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Reenactment and/as Political Form: Winter Soldiers Then and Now

Amy Partridge

The crimes against humanity, the war itself, might not have occurred if we, all of us, had not been brought up in a country permeated with racism, obsessed with communism, and convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that we are good and most other countries are inherently evil.

Al Hubbard, *Winter Soldier Investigation*

I would like to share with you how one goes about becoming a concentration camp guard without ever having really made many decisions. I was seventeen years old when I joined the Army National Guard in Michigan. I was living with friends. I decided to join the military November 20, 2001, because I had no other options. My family was poor. I was poor. I wanted to go to school. I was promised a significant amount of money for this purpose, which I have yet to receive.

Chris Arendt, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*

- 1 As Rebecca Schneider points out in *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, “re-enactment is a term that has entered into increased circulation in late twentieth and early twenty-first century art, theater and performance circles. The practice of re-playing or re-doing a precedent event, artwork, or act has exploded in performance-based art.”¹ Mark Tribe’s “The Port Huron Project”, which restages radical speeches from New Left movements of the 1960s and 70s at the same locations where they were originally delivered, is a case in point. Tribe selected speeches by César Chávez, Angela Davis, Stokely Carmichael and others on the basis of their relevance in and to the present, arguing that each “contain arguments, declarations, and calls to action that are equally evocative and vital today.”² The goal of the project, as Tribe describes it, was “to

point out with the help of art how much has changed, yet how much remains the same.”³ In other words, by restaging historic speeches, this project seeks to perform a temporal collapse that reveals that “then” is also “now” inasmuch as the urgencies of the past are still extant in the present.

- 2 In “Left-Wing Melancholy: Mark Tribe’s ‘The Port Huron Project’ and the Politics of Reenactment,” Paige Sarlin critiques this project as a form of “New Left-wing melancholy” that merely “fetishizes the history of the New Left as a way of avoiding addressing the present.”⁴ Functioning merely through “historical analogy”, the temporal collapse between “then” and “now” that Tribe’s project instantiates, Sarlin argues, works to elaborate itself not in relation to the specificity of the past or the present, but somewhere in between. As a result, she argues, it actually forecloses the possibilities of movement building in the present by rendering invisible the radical discontinuities between “then” and “now” and ignoring the complicated ways in which the legacies of New Left movements “then” nonetheless continue to shape our political imaginaries in the “now”. In her concluding remarks, Sarlin contrasts Tribe’s project to another contemporaneous restaging, the Iraq Veterans Against the War’s “Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan: Eyewitness Accounts of the Occupations”, which was modeled on the “Winter Soldier Investigation” that the Vietnam Veterans Against the War organized in 1971.⁵ Where Sarlin condemns “The Port Huron Project” as exemplary of the transformation of a “political project into an aesthetic or cultural practice”, she praises “Winter Solider Iraq and Afghanistan” for “reenacting organizing” itself and thus as a mode of reenactment “through which history can be repeated so as to disturb the present.”⁶
- 3 I take up where Sarlin leaves off to more fully consider the ways in which the Iraq Veteran’s Against the War’s 2008 Winter Soldier reenactment “disturb[s] the present”. Starting with the premise that New Left organizing strategies can be repurposed for the present, “Winter Soldier II” (as some of the media termed it) self-consciously re-enacts a political form from that era to make political claims in and for the present. In doing so, “Winter Soldier II” demands that we consider the similarities between the “then” and the “now”. This form of reenactment is premised, at least in part, on the assumption that we can and should draw comparisons between the war in Vietnam and the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. In practice, the similarities in the formal structure and stated purpose of both events and in the themes raised by those testifying “then” and “now” demands that we do so. In both cases, the stated purpose of the event was to reveal that wartime atrocities were a direct result of government policies, rather than the work of a few rogue soldiers. Organized as media events rather than “official” investigations, both the original WSI and “Winter Soldier II” arranged testimonies into panels, each of which included between 8-10 veterans, over the course of three days.⁷
- 4 Iraq Veteran’s Against the War (IVAW) was founded in July 2004 at the annual Veterans for Peace conference in Boston and currently has chapters in all fifty states, including six active duty chapters⁸, and a membership of over 1,800 veterans and active duty servicemen and women who have served since September 11, 2001 in the U.S. Military Service, National Guard, or Reserve. Their stated goal is “to mobilize the military community to withdraw its support for the war and occupation in Iraq”⁹ and they describe their mission as working “to build a service-member and veteran led movement that ends militarism by transforming ourselves, military culture and American society.”¹⁰ Since its inception, IVAW has re-purposed a number of the political forms initiated by

Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) to resist and protest the war in Vietnam from re-staging events in which returning soldiers toss their war medals to re-establishing a network of GI coffee houses near military bases. Their choice to re-stage VVAW's 1971 "Winter Soldier Investigation," (WSI) held in Detroit from January 31st to February 2nd, was part of this larger strategy. As their press release for the March 2008 event in Silver Spring, Maryland explained, "the event has been named Winter Soldier to honor a similar gathering 30 years ago of veterans of the Vietnam War."¹¹ In reenacting this political form, IVAW both pays homage to the "winter soldiers"¹² of an earlier era and inscribes "Winter Soldier II" (WSII) into a history of dissent. Like the Vietnam veterans of that time, veterans of the "War on Terror" have come home to tell the truth about the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan and make strategic use of the testimonial form introduced in the 1971 WSI to do so.

- 5 In this sense, of course, WSII is not the same kind of reenactment as "The Port Huron Project"; IVAW members do not reenact the testimonies that VVAW members offered at the original 1971 WSI. As a result, WSII also produces "then" and "now" as distinct, incomparable moments and renders visible the kinds of critiques that can be made, as well as those that cannot, in and through this political form in the 21st century. Of particular interest to me are the ways in which this reenactment brings to light the productive dissonances between "then" and "now" to reveal the conditions under which the discourse of gender and sexuality can (and cannot) be marshaled to critique militarism in a time of war. In the final section of the paper, I address how we should make sense of WSI's and WSII's divergent claims and assess their effects on IVAW's capacities to address the urgencies of the present.
- 6 I attended WSII. In addition to my own observations, I use IVAW's published and web-based documentation of these events and the 2011 documentary film *This Is Where We Take Our Stand*. I also use the published transcripts of the original 1971 WSI and the documentary footage of the event featured in the 1972 film *Winter Soldier* to explore the kinds of claims that were made then to those that are made now.

Standard Operating Procedure: Reenacting Dissent

- 7 In the opening panel on the "Legacy of GI Resistance" at the 2008 WSII, VVAW members who testified at the original WSI spoke to the importance of the 1971 event in contesting the contemporary portrayal of the Mai Lai massacre as an anomaly rather than as "standard operating procedure" in Vietnam. In 2008, the Abu Ghraib scandal was also being framed as the work of a "few bad apples" and IVAW members gathered at WSII to once again expose these atrocities as "standard operating procedure" by offering "an accurate account of what is really happening day in and day out, on the ground."¹³ In other words, one of the stated goals of both events was to collect soldier's testimonies to contest the official narrative and correct the historical record.
- 8 Reframing these atrocities as "standard operating procedure" requires VVAW and IVAW members to do more than describe the atrocities they witnessed and committed; it is only by reenacting their attitude towards their experiences while "in country" that they capture the ordinariness of these events. As Al Hubbard argues in the preface to the published testimonies from the 1971 WSI, war crimes are "committed by people who feel they have some kind of permission for what they do—even to the point of feeling righteous—and who commonly regard their victims as less than human."¹⁴ It is this

feeling of righteousness that many of the VVAW members consciously reenact in their testimonies. Consider, for instance, the following exchange in the documentary footage of the WSI: After one VVAW member has testified to the brutal rape of a Vietnamese woman, a reporter asks “did the men in your unit think it was alright to do anything to the Vietnamese?” Another VVAW member jumps in and effectively reenacts their attitude then and there in the here and now of the 1971 Investigation: “All Vietnamese were gooks and they were slat-eyes, zips, they were Orientals and they were inferior to us. We were Americans. We were the civilized people and, ah, you know, they, we didn’t give a shit about those people.”¹⁵ In other moments, however, we witness the attitude the men assumed “in country” colliding with their efforts to assume a new relationship to that experience. For example, in testifying to the murder of civilians in one Vietnamese village, one VVAW member explains that, “they killed another VC,” but then pauses and revises his statement: “not a VC but another person in the village.”¹⁶ Again and again in the documentary footage of the WSI we witness VVAW members fall into the language they used to make sense of their experience “then” but stop to revise and correct it to reflect their experience of these events “now.”

- 9 As a political form, in other words, testimonials of this kind simultaneously occupy two temporal moments. As in the original 1971 WSI, we bear witness to IVAW members attempts to both reenact their attitude towards their experience “in country” *and* their effort to re-constitute it in the here and now of testifying in 2008. Many begin their testimonies by describing how much they believed in the war and the military when they enlisted but often end their testimonies with apologies to the Iraqi citizens. Jon Michael Turner’s testimony is a case in point. He details his own attitude before and during his time “in country,” this way:

House Raids: . . . If the men of the household gave us problems, we’d take care of them any way we felt was necessary, whether it be choking them or slapping their head against the wall. On my wrist there is Arabic for “fuck you.” I got [the tattoo] put on my wrist just two weeks before we went to Iraq, because that was my choking hand and anytime I felt the need to take out aggression, I would go ahead and use it.

- 10 After ripping off his Purple Heart medal and tossing it to the ground, and ends his testimony with the following statement:

I just want to say that I am sorry for all the hate and destruction that I have inflicted on innocent people and am sorry for the hate and destruction that others have inflicted on innocent people. At one point it was okay, but reality has shown that it is not and this is happening . . . I am sorry for the things that I did. I am no longer the monster that I once was.¹⁷

- 11 In the two panels dedicated to the “Rules of Engagement” and to “Racism and the Dehumanization of the Enemy”, many IVAW members attempt to make sense of how, by what means, they became conduits for this “hate and destruction.” In testimony after testimony, they cite the inadequacies of their military training, which for example often included no training in even basic Arabic and “cultural competency” trainings that one IVAW member describes as “best summed up in a sentence: ‘Don’t touch the people of Iraq’s left hand. They wipe their ass with it.’”¹⁸ Most also testify to the racist indoctrination they received before and during their tours of duty, in particular the use of terms like “hagi,” “towel head,” “camel jockey” and “sand nigger” on the part of their commanding officers to describe all Iraqi and Afghani people. As Michael Prysner testifies

these “viciously racist terms” were re-introduced from the top down after September 11 into a military that had “seemed firmly dedicated to smashing any hint of racism.”¹⁹

- 12 Though most VVAW members also describe military training as a kind of indoctrination that prepares you to play “the role of professional marine, a killer whatever”²⁰, many point out that their training for this role, in fact, predated basic training. For example, the closing statement by VVAW member Don Duncan insists that we, the audience bearing witness to these testimonies, connect these atrocities not merely to successful military training, but to everyday life in cold war America, which he describes as “pre-basic training” in the following passage:

For those of you who have listened to this testimony, you might well be amazed at how our people – our men, our boys, our sons – could do some of these things that they described in this room. Otherwise normal individuals, creating terror, torture, destruction, wanton. How could they do this? How could they have been changed that dramatically in eight short weeks of basic training? I think the fact that so much can be done to so many by so few people is the greatest testament to the fact that our colleges, our high schools, our everyday life is nothing but pre-basic training . . . The men did not become racists when they entered the service. They grew up with it . . . The idea that the United States has a God-given right to go into any country and take out its raw materials at an advantage to ourselves is not something they learned in our schools. They learned it from their mothers, fathers, their sisters and their brothers, their uncles. They learned it from all of us.²¹

- 13 In the introduction to the published transcripts of the testimonies featured in the “Racism and Dehumanization of the Enemy” panels, IVAW reiterate a version of Duncan’s closing statement when they pose the following questions: “Why do these seemingly senseless killings occur? What makes them possible? What brings otherwise normal young men and women to the point of committing terrible atrocities?”²² But where Duncan posited everyday life in cold war America as a kind of “pre-basic training” to explain this phenomenon, here we are told that “the answer begins with the dehumanizing nature of military training itself” and the military’s reliance on a “pattern of abusive, reflexive, purposely dehumanizing training” to create the conditions which make it possible “for normal, morally upright and even idealistic people to perform acts of destructive cruelty.”²³
- 14 Importantly, IVAW points out that this training was developed after World War II and first successfully implemented during the Vietnam War.²⁴ Here IVAW draws explicit parallels between “then” and “now”, suggesting that the atrocities committed in the “War on Terror” are an extension of those committed in Vietnam. But IVAW’s analysis of the root causes of wartime atrocities also exposes the profound differences between “then” and “now” in terms of the kinds of critiques that can be made in and through this political form in 2008, given the particularities of the present. For instance, in WSII many (though by no means all) of the testimonies are premised on the distinction between the principled and patriotic “warrior” and a military that has grown increasingly out of sync with our core American values under George W. Bush, after 9/11, through its engagement in “the wrong war.” One IVAW member, featured in the film *This is Where We Take Our Stand*, which documents the organizing efforts of IVAW members in preparation for WSII, makes this point explicitly, arguing that “the military is not a bad organization”; It is “a good organization but engaged in the wrong fight.”²⁵ But this claim is also implicit in the testimonies above, which suggest that better “cultural competency training,” or more principled commanding officers, might have made all the difference. Moreover, many (but again not all) of those testifying explicitly identify as patriotic and capable

“warriors” both incensed and devastated at having been sent into an impossible situation. That WSII is focused on recuperating, rather than refusing, the subject position of the “warrior” is perhaps most evident in the motto reprinted on all their materials: “Honor the Warrior, not the War.”

“I Felt Like Crying”: Restaging Winter Soldier in the 21st Century

- 15 Even more revealing of the distinctions between the “then” and the “now”, are the divergent claims about the gendered logics of militarism that structure the critiques made in and through this political form in 1971 and in 2008. As I demonstrate below, VVAW members offer a through-going critique of the contemporary mandates of masculinity as part and parcel of the “pre-basic training” that enabled them to commit wartime atrocities. IVAW members, on the other hand, tend to contrast everyday life in a nation committed to equal opportunity to their devastating experiences in a military that is still committed to “old ways of thinking about gender and sexuality.”²⁶ These distinct deployments of the discourses of gender and sexuality reveal both the importance of these discourses to VVAW members’ reappraisal of everyday life in cold-war America as well as their limits in making sense of the conditions of citizenship in the 21st century.
- 16 Some of the most remarkable moments in the 1971 WSI are those in which VVAW members foreground their reenactments of cold-war-era masculinity in daily life then – before and during the war – and enact a kind of coming to consciousness about the limits of the mandates of masculinity in and through the act of reflecting back on this in the here and now of testifying. For example, although he joined the army in lieu of serving a prison sentence, Scott Camil explains, “I wanted to go into the service because I really believed the war was right. And I think one of the main things was I wanted, I wanted to see for myself whether I was really a man or not and I figured that’s how I could find out.”²⁷ Similarly, Mark Lenix explains that “When I first entered the service, I thought, uh, well shoot I will. That sounds like a good idea. I will be a hero. Just think of this I’ll have a rock hard body and, golly. Because when I went into the service that’s where my head was at, you know. I was the average middle-class American, it was, you know, just the thing to do.”²⁸
- 17 It is precisely this “average middle-class American” citizenship and the concomitant construction of the “hard,” “emotionless” male as the model citizen that VVAW members find themselves confronting, and ultimately deconstructing, in and through the act of testifying. Consider, for example, this exchange between Camil and a female reporter featured in the documentary footage of the WSI:
- Q: When did it first get into your head that something was really wrong?
 Camil: I decided all the things I did really wasn’t right . . . when I talk about it, you know, I laugh all the time, you know because I don’t want people to think I’m not a man in this kind of way that I’ve been brought up, again that you’re supposed to be man and that men are hard and that they don’t have feelings and stuff.
 Q: Has the concept of what a man is changed?
 Camil: Uh, yes, [...] like I had some sensitivity courses and it got where you know sometimes guys would cry and, uh, you know like sometimes I felt like crying. [...] but I’d start to and I’d think about something else [...] even though I know that I shouldn’t think of a man the way it is I just can’t change. I try to change but I still,

you know, try to be, uh, brave and things like that rather than [pause] and hard and emotionless.²⁹

- 18 It is clear in this exchange that, for Camil, critiquing the United States' role in Vietnam calls into question his status as a man and requires him to confront his performance of cold-war-era masculinity before and during his deployments as well, because it is this gendered embodiment of a "hard" and "emotionless" stance that enabled him to commit atrocities in Vietnam.
- 19 Importantly, Mark Lenix, who served with Camil, testifies to his transformation at the WSI when he explains that, "Scott was like I was . . . that's why it was so good to see Scott now and see that he was really a human being again instead of being a soldier, you know, because now Scott has wants and needs and desires... Well now I can see that things are starting to happen for both Scott and for myself."³⁰ In other words, the promise of these testimonies is not only that the realities of the on-the-ground atrocities will be written into the historical record but the fact that the contemporary cultural construction of the "hard" and "emotionless" man as the model citizen, who could be marshaled to carry out these atrocities, is itself open for question. It is on this basis that these testimonies offer the promise of no more Vietnams.
- 20 Although issues of gender and sexuality are more consciously foregrounded at WSII, IVAW members' testimonies tend to be more concerned with discrimination on the basis of sex and sexual orientation within the military than with the gendered logics of militarism itself. In this context, the discourses of gender and sexuality are deployed to claim the "warrior" as an honorable subject position that must be made available to all who would choose to inhabit it, regardless of their sex or sexual orientation. This is particularly evident in the testimonies included in the panel entitled "Divide and Conquer: Gender and Sexuality in the Military". For example, many of the women on the "Gender and Sexuality in the Military" panel offer important (and often devastating) testimony of their experiences of discrimination and sexual assault in the military but identify this as a problem primarily because it undermines their status as capable "warriors" in their own right³¹. This identification with the subject position of the (masculine-identified) "warrior" is perhaps most starkly evident in Wendy Barranco's testimony. She testifies to the fact that "through [my] whole deployment I was harassed every single day, I dreaded everyday I went to work" and points out that "it is extremely difficult to do your job proficiently, efficiently, and correctly when there is someone that you have to look out for, your own people, your own comrades". Near the end of her testimony she states, "I joined trying to be patriotic and I joined to try to do something for my country and I joined [pause]". But then she begins to cry and interrupts herself, saying, "Crap, I hate to be the girl"³². The difference between Barranco's desire to maintain the hard, emotionless stance of the warrior during the act of testifying and VVAW members Camil and Lennix's attempt to overcome this stance in and through the act of testifying is striking. Importantly, where Camil and Lennix describe the ability to cry as an expression of "wants and needs and desires" and as evidence of their transformation from a soldier into a "human being," in 2008 the impulse to cry is experienced as feminizing and thus as a negation of one's status as a patriotic and competent masculine-identified "warrior" able to do the job "proficiently, efficiently, and correctly."³³
- 21 In other words, though the inclusion of a panel on gender and sexuality in 2008 suggests that WSII will more fully elaborate VVAW members' critique of the mandate to assume

the “hard” and “emotionless” stance of the “warrior” and the gendered logics that underwrite this subject position, it does not. Instead IVAW members appeal to our assumed shared commitment to gay rights and equal opportunity for women in the post-Vietnam-era in order to critique a military culture that is still committed to “old ways of thinking about gender and sexuality.”³⁴ In doing so, these testimonies reclaim the subject position of the masculine-identified “warrior” for *all* Americans and ultimately recuperate it as a model of citizenship in and for the 21st century. Rather than using the 2008 reenactment of the original WSI to point to the differences in ways of thinking about gender and sexuality “then” and “now,” however, I would argue that we should instead attend to the radical restructuring of both the military and the workforce more generally since the Vietnam era in order to explain the difference in the kinds of political claims made in 1971 and 2008.

How One Becomes a Concentration Camp Guard: Disturbing the Present

- 22 The war in Vietnam depended on the draft to staff the military, while the “War on Terror” depends on an “all volunteer army” of poor Americans who join the military as an antidote to the increasing precaritization of American life in the 21st century. In their recruitment materials the military promotes itself as one of the last good jobs in America, one that not only meets the basic needs of its workforce—food, clothing, shelter, and education—but also promises training and expertise in marketable skills. In other words, the military promises a dignified means of securing “the good life” and seems to offer viable career options, both of which have all but disappeared, especially for the poor. As a result, as IVAW member Garrett Reppenhagen points out, “There’s a different type of soldier today. They’re career soldiers. They’re professional soldiers” who assume a different attitude towards their deployments, which he describes as follows:

The men and women I served with—for many of them that was their career, that was their job, and they took honor in that. They didn’t want to give that up . . . There are many benefits available to these men and women. They’re offered GI bills for college. They’re given health insurance. They’re given a nice safe base to live on where their spouses can shop at the PX or the commissary. Their kids are going to school in a safe, healthy environment, and that’s hard to give up as well.³⁵

- 23 As a result, it should not be surprising that those who join the military now often frame their critique of it in terms of miserable workplace conditions which imperil their status, and comprise their sense of themselves, as patriotic, competent “warriors,” as Barranco does above.
- 24 It is important to note that their testimonies are often most concerned with exposing how these conditions degrade, diminish and often ultimately destroy the competent (masculine-identified) “warrior.” Kristofer Goldsmith’s testimony is exemplary in this regard. Pointing to a picture of himself before he deployed, he says, “This is the proud soldier who enlisted just after Christmas in 2003 to support and defend the Constitution of the United States”³⁶. He goes on to describe both his excellent training record and the commendations he received during his deployment in Iraq. But he then turns to his harrowing experiences with PTSD upon returning home, his despair at being re-deployed as a result of the imposition of “stop-loss” despite having fulfilled the conditions of his contract, his suicide attempt and his ultimate discharge from the military, which charged

him with “misconduct” because he was unable to return to Iraq with his unit while “handcuffed to a bed in the hospital” after his suicide attempt and ultimately rescinded his college benefits as a result.³⁷ He ends his testimony by describing his transformation from a proud warrior to a mere pizza delivery boy:

That’s what I am now, a pizza delivery boy. I was a sergeant, I was a leader, I was a trainer, and I was very well thought of. I was a very good soldier. Now I’m a pizza delivery boy who works once a week because that’s the only job where I can call in a couple hours before and say, ‘I’m still at the VA, I’m waiting in line. I’m sorry I can’t come in for a couple hours.’ That’s what stop-loss does³⁸.

- 25 In this instance and in a number of the other testimonies at WSII, I would argue that “honoring the warrior” is an act of recuperation that is as much about demanding a fair contract and decent workplace conditions as it is about “honoring” the hyper-masculine culture of the military. In this sense, then, IVAW’s call to “honor the warrior, not the war” is similar to the now famous 1968 Memphis sanitation worker’s claim that “I am a man.”³⁹ In both cases, masculinity functions as a synecdoche for humanness and is marshaled as a site of inviolable dignity and recuperated as the basis upon which demeaning labor conditions can be critiqued as both immoral and unnatural while simultaneously framing these conditions as fundamentally emasculating. However, whereas the assertion that “I am a man” on the part of black, southern workers during the Civil Rights era demanded that black workers subject to Jim Crow receive the same opportunities and advantages as their white counterparts, in the present moment, when most American workers must contend with an increasingly precarious existence, the call to “honor the warrior” suggests a melancholic attachment to conditions of work and modes of life that have all but disappeared⁴⁰.
- 26 In the end, the value of this reenactment of a New Left “organizing strategy” to make political claims in and for the present is that it renders visible the potentials as well as the limits of this mode of organizing in addressing the urgencies of the present. WSII draws important parallels between “then” and “now” and in so doing demonstrates the value of a testimonial form initiated in 1971 to critique the war in Vietnam for the present. In once again offering “an accurate account of what is really happening day in and day out, on the ground,”⁴¹ IVAW members are able to expose the underlying logics and contest the official verities of the “war on terror.” Precisely because WSII self-consciously reenacts a political form from an earlier era, however, it also reveals the ways in which the particularities of the present limit the kinds of critiques that can be made in and through this political form in the current moment. During the war in Vietnam, the draft configured military service for all men of a certain age as both a stipulation of citizenship and as a gauge of one’s ability to embody the “hard” and “emotionless” stance upon which the claim to American exceptionalism depended. As such, VVAW members’ critique of the war in Vietnam could become the basis upon which to articulate a more thorough-going critique of contemporary citizenship narratives and to contest the gendered logics of citizenship as it was configured “then.” Under present conditions, in which military careers and contracts serve as an important (and often as the only available) antidote to the increasing precaritization of American life, IVAW members’ testimonies instead expose the discriminatory and degrading workplace conditions they face as soldiers employed to do a job “proficiently, efficiently, and correctly.”⁴² Doing so, however, depends on the recuperation, rather than a refusal, of the very rhetoric of American exceptionalism that was used to justify the occupations.⁴³ This stance, of course, forecloses a more thorough-going examination of our actual commitment to

equal opportunity for all in the post-Vietnam era but it also fails to contend with the ways in which the institution of an “all volunteer army,” in which the soldier has become an employee, participates in a broader transformation of our conception of citizenship itself.

- 27 The WSII reenactment, however, also points to possible futures. We should attend to Goldsmith’s despair at being reduced to a “pizza delivery boy,” Arendt’s continued inability to secure the “good life,” and Barranco’s efforts to hide her tears despite the impossible situation she finds herself confronting. They are each negotiating the conditions of precarious life. Under these conditions there is no shame in tears. On the contrary, our tears might be the basis upon which to form new coalitions around our shared wants, needs and desires, rather than our conditions of employment, and to develop new organizing strategies that enable us to once again imagine a society where the needs of the people come first.

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NOTES

1. Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 2. NDLR : les références bibliographiques complètes des ouvrages cités en note figurent dans la section « Bibliographie » du présent article.
2. Creative Time, “Mark Tribe”.
3. Creative Time, “Mark Tribe”.
4. Paige Sarlin, “Left-Wing Melancholy,” 141.
5. The 1971 “Winter Soldier Investigation” (WSI) was sponsored by the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and consisted of 109 veterans who testified to the war crimes they had committed or witnessed in Vietnam between 1963 and 1970. WSI was held in Detroit, Michigan from January 31, 1971 to February 2, 1971 and was intended show the direct relationship between military policies and war crimes in Vietnam.
6. Paige Sarlin, “Left-Wing Melancholy,” 143, 153.
7. It is noteworthy that both events include two panels on “racism” despite the fact that the WSI panels were primarily organized by unit rather than by theme as in “Winter Soldier II.” In the 1971 WSI these panels were titled “Racism” and “Third World” and in “Winter Soldier II” they were titled “Racism and the Dehumanization of War.”
8. Though most IVAW members have completed the terms of their contract and no longer serve in the military, some members are still employed by the military and thus are designated “active duty” members.
9. IVAW, “Founding of IVAW”
10. IVAW, “Mission, Values, and Vision”
11. IVAW, “Iraq Veterans: its our turn to tell our stories”
12. The term “winter soldier” was first introduced in 1971 by the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. In his 1971 “Statement to the Senate Committee of Foreign Relations,” John Kerry explains the choice of the term in this way: “The term Winter Soldier is a play on words of Thomas Paine's in 1776 when he spoke of the Sunshine Patriots and summertime soldiers who deserted at Valley Forge because the going was rough. We have come here to Washington because we feel we have to be winter soldiers now. We could come back to this country, we could be quiet, we could hold our silence, we could not tell what went on in Vietnam, but we feel because of what threatens this country, not the reds, but the crimes which we are committing that threaten it, that we have to speak out.”
13. IVAW, “Winter Soldier”; see also IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 4 & 7; and VVAW, *Winter Soldier Investigation*, xiii.
14. VVAW, *Winter Soldier Investigation*, xiii.
15. Sachs et. al., *Winter Soldier*, DVD.
16. Sachs et. al., *Winter Soldier*, DVD.
17. IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 26-27.
18. IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 64. Michael Totten is the one testifying.
19. IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 98.
20. Sachs et. al., *Winter Soldier*, DVD.
21. VVAW, *Winter Soldier Investigation*, 167-8.
22. IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 59.

23. IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 59-61. This final point is made by Stanford University psychologist Philip Zimbardo and quoted by IVAW.
24. IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 61
25. Zeiger et. al., *This is Where We Take Our Stand*, DVD.
26. IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 138. Jeff Key makes this claim in his testimony on the “Divide to Conquer: Gender and Sexuality in the Military” panel.
27. Sachs et. al., *Winter Soldier*, DVD.
28. Sachs et. al., *Winter Soldier*, DVD.
29. Sachs et. al., *Winter Soldier*, DVD. I transcribed this interview directly from the footage featured in *Winter Soldier* and tried to accurately represent Camil’s hesitations in response to this line of questioning to capture VVAW members’ coming to consciousness around the mandates of masculinity in this setting.
30. Sachs et. al., *Winter Soldier*, DVD.
31. For example, after detailing the fact that she was not promoted at the same pace or given the same opportunities to “engage the enemy” on patrols as her male counterparts, Abby Hiser ends her testimony stating that, “Overall, I’ve learned how to overcome and succeed in the military despite the many obstacles. I feel women in the military should be judged on an individual basis on performance alone . . . We work among men doing just as men do. We deserve the same respect” (IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 125). Similarly, Jen Hogg, testifies to “male soldiers trying to do my job for me” which, “gave the impression that women are weak and unable to do their jobs” and belied the fact that she was herself “a capable mechanic” (IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 122). Jen Hogg and Jeff Key, the two openly gay IVAW members on the panel, make similar claims about the effects of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 121-123; 138-139).
32. Wendy Barranco, “Testimony.” This excerpt is transcribed from the web documentation of her testimony rather than the published transcription, which does not include this aside.
33. Importantly, at the actual event, Barranco’s statement that “I hate to be the girl!” elicited comments from the other panelists who vetted this claim and its implications. You can view this exchange on the IVAW Winter Solider website.
34. IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 138.
35. IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 207. Of course, many of those deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan did not join the military as a career, but as a means to access resources otherwise out of reach to poor Americans, such as education, job training, and healthcare. As Camilo Mejia points out in his concluding remarks to WSII, the “global war on terror” is being waged primarily by “working Americans, people of color, immigrants, the uninsured and uneducated: in short people with lots of needs but very little socioeconomic power” (IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 214).
36. IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 185.
37. IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 186 and 189-190.
38. IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 190.
39. During the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike close to 1300 black sanitation workers walked off the job to protest discriminatory practices and dangerous working conditions. Numerous national Civil Rights Movement leaders and organizations participated over the course of the three-month strike. The strikers’ signs, which read “I Am a Man,” referenced a history of resistance to the racist use of the term “boy” to signify black Americans second class status that dates back to the abolitionist movement.
40. As these testimonies reveal, many poor Americans are confronted with the choice to accept conditions of “bare life” or to secure necessary resources by imposing this condition upon others as part the security apparatus in the “global war on terror.” In Christopher Arendt’s testimony,

which details his deployment as a prison guard in Guantanamo Bay, he points out that he joined the military at seventeen because “I had no other options. My family was poor, I was poor, and I wanted to go to school” (IVAW, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*, 82).

41. IVAW, “Winter Soldier.”

42. Wendy Barranco, “Testimony.”

43. Just as the occupations were defended as “liberating” and “freeing” the Afghani and Iraqi people from repressive regimes whose oppression of women and sexual minorities were posited as in direct contrast to our own commitment to equality for all, many IVAW members’ testimonies depend on their identification as patriots compelled to bring the military back into sync with these core American value.

ABSTRACTS

In 2008, Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) testified to the on-the-ground realities of the War on Terror at “Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan: Eyewitness Accounts of the Occupations.” “Winter Soldier II” (WSII), as the media called it, was modeled on the 1971 “Winter Soldier Investigation” (WSI) organized by Vietnam Veterans Against in the War (VVAW). As a reenactment of a New Left political form to make claims in and for the present, WSII demands that we draw parallels between “then” and “now” by making strategic use of the testimonial form introduced by VVAW in 1971. But it also reveals the critiques that can (and cannot) be made in and through this political form in 2008, given the particularities of the present. Examining the distinct deployments of discourses of gender and sexuality to critique the gendered logics of militarism “then” and “now,” reveals both their importance to VVAW members’ reappraisal of everyday life in cold-war America as well as their limits in making sense of the conditions of citizenship in the 21st century.

En 2008, les Vétérans d’Irak contre la Guerre (IVAW) témoignent des réalités du terrain de la Guerre contre la Terreur lors de “Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan: Eyewitness Accounts of the Occupations.” “Winter Soldier II” (WSII), comme les médias l’ont appelé, a été créé sur le modèle de l’“Enquête Winter Soldier” de 1971 organisée par les Vétérans du Vietnam contre la Guerre (VVAW). Proposant un reenactment de la forme politique de la Nouvelle Gauche pour formuler des revendications dans et pour le présent, le Winter Soldier II nous propose de faire des parallèles entre l’“avant” et le “maintenant” en utilisant de façon stratégique la forme du témoignage introduite par VVAW en 1971. Mais le reenactment révèle les critiques qui peuvent (et ne peuvent pas) être faites par cette forme politique en 2008, étant donné les particularités du présent. En examinant les développements distincts des discours du genre et de la sexualité pour critiquer les logiques genrées du militarisme “avant” et “maintenant”, on observe l’importance de ces discours dans la réévaluation de la vie quotidienne dans les Etats-Unis de la guerre froide par les membres de VVAW ainsi que leurs limites pour donner un sens aux conditions de citoyenneté du 21e siècle.

INDEX

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