David Perlmutter

Hypericons

Famous News Images in the Internet-Digital-Satellite Age

Only recently in human history have visual images been transmitted instantly from the place of their creation to a global audience. This chapter explores how the characteristics of "big pictures"—images that become icons of photojournalism—are affected by their "live from ground zero" status. Taking examples from the Iraq War of the "Cargo of Flag-Draped Caskets" and the "Killing of American Civilian Contractors at Falluja" pictures, I argue that the speeded-up famous image, or hypericon, has both thwarted government attempts at controlling images and undermined some of the traditional mechanisms of icon making and shaping. Furthermore, since the news system puts such a premium on its dissemination, saturation, and then replacement, the icon itself may have lost its value as a transcendent marker of history. The hypericon may be but a blur, signifying a post-icon age to come.

The scientist, the engineer, the editor, and the cameraman are today linked in a united, and ever tireless, effort to speed the news photograph to the reader, so that when he scans the picture as he reads the accompanying story over his breakfast table, he can truthfully exclaim: "This picture age is marvelous!"

Ezickson 1938, 48

The Rise of the Hypericon

In writing of the "real-time" phenomenon of the first Gulf War, Barbie Zelizer noted, "Critical incidents are generally shaped by discourse about two features: technology and archetypal figures" (1992, 82). My goal here is to appraise the effect of the technological quality of "speed" of a communication act on archetypal pictures of news events. Specifically, I look at two recent famous news pictures and ask what the "time" element of their delivery signified for our interpretations of their meaning.

In perspective, in the pre-electronic past, people were reliant on transmitting images and words via media that could be transported only as fast as a horse or ship. The last half millennium, however, has seen a compression of the time from the moment a picture of news is "taken" to when it reaches its audience (see Table 5.1 — Picture Transmission Chronology). The advent of printing on movable type in the 1500s facilitated the mass production and distribution of identical images. The invention of photography in the 1840s allowed the "capturing" of events with a mechanical device, although it was almost fifty years before "photojournalism" was regularly practiced (Carlebach 1992), and not until the 1930s that pictures were first regularly sent "over the wire" (Coopersmith 2000). Developments accelerated from the first black-and-white halftone used in "transferring" a photo to print (1880s) to radio-wireless transmissions of data (1895), the miniature still camera (1888), roll film (1889), commercial use of Leica (single lens reflex camera) (1925), and the widespread use of color photography (1950s). By the 1960s, critics and researchers were already talking about "living-room wars" — yet news-film stock took about a day to be flown from, say, Saigon, and then to be processed to appear on the evening news or in afternoon papers. The use of video (1970s), fiber-optic glass tubing (mid-1970s), the employment of satellite transmission (1962), the commercial Internet, digital photography, and commercial cell phones (1990s) further compressed the temporal distance between the pictured event and its audience, so that now pictures of the Iraq War are available to viewers worldwide seconds after they are taken, on television or on the Internet.

Questions about the effects of the content of images have an even more ancient heritage but also a modern provenance. In Plato's "Republic," the philosopher argues that most visual artists as well as vivid poets should be banned from the ideal state because painters and poets "too easily fool the senses, confusing reality with falsehood" (Plato 1987, 595c). In turn, the gullible public will be lured into following policies not because of their rational sense, as elucidated by the philosopher-rulers, but by spurious feelings. From the Vietnam era through the mid-1990s, television was typically cited as the most influential purveyor of such powerful images. As reporter Donald Shaw wrote, "Clear, dramatic pictures are the key to both 'good television' and to the impact a given story will have on viewers" (1992, A19).

Further, it is taken as a commonplace that such images affect what governments do and what the people think about an issue. For example, in the case of the 1992 decision of outgoing President George H. W. Bush to intervene in Somalia, media critic Tom Shales asserted that "shocking and heartbreaking" television pictures of starving children in Somalia helped motivate the American response (1992, G1). Concurring, one of America's most senior statesmen, George F. Kennan (1993), cited images as the driving force behind such a policy. Typically, policy-makers are unhappy that their deliberative processes are upset by images. Secretary of State Warren Christopher complained that "television images cannot be the North Star of America's foreign policy" (Urschel 1994, 10A). Yet political leaders often monitor television to find out "what's really happening."

When presidents and pundits speak of powerful pictures, notably they typically refer not simply to the herd of the news stream (many pictures), but to the select "icons" of photojournalism, that is, the canonical "big pictures"; those that not only become famous but are ascribed to be influential on the very events they portray (Domke et al. 2002; Hariman and Lucaites 2004; Perlmutter 1998, 2004a, 2004d; Perlmutter and Wagner 2004). These are the pictures that are printed and shown often in various media,

Date	Invention	Common Use
1450	Printing – Gutenberg	Multiple copies of a document
1663–1669	Drawing machines	Projected image traced on to semi-transparent paper and viewed through a fixed eye piece
1775–1804	Wood cut illustrations	Drawing traced onto polished surface and hand engraved by several workers onto separate plates
1837	Telegraph	Transmission of electronic signals by wire. Information that once took ten days now is received at 186,000 miles per second
1839	Photography	The capture of the visual image: daguerreotype
1867	Rotary press photogravure	Enables visual images to be printed along with text
1880	B&W halftone	Reduces process of visual replication from etchings of weeks to hours. First use of halftone in newsprint paper: January 21, 1897, the New York Tribune
1889	Roll film	Allows for capturing of fast-moving visuals (modern film)
1896	Radio	Wireless transmission of electronic data (limited distances) Marconi sends a message between two post-office buildings in London
1901	Radio/telegraph	First transatlantic telegraph message sent by radio
1907	Cathode ray tube receiver	Allows for electrons of light to be received and transformed into images
1925	Fax	Transmission of electronic images through wire
1935	Regular photo-by-wire service	Wirephoto introduced by AT&T, leads to AP Wire
1939	Television	Transmission of visual image via wireless technology. NBC officially inaugurated the nation's first regular television service on April 30 by sending broadcasting to an antenna atop the Empire State Building eight miles away.(Roughly 200 television sets existed in New York at this time.)
1946	Computer	Electronic Numerical Integrator and computer at Univ. of Penn. Digital compression of data allows for faster transmission of information with then-available vacuum tube technology.
1951	Network television	Coaxial cable and microwave relays allow for greater distance of television
1956	Transatlantic cable	Speed and quantity of news flow increased between nations
1956	Videotape	Capacity for high-speed scanning of imagery and the re-recording of information; instant replay not possible before video tape
1957	Sputnik satellite	
1962	Communication Satellite- Telestar	Instant transmission of electronic data across the globe
1965	Cell phone	Low-frequency transmissions of data that individual receivers can share and relay to a central tower
1969	E-mail	The first computer-to-computer message occurred in 1969 from UCLA to Stanford where two programmers sat at each end of a computer connected by phone wire.
1960s	Internet	ARPANET Sharing data over telephone lines and satellites, direct connection and instant data two-way transmission
1960s–1970s	Mainframe and minicomputer	Replication of process of data thousands and millions at a time on magnetic tape and disc
1970s	Fiber-optic cable	Telephone copper wire replaced by fiber-optic glass tubing allowing for greater capacity of digital information transfer two ways from one point to the next
1975	Electronic news gathering camera (ENG)	Before transistors in cameras, breaking news stories were filmed and there was a delay of an hour or more while the film was being returned to the studio and developed
1982	Sony Mavica digital camera	First electronic non-film still camera
1988	Portable transmitter	Allows for format, caption, and transmission of 35mm film images directly to computer or output printers
1996	30 million Internet users and growing by 15% a month	The number of people connected to the Internet grew at an exponential rate in the mid-1990s, a phenomenon called Metcalfe's Law, unseen or heard of in any technology, media, or business.
1997	Wireless application protocol (WAP)	Allows data to be sent in a roaming network and by satellite without wire
1998	Internet telephone	Nokia launches a telephone that enables users to connect to the Internet
2002	Satellite videophone	Allows camera to plug into cell phone with signal bounce off satellite; allows live footage in real time or completely edited tape fed back to station between 5 and 30 minutes transmission time.

Table 5.1: Picture Transmission Chronology

and then enter the pantheon of great historical images. Beyond celebrity, these pictures are employed in political struggles and serve as symbols of or "summing up" events, issues, and even whole eras of history. They become familiar to a generation of viewers and can be recalled by the mere mention of their subject matter: for example, Robert Capa's *Dying Spanish Militiaman* (1936), Eddie Adams's *Saigon Street Execution* (1968), Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother* (1936), Joe Rosenthal's *Old Glory Goes Up On Mt. Suribachi* (1945), the photo by an unknown Nazi photographer of a small boy emerging from the rubble of the Warsaw ghetto (1943), Alberto Korda's *Portrait of Che Guevara* (1960), Charles Moore's *Police Dogs Attacking Black Civil Rights Marchers in Birmingham, Alabama* (1963), Bob Jackson's *Jack Ruby Shooting Lee Harvey Oswald* (1963), John Paul Filo's *Girl Screaming over a Dead Body at Kent State* (1970), Huynh Cong Ut's *Naked Little Girl and Other Children Fleeing Napalm Strike* (1972), and *Man Standing Against the Tanks at Tiananmen* (various photographers). "The Fall of Saddam's Statue," "Abu Ghraib Prisoner Abuse," and "Cargo of Caskets" are more recent candidates for iconicity.

However, researchers tend to (or should) be somewhat skeptical about the "powerful" effects model for news icons. For example, Howard Bossen (1982) found that the widely held opinion that William Henry Jackson's magnificent western landscape photographs helped pass the protective Yellowstone Act of 1872 was plainly false, since the Jackson photos postdate the legislation. Studies in the anatomy of icons affirm that, while certifiably icons in their popularity and ubiquity, these images often have effects more complicated than generally surmised (Perlmutter 1998; Perlmutter and Wagner 2004). Often, in many famous cases, the ritual formula that develops is that a picture "drove" some big event, such as from war to an election, but the data to support this contention are a *fata morgana*, receding when one gets closer to the facts. In my study of the *Saigon Street Execution* image from Tet, 1968, for example, I found hundreds of assertions, coming from politicians, generals, and protesters, that this was "the picture that ended the war," but the public opinion data and the historical sequence of events simply did not support the hyperbole. It may be in fact that the most powerful effect of pictures is the generally held belief that they are powerful.

In response, I have suggested that visual icons be divided into two species. First, there are the singular, acute, or "discrete" icons, those images that we recognize as single famous "shots" taken at one time and place in relation to one event (such as *Girl Screaming over a Dead Body at Kent State*). Second, there are the chronic or "generic" icons that describe many images across time and space and events. The "starving child of Africa" is such a commonplace—a veritable visual cliché repeated over the last century in many African conflicts and disasters.[1]

We may further circumscribe the elements of the news icon into Celebrity (the degree of fame of the image as signaled by its winning awards such as the Pulitzer Prize or its citation in works such as this present study), Prominence (the relative status of its placement in media such as, for example, "above the fold" on the front page of the newspaper or as the lead-in of a newscast), Frequency (how often over time the image appears and reappears), Profit (how much money the picture earns in rights and sales), Transposability (how often and widely the picture is transposed into other media—for example, a photo appears on a T-shirt, or is morphed onto an editorial cartoon, or inspires a fiction film), Fame of Subjects (the notoriety of the people in the image), Importance of Events (the notoriety of the events of the image's provenance), Metonymy

(that the image is used to symbolize or stand for greater events and even eras), Primordiality and/or Cultural Resonance (the image seems to tie into greater or older cultural allusions: for example, *Man Against the Tanks at Tiananmen* is likened to Horatius at the bridge or David vs. Goliath); Striking Composition (the image seems to suspend dramatic events into what Cartier-Bresson called the "decisive moment," where "the subject and the compositional elements form a union" (Lester 1991, 7), and what Henry Grossman dubbed "revealing juxtapositions" (quoted in Clarke 1981, 28); and Emotionality (the ability to draw emotional reactions from viewers). Then, icons often are said to be powerful politically, driving public opinion, policy-making, even events themselves.

A final quality of icons is one that the modern technology has made possible: speed. Icons of yesteryear could certainly attain fame quickly: Benjamin West's *Death of General Wolfe* and Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, for instance, were popular and profitable from their first showing. But, in contrast, Umberto Eco spoke of the "hyper reality" of the modern world: everything is faster, from food to our media. Elsewhere I have written that while we often accuse media representations of being unreal, or false, actually they are "inreal"—intensified versions of reality (Perlmutter 2000). For example, most television police officers engage in weekly violence, from car chases to shoot-outs. Many real-world police take part in the same activities, but at a much lower rate. Indeed, as Derek Bouse found, even the "documentary" wildlife film, in order to create drama and action, compresses activities of months into minutes so as to make the animals' lives televisually dramatic (2000).

Here, taking examples from the Iraq War and insurgency, I will argue that the famous news picture is now a sort of *hypericon*—instantly available, globally disseminated via the Web, and, perhaps, also fleeting in public consciousness. I will speculate on how we can assess the effects of this novel phenomenon. Does the speeded-up pace of the modern news picture affect how we appreciate it? Are today's icons affected by their quality of instantaneousness or being actually or virtually "live from ground zero"? What happens when icons are not subject to the filtration mechanism of the old news media? Speaking to Walter Benjamin's argument that the "work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" has lost its status of uniqueness, can we think of "time" (and its compression) as one aspect of this erosion of the icon?

The Cargo of Caskets

Among the most common generic visual icons of war, both in news and in fictional portrayal, is the warrior's funeral. Some warriors are, of course, more famous than others and their rites of death were, in ages past, stock imagery. For example, the funerals of Patrocles, Hector, and Achilles were ubiquitous on ancient Greek pottery. In the case of the Greeks and Romans, the funeral scene typically comprised the body either being carried to a tower of immolation or on the pyre itself. In other cultures, the setting may be more stark. In Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954), after the final battle, the graves of the four fallen Ronin heroes are featured. They are marked by a quartet of swords plunged into a large pile of earth, crested by the war banner of the seven samurai. Of course, grand funeral proceedings and imposing monuments are part of many other traditions, occidental and oriental (Coombs 1983). But in the American iconology of war, the soldier's funeral tends to have certain distinct visual features: the casket draped by the American flag is almost always the centerpiece of the frame. The coffin may be in the

foreground at the Arlington National Cemetery (Perlmutter 1998, 127 and 153), or being transported off a cargo plane.

The Iraq War photograph of the American soldiers' flag-covered caskets combined a receptacle as well as a symbol of death with the premier symbol of the nation. The picture and its elements are not naturally "anti-war" or "pro-war" but rather are filtered through the minds of the beholders. For example, an anti-war activist, opposed to the Iraq War whether out of pacifism or in antagonism to this particular conflict, could take such an image as indicative of the war's costs—the pointless deaths of America's valiant men and women. A supporter of the war may agree on the tragedy of the loss but see the flag-draped casket as a measure of sacrifice for the cause of defeating terrorism. The more personally involved observer will, of course, be aware of the body inside the box. Recently, a New Jersey mother of a serviceman killed in Iraq became instantly famous when she confronted First Lady Laura Bush at a campaign rally (Hedges 2004). Interviewed later by the *New York Times*, she lamented that she felt the body of her son had not been respected because, as an observant Jew, she had "asked that her son not be embalmed or undergo an autopsy," but the Army had conducted both procedures anyway.

During the Iraq War, the flag-covered caskets became controversial for another reason: whether to show them at all, since they were subject to military censorship. Notably, the first breaking of this ban was a case study in the hypericon. The narrative of the events is straightforward (see Table 5.2—Timeline of Cargo of Coffins Story). On April 7, 2004, Tami Silicio, of Edmonds, Washington, was working for Maytag Aircraft company in Kuwait. Among her duties was to assist in the loading of caskets of American servicemen killed in the Iraq War onto the company's transport planes (Kugiya 2004). The planes would then fly the caskets to Germany and then to the United States, or directly to the United States Dover Air Force base. Ms. Silicio was helping to load a 747 jumbo jet transport bound for Germany. Using a pocket digital camera, she took several photos of the casket-packed bay of the plane. She then sent the pictures, as an e-mail attachment, to a friend in Seattle. She later told reporters, "The photograph was supposed to show the respect. It was supposed to be a comfort" (Buncombe 2004). That much can be read in the picture, at least by this observer. When asked by a newspaper to write about my aesthetic judgment of the image I responded,

> The photographer in me acknowledges the fearful symmetry of the rectangular flags over the caskets. They look like railroad tracks receding into the horizon. Then, the blurred attendants are bent over, as if they offer reverence to the honored dead, although they may simply be adjusting straps or securing hinges. Finally, there is the anonymity of the mass, packed economically ... (2004c).

These are images connoting veneration as well as a documentation of process, anti-war and pro-war considerations are imposed by the viewers.

But the picture did not remain in the private sphere. Ms. Silicio's friend provided the picture to the *Seattle Times*, which ran it and then put the photographer quickly in touch with a photo agency (Haldane 2004). The picture was picked up by print and electronic publications worldwide—"The Shot Seen Around The World," proclaimed London's *Independent* (Buncombe 2004). Meanwhile, Silicio and her husband were fired because, according to their employer, they "violated Department of Defense and company policies by working together" to take and pass on the images (*Los Angeles Times*, 2004). That policy had been formulated by the administration of former U.S. President George Bush senior. In 1996, media outlets lost an appeal for a lift on a ban on pictures (JB Pictures Inc. v. U.S. Department of Defense, 1996). But the policy had not been enforced until

Date	Event
January 1991	President Bush prohibits photos of coffins at Dover for Gulf War
1996	Media outlets lose appeal for lift of ban on pictures
November 2000	Military-wide ban against photographing coffins; prohibits families of killed from attending arrival of coffins
March 2003	Pentagon reiterates "no photograph" policy of deceased military personnel through Dover
April 7, 2004	Tami Silicio takes picture of coffins in cargo bay of plane at Kuwait headed for Dover
April 18, 2004	Seattle Times publishes coffin photo
April 21, 2004	Silicio is fired from Maytag Aircraft
May, 2004	Russ Kick of memoryhole.org receives and posts 288 photos of soldiers' coffins from the Air Force, including 73 of the Columbia astronauts killed. Print and electronic media apologize for publication of miscaptioned pictures.

Table 5.2: Timeline of Cargo of Coffins Story

November 2000, when the military enacted a ban against photographing caskets or the arrival of caskets. In April 2003, the Pentagon reiterated the "no photograph" policy of deceased military personnel through Dover (cf. Perlmutter 2004b). At one point, even the families of soldiers killed in war were not allowed to be at Dover when the caskets arrived, but that policy was revised on May 26, 2004, to ban only the taking of photographs (Penrod 2004). To add to the seeming contradictions, the DoD had allowed the dissemination of some pictures of flag-draped caskets from the Afghanistan war and others of bodies uncovered by American soldiers of enemies and civilians after battles in Iraq.

The publication of Silicio's picture unleashed a storm of controversy. The President, however, announced that he had been "moved" by the casket photos. Editorial opinion, not surprisingly, was strongly for a loosening or removal of the ban. A national poll asking, "Should the public be allowed to see pictures of the caskets arriving in the United States?" found 62% in favor, 27% opposed.

The story was complicated when many other flag-covered casket pictures began to appear in mainstream media, most sourced to memoryhole.org, a private website whose founder, Russ Kick, seeks out restricted information. In this case, Kick had filed a Freedom of Information request to get access to such photos from the U.S. Department of Defense. The DoD provided more than 300 pictures taken by military personnel but later announced that they had been released in error. Confusion ensued when NASA announced that some of the pictures were in fact the dead from the Columbia Space Shuttle. (Bloggers noted that NASA administrators are visible in a number of the photos (Cowing 2004).) In the end, the DoD maintained their policy on banning flag-casket photos and does so to the time of this writing (Kirschbaum 2004).

I argue that the flag-draped casket case challenges our traditional view of the icon in several ways, or rather creates complications and contradictions with the norms of "big pictures" and their outcomes. Of initial interest is the genesis of the photo. That an icon can be produced by an amateur, not even a hobbyist photographer, is not unusual. The Screaming Woman at Kent State and the Oklahoma Firefighter Carrying a Baby were both icons taken by ordinary people who happened to have a camera at the scene of an extraordinary event (although in the former case the photographer worked in the student photography lab of the university campus). Generally, however, the amateur has had to approach a media organization physically—that is, go to a nearby television station or

newspaper office to offer the photo.

Now, cheap digital cameras and e-mail attachments allow anyone to electronically mail a picture to any news outlet in the world. No longer must the photographer find a contact within the news industry. And if rejected by a "local" outlet, the amateur could try thousands of media outlets with websites. Note here how industry and fringe conflate: Once the picture is bought by an "acceptable" news outlet, then it can be distributed by traditional means over the "wire" (actually industrial computer networks and services like AP Photostream). Silicio's flag-casket photo, as stated, was e-mailed to a friend who in turn e-mailed it to a *Seattle Times* editor. Only *after* the paper printed the picture and then referred Silicio to a photo-rights agency did the image achieve wide distribution. In short, it was not exactly the case of an amateur creating her own venue for the image. Nor was the speed of delivery greater than what would have resulted from a professional photographer's production, in fact, it was a slower process from the taking of the picture to its appearance in print.

One element of hypericonicity, thus, is that the delivery of a news picture to a global audience is not yet at the point where we can determine contact to be direct between picture-maker and picture-viewing public on a wide scale. Certainly, a terrorist group can put a picture of some atrocity on the Web, but typically only after a widely recognized website publicizes the pictures (reposting them) and blogs provide the site's location can even the more technology savvy (and morbidly inclined) public actually see them. In fact, I have noted that by the time such images have been openly announced (and denounced), the Web links in question are down. In short, the mainstream media still play an important channeling, directing, and amplification role in the icon's rise to greatness; indeed, it is the speed of their transport systems that allows large audiences to take note of such icons.

But speed has another connotation here. Meyerowitz, in his book *No Sense of Place*, argued that mass-media events create a virtual public arena (or agora) where the public has less and less of a "sense of place" (1985, 145–147). Other writers have also asserted that improved communications technology can lessen locality, that is, suppress community ties driven by geographic propinquity (Kern 1983). Undoubtedly, we live in a society where we may be more in touch with the avatars of our comrades-in-arms in the online game Everquest (500,000 players nightly) whom we have never met face-to-face than our own next-door neighbors. The icon, however, still performs its function as a gathering place for eyeballs—and we can all talk about it with virtual as well as physical friends. It does so because in becoming an icon it tends to cross media boundaries (Internet, print, broadcast and cable television) and thus is available for any and all possible audiences. In this projection, we retain our sense of place of where we are and contrast it to where the "event" occurs, but at the same time share the act of making that contrast with others.

Control is another issue here. The history of war is also the history of warlords controlling its pictorial portrayal (Perlmutter 1999). Today, the traditional methods of censoring images seem to be stymied by technology. We are told that, for example, President George W. Bush "chastised his defense secretary, Donald H. Rumsfeld's, handling of a scandal over the American abuse of Iraqis" at Abu Ghraib prison; notably, no mention is made of the *events*, but rather the President was upset over "Mr. Rumsfeld's failure to tell Mr. Bush about *photographs* [emphasis mine] of the abuse, which have enraged the Arab world" (Bumiller and Stevenson 2004). A White House official was quoted as saying, "The president was not satisfied or happy about the way he was informed about the

pictures" (Bumiller and Stevenson 2004). Unsurprisingly, in later testimony to Congress, Rumsfeld specifically cited the uncontainable nature of digital photographs: "We're functioning with peacetime constraints, with legal requirements, in a wartime situation in the Information Age, where people are running around with digital cameras and taking these unbelievable photographs and then passing them off, against the law, to the media, to our surprise" (Plummer 2004). In sum, the "cargo of caskets" picture's genesis, provenance, and short-term outcome suggest that the news icon has altered to a degree from its traditional scope.

The Falluja Lynching

On March 31, 2004, Iraqi terrorists killed four American civilian contractors who were driving through the city of Falluja, Iraq. A mob of civilians quickly converged on the area and attacked the bodies with sticks, stones, even shoes. Many, including children, danced and chanted anti-American and pro-insurgent slogans. Some of the crowd hung two of the corpses from a nearby bridge that spans the Euphrates river. A number of local stringers and photographers arrived at the scene very soon after the initial attack. Within hours, photos and video of the event began appearing in print, on television, and on the Internet. As shown by a survey of major print publications, the pictures did not conflate around a single "defining icon" but rather displayed a range of shots showing a sequences of events, from Karim Sahib/Getty Images' *Iraqis Cheering with Burning SUV* to an AP photo of *Contractors Hanging on Bridge with Celebrating Iraqis in Foreground* to another Getty image, *Single Boy with "Falluja is the Cemetery of Americans" Sign in Front of Burning SUV* (Perlmutter and Major 2004). In addition, many news organizations chose not to show the pictures, edited them, or warned their audience as to the graphic nature of the content. The *Dallas Morning News*, for example, explained, "We didn't think it was appropriate to show bodies on Page One." Peter Jennings, during his newscast, introduced the images by cautioning, "Let us tell you in advance some of the pictures are pretty repugnant but they are the reality of war."

Like many icons, the Falluja photos exist in a public space that is linked with previous icons. The elements of jeering mob, desecrated bodies of Americans, and the proscenium of a Third World cityscape all reminded many observers of the icons of the American servicemen's bodies dragged through the streets of Mogadishu in Somalia in 1993 (Perlmutter 1998, 127–175). One commentator called it nearly a "Mogadishu moment" (Dyer 2004). On the other hand, a difference between the two events was that the Somalia images were unanticipated—that is, there were relatively few "bad pictures" coming out of Somalia before the Mogadishu disaster. In contrast, such pictures of carnage and at least the captioned knowledge that Americans were dying were coming from Iraq every day (Perlmutter 2004d).

For our purposes, however, the images raise further issues about the state of the icon in the era of new media technology. First, the pictures arrived quickly from on-site to satellite transmission. As the various modes of final presentation to the public showed, this rapidity posed a problem for editors. They needed to make, almost instantly, the gatekeeping and framing choices under their sovereignty. The print organizations, unlike in previous eras, had no more time for deliberation than their electronic peers. One newspaper editor I spoke to about her decision-making process remarked, "It's no longer the case that I have five hours until the presses roll. The pressure is high to get the scoop on the website first, as well." (The same is true even for weekly newsmagazines. The *Time*

magazine website posted pictures from the killings at about the same time as they began to appear on CNN.) So we can assume that the speed of delivery has not only compressed what used to be called the "news cycle" (for journalists as well as policy-makers) but fractured the process that once had set up time-oriented markers and deadlines. Certainly, for 24-hour cable news, every minute is a deadline, but we can project that this is increasingly the case with newspapers and even magazines as well.

The notion of speed of transmission, for the Falluja icons, implies yet another consideration. In the race for novelty, replacement rates of Web content are high (Perlmutter 2004a). There is no stable "page," rather, the website is updated frequently, in part or as a whole. We who study icons often assume that their longevity and their frequency of publication are linked: famous pictures are reprinted often, which in turn makes them even more famous. But what happens when the news-stream crowds out the old content with increasing rapidity?

In the summer of 2004, I asked two classes of some 200 mass communication undergraduates about their knowledge of the provenance of various past and contemporary icons, from the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima to several of the Falluja images. No more than 10% of the students recalled that the latter were pictures taken in Falluja, although most assumed they were from the Iraq War, roughly the same number recalled that the victims were "contractors." In short, the picture is vaguely familiar only because it looks like many generic images of carnage coming out of a war that packs our front pages and television screens with similar images daily. The images were icons for a few weeks, now they are footnotes for the visual researcher to study. I argue that "replacement rate" must be a factor here: so many similarly striking images are flooding out of Iraq that, unless we are students of such images, few have distinctive narrative or visual elements that make us recall them for longer than a news cycle.

Here we have an interesting fusion with research on how we remember events. Psychologists have studied the phenomenon of "flashbulb memory," that is, memory of particular scenes or events experienced physically or through media and important to an individual or group (Sierra and Berrios 1999). Past findings distinguish between event memory (of news about the event) and autobiographical memory (of news of one's own actions in relationship to the event) for any happening (Smith, Bibi, and Sheard 2001). There is a winnowing effect, in that memories of events coalesce into a set of selected details and images that come to define the event (Winningham, Hyman, and Dinnel 2000). These are not, notably, hard indelible engravings on the mind—they are subject to the biases of any other form of recollection and eyewitness testimony (Wright 1993). When masses of people view signature events, most often via media, they form a "collective historical memory" that is later interpolated via "the publicly presented past," in print media and television and film as well as more formally in "speeches and sermons, editorials and school textbooks, museum exhibitions, historic sites, and widely noticed historical art, ranging from oil paintings to public sculpture and commemorative monuments" (Kammen, cited in Laderman 2002). Finally, people tend to recall most strongly those events that occurred in the formative years of early adulthood; icons are often generation entities (Schuman, Belli, and Bischoping 1997).

A key factor in remembering an event via a photo-icon is how often that icon reappears and is publicly defined as the icon that symbolizes the event. Here replacement rate is even more important, since the hypericon does not have time to establish itself through long-term repetition because other quasi-icons replace it quickly. That said, we

must admit that this point is for future reference rather than present-day conclusion. In defining mental imagery, one researcher cautioned, "Another reason is that [mental images] are notoriously elusive—they can appear at one moment and quickly fade the next" (Finke 1989, 1). That fading, or blurring, is worth the attention of the visual researcher trying to understand the place of the news icon in our hyper-mediated world. For now, we can only say that images like the Falluja photos, which at the moment seem to be icons, may be crowded out of the immediate news stream. Indeed, as of this writing, in early December of 2004, my students are now primed by the word "Falluja" to call up a whole new set of icons from the recapture of the city from insurgents. The future months or years may bring a whole new set of pictures to attach to the name of the city.

The Falluja images raise a final question: Are they, as many contend, really shocking? Almost the entire slate of commentary on the images in the popular press noted this as one of their signature qualities. Indeed, when I was interviewed by almost a dozen journalists in response to the pictures, each began with some variation of a query on the shock value of the pictures' content. By "shock," the interviewers were referring to a reaction to several dimensions and degrees of grisliness: human beings killed in a terrible manner (burned to death), their bodies desecrated (beaten, hung), and civilians (especially children) jeering at the corpses. A political component was that, after all, these were the people that Americans had liberated from Saddam Hussein. Are their ferocity and subsequent elation not disturbing to us as Americans and as human beings? Does the speed of the pictures' arrival contribute anything to our sense of being shocked—a suddenness of impact?

A problem with such a direction of observation is that it fails to account for the relative value of human life as held by most humans. It surprises students, for example, that images that they think contain *objectively* shocking or "terrible" content were not viewed as such or through such a frame by the creators of the slaughter as well as the pictures. Two notorious historical examples suffice to elucidate this point. Most Holocaust pictures, displayed today as illustrations of the horrors of Nazi atrocities, were in fact taken by Nazis as trophy photos, souvenir snaps, or bureaucratic records: same pictures, different meanings. As well, we should recall that the many images of lynchings of African-Americans in the pre–Civil Rights era were taken by members of white lynch mobs. The images, appalling to our modern eye, were even employed as subjects for "scenic" postcards mailed to friends and family (Ginzburg 2000). Likewise the Falluja images, where reactions in the Arab world reportedly ranged from indifference to approval that the people of Iraq were striking back against their occupiers (Abdallah 2004; Khorshid 2004; Fandy 2004). In sum, shock and outrage, like any human reaction to any image, is in the mind of the beholder.

Conclusions: The Post-Icon Age?

A yet unwritten history of the "big picture," or news icon, might claim that it is a product of modern technology and mass psychology. Printing, then photography and the "wire," radio-transmission, followed by satellites and the Internet and e-mail, now allow any image to be distributed to anyone in her home with a brief (the speed of light!) delay from the time of the creation of the image. A fundamental question of icons is, Are they born or made? It is clear in many cases that there is "viral consensus" between photo editors, commentators, elites, and others that a picture has some sort of status beyond that of its millions of peers in the news stream. Perhaps that quality is aesthetic, or metonymic,

or possessing of a potential power to shape events in and of itself. Yet, at the same time, anyone who has sat at a monitor viewing AP Photostream software will note that many pictures are "great"—have all the qualities of amazing images—but they achieve no notoriety and now sit forgotten in archives or even have been erased for want of a buyer. Icons are partly born great, but mostly they have greatness thrust upon them. Visual researchers play a role in that process.

The news icon we know of depends on the maintenance of the elaborate system of newsgathering, gate-keeping, and dissemination that persists to this day. But cracks and contradictions are evident. The "handoff" of a picture from a reporter on the scene to a news page is no longer a predictable linear progression. Amateurs, outsiders, even antagonists to the news industry are becoming increasingly involved; some icons come from them. Consider the old ethical scenario once presented in journalism classes: Terrorists demand that their statement be read on television or they will kill a hostage: should the statement be broadcast? Today, the fanatics kill the hostage and upload the streaming video to their website, knowing the act will prompt media attention as effectively as the threat. In addition, a picture, once made, is no longer a controllable entity—by copyright or by holding it up to some nonexistent "negative." It is malleable, a *tabula rasa* for Photoshop, but also for anyone to make any point.

On the other hand, the "system" of news is still robust: the revolution is not yet here, or rather news elites are working very hard to co-opt it. No picture, for example, has become an "icon" in the traditional definition without at least in some manner going through the traditional process. The fact is that no homemade blog attracts as big an audience as MSNBC unless MSNBC tells us to look at it. Only when mainstream news picks up a picture does it get the mass circulation that makes it big news. We have yet to see an example of a "pure play" Internet icon.

But here is a problem for studying news icons: Our definition becomes tautological. If I say that a picture is not an icon because it has not attracted a mass audience, then are we insisting that there is only one class of icons, in terms of their reach? We live in a realm of niche marketing and audience segmentation (Turow 1997). A television show that would have been cancelled because of its low ratings in the 1960s now is classified a "hit" because its audience consists of thousands of teenage girls who can be lucratively sold to advertisers of acne medication, blue jeans, and Britney Spears CDs. So should we change our standard for an icon to that of inhabitants of such niches—icons for certain audiences for which no crossover can or should be possible? Further, the speed of the arrival of an icon puts a premium on its finding an audience quickly. This is the case with modern network programs that are cancelled in weeks if they do not "find an audience" as opposed to the many months allowed during the old "mass" audience era.

To conclude, speed, as I have said, implies an ephemeral quality. Icons blur past us, raising quivers of interest, then being replaced by an hourly Web page update to other pictures, more or less sensational. Again, I retain skepticism that we exist in a post-icon age. Yes, the era of the "big picture" seems ever more chaotic, unprogrammed, and jump-started, but icons will endure because the world desires them and even needs them. News icons have been, are, and will continue to be among the few objects that a world audience can share, if briefly, despite divergent interpretations. What is certainly the case, however, is that we are more aware than ever (or should be) that other people may not share our meanings for any picture. For example, we know more about what various groups in the Arab world think when considering an icon, and on a basic level what they

consider to be an icon, than was possible in a previous era. We can even share such cross-meanings instantly. But simple awareness, however useful, is hardly empathic understanding. We can share raw data, but can we share pain? The signal importance of icons in news and events has not been eclipsed, but new technology continues to force us to pose fundamental questions about their function in society.

NOTES

1 For discussions of the early use of icons and visual clichés in advertising, see Marchand 1985, 235-(84.

REFERENCES

Abdallah, S. 2004. Review of the Arab press. *United Press International Wire*. April 7, 2004. http://washingtontimes.com/upi-breaking/20040407–075123–6388r.htm.

Bossen, H. 1982. A tall tale retold: The influence of photographs of William Henry Jackson upon the passage of the Yellowstone Act of 1872. *Studies in Visual Communication*. 8 (1):8–109.

Bouse, D. 2000. *Wildlife films*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bumiller, E., and R. Stevenson. 2004. Rumsfeld chastised by President for his handling of Iraq scandal. *The New York Times*, May 6, 2004.

Buncombe, A. 2004. The shot seen around the world; When Tami Silicio saw the caskets of U.S. servicemen. *The Independent*, May 6, 2004.

Carlebach, M. L. 1992. *The origins of photojournalism in America*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Clarke, G. 1981. Freezing moments in history. *Time*, December 28, 1981.

Coombs, R. B. 1983. *Before endeavors fade*. London: Battle of Britain International.

Coopersmith, J. 2000. From lemons to lemonade: The development of AP wirephoto. *American Journalism* 17 (4):55–72.

Cowing, K. 2004. DOD Misidentifies Photos of Columbia Crew Remains Arriving at Dover AFB as Being Iraq War Dead. April 23, 2004. http://www.spaceref.com/news/.

Domke, D., Perlmutter, D. D., and M. Spratt. 2002. The primes of our times? An examination of the "power" of visual images. *Journalism* 3 (2):131–159.

Dyer, G. 2004. Editorial. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 4, 2004.

Ezickson, A. J. 1938. *Get that picture! The story of the news cameraman*. New York: National Library Press.

Fandy, M. 2004. Where's the Arab media's sense of outrage? *The Washington Post*, July 4, 2004.

Finke, R. A. 1989. *Principles of mental imagery*. Cambridge & London: The MIT Press.

Ginzburg, R. 2000. 100 years of lynchings. *Without sanctuary: Lynching photography in America*. Edited by J. Allen, A. Hilton, J. Lewis, and L. Litwack. Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms.

Haldane, D. 2004. O.C. agency is at heart of casket photo debate; Zuma Press of Laguna Beach distributes the picture, and hears comments pro and con. *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 2004.

Hariman R. and J. L. Lucaites 2004. Ritualizing modernity's gamble: The iconic photographs of the Hindenburg and Challenger explosions. *Visual Communication Quarterly* 11 (1 and 2): 4–17.

Hedges, C. 2004. Mourning the warrior and questioning the war. *New York Times*, September 22, 2004.

JB Pictures Inc. v. U.S. Department of Defense 86 F.3d 236 (D.C. Cir. 1996).

Kennan, G. 1993. Somalia, through a glass darkly. *New York Times*, September 30, 1993.

Kern, S. 1983. *The culture of time and space, 1880–1918*. Cambridge: Harvard University.

Khorshid, S. 2004. Pacify Falluja. *Islam Online*, November 4, 2004. http://www.islamonline.net/English/Views/2004/04/article02.shtml.

Kirschbaum, E. 2004. Military affirms TV cover ban on Iraq caskets. *The Independent*, April 26, 2004.

Kugiya, H. 2004. Lives altered by photo of coffins. *Newsday*, August 8, 2004.

Laderman, S. 2002. Shaping memory of the past: Discourse in travel guidebooks for Vietnam. *Mass Communication & Society* 5 (1):1520–5436.

Lester, P. 1991. *Photojournalism: An ethical approach*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Los Angeles Times. 2004. Correction Appended Home Edition, Foreign Desk. April 23, 2004.

Marchand, R. 1985. *Advertising the American dream: Making way for modernity, 1920?1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Meyerowitz, J. 1985. *No sense of place: The impact of electronic media on social behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Penrod, G. 2004. Letting loose the image of war. *The News Media and the Law* Summer: 7–9.

Perlmutter, D. D. 1998. *Photojournalism and foreign policy: Framing icons of outrage in international crises*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Perlmutter, D. D. 1999. *Visions of war: Picturing warfare from the stone age to the cyberage*. New York, NY: St. Martin's.

Perlmutter, D. D. 2000. *Policing the media: Street cops and public perceptions of law enforcement*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Perlmutter, D. D. 2004a. The Internet: Big pictures and interactors. In *Image Ethics in the Digital Age*, 2nd ed., edited by L. Gross, J. S. Katz, and J. Ruby. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Perlmutter, D. D. 2004b. U.S. can't block coffin photos. *Newsday*, April 27, 2004:A37, A39.

Perlmutter, D. D. 2004c. Indelible images of caskets. *Indianapolis Star*, April 28, 2004.

Perlmutter, D. D. 2004d. Photojournalism and foreign affairs. *Orbis*, Winter, 49:1.

Perlmutter, D. D., and L. Hatley-Major. 2004. Images of horror from Falluja. *Nieman Reports* 58 (2):68–70.

Perlmutter, D. D., and G. L. Wagner. 2004. The anatomy of a photojournalistic icon: Marginalization of dissent in the selection and framing of a death in Genoa. *Visual Communication* 3(1):91–108.

Plato. 1987. *Republic, Part X, 595c, 2nd ed.*, translated by D. Lee. London: Penguin.

Plummer, R. 2004. U.S. powerless to halt Iraq net images. *BBC News Online*, May 8, 2004. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3695897.stm.

Schuman, H., R. F. Belli, and K. Bischoping. 1997. The generational basis of historical knowledge. In *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives*, edited by J. W. Pennebaker, D. Paez, and R. Rimé. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Shales, T. 1992. Television: On the tube, talk, talk, yak, yak: The new age of blah. *Washington Post*, December 27, 1992.

Shaw, D. 1992. News often has to be seen before it is heard. *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 1992.

Sierra, M., and G. E. Berrios. 1999. Flashbulb memories and other repetitive images: A psychiatric perspective. *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 40(Mar–Apr):115–125.

Smith, M.C., Bibi, U., and D.E. Sheard. 2003. Evidence for the differential impact of time and emotion on personal event memories for September 11, 2001. *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 17(9): 1047–1055.

Turow, J. 1997. *Breaking up America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Urschel, J. 1994. Caution: Don't base policy on emotions. *USA Today*, February 10, 1994.

Winningham, R.G., Hyman, I.E., and D.L. Dinnell. 2000. Flashbulb memories? The effects of when the initial memory was obtained. *Memory* 8(4): 209–216.

Wright, D. B. 1993. Recall of the Hillsborough disaster over time — Systematic biases of flashbulb memories. *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 7 (2):129–138.

Zelizer, B. 1992. CNN, the Gulf War, and journalistic practice. *Journal of Communication* 42(1):66–81.