

Global Views Inc.

Visualizing Politics, from Shock and Awe to the Fall of Saddam Hussein

What does it take to find the perfect shot?
Millions of images,
Hundreds of photographers
Global editors
And a partnership with the QRS photo agency
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Even before the war in Iraq began in March 2003, many anticipated that this was going to be the most photographed war in history. This belief persisted despite the general sentiment in US media that this would be a very short-lived war. Eventually the use of digital cameras by both photographers and troops themselves, as well as the continuation of the war for almost a decade,¹ became the reasons most commonly given for why there were so many photographs of the Iraq war. But in 2003, this perception had to do with an announcement by the US Department of Defense that about eight hundred journalists would be given slots alongside specific units and would remain “embedded” with those units and allowed “minimally restrictive” access for as long as they wished.²

A few weeks before the war started, I received minimally restrictive access for as long as I wished to the work of the news and editorial team at Global Views Inc. (GVI), one of the world’s largest visual content providers.³ In a newsroom abuzz with phone calls, emails, and instant messages (IMs), I sat on a stool amid the group of open cubicles that formed GVI’s news and editorial team and wheeled from desk to desk. I attended daily meetings, met with the group’s bosses regularly, and

followed the work of producing, editing, and selling photographs. I read the official letters written by Paul, an editor whose job mostly became communicating with military personnel and other officials to try to get photographers access. As an anthropologist in a corporate setting, I learned not just from observing, but also by accompanying one of the key players when he went out for frequent cigarette breaks, listening to one side of phone conversations as well as conversations held on speakerphone, participating in conversations among team members, and reading emails or IMs that were shared with me or commented on as images “moved” from photographers’ cameras to editors’ screens, were captioned and color-corrected, and then got “pushed” out to potential clients. I followed people at various levels of authority in the newsroom, in the imaging lab, on the sales floor, and at other photography-related work areas. In other words, I attached myself to the news and editorial team at GVI at about the same time that embedded reporters and photographers attached themselves to various military units. While the US Department of Defense was pitching embed positions as windows onto the front line, from which journalists could send back accounts of the war that was about to start, I watched the work that went into producing photographic accounts of the war for journalism outlets. My work included observing editors arrange and maintain embed positions for photographers, observing them edit images submitted by both unilateral and embedded photographers, and observing the range of activities involved in circulating these images and getting them published.

Although I spent many months at GVI, and continued to visit and talk to the image brokers featured below long after I left, this chapter focuses on GVI’s news and editorial division as it prepared to cover the Iraq war. I begin two weeks before the initial bombing of Baghdad, the “Shock and Awe” campaign, through to the fall of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Firdos Square on April 9, 2003. Endings and beginnings are critical moments for thinking through visualizing politics. The coverage of these two moments highlights how the war was packaged as an event despite the anticipated end date receding further and further into the future. Shock and Awe was a spectacular beginning, and the toppling of Saddam’s statue was the first spectacle that was visually interpreted as some kind of ending, though of course the war lasted much longer and got much messier than many had initially imagined.⁴ In other words, both events were visually recognizable as political turning points. This chapter moves between image brokers and government officials as they

comment on the politics of how events are visualized. From the beginning of the war in Iraq, the demand for politics to be visualized meant that visuals also drove politics. By embedding the reader among GVI's news and editorial team, I hope to make visible the daily practices of image brokers in a war of images.

Hindsight, as the saying goes, is twenty-twenty, especially when analyzing always future-oriented news cycles. For it is only in hindsight that it is possible to render visible the practices of anticipation that shaped much of the image brokers' work and were particularly heightened in this case, when a war had been predetermined.⁵ The looming Iraq war and how to image it best were only the most spectacular and urgent of many futures being managed by those on GVI's news and editorial team. Along with decisions about which future events would need to be covered and how likely they were to actually occur, there was a daily need to manage relationships with photographers and editors at publications, with an eye to future collaborations. The stakes were particularly high for GVI, a visual content provider who had bought up several small news-focused photo agencies and was still grappling with being a newcomer to photojournalism. News images were a fraction of GVI's revenues but very important for GVI's standing in the world of photography and journalism at large. Covering Iraq was an opportunity for GVI to improve its reputation in various circles—among photographers, among news publications, among other agencies. Moreover, as discussed in the introduction, anticipation is central to the work of many image brokers, but especially those working at a visual content provider since their goal is to build an archive that can be mined by those seeking visual content not only for today's news coverage but also for use far into the future. Much of the work of image brokers consists of capturing the futurepast: anticipating which images might be asked for tomorrow to ensure that they are taken today.

In taking the reader back to the opening of the war in Iraq, my intention is to illustrate a time of transition at GVI. This was a moment when GVI was very uncertain about its role. GVI was not a news publication, and yet the news and editorial team were tasked with covering the war. At stake was the question of whether their website was a storefront or a journalistic front page, and the responsibilities that went with those respective roles. I have structured this chapter as a series of daily logs to highlight the central role of time in GVI's newsroom. As the opening scene of this book made clear, this was a newsroom covering war in digital time, a time of faster circulation and shorter news cycles. Image

brokers also knew that the value of a photograph as a news image depended critically on time: its being first to show something or the last taken before the magazines went to press for the week, perfectly timed to coincide with accurately predicted stories, or retrieved from the archive at an opportune moment. In this chapter, I show several examples where brokers grapple with the temporality of news images and are constantly brokering information as well as images in the hopes of accurately judging the value of each photograph.

Many of the individuals I observed had strong opinions and were quite reflective at times about their practices. The dialogue was reconstructed from notes I took as I scribbled constantly throughout the day. If at times some of the dialogue feels stilted, it's because I was overhearing only one side of many phone conversations. On the other hand, the image brokers I observed were constantly juggling many different topics, responding to all sorts of requests, and continually being bombarded with new information. Hence, this chapter also reflects the staccato-like quality of discourse in a newsroom. I cannot know now, nor did I assume to know then, what individuals were thinking. Instead I attempt to represent how they were working together by focusing on what was said. Individual personalities contribute much to everyday practices in any newsroom, a place where an "ordinary" day is hectic and focused on scouting out the extraordinary, the newsworthy.⁶

Yet, despite the ever-changing and often unanticipated subject matter involved, there are normative practices of discussing, requesting, editing, and selling photographs to news publications. In the process of becoming a news image and being worked on by different brokers, each drawing on previously circulated news images, a photograph becomes a surface on which many imaginations are concretized. The image brokers were constantly juggling journalistic concerns with business concerns, historical echoes with up-to-the-minute accuracy, and today's demands with what might be valued in the future. Their goal was to have fresh, original photographs that no one else had while also capturing the events and angles deemed by other media outlets as the most important of the day. The televisions that hung from the ceiling above the news and editorial division were almost always on and kept the team informed of exactly what news was dominant at any given moment. It was also through these televisions that the voices of government officials quoted in this chapter entered the newsroom.

Monday, March 10, 2003

When the receptionist waved me in on my first day of fieldwork at GVI, I proceeded to the office of the vice president of news and editorial photography, Michael Strong. The Monday-morning leadership meeting was to be held around the table in his office. Strong, whom the reader might remember from the sales meeting that I described in chapter 1, had been hired from a popular news website. He was young (early thirties), determined, and had been hired in part for his technical know-how. Many in the industry, particularly younger photographers, found Strong very charismatic, and he exuded an almost evangelical belief in both the power of photography and that of digital innovations. Brimming with confidence, and constantly noting but not answering calls coming in to his cell phone during meetings, Strong was the one who had given me “minimally restrictive” access to GVI because he was excited by the chance to have an observer around. “We as a team are ready to reinvent this place,” he told me. Strong seemed convinced I would witness the exhilarating transformation of GVI from distrusted newcomer to the industry to the place where all new talent wanted their work represented. My role as an anthropologist was preordained: I would be there to document his and GVI’s success.

An older man walked in, and Michael boomed, “Meet Henry Smith, director of news. He’s in charge of a solid news organization.” The leaders of the various divisions gave energetic and optimistic updates. Henry Smith announced, “Well, as you know, we’re getting ready for a war within about ten days. But apparently Nachtwey decided to leave for Baghdad, and *Newsworld*’s director of photography picked up Alex Levy that very day.”⁷ Jim Nachtwey is one of the world’s best-known contemporary photojournalists, and *Newsworld* had arranged an embed position for him with the US Army’s 101st Airborne. Henry was telling the team that when Nachtwey decided to leave his embed, the magazine had given the position to Alex Levy, a fresh-out-of-school photographer who had come to GVI just a few days earlier. Alex was already embedded in Kuwait. With unabashed pride Henry reported *Newsworld*’s rate: “One thousand dollars per day—double day rate for conflict!”⁸

Alex Levy was the Cinderella story of the photojournalism world in the spring of 2003. Recently out of college, he had been so desperate for a job that the day he came to GVI to show his portfolio he had also

stopped by the Starbucks across the street to fill in an employment application. At least, that was the story as told by Alex himself and repeated by others. Less than a month later, he was on assignment for *Newsworld*, one of the world's most prominent newsmagazines.

Henry walked me upstairs and introduced me to the small news team sitting in cubicles under four televisions, each tuned to a different channel. Henry oversaw a team that included Ed, the most senior photo editor; Jackie, the assistant photo editor; Liz, a young photo editor who worked on feature stories; and Sophie, a temporary hire who had been there for several weeks and who corrected captions and sent images to the lab for color correction.

Ed was explaining to Jackie why he had to get in touch with Alex Levy: "Apparently, there is a couple in the 101st that are a husband and wife, and *Newsworld* needs a vertical shot of them. 'Couple commanders.' You know, something different from all the 'going to battle' stuff we've seen. They want photos of each separately, working with the troops separately. Sandy background, nice lighting. Alex might have a hard time getting them together because apparently the writer already got them together." Indeed, Ed found out they didn't want to be bothered again for the photograph and were apparently reminding those trying to make the arrangements for the shoot, "Hey, we have a war going on here."

Jackie smiled at Ed's impersonation of the commander. "I just tried to call Alex, but I don't know if I got through."

"Does someone answer and say, 'Hello, Hotel Expensive Kuwait?'" Ed quipped. "Try his cell."

Ed, telling me the story of young Alex's good fortune, confessed, "An embed position is a great opportunity for a photographer, but perhaps it might be a conflict of interest. Cynics would say this makes the US media salivate over military embeds, which we are doing. And then there's the rules: you can't interfere with op-sec (operations security); you can't take photos of dead Americans. Actually, I'm not clear on exactly when or where the censorship will be done."

He swiveled in his chair and called out, "Hey, Jackie, remind me, I have to check with *Newsworld* about selling second rights⁹ on Alex's images since [*Newsworld*] may be planning an end-of-war special and they may want special rights for that." Before the war had even begun, Ed was anticipating the financial value of certain images for an end-of-war retrospective. In other words, he wanted to clarify with the maga-

zine that had put Alex on assignment whether they wanted to have exclusive rights to the photographer's images for any potential end-of-war retrospective, something they would have to pay for; or whether GVI's sales division was free to sell them to other publications. *News-world's* tremendous circulation means that publication in the magazine serves as a storefront for editors seeking images for overseas markets or publications with different timelines than newsweeklies. Ed was not just being a savvy businessman. He was also simultaneously being mindful of maintaining good relations with editors at publications and looking out for Alex Levy's best interest by trying to anticipate how his images could generate the most profit.

Later in the day, Ed tried to negotiate a partnership with the chief photo editor of a respected regional newspaper. GVI is a powerful player in the industry because its platform allows it to partner with all kinds of entities, from wire services to newspapers to individual photographers. In this case Ed was proposing brokering the images of a newspaper that cannot sell its material directly to magazines and doesn't have any sales staff to try to sell to foreign magazines, so they are interested in partnering with GVI, who already has the sales structure in place. This is a clever strategy for the newspaper, since it potentially turns its photo department into a revenue generator rather than just an expense center, strengthening the hand of the newspaper's director of photography to make demands on behalf of his photographers. Since profits from sales are shared, GVI gets added income from images it contributes no resources to producing, but it also gets high-quality images from a reputable news source to add to its portfolio of war coverage, thus linking its name with the names of prize-winning photojournalists.

The newspaper's photo editor was trying to negotiate a guarantee against sales (a minimum twenty-five hundred or three thousand dollars a week), and Ed was trying to negotiate for as short a time limit on the guarantee as possible.¹⁰ In other words, Ed wanted to minimize GVI's risk. Since it was not sharing production costs, GVI would lose money only if it paid a guarantee up front but then could not make enough sales to cover that guarantee. The newspaper's editor confidently stated, "Look, I think it'll be over in two weeks. They're going to go in and bomb the living fuck out of these people. Even 9/11 only ran ten to twelve days. There's only so many pictures of people in the sand you can run. I'm saying this as an experienced photo editor: tops it'll take three weeks."

Tuesday, March 11, 2003

At least for those in the New York office, the daily routine of image brokering begins at the 10 A.M. staff meeting. GVI is a global company, and the news and editorial teams in New York and Paris meet via a phone conference every day, often joined by photo editors in London and Los Angeles. Over the course of my fieldwork, I participated in these meetings at both the New York and Paris offices. Each office's news and editorial team would gather in one of the director's offices for these calls, making the meetings both face-to-face interactions with their local colleagues and phone-based interactions with international GVI colleagues. Sometimes editors also joined the conference call from other locations. Especially when the individuals in separate offices had never met face-to-face, this meant that the people who worked together in the same physical office seemed to understand each other's decisions and motivations better. Cultural differences—not just of the individuals but of the European and American news publications (e.g., different closing dates, different labor laws, different notions of public domain, different styles of conducting business)—were often blamed for the perceived differences between the offices, though these were amplified by the fact that for each news team the suggestions of individuals in other offices came through an often crackly speaker rather than from a colleague sitting across the table. Shortly after I began observing these meetings, Michael Strong took a trip to Paris and called in to a few morning meetings with the French team in an effort to coalesce the two teams.

The day after attending the leadership meeting, I attended the news and editorial team meeting, as did Edith, GVI's global research director, who was in charge of the use of the archive for editorial purposes. She had suggestions: "I've pulled together a loose retro of the Iran/Iraq war and chemical weapons. There's quite a lot of ancient Iraqi art in the archive. Does that have a place at all in our coverage? We've pulled the pre-1980 analog files on the Iran/Iraq war and chemical warfare, but we have to be careful with it because it's very graphic. There's a high probability Saddam'll torch the oil wells again and we have that from before, so we've put those images in as well. There were mostly Kurdish victims at the time. In fact we have photos of the north going back as far as World War I—young sheiks and Lawrence of Arabia period." Edith had looked at the analog negatives as well as digital archives and was detailing what historical visual content GVI had so that the editors could pitch it along with the latest coverage. In other words, she nar-

rated to the group the history of Iraq that GVI had the visuals to tell. Edith didn't work in the reactive mode of the news team but rather tried to anticipate future coverage. She didn't wait for events to happen to think about how to cover them but rather focused on what might need coverage in the future based on what had been covered in the past. Alternately, as was the case that day, she anticipated future needs for the history that GVI owned the visuals to tell. Her job was anticipating the futurepast. "I have to plan ahead, so at any given time I have about one to two hundred topics I'm anticipating requests for," she told me. The team agreed that the Iraq retrospective might be useful and that it should be put up on the website for clients to see.

After the meeting, Ed finally heard from Alex. Ed asked him, "Hey, Alex, did the writer tell you the couple story is a cover story? Are you getting on OK with him [the writer]? Is the relationship OK? You're going to have to be gentle with him because I think you're going to be spending a lot of time with this guy. Are you bumping up against bureaucracy? If bureaucracy's giving you shit, just chill with it a little bit, OK? Be cool, Alex, and check in with me once a day, OK?"

"Well, supposedly he's shooting the couple in the morning," Ed relayed to Jackie. "I imagine the writer must be annoyed because here he thought he was going on assignment with Jim Nachtwey and instead he gets twenty-three-year-old Alex. The troops were apparently wowed by Nachtwey, who probably has more combat experience than all of them put together, and now they have young Alex, who has been in Gaza but has no other real war experience." Turning to me, Ed explained, "I wanted to send Ilan." Ilan was another young, but slightly more established, photographer with more combat experience who had recently signed a representation contract with GVI. "But Ilan's got an Israeli passport, so we couldn't get him a visa."

On the cubicle divider next to Ed's desk was a large map of Afghanistan and a whiteboard with the names of several photographers, followed by the list of countries for which each had a valid visa. "Lydia: Yemen, Oman, Kuwait, Lebanon, UAE, Qatar, Iran. Sean: Iraq, Jordan, . . ." These lists simultaneously mapped both the anticipated geographies of imminent news stories and the bureaucratic limits determining where in that geography each photographer could move. Photographers' abilities to capture that "perfect shot" promised to visitors on GVI's home page often depended as much on mundane realities like their nationality and what visas they held as on their talents. The starkest example was Ilan, who was kept out of Iraq by his Israeli passport.

In fact Alex Levy, who was now shooting a cover for *Newsweek*, might not have gotten picked up by GVI at all, and certainly wouldn't have been the photographer GVI suggested when *Newsweek* asked for a replacement to take Nachtwey's embed position, had Ilan been able to get an Iraqi visa.

Monday, March 17, 2003

All the television screens around the news editors' cubicles reflected various packages of the "possible" war in Iraq. One channel's "Show-down Iraq" faced "Brink of War" on another channel. Almost all the nonembedded photographers represented by GVI had ended up in Baghdad. At the morning meeting Henry voiced his concern: "We have no idea how this will play out. Clustering everyone in Baghdad just seems a poor idea. We need to keep people spread out."

Jackie, on the other hand, inexperienced in war coverage, was concerned about the safety of the photographers. "ABC and NBC ordered their correspondents out. Do we want to send more people to a place that is so dangerous that other US news media are pulling people out?" she asked. "Are they all in the same hotel?"

Ed, who had told me earlier that he could only be cautious about not encouraging someone to put himself in danger but wasn't about to tell these professionals when to come out, moved the conversation on to the logistics of receiving images. If the professionals he represented were going to stay to produce them, Ed was committed to getting the photographs out of Iraq: "There is so much traffic that a lot of the satellite phones are jammed and photographers are having a hard time transmitting." Later, back at their cubicles, everyone, including Ed, seemed gripped by the same anxious tension. Jackie joked nervously, "I've got to clean my desk before this war starts," and set herself to the task.

Meanwhile, Alex Levy had photographed the commander couple, and the issue of *Newsweek* was already on newsstands. Ed talked to the photo editor at the magazine: "The magazine looks really good. Alex was on IM [instant messenger] earlier today, but I haven't been able to get through on anyone's phones. I think something's up. He's been asking me about what you want him to cover, so tell me if you have any ideas for him. He seemed fine. Finished shooting 'People Writing Letters Home to Loved Ones.' I don't know where he is because I try not to ask him that kind of question. I don't know whether lines are

monitored or not.” Then, with masterful salesmanship, Ed casually tried to interest the editor in an experienced photographer also represented by GVI who wasn’t embedded—“But Sean is in Baghdad”—and swiftly launched into the list of other photographers available that the magazine might also consider putting on assignment.

Tuesday, March 18, 2003

The next morning everyone’s morale seemed to have improved. Henry congratulated his team: “I’m grateful for all your work. Everyone has done a great job getting a first-rate team together. We are as well set up as any other news team. Hopefully it’s a short war.” Jackie raised her safety concerns again, and Michael Strong, calling in to the morning meeting from the Paris office, emphasized that they should be telling the photographers to do whatever they feel is safe but reminded Jackie that “everyone is there of their own volition.” The team members ran through the positions of all the photographers even more carefully than they did every other day. When they asked each other whom a photographer was traveling with, it was clear that the photographer’s safety was on the editors’ minds as much as the well-honed instinct to find out what their competition was doing.

As soon as the meeting let out, Ed got a call from Sean, the photographer whose work he had pitched to *Newsweek* the day before. Sean assured Ed, “I feel comfortable with my decision to be here [in Baghdad]. I think it’s a little bit of a panic snowball. I don’t feel a threatening atmosphere. The only real change is that suddenly there are no Iraqi minders anywhere.” This was a significant change, since several photographers had previously reported being under constant surveillance by Iraqi intelligence officers. Hence, Sean was not embedded with the US military but had until very recently been working under the constant threat of Iraqi government censorship.

The sense that nothing spectacular was happening was echoed in Alex’s call later in the morning. He had been told that his unit would not move for several days. They were still twenty kilometers from the Iraqi border, and his colonel had said that when the first planes went into Iraq he planned to sit on a sandbag, have a cigar, and watch them fly overhead. “I told him I’d be right there to photograph him,” Alex chuckled—though for most of the conversation on speakerphone with Ed, he sounded bored.

Friday, March 21, 2003

Reports were emerging at the morning meeting that coalition forces had taken control of Safwan, a southern Iraqi town, and a GVI photographer had sent a message saying that he'd be transmitting images. Supposedly there had been no fighting and locals had welcomed the troops. Robert, a cynical French photo editor from the Paris office, snickered over the speakerphone, "What'd they do, raise the American flag?"

Alain, the senior photo editor from Paris, filled the team in on a French photographer who had attached himself to a family in Baghdad: "Philippe's still on assignment today. He's found a family: a couple, grandmother, and two children." *Dateline NBC* was also interested in the story. "Now what we need is more bombing," Alain continued. "They are apparently anti-Saddam since the father was in prison last year, so it's a good story." Another Paris editor added, "They have no bunker. The photographer's trying to get them outside the home, but it's hard for them to agree to being photographed."

Ed ran through the positions of all the photographers. Yet even on what was to be the first day of the war, not all the stories on the table were about Iraq: "Suzanne is leaving for Afghanistan this week. She has several different ideas. Women in prisons. Women getting their driver's licenses."

Alain interrupted: "OK, I just got off the phone with Philippe and asked him to hold the photos of the family till tomorrow. The pictures from the family are very good: they are petrified." Pausing before trying out a new phrase, the editor continued in his thick French accent, "They're scared shitless, you know?"

Ed, in the New York office, laughed and said, "You must be hanging out with [Michael] Strong if you're talking like that! Well, on our end, Alex Levy's company is packing up. He's going to be going in with Black Hawks [military helicopters] so he's really psyched. He's hanging out by the showers because they keep having raid drills and people have to run out naked with their gas masks on." The editors regularly told each other which stories their photographers were covering or had mentioned as ideas so that when anyone spoke to an editor at a publication he or she could pitch multiple photographers and stories. Similarly, these meetings allowed for the editors to collectively pool what they had gathered the publications were interested in so they could guide photographers appropriately when asked.

"Hey, guys, it's Strong," a voice broke in. "Just wanted to check in. Listen, it's important to be thinking about getting some emails from our

photographers right now. You know—‘What it’s really like out there’—type stuff. We should really get some text. There are a lot of outlets that are asking for text. People want to hear from us. Also a note coming from you to the photographers would really be great. You know, just a quick ‘Be safe. And in your downtime think about sending us some thoughts.’ Since it is so hard to get through on the phone right now, any communication is sunshine to them. Support our people out there. And you guys have been mentioning IMs. Some of those IMs I bet are quite fascinating. This is history that we’re a part of. You are a part of history. What is it like to be doing this? We’re not just documenting visual history, but we should also be documenting the way in which we’re working with the photographers.” An ethnographer of sorts, Strong wanted the team not only to broker good images but also to document the production of visual history. He was forever thinking of new ways to package photographs. If such text could get GVI’s images into new venues, he wanted to make sure text was gathered along the way.

The meeting ended, and Ed went over to Sophie, the self-described “perma-temp” whose desktop was the place where images arrived in GVI’s newsroom. Sophie usually got right to work as soon as she arrived, editing photographs that had come in from the photographers while the others were in the morning meeting. Ed would usually review the selection on her desktop before she sent the photos to the lab for color correction. After reviewing captions and changing them if necessary, Sophie deleted redundant frames and pushed images to the lab. The photos of groups of Iraqis surrendering in Safwan had started coming in, and Sophie clicked through them for Ed’s approval before pushing them out to editors at various news publications who might want to purchase them for publication. Ed stopped at one that showed a concerned-looking American medic attending to a wounded Iraqi who was seated on the ground next to a tank with a bright yellow MRE (meal-ready-to-eat) pack in front of him. There was blood on the Iraqi man’s face, neck, and green uniform, and the medic was holding the man’s head in his blue-gloved hands. To the right of the photo behind the Iraqi man, the barrel of a rifle was visible.

“Wait, let me see the caption of that photo.”

Sophie opened the file and went to the caption field as Ed had instructed her. It read: “Navy Corpsmen tend to an Iraqi prisoner wounded as Marines took control of an oil pumping station in southern Iraq.”

“Excellent!” exclaimed Ed and immediately went to his phone. “Excellent! I’m calling *Newsworld*. They were looking for Iraqi POW

photos.” When the editor’s secretary answered, Ed had the editor paged. “I’ve got a POW image. Are you interested?” The deal Ed had negotiated with the newspaper a few days earlier was potentially already paying off since the photograph was from one of their photographers. Ed mentioned this to the magazine editor: “I’ll give it to you for a one-thousand-dollar guarantee plus one thousand dollars if you run it.”

Once off the phone, he looked a bit disappointed as he told his team, “She said two thousand dollars was way too much. If it were an injured American she’d pay that, but it’s too much for [an Iraqi] POW. Or if it were the only image out there. But apparently there are other images.” He walked over to Sophie’s screen again. “I mean it’s a total propaganda shot, isn’t it? ‘Look how nice we’re being to them, etc.’” This was typical of Ed. Like many professional brokers, he knew how to talk about the image to underscore its value for other brokers regardless of his own personal opinion of the image. There are formative fictions at work here. Ed anticipates the story that will move the photograph and get it sold. Nonetheless, he also claims it is propaganda. His commitment, however, is to the photographer in the field and selling his or her photographs.

At 1 P.M., the televisions that hung from the ceilings around the office lit up with special bulletins, and people gathered around as news of the outbreak of war flashed across the screens. Soon there were thirty or so people craning their necks to get a better view of the initial bombing of Baghdad.

“Wow, look at that!” an editor from the commercial representation team exclaimed. “It sounds like the Fourth of July. What a sound and light show! So this is the Shock and Awe campaign.”

People from other floors kept coming down to the newsroom—the only area with television screens that were always on—to see what was happening. After about six minutes of relatively quiet and intense viewing, the crowd of forty or so people dispersed as if on cue when the CNN reporter commented, “There you saw it, there you heard it.”

Within a half hour the screens were transmitting a Pentagon press briefing. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and General Richard Meyers presented the objectives of the strikes on Iraq and summarized the position of coalition troops. General Meyers ended his prepared briefing with the expected “And with that, we’ll take your questions,” but Rumsfeld jumped in:

Before we do, let me make one comment. Just before coming down, after the air campaign began in earnest about 1 P.M., I saw some of the images on

television and I heard various commentators expansively comparing what's taking place in Iraq today to some of the more famous bombing campaigns of World War II. There is no comparison. The weapons that are being used today have a degree of precision that no one ever dreamt of in a prior conflict—they didn't exist. . . . The targeting capabilities and the care that goes into targeting to see that the precise targets are struck and that other targets are not struck is as impressive as anything anyone could see. The care that goes into it, the humanity that goes into it, to see that military targets are destroyed, to be sure, but that it's done in a way, and in a manner, and in a direction and with a weapon that is appropriate to that very particularized target. And I think that the comparison is unfortunate and inaccurate. And I think that will be found to be the case when *ground truth* is achieved.¹¹

I would add also that I think we're probably watching something that is somewhat historic. We're having a conflict at a time in our history when we have 24-hours-a-day television, radio, media, Internet, and more people in the world have access to what is taking place. You couple that with the hundreds—literally hundreds of people in the free press—the international press, the press of the United States, from every aspect of the media—who have been offered and accepted an opportunity to join and be connected directly with practically every aspect of this campaign. And *what we are seeing is not the war in Iraq*. What we're seeing are slices of the war in Iraq. We're seeing that particularized perspective that that reporter, or that commentator or that television camera, happens to be able to see at that moment. And it is not what's taking place. What you see is taking place, to be sure, but it is one slice. And it is the *totality* of that that is what this war is about and being made up of. And I don't—I doubt that in a conflict of this type there's ever been the degree of free press coverage as you are witnessing in this instance.¹²

Shortly thereafter the White House press secretary, Ari Fleischer, answered questions from the press and echoed the language of getting the “totality” of information “in a totality” rather than relying on the press.

Q: Ari, has the President watched any of this, the unfolding events in Baghdad, do you know?

Mr. Fleischer: Obviously, the President, having authorized the mission, was aware of the mission, knew when it would begin, et cetera. And I don't think he needs to watch TV to know what was about to unfold.

Q: I was wondering if he had any comment on the impact of it.

Mr. Fleischer: No, the President's approach is to gather the information about what is happening *in its totality*. He receives the information from his advisors, people who have a sight on all areas of what is under way. The President is aware, of course, of the American people as they watch these events unfold; but he gets his information in a totality . . .

Q: Just to clarify Terry's question. You said the President doesn't need to watch TV to know what's going on in Iraq, but you're telling me—these

are pretty astounding images—he doesn’t have a television on somewhere, he’s not watching what’s going on?

Mr. Fleischer: The President, again, understands the implications of the actions that he has launched to secure the disarmament of the Iraqi regime, to liberate the people.

In this first question-and-answer session of the war in Iraq, the image that emerged was of a president as a sovereign who does not need to be informed by the press. Rumsfeld’s comments that the international free press *have been offered and have accepted* the opportunity to join every aspect of this military campaign describes the press as part of the campaign managed by the Bush administration rather than as an independent organ of information.

Q: Right, right, right. The question, though, is, Is he watching TV, or not?

Mr. Fleischer: The President may occasionally turn on the TV, but that’s not how he gets his news or his information.”¹³

In other words, the president didn’t rely on the same sources as the public or the press for information. Furthermore, in the first hours of the war, the implication was that visuals—no matter how astounding the images may be—were not influencing politics. They were mere reflections of the political decisions that had already been made. Moreover, in his comments Rumsfeld at once lauded the visual precision of the military’s targeting machinery and the unprecedented degree of free press coverage while insisting that what was shown through the press was not the war.

Liz, one of the young photo editors who was generally fairly calm, walked over to Ed’s cubicle with a look of concern: “Are people OK?” “They’ve been confined to the hotel, so I’m guessing so.”

Liz had just heard from another photographer in the field and added, “Well, Lydia is fine; she’s in the north. Is it going to be worse?”

“No, that’s it.”

Andrew, another photographer, called in to say he’d just driven by a downed helicopter but hadn’t been able to photograph it. He was with two other photographers, each distributing through different photo agencies, and an Italian television crew.

“Are the news mags closing tomorrow, or Sunday?” Jackie asked the others. Most newsmagazines close on Friday or Saturday but may push back their close time if they anticipate late-breaking news. However, in France magazines close on Mondays. Jackie was trying to get informa-

tion that would allow her best to guide photographers who were asking what their coverage priorities should be.

“*Newsworld’s* staying open till six tomorrow.” (It was at this point that the courier I described at the beginning of this book brought over an envelope of undeveloped film from a photographer in California who had been covering the protests.)

“Why is the refugees story on our front page?” Liz, who had gone back to her desk, asked Ed, pointing to GVI’s news and editorial home page on her screen, where a several-day-old story about refugees was still featured. “All people care about right now is the war.”

“Yeah, let’s put the bombing on the first page—that’s what people want to buy. It’s good to sell photos!” Ed had his joking voice on but repeatedly stated that their greatest commitment should be to selling photographers’ work. Liz’s instinct that the main news story should be featured on the homepage is both journalistic and commercial. GVI is not a news publication, yet its “front page” had to parallel that of the newspapers.

Monday, March 24, 2003

The morning conference call began with the Paris office relaying that Jacques, a very senior photographer, had had all his equipment stolen.¹⁴ The photographer thought it was the work of Iraqi officials who had broken into his apartment, but he had no concrete evidence. Robert, an editor, relayed what he had heard from Jacques: “They’re coming down hard trying to expel people. They took his telephone, money, computer—everything. Meanwhile several journalists have been killed, so I’m worried about them getting stuck in a no-man’s-land. They need to be together with others. So Andrew is traveling with guys from the other agencies.”

Liz nodded in agreement: “Lydia was only twenty to thirty meters away from the car that exploded in the north.”

Henry tried to assure his team: “Let’s get everyone home safely—that’s our first priority.” The meeting segued into coverage of the Oscar ceremony of the night before. There was a tone of excitement at the meeting; everyone had been selling well.

“We got two double pages in *Stern*,” reported Alain.¹⁵ “In France, though, everyone’s waiting for the deadlines to buy photos at the last possible minute.”

After the meeting, Henry sat at his desk watching the TV coverage and calling the various magazines his photographers were working for, asking

if he could syndicate the images overseas now that the magazines had closed the week.¹⁶ Henry was frustrated by GVI's website. "A lot of editors are telling me, 'I go to your website, but I can't find today's images.' They want wire-service speed," he explained to me. "This has turned out to be a much messier war than anyone expected," he repeated several times on his calls. Looking up at the TV images of Iraqi soldiers being captured, Smith said to me, "Honestly, I don't understand why what we show is not in violation of Geneva Conventions."¹⁷ Similarly to Ed, Henry had not received clear instructions on what the Geneva Conventions actually prohibited, nor had this information been provided by the US military in conjunction with the embed program.¹⁸ The assumption seemed to be that the sheer number of cameras in the field would ensure certain standards of ethical behavior. Henry continued: "This is a huge embed effort, though. I mean, there are hundreds of journalists out there and there's enough action so that someone has someone nearby no matter what's happening. This is going to be the best-documented war ever."¹⁹

Henry Smith, the director of news, had been alerted the night before that an American soldier with a unit still in camp had lobbed hand grenades into the commanding officers' tent, killing one soldier and wounding fifteen others. Coincidentally, it was the unit that Alex Levy was embedded in, and Levy had sent in a whole series of photos showing both the suspect and the wounded men being evacuated to medical facilities. Jackie and Henry had spent quite a bit of time debating whether they could put the photos up on GVI's website. Did the Geneva Conventions apply to your own soldiers? Would the images cause anguish to the families of the injured? Would this compromise Alex's position within his unit? What would be the political fallout for GVI? Of course, what was so apparent that it need not be spoken was the incredible "luck" that this incident of "friendly" fire—a major news item for that week—had happened just a few tents over from young Alex's cameras. Alex had apparently gotten an OK from the colonel of the unit for the release of the images, but nonetheless Henry was concerned that the soldiers in the photos were identifiable. The solution in the end was to post the images on GVI's website and ask the legal department for advice. This compromise allowed the images to be available to any publications that wanted to purchase rights to use the images, and yet allowed GVI to avoid taking on any responsibility for publishing the images, since GVI was not pushing the images out. In March 2003 at least, GVI's website was seen as a sales tool rather than a publicly accessible conduit of information. However, just a few days

earlier, Liz had treated GVI as a news publication when deciding what should be placed on the front page of its website.

Many of the people who had been in the industry for a long time—perhaps especially those who remembered all the speculations that television would be the death of photojournalism—seemed thrilled that television news programs were using still images. Several channels were featuring still photographs and including interviews with photographers. Veterans of the industry seemed to think that TV news's featuring still images in this case was confirmation of their belief that photojournalists produced more informative and more compelling visuals than TV cameramen. The question posed to Henry that day was whether GVI should be billing CNN for using GVI's still images or whether this should be thought of as free advertising because the photos were being run with a "courtesy of GVI" label. While he was in the midst of this quandary, Henry's phone rang. It was a photographer hoping to stop by and show Henry his portfolio. Rolling his eyes, Henry said politely, "I'd be happy to meet any photographer, but during the peak of a war is hard. Call me again when Baghdad's over."

Before lunchtime in New York, Alex had called Ed. Part of the unit was planning a helicopter mission, and Alex was trying to decide whether to stay with the mass of troops or go on the mission, which could be dangerous. The editor at *Newsweek* for whom he was still on assignment had repeatedly told him they didn't want him to put his life in danger. Alex hung up undecided, saying he knew the decision was his to make. The danger was real, and Ed listened intently but did not try to sway Alex one way or the other. Lydia, one of GVI's female photographers, called from the Kurdish area in northern Iraq within moments after Alex's call. As Liz had reported to the group that morning, Lydia had been just a few feet in front of a car bomb that killed three others, including a foreign journalist. Perhaps in an attempt to distract her from the tragedy or to emphasize that she was not putting her life in danger in vain, Ed told her, "*Newsweek* used your photo of them hosing down the blood this week."

"It was bloody awful. I realized a guy injured was a guy I knew from Moscow. I spent the night talking to him and he left this morning," Lydia said. Briefly Ed tried to console her, and then they switched to business.

"What's the situation with my day rate?" she asked.

"You're getting double day [rate] as of Shock and Awe in Baghdad last week."

“They asked if I wanted to go back to Kuwait two weeks ago.”²⁰

“Do you feel safe? There’s been a few journalists killed.” They wrapped up the conversation with Ed communicating how glad the team was that she was OK. Lydia was a highly experienced and very professional photographer, as indicated by Ed’s caring but professional interaction with her. His long years of experience as a photo editor determined when to express concern, when to switch to business matters, and, perhaps most important, when to inject humor into the conversation. This was the art of image brokering. Each photographer and every situation required a slightly different approach. Ed was careful never to make a judgment call on behalf of the photographer. Even when young Alex called again to say he’d decided to go on the mission with his troop but that a sandstorm was forcing them to drive rather than fly in with helicopters, Ed asked some questions but didn’t champion his decision or try to change Alex’s mind. Yet Ed was cautious about how to advise the least experienced of his photographers.

“When you move, make sure there’s someone on either side of you. There’s a lot of you, right?”

“Don’t worry, I’m OK.”

Once off the phone, Ed voiced additional anxieties: “I’m a bit worried about the fact that he’s developing camaraderie with the soldiers. He wants to go with the same people he’s been with. I don’t want him to put himself in a dangerous situation because he’s bonded with these people. If one of them gets shot and everyone runs away, I don’t want him trying to save the guy. But I guess I can’t control him from making a [human] decision. I’m just worried about him bonding with these guys. He’s the same age, he’s been pissing in the sand with them for weeks. I don’t want him to feel like he’s obliged to do an act of bravado. These guys are paid to die, they’re soldiers. He’s not. He’s there to document, and I’m not sure he always recognizes the difference.” When they spoke later in the day he made a point of adding, “Hey, Alex, if the shooting starts, don’t take pictures, OK? Just keep your head down, OK?”

Tuesday, March 25, 2003

As the action on the ground slowed, the team started struggling to find interesting angles to cover the war. How would they keep the imagery of the war fresh? The Paris office suggested looking at religion during the war.

“We’re seeing a lot of images of soldiers praying.”

“What about religion on the home front? There’s also big prayers [for US soldiers] in Doha, Qatar. We could ask: ‘Aren’t the Americans going too far?’”

“Shall we suggest to the photographers that they keep an eye out for religion?”

The team decided to tell photographers to send in religious imagery.

Meanwhile, another story had been brewing. Alain from the Paris office asked, “Have you seen photos on this virus in China? Masks seem to be the only things that can be photographed.”

Henry Smith urged the Paris office to take leadership of the Asian virus story, adding, “I think if the war weren’t around it’d be a big story.”

After the meeting, Ed rifled through the morning papers, pointing out an image of Iraqis herding sheep with a military convoy in the background: “That’s what war is to most people, trucks going by in the distance as life goes on.” Ed’s comment on this image taken early in the war implies that despite all the media attention on the war, he conceived of it as an event occurring in the background of daily life for many Iraqis. Yet he was actively engaged in representing it through the images being sent in by the photographers, many of which focused on front lines. Henry walked by, looked at the image, and told Ed to keep an eye on the photographer who’d taken the shot, commenting, “He’s going to become important.”

Ed read the credit below the photograph. “Damn! He’s staff. I’m always looking for good photographers to sign up, always looking for the potential quitting/fired photographer, but if he’s staff at the *New York Times*, we won’t get him.” Staff positions that came with benefits and steady work were very difficult to come by in the industry, and hence Ed knew it was highly unlikely that a staff photographer would give up the security of such a position, especially at a prominent paper, and choose to work as a freelancer.²¹

Later that morning Henry and Ed together called Sean, an experienced photographer who had gotten kicked out of Baghdad by Iraqi officials. The photographer was livid. He’d been in the field for three straight months and had sent in an email outlining a plan to drive back into Iraq immediately. Henry and Ed understood Sean’s frustration given the intensity of his investment in the story and the fact that he had been expelled just as he might have started taking images that were journalistically and financially worthwhile. Nonetheless, Henry was a

little concerned that Sean's decision might be a hasty one: "Let's talk about a situation where it's house-to-house combat or chemical weapons. Are you equipped with a gas mask in case those types of weapons are deployed? How many American journalists are still in Baghdad? Do you think driving in is safe?" All parties got frustrated as the line kept dropping out. Henry emphasized, "Yes, I read your email, but I just wanted to talk with you and make sure that frustration wasn't pushing you into an emotional decision. You can take a couple of weeks off. There's going to be a rich, long, complex story to cover. There'll be a lot of reporting and photojournalism to be done. Is that a better solution for you, or do you want to get in for the endgame? Don't feel like you owe anybody anything. It's entirely at your discretion."

They promised to wire Sean a five-thousand-dollar advance via Western Union and ended the call. Henry seemed assured that Sean wasn't in danger of burning out anytime soon. Yet a few minutes later, Henry expressed concern to Ed, shifting their focus from this particular photographer's situation to GVI's coverage: "Look, soon the war will be over, and we don't want to be caught flat with nothing else in the pipeline. In fact, I just asked Jackie for a 'best of the war' selection, since I'm sure people will be requesting them soon." Henry wasn't alone in thinking the war was nearing the endgame: less than a week after Shock and Awe, the CNN banner on the overhead television screens read, "Pace of war has slowed."

Thursday, March 27, 2003

The team in New York evaluated multiple factors when considering where to position the photographers: the photographers' wishes, their safety, the comprehensiveness of GVI's coverage of the war, its coverage of other news events—especially given the predicted end of the war. Many of GVI's photographers were in Baghdad. The most experienced of them, Jacques, who had had all his equipment stolen, was incredibly frustrated. He had new equipment now but felt he couldn't photograph anything unless the Iraqi minders wanted him to see it. After discussing how to support each photographer in the field, the team listened to the Los Angeles entertainment editor's lengthy update on coverage of Celine Dion's new show in Las Vegas, which was to run for three years.

Alex Levy, who had not been heard from, finally called; his unit had been traveling nonstop for three days, and he promised to send in what he had that night.

Meanwhile Kelly, an American photographer whose work GVI distributed, called from Doha, angry that she could not get *Newsworld* to give her a guarantee. She was trying to get exclusive coverage with General Tommy Franks.²² Kelly had connections. She had been introduced personally to Franks by Donald Rumsfeld, whom she had photographed before. But she was still establishing her career and was threatened by the imminent arrival of better-known photographers. Her biggest worry was a well-established photographer who had covered US politics for years and had connections to all these people.

“I asked him straight out: ‘Am I going to get stomped on by you?’ and he said he didn’t have any plans as of now to come here.”

Kelly had asked *Newsworld* for a three-week guarantee, but so far they hadn’t agreed to it, and she was very concerned because she was currently financing the coverage entirely out of her own pocket. At one hundred dollars a night, her hotel room in Doha was a good deal, but nonetheless the accumulating expenses were making her nervous.

“Look, because of the way the industry has gone, I know money is tight,” she said, “but this is the biggest story of our time, and I’m the only one who can cover from the inside. Do you guys think I’m out of line?”

Henry, who had himself come to GVI from *Newsworld*, tried to explain the magazine editor’s position: “Look, don’t be mad at the editor. She’s just maxed out her budget keeping her people in the field. This is a very, very expensive war to cover. Do you have any set times for when you’ll be getting behind-the-scenes stuff?”

“I don’t know when it’s going to happen, but I think it’s going to be ongoing throughout. Rumsfeld likes me, Franks likes me, the top guy likes me, and they like my pictures. Even if Nachtwey shows up—I think those guys do great work—but it’s about access, and there’s a tight situation here. I just want to get paid properly. How about if you guys cover the next three weeks at a day rate?” Kelly was highlighting her relationships with these top officials to persuade Henry and Ed that her access would not get blocked at a critical moment, that she had an in that the top brass would honor even if a more famous photographer appeared.

Henry quickly calculated: “Kelly, that’s seventy-five hundred dollars. That’s what mags [i.e., magazines] pay. I’m not sure I can do that. We need to think about this from a business perspective, not just a coverage angle. Plus I can’t imagine that Tommy Franks’s people would allow just one photographer to exclusively cover his arrival in Baghdad. Why don’t we both think about it and talk again in a few hours?”

After the conference call, Henry and Ed discussed the issue. “If Kelly rides the chopper with Franks to Baghdad we’d make the money back in a day. Or if she gets a shot of Saddam surrendering to him,” Henry figured, confirming that Kelly was not out of line in her estimation of the potential sales value of her access to US military officials.

But Ed cautioned, “I can’t even guess at the number of photographers in Baghdad right now. She didn’t let us try to make the original deal with *Newsweek*, and so she’s coming to us now, once they’ve turned her down. It’s not like we don’t see Franks; he’s doing press conferences. I just can’t see her getting consistently good shots for three weeks straight.”

“I’m thinking at most a five-thousand-dollar guarantee. She’d break even that way and then we could split profits from sales fifty-fifty.”

Showing confidence in his own ability to strike a better deal with the magazine editor, Ed suggested, “How about if I try to get *Newsweek* interested? Let me call the editor and try to get \$350 a day plus expenses from them.”

“I think she’s feeling vulnerable and is in a bit of a panic. If we guarantee her five thousand dollars, we need to sell ten thousand dollars’ worth of Tommy Franks pictures just to not be in the hole,” Henry calculated.

In the end they decided to cover Kelly’s expenses for three weeks but agreed that the photographs had to sell themselves; they wouldn’t guarantee an amount on the work.

Jackie came looking for Ed: “We’re showing Iraqi POWs’ faces. How in violation of Geneva Conventions are we?”

“I think Henry is going to talk to legal about it. I mean, we just deliver the photos on our website, right?”

Perma-temp Sophie pressed Ed: “Yes, but isn’t the Internet public domain? And you were the one who wouldn’t let us post the images of the grenade attack by the American soldier.”

“But it wasn’t a moral decision. It was a business decision: I didn’t want to jeopardize Alex’s embed position.”

Cynical Sophie insisted, “Don’t you think we should have some standards to follow? I don’t want to be making these decisions.” In the absence of formal guidelines, Sophie, the most junior member of the team, whose temp status was continually acknowledged by her and others, was the one pushing images out to publications or merely posting them to the website, often without much debate about whether they were troubling.

Henry, their boss, seemed confused as well. “Does the Geneva Convention automatically become law of every citizen of a land that’s a signatory of that convention?” he asked. “Until we hear from legal, we’re keeping the images up. There’s no obvious suffering in these images, and we have no Iraqi market. I am concerned about our market, where we might cause hardship to the families of those in the photos.” What is clearly getting blurred in Henry’s comments is a distinction between market considerations, responsibility to a particular public that a news publication might serve, and a sense of obligation to a more general ethics of visualizing war. This made sense, since Henry had spent many years at *Newsworld* before his job at GVI, and visual content providers’ responsibility, if any, toward a public had not been clearly spelled out by GVI’s management. This was, after all, the first major war since the rise of visual content providers. What was still unclear was whether visual content providers were in the business of covering war, or merely selling images. This was the beginning of the digitalization of the industry, signaling the collapse of the historical boundaries between the entities responsible for the production, distribution, and publication of news images.

Friday, March 28, 2003

“Well, the *New York Times* published the image that Sophie censored for us, so I think we can go ahead and load it on the website!” Ed told the group with his usual good-humored sarcasm. In the absence of clear directives on what GVI’s management thought the group should or should not distribute, the company’s image brokers began looking at what other news organizations were doing. Yet, despite his jab that they might have lost a sales opportunity by listening to the ethical qualms of their temp while the paper of record had found the same image unobjectionable, Ed himself was also often quite concerned about ethics. “Look at this photo,” he directed, pointing to an image in a different paper that showed two soldiers approaching a truck with rifles at the ready. Ed read the caption: “Dead occupants were found to be unarmed.” Exasperated, he added, “What did they die of? Old age?!” Even without speculating on Ed’s opinion of the morality of the killing, one could tell that he found the evasive caption troubling.

An editor from a different division came over to Ed’s desk and asked, “Have you spoken with Lydia this morning? Her mother just called. She’s worried. So I tried to give her lots of reassurance.” Ed hadn’t heard from Lydia.

Meanwhile, Henry had heard back from legal: “Apparently the Geneva Convention has no force on us but does have force on the US Army, so embeds are key. But Alex is our only embedded photographer. I’m not going to be everyone’s conscience and send out a blanket statement about POWs, because the trend is elsewhere. We’ll try to be sensitive in the same way we were to US troops. . . . Geneva Accords do not apply to private organizations. Alex Levy is a guest of the military. . . . With him alone we are going to be sensitive, but otherwise, we just provide a source for material. It’s up to the individual papers to decide what to run. We’re going to provide unambiguous, unbiased distribution.” The answer from legal allowed Henry to pass the responsibility of deciding which images were appropriate to others, whether those others were other publications setting “the trend,” or the US military.

Ed called the *Army Times*’s photo editor. The *Army Times* had five photographers who were working in Iraq and sending images. Ed wanted to syndicate their work: “Hi, it’s Friday, it’s a good day to try to get your images sold.” Many newsmagazines close on Friday, meaning that it is a good day to try to sell them images. They will most likely run an image they buy on a Friday because the risk is less that a late-breaking development will mean the image has to be substituted.²³ Fridays were busy sales days for Ed, who put a lot of energy into providing publications with a wide range of options through GVI. He asked Jackie to contact a Turkish newspaper whose photographer’s images had appeared in the *New York Times* to see if the paper would like the photographer’s work to be sold through GVI’s website. He was constantly thinking of how to make more images available through GVI.

Ed’s phone rang, and the name of the editor at *Newsworld* appeared on the display. After his conversation, Ed passed on the request to Jackie in a hammed-up voice: “OK, they want a soldier who looks like he’s dirty, in combat, full of strength, resolve, and the will to go on!” And then, in his normal voice, he added, “I tried to pitch that photo of the three smoking soldiers, but she said it’s shot from too far away.”

Later in the day, Ed negotiated with the *Newsworld* editor again, this time about the entire week’s coverage from a staff photographer for the regional newspaper whose work GVI was syndicating. He was trying to get the editor to commit to four thousand dollars for using anything the photographer had shot that week rather than just pay three thousand dollars to use the particular photographs she was interested in. This was not about purchasing the use of a single frame, but rather about purchasing exclusive rights to the photographer’s weekly output so that

none of the magazine's competition could use it—essentially taking a certain set of images off the market.

“Given that it's Friday and some magazines won't close till tomorrow, it's a bit of a gamble, no?” I asked Ed, wanting to know what he would do if he got a truly profitable single image the following day, perhaps an image that he knew no one else had. In other words, if the same photographer happened to send in a key photograph the next day, would Ed really not sell it to anyone else and not demand any more payment for it if the editor agreed to this four-thousand-dollar deal?

“Look, if I got something really great tomorrow I'd say the deal was off. I just listen to people's voices and make a decision on the fly. I try to get the various competitors interested.”

It was not that Ed and the editor at the magazine did not hold each other to their agreements; rather, each knew and accepted that each side was constantly in negotiations. What mattered most was the long-term overall relationship rather than each individual deal. Of course, long-term trust was built through a series of successful transactions, but there was room for some juggling. The key was having the experience to know how to protect your own interests while still holding on to your reputation and not losing others' trust. For example, the editor at *Newsworld* was thinking of possibly using one of the regional newspaper staff photographer's images for the magazine's cover and emailed Ed an example of the layout. The magazine wanted to crop the image, and so Ed contacted the editor at the photographer's newspaper with whom he had negotiated the syndication deal. It was not a legal matter of permissions and requirements but rather a process of developing and maintaining goodwill and trust and an attempt to get all of the various stakeholders on board about a decision. Ed got a provisional agreement from the newspaper's photo editor and relayed the details to the editor at *Newsworld*, who promised to send over a layout as soon as it was finalized. None of them were contractually obligated to get each other's approval, but each was being courteous and working toward maintaining a long-term relationship.

Henry told Ed he thought they should make a deal with Kelly, the photographer with access to General Tommy Franks, for similar reasons: “I want her in the fold. I like her, and I think she'll be good in the longer term. I'm more buying a future relationship than I'm buying a set of pictures.”

When they called her, Kelly was relieved: “The reason I offered it to you first is that it'd be easier for me to go to CENTCOM [Central

Command] and say I'm releasing it to GVI. . . . I've already been here for a week covering lame press conferences just to be present and show my commitment, but I can't afford to stay out here on my own. But I guess you can't pay the whole shebang?"

"Absolutely not," replied Henry. "But I want to support you in this and in the future. We'll give you a four-thousand-dollar guarantee against a fifty-fifty split. There's an increased risk for us because it's not just about 'Will you get the story?' but also 'Can we sell it?' We're not a magazine. We want to share the risk with you. We can help cover expenses and share revenues. If one of the magazines put you on assignment, then they'd cover expenses and pay you a day rate and we'd take 30 percent of that day rate. Perhaps we can sell the images internationally, but that can only come together when you get the images. An upfront agreement for Tommy Franks coverage would be impossible internationally."

"That wouldn't work for me anyway," admits Kelly. "I can't go to my main contact and say I'm covering this for *Paris Match* because he'd put me on the first plane out." This was a moment of high anti-French sentiment in America, particularly among supporters of the war. It was still a mere two weeks after France had refused to support the US military campaign against Iraq. This had triggered such anger that the cafeteria menus in the three Washington, DC, House office buildings had substituted the name "freedom fries" for "french fries." Ed laughed and agreed fervently, "Over! Do *not* mention *Paris Match*." Once off the phone, he turned to Henry and commented on their negotiation with Kelly: "I feel like it's a big mating dance. We dance around and I say, 'Oh I've got a big chest and I've got feathers on my arms,' and she says, 'Well, I've got . . .'"

"Well, that's exactly what it is!" confirmed Henry.

Back at his desk Ed found the layout for the *Newsweek* cover. "Looks like *Platoon* or something. Looks like a movie poster for a Vietnam film," he commented. Apparently the newspaper editor had given the go-ahead. "The magazine's already paid for rights to this week's coverage from this newspaper, but I want an additional for the cover. Fifteen hundred to two thousand is standard," Ed informed me.

We were interrupted by his phone ringing. It was a salesperson asking him whether GVI could allow a magazine electronic rights to assignment images and inquiring about the price per photograph. The salesperson was allowing the magazine to use stock images at seventy-five dollars an image. Ed answered, "Yes, but we can't bulk-price assignment photos, because the value of the image is very content driven,"

and rolled his eyes, annoyed at having to explain the need to value news images differently from stock images.²⁴

Ed's irritation might also have been due to the fact that articulating the particular attributes that made a specific photograph valuable as a news image was one of his talents. He behaved as if it were easy to sell an image with timely and newsworthy content—as if the visible sold itself—whereas how an editor verbally comments on an image is itself a skill, one that Ed had mastered. Moreover, the real art of photo-agency sales was in creating demand and desire for images that do not yet exist and getting publications to pay money to commit to images they may never use. Ed's true talents were in selling the invisible—creating a demand for the visual futurepast and selling it before it had even been framed in a photographer's viewfinder. This talent was a vestige of the days when analog images often had to be sold literally sight unseen. A generation of editors at publications were still accustomed to an agency editor describing an image to them rather than having the ability to see every image digitally before they committed to it. Ed was a masterful salesman because he expertly played off an editor's anxieties about not having the ever-elusive perfect shot, anxieties that many years of experience allowed him to hear in their voices. I heard him jokingly tell one editor he was cajoling into buying the following day's coverage, "You don't know what they are going to get tomorrow. They could get something really good tomorrow. Just so you know, I'll be in the office tomorrow." A master of well-timed humor, Ed never appeared desperate or lost his cool with clients, even when he was extremely anxious once off the phone.

Sophie called Ed over to look at an image of American soldiers lining up to get on a plane. Ed joked, "This way for death!" Later he told Sophie he'd called the *Newsweek* editor again and told her about the image and how it's "reminiscent of Vietnam." But apparently the editor had seemed uninterested; it wasn't the direction the magazine's coverage was taking. And then Ed looked up and noticed me scribbling in my notebook and added, smiling, "I should remember to say only profound things when I come over here." In a stentorian voice he asked, "Are we merely serving as the propaganda arm of the US military? Are the royalties we receive for these images blood money, or is it just money [that's] helping us feed information to the masses?" I include these comments not because Ed was the only insightful or humorous person on the team, but rather because Ed regularly had multifaceted reactions that were carefully tailored to his audience. He was the ideal broker because he

was constantly reframing ideas—and even his humor—for his audience, which changed with every visitor and phone call.

Monday, March 31, 2003

Alain, the senior editor in Paris, was telling the team that the photographers in Baghdad were going out at night to photograph the bombings but that during the day they had to take the bus tours arranged by the Iraqi ministry of information and go see whatever they wanted the journalists to see. “Also,” he added “we did an assignment about an Italian bishop still holding Mass in Baghdad which would be a good Easter story since Easter holidays are always good for Catholic religious stories.” The assignment had been motivated, then, not necessarily by the fact that the Italian bishop was very influential or that his congregation in Iraq was particularly large or significant, but rather because the photo editors knew that newsmagazines in Europe and the United States would be looking for news stories to tack on to their seasonal coverage of Easter. Ulf Hannerz, in *Foreign News: Exploring the World of Foreign Correspondents*, discusses stories typical of certain places, but there are also story lines at home that news abroad can be made to fit.²⁵

Henry passed on what he had heard about the Geneva Conventions from the legal department: “The Geneva Conventions do not specifically mention photography. So we are not going to go to pixelating out the faces of Iraqi prisoners. But we’re not going to use anything gratuitous, and the same standard applies as for American soldiers. Tell the story, but not by putting the Iraqi in a compromised situation unless there is a compelling journalistic reason. We are an unbiased conduit for material. What they use is the publication’s call.”²⁶ Each time Henry passed on this guideline he was reproducing a conflicting message: image brokers at GVI would take ethics into consideration and not compromise the subjects in their images—unless they decided there was a sufficiently compelling journalistic reason to do so. However, GVI was not a journalistic publication, merely a conduit delivering visual content.

The Asian SARS (severe acute respiratory system) story surfaced again, and everyone agreed it was too important not to cover. One editor got siphoned off of the war and put on covering SARS. Henry warned her, “Remember to tell photographers that this story is very dangerous to cover. Maybe more than Baghdad.”

Edith, the archivist, mentioned that the archive group had now pulled together a retrospective on the history of dissent during wartime.

Liz added, “That’s great to know. Sam [another GVI photographer] is covering US teenagers’ reactions to the war.”

Suddenly Michael Strong jumped in: “That’s exactly the kind of thing we should be thinking, but we should be doing it as big overarching themes. Think big stories. I’ve been thinking: What’s the big story we want to cover for 2004? I think it’s immigration. Or teens around the world reacting to war. Do they care? We need to be doing what no one else is doing.” Then, referencing a story one of GVI’s photographers had recently shot, he added, “Beauty parlors in Baghdad was a brilliant idea. But instead of doing twenty of these stories, let’s pick three.” Strong was always pushing his team to think of big overarching themes, what he termed “epic stories” with global reach, rather than small reactive coverage that tried to find fresh angles on stories already being covered.²⁷

Tuesday, April 1, 2003

The morning started with an editor mentioning that yet another photographer was in Amman trying to get into Iraq: “I asked him if it was like one big waiting room and he replied, ‘Yeah, except there are no good magazines!’”

A manager from the sales department congratulated the news team. It came as no surprise to the news and editorial team that war really did sell. The manager reported, “We’re getting a lot of placement. This is a great sales month. News sales are up about 125 percent of goal. It’s been an absolutely stellar month.”

The mood was more somber among the editorial team after the meeting as photographs began coming in. Alex Levy started transmitting explicit images of the aftermath of house-to-house combat in Iraq, and Ed worried about him: “When Levy comes back he’s going to be fucked up like the rest of them. They’ve seen too much and they can’t cope with it.” Yet Ed must have decided that this was not the time to share his concern with Alex, for when he called, Ed chose to focus on a temporary competitive advantage instead by relaying a rumor that the satellite phone of the senior photographer working for *Newsworld* had broken down. The implication was that Alex had a greater chance of getting his images into this week’s magazine because the senior photographer couldn’t transmit his photos due to this technical glitch.

The magazine had asked for a self-portrait of Alex, and he had sent in a selection of images. In one he was holding a large rifle. Ed removed the image before forwarding the others to the magazine editor. “You

can't have newsmagazines publishing a picture of a war correspondent brandishing a large gun with a huge grin on his face," he explained to me. Michael Strong, who saw the image later, agreed: "It looks like he's mocking the army." Ed and Michael may not have objected for the same reason, but both felt it important for the photographer to not be visually confused for a soldier.

Meanwhile, other photographers had noticed that young Alex Levy's images were appearing on the cover of major publications like *Newsweek* and that the magazine featured his work on double trucks—two-page spreads in magazines, with minimal or no text. Alex Levy's coverage of the war in Iraq was garnering a lot of attention, and his credit line at high-profile publications, signaling that he was represented by GVI, served as an endorsement for GVI among photographers. Even in a tough market, it seemed, GVI could get photographers good work and support their careers. A frustrated established photographer with another photo agency came in to GVI to show his portfolio. He wanted to know if the company would be willing to take him on as a photographer, and he let it be known that he worked regularly with the *New York Times* as a freelancer. In other words, he could immediately bring revenue to GVI. He commented, "It seems like this is the place that's going to pick up photographers from other agencies. Alex was really excited. You've done fantastically for him." Henry responded modestly, "He's done fantastically for himself," but there was no hiding the pride in his voice. After reviewing the photographer's portfolio, Henry simply said that he wasn't considering sending anyone else to Iraq right now, and the photographer left.

Later in the day Ed managed to get a deal with *Newsweek* for Kelly's potentially exclusive images of Tommy Franks. He was a better broker of Kelly's images than she herself had been. *Newsweek* agreed to cover Kelly's expenses for two weeks, and GVI was no longer sharing any financial risk for Kelly's production. Clearly, visual opportunities don't seal the deal themselves; they need to be expertly brokered.

Thursday, April 3, 2003

The morning meeting focused on Jacques, the photographer whose equipment had been stolen. Alain was concerned that Iraqi officials were preparing another expulsion of journalists, and he was trying to get together tear sheets (examples of published work) that proved that

Jacques was a working journalist whose work got published so that Jacques could make a convincing argument for himself.²⁸ “Victims would be good,” Alain said. “Let’s prepare a package he can use to convince the Iraqis that he is showing what the US is doing to the Iraqi population.”

Later in the day Ed looked over some images at Sophie’s computer and explained to me, “The photographer is the first editor. We’re the second editor. We’re not making news for people to consume, we’re making pictures for people to buy. We’re not making fast-breaking news.²⁹ When I’m sorting stories I focus on how a client would find this rather than which picture tells the story. You want to have as many photos as possible available online for licensing. There are very few out-takes for war photos. Oh, look at that, Jackie,” he broke off, pointing to pixelated faces of Iraqi prisoners of war on CNN.

Jackie commented, “I guess CNN is seen as a news outlet, whereas we’re a reseller. Strong might change our whole motto and make us a content provider, but for now, we’re just resellers,” she added, spelling out that she perceived GVI not as a news producer but rather as a visual content provider.

Ed nodded emphatically: “My job is to provide an income for photographers and that’s all. I mean, are we a business or are we a news organization? I don’t think we are a news service!”

Alex Levy sent in a new batch of images, and Sophie and Ed edited them together. “We couldn’t have picked a better guy to send on this stupid embed thing,” Ed commented.

Sophie, never one to shy away from controversy, goaded Ed: “I guess it depends what you call a good photograph.”

“A good photograph is one that will sell, not necessarily a great photograph. Come on, Sophie, he’s got a very good eye. This is excellent photography. I think you’re being overly critical. I mean, he’s still very young and still developing his eye.” Ed looked up and spotted Ilan, the Israeli photographer who should have gotten the embed arranged for Alex, who was visiting the office. “Don’t look at these, Ilan,” he said to him, “you’re going to get uncontrollably jealous.”

Ilan went through the images on the screen anyway.

“Pissed you off, right?” asked Ed.

“Yeah, I’m going to kill him when he gets back,” Ilan answered, painfully aware of the professional opportunities he was missing because of his nationality.

Friday, April 4, 2003

Robert from the Paris office wanted to know if they should let the Pentagon know about their photographers' locations: "So that if US troops storm Baghdad—" Before he could finish, Paul, responsible for all correspondence with the military, interrupted: "Their official position is that either it's an embed or they can't do anything for the photographers."³⁰

Robert switched topics. At least they had been able to get Jacques new equipment—most importantly, cables he needed to transmit his photographs. Known more for cynicism than praise, Robert surprised the team when he brought up French publications' interest in Alex Levy and extolled, "This guy's a revelation. We are all honored. This is excellent stuff."

After the meeting Ed repeated to the others, "'Revelation.' That's a rare compliment from Paris!"

Michael Strong and his right-hand man, his technical collaborator, spent the afternoon on the phone with GVI's core technical team trying to figure out how to redesign the delivery of images to their website and from there to clients' servers. Strong was trying to explain that although news images might be only a small part of GVI's revenues, they were critical to its reputation, and therefore the specific needs of news imagery had to be met.

"News doesn't sleep," Strong said. "GVI is not architected to be a twenty-four/seven operation, but I can't have a photographer slogging in the mud in Iraq and tell him 'Sorry, our FTP [file transfer protocol] server is down and so we can't distribute your image.' Our technical side has to be bulletproof." When someone complimented him on the ubiquitous placement of Alex Levy's photographs, Strong jumped on the opportunity to reiterate why GVI's technical architecture was critical to its being able to compete in the world of photojournalism: "You know, we met Alex through an email Listserv. He's just a kid, and he wasn't selected to go to Iraq. Another photographer, Ilan, was. But Alex ended up going, and this wild-eyed kid who's really green got the cover of *Newsweek* magazine! There's no better example of what GVI can do for a guy. But we need to technically be able to get his stuff out immediately."

After the meeting Strong was frustrated. He wanted to know what was technically possible and felt that others were questioning his business decisions without understanding the demands of news. I asked him the question the team had been struggling with lately: "Is GVI a visual content provider or a news provider?"

“Both,” he answered. “Proactively, we are a news provider. This is why we have assignment photographers. But reactively, we are a visual content provider because we need to have images of events that have happened. So we have partnerships with newspapers and other image providers like wire services so that we can syndicate their coverage and sell their images to publications that aren’t subscribing to them.” In other words, GVI had to be visualizing both the past and the future constantly. Its business was to provide the raw materials for others’ use, but Michael was trying to push his team to think and produce like a news publication with the strongest visual journalism.

The GVI photographers in Baghdad managed to get permission to stay for another ten days. Ed, adept at spotting opportunities, immediately wanted to know whether any photographers with other agencies had been expelled so that he could offer GVI’s coverage to those publications for which they’d been on assignment. The value of news images is directly tied to their potential exclusivity, so knowing how many other organizations might possibly have the necessary access to produce them is a key piece of information for an image broker trying to pitch a photographer’s coverage and gauge its value relative to what else is being produced.

Saturday, April 5, 2003

Despite its being a Saturday, and one during a weekend when he wasn’t supposed to be on duty, Ed was in the office in anticipation of US troops entering Baghdad. Someone from the news team was always in the office on a Saturday, but this week, in addition to Michael Strong, who seemed to work practically around the clock, there were two editors. Ed reported that yet another of the photographers affiliated with GVI was in Iraq: “Ahmed went in with an Arab passport and just walked into Iraq with an assignment for the *New York Times*. He hooked up with the writer by himself, not through GVI, but he should have the *New York Times* run the GVI credit for him if he’d like to have us syndicate his images.” The photographer was not compelled to share profits with GVI since he had found the assignment independently and GVI was not financing his coverage in any way. However, getting the newspaper to credit GVI beneath his photographs would be good publicity for GVI and a signal to other image brokers who might want to publish his work that it was available on the GVI website.

Then he brought the subject around to his rookie photographer: “Also I’m worried that Alex Levy is doing some translating for the unit

he's embedded with when they have prisoners of war. It just gets him deeper in the story and I think he is crossing an editorial line. He's somehow becoming complicit in the treatment of these people."³¹

But as was typical in the pace of the newsroom, before he was able to dwell any further on that thought, his phone rang and he switched into salesman mode: "I just worry that you're missing out on an opportunity here," he told the photo editor at the *Army Times*, whose coverage GVI wanted to syndicate online. The *Army Times* hadn't signed the official partnership agreement, and Ed was pushing them to do so. However, as Ed knew too well, even a conversation that does not result in a sale can be profitable. Ed was always getting information about what other photographers were telling their editors. This often required him to share some information as well: "That's what I heard from my guy, too, that the US took Baghdad airport. Though my embed can't really talk to me on the phone. Listen, if you can get me 'Tanks in Baghdad' I can do a lot with that today." Saturday on a big news day was prime time for the last-minute sales of news images. Ed knew that all newsmagazines that had Saturday closes were holding off on putting the week's issue to bed until the last possible moment to see whether they could get coverage of the US entering Baghdad. 'Tanks in Baghdad' was what everyone was hoping for.

That afternoon Liz, the photo editor officially on duty that day, had to write a caption for an image showing bullet-ridden portraits of Saddam Hussein taken by photographers traveling with US troops. Reading the attached caption, "Redecorating Saddam's portrait," Liz was troubled by what she perceived as a flip tone. Ed responded, "I feel as if we are in collusion with the armed forces. I mean, we're selling these images and moving them." Liz changed the wording of the caption to read: "Bullet holes left as a souvenir by US Marines on a portrait of Saddam Hussein on the road to Baghdad."

Later that day a series of photographs arrived that disturbed her so much that she turned away from the screen. A series of nine images showed women crying and clutching a baby, corpses of children lying in a pool of blood on a bus, the corpse of an alleged Iraqi Republican Guard leader and his driver, the map found in his vehicle, and an American soldier washing stretchers. Liz tried to formulate a title for the image set, struggling with her word choice.

"Aftermath of US incident on Iraqi bus." Then she deleted *incident*, and her title read: "Aftermath of US fire on Iraqi bus." "I was going to say 'Iraqi civilians,' but then it sounds like we meant to do that. The

photographer uses the word *attack*. ‘Aftermath of . . .’ There were seven women and children on the bus. Do we have a word for . . . ?”

“Slaughter?” suggested Ed in macabre jest.

“Ed! We’re trying to tone down *attack*.” Clearly, she was perturbed by the attempt to find words that were truthful without editorializing. “‘Iraqi civilian casualties?’ ‘Aftermath of US attack on civilian bus?’”

“Have you seen it corroborated in the press?” Ed asked. Liz went on to the website www.yahoo.com to see if the incident had been reported.

She did find other references to the event and typed out a new headline—“US Marines shooting on bus ends in civilian deaths”—but finally decided on “Bus shooting by US Marines ends in civilian deaths.” “Good, that doesn’t imply whether there were any Iraqi military on the bus,” she mumbled to herself or possibly to me. When a photograph or series such as this one is archived, part of what gets erased is brokers’ reactions—in this case, Liz’s emotions when captioning the images.

Tuesday, April 8, 2003

Edith, the archivist, told the group that the Saddam retrospective was ready. “But we need another edit because we have too many pictures,” she added. Henry Smith was insistent: “Well, let’s have it ready. If they announce this afternoon that [Saddam’s] in the rubble then we want to have something available.”

Edith also mentioned the retrospective on antiwar protests.

“But when we put that out there we attach a disclaimer to it, right?” Ed asked. “GVI is starting to editorialize, isn’t it? We don’t want to be slapped with ‘GVI supports antiwar movements.’”

“We only produced it,” explained Edith. “The subject matter is in the news. We’re putting out content that’s saying this isn’t new. It’s got history. When I spoke with one magazine they said, ‘We can’t do anything political, but we’re interested in this because it is historical.’”

“As long as you have that word in there . . .,” Ed responded. Liz agreed, emphasizing the role of the category “historical.”

Meanwhile, the Paris office was on to other, non-war-related stories: “We’re planning a story on road accidents, which is a real plague in France. We’re thinking about recouping images from the family albums of all the people who die in one weekend. Easter weekend is one of the biggest killers of the year.”

Henry cautioned, “I’d try to get a little separation between war and killer accidents. I think people need a break, need happy stories.

Something less about death. Anyway let's talk tomorrow. Also let's be ready to talk about ideas for postwar Iraq."

When Ed emerged from the meeting, Sophie was grimacing and quipped, "Ed, your boy Alex Levy didn't send captions." Ed promised to bug him about it. Photographers are supposed to always send in captions with images. At every one of my field sites, editors were constantly reminding photographers that captions mattered. Several times I overheard Michael Strong telling a young photographer that writing great captions was critical to getting a break as a photojournalist.³²

Ed noticed Strong walking a visitor around the office.

"Hey, Jackie, who's the woman with Strong?" he asked.

"I don't know. The consultant?" she joked, referring to *Office Space*, the team's favorite movie about mind-numbing corporate politics.

"No, she's another anthropologist! The anthropologist to study the anthropologist!" This moment of comic relief was welcomed by all—myself especially. During my initial weeks at GVI, I was constantly reminded that gaining access to an institution did not mean that I now had the trust of everyone who worked there. Michael Strong had given me unfettered access to his team in the GVI newsroom, and Ed couldn't object to this publicly since Michael had framed it as such a good opportunity to have someone document how the team, as a team, were going to turn around GVI's news and editorial division and its standing in the documentary photography world. Yet Ed initially made it clear that he did not want me around. As I mentioned earlier, I observed the workings of the newsroom by sitting on a small stool and moving between the desks of the main editors, and much of my time was spent with Ed. For the first two weeks, I arrived every morning to find that the stool had once again disappeared. Luckily Ed was even more polite than he was shy or adversarial, so the stool would usually turn up after I had stood for a few hours of work. So I, too, could laugh at the joke about the anthropologist being brought in to study me.

Before Ed could finish chuckling, his phone rang. It was Alex Levy saying that he might want to leave his embed. But Ed thought it might be too dangerous for Alex to wander off alone. Alex suggested that he might head to Baghdad.

"Look, Alex, I know you want to be a part of the action, but it's a big country. Baghdad's the endgame, but it's not the only thing to cover. I also don't know that *Newsweek* is going to want to keep four photographers in Baghdad. They're going to start ending some stints." After the call, Ed commented to Jackie, "Now we need to try to con-

tinue Alex's growth. Does he want to be a combat photographer? I don't think so, but it's up to him." In addition to scouting talented new photographers, one of Ed's tasks was to imagine future assignments for the photographers, to help them craft a profile to keep them working. The future of GVI depended on the future of its photographers, and Ed was particularly concerned that Alex not be typecast as a combat photographer.

The CNN headline was heard from the TVs hanging above the editorial team's desks in the office: "Journalists under fire." "Well, they're in a war zone!" exclaimed Jackie, who in the last few days had come to worry less, now that she had accepted that the photographers were there of their own volition.

The team was also actively courting respected photographers for GVI and had long been trying to get Yoshi, an up-and-coming photographer who was very well regarded among his peers, to sign a contract. Yoshi told me he had been hesitant to sign a representation contract with GVI partly because of the way older photographers talked about it as the corporate giant that had upended the photojournalism industry. Several members of the editorial team gathered in the evening for drinks with Yoshi to show their enthusiasm for his work. They flattered his unique style and what they perceived as his non-testosterone-driven approach. Yoshi shot film and made his own prints, the quality of which impressed everyone. His choice to not go digital somewhat dictated what he was being asked to shoot: stories that could afford to be slow. For example, although there were photographers in Iraq in April 2003 who typically had shot film, they were all now shooting and transmitting digital images. Yoshi had worked primarily for adventure-focused magazines but wanted to try to do more political photography. One editor was surprised by that information: "Really? If Kosovo were happening today, would you like to go?" Yoshi was a very humble photographer and lacked the swagger common to many of the combat photographers. In fact, slightly embarrassed by being the center of attention, Yoshi deflected the flattery and quipped, "OK, OK. I want a satellite phone and a pony!"

Wednesday, April 9, 2003

By the time the news team came in, close to 10 A.M., all TV screens showed a large group of people at Firdos Square gathered to topple a statue of Saddam Hussein.

“Everybody capable of holding a camera is live on the statue,” Ed announced. “Though I’m not sure about the jubilation and sense of liberation the anchors are going on about. I mean we’re not sure Saddam is gone.” Turning to Jackie, he continued, “There are Eastern European parallels, aren’t there?” Then, chuckling, “Oh, look at that, they’re going to bring in a tank to help!”

The whole team was gathered under the screens, trying out headlines or sales pitches and discussing the day’s coverage.

“It’s what we were waiting for!”

“Freedom has come back!”

“We want to avoid bunching up in the same place. Statue toppling is an obligatory cover, but the main thing is how to get a different photo [of it].”

“Where’s Jacques?”

“We might see him onscreen.” Sure enough, every TV camera angle showed photographers the GVI news team recognized.

Ed asked the Paris office if all the French TV channels were broadcasting live on the statue.

“Yes, of course,” came the response. “But we managed to tell one of the photographers about the rumor we heard from the *Newsweek* editor that Saddam Hussein might be at the Russian embassy, so he’s over there to investigate.”

“Any ideas on stories for the rest of the week?” Henry asked his team. “What will the future look like?” Editors in both New York and Paris brainstormed:

“All these towns haven’t fallen. There’s all the fedayeen up there. No pictures of arrests yet. Saddam and his minister of information, whereabouts unknown.”

“Then we’re desperately in need of Saddam’s palaces and bunkers.”

“Refugees, maybe following a family going home?”

“New government.”

“Palaces.”

“The mourning of families.”

“Daily life returning to normal.”

“We could do oil fields. The road from Kuwait to Baghdad. Bring a top photographer to do the symbols of war, maybe in black and white?”

Ed reminded people of the edit of Saddam portraits: “People are going to need covers. When Ceaușescu fell I remember one photographer picked up all the family albums. They’re very good for revenue. You know, all the forbidden pics.” Then Ed had to leave the meeting to take another call.

Robert, in Paris, told the others, “We have the cover of *Paris Match* this week. But in France magazines are finding out that war doesn’t sell.”

Henry concurred: “Yeah, today’s the first day that the *New York Post* does not have the war as lead story.”

Robert interjected, “TV is killing the surprise element of magazines. By the time you get the magazine you’ve heard so many experts, consultants, and seen endless footage.”

The meeting ended with a sense that although the war might be winding down, there were still many angles of the Iraq story to be pursued. It was up to the editors to relay these to their photographers in the hopes of generating photographs. This is how formative fictions are constructed. Photo editors often complain that even their family and friends don’t quite understand what they do since the editors are not the ones actually taking the pictures. I asked Ed who had called during the meeting. “My mother,” he confessed sheepishly. She had wanted to let him know what was happening on the news. As if unaware of what his work entailed, she had asked: “Ed, are you watching the TV? It’s like the Berlin Wall!”

At 10:35 A.M., an American soldier climbed up the statue and covered Saddam’s face with a US flag.

“I don’t think that’s so appropriate,” commented one soft-spoken photo editor. “They should let Iraqi people take the lead.”

Sophie called out, “Ed! Photos of Jessica Lynch’s parents in Ramstein are in!” Private Jessica Lynch had been injured and captured by Iraqi forces on March 23, 2003. Her recovery by US special operation forces on April 1, 2003, had garnered much media attention as the first successful POW rescue mission from Iraq, and Sophie knew that Ed would be interested in these photographs since they were highly likely to sell.³³

The group watched the statue of Saddam get pulled down.

Jackie started laughing when the statue got stuck midtopple: “He’s stuck. This is hilarious. I guess they used special glue on his feet.”

“It’s a total visual letdown isn’t it?” asked Ed. “It was a beautiful image when it was the Iraqi people bringing it down, but now it’s just boring.”

Alex Levy called and was cautious about revealing his unit’s position over the phone. Nonetheless, Ed tried to get information that he could then pass on to editors at the magazine—efforts that resulted in a riddle-like string of questions: “You’re heading in the right direction, right? Do you have anything to send? You’re heading north but you can’t say

where? Are you with the writer? Do they have a pretty interesting thing to do when they get wherever they're going?"

Then the team was back to discussing the toppling of the statue.

"It just ruins it visually," Ed lamented

"Yeah," Jackie concurred.

"I want crowds of peasants liberating their own country, not some friggin' tank pulling it down," Ed added.

Cynical Sophie chimed in nonchalantly, "Yeah, but this is reality. When you make the HBO version, you can change it."

"Ed, do I keep charging double day hazard rate?" Jackie asked.

"Always charge double rate till they complain!"

"*Focus* magazine [a German weekly newsmagazine] might be interested in putting someone on for Baghdad after the war. Should I show them photographer portfolios?"

Ed nodded.

"Real ones [i.e., physical portfolio books] or digital?"

"Digital," Ed replied, adding emphatically, "Digital is real!"

"So you're going to be at Saddam International Airport tomorrow?"

Ed asked Alex on their next call. In turn, Alex asked Ed for news from Baghdad.³⁴

"This morning the press showed up for a regular meeting, and no Iraqi officials showed. Everyone walked out and started reporting freely. There's been looting, pockets of sniping. But there's a general air of jubilation. There was a ridiculous live event. They toppled a Saddam statue for the Iraqis and there was a lot of screaming and jumping. There's a rumor that Saddam's at the Russian embassy trying to escape to Syria." In response, Alex expressed some concern about the futility of going to Baghdad now that it was swarming with photographers.

"There are lots of other stories to do once you get there," Ed assured him. "Just because the bang-bang is finished doesn't mean the story's over. Today's the first day that people reported freely."

Meanwhile, another editor was trying to tell me precisely what was so disappointing about the statue toppling: "Politically and psychologically there is a weight to a people tearing down its own icons. But this toppling an icon doesn't mean much." He was well read and often spent time reading non-American publications' coverage of events. "The Arab press is reporting that not only do Arabs need to stand up to the US but there are a lot of symbolic things happening in the defacing of photos." He felt that all of that was being ignored for the predictable image of the falling statue.

And still another editor complained, “Those were hardly throngs, were they?” The entire team seemed unconvinced by the spectacle of the statue; it fell far short of their visual expectations. Furthermore, the sheer number of photographers in the crowd in Firdos Square and the likelihood of many similar, competing photographs meant that it was unlikely that any of the images produced would be particularly valuable since none were likely to be unique. And yet, even in the midst of expressing disappointment at the weakness of the spectacle produced, none of the team members made a comment that expressed any doubt about the signal that the visual was being tied to by all the news sources around them—that somehow this marked the beginning of the end of the war. Formative fictions are powerful after all. Even in the midst of critiquing the particular construction of a photograph of a toppled statue of a leader, these brokers were not voicing doubts that this could be a moment of regime change. After all, it looked like a regime change.

When Jacques, the experienced photographer, called Ed and told him he’d been in the square, Ed immediately asked which other photographers he’d spotted. He was trying to assess the value of Jacques’s photographs in relation to others from the scene. Since it was clear that he wouldn’t be able to claim exclusivity, Ed was trying to find other ways he could sell Jacques’s coverage. Perhaps Jacques had been the most senior photographer on the scene? “Was Jim Nachtwey there?” Ed asked. If he had been, this would hurt Jacques’s chances of getting his images into that week’s *Newsweek*.

Afterward, Ed filled Jackie in: “Apparently the mood changed in ten minutes. One minute people were threatening to kill him [Jacques], and the next everyone was cheering. Also, *Newsweek*’s editor said they saw Nachtwey and another of their photographers on their TV screen!”

Another senior photographer phoned in from Baghdad. His first question was whether there were a lot of other photographers in Baghdad, and Ed confirmed his fears: “There are a lot. But listen, the story’s developing from here on out. If you get into the palaces look for covers. End-of-Saddam-era kind of pictures, smashed-up Saddam portraits. . . . Good luck and take care, there’s a lot of looting going on.” Ed was always positive on the phone with photographers, coaching them more or less depending on their experience level and how much sense he had of which directions the publications’ stories were going in. In keeping with his stated mission of providing photographers with an income, Ed worked with each one to think about unique angles to cover. Yet when taken collectively, his suggestions to his photographers about a range of

different stories they might pursue were also about rigorously developing the journalistic investigation. As an image broker, then, Ed served both the photographers and the news story.

Henry Smith, the director of news, looked over Sophie's shoulder at the images she was editing. "I don't need five angles of the statue falling," he told her. "A Shiite in a small town beating up a Sunni is going to be more valuable than another picture of the statue." Henry was already looking for a fresh angle on the story, something that had yet to be visualized. Anticipating how the story might develop, he wanted to have photos that first indicated the direction the struggle might take, the earliest images of the futurepast.

Sean called from the Iraqi border and told Ed the borders were crumbling and a bunch of journalists were going in. He wanted to know if Ed had heard any report of road conditions. "No," Ed told him, "but look, Baghdad is now crawling with photographers. There's a lot of stories in Karbala but there haven't been any journalists there. We're bunching in Baghdad." So the photographer agreed to try to convince the other journalists in his convoy to go to Karbala. Casually managing expectations, Ed warned him before they hung up, "Now that there are so many photographers free to roam there, getting you published may be difficult." The conversation ended with him expressing concern for Sean's welfare: "Are you taking a bulletproof vest and helmet?"

Sean responded coyly, "I shall rely on my winning smile to deflect incoming bullets." As in so many of Ed's conversations with experienced photographers, humor and laughter functioned as an instantly effective bonding tool over the crackling phone lines poorly connecting great distances. Ed and Sean had been working together long enough to afford being ironic.

Three other photographers that day voiced a desire to go to Baghdad. One informed Ed that journalists were being invited in and told, "You can stay as long as you like." But Henry was adamant that GVI was "overcovered" and discouraged anyone else from going to the capital. The disgruntled photographer threatened, "When Mosul starts to happen it's going to spread thin," implying that GVI might regret the decision later.

Ed ended the day by commenting with some concern, "All our photographers are going to be in Iraq within two days!" He would need to find ways to differentiate their coverage. Doggedly persistent, he called the *Newsworld* editor one more time before leaving the office: "We just got some images of looting. Any interest?"

REVIEWING THE VISUAL CONTENT OF WAR

Michael Strong regularly emphasized that “realities are often unforeseeable,” and this was precisely the challenge of an industry constantly trying to guess what the future would look like so that its photographers were sure to be in place to *have taken* a relevant image. The irony, of course, is that what the future will literally look like in photojournalism has a lot to do with what the past has already looked like, and what the various brokers of images—photo editors at agencies and publications as well as photographers themselves—imagine the future will look like based on news images that have already circulated and created expectations. In other words, formative fictions structure future frames. Henry, Ed, Liz, Jackie, and their respective interlocutors were constantly speaking of military operations “looking like ’Nam,” or the fall of the Saddam statue being reminiscent of events in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s. What does it mean for image brokers to have expectations of what types of images will best capture a dictator’s life? When Ed reminds his team of how well images of Ceaușescu’s family albums sold in order to encourage them to seek similar images in Saddam’s palace, there is a visual conflation between Iraq in 2003 and Romania in 1989, despite very different political contexts.³⁵ If we fast-forward to the futurepast and look back on today’s news coverage as the key component of tomorrow’s visual history, we need to consider what characteristics this type of visual history will have ingrained in it because of the conditions of possibility in which it was initially produced and circulated. Throughout this chapter we’ve seen formative fictions in action in the daily acts of image brokers attempting to visualize politics.

I was struck when the photo editor of a major regional US daily newspaper with whom Ed had sealed a syndication deal emphatically stated, “I’m saying this as an experienced photo editor: tops [the war in Iraq will] take three weeks.” Why would experience as a photo editor give him any knowledge or authority by which to speculate confidently on how long a war might last? But perhaps he does have some relevant experience in a military attack where the attacking country’s secretary of defense—in his first nonscripted comments to the press and, through them, to the public—talks about photographic representations of the war his country is engaged in. In a war of images, image brokers play a very different role than we, or even they, might suspect. Within three weeks of the war’s beginning, the politics of visualizing the war in Iraq

meant that the fall of Saddam's statue could temporarily represent a political end to the war and get widespread circulation, even if the images were visually underwhelming and the conclusion they suggested was politically inaccurate.

Furthermore, as the events I've detailed make clear, it is very complicated to delineate the lines between media production and reception, particularly when the military and governments are such active participants in media production. After all, at a time when US–French relations were very tense because France was not supporting the invasion into Iraq, commanders in the field could be swayed to grant a photographer access if she was shooting for *Newsweek* but might not have been had she been on assignment for *Paris Match*. On the other hand, tear sheets were prepared specifically with an eye to selecting images that emphasized a French photographer's documentation of Iraqi victims, with the goal of convincing Iraqi minders and information officials to grant him access and not expel him. Even for unembedded photographers, access was politically policed, framing the coverage before a single image had been made. Can any of the media producers or image brokers structurally claim to be *unbiased conduits* of information in the terms Henry Smith used to describe the work his team produced?

Remember the editor in Paris telling the photographer crossing the Jordanian border to keep an eye out for religious symbols, or the photographer in southern Iraq calling the photo agent in New York to hear news from Baghdad—which the photo agent *himself* had culled from other editors and agents (in turn reporting what their photographers have relayed to them) and what the agent is absorbing from the bombardment of media outlets around him. Where precisely are the grounds upon which any “*ground truth*” can be achieved? Yet what does it mean when the argument that there is no single ground truth and that each image or report is instead but a subjective *slice of the war* has been officially co-opted by the military? From the first press conference of the war in Iraq, the US military claimed that this war could be understood and evaluated only by those who had “a sight on all areas of what is under way”—those like the president and his advisors—thus creating the impression that they themselves, those whose interactions with the public are always mediated, have direct omnipotent vision.

In this construction, there seems to be little role for a free press if the media by nature cannot see in totality and yet only through the media does the public have any access to the leader who allegedly can. Rumsfeld warned that “what we are seeing is *not* the war in Iraq.” His

simultaneous insistence that the humanity that went into the precision of military targeting would undoubtedly be made clear once ground truth was achieved serves as a parable. The very rhetoric of precision and clarity obscures in its attempt to convince the news-viewing public not only that things are not as they seem but that what the public sees cannot possibly be what it thinks it sees because that which it would need to see in order to understand and intervene meaningfully is unseeable. Abstract state oversight is glorified, while all specific visuals are discredited.

This sleight of hand was indeed successful, and it contributed to the perception that this would be a very short war. Just a few days into the action, as we have seen, it became clear that things were “much messier” than expected. Of course, “Baghdad” was not over until 2011—if it can be said to be over now, five years later on—and the news media struggled with how to report on a war that was never anticipated to last past the fall of Saddam’s statue.³⁶ How did journalists’ conviction that this would be a short war affect their reporting? Perhaps media outlets’ expectation of instant reporting actually hampered their ability to investigate and report on longer-term events. Or conversely, when news cycles are so short, is there an automatic expectation of short historical cycles, quick events that can be iconically represented by “best of” image sets just a few days or weeks into the event? Perhaps the temporality of war itself was expected to comply with the digital temporality of news coverage, one that leaves no time for events or information gathering to unfold. To better understand how speed and worldwide distribution shape visual worldmaking, I turn to Agence France-Presse and focus on transformations in the very infrastructures of representation and the everyday practices behind wiring news images worldwide in the age of digital distribution.