

# Unruly Bodies: The Rhetorical Domestication of Twenty-First-Century Veterans of War

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*Veterans of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with visually identifiable injuries possess “unruly” bodies that render the story of war in efficient, emotional terms. The injured veteran’s explicit connection of war with injury motivates state and mainstream news discourse that domesticates veterans’ bodies, managing representations of injured veterans through three dominant strategies. First, dominant discourses invoke veterans’ bodies as metonymy of the nation-state at war—bodily well-being operates as a metonym for both the nation’s health and for the condition of the war. Second, veterans are domesticated by strategic placement in contexts that regulate their range of movement, especially amputees, who are often framed as having already overcome any limitations imposed by their war injuries. Third, dominant visual discourse domesticates veterans’ bodies by ascribing a strategic telos to them, shifting the meaning of the injuries away from their origins in state policy and toward wholeness and “normalcy.” Representations of whole-bodied and injured veterans tame the harshness of war and erode the argumentative grounds for questioning it.*

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In March 2008, former TV talk show host Phil Donahue embarked on a promotional tour for his new Iraq War documentary, *Body of War*.<sup>1</sup> The film’s title refers to two bodies: the US Congress, which voted for the war, and the body of Tomas Young, a twenty-seven-year-old Iraq war veteran who was confined to his wheelchair after a sniper’s bullet penetrated his spine, paralyzing him from the chest down. When

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Young was injured, he was sent to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC, once the most prominent and busiest military hospital and surgery facility in the United States.<sup>2</sup> When Donahue visited Walter Reed, he was shocked into action. In an interview concerning the documentary, he noted,

Our purpose is to try and lift the curtain on thousands of homes in this country where the same drama was being played out. If you send a nation to war you ought to be able to show the sacrifices being made. We don't see this. It's all being hidden. Less than 5 percent of the American population is sacrificing for this war. There are thousands of injuries like Tomas's. He can't walk. He can't cough. It just goes on and on. So I called Ellen [Spiro] and I said, "We should show this, show the pain."<sup>3</sup>

Donahue, like the Pentagon and the government whose actions he opposes, assumed that photographs and other visual signs of the death of and injury to American soldiers fighting across the world have the power to change minds. Employing a model borrowed from the Vietnam era, Young—like the wheelchair-bound Ron Kovic in *Born on the Fourth of July*—stages protests and tours the country giving speeches criticizing the war, a tour Donahue's film documents. Like Kovic, Young posed a problem to the smooth narrative of war because his rhetoric—words, body, performances—are anchored in the authority of his position as a witness to war. Effective dissent often necessitates a defense of one's patriotism, and injured veterans are uniquely positioned as war dissenters because the risks they took and the injuries they sustained stand as palpable evidence of their commitment to country.<sup>4</sup>

Because of the means by which war is being fought in the twenty-first century, as well as advances in medicine, representations of contemporary veterans often feature some aspect of their bodies. Technological changes have radically reduced the incidence of death at war since the Vietnam era, increasing the proportion of veterans living with combat-induced injuries. According to the latest estimates, sixteen soldiers are injured for every one US death in current wars, compared to roughly two injured soldiers for every one US death in World War II and the Vietnam conflict.<sup>5</sup> Improved helmets and Kevlar vests mean that two out of three injuries today involve the arms or legs. Such injuries typically end a soldier's tour, but now, they leave damaged bodies that occupy a central role in communicating the meaning of contemporary wars, warranting sustained public concern and attention. The return of such damaged or unruly bodies is freighted with an excess of symbolism that threatens to undermine war efforts and to dissociate injured veterans and civilians.

Although documentaries such as *Body of War* have failed to catalyze any sustained opposition, photojournalists, Pentagon photographers, and the US Army have inundated the mainstream media with low- and high-tech visual representations of veterans. The problem is not censorship, as Donahue implies, because veterans appear frequently in the media. The issue, rather, centers around who controls the circulation of such representations and how the meaning of such injuries is managed over time. While it is worthwhile to analyze the rhetorical strategies of anti-war activists and protesters, social movement and hegemony theorists remind us to interrogate dominant class strategies in order to evaluate how public discourse "renews and recreates the social order."<sup>6</sup>

In what follows, I show how such dominant strategies permeate and maintain a particular social order through discourses that manage the representation of injured veterans, constituting them as normal or “proper” bodies. By realigning what is “unruly” about their bodies within the rhetorical boundaries of familiar domestic narratives and contexts, dominant discourses erode the argumentative grounds for the body to serve as a locus of war dissent. In this process, the bodies and the experiences of veterans are ideologically domesticated across public culture, a move that helps maintain support for US foreign policy at home. By “domestication,” I refer to two senses of the word. First, the domestication of veterans is a “geographic” and “embodied” phenomenon, terms for understanding their physical relocation from the US to the battlefield and back, and especially the body politics that mark these transitions. In this sense, domestication refers to “bringing war home” and the powerful impact firsthand narratives and photos of injuries can have on war debates in the US. Second, domestication refers to a strategy that, when effective, closes a perceived chasm between the soldiers’ firsthand representations of war and the war as constructed in US mainstream news discourse for civilians. Characterized by efforts to “fit” veterans back into conventional ideological structures, domestication functions as a rhetoric of control that tames and softens renderings of war veterans for consumption at home. At the moment they are most dangerous, that is, conventional characterizations and cultural practices take purchase on, pull rhetorically, or otherwise “claw back” images of veterans in ways that flatten their injuries and prevent them from disrupting the inertia that has made war seem permissible and worthy.

### **Unruly Bodies of War**

In war, the body is a richly communicative means for marking out winners and losers. As Elaine Scarry points, one purpose of injuring an enemy in war is to create a concrete and tangible message for domestic audiences:

[I]njuring is, in fact, the central activity of war. Visible or invisible, omitted, included, altered in its inclusion, described or redescribed, injury is war’s product and its cost, it is the goal toward which all activity is directed and the road to the goal, it is there in the smallest enfolded corner of war’s interior recesses and still there where acts are extended out into the largest units of encounter.<sup>7</sup>

Communication about bodies and communication from bodies arises from cultural needs to direct or channel an entity that is by definition not reducible to any one essence. As Margrit Shildrick argues, bodies “resist full or final expression,” and the security of simple bodily categories (normal/abnormal) is always being “undone by a radical undecidability.”<sup>8</sup> Bodies are fluctuating signifiers whose forms are molded and shaped by a range of cultural forces, including medical technology, personal desires, and public discourses where definitional arguments about bodies find expression.<sup>9</sup> According to Kevin DeLuca, public controversies featuring “vulnerable bodies, dangerous bodies, taboo bodies, ludicrous bodies, transfigured bodies” make the

body “a pivotal resource for the crucial practice of public argumentation.”<sup>10</sup> Though the “plasticity” or range of bodily expression in public discourse is limited by the cultural context in which it is situated, the body is a rhetorically useful and flexible argumentative locus that reflects the attitudes, values, and biases of a culture.<sup>11</sup> In addition to their flexibility as sites of argument, public controversies involving bodies prove that the body is a forceful rhetorical form that captures and expresses ideas in ways words cannot.<sup>12</sup> This is a crucial point in understanding representations of veterans of war. Because their bodies are in a sense borrowed by the state for warfare, they are central to definitions of national identity—their health, their deaths, and their wounds serve as metonyms for both the nation’s health and for the condition of the war.<sup>13</sup>

It is useful to make a distinction between discourse *of* the body and discourse *about* the body in order to discern the strengths and weaknesses of different forms of body rhetoric.<sup>14</sup> This dual notion of the body’s communicative force—of a body that can be communicated about, and one that communicates—helps capture the rhetoric of the veteran of war. The body of the injured veteran becomes rhetorical, then, as a speaking subject who bears witness to the terrible violence of conflict, as an entity that seems to necessitate explanation by others, and as a site through which a “virtual” war becomes sensible and material. Veterans with visible bodily injury possess especially powerful rhetorical potential when prominent voices position their bodies as paradigms of the problems with war or when they become part of war dissent movements.<sup>15</sup> Whether or not a war is thought to be just, injuries remain, and “many of [a war’s] participants are frozen in a permanent act of participation” that gives the winning side “the force and status of material ‘fact’ by the sheer material weight of the multitudes of damaged and opened human bodies.”<sup>16</sup> The publicity of such bodies constitutes a challenge to cultural norms about the psychological and physical self, calls attention to the human costs of war, and invites attributions for combat veterans’ injuries to state policies and policymakers. Whether an injury is visible or more psychological, veterans are a significant problem for war advocates because they render the story of war in efficient, emotional terms.

By attempting to destroy them, war makes bodies that are unruly and at odds with commonsense notions of proper, whole bodies, conceived psychologically, physically, and otherwise.<sup>17</sup> Those with visually identifiable injuries such as amputations, burns, or paralysis stand out as “wrong” in a culture that sees bodies through very rigid binaries. A “wrong” body, then, is one that lies outside cultural assumptions about “physical health and beauty, ownership of the self, and physical appropriateness,” and its appearance threatens the connection between civilians and injured service members.<sup>18</sup> While the initial encounter with a veteran who has lost a limb may be strange and may initially seem to work disruptively against identification, Shildrick shows that in looking at injured bodies, audiences cannot escape identification with them because injuries “reflect back at least some contingent truths about the human condition.” Images of disability or amputation do not make amputees into an “absolute other, but rather a mirror of humanity: on an individual level, the external manifestation of the sinner within.”<sup>19</sup> A civilian can feel empathy, difference, and a

range of other emotions upon encountering an injured service member, depending on how the context in which the body is situated directs the process of meaning making.

Although a veteran's body has a certain malleability, the rhetorical plasticity of any one body is always constrained by the good reasons a culture considers appropriate for intervening to change it.<sup>20</sup> A good reason to intervene, in turn, depends on how the body becomes unruly or what makes it "wrong," and who is responsible for the body. In an effort to distance itself from responsibility for death at war in the past thirty years, the Pentagon has increased its control over the dissemination of images depicting injured or otherwise unruly veterans. It is precisely because of the emotional power of photographs of injured or dead soldiers, for example, that the Pentagon did not allow journalists to photograph caskets containing the bodies of deceased veterans at Dover Air Force base from 1991 to 2009.<sup>21</sup> When the sign of a deceased service member did occasionally appear on television or on the Internet, the military draped the soldier's coffin with a US flag, encoding the death as sacrifice for country. The use of the flag is important because it hails viewers as citizens and invites them into a specific public discourse about war. By invoking an associative bond between veterans and strangers, it runs the risk, however, of encoding the dissenting views about war. This is the rhetorical problem the Pentagon faces in portraying death and injury: if citizenship is to be more than just a legal category, more than just an abstraction, "it has to be articulated in a manner that encourages emotional identification with other civic actors."<sup>22</sup> The Pentagon's challenge is to find rhetorical means of encouraging civilians to identify with service members without turning civilians against its war policy. In order to accomplish this, I argue, the most unruly bodies—the dead and injured—are dissociated from representations of war and associated with normative notions of bodily propriety and care, recasting the vulnerability and pain so that it is no longer clearly connected to its origins.

In what follows, I show how contemporary, mainstream media representations of veterans domesticate the institutional phenomenon of war by comparing the strategies for depicting visual injuries and non-visual injuries (such as PTSD) in photos, news, and political rhetoric about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I argue that the presence of veterans in public discourse activates discursive responses that domesticate them via three main strategies. First, they invoke veterans' bodies as metonyms for the nation-state. Although some veterans may be usefully employed in recruiting rhetoric as representations of American heroism, in the case of visible, traumatic injury, veterans' bodies are also employed as representations of failed state policies. Second, veterans are domesticated by strategic placement in ordinary contexts that regulate their range of movement. Severely injured veterans, for example, are often shown exercising, which frames their bodies as a nexus for judging their recovery and creates the impression of physical prowess. In other instances, the bodies are pictured in static contexts, suggesting that their service delivered them to final, usually improved, places. Third, dominant visual discourse domesticates veterans' bodies by ascribing a strategic *telos* or purpose to the bodies, shifting the meaning of these injuries away from their origins in state policy and toward

wholeness and normalcy. If, as Scarry argues, the purpose of injuring a body is to communicate the enemy's superiority, dominant discourse redirects the injury as a personal struggle, shifting into a temporal mode that renders the injury not as a product of war, but as a problem already overcome. Though I treat each strategy separately, in the examples that follow, these three strategies emerge in concert with one another, overlapping and informing the comprehensive rhetorical architecture of domestication that normalizes unruly bodies and solidifies the social order.

### **Body of the War Hero: Metonymy and Tommy Rieman**

At the conclusion of his 2007 State of the Union address, President Bush appealed to the national audience to bear witness to the "strength, generosity . . . heroic kindness, courage, and self-sacrifice of the American people." Finishing a speech in which he had vigorously defended the war in Iraq, Bush then gestured to "ordinary" Americans in the immediate audience to celebrate his idea of the American spirit, including former NBA star/philanthropist Dikembe Mutombo, the creator of the Baby Einstein line of products, and Wesley Autrey, who had saved a stranger from an oncoming subway train. Finally, President Bush gestured to a veteran of the Iraq war, reciting a brief synopsis of the honoree's accomplishments:

Tommy Rieman was a teenager pumping gas in Independence, Kentucky, when he enlisted in the United States Army. In December 2003, he was on a reconnaissance mission in Iraq when his team came under heavy enemy fire. From his Humvee, Sergeant Rieman returned fire; he used his body as a shield to protect his gunner. He was shot in the chest and arm, and received shrapnel wounds to his legs—yet he refused medical attention, and stayed in the fight. He helped to repel a second attack, firing grenades at the enemy's position. For his exceptional courage, Sergeant Rieman was awarded the Silver Star. And like so many other Americans who have volunteered to defend us, he has earned the respect and the gratitude of our entire country.<sup>23</sup>

In nominating Rieman as an American hero, President Bush employed the figure of metonymy, reducing his argument for American virtues into seven sentences about Tommy Rieman's willingness to sacrifice his body for his country. Few figures are better emotionally positioned as evidence for the Bush administration's highly controversial war policies than "whole-bodied" veterans of war. And Rieman, who sat next to First Lady Laura Bush during the speech, was a particularly useful veteran for the president's purposes. Aside from the convenient symbolism of his hometown (Independence, Kentucky), this rendering of Rieman's story emphasized a litany of conventional American virtues: a rise from humble origins (pumping gas) to greatness (the Silver Star), a selfless desire to serve, persistence in the presence of obstacles, and, of course, allegiance to authorities, as demonstrated by virtue of his appearance at the address. Moreover, Rieman looked precisely like the kind of person the army had recruited in the past and was having a hard time now recruiting.<sup>24</sup> The president's use of the veteran as a metonym for the American spirit troped Rieman's firefight as a metaphorical bridge connecting civilian life with that of the warrior.

A timeworn “support our troops” strategy, President Bush’s argument implied that to defy his position on the wars was to cast Rieman aside and to stand against the American virtues of patriotism and sacrifice. The war was thus made sensible through Rieman’s literal fight, conflated by the president with the ordinary struggles Americans regularly wage in their ordinary lives. In Bush’s rendering, Rieman *was* the war, and, more than that, he *was* the embodiment of the American spirit, an example for ordinary Americans to follow.

President Bush’s selection of Rieman for this speech was notable not just because of the way it conflated fighting in Iraq with the struggle of everyday life, but because Rieman’s war injuries, though extensive, left no visible scars or wounds. In the Iraq war, the image and story of a now physically healthy Rieman—or any other surviving, whole-bodied war veteran—was an indispensable resource used to manage opinion and cultivate support for the policy. Rieman’s story, and the army’s effort to employ him as a metonym for the war, was similar to the strategy the Pentagon had employed with Jessica Lynch, the young woman injured in an ambush while in a delivery convoy early in the Iraq war. The difference is that in the latter case, the Pentagon badly overplayed the story by embellishing the details and prompting Lynch to correct the record when she returned home.<sup>25</sup> Rieman’s value to the executive’s ongoing defense of the war, and later, to the army’s recruiting efforts, lay in the communicative value of his body as tacit support of the war. In contrast to disfigured and disabled veterans, whose bodies are a continual visual reminder of war’s horrible costs, the dominant discourse found in the mainstream media transformed apparently “whole” veterans like Rieman into metonyms for personal uplift, sacrifice, and heroism. Indeed, during and after the 2007 State of the Union, Rieman’s rising arc in public discourse about the war was meteoric: his job at the gas station, his courage in battle, and his visually uninjured body so successfully exemplified and personalized the recruiter’s image of military service that the Pentagon hired him and gave him a feature role in the army’s high-profile video game and recruiting initiative, *America’s Army*.

Casting him in *America’s Army* was an especially significant move. The popular first-person shooter game is played by roughly 40 percent of new enlisted soldiers, has been downloaded more than 27 million times since 2002, and is often shipped already loaded onto Dell computers.<sup>26</sup> When the army teamed with the software company Red Storm Entertainment to create an extension of the game for Xbox called *True Soldiers*, the producers hired Rieman as a creative consultant; made his character one of eight to appear in the game; and placed his gritty, cartoonish visage on its box cover.<sup>27</sup> Teenagers can now access Rieman’s Iraq story directly through *True Soldiers* and can experience virtually the life of an army soldier. According to *America’s Army* operations officer Maj. Mike Marty, the purpose of *America’s Army* is

to inspire young adults and the American public to explore the US Army’s values, as well as soldier’s attributes of teamwork and personal courage, by telling heroic and personal soldier stories through the *America’s Army* brand, which includes the PC game, Web sites and a line of action figures. Young people can look up to these soldiers and see how values such as loyalty, personal courage, [and] integrity have

not only helped these individuals succeed in the Army, but in their personal lives as well.<sup>28</sup>

Explaining the choice of Rieman and the eight others whose stories made them attractive to the game developers, the director of the project, Col. Casey Wardynski, said featuring veterans was necessary because “[i]t’s hard to relate to a big green machine.”<sup>29</sup>

By personalizing the institution of the army—by employing Rieman as a metonym for the military—*America’s Army* bridges the gap between civilian life and military life, which requires generalizing the life of a soldier in terms of “work,” “loyalty,” “personal courage” and “integrity.” In the words of Sgt. 1st Class Gerald Wolford, another soldier featured in *America’s Army*, “I’m hoping that through this program people can read of the experiences of myself and others and find the motivation to succeed and work harder at what they do, whether in the Army or in civilian life.”<sup>30</sup> Rieman now works full time making this argument, which is why he visited his high school, was interviewed in major newsmagazines and newspapers, appeared several times on CNN and Fox News, and was invited to the State of the Union address. On “Armed Forces Day,” Rieman signed autographs for NFL quarterback Brady Quinn and band members from Disturbed, Stained, and Papa Roach, prompting him to remark on his *America’s Army* blog, “It seems like every week an event comes up that tops the last. . . . I got to go on stage and tell my story in front of thousands of patriotic fans. The arena went crazy and it was awesome!”<sup>31</sup> Although Rieman’s thirteen wounds from bullets and shrapnel are often noted in stories about him, representations of his story rarely mention the impact that killing several dozen insurgents has had on him, or that the gunner he protected with his body has struggled with PTSD. By suggesting that fighting a war is much like the daily work lives of ordinary Americans, *America’s Army* diminishes the inherent uniqueness of the veterans’ extraordinary experiences.<sup>32</sup> The logic governing how Rieman and the gunner he protected, Rob McAllister, are domesticated, is the same. Relative to physical trauma, which can be disruptive to war justifications, psychological trauma is less problematic in public culture because it usually does not manifest in visual terms. As far as the visual record is concerned, Rieman and McAllister’s bodies have traveled to the brink of death and returned unscathed, making them useful representations of America, of the army, and of the warrior spirit the military likes to cultivate in new recruits.

All of this helps explain why the Pentagon revived a World War II program and licensed the sale of Tommy Rieman plastic action figures. As it is with *America’s Army*, the purpose of producing and selling “Real Heroes” action figures is to introduce children to military values in an everyday context. On his *America’s Army* biography page, Rieman says he idolized G.I. Joe as a kid, a point he has made repeatedly in coverage surrounding the release of the video game, noting in a *Voice of America* interview that he “played with lots of G.I. Joes and action figures” when he was a child, and now his son is “going to be in first grade for show and tell and saying, ‘Look at my dad. He was an action figure.’ You know for me, that’s pretty awesome.”<sup>33</sup>



Rieman often tells reporters that the game, the action figure, and all the accompanying attention are “surreal.” In anticipation of the release of the game and the action figures, the army sent Rieman to the army-navy football game, where he told a military reporter, “I have a lot of family members who love to dress my action figure up and give me a hard time for being a ‘doll.’ I take offense to that. I’m an action figure; I have chest hair.”<sup>34</sup> The gender tension here is instructive. Although one woman, Leigh Ann Hester, was originally slated to become one of the “Real Heroes,” the army dropped her action figure, her character was removed from *America’s Army*, and there are no references to her on the Web site except in conjunction with another “Real Hero.”<sup>35</sup> This is a curious omission, given that Hester is the first woman to be awarded the Silver Star for valor in combat since World War II, but the move is consistent with the gendering of the target audiences for video games and action figures, who are often, but not exclusively, boys.<sup>36</sup> The female body is more difficult to portray as a representation of military values because such values have traditionally been molded around precepts of masculinity. An emphasis on male soldiers glosses over controversial issues about gender that the military would like to avoid, and, as a result, the metonymic use of Rieman perpetuates a problematic masculinist image of the military and of the United States.

The army’s use of Rieman in videogames and action figures illustrates how the seduction of war has come full circle: the young boys who play *True Soldiers* for Xbox are able to try out being Tommy Rieman, and the GI Joe doll that seduced Rieman as a child is now Rieman himself, a plastic figure produced to inspire the next generation of soldiers. Contrary to the notion that violent video games undermine or erase real violence because players may simply hit “reset,” Rieman’s example shows that “militainment” does produce violent bodily consequences, even if those consequences are not always tragic.<sup>37</sup> The action figure and the video game are an attractive means of depicting war for the military because of Rieman’s against-the-odds return from Iraq with an apparently unharmed body. The package for his action figure, for example, harkens back to the day Rieman was injured and “is outfitted with a black fleece jacket like he was wearing the day he earned the Silver Star.”<sup>38</sup> Whether the story is about the demonstration of a war-games simulation, new army video games, or action figures, the story is always simultaneously Rieman’s ability to return “whole” from a fight in the face of long odds. If Rieman did not possess an apparently “whole” body, it would not be possible for the army to structure the civilian relationship with him, and thus the military, in an entertainment context. In that context, war’s production of injury and death all but disappear.

### **Body in Place: Context and Movement in Representations of War Veterans**

*Newsweek’s* March 5, 2007, cover image features Specialist Marissa Strock, a twenty-one-year-old veteran of the Iraq war who lost two friends and both legs when an IED exploded beneath the Humvee in which she was riding. Against a clear white background, Strock stands out in an army T-shirt with a reddish stain on its front, perhaps from spilled food, and standard-issue army shorts. Strock poses for the

picture on a stool, her legs amputated at mid-calf, as her prostheses sit beneath her, unattached to the stumps that are now her legs. Her closed mouth and facial expression suggest exhaustion, perhaps pain, as if she has just completed physical therapy. She crosses her legs at the knee—a conventional feminine posture juxtaposed against the absence and utter difference of her body. Her right arm bears less visible but clearly serious scars related to the broken arm, wrist, and collarbone she sustained in the blast that destroyed her legs. The caption beneath her photo, “Failing Our Wounded,” frames her as a victim of a secondary tragedy—inadequate medical care and bureaucratic red tape that had prolonged her suffering and that of many veterans upon their return home. The *Newsweek* cover thus represents Strock as trapped in a despairing state of injury caused by and perpetuated by the army.

“Failing Our Wounded” refers to the scandal over veterans’ health care that broke out when the *Washington Post* published a series of investigative articles depicting Walter Reed’s deteriorating living conditions and the extended bureaucratic delays veterans and their families experienced at the hospital. The *Post* described a Walter Reed hospital that had transformed from the “crown jewel of military medicine” to an overpopulated, dirty, poorly run facility with inattentive and underqualified staff. Service members from the army and marines recovering at Walter Reed told the *Post* about the mountains of paperwork—on average it takes twenty-two forms to exit and enter the facility—the lack of staff, and a “bureaucratic battlefield nearly as chaotic as the real battlefields they faced overseas.”<sup>39</sup> Spanish-speaking families had to contend with additional language barriers because the hospital rarely had bilingual staff on hand. In short, the *Newsweek* cover set Strock in the context of Walter Reed, where badly injured soldiers, a group already physically and mentally vulnerable, were poorly cared for and subjected to additional, unnecessary burdens that threatened to stall or even reverse their recovery. By March 2, only two weeks after the initial *Washington Post* report, the secretary of the army had fired the general in charge and reassigned several other highly placed staff at Walter Reed.<sup>40</sup> Weeks later, President Bush asked former Senator Bob Dole, whose right arm was paralyzed in World War II, and Donna Shalala, former secretary of health and human services, to investigate Walter Reed Medical Center and report back.<sup>41</sup> Strock’s appearance on the front of *Newsweek* on March 5, then, should be understood in light of widening public attention to and reconsideration of health care for veterans vis-à-vis Walter Reed. As a metonym for the failures of the state, Strock’s body on the front cover of *Newsweek* functioned as a plea for help, an efficient expression of the need to reexamine a health care system that apparently had not adapted to the new realities of war. Failing to act was to risk failing her.

In *Newsweek*’s online version of the story, however, Strock’s photo appeared next to another, far different photo. Here, we find her alone in a kayak, paddling and smiling broadly during a trip organized by the Wounded Warrior Project.<sup>42</sup> In this photo, her legs are almost completely obscured. While we might feel sorry for Strock the amputee, mired in the bureaucracy of a failing veterans’ hospital, in the familiar domain of recreation and exercise, the photo activates a distinctly different emotional encoding, turning away from the causes of her wounds and toward her future

recovery, and inviting the viewer to cheer her on. Her happiness and physical vitality against the odds work as reassuring signs that she is recovering or has already recovered from her injuries. Rather than framing Strock as a harsh reminder of the bodily consequences of failing military and medical institutions, as the *Newsweek* cover does when it invokes the Walter Reed scandal, Strock in a kayak—and no longer wearing an army T-shirt—figures her wounds as a personal obstacle for *her* to overcome, decoupling her injuries from the very institutions and policies that made them possible. Importantly, Strock's injured body produces movement: the kayak photo is an antidote for the Walter Reed photo. Indeed, as Shildrick argues, disabled and other “monstrous” bodies have long been

shown in such a way as to offset their non-normative natures and bodies with an appeal to their recognisable everyday or cultured attributes that drew in the spectators at the same time as astounding them. Relatively few of those displayed were passive objects; they were performers engaged not only in showing off their anomalies, but in singing, sewing, dancing, feeding children, conversing in foreign languages, and in every way bypassing the putative handicaps of their extraordinary body.<sup>43</sup>

In the context of war, the historical practice of rhetorically “correcting” bodies takes on an explicit political purpose. As John Jordan argues, when advances in medical and transportation technologies after World War I increased the number of plastic surgeries, “correcting” bodies altered by war injury was “a means to allow soldiers to return home as heroic rather than pitiable figures, thereby preserving the social order through diminishing the personal and social stigma of modern warfare.”<sup>44</sup> Photos of veteran amputees exercising serve a similar “corrective” purpose, but the context in which the body appears, rather than the prosthetic, directs the meaning of the body. Being cast as an amputee in army shorts and an army shirt situates Strock in the context of war and failed medical care; sitting in a kayak, without the army signifier or a focus on her missing limbs, dissociates her otherwise unruly body from the war, deflects attention from Walter Reed, and replaces the institutional framework for her injuries with a recreational context that shows her actively overcoming her injuries.

The critical difference between failed institutions and active recreation is the movement accorded to Strock. On the front of *Newsweek*, she is static, stuck, and despairing. In the kayak, audiences can imagine her moving—quite happily, judging by her smile—beyond the frame. If the visual trope of an injured veteran engaging in normal physical exercise is an isolated representation, situating Strock's injured body in this context might be inconsequential. But dominant visual discourses frequently set amputee bodies in sporting contexts, where their injured bodies move symbolically toward “wholeness.” Photos of injured vets frequently set them in sport contexts, showing them golfing, skiing and snowboarding, biking, sailing, lifting weights, climbing rock walls, swimming, and participating in virtually every imaginable recreational context.<sup>45</sup> This is significant because, as DeLuca argues, bodies shown in politicized contexts are “not merely flags to attract attention for the argument but the site and substance of the argument itself.”<sup>46</sup> Picturing veteran amputees in sporting contexts places them in a familiar setting for the millions of

Americans who have ever exercised, played on a team, or pursued athletics recreationally; as such, it functions enthymematically to activate the viewer's sense that athletic performances are evidence of the health of the body, and, by metonymical extension, the health of the nation-state.<sup>47</sup>

On the same day that the Dole-Shalala Report was released, the White House scheduled a press conference and invited journalists to the South Lawn of the White House, where journalists were allowed to photograph and film President Bush running around a track with two veteran amputees. Published photos and videos portrayed the president and the two veterans jogging together against the lush green midsummer backdrop of magnolia trees and perfectly manicured shrubs. None appear to struggle, though video footage of the event shows they were not jogging very fast since running on prostheses is understandably difficult.<sup>48</sup> The point is that the two veterans—one who was missing his right leg and half his left, and the other who ran without a left leg—were able to run at all, no different than any ordinary or able-bodied American. The president's comments underscored the strategy of picturing veterans in athletic contexts. "Running with these two men is incredibly inspirational for me," said the president to reporters between laps. "And it should be inspirational for anybody who has been dealt a tough hand. Sometimes in life you get dealt a hand you didn't expect to play, and they got dealt a tough hand, and they're playing it with all their soul."<sup>49</sup> Linking the struggle of "these two men" with "anybody who's dealt a tough hand" erased the president's moral connection to the injuries and filled in the gap between civilian, "homeland" conceptions of war, and the soldiers whose bodies now bore its consequences. In the president's rendering, the injuries were the results of simple and ordinary bad luck. The combination of words and images cast the president as a man of the people, a strategy reinforced by the straight angle of the photograph, which suggests a peer relationship between audiences and the figures in the image. Conversely, the setting of the White House suggests the amputees have reached the highest point of the military and institutional hierarchy. An image of injured vets with the president reinforces Bush's role as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, solidifying the chain of command. The photo thus interpellates viewers as citizens and potential supporters of the effort to improve veterans' health care, inviting them to identify with the president as a model for how to behave toward veterans. Though the White House takes a risk with these images by associating the president with visible injury, picturing amputee vets exercising tames the harshness of their injuries by translating extraordinary injury into an ordinary but random obstacle. The veterans' midday jog with the president works as a testament to their recovery and bodily well-being, suggesting that more than being properly cared for, they have already met or surpassed normative standards for physical fitness. They are, in his estimation, a lot like ordinary people. In his comments after the jog, Bush praised the two men for refusing "to allow their current circumstances to get them down or to keep them down."<sup>50</sup> If there is a problem in the health care system for veterans, the photo and the press conference suggests that the country has moved past it. By placing veterans in a recreational context and emphasizing their athletic prowess, dominant representations of veterans

show the potential that veteran amputees can lead a good life, or at least a so-called normal life, even if it must be earned against long odds.

Since President Bush did not attend the funerals of soldiers who died at war while he was in office, thus keeping highly emotional images associating him with war off the front page, images of the president meeting with families of the deceased or running with veterans were an important means of controlling perceptions about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, juxtaposing injured vets with the “whole” body of the president of the United States in the luxurious setting of the White House lawn associated the privileged Bush with the stark bodily consequences of the war. Picking up a skeptical reading of another set of jogging images, *TheHollywoodLiberal.com* contextualized another amputee running event as just another in a series of Rovian power plays, ridiculing the stagecraft of the photos in comic text bubbles and criticizing the news media for its part in such a stunt. The eight-picture parody annotated the photos, beginning with Bush and a double amputee shaking hands, moving to shots of the two posing for photographers, and finishing with several shots of them running. Like Stroock, the veteran in these photos, double amputee Christian Bagge, wears an army T-shirt and a broad smile, challenging the notion that despair and neglect are representative experiences for veterans. Above the title, “Cool, Karl Rove Comes Through Again, What a Genius,” the first image shows a president who smiles at the veteran as they greet, but who is bored and upset that he has to be there. “Great,” Bush whines in a thought bubble, “now I am going to probably have to hear about how this guy got his little legs blown off, and how its [sic] all my fault because I lied us into war. Damn who set this up? This Sucks.” Referring to the veteran alternatively as “Hoppy,” “Hoppy The Kangaroo,” “Hoparoo,” and, finally, “Bladerunner,” *TheHollywoodLiberal.com* turns Bush into the cruel, bumbling, good-ole-boy caricature so often circulated by his opponents during his presidency. The parody indicts him for lying, blames him for the veteran’s injury, and destabilizes the ability of the photos to shift attention away from the injuries or the Walter Reed scandal. “See,” Bush muses in front of the White House portico, “getting your legs blown off ain’t that bad, this guy don’t [sic] seem to mind. I don’t know what everyone has to get so upset about all the time.” Not only does Bush become the embodiment of a bad war decision, but the parodist invokes the scandal at Walter Reed that prompted the photos, redirecting attention back to the veteran’s body and the need for reform in the military healthcare system:

Bagge: So you ready to go for a jog Sir.

Bush: WHAAT?? Go running, you can run . . . No I can’t do that kid, [w]e don’t have insurance for that kind of thing. If you should fall and break your . . . er . . . uh break something you would be on your own.

Bagge: Yeah so how is that any different then [sic] what happens to soldiers coming back from Iraq?<sup>52</sup>

Critics on MSNBC.com and other mainstream news Web sites that ran the original images of Bush and Bagge picked up the same resistant reading and directed their disgust by focusing on the contrasts in the bodies of the two men. As one reader put it in the comments section of the ABC News coverage of the event, “Idiot, must be nice

to job [sic] w/ the two legs you were born with! I dislike him even more . . . poser!”<sup>53</sup> Narrating the images as a continuation of the story of the Bush presidency’s clever and dishonest public relations efforts, this reader takes the focus off of the body of the veteran. Still, the dominant encoding of the image frames it in light of the scandal at Walter Reed, and the jogging photos visually reinforce the message put forth by the White House: that the president—a metonym of government—took action to improve health care for veterans. Although the rhetorical struggle over the meaning of the veterans’ bodies never completely settled, TheHollywoodLiberal.com could not compete on an even playing field with the president or the mainstream media, and the resistant interpretation of the jogging photo did not circulate nearly as many times. Bush’s comments to the assembled news media, like the photos of him and Army S.Sgt. Bagge, assured viewers that the injuries were not too serious by emphasizing again the incredible capabilities of the veteran’s body. Talking to a group of reporters about the Dole-Shalala Report’s embarrassing findings, Bush remarked, “Neil lost both legs, and he told me he’s going to run with me on the South Lawn of the White House. Max lost his leg, and he told me he was going to be jumping out of airplanes with the 101st Airborne. Sure enough, he’s jumping out of airplanes with the 101st Airborne, and along with Neil, he’s running on the South Lawn.”<sup>54</sup> The scandal at Walter Reed revealed that veterans’ bodies were still at risk and crystallized the problems with veterans’ healthcare, forcing the White House to address the perception that veterans were victims of institutional shortsightedness. By picturing veterans in sports and recreation contexts familiar to domestic audiences, the photos normalized their difference. Moreover, in sports contexts, war and veterans’ care were transformed into ordinary matters of leisure and fitness, minimizing the seriousness of the injuries and bypassing a discussion of the institutional and political logics behind them.

### Recreating the War Veteran’s Body

In addition to and alongside the trope of exercising, dominant representations of injured veterans domesticate them by suggesting that their injuries will move them, or have already moved them, toward a new “wholeness.” This occurs when images and texts attribute meanings and purposes to veterans’ bodies meant to inspire Americans to follow the vets toward self-improvement and to enact comebacks from their own daily struggles. By ascribing a strategic *telos* to their bodies, the images and texts representing Rieman, Strock, and other injured veterans suggest that war injuries are a small setback in an otherwise normal, and sometimes extraordinary, life. This strategy is evident in the way that representations of Rieman were circulated in public culture. Indeed, Rieman’s TV appearances, interviews, video game likeness, and his own words often cast him as someone whose service and bodily sacrifice made him a better, more evolved person. Unlike representations of Strock or of the White House joggers, whose images suggested movement and recovery, Rieman appears static, as if his injuries completed him. When he appeared with Wolf Blitzer

on CNN to demonstrate a new training simulator, CNN's Pentagon correspondent, Barbara Starr, asked first about his injuries:

[W]e are here today with Sergeant Tommy Rieman who is a remarkable young man. He is a recipient of the Silver Star. He is a veteran of very serious combat in Iraq. He's going to walk us through this simulation today, what it's like to be back on the streets of Baghdad. Sergeant Tommy Rieman, you're a guy who's been there, done it. You were very badly injured. Can you tell us about that?<sup>55</sup>

Rieman's response was by far the least glamorous iteration of his story that appears when it is told: "I was in a three-RPG [rocket propelled grenade] ambush. I was shot in the arm, the chest, and took some shrapnel to my legs, and I had a buddy who lost his right leg and another buddy that was shot in the butt."<sup>56</sup> In both military and journalistic accounts, by contrast, Rieman's story has much more detail, emphasizing his selflessness as he used his body as a shield for his gunner, McAllister. And more, they emphasize how, after being shot and hit by shrapnel, Rieman refused to take medical attention and continued to fight until he "silenced" the opposition. According to a similar account given on the *America's Army* Web site, Rieman attended to his own injuries only after being told by a superior to "stand down."<sup>57</sup> In a Fox News interview, Trace Gallagher pointed to Rieman's decision to ignore the injuries as the basis for his heroism:

Rieman's objective was to protect the gunner at all costs, and indeed the price was heavy. Using his own body to shield the gunner, Rieman was hit with a number of bullets and shrapnel—but several wounds are not enough to slow down an action hero. So Rieman kept moving, kept shooting, and kept saving lives.<sup>58</sup>

These and other mainstream media representations cast Rieman's injuries as the catalysts in a journey from ordinary life to the heights of military legend. Well beyond "recovery," the story of Rieman's fateful day shows him to be an extraordinary individual, his wounds transformed from signs of enemy strength to evidence of his heroism. As his body was "recreated," his story was used to inspire people, especially young men who might be considering the military.

The story of Rieman's courage in battle, however inspiring, risks portraying him in a context that would seem remote to most Americans or potential recruits. The dominant visual strategies for representing Rieman therefore balanced his heroism with identifiable signs of normalcy and wholeness. In the March 31, 2008, issue of *People* magazine, for example, Rieman and the gunner he protected were the lead subjects in a five-year Iraq retrospective profiling four surviving veterans and two families who lost loved ones.<sup>59</sup> In a large picture spread across almost two pages, McAllister, the gunner, stands proudly with his chin in the air and his arm around Rieman, whose facial expression suggests humility and a hint of shyness. Although neither man was serving in the army at the time of the story, both were dressed in army fatigues and sported shaved heads and berets. The headline, "Friends for Life," sits atop a short story that details how the army cemented the friendship of two unlikely people: thinking they had little in common, they learned while playing video games that they loved football and many of the same movies. Later, as part of an

intelligence-gathering team, they spent seven days together with six other soldiers in “a hole the size of a desk,” until the fateful day. “A guy takes a couple of bullets for you,” recounted McAllister, “I don’t even know how to put in words what that means.”<sup>60</sup> As Rieman puts it, “[y]ou go through this crazy experience . . . Nobody understands you.” “Nobody, that is,” adds *People*, “except for a buddy who went through it too.”<sup>61</sup> The article interpreted Rieman’s act as one of simple and ordinary friendship surfacing in an extraordinary context. Though the photo and text connected their friendship to the violence of the war, the story amplified the ordinary circumstances of their friendship over and above war, including precise details—they enjoy *Caddyshack* and *Office Space*—that sought to structure the relationship of the audience to the men in an everyday domestic context, as if the most salient feature of their service was their friendship.

Rieman’s common qualities are more evident when the coverage credits the army with saving him from himself. In between Rieman and McAllister’s harrowing experiences in Iraq and the five-year retrospective in *People*, the army and others refined Rieman’s “conversion” from a small town working-class stiff to a war hero and then disseminated it in multiple forms across public culture. As his story was built and reiterated, Rieman’s injuries at war were turned into events that lifted him out of a life slump to higher and higher levels of achievement. As *US News and World Report* put it, Rieman was like a lot of “ordinary people who, when thrust into danger, showed extraordinary courage. . . . Before enlisting, he was just a teenager with a bad attitude and a job at a gas station in Independence, Ky.”<sup>62</sup> *People* claimed that Rieman had joined the army “to escape his Kentucky town.”<sup>63</sup> The *Kentucky Enquirer* noted that when he graduated from Simon Kenton High School in Independence, he “was cleaning up after truckers at a gas station.” “Then,” it concludes, with gravity, “he joined the Army.” His high school football coach described Rieman as a boy without any interest in academics and a person who was “always wandering aimlessly.”<sup>64</sup> After speaking to the student body, Rieman supported this interpretation of his life, arguing that he “was not here to tell them to join the Army; I’m not telling them not to join the Army. I’m just telling them to not make the same mistakes I made when I was in school.”<sup>65</sup> Though those “mistakes” are never fully detailed, this reporting is a sufficient premise for the army’s standard recruiting appeal: enlisting allows ordinary/working-class people (in particular, boys), including those who “wander aimlessly,” to become extraordinary, courageous people. In short, Rieman’s heroics in battle were told only insofar as they showed how the army provided friendship and salvation; rather than reflecting the costs of war, his “injuries are seen as having occurred on the road to another goal.”<sup>66</sup> The army made Rieman a whole person.

The ascription of a strategic *telos* to the bodies of amputees and seriously injured veterans works differently because the presence of visible injuries places limits on what reasonably can be said about them. Unlike Rieman, representations of severely injured veterans may not simply omit the trauma—it is visually in evidence—and wholeness may be achieved when an amputee no longer experiences injuries as a deficit or obstacle. To paraphrase one amputee runner, veterans work to prove that injuries do not prevent them from doing the things they could before.<sup>67</sup> For example,



the White House published a series of photos in the spring of 2008 picturing the Wounded Warriors' "White House to the Light House" bike ride staged on the White House lawn to emphasize the physical movement of an amputee group. Like the images shot at the White House track facility with Bush running alongside leg amputees, these images show amputee veterans in the lush and carefully manicured landscaping of the South Lawn. The event was orchestrated to show that the veterans are whole. This time, however, President Bush was wearing a suit and was accompanied by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the deputy secretary of defense, and a collection of members of Congress. In the photos of the event published on the White House Web site, the president holds an air horn as Secretary Rice claps in encouragement and a dozen bikers line up on a white starting line. President Bush appears in the photo and the portico of the White House fills in the background, his suit underscores his distance from the bikers, whose red, white, and blue gear signifies a nationalistic tone for the event. One participant looks down, not acknowledging the president, and another, whose bike is already over the starting line, cocks his head in a pose of dismay. The photo performs a cruel re-inscription of the military hierarchy, which is visible in its contrasts: the whole-bodied president stands above the veterans, and the combination of his sleek suit and the shade of a tree hide his body, while the form-fitting Lycra of the bikers, who are pictured in direct sunlight, reveals their bodies and highlights their missing limbs. Just as in war, in this photo, they are linked to Bush, but they are the ones paying the price. Amplifying the physical accomplishments of the veterans—many of whom pedal with their arms on specially designed bikes—the president's prepared remarks perform a genuflection: "I was going to ride with the guys today, but Laura told me I probably wouldn't be able to keep up."<sup>68</sup> Elsewhere, the president suggested that he was an inferior athlete to veteran amputees.<sup>69</sup> Exaggerating the physical well-being of the bikers compensates for the injuries; if the amputees are truly faster or more physically fit than the president, then it would seem that their injuries are no real obstacles to a normal and ordinary life. Moreover, the president's comments about the bike ride regard it as evidence that the veterans have *already recovered* from their injuries. Recounting the day he visited one of the bikers at the hospital, Bush laid out one man's steps toward physical wholeness:

[W]hen I went into his room, he wanted to stand at attention and shake hands with the Commander-in-Chief, as well as salute. He got up to his walker. His daddy helped him and so did his brother. He held himself upright with his arm strength while a fellow Marine read his accommodation, and I had the honor of giving him the Purple Heart. I told him to sit down. He didn't want to. He was a Marine. And now he's here.

Invoking other evidence of this marine's recovery, the president continued, "He's got a new leg, and thanks to that leg, Chad will be able to start on even a greater journey than the one he begins today—this summer he's going to walk down the aisle to get married to his beautiful bride."<sup>70</sup> As a public performance of citizenship, the president's strategy illustrates how war injuries are not "permitted to cling to the original site of the wound, the human body."<sup>71</sup> In this story, the horrible violence of

the marine's injury and amputation was no longer a concern because a seemingly equivalent "new" leg had replaced his old leg. The president's story about the marine attested to his return to normalcy on several fronts: his insistence on standing just days after the injury, his ability to ride a bicycle, and his impending marriage all serve as evidence that he is recovering or has already recovered. As MSNBC's *Right Now* host Mika Brzezinski put it, pictures of such events "show, once again, that injuries are no match for the human spirit."<sup>72</sup> By invoking the commonly shared meaning systems surrounding the conventions of recreation and marriage, the White House and mainstream news organizations celebrated the physical progress of the injured veterans in photo events and ceremonial speeches, urging audiences to work through tough times, to exercise, and be better—to become, in a sense, more "whole" or "normal" themselves. The appeal to audiences here is simple: if an amputee or a Rieman can overcome serious war injuries, then the everyday struggles ordinary folks face seem a little less daunting. Indeed, the purpose of veterans' bodies in these events is to introduce a "comeback" narrative that suggests the bodies have already been "fixed," either with prostheses, or by textual and visual strategies that deliver veterans back to a better, more culturally esteemed place. In this way, the exercising photos make the veterans responsible only to themselves, completing the delivery of the body from the institutions of government and the military and back to the veteran. Such images not only orient the viewer toward personal recovery and obscure the institutional nature and cause of the injury, but also suggest the story is over and encourage audiences to forget about veterans when officialdom no longer wants think about them.

## Conclusion

The body of the veteran is a crucial means by which civilian audiences are invited to make sense of war in the twenty-first century. Veterans' bodies are fraught with an excess of symbolism and images of them are therefore heavily politicized. Whenever their bodies are connected to the United States—when wearing military uniforms, army shirts, or simply red, white, and blue—images of veterans interpellate viewers as citizens and create the possibility for audiences to cultivate an emotional attachment to the nation-state. In the past, especially in the context of the military draft that was in place during the Vietnam conflict, the Pentagon worried that such representations encoded emotional associations such as pity and compassion that could undermine war advocacy. In contrast, the primary visual and textual strategies for handling injured bodies discussed here work to disrupt the connection between the state and the consequences of war. I have attempted to demonstrate in this essay that such discourse dissociates "unruly" bodies from the state and manages the emotions audiences attribute to the state by countering the interpretations of an amputated limb as a permanent, immutable problem, and by "fixing" amputees by placement in strategic contexts to suggest their physical vitality; by seizing visually unharmed veterans for promotional and recruiting purposes; and by recreating their injuries as necessary to achieving a higher goal in life. Dominant discourses treat apparently

uninjured or unharmed bodies with similar strategies, in all cases shaping the meanings of veterans' bodies within the symbolic realm of normal, everyday bodily experiences. Such discursive strategies manage the potential for veterans to dissent from war by structuring relationships between civilians and veterans in public culture in ways that minimize, reverse, redirect, or erase the connection between bodily injury and the state.

By ascribing a strategic *telos* to the body, treating it as a metonym for the nation-state, or placing it in a context that regulates its movement, such discourse subjects veterans' bodies to a rhetoric of normalcy. "Whole" veterans like Rieman and McAllister can appear in public discourse as static figures because they have already arrived at a destination—or at least so the photo-textual logic of representing their bodies seems to suggest: they have their friendship, and like Rieman, their heroism. Injured veterans who appear stationary in public photos, on the other hand, suggest that injury is the endpoint for the body and are therefore more problematic. Situating them in athletic contexts moves them beyond the injury, at times overcompensating for bodily differences by attributing to injured veterans a hyper-athleticism or physical prowess. Such strategies are designed to decrease the distance between domestic audiences' perceptions of "normal" or "whole" bodies and bodies injured by war violence. As a consequence, such discourse reinforces conventional notions of what counts as a "normal" or "abnormal" body. Even though their sacrifice might be immense, amputees do not become "real heroes" in military recruiting efforts, and may thus suffer at two margins: they neither are seen as worthy of the military's praise, nor do they fit within cultural norms for the body. In addition, this discourse collapses the distinction between the everyday, ordinary work of most Americans and the extraordinary context of war, where injuries are always possible.

Whether the body is visually injured or not, such discursive efforts *recreate* the veteran's body in a variety of *recreational* contexts, such as in video games, as a macho action figure, or in video and photographic representations of athletic events, such as running, cycling, or kayaking. The recreation of the body, of course, is built on the assumption that the body in question begins with some kind of deficiency requiring modification. For veterans who suffer excessive burns or amputation, the deficiency is visual and explicit, but for apparently unharmed bodies like Rieman's, the (re)creation depends on the establishment of some other kind of deficiency. With a narrative of deficiency in place, the veteran's body can be talked about in terms of personal improvement and wellness, encoding a self-help discourse that already has a foothold in mainstream culture and that is rooted in American mythology. Each individual veteran, then, becomes a more sympathetic character and the public attention is thus directed to the possibility that the war veteran will be reincarnated as a whole citizen against great odds. The visual and textual evidence analyzed here suggests that veterans with amputations are recovering or have already recovered from injuries and will soon achieve a level of normalcy. The discourse surrounding apparently uninjured veterans, on the other hand, moves them from mundane, ordinary circumstances to levels of greatness and glory that (apparently) only military service can offer. Whether they are running alongside the president, biking, lifting

weights, or appearing in popular video games, the symbolic rehabilitation of the veterans' bodies is crucial to recruiting young people to the military during a time when it has been stretched thin.

Official and mainstream news discourses have been forced to contend with the presence of injured veterans as wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have dragged on, and as returning veterans have entered the public discussion of the wars, they have complicated, and sometimes undermined, previous justifications given for it. Of course, discourse surrounding veterans of war is just one part of the larger architecture of war rhetoric appearing in public culture. Nonetheless, the Walter Reed Medical Center scandal forced a public accounting of medical care for surviving vets because the hospital put already vulnerable bodies at further risk. Glossing over the distinctions between war/soldiering and home/everyday life risks overlooking the unique needs of all veterans of war and failing on the obligation to tend to their bodily welfare.

## Notes

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- [7] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985): 80–81.
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- [16] Scarry, *Body in Pain*, 62.
- [17] Scarry, *Body in Pain*, 22–23.
- [18] Jordan, "Rhetorical Limits," 349.
- [19] Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*, 16–17.
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- [21] In the final years of the ban, some of the images were made public, but only after the Pentagon was forced to provide them through the Freedom of Information Act. See Russ Kick, ed., "Photos of Military Coffins," *The Memory Hole*, April 14, 2004, [http://www.thememoryhole.org/war/coffin\\_photos/dover/](http://www.thememoryhole.org/war/coffin_photos/dover/). See also Associated Press, "After 18-Year Ban, Media See Return of US War Dead," *MSNBC*, April 6, 2009, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/30065783/>.
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- [32] Some veterans came back and wrote vividly about the trauma of war, including their moral quandaries about who was an enemy and who could be trusted, their struggle with the racism that often substitutes for strategy in fighting in Iraq, and their brushes with the deaths of friends and Iraqi civilians. See Camilo Mejía, *Road from Ar Ramadi: The Private Rebellion of Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejía* (New York: New Press, 2007); Paul Rieckhoff, *Chasing Ghosts: A Soldier's Fight for America from Baghdad to Washington* (New York: Penguin, 2006). Rieckhoff is the founder of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA). Likewise, *The Nation* systematically interviewed fifty veterans and recounted their eyewitness accounts of the horrors of war in 2007, revealing deep misgivings among vets about the routine work they performed in Iraq. See Chris Hedges and Laila Al-Arian, "The Other War: Iraq Vets Bear Witness," *The Nation*, July 30, 2007, <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20070730/hedges>.
- [33] "Gamers Downloading America's Army," *Voice of America English Service*, January 12, 2007. Rieman made similar statements about his action figure and his son in other media appearances. See Tommy Rieman, interview by Barbara Starr, *Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer*, CNN, August 16, 2005, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0508/16/>

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- [35] Barnes, "New Action Heroes," 53. Later, Sergeant Monica Brown, the second woman to win a Silver Star since WWII, was added to the "Real Heroes" website.
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- [38] Bryan Crowson, "'Real Hero' Shoots for Realism in America's Army," *Birmingham News*, October 22, 2007, [http://blog.al.com/techcetera/2007/10/img\\_of\\_silhouette\\_sgt\\_tommy.html](http://blog.al.com/techcetera/2007/10/img_of_silhouette_sgt_tommy.html).
- [39] Dana Priest and Anne Hull, "Soldiers Face Neglect, Frustration at Army's Top Medical Facility," *Washington Post*, February 18, 2007, <http://www.lexis-nexis.com/>.
- [40] Cloud, "General Is Fired."
- [41] Priest and Hull, "Soldiers Face Neglect."
- [42] Jamie Reno, "I Want to Live for My Guys," *Newsweek*, November 10, 2007, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/69528>; Wounded Warrior Project, <http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/>. Strock talks about her experience at Walter Reed in Dan Ephron, "Forgotten Heroes," *Newsweek*, March 5, 2007, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/36601>.
- [43] Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*, 24.
- [44] Jordan, "Rhetorical Limits," 331.
- [45] Several visual examples have circulated and continue to circulate in popular media; see photos of amputees at the White House by Joyce Boghosian, republished on "A Day in the Life of President Bush," April 24, 2008, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/2006671/posts>; "Bryan Anderson on *Today*," *NBC's Today Show*, republished on "AndersonActive" personal YouTube profile, March 28, 2008, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJ1X-BAo\\_La0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJ1X-BAo_La0); "Turning Amputees into World-Class Athletes," *ABC World News*, republished on "Iscott7224" personal YouTube profile, June 2, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcW5YHKv1h4>. Veteran amputees are pictured playing baseball with *The New York Yankees* at Daylife Publishers, March 5, 2008, <http://www.daylife.com/photo/05EwgGybxm9SN>. Veteran amputees are pictured lifting weights in Gina Pace, "San Antonio's Quiet Battles," CBS News, October 17, 2005, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/10/17/eveningnews/main950639.shtml>; and Daylife Publishers, March 1, 2007, <http://www.daylife.com/photo/035KbyY2-TI5Ad>. They are pictured playing basketball at Daylife Publishers, March 1, 2007, <http://www.daylife.com/photo/01DbcTWbZqaNt>; and jogging with the president in Richard Benedetto, "Amputee Iraq Vet Fulfills Wish, Jogs with Bush," *USA Today*, June 27, 2006, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-06-27-bush-jog\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-06-27-bush-jog_x.htm).
- [46] DeLuca, "Unruly Arguments," 10.
- [47] Scholars in disability studies and cultural studies refer to figures pictured "overcoming" non-normative bodies through mobility as "supercrips." Russell Meeuf, "John Wayne as 'Supercrip': Disabled Bodies and the Construction of 'Hard' Masculinity in *The Wings of Eagles*," *Cinema Journal* 48 (2009): 88–113.
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- [55] Rieman, *Situation Room*.
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