldiers I met (which, I should add, is not to say all soldiers or even a representative proportion), this is not happening. Some combination of

doctors, physicians assistants and caseworkers have refused the treatment that other doctors, physicians assistants and caseworkers have told them they will need to be whole, functional and free of pain, leaving Simmons and Petey caught at the very beginning of this process. The way forward from there was a tortuous labor of bureaucratic box-ticking. But the skepticism and suspicion that soldiers are subject to—from the “dicks” and shitty doctors—mean that this is only the beginning of the problem. For even as the system was simultaneously pronouncing Simmons and Petey unfit for their old jobs, failing to decide what should be done with them and preventing them from taking any action on their own behalf, it was also questioning the legitimacy and the very existence of the debilitating pain with which they were living. The Army had decided that their injuries were real enough to make them useless and merit the prescription of opiates and steroids but not necessarily real enough to merit the trouble and expense of surgery. Until their injuries could achieve some sort of stable, bureaucratically legible objectification, they were stuck in a holding pattern. Petey in particular felt himself faced with an untenable choice: because the Army would not recognize the legitimacy of his injury by either treating it and keeping him in or compensating him for it and letting him out, he was thinking about how he could take on the situation on his own terms. He could suck up the pain, tell the doctors it didn't hurt anymore, get back in shape so he could pass his PT test, and return to duty. Or he could allow himself to be judged unfit for duty, get processed out, and get a civilian job. The former option probably meant going to Iraq, and the latter option to Houston or the Gulf coast for decent-paying work in a chemical plant or a refinery, but his wife had just started nursing school in Waco. Either option, though, demanded living with pain that most of the time prevented him from being able to lift things, kneel, or hold his hands above his head, and if he denied the pain in order to get out of the WTU, the Army would no longer be responsible for it. In the meantime, the

Army would medicate him, keep him busy going to physical therapy and doctor's appointments, and leave him feeling bullied and neglected.

Irene, a physical therapist recently retired from the Army and now working as a contractor, described her work as a combination of, on the one hand, treating soldiers expeditiously and aggressively so that they could get back to their units and, on the other, educating unit commanders about how to prevent unnecessary injuries. If she could get platoon and company commanders "in tune with what needed to be done for soldiers, then they could decrease the amount of soldiers that had to go to sick call" with aches and pains. But it was a difficult balance to strike. Given the operational tempo—the urgent and continuous deployments—occasioned by the war and the concomitant strain on resources, it is difficult to get commanders to attend to injury prevention.

The results are perverse: units train harder because they are getting ready to deploy; more soldiers get hurt with easily preventable stress fractures and other repetitive strain injuries and have to go to sick call; the medical system gets overwhelmed and bottlenecked; the nurses and physicians assistants are overwhelmed, and lacking the time and resources to attend to each individual case, I was told over and over again, they send hurt soldiers on their way with a bottle of Motrim and a Xeroxed sheet of instructions for stretching exercises; the soldier continues to get hurt, continues to miss work because he has to go to sick call, continues to receive little or no care, and continues to incur the suspicion and ire of his commanders and fellow soldiers; and all the while, the medical system fills with a backlog of potentially preventable cases that distract from more serious problems. Some of the prevention measures are striking in their microtechnicality and apparent simplicity: arranging marching formations by height, shortest to tallest, prevents stress fractures because soldiers of different heights don't have to have to

uncomfortably lengthen or shorten their strides. Or it's just a matter of not working soldiers quite so hard.

[In] the Ft. Hood Sentinel ... a commander was actually bragging about doing twice-a-day PT. Twice-a-day PT! And talking about how important it is to basically run these kids into the ground to make sure they're physically fit so that when they go to Iraq and have to deal with the temperature then they've been trained so that their body can adapt. Well great concept, but you and I both know what happens. And yeah were we seeing a lot of their soldiers in physical therapy from that same unit. ... They thought what they were doing was a great idea. And then they wondered why all their soldiers were going [to sick call]. Well part of it was that their mentality was that if their soldiers were going to sick call their soldiers were weak, and what did they need? They needed more PT.

As Simmons and Petey and Irene all suggest in different ways, the Army is a hard place to be hurt. From basic training onwards, Army life is engrained with a suspicion toward claims of non-visible injury and a subsequent tendency to equate injury with deception and moral failing. "They told us in basic, 'Anything that's not life, limb or eyesight, suck it up. If you say you're hurt, we're gonna assume you're faking.'" Hence the abject epithets: shitbags, brokedicks. Injured soldiers are "broken" soldiers. That it is often the basic bodily labor of being a soldier that has caused this undesirable and individuating decay does not protect the soldier from the confusion, skepticism and hostility that his condition will provoke. The soldier becomes a problem for everyone, often despite anyone's best intentions: for his sergeant or his commander, the soldier is failing to properly fill his slot, and for the PA or the doctor, he is another potential shammer or malingerer.

These imputations collapse back on one another and produce their own unintentional structural effects: by providing a medical alibi for lassitude and incompetence, sick call and the WTU do in fact offer themselves as "dumping grounds" for bad soldiers. A PA I met was adamant about this: he would never say to his friends in line units, but it was simply true that it was easier to send a problem soldier to WTU than

it was to chapter³² him out. Because the WTUs were instituted specifically as an internal and public-image safeguard against the scandal of neglect, all complaints have to be taken seriously. Perversely, as WTU soldiers' treatment and diagnosis is delayed for months and months and the high priority accorded WTU patients bottlenecks the entire post medical system, extending the wait time for appointments for regular patients—including deployable soldiers—from days to weeks. I heard more than once, and always in a tone that combined cynicism with a whiff of taboo, that “malingering does not exist in the WTU”—which is to say, it does or it must, but it is not to be spoken of. The bureaucratic apparatus and institutional culture literally turn injured soldiers into bad soldiers and bad soldiers into injured soldiers. The soldiers feel bullied and infantilized and the doctors and caseworkers feel manipulated and overwhelmed. The whole thing spirals off into degrading subjectifications and displaced responsibility and a sort of mysterious vacuum that sucks up misdirected effort and resources. The soldiers and the people charged with healing them, divided from one another by a gulf of antipathy and suspicion, tell antagonistic but parallel stories about why this happens: bad faith on the part of some spoiling it for the honest others.

Thus it is that injury thrusts whole sets of actors into positions of exception that are sticky and entrapping and that do not resolve along any predictable timeline. Injuries are exceptions. My friend Stan, a retired cavalry First Sergeant and a veterans advocate told me that “the Army is very good at taking care of large numbers of people, but when someone becomes sick or injured they become an individual, and the Army is not good at taking care of individuals.” Indeed, in a way it is the primary goal of military medicine to maintain the interchangeability of individuals by restoring their broken bodies to a

³² In one of the many linguistic instances in which the names designations or written forms of rules acquire verb-like animation, “chaptering” and being “chaptered out” are references to being kicked out of the Army for misconduct, per Chapter 14 of AR 635-200, which covers discharges and separations.

uniform standard, and even that would seem to have its depersonalizing dark side. Ultimately what it produces, however, is a confusion of means and ends: instead of the categories being instruments that serve the healing of bodies, the bodies become raw material for the satisfaction of the categories. And sometimes this satisfaction is accomplished by bending or rewriting the categories so that they can accommodate bodies that would not otherwise have been suitable. You can fail a drug test two weeks before deploying and still be sent to Iraq, but if you fail a drug test two weeks after you get back, you'll be kicked out. You can be spared deployment because of severe sleep apnea, but then the Army can decide that sleep apnea is a deployable condition and give you orders to go. You can be scorned for weakness or malingering if a sprained ankle forces you to sick call and then made to labor in pain if your unit needs you to deploy. A constellation of symptoms can be pronounced posttraumatic stress disorder, and therefore worthy of medical discharge and compensation, but a second (or third or fifth) diagnosis can rename those same symptoms as an anxiety disorder, and therefore a preexisting condition. Such maneuvers are executed by individual commanders and doctors, but they are empowered and motivated by the more encompassing institutional imperative that the soldiers call "making a number" or "filling a slot": locating a body of uniform suitability to fill an empty position that a set of orders deems must be filled.³³

Of course the soldier's job *is to be* a number, to fill a slot, to be interchangeable, at least to an extent. And while soldiers may occasionally chafe at this, it is a familiar condition of their world, the way that, as Foucault puts it, the disciplined subject "assumes responsibility for the constraints of power" and "makes them play spontaneously upon himself" (Foucault 1979). When a soldier gets injured, however—when he is so encumbered by discomfort or pain that he can no longer perform to the

³³ [to complete the allotment of personnel specified by an MTOE or an MPAD]. define terms

uniform standard—he no longer constitutes that number or fills that slot. He has become, as Stan says, an individual: not in the liberal sense, suddenly coming into positive possession of autonomy and individual identity, but in a negative sense, as an exception, a bodily unit with non-standard (and undesirable) properties embroiled in a particular set of physical and material (and mental and emotional) circumstances. This is, as Sarah Jain observes, the American cultural logic of injury, of which the Army’s clinical and bureaucratic logic is merely an especially acute homolog: it exists “in isolation—as an event that could have not happened” (Jain 2006, 7). This logic, Jain writes, regards injury itself as unjust (once proof has cleansed it of suspicion), but it naturalizes the injuring structural disciplinary and market conditions to which bodies are subjected.

Stan’s observation and the general cynicism of soldiers about filling slots and making numbers testify to the acuity with which soldiers feel the threat of this individuation, how it both batters the emotions and leaves the body stranded in pain and dysfunction. These are the affective and sensory imprints of how biopolitics both normalizes and “differentiates, constituting difference within promises or fantasies of equality” (Jain 2006, 53). This is what comes through in Simmons sardonic remark to Petey that “it’s not all about you.” It’s not about you from your perspective. But from the Army’s perspective, it is all about you, and to a total institution there is nothing more useless or contemptible than an individual. Even though your decrepitude is often inseparable from the burdens that the Army has placed on you, injury thrusts you into a particular zone of exception that is, ironically perhaps, acutely paradigmatic of modern liberal subjectivity: you are at once “buffeted and controlled” by power and “at the same time “starkly individuated, stripped of reprieve from relentless exposure and accountability” for yourself (Brown 1995, 69). In the previous chapter, I referred to the ways that armored soldiers’ exposure to violence constituted a sort of experimental

probing of the functional limits of the human form. That same logic operates in the WTU in a much less spectacular form and, indeed, in a way that is not so different from the logic of injury in society at large, making the body a rhetorical and a literal “placeholder” for the limits of corporate and state behavior (Jain 2006, 28). Except that the decision, as it is parceled out in an endless schedule of doctor visits and briefings and rounds of paperwork, never seems to arrive.

A DRUG FOR SOLDIERS

Juares explained to me that soldiers should be given stimulants when they return from deployment. It was another conversation out on the Foundation porch: it was a quiet day, Jimmy and Buck and the other regulars were all gone. As I sat eating my lunch, he had come striding out of the building and then I had half-heard the fragments of his screaming phone conversation as he sat in the cab of his truck across the parking lot. He ended his call with a loud declamation and then walked straight to me across the asphalt and introduced himself. Cindy had introduced us briefly a couple weeks earlier. She pointed out his patch, from Multi-National Division Baghdad, the coalition command. The insignia is particularly striking: a creature that looks like a chimera, with an bearded and turbaned man’s head, lion’s body, and wings over crossed swords, cedar branches and a six-pointed star—exotic, even by Army insignia standards, and indeed distinctly foreign. “That’s a good patch,” Cindy said, a phrase I heard Juares repeat himself later, making me wonder if she had gotten it from him. “It’s the same patch that Petraeus wears”—he was still the Multinational Force commander at the time. Juares was in

PSYOP³⁴ and had been in a very small unit working closely training Iraqi Army (IA) soldiers.

Juares was in uniform and held a tall silver and green can of energy drink down at his side. He had olive skin and black hair that was on the long side for a soldier and looked to be somewhere in his early thirties. He was National Guard from north Texas, but had been on active duty for two years: a tour in Iraq and now WTU. His speech was rapid and jittery and just kept coming once we began talking. “So are you going to write a book and sell it to the RAND Corporation or something?” he asked when I told him about the project. I was a little taken aback. No, I told him, not really that kind of book. Had I read a book called *Downrange*? It’s a sort of PTS primer co-authored by a psychologist and a Vietnam vet, rich with bullet-pointed lists of warning signs, symptoms and coping strategies (Cantrell and Dean 2005). It’s about healing. There were dozens of copies of it sitting around the Foundation lounge and offices. “It’s shit! It’s not worth the shit it’s written on!” he declared. I hadn’t read it at the time and I asked him what the authors said. “Well I’m not gonna tell you what it says, you have to go and read it for yourself.”

His tone was snippy and flat—angry without being hostile, fussy and matter-of-fact, and refracted through the jumpiness that seemed to have a hold on him. I tried again, saying I just wanted to know what he thought the authors of this book had gotten wrong. They didn’t get into the details of real life, the little things. “It changes you permanently,” he said emphatically. He launched into a haphazard list of details of daily life that swerved in and out of experiences from before, during and after deployment. The ones from beforehand were filtered through the awareness of imminent departure and interruptible momentum, the stress of embarking on a multi-staged journey toward a

³⁴ PSYOP: Psychological Operations; tactical operations involving propaganda, communication, information management, and like functions.

fearful destination that could be indefinitely interrupted at any time, a temporality of anticipation at once relentless and fragile. The ones from during deployment traveled into the future to affect him even now, after his return. He ran through a list of daily, taken-for-granted amenities of pre-deployment life: going to work for regular hours, waking when you want to, driving your own car. He veered from the everyday luxury of running water to its absence in Iraq, where there were port-o-johns and open latrines for sanitation. This led on to his current and abiding preoccupation with the intrusive odors of trash and cigarette smoke that bothered him back here because of their association with the constant and overwhelming presence of strong odors in Iraq. He worried about how this pollution was affecting his body and the bodies of his fellow soldiers. He talked about heat and the weight of the armor. You come back with your body hurting and worn down from wearing and carrying all this weight.

Your behavior after you return is also altered. You come back and are still used to ways of behaving from over there: you are on post and you see the Black Hawks and the Chinooks; you hear gunfire and explosions from training exercises and sometimes you want to hit the ground; cops pull you over and don't understand why you were driving the way you were—you try to make yourself drive slow and sometimes you drive too slow, or erratically, looking around at innocuous objects that could be IEDs or keeping your distance from other cars. He doesn't like to be around people, so he goes shopping at night. In the store someone left their cart right behind him so that he bumped against it unexpectedly when he moved, “and I just”—he throws his leg out—“kicked it away. It pisses me off! A guy came up behind me in the airport and clapped me on the shoulder to say ‘Thank you for your service’ and I”—again he twists and raises his arm to demonstrate—“almost punched him. You don't do that! It pisses me off!” In restaurants he has to sit with his back to the wall, to scan constantly and find the exits. Laying these

things out, he moves back and forth among the before, during and after so that the sense of causality becomes both diffuse—all these little things, adding up—and overwhelming, because of the way it is woven into the fabric of the most banal things.

With all these things, he was adamant: *they were not psychological symptoms*. “Symptoms” were what therapists talked about, he said with scornful dismissal. “I hate these fucks!” They see behaviors and map them onto some idea of war and trauma that makes them symptoms of some invented entity called posttraumatic stress disorder. Civilian and non-deployed medical and psychiatric personnel can’t understand this sensory and bodily dimension and its persistent and overwhelming quality because they haven’t been to Iraq; their bodies haven’t been there. There is talk therapy and biofeedback and acupuncture “and all this other shit,” but none of it accounts for how you actually feel, for how *soldiers* actually feel. If someone gets in a car wreck here—he points out toward the road—these therapists would diagnose them with PTSD and prescribe them antidepressants. But they want to give this same civilian diagnosis and civilian drug to soldiers, whose experience is of a whole other order of magnitude. Soldiers get special medications, vaccines for anthrax and smallpox—why not military-grade drugs for stress as well? And forget antidepressants anyway, they didn't make any sense. Soldiers are full of surging endorphins set off by everyday stimuli. It was a state to which they had become accustomed, and anti-depressants just masked it, suppressed it, didn’t address the authentic nature of the problem. What soldiers really need is a powerful stimulant—and here I looked at the energy drink in his hand but said nothing. This would help them come down gradually from the hyper-activated state in which they dwelled. He gestured with his hand to show the ascending levels of arousal of a regular civilian, a non-combat soldier, a soldier that’s trained for war, and, at the very top, a soldier in combat or who has been to combat. There was an ideal spot to inhabit near but

not at the top of the range. “Soldiers are very high-strung. I’m very high-strung.” Being a soldier means a constant state of being on-edge, of bodily activation. A stimulant will help soldiers come down gradually from the very top and relieve them of the stress and exhaustion that came with it without dropping them so low as to become militarily ineffective. But this drug does not yet exist.

The generally accepted mechanism for PTSD is as follows: the sufferer steers clear of those stimuli in his or her everyday life—triggers—that resemble the sensory imprint associated with the original traumatic event and thus precipitate not only intrusive and upsetting memories, but also intense physiological arousal. Avoidance is thought to be pathological because it prevents the successful processing of the traumatic memory, and indeed the most demonstrably effective therapies for PTSD involve exposure to the traumatic memory (Institute of Medicine 2007; RAND Center for Military Health Policy Research 2008), whether through talk therapy and the narrative revisiting of the event, controlled in vivo confrontation with triggering stimuli, virtual reality simulation (NIMH 2008), or other means. A clinician might be inclined to understand Juarez’ elaborate model of war trauma as justification of avoidance behavior or even itself a kind of avoidance, and would probably also take note of his symptomatic and objectless anger and vigilance, his intensity of affect, and his abundance of triggers. These things, combined with his having been in a combat zone (which, incidentally, he refused to tell me anything about), are the stuff of which PTSD diagnoses are made.

Juarez’ account is in obvious contravention to the actual history of posttraumatic stress disorder as a medical category in the U.S., Canada and western Europe: the disorder’s nineteenth-century roots are in the recognition of “hysterical” responses to both industrial accidents and warfare, and its contemporary medicalization in the DSM-III came directly in response to the traumas suffered by American Vietnam War veterans

(Young 1995; Caruth 1995). American war veterans, in this sense, were the raw material for the invention of PTSD. And yet as the category of clinical trauma has been expanded so that it assigns equal recognition to the sufferers, perpetrators and witnesses of violence (Fassin 2009), the soldier has become both the archetype trauma and its special case: the soldier potentially occupies all three of these roles, but unlike the refugee or the rape victim, his training and work prepare him for and expose him directly to violence as a matter of course. Juarez' rather occult formulation has at its heart a kind of critique of the understanding of posttraumatic stress, "disordered" or otherwise, that highlights this distinctive condition. It resonates both with this ambiguity of trauma and with what many soldiers told me about it: namely, that the phenomena that signify this "disorder" are simply normal features of soldiering, and that the root of disorder lies in unwanted bodily and sensory sensitivities rather than in mental, mnemonic or emotional upset.

First, while the institutional and cultural stigmas associated with PTSD are very real concerns for soldiers, Juarez' account doesn't seem to be a direct reaction to any sense that the condition is the result of weakness or emotional frailty. Juarez normalizes the putative symptoms of PTSD as simply the way things are and even valorizes them as the part of the capacity and constitution that make someone a good and effective soldier. In neither of these assertions was he alone. For example, all soldiers know the posttraumatic stress screening questions that they will be asked in their mandatory Post-Deployment Health Reassessment (PDHRA), and what answers to give. "Did you see dead bodies?" "Did anyone you know get hurt?" "Do you have dreams about shooting people?" "Do you have feelings of invincibility?" With these questions, they want to know if you're crazy, he said, "but I've been like this as long as I can remember." Ernie told me he joked with the woman who conducted his PDHRA, and his entire account of it was punctuated with laughter.

The psychologist lady comes up and asks you questions. ... This lady said, "Did you ever have any dreams of shooting people?"

"Well, do I ever dream about shooting people?" I said, "You don't have to dream about it when you do it in real life."

"Good point!"

Cause you know, when they ask you those questions, some of those questions are personal, and you don't ... want people to think you're crazy, cause then they might send you to another unit or something like that. ... I don't want people to write shit down in my medical records for anything. So they ask questions: "How do you feel about being home?"

"I feel damn good!"

"You ever have any suicidal tendencies?"

"Never." [...]

And then everyone goes, "Do you guys feel invincible? Do you have feelings of invincibility?"

"Invincible? No. Unbreakable, yeah." I did a lot of stupid shit and was ok. I wrecked a motorcycle and was ok. All the cars I've blown up and totaled, I've been ok. Every time, thank God [*knocks on table*], I've never been hurt. All the times that we've been hit with stuff [in Iraq], I've never been hurt. So when the lady said, "Do you have feelings of invincibility," I go, "Unbreakable yeah, invincible no."

And she looks at me like I'm crazy and stuff like that and she asks me other questions. And I say, "Do you want me to answer them the way you want me to answer them, or do you want me to tell you the truth? Cause I don't think you wanna hear [that]; they'd take me away in a straightjacket." [*he laughs*]

"Oh forget it—good sense of humor, you're feeling good? OK, we're done."

"I was asking a serious question! Do you want me to answer you the truth, or do you want me to tell you what you wanna hear?" She thinks I'm joking. But I'll tell the damn truth. ... [E]veryone says, do you think you have any mental conditions from any—what's it called, PTSD? Do you have any posttraumatic stress disorder? Do you have any PTSD? "Naw, I've been like this for as long as I can remember."

Soldiers know what all of the questions in the PDHRA point towards, and they know that answering them truthfully in the affirmative could, at the very least, keep them tied up with doctors and counselors when all they want to do is go on leave and see their families. Even worse, it could stick with them in their medical records, rendering them (unofficially, of course) unsuitable for their jobs, ineligible for a security clearance, unfit for promotion. Aside from these structural disincentives, there is a basic cognitive dissonance to the PDHRA questions: if you answer them truthfully, they will make you seem crazy, but all the contextual cues of your own experience say otherwise. During his Desert Storm deployment, Ernie was assigned to clean up body parts along the “Highway of Death,” the road connecting Baghdad to Kuwait City where retreating Iraqi forces were bombed to cinders and thousands were killed. “And they never gave me no counseling for that shit! So I figured it wasn't a big deal.” Civilians and civilian clinicians simply don’t understand what war is like, and it is only on contact with the civilian world that the experience of soldiering is made to seem crazy. “Everything you go through, you go through with the same people you see day in and day out,” Ernie said. “So when you’re talking about it, it’s perfectly normal because you were doing the same shit I was doing, so you’re talking about it like it’s nothing.” Or even worse than simply misunderstanding, civilians offer diagnoses that judge the soldier. “Combat is fun,” a recently retired soldier who had done tours in Iraq and Afghanistan told me one night at an American Legion bar. Combat isn’t what gives you PTSD. “Being subliminally told by a 27-year-old woman therapist that ‘you were in a terrible situation’ and you should feel bad about what you did is what gives you PTSD.” In this perversely apt final inversion, an archetypal catch-22, it is the experience of diagnosis and therapy that makes you crazy, both fitting you with the label and upending your own felt sense of normalcy.

This sense of wildly misunderstood normalcy all goes to Juarez' more basic assertion that what soldiers experience is too qualitatively complex to fit under the abstract diagnostic label with which it is saddled. In Ernie's account, the remoteness of PTSD is palpable—he describes all the experiences that are thought to constitute it, but when it comes down to naming it, he gropes for the word, and then only to dismiss it. Trauma's language of shock and eventfulness makes less sense and generates less useful understanding when these feelings are the routine and shared result of training, soldierly disposition, deployment, and combat.

An important clinical criterion for PTSD lies in the persistence of the phenomena that are classed as the symptoms—the refusal of the trauma to retreat or be processed is what adds *disorder* to routine posttraumatic stress. As medical anthropologist Erin Finley writes, many soldiers and veterans—“even those without a formal PTSD diagnosis—report experiencing PTSD symptoms for a period of time following their combat deployment. Many of them [deal] with such symptoms for a while—a month, three months, a year—before passing through this period of processing their memories and going on with their lives” (Finley 2008). The problem, she indicates, quoting psychiatrist David Riggs, is with soldiers and veterans who do not “pass through” and instead become “stuck” on their traumatic memories and the physiological responses that they prompt.

The second feature of Juarez' critique has to do with this somatized stickiness. Juarez didn't want drugs for his emotional feelings—antidepressants—but for his bodily feelings. Plenty of the soldiers I met would mention traumatic memories, nightmares and intrusive thoughts. But I was surprised over and over again by their emphasis that it was as much their bodies as their minds that refused to calm down. You're going about your business at Ft. Hood and you hear a helicopters or the sunny-day thunder of artillery fire rumbling in from the ranges, and before you even realize you heard it your guts turn to

ice and your palms get clammy and your whole body is arched and alert and ready to go. You might even suddenly find yourself on the ground, your body having thrown itself to the deck before your brain has a chance to think about what's going on. An acquaintance was at a party when a friend took out a handgun and fired it into the air. She was on the ground before she knew it. She seemed to brush off being startled, but it aggravated her knee injury and she was pissed.

The way soldiers talk about these bodily responses brooks no narrativization or translation into a temporality of recollection. The sound of the helicopter does not necessarily recall an unpleasant image from Iraq, nor do soldiers necessarily think all of the sudden that they are somewhere else. There is far less “meaning” to it than that, a direct line from sensory stimulus to neuromotor response, bypassing consciousness, thought, interpretation, narrative. In this way, Juarez’ conception of trauma suggests an affective conception of soldierly embodiment, keyed less to the bright line breaks along the continuum of viscera, nervous system, brain, and conscious thought and more to the indistinctions within it. It is less concerned with an arbitrary criterion of normalcy and more with a rebellious and unruly body that has been honed and objectified as a tool but has now developed a personality of its own and gotten out of control. For better or worse, “the body is not incorporated into the self as inert substance or bodily ‘self-image’ but retains an affecting agency all its own,” as Katie Stewart writes (1996, 132). Talk therapy and even biofeedback are all too much about thinking, too mentalistic perhaps. Why fixate on how it’s all in your mind when it’s in everyone else’s mind too and what is giving you trouble is your body? All that talk lacks the hammer-blow efficacy of Juarez’ fantasized military-grade upper. It can’t compete with the way the body takes over in response to innocuous situations, sounds, smells, talk—the way the hysterical organism “thinks for itself” (Wilson 2004, 82). “I just want to get off this roller coaster,” Dime told

me, miming a swoop of hills and valley with his hand. That morning in formation he had heard a helicopter fly over “and all of the sudden I feel like I have to take a shit!” Dime had nightmares, depression, spikes of anger, an ex-wife who had taken his kids away. He had seen his friends die in front of him. But with all that, what he needed was to be able to domesticate his body again, calm it down, balance it out.

This unruly body tells a story about power. It adds a new reading to the notion of a body that “is and is not mine”: it is attached to others, it is subject to the institution in every detail, and now it is actively traitorous to the soldier’s conscious command. This third dispossession plays off the other two: the soldier is bound to his loved ones, and their vulnerabilities are his, but his discombobulated body deprives him of the pleasure of simply “being himself” with them. And the same disciplinary power by which the Army “owns” the soldier’s body also empowers that body, crafting it into an instrument whose capacities are a source of pride and self-worth for the soldier but which are called into question when the body rebels.

None of this is not to say whether Ernie or Juarez or Dime or any of them do or do not have PTSD. It is to emphasize that this categorization is not meaningful for them in the ways we might expect it to be. To use the argot of PTSD, they are “stuck” in some liminal state between traumatic eventfulness and a stable diagnostic constellation. But I would argue that they are stuck not merely because they need to move on and adjust or because they simply haven’t been properly diagnosed, but stuck because there is no sufficient conceptual language for this field of experience of normalized posttraumatic stress that they inhabit, a field both overdetermined and not sufficiently described by ‘PTSD,’ or at least by the lay and corporate culture understandings of that term, which are the understandings with which most soldiers operate. Soldiers know that posttraumatic stress is real (whatever that means), both in “normal” and “disordered”

forms. They bond over its intensity and they note its pathological excesses in themselves and others. Many of them do have nightmares and intrusive memories and emotional scars that they link to precise events. But this somatic dimension makes clear how, when it comes to labeling things, the pieces have not been arranged so that they make sense. Or perhaps it is that they're not interested in that kind of arrangement or convinced of its importance. For even if this state is something that they must "move through" and mediate with narrative and carefully reformed cognitive-behavioral mechanisms, it also has the stubborn autonomy of the flesh, the way they talk about it as this very immediate and grounded thing—this is what they *feel like*—while the diagnosis remains artificial, abstract, arbitrary.

These soldiers are "stuck" in another way: stuck at the very point at which psychiatry or medical anthropology or trauma theory are inclined, at the same time as they provide valuable bases for therapeutic intervention, to move perhaps too quickly to consolidate fragmentary and even dubious collections of symptoms under a single label and explain, narrativize and synthesize them just as they would encourage the afflicted to do. The inclination to narrativize and textualize the body can do injustice to the vagaries, agentive capacities, and often object-less affective intensities of the body itself (Wilson 2004; Csordas 1993; Haraway 1991). Of course most psychological, literary and medical anthropological literature on trauma focuses on individuals and groups who have been diagnosed or, as in the instance of Holocaust survivors, are otherwise widely recognized as having been traumatized. These soldiers, in various ways, kept PTSD diagnosis at a cautious arm's length.

One day I asked several of my acquaintances at the Foundation if they had been diagnosed with PTSD and if they thought that they had it. Some said they thought maybe they had something like it, but not as bad as other people did, so they didn't think it was a

big deal. Others talked about the importance of getting it on their record if they thought that they were getting out—so that it could be factored into their disability compensation and they could get VA care for it—or the need to keep it off their record if they were staying in, so as not to jeopardize their promotability down the line. Juarez said he was happy to have the diagnosis, since he was getting out and they were going to pay him for it. “But I’m normal. I’m not gonna kill somebody. I’m not gonna rob a bank.” The diagnosis exists separately from the lived condition, not just because it fails to adequately encompass soldiers’ experience, but because soldiers know full well how readily the Army will bend and reshape diagnostic categories to suit its own purposes. It has so much attached to it in terms of material value and stigma. While the feeling of posttraumatic stress makes the body into a traitor or at least a rowdy and unpredictable nuisance, a diagnosis of PTSD makes it into a pathologized commodity, an instrument of another kind, one that the soldier then becomes obligated to demonstrate is broken. In various ways, these soldiers “[embody] ‘disability’ in the face of power” in moves that are “at once self-objectifying and a plastic performance” (Stewart 1996, 129). It is another register of alienation or separation from the body, not owning it, its responses to things having been taken over by the extreme circumstances to which it was/is subjected, and the meaning of those responses organized in a particular and arbitrary way by the structure that subjected the body in the first place. Physical experience and the interpretation of that experience both exceed individual agency and subjectivity.

Juarez and Ernie and others describe here is a free-floating condition, one that is intimately familiar to them and that they will surrender to larger interpretive schemes—the schemes that decide fitness for duty and for promotion and the level of disability payments—only on their own terms.

AT HOME

Dee was a technician but she volunteered for guard duty on transport convoys. She rode with them as a gunner, sitting behind the .50 cal in the turret, and went out almost every day for six months. She had been home for almost two months when she and her husband and three-year-old daughter went into town Christmas shopping. They stopped at a Red Robin for Lunch. It was busy and they sat down by the entrance to wait for their table. The hostess gave Dee's daughter a helium balloon. The guy next to her, a man in his sixties, was wearing a Vietnam veteran cap and so she struck up a conversation. As they were chatting, the balloon got away and popped on a giant metallic Christmas ornament right above her head, and she instantly ducked her head down between her knees. The vet put a friendly hand on her shoulder and told her dryly not to worry. "It'll only take 15 years for that to stop." I asked her how it made her feel to hear that. "It made me feel normal," she said.

But things in her marriage weren't normal. She couldn't be close to her husband. She was used to sleeping alone, she said (though intense sensitivity to personal space is classed as a symptom of PTSD). One night she rolled away from him, sat up, and said, "You need to get out of the bed, now." He was furious with her the next morning, but she didn't even remember it. They didn't have sex. They didn't even touch. Enraged one night, she yelled at him, "I'm sorry you're not getting laid, but I'm still seeing my buddies get killed in my head!" He felt resentful and emasculated; he had been in the Army too, but he hadn't been in combat and he had gained weight while she was gone. She internalized his criticisms of her distance and thought that she wasn't doing enough to make things right again.

She had traumatic reactions to unexpected things. One night months after getting back she was watching *Transformers* with her husband and daughter. The opening scene

shows a military base in the middle of the desert being attacked and destroyed. She watched it knowing it was just a movie, but even just as the dramatic tension in the scene was building, before any of the destruction actually started, she could feel the hyperarousal coming on: her heart racing, cold sweat down her back. She left the room and sat on the kitchen floor with her head between her knees. Her daughter came up to her and offered her her apple juice. “For the first time in my life I couldn’t sleep.” Her Army friends used to call her Cat because she would curl up anywhere—in lockers, under vehicles—to take a nap. But now her mind would race through a chain of relentless associations that always ended up somewhere dark: “it was not hard to connect taking my daughter’s Christmas pictures with .50 cal.”

They were working through it a little bit. But in a month she was leaving for a couple weeks of field training. And another month after that she was leaving the state for an NCO training course. And more likely than not she would be deployed to Iraq again before long. “This is how our marriage works,” she said. They were both used to Navy deployments and being away from one another. Except that now it wasn’t just the separation that was hard, it was all this other stuff folding back on top of it. Being apart wouldn’t save them, but it would make it possible for them to carry on.

After Bullard got blown up, he woke up in the hospital. His buddies told him he had gotten out of the demolished Bradley and was wandering around babbling, but he didn’t remember it. He was in the hospital in Balad for a couple weeks, and then Landstuhl for a couple more, and then Brook Army Medical Center in San Antonio for another month. His wife came and met him there, and he was utterly emotionless, he said. His responsibility as a Bradley driver was to bring everyone home safe, and he had failed. They hadn’t gotten to come back, and “I felt like I shouldn’t have come back. I was trying to keep myself from coming back.” There’s lots of stuff he hasn’t told his wife about what

it was like; he still doesn't tell her about the IEDs and all the vehicles getting destroyed and his soldiers getting killed—anything that would have made her worry when he was there, he said, he still keeps to himself or talks to his buddies about.

So it's hard for her to understand, he said. And it's hard for him to feel dependent on her, to feel taken care of. With his TBI, he has to stick to a really regulated routine and double-check everything. And she has to double-check it too, which he doesn't always like. It's like she doesn't trust him to do it. "You feel like a kid." Other times, though, she acts like there's nothing wrong, like there's no injury. She's still getting used to what he's like now, the things that bother him and what he can and can't do. But she's patient, she reads the medical literature when there are things he can't explain. "She tries so hard," he said. "She's really, really understanding."

One last story: Childs is a Texas National Guard chaplain in his early sixties. His office shelves are full of philosophy texts in French and German, but because of TBI he can't read them anymore. The forms and meanings of words slop around in his brain like it's a bowl of spaghetti. He was at Camp Slayer, which used to be a luxurious Ba'ath Party compound at the edge of Baghdad International Airport, and a 122 mm rocket hit the chapel where he was conducting a service on the morning of the first Iraqi elections, in 2005. The TBI came on slowly: mood swings, memory loss, Tourettes-like swearing fits. Then he had a stroke—a mild one, but scary.

The stress doesn't just go away the day you come home, he said. When he is home with his family, he is solitary and withdrawn. His kids can relate to him all right, but his wife doesn't really believe anything happened to him, that he ever saw any action. One day she noticed a dark stain on his boot. It was the blood of a soldier who Childs had been with when he died. "That's Browning's blood," he told her. "No it's not," she said. "You don't love me anymore," she tells him. He is still deployable. He wants to go back.

This all sounds grim, and so I want to emphasize that reunions are of course joyful too. Soldiers are happy to be back, and their families are happy to have them back. Sometimes, from how it was described to me, the adjustments are seamless, or close to it; there are countless points at which the wounded do heal up, the stressed out do relax, and the neglected and the bullied and the lonely and the bereaved begin to get some reprieve. But again, these happen in increments, by slow labor that most of the time resembles nothing so much as waiting out the feeling of being stuck.³⁵ And the current temporality of Army life is short on opportunities to allow time to pass without new stresses coming to bear. The stresses of exposure and separation do not end with reunion, and they are not necessarily reversible. Just about everyone is changed. In that change, vulnerability extends itself into these intimate spaces, asserting itself in these moves of isolation, withdrawal, holding back. Where before it made its presence felt through absence, now it works in the barriers that people raise or the spaces they carve out between one another and within themselves. The soldier blocks out his injury. The spouse seeks only certain information, is granted only certain information, is even distrustful of information. And the Army itself looms over the whole scene: what it demands and expects, what it gives with one hand and takes with another.

UNCOMFORTABLY NUMB

I began the last chapter with the idea of the soldier as a kind of anaesthetic subject (Buck-Morss 1992) that can act decisively on the world while remaining hermetically isolated and impervious to pain. The kind of protective technologies that facilitate that anaesthesia, however, have their own aesthetic, sensory properties. So too on this end of

³⁵ A recent study from the University of Denver links marital discord in military families to deployment and combat stress (Jon Anderson 2010).

things, away from the battlefield. For the thing that unites the accounts and examples above is the labor of not feeling, of the self-conscious mastery of affect and emotion and physical pain by soldiers and spouses, and of the institutionally imposed haze of medication and the disciplining of the body and the emotions. There is a whole range of gripes about Army life that revolve around the stress of managing or suppressing feelings, along with more neutral or positive commentary that valorizes such discipline as a way to empower oneself, to protect others, to maintain one's efficacy and capacities. People live with this ambivalence.

But numbing is the bad side, the critique. I met a helicopter pilot who had become a massage therapist after her deployment. "Everyone in the Army walks around all hush-hush," she said, because there's so much you're not supposed to say, so much you're just supposed to take. It blocks your throat chakra, she said, and blocks you up—she mimed a hunched posture, her body curled in around the imagined point of blockage in her throat. All that restraint builds up on the body. When she was stressed out, her Army psychiatrist just wanted to give her antidepressants and redeploy her. That was "the Army solution," she said—chemically neutralizing the feelings instead of addressing them. In this sense, it is important to understand anaesthetics as something more complicated than simply the absence of feeling. It can be accomplished equally by foisting Prozac on one soldier and denying Percoset to another, by demanding that physical or psychic pain be shaken off, by pathologizing injury as weakness or a failure of character. What results is not the banishment of feeling, but the "benign brutality" (Povinelli 2006, 204) of its circumscription. This is an anaesthetic that never quite takes hold and never fully wears off, and so you remain perpetually aware, even if only at that proprioceptive level where feeling fades off into a tingly fog, of the feelings that you aren't feeling, that lie buried between brief punctuations of consciousness.

Chapter 4: Vicissitudes of Love

TEARS AT THE MANIFEST

The departure and return events for deploying soldiers are called manifests. They are a sort of bureaucratic roll call combined with either a prolonged and devastating farewell or a quick and joyful reunion. They have a sort of folk-mythic significance in military communities as scenes of eventfulness and intensity that define the collective experience of absence, separation, anxiety, and strained attachment, the stone-faced inhumanity of the war apparatus and the extravagantly painful human frailty of the people caught up in it. People wanted to know if I had been to one; they wanted to make sure that I did.

A lot of the time the manifests are held in gyms, of which there are several on post. Indeed, the gym is such a familiar scene of imminent absence and endangerment that its bleachers and brick walls often provide the setting for the ads from military insurers that appear in *Army Times*. Odd that this wrenching ritual of departure should be set in this place laden with youthful associations of sex, competition, discipline, play, humiliation, and burgeoning bodily prowess. The gyms look like normal, good-sized high school or YMCA gyms, with patriotic slogans and icons—soaring eagles, geometric designs of stars and stripes—on their cinderblock walls above stacked bleachers. But they do so much duty for manifests that there are signs hanging up permanently, banners with big block-letter messages specific to the occasion, but constant reminders, it would seem, to soldiers playing basketball or lifting weights: above the doors out to the parking lot, “COME HOME SAFE”; on the opposite wall, the first thing you see when you enter, “WELCOME HOME.” These rooms are permanently configured for coming from and going to war.

For whatever reason, this manifest was outdoors, on the lawn and parking lot next to the unit HQ building on Battalion Avenue. There is a long line of battalion headquarters buildings stretching for a mile or maybe more through this part off the post, and like all the others, this one is square, bland and tan, inside and out, not much to it but a long linoleum corridor, a reception desk, a handful of offices, a conference room. The walls are mostly bare. In front, a parched but well-kept lawn slopes to the street; behind, a long stretch of parking lot—filling now with cars—and then a barracks; and next door, a narrow, equally nondescript warehouse, where in a couple of hours soldiers will line up to be assigned their weapons. Sometimes these buildings have a sleepy feeling, the few occasions I’ve been in them before—light slanting through the windows, Privates on desk duty killing time while they wait for the phone to ring. But today this place is lively, soldiers and civilian family members moving in and out the doors, calling to one another from one room to the next.

The manifest is for several hundred soldiers, a good part of an artillery battalion—some were deploying the next day, and a smaller number had already gone ahead. Artillery means that they are combat arms, and so all men except for a very few women soldiers I spotted who must have had ostensibly non-combat logistical, support or administrative jobs. An acquaintance, Danielle, invited me. Her husband Gene is a senior NCO who has already served two OIF tours, so he got assigned to the rear detachment, the part of the unit that stays in garrison while the rest is deployed. When I first met Danielle she was adamant about steering clear of military wives during deployment, what she described as the pointless drama and hassle that came with life in a military community. She singled out the FRGs—“Family Readiness Groups” organized by the Army to foster communication and mutual aid and social connection among soldiers’ spouses—for special scorn: nothing but gossip and bad energy. Originally, when it

looked like Gene was going to go, Danielle had been planning on moving back to Georgia, where she was from. But now, somehow, she had ended up in charge of the FRG for Gene's company—FRGs are organized parallel to their Army counterparts, and it is typical for the spouse of a senior NCO to serve as the corresponding company-level FRG head. Danielle—tall, broad-shouldered, and with a disposition at once cheery and forceful—had spotted me in the parking lot of the foundation a few weeks previous, told me the unit was deploying, and shepherded me along to a whole series of events leading up to it. First there had been a mass FRG meeting, a briefing for all the spouses and families of the soldiers in the battalion; there were handouts and PowerPoint slides and a series of presentations outlining where the soldiers would be—LSA Anaconda in Taji, Iraq—what their accommodations would look like—white vinyl-sided trailers on cinderblocks, studded with air conditioners—when they would get there, how they and their families would be able to communicate—internet access, phone cards, the Army's DSN phone network—what circumstances would merit emergency leave, who spouses and parents should contact in the rear detachment when they had questions or problems. Before the meeting, in a giant, nondescript auditorium, Danielle and the other FRG section leaders stood at tables in the crowded lobby and handed out deployment care packages for the soldiers: heavy, purse-sized plastic bags of toiletries, sunscreen, candy, stationery, pamphlets on stress management and communication skills. These were either assembled by the FRG itself or donated by an outside group—the Army does not provide them. The next event was a family day, a couple days later, a sort of company picnic for the entire brigade, or what Gene called “mandatory fun”. There was barbecue, donated by a host of chefs from all over central Texas, served under tents on the wide, bare field watched over by the façade of the post stadium and a giant water tower. There was a flag

football tournament with teams drawn from the deploying battalions and there were more speeches.

But the manifest wasn't about getting ready or getting together—it was about saying goodbye. The soldiers will gather, wait, attend to a few last duties, and then, with little fanfare, assemble in formation and board the plain white school buses that will carry them across the post to Robert Gray Army Airfield, where they will board a plane to Kuwait and then convoy to Baghdad. The wives and children and friends and parents of many of these soldiers will gather and wait with them and pass an uneasy last couple of hours together before a sudden and painful goodbye; they will watch the buses depart and they themselves will disperse. Around 10 am, soldiers show up in uniform, toting massive bags: big rucksacks that they will carry with them, even bigger duffels that get dumped in a pile and loaded into a plain white box van. The soldiers cluster in groups and stand in lines across the parking lot, the lawn, the loading dock next door, waiting on squad or platoon leaders or comrades with clipboards who check their names off of one or another list. They pass in and out the back door of the HQ building that opens onto a strip of sidewalk and the parking lot where the buses will pull up before long.

Just inside that door, in a sort of vacant-looking lounge area—no windows, high ceiling, vending machines, furniture pushed into one corner—I stand with Danielle and some other FRG ladies and a group of civilian volunteers who have come to help see the soldiers off. They have laid out a couple of folding tables with red-, white- and blue-frosted cupcakes decorated with the unit's informal dragon crest, little bags of snacks and candy, sodas and bottled water, and stuffed toy bears that the soldiers can take with them and, the idea is, give to Iraqi kids, or they can give them to their own kids, here, now, before they leave. And soldiers and their kids come up and avail themselves of these things, and Danielle and the other wives and the volunteers all chat smilingly with them.

The volunteers work for a big telecom company; they tell me that they stuff and stitch up the bears on their lunch hours. They are in their fifties or sixties; some of them were in the military themselves, or have spouses who were, and several of them come regularly to manifests at Ft. Hood. The bears, done mostly in brightly colored print fabrics, are small and squishy enough that they stuff easily into the side pocket of ACU pants; before long, in the gathering crowd of milling soldiers, you can see the little fabric arms and legs and dark button eyes sticking out of pockets and the side straps of backpacks, vivid against the drab ACU camo. One lady tells me she makes sure the Privates and PFCs all get one. “I tell them they can use it as a pillow.” Privates and PFCs don't have pillows because they can't afford them, she says, but then adds, “They're for the kids. I really hope they make it to the kids.”

The soldiers settle all over the lawn, joined now by wives and kids and parents and siblings and friends, a field of drab olive and crew cuts interspersed with the bright tones of blues jeans, t-shirts, sneakers, bare limbs, long hair. Two little girls in matching Supergirl shirts alternate between messy bites of cupcake and clinging to their dad's camo legs. A teenage boy holds the leash of a little pit bull puppy with sores on its back. The crowd grows and spills across the lawn, around to the front of the building. It is a summer day in Texas, mostly overcast but still hot, and people crowd into the scant patches of shade. Soldiers without family or visitors to see them off sit in groups by themselves. Families sprawl in big, multigenerational groups. Little kids run around playing tag. Couples hold each other as closely as they can in public. It is an exercise in waiting, everyone waiting out these precious and painful last couple of hours. As I skirt the edge of the crowd, people-watching, it seems, from the outside, surprisingly upbeat, not much different than the family day the week before: soldiers together with soldiers, soldiers together with families, families together with families; the odd mix of tedious

official obligation and the pleasure of socializing; the tension of the looming deployment surprisingly *not* palpable, at least to me.

Danielle introduces me to the wives of the other NCOs, a couple of the officers, the battalion commander. For many of them, this is their third deployment. One of these ladies, married to an E5 and in her early thirties, tells me, “A lot of young couples won’t make it.” But one of the ladies gestures out to the crowd of soldiers and points out that almost half wear no patch on their right shoulders, meaning that they have never deployed before. They have all been told to expect the deployment to last 15 months, and though they will end up coming home in 12 instead, this preemptive extension, a whole year plus another season, weighs on everyone’s mind. “Just stay busy,” the sergeant’s wife says—that’s how you get through. Another woman tells me, “I’ve already cried once,” at home, in private. When we met before she told me she preferred to stay away from the manifests, that you didn’t want to be around other people’s negativity—crying, fighting, recriminations—when you were trying to say your own goodbyes. People who have been through it before have already done their talk at home. Maybe that accounts for the sense of relative calm. Earlier this morning, she read the notes her kids, who are middle school to college-aged, had written to their dad, and she packed them in his gear for him to discover later. She was proud of them: they’re old enough to express themselves really well now. Her daughter quoted Psalms 31 in her note: “Angels will watch over you.”

Time passes, relatively uneventfully. After a while, a couple dozen soldiers are called into formation, then a couple dozen more, and then they disperse again. Two buses arrive. They look innocuous, but they are icons of doom—Danielle jokes that the FRG should have a fundraiser where wives could pay money for a chance to smash the hell out of one of those buses. The buses sit a few feet off the curb with their engines off. There is

another formation, then another. Everyone keeps telling me to just wait, I'm going to see a lot of crying any minute. They have said this a lot, as I have met them over the past couple of days, and now all morning long. "Just wait a few minutes, that's when all the boo-hooing starts," Gene says to me, in his voice not scorn, exactly, but a put-upon uneasiness. They, the women, have brought me there to see the crying, I suppose.

The families and little kids continue to mill around. And then, at some signal that I miss, the soldiers begin to shoulder their packs and weapons and move toward the buses. Little kids, half-comprehending, are hoisted up again by their dads and put back down. Here and there, couples twist into final, agonizing clenches and hold on for dear life, for minutes. One by one, the soldiers pull themselves away from wives and kids; arms stretch out, hands keep gripping, slacken, release. The soldiers walk across a few feet of asphalt and form a long, orderly line along the side of the bus and slowly file on. I look for the crying: there is a little, here and there. It won't really start until the buses pull away, Danielle murmurs to me. Minutes drag on as the soldiers board. Nothing about this melodrama happens cleanly or quickly, or even particularly dramatically. Some women dash up to the line to steal one last embrace. One couple lingers holding hands awkwardly through the window of the bus. There is a constant racket of activity: squads and platoons summoned, shouted questions, names called off, jokes. The soldiers are not crying, not that I can see. Some are smiling, most look at least a little dazed. But they are with each other now, on the other side of this strip of pavement. And on the sidewalk and the lawn, the families and wives and girlfriends are with each other. The muddled bonds and boundaries that could be foregone for the last couple of hours have snapped cleanly back into place, a kind of intimate social alchemy: one moment the man in the ACUs belongs only to the people who have come to see him, to their embraces and smiles and last words, and the next moment he belongs only to the Army.

Again without preamble, the buses drive off down the parking lot. The soldiers are now deployed. I look around for the deluge of tears, afraid to look and then doing it anyway. I see wet cheeks and eyes, women hugging—hugging each other, hugging kids, hugging dads and brothers and in-laws. But there is no spectacle, no flood, and indeed the crowd has already thinned, many of them are already gone. On the one hand, it seems like a classically liminal moment, but for everyone who didn't get on the buses, there is no passage to the other side, no clear ending. There are signs, protocols, all that, sure, but no pomp, no regalia, no ecstasy of *communitas*, no flood of tears, no closure. Does the closure come in 12 months, or 15, when the soldiers return? Can it, when they know they will be headed out again after a scant 12 months at home, even that precious and far-off time filled in with long days of work and weekends in the field. There is no closure, only whatever quantity inheres in persisting with daily life, with normalcy, in the face of the burden of fear, anxiety and absence that now lies before the wives, the girlfriends, the parents, the children, and even, in different form, the soldiers themselves. Instead of closure, there is the daily work of not coming undone.

I say goodbye to some of the women I met and wish them well. Danielle looks around for Gene—he disappeared inside minutes ago and missed the entire departure. A moment later he emerges, his giant action-figure frame bounding out the back door off the building. “You left me and Ken out here with all the bawling wives!” she snaps at him.

“I know,” he replies. “Why do you think I went back in?”

“You needed to see that,” she retorts, and then walks off.

Gene turns to me. “My wife doesn't understand that if it's hard for them, it's even harder for the man, because you feel like you're abandoning your family! You're in a mindset, and if you look back, you're gonna get out of it. She called after me when I left

last time and I didn't look back. She was mad. She didn't understand.” His voice has a little more than its usual aggressive snap. Other soldiers have told me this too—you feel like shit when you get on that bus, you look around and see everyone else on the verge of breaking down too, wiping their eyes, looking away, but you don't let it take you over. The women wanted me to see the crying. Gene wants me to know this other side. They both want me to know what the other cannot, I think, help but know, but which they insist the other somehow fails to understand.

From the outside, this event looks oddly flat for something so intimate, not quite coherent. From the inside, it looks totally different depending on who you are and where you are in it. It's an exercise in solidarity and affection, but its strongest features are pain, loss, grief, misrecognition, the tight control and suppression of emotions—and then on top of all that, the anticipation and recollection of all these things.

The manifest appears to be a break of some sort. It gets built up as a break, gets reacted to as a break. And of course it is. But it is also just an extreme scene in an ongoing condition that also moves in longer, slower waves. The pain, the absence, are problems of anticipation, duration, waiting; at worst attrition, at best endurance, and in fact probably some combination of the two. This is what it means to cry beforehand, at home, or to know that you will need to stay busy. This duration, the slow movement through time of these attachments, it maybe the essential feature that makes such a mess of them, that poses these dilemmas of at what moment, and for how long, should matter more or less than another or another or another.

All different forms of attachment seem to be in full flower: the soldierly solidarity, the leaders giving orders and benediction and encouragement, the parental love, the romantic and conjugal bonds, the sentimental volunteers, the wives who lean on each other, the kids half scared and half oblivious, the single soldiers with no one to say

goodbye to, the looming presence of The Army and The War, these inhuman forces that just keep rolling arrogantly on, and thank you for your cooperation. These things all knot together against a background of work, sex, death, loss, danger, absence, duty, money—the reasons for making some attachment that places another one jeopardy. Classic liminality means that some surface splits open and truer, more fundamental things are revealed. Here it is more as if the significance of all these relations is revealed at their most visible as they variously combine forces and turn against one another. There is no subtext. The conflicts and the synergies work right there on the surface and everyone is talking about them—waiting for the tears, or trying to avoid them—so that as you attend to the knot bit by bit, what you get is decidedly not a sense of what is “really” going on. Rather, any claim to normalcy, that any one of these attachments naturally or necessarily comes before others, and the others merely exert a deforming influence on them ... well, it all begins to seem pretty arbitrary. Does Gene’s dedication to his job hurt his marriage? Or do Danielle’s expectations interfere with his ability to be a soldier? Is it worse to experience the pain of departure alone, as one wife of one soldier, or in a group, as one of many wives, some of whom react in ways that make you uncomfortable. Are the men soldiers first, or husbands, sons, boyfriends, fathers? Are the women women first, or wives, or Army Wives? Which attachment is more fundamental? Which comes first and which lasts the longest? Which is left when others dissolve and fail? Which is called into being only by dissolution and failure? Which rules apply? Which ones get broken? And are these attachments separate kinds at all? Are they not, even at the moments when one struggles so hard to give a specific and appropriate name and form to them, always excessive and always ready to collapse down into nameless flatness? Could it be that chronic uncertainty, that high-stakes mutability, and that dull and mundane ground of

attachment, as much as a promise of no-matter-what-forever-and-ever that gives love its charge?

LOVE IS THE ANSWER

In my conversations and experiences with soldiers and their families and those close to them, love was invoked endlessly by one definition or another to explain one thing after another. War raises the stakes on the capacity for subsumption and erasure that the word love seems to possess, its ability to conjure so many different feelings and kinds of attachment. Or perhaps it is more correct to say that war helps reveal what the stakes always already were, and that violence and politics are always hovering over the question of “how one loves what one loves” (Dumm 1999, 3). War is full of things that are overwhelming, that cannot be balanced out, that cannot be justified or adequately explained—things, in short, that beg for something to intervene and sort them out, something that is both crudely sentimental and transcendent. Something that is certain and unarguable. People endure and do the unthinkable out of love for those they are bound to protect or to support. They turn to love, in one form or another, so that the unthinkable becomes livable.

Love is invoked all the time, so it must mean something—or rather, invoking it and feeling it must *do* something. People say they love their country, the Army, their fellow soldiers, their husbands and wives, their jobs, where they live. A lot of the time they say they hate these things too. Or that they used to feel one way and now feel another, or that they love some parts and hate others. Love makes some things easier. It makes other things harder. Love is the reward for work, or it is the thing that itself has to be worked on. It is the thing that must be explained, or it is the explanation for things.

It is surprising how bereft the English language is of words that specifically describe various different kinds of attachment conjured by love. Freud notes that the term refers to the attachments between both a heterosexual pair and a parent and child, between siblings, and so on. This banal bit of language deliberately obfuscates the boundaries between categories of attachment. Well-adjusted psyches, Freud says, are “obliged” to recognize the differences among these categories and act accordingly, but the term’s promiscuity nevertheless highlights the foundational psychoanalytical insight that all attachment is best understood via a map of muddled, misdirected, sublimated, and often wildly inappropriate desires. Is there thus some cliché of social unconscious at work in the fact that “love” can indicate so many things that we are “obliged” to keep separate—filial loyalty (“I love my father”), sex acts (to make love), attachment to objects and commodities (“I love my new belt”), a sense of well-being and goodwill (feeling the love), and care for pets and children (“your father loves you”)? After all, we commodify sex, sexualize children, infantilize lovers, eroticize friendship, trivialize emotion, and sentimentalize the trivial, all on a routine basis. Something is accomplished by the ability of this sign, “love,” to draw in and collapse wide-ranging meaning into singularity—and not just any singularity, but an indisputable, incorruptible, deliberately ineffable one; a trump card, all-purpose. Love is implicitly boundary-blurring and explicitly boundary-defying. Attention to its deployment both highlights the interrelation of supposedly different and distinct kinds of attachment and draws attention to the other ties and boundaries of sociality that “love” works with or against. By blurring boundaries love comments on those boundaries, makes itself a practice for accommodating them.

In this way love is a language for negotiating unsettling dependencies, structural alienation, forced intimacy, quixotic ideologies, and unthinkable events and circumstances. It is a richly evocative discourse, but one worthy of some skepticism of

the naturalized transcendence it conveys. Because the surface meanings of love are highly circumscribed and regarded as self-evident goods in themselves: it means heterosexual love, domestic coupling and marriage, children and parental love, properly bounded platonic love for one's fellow soldiers and military spouses, the homosocial filiation of Army corporate culture, the ideologized love for the Army and the country. These individual and deeply personal impulses are not separable from their structural condition. Love is called upon as a resource for reproducing militarized labor, or for animating the overbearing homosociality of the "Army Family," or to give meaning and purpose to horrific and violent death. Love in this broader sense resembles Foucault's description of sex: it is not merely an emotion, "a stubborn drive." It is "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, ... an administration and a population" (Foucault 1988, 103). As a relation that creates subjects, love is what makes you human, the thing without which your life is an impoverished shadow. Love in this sense is a point "through which each individual has to pass to have access to his own intelligibility" (ibid., 155)—to Be All That You Can Be, as the recruiting ads used to have it.

In this community, as in the culture at large, heterosexual love and the nuclear family are cast as a sort of ultimate good that justifies difficult choices and motivates the endurance of hardships. People experience the obligations and attachments of their actual families in direct tension with the Army's intrusive demands and impersonal coldness. But just as often, the language of love and family was invoked to metaphorize the intense homosocial bonds among soldiers, or to talk about how these bonds overflow their institutional boundaries and take hold of other areas of life. Soldiers commented on, valorized and complained about their families and significant others—cited them as sources of inescapable stress and undue drama and immeasurable reward and limitless

devotion—almost as much as they did the Army itself. Supporting wives and husbands and kids was the reason for joining the Army, for getting up every morning in the dark to go to work, for enduring unthinkable hardship in Iraq. That love was the highest good, the thing that seemed able to redeem everything else. But it was also incredibly fragile—it was severely tested by war and by Army life, and it had to be worked on, looked out for, protected. Often it was painful, in its transience, its mutability, its susceptibility to betrayal. Tales of infidelity and broken marriages abound, many of them more painful even than the comparatively straightforward challenges of bureaucratic discipline and the traumas of war violence. In this way, love is cast as a sort of other to the Army, an alternate system of value and way of being.

At the same time, love provides the language of homosocial solidarity and Army corporate culture. It's epitomized in a bit of the Gospel according to John that appears in speeches and pep talks, eulogies, newspaper columns, inscribed on buildings and murals and emblems: “no greater love hath any man than to lay down his life for his fellow man.” The fellow man cited here can be read as the national populace whom the soldier has sworn to defend, of course. But it refers less to fellow Americans than it does to fellow soldiers. Terms like “brotherhood” and “friendship” hint at it, but they don't tell the full story. This is love that is isomorphic with the Army. It is the name for the kind of attachment between people who would die for one another, who have exposed themselves to harm for one another, who have seen others who were helping them befall harm as a result, who have so much confidence in their leaders that they would follow them anywhere, or who care so deeply for their subordinates that they would do anything to protect them. More prosaically, love is the attachment among groups of people who have passed significant portions of their lives living and working in extremely intimate proximity with one another. Though perhaps not so prosaic, for in the Army it is

precisely the potential for harm and death the demands an unparalleled level of attention to and involvement in other people's lives—the emotional quantities known by terms like “cohesion,” “morale” and “esprit de corps” earned these technocratic names precisely because military logic understands them as instrumental matters of life and death. This kind of love can be painful too, when it is lacking, taken for granted, or grown dysfunctional. It is not a mere instrument—soldiers believe in the importance of morale, both on its own terms and for its instrumental end, on which they may find their own lives depending, and it hurts when leaders don't care, when subordinates don't show respect, when people don't look out for each other. It can spell alienation, or death.

The term “love” is my own methodological choice. In some instances it is taken directly from soldiers' own words, but in other ways I have appropriated it as a gloss for the feeling of the whole range of kinship, attachment and dependency that they would describe—brotherhood, friendship, loyalty, duty, etc—all of which seemed like it would fit under the term. In his classic study *American Kinship*, David Schneider (1980) describes “love” as a symbol linking two kinds of “enduring, diffuse solidarity”—conjugal, erotic love, between husbands and wives, and cognatic, filial love between parents and children. “Love is what American kinship is all about,” writes Schneider. It bridges differences—between generations and between sexes—and affirms the unity of the people thus differentiated. The instance of the Army introduces considerable pressure and complexity into this model, as the “involuntary” character of real kinship is extended, by the total and coercive character of the institution, into other areas of life.

And that is precisely the problematic, the condition that makes the invocation of love so useful. Schneider remarks at the outset of his study that American kinship is notable for its putative autonomy from other areas of social life: family is separate from work, separate from politics, separate from the nation. To label an attachment as love is

to claim an exception to all the binds of the social. As Elizabeth Povinelli writes, “True love works against the social, even as it configures the social as a set of constraining surfaces ... deforming the true destination of the self” (2006, 177). Love, in this way, not only lets you know who you are and where you stand, but posits a mode of “true” individual sovereignty that only makes sense against a background of unreasonable constraint—it is an “involuntary” impulse that pits individual will and autonomy against “involuntary” supraindividual constraints. The ethnographic reality is, to use Foucault’s words, that love *is* stubborn, and that it is lived as a drive, albeit one that is promiscuous and multiple and mutable in its objects. Love is not merely double or dialectical in this way, but extends polysemously into all things at the same time as it asserts its independence from all things. Love is not simply desire, but the heady proximity of desire, the desire for desire, the experience of and desire for a feeling powerful enough to rearrange all other priorities. Love is “a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us” (Berlant 2006, 20). The fluidity of the term draws attention to the portability and flexibility of the idioms and metaphors that make sense of all these things, and also to people’s own real sense of confusion and conflict about how they all come together without ever fitting together or resolving, an excess of attachments between and among people, groups, things, institutions, and feelings.

NERVOUS STRUCTURES

Much of what first caught my attention about this terrain of “love” is described in expert detail in John Hawkins’ ethnography of life at U.S. military installations in West Germany during the mid-1980s. Hawkins—a retired Army Colonel turned anthropologist—frames his analysis in terms of the immense satisfaction that soldiers and

their families take from Army life and the simultaneous “alienation” produced by the Army’s domination of all other areas of life—and its domination, especially, of domesticity and the family. American posts in Germany were incredibly insular, both by design—for reasons of security and control—and by circumstance—linguistic and cultural barriers that divided Americans from the local German population. In the context of this insularity and high-alert posture of the late Cold War, with the frontier of the Eastern Bloc literally a short car ride away, “The military ethos penetrated the entire community ..., and thus, also penetrated the military families that constituted part of the community” (Hawkins 2005, 43). Military families found themselves subject to the “competing premises” of Army corporate culture and their native American culture, Hawkins writes. In words that my own informants echoed, Hawkins’ subjects complain that the Army is full of “bullshit”; it is a “crazy system.” And while the Army was—as it still is—able to make unconditional demands on soldiers, its standards and mores, in comparison the “naturalness” of American culture, appear “subordinate,” “contingent,” and even “foreign” and “communist” (ibid., 230, 276). It is precisely this disjuncture, “the interplay and misplay of institutions,” that proves “alienating” (ibid., 282).

Hawkins’ aims are straightforwardly functionalist: how to increase military efficacy by alleviating this alienation. Indeed, it seems animated by a sort of grim and mortal apocalypticism, in the form of a warning that “Those cultures whose armies can keep their institutional culture most closely tuned to the reality of war—rather than distort it in nationalisms, deify it in myth, or dilute it with accommodations to the patterns of the larger culture—will likely survive longer” (Hawkins 2005, 282). So his book concludes with a series of nuanced policy recommendations; and policy changes can and should be deployed to improve life in and with military institutions. But while Hawkins sees the problem of “competing premises” as a sort of structural-functional

friction, I am interested in what happens when this competition is treated as fundamental rather than incidental—if all the effects of institutions are taken as a single whole and the undesirable ones not shunted to the side as “misplay.” Indeed, Hawkins himself cites Erving Goffman’s insight that total institutions like the Army “do not really look for cultural victory. They create and sustain a particular kind of tension between the home world and the institution and use this persistent tension to leverage the management of men” (Goffman 1961 as cited in Hawkins 2005, 277). While Hawkins’ goal seems to be that of refining a means of “leverage” that is both efficient and humane, I am interested in the “sustained tension” that Goffman points to, in the way its constitutive power far exceeds any straightforward instrumentality and the “bullshit” and “crazy system” that result. And beyond even this is the way that the system itself becomes infused and invested with affect and ideology, the ways that its rational operation becomes a source of emotional significance and satisfaction. Call it, after Michael Taussig, a “nervous system” (Taussig 1992), this always incomplete, always in progress, always productive tension between the hyperrationality of imposed regulation, itself riven with excess, and the exigencies of experience: rules being imposed, attachments being cultivated and stretched and broken and forged anew. Nervous because of its agitation, its dynamism, its anxiousness, the visceral, felt impulses of the people who inhabit it—a system that is, as Taussig writes, a response just as much as it is a tool of analysis (ibid.). Rules, orders, premises, organizational sociology of the total institution can be a starting point rather than just a conclusion: it is precisely their insolubility and excessiveness that makes the competing forms of attachment described in this chapter so compelling to the people enmeshed in them, and thus so important to pay attention to.

And what of these competing and mutually exclusive forces, domains, premises that Hawkins lays out? I engage them here to posit as starting points what might

otherwise appear as endpoints, to suggest as the basic state of things those features that Hawkins treats as problems to be solved. Chief among these is the opposition between work and family, the Army's intrusions on private life and private time, its ability to always trump without excuse, and with no recourse available for soldiers and families. This tension is very real, but in the context of ongoing war and repeated and lengthy deployments, the prolonged absences and exposure to danger that these entail, does it even make sense to think of it a soluble problem? In my ethnographic experience, it seems that it is also useful to consider this tension as a chronic condition, and to ask not how to solve it, but how it is that people live with it. A related concern is the contrast Hawkins articulates between the emphasis on autonomy and self-gratification that characterizes "American cultural premises" and the asceticism, discipline and hierarchy of military cultural premises. In reality, however, the functional significance and the emotional investment in these differences swoop and swarm around each other, entangled and without a single distinct origin. These putative oppositions are as much symbolic as they are pragmatic, though no less 'real' for that. This blurring is especially apparent in the gendered qualities that Hawkins attributes to them: the Army is rational and arbitrary, home is emotional and natural. The Army is doing, hardship and sacrifice, home is resting and nurturing. Home supports Army, and per Hawkins, the Army "penetrates" home.

Supposedly such practical imbalances can or ought to be justified, for Hawkins' informants, in terms of the functional efficacy of the Army—that is, they would be willing to live with these tensions if they seemed to serve some purpose. But because the institution is dysfunctional, he says, the imbalances are not regarded as worthwhile concerns. This thesis makes two assumptions about the Army: first, that the irrationality of a hyperrational system can be rationalized away. And second, that the Army itself is

pure function, that there is no feeling wrapped up in it, that its internal structure doesn't work by its own logic, as an end in itself. And here we come back to “no greater love,” the Army’s most valorized “cultural premise.” This greatest love belongs not to the person willing to die for his country, for his constitution, for his political leaders, for the democratic will of his nation. It belongs to the person who is willing to die for “the guy on your left and the guy on your right,” as I was told numerous times. And this is what makes any opposition between Army, war or violence in general, on the one hand, and “culture” on the other fall flat. Because greater love is about precisely that: the ideological, affective and emotional investment in the institutions of war—a culture of war.

ARMY FAMILY

There is of course tension between these two senses of the term: love as the other of the Army and love as the Army itself. And that tension takes really explicit form, perhaps most explicit around the simple fact that the Army is an inflexible and massively time-consuming employer whose workers are invested in, ambivalent about, or resentful of its domineering character in varying degrees. Thus the soldier is desperate not to be kept late at work so that she can go home to her husband and kids, or the soldier uncomplainingly foregoes time with family or significant other in the name of duty and obligation to fellow soldiers—or the same soldier does both. But that tension is complicated by the sprawling constellation of overlapping definitions by which the Army and the people who make it up bring the two together. Indeed, one of the features of love in the military is that it is not necessarily possible to disaggregate military and biopolitical instrumentality from practical concerns from authentic emotional investments. The modern American military has been a sort of national social laboratory for experiments in the regulation of

sexuality and appropriate modes of attachment for almost a century. During the congressional debate over sending U.S. soldiers' families to live with them in post-WWII Germany, Congressional Representative Margaret Chase Smith argued that cohabitation was not only central to "the American way of life," but that "American families could 'set an example for the natives'" of host nations (Stars and Stripes as cited in Hawkins 2005, 5-6). The debate over "don't ask, don't tell"—and hopefully its imminent lifting—is the current generation of an almost century-long history of sexual policing in the military (Canaday 2009).

In the name of things like morale and esprit de corps—and thus ultimately in the name of military efficacy—the Army institutionalizes familial and domestic love in myriad ways. It provides housing and healthcare for spouses and dependents of soldiers, and moves you to a bigger house if you have more kids. It pays married soldiers more. It officially recognizes degrees of hardship based on the separation of families and provides extensive life insurance. It builds schools, chapels, commissaries, PXs, and movie theaters, so that married soldiers can enjoy the pleasures and privacy of domestic life on post instead of the mess room and board of barracks and chow halls. The Army organizes Family Readiness Groups, organizations that provide mutual support for spouses and keep families in the loop about deployments and returns and other aspects of their soldiers' units. It sets up unit Family Days, when soldiers get to take their kids into their motor pools and firing ranges, and establishes Family Resource Centers, where military couples can go for marriage counseling or seminars on household financial planning. And it maintains its ties to older generations of soldiers, opening its facilities to veterans and retirees.

This elaborate and far-reaching arrangement of institutional involvement, and the ethic of care and the affective investment with which it is infused, is glossed as "the

Army Family.” The term has a slippery polysemy. It suggests a recognition of soldiers’ families as “Army families” and therefore the Army’s responsibility, owed compensation and recognition for their work supporting the soldier. But it also suggests the way that the family is comparable in status to “Army boots” or “Army regulations”—at worst generic, interchangeable, instrumental, and at best still subject to the Army’s control and standards. “Army wife” is the same way: it has a straightforward, surface meaning, but it also suggests a piece of interchangeable equipment, something issued by the Army; or it suggests a woman who is married to the Army as a whole, rather than to an individual who belongs to it; or it is a wife who is herself in the Army, though “by marriage,” as it were, rather than by the “blood” placed on the line by enlistment. Like the sense of “Army family” described above, “Army wife” is valorized by many of the women who see themselves in this role, who talk of their love for it or their duties within it. It also has its own subgenre of crude, misogynistic jokes: Army wives are “fat and nasty,” money-loving “boot-chasers”; SIAW is “standard issue Army wife,” BMW is “big military wife”—sexualized figures of greed, complacency and ugliness reduced to a techno-bureaucratic acronyms.

The term also goes beyond individual families to the sense in which the Army and those attached to it comprise a single Army Family. Here again it has a double sense. One the one hand, it is officially enshrined. The front page of the web site of the Army’s Morale, Wellness and Recreation Command (MWR) states:

The Army Family is broad-based, and includes:

- Soldiers (Active Duty, Army National Guard and Army Reserve)
- Department of the Army Civilians
- Retirees
- Veterans
- Families and their children
- And Survivors

The Army Family Covenant

We recognize the commitment and increasing sacrifices that our families are making every day.

We recognize the strength of our Soldiers comes from the strength of their Families.

We are committed to providing Soldiers and Families a Quality of Life that is commensurate with their service.

We are committed to providing our Families a strong, supportive environment where they can thrive.

We are committed to building a partnership with Army families that enhances their strength and resilience.³⁶

It is perhaps not surprising that many soldiers and spouses bristle at the earnestness, superficiality and heavy-handedness of the Army's "recognition" and "commitment," the way that promises of support stand against a lack of real material assistance. It is mocked as pointless busybodying or "mandatory fun" or inadequate or intentionally deceptive window dressing. But everyone attached to the Army recognizes the rules of this "game" of compulsory kinship, even if they resent or actively resist them, critique them, or mock them (Chock 1987); everyone agrees on basic premises about the respective natures of the family and the Army and their compulsory strictures and the tensions between them. Army Family is a species of what Michael Herzfeld terms "social poetics," "link[ing] the little poetics of everyday interaction with the grand drama" of the official realm (1997, 26) and thereby "constructing the nation-state"—or in this case the state's apparatus—"out of intimacy" (*ibid.*,19). I take Herzfeld literally here. This intimacy is not just symbolic or discursive, but deeply felt. Family binds the institution and the people that live with it together in this loose and changeable notion of family, this nostalgic ordinary where nothing happens except the maintenance of the dream of what is meant to be (Stewart 2007).

³⁶ From <http://old.armymwr.com/portal/family/>.

Army Family is not merely a slippery and labile discourse, but a lived affect, a deep, organic, and often complex reality for soldiers and their spouses, even those who are inclined to view specific features of it with suspicion. Most senior NCOs I met—especially the ranks of Staff Sergeant to Sergeant Major, who are charged with direct responsibility for the care and behavior of the soldiers under them—they don't talk about subordinates, but about “their” soldiers, “their guys”. They talk about encouraging young enlisted soldiers to think long-term, to consider what they will do when they get out of the Army. They talk about the importance of “bringing families in,” not just telling a new soldier and his young wife about the family center or the financial planning office, but taking them directly over their themselves. They talk about involving families in what the soldier’s unit is doing, keeping them in the loop and informed and interested. “Family and the Army go hand-in-hand,” a recently retired Sergeant Major told me. “The Army is what we do,” and the family should be thought of as a part of it. It’s important for your family to be “wrapped up” in what you do—in a positive way, because they inevitably are anyway. Even beyond the egregious stresses of deployment, more basic business like promotion or bad behavior can have profound effects on a soldier’s family, everything from changes in pay or housing, to extra duty or responsibilities, to a move to a different unit or a different installation. “Bringing families in”—getting them to come to FRG meetings, getting them to be knowledgeable about and affirmatively invested in everyday Army business—means, the Sergeant Major friend told me, that things will go better for them when soldiers go, when they really are in harm’s way.

Bringing families in has its counterpart in the sort of fictive kinship that many more senior NCOs with their own spouses and kids extend to “their soldiers” and “their guys.” NCOs and their civilian spouses even use this language together. They talk about “adopting” junior soldiers, especially those who are very young, unattached, and far from

home, or being their “surrogate moms and surrogate dads.” Though it can be a violation of fraternization rules, many sergeants invite their soldiers into their homes for parties and on holidays. The paternalism and sense of mutual care and responsibility of the military hierarchy bleeds over into the domestic sphere. Wives of sergeants use the first-person plural to talk about the soldiers in their husbands’ units: “our” soldiers, “we” didn’t lose anyone on the last deployment, et cetera. Lydia told me about her husband Steve, a recently retired NCO. Lydia calls the other wives her “girls,” the commander’s wife, the head of the FRG, is “like the mother of us all”; Steve’s soldiers are “his babies.”

He’s so good to his soldiers. So good. I mean, he’ll go out of his way. You know Ken, we still have soldiers that call him, that he met like 13 years ago, 17 years ago. And they’ll always call us like their surrogate mom and surrogate dad. [This one soldier is] in Chicago [...]. We always call each other by the last names. So he called [Steve], “Hey, so I heard my dad is retiring! It’s about time! How many years? I’m thinking about going back into the Army! You know I got out ...” [Lydia laughs] And he would tell him, “You know Sergeant Uribe [Steve] taught me *so much*. I still talk about you guys.” Seventeen years later, Ken! And they call you, and they keep in touch, and they tell you—it really makes me *so* proud of my husband. That there’re like *aaaall* these, our guys, I still hear them, I still hear them: “I still, I do certain things certain ways because I knew you said, ‘That’s the way you have to do it. You got to treat people with respect. Family comes first. God first, family second. And the Army comes next.’” [...] It’s always amazing to us how when they’d call. We have friends who were stationed here, and they got out of the Army, and now they’re in Jersey. And he was a Redskins fan, Steve is a Cowboys fan, and they’ll call, every day, every Cowboys-Redskins they’ll call! And they’ve been gone 15 years. And every day, every game, they call, or we call. It’s amazing! You never forget. You never forget—your Army family.

In one sense, Lydia’s talk makes apparent the way that people do use the term “Army Family” in a deeply felt and organic sense, as a description of the transcendent, persisting and deeply felt sense of solidarity among soldiers, military families, and veterans. “You sit down with any Army,” she said, snapping her fingers—“it’s automatic.” More instructive, though, is the way that in the space of a few sentence, Lydia’s talk swerves through a whole series of different, mutually enforcing attachments: from her love for her

husband, to his care for his soldiers, to their filial attachment to him, to higher principles of faith and family and personal conduct, to friendships that have endured across time and distance. And maybe this is why it is misleading to describe Army Family in terms of mere polysemy. For as much as the term assumes different meanings in different context, its various definitions overlap with and feed back on one another; they can't be disaggregated. And that is arguably what is most powerful about them: not their exploitation by the military, by their effective enshrinement in corporate culture, their rejection by the jaded or the suspicious, their embrace by others, but the whole knotty constellation, all these things and more.

CARE, VIRTUE AND VIOLENT DEATH

Like the gospel says, death is the measure of love.

Fictive kinship can become the source of abiding loss and pain. I asked Randy, an avuncular NCO in his mid-30s, a lot of my standard questions about being deployed in Iraq: what were the worst and the most rewarding parts? What are the hardest things to convey to someone who hasn't been there? The best thing, he said, is taking care of soldiers. "It's just the family that you feel there. When you're in Korea, you're in Bosnia, you're in Iraq, those troops are your mom, your dad, your brothers, your sisters, your kids." In garrison, you can work nine to five with the same people, but then you go home. Over there, in a combat zone, you're together all the time and you don't have anyone else to turn to. Your life is in their hands, and their lives are in yours. This solidarity of Army Family was very real and very beautiful to Randy, this intimacy and sense of kin-like dependence honed by the close proximity of death, the mortal anchor of "greater love hath no man..." What a lot of people don't understand about soldiers, Randy said, like the junior soldiers under his command, is that they're kids. "Most of the people who are

fighting are children—17-, 18-, 19-year-old kids who haven't really seen the world yet.” “Children”: it implied utter innocence and dependency that resonated with the fact that, as Randy said, they're “just doing what they're told.”

Then I asked him to tell me about when he was injured. I had heard only little bits before. The story, he said, “starts way before the war ever started.” It began when he was at his first duty station, in Korea, as a young and inexperienced private. His squad leader “took me under his wing and pretty much became my dad. Showed me everything.” Years on, Randy had been promoted several times and was working as an instructor when this old sergeant's son showed up as one of his students. Then Randy went to Iraq—last-minute, as a volunteer—and there the kid was again, not working directly under him, but in the same shop, maintaining and repairing attack helicopters at the very beginning of the war, when things were hectic and hot. Randy looked out for him, checked in on him all the time. The guy was sharp, his work never needed to be redone, his bird was always ready to go and was always the one the pilots wanted to take. One day they got a call to go out and work on a downed helicopter—a maintenance problem had grounded it at another base. They had been working for several hours and were almost done when a mortar hit. It landed next to the helicopter and the explosion flipped it over, and it exploded too. Randy and his soldiers had been up on top of the bird working, 25 feet in the air. When Randy regained consciousness, he was on the ground. There was nothing but black, and then blinding, blurry white. He couldn't hear right away, or smell, but then after a moment there was the sound of gunfire and the aroma of smoke and a sickening sweet char. Around him his soldiers were moving, gazing uncomprehendingly at one another, slowly coming back to it just like he was. Except for one soldier face down near him who wasn't moving. The sand around him was stained red. Randy hobbled over to him on a ravaged leg and turned him over. It was the kid. His eyes were open, but his

chest was a single giant wound. He was gone. “The medic kept telling me to let him go, there was nothing I could do, let him go. And I kept yelling at the medic to fix him. ‘He can’t die, I promised his dad! His dad asked me to look out for him!’ ... I was gonna kill the medic if he didn't fix this kid.”

Randy’s injury had affected his life in all kinds of ways. His tour was cut short, along with his career as a platoon sergeant, a helicopter mechanic, an instructor. He had had numerous surgeries on his knee and shoulder. His leg might not ever heal. He often wore a leg brace and walked with a cane, though he preferred not to. Sometimes his arm was in a sling as well. He took a combination of opiates and other medications for the chronic neuropathic pain that his injuries had brought; some of these left him sleepy, altered, and unable to work or drive, tripped up his mood, and wiped out bits of his short-term memory. He never complained, but if you so much as patted him on the shoulder, he winced in pain. He could easily have died in the explosion, and he suffers from PTSD. But what is truly painful about the whole thing for him is the loss of his old sergeant’s son—the proxy son of the proxy dad. He was overcome with shame and guilt. He couldn’t look his old sergeant in the eye. He couldn't stop thinking about what he could have done differently, what someone in his place could have done instead. That there wouldn't have been anything to do was no comfort.

Randy’s story is just one of many I many I heard in which love frames the tragedy of soldiers’ lives cut short by war violence. And not just any love, but a sort of nurturing, responsible, parental love. Soldiers with families. Soldiers with new wives. Soldiers with babies on the way. Soldiers who were young and inexperienced but good and loyal and who needed to be taken care of. These soldiers show up in stories again and again as they get shot or blown up by mortars or rockets or IEDs, as if their love-infused innocence is some sort of attractor for violence.

Fucking 19 years old, getting their asses blown the fuck up. They haven't even felt the warm embrace of a real woman and a real relationship, getting their asses blown up and never will know that shit. Sorry, that sucks. In my eyes, that blows. Never being able to have kids.

And then there is the other end of things, the soldiers whose death is made more poignant by their care for others in life. Dime told me this story about his NCO who got killed bringing hot chow out to the OP where they had been stuck for weeks.

He came to the mess hall, loaded up a bunch of hot chow for us, cause we hadn't eaten anything in forever, and was coming out with us, and got fucking killed, blown up by an IED. The only thing that kept him together long enough to put him in a Blackhawk was his IBA [body armor], and he died on the way back to the aid station. He didn't make it. Bringing hot chow to us so we could eat. That's what kind of guy he was. [*He begins to weep*] This was probably the most gung ho—he probably had a bigger dick than anybody you ever knew. I'm not shitting you. I mean, this man would stand in front of a bullet for you.

These men's condition vis-à-vis love—one cut short in its realization, one tragically undone by his heedless gift of it—is what gives meaning to their deaths. Paternalistic care, heroic prowess, youthful pre-masculine innocence, and the reproduction of the line collide with violence and are cemented by the white heat of explosives into a gestalt of idealized masculine love.

Dee worked in electronic warfare and communications when she was in Iraq. Her regular duties didn't require her to go outside the wire at Adder, but she volunteered to do convoy security and rode as a turret gunner almost every day. On one mission they had to stop suddenly somewhere, some neighborhood of Talil.

She was watching the perimeter along with everyone else while they waited for the long line of vehicles to get un-fucked. From the alley directly opposite her a care emerged, moving too fast. Maybe he hadn't seen them, or maybe he was a suicide bomber. The ROE specify a particular escalation of force: verbal warning (which may be hard to hear, let alone understand), warning shot (ditto), shot into the engine block (with a .50 cal, this is enough to disable a car or truck), and as a last resort, shoot the driver. But with a fast-moving target at a distance of 200 yards, there is no time for this whole procedure anyway. She fired a warning shot

and the car came on. She had to act; she shot the driver. The car came to a halt. They investigated it: there were no weapons or explosives inside, just a middle-aged Iraqi man in slacks and a dress shirt with a giant hole in his chest. But this she added basically as an afterthought. The important thing was that his actions made him a threat, and that that was ultimately the deeper truth of the situation. "That man got between a mother and her child, and that's the most dangerous place you can be."

Dee's daughter, suddenly present on a dusty street in Talil, was less than a year old when Dee deployed. I tried to imagine this presence literally, an arrangement of figures into which the car intruded, placing the young girl in danger. In danger of what? Of herself being killed by a terrorist? Of suddenly finding herself without a mother?

The child is perpetually invoked as soldiers talk about why they do what they do. They signed up to get them health insurance. They go to work everyday to make a living and put up with the bullshit for them. "I'm doing this for my family"—a wife and young daughter. "If they told me to blow up a hundred hospitals I'd do it." Or, "It's for our kids, so they don't have to worry about terrorists coming over here." It's not hard to guess about the important role such a figure of total and unimpeachable innocence can serve in a scenario where even the baseline conditions are unthinkable, let alone the particular things one might be asked to do in the midst of those conditions. It's so crudely obvious that even to state it seems like a sort of violation: that invoking the innocence of the child can justify anything. The child conjures the innocence of national intentions, the biological futurity of the population, the very continuation of life that should be allowed to live and that must be preserved against threat by a watchful, jumpy, unhesitating trigger finger. But that is something we all know already. In biopolitics, state violence is always about the preservation of innocent and vulnerable life, so the life of the child, in an abstract sense, is always at stake on the battlefield. But knowing this does not lessen the charge of love, the real work that it does to make a virtue of the unbearable or to create an entirely new wound.

So it is also something we must reckon with, this particular power of love. It becomes sovereign in a different way here. It collapses the state's responsibility for life and death in war onto individuals and the personal, intimate relationships between them. With the infusion of the institution with the burdens and responsibilities of kinship, with the substance of intimacy, the shared responsibility for life in a war zone does not devolve onto the state or the Army, as it does in a conventional understanding of sovereign power. Instead it devolves onto the collective—your lives in each others' hands, as Randy said—and then onto the individual, Randy alone—"He can't die, I promised his dad." The autonomy of kinship leaves him cut adrift from other ways of framing this loss. The freedom of love leaves him unanchored from those dimensions of the social that could mitigate loss, responsibility, vulnerability. The consuming freedom of love becomes a consuming curse—Randy thinks about the kid every day.

The cruelest counterexample comes in the form of the children who *are* on the battlefield, following the soldiers around, calling for handouts of toys and candy and bottled water—"Mister! Mister!" the soldiers imitate their tiny, eager voices as they tell stories—clustering around the Humvees as they roll through villages and sometimes getting too close, waving and smiling at soldiers even though they know that a bomb or an ambush lies around the corner, riding in the cars that are shot up when they get too close to a convoy or a checkpoint. One friend said of her husband, "it's about the kids over there, that's what he says. He's doing it for them, so that they can have something better." The child who really is on the battlefield is more complicated than the one who is only imagined there. The child really on the battlefield cannot be protected at all costs, cannot be imagined innocent.

Too many things too horrible to contemplate, stacked on top of one another: being away from one's own child, making your own child suffer in your absence, feeling your

own child to be in danger; and then seeing other children suffering and in danger, wanting to alleviate those things, but maybe also being the cause or the root of that danger yourself. Love swallows it all, cuts the horror, helps you cope with it. But it also makes the horror what it is in the first place. The horror of the war zone, a state of exception, is that all things are made possible—like with love. Love lets us see, even if we don't want to, possibility stretching in many unfathomable directions all at once.

FRIENDSHIP AND THE EXCESSES OF ATTACHMENT

Army friends are different than other friends, the soldiers told me while we were sitting around the office one day. They're not like your friends from high school (high school, of course, because these guys are young—22, 23 most of them, though they seem older—and because, I would sometimes have to remind myself, they are in the Army, they did not go to college). Regular friends are people who you like, who you can choose to be around. But if someone from home called you up in the middle of the night and needed help, well, depending on who it was, you might go, or you might tell them to call back in the morning. But someone from your unit, even some guy you hated, anything, any time, anywhere, you would drop everything and go to him, go help him, without hesitation, no questions asked. It's different, they all agreed, each chiming in after the other to complete the undefinable definition of Army friendship. Just as the life-and-death stakes—"your lives in each others' hands"—frame the experience of loss, they also mean that "there's a lot of intensity to relationships" in general, as a chaplain told me. "Friendships that last for years." As Evan Wright says in his account of the Iraq invasion with a Marine Recon battalion, there was the palpable sense among the men that if they died, it would be "surrounded by the best friends they would ever have."

It gives rise to intense and surprising scenes of loyalty and solidarity:

Dale is sitting at the computer by himself, looking worn out. The night before, a friend from his unit had shown up at his barracks room covered in blood. He had been in a fight. “And I was worried about what happened, cause he’s racist,” Dale told me. He had gotten in a fight with a much bigger guy and ended up stabbing him. Dale brought him inside, talked to him, took his knife away. Then he put zip cuffs on him and brought him to the MPs—it’s better if you turn yourself in.

I ended up knowing Dale for a while, but the day after I met him, his closest friend from his unit came by the office. “This is Adam,” he said by way of introduction—“he shot a guy in the stomach.” They both laughed.

If this bond is so powerful that it can put even the relative value of life and risk of death into question, perhaps it is no wonder that people seemed to find something dangerous and disruptive in this attachment. It can be too much and it can overrun everything else. It pushes at the boundary of what a friend is properly meant to be. “Friend” suggests a degree of autonomy: you can choose a friend and you can leave them behind. “Friends are relatives who can be ditched if necessary,” Schneider writes, just as “relatives are friends who are with you whether you like it or not” (Schneider 1980, 54). Friends are interstitial, occupying some space between family and coworker. That interstitiality is artificial to begin with, of course, but in the Army, the institution’s kin-like compulsions to intimacy and dependence collapse it completely and make it all the more important that it be aggressively demarcated, philosophized, critiqued, and, when it grows dysfunctional, policed. The classic story is that of the soldier who comes back from deployment, ignores his family, and spends every night back at the barracks with guys from his unit. He can’t come home. That army attracts intense, risk-taking people anyway, the chaplain told me. But they get used to the intensity of training and deployment, and back home suddenly there’s no outlet. “They’re bored 50 percent of the time.” They want to turn back to each other. “You have to remind them that their wife is their best friend.” Soldiers who just stay with other soldiers can call up a rising friction of

violent potential, can insulate themselves from the checks of domesticity and civilization that are meant to level them out when they get back from war. In the narratives about violent crimes committed by returned soldiers, it is those who can only hang out with other soldiers who are dangerous.

It can go the other way, too, the intense closeness growing awkward or uncomfortable. Some people don't like to be around people from their units after they get back.

We were so tight. But everyone's past it now and they don't want to bring it up. The friendship is built on hardship. You've seen things that people in real life would never see. You can't get that back because you're not forced to depend on each other anymore. You bond over loss—the loss of everything.

So the bond isn't something that can be taken for granted. It is a place and time, a context, a duration, a relation. But it is not some chunk of ontological concrete. A paradox: insisting on these intense and lasting bonds as the product of circumstances, when it is precisely this provisionality that makes them so messy to deal with.

Sometimes, this friendship isn't there, and that is bad too. People don't want to see each other after they get back simply because they couldn't stand being together in the first place; even if they like each other all right, the company itself might be a source of bad memories. There are bad units, places where people don't look out for one another, where the leaders won't stand up for you and you have to watch your back. People pass buck and set each other up. Simmons was in a bad unit. When he got orders for Ft. Hood, everyone told him not to worry, it was a fine place, as long as he didn't end up in this one unit. But that was where they sent him. "I've never seen anything so disorganized," his girlfriend told me—she had been married to a soldier before and lived with him on installations in Germany. "Nobody helps each other out. Nobody.... The military I remember, when I was married before, was ... you know, even if they didn't like each

other and had different personalities, they were still each other's keeper, you know what I mean?" Simmons went to Iraq to drive HETTs, overgrown flatbed tractor-trailers that haul 65-ton tanks, but in a rush, without the training he really needed. The whole time he was there, his platoon sergeant was sitting beside him in the truck or waiting for him back at base, ready to cuss him out for every little thing he did wrong.

"Why the hell aren't you doing this? Why the hell aren't you doing that? What the hell is wrong with you? Are you a fuckin dumbass? Are you retarded? Are you really retarded, is that the problem?" ... sitting in the truck. ... And that was basically his and I's relationship: he screamed at me, I took it, and everything was good and golden, basically. Except it wasn't [*Simmons laughs*] So basically the whole entire first deployment was spent with me getting yelled at for one thing or another, volunteer doing missions on the road, and ... the two of 'em combined just don't make you happy. And when you're still getting attacked, you want to come back to your home base and be like, "I can relax now." And when you get a second to relax, your platoon sergeant starts yelling at you again. And I'm like holy crap, man. I just spent frikkin' two weeks wondering whether I was gonna die in five minutes or not.

The solidarity that is supposed to be underwritten and refined and made necessary by the presence of death collapses, turns inside out, shoves the soldier closer to his own lonely mortality instead of drawing him back in from it. The same NCO carelessly lost his Kevlar and then moments later stole an unattended one from a junior soldier right in front of Simmons; he threatened Simmons into silence about it. The Kevlar costs a soldier more than \$300 to replace, plus restriction and extra duty penalties of you get written up for losing it. Simmons told me an Army joke: "There's only one thief in the Army. Everyone else is just trying to get their stuff back." I laughed and he said, "It wouldn't be funny if it weren't so true." "And this guy is my leader," Simmons said in sarcastic wonderment. "And I'm supposed to have faith in him." This is a terrible irony of the Army's cool, calculating meritocracy: that just one person in the wrong spot can make things totally impossible, like a brother who bullies you or a mother who ignores you.

You can love people without trusting them, and in the midst of all this forced intimacy, its better to know this difference. Debbie, the Foundation director, lived forty minutes away, but when things got really busy or some soldier was in a really bad way, sometimes she would stay on the post for days straight, sleeping on the recliner in her office. If soldiers needed gas money, she would give them a twenty out of her own pocket. But this generosity was vulnerable to abuse. Anything that wasn't nailed down or locked up around the place would get stolen. Soldiers took doors off of hinges to get into the storerooms full of donated toiletries and packaged foods. They took hams, frozen turkeys, cases of M&Ms. They opened up the computers—bolted down—and stole the RAM and motherboards. They stole each other's pain meds. Debbie put up cameras, but they figured out that with the lights off, the cameras wouldn't activate. "I don't even bring my purse in there," she told me. "I always say, you love them but you don't know them." Love appears as the opposite of power/knowledge, *pouvoir/savoir*. Love means that you don't know, functions as a warning that your knowledge may be faulty or incomplete. Love is something to be guarded against—perhaps that is its constitutive magic, to be able to be itself and its opposite.

At work here is some sort of ethics of attachment, in this distorting impact of care, friendship and love on other more "normal" and natural ties. It is a way of recognizing that the bonds are always in danger of becoming or being about something else, something unseemly.

DURATION AND DEFACEMENT

Against the background of possible violent death, love mediates the worth of life, the waste of waiting, the ability to "live" life or not during periods of burden and stress and constraining attachment to other people and things. On an early morning run, my friend's

phone rang: her husband, calling from Iraq, just a few weeks out from returning. It was 7:30 or 8 for us, so early evening for him. I went on ahead out of earshot while they chatted for a couple of minutes. They were just catching up, she said, talking about mundane things: his parents had been in town visiting; their son was getting close to graduation. That's what these correspondences are like for most folks: catching up, checking in, paying bills and getting cars repaired, managing kids and pets, details of daily life. "You can only do, 'Oh my God, I miss you so much!' for so long."

The war and the Army churn inexorably onward with little concern for the temporality of personal crisis. Simmons' girlfriend had caught him fooling around not long before he deployed and they were on the brink of breaking up. The war and the Army, however, were indifferent to this temporality of personal crisis. They found themselves having to negotiate whether and when to talk about these things, to let them fester or go through the pain of addressing them in costly and painful phone calls. Kristen, his girlfriend, had to take it on.

[I was] just gonna leave him. And everybody's like, "Well wait to he gets back." And I'm like, "Why?" I mean I understand the whole don't-make-things-worse for him while he's there, but on the other hand, well, why lead him on the whole time he's there? So we talked a lot about that stuff at first. And that was difficult, because how do you repair a relationship when you're not even together? And he kept saying, "Well, you know, I'm trying to do my best, and whenever I get back we'll handle it." And I'm like, "Well you're not getting back for a year, and what am I supposed to do in the mean time? You know, I'm pretty much hating you right now!" [*They both laugh*]

She was enraged at him and terrified for him. "Things you want to say, do you really want to say them?" she wondered. Barthes' narrating lover in *Lover's Discourse* waits for a phone that never rings (1979), but there is that other terrible uncertainty of a lover hanging on the line, exhausted and afraid and with nothing to say to each other, nothing but silence or the rush of breath. On the telephone, just like everywhere else, love is not a

transcendent thing but a changeable ebb seeping through the grit of circumstance. It demands strategy and practical decisions.

There is another kind of waiting, another side to the constant and lengthy deferral of desire: the issue of fidelity. The lover by the phone can't *not* wait. But how long can you "wait" for another person, can your body wait for them? Waiting frustrates desire instead of constituting it, and then desire finds an outlet that ends the waiting. There is screwing around on both sides of the world, twin realms of stress and loneliness and steeply disproportionate gender ratios. The Army town itself appears as a sort of toxic zone, with a self-perpetuating drama of sneaking around, testing boundaries, often out in broad daylight: people canoodling in corners at parties, a truck from across town parked in front of a neighbor's house the day after her husband leaves. The young wives—and even some of the older wives—head out to the clubs the instant their soldiers leave town. Or so everyone says and was eager to tell me. I have no way of measuring the real frequency of these things, but the myth of them hangs thickly, headily in the air. "This town makes people into whores," as Dale pronounced one day. I must have seemed a little incredulous in my response, because then everyone chimed in, all young soldiers with wives or girlfriends or boyfriends: "It totally does!" That's why he didn't bring his wife here, Dale says. He trusts her, but he doesn't want her to be around it, so she stayed in New Mexico.

The suspicion itself is a major cause of strain.

Chad takes me fishing; he hasn't been in weeks and he is feeling really stressed out. His wife, who lives in Tennessee, is being a pain in his ass. He loves her deeply, but the distance is a massive strain on them. She has medical problems, and her ex-husband gets on her case about caring for their kids on a daily basis. But then she gets on J's case. She accuses him of being unfaithful, and it is hard to tell by his reaction to what extent he is hurt by this versus simply resentful of its untruthfulness (so he says and I believe), but in either case it definitely gets to him, angers him. "She says, 'Where were you? I bet you were out screwing

around!’ And I say, ‘Well I may as well if you’re just gonna accuse me of it anyway!’” He earnest sentences are scattered amid long pauses. “You have to understand the history ... and the psychology ... of the wolf. ... Wolves mate for life!” Which one of them is the wolf, or is it both of them, I ask. “I am!”

Everyone talked about all the cheating, the divorces, bearing out what the sergeant’s wife said to me at the manifest, that “a lot of couples won’t make it.” People quoted extreme percentages to me: 60, 70, 80 percent divorce rates for deployed soldiers, the point not the number so much as that there were so many, that there were too many, that something was wrong. A friend based in Baghdad at the height of the worst fighting in ’06 said, “The JAG lawyers are like, ‘We can’t even keep up.’ Every day the First Sergeants would be like, ‘Every day I have a soldier coming to me from a brigade [about a divorce].’ That’s 365 days plus an additional three months that you have. That’s a lot of divorces.” Lots of soldiers cheat when they’re deployed, too, despite the scarcity of both privacy and prospects, Sarah told me. “Many” or even “most” soldiers do, “maybe even a majority”—“they will find anywhere.” There is “story after story” to match these proportions, not just isolated incidents. I heard many, mostly second-hand, circulating as a kind of salacious and disconcerting folklore.

Sarah’s friend divorced her soldier husband of 12 years because she discovered he was having an online relationship with another woman while he was deployed. Another friend discovered the affair when she happened across pictures of the other woman on the soldier’s Myspace page; she emailed a link to it to the wife, who happened to open it as her 15-year-old daughter was looking over her shoulder. Sarah’s husband Ron told her about how guys in his unit asked one another if they had “picked someone out yet” to be with in Iraq. There is a deliberation to it: they prefer exclusive dalliances so they don’t have to worry about STIs as much.

Again, and again perversely, all things become possible. To retain love in the form of fidelity means, Sylvia told me, that you have to “work,” you have to “fight”. Love means laboring under the burden of this capacity to be able to be betrayed.

Is that fear what drives that constant recitation of other people's bad behavior, the tone of fascination and disavowal and the constant rehearsal of transgression and revelation? Some of these guys and women were perched on the edge of it—or maybe all of them were: the stress, the excessively intimate environment, wives and girlfriends states away. “The labor of the negative,” which is not simply the addition of new information, but a new thing released as a line between what is allowed and not, sayable and not, supposed to be known and not is crossed again and again—defacement (Tausig 1999). The threat of betrayal feeds on absence, distance, impatience; the threat becomes a thing itself, the frame across which love is stretched and torqued. Or you could say that both things are love, that love itself swirls, builds, hypertrophies in an accelerating orbit around an infinitely dense and empty center. This impossible, remote singularity calls up the way so many people would narrate these things to me, perched nervously on its edge rather than actually inside it.

These strains and dilemmas demand responses. Sometimes these responses are unorthodox experiments. A friend told me about some acquaintances, also military: two couples, one of the men deployed, and his wife was terribly lonely. The other woman was actually the one to bring up the idea of “loaning” her own husband to their friend, to have sex with her. It never materialized, as they couldn't settle on ground rules: the wife would be there, but was the guy allowed to use his hands? Could they kiss? Should he or shouldn't he come? Sometimes the presence of another body is enough, though. On some of the bigger FOBs in Iraq they have weekly dances and lessons—salsa, country, hip hop. Dee, who is married with a kid, was a big fan and went every week: “That's how I got my jollies. And every week, afterward, I went back to my trailer—*alone!*” At what level does the betrayal of love happen: at the body itself, or of some practices and not others, of the vows and expectations that surround and bind the body.

Sex and sociality can overrun one another in exactly the ways one might expect, ways that nevertheless take the people caught up in them by surprise. Erotic friction builds unexpectedly in shared spaces and shared experiences.

One of the first times I hung out with Doug, a reservist who had been deployed to work as a lab tech at Ft. Hood. We were drinking beer at the bar at Applebees, enjoying the amicable but generically un-local atmosphere. He told a story about an acquaintance from Ft. Drum who had returned from Iraq and was telling him about it. They weren't particularly close, but he really opened up, told him, "You wouldn't believe some of what goes on over there." In a series of admissions and descriptions that Doug related as alternately reluctant and relieved, the guy described not only infidelity between men and women, but also men hooking up with one another. Doug asked if he knew anyone who had done this, and it was the same thing: he held back but seemed waiting to confess. The guy said he himself had, with the other soldier in his hooch or billet or whatever. At first it was just a very intense platonic relationship, but then it developed into a sexual one. The acquaintance told how he had then broken up with his girlfriend when he returned to the U.S. and still saw the other man semi-regularly, every three or four months. It was always a little awkward at first, but then back to usual: "Platonic, and sexual, but not romantic," said Doug. As he was telling me the story I couldn't help thinking of Brokeback Mountain, which he then invoked as a perfect parallel, this story totally reminded him of that. I tried to give my queer analysis of the situation: we don't have the language or the model for talking about what kind of relationship that is, etc., and he seemed to vibe on that. He is a very smart guy and great to talk to.

We eventually became close friends. About a month after this conversation he came out to me. He is bisexual. He had just started dating a man in Austin and wanted to be able to tell me about it. He is from a very conservative evangelical family, and his first homosexual experience with another soldier. "It happened because of the Army."

I heard about them from the inside, too. Randy and his wife Susan are very much in love. She is a few years younger and takes care of their kids full-time—a couple each from their previous marriages. They were both married to other people when they met and fell in love. This makes them maybe a typical case or maybe an atypical case, an exception and at the same time an embodiment of a stereotype about Army relationships. They met online and he seduced her. By their frank account their affair was pretty wild

and lustful, but it was also very carefully managed. In yet another extension of the compulsory mandates of kinship, adultery is illegal under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and while it is not often prosecuted, proof of cheating can become a weighty bargaining chip in divorce proceedings. Randy and Susan had both had their reasons for getting married. Randy's mention that he and his ex-wife "did not get along" was perhaps the kindest and most moderated thing I ever heard him say about her—they clearly hated each other. They had gotten married for the money, the extra pay for being married and the housing for her and the kids. "It was wrong," Randy said. At the time he met Susan, his wife and their kids were living in another state. Susan's ex was a soldier too. He had problems, did a lot of drugs, couldn't hold a job. She pushed him to join the Army in the hope that he would straighten out. But he didn't, and she started pulling herself away from him.

So both Randy and Susan were breaking the rules, the normative practices of love. Though these normative forms weren't in the right shape to begin with. They were in shapes that marriage assumes for people everywhere sometimes, including for a lot of other people I met in the course of this project—the shape of a fleeting desire, a mercenary impulse, a survival tactic, a need to take care of kids. But in Randy and Susan's cases, the Army was a big part of that shape, enabling, constraining, motivating, surrounding them. The Army offered Randy and his wife, as it does many others, the incentive to marry where there might not otherwise have been one. It offered Susan the possibility of disciplining her juvenile husband into a reasonable human being. The deployments and duty stations that break up families separated Randy and Susan from their respective spouses but put them together with one another. "A deployment gave me my wife," Randy said of Susan. Army prerogatives took her husband away, and gave Randy and his wife reason to live apart. It made his and Susan's being together possible.

As we talked through all this together, Randy and Susan pointed out the other factors involved, the things that seem to make cheating and war go together. What other occupation is there, they asked, where couples are separated for such long periods of time? “Name a corporation that’s like that,” Randy said—entire cities of people with the same job living together, everyone attuned to the comings and goings, knowing exactly who is there and who isn’t and how long they’ll be gone for? An image comes to mind: blocks full of lonely spouses (wives) in Killeen and Fayetteville, North Carolina, and Colorado Springs, and then massive camps of tense and horny soldiers (mostly men) in Baghdad and Talil and Arifjan. These are spaces where intimacy is compulsory and loneliness is built in; they lend themselves to certain kinds of visibility, make certain kinds of behavior possible (Foucault 1984). Commenting on what they saw around them, what they had witnessed as well as what they had done, Randy said, “It seems like it’s rampant, but at the same time, again, all these people that live in this area have the same job. And that’s to go do something, to go away. And when they go away, what’s left? Well, there’s sex.” “It sucks to be alone,” Susan said. “That’s why it’s seen more in the military as opposed to just anywhere else.”

Seen more—a telling construction, whether it was intentional or not. It leaves aside the question of whether there actually *is* more. It muddles together the feelings, practices and appearance of attachment, highlighting both the broken rule and the reason for its violation in a way that empties the rule of its arbitrary significance. What matters is the visibility, the defacement: that charge that accompanies the revelation of something that is common knowledge but is also commonly known should remain hidden (Taussig 1999). First is the density, the panoptic fishbowl of military life that makes it so: the scandal of things being seen, seen and then talked idly about. Then, second, is the image of soldiers, the way that it is both more shocking and more expected for soldiers to

behave badly, the way that, as Susan said, “people forget that they’re human.” Susan’s words deftly sidestep the red herring of the “really is” that distracts from the true power of stereotype: what matters is the visible violation of a rule.

What Randy and Susan did seem to regard as pernicious was this defacement, all the idle talk, gossip and indiscretion. They shared this perspective in common with other couples I met who were only witness to cheating rather than participants: the problem is not just the cheating, but the failure of people to mind their own business and let others handle things themselves, not the behavior itself but this excess that arises around it. It spills over into the domain of work in ways that Randy regarded as unseemly and counterproductive. Perhaps it makes the Army look bad, he acknowledged. But this is a time of war, and war itself has helped create conditions in which people are “naturally” going to cheat. You can’t go kicking people out just because they’re messing around. And just because they are messing around doesn't mean that you can’t trust them on the battlefield. These are different kinds of attachment, different ways to depend on people and be responsible. Sex is not as big of a deal, at least not on its own terms; it’s not the same as work, as war. Failing to recognize that is what causes problems, or makes problems in one domain out of problems that should have stayed separate in another.

I asked Randy and Susan if they felt like they fit the image of cheating military couples. Susan said,

I think we’re in that category, because technically everybody has a reason for what they’ve done. So we fit into the stereotype regardless of the reasons. We did it. I mean, you’ve either done it or you haven’t, it doesn't matter what your reasons are. You are part of the stereotype, so yeah, we definitely fit in it.

With a sensitivity and perceptiveness perhaps honed by painful personal experience, Susan deftly reduces the stereotype from judgment to mere taxonomy: it is about what they did, not about their reasons. For both of them, the story they told *was* the stereotype,

and it *was* real life: the marriage for money, the loveless, entrapping unions, the worthless husband, the loneliness, the distance, their own wild and incautious coming together. They liked the Army. Randy was devoted to his job. Susan was devoted to supporting him in it. They had lived through and survived and come out better from all this bad behavior and broken taboo. Was it right, what they did? The both asked this question rhetorically a few times in their telling. And they both offered a kind of agnostic's confession as the answer: not really, two wrongs don't make a right, it's what happened, etc. "I'm sorry," said Susan, "and I'm not sorry, and I don't regret it." How bad are they supposed to feel about it, after all? They ended up together. They found love, so having violated lesser norms in pursuit of this greater one, they could confess all the wrong they wanted. "I believe you should be happy," Randy said.

What is love in all this? It is not exactly wholesome and pure. They broke all the rules, they hurt people, they even took some delight in having pulled one over on their respective exes and bidding good riddance to them. And yet it was all in the name of the same ideal, the same connubial happiness that "cheating" goes against. Love brought them together out of situations where it was absent. They care for each other. They have never felt this way about anyone, felt this connection with anyone before. But it's too easy to say that this is simply a fortuitous romantic connection or that it is nothing but a violation of how things ought to be. It is love as something that is excessive, boundary-breaking and binding. Love becomes a gesture of *sovereignty* in the midst of an environment of overwhelming disciplinary constraint, a way of declaring an exception from all the other things you should be doing instead. The imprint of love means that you, to use Schmitt's words, are the one who decides. It is a sovereignty that weaves in and out of static norms and changing desires, breaking one rule and affirming another in the

name of something that is more important, or rather, furnishing the agency to say which rules are more important than others.

ROOM FOR MANEUVER

Back in October 2009, in Washington, D.C., Army Lieutenant Dan Choi addressed a massive gay rights rally. Choi is a West Point graduate and Iraq vet who has become a vocal advocate for gay and lesbian soldiers, and is currently fighting a discharge for violating “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”—which President Obama and Secretary of the Army John McHugh have promised to overturn. Choi is a charismatic and almost theatrical speaker. His words draw a straight line from the love of country that motivates soldiers (including gay soldiers) to serve the state to the prohibited romantic and erotic love that denies their ability to serve:

Now, I know that there are many things that are worth fighting for, and I’ve fought for many of them, and I will tell you that some of those are very, very expensive. But of all those things that are worth fighting for, love is worth fighting for. Love is worth it. Love is worth it.

Some of us have come from very far places to be here today. You’ve sacrificed a lot. But love is worth it. Some of us have just come out of the closet this year. Some of us are still in the closet. But I want to tell you that love is worth it. We’ve sacrificed so much. Some of us have been rejected by our families and our communities and our churches and our workplaces, but I will tell you that love is worth it. And many of us have been discharged from the service because we told the truth. But I know that love is worth it. We love our country, even when our country refuses to acknowledge our love. But we continue to defend it, and we continue to protect it, because love is worth it. Love is worth it!

If you believe it, say it with me. Love is worth it! Love is worth it! Love is worth it! Love is worth it! (Goodman 2009a)

In Choi’s rhetoric, love is multiply sovereign: a good in itself—it is “worth it”—and as a force of attachment more powerful than the sanctions pitted against it—“we love our country, even when our country refuses to acknowledge our love.” Love takes the form of

an incontrovertible truth. Progressive journalist Amy Goodman's column on Choi is headlined, in a play on the mortal sacrifice that he, as a soldier is willing to make: "Choi Won't Lie for His Country" (Goodman 2009b).

In its portability and flexibility, love's unimpeachable claim to truth leaps readily from one object to another. Far more needs to be said elsewhere about the specifics of LGBTQ soldiers in the Army and about some of the more literal aspects of the queerness of military corporate culture. But what I am interested in here is the way that even as Choi's words pit the sovereign truth of love against unjust discrimination, his rhetoric relies on allying the transcendent goodness of romantic and erotic love with the transcendent goodness of patriotic love—that is, it seeks to infuse marginalized sexualities with the legitimacy of state sovereignty. Such moves are the stuff of which political legitimacy is made, on the basis of one sovereignty's transcendence over or in concert with another, and they necessarily leave the bases of "strong" sovereignties unexamined (Sedgwick 2003, Ch.4). Indeed, regardless of how literally "queer" they are, affects of attachment and intimacy can be bent to the purposes of the most normative, violent and hierarchical appeals (Thrift 2004); there is nothing inherently liberatory about them. But Choi's words also work in the other direction, pointing to the more general, boundary-blurring queerness of love as a language of attachment, and even to the conceptual, categorical queerness of military life in general.

This queerness of categories that overlap, snap into place, drift off, and recede into the background, goes all the way down into the everyday and intimate strata of Army life. And as it brushes up against other rules—the economic ones, the life-and-death ones—the forms of everyday sovereignty it affords are comparatively weak (Sedgwick 2003, Ch. 4). Without the lofty rhetoric of obvious politics, they take forms that are harder to see. There is a whole genre of talk surrounding the marriage of young women to

young soldiers, for instance, the theme of which is, they want their money: the house and paycheck and power of attorney they get when the soldier is deployed and, most ghoulishly, the \$400,000 Servicemen's Group Life Insurance payout if he is killed. In this story about the world, young men and women are heedless and lustful and bad with money, and in general doing unwise and desperate things to get by, clawing a wild, hard-partying form of survival from the strictest and most unforgiving of institutions, the one that can make you live and let you die in so many different ways. Against this background, love appears highly suspicious—again, an enemy of trust. But it would be a mistake to reduce it to pure instrumentality. For there are feelings at stake in what it means to survive, “orientations toward pleasure”—the pleasure of sex and intimacy and care—“that do not take the form of decision or self-assertion” (Berlant 2007, 757). Love retains some autonomy, some excessive frisson not reducible to biopolitics. In conditions like these, “a certain meatiness, a certain benign brutality, becomes available for politics, certain relations of capital become possible, acceptable, even inevitable” (Povinelli 2006, 204). This is the weak sovereignty that love affords.

Sylvia would counsel other wives about divorce when things got rough, or when they got comfortable with the independence of having their husbands gone. She wanted them to think about it first. There were practical concerns and emotional ones. It's not enough to be bored or frustrated or lonely—it has to be that you don't love him anymore, and you have to be ready to take care of yourself if you are going to make the move. The material and affective stakes twist up around one another.

I say, “Right now you're having a good time. But think about it. Take his money away. Take all the money. Can you live on your own, by yourself? Can you support yourself? If you can support yourself and you no longer love this man, then you divorce him *when he gets back*. You tell him, ‘I don't love you. Reason number one: I don't love you.’ But if you still have love for that person, you stick it out.” Now if he beats you up, I'm gonna tell you to leave his ass. But if he

doesn't touch you, he's decent to you, he just has little bullshit crap and you can deal with it by talking or whatever, then ok. But if *no*—unless you can support yourself, I'll tell you do it. I don't really believe in divorce, but I'll support them ... I don't want my girls to be abused or beat up or mistreated. But I will tell em, I'll say, "Right now you're ok because you've got this money coming in. If you don't have that, if you can support yourself ...Go get a job, Go get a job. Go get yourself a lawyer. You pay for your divorce. You pay for half of it at least. You do something. *Do* something. Be *ready*. Be ready to support, to be on your own, without taking money. Cause you don't know what you're gonna get. You've been married ten years? I'll tell you, you'll get half of his retirement—*when he retires*. If he's got ten, you still got ten years before he starts paying."

All these practical considerations. For Sylvia, the personal stakes are especially high: these are the women who are married to her husband's soldiers. She looks out for him and tries to keep him apprised of things, but also polices her loyalties carefully.

I have seen so many who have opted for divorce, who tell them [the soldiers] when they are there [in Iraq]. And we're suffering, my husband's suffering. "I'm miserable. This guy is wearing me out. He is depressed. He wants to kill himself. Did you not talk to his wife? Did you not tell her what is going on over here?" *I did, I did!* I tried. My duty is done. I did the best I could. She chose the divorce. I asked her, please, I remember begging her, "Don't do it while he's out there. Just wait."

One of her husband's soldier's found out his wife was getting a lawyer when he spotted it on their bank statement. "She's a loser!" Sylvia exclaimed. "You have to think it out." All these sneaky little detective story details, these banal and practical matters of survival, are part of what you have to do with love. Meanwhile, Sylvia knew already that the woman was hiring a lawyer: "What the ladies tell me is private. I don't tell him everything."

Love can get you into a situation—exactly these kinds of situations—but fail to get you out of it. One day I met a woman married to a soldier who had had a series of catastrophic strokes. He couldn't drive or do his old job. He couldn't be left alone at home. He had the emotions of a seven-year-old, she said, and threw temper tantrums. And the Army, in the form of this soldier's Warrior Transition Unit platoon sergeant, said

he had to show up at formation every morning and afternoon, Monday through Friday. She had to drive him there herself, after helping him get dressed. He was impossible to deal with: impulsive, forgetful, angry, unreasoning. The WTU wasn't taking care of him. His own parents, in another state, were indifferent. She spent all her energy on him and had nothing left for their kids. She was considering a divorce. This woman was not cruel or neglectful. She seemed impatient as she described the burden of caring for her husband, and when she cried it was because she was overwhelmed by the prospect of making it through an unending succession of days with him.

Sometimes that highly circumscribed space, the space of getting stuck in the first place, is all the room to maneuver that you can hope for.

Theresa tells me, "You can count on two hands the number of jobs in the community that pay more than 10 or 12 dollars an hour. My daughter [who is 19 and going to college] works at the video store! And some of the stuff she tells me, Ken: these women she works with, [military wives,] they can't even do basic math!" Their daughter F is 19 and lives with them, because there is no way to make enough money for rent: "There is no way for our young women to live on their own here!" They can't live on their own so they go and marry a soldier and have kids. The woman she mentioned earlier talking about getting pregnant was in the other day. She is married to a soldier and recently had a baby, but she wants to have another before he goes again "in case something happens to him" (I don't think salary goes up to account for additional kids, but other benefits, like the SGLI, must). Theresa knows another woman who has five kids by five different fathers; she ended up marrying her sister's ex-husband (a soldier?), a very awkward situation for them both, but he was willing to help care for the kids.

Theresa had gotten stuck herself, married years ago to the military man who was her daughter's father. She made a decision to stay with him until she knew she could support her daughter on her own. "He did his thing and I did mine, Ken. Those were my rules." There is an uncanny mimesis here, a parallel logic of marrying for survival with what soldier jargon calls "making a number" or getting someone to "fill a slot": being reduced from a person to a body that has to be kept alive and working and occupying a position

but after that you can expect little care and less recognition. This is love as what Berlant dubs “cruel optimism,” “a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility” (Berlant 2006, 21). Love might be a word for all that you need, but it might also be a word for all that you have available.

It is love’s banality that makes it so accessible to politics, though not always in ways that are obvious. Everyone knows what it’s like to love someone, Cindy told me. Her husband is a Blackhawk pilot, deployed when we meet; she has a law degree. (That he is a pilot means he is an officer, and that means he is college-educated.) She founded a military spouse advocacy organization. They’ve provided legal assistance and sought media attention for soldiers with PTSD and traumatic brain injuries who have been denied treatment and get forced out of the Army on bad conduct discharges when they self-medicate or refuse to deploy. It’s not partisan, but it is outspokenly critical of Army and government policies that they see as harming soldiers and military families. It’s a level of politicization that most military folks are at least a little uncomfortable with—it’s hard for her to get other wives on board sometimes, and her husband has caught flack for it as well. But every time she finds herself discussing some fresh horror of institutional neglect with other spouses, she reminds them, “That could be your husband!”

I call as I am getting into my car to go and meet her, and she begins to talk, her voice and pace tinged with a vigor that’s a little bit angry and a little bit manic, and very eloquent. I sit in the parking lot with AC on full blast, waiting and barely able to get a word in edgewise. She lives only five minutes away and we’ve been talking for weeks about meeting, but she is ready to talk now. I’ve already gotten one ticket for talking on the phone while driving on post, and anyway I am struggling just to jot down her torrent of words.

It's my cross to bear. And I don't get anything out of it [the organization—it has no funding]. It's like your inner compass, a voice that's nagging you, that won't leave you alone. Military spouses bridge the gap between civilians and the military. Civilians can feel justified in looking down on soldiers, but not on spouses. Everybody knows what it's like to love somebody. It's not political. We just want someone to take care of our husbands! We can speak when they can't.

Again, pain, care, empathy, indifference, and identification collide in this melodramatic claim on the real. But instead of being fused by the white heat and molten nickel of an IED, they intersect like the members of a cross, borne by a thousand minute and often invisible daily labors, love facing down death in quotidian increments rather than a sudden explosive flash. To suffer for someone is to love them. To understand that shared suffering from afar is to understand an otherwise unfamiliar burden, to constitute a particular form of vulnerability by recognizing it. The love of marital loyalty translates the unthinkable and unsayable in a way that direct attention to stories from the battlefield cannot. A husband gone for months; a husband become a different person when he returns, violent, withdrawn, or screaming in the night; a husband crippled by his job and then kicked to the curb by those he served; a husband upon whose service your life and the lives of your kids depend and who suddenly cannot serve, or is deemed unfit to do so for reasons that have nothing to do with him. For those outside the Army, those to whom Cindy's organization tries to speak, the Army wife's love both domesticates and relays outward the shock and awe of war, making it *more* real, *more* comprehensible.

The mailing list for the organization is full of stories of lives badly broken and only redeemed through litigation and (because it is hard to sue the Army) congressional intervention. Sometimes they are cases she has worked on. Other times she can do nothing for them right away and the women who send in the stories want at least to be heard right away, so the emails get sent on just as they are. *I promise a story no one will*

ever forget, the truth, the brazen bold, uncurtailed truth of this widow [the writer] and my kids and what my husband suffered before he finally died and went home to rest at last.

Love yokes you to this precarious state, this cruel optimism, and perhaps it can pull you through to the other side, make the fear and danger legible. There is peril, we know, in assuming anything can ever be understood so clearly, in putting the violence in one spot, on one person, and then deceiving ourselves into thinking we know and feel what happened, and likewise in recusing ourselves with the assurance that we cannot know. Is there a better way out of this double-bind? For Cindy, it is the only strategy that makes sense: you begin with what everybody already knows and you channel it into a language and affective vocabulary of critique. Love and the institutional orders that appear to antagonize it share a secret complicity, as the former is called on to right the injustices of the latter. The survival maneuvers of love invite us to an intimate witnessing of struggles that are often opaque and un-dramatic. The grandiose background of sovereign violence can slip easily into incoherence as one approaches its center, that place where violence seems to be happening only for its own sake and where the institution's instrumental indifference to the soldier's battered life and the survival of his dependents seems nothing more than unfathomable cruelty. But that is the place that people are bound to by love, by its also often incoherent truth. Once attachment brings us there, the next question, the next maneuver, is what is to be done? What do people need to survive such challenging attachments? How can this space be recognized from both within and without?

Chapter 5: War Economy

“YOU WILL ALWAYS BE 100 PERCENT IN DEBT”

I go with Jimmy and his wife Liz and some WTU soldiers from the Foundation and a couple of their spouses and kids to a barbecue in Waco. It is an annual soldiers and veterans tribute event thrown by a wealthy local businessman, Mr. Rogan—a “magnate,” the local paper calls him in an article about the event—who owns a big ranch about 40 miles from Ft. Hood. We get to the ranch in a small convoy—Jimmy’s truck, a government van (we receive a briefing on riding in a “military vehicle” beforehand—no food, drink only water, no smoking), and another soldier and his kids in a car behind us. The businessman, who looks stern and vigorous and is clad in a sort of gentleman rancher style with vest, boots, bandana, and cowboy hat, greets us from the back of a horse as we pass through the gate. An assistant collects a liability form that we have all signed. We head over a cattle guard, down a long driveway through a pasture where longhorn steers are grazing. The road is full of people walking the same direction from cars parked in the grass—many have the short hair, broad shoulders and purposeful gait of soldiers—and we drive slowly. Because the van contains a group of “wounded warriors,” I gather, we have been accorded the privilege of parking close in. A group of women on horses surround the vehicles, in a row on either side, and escort us down the road. They wear sequined blue and silver shirts and elaborate blue, white and silver fringed chaps; the horses are decorated with swaths of blue and silver glitter on their flanks; and the women carry flags, USA and Texas and the seals of the various armed forces—Navy is immediately outside my window, blue eagle and anchor on white background. Down the drive are more and more people, many looking less like soldiers than like civilians—bigger, older (some elderly), longer hair. They are clapping and waving flags as we pass.

I wonder if, as has been the case at other events like this I have attended, there is someone preceding us with a sign reading “Wounded Warriors.” The mood inside the van is flat, a little uneasy. All along the drive are huge signs that Mr. Rogan has put up with quotations and bible verses printed on them: “Chop your own wood, it will warm you twice” (Henry Ford); “He will lift you up like eagles” (Isaiah 40:31).

We pull up the drive past two houses, one low and brick and older, the other set further back, with broad overhanging eaves, tan plaster walls, dozens of large, dark windows, and an elaborately landscaped yard and patio. We debark from our military vehicle and slather ourselves with sunscreen. Jimmy, as nominal NCOIC³⁷ and so responsible for us, pairs everyone into buddies: most of the group, including him, are with their spouses or kids; he asks me to go with Hank, a volunteer WTU soldier from the Foundation, talkative but socially awkward, a bit of an outcast. We seat ourselves in front of the stage that has been set up in a swath of pasture between the houses and some outbuildings. Facing the stage are a couple of big tents where volunteers will serve us food. The stage is a big gooseneck flatbed trailer, bright red and new, with two semi trailers parked behind it as backdrop, one bearing the logo of Mr. Rogan’s construction company and the other a promotional image for a local news channel, photos of two anchor’s faces against a background of blue sky and an American flag. There is bunting draped over everything, and flags everywhere, Texas and U.S., literally dozens around the stage, the tents, the house. Everywhere are people in various forms of red, white and blue and stars-and-stripes clothing. Then there is an elderly lady wearing an oversized t-shirt with the word “PROFANITY” with an interdicting red circle and slash printed over it. There is a slightly overweight young guy wearing a UT-colored burnt orange tee that says “Don’t mess with Dubya” in big, goofy type.

³⁷ NCOIC: noncommissioned officer in charge.

The crowd is a little thin. In addition to our small crew, there are a few dozen soldiers from a combat unit at Ft. Hood, some sitting down in front of the stage, and others checking out the fishing pond and horse paddock that Mr. Rogan has also opened up to his guests. After a few minutes, maybe ten or fifteen elderly WWII and Korea veterans from the VA hospital in Temple are brought to the row of seats closest to the stage by a shuttle bus; a few are in wheelchairs. There are a lot of volunteers and boosters and other civilian guests—they could easily outnumber the soldiers. More soldiers are expected, or were, it's not clear. It is a little embarrassing: Mr. Rogan has clearly gone to considerable expense and effort to put on this event, but the idea that there might not be enough soldiers to thank, to fill the space in front of his stage and eat his food, makes us a little nervous. Neither Jimmy nor Gene and Danielle, who are heading up the other group of soldiers, seem sure who else is supposed to show up. There is in fact some bad history between them, and they give me separate and conflicting explanations of what the other was supposed to do, how many soldiers they promised to bring and how they may have fallen short. This is one of the curious responsibilities of volunteer soldier advocates: gathering soldiers and delivering them to parades and picnics and dinners, getting them to show up *to be thanked*. It is part of an exchange, and not only as the price for enjoying an afternoon of bands and speeches and free barbecue and the fishpond on the ranch. The Foundation depends on being helped by people who want to help soldiers, and so it tries to fulfill that desire for those who do give time, attention, money, baked goods, sheets and towels and toiletries, Christmas cards. It is nothing so instrumental as hoping to get some kind of donation out of Mr. Rogan; it is more diffuse I think, about maintaining the spirit of good will and giving that the Foundation doesn't so much depend upon as cultivate and nourish, mediate and redirect among the various interested parties to which

it is bound by various exchanges. Hence the anxiety and the bitterness between Jimmy and the others over how it is that something here might have fallen short.

The women on horseback have gathered off to one side of the stage. There is an introductory speech from an emcee, a trim, middle-aged white man in a dress shirt, jeans and boots, sharing the stage with several other similarly attired trim, middle-aged white men, who welcomes the soldiers. A ten-year-old Boy Scout takes the mic and leads a presentation of the colors: the Texas and American flags are marched up to the stage by groups of JROTC kids and Boy and Girl Scouts. The Scouts wear their militaristic tan uniforms, but with sneakers. The Air Force JROTC kids wear camo pants, polished jungle boots and logoed t-shirts; the Navy kids wear blue dress uniforms with shoulder braids and garrison caps. They march in lock step to the boy's commands—"Color guard ... advance! Color guard ... halt!" Following an instruction that those in uniform should salute and those not should place their hand over their heart, we say the Pledge of Allegiance and sing the national anthem. There is a benediction by a preacher frequently mentioning Jesus and asking God's protection for the soldiers as they do "His" work. There is more than one invocation of John 15:13, "Greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friend." The more intensely evangelical atmosphere here highlights by contrast the comparatively reserved religiosity of official Army proceedings, which, while they tend to be unapologetically Christian, are also typically generic and inclusive in tone. The color guard is excused, but as they begin to march out, one of the kids collapses directly onto an elderly vet in the front row, overcome by dehydration or the newly high spring sun. An EMT scoops him up and carries him to an ambulance parked behind the stage, and the ceremony goes on.

When I look back on them later, my notes from the day are spotty. I'm feeling a little sickly and somewhat besieged by all the sentiment, but it's also simply the case that

everyone is a little confused: who the speakers are, what we are there for, what the appropriate way to respond is, what's happening next. All this effort to thank soldiers, but without all the soldiers. We sit and wait for another load of soldiers to arrive, or to be excused for lunch, or for something else to happen, it is not exactly clear. There are more speakers. A couple are veterans, a World War II vet from the Army's first all-African American artillery battalion and Dave Roeber, who was horribly burned by a white phosphorus grenade in Vietnam and now is a professional motivational speaker. But beside that there are no soldiers on the stage. This is something *for* soldiers, something directed at them. The speeches that follow—from one of the TV anchors, from a couple of other local businessmen, from a conservative activist who is the father of a soldier killed in Iraq—are relentlessly affirmative, utterly sincere. They blur together, and Hank and I wander off to get plates of barbecue at some point. There is certainly nothing cynical or false about the hyperabundance of militaristic and patriotic sentiment, but there is just so much of it, a single chord being sounded again and again. Indeed, one of the guests is a man from Dallas who tours the state towing a working replica of the Liberty Bell on a trailer; guests at the picnic are invited to ring it, and it tolls solemnly and at odd intervals throughout the afternoon. One speaker is invited by the emcee to “tell us your feelings on what we're doing here today, and on America.” The TV anchor, clad in a stars-and-stripes button-down, tells the crowd of soldiers, “I need to tell you personally how grateful I am,” and segues from his brief speech of thanks to a rendition of Lee Greenwood's “God Bless the USA” and a medley of other patriotic songs. Another speaker asserts that “If you're an American, you will always be 100 percent in debt” to soldiers who have served in war; whether this was addressed to the soldiers in the audience, or to the civilians, or both, is not clear.

One hundred percent: that is some serious indebtedness, its phrasing both hyperbolic and actuarially exact, and I wonder what is to be done with it. What is owed on it, and in exchange for what, exactly? Who else might we be indebted to and maybe welshing out on? The Iraqi or Afghan civilians who have been hurt or killed or who have fled their homes or had their lives upended? Who else's exposure and pain and immiseration and death has helped to earn whatever it is that the war is for?

At 100 percent indebtedness, the emotional investment in soldiers turns into a kind of abasement on the part of those saying thanks. They place themselves permanently in debt. It is a short leap to the sacred from here, to Christ on the cross and the idea of a sacrifice of life that cannot be paid back. And because it cannot be paid back, as Nietzsche suggests in *The Genealogy of Morals*, this sacrifice gives rise, as the crucifixion did, to a new order of things based on guilt and perpetual obligation (1956). The sacred debt provokes crisis, though. It runs counter to the capitalist notion that all quantities are fungible, alienable, exchangeable—that there is a fair price for everything. And it runs counter to the modern and secular imperative that military force be subordinated to civilian political will and rationality. In the process of resolving one problem, soldiers' sacrifice has, given rise to another. It is not merely that the debt is too great to ever be paid back—that there is no love that is greater, as the passage from John has it—but that there is a structural obstacle to resolving it, a failure of rationality to take full account of the sacred, a failure that can nevertheless be given form in a rational absolute: always 100 percent.

The air is thick with this feeling of the boosters and the thankers, though not as any kind of rapturous communitas. This deep emotional investment in the soldiers floats about seeking its outlet, and that outlet proves to be an ambivalent and moving target. The feeling is there in the way that grave intonations of sentiment come in wavering or

cracking voices as the speakers find themselves overwhelmed by their own emotion, a disabling excess of affect. I have seen it plenty of times in how civilians talk to soldiers, and even felt twinges of it in myself, the way that feeling rises to the surface, maybe even ambushing you a bit, as you struggle to say something meaningful and appropriate. Finding words that can stand up to that imbalance is a struggle; maybe the feelings come first, or maybe they come with the struggle for language. Each iteration of thanks just draws attention to the way that no acknowledgement could ever be fully adequate. “I need to tell you personally”: it is a need not just to tell and to affirm, but also to thank and acknowledge and give back something to soldiers, and even after all that, ultimately, to insist on “100 percent” indebtedness.

The soldier stands before the booster and the volunteer as an avatar of death, of life that has suffered and is ready to die. For that he is bid thank you, thank you, thank you. But the soldier did not reach this status on his own; he came by it via a vast apparatus of power to which the civilian is also attached. It is this apparatus as much as anything else that has produced the debt, but paradoxically it is also the thing obscured when the debt is personalized in direct encounters between soldiers and civilians: “I need to tell you personally.” Bringing the whole war down to *I, you, personally*, collapses the frame, the shape and the scale of the debt and the responsibility to thank. Death and debt move person to person without the intervening mass of the institution to dampen their force. In the face of this overwhelming scale, the recognition imparted by thanks can be a site of vulnerability; it can give rise to new inequalities as it seeks to address old ones (Markell 2003). As Butler writes,

we all live with this particular vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, a vulnerability to a sudden address from elsewhere that we cannot preempt. This vulnerability, however, becomes highly exacerbated under certain social and political conditions, especially those in which violence is a way of life and the means to secure self-defense are limited. (Butler 2004, 29)

Not that this scale-making move is intentional on the part of those who say thanks, but the force of war is just far too big for any two people to take on on their own, even with a lot of speeches and songs and prayers and free barbecue to back them up. And so both parties to the scene of gratitude struggle with all the unnamed excesses that surround the simple effort to say thanks, the effort to condense all of what war means and has done into a momentary face-to-face encounter.

The problems here are several, but they all stem from the fact that we face a debt whose form and content are unclear. On the side of the debtors, there is the insistence on thanking and on the impossibility of repayment. On the side of the creditors—the soldiers—there is the burden of graciously accepting this repayment and conforming to expectations of the indebted, even when it is not consonant with soldiers' own notion of what they are owed. The thing given is said to be priceless, and yet it is intractably bound up with more profane constructions of political and material value. And it is said and felt to dwell between persons, and yet it cannot be spoken from one to another without invoking a vast sweep of enabling and intermediating structures. Debt, repayment, value, and scale—these are the problems of this last chapter. They are, for anthropology and philosophy, very old problems, and I do not presume to resolve them here. Instead, I offer what follows as part of the ongoing and unfinished conversation between different perspectives on exchange, some of which are totalizing and functionalist and others of which explode these conventions and offer new ways for thinking about how value is generated. My intention is not to arrive at a correct model of exchange, but to trace people's "capacities for affecting or being affected" (Thrift 2005) within relations of exchange.

TRANSACTION

This rehearsal of debt and obligation all goes to the notion that war is some kind of transaction: lives risked and given in the name of political ends, ideological premises, the existence of the nation, the security and freedom of Americans and of fortunate foreigners. Carl von Clausewitz is well known—and often misquoted—for his definition of war as a simple means to an end, “nothing but a continuation of political intercourse with an admixture of other means” (as cited in Huntington 1957, 56): fighting solves practical and ideological disagreements and contentions over power and control. This statement represents only one pole of Clausewitz’s dialectical description of the “dual nature” of war. As military scholar Christopher Bassford writes, the complementary pole is the notion of war as “nothing but a duel on a larger scale.” Ultimately, “war is neither ‘nothing but’ an act of brute force nor ‘merely’ a rational act of politics or policy” (Bassford 1994).

As Elaine Scarry elaborates, the dual nature of war means that the experience of harm *within* it is artificially isolated from the ideologies and discourses that stand outside, prior to and after it. Scarry writes that the relation that defines war

will itself not be locatable within the *relation* between any two persons—soldiers and soldier, soldier and officer, soldier and civilian—nor even in the *relation* between two large groups of people, such as the hundreds of thousands of persons who face and deface each other across the field of battle. The essential structure of war, its juxtaposition of the extreme facts of body and voice, resides in the *relation* between its own largest parts, the relation between the collective casualties that occur *within* war, and the verbal issues (freedom, national sovereignty, the right to disputed ground, the extra-territorial authority of a particular ideology) that stand *outside* war, that are therefore *before* the act of war begins and *after* it ends, that are understood by warring populations as the motive and justifications and will again be recognized after the war as the thing substantiated ... by war’s activity. The central question to be asked here—what is the relation between obsessive act of injuring and the issue on behalf of which that act is performed—is a question about the relation between the interior content of war and what stands outside it. (Scarry 1987, 63)

Scarry's critique is an attack on the metaphor, euphemism and compartmentalization of war. It is an attack on the language that banishes the living human body and its destruction and replaces it with synecdochic gestures and abstract talk of what war is "about." What defines war—what Scarry finds so shockingly common to it across a range of times, peoples and places—is not its root in the rivalry of nations or the avarice of men, but the obscured conversion of brute destruction of bodies into reason, right and value, the transmutation of different types of capital (Bourdieu 1987) across the boundary between war's interior and its exterior. The relations among people—between enemies, between fellow combatants, between those who fight and those in whose name they do it—matter not to Scarry, for whom the wounding of an individual soldier translates directly into the strategic disadvantage of the unit, the army, and the state of which he is a part. All that matters is the transaction across the boundary between "the interior content of war and what stands outside it": the expenditure of life within and the generation of value without.

At the picnic, the soldier and the civilian stand outside—in time, place and experience—of war and pay a bloodless but deeply felt tribute to the violence of its interior. The speeches and songs and pageantry affirm the transmutational operation in which the harm done to the bodies that partake in the duel, the "contest of injuring," becomes the ground for enduring discursive, ideological and political effects: "victory" and "defeat," reformed sovereignties and borders, concessions and reparations, "our freedom," "our liberty," "our way of life" (Scarry 1987, 63). But it goes beyond causes and consequences to the cracking voices, the feelings, that sense of being overwhelmed. It is in light of such excesses that this chapter argues against too strict a sense of what the transaction of war is all about.

The scene of thanks passing from civilian to soldier complicates this transaction on at least two fronts. First, it vacillates between the two dialectical poles of war's "dual nature." It originates with the civilian's conception of war as a meaningful political endeavor, but it draws attention to the soldier's direct experience of violence, moving into that space at the center of war where violence has no explicit "meaning" outside of the immediacy of the contest. The transaction of war takes on increasingly excessive and contradictory form the closer you get to the center of the thing itself, the place where the soldier labors, because war's interior is a zone where violence appears to be transpiring "for its own sake." Means become divorced from ends, and war looks as though it is being waged not as a contest over values, land or ideology, but according to the gratuitous logic of vengeance and satisfaction that governs the duel. This ambiguity over what exactly the soldier is being thanked for produces a sort of double bind: the soldier is either being thanked for war's political outcomes, which are alien to his actual labor, or for that labor of violence, which is alien to the politicized humanity that he is meant to be defending.

Second is the related problem of scale introduced by the desire and need to make "personal" so vast a thing, for the parties in that person-to-person interaction never stand just for themselves, nor do they just correspond neatly to the larger entities—military and civilian—of which they are a part. War may simply be a duel "on a larger scale," but scaling up the one-on-one of the duel makes it infinitely more complex. As Ana Tsing points out, "scale is not just a neutral frame for viewing the world; scale must be brought into being: proposed, practiced, and evaded, as well as taken for granted" (Tsing 2005, 58). It is this exact proposal, practice, evasion, and taking for granted that transpires when "I need to thank you personally." The different categorical frames and orders of magnitude that impinge on this encounter do not fit neatly together into a coherent whole

or a tidy dialectical synthesis. Indeed, tracing the various relations and distinctions and ricocheting arrows of obligation that in-fill war's putative interior—between, as Scarry writes, individual persons and groups, between soldiers and civilians and officers and enemies—leave you feeling like there may not be an inside to get to. Scarry insists that it is only the relation between war's two “own largest parts” that counts. But from an ethnographic perspective, the relations among all the other parts must count as well, for there is no point at which “culture” gives out and “History” or “the system” takes over, as George Marcus suggests (1998). The “dual” nature of war is really a sort of polyvalent contamination, a persistence of each element in the others in varying combinations and “with an admixture” of yet other means as well: the soldier, the couple, the kids, the family, the squad, the unit, the block, the base, the town, the Army, the country, the war; and then the sacred, the personal, the affective, the political. Value is generated and confusedly negotiated over at every intersection and between every order of magnitude.

Exchange, even in its guise of cliché and sentiment, provides a way of talking explicitly about the relationship between the inside and the outside. Exchange opens up the structure of war so that it is not so much a dualistic zone of indistinction as a polymorphous space of interchange, countless moments of traffic across the various borders that separate its inside from its outside. This is what I understand to be at work in the outpourings of sentiment at the picnic. It is a dynamic all the more nervous for the way it mixes up means (outside) and ends (inside), celebrating the outcome of the contest and the virtue of the participants as if they were the same thing. And in this respect it is a dynamic no different from how we all may be inclined to talk about soldiers—how we may feel we *ought* to talk about them—and often how they talk about themselves.

CIVILIANS AND SOLDIERS, SERVICE AND SACRIFICE

The fantasies and expectations projected onto soldiers, including the discourses and affects of obligation and tribute illustrated above—are efforts to nail down the nature of the transaction that say more about how civilians see themselves as about the nature of soldiers. This oppositional figuration of the civilian and the soldier stands at the center of the stories about state violence alluded to at the very outset of this dissertation, the stories we tell ourselves about what all this is for. As Catherine Lutz writes, the soldier is figured as “emotionally disciplined, vigorous, and hardworking. By definition, then, the civilian is weak, cowardly, self-centered, materialistic, and wealthy. The civilian is soft, lacking experience with both the physical discipline that hardens muscles and with the hard facts of death and evil that the soldier faces down” (Lutz 2001, 228-229). While civilians are “free” to do as they please, the soldier pursues a transcendent, higher purpose (whether fighting for freedom and democracy or simply doing one’s duty as a result of economic or educational aspirations), made righteous by threat and injury, and stoic in the face of the trauma that dogs it. Soldiers themselves reproduce versions of this binary, and during fieldwork when I would ask about differences between civilian and military perspectives on war, some soldiers would say that they didn't know what “civilians” felt or believed because they weren’t civilians themselves, or even that they had never been. All this despite the fact that they shared the same tastes, values and aspirations to the good life of non-military Americans.

The military is frequently figured from both within and without as an institution apart from the nation as a whole, existing to protect the public but exceeding it in discipline, virtue and moral authority (Lutz 2001; Brodie 2000; Ricks 1997). Soldiers are presumed to enjoy a sort of “supercitizenship,” Lutz writes, as military rhetoric, especially in the form of recruitment advertising, motivates civilians to “value soldiers ...

in exchange for not being asked to kill and die” (2001, 236). By default all non-military citizens are thus “subcitizens,” and the alienation and hierarchy of value this implies further erodes the notion that military power authority are and should be subordinate to democratic, civilian control (Lutz 2001, 237). The relation between soldiers and civilians is thus not just one of simple opposition, then, but of *exception*. Soldiers are excepted from the category of “regular” citizen at the same time as they exemplify it to an extreme by their mortal exposure on behalf of the nation.

Through this fraught haze of political and cultural associations, it is not surprising that the transaction of war looks different depending on where one is standing, especially in those scenes in which civilians demonstratively and emotionally profess their indebtedness. As Zoë Wool notes in her ethnography of injured soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center,

It is the debtors, that is, the volunteers, visitors, and war and troop boosters, who insist on this debt. It is they who insist that they owe things to the soldiers. It is they who insist the soldiers have sacrificed on their behalf. They elevate soldiers to the level of the self-sacrificing hero and do their best to repay this unpayable debt to which they declare they are bound. (Wool 2009)

Soldiers would not deny that they are owed something, even many things, for what they have done. In soldiers’ own colloquial language and in official Army discourse, the fallen, the injured, and the exceptionally courageous and competent are routinely referred to as “heroes.” Heroism itself is a complex and unbalanced category: heroism is a state of renunciation. A hero is someone who asks for nothing but to whom others feel that they owe everything. And heroism bears the imprint of entities—the nation and the divine—that completely overwhelm the individual. As Wool points out, and as the discussion to follow will elaborate in its own way, “the experience of being nominated as a willing sacrificial victim is profoundly troubling,” not least for the way it precludes any possibility of normalcy for those so nominated (2009).

The labor of making war is called “service”—not servitude, as in “service sector,” like the jobs that constitute a massive proportion of the economy of Killeen and many other military towns, but service to the public and the nation. It is a description applied to few other kinds of work—teaching, medicine, public safety—and one that suggests a different kind of exchange than ordinary work, a relationship of commitment and subordination rather than the contingent and measurable transaction of wage labor. We believe that one does not go into “service” for the money, but for loftier motives, and that in any case the money is not something that can balance out what is asked for in return. Catherine Lutz writes,

Military work is called *service* because people see soldiers as giving the country something larger than what they take home in their paychecks. It is a never completely reciprocal exchange because of life’s sacredness—both their own and those they take in battle. But for this reason, soldiering can have a weak if noble cultural reputation, as do nurses, day care providers, sanitation workers, and others. (Lutz 2001, 231)

So in fact service in this sense is not so far from servitude, the moral “nobility” of the former overlapping uncomfortably with the meager social and economic capital of the latter. Lutz’s observation also accounts for the ways that soldiers are infantilized by civilian gratitude: given cookies, stuffed animals and hugs, referred to as “boys,” “kids,” and “our young men and women.” For indeed they are young—“older” soldiers are those in their late thirties and early forties. There is reason enough right there to be a little suspicious of service: valorizing those who serve because they give more than they take means not having to think about what is not being given to them, not least the measurable, cold, hard cash that would really make a difference.

A soldier’s death in war, or risk of death, is a “sacrifice.” The civilians in whose name war is waged are expected to sacrifice as well, but only in the Protestant sense of forbearance and abstention—or in self-torture over the failure to sacrifice. The sacrifice

of physical and psychic integrity and of life itself has the aura of sacred spectacle. Skillful tactical soldiering might be nothing more than the reasoned use of a life toward some end, but *sacrifice*—making holy through renunciation and destruction—is an excessive and violent consumption of life. It is anti-utilitarian. Sacrifice carries the full force of a positive moral clarity, connoting a life freely given. Like service, sacrifice is an exercise in displacement and surrogacy (Girard 1979), so as a sacrificial victim, the soldier is—and so we are—freed from burdensome questions of state exploitation and moral ambiguity: the soldier’s innocence and humanity are restored, since it was not these things but his life that he gave, a gift in the name of freedom and security. Sacrifice ups the ante even higher than “service” and entails yet another kind of balance sheet, one laden with unpayable debts. They die so that we live. And the people whose labors of gratitude support soldiers assert this over and over again; the first day I met Debbie, the Foundation director, she told me, “They’re doing a job that most of us can’t do.”

THE GIFT OF DEATH

In this constellation of excess and half-formed meaning, I follow Alan Klima’s insight that such forms of death are always tinged with an ambivalent spirit of giving, just as giving so often bears the traces of death and violence (Klima 2002). Let us think of soldiers’ work—the violence that they produce and are exposed to—as a gift, given to the state and population on behalf of whom they labor; given, that is, to us. This gift of death—of exposure to death and of the wreaking of death on others—is the thing that defines war and defines the soldier’s exceptional condition as agent, instrument and object of sovereign violence. This gift of death is the sovereign, mutable, fungible quantity that is minted out of the raw matter of injured bodies and transformed by fetish and fiat into the things that war is “about”: territory, security, ideology, et cetera. This is

why I turn to the gift, to its impossibility and irresolution and its capacity to bind otherwise incommensurable experiences intimately together, especially when those incommensurables carry life-and-death stakes. If this chapter is a meditation on the various and not always compatible ways of thinking about exchange—as heroism, service, labor, sacrifice, and so on—the gift provides a coherent point of reference that nevertheless calls attention to the instability and shapeshifting that inhere in dynamics of exchange. It calls attention to the way that gifts always “contain within them” destructive forces that can be unleashed if “the obligation to reciprocate ... may fail to be observed” (Mauss 2000, 10), and thus the gift contains within it the possibility that its value and spirit will be misrecognized or mishandled. In its danger, its ambiguity, its relationality, and its demand for participation, the gift gives a definitive name to war’s problem of value and indebtedness for which no definitive shape and content can be figured.

Marcel Mauss, in his famous essay on the gift, describes it not as an isolated object passed between subjects, but as a gesture that instantiates cycles of obligation, reciprocity and debt (Mauss 1990). The “spirit” of the gift travels along with the actual thing given and accumulates with and flows from the givers and receivers in their subsequent transactions. According to the Melanesian shaman whose words Mauss borrows, “no price is set” on the thing given. If you give the thing received to a third person and then receive another object and attendant spirit in exchange, you become indebted not only to this new donor, but to the original donor as well. Failure to hold up your end of the unspoken deal can result in “serious harm, ... even death” (Mauss 2000, 11). The gift in this sense is a practice of social relations, relations of mutuality and dependence that are reaffirmed with every exchange and counter-exchange and that ultimately carry mortal stakes. The entire thing unfolds on the presumption that what has gone around will come around, even if by an as yet unforeseen avenue. The routes that

value travels are much more circuitous and diffuse than the clean and impatient one-to-one of the marketplace, and this, combined with the absence of a price, makes the gift a dramatically un-capitalist and un-rational mode of transaction.

Soldiering, in its mortal altruism, mimics this irrationality. But in the process, it also exemplifies what Jacques Derrida, in his reading of Mauss, calls the “impossibility” of the gift (Derrida 1992). Soldiers are not free agents or self-interested actors. Soldierly identity derives from unbreakable loyalty, unquestioning obedience, and the virtuous asceticism that adheres to service and sacrifice; it derives, paradoxically, from the “voluntary” renunciation of individual autonomy (Harding and Stewart 2003). Soldiers cannot act as free agents, and indeed this subjection to authority is what makes their otherwise unthinkable actions possible. Just as soldiers are not free, the gift that they give is not freely given. It is a condition that curiously accentuates what Derrida describes as the impossibility of freely giving, of giving disinterestedly and without anticipation of a return, since with giving always comes “the immediate gift-canceling return of self-satisfaction in ‘giving’” (Klima 2002, 246; Derrida 1992). That this contradiction is so especially intense at the heart of the ultimate gift—the death that makes law, freedom, security, reason, right, prosperity—says something of the un-free nature of all gifts and of the violence and coercion that perhaps lurk at the heart of all that appears to be free.

In its capacity to generate order and assert dominance, the gift is thus far from innocent. The power to give is the power to obligate, to place others in your debt. And as Mauss famously demonstrates in his account of the potlatch, the extravagant expenditure of valuable things is a way of asserting dominance. Even in putatively ‘modern’ times and spaces, Mauss says, “The unreciprocated gift still makes the person who has accepted it inferior, particularly when it has been accepted with no thought of returning it” (Mauss 2000, 65). A gift of sufficient magnitude, of extreme generosity, can bury a rival giver or

exert a sort of domination over the recipient because there is no way to pay it back. It is in this sense that, as Georges Bataille writes, “the gift is the opposite of what it [seems] to be” (Bataille 1988, 71). Indeed, Bataille uses the strikingly military language of “rank” to name the power that accrues to ostentatious giving or expenditure: “the meaning of warfare and glory is poorly grasped if it is not related in part to the acquisition of *rank* through a reckless expenditure of vital resources” (1988, 71). This is not the rank of military hierarchy, but the sense of relative worth that comes from have squandered something precious. And what could be more precious than the expenditure of sanity and safety and life itself that comes with going to war? This “tyranny of the gift” is especially acute with “gifts of life,” as the medical anthropology of organ donation has elaborated (Sharp 2006; Fox 1992). Such gifts beg the same question as the soldier’s gift: what is the proper relation between one who has died and one who has lived because the other died?

For many people—those in the U.S. and elsewhere who object to war, those in Iraq who must live in it or die from it—the gifts of war violence and attendant death are unsolicited and unwanted. We may not have asked for them, and we may even have objected strongly to them right from the beginning. But these gifts cannot be refused. And at least on our end of things, it is arguably the case that we have accepted it already merely by inhabiting a social order that is upheld by violence, by the dying of those who have gone before both here and in foreign elsewhere. And on the other end, soldiers confront a range of expressions of gratitude that they often don't know what to do with: the fetishization of the soldier in public culture, the volunteers who greet plane-loads of returning soldiers with waving flags and baked goods, and the individual expressions of thanks that people in uniform encounter while going about their business out in the civilian world. Soldiers’ responses to these things, while never ungrateful, are often ambivalent. Such gestures address and complicate the debt, but they don’t erase it.

A significant part of this ambivalence, as the scene at the picnic demonstrates, resides in the way the soldier and the gift of death sit perched on a threshold where the sacred, the material and the political intersect. The soldier's sacred labor on behalf of the nation can never be separated out from the wage that he receives for that labor or from the unfeeling instrumentalization of his body by the state. Giorgio Agamben argues that anthropological notions of sacrificial gift are a sort of naïve ethnological tautology that obscure the true origins of political power in the only secondarily sacred capacity to exclude and kill. Agamben writes, "*The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice*" (Agamben 1998, 83). This of course is the sphere that the soldier occupies—in an ideal if not actual sense—and from which the indebted civilian is excluded. Within the legal and geographical space of the field of battle, the soldier is allowed to engage in all sorts of acts that would otherwise be illegal, and is likewise subject to levels of indifferent physical danger that he would not otherwise be expected to endure. This is war as "nothing but a duel," with no framework of judgment or evaluation tacked on. But this is not simply a stark political structure to which "culture"—deeply suspicious to Agamben—is merely epiphenomenal. Some notion of transcendence, as René Girard argues, is always necessary to distinguish illegal violence from "violence that is holy, legal and legitimate" (Girard 1979, 24). The very human activity of legitimated killing need not be reduced to a primordial mystification, but nor is it helpful to understand it as somehow "political" prior to being anything else. It is, rather, thick with lived experience. It is, as Dime said to me at one point, "a very real feeling" that in its subjective immediacy is simply overwhelming and essentially divorced from politics, symbolic elaboration, or even ego, all of which hover at its periphery as the recording angels that will later translate it into an intelligible story.

A lot of people think we go over there to satisfy the whole testosterone, male, go-over-there-and-be-a-warrior. That leaves about the first five minutes after you get your boots on the ground and you realize, “Holy shit, I’m actually here!” ... That whole warrior mentality, right out the window! [*laughs*] And you’re like, “Holy shit, I’m actually here doing this, what in the hell did I just get myself into?” I mean you wanna serve your country with honor and distinction, but self-preservation kinda takes a little bit more precedence over that, and you’re kinda like, “Wow, ok, um, shit, I’m carrying a weapon, and I’m walking around, and there’s people actually trying to kill me now. Because of the flag that I’m wearing on my right shoulder.” And it’s very real. It’s a very real feeling.

On the other hand, he said,

If I had to go and explain myself to everybody about the shit that *I* fuckin’ did, my god, I should be in jail right now! But no, I was under orders to do what I did. That’s the only reason why I’m not in jail.

The civilian peers over the edge of this zone of killing and dying and is witness to it in various circumscribed ways. But there is a way that, in saying thank-you to the soldier and extending a hand in gratitude, the civilian is also reaching across the border of this zone and dragging with him misapplied rules and values that do not make sense once they are extended into the space of exception. As Dime tells it, the soldier’s courage is also sheer terror, and the soldier’s brave deeds are also crimes. The soldier is not exactly comfortable within this zone, but he knows it and it offers a logic that corresponds to his experience. When the civilian reaches across into this zone and imposes upon it the standard, sacred, elevated values for life and death, the soldier grows uneasy and then resentful, for he has, with no small effort, learned to value these things in different, even alien ways. In actual practice humans are always mingling across the boundary between the normal and the exceptional and assigning meaning to it and deriving feeling from it in such haphazard ways—ways illustrated in the scenes from the picnic and scenes to be recounted throughout the rest of this chapter—that Agamben’s prioritization of the political over the sacred or the merely “cultural” seems of limited utility. The traffic

across that boundary is always messy and always incomplete, and people are always working out the ways that they find themselves in the middle of it.

WAR'S GENERAL ECONOMY

Mauss' assertion that the gift brings everyone closer together in ways that are communal if not egalitarian relies on the legibility of the gift, on the presumption that everyone has an equal understanding of its value as it passes from person to person. But in this setting where actors leap between scales, where value changes magically from one form to another, where the thresholds between the sacred, the material and the political merge and multiply, an alternative mode of understanding transaction is necessary, one that goes beyond capitalist reason or the nostalgia of organic solidarity.

Though capital, ubiquitous and inescapable, is a good place to start. For while the gift of death is irrational and un-capitalist, capital too makes a commodity and an asset of debts. Even a bank balance sheet, that most rational and unfeeling of instruments, is a curiously inverted field on which outstanding debts represent assets and too much cash on hand is just unexploited dead weight. This curious inversion in the very heart of capitalist rationality would seem to mimic the irrationality of violent sacrifice, meted out in those things that we agree really are "priceless" and that soldiers are asked to give up: peace of mind, domestic bliss, psychic stability, a limb, a life. What is principal plus interest on a thing that has no price? And how does the question of price become complicated once we begin to take account of the many different economies that surround war and orbit the gift of death at its center? What happens in this tense knot of understandings of the exchange value of war: as just another job on the one hand, and the ultimate sacrifice on the other? What does it mean to compensate soldiers for their work,

and to be “indebted” to them for it? The very act of trying to economically rationalize the sacred and “priceless” gives rise to its own particular excess.

War, in addition to being a crucible of bodily, political and sacred transmutation, is a source of wealth. Being a soldier is a job, and wages, bonuses, training, security, health insurance, college funding, loans, and housing are all things that attract the people who become soldiers. Not to say that many of these people are not also motivated by patriotism, ideology, a desire to serve, camaraderie, or professional pride—or by the search for thrills and adventure. These things mattered to the people I met in different proportions, complex knots of priority and motivation. But I met no one who had only a single reason, material or ideological or emotional, for joining the Army, or who derived just a single source of satisfaction from it.

Though we may expend a lot of energy reminding one another of the fact, we generally take for granted that for good or ill, the established exchange of things and labors and forces in which we live must at times be protected, sometimes preemptively, by the exercise of violence. And we know that that violence is also good for business, again whether for good or ill: think of FDR sweeping the nation out of depression on a tide of righteous, home-built bombs and rivets; security and logistics contractors chummy with the very folks who decide when and how to invade our ostensive enemies; the very idea of going to war in the first place to protect the dark and slippery substance that keeps the wheels of production and consumption spinning so smoothly. Some version of all of this held for just about everyone I met at Ft. Hood. The cynical asserted that the war would continue indefinitely, or at least as long as possible, because there was so much money to be made at it by contractors and weapons makers. Everyone acknowledged, unbidden and in various ways, that oil figured into things. Though they varied on whether America’s concern for oil was hypocritical looting, or rational self-interest, or responsible

custodianship of this valuable resource that the whole world depended on. Simmons told me the war should be called “Operation Iraqi Liberation—O.I.L.” Buck asked me one day why, in 2008, after five years of fighting, gas was still so damn expensive. We consulted Wikipedia briefly, and I rambled about OPEC, regional instability and petroleum futures markets. “Whatever,” he said. “I just wanna be able to drive my truck.” Dime, ranting angrily at one point about the Army’s failure to take care of his injuries from two IED blasts, interrupted himself and said, “Sorry if I’m getting angry, but you know, it’s a little sensitive subject there.” Leaning in close to the microphone of my tape recorder, he yelled theatrically, “Hope you enjoy the gas!” We both laughed and he apologized again: “Sorry man, sorry.”

So though wars are regarded as a source of wealth, it is vague and abstract wealth in the form of greater prosperity to be collectively enjoyed, or it is someone else’s wealth, siphoned off the hard work of many to be enjoyed only by a few. It makes sense, then, that, as with all the talk of service, sacrifice and debt, we talk about the economies that surround war in terms of cost. Wars may be profitable, but more importantly they are expensive. Wars “cost” money just as they “cost” lives (leaving aside for now whose lives and their relative value). It is said that they cost “blood,” as in “blood and treasure” and “no blood for oil.” Both expressions reduce to cliché the otherwise unseemly notion that “blood” is somehow fungible in crass material terms, but they also offer an instructive contrast. “Blood and treasure” suggests that the two expended quantities, while they exist on the same plane, are not reducible to one another. “No blood for oil” is arguably disingenuous in its righteousness, for it seeks to preserve some distinction between those things that we buy with money and those things that we pay for in human lives; it presumes that oil can somehow be gotten without spilling blood. Both expressions, however, link “priceless” blood—signifying both vitality and death—to the

profaneness and finitude of worldlier “costs.” This rhetorical yoking is a potent reminder that the reason it is so important to be able to symbolically distinguish the gift of death, the soldier’s sacrifice, from the pursuit of filthy lucre is precisely that in practice it is impossible to disentangle them. So everything that we might want to say about the intersecting and interwoven systems of exchange and expenditure—the economies—that surround war calls attention to the traffic between the profaneness of politics and wage labor and the sacredness of selfless expenditure, the pricing of the priceless.

Even as we tell one another that blood and lives are priceless, the costs of war are measured with actuarial precision: body counts issued and published daily (leaving aside the question of whose bodies are counted); tallies of friendly and enemy casualties; strategic gains and losses; timetables and troop levels; and governmental appropriations measured in the hundreds of billions. Projecting the cost of today’s soldiers’ medical care and retirement benefits into the future, economist Joseph Stiglitz, in his eponymous work on the subject, estimates the total cost of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq at three trillion dollars (2008), which is about the size of the entire U.S. federal budget for 2008. Discourses of war’s cost circulate broadly in public culture, but for the soldiers and military families who inhabit and work at Ft. Hood, the tension that this language points to is also a condition of everyday life. The base is responsible for literally billions of dollars of economic outlay annually, a significant portion of which goes directly into the local economy of Killeen and the surrounding area, where business is driven by the urgent pace of continuous deployments and continuing war. In accordance with the Army’s dedication to the rationalization of violence, there are very real formulae for figuring the monetary worth of priceless quantities like life and limb, such as the \$400,000 Servicemen’s Group Life Insurance death benefit (plus \$100,000 for death in a war zone), or the \$50,000 that a missing arm or leg is worth under SGLI, or the 30 or 40

or 50 percent disability pension one might receive from the Army and the VA for a ruined leg or wrecked vertebrae or a traumatic brain injury. There are plenty of less spectacular tallies that also accrue to military service: the extra monthly pay for being stop-lossed or for hazard and hardship during deployment, the sales tax you don't pay when you shop at the base commissary and PX and the "service charge" you pay instead, the housing and medical benefits that sometimes cover what you need and sometimes don't. These are the wages of war in a very real and practical sense.

The numbers are tricky, though. They are not deceptive, exactly, for in a way they simply lay things bare with a candor that red, white and blue bunting and outpourings of sentimental gratitude tend to elide. The numbers state definitively the allotments of value—the salary, the bills and car installments, the disability payments, the federal budget outlays, the price of gas—with which everyone will have to be content. But the numbers are also haunted in a way by the ghosts of incommensurable or immeasurable values that they are meant to stand in for, and even by the way that they can differ so vastly among themselves, multiplying and dividing unthinkably vast sums and tiny, unremarkable quantities into one another. This produces a vertiginous sense of scale, of where and in what context a quantity appears generous or scarce, dear or cheap. Any amount of money can matter and any amount can go up in smoke in an eyeblink, desperately clung to or spent with abandon in the nervous way that Derrida observes is also a quality of the gift (1992, 47). When soldiers talk about staying in the Army "for the money," or when people gripe that the war is "about money," sometimes "money" itself means the same thing, and sometimes it means different things.

But let's give the numbers their moment, a chance to demonstrate on their own that, as Tsing points out, the intersection of different scales can give rise to great conflagrations of wealth and calamity (2005, 58):

The war costs—or is projected so far to cost—\$3 trillion.

The amount of cash unaccounted for by the Coalition Provisional Authority, shipped directly from the Federal Reserve Bank in New York to the Green Zone in Baghdad on shrink-wrapped cargo pallets, is \$9 billion.

A week of U.S. occupation costs \$2 billion.

An Apache attack helicopter costs \$16 million.

A loaded and armored Humvee costs \$185,000.

With the tick of a pen, a 20-year-old junior enlisted Abrams Tank System Maintainer (Military Occupational Specialty 91A) can order a workup that costs tens of thousands of dollars.

A year driving trucks in Iraq for KBR³⁸ in 2007 would get you about \$100,000.

A 2008 Dodge Challenger is \$40,000, and one day in the lounge a soldier who, as a Private, and in contrast to the KBR truck driver, makes a little over \$21,000 a year, asked me if I thought it was worth the price.

An enlistment bonus is \$20,000, before taxes; a reenlistment bonus might be almost that high, and a medical severance could be around the same ballpark.

A bedroom set is \$1,700.

A sleeve tattoo is \$1,000.

A two-bedroom apartment in Killeen is \$490 a month.

An Xbox 360 is \$300.

Cable costs \$80 a month.

Your neighbor sells you a washer and dryer for \$50 apiece.

A complete SGLI policy with a \$400,000 death benefit costs \$27 per month.

³⁸ KBR: Kellogg, Brown and Root, an engineering and construction company, formerly a subsidiary of the logistics contractor Halliburton.

Gas money is a 20-dollar bill you hand to a friend and might not get back.

The hourly wage at Wal Mart in Killeen or Copperas Cove is \$8. You can make more money in Georgetown or Austin, but this means driving 40, 50, 60 miles when gas was near \$4 a gallon; when I was driving back and forth a lot, my own cost was about 10 or 12 cents per mile.

A pack of Merits is \$6.

If you can handle the pain, you can sell some of your Percocets for \$5 apiece.

Buffalo wings at Applebee's are \$4.99.

A beer at Joker's or the American Legion is \$2.25.

A single 5.56 mm round for an M4 rifle costs 25 cents.

Another level to this scale: several soldiers remarked to me that one misperception they face from people back home is that they make a lot of money. This perception says a lot about the scale of moneydness in the places that a lot of soldiers come from. Form the perspective of the soldier, his pay is not much, but it nevertheless has a level and reliability that surpasses what his friends, family and neighbors back home are used to. And so he gets hit up to cover big expenses, to pay for taking relatives out to dinner, to loan money to friends and in-laws.

The subsuming of the epistemic murkiness of the value of death beneath the cool certainty of numbers (Taussig 1986) is not limited to strictly profane quantities like money. It is just as vitally and anxiously present in the way that people related to that most sacred of numbers, the currency that opposes and parallels money: blood, the body count, which is to say, the U.S. military body count. Soldiers are both cynical and sentimental about this number; their rhetoric poses the relatively small toll against the massive personal grief of individual losses. Of civilians, they say, "they're pitching a bitch over three thousand dead—that's nothing!" A year of deaths in Iraq was a bad

week's worth in Vietnam, more than one soldier argued to me. On the other hand, civilians can't possibly understand the grief of the various individual losses that most soldiers and those close to them have suffered. There are a lot of funerals. How many people did they know who died? Four, six, ten, twenty, more.

Beginning to pick at the edges of economy, complexity arises not just from overlaid and overlapping systems of value—sacred, political, economic—but also from the abundance of middlemen and mediating figures and institutions that help to create and define scale. Again, the problem of exchange is not simply that of the relationship between war's two largest parts or the traffic across a neatly defined boundary between inside and outside. Beyond the simple opposition between service or sacrifice and paid work, there is a long series of obligatory or debt relations that become useful for explaining war at one moment or another, any of which can be richly imagined from the perspective of either or both parties. You could make a map of all the different entities: soldiers, spouses, NCOs, commanders, the Army, the VA, the Department of Defense, the government, the American civilian public, insurgents, al Qaeda, Iraqi civilians, military contractors, oil companies, the world at large. Draw arrows in the right directions to show assertions of debt and obligation (e.g., the Iraqi people to the U.S. state and public, the VA to the hurt soldier), real or expected expressions of thanks (in the other direction), actual material compensation (wages, insurance payouts, baked goods), relations of extreme obligation (to the dead, to exceptional and caring leaders, to fallen comrades), places where things broke down (bad leaders, unfaithful spouses), relations where people took without giving (clueless civilians, contractors). There are myriad ways of drawing these lines, of ranking sets of obligations, each constellation a different image of the gift of war. Though at some point the arrows become inadequate and begin to

betray a ricocheting and boomeranging of debt, misrecognition, unpayable burden, unpardonable theft with no beginning and no end.

It would be a mistake to hierarchize these different circuits, or to reduce one to another. The lofty ideological strains of service and sacrifice are neither more nor less real than the challenges of daily survival eked out on a soldier's wage. Bataille makes a virtue of such intractable overlaps as the basis of his theory of "general economy": "Economic phenomena are not easy to isolate, and their general coordination is not easy to establish. So it is possible to raise this question concerning them: Shouldn't productive activity as a whole be considered in terms of the modifications it receives from its surroundings and brings about in its surroundings?" (Bataille 1988, 20). From such a perspective, war is not just incidentally implicated in various realms of exchange and value generation. Rather, war unifies diverse domains of exchange in a general economy, a comprehensive space of interchange and transaction in which the movement of things, forces and people can be considered and analyzed as an aggregated whole, a whole riven with conflicts and eruptions of excess. The frantic thanking of soldiers commingles the debt and worthiness of the soldier and the civilian, financial compensation and sacred obligation, and the means and ends of warfare. General economy, in a parallel move, mixes up—inverts, even—the means and ends of rational economic exchange. The problem of general economy is not simply scarcity—which is to say, the distribution of compensation and the balancing of debts—but also of excess, of what is done with all the *something else* that bubbles around the edges of quantified value. General economy "jumbles up wealth, energy, excess, and the gift" (Klima 2002, 243), making it possible to talk about the costs, expenditures, and generation of value that surround war without recourse to political economy's suspicious demystifications and paranoid, causal assertions of what war is "really about." At the same time, this knotting up of means and

ends in general economy is a salutary reminder of the conflation and confusion of means and ends that is inherent to the structure of war and the sphere of sovereign violence.

Framing these costs and payments within a general economy is instructive, because people at Ft. Hood often prefer not to talk about politics in the way that invoking “war” and “economy” in the same sentence conjures. But they do talk about the war, and their part in it, in a language of worth and effort and compensation heavily freighted with political claims. They talk about a deeply felt and often ambivalent problem of recognition: how their labors and losses are perceived by others, especially the civilian others who make up most of “the public” and “the country,” and the institutions both intimate and remote that are responsible for giving monetary and symbolic value to the work of war. This series of middlemen includes various organs of the Army itself, the Department of Defense, the Veterans Administration, the government and the president, the media and the civilian public.

In this general economy, soldiers tell a narrative that is in many ways a more bitter and more complete version of the one the guilty-minded civilian public sphere tells itself already: that only a tiny fraction of the country is acquainted with the costs of the war; that civilians are ignorant of these costs or indifferent to them, or overly hung-up on body counts and price tags; that no “payment” is being demanded of the people whose “freedom” is being protected; that those who bear the most hardship are chronically misrecognized as baby-killers and hateful thrill-seekers and dupes. As much as soldiers’ lives and livelihoods—the securing of basic necessities and pleasures—depend directly on material compensation for their labor, there is clearly something more at stake as well, circulating through the general economy in a way that piggybacks off of wages and benefits but is hardly reducible to them.

You can see this quantity in the campaign for recognition waged on car bumpers and tailgates in Killeen, in bumper stickers that proclaim “Busting Mine, Defending Yours!”, and “Home of the Free ... Because of the Brave,” and “If you don’t stand behind our soldiers, feel free to stand in front of them!” Ribbons in yellow, camo, and red, white and blue urge “support” and prayer and blessings for the troops and even display the portraits and birth and death dates of soldiers who have been killed. Red heart window decals testify to the sacrifice borne by lovers and families with the proclamations “I Love My Soldier” and “Half My Heart is in Iraq”.

The town is thick with flags and banners blessing and thanking the soldiers. And then there are the memorials, too: monuments in the old downtown, in Conder Park, in the entranceways of the community center and the high schools. There is a massive new veterans’ cemetery just south of town, which in addition to its hundreds of graves houses its own OIF/OEF memorial, thumbnail portraits of the fallen etched on massive black granite slabs. There are memorials all over the base, each unit has their own. There are memorials that soldiers make for themselves and each other: photo slideshows set to patriotic songs or melancholic alt-metal, tattoos of the names of dead friends. All these things cluster densely in Killeen, are notable for their relative abundance there, as in all military communities, and their relative absence just about everywhere else. They are reminders directed inward rather than appeals to the outside world. If “items of exchange embody the persistence of social relationships in time” (Klima 2002, 235), what does it mean that these material markers of giving are concentrated in sites where they are reminders chiefly to those who have given and sacrificed? Do they become tokens of resentment, reminders that one’s own suffering is ignored by powerful and indifferent others (Nietzsche 1956; Brown 1995)? At the same time, other items of exchange, like

the gallons of gas that everyone agrees are somehow on the line, are rendered completely anonymous and stripped of any imprint of sacrifice.

When the general economy includes everything, so too does the debt include everything. General economy at least makes it possible to imagine a way of accounting for what all this might be. Bataille has a name for this: “the accursed share,” a remaindered excess that is only haphazardly accounted for by other dimensions of the economy. The accursed share dwells with each of us, soldier and civilian, in various forms; it is opaque, sometimes terrifying, and stubbornly present.

REWARD AND EXPENDITURE

A key feature of Bataille’s general economy is that this accursed share is not simply a side-effect of exchange, but its entire point. Economies exist not to shepherd scarce resources, but to dispose of excesses of energy. War, according to Bataille, must be understood as one such mode of expenditure, one that is resorted to by modern states when leisurely and wasteful consumption proves inadequate to dissipating the accumulation of vital forces (1988, 24), and one that also has its own entailment of remainders. So what if, just as debt can be wealth and giving a gift can mean taking power for yourself, the soldier’s labor produces not just a traumatic exposure, but an investment with vital excess energy that then needs to be disposed of? War’s calamitous consumption is executed by and passes through the soldier, making war a source of value in another way: not just an undertaking that “costs” in the name of some greater benefit, or a domain of activity from which opportunistic profit can be derived, but the source of a high, a drug, “a force that gives us meaning” (Hedges 2002), a moment after which the soldier “may never again be so alive” (Swofford 2003, 225). Ultimately, this energy is to be “sent up in smoke ... against the basis of rational economy” (Bataille 1988, 22).

But I want to talk here about something more prosaic than the soldier altered by the rush of war. Ironically then, one of the classic figures of the soldier, one that has gained in visibility as the war has dragged on and become less popular and come under the scrutiny of many who many had been content to ignore its dark sides five years ago, is that of the debtor. Most of us are probably pretty familiar with it. But it is worth noting that this figure, as a thing identifiable in real, daily life, circulates with incredible and intimate vigor among soldiers themselves and within the communities where they live. The young soldier—say, 21—comes back from Iraq with 15 months of salary and combat pay in his pocket, more money than he has even seen in his life, though he gets paid comparatively little for a job that demands so much. We like to say that the money is burning a hole in his pocket, as if it is possessed of a dangerous and radiant and self-consuming energy. The soldier buys a new truck, and a set of rims for it. Maybe a new TV too, and presents for his wife or girlfriend or parents. And before you know he has outspent himself. He gets in over his head with the payments. He goes deep into debt and begins to borrow money, he gives back the truck and has to move out of the new house and sell back the furniture so that he can eat and pay his bills. He can't get out of hock, and as his contract nears his end, he reenlists to get the bonus. Then he goes back to Iraq.

Soldiers are a captive market for various predatory enterprises that congregate in military towns: pawn shops, used car dealers, storefront lenders, credit cards. The digital zipper sign at the pawn shop at the intersection of Hood Road and Rt. 190 in the center of Killeen flashes,

WE LOVE OUR SOLDIERS!!!

GREAT DEALS!!!

BEST PRICES FOR YOUR STUFF!!!

WE LOVE TO LOAN MONEY!!!

WE LOAN MORE AND SELL FOR LESS!!!

Soldiers represent a guaranteed steady paycheck, and a built-in collection authority: if the soldier falls behind, all the creditor has to do is call his commander; the soldier's NCO can harangue him more aggressively than any civilian boss, and even arrange for his paycheck to be docked. (An indebted soldier is a security risk, vulnerable to exploitation; your debts can wreck your security clearance, if you have one, and thereby your career.)

That soldiers spend and indebt themselves in these excessive cycles is an article of faith and feature of everyday experience among soldiers themselves and those who live with them. One day as we were talking, a friend launched into a (for her typical) rant against consumerist excess—"Things are just things! A job is there to support you, not to enslave you!"—and the extreme irresponsibility of free-spending soldiers. Why did she think they did it? "It's because they want to reward themselves," she told me. They've been to war, they deserve to have nice things, to have what they want. Should we be nervous about what the idea of rewarding oneself does to the right and proper exchange of gifts and the repayment of debts? In a gift economy—or even in a regime of service that "rewards" work well done—the spirit needs to arrive from elsewhere, from an other, and then be passed on. Keeping it to oneself—either by refusing to make good on a debt or by taking for oneself what one feels has been earned—can mean "serious harm, even death." And this is the anxiety-provoking dysfunction of the profligate soldier, the PFC paying for a Mustang, a set of rims, a TV, a bedroom set on installment plans.

One need not have been to war already for this to happen. You come into the Army knowing that that is where you are headed eventually; that exposure to death is there, but in the near future rather than the present or recent past. Whichever way, it enhances the volatility of the wads of cash you may suddenly find on your hands, whether it's your accumulated paychecks or a bonus for enlistment or reenlistment.

Sergeant Vincenzo, a lean, hyper-active tanker who was still waiting for his first deployment, having been sidetracked into WTU with a broken leg from a car crash, told me a story about an acquaintance from AIT who had squandered the bonus he got for coming in. After paying off a couple things, he had \$8,000 left. And he spent it like crazy: new clothes, a truck, tattoos he grew tired of a few months later. He would invite friends out for dinner night after night. “It’s cool,” he would say, over and over. “I’ve got \$8,000.” He kept saying it even as he was spending it away, trying to have it and consume it at the same time. It was gone in a couple weeks.

As Bataille writes, exchange and expenditure are born of the problem of surplus, of there always being too much energy burning a hole in everyone’s pockets. By some magic, the pawnshop wants to loan you all the money you need and to sell you whatever you want at the lowest prices around, so that you can have and spend and have and spend. Breaking up the daytime TV shows in the Foundation lounge—hours of COPS and sitcom reruns and *The Bachelorette*—an ad plays over and over that promises this same contradictory magic of the universe suddenly handing you value out of nowhere: *We Buy Broken Gold*, promising a fistful of hundred-dollar bills in exchange for an envelope of dilapidated jewelry. But it remains impossible to consume and retain at the same time (Bataille 1988).

Of course the anxieties and contradictions surrounding earning, spending, saving, and the notions of worth and deserving that attach to these things are not specific to this transaction. The Protestant ethic says expect reward only as payment for hard work, discipline and abstemiousness. But the credit card companies and payday loan stores invert this logic. “Reward yourself,” they invite. And pay later of course. The neat structural categories become jumbled up; war reward and consumer reward, war debt and consumer debt become confused. One quantity is depleted to pay off a perceived

imbalance in the other. And the whole phenomenon takes on the quality of a thing in itself, recognizable and familiar and inflected with a rueful and cautionary tone. A contradiction, an exception, but a normal one, one we know when we see. Bataille writes that this is precisely the condition of gifts and debts in general economy: in settings of abundance, the mechanisms for the expenditure of excess become objectified as ends in themselves. Is it not possible to think of easy but ultimately expensive credit in this way? It balances out one incommensurable debt, but at the expense of creating another. And not by way of a primordial and humane web of interdependence among individuals, but in a way that isolates and alienates individuals, loads them down with unpayable debts and then cuts them loose. The binding ties of obligation and exchange do not draw people closer together but instead enchain them to forces far beyond their control. There is no way of passing debt on; the debtor implodes.

The soldiers are doing for themselves rather than asking for things from someone else, but the process is destructive. It is a kind of madness. All the madresses and dysfunctions of the gift seem wrapped up in this expenditure, the way the gift “*gets carried away with itself*” (Derrida 1992, 46), the soldier carried away in the tornado of being giver, receiver, and even gift itself all at once. The demonstrative and enchaining power of giving that Mauss describes includes “destroying so as not to appear to desire repayment” (Derrida 1992). In this insane and socially unmoored potlatch, a self given over to a spiral of extravagance. In the myth of Haiyas, a man who has lost face gambling and then dies is brought back to life when his family gives a “revenge” potlatch. Expenditure can be potent enough to raise the dead. Or it can be understood as part of the extended life-in-death interlude inhabited by the soldier back from war, his need for stimulation, gratification, expenditure. Soldiers buy motorcycles and sports cars in which

they go hurtling down the highways to burn off the excess buzz of war and sometimes these things kill them.

DEALS WITH THE DEVIL

I met a plumber a few weeks after I moved in—my ancient water heater caught on fire and he came to replace it. He talked about the construction booming all around Ft. Hood. There are construction companies making bank throwing up rows and rows of identical spec houses and four-plexes all over re-zoned ranch land. His amiable tone turned scornful as he talked about it. It's wrong to make a buck off of war. It's blood money. The Blackwater guys burned to death and hung from the bridge in Fallujah in 2004? They never should have been in Iraq. I pointed out that they had signed contracts that took away all their rights, that they were killed in part because know-nothing bosses ordered them off on a needlessly dangerous mission and the dead men's families were now suing the company (Eviatar 2007). No matter: they sold their souls when they signed the contract. Maybe that's what's wrong with the country. "I agree with bin Laden that America is corrupt. I've talked to my preacher about it. Bush has horns, man!"

I was too nervous—too wary of appearing to split hairs when the condition of our and everybody else's souls were at stake—to point out to my new friend what seemed like a much bigger and messier complicity. Weren't we all here because of war, one way or the other? Was there even any question of turning down blood money, of not ending up with some of it in your pocket? The other tenant of the house was a soldier who was paying rent for a place to sleep by the base hours away from his wife and their home so that both he and she could keep their jobs. I was there because the National Science Foundation was paying my rent while I talked to soldiers about what violence had done to their lives. The plumber himself had been in the Army, he told me.

But this is the distinction between wage labor and service: contractors lack the nobility of a higher purpose and a lower wage. Fair enough: if you are going to kill someone, it should be for a reason other than money.

And yet, there is the lingering question of what it means to do something for money or not, the perhaps peculiarly American preoccupation with intentionality, sincerity and purity of motivation, with meaning what you say and doing what you do for the “right” reasons. This is what “service” and “sacrifice” are all about. But are soldiers’ motivations really that straightforward? Are they fighting only for ideals? Are they doing it for money? I wouldn’t impugn the patriotism of any of the soldiers I met, whatever that would mean anyway. But few of them had just a single reason for enlisting, and many cited the need for a regular paycheck and housing and health insurance, often when there were a wife and young kids to take care of. Doing hard and dangerous work for a wage to support a family is generally regarded as a noble thing. So then what is blood money and what not?

There do seem to be distinctions at work, though, distinctions having to do with motivations and with the amount of money one gets paid. These distinctions sort the weak nobility of soldiers’ service from the mercenariness of the mercenaries. But they don’t necessarily hold up under inspection. The mercenaries are necessary to the mission. As many as 30,000 of them are security—the hired guns—but most of the rest are doing laundry, serving food, building roads, all things that the military did more of on its own in the days before the all-volunteer force. There are almost as many U.S.-employed contractors of various nationalities in Iraq and Afghanistan as there are U.S. servicemembers. Contracting wages were often two or three times those for doing the same job as a civilian in the U.S., or for doing it as a soldier. But investigative journalist T. Christian Miller writes that most of the contractors he met researching a series of

stories on civilian workers wounded in Iraq had simply needed a job, any job. Many of them are former military (Miller 2009b; Gross 2010). Geographically, they are concentrated in military states, especially North Carolina and Texas, home to Ft. Bragg and Ft. Hood and numerous other installations out of which regularly cycle large numbers of newly-separated ex-soldiers in need of work (Miller 2009a). Many of Miller's informants cite patriotism and a desire to contribute to the war effort as part of their motivation for signing up (Gross 2010).

And then there are all the things that contractors don't get. They do not enjoy very tangible benefits such as insurance and housing for themselves and their dependents and the Army's long-term job security. They are privately insured at astronomical rates—war zone insurance costs about \$100,000 per employee, ultimately borne by taxpayers anyway—but don't have the benefit of the military's sustained, integrated medical care or its sensitivity to and knowledge of battlefield conditions and injuries (Miller 2009b; Gross 2010). Contractors, like soldiers, put themselves out there. They are exposed and endangered and far from home. But because they are paid more money, they are not seen to be owed anything for the particular gift of death that they bear.

The point is not to sort out what the right reasons are, but to reveal the constitutive power of distinctions even as they constantly break down or are contradicted, something essential to this about rendering value out of war. Everyone is trying to make sense of it and grab for these distinctions in the midst of a macro-level shit storm of callous and lethal power relations from which all are trying to find shelter. The unmeasurable gift of death and the divine aura of service and sacrifice run up against the sovereign rationality of money, its profane capacity to travel anywhere and account for anything and bend people to any purpose. Money's absence is a curse; too little of it is a grave injustice; but too much—and how much is too much in a city where so many

people have the same boss and the same salaries is not hard to figure out—is cause for suspicion. Each way of resolving the equation, of putting a name to the right and wrong reasons for a thing, comes up with a different remainder, a different notion of what is wrong or excessive or in need of further balancing out.

In his ethnography of an impoverished gold-mining village on Colombia's Pacific coast, Michael Taussig describes a condition of permanent emergency. The gold that the town survives on—a meager trickle compared to what it once was—is morally suspect. Like the plumber's take on the builders and hired guns, this tension is mediated by religion: the gold is said to belong to the Devil, who people sometimes see in the mines. Taking it for yourself means entering into a deal with him. In the case of the village—not unlike the town next to the Army base—the deal was struck long ago by someone else and had been going on for decades. You're not signing your name to anything that countless before you haven't also signed. In fact the church had more gold than anyone else—chalices, candelabra, crucifixes. The deal is just a fact of life, but the cosmological and spiritual stakes are not any lower as a result. The source of wealth is valuable precisely because it can only be gotten by breaking a rule (“No Blood for Oil!”), and as a result it introduces an uncontrollable contagion.

To break the rule means to create and enter into a space ... in which the rule is suspended and comes to exist in a ghostly, negated form, of which gold is but one, albeit splendid, manifestation. The problem is that the space thus created is uncontrollable without rituals of purification. [...] In Santa Maria, there is no recourse to purification; no sacrifice, no libations, no cleansing baths. The village is caught, it would seem, between the profane norms of a world greedy for gold and a sacred economy that defines their livelihood as transgressive and self-destructive. I don't want to exaggerate this. Everyday life proceeds without great drama or clash between the sacred and the profane. But under the surface, this pattern exists For the village, the state of emergency in which they live is not the exception but the rule.

[...]

This is the other side of law; its dark side, the side of sorcery, the moon, and of the left hand. (Taussig 2004:126)

The economy of war is about these rules: rules not as a means of containment, but as lines demarcating desire and interdiction that only become more important as they are crossed and re-crossed. These rules draw the line between countries on a map that remain sovereign and separate until the army of one rolls into the territory of the other. They draw the line between aiming a gun at another human being, which the state gets up every morning to do, and pulling the trigger, which we are to believe is a necessary exception to the peace-loving status quo. These are the lines that are crossed in war, and crossing them transmutes spilled blood into the profane illumination that gives value to commodities and animates the institutions of official violence, contradictions that cannot be undone.

War's gift of death and its traffic between the sacred and the profane make up this dark, left-handed side of law. As the relentless torrents of circumstance dissolve distinctions, it only becomes more important to reassert them, to keep the fact of their dissolution at bay. Again, what is blood money and what not? Taussig concludes by quoting Carl Schmitt: "The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything" (ibid.). In its comprehensiveness, the exception itself becomes banal. But not banal in the judgmental and paranoid sense we might be tempted to make of it: Eichmann and Arendt, as if some sort of amoral nihilism has taken hold here. Again, I think of the acquaintance who told me he had enlisted for his family, for them, he said, "I'd blow up a hundred hospitals if I had to." The question is less whether he would or wouldn't really do this, but how he—and we—would go on living in the aftermath of such an experience, obligated to some new crop of dead. Like Taussig, I don't want to exaggerate this—precisely the opposite, in fact. The exception is banal in the way that the drama is simply sucked out of

everything, in the way that the death that is the price of continuing to live is extracted in increments, interruptions, half-conscious lateral movements, and daily necessities (Berlant 2007). The tinge of sacred danger is simply the price of doing profane business and profane contamination is a necessary ingredient in the elevation of the sacred.

Many people—both non-military and those soldiers who find themselves considering other options—resent it, the way everything revolves around the Army. It has less to do with the way this makes war the source of wealth, thus livelihood, thus life itself, and more to do with the simple arrogance of monopoly. You can't get away from it. Even the years-long refurbishing of Route 190—the highway that is the main artery for Killeen, Ft. Hood and the neighboring towns—has been contracted; you can't go down the road without seeing the distinctive white and orange Knife River trucks, sometimes by the dozen, like another occupying army.

People resent the contract companies cavalier treatment of that livelihood too—renewing and rehiring every six or 12 months, no benefits, no vacation, no promise of long-term stability. Sign up to make blood money and maybe get shot, maybe come home from Iraq early and lose all your money, maybe come to work on Ft. Hood one morning and find out that you and your 500 coworkers are no longer needed. The relentless demand of service is replaced by the merciless absolutes of the contract, the precarity of living with no obligation whatsoever—owing none and, more importantly, being owed none. And yet it is just a job.

The security contractors in Iraq have a spooky, spectral presence that mimics the fleeting ghostliness of the contract job. They are the bodyguards for State Department and other non-military personnel, protecting people, convoys, infrastructure. They look like soldiers, but not quite: decked out in jumpsuits or civilian clothes and “high-speed” gear and armor, different kinds of weapons, no nametags or badges. They move on their

own and show up out of nowhere, running missions that the soldiers don't know about. They're around on the bigger FOBs, living there, eating in the DFACs. Often they are just a banal presence, sometimes an irritation. But sometimes they approach soldiers and try to recruit them. Sometimes they seem to know things about the soldiers: they address them by name, already know what job they do and where they're from, say that some obscure third party had said to look for them. Friendly, casual and smiling all the while. Like a ghost army moving in the shadow of the real military, sometimes nothing but normal, sometimes reaching out to invite you over to the other side, like the Satanic apparitions in a Colombian gold mine. They shift from category to category: engineers, drivers, essential personnel, State Department security; torturers, assassins, and other deadlier and unaccountable agents of the darkest of military tasks; opportunistic hired guns, bandits, thugs. Their ghostliness is the ghostliness of the suspended rule that says killing must be in the name of the nation and not just for a paycheck, the rule that says there is no such thing as a private Army.

THE EXTRAVAGANCE OF THE OTHER'S GENEROSITY

I met a woman who is an Arabic linguist and works in military intelligence. We talked about what anthropologists and soldiers have to say to each other, about soldiers' inability or constitutional disinclination to understand foreign cultures in any sort of thoughtful or sensitive way. In her language training she had spent time with a lot of people from all over the Middle East, teachers and fellow interpreters. Arabs are "the fiercest and the warmest people in the world, in my experience," she told me. Their hospitality is unrivaled. You have to be careful about complimenting something that belongs to someone because they will try to give it to you, and to refuse is very rude. You have to give the compliment in such a way that they will not be obligated: say "that

picture really looks wonderful in this room,” e.g., instead of “that’s a beautiful picture.” A coworker of hers called her from his car the other day to tell her, “I have an extra grill and I know you need one, I’m bringing it over right now.” She had a grill already but she took it. A lot of soldiers tell comparable stories from Iraq: Iraqi soldiers and families who brought them bread and lamb kebabs and chai; the lengthy hellos and goodbyes that would make meetings between American Colonels and Iraqi sheikhs and politicians drag on for hours; gifts from Iraqi interpreters and contractors—dishdashas, which the soldiers call “man dresses,” were especially popular.

By way of further illustration, the interpreter told me a story about Charles R. Crane, an American investor and Arabist: during his travels in Saudi Arabia in the 1920s, Crane saw a stallion belonging to King Ibn Saud and admired out aloud. When Crane’s compliment was relayed to the king, Crane found himself receiving the horse as a gift. In gratitude, he offered to come to Saudi Arabia to conduct hydrological projects, projects that ended up being instrumental in the kingdom’s first oil explorations, and thus, unlocking its seemingly limitless wealth and, ironically, paving the way for decades of resource leveraging and imperial intervention. The story has the air of the folkloric to it, though many of the significant details are true: Crane was a philanthropist, he did play a key role in getting Saudi oil out of the ground, and he was an enthusiastic importer and collector of rare Arabian stallions. But what about this exchange of high-stakes gifts built on the most delicate and accidental of insinuations? It is hard not to see it as an allegory, how an exotic and extravagant cultural protocol, a reflex of decorum as irrational as it is noble and dignified, becomes the hook for the unleashing of Arab oil wealth at the hands of beneficent Western experts. It is a sort of comedy of manners in which the good taste and geniality of the earnest and curious and slightly naïve visiting American collide with

the obscure oriental decadence of the Saudi king, with the atavism of desert people for whom hospitality means survival and a strong horse means power and dominance.

All this plays out under the heat of the sun and its scorching, foreign hostility; the sun, which, as Bataille writes, gives without receiving, the originary font of energy, expenditure, excess. The problem of excess, and of the need to expend it, to burn it off, begins with the sun. The sun's energy is there in the black goopy wells of decayed biomass beneath the sand. And that mass of energy has been exhumed, trafficked, marketed, transformed into all manner of materials and commodities, and warred over, all of this as if to validate Bataille's observation that "man is only a roundabout, subsidiary response to the problem of growth. ... Man is the most suited of all living beings to consume intensely, sumptuously, the excess of energy offered up by the pressure of life to conflagrations"—in the oil wealth of the Arabian peninsula, spectacles of profit, decadence, and finally even war—"befitting the solar origins of its movement" (Bataille 1988, 37). The sun shines down on the philanthropist-traveler and on the king as they shake hands, a curtain of white fire descending from a painfully blue and empty sky. The American brings up water and makes a garden of the land scorched by sun: first a garden of pools and channels, then a garden of skyscrapers, banks, refinery terminals, Mercedes Benzes. The sun shines down on the soldiers and multiplies the burden of their loads of armor and weapons; it makes them sweat and the memory of the sun's heat is the unreturnable gift that they will bring home with them.

The story is specifically *not* told as a strategic move by a prince who perhaps already knew about the great natural resources he possessed but lacked the means to exploit them; the gift exchange appears as a compulsion, a deeply engrained trait rather than a form of practice; and the American's response is merely a befuddled sense of good will rather than a corresponding recognition of the meaning of the act in practice. Instead

an opaque “cultural” gesture sets the stage for almost a century of imperial adventure and entanglement.

Scale plays a role here as well, gift economies that leap from one order of magnitude to another and back. The king’s generosity to Crane sets the stage for the West’s generosity to the East, which is then reprised in the wars of security and liberation waged by the U.S. in the Middle East and South Asia, the “violent gifts” of U.S. foreign policy (Klima 2002). The seeming ingratitude of these nations and people who stubbornly refuse to be freed and pacified is regarded as a great injustice. “Iraq is so wealthy,” one soldier told me. “They should be paying reparations to *us*. And we should be paying 50 cents a gallon for gas!” This ingratitude is mirrored in the tense relationships between actual American soldiers and actual Iraqis. Often, various forms of giving to Iraqis were celebrated goods: painting schools, visiting orphanages, building bridges. But just as often, the soldiers were frustrated when their gifts of candy, soccer balls and school supplies, medicine and crates of food, were accepted with smiles one day in villages from which insurgents would attack the next day. What do they want then? the soldiers would ask. The violence as a seeming response to the gift becomes evidence of venality, duplicity, ingratitude, and wasted effort that then slides into a certain species of critique: “They obviously don't want us there. We should go.”

On Ft. Hood, near the base’s east end, stands the 4th Infantry Division’s Iraq War memorial. A low circular wall bears brass plaques with the names of the dead, currently about 430 of them. At the center of the memorial is a bronze, life-sized sculpture of a soldier kneeling before the helmet, rifle and empty boots of a battlefield memorial to a fallen comrade. A little girl in bronze reaches a consoling hand toward his shoulder. The bronze figures were made in Iraq at the beginning of the war, in 2003, when 4ID was based in Tikrit (Miles 2004; Kibbey 2004). The sculpture’s folkloric back-story,

according to a widely circulated email forward, is that it was made by an Iraqi artist “who for years was forced to make many hundreds of bronze busts of Saddam that dotted Baghdad.” In his gratitude, the artist, Khalid Alussy, melted down some of these busts and made a sculpture “dedicated to the American soldiers and their fallen comrades” on which he labored “night and day for several months.” Again, though, the vulgar reality of motivation rears its head and puts the lie to fantasy. Alussy did indeed make sculptures of Saddam, including two massive horseback figures in Tikrit that 4ID had dismantled. But, as he told a Wall Street Journal reporter, the 4ID memorial was not born of gratitude. Alussy’s uncle had been killed in an American rocket attack, and he blamed the U.S. for the violence and economic devastation that had turned Iraq upside down. “I made the statues of Saddam—even though I didn’t want to—because I needed money for my family and to finish my education. And I decided to make the statues for the Americans for the exact same reason.” He was paid \$8,000, financed by cash donations from 4ID’s own troops, and labored on the statue in secret lest his complicity with the Americans be discovered (Dreazen 2004).

To give the figure of the grieving soldier more of a connection to Iraq, then-division commander Major General Ray Odierno suggested adding the little girl, an Iraqi child meant to symbolize the country’s hopeful future. The little girl’s outstretched, consoling hand thus makes the memorial also a monument to a liberated Iraq’s indebtedness to the U.S. for its unasked-for gifts of violence. When Alussy was commissioned to craft the second figure, he demanded \$10,000. And so the Army paid to give lifelike form to its vision of the country’s thankfulness. But even in this the Americans bestowed a gift, a gift of knowledge and enterprise that undid the irrational extremes of Arab generosity: the division’s top NCO, Command Sergeant Major Charles

Fuss, who coordinated all these efforts, remarked of his negotiations with Alussy that the Iraqi sculptor had “learned capitalism real fast” (Dreazen 2004).

DEAD-END COMMODITIES

One day at the Foundation a couple of civilian workers from the engineering building next door came in with a box they had pulled out of a dumpster down the road. It was full of medals in blue cardboard boxes. There were easily a hundred of them in the box. They were mostly Global War on Terrorism Service Medals: a bronze medallion with American eagle and shield, arrows and ivy in front of a sort of minimalist globe graphic and the name of the award in blunt, unlovely type around the edge, all hanging from a blue ribbon striped in red, gold and white. But the GWOT Service Medal is a pretty generic one, an “automatic decoration”: it recognizes service “participating in or in support of” any War on Terror operation, which includes just about anyone who has been in the military since September 11, 2001. You get one even if you haven’t deployed abroad—for that you get the Global War on Terror Expeditionary Medal as well. And there are other automatic decorations too.

Why there would be a box of them just chucked in a dumpster was a mystery to me, but it didn't faze Jimmy or Dale or any of the other soldiers hanging around that day. Probably just someone cleaning out an office—a unit that was moving or deploying—and dumping stuff the accounting of which wasn't worth anyone’s trouble. But they decided to save the medals, a returning unit might need them. I was so intrigued by this find that I retrieved my camera from the car and took a couple of washed-out, blurry photos, though only after Jimmy shuffled the boxes around a bit so that the barcodes and product numbers on the boxes weren’t showing. Dale chuckled as I took the pictures. “Yeah man,” he said with the excitement of a muckraking co-conspirator, “you gotta write about

all this wasteful shit that they do.” It wasn't waste exactly that struck me, though the full medals cost about ten bucks apiece if you have to buy them yourself, and if you multiply that by the dozens of them in the box it wasn't exactly a pittance that was sitting there in the dumpster. To me it was more the uncanniness of the things. First was the fact that this was in some ways the most unremarkable of all medals, a “special” recognition that was depleted of its specialness by being bestowed on everyone; its combination of commonness and dignified pretension would seem to insult both the giver and the receiver. Then there was the utter strangeness of seeing so rare a thing as a medal reduced first to a banal commodity and packed up wholesale in a box, and then reduced further to mere junk with a heave into the dumpster. Then maybe reduced yet again by having been rescued—would you want a medal salvaged from a dumpster? More importantly, does it make any difference? Think of a medal, any medal, as a materialized symbol that bespeaks a certain constellation of giving, receiving and recognition: the work and service given, the medal and the spirit of recognition given in return, some affirmation of solidarity and the value and meaning of things achieved in the process. Without these things—a ceremony, a handshake, a salute, a uniform to be pinned on, or whatever—the medals looked rather shameful and half-dressed there in the box. But as is the case with the many other fetishes that populate our daily world, there is something wondrous about seeing a supremely fetishistic object like a medal completely denuded of its enchantment and simply confronting you as a thing. You are witnessing a commodity waiting to be activated. It alienates the thing's alienation, as Michael Taussig might suggest, stepping back and to the side so that the taken-for-granted exercise in awarding recognition given form in the medal looks all the more magical for being so artificially contrived out of boring, base stuff (Taussig 2004, 24, 111).

Dale chuckled knowingly at the waste. But what about the expenditure involved in simply putting the things to their intended purpose, in this bizarrely redundant exercise of distinguished service in which no one is distinct? What about all the certificates of achievement and appreciation and plaques that decorate so many soldiers' walls or clutter their desk drawers, as they decorated the walls and cluttered the desk drawers of the Foundation office? What about the "challenge coins," individual, custom-printed brass and enamel medallions that officers and senior NCOs give out as awards and tokens of recognition? (A friend once told me he had about 75 coins from his eight years in the reserves, "and only one of them means anything to me.") This is not just any fetish, but one born out of a curiously intense bureaucratic magic, one that is dense with symbols, but which makes symbols into things that are so real that their symbolic meaning evaporates and they become clutter, like a too-big jar of change forgotten on a shelf. No one hands you this medal; there is no award ceremony. It just goes in your record that you have earned the GWOT (the soldiers say "gee-wot"). And in fact the medals themselves—the full kit with brass pendant, like those sitting there in the box—are themselves a little pointless. All you need is the little rectangular ribbon with the same colored stripes that costs a buck or two, and the pinned bars that you also buy at the PX to slide it onto in the correct configuration with whatever other ribbons you have earned. And then when you have dress inspection, it better be there, the blue, red, yellow, and white stripes there in the "fruit salad" of brightly colored blocks and stripes, the readable career biography that hangs on the chest of a dress uniform.

Getting a medal means another niggling bit of responsibility. The soldier has to be responsible for the medal. Maybe he loses one in his desk drawer and has to buy another. He has to be accountable for it and make sure it is displayed correctly. "This is what Privates talk about in the barracks: getting drunk and getting laid and shit like the right

way to arrange your ribbons for inspection,” a friend told me when I asked him to explain how the ribbons and medals worked. “Your E6 never says to you, ‘This is the GWOT. Think about what it means, because one day not everyone will be wearing one, and you’ll be able to say to your grandkids that this medal was for serving in the Global War on Terror.’ They say, ‘You wear it because I said so.’ And,” he added, “I’ve been guilty of it too. We don’t think about it.” And so this nominal token of reward, thanks and recognition, it is not a gift and it is barely even an attenuated sign of blood and valor; it is a pain in the ass, something trivial to be responsible for.

As long as I was there, the GWOTs just sat on a shelf in the storeroom next to boxes of candy and canisters of powdered iced tea. The Foundation functioned on donations, so perhaps it is not surprising that it was full of dead-ended commodities. The forms these donations take are eclectic and sometimes odd. Hanging on the wall—between framed photos and plaques and certificates of appreciation—are oversized copies of thousand-dollar donation checks from corporate and non-profit donors. There are a couple of big-screen TVs that were the gifts of wealthy supporters. There are two-dozen computers that came directly from Michael Dell. There are cases and cases of soda, bottled water, Girl Scout cookies, Doritos, canned soup, a freezer full of hamburgers and hot dogs—surplus dropped off by grocery distributors.

Even the food has a motley quality: the nonperishable miscellanea stacked in the pantry, the baked good brought and picked over and their remnants sitting out on the lounge tables for days, crumbs and oil subsiding into layers of wax paper and foil. Danielle was in the office for a few days at one point and found, under a desk, cookies that she had left there before Gene’s previous deployment, months ago. They were vacuum packed and still good.

But then there's the other stuff, cast-offs stockpiled against some future need and highly sentimentalized tokens of thanks without a specific destination that ended up sitting around collecting dust. The storerooms were entropic and claustrophobic: linoleum floor and wood veneer walls, neither of which you can see, and stuff piled to the cork tile ceiling in random arrays that booby-trap and barricade the things you're trying to reach. As part of my loosely directed volunteer labor I spent a lot of time with these things—moving stacks of them around, consolidating piles of clutter, sorting and taking stock, often in the company of a couple of young soldier volunteers assigned to the task who would forage vigorously through drawers and boxes and label everything with arcane Army supply codes.

There are literally hundreds of stuffed bears, the same ones that the volunteers give out at the manifests. Some are more elaborate, with mass and shape, body and limbs sewn into a sort of upright, seated position, and with button eyes and stitched-on mouth. Others are simply two pieces of fabric, the barest suggestion of a silhouette, stitched back to back and stuffed. Their faces are printed on in a bright and clownish silkscreen, long-lashed eyes and a tongue sticking from a too-wide smile, but the patterned fabric they are made from is less pleasant to touch, duller, more obscure. A pamphlet I find in the office describes how the bears are prayed over as they are assembled by hand by groups of volunteers. Singly and in context, they read for me as something between sweet and kitschy. But here, in their massed hundreds, they become something else altogether. They are packed into 50-gallon-size cardboard and plastic drums and stacked in corners or stuffed in big industrial trash bags and heaved out of the way in the highest, furthest corners. You climb up to look for something and find these stuffed creatures hemorrhaging from the split bottom of a cardboard box or pressing their faces toward you from behind milky plastic. It's not really clear who they are for: soldiers, soldiers' kids,

Iraqi kids. They have come in these massive loads from church and corporate volunteers. A couple of times Jimmy has had to drive to pick a fresh shipment of them—not that they are needed, but they cannot be turned down. At the moment they're not going anywhere, they're just sitting there in the storeroom.

Then stashed here and there in the more entropic corners of the office and the storage sheds are care-package boxes from a community group off in some small Texas town. The boxes themselves are decorated on the outside with collages of American flags and photos of soldiers on desert city streets and little handwritten signs saying “For the Troops!” Some of them are full of hygiene kits—toiletries, tissues, baby wipes, sunscreen, stationery and crossword puzzles, religious pamphlets that have to be removed from each one before we pass them on. Others contain more obscure items: in one, small bits of red, white and blue fabric folded in plastic-wrapped packages. Hansen, a soldier who has gone foraging in the boxes with me, thinks they are lap blankets, or maybe pillow shams. Each is packed with a typed note to the recipient naming the group it is from, reminding the soldier that this same group also sent them the bears, cookies, various other things. Several words, including “Irag” and “troups,” are spelled wrong. Many gifts come decorated with these little bits of flair. On Memorial Day, a group of volunteers dropped off a basket of individually Rice Krispie treats; attached to each was a miniature American flag stabbed through a home inkjet image of a C130 cargo hold full of flag-draped caskets and captioned “Never Forget!” “Yeah, these are real nice, we’ll just give these to the soldiers,” sneered Tony, sweeping them off a table into the lounge and stashing them out of sight in an empty desk drawer. Does a 20-year-old soldier need to be reminded not to forget that he may come back from Iraq in a box? Or rather, who is reminding whom of what with a gift like this? Who is it really for?

It is odd to see these rather mysterious objects, invested almost grandiosely with so much feeling and intention—and momentum—halted far short of their destination. They have left the swirling orbit of gift; gravity has pulled them to earth and pulled a blanket of dust down over them. The little enclosed notes have not yet been read by the soldiers meant to see them. Perhaps they never will be. So the storeroom also becomes a stockpile for the positive platitudes with which soldiers are barraged in the form of these many, many sincere but also mass-produced texts: the care package notes, the pamphlets, the banners covered in signatures, the valentines and Christmas cards from school kids. What provokes is less whether these things “mean” something to soldiers or not, whether they “agree” with their sentiments or not, but the simple fact of their material presence, often in rather ignominious piles of stuff that is ignored in a back corner or that gets in the way, and that is around, lingering as clutter in the corners of daily life.

THE BURDEN OF GRATITUDE

There is a lot of ambivalence on gratitude’s receiving end. Soldiers are constantly thanked for their service, but as Simmons told me when I asked him about it, “We don’t really wanna talk about it.” People saying thank-you becomes a certain kind of unwelcome attention after a while. His wicked humor and theatrical expressions of exasperation cut some of the apparent bitterness. Kristen and I laugh along with him as he talks.

On your first deployment, you know, you come back, and the Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders and this group and that group are there, and you’re like, “Check it out! This is freakin awesome!” All the fanfare, this, that and the other, and you’re like, “That’s right, cause I freakin’ rock!” [*We all laugh*] It’s all great and fine, you know, it’s just fabulous. But after the second time, it’s just like, “Yeah, whatever. Quit bothering me. Leave me alone!” And then, after the third time, you’re just like [*in a weak, pained voice*], “Oh god, why do you even care? Just shut up and leave me the fuck alone!” But, in the back of our minds, we do

understand that it's just people showing their appreciation. We understand and we're grateful. But people don't understand that, we understand that you're grateful. You don't have to keep telling us.

The thanking becomes excessive. It gets out of hand. The attention is unwanted. Simmons invoked the allegory of gift, of a gift-like problem, as he struggled to explain his frustration to our continued laughter.

Well, it's frustrating when it gets to be too much. If you give me a birthday present, and I say, "Thanks! Oh my God, oh my God! Just ... thanks! I appreciate it so much!" And then I keep just going on and on and on about it. [*We laugh*] And then every time I see you the next day, [I say,] "You know man, I just really loved that birthday present! Holy crap, this is great! Wow! Oh my God!" And you're like, "OK, cool, we're friends. I appreciate your appreciation." And you think that's gonna be it. And then you see the guy the next day. [*In increasingly exaggerated tone:*] "Man, oh my God, that frickin' birthday present just rocks! Oh my God!" [*We laugh some more*] After a while, it's just ... it gets ... it's too much, you know? You're overwhelming me.

You know, I know I'm not the only one that thinks this. [...] My best friend, we've talked about this. And he's like, "You know, I've gotten to a point where I just don't wanna be recognized as military. Because people are just gonna deluge you with compliments." It gets to be too much. You know, I appreciate the appreciation, but the appreciation is getting to be too much appreciating. [*laughter*] You know what I'm saying?

For Simmons, the soldier has given a gift, and seeks only that point at which the cycle of obligation can be recognized and the necessary gestures concluded. Instead what happens is a perverse sort of inflation. Simmons says that the soldier takes less value in the thanks after each successive trip to war. But at the same time, the appreciation "appreciates," as it were, to the point of being too much. Indeed, in Simmons' narrative, it accumulates interest and gains some oppressive kind of value over time, building from a point of appropriately balanced acknowledgement to something that becomes cloying, then intrusive, then burdensome. We can consider the soldier's service in war as the ordinary gift, but what happens next is less clear, a muddled exercise in the impossibility of counter-gift. Having been given something that it is impossible to repay, the civilian

struggles simply to say thanks. Like the speakers at the picnic, their voices choking and cracking with stridency and insistence, their language literally broken and insufficient in the face of the thing they are trying to say. In Simmons' telling, it is as if this sense of insufficiency prompts a compulsion to repeat and compound, as with each iteration there is a fresh realization of the inadequacy of the previous one. Every time you say thank you to a soldier more interest has accumulated, the debt is even bigger than you realized, and you try to pay more, and it never works. You are overwhelmed, and at the same time, as Simmons says, "You're overwhelming me." We might like to think that enough thanks can somehow be dumped into the gap of obligation that lies between the civilian and the soldier, some sort of emotional substrate that will fill in this chasm and make it passable. But instead it just draws attention to the gap. It pushes the soldier further away, prompts his retreat into a space of concealment and being left alone. "You're overwhelming me."

After all, the soldiers insist over and over, they are merely doing their job. Soldiers aren't out for glory, Jimmy told me the day after we returned from a tribute to "wounded warriors"—injured soldiers invited from several different Texas military installations, including Ft. Hood—at the Houston rodeo. At the same time as the volunteers and civilian audience at the rodeo had been all too eager to nominate soldiers as sacrificial victims, Jimmy made the complete opposite assertion, that what he had done was not sacrifice at all (cf. Wool 2009). I had sat next to them as an announcer's voice directed the crowd's attention and spotlights swept down the vertiginous slope of the upper deck bleachers, and Jimmy and Vincenzo and Dale and Hank all rose to the sound of applause, unsmiling and not quite comfortable under all that attention. As we talked about it the next day, Jimmy echoed Simmons: you don't know how to respond when people make a big deal of things. Say thank-you and leave us alone. Jimmy was especially upset because he, as ranking NCO from our Ft. Hood group, had been invited

to have his picture taken with the country music stars who performed at the culmination of the rodeo finals under a hail of red, white and blue confetti. Hank was a much bigger fan, and Jimmy had wanted him to go instead. “He’s dying,” he said to me angrily—Hank has cancer. But all the band cared about was a photo op. No questions, no requests for autographs. And, said Jimmy, they didn't want any visibly wounded soldiers in the picture. On the one hand this extravagance, this overwhelming of what ought to be a simple recognition of duty; on the other, the disappointment that people insist on thanking on their own instrumental terms. Another misfire of gratitude.

Kristen said people are “misguided” about how they throw their gratitude at soldiers.

People always say, “Thanks for my freedom,” and I’m like how does Iraq have any damn thing to do with your freedom of speech or whatever? And maybe in the long run it would, *if* we were preventing the problems ... which ends up with that whole political crap about why are we in a war and whatever. But because it’s misguided. You know, “thank you” is a bandwagon thing. [With some people, like the volunteers who come by the Foundation,] that seems to be motivated from the right place, regardless of what they’re doing, why they’re doing it, whatever the hell. All they’re doing is recognizing, “Hey you’ve been through a hard time here, we’re gonna give you a gift certificate.” At the same time, the whole “Thanks for our freedom”—what the hell are you talking about?

Saying thank you, the civilian narrativizes the soldier’s experience, foists heroism upon him, converts immeasurable loss and irremediable pain into history, progress, steps on the way toward a victory or a loss, a national story and a political point (Feldman 2004; Scarry 1987). It’s not just about the way it posits a wrong connection between one thing and another—“how does Iraq have any damn thing to do with your freedom?” Presumably gratitude that is “motivated from the right place”—that is real gratitude and not theater—does not insist on bending the soldier’s experience to some shape that is pleasing to civilian concerns. Simmons and Kristen distrust the frenzy of images and discourses that surrounds war and the soldier and that compels civilians to thank

unthinkingly, without “meaning it” (Varenne 1987), thereby undermining the integrity of the exchange. The tension over what the soldier’s gift “has to do with” links directly to the problem of its value. Playing deliberately with the “weak nobility” of soldierly labor, Jimmy told me at one point, “I don't wanna die for this country. I don't wanna die for you. I mean, I will if I have to, but I don't want to.” He paused. Then, in an echo of Dime’s exhortation to “enjoy the gas” and with a smirk and a shift in tone that addressed the larger audience that my presence with notebook and tape recorder signified, he added, “That, and I need a raise!”

The soldier’s status as an avatar of death or of broken life adds another dimension to how the cycle of thanks operates, in the binding together and the mutual alienation of the giver and the receiver of gift, the giver and receiver of thanks. For Simmons, it was the way this desire to say thank you was mingled with a morbid curiosity. People want to know what you saw, what you did. It’s not an obvious connection, but for Simmons the acknowledgement of the gift has come to be tinged with an attraction to that violence, something prurient or voyeuristic.

They’re like, “Thanks for doing what you do! Yeah! Huah!” and all this bullshit. And then they’re like, “What’s the worst thing you’ve ever done or you’ve ever seen?” [...]

What the problem might be with it is, with all the appreciation, the appreciation leads to a conversation. You know, truthfully, I hadn’t thought about that. The appreciation leads to a conversation, and then you get the ultimate question: “The worst thing ya seen?” “I don’t wanna talk about it.” And people don’t accept that. They’re like, “Aw, come on man, tell me something!” Most people don’t get pushy like that, but you know ... but that’s it. The older vets are just subtly appreciative. They don’t ask you that question, cause you know, they’re like, “We love you guys, and we appreciate all that you’re doing.” And then they cut it off at that point, hand you a cookie—USO or whatever. [...] I mean, I know I can speak for all soldiers when I say, we appreciate that. Cause they show their appreciation, they talk to us a little bit, and then they go back home. As opposed to ... Joe Somebody, because you’re having dinner somewhere, finds out you’re military

and is like, “Aw man, thanks, thanks. What’s the worst thing you’ve ever seen?”
... I’m eating dinner here, guy. I don’t wanna talk about it.

The vets, who know death, know how to moderate their appreciation. Is it not death that is ultimately so overwhelming in these encounters?

Simmons and Kristen are good friends with Dime, who had just gone to visit his family in California.

Kristen: When I took him to the airport he had his uniform on. I was like, “Why are you wearing your uniform? You hate that thing!” And he was like, “I always fly in uniform because everybody’s nicer to you!”

Simmons: And yet he said he’s coming back in civilian clothes, like, “I don’t even wanna be associated with the military on the way back. It just draws too much damn attention.”

Kristen: Something happen on the way there?

Simmons: No, the way there he got bumped up to first class, everybody was buying him drinks, and it was all great. And if I’m lying may I be struck down. He said, “And then some guy asked me, ‘What’s it like over there?’” And there it goes, there’s the question. “What’s it like over there?” “What’s the worst thing you ever seen?” Dime had to cut him off. He just politely said, “I don’t wanna talk about it.” Cause the guy would’ve eventually [asked], “What’s the worst thing you ever seen?”

Kristen: And unfortunately for Dime, the worst thing he’s ever seen is his best friend get blown up.

Do you want to know that this happened to someone? Do you want to thank them for it? I knew this story from talking to Dime, and it appears in Chapter 2, so now you know it too. It wasn't offered in response to my thanks or a demand to know the worst thing he had seen or done. In fact, he began reciting it almost without preamble the moment I turned on the tape recorder. But it was one of the more horrific things I'd heard, gory and violent and heartbreaking and profane in the most hideous ways imaginable. When he told me the story, I wasn't sure that I wanted for him to have told it.

Indeed, what are people thanking you for? Thank you draws attention to the ill-defined content of the gift. It tries to make sacred the simple virtue of doing one's job, or the irredeemable trauma of seeing a best friend dismembered before your eyes. What exactly is the gift? Even though "most people" aren't that pushy, even approaching it is upsetting. Thanks not merely misdirected (because people misunderstand the gift), but also a provocation to reveal the nature of the gift, the ill-defined and terrifying burden it continues to impose on both the giver and the recipient, the tension and taboo that abide between soldier and civilian (Lutz 2001, 230). The thanks and then the question ask the soldier to share what he has done with himself, and thus to relive and reveal what he might prefer to forget and withhold. In this way the gift is a problem of memory, as Derrida has suggested, and with that problem, a certain kind of madness—"madness of keeping or of hypermnesic capitalization *and* madness of the forgetful expenditure" (Derrida 1992, 47)—that confounds any balance between taking close account on the one hand and letting things go on the other. Saying thank you and knowing what to say in response become dilemmas of memory, of deciding what to resuscitate by remembering and what to let go by forgetting.

There is some frisson of taboo, where "thanks" is actually a way of getting closer to forbidden knowledge. If "thanks" draws attention to the chasm that lies between soldier and civilian, trying to pave it over even as it widens it, then taboo—broken wide open and seething with the power of spilled blood—is what lies in that chasm. The civilian tries to step blithely over the carnage, as if it is not there, as if it is not the thing that it is; or the civilian draws attention to it in a way that is unseemly, wants the thrill of getting at it without the burden of going there himself. Either way, the soldier retreats even more determinedly to its far side. Thanks prolongs the exchange when the giver

would rather just let it go, forget about it, or at least not share it with that person at that moment.

At the scene of thanks, the double-binds of giving and reciprocity multiply and spiral off toward some horizon that marks the impossibility of resolution. The soldier wants to be thanked less and paid more. The soldier, as the one who has given, finds a burden of counter-gift placed on him in the form of the civilian's extravagant, interest-accruing gratitude. The soldier wants to be recognized and does not want the nature of the gift to be misunderstood, but he, and we, lack both the power and the language to define what the gift means, a vocabulary of recognition or acknowledgment that would not reduce the soldier's experience. Instead we are stuck with a series of disavowed clichés: the soldier complains of being thanked for the wrong thing, but he prefers not to address the right thing. The causes, results and reasons of war that lie outside of its conduct—"our freedom"—are too abstract and bloodless to serve as an adequate basis for recognition, while the particularities of the labor of war—"the worst thing you ever saw"—are far too personal. This built-in impossibility is, I think, testament to the capacities of sovereign power to operate at every scale, from the grandest to the most intimate, and to make the carefully orchestrated destruction of life such a common-sense phenomenon that no language is necessary to describe it.

THE NATURE OF THE DEBT

When we as a society make war, what do we do to ourselves by indebting ourselves in this way? Why are we compelled to construct the situation in a way that entails a crisis of indebtedness at the same time as it obscures other responsibilities and obligations? This is the dilemma that is invoked when people say, as then-President Bush did on Memorial Day, 2008, that "we can never repay the debt" that we owe to soldiers present and past

for their willingness to give their lives for their—our—country. To insist we cannot repay a debt is, essentially, to default on it, to abdicate responsibility.

In its unknowability, this debt is like the toxic assets at the center of the financial crisis: no one is sure what it is worth or what price to attach to it, and great harm could result from misjudging its value. And all the while we insist on asking—cynically, guiltily, and in confusion—what the taxpayer can expect to get out of the whole enterprise anyway. This is hardly the neat and rather nostalgic structure of solidarity that Mauss exposes in the gift. Unable to give back, we in whose name war is waged are left with an accursed share, an excess that is only haphazardly accounted for by other dimensions of the economy. But by picking at that excess, we can, through a deconstructive retelling of the familiar story of who owes what to whom in war, bring some of this messy complicity to light. As Klima writes, in the ethnography of violence, “what matters is not how much death you have seen but how you handle it, and what you are willing to do with that accursed portion” (2002, 25).

The nature of the debt remains unclear. We cannot even say what it includes. The 4,250 American military fatalities in Iraq (at the time of this writing)? The hundreds of billions it is expected to cost to care properly for the wounded? What about the tens or hundreds of thousands of Iraqi dead? And those 2.2 million forced to flee their country and the tens of thousands more displaced internally? What about the stressed out and busted up families, the car accidents, the alcoholism, and the low-wage, unskilled economies that surround military bases?

Just as this chapter is an argument against treating war as too straightforward a transaction, perhaps it can also serve as an argument against treating this debt as something that needs to be closed or resolved, in favor of learning to live with the differences it engenders, the questions of responsibility it insists on keeping open, the

accursed share that it will not permit to dissolve. Instead of a nostalgic appeal to the primitive spirit of the gift and its affirmative solidarity, why not an acceptance of the permanence of its impossibility? This entire project is an argument for recognition—for collective social responsibility for violence done in the name of preserving the sociality that we inhabit—but why not let that responsibility take the form of an open question?

Postscript: So-Called Resiliency

“What interests us are the circumstances”
—Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault

On the afternoon of Thursday, November 5, 2009, I was sitting in the coffee shop where I wrote much of this dissertation when emails and text messages from friends started pouring in: there had been a shooting going on at Ft. Hood, or maybe it was still ongoing, because there was no information and the entire place had been locked down. I got a phone call from my friend Danny, who used to work in the Soldier Readiness Center, which even the preliminary reports correctly identified as the site of the shooting. Danny had left Ft. Hood and the Army back in the fall of 2008, but an old work acquaintance had just called him. This friend was just sitting there at his station when all of the sudden he heard shooting, this guy had told Danny. The shooter was foreign, he said, yelling something that wasn't in English. When Danny's buddy heard the shooter stop to reload, he hauled ass out of there. I hunted down a streaming live local news feed and sat watching it for almost an hour as the anchors and reporters recycled the same handful of vague facts and rumors: people had been killed; the base was locked down; post police and MPs were running down several shooters who had fled the scene. There was a lot of footage of traffic stacked up outside the gates, people just parked and waiting to get in—to go home, or get to work, or pick up their kids from school. There was little to learn, but I stayed glued to the screen.

I had been inside the Soldier Readiness Centers before—not this exact one, which seemed to be a newer site, but others. I had visited Danny there a couple of times, and gone with folks from the Foundation to hand out snacks to the staff and soldiers. They

were all in gymnasiums, whereas this one was purpose-built, but the general layout was the same: a large open space, cubicles and desks lining all four walls, and dozens or hundreds of soldiers waiting in line or sitting on bleachers or in rows of folding chairs, and a couple dozen military and civilian staff busy at their posts. People from one end of the room to the other and no cover more substantial than a plywood partition anywhere. And no police or MPs or metal detectors, either. In fact few of the places on Ft. Hood I had been, besides the hospital and the visitors' center and the gates, had any sort of visible security like that. Soldiers can own personal weapons, but despite it being a military base, people don't walk around there armed, it's not allowed. It was supremely ironic, as many would soon remark, that a room full of soldiers about to deploy to a combat zone would present such an easy target.

By the end of the day it was known that the lone shooter was Major Nidal Malik Hasan, a psychiatrist and Army Major. At about 1:30 in the afternoon, Hasan walked into the Soldier Readiness Center, drew a 5.7 mm FN Five-Seven handgun that he had purchased from Guns Galore, on Hood Street in Killeen, and began shooting. He fired more than 100 rounds in the space of a few minutes, killing 13 people and injuring 30, before being incapacitated by shots fired by two police officers. Paralyzed from the waist down, he was taken to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio.

More information about Hasan emerged. Information from the military and anecdotes from former colleagues depicted a mediocre soldier (he received poor performance reviews) who alienated his fellows by preaching aggressively against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and who seemed fixated on what he saw as the contradictory relationship between U.S. military interventions and Muslim identity—both his own and that of the people he would be facing as enemies when was to deploy to Afghanistan later in 2009. Later accounts depicted him as a fundamentalist who had been

radicalized by online Islamist sermons and message boards, correspondence radical Yemeni cleric Anwar Al-Awlaki, and membership at the same Virginia mosque that one of the 9-11 hijackers had attended. As he opened fire at the Soldier Readiness Center, he shouted “*Allahu Akbar!*” Statements from Hasan’s family members, on the other hand, asserted that he had been under the strain of an acute personal crisis for years, conflicted over his role as a soldier, his religious identity, and his objections to the wars. He had been trying for years to find a way of legally leaving the military and repaying the Army for his medical school training, but to no avail. He had faced ethnic and religious discrimination at Ft. Hood and at his former post, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, in Washington, D.C. The possibility that Hasan was traumatized to the point of violent action by his impending deployment or by the stresses of his counseling work at Walter Reed was raised as a justification by some commentators and dismissed as absurd by others. The discourse on Hasan focused, as it continues to today, on whether his actions can be explained by his religion, his recruitment as a terrorist agent, his objection to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, his own mental imbalance, or secondary trauma from years of treating returning soldiers.

Before all this came to light, on that Thursday afternoon, I sat at my computer clicking through the live feeds and the dozens of photos of the largely invisible non-event that, from the outside, the shooting appeared to be. There was little information and even less to look at, but I kept clicking onward distractedly, because continuing to take in this uninformative information was easier than sitting with my racing and incoherent thoughts or trying to concentrate on something. I was more agitated than frightened or sad. I still had friends up there, sure, but most of the people I knew who would have been at the scene of the shooting had moved on and were no longer at the base or even, like Danny, in the Army. For those who I knew were still around, I was far more worried for how the

terror and disruption of this event would pile onto their existing difficulties than I was about their personal safety. To be honest, I have a certain reflexive cynicism about the anxieties that freak events of mass violence and even the fear of them provoke. I am afraid of many things, but I am not afraid of terrorist attacks or crazed gunmen. And I suspect I derive some satisfaction from reminding myself of the ways that people obsess over sensationalized scenes or threats at the expense of attention to more everyday forms of harm.

Even accounting for that feeling, however, I still felt agitated. There was another pressure building, a voice in my own head that was quickly joined by the voices of friends and professors. It was the voice that said that something had happened in this place that I was connected to; that I was responsible for saying something about it; that it had now become part of my project. But it had been a long time since I had been in regular contact with anyone but my closest acquaintances from there. I hadn't even been to visit. I had a sudden image of myself as a scavenger, compelled by the scent of death to swoop back in at this particular moment to this place that I didn't belong in and that owed me nothing.

Most of all, though, I knew what my project was. This wasn't it, and perhaps that was the point. This was clarified for me by an otherwise unremarkable photo I came across as I clicked nervously away at my table in the coffee shop. It was of a woman named Kris Starr, who stood leaning on her car where it was trapped in the snarl of stalled traffic outside one of the gates. Her husband was deployed to Iraq. According to the caption, she said of the shooting, "I expected it someday. I'm not shocked. We're not invincible, and our soldiers need help without stigma." This unsentimental and un-sensational pronouncement, offered up before Hasan's identity or all the oversignifying details of his biography or even his identity were known, said far more about the state of

things at Ft. Hood than any other bit of non-information or premature speculation possibly could. While everyone scrambled to account for the horror, here was this woman refusing to be shocked. Because this is a place where the pace of everyday life, rolling along at the relentlessly efficient speed of organized state violence, simply does not yield to the melodramatic temporality of tragedy. If you want to keep up, maybe you don't have time to be shocked.

In a way, Kris Starr's cool assessment links back to the narrative that begins this dissertation, the story of Dime. Both locate violence, stress and harm as much with the soldier and the military institution as with the freakish, the foreign, the enemy. Both insist that some accursed share remains lurking right out there in public and ready to erupt, a quantity that is conveniently banished from the figure of alienated fanatical violence that Hasan has come to represent. And both are poised on the knife's edge that separates the pernicious stereotypes of the soldier as a vulnerable victim from the soldier as dangerous maniac and "crazy vet". These two stereotypes oscillate around Hasan, but Dime and Ms. Starr explain violence with a both/and rather than a false telos: soldiers need to be recognized and helped without being pathologized, and violence is evidence that this need is not being met. Hasan's case too demonstrates that the one-dimensional narrativizing reduction of any biography is easy to perform but cannot produce any new understanding. Hasan is now the figure that obliquely brings these systemic features to light, though perhaps he must then be dismissed if they are to be kept fully in view.

There was another thread to the discourse that followed the shooting: how were people coping? How were they recovering from this trauma. One commentator after another observed that this community "had been through so much," that people there were "resilient," that they "rallied in times of trial," that they are "resilient." It is not that these things aren't true, but at what point does celebrating and fetishizing the "resiliency"

of those who are structurally, systematically subject to violence begin to stand in for a more complete examination of wider complicity and responsibility? The whole practice of biopolitics hinges on the fact that humans are resilient. At Ft. Hood, as in so many other places zoned for slow death, it could be asked, what choice does one have? Dime had to go to twenty funerals, and Kris Starr had to wait out her husband's return from combat as she wondered at the strained condition of the people around her, and everyone else had to go on remaining alive, all whether they were constitutionally "resilient" or not. Even as the casualty rates and deployment schedules have spiked and leveled off, the grueling pace of life and death and their multifarious attendant feelings have continued. The bright light shone on them by the November 5 shooting threw many things into relief for a moment, but with its glare came blindness to the fact that living with war has been a ponderous burden that has been building for years and that will remain for years more.

Lauren Berlant notes that it is a grave error to "to misrepresent the duration and scale of the situation by calling a *crisis* that which is a fact of life and has been a defining fact of life for a given population that lives it as a fact in ordinary time" (Berlant 2007, 760). Being subject to these facts of life makes them normal, but it doesn't make them easier. Just because we can trick ourselves into seeing them as noble doesn't mean we should accept them as good. We should take them, these circumstances, as they are if we want to know what makes the war.

Appendix: Army Rank Structure

Like most militaries, including the other U.S. service branches, the Army has a two-tiered rank system consisting of enlisted and commissioned or officer ranks. The bulk of the Army, about 85 percent, is composed of enlisted soldiers. Enlisted soldiers typically have task-specific responsibilities and noncommissioned officers (NCOs, various grades of Sergeant) the direct hands-on leadership and supervision of soldiers. NCOs can be “in charge,” but ultimate “command” leadership and administrative responsibility, from the platoon level upwards, resides with commissioned officers. Some occupational specialties requiring advanced technical training—doctors, physician’s assistants, and pilots, among others—are also reserved for the officer ranks. NCOs can seek officer commissions, and many hold college or graduate degrees but elect not to pursue commission. Most officers enter the Army with commissions, which is to say, without ever having served in the enlisted ranks.

While even the lowest-ranking commissioned officer—a Second Lieutenant—is technically the superior of the most senior Sergeant Major, in practice the two rank tiers function in a complex parallel relationship in which the respective role, responsibility and legitimacy of different ranks varies from context to context within and among chains of command. In practice, NCOs, as the immediate supervisors of the enlisted ranks, have a far more active and regular presence than officers in the day-to-day lives of most soldiers. Because NCOs have themselves advanced through the enlisted ranks and have earned their seniority through years of experience rather than outside credentials, their authority possesses a degree of legitimacy not necessarily available to officers, especially junior officers.

Soldiers often address one another, and always address superiors, with the rank-appropriate title. For the various grades of Sergeant, this address is often shortened to simply “Sergeant,” though First Sergeants and Sergeants Major are usually addressed by their full title. Typically, only commissioned officers are addressed as “Sir” or “Ma’am”—forgoing such honorifics is a point of pride for many NCOs.

When referring to rank in the abstract or to a person of a particular rank, soldiers use rank titles interchangeably with the equivalent Department of Defense pay grade designations: for enlisted soldiers, E1 to E9, and for officers, O1 to O10. While I don’t have any hard data on the subject, anecdotally it seemed that pay grades rather than rank names saw far wider use as terms of reference and self-description, e.g., “some E7,” “I made E4 on my last tour.” Pay grades are never used as terms of address.

Tables describing enlisted and officer ranks and responsibilities appear on the following page.

Enlisted Ranks

Rank	Abbreviation	Pay Grade	In Charge of/Duties
Private	PV1	E1	
Private	PV2	E2	
Private First Class	PFC	E3	
Specialist	SPC	E4	Team or vehicle crew
Corporal	CPL	E4	Team or vehicle crew
Sergeant	SGT	E5	Team, vehicle crew or Fire Team; Squad second-in-command
Staff Sergeant	SSG	E6	Squad or platoon
Sergeant First Class	SFC	E7	Platoon
First Sergeant ("Top")	1SG	E8	Company
Sergeant Major	SGM	E9	Battalion level and upwards

Commissioned Ranks

Rank	Abbreviation	Pay Grade	In Command of/Duties
Second Lieutenant	2LT	O1	Platoon
First Lieutenant	1LT	O2	Platoon; company command staff
Captain	CPT	O3	Company; Battalion command staff
Major	MAJ	O4	Battalion executive or operations officer; Brigade command staff
Lieutenant Colonel	LTC	O5	Battalion; Brigade command staff
Colonel ("Full-Bird Colonel")	COL	O6	Battalion; Brigade command staff
Brigadier General ("One Star")	BG	O7	Division
Major General ("Two Star")	MG	O8	Division, Corps
Lieutenant General ("Three Star")	LG	O9	Force Command
General ("Four Star")	GEN	O10	Force Command

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