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In order to win wars, the United States Marine Corps must perform the highly difficult task of training recruits to kill when and whom they should in combat. This training is not primarily a matter of skills, but a matter of promoting an *attitude* that will facilitate strategic—not indiscriminate—killing. In shaping recruits, the Corps must not strip their agency away entirely, since they need Marines who can think clearly and quickly in the fog of combat, but they must mitigate those parts of recruits' agency that would keep them from killing when and whom they should. Using rhetoric that falls between coercion and suggestion, therefore, they persuade recruits to become part of the body of the Marine Corps and to take on a Marine *ethos* that is neither too aggressive nor too restrained. Through critiques of such concepts as bodily persuasion, agency, understandings of cause and effect, and the rhetorical situation, my analysis uses complexity theory and neuroscience along with rhetorical scholarship to explain how the Corps uses knowledge of recruits' physical perceptual systems to persuade them to adopt the Marine *ethos*.

THE EMBODIED RHETORIC OF RECRUIT TRAINING  
IN THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

To my parents, without whose help I could not have finished my degree,  
and to Khadar, with whom I now begin a new phase of life.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Rachel Lynne Bowman has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION: AGGRESSION, RESTRAINT, AND  
THE RHETORIC OF TRAINING

**The Problem and the Solution; or, How to Persuade Marines to Walk a Line**

Since the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. military has initiated a number of programs and guidelines designed to train its fighters to be “ready each day to be greeted with either a handshake or a hand grenade,” as described in the 2006 Army and Marine Corps counterinsurgency manual (n.p. Foreword). United States service men and women face high levels of unpredictability and ambiguity in most of today’s conflicts. The manual warns that soldiers and Marines can easily “fall victim to the enormous pressures associated with prolonged combat against elusive, unethical, and indiscriminate foes” and that effective leaders must “know when to inspire and embolden their Soldiers and Marines and when to enforce restraint and discipline” (7-2). This need for balance between aggression and restraint has been a persistent theme in U.S. military training, and it is one that calls for rhetorical analysis.

On one end of the continuum is the need to train troops to be more aggressive, more willing to shoot to kill. In 1947, World War II Army General S. L. A. Marshall claimed that only twenty-five percent of “well-trained and campaign-seasoned troops” actually fired their weapons at the enemy during combat—even when they themselves were in danger (n.p., Chapter 5). Marshall’s study touched off serious debates within the

Army, which in the 1950s resulted in “a training revolution” designed to make greater numbers of fighters shoot to kill (Roxborough 126). That is, after major debates over Marshall’s research and other perceptions that firing ratios were not high enough, the Army instituted the Trainfire system, which, among other changes, used realistic human-shaped targets that popped up into the field of view and dropped when hit instead of static bull’s-eye targets, in an effort to condition soldiers to fire at humans (Emerson 60). Army Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman has built on Marshall’s work, analyzing why so many soldiers have declined to fire at the enemy, not just in World War II, but throughout history. Grossman’s transhistorical study examines firing ratios dating back to the Civil War and further, claiming that each human carries a fundamental aversion to killing other humans, that “despite an unbroken tradition of violence and war, man is not by nature a killer” (n.p. Introduction to Revised Edition). Marshall’s research methods have been heavily debated (Spiller 63-71; Chambers), and Grossman’s analysis has also been subjected to some criticism (Glenn; Engen), but as I hope will become clear in this project, current training attests to the fact that killing people in battle is difficult, and not just because of the skills involved. Being willing to kill in battle is no easy thing for most people.

Still, strong emotions like anger or fear can press humans into a killing attitude, which presents difficulties on the other end of the spectrum from those Marshall identified. For example, former Marine Tyler Boudreau describes his time in Iraq as one in which personal grievance fueled the desire to kill to the extent that it jeopardized the mission:

2004, the year I was deployed to Iraq, was a truly violent time. The killing on all sides was rampant. Our own casualties mounted quickly, predominantly from the ubiquitous Improvised Explosive Devices (a.k.a. roadside bombs). I remember clearly the first Marine they brought back to base with his skull broken open by shrapnel. And even more clearly than that, I remember the hatred churning in my gut for those who did it. The trouble was that we didn't actually know who did it. It was difficult not to make the entire Iraqi population the collective scapegoat for this one Marine's death. As our frustration swelled, our operations shifted conspicuously from humanitarian (stability and nation-building) to a fierce battle of wills with the insurgents and, by definition, with the populace in which they concealed themselves. The more casualties we took, the heavier our hand became with the locals, and consequently the more recalcitrant they grew. (n.p.)

Boudreau describes himself as filled with powerful incentive to inflict damage without knowing where to inflict it. This example clearly demonstrates the potential for indiscriminate, overly aggressive violence. It also demonstrates the critical need to keep such potential in check, not only for ethical reasons, but also for tactical ones. Killing Iraqi civilians clearly hindered the effectiveness of the mission and escalated violence. What kind of rhetoric can work to mitigate this potential for aggression?

In order to keep its fighters from both extremes—from killing in an overly aggressive, undisciplined way and from declining to kill altogether—the military must train its service men and women to adopt a professional killing attitude. I use the word “professional” in order to mark this kind of approach to killing not only as something one does for pay, but as something one is trained to do in a particular, expert way. A professionally trained approach is not governed by instinct or personal choice, but by an attitude accepted by others in the profession as the most effective for the job at hand. In the case of professional members of the military, the preferred attitude in combat is “calm and rational,” as former Marine Captain Nathaniel Fick says. Describing the difference

between the untrained civilian and the military professional, Fick claims that there is a “predatory element that results from military training, which you don’t see in civilians, unless they’re psychopaths (in a clinical sense).” Humans do not naturally stalk each other in a calculated way, says Fick; only psychopaths and trained members of the military can kill strategically without being overwhelmed.

How does this training for professional killing happen? I propose that military training is highly rhetorical, even though such training is far from the classical rhetorical form of oratory; in fact, military training offers a perfect place to understand the nature and the limits of persuasive power, which rests between coercion and suggestion. Persuasion, after all, is fundamentally about getting an audience willingly to do what the rhetor wants. The essential work of military training is to get troops to kill when and whom they should in combat. To accomplish this goal in the face of some of humankind’s strongest taboos and instincts, in a setting where the stakes are life and death, military training attempts an extremely difficult and lasting kind of persuasion. It aims to create a permanent change in a person’s most fundamental habitual attitudes toward the world. United States Marine Corps (USMC) recruit training, which operates under the slogan “Once a Marine, always a Marine,” is an especially vivid example of the rhetoric of military training.

To clarify what I mean by rhetoric in this project—especially rhetoric as opposed to mere force, which can also be used to get an audience to do what a person wants—it may be helpful here to observe Stephen R. Yarbrough’s Pragmatist distinctions among actual force, rhetorical force, and rhetorical power. *Actual force* is the capacity to make

things happen in the physical world. This force could be in the form of direct physical coercion, as when someone grabs a person's hand and physically forces him or her to perform a given task, or indirect but immediate force, as in the proverbial gun to the head. *Rhetorical force* is "actual force deferred" (347), or the audience's belief that the rhetor is telling the truth or has the capacity to enforce a particular command. In boot camp, for example, the Drill Instructor's (DI's) capacity to make recruits do pushups when they have disobeyed orders, under threat of further punishment, is an example of rhetorical force. If the recruits believe the DI has the capacity for force, actual force need not be used. In fact, the DI's position is stronger when he or she *does not* use actual force. As Yarbrough says, we credit rhetorical force to a speaker "to the extent that we believe in her capacity to avoid using force" (348).

*Rhetorical power* is yet another step away from actual force, and yet a stronger capacity; it is distinguished from rhetorical force by its ability to change how a whole group of people operates, and it can impact motive. The essential feature of rhetorical power is the ability to convince us that *other members of the rhetor's audience* will see the rhetor's words as true, or follow his or her commands, even if we don't. In Yarbrough's words, "if we believe that *others* will believe what a speaker says is true (whether we do or not) and that they will act on that belief, we credit the speaker's persuasiveness" (347 emphasis in original). The salient point is no longer the rhetor's perceived capacity to enforce his or her commands, but a belief in the community's acceptance of them. The distinction is clear in Yarbrough's illustration of rhetorical force as a speed limit, which is backed by the force of an impending ticket, and rhetorical

power as the directive to drive on the right side of the road, which is backed by our belief that those coming toward us will obey the directive and drive on *their* right side of the road. The decision about which side of the road to drive on is arbitrary, but we accept it because we see that others will also accept it. In other words, the fact that others have been convinced changes the real-world situation and prompts us to act in such a way as to avoid being hit by other cars (349).

The other crucial distinction among these forms of influence emerges in relation to their capacity to shape our subsequent motivations. Rhetorical force operates within a person's already-established frame of reference, while rhetorical power has the capacity to change that frame. Rhetorical power can therefore change how people are motivated to act within the new frame (Yarbrough 349). For example, in the speeding-ticket-as-force scenario, we must weigh our existing desire to get somewhere faster against our existing desire to avoid paying a fine. In boot camp, this kind of rhetorical force comes into play when, for example, recruits choose to rappel down a tower to avoid looking weak in front of other members of their platoon (Butler)—the desire to avoid being seen as weak existed already. But with rhetorical power, a rhetor can put new values in place by changing a frame of reference. In the question of which side of the road to drive on, any new situation in which a different rhetorically powerful directive is in place (for example, the laws of Great Britain) will make drivers want to change their habit of driving on the right. As I show below, the USMC exercises this kind of power to change values during recruit training.

The reason rhetorical power can change a frame of reference, and a thus a motive, is that a whole group of people is acting as if the new frame is true, and therefore investing in its truth. This communal change of reference frame is exactly what happens when Marine recruits join the body of the Marine Corps. In boot camp, individual frames of reference become less relevant and the whole community becomes involved in upholding the rhetorical power of the institution. By the end of boot camp, DIs need no longer resort to force but can use rhetorical power, and the new Marines *want* to act like Marines.

How do the DIs get this power? Partly through force, it is true. Yarbrough writes that “crediting a speaker with actual force increases her rhetorical force, while crediting a speaker with rhetorical force increases her rhetorical power” (348). This amplification process does occur in boot camp, as DIs start out with actual force and move through rhetorical force into rhetorical power. By the end of training, actual force has been basically phased out. Rhetorical force is still in play for those who need it: there are still rules with corresponding punishments. But if the Corps continued to rely only on force throughout the recruit’s term of service, very little could be accomplished.<sup>1</sup> The Corps relies heavily on rhetorical power to ready its Marines to kill when and whom they should in combat.

While rhetorical power may be bolstered by actual or rhetorical force, it also includes all the elements scholars generally see as part of rhetoric—such as the rhetorical

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<sup>1</sup> Some militaries do use continuing force to make their soldiers go into battle. Russian officers, for example, have long had the authority to shoot “cowards” on the spot

canons, the rhetorical triangle, *kairos*, appeals to *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*, Burkean identification, and so on. Particularly important in USMC recruit training is the alteration of the recruit's *ethos* through identification with the body of the Marine Corps. Rhetorical power derives from an ability to make a member of an audience believe that other members of that audience find the rhetor's words to be true; as will become clear in this project, the Marines strengthen that rhetorical power by emphasizing group unity among their audience of recruits.

While basic training in other branches of the military emphasizes the teaching of skills or tactical thinking, the USMC's primary objective in recruit training is to get recruits to see themselves as Marines. The training recruits receive in other branches varies based on their eventual military occupation, but all enlisted Marines go through the same training at one of two recruit depots, in Parris Island, South Carolina, or in San Diego, California. Drill instructors swear an oath to create "basically trained Marines, fully indoctrinated in love of Corps and country" (Marines website). Journalist Thomas Ricks, who wrote *Making the Corps* after following a platoon through training, finds that "Marines Corps basic training is more a matter of cultural indoctrination than of teaching soldiering, which comes later . . . Before they can learn to fight, they must learn to be Marines" (37). Other services focus more on skills, as opposed to values and perceptions, than the Marine Corps. Army Colonel Johnny Brooks, then commander of Fort Benning's infantry training brigade, told Ricks in an interview, "I think Parris Island does exactly what the Marines want it to do . . . It instills discipline, the values of the Corps, and how to wear a uniform, which is very important to the Corps—they have a lot of

uniforms.<sup>2</sup> But they don't train infantrymen at Parris Island [as the Army does at Fort Benning] . . . What they do is turn a civilian into a Marine" (175). While Fort Benning focuses on the skills and tactical knowledge needed by infantrymen, the Marines focus on getting recruits to see themselves as part of their elite band of fighters. In his popular book about the USMC, *First to Fight*, Marine Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak describes what is often called "the transformation" of boot camp (J. Durham; Parris Island Museum) with a kind of reverence:

In the Marines, recruit training is the genesis of the enduring sense of brotherhood that characterizes the Corps. In that twelve-week period, an almost mystical alchemy occurs. Young adults from diverse areas of the country and backgrounds are immersed in an environment wherein they are able to perceive, understand and finally accept as dogma the essential Marine Corps virtues. (159)

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<sup>2</sup> This inter-service dig at the Marines' predilection for uniforms covers well-worn ground, and the Marines *are* rather proud of their uniforms. In one bit of Marine Corps lore, archaeologists discover some new scrolls detailing an alternate creation story, in which the Divine Authority creates soldiers, airmen, and sailors, and then his masterpiece, the US Marines, in his own image. Then he creates uniforms:

"The Divine Authority gave these new and perfect creatures of Divinity practical uniforms so that they might wage wars against the forces of Satan and other evils. He gave them wear-hardy service uniforms for their daily work and training so they might be kept sharp and ready.

"The Divine Authority created special uniforms of evening dress so that Marines would look elegant, sharp, stylish, and handsome as they escorted their ladies on Saturday nights, and would just damn well impress the hell out of everybody. . . .

"But the Divine Authority wasn't happy. Something was still missing. What about Me, He thought. The answer struck Him. In the course of His labors He had forgotten one thing—He had forgotten to create a set of dress blues for Himself. He did not have His own Marine uniform.

"But then the Divine Authority thought about it, pondered over it, and considered it some more. Centuries later He made a decision. He would NOT create His own set of dress blues. "Not everybody can be a United States Marine," he sighed. The Divine Authority rested" (Taylor Appendix 3 n.p.).

This is rhetoric as identification in Kenneth Burke's sense of the term, as the creation of consubstantiality and its consequent alteration of perceptions. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke writes that a person identifies with another "insofar as their interests are joined" or "if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so" (20). Further, "To identify A with B is to make A 'consubstantial' with B" (21). So when A identifies with B, A becomes of one substance with B, even while they are still distinct, the way children are of one substance with, yet still distinct from, their parents. Rhetoric, then, is an attempt to induce identification between groups of people who are not yet consubstantial. Burkean consubstantiality highlights rhetorical power's ability to influence whole groups, and it portrays with striking accuracy what happens in USMC recruit training, right down to the way recruits describe their DIs as parent figures by the end of their training (R. Taylor; Ricks 55, 65, 59). In fact the Corps draws on familial relationship patterns frequently to facilitate consubstantiality.

More than any other service, the Marines focus on getting their recruits to identify with the body of the Corps. The etymology of "Corps" is illustrative here: the word's original meaning of "body" applied to a group of people—in the military or in its other prominent usage, *corps de ballet*—refers to a physical grouping of people who act as one (*OED*). The Marines' continuing emphasis on drill (more than the other services) demonstrates their faith in this physical unity. The emphasis on the Corps's unity extends to language as well: upon entering training, recruits are no longer permitted to use the first person, but must refer to themselves as "this recruit." They are no longer many individuals, but part of one unit, only identified by their relationship to the Corps. Boot

camp performs what James A. Warren identifies as an “‘egoectomy,’ in Corps parlance,” getting rid of teenage narcissism and rooting out self-centeredness (Warren 18, Popaditch, Butler, R. Taylor). The Marines encourage their recruits to physically and ideationally identify with the larger body of men and women they are joining.

This identification is how the Marines alter recruits’ habits of attention and perception and change what Burke would call their terministic screens. Burke uses a theological dictum, “believe, that you may understand,” to illustrate how the terministic screen works, saying that if a person has already committed to a particular terministic screen, he or she will then “proceed to track down the kinds of observation implicit in the terminology” of that screen (“Terministic” 47). In the case of the Marines, the focus on identification with the body of the Corps encourages recruits to *believe*, almost in a religious sense, in the unity and guiding principles of the Marine Corps. In fact, Warren writes that

there are some striking similarities between the Marines and a religious order. Both require a transformation for full membership, a kind of rebirth. Both require the willing acceptance of a core set of beliefs. Both require an enduring commitment to a cause greater than oneself. (21)

Indeed, though it isn’t a major focus of this project, the reader will notice many religious references in the Corps’s rhetoric, from the Rifleman’s Creed to the cadences recruits sing, hymn-like, as they march.

Just as religious believers find the “correct” interpretation of religious texts, Marine recruits are trained to perceive the world and their own activity through the Corps’s own terministic screen. Perceiving their surroundings and their enemies through

the Corps's eyes enables Marines to kill professionally. To use Fick's metaphor, the Marines' terministic screen enables them to stop seeing their enemies as humans like themselves and begin to see them as prey, to be stalked calmly and rationally, and killed when the time is right. Marines have less difficulty than civilians with killing another human because they see the enemy as prey rather than a fellow human. Using rhetorical power, the Marines change their recruits' frames of reference.

### **Coercion, Brainwashing, and Agency**

Some might argue that boot camp's transformation is accomplished not with rhetoric, but with some kind of removal of agency, either through force or brainwashing. Indeed, if we wish to understand the rhetoric used in boot camp, it is important to understand boot camp's relationship to agency, as I maintain that rhetoric has no place in a context in which audience members have no agency. I agree with Marilyn Cooper that rhetoric needs a "robust theory of agency" (423). Also with Cooper, I define agency as the ability to act, coupled with the felt experience that one's actions are one's own (more on that below). I propose that while recruit training does mitigate agency in some ways and at some times, it does not remove it altogether.

I have already stated that boot camp uses force, for example in a DI's capacity to force a recruit to do pushups for disobedience. Some might argue that force takes away a person's agency. I suggest that only *some* kinds of force take away a person's agency completely; other kinds of force mitigate or constrain agency but do not remove it entirely. Bodily coercion, as when one person overpowers another and binds him or her,

is an entire removal of agency. This kind of force is not permitted in boot camp.<sup>3</sup> Holding a gun to a person's head, another kind of force, involves a very strong mitigation of agency, but a person still may retain the capacity to act other than as the gun holder would wish. On a much milder level, threatening a driver with a speeding ticket is also a use of force, but it involves a lesser mitigation of agency. The kind of force exercised by Marine recruit training falls somewhere between the latter two examples, stronger than a speeding ticket, but weaker than a gun to the head. The relevant point is that while the force exercised in boot camp can mitigate recruits' agency, or make them feel less like agents for some period of time, it does not remove that agency through force, because recruits are still able to act in ways they choose and view their actions as results of their own choice.

Another important issue to discuss regarding agency and boot camp is the common allegation that boot camp's techniques amount to brainwashing (Lalor; Durham). The term "brainwashing" itself is powerful in the public mind, though what it is and whether it is actually possible is not clear. It was coined in 1950 by CIA publicist Edward Hunter, who wanted to convince Americans that communists could only gain support by taking away people's free will (Seed 28). Hunter claimed that the Communists had at their disposal

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<sup>3</sup> There are some exceptions to this, some legitimate and some under the radar. DIs can break up fights or can defend themselves if they are attacked. And of course, Military Police (MPs) may restrain a violent recruit. According to the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), DIs may not strike a recruit, but I've heard and read multiple accounts that this does happen (Lalor, Butler, Turley).

a devastatingly effective psychotechnology of extrinsic psychic coercion which could transform a victim into a kind of robot or zombie through the use of Pavlovian conditioning, hypnotic trances, and other means. (Anthony and Robbins 250)

This concept caught on with the American public and has remained prominent, but as Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins show, many responsible researchers—even those who conducted foundational work on brainwashing—question the very existence of the phenomenon, suggesting instead that those said to have been “brainwashed” held predispositions to the totalizing beliefs they adopted (250-255).

The word “brainwashing” does often crop up in descriptions of boot camp. When I asked Marines about this, many rejected the word. First Lieutenant Jean Durham, joking about the perception that boot camp brainwashes recruits, said, “You know how it brainwashed me? It brainwashed me by making me more organized. It made me better able to manage my time. That’s the kind of brainwashing it did.” Drill Instructor Sergeant Danielle Weldon told me in an interview that recruit training was less like brainwashing and “more like ‘Let’s see if they follow these orders’”—in other words, she issues commands, and the recruits choose whether or not to follow them. Whether they follow them or not says something about whether they are ready to be Marines. When I asked Gunnery Sergeant David Washington whether the outcome of the Marines’ training process was a hundred percent predictable, and if so whether that meant it was brainwashing, he said,

You can bring anybody through the process. It’s how they accept that process that’s gonna make or break them. I can put you through all the physical rigors of it, I can put you through all the mental rigors of it. I can put you through the

seventy-three-day training schedule. That's pretty predictable. But it's what you do with that time, what you've learned [that matters].

In the perception of these Marines, recruits still choose whether to enact the role of the Marine, which means that recruit training is not brainwashing.

Other former Marines I spoke to, however, did find the concept of brainwashing to be applicable to the boot camp transformation. Robert Taylor at first declined to call it brainwashing, but when I asked whether the process was entirely predictable—that is, always successful in turning out indoctrinated Marines, which might lend support to those who argue that it is brainwashing, he speculated that to the extent that it was predictable, it was perhaps “a controlled brainwash.” Butler went further and said at one point, “It’s brainwashing. Let’s not equivocate here, it’s brainwashing.” But when I asked Butler to define brainwashing, it seemed that he had in mind what I would call a kind of conditioning habituation. The difference between that and brainwashing is that habituation does not take away a person’s “veto power,” or the ability to decline to act as inclination or influence might suggest.<sup>4</sup> That is, a person who has gone through habituation will react fairly predictably to given conditions, the way most of us stop at a red light. There is no doubt that the USMC makes use of techniques that facilitate habituation. But these techniques do not take over all of a person’s thoughts and actions. We can reflect on our habit of stopping at a red light and choose to continue that habit or not to continue it. Marine recruits are pressured on many sides, with force and with

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<sup>4</sup> I avoid using Skinner’s “operant conditioning” not because I think he doesn’t offer some valuable insights about habituation, but because I disagree with his behaviorist negation of agency.

rhetorical power, but they still experience some capacity to reflect on those pressures and to respond in their own ways.

Not only do recruits have reflection and veto power as evidence of their agency; they also have the capacity to make their own meanings. In fact, as Chapter II will show, they *must* make their own meanings—it is the nature of meaning to be made in each individual’s brain. Meaning cannot be transferred, directly and fully formed, from one brain to another. While DIs can influence recruits by manipulating their environments, forcing them to act a certain way, or speaking to them in a specific manner, there is no way to guarantee that the recruits will make the meaning the DIs want them to make out of these interactions.

On the whole, brainwashing is not the best way to understand what happens in boot camp because brainwashing implies the removal of agency, or the capacity to act on one’s own decisions, but boot camp does not remove agency. It will be the task of Chapter II to describe agency more fully, but here I will note that the agency recruits experience is not a Cartesian dualist free will, in which a ghost directs the actions of a machine, but *emergent*, in the sense Cooper uses the term to discuss agency as “emergent and enacted.” In this definition, drawn from complexity theory, emergence is a phenomenon by which a property arises from the workings of a nonlinear self-organizing system. That is, when a system is in a state of complexity, which is a mathematically definable state far from equilibrium and near to chaos, elements interact with each other in surprising patterns. One of the most important of these patterns is *emergence*, a phenomenon by which a property arises from the interactions of elements in a system

without the help of an orchestrating agent. In Cooper's account, agency emerges from "cognitive processes and brain dynamics as embodied nonlinear self-organizing systems interacting with the surround" (Cooper 421). In other words, our bodies interacting with their environments form a *complex system*, and agency arises from the workings of that system.

### **Embodied Rhetoric**

Complexity theory helps us understand not only how agency arises, but also the nexus of the body, agency, and persuasion in general. The neurons in our brains interact in a complex system, and it is from these interactions that meaning emerges. This complex system of neurons is where the mind and the body meet, and where persuasion must do its work. Again, in Chapter II I will more fully develop my use of complexity theory and the mind-body connection, but here I simply want to stress the importance of the physical, along with the ideational, in how persuasion takes place. Older theories of rhetoric sometimes hint at the importance of the body, as Burke does with his "consubstantiality," but many still generally focus on language. Language is undoubtedly important in attempts at persuasion. In this project I do spend some time analyzing particular language, and readers will notice many other instances of the importance of language in Marine recruit training that I don't focus on explicitly, but this project's

emphasis is on the body's role in rhetorical influence, and Marine training is an excellent place to examine that role.<sup>5</sup>

Western intellectual history has a long tradition of either denying or demonizing the embodied nature of rhetoric. But the body is an integral part of the persuasion process. Both the rhetor's and the audience's bodies play a role, not just in the medium of delivery—sound waves to the ear drum, light on the retina, neurons snapping away in their grooves—but also in the bodies' movement and setting—whether the audience is a scholar holed up in a library, a crowd of citizens packed in close at a rally, or a row of children crossing the street all holding hands. Also important are our physical reactions to rhetoric, both voluntary and involuntary, such as chills when we hear something sublime or uncanny, a twist in the stomach at something disgusting, and laughter at the absurd, or the delightful. All of these physical elements play an undeniable role in directing our attention and thus influencing our perceptive screens.

While all rhetoric uses the body and its environment, Marine recruit training uses the physical in ways that make the body's rhetorical possibilities especially clear and powerful. The USMC asks its recruits to put their bodies through actions and conditions that it knows will make them feel and think a certain way in order to persuade them to become Marines. Important tools include lack of sleep, lack of food, physical exercise as punishment, matching uniforms and haircuts, loud verbal abuse, and—most importantly

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<sup>5</sup> I adopt Donald Davidson's assertion that words and physical objects work in the same world and by the same logic, over against the poststructuralist notion that words can only ever refer to other words and are thus locked in a system apart from the physical. Therefore much of my analysis applies to both language and the physical world.

for inducing consubstantiality—close proximity to other bodies undergoing the same process. Take the example of drill, “the heart of boot camp” (Ricks 63), in which recruits are trained to march and perform a variety of other movements in unison with their platoon mates. While drilling, recruits can feel the body heat of the recruits next to them, feel the air disturbed by their movements, smell their odors, see and hear the platoon moving in unison. This intimate proximity cannot help but influence their habits of perception, even if these sensory processes are not conscious. Through drill, recruits begin to see themselves as part of a disciplined unit (R. Taylor n.p., Ricks 88), one crucial step on the way to being a Marine ready to kill in combat. And drill is just one example of the physically persuasive elements of boot camp. The process is full of attitudinal lessons that can only be learned physically. When I asked Fick whether the changes in attitude that boot camp accomplishes could be replicated with words only, with no physical component, he responded, “No chance.” In other words, the USMC uses knowledge about the recruits’ bodies to effect a change in their perceptions and actions. It is a persuasion that makes full use of the essentially embodied nature of rhetoric, with all the interconnections and overlaps between mind and body—and resultant theories about the nature of agency—that implies.

### **The Project’s Contributions to Rhetoric**

This project is heavily invested in rhetorical concepts of agency, the body, and how the two interact. Further, in considering the intersections of agency and the body as a persuasive tool, it becomes essential to add two more areas of investigation: we need to rethink the role of the rhetorical situation in persuasion and, more basically—since

persuasion is about how to cause certain effects—the nature of cause and effect. This project thus contributes to the field of rhetoric in four interrelated areas: agency, embodiment, the rhetorical situation, and cause and effect. While other scholars have certainly examined these issues, I offer new ways of conceiving them individually and in relation to each other. In Chapter II I lay out the interrelationships between these areas in detail, but here I offer as examples a few ways these key concepts connect.

All rhetoric must start with the body, as all rhetoric must be physically sensed. The processes by which we sense rhetoric are integrally connected with those by which we make meaning from it: meaning *emerges* from the complex system of neurons in our brains as they react to information coming from the sensory neurons. Larger or longer-lasting sensations are more likely to create meanings, and the physical environment plays a key role in determining what sensations are meaningful as well. So meaning cannot be transferred wholesale from rhetor to audience, but emerges from each audience member's brain in response to a whole rhetorical situation. The rhetorical situation is thus highly important, but it does not actually determine meaning. The fact that meaning emerges in each audience member's brain precludes the possibility of brainwashing, since meaning cannot be planted fully developed from external sources into the brain. Incoming sensory information influences the pattern of meaning in the brain, but existing patterns of meaning also influence the way new sensory information is perceived. This is nonlinear cause and effect understood through complexity theory; I describe this kind of cause and effect as “haloed cluster” causality, in which the cluster of interactions and the halo of emergent meaning mutually and *simultaneously* influence one another. This preview of

my analysis thus illustrates how the four key areas of my contribution to rhetoric are related: 1) the body is of central importance because it is the body that not only senses rhetoric but makes meaning from it; 2) the way the body makes meaning implies that we are agents who make our own meaning instead of imbibing it ready-made; 3) the way the body makes meaning also implies that we need an understanding of the rhetorical situation that takes into account how the body senses its environment; and 4) the way we understand how rhetoric *causes* people to “change their minds”—change their physical brains—necessitates a new understanding of cause and effect.

Other rhetoricians have examined these areas from differing angles, and embodied rhetoric and agency are especially frequently studied. My focus on the body as an object of rhetoric adds to an increasing attention to the body by scholars in our field. Cooper’s work, referred to above, Jeff Pruchnic’s neurorhetorics, Debra Hawhee’s study of athletics in ancient Greece, Cheryl Forbes’s adaptation of Rudolph Laban’s movement analysis, Joshua Prenosil’s proposition of the ontological enthymeme, and Donna Haraway’s well-known work on cyborgs and the extension of bodies through technology all constitute astute analyses that illuminate the body’s role in the persuasive process. Body-based studies have emerged in varying venues, including dissertations, and in a number of different subfields of rhetoric and composition: women’s and gender studies, pedagogy, cybernetics and technology, disability studies, health, medicine and human biology studies, and transnational studies.

As evinced in the recent work of Susan Wells, Bernadette Calafell, Rebecca Coleman, and Gayle Salamon, women’s and gender studies has been especially attentive

to the role of bodies in rhetorical exchange, especially in relation to power dynamics. Feminists have pointed out that in the Western tradition, women are seen as peculiarly embodied while men are treated as founts of pure disembodied thought. Women have therefore had to be more aware of their bodies than men. Scholars often quote Susan Bordo's use of the following 1971 consciousness-raising exercise:

Sit down in a straight chair. Cross your legs at the ankles and keep your knees pressed together. Try to do this while you're having a conversation with someone, but pay attention at all times to keeping your knees pressed tightly together.

Run a short distance, keeping your knees together. You'll find you have to take short, high steps if you run this way. Women have been taught it is unfeminine to run like a man with long, free strides. See how far you get running this way for 30 seconds. (qtd. in Bordo 19)

The exercise goes on, illustrating, as Bordo writes, "how female subjectivity is trained and subordinated by the everyday bodily requirements and vulnerabilities of 'femininity'" (19). Here bodily actions are part of a largely unacknowledged system of gendering that governs the small postures of everyday life. I study more explicit and regulated instructions for bodily movements in a particular setting, entered voluntarily, which makes the social and power dynamics somewhat different, but the similarities between the exercise Bordo quotes and my work are substantial. Both see manipulations of the body as powerful rhetorical tools with the potential to change how a person perceives and responds to the world.

Jeff Parker Knight's insightful, well-researched 1990 essay "Literature as Equipment for Killing: Performance as Rhetoric in Military Training Camps" also has a lot to offer those who study not only embodied rhetoric, but specifically embodied

rhetoric in the Marines.<sup>6</sup> Knight uses Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s concept of secondary socialization and Burke’s performativity to analyze the use of “jodies”—the cadence marching songs that often begin with “I don’t know but I been told”—in Marine training. He examines not only the texts of the jodies, which make explicit many of the implicit values of the military, but also the ways in which the kinesthetic performance of the jodies enforces those values. While my work uses complexity theory and neuroscience instead of Berger and Luckman’s social constructionism and Burke’s performativity, in its examination of the physical rhetoric of Marine training, my project is an extension of Knight’s work.

Agency has been another key area of discussion for rhetoricians since postmodernism made its influence felt. Carolyn Miller identifies a “crisis for agency, or perhaps more accurately, for rhetoric, since traditional rhetoric requires the possibility for influence that agency entails” (143). The existence of rhetoric—especially rhetoric as teachable, the foundation on which many jobs rest—is threatened by the dissolution of autonomous agents that postmodern theory seems to entail. Rhetorical scholars have responded to the crisis of agency in a variety of ways, either with “modernist lamenting or postmodern rejoicing at the loss of our responsibility for the way our world turns out,” or with attempts to “rescue” “some notion of human agency,” as Cooper puts it (420). Dilip Gaonkar is one who has argued that we should do away with the concept—because of its inherent and obsolete humanist ideology—but many rhetorical scholars have argued

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<sup>6</sup> As far as I know, this article is a stand-alone work, not having started a conversation in rhetoric about military training (it has been cited a few times by scholars in theater studies and media communications).

that we should hold on to agency in some form. Cooper herself is “for rescuing, rather than lamenting or rejoicing” its demise (420). Some scholars respond to the crisis not by attacking postmodernism head on, but by attending to the specific ways that groups who have traditionally been denied agency have found ways to be heard (Geisler 10-11). Others focus on technology, especially computers, in order to see agency as dispersed among technology and humans (Geisler 11). Donna Haraway’s cyborgs fall into this category. Another group of scholars has tried to hold on to the *concept* of agency while denying its real existence; Celeste Condit calls agency a “necessary illusion” (qtd in Miller 152). And Miller comes to the conclusion that while it is necessary that we see people as agents, actual agency exists in a kind of kinetic energy between people, not in people themselves, and it is an illusion in the sense that it’s “an attribution that’s not determined but constructed” (152).

Besides these conversations about embodiment and agency, my work also joins an ongoing investigation into what complexity theory can do for our field. Some rhetoricians use complexity to explicate agency, as Cooper and Pruchnic do, and some focus on the rhetorical situation, as do Sidney Dobrin, Byron Hawk, and Thomas Rickert. My work builds on that of Dobrin, Hawk, and Rickert, though I differ with them on the key issue of agency. What I value about Hawk, Dobrin, and Rickert is their renegotiation of the traditional boundaries of personhood in the rhetorical situation and their emphasis on non-linear causation, both tenets of complexity theory I find useful for analyzing the interconnected, recursive nature of rhetorical power in boot camp. In Chapter II I engage Dobrin, Hawk, and Rickert’s conceptions of the rhetorical situation more directly.

## **Outline of the Chapters**

In this project I look especially at changes that happen during boot camp that enable Marines to kill when and whom they should during combat. As discussed above, a Marine *ethos* must include enough aggressiveness to kill another human being, but enough discipline to refrain when killing is not required. I suggest that, in order to create this *ethos*, boot camp cultivates a willingness to await and follow orders, a loss of individual identity to the unity of the group, the performance of anger and aggression, a taste for the thrill of violence and fetishization of weapons, orientation toward precision and effectiveness, and preparation for the grueling conditions of combat. I analyze particular bodily actions that facilitate the growth of these characteristics in recruits, such as standing at attention, marching in formation, drill with weapons, pugil stick sparring, and more. I hope to show how training's rhetoric functions physically to transform recruits into Marines.

### *Chapter II: Theory and Core of the Argument*

In this introductory chapter, I lay out my project's theoretical framework as it supports the core of my argument. Drawing on complexity theory and neuroscience's understandings of the body, agency, and persuasion, I introduce my guiding spatial metaphor of a unidirectional bridge between "haloed clusters." The haloed cluster is a conceptual representation of the interactions and organization of a complex system; recruits are haloed clusters, and boot camp is another kind of haloed cluster. At the level of each individual recruit, the halo represents the emergent agency of the recruits, which both emanates from and interacts with the cluster of physical events and characteristics

present in recruit training. At the level of the broad community or situation of boot camp as a whole, the halo is the emergent sense of what it means to be a Marine, which arises from the events and order parameters of the system. Recruits' perceptions form the one-way bridge between the two systems. In Chapter II I draw on the work of Cooper and Walter Freeman, a neuroscientist who theorizes how agency arises from the physical brain, as well as various complexity theorists who discuss the phenomenon of emergence.

### *Chapters III-V: Loaded Actions*

These chapters expand the core of my thesis, presenting evidence and analysis. I organize the chapters by physical actions that emblematically represent some aspect of the transformation from civilian to Marine. In each chapter I describe the representative action of the title and analyze its importance, but I also include other aspects of training that contribute to the represented phenomenon.

Chapter III, "The Yellow Footprints," discusses the following elements of training: willingness to await and follow orders, loss of individual identity, beginning of drill and professional discipline, and the "shark attack" and disorientation. When Marine recruits get off the bus at their training facility at Parris Island, South Carolina or San Diego, California, a DI shouts a command to run and stand on the yellow footprints painted onto the asphalt in a long column, four recruits wide. The footprints arrange the recruits in their first formation, and the instructor teaches them how to stand at attention, fingers curled, thumbs pressed against their trouser seams. The yellow footprints are famous—or infamous, as some sources have it—as a symbol of induction into the Marines. A recruit first becomes part of a carefully regulated unit by standing at attention

on the prints, forbidden to stand around at their own chosen places in their own chosen postures. Drill instructors shout at recruits in the famous “shark attack,” screaming orders and insults until recruits are quite disoriented. This is a foretaste of the coming “pick up,” when recruits are formed into platoons and see their permanent DIs for the first time. The yelling is part of the first phase of training’s disorientation, or “controlled chaos,” as DI Sergeant Weldon described it. The point is to put the recruits through “culture shock,” to “break them down so that they can build them back up,” as is often said of the Marines (Weldon). This disorientation significantly mitigates recruits’ agency. But it is impossible to talk about how agency is mitigated without recognizing the important effect recruits’ individual agencies have on their training when they respond and reflect on training in their own ways, so this chapter discusses both sides of the issue.

Chapter III also discusses the uniformity and discipline emblemized by the yellow footprints’ status as the beginning of drill practice. The simple act of standing at attention represents a willingness to await and to follow orders. Such a posture is unnatural, which emphasizes that those who stand in it have accepted someone else’s command over their bodies. Second, standing in a regulated group emphasizes the giving up of one’s individual identity to the unit. Everyone in formation must look and act the same. The self no longer matters. In fact, it is on these footprints that recruits are instructed that they may not use first-person pronouns, but must refer to themselves as “this recruit.” The fact that thousands of Marine recruits have stood on the same yellow footprints emphasizes this loss of individuality. Third, standing on the yellow footprints is the recruits’ first introduction to drill, in which they will learn individual and unit

discipline. Drill teaches mental discipline through physical discipline. It teaches recruits not to give in to their first instincts—to scratch, or shift their weight, for example—but to act professionally, as trained Marines.

Chapter IV, “Sparring and the M16,” discusses the following elements of training: encouraging a taste for the thrill of violence, channeling intensity toward a human opponent, precision and efficiency, and the fetishization of weapons. In this chapter I analyze the push and pull of aggression and restraint necessary for a Marine to act as a professional soldier who will kill when and whom he or she should. Aggression of different types—anger, excitement, and urgency—is encouraged in many aspects of boot camp, especially close-combat training. Recruits begin with a brief bayonet assault course, in which they “channel their intensity toward a target” in order to find “the warrior within,” as the Marines’ website describes it. Then they progress towards fighting with individual opponents from other platoons in their series, sometimes with pugil sticks and sometimes with boxing gloves. Recruits are encouraged to get angry during these events. Here is one example from the documentary film *Ears, Open. Eyeballs, Click.* which followed a platoon through its training cycle:

“We’re wearing protective padding, right?”

“Yes sir!”

“So we might as well go all out, right?”

“Yes sir!”

“Might as well, right?”

“Yes sir!”

“Who’s all pissed off?”

“Yes sir! [or inchoate yells]”

“You don’t sound pissed off!”

“Yes sir! [more yells]”

“We’re all pissed off about something, right?”

“Yes sir!”

“We’re all pissed off about something, right?”

“YES SIR!”

Here is the cultivation of performative anger; in this exchange, anger is solicited and induced through a call-and-response ritual designed to get recruits ready to fight each other all out. This anger is an integral part of training, and it is taught to new recruits as a way of interacting during training. The performance of anger, even alienated from its actual experience, serves as a social incentive to fight.

Recruits are also given training in the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP), a martial arts system designed to be useful across the full spectrum of violence, from encouraging compliance from a noncombatant to killing the enemy. Part of the program, built on the three pillars of physical discipline, mental discipline, and character discipline, is to discern when all-out violence is required. Here is the need for balance between aggression and restraint necessary for all Marines.

Another important part of the Marine identity is the love of weapons, and Marine recruits spend two weeks in boot camp learning to operate their rifles. They learn how to clean them, drill with them, aim them, fire them, and think of them as extensions of themselves. Even outside of those two weeks, the recruits are responsible for their weapons twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The rifle thus becomes not only an emblem of the excitement of fighting, but also of the precision and effectiveness Marines must cultivate. They must learn the Rifleman’s Creed, one of the many religiously inflected elements of training rhetoric, which begins, “This is my rifle. There are many

like it, but this one is mine.” The identification with one’s rifle is essential to becoming a Marine. Although numerous military branches involve weapons training, the rifle plays a particularly crucial role in Marine training, where “every Marine a rifleman” is a cherished dogma.

The rifle as emblem, or as fetish, stands for a willingness to kill, but as a weapon, it is less intimate than the bayonet, or hand-to-hand combat. This is why the rifle stands not for hate or violent aggression, as sparring might, but the restraint necessary to work with precision and care. This chapter holds sparring and the rifle up together as demonstrating two affects necessary to engage in combat: fierce aggression and professional effectiveness.

Chapter V, “The Crucible,” discusses peer bonding and the Corps identity, which is built on honor, courage, and commitment. The Crucible is the last phase of recruit training, a sort of summing up of knowledge, skills, and values learned. The USMC website describes the event thus:

Recruits will be challenged for 54 continuous hours with little food and sleep. To complete this final test, recruits must have the heart—and the intestinal fortitude, the body—and the mind, the desire—and the ability. The recruits must pull together or fall apart. Win as one or all will fail.

The Crucible illustrates the grueling effect of combat circumstances on the body. More than that, training uses sleep and food deprivation not only to simulate combat conditions, but also to make the bodies of recruits more pliable, or even, as some say, to break them. Lack of sleep and nourishment are used, like the disorientation of the first

phase, to “break ’em down so they can build ’em back up.” Bodies pushed as far as they will go react in mostly predictable ways, and boot camp makes use of that fact.

As stated in the “win as one or all will fail” slogan on the website, the crucible also emphasizes teamwork and unit cohesion, the other side of the denial of individual identities. Another oft-heard trope is that soldiers in the thick of combat do not fight for abstract ideals, but for “the man on their right and the man on their left.” Unit cohesion is a primary motivation in combat. During training, recruits are forced to rely on other members of their teams to complete their tasks. Further, if one member of a unit commits an infraction, all the other members of the unit are punished. Groups of recruits who go through extremely difficult circumstances together and who are treated as one begin to perceive and to act as one. They are therefore much more likely to do what is necessary to save their teammates, including killing.

The Crucible is also an event in which the Marines’ core values of honor, courage, and commitment are on prominent display, ready to be embodied by recruits. Recruits discuss the core values during and between stations and in special “core values huts” during the Crucible. Recruits thus have the opportunity to both embody and discuss the values they should hold as Marines. Recruits officially become Marines when they complete the Crucible, and their new identity as Marines should be founded on honor, courage, and commitment.

### *Conclusion*

In the conclusion, I reflect on how the information and analysis in the dissertation could be used both inside and outside the academic field of rhetoric. In rhetoric, I hope

my work can further inquiries about how manipulation of the body can function in the rhetorical process, detailing examples and opening up new avenues for study. My theoretical work can be useful to those interested in finding theories of agency outside of modernism, those who want to understand the physical effects of rhetoric, and those who want a complexity-based understanding of perception, meaning making, cause and effect, and the rhetorical situation. My investment in the social exigencies of this work can also be relevant to rhetorical and pedagogical work that examines public policy debate and social attitudes toward the U.S.'s global position.

I also anticipate this project could have two main uses outside academia: in facilitating the return of servicemen and women, and in public deliberation about when and how to use the services of Marines and other members of the armed forces. It takes a lot of work to turn a civilian into a Marine, soldier, sailor, or airman, but the transition support for returning service men and women is slight in comparison. How might we put our knowledge about bodily rhetoric to use to help returning veterans reintegrate into civilian life? Studying the process of transition *into* a warrior *ethos* seems the most likely to yield insight into the transition *out* of it. The body needs to relearn its civilian habits. Learning how the rhetorical process works in boot camp could offer new ways of envisioning what needs to happen for veterans returning to civilian life. And in our public conversations about when to send our forces into combat, we should know about the work it takes to ready a person to kill on command. In a recent Miller Center Forum, Kimberly Phillips makes the observation that even if we thank troops for their service when we see them in the airport, we as a society don't want to know much about their

actual experience. This is unfair, unethical, and unhealthy for our democratic decision-making process. If we decide that a particular national or international goal is worth sending troops, we should make that decision with open eyes.

Rhetoric and warfare are no strangers. From Demosthenes to the Gettysburg Address, rhetoric has long been intimately intertwined with warfare. I used Burke's definition of rhetoric earlier; much of Burke's work is guided by his awareness of the extent to which rhetoric is used to induce people to fight in "that ultimate disease of cooperation: War" (22). Referring to his proposed triad of grammar, motives, and symbol,<sup>7</sup> he writes in *A Rhetoric of Motives*,

On every hand, we find men . . . preparing themselves for the slaughter, even to the extent of manipulating the profoundest grammatical, rhetorical, and symbolic resources of human thought to this end. Hence, insofar as one can do so without closing his eyes to the realities, it is relevant to attempt analyzing the tricky ways of thought that now work to complete the devotion of killing. (264)

This project takes up the task Burke lays out, applying the tools and insights of rhetorical inquiry to the methods used to train those who fight whenever our country deems it prudent to send them to war.

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<sup>7</sup> Burke's *A Rhetoric of Grammar*, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, and his proposed third book focusing on symbols (*Motives* 21-22).

CHAPTER II  
THE RHETORICAL SITUATION, THE RHETOR, AND THE AUDIENCE IN  
MARINE CORPS RECRUIT TRAINING



Figure 1. New Marines of Kilo Company, 3rd Recruit Training Battalion, Run under the “We Make Marines” Sign during a Traditional Motivational Run through the Streets of Parris Island, S.C., on Aug 15, 2013. Photo by Cpl. Caitlin Brink. From the Defense Video and Information Distribution System (Web; 9 May 2014).

The sign over the entrance to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) at Parris Island proclaims “We Make Marines” (Fig. 1). As demonstrated in the introduction, “making Marines” is less a matter of training recruits to perform particular tasks than inducing recruits to see themselves as Marines, as part of a body of men and women whose values and disposition they share. This means that it is the goal of the Marines at

boot camp, especially the drill instructors (DIs), to change recruits' terministic screens—that is, to change not simply the recruits' actions, but the *meanings* recruits attach to their actions. This, then, is the fundamental question: how do DIs effect change in recruits' meanings and values?

To begin to answer this question, we need to understand the elements of the question, especially what we mean by “DI,” “recruit,” and “the rhetorical situation.” The traditional model of persuasion—classical rhetoric seen through a lens of Cartesian dualism—would have it that DIs and recruits are each autonomous, rational subjects. DIs choose, from an array of rhetorical techniques available in their particular rhetorical situation, the one best suited to influence their audiences, and the recruits are autonomous subject-agents who listen, weigh the strength of the DIs' approaches, and choose whether or not to identify as Marines. This model has its appeal, not only because we like to think of people as able to choose, but also because it highlights the nature and function of rhetoric so clearly. People use different techniques to try to persuade each other, and the best technique wins.

But this model no longer holds. Postmodernists have argued convincingly that the autonomous subject is not a natural whole, but a construct, and scholars like Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Judith Butler have directed our attention to how our identities and our choices can be socially constructed. Scholars like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have explored the material environment more deeply to construe agency as dispersed into what rhetorical scholars call the rhetorical situation. These developments have seriously diminished the role of autonomous, bounded agency in how we

understand human interaction. This is a problem for rhetoric, which works so well under the old agent-persuading-agent-in-a-rhetorical-situation model.

The present project about recruit training is highly implicated in questions of agency, since, as discussed in the introduction, the Marine Corps wants recruits to see themselves as *voluntarily* becoming Marines. And because the environment of boot camp is so important to the rhetoric that makes this happen, we also need to understand just what the role of that environment is in persuading recruits to become Marines. It is therefore necessary to theorize a conception of *agency in rhetorical environments* adequate to the task of analyzing recruit training.

Besides the approaches to agency discussed in the introduction, a number of rhetorical scholars tackle the problem of agency by focusing on the environment instead of the autonomous subject. After all, if agency is dispersed because the postmodern subject is fragmented, we need to understand where agency is dispersed *to*. Thomas Rickert, Byron Hawk, and Sidney Dobrin offer some examples of scholars who have posited new frameworks for understanding agency relative to the environment. Rickert replaces the rhetorical situation with “ambience” in which “boundaries between subject and object, human and nonhuman, and information and matter dissolve” (1). Part of the reason Rickert makes this move is to account for the ways in which the material is far more integral to rhetoric than traditional conceptions of “the rhetorical situation” can accommodate (x). Material relations in the environment constrain rhetoric to the extent

that those material “objects” are themselves rhetorical agents,<sup>8</sup> acting in a simultaneous web of influence with what we can no longer call the “rhetor” and “audience” (6,15).

This is a major change in perspective from classical rhetorical theory; ambient rhetoric is

not subjective agency in a (necessary) context but a dynamic interchange of powers and actions in complex feedback loops; a multiplication of agencies that in turn transform, to varying degrees, the agents; a distribution of varied powers and agencies. Such an assertion dethrones the idea of mind as the engine of reason and the seat of the soul. (10)

Similarly, Hawk declines to delineate elements of the rhetorical situation by bodily boundaries or subject-object designations; instead, he draws those contours using function and interaction. He makes use of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “desiring-machines”—groupings of elements that constitute the interactions between bodies and the environment, which produce desire. He offers the mouth as an example: “connected with food it is an eating-machine, with language it is a talking-machine,” and so on. And these machines are part of a system: “Just as the bumblebee is part of the reproductive system of the clover, humans are part of the reproductive system of machines. This is all one system, one continuous flow of life” (n.p. Chapter 4). Because desire is connected to interaction and function, we need not posit subjects and objects in the traditional sense; instead, “the subject is a global effect of local parts and a part itself that is continually emerging” (n.p. Chapter 4). In other words, the subject is not an autonomous originator

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<sup>8</sup> But, Rickert says, material elements are not agents to the same extent that humans are agents (16).

of functions and interactions, but emergent from the functions and interactions of the various desiring-machines.

Dobrin argues that Hawk doesn't go far enough in his attenuation of autonomous subjects. Instead of seeing the subject as emergent, he wants to eliminate the subject altogether, declaring the "obsolescence of subjectivity and subject formation as a central feature to theorizing and understanding writing" (n.p. Introduction). This declaration is part of Dobrin's posthumanist commitment, which "casts human thought as imperfect and not the avenue through which the world is known or defined" (n.p. Chapter 3). Further, Dobrin removes agency along with subjectivity and calls writing "a dynamic autopoietic system" (n.p. Chapter 6)—writing is a complex system that organizes and assembles itself without any need for agents.

I share Rickert, Hawk, and Dobrin's desire to redraw the map of rhetorical interaction. Like these scholars, I see the rhetorical situation as a complex system, and the available rhetorical interactions in any given situation as at least partially shaped by the parameters of that system. These scholars' arguments are compelling, and they explain much of what goes on in rhetorical interaction. But there is something missing. They make no provision for how perception alters the flow of interaction and thus agency. However much Dobrin and other posthumanists want to portray human thought as "not the avenue through which the world is known or defined" (Dobrin n.p. Chapter 3), human *perception* is the only starting point humans have. Even if we see ourselves as something other than the center of the universe, we're still *seeing ourselves*. Further, and of crucial importance, we do not see everything in ourselves or our surroundings like a

camera; based on input from sensory neurons, our brains *create* percepts, and our actions are inextricably bound with our perceptions. Agency is thus implicated in perception, an inescapable correlate. And perception links the perceiver bodily to the environment, or the rhetorical situation. All three—agency, the body, and the rhetorical situation—interact in mutually influential ways that we must understand in order to create a model of how rhetoric works. This intertwining is why agency, the body, the rhetorical situation, and cause and effect are the key areas of inquiry in this project’s theoretical framework.

At the foundational level, what we need is a way to understand how people make sense in and from their environments. This sense-making is fundamental to all interaction, human and otherwise. Rhetoric is a specific type of sense-making in which a rhetor attempts to shape or direct the sense so that the audience will make the “right” kind of sense from their environment (what is “right” being determined by the rhetor). For example, in boot camp, the Marines want recruits to see their drill instructors as disciplined, hard-driving super warriors, rather than mean-spirited, insecure bullies. To understand how the Marines accomplish this task, I study the Marines’ shaping of the environment and DIs’ interactions with recruits. But we also need to understand how those recruits perceive and act into their environments. Again, if we want to understand rhetoric, we need to understand not only how rhetors view and shape meaning in an environment, but how audiences perceive that meaning as well.

For this project, I offer a new theoretical framework to help rhetorical scholars understand how audience members’ perceptual apparatus works to create sense from their environment, and how the rhetor can use that knowledge to create more powerful

rhetorical techniques. In order to do this, I draw on what we know from neuroscience, especially as it relates to perception, and from complexity theory. Complexity theory is fundamentally a way of understanding how elements in a system interact. It is a subset of systems theory, begun by mathematicians and physicists in the middle of the twentieth century, and it has proved useful in a variety of disciplines because its object of analysis is not historically and locally situated “content,” but the patterns created by a system in a particular state. These patterns have been observed in phenomena from biology to physics to anthropology—and rhetoric too, as demonstrated by Rickert, Hawk, and Dobrin. When a system is in a state of complexity, which is a mathematically definable state far from equilibrium and near to chaos—or in physicist Norman Packard’s memorable phrase, “on the edge of chaos” (Lewin 53), elements interact with each other in surprising patterns. These patterns include *emergence*, a phenomenon by which a property arises from the interactions of elements in a system without the help of an orchestrating agent, and what I call “*haloed cluster*” *causality*, in which elements and properties in a system influence each other simultaneously. Complexity theory has a lot to offer our understanding of perception and the rhetorical situation. It can show us exactly how meanings *emerge* in the embodied minds of audience members, and it can show us how meanings *emerge* from the larger interactions of a group, including rhetors and audiences.

I draw the outlines of this project, therefore, using complexity theory to explain both perception and the rhetorical situation. Spatially, I conceive of what goes on at boot

camp as a unidirectional bridge between two complex systems, or what I will call “haloed clusters” (Fig. 2).

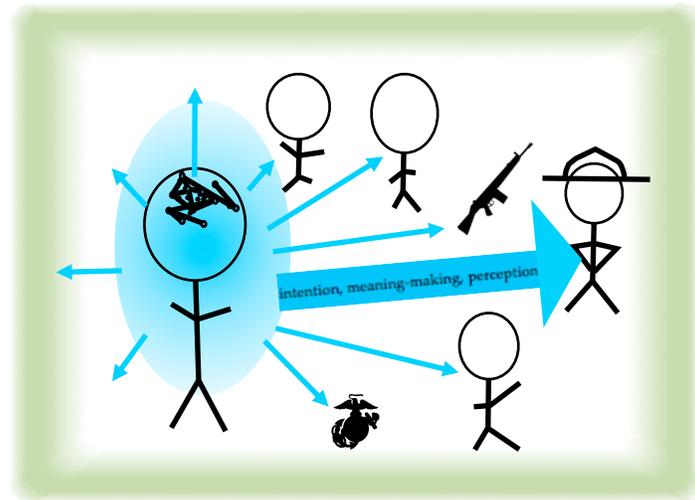


Figure 2. A Unidirectional Bridge between Two Complex Systems. Recruits themselves are complex systems with a (blue) halo of agency. They reach out across unidirectional bridges to make meaning about that which they perceive. Boot camp itself is also a complex system; from the interactions of this system emerges a (green) halo of what it means to be a Marine, which recruits can also perceive and make meaning from.

Using complexity theory, I sketch two out of the many nested and overlapping complex systems that exist in the world—a recruit and recruit training—and analyze their relationship to each other. Each recruit constitutes a complex system, or haloed cluster, with interactions among neurons, neural populations, cortices, eyes, ears, arms, legs, and so on, giving rise to a halo of emergent agency. This person-as-complex-system also interacts with the larger complex system made up of the interactions of Marines and recruits at boot camp. The interaction between these two systems is not indiscriminate. As I have said above, people cannot take in everything in their surroundings, and

information does not flow unfiltered into recruits' brains. In fact, recruits, like all people, only perceive what means something to them. This is what makes the bridge between recruit and the boot camp environment unidirectional. Meaning can't be transferred from the environment directly into recruits' brains; recruits have to reach out across a one-way bridge and form their own meanings. It is the Marine Corps's job at boot camp to *persuade* recruits to reach out across the bridge and create the meanings and values of a Marine.

To analyze how this happens, I first explicate how sensation, meaning, intention, and perception work. In this section on perception I draw on the neuroscience of Walter J. Freeman, who uses the work of complexity theorists, American Pragmatists, and phenomenologists in addition to his own empirical research. I then move on to consciousness and agency, using Marilyn Cooper's concept of rhetorical agency as emergent and enacted (which itself draws on Freeman's), and finally, I return to the agent in the rhetorical situation, this time putting newly explicated concepts from neuroscience and complexity theory to work. I will explain concepts from complexity theory as they become relevant: emergence will help us understand how sense emerges from percepts, and nonlinear causation will help us understand interrelationships among parts of the perceptual apparatus as well as consciousness's role in agency.

### **Sensation, Meaning, Intention, and Perception**

A central part of Freeman's analysis of neurodynamics is that perception is always unidirectional. Meaning from the external world can never cross the borders of

our personhood. We cannot receive direct thought transplants or information downloads about the characteristics of an element in our environment. We can of course *sense* elements in the outside world, but sensation is distinct from perception. If we perceived everything we sensed, we'd be overwhelmed by sensory information. The unidirectionality of perception enables finite beings to cope with an infinite universe (see Freeman 29).

Drawing on Thomas Aquinas, phenomenologists Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Pragmatists John Dewey and William James, Freeman defines perception as sensation with the addition of meaning and intention (28-29, 118-121). Freeman's own work demonstrates that when sensory neurons fire—for example, when a rabbit sniffs a new odorant—those sensory neurons send pulses to other neurons in the cortex in spatial patterns that are “comparable to constellations of stars in the night sky, flashing with each pulse” (Freeman 67). But these constellations alone are not automatically distinguishable from static or noise, since other smells are sending other pulses at the same time, and since neurons also have to fire periodically in a random way to stay healthy, creating yet more noise (Freeman 43). The sniff constellation is a simple mechanical result of the placement of the sensory neurons relative to the odor-causing chemicals in the nose that changes with each sniff—even of the same odorant—since the air in the nose is turbulent. This constellation is therefore meaningless on its own (Freeman 67). It does however cause an arousal in the limbic system, which prepares the brain for learning via a release of neuromodulator chemicals, so that if some kind of reinforcement, such as a treat or a shock—or in the case of recruit

training, a DI's yell—follows the stimulus, then an *amplitude modulation* (AM) pattern can form and become correlated to that stimulus (Freeman 76-79). This pattern is a self-organized, emergent pattern in the electrical output of the neurons, facilitated but not directed by neuromodulators from the limbic system.<sup>9</sup> The pattern emerges with *meaning* and *intention*: the odor means a treat or shock is coming, and the rabbit intends to get the treat or avoid the shock. Or in boot camp, a DI's yell means punishment is imminent, and the recruits intend to avoid the push-ups. Each time the neurons form a pattern, the connections among those neurons are strengthened, forming a basin attractor<sup>10</sup> and making it more likely that the rabbits can understand future scents according to this pattern and that recruits learn to heed the DI's instruction. This is how we learn, through meaning and intention, which emerge from the complex interactions of neurons in the brain impacted by sensation.

The precise way that meanings arise in the brain relative to sensations is extremely significant. Our everyday notions of cause and effect are insufficient to explain this process. Meanings emerge without any guidance, simply from the interactions of the neurons. To grasp how meaning can emerge on its own, it is important to understand the complexity theory principle of emergence in more detail. Stuart Kauffman, a complexity biologist, made an important concrete discovery regarding emergence in the 1960s while

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<sup>9</sup> For more specific information about neural dynamics and how these patterns arise, see Freeman 37-63.

<sup>10</sup> “Basin attractor” is a metaphor that explains the tendency of interactions to fall into certain patterns the way marbles roll toward the lowest spot in a basin. For a clear illustration of how attractors work using biological population dynamics, see Mitchell 27-30.

trying to understand how random natural selection could possibly manipulate the 100,000 genes in the human genome in ways that would give rise to the 250 or so cell types used by the human body. Kauffman had a gut feeling that it couldn't be possible for pure chance to cycle through all of the possibilities allowed by the genome—some  $10^{30,000}$  possibilities—and select the most useful based on functionality. He therefore devised a computer-aided Boolean network experiment to investigate the possibility that the right expressions were hit on by something other than pure chance (Lewin 24-28).

Here's how the Boolean network experiment works: imagine a network of lightbulbs. Each bulb can be in one of two states—on or off—and each bulb is connected to a given number of other bulbs ( $K$ ) that send signals telling it whether to turn on or off, based on whether the first bulb itself was most recently on or off. If  $K=2$ , each bulb receives 2 input signals from 2 other bulbs. Rules set at random determine which input signals the bulbs follow. If the rule is AND, for example, a bulb will only light up if *both* inputs tell it to light up. If the rule is OR, the bulb will light up if *either* of the inputs tell it to light up. Kauffman experimented with networks of various sizes and  $K$  values; he found that when  $K=1$ , short patterns, or state cycles, quickly emerge (the state cycle is the number of times bulbs light up before the pattern starts over). When  $K$  is higher than about 3 or 4, the state cycle is so long that the system appears to operate at random. But when  $K$  is about 2, a very surprising thing happens. As Kauffman writes, this is where “the order arises, sudden and stunning” (*At Home* 83). The interactions of the elements in the network become ordered—without a single element directing them—when “nearby states converge in state space,” meaning that when patterns next to each other start off

similarly, they join together in one basin of attraction (*At Home* 83). This basin of attraction forms around whatever given pattern the Boolean network has fallen into, creating order. So the state cycle settles down into a predictable number, which is roughly the square root of the number of bulbs. This happens no matter how big the network is, no matter which bulbs are wired to which other bulbs, no matter what state the bulbs start out in, and no matter what the Boolean rules are. Kauffman calls this principle “order for free” (*At Home* 75-83). And it does exist in the biological world. When Kauffman investigated the number of cell types in a wide selection of organisms, he found that the number of cell types always equaled roughly the square root of the number of genes (Lewin 28).

This astounding phenomenon demonstrates how patterns can emerge unguided from a previously random set of interactions. The property of order emerges from the workings of the system as a whole. With emergence, the whole really is greater than the sum of its parts. The order supervenes on the interactions but is not reducible to any particular interaction. This is complexity theory’s principle of *self-organization*. A system whose elements interact in a complex way can arrive at elegant, functional order without careful orchestration. And this is how meaning emerges from the interactions of neurons in the brain. The AM (amplitude modulation) patterns are the emergent meanings that arise without any central director.

To understand how our brains learn, it is important to note that the kind of order that arises from complexity is flexible and thus open to change. If a system is in perfect equilibrium, with each part running according to its function and everything working

smoothly, an alteration of conditions throws the system out of order. There is no way to account for deviation because of the lack of noise, defined as elements that are not meaningful in the system. A state change therefore results when perfect order is interrupted—the system may become complex, for example, or it may lapse into chaos. If a system is in chaos, an alteration of conditions produces drastic changes farther down the line, since there is no basin attractor to keep the effect from snowballing. This is the well-known “butterfly effect.”

But in the kind of order we see in complexity, which exists between equilibrium and chaos—and in the neurodynamics that create meaning and perception—the patterns react more stably to noise. The introduction of noise is not enough to force a state change, away from complexity-order, because of the way that complexity-order arises from noise itself, integrating more noise as it goes by pulling it into its basin attractor. New noise *is* enough, however, to nudge a pattern into a slightly different configuration, changing the outline or position of the basin attractor. This adaptation or “learning” response to alteration of conditions means that complexity-order can change gradually in response to its environment (Kauffman *At Home* 83-84, 188).

The landscape of basin attractors formed by the AM patterns that Freeman observed in the brains of rabbits displays all the characteristics of complexity-order, including the kind of gradual change and adaptation Kauffman describes. Successive sniffs of the same odorant reveal a gradual shift in the contours of the basin, which demonstrates the openness of the system to the integration of noise while retaining the characteristics of complexity-order. More than this, an individual’s experience—for

example, previous meanings attached to both the scent in question and other scents—also alter the attractor landscape. If a rabbit sniffs, as those in Freeman’s experiments did, sawdust, amyl acetate, butyric acid, and then sawdust again, the AM pattern from the final sniff of sawdust differs from that created by the first sniff of sawdust. The other scents have altered the attractor landscape so that the second sawdust sniff cannot land in the original sawdust basin attractor. “So,” writes Freeman, “the AM patterns are dependent on context, history, and significance—in a word, meaning” (77, see also 133). Tellingly, if no reinforcement at all follows the first sniff of a new odorant, then no AM pattern forms. The odor is returned to the status of noise, relegated to the background, sensed but unperceived.

So we learn about elements in our environment by intending to do something with regard to them and perceiving how they respond to our action. In his discussion of intention, Freeman invokes the Latin source, *intendere*, which means “not only to stretch forth but, equally important, to change the self by experiencing action and learning from the consequences of acting” (26). This is also how we create meaning: “meanings arise as a brain creates intentional behaviors and then changes itself in accordance with the sensory consequences of those behaviors” (Freeman 8). When we shape ourselves around an object, emergent patterns in our neurons are literally altered, so that we are changed by what we perceive. Freeman calls this process assimilation. It isn’t that pre-made meanings somehow find their way into our brains. Instead, we act into the world and meanings emerge from the interactions of neurons in our brains. This is the foundation of

agency. All meaning—including, of course, the sense that we are agents who can cause events in the world—emerges from our intentions and actions in our environments.

All perception, then, works unidirectionally, as people create meanings about that which they sense physically in their environments. Meaning can only move in one direction, from the perceiver toward objects or people in the environment, and not from objects or people toward the perceiver. Any understanding of rhetoric needs to take this into account. The *body* makes meaning. That includes not only the brain, but also the ears, skin, eyes, tongue, arms and legs—these are all integral to the meaning-making process because they work in a close reciprocal relationship with the brain from which meanings emerge. The sensory information from the body is only ever registered when the body is used intentionally, or meaningfully. The senses send information to the brain based on the intentions that emerge from the brain. The brain “creates,” through a process of self-organizing emergence, the intentions on which the body acts by using the information it gathers. This is an ongoing, reciprocal process.

Here it may be useful to discuss cause and effect in complexity. Cause and effect do not necessarily work linearly in complex systems. This nonlinearity can be illustrated using the phenomenon of emergence. The interactions of the elements in the system give rise to the overall property, and the property also constrains the interactions of the elements. We might call this “circular causality,” but there are two problems with this classification. First, circularity is closed, and we know that complex systems are open. Douglas Hofstadter proposes what he calls “strange loops” to help us understand this problem. Drawing on Hofstadter, Mark Taylor defines these loops as “self-reflexive

circuits, which, though appearing to be circular, remain paradoxically open” (75). But the second problem with “circular causality” is temporal. As Freeman points out, when we try to explain circular causality, we still understand the circle by snipping it and flattening it out: A influences B, (then) B influences A (128-129). In fact, in a state of complexity, effects can be simultaneous with causes, and insofar as the circle is something we’re expecting to travel around, it still forces us to understand causation as temporally linear. Freeman writes that in complex systems such as neurodynamics, hurricanes, lasers, fires, and so on,

particles making up the ensemble simultaneously create a mesoscopic state and are constrained by the very state they have created. Simultaneity violates the requirement that effects must follow causes, and the distributed nonlinear feedback makes a mockery of any attempt to determine which neuron caused which others to fire or not to fire. (128-129)

Despite his understanding of simultaneity, Freeman does actually use the metaphor of circular causality to explain what happens in neurodynamics. But he also claims, following David Hume, that our whole notion of causality is really more a quality of our minds than of phenomena in the physical world. This is because of intention’s role in perception. In our existing attractor landscape, Freeman explains, we hold a set of expectations about how an object in the world will react to our goal-directed action. When we fulfill our goals, we discern a causal relationship between our actions and the object’s (re)action (130). That’s why we can only understand causality in a linear way, or at best, a circular way (which is really a line we tie up at the ends). Freeman seems to think that since we’re set up to perceive linear/circular causality, we might as well keep

using it as a metaphor, even though it's wrong. But I think it's worth coming up with a different metaphor to help us understand the mutual influence between the interactions of a complex system and the property that emerges from it.

I suggest that causality in complexity theory is less like a line or a circle than a *haloed cluster*, in which the emergent property is a halo as of light or heat that *simultaneously arises from and influences* the interactions in the central cluster (see Fig. 3). The interactions in the cluster are what created the halo, and they continue to influence it whenever they integrate new noise, but they cannot escape its influence because the basin attractor continuously pulls interactions towards itself, altering the landscape when it integrates that new noise. Physicist Hermann Haken, whose work is foundational in complexity, calls this influence of the emergent property on the interacting elements "enslavement." The emergent property both emanates from the interactions and saturates them. Causality is a process of mutual ongoing adjustment.<sup>11</sup> This is how the brain and body work, as they mutually adjust to each other. When we analyze how rhetoric works in any given situation, we need to be aware of the body's continuing importance in making meaning.

Using neuroscience and complexity theory to explain how intentions and perceptions interact in the brain and body helps us understand what about Marine rhetoric is so successful. The Marines change recruits' intentions and create new meanings by

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<sup>11</sup> Some might object that this is a kind of overdetermination, in which everything influences everything else. In complex systems, everything *does* influence everything else. The objection to overdetermination is based on trust in linear causality, which cannot explain the phenomena exhibited by complex systems.

manipulating these interactions among intentions and perceptions, brains and bodies. DIs can work to change the intentions of their recruits by changing what their bodies sense.

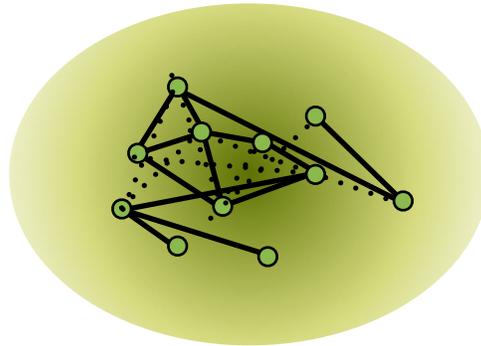


Figure 3. Haloed Cluster.

Like all interactions among people, attempts to persuade or induce consubstantiality, to use Burke's term, have to start with sensation. Given that humans screen out sensations that have no meaning to them, one of a rhetor's first jobs is to create sensations that matter. One way to do this is to make those sensations integral to the body itself—make them proprioceptive sensations. Proprioceptive sensations tell the brain where the various parts of the body are in space and in relation to other limbs. When DIs make recruits stand at attention, march in formation, or rappel down a forty-seven-foot tower, they are in fact telling recruits' bodies what sensory information to send to their

brains. Recruits are then more likely to make meaning out of these sensations, to perceive them as actions that mean something, even if nonconsciously.<sup>12</sup>

The effect of proprioception on meaning-making is well documented in psychological research, which has demonstrated not only that certain physical postures and actions correspond to certain emotions (Carney, Hall, & Smith LeBeau; Hall, Coats, & Smith LeBeau), but also that these emotions lead to behavioral changes, even if people are not conscious of those changes (Carney, Cuddy, & Yap; Strack, Martin, & Stepper; Huang et al.). Dana Carney, Amy Cuddy, and Andy Yap have demonstrated that embodying what they call a “power pose”—an expansive, open posture—for two minutes raises testosterone and lowers cortisol (both previously shown to correspond to power) and makes people more likely to take risks. In a subsequent experiment, Cuddy, Carney, and Caroline Wilmoth demonstrated that participants who power posed before a mock job interview were judged significantly higher on performance and hireability by blind judges, even if the subjects were not consciously aware of feeling more powerful, and even though they did not carry the power postures into the interviews. And Huang et al. demonstrated that physical posture is *more* important than a person’s hierarchical role in determining how powerful they act, even though they are less conscious of the effects of posture on their actions than the effects of the role they occupy. Clearly, making recruits

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<sup>12</sup> I use nonconscious instead of unconscious to clarify that I do not intend any reference to Freudian theory, which imbues many of our perceptions of the term “unconscious.” Many of the neuroscientists I draw on also use “nonconscious.”

manipulate their own bodies in particular ways is an important rhetorical tool at the Marines' disposal. Body positions matter.

Another way to create sensations that matter is to simply make the sensation new, or big or loud or fast, disrupting the expected flow of interaction. The work of Claude Shannon, an early systems theorist, is useful to explain how information is distinguished from noise. Shannon wanted to know how machines could detect signals in a sea of noise, and a breakthrough came in 1948 when he posited that information should be defined in relation to probability, that we must understand information as one bit selected from many other possible bits. The more unlikely a bit is, the more likely it is to be important (Shannon; M. Taylor 107-110; Kauffman *Reinventing* 94-97; Mitchell 51-55).

Shannon's insight allows us to see how form and information might operate according to the same set of rules,<sup>13</sup> a problem many have stumbled over in the guise of the mind-body problem.<sup>14</sup> The neuromodulators Freeman saw released in response to new

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<sup>13</sup> This is ironic, because Shannon started out by distinguishing between form and information. But then his method treated information as form by making the only relevant factor about a piece of information how often it repeats. The machine decoding the message only needs to detect a pattern of frequency of or infrequency. But new work in complexity theory blurs the distinction between form and information, while retaining Shannon's insight regarding the inverse relationship of information to probability. While Shannon distilled the "difference that *makes a difference*" into mathematics, or form, Mark Taylor applies the "difference that *makes a difference*" to meaning, letting go of Shannon's mathematical shorthand and its implications of a distinction between form and content (110; emphasis in original).

<sup>14</sup> Like Donald Davidson, who posited his anomolous monism in answer to this question about mind and matter interacting causally. Freeman says Davidson has been "undermined by new developments in physics and neurodynamics" because 1) Davidson's physics—and thus his understanding of the physical brain—didn't account

sensations—sensations that are important according to Shannon’s theory precisely because they haven’t happened before—are where the boundary between mind and body blur. That is, neuromodulators are released in response to a purely physical phenomenon, but they facilitate the emergence of AM patterns that constitute meaning. We can then extend this insight into the Pragmatist notion of meaning’s relation to broken expectations, as Freeman does (91-95). When audience expectations are broken, their brains are brought to a state of arousal by neuromodulators (Freeman 91, 97). Advertising is rife with attempts to create this kind of arousal. And boot camp is full of them as well, with screaming, gesticulating DIs and a high-octane pace (see Fig. 4).

In fact, recruit training’s use of neuromodulators’ capabilities in the brain goes beyond catching recruits’ attention with a little screaming. Lack of sleep, hunger, extreme sensory stimulation, physical exhaustion, and isolation from previously comfortable social interaction all make recruits more receptive to new meaning. Freeman points to Ivan Pavlov’s experiments with dogs in which extreme stressors led to collapse, and, after recovery from the collapse, a loss of prior training. Freeman posits that the wash of neuromodulators in the brain from the overstimulation can “loosen the synaptic fabric of the neuropil [neural fabric of the brain]” and “open the way for the growth of new intentional structure” (151, 150). Older learning becomes attenuated, and newer learning is therefore more possible, as well as more necessary.

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for emergence and 2) Davidson saw meaning as an open system, instead of seeing that brains create meanings in isolation (137-138).



Figure 4. Staff Sgt. Lindsey Gonzalez, Marine Corps Drill Instructor with Papa Company, 4th Recruit Training Battalion, at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C, July 10, 2013. Photo by Cpl. Caitlin Brink, From the Defense Video and Information Distribution System (Web; 11 July 2014).

In support of this theory, Freeman describes experiments that show how a particular neuromodulator, oxytocin, helps sheep mothers to bond with new litters by erasing scents of previous litters. If the chemical is blocked, the mothers fail to bond with their young, but it is not released during a ewe's first litter. "This implies," Freeman writes,

that oxytocin is required to expunge an olfactory imprint from a previous litter to pave the way for the imprinting of a new one. In other words, there needs to be unlearning of old meaning before new meaning can form, without significant loss of the procedural motor skills and episodic memories of experience. (152)

Freeman posits that the same kind of process happens in rites of passage and religious or political conversions. Freeman notes that this process has been denounced as brainwashing, but he laments this fact since these techniques, "in less extreme and more invitational form, are not only widespread in modern societies but are essential for the formation of cohesive social groups based on deep trust" (150). In fact, Freeman

mentions militaries, along with fraternities, street gangs, and sports teams as among those who use these techniques to produce trust (150). Crucially, this “washing” of the brain with neuromodulators only *opens the way* for new intentional structures. Because of the unidirectionality of perception, the intentions still have to emerge from the recruits’ own brains, and because neuromodulators never erase all brain patterns, each recruit’s identity is not completely destroyed. The wash just makes the way a little clearer. We can thus see boot camp as a mitigation of agency insofar as it works to disrupt some old structures of meaning, but it does not remove agency since intentions are always emergent from the recruits’ own brains.

We know that clearing the way for new meanings isn’t enough to persuade recruits to become Marines anyway. A rhetor needs to create not just any new intentions, but also specific intentions, specific meanings. At the most basic level, a DI needs to make a recruit intend to do what recruits do—for example, to keep their uniforms squared away. The meaning behind this particular intention for a given recruit could be as simple as “I will keep my uniform squared away to avoid pain,” like the rabbit with the odorant in Freeman’s experiments. This is force, actual or rhetorical. It is possible that some recruits stay at this level throughout boot camp, even throughout their careers as Marines. But this is undesirable from the Marine Corps’s standpoint. The Corps would rather recruits take pride in their sharp uniforms and identify with the unity it expresses with other Marines than simply do what they have to do to avoid punishment.

Perhaps ironically, one of the factors that helps the Corps move recruits away from this basic intention to avoid pain is the sheer difficulty of tasks in boot camp. Boot

camp is *hard*. While recruits are rebuilding their structures of intention, they need what in everyday language we call will power. When recruits become so exhausted on a hike that they think they can't go on, for example, they are likely to ask themselves whether being a Marine is worth it. Asking this question makes recruits conscious of their intentions, and thus their meanings. At this point, the Marine Corps needs more than force; it needs rhetorical power. It needs to ensure that recruits' conscious values enable them to finish the hike. How does this play out? To understand that, we need to discuss how consciousness and agency work in complex neurodynamics.

### **Consciousness and Agency**

No one yet knows how consciousness works or where it comes from. Neuroscientists are working on the problem in a variety of ways, and some well-known researchers such as J. A. Scott Kelso, Giulio Tononi, Christof Koch, and of course Freeman are using complexity theory. I find Freeman's explanation the most convincing and the most useful because of the way he explains how perception and meaning-making relate to consciousness. He begins with awareness, proposing that awareness arises from the self-organizing, global interactions of AM (amplitude modulation) patterns such as those formed when our rabbit sniffed sawdust and made meaning from the sensation, or our recruit made meaning from his DI's shouting (Freeman 134-135). That is, while AM patterns arise from the interactions of neurons, in a hierarchical "next step up," awareness

arises from the interactions of AM patterns.<sup>15</sup> We do not yet have a precise empirical understanding of how this happens, but *emergence* seems to be the best explanation for the origin of awareness. Awareness emanates from the interaction of the AM pattern like the halo from the cluster.

In Freeman's scheme, adding time to awareness leads to consciousness:

"Awareness is an experience, which in neurodynamic terms is a transient state.

Consciousness is the process by which sequences of hemispherewide states of awareness form a trajectory of meaning" (116). This trajectory of meaning is the attractor landscape created by meaning, continually adapting to new sensory data.

Consciousness, like any other emergent or halo property, constrains the actions of the elements from which it emerges. While the noise of neural activity continually pushes the system toward chaos, emergent patterns generate intentional activities as described above. Consciousness provides yet another layer of emergence and therefore yet another layer of constraint. Drawing on the work of physical chemist Ilya Prigogine, Freeman claims that it is the role of consciousness to "prevent precipitous action not by inhibition but by quenching local chaotic fluctuations through sustained interaction that acts as a global constraint for damping, as described by Prigogine" (Freeman 134-135). Prigogine has demonstrated that under conditions of complexity, the stability of the system depends meaningfully not just on microscopic short-range interactions, but also on global characteristics, such as the size of the system (Prigogine 103-126). The basin attractors in

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<sup>15</sup> Hierarchy does not connote value in this usage; it's just that the "lower" levels are necessary for the "higher" levels.

Kauffman's Boolean networks are another example of this kind of global influence on stability. New interactions, or noises, are integrated into existing basin attractors, which change their shape in accommodating them. The basin attractor was originally formed by microscopic short-range interactions, but now that it has formed, it, and not the individual interactions, "decides" how noise will be integrated. So Freeman contends that it isn't consciousness's role to pick out certain actions and say "don't do that"; rather, the effect has to do with how the building blocks of consciousness create stability through the very manner of their interaction.

The mutual influence of consciousness and its building blocks of meaning is an excellent example of the kind of haloed causality I explained above (see Fig. 3). If we apply the principles of haloed causality to neurodynamics, we see that consciousness emerges from interactions and constrains them, even as it itself is constrained. And because consciousness emerges from the sequence of meanings in the attractor landscape, its substance is that which is meaningful according to our lived experiences. We are conscious of that which is meaningful and that of which we are conscious is meaningful.

Consciousness not only directs us toward that which is meaningful; I argue that it also gives us a sense that we are agents who are responsible for our actions. In this definition of agency as involving consciousness, I break from Freeman. Discussing what he calls the "pseudoproblem" of free will versus determinism, Freeman seems to see agency as the actual initiation of actions, disregarding consciousness. Current research seems to indicate that our awareness of our actions and decisions usually lags behind our brain's dynamics, which, if we define agency as the conscious initiation of intentional

actions, must be interpreted as a point in favor of determinism. If we're not aware of a decision until after we've made it, how can we really be agents?<sup>16</sup> Freeman answers the question by removing the necessity for awareness from agency. His position is outlined here:

In summary, each of us is a source of meaning, a wellspring for the flow of fresh constructions within our brains and bodies, sheltered by the privacy of isolation. Our constructions are by [*sic*] the exuberant growth of patterns of neural activity from the chaotic dynamics of populations containing myriads of neurons. Our intentional actions continually flow into the world, changing the world and the relations of our bodies to it. This dynamic system is the self in each of us. *It* is the agency in charge, not our awareness, which is constantly trying to catch up with what we do. (139; emphasis added)

According to this analysis, the “dynamic system” of our actions into the world is the agency that is really directing us, and this system is self-organized, not directed by a single, centralized will.

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<sup>16</sup> Freeman refers to the work of Benjamin Libet. Many of Libet's experiments in the late 1970s and 80s seem to prove that the consciousness of a decision follows the preparations for the act itself. But in a 1999 paper, Libet argued that we do have conscious veto power (more on this later). Since Freeman's book was published in 2000, it is unclear whether he had read this 1999 paper (it isn't in Freeman's bibliography). Work on awareness of intention continues, with many debates on methodology and implication, as Kerri Smith's article in *Nature*, “Neuroscience vs. Philosophy: Taking Aim at Free Will,” illustrates. But we have no empirically definitive answer on the question. Alexander Batthyany claims that models that “deny the reality of conscious causation and free will” and those that affirm it are both “compatible with the outcomes of the experiments” done at the time of his writing in 2009 (8). Soon et al.'s 2013 research adds another layer to this question, as the authors claim to be able to predict subjects' abstract choices before they make them, but they only succeed at a 60% rate, and they do not deal with conscious veto power.

But Freeman’s analysis does suggest that consciousness is important to agency, even if consciousness is not its wellspring. Freeman continues, “We perceive the world from inside our boundaries as we engage it and then change ourselves by assimilation. *Our actions are perceived by ourselves and others as the pursuit of individual goals, and as the expression of our meanings*” (139; emphasis added). We perceive ourselves as agents. It is because of this lived experience that the whole question of agency arises. We wouldn’t even bother trying to decide whether or not we had free will if we didn’t experience ourselves as agents, capable of acting and responsible for our actions.

Cooper’s extremely useful theory of rhetorical agency as emergent and enacted uses Freeman’s understanding with this added consideration of consciousness—our perception of ourselves as agents. That is, she asserts that

agents do reflect on their actions consciously; they do have conscious intentions and goals and plans; but their agency does not arise from conscious mental acts [conscious initiation of action], though consciousness does play a role. Agency is based in individuals’ lived knowledge that their actions are their own. (421)

This assessment acknowledges that consciousness is part of agency.

But I want to add another function for consciousness regarding agency. Freeman says that consciousness does not work through the inhibition of actions, but through complexity’s nonlinear causality—what I call haloed causality (134-135). I argue that it works through *both* inhibition and haloed causality. Research suggests that we can veto the actions that arise from our neurodynamics when we are conscious of an intention and how it fits into our own trajectory of meaning (Freeman alludes to this in passing on 124;

see Libet 51-53). That is, while many of our intended actions, like lifting a cup to our lips, do not require ongoing awareness of the action, our consciousness can keep us from performing an action that we don't want to perform, as when we remember that the last time we drank our coffee as soon as the server gave it to us, we burned our tongue, or that we have been wanting to cut down on sugary drinks to lose weight.

Under this model I propose, our nonconscious intentions guide us until we encounter a problem. Our self-organizing neurons, with the help of neuromodulators from the limbic system, give us intentions for actions that we perceive as automatic. Cooper, following Kauffman's "order for free" formulation, calls this "meaning for free" (429). Unless something comes along to break our expectations and prompt us to do otherwise, we'll act according to those "free" intentions. Self-organizing neuron populations do a remarkably good job at coordinating our everyday interactions—our habitual intentions—in our environment. Over time, they build up a personality, or what Cooper calls a disposition: "how we experience the neurodynamic structure of individuals, ourselves included" (Cooper 432). This disposition need not be conscious.

But this nonconscious disposition is not the sum total of our selfhood. If some object or event gets hold of our awareness and our AM patterns organize a *conscious* meaning around it, we can alter our self-organized, nonconscious intentions. Recruits can consciously force themselves not to swat at sand fleas on their arms, though their spontaneous intention might be to slap and scratch for all they're worth. They can force themselves to finish a hike they thought they could never get through. So we are agents who both initiate and veto intentional actions, because of the nonconscious selfhood that

Freeman describes as arising from our actions into the world *and* because our consciousness directs our trajectory of meaning through inhibition and simultaneous halo constraints.

Rhetoric in boot camp works on multiple levels to change both the nonconscious selfhood and the conscious. As mentioned above, boot camp can alter intentions and some meanings through force and rhetorical force. But if the intentions come to consciousness, as when tasks are very difficult, those intentions acquire yet more meaning. This is when rhetorical power, which works well on a conscious level, is most effective.

During recruit training, the Corps makes available myriad options for conscious meaning making. These options take many forms, such as inspirational talks from the senior DI, signs and placards with slogans and Corps values everywhere, the recitation of the Rifleman's Creed and the singing of the Marine Hymn, the playing of Taps before lights out, the honor attached to the platoon's colors (flag), instruction in Marine lore during history classes, religious reinforcement for those who attend services, the discussion of the Marines' official core values of honor, courage, and commitment in dedicated "core values huts" during the Crucible, and above all, the fact that forty to eighty other recruits are going through it all at the same time. These examples are uses of rhetorical power that may work nonconsciously, but they also lend themselves well to the inevitable conscious reflection brought about by the difficulty of training.

None of the options for meaning making listed above can transplant their "content" into recruits' brains, but they are there waiting, saturating the environment,

when the recruit is ready to find new meanings. Boot camp thus creates a need for new meanings and values by crafting a rhetorical environment in which renegotiation of old meanings and values is necessary, and then it fulfills that need.

In fact, Marine Corps recruit training is an excellent place to study the role of conscious agency in persuasion precisely because of the interplay between the strong physical sensations and the rhetorical situation that is saturated with opportunities for conscious reflection. One might see intense physical sensations as precluding conscious reflection and agency, and this can be true in the sense that exhaustion can dampen one's capacity for rational deliberation. But if agency supervenes on consciousness, consciousness supervenes on meaning, and meaning supervenes on physical sensation, then the connection is clear. Boot camp makes it almost impossible for recruits to escape conscious reflection on the meaning of their physical sensations while offering many opportunities to make the meaning they are supposed to make. This is about as far as persuasion can go without becoming coercion.

### **Agents in a Rhetorical Situation**

Thus far I have discussed the center of my spatial map—the unidirectional bridge of perception—and one of the haloed clusters—the person-as-complex-system. Now I discuss the other haloed cluster, the complex system of people at boot camp—what is traditionally called the rhetorical situation—and how it is connected to the rest of the map. I have argued for agency as integral to perception, which is a one-way phenomenon; this means that agency is not dispersed into the rhetorical situation. It is not in the

“kinetic energy” between people, as Carolyn Miller would have it; it is not shared by ambience, as Rickert asserts; and it is certainly not entirely dissolved into a node-less system, as Dobrin argues. Agency emerges from individuals’ brains.

But though the perceptual bridge is unidirectional, it is still a bridge. There must be connections and interactions between individual and environment for agency to exist. That is, meanings can emerge from neurodynamics only when agents interact in the world. Further, when agents reach out across a bridge of perception, using their senses, that which they sense obviously makes a difference. Even though meanings emerge from the interactions of neurons within an individual’s brain, they are initiated by the sensory neurons’ messages about what is there in the world. So the world offers constraints, or what in complexity theory are called order parameters, on possible meanings. I share Rickert’s insistence that what’s in the surround matters, even if I don’t go so far as to say that the surround has agency.

To clarify my stance on dispersed agency, it may be useful to contrast my position with Rickert’s in further detail. Rickert uses examples from pop culture, which by nature of their popularity “already speak to everyday concerns,” to illustrate how troubled our notions of agency as a solely human property already are (3). In the film *Minority Report*, for example, advertisements pop up wherever people seem to be in need of their product, as when an American Express ad appears to the fleeing protagonist saying “It looks like you need an escape, and Blue can take you there.” Rickert analyzes the example as follows:

advertising is fully mobile and interactive; it is “smart” because it can assess, adapt to, and influence emerging situations, such as a man on the run who has been identified by networked computers assessing circulating data that are empowered to capitalize on his predicament. “Who” are the agents here? It would be arbitrary if not simplistic to assign agency solely to the human programming of computers. (3)

This is an interesting example, and it certainly does point to discomfort in society about whether machines can be agents. It also points to what Miller describes as “our predilection for ethopoeia,” which “results in frequent attributions of agency to machines: people name their cars, others talk to their computers, gamblers attribute beneficence or malevolence to slot machines, and so on” (151). But I argue that this example does not necessarily point to agency on the part of the machines.

Rickert seems to assert that the American Express ad has agency because it “can assess, adapt to, and influence emerging situations.” I don’t dispute that agents can do those things, but agency includes more than these abilities. As I stated in the introduction to the project, agency is defined as the ability to act with the knowledge that one’s actions are one’s own. I don’t mean to assert, facilely, human uniqueness over and against machines by claiming that because machines aren’t conscious of their actions as their own, they aren’t agents. I mean that the phenomenon of agency as we know it from a human perspective—and we can only know it from a human perspective because of the unidirectionality of perception—necessarily involves awareness that one’s actions are one’s own, simply by virtue of the way the process works. We act into the world based on intentions that emerge from our neurodynamics. This is the process by which we form not only meaning, but consciousness. The AM patterns that form in response to sensation

are what create meaning—and they are also the building blocks of consciousness. Our sense that we are the cause of our actions is therefore inextricably intertwined with human perception and action in the world.

In a postmodern and posthumanist theoretical environment, my insistence on the unidirectionality of perception may seem a humanist obsolescence, an outdated attempt to cling to humanity as the center of the universe. This is not my intent. In fact, I readily acknowledge the agency of creatures other than humans. I don't doubt that animals are agents. And machines may even be agents at some point. What will make them agents, though, is not the ability to “assess, adapt to, and influence emerging situations,” which many computers can already do. It will be a process that involves perception, meaning-making, and consciousness *through complex emergence*. The process of emergence from a complex dynamic system—millions of neurons interacting in the brain, coordinating with hands and feet and mouths—is what currently separates living agency from mechanical processes. If at some point we create computers that can put material gathered through sensors into a complex system so that meaning emerges from that complexity and then consciousness emerges as well, we will see machines with agency. Artificial intelligence scientists are working on it. Freeman has written extensively in the field of neural networking, the building of artificial networks to model how neurons interact in the brain.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, “A Pseudo-equilibrium Thermodynamic Model of Information Processing in Nonlinear Brain Dynamics” *Neural Networks* 21.2-3 (Mar-Apr 2008): 257-265; “Indirect Biological Measures of Consciousness from Field Studies of Brains as

What does this mean for the rhetorical situation? That is, if agency is no longer dispersed into it, but the situation still matters, how should we understand that situation with regard to rhetorical phenomena? I propose that we view rhetorical situations as complex systems from which various properties can emerge. While Rickert, Hawk, and Dobrin's use of complexity theory involves the dispersal of individual agency, I contend that the agencies of rhetors and audience members constitute important order parameters for the complex system that is the rhetorical situation. Individual agencies keep the system from being too ordered, as people are never entirely predictable. Rhetors do attempt to impose a certain kind of order, but as discussed above, people cannot be forced to adopt the meanings of a given rhetor. Still, even though their interactions are not micromanaged by some omnipotent director, the interactions of rhetors and audience members can give rise to emergent properties, just like elements in any other complex system. As intangible properties like consciousness and agency emerge from the person-as-complex system, intangible properties also emerge from rhetorical situations as wholes. Rhetors and audience members can then perceive and respond to those properties, which changes both the properties and the people. Mutual change is inevitable because the properties and the people are linked together in a haloed cluster of interaction and emergence.

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Dynamical Systems" *Neural Networks* 20.9 (Nov 2007): 1021-1031; "The KIV Model of Intentional Dynamics and Decision Making" *Neural Networks* 22.3 (Apr 2009): 277-285; "Vortices in Brain Activity: Their Mechanism and Significance for Perception" *Neural Networks* 22.5-6 (July-Aug 2009): 491-501.

The application of complexity theory to social systems is not as precise as with other systems we have discussed—it is not as demonstrable as with Boolean networks or as observable as with neural networks. Systems involving people with agency have the added wrinkle that what people believe about themselves affects how they act, as Anthony Giddens has made clear (xii-xiii). But the idea of complexity in social situations is fertile ground for speculation. A number of scholars have applied complexity to social actions at what Roger Lewin calls “the level of analogy”; Lewin even writes about anthropologists and archaeologists who apply complexity principles to state formation, positing that states emerge from complexity in generally similar ways (166, 193-194). Mark Taylor also writes insightfully about complexity theory’s application to our current cultural moment; Rickert, Hawk, and Dobrin use his work extensively.

Because scholars who study social phenomena are working at the level of analogy rather than in concrete terms, it comes as no surprise that there are differing interpretations of how the theory works in social situations. But the essence of complexity theory is the idea that the whole can be more than the sum of its parts. In a system that exists on the edge of chaos, not too ordered and not too random, elements will interact in particular ways that lead to some emergent property or properties.

So the most useful analogy we can gain from complexity theory in discussing Marine recruit training is to search for the property that emerges from the rhetorical situation of boot camp. I propose that what emerges from recruit training is a sense of what it is to be a Marine, or more accurately, what it is to be Marines. It is a sense of a body of men and women united by values and *ethos*, by the shared disposition to perceive

certain objects with certain meanings. The fact that this sense arises from the actions of all Marines is a built-in component of this sense of Marinehood. That is, to be a Marine is to be part of the group that creates Marinehood. This group is a body, even across generations. The leadership manual put out by the USMC as part of its warfighting series declares, for example, that anyone seeking to lead Marines must understand that

our Corps embodies the spirit and essence of those who have gone before. [The Marine *ethos*] is about the belief, shared by all Marines, that there is no higher calling than that of a United States Marine. It is about the traditions of our Corps that we rely upon to help us stay the course and continue the march when the going gets tough. It is about a “band of brothers”—men and women of every race and creed—who epitomize in their daily actions the core values of our Corps: **honor, courage, commitment.** (n.p. Introduction; emphasis in original)

The emergent quality of Marinehood is a “spirit” or an “essence” that has to do with what is “shared by all Marines,” who are a “band of brothers” (including women). The Corps’s traditions are what help each Marine keep going in tough times, not the ostensible reason for fighting whatever war a given Marine happens to be in. These things are what make up the Marine *ethos*: feeling oneself to be part of this body that continually defines itself.

One could argue that the writers of this manual are creating this “Marine essence” and imposing it on Marines. There is some truth to this—they are certainly rhetors who want to guide their audience to the “right” meanings. But this kind of rhapsodic description of the Marines as a band of fighters unified even among different generations exists in many places, not just manuals. For example, Master Sergeant Andy Bufalo wrote, in an open letter to terrorists, that while it is true that the Americans depicted in television shows are soft, “we also have a warrior culture in this country, and they are

called Marines. It is a brotherhood forged in the fire of many wars, and the bond between us is stronger than blood” (n.p.). Here again Marinehood is created by the actions of Marines who have lived and died over many years. And other descriptions of Marinehood are less exalted, but they do frequently allude to an intangible sense of “Marineness” created by actions taken together. For example, Butler talked about how the same disciplined, committed, give-it-your-all kind of attitude is embodied by Marines as they clean toilets, learn infantry tactics, or kill their enemies. This is learned in boot camp, he said. It’s a Marine attitude that “just becomes part of the *ethos*, it’s just absorbed into it.”

These three descriptions illustrate different levels of affirmation of the emergent sense of Marinehood, from the guiding document for all Marines to a high-ranking noncommissioned officer’s experience to the experience of an enlisted Marine. No doubt the parameters that the commandant and other officers set up for boot camp—the exercises, the environment, the DIs’ training—contribute to this sense of Marinehood. But they do not prefabricate it and then just hang it in the air at Parris Island and San Diego for the recruits to absorb. It is an emergent property that emanates from the interactions of recruits and Marines, and it is more than the sum of the activities that happen there.

Recruits perceive this emergent sense of Marinehood in various ways. As we know, it cannot be simply plugged into recruits’ brains as raw meaning. It has to enter through the senses. But it can enter in various forms, sometimes in particular actions, sometimes as an abstract concept, sometimes through stories told in classes. Let’s examine the value of commitment as an illustration. Even before they arrive at boot

camp, recruits are likely to know that commitment is one of the Corps's "core values" of honor, courage, and commitment. They would know this through recruiters, web material, television advertisements—even billboards proclaim the value. Recruits will have some sense of what commitment means from previous interactions and uses of the word. When they get to boot camp, they will have many opportunities to question their commitment, starting with the abuse they receive on the yellow footprints (Cabrera n.p.). They will experience exhaustion, pain, and food and sleep deprivation, and they will want to quit—badly. Somewhere between 10% and 14% of recruits do quit (Brookshire and Hattiangati 5; Hall n.p.). But those who stay demonstrate commitment, and they can interpret their staying as commitment even if sometimes it didn't feel like the noble value of commitment. Even if they stayed because they had nowhere else to go, the constant availability of the concept allows them to see their actions as a demonstration of commitment. Another opportunity to understand commitment comes from recruits watching others in their platoon, as exhausted as they are, continue their tasks. And DIs are a special source of inspiration. Drill instructors do all tasks required of Marines and more. One recruit told journalist Thomas Ricks, "When you've gone sixteen hours, and you're wiped out, and you see [the DI] motoring, you say to yourself, 'I've got to tap into whatever he has'" (153). There are opportunities for more abstract understandings and discussions of the word as well, such as in the core values huts during the crucible. James B. Wolfe recounts such a conversation after a platoon completed a task representing the commitment of Corporal Mackie:

“What about Corporal Mackie’s marksmanship skills, how did he use them to take care of others?”

“He kept up the fire at the enemy,” said a recruit.

“His skill could be counted on,” said Sergeant Lee. “What’s that called?”

“Competence, Sergeant,” said one man.

“That’s part of commitment,” said another.

...

“Right,” said Sergeant Lee. “Having the dedication to maintain and improve to a level that is second to none. That should be your own goal with the rifle by building off the marksmanship skills you developed when we were on the rifle range.” (n.p. Chapter 4)

Here stories are used to describe the value, letting recruits make meaning around the word “commitment” in yet another way. These discussions, stories, and physical requirements of commitment contribute to the sense of what it is to be a Marine. Even though they are unpredictable in themselves, interactions within order parameters set up by the USMC lead to the emergence of the quality that unites Marines.

The emergent sense of Marinehood can also be emblemized in a more holistic way by various symbols, like the platoon’s colors or the Marine uniform. Because these symbols are ever present, and because all Marines treat them with respect, they are ready to carry whatever meaning recruits create to attach to Marines in general. Perhaps the most potent of these symbols is the eagle, globe, and anchor symbol that all Marines wear, and that recruits have pinned on their camouflage uniforms after going through the

Crucible, when they officially become Marines. Woulfe writes that at the end of the Crucible,

the drill instructor handing a recruit his first eagle, globe, and anchor will culminate the transformation into a Marine. It creates a sense of belonging that is important to his feeling and acting like a Marine. . . . the recruit, now a new Marine, knows that he or she is truly different. (n.p. Chapter 5)

Gunnery Sergeant Nick Popaditch, in his instructions on how to survive boot camp, puts it more succinctly: “When your Drill Instructor puts your Eagle, Globe, and Anchor in your hand, you will know who you are” (171). And former Marine John Roseman attests to the long-lasting power of the ceremony in his perception of his own identity, more than ten years after it occurred:

At 8:00 a.m. we had what is called the Eagle, Globe and Anchor Ceremony. At this time, Lee Greenwood's “God Bless the USA” played on a loop while the Drill Instructors went to every recruit in formation and handed them their Eagle, Globe and Anchors with the simple expression “Congratulations, Marine!” At that moment, most of us were overwhelmed with emotion and began crying. For the first time, we felt a sense of accomplishment that is not felt very often. We were no longer “maggots” or “lower than dirt” and were finally Marines! That is a moment that to this day still brings up emotion. (Personal email)

The Marines set up visual, tactile, and auditory sensations in such a way that recruits find it both easy and rewarding to reach out across their bridges of perception make the meaning the Corps desires them to make. Recruits have just experienced an intense flooding of neuromodulators and proprioceptive sensations during the Crucible, and the eagle, globe, and anchor and the name “Marine” can give meaning to those experiences

in a way that makes their effort seem worthwhile, not to say heroic. It is unsurprising that the moment is formative and memorable.

So boot camp is a complex system that gives rise to a sense of what it means to be a Marine, which recruits can assimilate in various ways, through symbols, physical actions, and more abstract discussions. They also assimilate individual elements of the rhetorical situation, making meaning of drill through their proprioceptive senses, making meaning of orders through their hearing, making meaning of mess hall food through their taste, and so on, and through it all, also making meaning through conscious reflection and decision making. The rhetorical situation is made up of agents and order parameters interacting in a complex system, all perceived unidirectionally and made sense of by individual members of that system.

## **Conclusion**

This is how the rhetoric used in boot camp “makes Marines.” Recruits are placed in a rhetorical environment rich with opportunities for meaning making and then yelled at, disoriented, worked hard, and deprived of food and sleep, which creates a state of arousal and overstimulation in recruits’ brains. These stressors wash the brain in neuromodulators that not only loosen old synaptic connections but also prepare the brain to make new ones, so that when sensations occur, new AM patterns *emerge* in the brain, with new *intentions* and new *meanings*. Thus, recruits begin to *perceive* themselves and their environments differently. Events at boot camp also inevitably engage recruits’ *consciousness*, which is emergent from those perception-based AM patterns in the brain.

Recruits reflect on their actions, creating conscious meanings to go with their already-formed nonconscious meanings. Recruits can consciously make decisions about how to deal with the stresses of boot camp. This conscious decision making, along with the fact that meaning must always originate in a person's own mind, is indicative of *emergent agency*, but agency is also mitigated by the use of stressors and the ubiquitous presence of the Corps's own preferred meanings. A sense of what it is to be a Marine also *emerges* from the complex system of boot camp, which recruits can assimilate in various ways, along with meanings they make by interacting with individual elements of boot camp. The persuasive process in USMC recruit training is thus a complicated mix of conscious and nonconscious processes, agency and the mitigation of agency, complexity and order.

## CHAPTER III

### THE YELLOW FOOTPRINTS

When we finally reached the gate at Parris Island, the bus stopped at the guard post and the bus driver told the Marine on duty that she had a bus full of recruits. The Marine came on the bus and yelled at us for no apparent reason. One of the other new joins at the airport had told me that they drive you around in circles once on Parris Island so that you get confused and don't know how to get off the island should you try and escape . . .

Just before the bus stopped we drove under a sign that arched the road which read "Where The Difference Begins." I wondered whether, at my age [24], a truly fundamental difference would occur. . . . We'll have to wait and see what the Marines can do.

. . . I was the first to line up on the famous "yellow footprints." . . . Everybody stands on a set of footprints, which are lined up in four columns in a marching formation. Of course, I was so disoriented and confused that I jumped off the bus and stood on the footprints facing the wrong way. The Drill Instructor was kind enough to show me the error of my ways, referring to me as a "moron." After they got me facing the proper direction and everybody lined up on the yellow footprints, they marched us through these big, huge, shiny metal doors. Above the doors it said, "Through These Portals Pass Prospects For America's Finest Fighting Force." Reading these words reminded me of why I was here and calmed me down at the same time as it filled me with [an] unprecedented sense of purpose and motivation. (Lalor n.p. Chapter 2)



Figure 5. Yellow Footprints on which New Recruits Stand at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island. Photo by Geoffrey Ingersoll, in "Welcome to the Suck: Here's What Life at Marine Boot Camp is Like" in *Business Insider* 12 Jan. 2014. Web.

Since the 1960s, the first order incoming recruits receive when they arrive at the recruit depot is to get off the bus that brought them there and stand on a set of yellow footprints (fig. 5). The footprints are arranged in a four-person-wide column, the first drill formation in which the recruits engage and the recruits' first taste of drill discipline. A receiving drill instructor (DI) orders the recruits to stand at the position of attention (POA) and then reads the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) to which recruits are now accountable. This display of rhetorical force is then buttressed by the command that all sentences out of recruits' mouths must begin and end with "sir" or "ma'am," giving authority to the DIs and any other Marines to whom recruits speak. The DI also tells recruits that they may no longer use the first person, but must now refer to themselves as "this recruit." This new moniker, along with the uniformity of their stance, begins to deny the recruits their individuality. The yellow footprints are also home to the first famous "shark attack" of screaming DIs (the second, larger one occurs when the platoons are formed and recruits first meet their permanent DIs), which inaugurates the campaign of disorientation to which recruits are subjected during the first phase of their training. This disorientation serves to make recruits more receptive to the indoctrination in "love of Corps and country" that boot camp offers (DI oath). And finally, that indoctrination is represented by the sign over the gate through which recruits march, with an inspiring slogan that is meant to remind recruits that they do really want to be there, or perhaps to throw down a challenge: "Through These Portals Pass Prospects For America's Finest Fighting Force."

The excerpt from Kieran Michael Lalor's journal that opens this chapter, written on Parris Island during recruit training, illustrates a number of the key elements of USMC recruit training emblemized by the yellow footprints: the mitigation of agency through disorientation and verbal abuse from DIs; the expression of agency through reflection, resolve, and individual response to the Corps's rhetorical power; the beginning of drill discipline through standing at attention; and the absorption of individual identity into the group body through uniformity.

In this chapter I use memoirs, personal interviews, and journalists' accounts to explicate each of these elements in turn, discussing them in relation not only to the yellow footprints, but to their use throughout boot camp in relation to each other. The disorientation and verbal abuse of the first phase of training make recruits more susceptible to Marine rhetoric, as discussed in the previous chapter. That is, the release of arousal-based neuromodulators loosens old intentional structures, leaving recruits to find new ways to perceive the world around them and their own actions. Recruits are thus ready to bond in a leader-follower relationship with their DIs, who represent what it means to be a Marine by embodying order in the midst of chaos. But recruits' old habits and dispositions are not completely erased by the stress of boot camp, and they express their own agencies in response to the disorientation and verbal abuse in a variety of ways other than simply copying their DIs' actions. If they succeed at training, recruits learn to at least partially incorporate their individual agency into a corporate agency. Drill practice emblemizes this process on two levels: one deals with the interplay of order and chaos, and the other with negotiations of agency. Regarding order and chaos, recruits

are always disorderly when they begin to drill because it is unfamiliar. But by the end, they have followed the example of their DIs' precise, ordered movements, moving in unison with their platoon mates, creating order from the chaos of boot camp. Regarding agency, drill takes away recruits' individual agency by forcing them to move in exact and particular ways, but it also gives them a new power as they move with a group with whom they now feel consubstantial, their brothers or sisters in the body of the Corps. Through all of this interaction, a sense of what it means to be a Marine emerges, and recruits have the opportunity to reach across the one-way bridge of their perceptions and embody it.

### **Mitigation of Agency through Disorientation and Verbal Abuse**

Whether or not it is true that recruits are driven around the island in circles so that they don't know how to escape, as Lalor wonders, it is beyond doubt that one of the Marines' first goals for recruits at boot camp is disorientation. The wash of arousal-based neuromodulator chemicals, which Walter Freeman posits loosens old neural connections and intentional structures in recruits' brains, begins immediately and continues through the first phase of training. Recruits arrive at night, in the dark, and get very little sleep for the first several days of boot camp. The DIs have been invested with rhetorical force by the UCMJ; the code puts all the institutional weight of the military justice system and the U.S. government behind DIs' power to punish recruits who disobey. Thus when they scream at recruits, giving them orders they don't yet know how to follow, and then reprimanding them when they cannot obey, their words have ample rhetorical force to

make an impact on recruits, in addition to the sheer power of physical intimidation. In the face of all this power, recruits' bodies are almost beyond their control, both in the sense that they must follow orders about how to arrange their limbs and in the sense that their involuntary nervous systems are hyper-aroused by the new and aggressive stimulation their nerves are receiving. For example, the new world of boot camp initiates faster heart rates, dizziness, nausea, even alteration in basic perception—one recruit reports that when he entered the recruit depot, “the world seemed to change to a different color on that side of the gate” (Stoner 10). When recruits spend a significant amount of time in this state, they are much more likely to follow instructions. They are more likely to reach out across the perceptual bridge for guidance and the values available from the Marines around them, especially their DIs, and perceive the Marines the way their DIs do. In this section I analyze how this process of loosening old intentional structures works to make way for new meanings.

Former Marine Gregg Stoner says that as soon as his bus had entered the recruit depot at Parris Island, “everything seemed too big. Yelling was constant. The experience was turning into a nightmare. . . . Then all hell broke loose, and they swarmed on us like stink on crap. Yelling and screaming. It was everywhere, and in stereo” (12). Stoner is describing the famous “shark attack” of the yellow footprints. Significantly, Stoner titles his memoir *The Yellow Footprints to Hell and Back*. Amber Cabrera informs prospective recruits in her *Boot Camp Survival Guide* that when they stand on those famous yellow footprints, they will ask themselves, “what have I gotten myself into?” (n.p.).

At this point, and continuing through the whole first phase of training, recruits are often bewildered and frantic, as demonstrated by Lalor's standing backward on the footprints. DIs certainly affect recruits' involuntary functions, such as heartbeat, and recruits' brains do not function at peak levels under such stress. Former Marine Robert Taylor told me in an email that DIs give recruits a constant "horrible feeling" in the pit of the stomach, and he said that for the first phase of training, "recruits remain so shook up they seem to begin saying sir to sign posts, saluting civilian workers." Stoner writes that "having a DI in your face was like having a Doberman pincher growling just inches from your nose. Your heart skips a beat, and your pulse nears the explosion level" (18). Former Marine Patrick Turley reports feeling "light headed" when he saw his DIs for the first time:

they got in our faces, prodding at us with their fingers and screaming in our ears. Between the three of them at a constant yell, and my focus on my posture, most of the yelling was unintelligible. I just sat there, unsure of what to do or say, even unaware of how I got there. (n.p. Chapter 1)

Recruits do not have complete command over their own bodies or brains because of the neuromodulators released when DIs create such larger-than-life sensations. This is one point at which recruits' agency is extremely mitigated, since many of their physical reactions—increased heart rate, sweating, and so on—are involuntary and exist as immediate responses to the DIs' actions. Recruits have been flooded with neuromodulators that erase their old meanings and intentional structures, but they have not had the opportunity to build new ones. They are thus bereft of orientation in the

world, of habitual attitudes that enable them to succeed. Still, recruits are held accountable for their actions—while being set up to fail.

One of the points of the shark attack is to demonstrate to recruits how little they know in their new environment: they don't know how to stand, where to point their eyes, or how to perceive this new creature now confronting them, the drill instructor. The insistence on recruits' lack of knowledge is clear in the yellow footprints scene in Turley's memoir, beginning with the DI's instructions on the bus:

“My name is Drill Instructor Staff Sergeant Jones. Welcome to thirteen weeks of hell.” He paused, taking in a deep breath. “Now *get off my frickin' bus!*” he yelled, exploding at us.

I jerked myself up and made a sprint for the door, as we all pushed and fought through each other for the very first time. There were other Drill Instructors waiting outside around a set of yellow footprints. . . .

“Stand at the friggin' POA!” one of them barked at me, with a sharp finger pointed into my face.

What the fuck is a POA? (Turley n.p. Chapter 13)

In Turley's case, the recruits had not been told that the POA is the position of attention, much less what posture was required, before they were instructed to assume it.

Setting recruits up to fail is part of the plan to disorient recruits, and the disorientation is part of the training, says a master sergeant interviewed by journalist Thomas Ricks (42). Boot camp was frequently described to me as a process of breaking recruits down so they could be built back up as Marines; this disorientation of the first phase is clearly part of breaking recruits down. In the beginning of training, it is

impossible for recruits to get anything right—they are always in the wrong. Ricks writes about the beginning of boot camp, “For the most part, the platoon learns by error. They live in a blur of anonymous drill instructors sweeping by them and yelling at them for committing sins they didn’t know existed” (46). Former Marine Eric Odiorne compares this phase to a fixed game: “You’re playing a game but you don’t know the rules to it. They’re there to tell you when you are wrong. That’s how you find out the rules” (personal communication). Drill instructors break recruits’ expectations that they will be able to get along fine by following instructions, even the expectation that they will be instructed in how to be a Marine recruit before they are required to be one—these are basic expectations of fairness set up by the American school system and the laws of the United States. If we follow the Pragmatist definition of emotions as responses to broken expectations, it isn’t difficult to see why breaking such basic expectations about fairness would elicit powerful emotions in recruits. Former Marine Brian Butler says of this disorientation,

It’s sheer terror. It’s a method of terror. Oftentimes you didn’t have to do anything to be quarterdecked [made to do punitive exercises on the ‘quarterdeck’] . . . I was watching this stuff and was like, there’s no reason, and yet they’re doing it. Years later thinking back this occurs to me. . . . It’s like WWF [professional wrestling], it’s all vaudeville showmanship, it’s drama. (personal interview)

The drama has a clear purpose: breaking recruits’ expectations about how they will be treated heightens their attention by keeping them from feeling comfortable. It makes them take notice of their surroundings and try to sort out the pieces of information that will help them survive boot camp. In this way they are like the rabbits in Walter

Freeman's experiments, which form neural patterns to keep track of the smell of sawdust only if they are given pleasure or pain along with that smell. The pleasure or pain, which breaks expectations and signals something new, releases neuromodulators that allow a complex pattern of meaning to emerge in rabbits' brains. Breaking expectations is thus an important facilitator of new meaning making. When recruits are made physically and mentally uncomfortable—and “uncomfortable” is a profound understatement—and all their attempts to orient themselves meet with failure, their agencies are at their lowest ebb. The disorientation of the first phase clears many old intentional structures the way Pavlov cleared those of his overstressed dogs, and recruits must learn new ways of perceiving their surroundings. Breaking recruits' expectations about something so basic and ingrained as fairness forces them to make new meaning about how the world works on a very deep level.

Breaking their expectations also makes recruits more amenable to DI's exhortations on Marinehood, since recruits are now sniffing for new patterns that will help them survive. Former DI Jon Davis discusses how disorientation makes recruits ready to idolize Marines:

The whole time [in the first phase] you are completely exhausted while running on adrenaline and hearing over and over, that you are inferior. Inferior to real Marines, which you aren't yet. You aren't thinking about it, but it is sinking in. You are completely tired and these things build up. Without realizing it, you start to believe that which is being told to you is true, that there is a weakness in you and that you are less than perfect. In your current state you believe them and that you must change to be good enough. (n.p.)

Here Davis explains how the Marines use the physical techniques of exhaustion and adrenaline—one of the neuromodulators Freeman finds so important in loosening old synapses—to make recruits more receptive to their rhetoric. Stoner, who became a drill instructor himself, confirms the process, adding the importance of the DI figure to the equation:

Our strategy was to keep the recruits off-guard at all times. We would create constant chaos using enormous amounts of yelling and screaming. The atmosphere we created put every recruit into a state of stress that removed their individuality of thought. They were suddenly responding to orders. They had no will to question those orders and especially the person who gave them! (69)

The disorientation strategy creates a hole that the Marines can attempt to fill, and one of the most important things that goes into this new empty space is a drill instructor, who is all-important in recruits' lives. The DI is one of the most important opportunities the Marines offer recruits for making new meanings and intentional structures, especially because the DI is *embodied*. Recruits physically experience the chaos of the first phase of training, and it is highly important that DIs are also physically present in that chaos. Their bodies represent order. Stoner's experience as a recruit is just one iteration of the pattern: he writes that the disorientation of the first phase "put us more at the mercy of our drill instructors' orders. We were lost and needed a leader to pave the way" (14). When Ricks asks battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Becker about the shock of "forming," when recruits meet their permanent DIs and the major shark attack occurs, Becker explains, "from the recruit's perspective, it appears to be chaos. War is chaos. And then they see this drill instructor—this magnificent creature who brings order to chaos" (57).

When recruits' whole world is chaos, the bringer of order is magnificent indeed. DIs are masters of chaos, both in the sense that they can wield it and that they can rise above it, supremely indifferent to the dire effects it has on recruits.

So the DIs fill a vacuum in recruits' lives, entering into an absence of meaning and purpose created by the first phase of training, if not by life before boot camp. Drill Instructor Staff Sergeant Phillip Johnson tells Ricks that recruits "'come here and they're empty,' or are emptied by the first few days and weeks" (114). Recruits' brains have been washed with neuromodulators, and many of the basins of attraction into which their neural patterns have habitually fallen have been bulldozed. When the landscape of old meanings has been leveled, DIs are a focal point around which new amplitude modulation patterns form, allowing new meanings to emerge from new neural connections as recruits hear, see, smell, or touch their DIs. Thus on a literal and a figurative level, DIs bring order in the midst of chaos.

Drill instructors are "walking models of Marinehood" (Ricks 102) when recruits are desperate to become Marines. As the former director of the drill instructor school Keith Burkepile told Larry Smith, "recruits need to see [each] drill instructor as perfect" (n.p. Chapter 28). The DI becomes the model Marine to be emulated. Johnson tells Ricks that recruits who are empty gain a new desire: "They want to be Marines. They start walking like you and talking like you" (114). These recruits are perceiving their DIs with the intention of becoming like them. Recruits perceive with a particular intention and thereby make meaning, as described in Chapter II. In this case, the meaning they make is a meaning about themselves, about who they are and who they want to be. With their

physical actions and proprioception, they adopt and reinforce this new identity. Recruits thus become consubstantial with the Marine Corps through the embodied example of Marinehood, the DI.

The DI is ascribed almost superhuman powers; he or she is “junior only to God” (Alvarez 26), or, in Ricks’s formulation, “God is the most senior drill instructor of all” (118, 215). Drill instructors make a deep impression on newly formed platoons. Turley describes his first encounter with his DIs thus:

Walking in and sharply turning before us, all in the meticulously trained discipline that we lacked, were four figures that oozed intimidation, each man with skin tightly stretched over nothing but bone and sinewy muscle, the four figures that would now become our Drill Instructors. Their campaign covers were tipped low, casting a shadow over most of their stern faces. They looked hungry. They looked ready to kill us all if they got the opportunity. (n.p. Chapter 1)

These are aggressive yet controlled, disciplined, competent, fierce Marines. Their ability to exude both discipline and fierceness is a key component of the Marine *ethos*, and it is part of what inspires such wonderment on Turley’s part. Lalor describes his new DIs with similar awe, particularly one sergeant—a “mean mother” whose eyes pop out of his head when he yells, and whose “tongue and lips are as red as fire” (n.p. Chapter 2). The vividness of the description reflects the outsized place DIs have in recruits’ meaning-making perceptions. In the journal he wrote while at boot camp, Gunnery Sergeant Will Price recounts a particular moment in which he apprehends the DIs moving through the squad bay first thing in the morning: they seemed to be gliding, as if they were ice skating. “Seeing them move in this truly inexplicable manner gave me the chills,” he

writes. “It’s crazy, but it gave the impression that the DIs were supernatural” (43). Part of the Corps’s rhetorical strategy is to give recruits an embodied example of what they should aspire to be: members of an elite, even superhuman body of warriors.

The deep impressions DIs make on recruits change throughout boot camp and after it, as the basin attractors in recruits’ brains change to adapt to new sensations available in each phase of training. Though they are first seen as arbitrary, unfair, or scary, later they come to be father figures or mentors, as one who takes Burke’s definition of “identification” seriously might expect—after all, Burke’s quintessential relationship of consubstantiality is the parent-child relationship. One of the notable stages in the DI-recruit relationship is centered on approval. Most recruits dearly want their DIs’ respect. Lalor writes, as training progresses, “I am embarrassed to admit [it] but I want to impress the Senior [DI] and I’m not sure why” (n.p. Chapter 3). Turley says more about this phenomenon, even jokingly linking it with Stockholm Syndrome, in which captives end up loving their captors. At one point, Turley is ordered by his DI, Rand, to kick him (Rand) repeatedly during Marine Corps Martial Arts (MCMAP) training. Turley writes, “I knew deep inside that I was, in a strange way, seeking favor and approval from Rand. The kicking felt better and better and I knew in his strange way he was liking what I could do.” Later, when another recruit fails to make way for Rand as he passes, Turley runs up and pushes him aside, schooling him in proper protocol. Then Turley describes his satisfaction at Rand’s grudging approval, ending his story with a humorous return to the love of the captive for the captor: ““Carry on!’ Rand yelled, and then sent me a curt and cold nod as I fell back into the formation. Stockholm Syndrome” (n.p. Chapter 5).

When Rand is moved to another platoon, Turley misses “getting yelled at by him” and feels the other platoon “doesn’t deserve him” (n.p. Chapter 5). Turley’s experience is not uncommon. Former Marine Art Buchwald writes “The DI who is perceived of [*sic*] as a sadist in the beginning of boot training, usually winds up as a father figure before it is over” (qtd. in Alvarez 118). And Taylor writes that DIs are “hated, adored, and envied” at various stages of training:

For the first third of training, a boot promises himself that one day he will kill his DI. At the mid-point of training, the recruit begins building a resistance to the constant terror and frustration. He makes up his mind that he can take anything those SOB drill instructors can dish out. Finally, on graduation day, the DI is the hero of every Marine in the platoon. These new Marines would follow this leader to the ends of the earth, obeying every command with dedication. (n.p. Appendix 1)

In an email to me, Taylor expanded on the idea, even going so far as to say that when he sees his DI walking toward the platoon, he knows he has “fallen into a very strange love affair with him. Not sexual. A closeness that says I am to do what he commands, go where he sends me.” One more description, from Stoner, makes similar claims:

During each phase of training we had felt that the DI’s were mean, sadistic bullies, hell-bent on making our lives as miserable as they could. However, in the end we all ended up with the absolute highest respect and regard for them. They had pushed us to the edge, and many times pushed us over the edge. In the end we had endured their wrath and we came away stronger than we could have ever believed was possible. Our drill instructors became etched in our minds forever. Every boot camp moment, no matter how harsh, would remain with us. The DI’s set a standard for our lives that remains to this day. They had made us into United States Marines. (39)

DIs are an anchor and a model for new, struggling recruits. Because they inspire new meaning making at such a turbulent time, when recruits' attractor basin landscape is undergoing major adjustment, the meanings they inspire are intense—intense loyalty, respect, even love.

Perceptions of DIs are one particularly clear example of how intentional structures change as a result of boot camp rhetoric. Before recruits come to training, they may see DIs as over the top, or far off and distant, or irrelevant, or perhaps showmen like the professional wrestlers Butler mentioned. But the chaos of the first phase of boot camp makes the DIs' actions seem not only intelligible, but necessary. Recruits hear repeatedly that combat is chaos, and that everything they are experiencing in training is preparation for combat. It is easy for recruits to see DIs' extreme discipline and hardness as appropriate in such a setting—this is yet another of the opportunities the Corps holds out to recruits to assimilate, in Freeman's term, the Marine *ethos*. This opportunity is made possible by the closed, carefully controlled rhetorical situation of boot camp. The importance of the rhetorical situation can be illustrated with a quick contrast between officer and enlisted training. Officer Candidate School (OCS) is similar to training for enlisted recruits in many ways: officer candidates are screamed at by Sergeant Instructors (SIs) and forced through pain and disorientation. But officer candidates get weekends off. This time allows them out of the pressure cooker of the training experience, and their perceptions of their old environments remind them of old intentional structures. Captain Nate Fick writes that during his first leave from OCS, he found himself unable to relay his experience to his family: "I tried to describe OCS, but the stress and chaos were

laughable, a million miles away. It embarrassed me to seem too affected by them” (23). Enlisted recruits don’t get the same opportunities that officer candidates get to re-situate their perspectives, or to return to old intentions and meanings. If their intention is to survive boot camp, they are forced to invest in new perceptions, especially of their DIs.

It is important to make explicit here that the perceptions recruits create during boot camp are very much *embodied* perceptions. Recruits’ adrenaline, their rapidly beating hearts, their lightheadedness, and their quick compliance with orders about how to move their arms and legs just so—these are all inseparable from how they perceive the DIs’ mastery of chaos. Recruits may have known to expect the screaming and disorientation before they arrived at training, but by all indications, one cannot truly understand what it is like without being bodily present in that rhetorical situation. Fick’s reaction to being dressed down by his SI, Sergeant Olds, is a good example: “This is theater, right? I had seen *Full Metal Jacket*. It’s all a joke. But it didn’t feel like a joke. When Olds spoke to me, icy adrenaline washed through my chest. My legs shook” (10). Fick is fully aware of the purpose of the process and was even expecting it. His pre-training intention was probably to take all the yelling in stride. But his experience there in the flesh took him off guard and forced him to reconsider his perceptions and intentions. It is the physical experience that creates Marines.

Neither recruits nor DIs alone can create a sense of what it means to be a Marine—the quality of being a Marine *emerges* from the complex interactions of agents in the rhetorical situation of boot camp. The sense of Marinehood is not created by one single agent. Yes, DIs act in a very particular way for a particular purpose, but their

actions do not demonstrate what it means to be a Marine without the environment of chaos that represents the fog of combat—the sleep deprivation, the environment unfamiliar to recruits, the new set of rules. Without the chaos, the DIs’ actions have either no meaning or a very different meaning. And because of the unidirectionality of intention and the embodied nature of perception, recruits must also participate in the creation of Marinehood. Recruits realize what it takes to think clearly and perform correctly under stress because of their interactions in boot camp; they can feel in their guts what it takes to be a Marine in a way that anyone who has not experienced those interactions cannot. Recruits understand what it takes to be a Marine by watching their DIs master the chaos that they themselves feel so deeply in their own bodies. Thus the sense of what it means to be a Marine emerges from the interactions of recruits, DIs, and the rhetorical situation.

### **Expression of Agency through Reflection and Resolve**

One of the main reasons boot camp is not a predictable machine churning out perfect identical Marine *ethoi* but a complex system with emergent qualities is that recruits’ old perceptual structures are not completely wiped clean. While recruits are disoriented by the chaos of the first phase of training, and their previous perceptual habits are attenuated, they are not all so completely empty as Staff Sergeant Johnson claims. Recruits bring their own identities, desires, and dispositions, in Cooper’s sense of the word, to training. While these dispositions are held at bay in the most extreme moments of disorientation that prevent recruits from making meaning, they do not entirely disappear. Their brains still create different responses to contingencies based on previous

experiences, and their consciousnesses choose different actions. These recruits' neural attractor landscapes, and thus the ways they perceive and make meaning from their surroundings, are not permanently leveled. Individualities sometimes reinforce and sometimes work against the attempted indoctrination of boot camp, demonstrating that recruits are not brainwashed. In this section I discuss some conscious individual agencies as they intersect with Marine training rhetoric regarding DIs and chaos.

According to the DIs I spoke with at Parris Island, in the ideal recruit, the goal of becoming a Marine is reinforced, rather than newly created, by the chaos unleashed at boot camp. All the Marines I asked told me that what the recruit brings to boot camp matters a lot. When I asked whether boot camp tactics can turn around the attitudes of recruits who don't want to be there, one DI said it's a matter of degree. If they want to be there 80%, the DIs can get them the rest of the way, but not if they only want to be there 50% (Puentes). As noted in the previous chapter, some recruits do leave (Brookshire and Hattiangadi).

Recruits who stay seem to have some motivating agency that originates outside boot camp on which they can rely. When I asked Taylor what helped him through, he replied, "I worked hard. I felt God was on my side." While the Corps does use a number of rhetorical techniques that draw on religious tropes—and actually used more explicit references to God when Taylor went through training decades ago—Taylor's experience of God's help was not created in boot camp. Another example of outside motivation (though "activated" at boot camp) shows up in the story at the head of this chapter, when seeing a sign that declared the Marines "America's Finest Fighting Force" reminds Lalor

why he has come to Parris Island and inspires him with an “unprecedented sense of purpose and motivation” (n.p. Chapter 2). Fick told me he made his decision to continue his officer’s training course during some soul searching while looking out over the Atlantic. Price recounts his moment of resolve as the moment he first saw his recruiter, who “was strong, proud and confident. He had something else I couldn’t quite put my finger on—some kind of inner power. Whatever it was, I knew it was awesome, and I knew I wanted it. At that moment, I knew I had found my calling” (8). Turley’s moment came when he saw the two towers of the World Trade Center fall on September 11, 2001: “It was now my moment. I made my decision. I was ready to die and find rebirth” (n.p. Prologue). (Turley’s experience has its own religious echoes.) Though personal and national exigencies clearly influence each recruit’s decision to commit to the Marines, the Corps’s own careful attention to “the science and art of telling the Marine Corps story,” as a 2010 public affairs order has it, undoubtedly paints a picture of an elite brotherhood that is worthy of the utmost effort to join (1-1). So the seeds of commitment are sown even before recruits arrive at boot camp, and recruits’ own agencies play a leading role in tending those seeds.

But for many recruits, there are times during the boot camp experience when their agency shows itself in ways less supportive of Marine *esprit*, either through coping mechanisms for actions about which they are not entirely enthusiastic, or through outright rebellion. Examples of coping mechanisms include Turley’s biting his cheeks to keep from laughing at DIs and then talking about the funny moments at night with his platoon mates (np. Chapter 3), Lalor’s daydreaming about “girls or ice cream or the Yankees” to

get through unpleasant exercises (n.p. Chapter 2), and former DI Nick Popaditch's suggestion in his *Ultimate Marine Recruit Training Guidebook* to "consciously control your breathing to slow your heart rate" to deal with the stress experienced on the yellow footprints (103). Here recruits bring their own individual agencies and existing perceptual structures into play when the training techniques of boot camp might work against their goal of becoming a Marine.

Actual rebellion happens too, though often in small ways. For example, Lalor writes that one of the things he has learned during training is that true leadership requires "credibility and respect," not just rank, because "the guys here are, for the most part, proud and stubborn and even if they have to listen because you have a billet (position of authority), they can follow your orders in an ineffective way just to spite you" (n.p. Chapter 5; parenthetical remark in original). Clearly recruits can find ways to make their dissent known. An episode from Turley's training is another especially clear example: when Turley has just followed one DI's orders and another DI, McFadden, reprimands him for his actions, Turley reaches the end of his rope, and decides to push back against the DI's authority by using improper protocol in responding to the DI's orders:

Enough! I had put up with enough bullshit over the past week to last a lifetime, and now I had to take more for following an order?

I was angry. "Okay, sir," I said quietly, through clenched teeth.

McFadden's face lit up. "Push-ups!"

"Push-ups, okay, sir!" I said and dropped to do push-ups.

And so it began. Every time he named a new exercise, I would respond with “Okay, sir!” instead of “Aye, sir!”, [sic] and his anger intensified. It may not seem like much, but in the laws of circumstance, it was mutiny. It was my way of saying, “fuck off”. It was my way of saying, “I still have my identity”. It was my way of saying, “I will not break”. It was my way of saying, “bring it”. [sic] (n.p. Chapter 2)

Rather than accepting boot camp’s negation of fairness, Turley retains his pre-boot camp perception that he should not be punished for doing what he understood he was supposed to be doing. This capacity demonstrates why, though boot camp can mitigate agency and force at least some reconsideration of intentional structures, it cannot remove agency completely—much less can it force recruits to adopt the particular meanings it wishes. It is important for Turley to keep from losing his sense of self in recruit training, and here he manages to hold on to a sense of justice that predates and excludes the Marine recruit training way.

There seems to be a wide variety in how wholeheartedly recruits respond to the chaos of training. Some accept the Marine *ethos* completely, like Taylor, who told me how proud and excited he was when he took his four-year-old granddaughter to a recruiting station, where the recruiter “indoctrinated” her and administered the oath new recruits take. And Price’s *Devil Dog Diary* is basically a record of how a “true believer” is made—an extended analysis will illustrate a personal experience of boot camp’s rhetorical success. The journal chronicles Price’s journey from self-described cocky kid who thinks the Marines can’t change him (12) to older, wiser, and prouder Marine (193). Along the way, Price describes a number of instances in which he messes up, is punished, and learns from his mistakes, identifying how the DI is right to punish him. In one

example, Price is called out for smiling at another recruit in the chow hall. He was smiling to encourage his fellow recruit to keep a positive attitude and get through the tough times, but smiling is not allowed, since it is not consistent with proper military bearing. So a DI screams at him to follow him out of the chow hall, and as they are walking out, the DI trips. Perhaps because of this slip, the DI is particularly angry and grabs Price. Price responds not with indignation, but with meekness:

This was the second time he had grabbed me, but this time I really felt like he was guiding me with his own personal advice. Before I came to Parris Island this would have totally enraged me, but my attitude has changed since I came here. Now it doesn't bother me that he grabbed me like that, because I know that if he only yelled at me, the message would not hit home.

I must learn to maintain my military bearing at all times—that's just part of being a good Marine. And if it takes being grabbed, choked, punched to make me remember that, then let them do what it takes. Some may find this type of training excessive, but the Marine Corps is a no-nonsense business. If you are not prepared to go all the way—stay home. (108)

Price has been so indoctrinated that even though all he did was try to encourage a fellow Marine, and even though the severity of the DI's punishment was likely due to the DI's own gaffe (and physical punishment should have been illegal anyway), Price accepts it entirely. Price seems aware of how the process of indoctrination works, and he welcomes it. In the following passage, Price compares boot camp to hypnotism, and then he also asserts that it's up to the recruit to make what he can out of that hypnotism:

Not a Marine among us had gone unchanged by the last twelve weeks. There were some that, like fighting the effects of hypnotism, resisted Boot Camp—and so all they got out of it was an improved physique. They had not learned all they could about discipline, respect, pride, the Corps—or themselves. . . .

Speaking for myself, I had learned more in the last three months, than I ever learned in my whole life. Physically, mentally, and spiritually, I am light years ahead. For years, I had been searching for the meaning of life without finding anything. The Marines finally opened the “hatch” for me. (193)

Here Price points to both the agency-removing and agency-encouraging aspects of boot camp, exemplifying in his own experience one of the most important elements of Marine training. Comparing boot camp to hypnotism would seem to imply that boot camp takes away recruits’ agency; Price implies that passively going along with the program is all that is required. But he also implies that others who resisted actually failed to take advantage of this opportunity to transform themselves and thus did not exercise their agency enough. They were, in a sense, lazy. They fell into their old patterns of perception. Thus it would seem that making the change into Marine does require some effort on recruits’ part. Price makes a similar claim in another passage, after describing a platoon mate who “flips out”:

It does make you a little crazy, the way they take away everything you used to be and replace it with a new Marine attitude. You just have to learn to like it. Not everyone can—but Recruit Price sure as hell can. . . . They’ve made me into a new man, and I’m damn proud of the changes they’ve made in me. (137)

So for Price, becoming who he wanted to be when he met that recruiter and decided he wanted whatever “awesome” quality he had involves surrendering to hypnotism and learning to like a “crazy” process. His strategy, both passive and active in its alignment with Marine authority, opens doors to enlightenment and personal fulfillment. Price feels he has found his calling and somehow expressed his truest self, as a friend told him he

would in a letter at the beginning of training. Price’s neural attractor landscape and his perceptual structures have been altered, and he has welcomed the change.

People who are unreservedly gung-ho, like Taylor and Price, are what Butler called the “superstar Marines” (Price actually uses this phrase aspirationally—he says he works out during his free time because he wants to be a “superstar Marine” [87]). These superstars are promoted, are “at the head of the pack”—they keep the “high and tight” haircut they are given at the end of boot camp, their uniforms are always “creased out to the nines,” as Butler says. These are the people who never question their leadership or their identity as Marines, right down to their appearance.<sup>18</sup> In fact they actively embrace the Marine *ethos*. But not everyone goes this route. Plenty of Marines, Butler says, choose to retain some of their own identity. Butler gave me some quick estimated percentages about how many enlisted Marines accept the Marine *ethos* wholeheartedly: 20% are “deep hardcore fundamental believers” who “rise up pretty quickly through the ranks.” Another 30% like the Marines pretty well, do a good job, and may make a career in the Corps. The largest percentage, 40%, are “just marking time,” going along to get along until their enlistment is up. And 10% are “just shitbirds, not to be trusted with anything, not to be relied upon.”<sup>19</sup> Others might align the percentages differently, of

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<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting that Taylor and Price were both highly motivated recruits coming into training. Price wanted whatever “awesome” quality his recruiter had, and Taylor described a similar feeling in an email to me, telling me a story about how he and his friend went to the recruiting office together, and his friend was devastated when the Marines wouldn’t have him.

<sup>19</sup> Butler offers two caveats: first, these percentages will alter with a person’s Military Operations Specialty (MOS). There are many more gung-ho Marines in the infantry, for

course, but most people seem to agree that there are varying degrees of “love of Corps and country” among Marines. Even Taylor, who said, when I asked some probing questions about the Marine Corps, “Damn, everyone is supposed to love Marines!” admitted that he had a friend in the Marines who was a good guy but never really took to the training. He ended up as a POG (“people other than grunts,” non-infantry, pronounced with a long “o”), working an administrative job in the Marines. So clearly the training rhetoric doesn’t work on every recruit in the same way. As with any rhetoric and as in any complex system, recruits’ dispositions, reflection, and resolve affect how they respond to boot camp’s rhetorical techniques. The unidirectional nature of the bridge between recruit and boot camp insures that each recruit experiences Marine rhetoric differently.

### **Drill Discipline and Uniformity**

Many modern military forces no longer train their fighters in drill, but the tool of military precision so popular in the eighteenth century is still alive and well in the Marine Corps, where drill is still the “heart of boot camp” (Ricks 63). Drill has even given its name to those non-commissioned officers who have the most power over recruits’ everyday lives—drill instructors. Drill is emblematic of the order out of chaos recruits

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example, than in maintenance or food service. He also says that among officers, a much higher percentage are “true believers”—this probably has something to do with when enlisted Marines versus officers sign their commitment. Officer candidates do not commit before they begin their training, but afterwards. This ensures that only the ones who really want to stay do stay.

experience as they become Marines, and it also emblemizes the complexity of the agency of recruits who join the body of the Corps.

When recruits stand on the yellow footprints, they receive their first lesson in close-order drill. The fundamental position of drill, the POA, is a posture that is calculated to make power relationships clear: those who stand and wait are at their superior's command. Recruits standing at the POA must put their feet at a 45-degree angle with heels together, legs straight but not locked at the knees, arms straight but not stiff at the elbows, thumbs at trouser seams with palms inward and fingers curled, gaze straight ahead, mouth closed, chin slightly pulled in, and whole body absolutely still, with no talking ("Instructing Drill"). Other drill movements include marching in step at various speeds or "times," turning together in right and left "face," and rifle manual, or a series of precise movements with weapons. These movements add up to a whole catalogue of actions that must be taken in certain contexts. Figure 6, a chart containing instructions on when to give which kinds of orders, demonstrates the intricacy of drill. The meticulous control over each part of recruits' bodies is what Foucault, in his analysis of eighteenth-century "discipline," called "projects of docility" (136). The Marine Corps likely would not care for the word "docility" in describing its "rough, tough, can't get enough" Marines (Ricks), but they make no secret of drill's goal of discipline and obedience to orders.

RIGHT	LEFT	RIGHT	LEFT	RIGHT	LEFT	WHEN GIVEN
		"Squad,	(Step)	HALT"		From column or flank
	"Pla	toon,	(Step)	HALT"		From column or flank
	"Com	pa	(Step)	HALT"		From column or flank
	ney					
	"Right	Turn,	(Step)	MARCH"		While marching in company mass the color guard or staff
"Left	Turn,	(Step)	MARCH"			" " " " " " " " "
						" "
"Counter	March,	(Step)	MARCH"			For color guards.
"Mark	Time,	(Step)	MARCH"			May be given as either foot strikes the deck from line, column or oblique
	"Mark	Time,	(Step)	MARCH"		
"Half	Step,	(Step)	MARCH"			May be given as either foot strikes the deck from line, column or oblique
	"Half	Step,	(Step)	MARCH"		
"For	ward,	(Step)	MARCH"			From mark time or half step in column or flank
"By	the	Flank,	(Step)	MARCH"		From column or flank
	Right					
	"By	the	Flank,	(Step)	MARCH"	From column or flank
	Left					
RIGHT	LEFT	RIGHT	LEFT	RIGHT	LEFT	WHEN GIVEN
	"Column	Right,	(Step)	MARCH"		From column
"Column	Left,	(Step)	MARCH"			From column
"Column	Half	Right,	(Step)	MARCH"		From column
	"Column	Half	Left,	(Step)	MARCH"	From column
	"To	the	(Step)	MARCH"		From column or flank
	Rear,					
	"Right	O	(Step)	MARCH"		From column
	blique,					
"For	ward,	(Step)	MARCH"			From right oblique
"Pla	toon,	(Step)	HALT"			From right oblique
	"In	Place,	(Step)	HALT"		To halt in the right oblique while marching at quick time, mark time or half step.
"Re	sume,	(Step)	MARCH"			To resume marching in the left/right oblique from in place halt, mark time or half step
"Left	O	(Step)	MARCH"			From column
	blique,					
	"For	ward,	(Step)	MARCH"		From left oblique
	"Pla	toon,	(Step)	HALT"		From left oblique
	"In	Place,	(Step)	HALT"		To halt in the left oblique while marching at quick time, mark time or half step.

Table 1-1.--Suggested Foot to Give Marching Commands On.

Figure 6. Suggested Foot to Give Marching Commands On. From the *Marine Corps Drill and Ceremonies Manual* Marine Corps Order P5060.20. May 2003. PDF file. p. 1006 or 1-16

Taylor writes that “close-order drill is the root of military discipline,” that drill trains troops to follow in “blind obedience” in an “almost subliminal fashion . . . instantly and without question” (n.p. Chapter 15). *Ears, Open. Eyeballs, Click.*,<sup>20</sup> a film that documents one platoon’s experience at the recruit depot in San Diego, includes a scene in which drill is taught. The scene illustrates the kind of immediate and particular obedience required:

“Ears!”

“Open, sir!”

“Now, when we fall out into a formation, you will always fall where you are at right now, do you understand that?”

“Yes sir!”

“If you fall out into formation in the wrong spot, you can stay the hell behind, do you understand that?”

“Yes sir!”

“Okay, open your mouths.”

“*Yes sir!*”

“That means get loud. Open your mouths.”

“YES SIR!”

“Open your mouths!”

“*YES SIR!*”

“Do you understand that?”

“*YES SIR!*”

Each individual movement, in this case “falling out” to a particular location, is reinforced with hyperbolic care, step by step—here even with emphasis on how recruits accept commands with the required “yes sir.” Foucault claims that this kind of discipline

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<sup>20</sup> The title refers to a training tactic used in some platoons: the DI says “ears!” and the platoon responds “open!” to indicate they are listening, and when the DI wants the platoon to watch, he says “eyeballs!” and the platoon shouts back “click!” Not incidentally, this is the only time recruits are allowed to look at a DI—otherwise they should be looking straight ahead.

increases the body's capacity for efficiency while it "reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from [that capacity], and turns it into a relation of strict subjection" (138). In this case, then, the discipline of drill makes the recruits into Marines who are tremendously efficient at following orders.

But the point of drill isn't just the power to subjugate. Once recruits are familiar with drill and rhetorical force is no longer needed to make recruits act, recruits can take ownership in the qualities and perceptions it promotes. Because of the nature of perception, they must reach out across a unidirectional bridge to make sense of their actions. In drill, the Corps offers meaning that can give them a heightened sense of power deriving from belonging to a large, well-coordinated group. It seems likely that the recruits would make this meaning, seeing drill as an expression of pride and power in the Marine Corps. This example is one clear illustration that the Marines' influence on recruits is somewhere between coercion and suggestion—persuasion.

The combination of disorientation and drill is particularly effective in getting recruits to identify with the Marines. Because drill is essentially *about* order, it illustrates, on recruits' own bodies, a kind of salvation from the mind-numbing, crazy-making disordering of recruits' values and identities that takes place during the first phase. Recruits' bodies are the medium in which the lesson in contrasts is learned. While the shark attack of forming is "sheer chaos," final drill is "pure order" (Ricks 205). Perhaps it is this contrast that makes Stoner write, "Done properly drill can be like a ballet dance—smooth and artistic, like a well oiled machine"; later he calls it "poetry in motion" (18, 80). Though the endless, repetitive drill practice is not fun for many recruits—Lalor calls

it “cruel and unusual punishment”—the smart precision also brings a sense of pride when platoons finally master it. Turley recounts this sense of accomplishment in the following scene from his graduation weekend:

“Riiii-ght *face!*”

Our heels slammed together with authority.

“Forward, march!

Initial drill, final drill, they couldn’t have held a candle to how we performed now. The excitement, the anticipation, the pride, it all resonated inside us and we felt, at last, truly accomplished. (n.p. Chapter 14).

Drill is a marvelously visible demonstration of how far recruits have come. Not only is it visible, it is sensed proprioceptively in recruits’ own bodies. When their heels come together “with authority,” those recruits experience that authority. They perceive themselves as actors with power; they are agents whose agency emerges from their actions and their awareness of the meaning of those actions.

One could argue, with Foucault, that it is really the Corps that holds all the authority of the heels coming sharply together. I argue that while the Corps does certainly hold authority, it isn’t a zero-sum game. The recruits hold power too insofar as they *identify* with the body of Corps, become consubstantial with it, in the Burkean sense. The attractor landscapes in their brains are habituated to viewing their bodies as powerful insofar as they share substance with the Marine Corps. And this is really the goal of the Marines: to make each recruit consubstantial in the body of the Marine Corps, so that

recruits' bodies are empowered with the Corps' own power, to use in ways the Corps will direct, of course, but not as mere mechanical extensions.

In fact, drill is an excellent example of rhetorical power. If it is a proprioceptively sensed demonstration of the journey from chaos into order, it is also a proprioceptively sensed demonstration of rhetorical power, the power to make audience members believe that *other* audience members will act on the rhetor's words. There is a lot of power in being one of a group that moves in unison. One of the most important aspects of drill is its uniformity. Taylor writes that "a well-trained troop unit on the drill field will look as if one person is drilling in front of 60 well-positioned mirrors" (n.p. Chapter 15). In writing about drill, Ricks notes that "historian William McNeill theorizes that humanity's first step in moving beyond small groups was engaging in large-scale movement together, the tribal dance" (63). Ricks even calls drill "the military dance." Perhaps the ultimate expression of this military dance in the Marine Corps is the USMC Silent Drill Team—the team performs all the steps of drill with no one calling cadence or instructions. This is quite inspiring to many Marines: Master Sergeant Andy Bufalo writes of the silent drill team: "Anyone who has not seen it at least once is missing out on one of the great thrills that come with being a Marine. If you can't get motivated watching the Silent Drill Team you have to be crazy, or dead" (n.p. [no chapter]). I suggest that one of the reasons movement in unison is so powerful is that it involves trust that others will move exactly as you move, a complete trust in the rhetorical power of the *corps*. This trust shares power out among recruits who participate in it. No leader is necessary for the Silent Drill

Team because each member has such faith in the group as a whole. No wonder it is inspiring for Marines. It embodies the dream of Marines who are fully consubstantial.

While drill begins with the rhetorical or actual force of the DI yelling instructions and slapping hands that aren't in the right positions, if the rhetoric succeeds, by the end it is full-blown rhetorical power. Recruits now act as one, in complete faith that each recruit will play his or her part. This unity in order is tremendously powerful for recruits who have been facing such confusion regarding their previous values and identities. Recruits can choose to remain at the level of rhetorical force, but many of them do not, choosing instead to respond to the rhetorical power of movement in unison and become consubstantial with one another. Thus rhetorical power makes recruits ready not just to act with the group, but to identify with it, to identify as prospective Marines.

The way drill functions in boot camp is another potent example of how a sense of Marinehood emerges from complex interactions between recruits and others in their environment. One could claim that drill is rather an example of order than of complexity, which resides "on the edge of chaos," after all. This is true on a surface level: in ordered systems as in drill, each component has its role to play and is directed by a guiding force. If drill were an example of ordered system, recruits would have neither power nor agency. But drill exists on the edge of chaos in several ways. First, it is not only formed out of but is made possible by the chaos of the first phase of recruit training. Recruits would not have been able to perceive the minute distinctions in, say, hand posture without the chaos that made them hyper-aware of what to do to survive boot camp. While many recruits would never have paid attention to the position of their pinkies while they

hold their rifles before boot camp, in the intense training environments of Parris Island and San Diego, they know that hand positions matter. Second, drill exists on the edge of chaos rhetorically, because the recruits are after all agents who can choose not to march in step. Recruits' agency is in fact one of the most important factors in making drill so consistently powerful. If recruits were not agents, drill would be laughably unnecessary—imagine a platoon of robots rehearsing to move in unison. But more than that, drill continuously reminds recruits proprioceptively of the rhetorical power of the Corps, as well as the power they have if they choose to *incorporate* their own agency into that unit. Thus the sense of Marinehood emerges from recruits and the actions their bodies perform.

## **Conclusion**

The yellow footprints emblemize fundamental perceptual changes the Corps aims to induce at boot camp. Recruits move through chaos in which many of their neural habits are rendered meaningless and their attractor landscapes are altered. They are given DIs to look to for new perceptual structures. They must wrangle with their old dispositions and habits of perception as they push against the new meaning-making patterns being demonstrated for them. To the extent that they assimilate the Corps's intentional structures, they gain the authority and power of the Corps as represented by drill.

These elements represented by the yellow footprints are a sort of foundation for forming a new Marine identity. In the next chapter, I move on to the Marine's *raison*

*d'être*, killing the enemy in combat. With the emblems of sparring and the M16 service rifle, I discuss Marine perceptual structures regarding aggression and restraint, which help Marines know when and whom to kill.

## CHAPTER IV

### SPARRING AND THE M16

Another thing I always preached was about killing somebody. I always believed the bottom line is, the Marine Corps exists to kill people. You can filter through all the political rhetoric but the bottom line is, we exist to kill the bad guys. (Post, qtd in Smith n.p. Chapter 27)

For me, one of the most hard-core lessons about what being a Marine was all about came to me during Close Combat training. . . .

“Kill the enemy.” That thought really hit me during that phase of training. Up to that point, training had seemed just sort of “military”. [*sic*] Suddenly it was sinking in that we were being trained to kill. (Stoner 31)

While all the chapters in this project address the question of how Marine recruits are trained to kill, this middle chapter, at the heart of the dissertation, addresses the heart of the issue. The traits and values discussed in the yellow footprints and crucible chapters are supporting traits and values, in the way the cook and the mechanic in the Marines support the infantry whose job is to kill. These supporting traits and values play a very important role in shaping the sense of Marinehood that arises from the complex system of boot camp. But in this chapter discussing the emblems of hand-to-hand combat and the rifle, I deal with the acts that in boot camp come closest to the actual act of killing, which is a Marine’s purpose.

During the course of their training, recruits engage in a number of exercises designed to intensify and channel their aggression through what the Marines call a “warrior *ethos*.” These exercises are designed to change their perceptions of themselves and their actions so that they can kill when and whom they should in combat. Recruits complete a bayonet course, in which they run from dummy to dummy, either spearing the dummies with the blade on the end of their rifle or hitting them with the butt of the rifle. They compete with recruits from other platoons in body sparring—boxing with gloves, no head shots—and pugil sticks—fighting with long padded sticks meant to simulate rifles in hand-to-hand combat, head shots encouraged. Since 2001, recruits also earn their tan belts in the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP), created to develop physical, mental, and character discipline while teaching both lethal and non-lethal violence techniques. And throughout boot camp, recruits continually use language filled with words of violence and aggression, both during fighting and during non-combat-related activities, like eating and getting ready to sleep.

Recruits are given their M16 rifles during the first week of training and are never to let them out of their sight after that, even sleeping with them. They learn to clean, maintain, and drill with their rifles. During “grass week,” they go to the rifle range and “dry fire” with no bullets, in a process meant to engage muscle memory known as “snapping in.” Then in “firing week,” all recruits are required to hit targets from standing, kneeling, sitting, and prone positions, at distances of two, three, and five hundred yards. Recruits are also taught the “My Rifle” creed, which they recite regularly,

and are encouraged to bond with their rifles, sometimes even giving them women's names.

Through all these methods for engaging the enemy, whether fighting a fellow recruit or firing at a target, recruits are taught to perceive themselves as fierce and capable of all-out attack but also guided away from unruly, unthinking aggression. They are taught that to be a Marine warrior is to be ready to kill the enemy in an aggressive yet disciplined way. The balance between aggression and restraint is tied to the distinct Marine *ethos* that recruits are taught to embody. An individual's inclination to act with aggression or restraint is often thought of as part of an unthinking disposition or even as a hardwired instinct; sometimes it is considered as outside a person's agency and as unalterable. But Marine training aims to do just this—to alter recruits' habitual perceptions and actions with regard to aggression and restraint. Through sparring, attack-mode language, and excitement about the power of the weapons they will use, recruits learn that the Marine *ethos* includes aggression, whether it takes the form of urgency, anger, or more positive eagerness to fight. Through MCMAP's physical, mental, and character disciplines and through learning to operate and care for their rifles with precision, they are taught that it is also part of Marinehood to know when blind aggression is not the best course of action. They learn to perceive themselves as part of a long history of warriors with a Marine *ethos*. The *ethos* has certain values attached to it—honor, courage, commitment. These specific values are important, but just as important is that they are the values of the *Marine ethos*, and the recruits can take on that *ethos*. This tradition shows them how to fight, when to push and when to wait (mostly push, but you

can't be all hellbent all the time). It makes them feel immortal, it reminds them they are not alone, and it makes them feel grounded in a specific ethical tradition, which is very important when they are being taught to break one of society's strongest taboos—the taboo against killing. In this chapter, with sparring and the rifle as its emblems, I examine the particular ways in which USMC recruit training encourages recruits to embrace a calling of violence.

The chapter is organized in two main sections, “Stoking the Fire” and “Refining and Channeling.” The first section discusses various ways that boot camp fuels aggression: by instilling a sense of urgency, encouraging the performance and the experience of anger, and fostering a “motivating” excitement about weapons and other trappings of war. Tools used to fuel aggression include body sparring and pugil stick bouts, harangues from DIs, the quick tempo of boot camp, violent language, and the love of powerful weapons. The second section discusses various ways in which recruits are taught to bring their wild aggression into control and make responsible decisions. Tools for taming the fire include the care and precision use of weapons and the disciplines and values of MCMAP. Marines encourage recruits to adopt the appropriate attitudes toward aggression and restraint by offering them a variety of meanings they can make their own by reaching out across their perceptual bridges—meanings about themselves and their dispositions, their weapons, their brothers and sisters in arms, and their enemies.

## **Stoking the Fire**

One gunnery sergeant working at Parris Island told journalist Thomas Ricks that many recruits arrive at training “overflowing with passivity” (111). Marines must not be passive. An important part of what boot camp does is to ignite—or, if it’s already there, fuel—aggression in recruits. We usually think of aggression as linked to anger, and Marines certainly do use anger in training recruits. But the kind of aggression Marines need does not rely solely on anger, especially as Marines deal with weapons whose operation requires a clearer head. Marine training also draws on what the *OED* identifies as an originally American definition of aggression, which includes initiative, assertiveness, and quick action, and is usually used in a positive sense, not necessarily linked to anger. Positive emotions like excitement, admiration, and even a sense of fun can facilitate this kind of aggression.

Aggression in any of these senses is linked to perception and often to disposition. That is, it can come as a response to a single event, but it can also become a pattern of action. If we think of a person’s disposition as a nonconscious wellspring of habitual action, originating in perceptual and meaning-making patterns in the neocortex, aggression can be built into a person’s patterns of action just as, say, a perception of a DI as awe-inspiring can be built in. Because perception is always unidirectional and meaning arises from the intentional structures already present in the brain in addition to whatever sensory stimuli are present, aggression built into recruit’s intentional structures affects everything they perceive. In this section, I discuss how Marines cultivate aggression in

recruits' dispositions, from simply drilling the need for urgency into recruits, to stoking their anger, to encouraging excitement about the tools and tactics of warfare.

### *Urgency*

Simple speed of action is a major Marine value. As the thirty-first commandant of the Marine Corps, Charles Krulak, writes, "Everything about the Marines—their culture, their organizational structure, their management style, their logistics, their decision making process—is geared toward high-speed, high-complexity environments" (xix). Marines frequently repeat the words, "improvise, adapt, and overcome," which the Marines website calls "a mantra that symbolizes the flexibility, resourcefulness and quick decision-making ability found throughout the Marine ranks." The need to act quickly in complex environments is confirmed in accounts of both enlisted recruit training and Officer Candidate School (OCS). Former DI Nick Popaditch writes in his guidebook for enlisted recruits, "Out in the Fleet Marine Force, the only unforgivable mistake is a fear to act. . . . Marines will often say, 'It is better to do the wrong thing at 100 miles an hour than to do the right thing halfway'" (34). Captain Nate Fick's memoir about OCS recounts similar advice: "According to Captain Fanning," the platoon commander, "one of the gravest errors was waiting to have all the information before making a decision. In the fog of combat, you'll never have all the information. A good plan violently executed

now, he urged, was better than a great plan later” (22).<sup>21</sup> The idea is to train neurons and arms and legs to act quickly, from sensory input to gross motor output.

The fact that Marines need to act quickly and automatically means that not just their conscious deliberation but their very dispositions need to be altered. The necessity for speed of action contradicts traditional conceptions of agency tied to slow, conscious deliberation. There is no doubt that recruits are encouraged to perform many actions without much or any conscious consideration, and this does mitigate agency. Brian Butler told me that if he were in a room full of Marines or even former Marines, he would know exactly “what button to push to turn everyone into an automaton.” But with our deeper understanding of agency, we can see that the issue is not so clear cut. Agency emerges from meaning, which itself emerges from habituated neurons in the brain reacting to sensory signals, so the root of agency is sensory stimulation (to which one will react) plus habitual patterns of perception and intention in the form of basin attractors and strong neural links. Both conscious deliberation *and* this sensory and habitual root are part of agency. When the Marines can affect recruits’ senses repeatedly and catalyze a change of habit, they create a habitual conditioning. But recruits still have the power to reflect on

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<sup>21</sup> An example of this in combat shows up in Wright’s account of the second invasion of Iraq, when Colonel Joe Dowdy is relieved of his command for indecision in a crucial moment outside Nasiriyah; he is later “castigated in a subsequent fitness report for being ‘overly concerned about the welfare’ of his men, with the idea being that this concern got in the way of mission accomplishment” (348). Another note, regarding the differences between officers and enlisted Marines: officers obviously make decisions that affect high numbers of people routinely, but enlisted Marines are also required to make responsible decisions. The Marines are one of the most decentralized branches of the military in terms of hierarchy and authority. So both officers and enlisted Marines need to be able to make decisions rapidly and act on those decisions.

that conditioning, the way someone conditioned to stop at a red light can reflect on their inclination to stop at a red light and choose not to stop, as mentioned in the introduction. Drill instructors do offer frequent exhortations to urgency based in rational thought, reminding recruits that in battle they would not have time to act at anything less than full speed. These reminders constitute an acknowledgement that recruits will reflect consciously on their new modes of action and that they need to be persuaded to fully claim those modes, or to embrace them, the way Price embraced the “hypnotism” of training. Once more we see the Corps exerting a strong influence on habitual perceptions that may mitigate agency at times but stops short of coercion or brainwashing.

Speedy action and decision making in combat begin with training. The rhetorical situation of boot camp is engineered to offer a foretaste of the battle environment, and recruits are told that this intense experience is what they can expect there. In the haze of disorientation described in the previous chapter, meant to simulate the “fog of combat,” recruits’ actions in boot camp must always be executed with urgency. Thus, one of the ways the Marines train aggressiveness into their recruits is to emphasize that everything is done “NOW,” “quickly and loudly” (Ricks 37). One of the most common “games” DIs play is to make their platoons act “by the numbers.” That is, they will order recruits to perform specific tasks, like dressing, showering, shaving, even eating, and give them a count of time in which to do them, always impossibly short, often skipping most of the numbers in the count (Fick *One Bullet*; Turley; Ricks; Lalor; *Ears, Open.*). Recruits have to hustle from one thing to the next throughout boot camp, which instills the habitual

perception that there is no time to stop and think about whether to act. The idea is that they will take these habits from the rhetorical simulation of war to the real thing.

### *The Experience and the Performance of Anger*

Anger, as an emotion, occurs when an expectation is broken in a negative way and the personal disposition prompts a forceful, outward-directed response. Sensory neurons give some indication that things are not flowing smoothly, neuromodulators are released, and the meaning and intentions that emerge from the complex neural patterns in the brain are full of a strong negative urge to action. Anger *is* an important component of Marine Corps aggression: recruits' expectations are frequently broken in negative ways, and they are encouraged to make that energy mean something like anger. When I observed sparring at Parris Island, for example, a gunnery sergeant shouted to recruits waiting in line, "Hey youse, who still have to go, this is your opportunity to take out all your frustrations you've had while you're here! Understand that?" "Aye ma'am!" they shouted back. Robert Taylor, Kieran Michael Lalor, and the documentary *Ears, Open. Eyeballs, Click.* offer accounts of similar instructions to release pent-up frustrations. Recruits have plenty to be angry about in boot camp. The disorienting techniques discussed in the previous chapter induce frustration, especially when recruits are reprimanded for doing something wrong without having been told how to do it right. The Marines work hard to offer recruits opportunities to use their emotions and their bodies' energies in ways that will encourage them to adopt the Marine *ethos*. By making recruits angry and then asking them to perform quintessentially Marine activities that are fueled

by anger, the Corps once again creates the exigency and offers the meaning-making opportunity for recruits to see themselves as Marines.

Recruits are often punished in ways that seem unjust, or at least not proportional to the severity of the infraction. Lalor's most angry moment comes when he can't get his boot off fast enough because the lace is too tightly knotted. The DI, Sergeant Willis, grabs his boot to get it off:

As I lay on my back, with my foot in the hands of this madman, he pulled and tugged on the boot, indifferent to the fact that he was literally swabbing the floor with my flailing body. When somehow the tied boot came free of my aching foot, Willis hurled it toward me as I lay in stunned disbelief on the squad bay floor. The size eleven combat boot drilled me in the chest and, although adrenaline prevented it from hurting, it knocked the wind out of me. This was undoubtedly the most furious and frustrated I had been in my life. Defeated, I rose and returned to my spot in front of my footlocker. As I stood online, with one boot on and the other still cradled in my arms, I began shaking violently, consumed by rage, despair, and regret.

God I hate this fucking place. (n.p. Prologue)

Being manhandled for something trivial enraged Lalor; no doubt he thought about this moment when he was told to release his pent-up frustrations on his sparring opponent (Lalor n.p. Chapter 3). DIs also play "mind games" in other ways. Patrick Turley writes that "the most degrading few minutes" of his life came when his DI Sergeant Rand (towards whom he later comes to feel a kind of "Stockholm Syndrome" affection) apparently takes amusement in commanding the platoon to wash their faces immediately after their rear ends while the platoon showers by the numbers (n.p. Chapter 1). In another example of more serious humiliation, Turley recounts being incredulous when a

DI speaks ill of a recruit's dead mother: the encounter begins when the DI asks Recruit Bequet, "Why didn't your mother stop feeding your fat, ugly ass?" The recruit tells the DI his mother is dead, and at first it seems the DI will back off, but he doesn't. "Drill Instructor Staff Sergeant McFadden paused and gave him a nod. He turned to leave, but then looked back at Bequet. 'So that's why she barely moved when I fucked her.'" Turley freezes in astonishment. And "Bequet just stood there in rage and pain, yet paralyzed by fear and uncertainty. There was nothing he could do" (n.p. Chapter 1). There was nothing Bequet could do in the moment but hold onto that rage until he had the opportunity to let it out on another recruit during a sanctioned scene of aggression, such as sparring. It seems that all recruits are humiliated or belittled during their time at boot camp. Former DI Nick Popaditch warns recruits that they will be screamed at and that the DIs will make these "verbal smokings" "seem very personal"—they are meant to sting (126). Part of the reason for this is to give recruits something to be angry about when it's time to attack the enemy. Turley even writes, "I think the Marine Corps is so effective for the simple reason of three months in this place puts something inside you. A small part of you is and always will be pissed off at everything" (n.p. Chapter 3). Recruits perceive themselves as hard done by, and perceive the world as a harsh, unfair place, both of which are perceptions that fuel anger.

Recruits frequently access rage and adrenaline when they learn hand-to-hand combat techniques, taking the opportunity the Corps provides for restructuring intentions, turning anger at DIs or the rhetorical situation of boot camp into an intention to go after their opponent with everything they've got. Turley talks about how, during MCMAP

training, “all of the frustration from the past month began to surface and fuel an anger that wanted release” as he kicked his opponent (n.p. Chapter 5). Before pugil stick fighting, Turley looks forward to the “much needed opportunity to let out some pent-up aggression.” When the opportunity arises, he says,

adrenaline surged through my veins with the sound of the whistle, and with it everything became slow motion, just like it does before a car accident. Right before we met, I slid back and jabbed one end of the stick in his helmet. His neck snapped back as he made a gurgling sound, and he went down. (n.p. Chapter 3)

Turley derives a great deal of satisfaction from expressing his anger via violence. The adrenaline in his veins—and his brain—heightens his sensations. That is, it raises the number of sensory input signals that will be attached to intentions and meanings, which is why everything seems to occur in slow motion. This physical response makes it more likely that Turley will retain an impression of his identity during this moment, and if he perceives it as a Marine identity, his lasting sense of Marinehood will be strong.

But recruits aren't always angry. Sometimes they perform anger and aggression without necessarily feeling it. One way recruits perform aggression is by using language that familiarizes recruits with violent action. The frequent Marine Corps exhortations, “get some!” and “ooh-rah!” are both full of aggressive energy, with “get some!” even tapping into sexual energy. Recruits also constantly use language of attacking and killing, which creates an immediate and habitual reaction of at least the idea of violence, if not its actuality. “Kill!” becomes the go-to word of affirmation in a wide variety of circumstances. For example, Turley explains that when a recruit answered a question

correctly in a class, the rest of the platoon “would respond with a ‘motivating ‘kill’” (n.p. Chapter 2). In *Ears, Open. Eyeballs, Click.*, recruits clean the floor on their knees with brushes while chanting in response to a leader, “sweep” “kill” “sweep” “kill.” When I was at Parris Island, one of the NCOs used “kill” as a throwaway affirmative in a conversation with my escort lieutenant about when a Crucible exercise would start; the term meant “great” or “got it.” This use of violent language makes the idea of killing slightly more commonplace to recruits.

Language itself is not enough to make recruits fully aware of what it is like to kill an enemy, but it does have an important effect. This is because its meaning is perceptually linked to all the other instances in which that language has been used in the recruit’s experience. As Donald Davidson claims, words operate in the same way and the same world that objects do: people sense them, form intentions regarding them, use them, and make meanings based on how well they match our expectations for them. So while this project’s focus is not on language, words can be understood with the same theoretical lens as physical objects. But words alone, just like objects alone, are not as strong as the proprioceptive experience of an action, because the sensations they create are not as numerous or immediate.

Stories recruits have heard from veterans or others who have killed, and of course films they have watched carry experiential resonance. Of course recruits do not consciously think of every instance the word “kill” has been used every time they hear it, but the very fact that the word has meaning means the speaker and the listener have the appropriate perceptual structure for it. The same perceptual structure that gives the word

its meaning gives recruits who use the language the appropriately aggressive, Marine attitude toward violence. This effect is heightened by the proprioceptive sense recruits get from shouting the word “kill” themselves, not just hearing or reading it. They are more likely to associate their own intentions towards others—enemies, hopefully—with the word that comes out of their own mouths. Still, though it may work to change intentions, saying “kill” a lot doesn’t necessarily make the act of killing easy.

In an example of this effect, in the middle of a combat mission in Iraq, Marine Sergeant Antonio Espera offers journalist Evan Wright this reflection on the power and limits of language when Wright asks him about his reaction to killing: “We’ve been brainwashed and trained for combat. We must say ‘Kill!’ three thousand times a day in boot camp. That’s why it’s easy” to kill. But then he quickly amends his statement: “That dude I saw crawling last night, I shot him in the grape. Saw the top of his head bust off. That didn’t feel good. It makes me sick” (253). Clearly, the repetition of the word is powerful, but the word does not carry as much weight as the embodied act.

Besides replacing common everyday expressions with violent ones, recruits are also required to shout or respond to various aggressive chants and slogans as they exercise or perform other boot camp tasks. Brian Butler mentioned a common chant in which the DI shouts, “what makes the grass grow?” and the recruits respond, “blood!” Another chant asks “What is the spirit of the bayonet?” Recruits answer, “Kill, kill, kill ’em all!” The recruits Ricks writes about are “rough, tough, can’t get enough, United States Marine Corps recruits” (165) who chant what Ricks calls a “boot camp haiku that

eventually will be tattooed on their brains” every time they sit down for class or mail call: “Honor, courage, commitment! Kill, kill! Marine Corps!” (62).

The cadences DIs and recruits chant while they march are also full of aggression and often vivid violence. Jeff Parker Knight, who analyzed the cadences, called “jodies,” he sang in officer training in Quantico in the early 1980s, writes insightfully about the sometimes extreme aggression called back and forth between leader and platoon. He writes that “jodies, as symbolic action, as participatory, ritualistic performance, help desensitize recruits to the taking and losing of life” (165). Singing jodies, like singing hymns in a religious tradition, joins the physical to the verbal for a stronger impact. The fact that these cadences are sung to the beat of marching or running feet enables them to send even more sensory signals that coordinate with each other, increasing the chances that the whole-body action will be perceived with meaning and intention. This song and dance encourages recruits to feel consubstantial with their platoon, the way drill does.

These jodies can convey a number of elements of Marinehood; some of them are quite violent. Knight prints the following jody as an example that he performed “with great relish”:

My Marine Corps color is red  
Shows the world the blood we’ve shed  
Hey, hey green Marine  
Where’ve you been and what’ve you seen?  
I been down to Lebanon  
Saw bodies lying all around

Running through the jungle with my M-16  
I’m a mean motherfucker, I’m a U.S. Marine

Hitting the beach, bayonet in my hand  
I'm gonna be one killing man

.....

I want to go to Vietnam  
I want to kill some Charlie Coms  
Flying low and feeling mean  
Fire a family by a stream  
See them burn and hear them scream  
Cause Napalm sticks to kids

Family of gooks was sitting in a ditch  
Little baby sucking on his mama's tits  
Baby's gonna burn don't give a shit  
Cause Napalm sticks to kids. (165-66)

This cadence is shocking to civilians, and perhaps to some Marines and recruits as well, but according to Knight, learning to take death lightly through such chants is part of the change in perception recruits and officer candidates go through.<sup>22</sup> Parker writes,

I am still sometimes surprised, and horrified, at the words I said and the way I thought during and immediately after a brief stint in a military training camp. The jodies were part of the change we went through. By laughing at the unpleasant realities of war, we no doubt were hardening ourselves to our own squeamishness and fear. Such hardening was to make us efficient soldiers, willing to kill or die on command (and as officers, willing to give such commands). All [the other attitudes we took on in training] are geared toward this goal. (166)

Here Parker describes the “relish” of the bloodthirsty language in the cadences as a kind of necessary black humor to harden recruits’ perceptions to what they must do. While the

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<sup>22</sup> For the record, it is my impression that such jodies are rarer now than they were during and just after the Vietnam War, when Parker trained. Such callously bloodthirsty attitudes—at least towards non-combatants—are officially no longer part of training. See the discussion of the new Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) below.

example he offers is chilling, particularly in its attitudes toward non-combatants, he sees it as necessary to make Marines ready to die and kill. All of these frequent uses of violent language, including jodies, slogans, work chants, and the casual “kill” as “got it,” work toward making violence familiar, the stuff of everyday labor. Gregg Stoner writes of his time as a recruit, “After a while the aspect of killing another person just becomes part of the process: it no longer came to us as a chilling thought” (32). The new amplitude modulation patterns that emerge from the complex systems of neurons in recruits’ brains during boot camp, especially when facilitated by multiple coordinating sensations, attach a new meaning to the idea of killing. Killing is now perceived as simply part of a job, the stuff of everyday work. That perception will undoubtedly change again if recruits end up facing actual killing in combat, but for now, killing is perceived with an appropriately professional attitude.

Besides using language associated with attacking attitudes, the Marines also use modes of *behavior* associated with attack attitudes. Anger is often performed by Marines and recruits at boot camp even if they aren’t feeling angry at the moment. Anne Demers, who explored the loss and trauma returning service men and women face, writes that, in interviews, “Many soldiers<sup>23</sup> referred to their ‘anger switch,’ which was described by one participant as ‘an act that you learn from your drill instructors’ that you can go into at any time. . . . ‘it’s not because [you are] really angry, but just because [you] . . . communicate

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<sup>23</sup> Demers uses the term “soldiers” to refer to service men and women generically, not only those in the Army. The fact that the interviewee refers to a “drill instructor” indicates that he/she was a Marine (other branches have different designations, such as “drill sergeant” or “military training instructor”).

that way” (167). The way DIs scream at recruits is a ready model for this kind of ramped-up communication; even if DIs aren’t actually angry themselves, they perform anger. I witnessed this when I saw platoons of recruits body sparring and fighting with pugil sticks at Parris Island: the fight instructors would shout at the recruits, yelling, “Fight back! Hit her!” and “Get mad! Strike her! Strike her!” But between bouts, I saw them looking off into the distance, not bored exactly, but with an “all in a day’s work” expression on their faces. And the series commander and other DIs who were standing with me on the catwalk would sometimes join in the shouting, ginning up angry excitement as if at a boxing match. In between their cheering, they would talk to me. During our conversation, the series commander was mild mannered and displayed a frequent, open smile; she seemed like she would have been at home in the Peace Corps (in fact, she had career aspirations in humanitarian work). Apparently, one need not be eternally pissed off to perform the Marine Corps attack mode, despite Turley’s hypothesis about Marine effectiveness. But when the officers and DIs, who have a lot of rhetorical force and rhetorical power, perform anger, recruits follow suit. Recruits have proprioceptively experienced anger, and that experience left strong enough neural connections that their bodies remember how to act. The DIs and officers offer an embodied example of how to proceed. When the officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) standing on the catwalk yelled at the recruits, I saw the fighters’ intensity ratchet up noticeably. Clearly the performance had an effect.

Body sparring and pugil stick bouts are occasions for demonstrating extravagant angry aggression. Instructors feed recruits a kind of attack patten before they begin their

sparring bouts to elevate the stakes of the fighting. DIs tell recruits, for example, “Kill or be killed, understand? If you come out a loser, you might as well consider yourself dead, understand?” (Ricks 81). The attack patten is even clearer in this pugil stick scene from *Ears, Open. Eyeballs, Click.*, which merits an extended description:

Recruits who are about to fight stand opposite each other like boxers in their corners, each with drill instructors revving them up. At one side, an instructor, standing behind his recruit, grabs the recruit’s vest and pushes him forward and then pulls him back several times, then slaps the back of his helmet two or three times. In the other corner, a recruit is sitting down in his protective gear—bulky padded vest and a white football helmet, with what looks like old blood on the earholes—while a fight instructor towers over him, leaning down close. “You don’t know him, do you?” “No sir.” “So there’s no reason to fucking like him, is there?” “No sir.” “Take out everything you have on that kid right there, you understand?” “Yes sir.”

Another instructor comes over and leans in on the other side, saying, “Tell you right now, if this was combat, one of you’d be going home to your family, one of you’d be going home in a body bag.” The two instructors pour aggression into the recruit, talking over each other. The first says, “That’s right, that’s the bottom line. He’s trying to stop you from going home,” while the other reinforces, “One’s going home in a body bag, and one’s going home to see his family. Which one are you going to be? Which one are you going to be?”

They are ready. The first instructor tells the recruit, “Get up. Get up.” The second says, “You better freaking swing that stick. Like a fucking chainsaw. Open up the fucking chainsaw, and just fucking let it rage. Rage. Rage. Rage and aggression. Rage and aggression.” A whistle blows, and the recruit’s platoon mates shout, “Go get him.”

The two recruits fight. The fighting is not exciting to watch. They’re clumsy and not particularly skilled, and they’re wielding bulky padded weapons. But the other recruits, standing in lines curved around the fighting while waiting for their turn, shout encouragements to their platoon mates. One of them loses his grip on his stick, and the other waits for him to recover his grip before moving in. An instructor comes in and grabs the face mask of the too-passive recruit and yanks him around by it, snapping, “Fight, goddammit! Fight!”

The whistle blows, and the instructor moves in again like a predator and shoves the recruit, saying, “Why’d you stop? Why’d you stop? Why’d you stop? Why did you stop? Why did you stop? Why did you stop? WHY DID YOU STOP? Answer my fucking question before I rip out your teeth. Why did you stop?” The recruit protests weakly, and the instructor goes on, “You were being a little fairy. You didn’t wanna hurt him. Because you’re sweet, and nice, and you didn’t wanna fricking kill.” The instructor is right in the recruit’s face. “Get the freak away from me right damn now.” The recruit runs away, and while he runs, another instructor yells, half desultorily, “Yeah, you messed up. I guess you’re going home in a body bag. Don’t worry, someone else’ll take care of your girl.”

In this scene the instructors perform a consummate, almost eloquent anger, using physical posture and verbal repetition—the rhetorical technique of amplification—in addition to the content of their words. And those words are calculated to make recruits aggressive too, alternately through encouragement, fear, and humiliation. Drill instructors intensify the affect and increase the stakes of this sparring, which is not in itself a spectacular display of skill. Recruits are awkward in their ill-fitting padding and don’t have enough time or training to make this contest exciting without the ramped-up rhetorical context the DIs create. This makes the DIs performances all the more important.

Perhaps more importantly though, the recruits’ actions themselves embody a performance of anger and aggression. Swinging a pugil stick as hard as possible at another recruit’s head is a movement one would normally associate proprioceptively with anger, and certainly with aggression. This action serves as a powerful expression of the aggressiveness recruits are taught, even if recruits aren’t feeling particularly angry at the moment. In another example of the physical performance of angry aggression, when I watched recruits sparring at Parris Island, they were required to run in from opposite corners, arms raised, yelling, “Aaaahh!” This is a simulation of the angry battle cry of a

warrior ready to kill, another hymn meant to make the bodies of recruits more aggressive. Just as psychologists have proven that posing in positions of power before a given action makes people more likely to take risks and to do well in mock interviews, performing aggressive actions makes recruits behave more aggressively, not just in the moment of the action, but after the action is complete. As discussed in Chapter II, this effect takes place even if recruits are not conscious of the aggression they are being asked to take on. In this way the Marines influence the future behaviors of recruits by manipulating their present physical actions, turning the recruits' own bodies into powerful rhetorical tools.

*Positive Motivation: Excitement, Fun, and Glory*

As I claimed above, anger isn't the only emotion associated with violence in boot camp. Sometimes the go-to affect isn't rage directed at the enemy, but sheer enjoyment of the act of violence itself, which civilians only get to experience vicariously, through films and books. Though DIs don't say things like "let's have some fun out there" while sending recruits into fighting drills, recruits are encouraged to have fun fighting, whether with weapons or in hand-to-hand combat. Many recruits already find fighting and powerful weapons exciting, and boot camp facilitates the proliferation of this perception. This experience of fun is a very important way that the Corps encourages recruits to adopt the Marine *ethos*. It is very difficult—perhaps impossible—to *force* someone to have fun. What a person finds fun depends very much on their disposition, and many of the Marines' go-to techniques for changing perceptual structures, such as screaming and discomfort, preclude the possibility of fun. This is not to say that people can't be

encouraged or persuaded to have fun. One can invite a person to have fun the same way the Corps invites recruits to make other meanings. But the important thing about fun is that it makes people feel that their own inclinations are being indulged. If recruits' inclinations are being indulged while participating in a quintessentially Marine activity, they are very likely to identify with the Marines. The rhetorical situation of boot camp is very important here, as recruits and Marines share and reinforce each other's excitement in a haloed cluster of mutual influence. People are more likely to have fun around other people who are having fun, and are also more likely to feel consubstantial. The environment encourages excitement in the instruments and attitudes of war, and individual people feed the general rhetorical situation that is conducive to excitement.

The word often used to describe excitement about fighting and weapons in the Marines is "motivating." For example, when a platoon watches an instructor detonate a grenade that heats to four thousand degrees and burns a hole through an old metal ammunition box, the instructor asks, "That's a motivating grenade, is it not?" (Ricks 155). And Price loves the moment when his platoon goes to "Parris Island's version of Mad Max's Thunder Dome," where his platoon

learned four different ways to kill a man, including choke-holds, arm locks, and violent boot-stomps to the head. MOTIVATE!! Of course, this type of killing is for combat and defensive purposes, only. Next, came boxing. MORE MOTIVATION!! Around here, if you don't like to fight, it's almost unpatriotic—like not voting. No guts, no glory! (52)

It is a Marine's duty to love to fight. The act itself, regardless of what one is fighting for, is motivating. In another example of the word's use, Turley describes his senior DI's

excitement after the day's sparring: the DI is "too pumped to sit in his throne" and tells his platoon, "That was some good shit, gents. I saw some people give out some serious ass whippings today. That's the shit that motivates the hell out of me" (n.p. Chapter 3).<sup>24</sup> The word "motivate" is useful for describing this trope of eagerness to fight because it conveys the enjoyable side of fighting without seeming too passive or childish on the one hand or too sadistic or twisted on the other. The word's pointedness reminds Marines that the point isn't *just* the fun they have; they must be motivated *toward* something—killing the enemy. This reminder also allows Marines to express excitement about the thrill of violence and the power of weapons without seeming to enjoy the killing for its own sake. Also, the idea of motivation strikes the right balance rhetorically between merely encouraging and coercing or brainwashing. People who have been motivated have not been given new or foreign ideas, but merely prodded toward fulfilling their own desires,

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<sup>24</sup> "Motivating" is commonly used in Marine jargon even after training. Shortened to "moto," sometimes the word has a negative connotation among Marines who are no longer fresh and eager: in his account of a reconnaissance battalion's part in the Iraq War, Evan Wright explains that "Marines call exaggerated displays of enthusiasm—from shouting *Get some!* to waving American flags to covering their bodies with Marine Corps tattoos—'moto.'" Cool-headed, seasoned Marines avoid such enthusiasm (2). But occasionally, even the coolest become "moto," as when the noncombatant Wright finds himself excited about an upcoming mission: "I had almost looked down on the Marines' shows of moto, the way they shouted *Get some!* and acted so excited about being in a fight. But the fact is, there's a definite sense of exhilaration every time there's an explosion and you're still there afterward" (99). Elsewhere in Wright's story, leaders draw on this exhilaration to get their Marines ready for combat. On the eve of a risky offensive, Lieutenant Nathaniel Fick tells his platoon, "The good news is, we get to kill people," and Wright writes, "It's rare for Fick to sound so 'moto,' regaling his men with enthusiastic talk of killing" (237). Even though, as Wright subsequently reports, Fick's confidence in the plan seems "hollow" (238), Fick can draw on this "moto" behavioral trope because it's a way Marines relate to each other that they all understand, and can embody when necessary.

making them feel they are still in charge. And finally, “motivate” is also a multi-syllabic Latinate word, giving some official-sounding caché to those who use it, almost as if they belong in the high-powered corporate world. So the Marine excitement about violence can be presented as educated, rationally justified, and professional. The word “motivating” is thus an extremely useful word in describing the kind of excited aggression recruits need, part of the Marine warrior *ethos*.

Many accounts of boot camp are full of excitement about violence and powerful weapons. Price writes of the day his platoon won the red flag (the highest place) in the pugil stick tournament:

Today really was a glorious day—and it had nothing to do with sunsets. . . . There’s nothing like looking into another man’s eyes and sensing his fear. I fed off it, like a shark, as I lunged at my opponent with everything I had. I was all over him with “death blows” and I quickly won all three rounds. We went in scared, but most of us came out feeling awesome. It felt great to turn around and see your Senior’s proud face and get congratulations from the other recruits, as well. BAM, POW, POW—like an episode of Batman! (62)

Here Price’s dominant emotion isn’t anger at his opponent, but the excitement of a child watching his cartoon superhero, and the excitement of domination. Lalor also feels excited at the opportunity to engage in violence, comparing it with films he has enjoyed. About the bayonet assault course, he writes, “It is the kind of stuff that you see in boot camp movies and I loved it” (n.p. Chapter 2). When he gets to work with weapons in a nighttime training session, Lalor writes, “the sky filled with streaking tracers reminded me of a cross between *Star Wars* and CNN’s coverage of the Gulf War. It was very exciting and, again, exactly the kind of stuff that made me and thousands of others want

to join the Marines.” Nick Popaditch makes a similar claim about field week, when recruits learn infantry tactics: “This is the crawling-through-the-mud and firing-your-weapons-at-moving-targets type stuff. If you do not enjoy this sort of training, you are in the wrong profession” (153). Marines are supposed to love the excitement of war—this is one attractor basin that should perform the same way. In fact, General Smedley Butler, one of the Marine greats about whom recruits are taught, wrote to Commandant John A. Lejeune,

We have a class of men in our ranks far superior to those in any other service in the world and they are high-spirited and splendid in every way. They joined because of our reputation for giving them excitement, and excitement from a marine’s [*sic*] standpoint, can only be gained by the use of bullets and the proximity to danger. (qtd. in Warren 14)

Marines who are “high-spirited and splendid” run toward danger, not away from it.

Butler normalizes the love of danger and bullets within a sense of what it means to be a Marine.

Aside from the sheer thrill of danger, General Butler’s reference to “the use of bullets” is extremely important in Marine Corps culture and in boot camp. Recruits are encouraged to revel in the power of their rifles, to perceive them as beautiful and strong. They are not taught to associate anger or urgency with rifles, perhaps because rifles are precision instruments that require a high degree of care both in their maintenance and their use. A rifle is not an anger-dependent weapon. Anger brings extra strength and speed to hand-to-hand combat situations, but those very assets are liabilities in handling a fine-tuned weapon. So the go-to motivating affect surrounding weapons is not anger, but

excitement about the marvelous power of the rifle. For example, in Thomas Ricks's account of boot camp, Sgt Paul Norman, an infantry instructor, tells recruits how "beautiful" an M16 rifle is:

"An M-16 can blow someone's head off at 500 meters," he teaches. "That's beautiful, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir!" shout the 173 voices of 3086 and its companion platoons.

"*What* is the mission?" he asks.

The platoons chant in rollicking unison: "The mission of the Marine rifle team is to locate, close with, and DESTROOOOOOY the enemy!"

"Isn't that a beautiful thing?"

"Yes sir!" they respond in a roar. (150)

The beauty here seems to be in the power and accuracy of the rifle rather than the death of the enemy, primarily. But the idea of death becomes subsumed in the power of the rifle, and to glory in one is to glory in the other.<sup>25</sup>

The Marines walk a fine line between sadism and pride in a job well done, precisely because the "job well done" is the effective termination of a human life. One of the ways the Marines walk that line is to fetishize the rifle. The Corps attempts to change the meaning that recruits' perceptual structures attach both to their rifles and to their own

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<sup>25</sup> It is easy for weapons to be associated with physical sensation. Elaine Scarry notes that people who describe pain, even when that pain was not violently inflicted, tend to use language that includes weapons to convey how they feel. The "physical fact"—what the weapon can do—and the "perceptual fact"—what the metaphorical weapon is doing when we feel pain—are very close to each other (16).

persons with respect to their rifles. The rifle becomes a separate receptacle for the power to rain down death and destruction on enemies and at the same time an extension of the Marine's own body. This way a Marine's excitement can be about the rifle's power and accuracy rather than the act of killing, while the rifle is immune to guilt for such actions. At the same time, the rifle can also be a carrier, extension, or bolster to a Marine's own power. This relationship allows the Marine to identify with the rifle when necessary and to dissociate when necessary. This double possibility is contained in the following quotation from the *Army's* General John Pershing which Marines publish on posters, internet memes, books:: "The deadliest weapon in the world is a Marine and his rifle." For example, it shows up as an epigram to Chapter 8 in Turley's memoir, and on the bumper sticker pictured in fig. 7.



Figure 7. Bumper Sticker Reading "Deadliest Weapon in the World, A Marine and his Rifle."

Here the power of the rifle is wedded to but still distinct from the power of the Marine. And the enthusiastic Price offers a supporting example of a recruit bonding with the power of his weapon:

Well, it finally happened. Today, we fired our M16A2 semi-automatic assault rifles. Talk about power—it was friggin' awesome! We fired three magazines of five rounds each.

. . . I was so enthralled with actually firing the M-16, I forgot all the correct procedures—my breathing, everything was wrong. What really distracted me was the smell of the carbon. My previous experience with guns was nil, but after breathing in the smell of carbon from firing a rifle for the first time, I was in love!  
(80)

Turley recounts a similar experience when he fired his rifle: “I felt a rush of power wash over me with those three rounds. The M16 barely recoiled as I squeezed the trigger, intent on killing my imaginary foe. My eyes grew wide as I shot and my breathing turned heavy. It was addictive and it was over far too fast” (n.p. Chapter 8). The power of the weapons is intoxicating, beautiful, motivating, sexual. Turley writes that everyone in his platoon was excited about getting an M16, which he calls “the most gorgeous and prized possession we had set our hands to” (n.p. Chapter 2). Stoner claims all Marines love to shoot rifles (137), and Andy Bufalo calls the Marines a “gun club” (n.p.). Recruits who love guns become consubstantial with the Marines, who share their love. The long-adopted Marine slogan “Every Marine a rifleman” illustrates the full support of Marine brass for this identification, and its frequent appearance at boot camp illustrates the way the Marines can manipulate a rhetorical situation to make people feel excited about taking on the Marine *ethos*.

But while there is much excitement surrounding the rifle, it is a precision tool, as stated above. It cannot be the object of wild, limitless excitement precisely because it is very powerful. Marines must take their rifles very seriously. While they do encourage excitement in recruits’ perceptions of their weapons, the Marines are also careful to channel that excitement and regulate it. This is a good point, therefore, to transition to

discussing the refining and channeling of the aggressiveness that Marines encourage in boot camp. In the next section, I discuss the more restrained attitudes toward rifles as well as other cool-headed attitudes with which recruits' ooh-rah approach is tempered.

### **Refining and Channeling**

Whether it takes the form of excitement, anger, or simple urgency, the aggressive attitude that Marines cultivate in recruits needs to be channeled properly so that Marines can kill *when and whom they should* in combat. They may need to make quick decisions, but straight aggressiveness is not always the right answer. The correct response to the exigencies of war is not always “kill, kill, kill ’em all!” One former Marine I spoke with, Brandon Delagarza, said that *all* of boot camp teaches self-control, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The disorientation described in the previous chapter and the provocation of anger described in this chapter, along with the fact that recruits' actions are highly constricted, with almost no free time in their schedule—all of this means that there is no room for recruits to indulge their own various inclinations. They absolutely must learn impulse control or they will not graduate. This self control is a clear manifestation of the Marine Corps's investment in recruits' retaining their own agency. Marines who were simply programed or brainwashed would not be able to discern when to act and when not to act. The Corps's inducement to self-control exists mostly on the level of force or rhetorical force, but when recruits experience such powerful embodied inclinations to quit or lash out and then manage to master them, their bodies remember that lesson. This is a clear instance of the power of proprioceptive perception, the making

of meaning in relation to one's own body. In addition to this general constant constraint on recruits' bodies, the Marine Corps also offers more specific ways for recruits to learn the values of restraint and self-control that will become part of their future Marine *ethos*.

### *Rifle Values*

One kind of restraint that is especially important for Marines is diligence, and the way recruits learn to treat rifles in boot camp is an excellent example of how this quality can be embodied and sensed proprioceptively. Recruits are required to disassemble, clean, and reassemble their rifles using cloths called "Mickey Mouse towels," with outlines of the weapon's parts drawn on the towel (see fig. 8). Rifles can never be left unattended. Recruits sleep with them, drill with them, carry them on marches, and so on. They even use mock rifles in their swimming qualifications. If recruits perform some activity that precludes holding their rifles, the rifles are padlocked and assigned a guard from the platoon (Ricks 50; Lalor n.p. Chapter 3). And DIs back off their campaign of disorientation and harassment during "Grass Week" and "Qualifying Week" when Marines learn to fire their weapons, so that more of their attention can be focused on the intricacies of shooting (Stoner 105). Recruits must always treat their rifles with care, attention, and diligence.

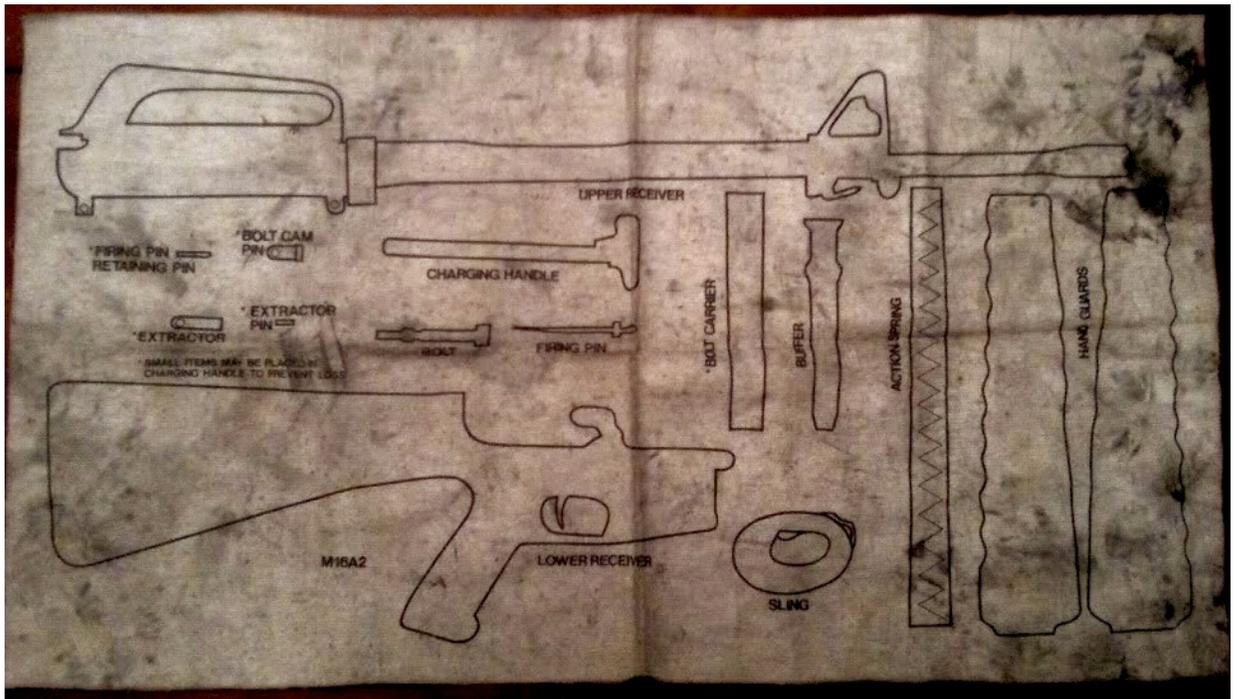


Figure 8. A Well-used “Mickey Mouse Towel” Outlining All the Parts of an M16A2 Rifle. These towels are issued to all recruits at boot camp. Photo submitted to forums.officer.com by BlackDog F4i on 3 Mar. 2010. Web. 8 Oct. 2014.

Recruits are charged to take better care of their rifles than themselves (Ricks 94).

Marine and historian Eugene Alvarez quotes an old WWI-era verse about rifle care:

Your rifle is your best friend; take every care of it.  
 Treat it as you would your wife;  
 Rub it thoroughly with an oily rag every day.

Aside from concerns about rubbing one’s wife with an oily rag (which may be the result of infelicitous phrasing or may be a sexualization of the rifle), this verse demonstrates the utmost terms of care and attention that should be devoted to a Marine’s rifle. Recruits should perceive their rifles as if they were just as important as their wives. Recruits have

sometimes been instructed to give their rifles a feminine name, in order to symbolize the devotion a Marine must have to the weapon, but this practice seems less common now than it used to be. Delagarza, who finished his service in September 2014, says recruits weren't required to name their rifles when he went through training, but some did on their own.

The "Rifleman's Creed," sometimes called "My Rifle," encompasses much of the Marine attitude toward the weapon each one carries. It assigns personhood to the rifle and ingrains a respect in the Marine for the rifle that is at once solemn and hyperbolic.

This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine.  
My rifle is my best friend. It is my life. I must master it as I must master my life.  
My rifle, without me, is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless. I must fire my rifle true. I must shoot straighter than my enemy who is trying to kill me. I must shoot him before he shoots me. I will...  
My rifle and myself know that what counts in this war is not the rounds we fire, the noise of our burst, nor the smoke we make. We know that it is the hits that count. We will hit...  
My rifle is human, even as I, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a brother. I will learn its weaknesses, its strength, its parts, its accessories, its sights and its barrel. I will ever guard it against the ravages of weather and damage as I will ever guard my legs, my arms, my eyes and my heart against damage. I will keep my rifle clean and ready. We will become part of each other. We will...  
Before God, I swear this creed. My rifle and myself are the defenders of my country. We are the masters of our enemy. We are the saviors of my life.  
So be it, until victory is America's and there is no enemy, but peace!  
(Marines.com; ellipses in original)

All recruits learn this creed, which Ricks calls the Marine equivalent of the Lord's Prayer. Many platoons recite it nightly before lights out, as in the famous scene in *Full Metal Jacket* when DI Hartman instructs his recruits to recite the creed with the command "Pray!" (Ricks, Turley).

The “Rifleman’s Creed” lays out in powerful language the meaning the Corps wants recruits to attach to the rifle in their own perceptions. Just as with the violent language discussed in the previous section, saying these words over and over can be a powerful influence on recruits’ intentions regarding their rifles. The creed is important enough that it deserves close reading. The creed begins with a simple declarative statement, solid and uncompromising, which makes clear the importance of the object: “This is my rifle.” The second sentence, “There are many like it, but this one is mine,” is a nod to the one-and-many *topos* so common in the Marine Corps. Recruits must be reminded that they are not alone, not individuals with egos; however, in the interest of bonding with the rifle, they are encouraged to think of their particular rifle as unique, because uniquely theirs. Emphasis on uniqueness fosters recruits’ sense of agency. Agency is the lived experience that one’s actions are one’s own, which implies that those actions are unlike any other person’s—they are not mere copies. So having a rifle that is tied to one’s own identity in the same way that one’s actions are tied to one’s identity strengthens the sense of power we call agency. These first two sentences together also center the speaker’s attention and encourage a kind of meditation on the rifle as object and symbol. Meditation is further encouraged by the unfinished sentences throughout the creed and the ellipses that stretch into the unknown. The rifle is the solid bridge into that unknown, the one thing Marines can count on when they think about all the uncertainties of combat.

The creed balances aggressiveness and restraint by inspiring both strong emotions and an ethic of diligence. Aggressiveness shows up in the third and fifth paragraphs both

as fear of an enemy and as an intense emotional attachment to one's weapon. This bond is described as that felt between family members or best friends, but also as one of practical importance. Mutual dependence—"My rifle, without me, is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless"—is the ultimate bond. This bond, according to the creed's rhetoric, can lessen the fear of being useless in the face of an enemy intent on one's destruction. So the creed reminds Marines of the enemy trying to kill them but immediately offers an antidote to the fear it raises. This antidote resides not only in the weapon itself, but also in the knowledge of how to use it, knowledge given in the next paragraph, beginning "My rifle and myself know..." That which the Marine and the rifle know is imbued with restraint—the sober surety of precise hits contrasts with the useless excitement of noise and smoke.

The Marine also knows how to maintain his or her rifle, even to keep it from the "ravages of weather." The fifth paragraph exemplifies the Marines' high pragmatism but also their attention to emotional needs. The M16 rifle, as the M14 before it, is one of the most effective weapons in the world, but it malfunctions if not cared for properly (contrasted with the AK 47, for example, which almost always works, rarely jams, but is less accurate). The creed reminds Marines, on a practical level, that their weapons will only take care of them if the Marines take care of their weapons. But this mutual dependence is also made into a comfort. The rifle and the Marine "become part of each other," which means that a Marine is never alone.

The two final paragraphs are more abstract. In language swelling with importance, Marines are reminded of their ultimate mission on the battlefield and the

ways their rifles can accomplish that mission. Rifles can help defend our country, master our enemies, and save our lives. This list, descending from most noble to least, covers three of the most important emotions that lead to aggressiveness in combat: a sense of glory and honor, anger at opponents, and fear for one's life. And finally, the creed ends with a triumphant declaration of perseverance in pursuit of victory and peace. Thus the creed wraps up a number of key values and emotions—fear, strong attachments, diligence, and perseverance—and presents them in ringing, easily absorbed language for all recruits to associate with their rifles.

Recruits have an opportunity to embody these values and make meaning from them proprioceptively during the two weeks of training dedicated to qualifying with a rifle. (Recruits must meet certain marksmanship standards to graduate boot camp.) During “Grass Week,” recruits have no ammunition but assume the postures necessary for shooting. This is called “snapping in.” During this time, recruits train their bodies to shoot accurately based on “skeletal stability and muscle relaxation” (Popaditch 142). Popaditch explains the process when he tells prospective recruits, “you will spend extended periods in the different firing positions to train your body to contort into them and achieve the comfort level to get muscle relaxation and obtain a ‘natural point of aim’ for you and your weapon” (143). In other words, it isn't just your mind that needs to learn how to shoot; it's your *body*. When your skeleton is stable and your muscles relaxed, you will shoot accurately. As with drill and so many other lessons in boot camp, the Corps exhibits faith that putting the body through the correct actions will obtain the necessary results. The Marine Corps shooting dogma, what Ricks calls “the gospel according to

Parris Island” is clear: “shooting accurately is a matter of discipline: Even the clumsiest recruit can do it well if he follows the prescribed steps, from sighting and aiming, to proper positioning, to trigger control and sight adjustment” (119). This practiced discipline is yet another example of the restraint exercised with the rifle. No freaking out, no flashes of insight or power; just put your body in the right places, and proficiency is yours.

Recruits who experience this centeredness can link it to the values of the “Rifleman’s Creed.” For example, Turley writes about his qualification shooting:

I walked to my target with Angel [Turley’s name for his rifle] and sat on the ready bench. It was my turn to shoot next. I put my ear plugs in. . . . The sound around me was swept away immediately and I felt at peace. Angel was sitting on my knee, muzzle up perpendicular to the ground. I didn’t even notice I was softly stroking her.

I was focused and determined to connect with every round. I had memorized “My Rifle” and I began to slowly recite it under my breath as I stroked Angel up and down. (n.p. Chapter 8)

Turley’s relationship with his rifle is clearly intense and somewhat sexualized. But his description also conveys an almost spiritual kind of connection between man and rifle, as if the rifle fulfills a deep need for meditative centering. If the creed is the Marine “Lord’s Prayer,” Turley’s actions are spiritual practice. Turley has bonded with his rifle as the creed suggests; the creed’s values have crept into and altered his perceptual attractor landscape and are present with him as he shoots.

Thus the rifle is the site of diligence both through rote actions, as when DIs ask recruits to disassemble their weapons using their Mickey Mouse towels or when they “snap

in,” and through more abstract inspiration such as the “Rifleman’s Creed.” But the kinds of rote actions and ingrained respect required for rifle use aren’t the only kinds of restraint required by the Marine Corps.

### *Decision Making and MCMAP*

Today’s Marines need to make wise decisions in combat—not just officers, but enlisted Marines as well. The Marine Corps is much more decentralized than other branches, emphasizing the importance of lower ranks. Drill Instructor Staff Sergeant Rodolfo Rodriguez tells Larry Smith, “I think there’s a perception out there that people think that Marines are brainwashed like robots, but in the Marine Corps we put a lot of emphasis on small-unit leadership” (n.p. Chapter 23). The nature of maneuver warfare requires quick, wise decisions from squad leaders on patrol or other smaller missions, who don’t necessarily have time to get in touch with their platoon commanders before acting.<sup>26</sup> David H. Freedman, who has studied the Corps’s hierarchical structure, writes that because Marines “exercise their own judgment in carrying out missions,”

they have to have the mental acuity, creativity, and knowledge to deal with fast-changing, complex situations. “More than ever, the Marines at the lower levels need to know more than just rote tasks,” says one colonel. “The Marine’s mind is becoming our main weapons system.” (105)

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<sup>26</sup> But the officers do set the rules of engagement overall, authorizing different levels of violence for different missions, or even different phases of missions.

Confirming this attitude, a DI told Ricks that he had been taught in DI school, “We want a warrior who thinks, like those down in Somalia that held babies one day and had to kill the next day, and knew the difference between the two” (103).

And because of the “CNN factor” of contemporary warfare, decisions made by the most junior Marines can have major ramifications in the court of world opinion: a corporal’s actions may show up on twenty-four-hour news cycles and immediately influence a much larger sphere than ever before (Freedman 47; Smith n.p. Chapter 23; Ricks 145, 190). In fact, when Wright wanted to write about Reconnaissance Marines in Iraq, General James Mattis and Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Ferrando directed him to write about the enlisted Marines rather than officers (Wright [Response to Shoup]). The other new aspect of Marine work that requires wise decision making is the nature of contemporary missions. Peacekeeping missions, natural disaster response, and limited wars such as counterinsurgencies, which Marines are now called on to perform in addition to traditional unlimited warfare, require a mindset other than attack mode. During a counterinsurgency, it is always of vital importance to separate enemies from non-combatants, both because of basic ethical concerns and because the mission of the counterinsurgency is compromised when U.S. forces are seen to be fighting local non-combatants.

Thus a basic skill for every Marine is to be able to assess what level of violence is necessary in a given situation. This is a crucial reason the Corps cannot afford to turn recruits into automatons, and it is a major tenet of the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP), which was developed in part to fulfill a need for a program that worked

“across the full spectrum of violence” (MCRP 3-02B). That is, the program needed to work for Marines killing their enemies in close-quarters combat, but also for Marines on peacekeeping and other missions trying to ensure the compliance of non-combatants. The Corps’s previous system, the linear neural-override engagement (LINE) system, was specifically formulated to kill opponents in close quarters (“medical feasibility studies” were conducted to ensure the moves were deadly). The MCMAP program teaches methods for subduing without harming in addition to methods for killing enemies, and it teaches when to apply each technique (MCRP 3-02B; Yi). In his study of MCMAP, Captain Jamison Yi writes that MCMAP provides “maximum flexibility for adapting to any possible threat level.” He continues,

Marines are taught methodologies for rapidly selecting and using appropriate techniques to fit the situation. Applying the right technique with the least required force to prevent situations from escalating beyond control is especially important in military operations other than war. Selecting justifiable techniques is also important. (21)

Yi’s reference to “justifiable techniques” acknowledges the “CNN factor,” the fact that Marines will be held accountable for their actions during warfare in ways previous combatants were not. Yi also prints the “continuum of force taught during MCMAP syllabus,” which lays out guidelines for how Marines respond to various people they encounter in the course of a mission:

1. Compliant (cooperative): Verbal commands.
2. Resistant (passive): Contact controls.
3. Resistant (active): Compliance techniques.\*
4. Assaultive (bodily harm): Defensive techniques.\*

5. Assaultive (serious bodily harm/death): Deadly force.\*  
\*Martial arts techniques. (20)

Thus an important part of MCMAP training is learning to recognize which level of force to use in which situations. Note that the language in this continuum does indicate dominance. The interlocutor may be “cooperative,” but Marines do not cooperate; they “command.” They enforce “compliance.” Even if they are on a “peacekeeping mission,” they are not peacebuilders who collaborate in humility and listen generously to the other’s perspective. But this “verbal command” is different indeed from the one-note, all-out attack encouraged by previous generations and taught by the LINE system. Marines cannot simply access their anger or their fear—or their survival instinct—and let it take over. They must channel their aggression, controlling themselves as well as their interlocutors. Yi writes that “MCMAP aims to develop self-discipline and self-control to restrain oneself in the heat of the moment and use force responsibly” (23). The Marine disposition must not be geared entirely toward aggression, and Marines’ capacity for conscious deliberation must remain intact.

The Marines train recruits to channel their aggression in the MCMAP system not only by teaching them to recognize different levels of attack, but through an emphasis on the Marine warrior *ethos*. The program is not only “designed to increase the warfighting capabilities of individual Marines and units,” but also to “enhance Marines’ self-confidence and esprit de corps, and foster the warrior ethos in all Marines” (MCRP 3-02B 1-1). Based on a number of martial arts traditions, especially eastern traditions, MCMAP is meant to be not merely a series of moves, but a more holistic guide for a

warrior. The warrior *ethos* is built on three pillars: mental discipline, character discipline, and physical discipline, which correspond roughly to mind, self, and body, three of the elements we traditionally see as entwined in agency. The Marines want whole agents in their brotherhood.

The physical discipline involves combat conditioning and fighting techniques. The fighting techniques, which include strikes, kicks, chokes, falls, bayonet thrusts, knife techniques, and techniques for disarming an opponent (e.g., fig. 9), are the physical actions to be performed in a close-quarters fighting situation, while the conditioning is integrated into the regular USMC physical training (PT). In boot camp, recruits earn their first belt, the tan belt.<sup>27</sup> Training in fighting techniques takes place with recruits in squared-off rows, practicing strikes and throws repetitively. Recruits are encouraged to put their all into these strikes, but they are also restrained or punished if they get out of hand and let their emotions take over (Turley Chapter 10; Parris Island interviews). As an instructor tells Ricks, “blind aggression doesn’t always work” (112). The point in MCMAP training is less to get recruits’ blood up, as in the pugil sticks and body sparring exercises, and more to train recruits’ muscles to perform specific actions through repetition. Popaditch tells prospective recruits, “You will learn about ‘muscle memory’: you will repetitively rehearse techniques to the point that your body can execute them without conscious thought. . . . You will strike, strike, and strike some more” (129). Just as in rifle training, the *body* has to do the learning. But though the “physical” discipline is

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<sup>27</sup> There are five colored belts, tan, grey, green, brown, and black, and Marines are encouraged to train to higher belt levels throughout their careers.

meant to train and strengthen muscles, it should also have intangible benefits—the MCMAP manual claims that the physical discipline “develops a physical toughness in every Marine that will translate into mental toughness” (1-3). This is yet another expression of the Marine confidence that physical actions achieve intangible results.

The “mental toughness” of MCMAP is even more explicitly honed by the other two disciplines, mental and character. Mental discipline consists of the study of “warfighting,” which includes the tactics of expeditionary maneuver warfare and combat decision making, and “professional military education” (PME), which includes the Marine reading program (enlisted Marines and officers are given lists of books they can read to help advance their careers), the study of the history of war, and familiarity with Marine customs, courtesies, and traditions (MCRP 3-02B; Yi).

The character discipline is the part of MCMAP that deals with values. This discipline is “designed to instill the Marine Corps ethos into every Marine” (MCRP 3-02B 1-3). In boot camp, this happens partly through discussions of core values, especially during the Crucible; I will discuss that process in the following chapter. But another important part of the Marine *ethos* has to do, again, with feeling part of a group. Marines need to perceive themselves as consubstantial with fellow Marines. Hand-to-hand combat is one of the more isolating types of fighting—isolating from fellow Marines, that is; of course fighters will be in close quarters with the enemy, but they can be separated from their own units. A Marine who is shooting from a distance or riding in tanks or humvees is often physically close to brother or sister Marines and is apart from the enemy, but in

hand-to-hand fighting, the enemy can loom larger than those brothers and sisters in a Marine's physical and psychical space.



Figure 9. Counter to Pistol: Front. This move is part of the brown belt level of MCMAP training. (MCRP 3-02B 5-32)

This distance from fellow Marines during close fighting is all the more reason to infuse a sense of connectedness into the *ethos* of the close-quarters fighter, to offer recruits as many opportunities as possible to make meaning that will strengthen that connectedness. The motto of MCMAP, “One mind, any weapon,” signifies not only the balance of the tangible and intangible components of fighting, but also the unity of Marines who adopt the warrior *ethos*. The one-and-many *topos* shows up again when the MCMAP manual claims that the character discipline of MCMAP is both “the spiritual aspect of *each Marine* and the *collective* spirit of the Marine Corps” (1-3; emphasis added). Each Marine’s spirit should be perceived as part of the collective spirit of the whole Corps. Yi discusses how to foster this collective spirit: “developing the USMC warrior ethos includes mentoring values and shaping a long-term, individual commitment to the USMC and the values it represents” (23). Note that a commitment to the Corps’s *values* is not enough; there must also be a commitment to the Corps itself. The Corps’s values of honor, courage, and commitment are important, but they alone don’t help Marines to feel less alone on the battlefield. It is physically experienced devotion to the Corps, with all its physical symbols—the flag, the eagle, globe, and anchor symbol, and the rifle that is just like everyone else’s rifle—that remind Marines that they are part of a larger body. That’s why ceremonies are important, as Yi points out. Other activities that develop the Marine *ethos* during or after boot camp are social interactions like mess nights, case studies, and programs to teach Marines about citizenship, family obligations, safety, and risk management. These, says Yi, “are designed to instill an ethical dimension

that places individual achievement in the context of continuing an old, honorable, warrior tradition” (23).

Here again is the sense of Marinehood that stretches across generations, the property that emerges from the complex system of interacting Marines. The MCMAP program and the activities Yi describes are ways for recruits to perceive and then embody that emergent sense of Marinehood. They give Marines a sense of security that they can count on in a physical way, since one of the all-important traditions passed down in the Corps is never to leave a Marine behind. But they also give Marines another kind of security—a place to ground and to physicalize their values. The values live in the actions Marines perform and perceive proprioceptively. Mentorship and case studies give Marines role models who are embodied reference points. These activities also give Marines a sense of who they’ll be letting down if they fail. Thus they offer a variety of incentives to behave in ways that honorable, courageous, and committed Marines behave—specifically, to kill when and whom they should in combat.

### **Caveat: On the Effectiveness of the Training**

As I have outlined them above, these values are intended to enable Marines to operate ethically in battle. But even after the implementation of the MCMAP program, Marines in combat still have difficulty deciding whom and when to kill, and then acting on that knowledge. Marine Lieutenant Colonel William Speigle’s 2013 paper about today’s warrior *ethos* expresses some concerns about what he calls “ethical hiccups where Marines fail to uphold their warrior ethos” (24). Speigle argues that while the

Marine Corps has “almost a majestic halo that surrounds its presence today thanks in part to history, most notably from the unlimited warfare of World War II,” current Marines are at a disadvantage because they “operate in the most complex environment of warfare in history” (24). Speigle expresses concern about current Marine values, especially that which keeps Marines from killing non-combatants:

This pertains to an intrinsic value of life, not to any relative value, such as culture, ethnicity, religion, or behavior. Marines must appreciate the intrinsic value of life in order to conduct successful operations in today’s complex environment. In unlimited wars of the past, the intrinsic value of life was less a concern for an individual Marine. The basic principle was to kill the enemy in the most expedient, ruthless manner possible or the mission would fail. There was little concern for collateral damage or the value of life for non-combatants. The 2006 MHAT [Mental Health Advisory Team] IV survey illustrates that individual Marines do not grasp these ethical standards.

- Only 38% of Marines believed all non-combatants should be treated with dignity and respect
- Only 24% of Marines would risk their own safety to help a non-combatant in danger
- 17% of Marines believed all non-combatants should be treated as insurgents (21)

Speigle is in effect suggesting that an extreme level of cognitive dissonance is required for the correct warrior *ethos*: he argues that Marines should perceive all life as valuable while engaging in a profession that requires them to kill ruthlessly. In the unlimited warfare of, say, World War II, Marines were not required to hold these two capacities at once. But now that more operations take place in limited warfare, and more life-and-death decisions are made by more Marines, the possibility for slippage has increased.

Speigle claims that the best way to address these values is through the PME program—basically through reading. As much as I believe that reading about others’

experiences is a worldview- and ethics-widening endeavor, reading simply cannot compete with the intense physicalization of the training that fires up recruits' kill instinct. Values learned physically are more vivid and more powerful than those learned intangibly because more of the recruits' bodies and brains are involved. Those big, loud, fast events at boot camp set off neuromodulators with which recruits *can't help* but make meaning, rewiring neural networks and remaking the conscious and the unconscious self. After boot camp, "Kill" beats "Do Not Kill" in recruits' physical memories and in their habitual attitudes toward the world. The persuasive task for Marine recruit training is difficult. The Corps cannot simply rely on habitual conditioning that makes recruits more aggressive. They must try to persuade recruits to adopt a disposition that contains both aggression and restraint and a capacity to discern right from wrong consciously.

## **Conclusion**

If the Marine Corps wants its Marines to follow orders but still wants them to retain agency and decision-making capability, they cannot simply train all recruits to obey mechanically all the time. They need to train recruits to access both aggression and restraint, and give them some tools for knowing when to use each. Whether this training is entirely effective is beyond the scope of this project, but the goals are clearly visible in the training. Sparring ramps up anger and aggression, weapons are beautiful or "motivating," and decisions are made quickly, but precision care for weapons and the disciplines of MCMAP channel and restrain that quick, excitable energy.

In the next chapter, I will elaborate on some of the values the Corps makes available for recruits to adopt, exemplified by the Crucible and perceived proprioceptively by recruits especially during that exercise. Chapter IV has necessarily discussed the Marine *ethos* as extremely important in learning when to be aggressive and when to exercise restraint; Chapter V will dive further into the *ethos* as created by the whole complex system of boot camp but especially represented by the Crucible. This Marine *ethos* that the Corps wants recruits to adopt contains the core values of honor, courage, and commitment, and is overlaid by an all-important devotion to fellow Marines. Devotion to fellow Marines and devotion to the core values reinforce each other in a haloed cluster of causality.

CHAPTER V  
THE CRUCIBLE

Just as the Marines will build your fighting stance and teach you firing positions, your character must be built from a solid foundation. We call this foundation your “Core Values.” They are Courage, Honor, and Commitment. In the civilian world, these values or attributes are referred to as intangibles—things you can’t see, touch, smell, or taste. That is not true in Recruit Training and in the Corps. There, these attributes and values are quite tangible: visible, obvious, touchable, and TRAINABLE. (Popaditch 3)

You will use these Core Values constantly and develop them just like the muscles that move your body. (Popaditch 3)

. . . . In the Corps, values are seen daily, close enough to touch, and you will be measured by your ability to display them. (Popaditch 27)

Regarding the Crucible module that is taught to students at Drill Instructor School:

**Conduct of the Crucible.** Provides the student with the leadership tools necessary to validate the mental, moral, and physical transformation of each recruit into U.S. Marines. Here, the students learn to evaluate recruits in a series of physical, mental and moral challenges over a 54 hour period conducted in an environment of adversity, friction, and hardship designed to emphasize the importance of teamwork and adherence to our Core Values in overcoming adversity. (DI School Welcome Package)

Since 2007 each recruit has participated in the culminating boot camp event known as “the Crucible,”<sup>28</sup> so named because it is meant to be an experience that forges

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<sup>28</sup> The Crucible was first instituted in 1997, but it was modified and moved from week eight to week eleven to become the culminating event of boot camp in 2007 (Gawecki).

new Marines out of the fires of extreme trial. This is a fifty-four-hour exercise during which recruits receive only two and a half meals, march approximately fifty miles with their gear, and complete a series of exercises designed to elicit teamwork and a demonstration of the warfighting skills they have acquired in boot camp. During the Crucible, DIs discuss the Marines' core values of honor, courage, and commitment after each exercise and/or in dedicated "core value huts" on the training grounds. At the end of the Crucible, recruits eat a "Warrior's Breakfast" and receive their eagle, globe, and anchor pins. They are now Marines, and for their final week at boot camp, "Marine Week," they are referred to as such. The Crucible is when the recruits' new *ethos* as Marines is galvanized. It is an intense, physical experience, when recruits can perceive for themselves how the events and exercises of boot camp become the embodiment of Marine values. And core values discussions make conscious—and thus deliberate, if the recruit is to succeed—the connections between their physical actions and the values they embody.

Part of the reason these core values are so powerfully experienced by recruits is that they are deeply embedded in both the peer bonding and the emergent Marine identity that are such important parts of all of boot camp, but especially the Crucible. Recruits forge deep connections to those who are going through the same trials they are, and they adopt a similar *ethos* because they are responding in similar ways to a shared context. If all goes according to plan, the *ethos* recruits adopt will be a Marine *ethos*, complete with core values of honor, courage, and commitment, with an overriding devotion to fellow Marines.



Figure 10. Recruits Hike up “The Reaper” during the Crucible, Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. 2007. Public Domain image; no photographer listed. From “India Company Conquers Boot Camp Changes” by Gunnery Sgt. Laura Gawecki, January 4, 2008. Marine Corps Recruiting Command website. 14 Nov. 2014. <http://www.mcrc.marines.mil/News/NewsArticleDisplay/tabid/5320/Article/519704/india-company-conquers-boot-camp-changes.aspx>

Peer bonding (horizontal cohesion in military terms) and the Marine identity are two very important mutually fostering phenomena that emerge from the complex system of recruit training. The metaphor of the haloed cluster is again useful here, with the bonding as the cluster of connections forged by co-suffering recruits and the identity as the halo of Marinehood (see fig. 3 in Chapter 1). If recruits are bonded, they are more likely to share an identity because they are more attuned to each other’s actions and reactions. Because people naturally put themselves in the shoes of those to whom they feel close, recruits share an inside-out experience of traits, perceptions, and habitual

responses to circumstances. The reverse is true as well: if recruits perceive a shared identity, they bond more easily. They see themselves as consubstantial. So whichever property recruits perceive first, they are likely to enter this haloed cluster of bonding and Marinehood. As introduced in Chapter II's discussion of how recruits perceive the property of Marinehood that emerges from the complex system of boot camp, we see the Marines offering multiple inlets of perception to a network of interconnected meaning, always available wherever recruits turn. In this chapter I explore the bonding of recruits and the core values of Marines as they contribute to the Marine *ethos*, using the emblem of the Crucible, during which the most intense physical perception of these properties takes place.

### **Horizontal Cohesion: What, Why, and How**

One of the most important goals of the Crucible is teamwork. Squads must work together to, for example, get all members through a tire without touching the sides in a certain amount of time, or climb a three-level tower while ensuring two people are together on a level for the duration (Delagarza). While earlier exercises, training tactics such as drill practice, and the disorientation of the first phase focused on denying recruits their individuality, the emphasis at this phase is more positive. That is, while during the first phase, "individual" is the worst of epithets (Ricks 64), recruits are actually encouraged to show some individuality during the Crucible, provided it is shown in the service of the team (Popaditch 170). The first phase of boot camp was a scrubbing of old identities as old neural networks are broken down; during the Crucible recruits begin to

adopt the attitudes toward their fellow recruits that they will have as Marines. In boot camp all recruits are treated the same, whether their eventual military operations specialty (MOS) will be joining the infantry or playing in the band. But in the fleet, Marines do not all perform the same jobs and must each contribute their own skills. That differentiation starts during the Crucible, as the good strategists are asked to plan, the strong recruits are asked to lift, and so on.

But more important than each person's skills is still the attitude of contributing to the goals of the larger group—that is the essential thing for Marines. As in the well-known New Testament metaphor in which individuals are members of a single body all working together, it is crucial that Marines feel part of the body of the Corps, feel consubstantial with their brother and sister Marines. This is partly to increase productivity, as in a business, but the more important reason for fostering a sense of consubstantiality has to do with motivation to fight.

A common and long-standing trope is that soldiers don't fight for a cause, but for "the man on the left and the man on the right." In a story that illustrates the pervasiveness of the trope, the 2013 Texas Longhorn football team used "for the man on my right and the man on my left" as their team theme. Player Nate Boyer, a former Green Beret, explains:

In the Army, a lot of guys join for different reasons. Some of them join because that's the only thing they think they can do. Some of them really want to serve their country. Some want to be able to go to college, need a job, whatever. But once you go through the training and understand, they really instill in you, what's more important than anything is . . . the guy next to you. When you're deployed, something goes down, immediately all you think about is, "What can I do so I

don't let the guy next to me down?" . . . No matter what you're doing, no matter what your political agenda or whatever, in the end it's all about the guy next to you. You don't even have to like him, and a lot of times you don't [laughing]. (qtd in Eberts n.p.)

According to Boyer, the welfare of the man next to you is the *real* reason you fight—that's all that matters during deployment, and training prepares you for that. Marine Major Brendan McBreen confirms this mentality in the Marine Corps, writing in his Commandant's Fellowship study of unit cohesion, using the famous "mom and apple pie" trope:

Men do not engage in combat for motherhood, the flag, or apple pie. They do not fight for patriotism. They may have volunteered for these reasons, but when their lives are at risk, and the incredible stress of close personal violence is immediately at hand, the key truth emerges. Men fight for their friends. The primary group is the major factor in explaining man's behavior in combat. (4)

While non-military (or pre-military) people might think soldiers fight for a cause, insiders know differently. When I spoke with Marine Captain Nate Fick, veteran of the Iraq war, he used both the "mom and apple pie" trope and the "man on the left and the man on the right" trope, casually and without prompting. I asked him about the DI's oath to indoctrinate recruits in "love of Corps and country," and he responded with a discussion of what it takes to overcome the instinct to curl up in the fetal position in times of extreme stress, ending by saying, "I didn't hear a lot of verbal commitment to

motherhood and apple pie. There was a commitment to those on the left and the right.”

The pervasiveness of these tropes about what we fight for is clear.<sup>29</sup>

Ironically, the original reasons for fighting a war often disappear for those actually doing the fighting. The country’s best interest, freedom, or any other abstract ideal for which a war may be fought simply does not always hold in the face of actual killing and dying. In the words of the *Black Hawk Down* character Hoot, “once that first bullet goes past your head, politics and all that shit just goes right out the window.” I propose that the reason “all that shit” disappears is that it is too abstract, too dependent on conscious thought, which is too slow to be useful in urgent situations. The body prioritizes the physical over the abstract when there is need for immediate action. In fact, complexity theory biologist J. A. Scott Kelso relates a story about a group of physicists in Niels Bohr’s lab that demonstrates this phenomenon. Bohr, a fan of Western films, commented that in a shootout, the person who draws first always loses. Nobody believed him, but the lab set up experiments, and Bohr was proven right. Kelso shows that this is because the will to act takes longer than an instinctive reaction (Kelso 141-144). The instinctive reaction is faster because it emerges from the complex systems of neurons in

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<sup>29</sup> Though the pervasiveness of the tropes is clear, some scholarly literature actually argues that they aren’t true, or aren’t the whole truth—that soldiers do fight for other reasons. And certainly the context of the fighting matters. But the most consistent reason to fight given by those who have seen battle is for their fellow fighters, and the Marines take this very seriously. For more on combat motivation see Johann M.G. van der Dennen’s discussion in the journal *Peace Review* and Leonard Wong et al.’s 2003 report on soldiers’ attitudes in the U.S. Army during the Iraq War.

the brain and bypasses the slower veto power of consciousness.<sup>30</sup> Crucially, when the physical body is urgently endangered, only the most embodied values can be accessed. In combat, the value of commitment to one's fellow warriors, who are right there in the heat of battle and whose bodies are experiencing the same stresses, is the most vivid and real embodied value available. Consubstantiality is of utmost importance here. While Burke's consubstantiality is metaphorical, bodily experience of the same intense environments does create a very real sense of consubstantiality in the rhetorical sense of a shared identity. Marines use stress and proximity to other recruits in the rhetorical situation of boot camp to take advantage of this process.

In the second chapter, I outlined a number of ways recruits can perceive the sense of Marinehood that arises from the complex system of boot camp. The most powerful are those sensed proprioceptively—that is, when one experiences strong physical sensations that are accompanied by neuromodulators that force the mind to make meaning. When recruits or Marines experience these sensations *and* perceive that others around them are experiencing the same things, both the resulting meaning and the bond between the recruits or Marines are stronger.

If proprioception is an immediately powerful sensation, a fellow human body is an immediately powerful source of meaning. Scholars as disparate as Jacques Lacan and George Herbert Mead—not to mention evolutionary biologists—have agreed on the importance of interaction with others in the formation of the mind and the self (even if

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<sup>30</sup> See the discussion of the nonconscious disposition with reference to Walter Freeman, Benjamin Libet, and Marilyn Cooper in the first chapter.

they have understood the effects of this interaction differently). Unquestionably, human beings are specially attuned to interaction with other physically present human beings. We can perceive microadjustments in facial muscles, body language, vocal cues, and scents. We understand how other people work from the inside out because of our own embodiment. And when we share sensations, we are likely to create similar meanings for those sensations, especially if those sensations are experienced in the same context. In terms of Freeman's findings about how our brains make meaning from sensation, when our brains create amplitude modulation patterns in response to the same stimuli in the same environment, they are more likely to create the same meanings.

Shared meaning is even more likely to result if the shared context is as distinct and full of meaning-making opportunities as those experienced by Marines. As discussed in the first chapter, boot camp floods recruits' brains with neuromodulators to loosen old synaptic structures and patterns of meaning making and then floods their environment with opportunities to make the "right" meanings. The Marine Corps manual *Leading Marines* claims that the bond that "flows from the common but unique forge from which Marines come" is drawn from "the shared experiences of danger, violence, the adrenaline of combat, and the proximity to death" (1). The Corps works to simulate this shared context in boot camp. When I asked former Marine Brian Butler how the transformation from recruit to Marine worked in boot camp, he responded, "It's not brainwashing or persuasion; it's just a miserable circumstance that everybody's equally a part of and equally feels in the same way." Shared experience of extreme stress is powerful. Butler did not perceive the Marines' actions as persuasion because the physical experience

overshadowed his consciousness of being persuaded. In fact, this is how all self-formation occurs—we share physical sensation in an environment with others (this is Donald Davidson’s triangulation theory of language, and George Herbert Mead’s social interactionist theory of self). We don’t perceive our self-formation as brainwashing or as persuasion because of the way our agencies arise ultimately from sensation. I claimed in the last chapter that the root of agency is sensation plus habitual perceptual structures, but of course those habitual structures also come from physical sensation. Boot camp and the Marine experience are an excellent place to study these processes because the physical stakes are so high in warfare and the sense of connectedness with one’s fellows is so strong.

So the simple fact that boot camp is full of stressors and full of other people experiencing those stressors in the same way creates a bond among recruits. Fick said that he thought the fact that most people who finish Officer Candidate School go on to sign up for the Marines (they are not required to sign up) is because of the bond of shared experience: “You suffer with people,” he said. “It’s the proverbial blood sweat and tears. . . . it’s inextricably linked to the physicality.” When I asked Marine Brandon Delagarza whether he felt close to his fellow Marines, he said “I can see them a mile away. [They’re] family. I know them instantly.” And when I asked why he felt so close to them, he responded simply, “Because we all struggled together.”

Many Marines regard fellow Marines as family. James B. Woulfe writes of a fellow Marine he’d read about, “I never met him, but I recognize him as a brother” (n.p. Introduction). Journalist Thomas Ricks writes a lot about this familial feeling in his

characterization of the Corps. Corporal Armando Cordova tells Ricks that he reenlisted in the Corps after leaving for a while because “you don’t make friends in the world like you do here. . . . We are like family” (18). One of the DIs tells Ricks about boot camp, “The Marine Corps is like a family, and we teach family values” (38). Ricks comments in his notebook on this Marine *ethos* that “in an era when many people of their age seem aimless, these Marines know what they are about: taking care of each other” (18). Of course, some “aimless” civilian young adults also take care of each other, notably in gangs, but that’s a comparison that doesn’t bother Marine Colonel Richard Barry, who says, “gangs provide their members with a sense of identity, with father figures, with leadership, with the opportunity for promotion, and members will lay down their lives for it [*sic*] . . . The Marine Corps is a gang alternative” (qtd. in Freedman 165). Barry’s comments demonstrate how strong the Marines’ sense of family is. Marine Josh Payton even told me of his fellow Marines, “Honestly I would say they were closer to me than my real family.”

The connection Marines feel with one another enables them to bear tremendous hardship. Marine Will Price writes in his memoir about this phenomenon, again using the “man on the right and man on the left” trope: after talking to some recruits from another platoon at church during boot camp, he says, “it was good to hear of their pains, because it helps your morale to know that you’re not alone. If the guy to the right and left of me can make it, then so the heck can I” (85). Marine Ian Hernandez writes something similar about what got him through boot camp: “I realized that this personal hell of mine was not

so personal and that everyone that was there was experiencing it with me” (qtd. in Turley n.p. Appendix). Butler was particularly emphatic on this point:

You’re constantly placed in situations that are purposely designed to be horrible, to be horrific, to be discomfoting, and it’s like do you have enough discipline and intestinal fortitude to say, ‘I’m gonna make it. I’m gonna be ok.’ And part of [being able to make it] goes back to the group mentality of looking around you and saying, well this sucks, but we’re all in it together.

Knowing others are dealing with the same physical hardships and perceiving the embodied examples of those who have come out on the other side—this is a great encouragement.

Bonding through suffering is encouraged by many of the conditions throughout boot camp, but one of the most noteworthy and complex ways it is fostered is the practice of punishing a whole platoon for one member’s infraction. Butler talked often of this practice during our interview, saying that it was sometimes even comforting: “It’s like ‘I’m not being singled out here.’ Everybody is enduring this hell in the same way, and it’s like we shore one another up.” In another example of haloed causality, the suffering creates the bond, and the bond enables recruits to endure the suffering. This is true even when the suffering is created by a practice that would have seemed unjust before boot camp. In fact, recruits seem to resent the person messing up much more than they resent the policy, perhaps in genuine agreement with the value, or perhaps in an example of the classic displacement theory in which aggression is redirected toward a new object when to express it toward the original object would be dangerous. For example, Price writes when the senior DI’s punishments become more intense,

some recruits are starting to get hard on each other. It's like a pecking order. The trash flows downward from the top—the only problem is us recruits are at the bottom. We've been getting on each other's cases about lack of discipline, kind of like policing our own ranks. (83)

Former DI Gregg Stoner also describes such an effect, writing that when a whole platoon was punished for one member's mistakes, "there were sure to be words amongst the recruits" to straighten out the offending member. "That process worked very effectively in getting teamwork into action," he claims (79). It seems fairly common for recruits to resent weaker links. Butler says he knew if you did something wrong,

you'd get crucified. Then the platoon would get crucified, so everybody that you'd built rapport with, maybe become friends with, would no longer be your friends. They'd be like "Alright, I'm staying away from you Butler, because you make life hell."

Kieran Michael Lalor writes after the first phase is over, "The DIs have ceased being the enemy and the non-hacker recruits are the enemy. Until we get them up to speed we are all going to pay the price" (n.p. Chapter 6). Price writes of an underperforming recruit,

He screws up so much, I can't believe he's still with us. I'm sorry, but if he graduates, that trash just isn't right. The rest of us had to work too damn hard to earn the title of Marine to just give it away to a nasty, weak recruit like him. (126)

And when some recruits wash out of his platoon, Patrick Turley writes, "Circumstances forged a tighter bond with some but many had caused the group undue pain, and I couldn't feign concern to watch them leave" (n.p. Chapter 5). Clearly, not *all* recruits are invited into the bond.

Some recruits are frustrated by this lack of unity. Lalor, for example, writes that when the DIs punish everyone for one person's infraction, it "makes everyone turn on each other because it exposes the weak links. It's frustrating because it erodes a lot of the camaraderie that has developed during the more important training exercises" (n.p. Chapter 3). But I propose that this is an intentional attempt to shape the particular kind of bonding recruits experience.

What the Marines want to foster is not an unconditional acceptance, a "give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses" kind of welcome. Recruits must *earn* a Marine *ethos*, and it's supposed to be hard work. An anecdote from Price's diary illustrates the necessity that each recruit pull his own weight. During a motivational meeting, Price's platoon decided that *all* the platoon's punishment would be "all for one and one for all"—that is, even if the DIs did decide just to punish one recruit for his own transgression, they would all take the punishment together, to prove they were a team. The DIs laughed at them and said "Have it your way!" The next time someone got into trouble, the DIs made all the recruits do exercises, as per their new policy:

They worked us extra friggin' hard on purpose. They wanted to break us from our new policy—and did it pathetically easily. SDI Bixby explained why they had to change our minds. "IF THE RECRUITS WHO KEEP MESSING UP AREN'T SINGLED OUT, THEY DON'T LEARN FROM THEIR MISTAKES! THEY DON'T GROW!" he said. I realized that while we were coming together as a unit, he was right. (89)

This example illustrates the limits of group solidarity. Weaker members of the group cannot be carried by stronger members indefinitely. The standard for attaining member status in the Corps is high, and some people do fail.

This high standard not only gives Marines an opportunity to feel pride at attaining that standard—Gunnery Sergeant Willie Bennett said, “the Corps put so much pride in my body, it’s hard to explain what it feels like” (qtd. in Freedman 164)—but also reassures them that everybody who does make it in can be counted on. It gives Marines confidence because they now have proprioceptive evidence that no Marine will let another down. They know just how far everyone at boot camp has been stretched because they’ve been stretched that far themselves, which gives them some embodied experience they can rely on when it’s time for a fellow Marine to save their lives. Master Sergeant Andy Bufalo asserts that “Marines will low-crawl through a thousand miles of barbed wire and broken glass to help a brother Marine” (n.p.). This mutual trust in future aid is yet another way that peer bonding and the Marine identity reinforce each other in a haloed-cluster causality. The more you feel like a Marine, the more you’re willing to help a fellow Marine; the more you’re willing to help a fellow Marine, the stronger your Marine identity.

In fact, mutual trust is one of the most important themes of the Marines’ motto, *Semper Fidelis*, often shortened to *Semper Fi*. The Marines’ recruiting website explains the spirit of the motto thus:

*Semper Fidelis* distinguishes the Marine Corps bond from any other. It goes beyond teamwork—it is a brotherhood that can always be counted on. Latin for

“always faithful,” *Semper Fidelis* became the Marine Corps motto in 1883. It guides Marines to remain faithful to the mission at hand, to each other, to the Corps and to country, no matter what. Becoming a Marine is a transformation that cannot be undone, and *Semper Fidelis* is a permanent reminder of that. Once made, a Marine will forever live by the ethics and values of the Corps.

The devotion Marines feel to each other is a distinguishing characteristic of the Marine *ethos* that the Corps wants every recruit to embody. Setting this devotion into the Corps motto institutionalizes the value, makes it something recruits perceive as stretching across generations. The Corps wants the devotion to permeate that sense of Marinehood that is continually recreated from the complex system of boot camp.

The Corps succeeds in fostering devotion to fellow Marines, and this value is no doubt helpful in motivating Marines to fight for each other. But it also has a negative side: it promotes a kind of insularity in which Marines are well bonded to each other, but separated from the society they are meant to protect. Ricks writes about this concern (19-25). When members of a military force feel isolated from society, they may have less motivation to fight to protect it. More troubling than this is the possibility that Marines may come to see themselves as not just elite warriors, but more worthy of trust and resources and more capable of making important decisions than members of the civilian population. This is a concern that needs to be addressed as the government and the Marine brass make decisions about what characterizations of Marinehood they offer recruits.

The above explication of the *Semper Fi* motto also celebrates and institutionalizes other values than faithfulness to brother and sister Marines. Devotion to fellow Marines

cannot be the only value for an institution whose purpose includes the possibility of death for all its members. All Marines know that, as in the above list, mission accomplishment is priority number one, while troop welfare comes second (Popaditch 39; Butler; Fick). So the Corps needs to foster other values—to make available other meanings recruits can make their own by reaching out across their perceptual bridge—to shore up Marines’ ability to do their jobs.

### **Core Values: Honor, Courage, Commitment**

The Marines’ official core values are honor, courage, and commitment. These are the banner principles the Marines have decided are the most rhetorically and practically effective. The Corps needs to work with extra care here because while they may claim that values are tangible in the Marine Corps, as Popaditch does in the quotation that heads this chapter, no value can actually be tangible. Tangible means that something can be sensed, and values cannot be directly sensed. But objects and actions can be sensed both externally and proprioceptively, and values can be named as meaning emerges from those sensations. The Corps gives recruits opportunities to reach out across their perceptual bridges and create the values of the Marines. As the values become more abstract, they need to be defined with more care, since there is greater room for differing interpretations.

The Marine Corps, like any military institution, walks a fine line in asking young men and women to acclimate themselves to killing and being willing to die. They must highlight those aspects of the job that make Marines capable of killing when and whom

they should in combat while also at least appearing to be compatible with our society's ethics. "Courage," for example, is the capacity to act in the face of an instinctive disinclination to act. By another name, this capacity could be construed not as overcoming fear, but as, say, overcoming conscience. Overcoming fear and overcoming conscience are sometimes difficult to distinguish in the fog of combat, as mercy and cowardice are sometimes difficult to distinguish. So because these values are open to interpretation, they must be discussed with conscious deliberation in boot camp, not merely embodied and internalized like a salute, or the manual of arms. But they also have to be embodied in some way and sensed proprioceptively, because as previously discussed, embodied values are more likely to stick with recruits when it counts. So the task in boot camp is to define these values both with conscious deliberation and physical embodiment. That is, the Corps's goal is to present stimuli that, when perceived, will rearrange the basin attractors in recruits' brains and thus shape their nonconscious dispositions into ones that will react automatically as Marines should. At the same time, the Corps needs to present recruits with opportunities for abstract, conscious reflection on core values so that recruits' conscious wills and their veto power will work to refine and, if necessary, check those dispositions.

Marines present opportunities for conscious deliberation in a variety of ways. Recruits are aware of the Marines' core values before they even begin boot camp, since public relations campaigns make them generally known. Guided discussions about the values occur throughout boot camp as well. When I asked Gunnery Sergeant David

Washington at Parris Island what the guided discussions were for, he responded by discussing identity, the Marine bond, and values:

We're getting recruits from every single walk of life, from midnight black to powder white. We're getting recruits from gangs, from farms, recruits who never brush their teeth, recruits who had all the money of the world. Getting fifty to ninety recruits—ninety *individuals*, ninety souls—to strip them of everything that they know and to build them back up as a team [so they will] forget about themselves and worry about each other and those around them. Get out of their comfort zone and their little personal bubbles. That's how we do that.

The stress and disorientation of boot camp get recruits out of their comfort zones and level old attractor landscapes in their brains, while the guided discussions provide explicit, conscious formulations of the values the Corps aims to persuade them to adopt. As is to be expected with recruits who have agency, these discussions have different effects on different recruits. The always enthusiastic Price describes discussions in which the senior DI makes up different scenarios and asks what recruits would do: “This teaches us about honor, commitment and courage. It sounds corny, but I actually get a lot out of it. I know that I've changed physically since I got to Parris Island, but I also know I have to change inside as well, and these meetings really teach me a lot” (100). Similarly, former Marine John Roseman told me in an email interview,

The Core Values are definitely still a part of me. I've been out for over 5 yrs now and still get confronted with situations where I have a decision to make, whether it's look up answers for a take home exam or work decision that I think of Honor, Courage and Commitment. They go into any ethical decision I have to make.

For Roseman, the core values are an important part of his life even after quitting the Marines. In a contrasting example, Payton told me in an interview that he didn't really remember his discussions, though he did say of himself and his platoon mates, "we had a higher set of standards that we held ourselves to when we graduated." It seems unlikely that all recruits are as earnest about the guided discussions as Price and Roseman, but they do seem to have an effect, especially when combined with proprioceptively sensed values.

In the following section, I offer some examples of the ways the core values emerge from proprioceptive sensation and are deliberated consciously at recruit training, as well as some ways that the Corps may need to continue to refine their conception of these values. As a starting point for the discussion, Popaditch offers the following simple scheme: recruits develop honor through stress, courage through fear, and commitment through frustration (5-6). Stress, fear, and frustration all activate powerful neuromodulators in the brain, creating the opportunity for new neural networks, new meanings, to arise. The physical actions that accompany stress, fear, and frustration, along with the recruit's correct response of honor, courage, and commitment, further reinforce the values desired.

### *Honor*

Honor is required of recruits in a number of ways. In one example, Price's DI, annoyed at some recruits for "gaffing him off" when they should have been listening to

him, asks those responsible to step out of the line of recruits, requiring them to display their honor. Price owns up:

I knew it was going to mean punishment for me, but I had to do it anyway. I'm learning how to take responsibility for myself here, and it was just something I had to do. It was a matter of integrity. I couldn't lie. That's just not who I am—at least not anymore. (56)

Price had been changed by boot camp—not just his nonconscious disposition, but the way he conceives of himself consciously. By asking misbehaving recruits to self-identify, Price's DI requires them to deliberate about their honor. By asking them physically to step out of a line of recruits that has come to signify their impending Marinehood and their consubstantiality with the Corps, the DI requires an embodiment of the value that these recruits will remember.

During the Crucible, recruits have plenty of opportunity to demonstrate and discuss the value of honor. After an exercise described by Woulfe, the sergeant asks recruits to analyze what went wrong. The leader assumes responsibility, but another recruit also chimes in, "It's all of our faults. . . . We should have been looking out for each other." The sergeant draws attention to their attitudes to make the value explicit:

"What are you demonstrating now, during this debrief, Simms? What core value?"

"Uhhmmm . . . courage?" said Simms.

"Sort of, but what I'm looking for is for some of you to personally accept the consequences for your decisions' actions."

"Honor," said Simms. (n.p. Ch. 4)

In this teaching moment, the sergeant puts a name to the value underlying the recruits' actions.

Recruits are held accountable for themselves and their actions throughout training. Former Marine Eric Odiorne told me, when I asked him how boot camp changed him, that he learned not to blame other people for his problems, but take responsibility for them himself. When I asked how that change happened, he said that in boot camp, “when something bad happened, you were made to take responsibility for it.” Say a recruit accused a fellow recruit of stealing something, he continued. DIs had no sympathy: it was the accuser's fault for not securing his gear properly. Even if you had a valid excuse for some negative occurrence, it was still your own problem, Odiorne said. You could always have done something differently. Ownership of one's own actions and a refusal to offload blame are an important part of Marine honor.

Marine honor also includes the responsibility to look after the reputation of the Corps. The long lessons in Corps history—or as Stoner calls it, lore (135)—serve not only to make recruits want to be Marines, but also to admonish them to live up to the legend. Odiorne said that the long tradition of what it means to be a Marine, down to uniform standards, is “extraordinarily important”; he said in boot camp you're taught that “you're responsible for carrying that forward.” Perhaps this is why, as Fick told me, Marines are never allowed to chew gum or carry umbrellas while in uniform. No individual Marine can allow Marines in general to be seen as trivial or anything less than impervious. Each Marine becomes the embodiment of the Marine *ethos*. Washington illustrated this point by describing an incident in which a hypothetical bad egg Marine

rapes a woman in the community. He said that reflects poorly on the whole Corps: the headline, he pointed out,

doesn't say "Bob Smith Raped a Woman" out in town. It says "Marine Raped a Woman" out in town. So you don't just bring discredit upon yourself—because no one cares about the individual. They care about the institution that did it. All Marines rape people now, because that's what Bob Smith made us do.

Every Marine takes on the responsibility of the good name of the Corps. This is yet another way the Marine *ethos* and consubstantiality should mutually foster one another in metaphorical a haloed cluster. The bond should increase an inclination for honorable action, since discredit for one is discredit for all, and honorable action should increase the bond, since Marines are drawn to those who can be proud of their honor.

But giving recruits opportunities to reflect on honor and to perceive it proprioceptively is different from knowing how to do the honorable thing in the real world. There are circumstances, for example, when the responsibility to safeguard Corps honor and the responsibility to be a person of integrity could conflict. Consider the case of Reserve Major Jason Brezler, a Marine who had been deployed in Afghanistan in 2010. In 2012, after receiving news that police official Sarwar Jan, whom Brezler had caused to be fired after discovering he had been raping children, was back around the base, Brezler sent a classified document from his personal email account in order to provide further information to officers currently in charge. When those officers wrote back to tell him that his actions may have been in breach of security protocol, he immediately turned himself in. No disciplinary action was taken at this time. Soon after

the exchange, a teen connected with Jan killed three Marines on base. Brezler spoke to a congressman about the situation and his warning. After he spoke to the congressman, Brezler was prosecuted by a three-star Marine general for mishandling classified information. Brezler alleges that this prosecution was in retaliation for speaking to the congressman. The Pentagon's investigative agency has cleared the Marines of wrongdoing, but a New York judge has ordered the general to answer allegations of reprisal for whistleblowing (Seckman, Brezler was prosecuted by a three-star Marine general; Harper; Watson and Dolan). In this situation, one could construe Brezler's actions as honorable: he attempted to provide a warning and useful material when he thought lives were in danger; he turned himself in when he was told he'd breached security; and when he thought the Marines had failed to take appropriate action to save lives, he tried to do something about it. A *Marine Corps Times* editorial argued that although he made a mistake in sending classified information over an insecure line, he basically legitimates the sort of officer the Corps needs more of. In sending classified information over an insecure line, he basically legitimates reprisal for whistleblowing (Seckman, Brezler was prosecuted by a three-star Marine's safety. Is the Marine reputation to be protected at all costs? Is that what devotion to fellow Marines means in concert with core values? Even thornier, should officers be allowed to make reprisals for truth-telling that hurts their own reputations on the grounds that it hurts the Marines? The Marines an insecure line, he basically legitimates reprisal for whistleblowing (Seckman, Brezler was prosecuted by a general who prosecuted Brezler after he spoke with the congressman. Is Marine training instilling or allowing a

different version of honor than the official version? This situation offers a clear example of how differing interpretations of a core value can conflict in practice. It is, at the least, evidence for the necessity of continuing deliberation.

### *Courage*

Courage is one of the easiest values to reinforce proprioceptively, since everyone knows what fear feels like in the body. The rapid pulse and respiration rate, the dry mouth and sweaty palms—these are powerful sensations that the body can't help but make meaning from. Overcoming that strong physical disinclination is distinctly memorable. Boot camp forces all recruits to face their fears, and this is clear in many recruits' perceptions. What recruits find scariest—and thus have the opportunity to learn the most courage from—varies. While Patrick Turley finds the swimming qualification easy and even a nice break, he finds that “Water turned some people frantic.” He describes one such person:

One of the recruits in my platoon made it halfway across the pool doing the side stroke when his nose burst into a stream of blood out of sheer anxiety and he became hysterical, with tears rolling down his cheeks, then he started choking on water. (n.p. Ch. 6)

In Lalor's platoon, several recruits panic in the gas chamber and have to be “forcibly restrained” by DIs (n.p. Ch. 7). For other recruits, the scariest part of boot camp is rappelling off the high towers, or being singled out for punishment.

Some sections of boot camp are explicitly engineered to force recruits to face their fears in a physically unambiguous way, like the eleven-station confidence course,

which involves climbing towers, swinging over pools of mud, balancing on tightropes, and so on. The video of recruits performing the confidence course on the Marine recruiting website begins with an instructor prowling in front of the assembled recruits, shouting, “This is a *physical* training event,” stressing the word “physical.” They respond, “Aye sir!” and he tells them they should be “putting out maximum effort at all times” (Marine website). This is what the Corps wants recruits to perceive as tangible courage, courage that is “close enough to touch” and to measure (Popaditch 27). The confidence course and other fear-inducing exercises of training are opportunities for recruits to develop their courage “just like the muscles that move your body” (Popaditch 3). Recruits perceive their courage proprioceptively as they perform the actions whose prospects sent adrenaline coursing through their bodies. This is a lesson in confidence well learned, learned with the physical body. It becomes part of recruits’ self perceptions. Payton told me, “[boot camp] gave me the opportunity to know what I was capable of, so I knew more about myself.” Recruits realize they can do more than they thought they could, and this courage becomes embedded in their new identities as Marines.

In a social sense, courage is celebrated by the fact that the infantry is the MOS (military occupational specialty) with the most status. The infantry is the Corps’s *raison d’etre*. They are the grunts, and everyone else is just a POG (people other than grunts, pronounced with a long o). That POG is derogatory is no surprise; junk food even used to be contemptibly referred to as “pogey bait” (*Generation Kill*; Taylor). Lalor describes a speech given by a recently retired Sergeant Major in which the speaker claims that though some MOSs are “more glamorous than others,” they are all important. But Lalor

doesn't buy it: "I have to say that I have noticed recruiters, civilians, and even DIs and other Marine Corps personnel, have a positive reaction when you say that your MOS is infantry." He goes on to explain, "It makes sense. As Drill Instructor Sergeant Willis, himself a supply and logistics guy, once said, 'Infantry is where the metal hits the meat'" (n.p. Ch. 5). The vivid physical image of metal hitting meat speaks volumes.<sup>31</sup> The infantry is the most respected because it requires the most courage. Odiorne, who went to boot camp already having auditioned to be in the band, confirms this perception of the status of MOSs. He was at the bottom, he said—below the cooks and the silent drill team—and the infantry was absolutely at the top. He was so inspired by boot camp's glorification of infantry courage that at the end of it, he was ready to change his MOS to infantry. He returned to music, but this anecdote demonstrates how much recruit training valorizes the courage of the infantry.

But while courage is physically unambiguous and definitely memorable—and therefore easy to incorporate into a new Marine's *ethos*—it can be ethically ambiguous. When Patrick Turley writes about his transformation into Marine, he cannot verbalize everything he experiences, but the ability to overcome a disinclination to act is a clear part of the change:

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<sup>31</sup> For more on the perception of POGs in today's Corps, see Hope Hodge Seck's "Don't Call Me 'POG': The Push to End the Corps' Most Damaging Divide." Seck reports that infantry Marines, especially young ones who haven't seen combat, have been increasingly disdainful of non-infantry Marines, particularly in social media. This is an example of how the use of social pressure to valorize courage can turn into a morale problem, dividing the body of the Corps in a destructive way.

‘A leopard can’t change its spots,’ and it’s similarly hard for a human being to change. Yet, here I was, growing into something I didn’t understand yet. Something I may never fully understand. Less timid and afraid. Eager to confront and challenge, even in these extreme circumstances. (n.p. Chapter 6)

Turley seems to be surprised that he is ready to be confrontational “even in these extreme circumstances,” but it is precisely the extremity of the circumstances that has taught him this lesson and given him this new identity. But Turley’s musings on his change in identity also highlight the difficulty of distinguishing courage from belligerence, foolhardiness, or cruelty, all of which are also linked to eagerness to confront and challenge in extreme circumstances. Perhaps this is why, as Spiegle points out and as was discussed in the previous chapter, so many Marines have trouble conceiving of ways to treat non-combatants with dignity and respect. When boot camp teaches a confrontational *ethos* in a physically powerful way, it’s difficult to teach Marines when not to be confrontational. Physical lessons are easy to teach, but wrangling their meanings is more elusive.

### *Commitment*

The final core value is commitment. Commitment in the Marine Corps context is most essentially about not quitting when things are rough. Master Sergeant Andy Bufalo waxes eloquent on the subject, characteristically understating the horrors of war as “unpleasant situations”:

One of the things which sets a Marine apart from the average Joe Blow is the ability to tolerate unpleasant situations while in pursuit of an objective. This characteristic has enabled wounded Marines to take hills and establish beachheads

for over two centuries, and it is part of the Marine persona even during peacetime.  
(n.p.)

All of boot camp is training for this part of the Marine persona, as suffering is plentiful and recruits are not allowed to quit. Whether sensory nerve endings are actually dulled, as Turley says the repeated strikes and kicks of the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program are meant to do (n.p. Chapter 5), or the sensation of pain is given a new and different meaning, recruits' attitudes toward pain change in boot camp.

One of the most frequent refrains in memoirs and interviews about the boot camp experience is the necessity to keep plowing ahead, no matter what. Turley recounts an experience during swim qualification in which his friend Derek, to get a first-class qualification, had to be “dragged underwater in a blood choke<sup>32</sup> by an instructor, fight his way out of it, and swim back to the surface three times.” After completing the requirements, he “passed out spread-eagled on the edge of the pool.” He was awaked by the series commander, who asked what he was doing. Then “Derek stood as fast as he could, and then wobbled left and right as he said, ‘Getting dressed, sir!’ The series commander and our Senior Drill Instructor stood there and laughed at him as he stumbled back to the changing room” (Turley n.p. Chapter 6). In another context, such behavior might be cause for concern, but in the Marines, it's par for the course—even a good thing. Recruits are supposed to laugh at pain and discomfort, even when serious medical ramifications loom. Delagarza got frostbite on the Crucible and didn't tell his superiors.

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<sup>32</sup> A blood choke involves cutting off a person's blood supply to the brain—this works more quickly than an air choke, which cuts off the air passage to the lungs.

Instead, he told me, “I thought it was funny to smack my toe against the bed each day and show my friends and laugh.” This is a major paradigm shift from other life situations in which injuries are possible, such as sports. In sports, injuries that will have lasting effects are taken seriously. But in the military, when mission accomplishment comes before troop welfare, the *ethos* is different. After all, these recruits are getting ready to die for their countries; they should be willing to go through some pain during training.

Drill instructors are always on the lookout for malingerers or “sick bay commandos” who pretend to be injured to get a break from training. Malingering is one of the worst sins a Marine can commit. The documentary *Ears, Open. Eyeballs, Click.* contains several scenes that demonstrate how recruits reporting injuries are treated if there is a chance they are faking. Consider the following scene, which takes place just after a nighttime maneuvers course that one recruit has had to sit out, apparently having been dehydrated and suffering a cut on his head. A DI, inches from the recruit’s face, asks what the corpsman (Navy medic) said. The recruit, who has a cut on his forehead and looks weak, begins quietly,

“The corpsman told this recruit...”

The DI cuts him off. “Open your goddamn mouth, ass! I’ll give you a freaking reason to be goddamn dehydrated!”

“Aye sir.”

“Open your freaking mouth!”

Louder, the recruit says, “Aye sir!”

Another DI comes up and asks, “Why did he not go through my course?”

“He had a headache,” the first DI answers, shining his flashlight on the cut, mocking him.

“The corpsman told this recruit to sit out sir,” says the recruit, weakly, his head listing to one side.

“Why you talking so slow to me, like you think I’m gonna buy all this freaking dramatic crap? You better start sounding off with some freaking volume, short, sharp, and fast right freaking now. And hold your fucking head up,” he says, grabbing his head and straightening it, “before I freaking hurt you, you understand that?”

“Yes sir!”

The DI begins to taunt the recruit: “Get a freaking attitude with me, fuck with me, fuck with me.”

“No, sir.”

The DI asks his fellow instructor, “What is our freaking problem?”

“He started feeling better when everyone was done with the course. That’s the amazing thing.”

The first DI looks at the recruit. “Is that right?”

“No sir,” says the recruit, and mumbles something indistinct.

“That’s what you said to the freaking corpsman!” Now both DIs are right in the recruit’s face, yelling at the same time, the light having been shining on the recruit’s face this whole time. “Did you tell the corpsman that?” they ask.

“This recruit told the corpsman he was feeling better after he started to hydrate, sir.”

“Why? Why? Why were you dehydrated? Why were you dehydrated? WHY WERE YOU DEHYDRATED?”

Another DI has come over. He says to the recruit, “Get away. Get away before you get murdered. Is that as fast as you can move? IS THAT AS FAST AS YOU CAN MOVE?”

In this case, the corpsman did instruct the recruit to sit out the course. But the recruit is held responsible for his dehydration, which means his condition is his own fault and deserves no sympathy. The fact that he started feeling better when the course was over is also suspicious. And finally, the DIs are highly suspicious of dramatic displays of illness or injury. The recruit is *always* responsible for his bearing. Recruits should never display weakness, even when they are weak. Here recruits are required to use their agency to counteract their physical sensations.

In another example from *Ears*, the responsibility to maintain Marine identity is clear in a different way. When one recruit falls on a march, the DI runs up to see what has happened, and the following conversation ensues:

“You tripped?”

“My knee just gave out.”

“My my my my? MY? This recruit, sir! This recruit! You will freaking die with that discipline! Do you understand that?”

“Yes sir!”

“Get on your feet.”

“Aye sir.”

“Get on your freaking feet! This shit ain’t broken son. I know what a broken leg looks like, and that is not broken.” The DI gestures to the recruit’s gear. “Get this shit and get on. You know something? If you ain’t dyin, you humpin [marching]. We hump till we die.”

Even injured, the recruit cannot refer to himself in the first person. The identity of a Marine must be deep enough to reach below injury; recruits cannot morph back into their

former or childhood selves, expecting to be taken care of or at least be given some slack when they aren't well. New attractor landscapes must hold. Recruits must commit to the Marine task at hand, even unto death.

Recruits frequently do not report serious illnesses or injuries. Most recruits get colds, fevers, or “the crud” at some point during training, and many are injured, but sick call is for weaklings. Lalor writes in his journal, “I have never been to sick call and don't plan on ever going. Most of the guys that go to sick call are pretty much just pansies. . . . this is Marine Corps Boot Camp, if you have a cold or a fever—suck it up” (n.p. Ch. 3). In *Ears, Open.*, one recruit tells a platoon mate who is moving slowly while cleaning the squad bay because he is sick, “You're freaking worthless. You're not helping the platoon at all. All you're doing is hurting it. Man up. Everyone is sick here, man.” Former Marine Sergeant Andrew Curtis writes that he had pneumonia for the last five weeks of training. “My senior drill instructor Nick named [*sic*] me ‘Cancer’ on the Crucible because I looked near death the entire time, and forced me to go into medical when it was over.” Curtis went to medical as advised, but he wanted to graduate with his platoon, so he lied to the staff. When he finished boot camp and went to the civilian doctor, it was confirmed he had full-blown pneumonia (qtd. in Turley n.p. Appendix). In another example, Turley suffered from increasingly acute knee pain as he finished training. During the Crucible (which was not at the very end of training when he went through boot camp), he took so many painkillers that his stomach started rejecting food. Even a single piece of bread is too much: he vomits blood on leaving the mess hall. At one point a DI sees he can barely stand and calls his name.

I forced myself to the POA “Yes, sir!” I managed to respond.

He looked me up and down and stood there, slightly bobbing his head forward and back as he thought. “Tomorrow you go to Medical. I’ve seen you limping. Check on that shit, too.”

“Aye, sir!”

“But that’s tomorrow and today is today. When I see a chit saying you’re sick, that’s one thing. Until then, you’re feeling fine. Now get your ass in formation and quit marching like you just got fucked in the ass and making look like shit [*sic*], or I’ll break that fucking leg off myself.”

“Aye, sir!”

I almost fell as I turned to run to my platoon, but I didn’t.

Turley is determined to graduate with his platoon. When he goes to medical, he is told that his ligaments are ripping as his kneecap is pulling away from the bone and that he needs surgery. He is given bedrest for the following day, and after that he is supposed to be taken to the hospital to “see how many months” he needs to be there. When the DI asks what the doctor said, Turley responds, with his bed rest chit in his pocket, “This recruit is fine, sir!” The DI lets him continue and graduate with his platoon. That kind of commitment is highly regarded in the Corps.

This commitment to the task at hand, over against personal welfare, is very useful when Marines need to accomplish a mission in the field of battle, but neglect of one’s own needs can also be a negative, even when considered purely from a tactical standpoint. This is especially true with regard to mental health, and the Marines (like all U.S. forces) have a serious suicide problem. In the latest report available, the Department of Defense Suicide Event Report (DoDSER) for the calendar year of 2013, the rate of

suicides is 23.1 per 100,000 active-duty Marines. This is significantly higher than the national average for the relevant age group, 12.2 for people ages 15-34 (CDC “Suicide”),<sup>33</sup>. Veterans also commit suicide at alarming rates; the veterans’ group Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) is lobbying Congress to pass the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for Veterans Act to address the problem (IAVA website). Clearly commitment is necessary for Marines, but when commitment to mission accomplishment contributes to an environment in which Marines cannot come forward to receive help and suicides result, mission accomplishment is endangered. This is not to mention the serious ethical concerns involved in driving service members to suicide. The core value of commitment thus also calls for deliberation.

## **Conclusion**

The Marines use powerful rhetorical techniques to instill both the Marine identity—which includes the core values of honor, courage, and commitment—and a devotion to fellow Marines in each recruit during boot camp. Those rhetorical techniques include opportunities to sense and make sense of these values proprioceptively and consciously and thus to alter recruits’ attractor landscapes, dispositions, and conscious identities. Hiking fifty miles, for example, gives recruits the opportunity to claim the value of commitment, and the fact that they do it with their platoon mates bonds them

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<sup>33</sup> Two caveats are relevant to this comparison: 1) This is the rate for 2012, as the CDC has not yet assembled information for 2013; 2) Men commit suicide at much higher rates than women. Both the Marine rate and the civilian rate count both men and women, but the Marine Corps contains a higher percentage of men than the civilian population does.

together. The proprioception of values makes a strong and memorable impression on recruits, and for this reason values are fraught with possibilities for intense contradictory interpretations, which sometimes hinder Marine goals even as they fulfill them.

In the project's conclusion, I analyze some consequences of recruit training as Marines deal with them in the Fleet, as working active-duty Marines, and after separation from the Marines, as veterans. I provide some provisional suggestions for rhetorical techniques that can help Marines returning from deployment, especially combat duty, to reintegrate to civilian life. I also speculate about how this project can be useful in the field of rhetoric.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION: WHAT WE KNOW NOW AND WHERE TO GO NEXT

#### **Pulling Theory and Analysis Together**

To help explain how Marines train recruits, I have described the rhetorical situation of boot camp as being comprised of a unidirectional bridge between two complex systems. In this scheme, recruits are complex systems who reach out across a one-way perceptual bridge to the larger complex system of recruit training. Below, I take up each of the elements of this scheme in turn: sensation, intention, meaning, and perception; emergence, basin attractors, and haloed causality as applied to individual meaning making; boot camp as a complex system from which a sense of Marinehood emerges; and consciousness and agency.

All rhetoric starts with sensation, and recruit training is no exception. The Marine Corps creates the boot camp environment and circumscribes recruits' words and actions so that almost all the recruits' senses, even their proprioceptive senses, are tuned in to what the Corps wants them to sense. This much the Corps can control. Beyond this, meaning making becomes the province of the complex dynamic processes in each recruit. The recruits' sensory systems send signals to the complex systems of neurons in their brains. Sensations in general are not always meaningful; if they are not accompanied by other signals that reinforce them, they remain at the level of noise and do not become part

of the pattern of meaning that emerges from neural interactions. But if reinforcement accompanies those signals, as when pain or pleasure accompanied signals to the brains of the rabbits Walter Freeman observed, then new meanings emerge from the neuropil (neural fabric of the brain) in the form of amplitude modulation patterns (AM patterns). This meaning-making process constitutes *perception*, as distinct from sensation. Perception becomes habitual when the same neurons fire repeatedly and the same meanings emerge.

To understand the dynamics of perception and perceptual change, it is important to emphasize that meaning is an *emergent* property that arises from the complex systems of neurons in the brain. As such, it supervenes on the interactions of the neurons but is not reducible to those interactions. In other words, stimuli are necessary for meaning to be created, but meaning is more than the sum of the stimuli. Instead, meaning and the neurons' interactions influence each other simultaneously, in a haloed cluster of causality. In this special causality, characteristic of complexity, meaning is subject to the kind of gradual change associated with learning. Like all emergent properties, meaning forms in a basin attractor. A pattern begins and gradually takes in the interactions happening around it the way marbles roll toward the bottom of a basin, modifying the interactions as it takes them in, but also being altered itself by the addition of the new interactions to the basin. In this way, intentions and perceptions are both stable and ever-changing.

These gradually changing basin attractors in our neuropil explain how we learn to react in habitual ways to common situations. But the Corps wants to break recruits' old

perceptual and intentional habits and give them new ones. To do this, they must break recruits' expectations—must disorient them, draw their attention to objects that require new meaning. Broken expectations produce the neuromodulators that loosen old synapses and make way for new connections. The Corps breaks recruits' expectations in a variety of ways in order to grab their attention. Many of these expectations are implicit expectations about how social systems should work. For example, the Corps breaks recruits' expectations that they will be treated fairly by setting them up to fail during the first phase of training. Drill instructors also break recruits' expectations that authority figures want them to be happy and healthy by screaming at them and pushing their bodies to perform more on less sleep and less nourishment. And generally, the Marines break a basic human expectation that the future will go on as the past has been simply by making sensory stimuli big, loud, and fast. This startles recruits and makes them pay attention, requires them to make new meanings regarding their percepts. All of these tactics and more loosen old synaptic structures in recruits' brains to make way for new meaning-making and perception. So after recruits' brains have been washed with neuromodulators that loosen old connections, they make new meaning that becomes habitual but can also change with circumstances.

A good example of this kind of learning can be seen in recruits' perceptions of their DIs. In the beginning, recruits expect DIs to tell them what to do before they have to do it, as previous authority figures have done. But as stated above, DIs break those expectations and set recruits up to fail, holding them accountable to standards they have not been taught. Drill instructors also shout at recruits, force them to move faster than

they thought they could, and act with the larger-than-life Marine attributes of precision, fierceness, physical strength and stamina, and order in the midst of chaos. All of these percepts force recruits to make new meaning when they see and hear their DIs. In the beginning of training, this meaning may be something like “my DIs are unfair, ridiculous, and super-human.” But as recruits adjust to life on a Marine base, the DIs’ actions make more sense, and the recruit begins to see DIs as “walking models of Marinehood” (Ricks 102).

How does the recruit understand what a “walking model of Marinehood” is? Marinehood is an emergent property that arises from the complex interactions of Marines and recruits during boot camp, just as meaning arises from the complex interactions of neurons in the brain. Again, haloed cluster causality helps us understand how individual actions relate to the general sense of what it means to be a Marine: the interactions of individual recruits and Marines give rise to a sense of Marinehood, and that sense of Marinehood influences each of those interactions. Recruits can then sense through eyes, ears, tongue, skin, nose, and proprioception what it means to be a Marine. Chapters III-V of this project outline many of the interactions in the complex system of boot camp from which Marinehood emerges, as well as many of the ways recruits perceive that Marine *ethos*. For example, when recruits are bone weary and cold, sleep deprived and hungry, they sense proprioceptively how much energy it takes to keep marching. And when they see their DIs, who have done just as much on just as little sleep and food, continuing to march with no apparent fatigue, they get a deep, lasting impression of what Marine commitment is. Their DIs have become “walking models of Marinehood.” Recruits can

then use all the perceptual processes discussed in the last few paragraphs to sense, to make meaning from, and to form intentions regarding that Marine *ethos*.

All the perceptual processes discussed in the last few paragraphs play important roles in making Marines. But there is something missing. All these meanings and intentions could be experienced nonconsciously. While nonconscious perceptions are the basic stuff of Marine-making, there is no doubt that consciousness also comes into play in the creation of Marines. We don't know exactly where consciousness comes from, but the most compelling explanation holds that consciousness exists on yet another level of supervenience, emerging from the attractor landscape of meaning and intentions the way meaning emerges from neural interactions. Consciousness is more than the sum of its parts, an ontologically distinct property that arises from the attractor landscape (which is made of the interactions of intentions and meanings) in the brain. The same haloed causality applies: consciousness directs what we find meaningful while at the same time being influenced by it.

Crucially, consciousness also gives rise to our sense of ourselves as agents. While the nonconscious intentions and meanings that emerge from our neural systems create most of our actions, our consciousness can also guide those meanings and actions. Consciousness guides our actions in two ways. The first occurs in a haloed cluster causality, when, simply because intentions are the elements that interact in the complex system from which meaning emerges, meaning and consciousness coexist in perpetual mutual influence. This what Freeman describes when he avers that consciousness “prevent[s] precipitous action not by inhibition but by quenching local chaotic

fluctuations through sustained interaction that acts as a global constraint for damping, as described by Prigogine” (Freeman 134-135). But consciousness also guides our actions through veto power. The intentions that bubble up from interacting neurons “propose” an action, but we can inhibit the action when we think about it consciously. When emergent consciousness directs our actions in either of these ways, we experience ourselves as agents. Marine recruit training offers many opportunities for conscious reflection on what it means to be a Marine, partly because training is so difficult that it frequently requires conscious inhibition of the impulse to quit. To encourage recruits to stick it out, the Corps is ready with a variety of definitions of Marinehood that recruits can process consciously, from signs and slogans to the core values discussions during the Crucible. The fact that conscious “will power” is frequently required to complete tasks and the fact that conscious reflection is frequently encouraged facilitates the recruits’ perceptions of themselves as agents who freely adopt the Marine *ethos* that emerges from boot camp. This is the Marine Corps’s goal.

Conscious deliberation also plays an explicit role in defining what the Marine *ethos* is. That is, while the Marine *ethos* is a property that emerges from boot camp simply from the interactions of recruits and Marines and can be perceived by recruits as such (which of course involves meaning-making, even if nonconsciously), it is also interpreted and created with conscious thought and even verbal discussion. Discussions about appropriate levels of aggression and restraint through the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP), for example, or the discussions about honor, courage, and commitment that take place in the core values huts during the Crucible—these

deliberations shape recruits' senses of what it means to be a Marine on a conscious level. They are clearly appeals to recruits as agents. Thus Marine rhetoric works on multiple levels, engaging the senses, perceptions, and conscious agencies of recruits to persuade them to become Marines.

### **Usefulness in the Field of Rhetoric and Where to go from Here**

This project's explication of the rhetoric of U. S. Marine Corps recruit training offers a number of fresh and useful ways to understand rhetoric and the rhetorical situation in general. I identify four key areas of intervention: 1) the body's role in perceptions of rhetorical attempts, 2) a theory of agency that helps us understand how rhetoric works as a mode of influence between suggestion and coercion, 3) a theory of cause and effect that allows us to see how rhetors might effect change, and 4) a theory of the rhetorical situation that shows us how interconnections among rhetors and audience members, as well as the physical environment, influence attempts to persuade.

First, we need an understanding of how the body fits into rhetoric. All rhetoric must start with sensation. This seems obvious, but it is critically important in understanding why some rhetoric is more effective than other rhetoric. We need to understand how the body's processes of perception work—how our brains make meaning from sensations—because rhetoric is essentially an attempt to make people make the “right” meanings out of given sensations. Neuroscience and complexity theory explain why some sensations do a better job at facilitating new meaning-making than others.

Rhetors must create sensations that *matter*. The bigger the sensation or the more signals that reinforce it, the more likely the audience will make new meanings from it.

To further this contribution to rhetoric, scholars could analyze other examples of the body's importance in rhetorical settings. That is, as rhetoricians study how the body works in rhetorical situations other than Marine recruit training, our understanding of the physical processes that are so important to rhetoric will be materially increased. Building up case-study knowledge will help us understand why the body is the powerful persuasive tool it is.

Second, a theory of agency is crucial to rhetoric, as Marilyn Cooper avows. Agency and perception are related, because how we perceive is the germ of our agency. When that germ grows, via emergence, into a fully developed agency, it contains both a nonconscious "wellspring" (Freeman's word) or "disposition" (Cooper's word) and a conscious constraint. These two elements influence each other in a haloed cluster. Using neuroscience and complexity theory helps us understand why common conceptions of "free will" and "brainwashing" are both extremely compelling but at the same time only part of the story. Our dispositions perceive and create intentions nonconsciously from our sensory input, which makes us think that perhaps we have been brainwashed. But when we consciously reflect on our actions, we experience ourselves as agents with free will, able "to act or not to act" based on our rational deliberations. Rhetoric includes attempts to influence both these processes, as this project's analysis of recruit training clearly demonstrates. That is, the Marines' training programs cover all their bases by influencing nonconscious intentions and conscious deliberation, and both types of influence are so

powerful that recruits are sometimes left with the feeling that they have been brainwashed *and* have become stronger agents who have chosen to adopt the Marine *ethos*. It seems likely that all effective persuasion works on both these levels to influence the “gut,” giving audience members a nonconscious sense that the new position “feels right,” and the mind, with the conscious processing that allows us to experience ourselves as making our own decisions. In this way, rhetoric is neither simple suggestion nor coercion, but something between.

When it comes to further study in this area, it is clear that we need more research to help us understand the nature of consciousness. As neuroscientists work from empirical studies, rhetoricians can use rhetorical theory, which is integrally tied up in questions of agency and consciousness, to offer models of consciousness and agency that can help us frame what we know now and perhaps also help scientists develop directions for new experiments. Understanding consciousness cannot help but further our understanding of agency, since the whole question of agency arises from our conscious experience of ourselves as agents.

Third, an understanding of cause and effect is integral to rhetoric, because rhetoric, more than many other fields, is about how to *cause* things. Rhetoricians study not just how things happen but how to make things happen. It would be easier to make things happen if cause and effect were always linear as in the rationalist fantasy, but that simply isn't how the world works. As demonstrated by complexity theorists, influence can be simultaneous, not just linear or circular. My concept of the haloed cluster, in which the interactions in the cluster both create and are influenced by the halo emanating

from it, offers a new metaphor for the mechanics of influence. The haloed cluster helps us understand the interconnectedness we know exists and can give us new ideas about how to intervene in those connections to effect change.

Further research in this area could involve more specific examination of simultaneous causality, perhaps starting with the work of Herman Haken and Ilya Prigogine and extending into more recent work. Complexity theory has much to offer here. Additionally, a thorough investigation into the ways haloed cluster causality impacts rhetorical theory might have far-reaching implications. Byron Hawk, Sidney Dobrin, and Thomas Rickert have begun investigations along these lines.

And finally, haloed cluster causality points to the need for a new theory of the rhetorical situation. Once we understand how dispersed cause and effect are, it's even *more* important to understand a given rhetorical situation as a whole. Complexity theory helps us understand these system dynamics. While not all aspects of complexity theory as strictly defined by mathematics apply to social systems like rhetorical situations, many principles are relevant, especially *emergence*, in which a property arises from the interaction of elements in the system and both depends upon and influences those interactions. Particular properties can emerge from a given rhetorical situation and can be sensed by participants, as recruits sense the Marine *ethos* that arises from boot camp.

There is much work to do to refine what complexity theory brings to our conception of the rhetorical situation. As I stated, complexity theory strictly defined may not apply to social situations, but it does offer some very useful concepts. Many scholars have applied complexity principles to social situations (M. Taylor, Mitchell, Lewin), and

some rhetorical scholars have as well. Again, Hawk, Dobrin, and Rickert have all used complexity theory, but as I stated in Chapter II, these theorists miss something important about perception and agency. We need a rich, detailed way to account for the complexity of rhetorical situations while acknowledging the importance of perceiving agents.

Taken together, the four interventions I offer in this project explain both why rhetorical influence is difficult and why it is possible. It is difficult because rhetors cannot simply create meaning and force it into audience members' minds. Linear causality is tempting for rhetoricians, but it is an empty dream. Audience members' brains create their own meanings, and as conscious agents, people can decide whether or not to adopt them. Still, rhetorical influence is possible, because rhetors can create sensations that are likely to make an impression. They can also offer many opportunities for audience members to make the meaning they desire from those sensations. They can manipulate the rhetorical situation by manipulating the physical environment and, in the case of boot camp, even circumscribe the interactions of recruits. The Marines are successful in creating new Marines because of their frequent use of strong sensations and their canny manipulation of the rhetorical situation.

### **Applications for the Marine Corps: Embodied Transition Training**

A major part of my motivation for embarking on this project has been the difficulty many Marines face when they separate<sup>34</sup> from the Corps and return to civilian

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<sup>34</sup> "Separation" is a generic term that applies to Marines who are leaving active duty, whether they are retiring, being discharged, remaining on reserve, etc.

society. As discussed in Chapter V, active duty Marines' suicide rate is high; according to a January 2014 Veterans Health Administration report, the rate for veterans is also high (Kemp). Twenty percent of suicides in the U.S. are veterans (SAMHSA website). Rates among veterans are also high for substance abuse and violence, especially domestic violence—the rate of intimate partner violence among veterans, for example, is three times higher than the national average (SAMHSA “Behavioral” 1-2; VA “Intimate Partner Violence”; Elbogen). Many of these issues are clearly traceable to combat. Traumatic brain injury (TBI), in which mechanical injury to the brain results in long-term neural dysfunction, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), in which psychological trauma leaves lasting effects on a person's ability to function, are two very common and serious injuries resulting from recent wars (Tanielian and Jaycox). Many agencies and resources exist to help veterans dealing with TBI and PTSD, with varying effectiveness, but I suggest that the Marines themselves could do better with preventive care.

Recruits go through months of intense, embodied training to enable them to kill or die in combat, but they go through comparatively little training—with almost no embodied components—to help them readjust to civilian life. This is especially important for Marines who are returning from combat deployments, but is also relevant for those who never see fighting. Values that make sense for a warrior—values all Marines are trained to adopt, whether they use them in combat or not—do not always make sense for civilians. The problem discussed in Chapter V, regarding the core value of commitment that perhaps prevents Marines from asking for help when they need it, is a prime example. Other examples abound: Marines who feel a strong bond to other Marines may

feel adrift around only civilians, or worse, may feel that civilians' lives and opinions are not as valuable as Marines'. Journalist Thomas Ricks, who has covered the Marine Corps for decades and is generally well disposed toward them<sup>35</sup> is concerned about the growing isolation of Marines from American society; he even writes that "Today's Marines give off a strong sense of disdain for the very society they protect" (22). The implications of this disdain are clearly negative. Marines have been trained to perceive each other as set apart, a perception essential to their willingness to kill and die. But when the necessity for killing and dying has passed, what happens to the sense that Marines are set apart?

Marines who have separated often have trouble reintegrating into a civilian lifestyle. A memorable scene in the film *The Hurt Locker* shows a soldier home from deployment standing in a typical American grocery store, completely unable to choose a cereal (see fig. 11). Civilians who are used to walking into grocery stores with many choices simply tune out the ones they know they don't want—they sense those objects but do not perceive them, since signals that are not incorporated into basin attractors of meaning remain at the level of noise. Marines who have come to value commitment to their superiors or have simply gotten used to having many of their decisions made for them are likely to have trouble readjusting their perceptual structures. Because the abundance of choices breaks their expectations, they are forced to perceive and make meaning from all objects available to them.

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<sup>35</sup> Ricks's talk at Dartmouth and his book *Making the Corps* convinced Nathaniel Fick to join the Marines (*One Bullet 5*).



Figure 11. Jeremy Renner as William James, a Post-deployment Soldier Unable to Choose a Cereal. From the film *The Hurt Locker*.

The need for constant vigilance in war settings sometimes makes former Marines unable to perform mundane civilian tasks. Former Marine Phil Klay’s short story “Redeployment” describes a returning Marine who has a hard time getting his mindset out of threat level “orange,” a constant alertness, and down to “white,” safe, while on a shopping trip with his wife:

Here’s what orange is. You don’t see or hear like you used to. Your brain chemistry changes. You take in every piece of the environment, everything. . . . I had antennae out that stretched down the block . . . I think you take in too much information to store so you just forget, free up brain space to take in everything about the next moment that might keep you alive. And then you forget that moment too, and focus on the next. And the next. And the next. For seven months.

So that's orange. And then you go shopping in Wilmington, unarmed, and you think you can get back down to white? It'll be a long fucking time before you get down to white. (13)

Klay explicitly describes the process Marines go through in combat as a change in brain chemistry—this is similar to the difficulty experienced by the *Hurt Locker* character choosing cereal. The former Marine's perceptual processes have been altered by the need to perceive everything in the environment in the present moment only. His brain has been so continually flooded with neuromodulators that there is no room for unrelated meanings to emerge, or for conscious deliberation. It will be a long time before his brain's attractor landscapes readjust to civilian life.

The Marines—and American society as a whole—need ways to help veterans re-train their perceptive structures to help them transition out of the Corps. Two things are especially needed: first, Marines who return to civilian life need a sense that their time with the Marines has been meaningful and worthwhile. They need to see their Marine identities as continuing to be elite and valuable while at the same time claiming their place in and responsibility to civilian society. The honored slogan “Once a Marine, Always a Marine” needs to be a bridge to new civilian iterations of Marine values such as honor, courage, commitment, and a dedication to one's peers. Too often the sentiment can become a rigid irrelevance or a nostalgic longing for bygone days—or a mockery of one's current comparatively lowly status. Transition training needs to help separating Marines conceive of Marine values in civilian life.

For combat veterans, the valuation of the Marine identity is even more important. Former Marines who have seen combat need to see value in the work they have done. Research shows that suicide and mental health difficulties are much lower among veterans who understand what they were fighting for (Wong et al.). Of course, when the initial reason for sending troops to a particular fight is ambiguous, this ambiguity has a direct impact on veterans' health post deployment. This effect on the health of service men and women and their families is one of the many important reasons we need to deliberate very carefully and to be extremely judicious when committing combat troops to action. But Marines do not hold the power to refrain from fighting badly considered wars; they must deal with the wars they were ordered to fight. Transition training must address this issue of the meaning of the fighting. This is an area that requires some conscious deliberation, so it should be discussed in conversations like those in the core values huts in the Crucible or in required reading like that connected with the MCMAP program's pillar of mental discipline.

The second important thing Marines need when separating from the Corps is embodied training—training that is informed by the successes of initial recruit training—to reorient their habits of perception and engage their conscious agencies as civilians. As this project demonstrates, boot camp is successful at making Marines because it engages perceptual habits through all the senses, including proprioception. Transition training should do the same.

While the current program offers Marines some valuable information, it is severely lacking in one of the most essential components of Marine training, and what

makes recruit training so lasting and effective: the current transition program is not embodied enough. The current Transition Readiness Seminar (TRS) focuses on practical elements like finding a job and how to manage personal finances, as well as some discussions of character issues and values (one of the sections of the seminar is titled “Marine for Life”). Marines can choose from several tracks, such as the college preparation track or the business track. Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS), which coordinates transition training, offers listings of job openings and sets up hiring fairs. The program does include some embodied elements, such as requiring Marines to show up in business dress for mock interviews. Clothes are important, as the Marines’ own emphasis on uniforms attests, and mock interviews do give Marines a physical sense of the interview experience. But most of the transition program consists of seminars in classroom-type settings (MCCS Lejeune website; Delagarza). Below are some ideas of ways to embody principles that will help Marines transition to civilian life.

I suggest that instead of spreading out appointments and seminars over the last 90-180 days of a Marine’s time in the Corps, as currently takes place (MCCS website), Marines go through a three-week intense “reverse boot camp” process. During this time, Marines would be able to spend time with friends and family, since those relationships are important, but most of their time would be taken up with the activities of their transition training. This intensity focuses recruits’ perceptions. The all-encompassing change in routine breaks recruits’ expectations and facilitates new perceptual structures.

In boot camp, Marines use implements and actions that represent the essence of the Marine’s job—the rifle and sparring—to ground recruit training in the physical.

Transition training has no similarly unifying physical objects and actions to represent the purpose of civilian life. But on closer examination, the two types of training are not as dissimilar as they might appear. In fact, a relatively small percentage of Marines go into the infantry, where the rifle and sparring are truly the substance of their everyday work (about 18% of Marines were in the infantry MOS in 2013 [Marine Corps Almanac]). The Marines make sparring and the rifle the center of training for all recruits partially because they hold symbolic power in representing unity. Remember the slogan “Every Marine a rifleman” and the motto of MCMAP, “One mind, any weapon.” The unity is important in boot camp. In training to help Marines transition to civilian life, unity is less important; in fact, Marines who are about to separate should be encouraged to express individuality. But the grounding in physical actions and physical objects is no less important in creating rhetoric that is effective. The physical aspect of these symbols and actions should be engaged in recruit training. Here I offer some suggestions for activities to use during transition training. I organize them as I have organized the analysis chapters in this project, around the emblems of the yellow footprints, sparring and the M16, and the Crucible.

I have suggested activities and elements that correspond to various elements of recruit training. This correspondence should be made clear to Marines in the program, so that transition training can serve as a sort of bookend. Conscious reflection on the beginning of their Marine careers will encourage reflection on the end of that period. Further, the parallel will serve to remind Marines that this too is a beginning, a training

*for* something, not just an end to something, in the way that “commencement” is a word we use for graduation to signify that important things are commencing.

### *The Yellow Footprints*

The yellow footprints chapter of this project analyzed disorientation, the loss of individuality, and renegotiations of agency; transition training should address each of these areas. Disorientation can be achieved by breaking Marines’ expectations. This begins with a change in daily routine, but it could also include surprising actions from leaders, like telling jokes or bursting into song—though maybe I’d better leave the specifics up to those actually involved. The point is that some physical and mental disorientation is necessary to shake up basin attractors and allow new perceptual structures to take hold.

An action corresponding to drill could be very useful—some physical action that can address individuality versus group identity. Drill denies recruits their individuality and makes them feel part of something bigger than themselves; transition training needs some physical action that gives Marines the opportunity to reassert individuality but lets them retain a kind of harmony with the group as well. The obvious option is dance. Dance fulfills all the necessary characteristics—it allows individual expression but encourages a kind of fellow-feeling with the group. If Marines find it *disorienting* to be asked to dance, so much the better. After all, drill is fairly silly from the outside. If the Corps can ask recruits to drill, it should be able to ask Marines to dance. But if the Corps

has an objection to forcing Marines to dance, perhaps sports could fill this requirement for physical action that addresses the group/individual continuum.

To engage recruits' agency in new civilian-ready ways, transition training should force recruits to make choices frequently. (This will be disorienting for them as well—think of the *Hurt Locker* scene.) They should have to make decisions about what matters to them as well as the stuff of everyday life. Training should also encourage Marines to reflect on why they choose to leave the Marines. Recruits reflect on how much they want to be a Marine when they are going through the difficulties of boot camp, and that conscious reflection—if they do decide to continue—reinforces their sense that they are agents who *choose* to become Marines. Transition training should make Marines reflect on their choice to leave the service and look forward to what their lives will be like as civilians. This reflection should not be merely negative—as in “I won’t have to live on base anymore”—but positive, as in “I can become a teacher, like I always wanted to.”

### *Sparring and the M16*

Chapter IV focused on balancing aggression and restraint and showed how the Corps uses sparring and the rifle to symbolize the core purpose of the Marines. In the corresponding elements of transition training, separating Marines would need to learn a new balance between aggression and restraint, no longer conceiving of their core function as violence. Marines should find excitement and motivation in activities other than warfare. Some non-life-threatening competition could still be encouraged, such as martial

arts or boxing, or other competitive sports. But physical activities that encourage calm, such as tai chi or yoga, should be a part of this transition training as well.

Exiting Marines also need some physical object that can replace the rifle. The M16 plays a central role in recruit training (remember the Rifleman's Creed), and for those who see combat, the rifle becomes almost an extension of the self. A few lines from the Marine novel *Jarhead* illustrate the challenge:

The man fires a rifle for many years, and he goes to war, and afterward he turns the rifle in at the armory and he believes he's finished with the rifle. But no matter what else he might do with his hands--love a woman, build a house, change his son's diaper--his hands remember the rifle . . . (173)

The rifle has a solid, undeniable impact on the body's sensory and perceptual structures. Something needs to replace it. I suggest that at the beginning of transition training, the Marines each choose a physical representation of their future selves as civilians. It can be any object small enough to carry around. Each Marine writes a creed connected with that object and recites it frequently, as well as keeping the object close at all times. The fact that each Marine chooses his or her own object again emphasizes the expression of individuality and agency while also making the object more personally relevant.

### *The Crucible*

The Crucible is perhaps the easiest of all boot camp activities to transfer to transition training. This version could be a bit more like a retreat than an ordeal. The actual physical exercises could be similar, though I would suggest more food be allotted and less marching required. The kinds of exercises performed, however, require creativity

and teamwork in physically clear ways, and they can easily be adjusted to suit transition training. The similarity encourages reflection on personal growth. And just as the Crucible marks the transition from recruit to Marine, the transition training version marks an important transition to civilian.

The Crucible emblemizes the adoption of the Marine *ethos*. It physically galvanizes the sense of Marinehood recruits have striven for throughout boot camp. The transition training version should promote an adjusted identity: civilian Marinehood. The Corps cherishes the depth of its members' identity—"Once a Marine, always a Marine"—and this helps Marines do their jobs, but it also makes becoming a civilian a comedown. Marines leaving the service need a better way to continue to identify as Marines (if they want to do so—and most of the Marines I've talked to are proud of their Marinehood, even if they are disenchanted with the Corps in some way), but they need to reconceive the values so that they will work in civil society. Civilian life needs to be made valorous. Separating Marines should be told stories about great civilian-Marines the way recruits are taught Marine lore about heroes who died in battle.

The Crucible-retreat should also include discussions of how Marine core values work in civil society. Regarding honor, Marines in the transition program should discuss how to build habits of respect and honesty when working with civilians. They also need to remember that while Marines are elite, civilians are doing important work too, and the military and civilian society support each other. Courage may not be required in as clear and exciting ways in civil society as in war, but it is still an important attribute for civilians. Marines should discuss ways civilians can show courage. And commitment is

important for civilians too—separating Marines will need to continue to display determination and perseverance in their lives after the Corps. Commitment to the Marine Corps can be a powerful anchor in Marines’ lives, and as they transition out of active duty, Marines will need to work out what else they can be committed to. The answer might not be tangible—it might be an ideal, or a value—or it might be very clear—one’s family or one’s God. In any case, separating Marines should examine and discuss their own priorities and how the core values might continue to guide them.

During this time, separating Marines—especially those who have seen combat—should also discuss the larger meaning and purpose of their work as Marines. Transition training should help separating Marines feel positive about their time in the Corps if possible. People who feel at peace about what they’ve done are more likely to go on to lead healthy, happy, productive lives. If the Marines truly feel that their work was worthless or detrimental, however—if they find the wars they have fought unnecessary or more destructive than warranted—they should say as much, and they should be taken seriously. In fact, I propose that there should be an information pipeline from veterans to lawmakers and the public so that we can use information gathered by those who fight our wars to help us make informed decisions about when to send troops to action. This information pipeline should start in transition training.

Finally, the Crucible-retreat should address the team-building and devotion to fellow Marines that is built up so strongly during boot camp’s Crucible. During that time, as recruits suffer together with their fellow recruits, they are joined in a special bond of devotion. This bond could be detrimental during the adjustment period if it isolates

former Marines from civilians. But it seems counterproductive and just plain cruel to try to destroy or loosen those bonds, since they are often so important to Marines. They are especially important to Marines who have seen combat, since no one else understands their experiences. So I do not suggest that the Crucible-retreat attempt to lessen the devotion Marines feel to each other.

Instead, I propose that separating Marines attend the Crucible-retreat with their families or friends. This would give them time and opportunities to form new bonds in their non-Marine relationships. The Crucible-retreat's similarity to the boot camp Crucible would give their family members and friends a chance to experience small portion of the Marine's world: being physically present in the Marine environment would help friends and family members understand where the Marine is coming from physically and perceptually. It would also offer everyone the opportunity to reset their relationships, breaking expectations by offering a new place to interact and encouraging the formation of new patterns. In these ways, separating Marines would be given the opportunity to make an embodied transition to civilian life.

## **Conclusion**

I hope this project has shed some light on the rhetorical techniques the United States Marines use to train recruits to kill when and whom they should in combat. The Corps makes use of (implicit) knowledge about how the body's perceptual system works as well as the dynamics of consciousness and agency to persuade recruits to adopt that sense of Marinehood that arises from the interactions of Marines and recruits. I also hope

I have offered material that is of use to rhetorical scholars looking for ways to understand the body, cause and effect, agency, and the rhetorical situation. And perhaps most of all, I hope this work can be helpful to Marines, who must go through so much to be able to do what we ask of them.

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