DOUBLE EXPOSURE

memory & PHOTOGRAPHY

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EDITOR

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4

Framing Zarqawi: Afterimages, Headshots, and Body Politics in a Digital Age

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> *Just as the entire mode of the existence of
> human collectives changes over long historical
> periods, so too does their mode of perception.*
> —Walter Benjamin, The Work of Art in
> the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

> *We are constantly finding that we have
> procedures and habits that have evolved over
> the years from the last century that don't really
> fit the twenty-first century. They don't fit the
> information age. They don't fit a time when
> people are running around with digital cameras.*
> —Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld before the
> House Armed Services Committee, May 7, 2004

*Afterimage: A visual image that persists after the visual stimulus causing
it has ceased to act*

The concept of afterimages is most often used to describe the persis-
tence of vision that makes motion pictures possible; it's the physi-
ological explanation for how time and space are filled between images
projected on a screen. In the schema of Hal Foster's distinction between
vision (sight as a physical operation) and visuality (sight as a social
fact), afterimages are typically talked about in the domain of vision.

However, I want to argue that photographic images also produce after-images on the metaphoric mind's eye, and thus that afterimages also belong to the domain of visuality, sight as a social fact, and have histori-cal and political dimensions.[1]

In particular, I will focus on news images, for such images inform political opinion long after they are no longer immediately before viewers' eyes. Moreover, news images do not start out as news images. Certain photographs become news images, acquiring and occasionally losing value and credibility through their circulation. Even in a digital age, their production and circulation is far from automatic; it is determined by image brokers. Image brokers are the people who act as intermediaries for images through acts such as commissioning, evaluating, licensing, selling, editing, and negotiating. They are the people who move images or restrict their movement, thereby enabling or policing their availability to new audiences. Their decisions at each stage of production and circulation of news images are informed by how they imagine various communi-ties—both those represented in the photographs and those in which the photographs will circulate, which may be the same community, but often are not. Images and imagined communities then are produced, reproduced, and circulate together. Afterimages—metaphoric screen memories of prior visual knowledge—are central to the imagining of communities through photographs and thus to how future images get brokered.

Carnal Density in the Domain of Visuality

Physical afterimages have an important history in debates about the mechanics of vision and discussions of the formative effects of images.[2] For example, afterimages are central to historian of visual culture Jona-than Crary's argument against a visual historiography that assumes con-tinuity from the Renaissance to the present, specifically the widespread myth of a seamless progression from the camera obscura to the pho-tographic camera.[3] Crary examines the camera obscura not as a piece of equipment that functions the same way today as it did in antiquity, but rather as a socially constructed artifact embedded in historically and culturally determined notions of knowledge and the observing subject. Crary argues that the first three decades of the nineteenth century saw a dramatic shift away from the Cartesian conception of the sovereign, isolated observer and a notion of vision completely severed from sen-sory evidence gathered by an embodied subject. His analysis builds on Goethe's *Theory of Colours*, which, in dealing with the phenomenon of afterimages, emphasized the physiological processes involved in vision as well as the effects of external stimuli, thereby giving the body a central role in vision. Retinal afterimages require an embodied sub-ject. They are "optical experience that was produced by and within the subject" (98). Hence, Crary concludes, the nineteenth century observer acquired "carnal density"; objective vision was quickly replaced by a subjective and autonomous vision, one residing in a particular body.[4]

If retinal afterimages highlight the carnal density of observers, men-tal afterimages underscore the density of the bodies of subjects *in* news images. During fieldwork conducted at sites where decisions were made in the international photojournalism industry, I continually observed image brokers making decisions about a photograph—whether to buy it, publish it, or circulate it—based not only on the aesthetic composition of the indexed body but evaluation of the imagined body politic as well. Each body in a photograph is highly singular and indexed to a particular individual, and yet many of the bodies in news images—almost all except images of celebrities—circulate as stand-ins for large numbers of bodies sharing the same condition—bodies that are metonyms for body politics. News images serve as points of departure for imagining collectives that are represented but not present in the frame itself.[5] While they do not have political agency of their own, they gain it through circulation, and news images circulate based on their ability to contribute to the visual construction of a social body.[6] They accrue carnal density as they circulate and are mobilized in journalistic narratives, whereby the imaged indexed body comes to represent a collective to broader audiences.

At times a single face can come to represent an entire country's popu-lation, as in the well-known portrait (Figure 4.1) to which I now turn in order to illustrate this political dimension of carnal density in the field of visuality.

Steve McCurry's famous "Afghan Girl" image that appeared on a 1985 cover of *National Geographic* is an indexical representation of Sharbat Gula, an Afghan girl who moved to Pakistan as a refugee. Her image initially appeared with no identifying name; she was merely one of 2.4 million Afghan refugees and one of 350 female students at a school mentioned in the article, as her persistent pseudonym—Afghan Girl—reminds us. That particular 1985 image indexed only her, and yet it had also represented Afghan refugees in general. In other words, while the portrait was of Sharbat Gula alone, the afterimage of the portrait encom-passed all Afghan refugees.
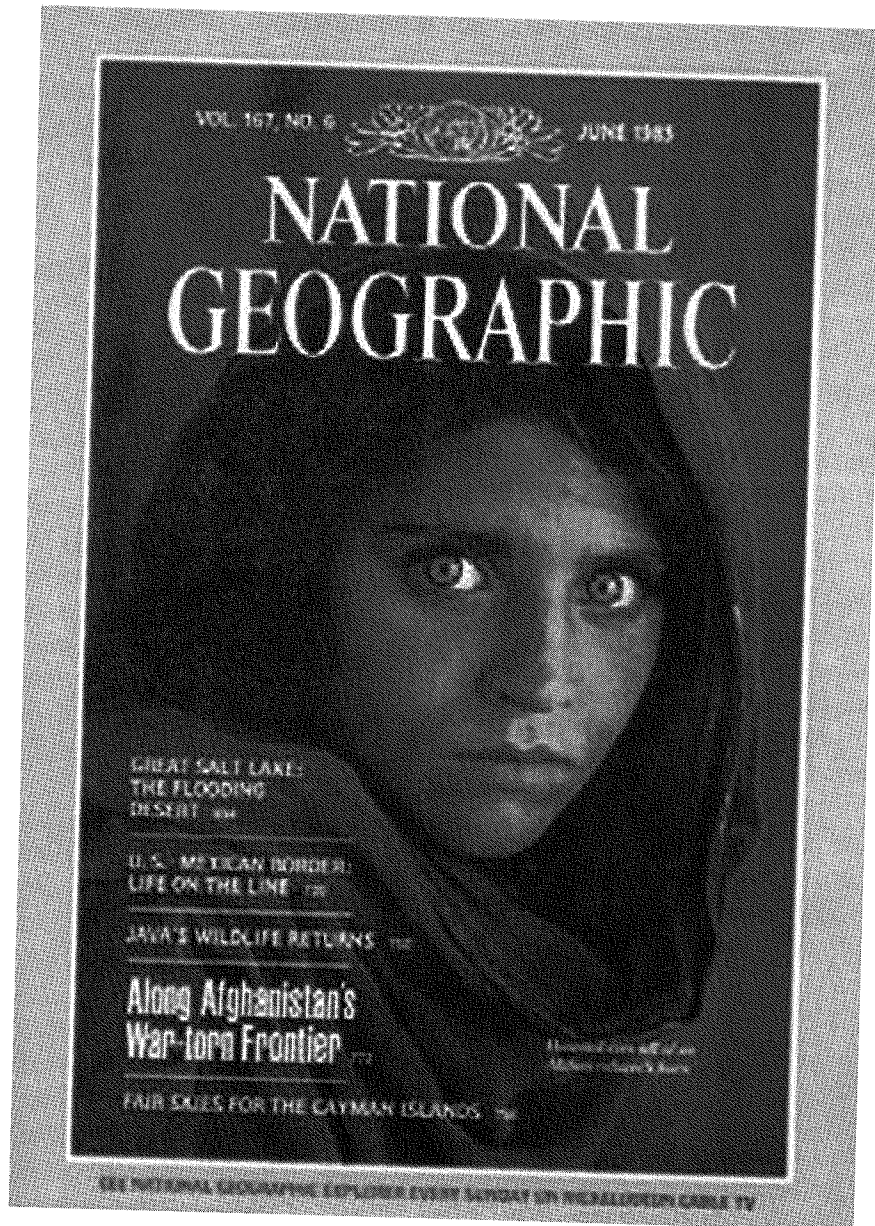
Figure 4.1. June 1985 cover of *National Geographic*.
(Photograph by Steve McCurry.)

In April 2002, a year after the War on Terror had commenced, and Afghanistan was once again in the news, Sharbat Gula once again appeared on the cover of *National Geographic* (Figure 4.2). As evidenced by the cutting-edge biometric technology used to identify her irises, a particular thirty-year-old woman was confirmed to be *the* girl in the famous *National Geographic* photograph. This time Gula was clad in a burka and held a copy of the portrait of her younger self.

A caption tells us, "She had not been photographed since Steve McCurry made her portrait in 1984, and she only agreed to be photographed again—to appear unveiled, without her burka—because her husband told her it would be proper." Yet, although the magazine article includes other images showing her face or showing her with her family, the image chosen for the cover is one of her in a burka. She serves as a human easel for the iconic image made of her eighteen years earlier. The only visual individuality allowed to her by *National Geographic*, an entity stricter even than Gula's husband, is a reference back to their photographer's encounter with her. Hence, even when she is again on the cover of *National Geographic* for being *the specific girl* indexed in the earlier photograph, in the political climate of 2002 when liberating Afghan women was one of the alleged goals of the military operation in Afghanistan, she once again represents the category of Afghan women in general. Both of Gula's cover photographs then are portraits with great carnal density in the realm of visuality. Though the 2002 article rejoices that "Now we can tell her story," we get only the bare details about her, and the writer states several times that so many share her story. "Consider the numbers. Twenty-three years of war, 1.5 million killed, 3.5 million refugees: This is the story of Afghanistan in the past quarter century." The portrait of Sharbat Gula is merely an aggregate of what is portrayed as Afghanistan's timeless, almost naturalized, plight of despair and poverty: "It is the ongoing tragedy of Afghanistan. Invasion. Resistance. Invasion. Will it ever end?" United States' military operations in Afghanistan that began in October 2001 are not mentioned in the story at all, even though it took the US invasion to render Afghanistan a cover-worthy topic.

In discussing similar images of Afghan women in burkas and the supposed feminist call to war, Judith Butler enjoins us to investigate the narrative function in which images are mobilized. Herein lies the political dimension of afterimages. Paying close attention to the constructions of social bodies through indexed bodies allows one to trace precisely how images get mobilized in particular political narrative functions. The War on Terror responsible for the journalistic and military attention bestowed
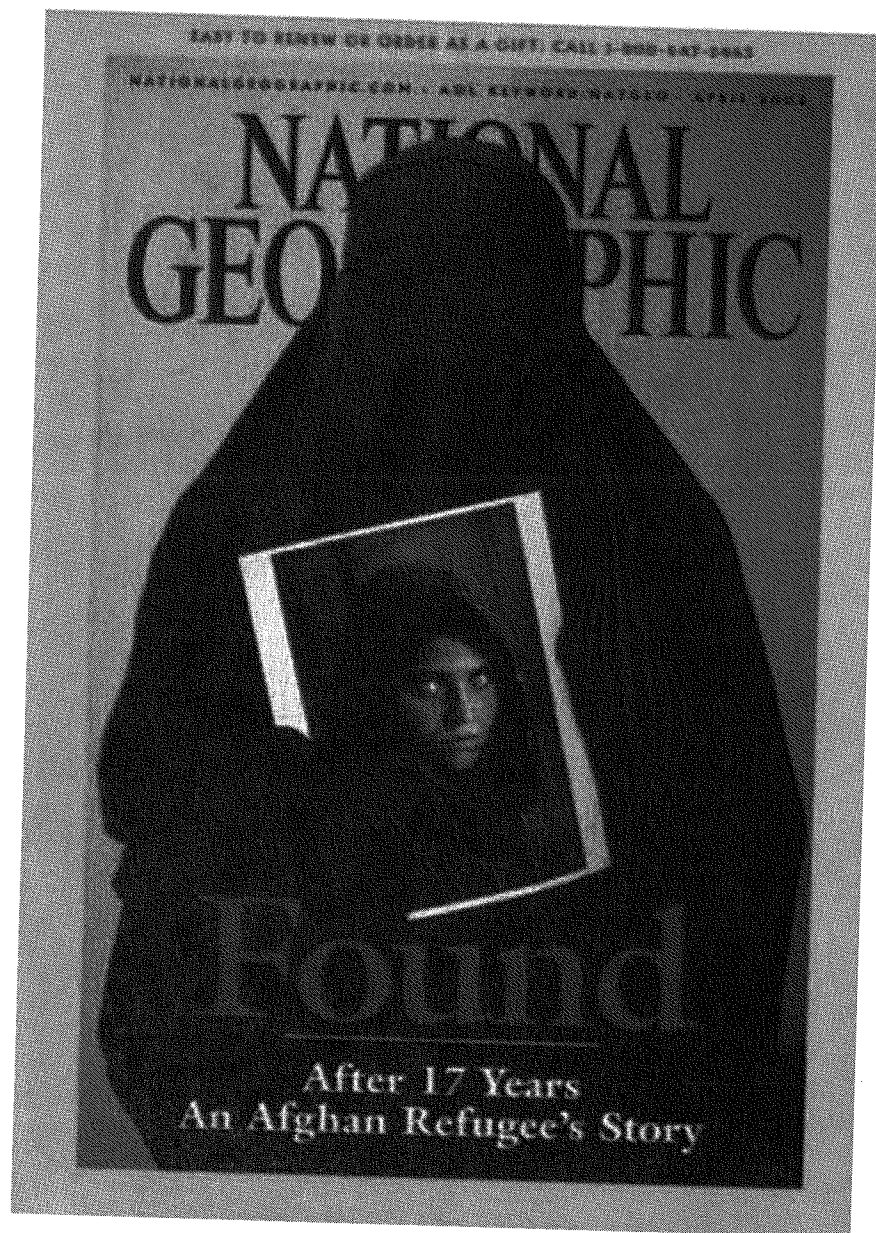
Figure 4.2. April 2002 cover of *National Geographic*.
(Photograph by Steve McCurry.)

upon Afghanistan, after years of virtual absence in the US media, is inseparable from its representations; hence the stakes of understanding how images acquire political agency are high indeed.[7]

Digital Circulation and the Spectacular War on Terror

Not only are the War on Terror and its representations inseparable, but September 11, 2001 is a key originary moment for the United States' military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and the professional transition to digital photography. There had been terrorist attacks before, most saliently perhaps the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, but the 9/11 attacks were an event of a different scale. The first digital camera system marketed to professional photojournalists was introduced by Kodak in 1991, but even a decade later, many in the professional world of photography still resisted using digital images because of what they perceived as inferior image quality. However, when the Federal Aviation Association grounded all flights for three days following the 9/11 attacks, the photojournalism industry was obliged to accept digital transmission as a standard regardless of whether they were analog or digitally produced images; images could only *move* digitally. The scale of the digital circulation of news images changed dramatically. The standard of sending undeveloped rolls of film via air courier and consequently pre-digital technologies and scales of circulation were grounded along with the United States' airline industry.[8]

The inseparability of the War on Terror and its representations also can be attributed to the fact that the hijackers who crashed two planes into the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, launched an attack in the realm of the image world at the same time as their attack on the twin towers. This was an act of spectacular terrorism, not just because of the images of fireballs and gaping buildings but also because, due to the delay between the two crashes, millions were drawn to their screens upon hearing of the first crash and watched the second attack live. Hence the events inaugurated a new type of spectacular terrorism where a visual assault on spectators magnified the symbolic impact of the physical attack and prepared the way for visual revenge. Significantly, the revolutionary aspect of the rise of digital photography at this specific moment was not about its reproductive capacity, but rather the vast expansion of powers of circulation and thus the role of shared images altogether that it enabled.

The intertwining of the War on Terror and the worldwide circulation of digital images was perhaps nowhere more evident than in the notorious

photographs of American torture in Abu Ghraib prison. Yet it is necessary to place them in the context of a visual and political economy of contemporary images. In order to illustrate the visual battlefield that is integral to the War on Terror, I now turn to a case study that illustrates how news images get deployed for particular political and military narrative functions and pay close attention to the medium specificity of these images. In particular, I am interested in the visual politics of substitution and the framing devices, discursive and physical, which make such substitutions possible. I have chosen the specific example I now turn to precisely because it makes salient the establishment and contesting of equivalence and justice based on visual material presented as evidence and hence the political dimension of afterimages.

Framing Zarqawi: A Headshot as Hard Evidence in a Digital Age

On June 9, 2006, Major General William Caldwell, stationed in Iraq, spoke to the press corps at the Pentagon via videoconference. The United States Department of Defense had become fully integrated into the global world of digital spectacle and had been using PowerPoint
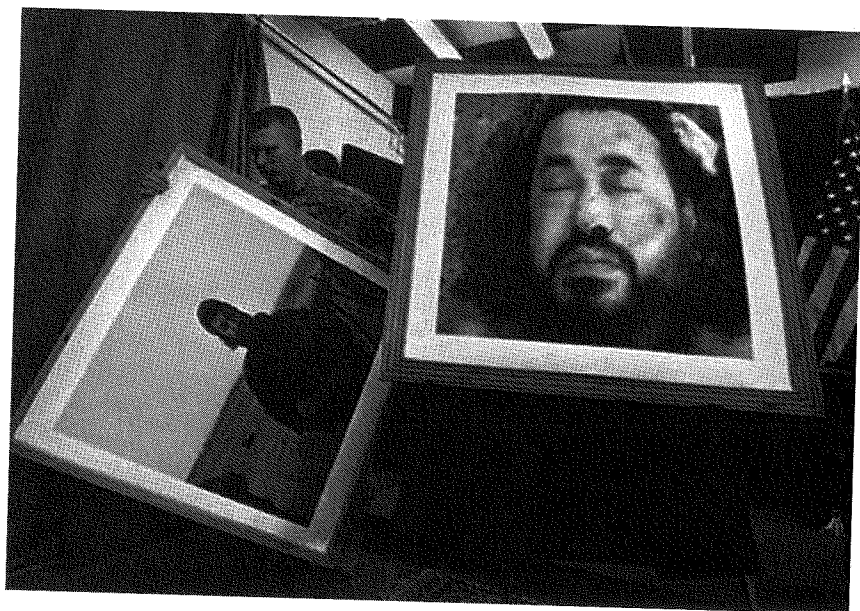

Figure 4.3. Framed portraits of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi presented at a press conference in Baghdad held by Major General Caldwell to announce that Zarqawi had been killed. June 8, 2006. (Photograph by Khalid Mohammed/Associated Press.)

presentations in Baghdad press briefings regularly for several years. Caldwell showed digital photographs of what had been seized in just one of the seventeen raids conducted in Baghdad the night before to illustrate what he had termed "a treasure trove" of information and intelligence.[9] However, the big news from the raids had been announced a day earlier at a press conference held in Baghdad in the midst of American morning television shows: Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, a man President Bush referred to as one of the ideology of terror's most visible and aggressive leaders, had been killed. His death was illustrated not by a digital image but by an oversized, matted, and framed print of Zarqawi's head, eyes closed, in death. The frame was so large that it had to be positioned by two US soldiers[10] (Figure 4.3).

What work was being done by this lifeless face that made a mere digital image ontologically insufficient? Why, when there was in fact a digital image of Zarqawi's dead face included in the deck of slides prepared by the Department of Defense for this very briefing, was it necessary to render Zarqawi's head in such a large and tangible format? General Caldwell repeatedly used a pointer to gesture at Zarqawi's giant portrait positioned over more usual images of maps and charts, creating a face-off of bizarre proportions, with Zarqawi's head looming far larger than those of the live men in the room.

That the capture and killing of such a high-profile enemy was represented not as a digital image but rather as a framed trophy requires a rethinking of the political economy of images in the digital age. Zarqawi's looming head recalled the classic metaphor of the death mask with which theorists have talked about photographic technology as an index of the real (Bazin 2005; Benjamin 2003; Sontag 1977). Furthermore, there was a peculiar eeriness to the image because it consisted only of the dead man's face. Even while recognizing the significant shift of the cult value of objects after their technological reproducibility became possible, Walter Benjamin claims that cult value "falls back to a last entrenchment: the human countenance." He adds, "It is no accident that the portrait is central to early photography. In the cult of remembrance of dead or absent loved ones, the cult value of the image finds its last refuge. In the fleeting expression of a human face, the aura beckons from early photographs for the last time." The human portrait, as in the cases of both Sharbat Gula and Zarqawi, seems to promise something singular even if mechanically or digitally reproducible through photography. The presentation of Zarqawi's dead face to the press corps was a public digital rendering in the sense not only of a representation but also of a formal delivery of retribution,

a giving of what is due or owed. In this sense, the portrait itself carried out the death sentence, the frame itself, at least formally, delivered justice.

A Circulated Headshot

The portrait of Zarqawi offered by the Department of Defense is not merely a mass circulated image of an individual, but an image of a dead individual whose portrait had for years been widely circulated as a condensed representation of mass destruction. The political signifi-cance of this portrait stems from the particular *carnal density* of the face of Zarqawi. The photograph of his corpse is digital, yet it works in a particular way precisely because it recalls other pre-digital and even pre-photographic visual traditions with cult value. One such echo is the tradition of political portraits and the use of portraits of leaders, monarchs, and heads of state as symbols of that state. President Bush, when commenting on Zarqawi's death, referred to him as "the opera-tional commander of the terrorist movement in Iraq," and then added, "Osama Bin Laden called this Jordanian terrorist the prince of Al-Qai'da in Iraq."[11] This portrait then is very much a headshot in that Zarqawi is
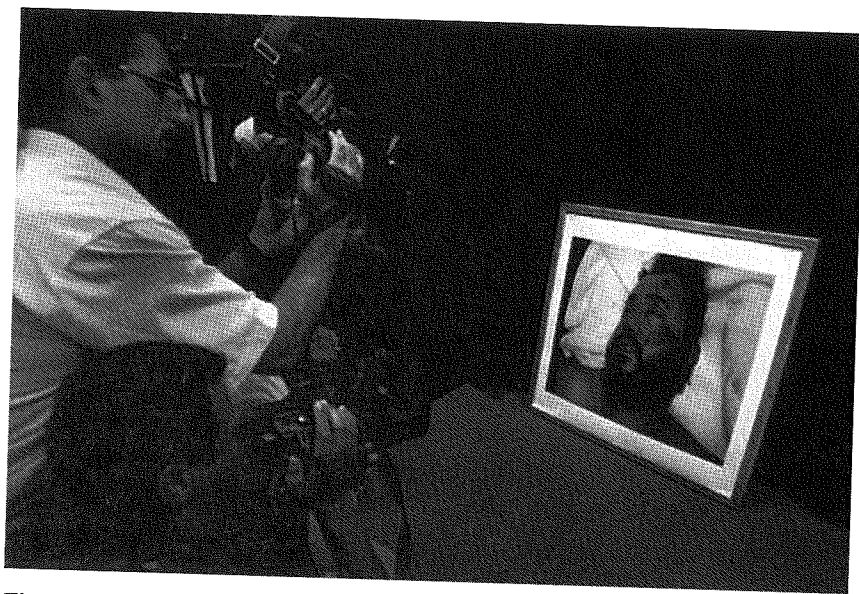

Figure 4.4. Framed print of a digital photograph of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi's corpse presented to members of the press in Baghdad June 8, 2006. The images they produced then circulated around the world.
(Photograph by Khalid Mohammed/Associated Press.)

being visually represented as a head of a body politic. Yet if Zarqawi was positioned as the head of a body politic, what precisely was this body politic that was rendered headless?

Furthermore, this posthumous portrait served to emphasize the stature of the visible leader of terrorism who had been slain, and yet, as I will show, the US government's use of another headshot was instrumental in establishing Zarqawi as a leader, at least in the visual logic of organiza-tion charts. Put differently, if Zarqawi was, as President Bush claimed, "One of the ideology of terror's most visible leaders," the US govern-ment was in part responsible for his visibility. Zarqawi's image in death owed some of its potency to an earlier photograph's afterimage. Long before the framed portrait of his dead face was presented to the cameras in Baghdad, the terrorist network that Zarqawi allegedly led had been made into a Hobbesian leviathan, that entity defined as "an artificial man, though of greater stature and strength than the natural" (Hobbes 1994).

On February 5, 2003, in his address to the UN Security Council, US Secretary of State Colin Powell discussed at length what he saw as a threat potentially far more sinister than Iraqi weapons of mass destruc-tion. During this critical address in attempting to sway world opinion in favor of war in Iraq, Powell named this threat as "a deadly terrorist network headed by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi."[12] Zarqawi was declared the crucial link between Al-Qai'da and Saddam Hussein's regime.[13] The slide Powell used to display the chart of the alleged terrorist network in Europe rendered Zarqawi as not merely a lone terrorist, but the head of a dark leviathan reigning over a particular territory and a body politic[14] (Figure 4.5).

The visual organization chart of terrorism circulated far beyond Pow-ell's 2003 address and helped establish Zarqawi's significance. In effect, when Zarqawi's framed lifeless head was presented to the world via the press corpse in Baghdad, one headshot—put into circulation by Powell on February 5, 2003—was replaced by another; a much larger, concrete other. While much of Powell's speech was later discredited, the cover of the *TIME* magazine that contained the news of Zarqawi's death in June 2006 also featured the headshot presented by Powell, albeit in a stylized format (Figure 4.6).

News images, then, can continue to circulate and wield evidentiary power and hence political impact regardless of the actual hardness of the evidence on the basis of which they were originally put into circulation. The afterimage of Zarqawi's headshot continued to circulate with politi-cal force despite the threat level posed by the terrorist network presented
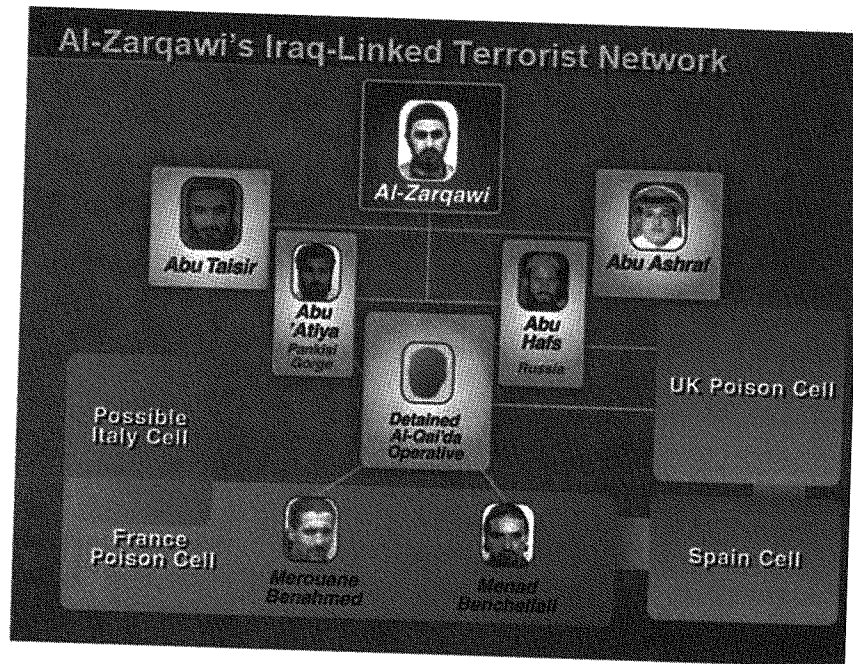
Released on February 5, 2003

Figure 4.5. Slide presented to the UN Security Council by then US Secretary of State Colin Powell, showing what he claimed to be a deadly terrorist network that posed a threat significant enough to justify going to war with Iraq.

by Colin Powell being called into question. Notice that the *TIME* cover image is also a severed head floating in white space without a neck. The crossed-out mug shot signifies not just a single enemy death, but the promise of the end to terror. The article within is titled "Funeral for Evil."

Furthermore, while a generous reading might conclude that Powell's words, while not truthful, were prophetic of Zarqawi's critical importance, the US military was key to making Zarqawi the icon of the leviathan he was said to be at the time of his death. Just a few months earlier, *The Washington Post* featured a story about a military propaganda campaign aimed to magnify Zarqawi's role so that he could then be strategically villainized. The article included two slides from a briefing for the top US commander in Iraq that illustrated plans to use *strategic communication* to ensure that Zarqawi come to represent not just terrorism in Iraq but also "foreign fighters in Iraq, the suffering of Iraqi people and the denial of their aspirations."[15]
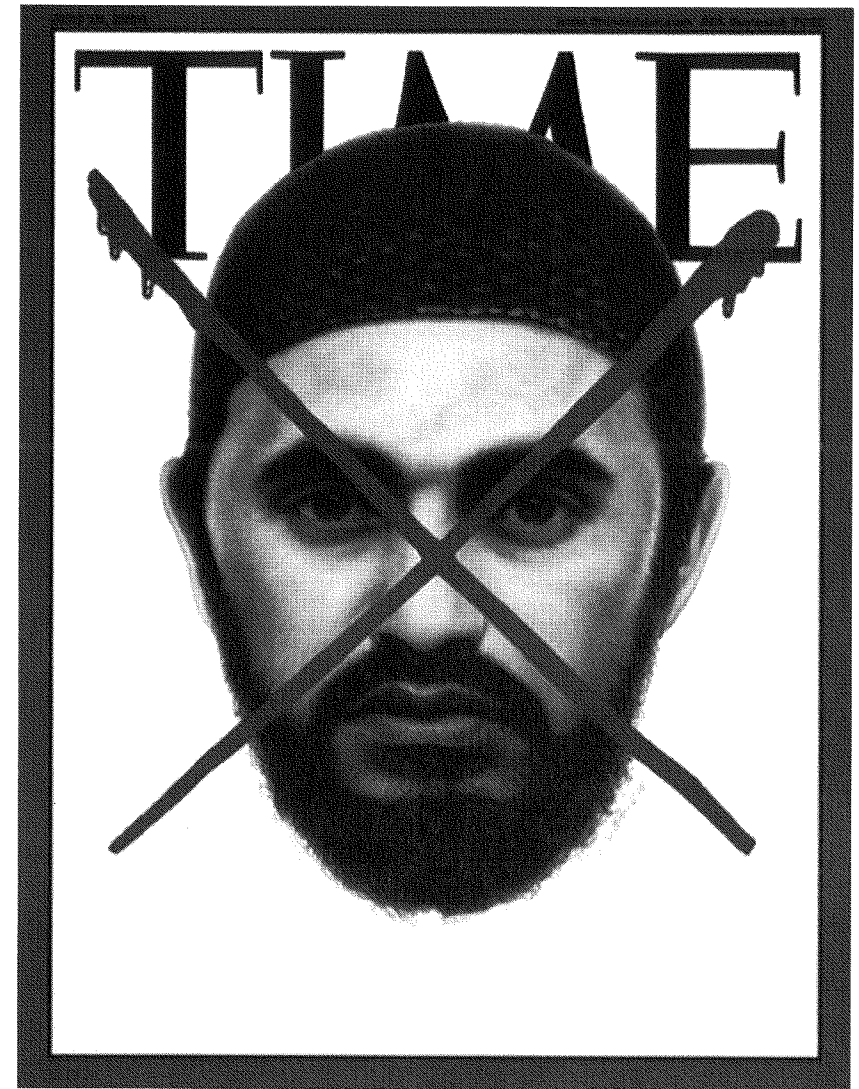
Figure 4.6. The June 19, 2006, cover of *TIME*. (Cover illustration for *TIME* by Tim O'Brien.)

Yet *The Washington Post* also used the Powell 2003 headshot in a slide show after Zarqawi's death was announced, despite the fact that it had reported on the military's deliberate strategy to overstate Zarqawi's importance.[16] The caption below the organization chart as it appeared on *The Washington Post* website listed the source as the US State Department

and represented the chart as an illustration of the "Iraq-linked terrorist network" headed by Al-Zarqawi. In other words, while *The Washington Post* was the very news organization that had reported on the construction of Zarqawi's aggrandized image as the leader of the terror network in Iraq, it still used the 2003 headshot produced before the United States declared war on Iraq that had visually positioned Zarqawi into a role he had yet to grow into. In fact, the final clause of the caption identified Zarqawi as "a Jordanian who swore allegiance to Al-Qai'da leader Osama Bin Laden in 2005"; though the image remained the same in 2003, 2005, and 2006, the caption used to frame how Zarqawi should be read changed and redefined the threat he posed.

A Context of Beheadings and Echoes of Regicides

The portrait presented by General Caldwell to the press in Baghdad and then disseminated worldwide to announce this public triumph for coalition forces in Iraq, the most significant since the capture of Saddam Hussein in 2003, also echoed the tradition of representations of regicides.[17] Recall that President Bush reminded the press that Bin Laden had referred to Zarqawi as "the prince of Al-Qai'da." When the earlier headshot in widespread circulation was replaced by the photograph proving that Zarqawi had indeed been killed, what was provided was a visual narrative of a difficult task completed, a dangerous mission accomplished. The lifeless headshot, then, was a hunting trophy presented as justice framed and furthermore the visual promise of a regime change. As part of the campaign to villainize Zarqawi, the bounty on his head had been increased to $25 million. Similarly, what the frame before the press corps did is reiterate the stature of Zarqawi and, therefore, the even greater potency and prowess of those who killed him.

John Berger argues, "A photograph whilst recording what has been seen, always and by its nature refers to what is not seen" (Berger in Trachtenberg 1980: 293). This is especially true of trophy shots where all collateral damage is cropped out. Six thousand and two bodies had been brought to the Baghdad morgue in the first five months of 2006 before Zarqawi was killed. Just three months earlier, the scandalous news story of seven marines accused of shooting twenty-four civilians in Haditha had broken. Moreover, the Abu Ghraib images continued to haunt the US military as they had since their public appearance in 2004.[18] The framed portrait of Zarqawi's dead face not only drew attention away from these other stories even if momentarily, but also provided a narrative of the US mission in Iraq continuing to be accomplished despite the fact that the

War on Terror had not yet brought home the head that it went hunting for—that of Osama Bin Laden.[19]

The photograph also provided a cause and effect for the ongoing violence in Iraq; it provided an explanation of the logic of violence in Iraq visually. The oversized photograph is a sanitized metaphoric beheading of Zarqawi, presented at a time during the escalating war of images when beheadings had become commonplace.[20] Zarqawi was, after all, a man who greatly increased his notoriety by claiming to have personally beheaded many, including Nicholas Berg. Berg was a businessman who traveled to Iraq and became the first Westerner beheaded there. His murder gained widespread attention when a video of it was posted on the Internet. In other words, Zarqawi himself was responsible, at least according to the CIA, not only for beheadings but also for putting images of those beheadings into circulation. Moreover, Berg's beheading was allegedly an act of retribution for the abuse of prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison, which had become public just a few weeks earlier, a visualized revenge for the circulation of incendiary images.

Executive Decisions and Visual Regimes: Appropriate and Proportionate Images

The US military attempted to present its own use of visuals as far more civilized; its military trophy in the form of Zarqawi's portrait was meant to be read as a civilized act of representation against a backdrop of barbaric beheadings.[21] At the initial press briefing, General Caldwell had stated, "As far as the body itself, in terms of the explosion of the bomb, I mean the pictures we provided to you were obviously—we had wiped off a lot of the blood and other debris because there was not a need to portray it in any kind of de-humanizing his body [sic]. The intent was to show you that he, in fact, had died in that explosion. But there are far worse, graphic pictures that are very inappropriate, we felt, to share with anybody that were the result of the immediate strike." The next day, another reporter during the Pentagon briefing asked whether Zarqawi's face had been Photoshopped to be more recognizable. Caldwell's response was that Zarqawi's face had been very bloodied, but these were the straight photographs. And again he emphasized, "Despite the fact that this person actually had no regard for human life, we were not going to treat him in the same manner."

Earlier, when a journalist asked Caldwell whether there had been any discussion of trying to capture Zarqawi alive—coalition forces did after all drop two five-hundred-pound bombs killing six people total—Caldwell

suggested that the decision was based on weighing the risks to coalition forces, then he added, "But I think what they did was very appropriate and proportional to the fact that Zarqawi is the number one terrorist in Iraq. He has proven to be a brutal murderer that has absolutely no consideration for civilian life."[22]

This discussion of proportionality and appropriateness significantly recalled language employed earlier in the war during a crisis of visualization, a moment when routine visualization itself is disturbed or challenged. In justifying his decision to release photographs of the bodies of Saddam's sons in July 2003, Rumsfeld explained, "This is an unusual situation. This regime has been in power for decades. These two individuals are particularly vicious individuals. They are now dead. . . . The Iraqi people have been waiting for confirmation of that, and they, in my view, deserved having confirmation of that." The implication here is that the conventions governing military behavior such as the Geneva Convention should be based on the moral worth of the bodies captured; these were "particularly vicious individuals" and therefore did not merit any protection. Furthermore, they were not merely individuals but representatives of a regime. Ambassador Bremer stated that, in fact, it was the desire on the part of the governing council—"the people responsible in Iraq now"—that had convinced them it was an important matter for the Iraqi people. Bremer's comments suggested that the rules of military conduct should be determined by the body politic of the territory under the US military's authority *as if* they were sovereign, even though sovereignty had not yet been handed back to Iraq.[23]

One journalist managed to ask Rumsfeld, "America has long objected to its dead soldiers in various instances being shown on television . . . there have been very strong objections going all the way back to Somalia. Do you worry, sir, that perhaps there is a risk for the moral high ground for the US military on this issue now that you have broken the precedent? In other words, the next time there were to be in the future [sic] dead American soldiers or dead Americans shown by America's enemies on television, how do you make the case now that it's the wrong thing to do?" Somalia was a particularly important visual moment of origin for the journalist to cite because many believe that in that military intervention, it was the televised images of an American soldier's body being desecrated that led to the withdrawal of the US military.

In answering, Rumsfeld first acknowledged the importance of these representations, "Well, it's a fair question. And as the one who made the

decision to do it, I can say that it was not a snap decision. It is something that one has to think through quite carefully." Then he deftly substituted the soldier in Somalia's body with the body of Romanian ruler executed with his wife on Christmas Day in 1989. "And if anyone goes back to Ceausescu's demise, it was not until the people of that country saw him, saw his body, that they actually believed that the fear and the threat that his regime posed to them was gone." Thus, as evidenced by Rumsfeld's reference, the afterimages of Ceaucescu and his wife's corpses have been particularly performative in their circulation and represent regime change as well as two deaths.[24]

Another critical incident in which a US official was asked to comment on circulating images involved Colin Powell who, in May 2004, had to answer for the circulation of the incendiary Abu Ghraib images. On the NBC news program, Meet the Press, Powell was asked if he was satisfied with the level of outrage in the Arab world against the images of Nicholas Berg's beheading,[25] to which he replied, "I think that [sic] should be a higher level of outrage. Notwithstanding what people think, what we did at the prison, there can be no comparison to the actions of a few who are going to be punished and brought to justice as a result of what happened at Abu Ghraib.[26] But what we saw with this horrible, horrible, horrible, horrible murder of Mr. Berg should be deplored throughout the world. It is an outrage and the terrible thing about it is these individuals are yet to be brought to justice. They have no concept of justice. They have no concept of right."

As with Rumsfeld, Powell also set up a comparison between sets of images—torture at Abu Ghraib and Berg's beheading—and framed the issue as "the actions of a few" and a murder by individuals. But whether or not the individuals who beheaded Berg had a concept of justice or a concept of right, what they did not have was the legitimacy of a sovereign state. Moreover, at the time of Berg's beheading, Iraq was not yet *sovereign*. Zarqawi himself had been called a "nationless freelance terrorist."[27] Hence, while the Department of Defense might want to present Zarqawi's portrait as an evidentiary document, a death certificate appropriate for a leviathan who took many heads, it needs to be analyzed in terms of how images play a part in the politics of terror, particularly state-sanctioned violence. A head had been taken and how this was claimed publicly reveals much about the political use of afterimages.

The death of this alleged head of a terrorist network was announced by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Maliki during a session of Parliament. While

the lengthy press briefings from General Caldwell, Donald Rumsfeld, and President Bush emphasized the role of the US military in this operation, Maliki underscored the cooperation from Iraqi masses and citizens who provided information and added that, "Today's Iraq is the Iraq where all political forces and the sons of the country are united."[28] Shortly thereafter, the long-debated posts of interior minister, defense minister, and national security adviser were filled; the body politic was fully constituted, reflecting Maliki's representation of the masses as a united corpus. Curiously, while General Caldwell's Pentagon press briefing the following day began with a celebration of an Iraqi government's being in place, it continued with him confirming, with a slip of the tongue, that, "*We've* appointed the minister of defense, interior, and national security."

The Afterlife of Afterimages

Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld's comments to the press after Zarqawi's death, made after a NATO defense ministries meeting, continued to aggrandize the slain terrorist: "I think arguably, over the last several years, no single person on this planet has had the blood of more innocent men, women and children on his hands than Zarqawi." Despite his focusing on the singularity of Zarqawi, he remained singular as the head of a leviathan, and Rumsfeld's statement presented this death not only as a victory but the elimination of a source of mass destruction. Yet, Zarqawi's death was announced with none of the utopian promise that accompanied the death of Saddam's sons (or Ceausescu for that matter). Everyone seemed to accept that violence in Iraq would continue. A statement purportedly from Al-Qai'da in Iraq claimed that the organization would be led by "a new prince," and promised—in language that coopts the work done by the US military—to aggrandize Zarqawi as a threat and seems fitting with terrorism in the digital age: "He will be a copy of Zarqawi."[29]

The spectacular terrorism of September 11 was a creative and watershed, if horrific, intervention of man in the formation of certain spectacular images. Yet there are other interventions possible through images. For images do not enter circulation automatically; their meaning and use are subject to the intervention of individuals, publications, and many civilian, governmental, and military organizations. Therein lies their political potential. An image in the issue of June 19, 2006, *TIME* magazine, the cover of which featured the floating headshot of Zarqawi illustrates this particularly well:

Figure 4.7. The double-page opening spread of the cover story on Zarqawi's death in the June 19, 2006, edition of *TIME*. (Composite image: photograph of Bush by Christopher Morris/VII for *TIME* and Zarqawi photo from Getty Images.)

This remarkable news image spread over two pages shows members of the administration at the Rose Garden during President Bush's comments following the announcement of Zarqawi's death. The photo editor and art director superimposed this image of Zarqawi's lifeless face onto the photograph in Washington. It is, on the one hand, a face-off between two heads: those of Zarqawi and President Bush. Yet it is a complicated image that exemplifies the ability of photography and innovative editing to provoke complex questions about current events, to add complexity through visuals even when the textual story being narrated may seem far simpler.

Zarqawi's face is lifeless; Bush's face is out of focus. It is a ghostly photograph that visually subverts the cult of the symbolic head as wielder of power on behalf of a population. The focus is instead on the representatives of the administration. Despite the rhetoric of the event at which the Washington photograph was taken, and the tone of the military briefing where Zarqawi's head was presented to the press, this image can be read as a sinister message that the leviathan the United States helped to create might be beheaded but will continue to haunt as a ghost-like presence or, hydra-like, sprout new heads.[30]

The editors have removed the large frame in the original photograph that symbolically contained the threat of Zarqawi and transformed this portrait into the representation of a successful regicide. Without the frame, the continual threat of violence looms large. Not only is the architecture of the White House visible in Zarqawi's face, but his hair is indistinguishable from the shadows of the trees in the manicured Rose Garden. The time code on the photograph of Zarqawi remains in the final image, however, making this image a temporal composite as well as a spatial one. The past is fixed at a particular moment, but much of the present is out of focus. The text on the image reads "Funeral for Evil," but the image cannot bury Al-Qai'da's ominous message that there will be a new prince and, "He will be a copy of Zarqawi."

This is an image that relies heavily on afterimages. The image works visually because we have seen images of men in crisp suits at Rose Garden briefings before, and we are already familiar with the framed version of the Zarqawi's corpse. Afterimages inform the professional decisions of image brokers, such as the art and photo editors of *TIME*. They also play an increasingly important role in government and military officials' decisions on the visual battlefield of the War on Terror as digital circulation allows for new types of image brokers to influence how the war gets

represented. Hence, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's comments to the House Armed Services committee, with which I began this chapter, echo Walter Benjamin's arguments on the medium in which human perception occurs and demand media theory for the twenty-first century.

Coda: Recurring Afterimages

Within ten days of Zarqawi's death, Abu Ayyup Al-Masri was presented as the man the US military believed to be Zarqawi's successor (Figure 4.8). Though he was a live threat, he was presented not digitally but as a hard-copy portrait in a frame that had been used for the briefing following Zarqawi's death.[31]

By the time of Al-Masri's death at the hands of the US military in 2010, the *New York Times* merely reprinted the same 2006 photograph with a slightly revised caption to announce the death of the "copy of Zarqawi." These visual substitutions and framings of justice draw attention to the political stakes of photography and the importance of attending to medium specificity. Photographs can serve to frame the very terms of justice, often

U.S. Portrayal Helps Flesh Out Zarqawi's Heir

Karim Kadim/Associated Press
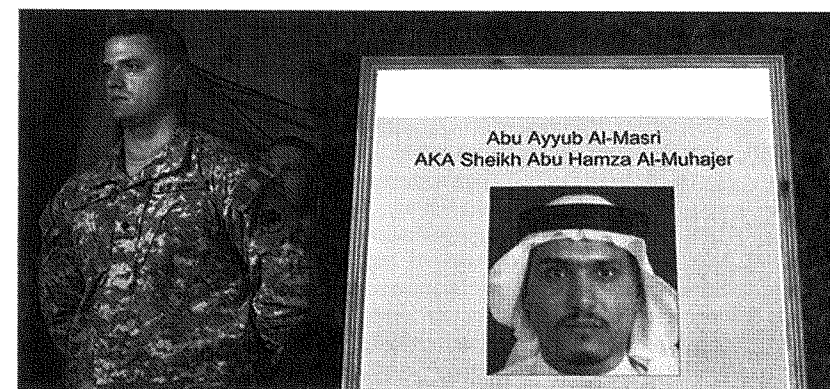
A photo of the man the American military says is the new leader of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's group in Iraq.
By DEXTER FILKINS
Published: June 16, 2006

Figure 4.8. Screenshot of the *New York Times* website showing a photograph of Zarqawi's alleged successor. This identical image was used to illustrate an article in 2006 announcing Abu Musab as the new leader of Al-Qai'da in Iraq and an article in 2010 announcing his death in a raid.
(Photograph by Karim Kadim/Associated Press.)

by determining what can be cropped out of the debate, and in a digital age visuals can accrue value simply by their decentralized circulation, regardless of their accuracy as evidence. Afterimages, then, are not just ghostly presences but are also used for real political work.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. While my research focused on noncelebrity news images, one can also speak of celebrity afterimages. See Joseph Roach's *It* for a rich discussion of afterimages of celebrities in which he argues, "Celebrities then, like kings, have two bodies: the body natural, which decays and dies, and the body cinematic, which does neither" (36). I would argue that it is precisely because their celebrity has been based on photographic presence that celebrities, after the invention of photography and especially cinema, have had such potent afterimages. Photographic images allow for those no longer alive to appear present. Early photography historians such as Tom Gunning have underscored that spirit photography was premised on the plausible belief that photography could truthfully represent an individual who was not here now.
2. For example, the notion of afterimages appears in the work of Horkheimer and Adorno alongside a view of representations as always linking the individual and the collective. For Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "Entertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism. It is sought by those who want to escape the mechanized labor process so that they can cope with it again. At the same time, however, mechanization has such power over leisure, and its happiness determines so thoroughly the fabrication of entertainment commodities that the off-duty worker can experience *nothing but afterimages of the work process itself*." (109)
3. Among one of the most prominent positions that Crary is arguing against is film theorist Jean Baudry's claim that photography and cinema are but culminations of apparatuses of power developing over centuries.

4. The carnal density of spectatorship has been discussed by film scholars grappling to explain the phenomenology of viewing images. See the work of Linda Williams, Vivian Sobchak, and Laura Marks, among others.
5. While I am limiting my investigation to noncelebrity news images, other have made arguments about the power of photographic images because of the credibility granted photography as a medium. Alongside Tom Gunning's work on spirit photography, see Linda Williams's *Film Body: An Implantation of Perversions* for why early depictions of female bodies carried great formative weight. Even if we can now look back and deconstruct Muybridge's biases in how women were imaged, at the time his motion studies carried scientific validity. And by the time that validity was questioned, a powerful visual tradition had already been established that had a weighty influence of its own independent of its accuracy.
6. See Tom Gunning's classic description of spirit photography in "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny," In *Fugitive Images From Photography To Video* edited by Patrice Petro, 42–71. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
7. For an extended argument about spectacular terrorism based on interviews with viewers immediately after the September 11, 2001, attacks, see Gürsel, Zeynep. 2003. "Spectacular Terrorism: Images on the Frontline of History." In *9-11 New York-Istanbul*, edited by Feride Çiçekoğlu, 152–193. Istanbul: Homerkitabevi.
8. For a more extensive discussion of the changing infrastructures of representation, see Gürsel, Zeynep. 2012. "The Politics of Wire Service Photography: Infrastructures of Representation in a Digital Newsroom" *American Ethnologist* 39 (1): 71–89.
9. http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2006/06/mil-060608-mnfi-b01.htm; http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2006/06/mil-060609-Department of Defense01.htm
10. http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2006/06/mil-060608-mnfi-b01.htm; http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/06/print/20060608.html
11. http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/06/print/20060608.html
12. http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2003/17300.htm
13. The accuracy of this comment has been much debated. See Mary Ann Weaver and Christopher Hitchens for two opposing views.
14. http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/photos/2003/17356.htm
15. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/graphic/2006/04/10/GR2006041000097.html
16. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/gallery/2006/06/08/GA2006060800511_index_frames.htm?startat=1
17. Interesting comparisons could be made to historical regicides that not only ushered in changes in government but were also represented in engravings that circulated widely such as those of Charles I or Louis XVI.
18. The angle of the Zarqawi photograph—putting the viewer in the position of someone looking down on the corpse—inevitably recalls, to my mind at least, an image of another corpse; however, one for whom no special military briefing was held: Manadel al-Jamadi, the Abu Ghraib detainee killed while being tortured during investigation and photographed in his body bag with an ice bag on his chest.
19. That President Obama's administration chose not to release photographs of the body of Osama Bin Laden when he was finally captured and killed in May 2011 can be read as a visual regime change.
20. For a more extensive discussion of the circulation of images of beheadings in Iraq, see Gürsel, Zeynep. 2012. "The Politics of Wire Service Photography: Infrastructures of Representation in a Digital Newsroom" *American Ethnologist* 39 (1): 71–89.

21. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5052144.stm
22. http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2006/06/mil-060609-Department of Defense01.htm
23. In fact, when the coalition forces handed sovereignty back to Iraq, this was visualized by a handout photograph of a note passed from Condoleezza Rice to President George W. Bush at a NATO Summit. Iraqi sovereignty seems to have come up most around issues of what corpses they wanted to be shown, rather than being allowed full access to cover the Saddam Hussein trial even once sovereignty had been handed over to Iraq.
24. Yet what has come to be questioned since the images were taken on Christmas day 1989 is precisely their representativeness of a sovereign Romanian social body. Many contend that the summary execution of the Ceaucescu couple without a public trial precluded deep political reform in Romania and read these very images of death as an impediment to different political outcomes for the Romanian body politic.
25. http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4992558/
26. The afterimages of the Abu Ghraib images are particularly powerful precisely because in most of them the prisoners are hooded and thus already humans without faces, stripped of any individual identity. Therefore they are instantly representative of the Iraqi social body, the violence being done to any single body is magnified as violence being inflicted on a social body. On the other hand, the faces of the perpetrators are revealed, but for their part they are men and women in uniform, a visual cue signaling their metonymic relationship to a military collective, a population that acts on behalf of a body politic. Powell's language is very telling in this respect because while he refers to the Abu Ghraib scandal as "what *we* did at the prison," he also wants to contain the violence to "actions of a few."
27. http://www.cfr.org/publication/9866/#1
28. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5058872.stm
29. http://www.cfr.org/publication/9866/#1
30. Perhaps because 9/11 produced images of so few perpetrators (or victims for that matter), visually the War on Terror has been a hunt for a ghost and on behalf of ghosts from the beginning with this initial lacuna, meaning there is an extreme eagerness to show a face of the invisible enemy.
31. The specific frame was not the one for the shot showing Zarqawi's corpse, but rather the one that had shown a photo of Zarqawi in combat gear. While it would be speculation to surmise that the choice of specific wooden frame was deliberate, it is undeniable that the presentation of the head of the threat of mass destruction posed by a group in Iraq within a physical frame was not a one-time fluke. Even if the initial framing of Zarqawi had been a spontaneous decision on the part of a military public relations office, it had clearly received sufficient praise to be repeated in the presentation of Abu Ayyup Al-Masri.

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