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Source: *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Aug., 2003), pp. 398-428

Published by: [Blackwell Publishing](#) on behalf of the [American Anthropological Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3651572>

Accessed: 20/09/2011 17:23

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Violence and the Rhetoric of Images

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Photographs [have] become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance. They demand a specific kind of approach; free-floating contemplation is not appropriate to them. They stir the viewer; he feels challenged by them in a new way.

—Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*

The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.

—Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

In early spring 2001, two campaigns of iconoclasm—one literal, one virtual—were playing out in southwest Asia and the well-worn ideological landscapes it defines in the Western imagination as a religious, political, and cultural “center-out-there” (Turner 1973). On March 3, soldiers of Afghanistan’s Taliban militia began destroying thousands of statues on the orders of their leader, Muhammad Omar. Small clay figurines in museums were hammered and crushed underfoot. Two soaring images of the Buddha, which had been carved into the sheer sandstone cliffs overlooking the Bamiyan valley centuries ago, met with a Procrustean attack beginning with the effacement of their heads and feet by anti-aircraft missiles. By the end of the first day, two-thirds of the country’s statues had been destroyed, and it was announced that those remaining would be completely destroyed by the Feast of the Sacrifice, which is the annual commemoration of the patriarch Abraham’s single-minded commitment to God. “These idols,” explained Omar, “have been the gods of the infidels,” and there is no room for them in a Muslim country (Farley and Wright 2001; Moore 2001; Shah 2001).¹ Meanwhile, the American news agency MSNBC was experiencing a ratings battle between Palestinian and Israeli sympathizers over a photograph of the killing of 12-year-old Muhammad al-Dura. The boy was shot to death by Israeli forces on September 30, 2000, as he huddled, terrified and crying, behind his father in the midst of a furious gun battle in a Gaza street. Palestinian photographers working for French television caught the incident on tape, and a photo was posted on the MSNBC web site as part of their “Year in Pictures 2000” contest. For three weeks, the photograph was the

leader in on-line voting for best picture. But then Meirav Eilon Shahar, an Israeli diplomat in Los Angeles, started an e-mail campaign urging Israeli supporters to vote for other photographs. Shahar's allegation that Muhammad's father led him into the crossfire for publicity was met by countercharges that Israel was distorting the incident for similar reasons. As a result of the campaign, the photo of Muhammad's killing fell to sixth place in the photo contest, behind five animal pictures, including one of a dog straining to get through a fence to urinate on a fire hydrant (*Charlotte Observer* 2001).

The Buddhist statues and the photo of the boy's death are two radically different sorts of images. But the mountain of graven stone and the ceaseless transmediation of electronic code share a social origin and a social fate. Born in the collective mobilization of human groups to craft objects of memory, both have become focal points of emotionally powerful battles over self-definition, over history and forgetting, and over the nature of truth and virtue. Both are idols.

In arguing about what truths these idols represent, Palestinians, Israelis, American Jews, academics, journalists, computer and photography buffs, Afghan politicians, Iranian and Pakistani mullahs, the Dalai Lama, UNESCO officials, and horrified museum directors across the world struggled to define the nature of images and what they signify about human nature, motivation, and history.² The statues and the photograph became objects of contest in part because of their place within specific traditions of representation (faith, secular art history, photojournalism) and larger traditions of politics and culture. It was these traditions as much as the images themselves that were being contested. However, the immediacy of representative images disguises their social nature. Their seeming transparency, simplicity, and distance from language restricts our consciousness of their essential sociality (Barthes 1985; Mitchell 1986). Thus, the Taliban claimed to be destroying statues of Buddha because of what the images represent—infidel gods—rather than because there were infidels arrayed around them. The video image of a screaming child was read as a narrow statement about his father's intent rather than the twisted political affinities of the image's viewers. Viewed obliquely these alternative readings can fall into relief. Spectacles that appear to signify virtue or vice to the viewer derive their power from the relationships the images mediate between the viewer and other people. In our horror at Taliban destructiveness, we become the infidels arrayed in impotent solidarity around the statues. Similarly, MSNBC's web viewers constitute themselves as collectivities, through multiple mediations, around the slaughter of Palestinian children.

This article is about the politics of visual representation, specifically about how the documentary photograph can be used to mobilize collectivities.³ In the two cases above, images became the medium for transnational political contests in which opposing groups mobilized by projecting onto those images fundamental values: purity versus idolatry, heritage versus fanaticism, injustice versus innocence, cynicism versus responsibility. In exploring this further, I will use another Middle Eastern case study, an interlinked series of spectacles

created and reported in the Cairo press during the summer of 1993. Unlike the first two stories, these spectacles were not widely reported outside Egypt, yet they have become central to contemporary Egyptian discourses of class, kinship, and patriotism. Documentary newspaper photographs act as a discourse of emotional engagement through which the Egyptian state seeks to assimilate itself with the newspaper reading audience into a single rhetorical subject. By representing emotions visually, photojournalism engages the passions of a diffuse audience and expresses that engagement as a spontaneous unified outpouring of feeling. It becomes in effect the expressive art of the modern political order.⁴

Scene of the Crime

The camera is getting smaller and smaller, ever readier to capture fleeting and secret moments whose images paralyse the associative mechanisms in the beholder. This is where the caption comes in, whereby photography turns all life's relationships into literature. . . . Is not every square inch of our cities the scene of a crime? Every passer-by a culprit? Is it not the task of the photographer—descendant of the augurs and haruspices—to reveal guilt and to point out the guilty in his pictures? . . . Will not the caption become the most important part of the photograph?

—Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street, and Other Writings*

Egypt's complex media environment is influenced by a longstanding political war between the state and a number of Islamist opposition groups. In this conflict, the Egyptian government has used a number of police, political, and cultural strategies. The latter have included changes in educational and publication policy and the use of mass media to inform, persuade, and mobilize the population. Art and photography have long histories as part of Egypt's journalistic heritage (Dougherty 2000), despite changes in the way the oral, the written, and the pictorial articulate with locally particular senses of self, motivation, and knowledge. From its beginning in the 1870s, print journalism in Egypt has been harnessed for nationalist and reformist projects, as have 20th-century theater, literature, and visual arts. William Rugh (1979) lists Egypt among Middle Eastern countries possessing a "mobilization press" intended to shape public opinion and motivate collective action. Confirming this tradition in 1993, interior minister Hasan al-Alfi told a national conference of journalists that "the relationship between the police and the newspapers is strong and profound" in defending and securing the political system against threats, particularly from Islamist groups ('Abd al-Majid 1993). This is the context in which newspaper art is deployed to arouse the public through its representation of virtue and vice.

Although Middle Eastern Muslim religious, legal, and artistic practices have traditionally privileged the oral/aural over the written (Caton 1990; Mesick 1993) and representational art has long been marginalized in Arabic-speaking regions of the Muslim world, visual idioms are no stranger to traditional poetic compositions or contemporary religious and political discourses.

Popular perception of truth is suffused with visual idioms, and traditional culture producers use or mimic them for heightened emotional effect. During the 1970s, popular Egyptian *khutaba'* (preachers), such as Shaykh 'Abd al-Hamid Kishk, transformed the art of Islamic preaching by deploying a rhetoric of passionate expression meant to awaken and shape the audience's ethical sensibilities (Hirschkind 2001). They pioneered discursive techniques that relied on the audience's familiarity with the visual imagery and visualizing narrative of cinema, theater, and television newscasts. In his sermons Kishk often called on his audience to visualize dramatic scenes and led them through the action like a newsman with a camera. Admirers dubbed Kishk's technique as "the word as camera," a "rhetorical form . . . tied to modern technologies of the image" (Hirschkind 1999:133–134).⁵ The visual has not eclipsed the oral/aural as a mode of religious expression and understanding, but it has been incorporated within traditional discursive forms in recognition of its power and pervasiveness in contemporary popular culture.

Egyptian newspapers contain dozens of photographs, such as portraits of political leaders, columnists, obituary portraits; advertising images, paparazzi snapshots of celebrities, records of speeches and conferences, scenes of court trials, factory work, agricultural fields, local streetscapes, foreign political rallies, action shots of soccer games, and photos illustrating the occasional story of the bizarre or unusual, such as the birth of a two-headed calf or the local display of a micrographic Qur'an.⁶ The photographs that form the basis of this article are drawn from several weeks of coverage of a set of events that took place before and during the difficult summer of 1993.⁷

For a year, small militant Islamist organizations had been reigniting a fierce but sporadic war against the Egyptian government, sometimes using foreign tourists, indigenous Christians, and public figures as surrogates. In January a handful of men later dubbed "the Afghan veterans," who had been Egyptian participants in the guerilla war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, had launched a wave of attacks in Egypt, first against tourist buses at the Giza pyramids and then in front of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo's main square. Later they placed a bomb under a police car, and finally in late April, they ambushed Egypt's Minister of Information as he returned to his home one afternoon. This sort of attack by small armed cells, meant to drive away tourist dollars and punish government functionaries by humiliating the state and pushing it toward an anticipated political crisis, became increasingly frequent through the mid-1990s. The Afghan veterans' 19-day trial before a military court ended with a guilty verdict on May 27, 1993, and a sentence of death.

On July 16, the day before the five veterans were to be hanged, the Cairo press launched an antiterrorist media blitz to underscore the threat such groups posed to general security. Grisly full-page photo spreads of the blood-soaked bodies of victims of previous attacks, wounded and orphaned children, screaming mothers, and burning automobiles, appeared under enormous headlines announcing, "This Is Terrorism: Their Bullets Target Everyone!" (*al-Jumhuriyya* 1993a; *al-Wafd* 1993). The campaign continued through the morning after the

execution, when details of the veterans' crimes, conviction, and sentencing were accompanied by mug shots of the five newly executed men. Accompanying text expressed the grim judgments of God and country:

In an application of God's Law and Revelation, punishment was carried out against five enemies of the people. They conspired in killing and sabotage. They shed the blood of the innocent. They corrupted and spoiled the very earth that God has promised as a safe haven. They wanted to frighten and alarm society and the national economy by trying to strike at tourism. They allowed what God forbade, and the court applied to them the Divine Ordinance of God and the ruling of the law. [*al-Akhbar* 1993a]

In death's finality the incident was meant to rest. However, just as the newspapers hit the streets early in the morning on July 18, the bodies of the executed men catalyzed fresh violence. They had been transferred from prison to a police morgue in the crowded working-class Zeinhom district of Cairo. It was Sunday, the first day of the workweek, and as the neighborhood began to stir, a taxicab stopped in front of the Zeinhom morgue and half a dozen nervous young men emerged to fan out into the street. Wearing black headbands, they clutched automatic rifles and nine-millimeter pistols with extra ammunition clips tucked in their pockets. Three of them had concealed explosives beneath their clothing.

According to one eyewitness account, they screamed "God is Great," as they opened fire on a police car in front of the morgue, hitting the building, a number of cars, and two bystanders. The confused and contradictory newspaper accounts that appeared the following day portrayed a bewildering set of accounts, in which the capture, killing, or escape of the attackers were all reported. As police pursued the young men, they were joined by the residents of Zeinhom and the neighborhood of Sayyida Zeinab nearby. Drivers, painters, deliverymen, butchers, merchants, locksmiths, restaurant owners, private guards, mechanics, and auto-body repairmen, armed with rocks, sticks, and butcher knives, all followed the fleeing youth. One of the young fugitives, probably wounded by police fire, was hit by a passing car and fell behind a parked vehicle where he began to shoot at neighborhood residents surrounding him. When his gun jammed, the local people jumped on him, beating him nearly to death. Another fugitive ran out of ammunition and was beaten unconscious by neighborhood residents, but when he was wounded by gunfire from one of his colleagues, the crowd dragged the bleeding youth to safety so they could deliver him to the police.

Two of the young militants forced their way into a taxicab and ordered the driver to head for a main highway that would whisk them out of the city. A butcher's delivery motorcycle and sidecar loaded with angry neighbors chased the taxi until it crossed the path of a police patrol car. The taxi driver slowed his vehicle and rolled out of the door, yelling for help, and the armed passengers, turning their rifle fire from the escaping driver to the police captain and his sergeant, wounded both while perforating their patrol car with bullets.

One of the young men escaped into a nearby cemetery on foot. The other ran under a highway overpass where police shot him dead as he paused to remove the disguise he wore.

In the end, the Zeinohm incident resulted in the wounding of at least four civilians, including a middle-aged woman out buying bread for her daughters, a local merchant, a bus driver, and an office worker. A 17-year-old vocational school student was killed by a bullet that shattered his spine, and a handful of police and military personnel were wounded, including police Captain Ahmad al-Baltagi, who died of internal bleeding in hospital that afternoon. Of the two captured militants, one died of his wounds in police custody. The other was placed under interrogation at the hospital. The young man shot to death under the highway overpass became a mystery figure. Of the five different names local newspapers used to identify the body, the most exciting was *al-Akhbar's* page-one identification of the young man as 23-year-old Mustafa 'Awni Kamil, a fugitive wanted for the assassination of a State Security official in southern Egypt (a front-page photo caption in *al-Ahram* concurred with that identification, although the accompanying article put forward a different name). A search of the body turned up a bomb detonator, 450 Egyptian pounds, and—most significantly for my argument—a wad of illustrated newspaper articles about the executions of the Afghan veterans.

The surviving militant told police that the young men belonged to the military wing of the Jihad organization based in the southern province of Asyut and had been staging a revenge attack, wearing black headbands to signal their state of mourning for the executed veterans.⁸ Casing the neighborhood for two nights, they had clearly been reading the news coverage of the executions by day. The newspaper articles found in the pocket of the unidentified man had probably been part of the antiterrorism media blitz carried out in Cairo newspapers beginning the day before the execution. But even as clippings were carried on the bodies of the attackers as tangible commemoration of their fallen comrades, the intensive newspaper coverage had also helped produce the popular outrage that aroused neighborhood residents to chase, capture, and beat the young men.

The veterans' execution had triggered a chain of events in which each day was overcast by the lingering presence of the journalistic images of the day before. The attackers at Zeinohm, carrying newspaper stories in their pockets, were themselves described on Monday in stories blanketing the daily papers. Their clothing, the events of the chase, and praise for the heroism of their working-class captors were mixed with forensic details from the crime lab investigators. Capping the stories were ensembles of photographs that created a thumbnail sketch of the complicated incident: the shot-out patrol car window; the taxi used as a getaway car; faces of neighbors and pursuers; the wailing relatives of the wounded and dead gathered at the hospital; the Muhammad Ali mosque towering behind the overpass below which the body of the unidentified man was being examined by police. An inset displayed a police academy photograph of al-Baltagi, a photo of his wounded sergeant, and a close-up of

the blood-streaked face of the student killed on his way to school (*al-Ahram* 1993a). Several photos show close-ups of the dead militant. In some, his face and torso are covered with newspapers like fresh cuts of meat. In others, these have been pulled away to show his open eyes and mouth and his shirt pulled up to reveal the blood caked on his chest. In many of these montages, photographs of the militant accompany those of the dead student or the police officer, balancing visually the acts of murder and official retribution. Victims and killers remained distinguished even in death: newspapers consistently referred to the bodies of officer and student as *juthmanat* (mortal remains), whereas the bodies of the dead or executed militants were referred to less politely as *juthath* (corpses or carcasses).

These scenes filled Cairo's papers on Monday, the day the two *shuhada'* (martyrs)—Captain al-Baltagi and the high school student—were given funerals. In the newspaper coverage, events sequential in time for their immediate participants were being viewed simultaneously by the public at large. The photographic record of the attack, juxtaposed in this way with the funerals, forces each event to comment on the other. Captain al-Baltagi received a state funeral ceremony at the Omar Makram mosque across the street from the main government administrative buildings downtown. The area was under heavy security to prevent threats to the safety of the dozen dignitaries attending the ceremony. In fact, much of the city was on alert during that week, and armored personnel carriers were parked outside the National Radio and Television building on the Nile Corniche in anticipation of further assaults on government facilities.

I was in Cairo that week. On the way to pick up my mail downtown that Monday, I ran across Captain al-Baltagi's funeral in progress. Ranged along the sidewalk across the street from the mosque, children and young people carried banners: "Yes to Social Tranquility! No to Terrorism!" Not having yet read the papers, I asked a plainclothes security officer what the demonstration (*mudhahira*) was about. "It's not a demonstration," he said curtly, turning to face the crowd again, "someone died." I squeezed through the crowd and climbed the steps of the office building just south of the mosque to watch. After prayers ended within the mosque, a police marching band led 40 rows of officers down the street, three abreast, followed by the somber dignitaries and then the casket, draped in green cloth with gold Qur'anic verses, carried on the shoulders of marchers. Finally the children followed, holding their banners and tiny Egyptian flags. The procession was led in patriotic chants by a man on top of a fire truck, and the whole cortege was guided down the street by a human barrier formed by the black-clad Central Security forces who held hands along the sidewalk to separate the marchers from spectators. Journalists snapped pictures and television cameras rolled.

I had, at first, assumed the procession would head toward the cemeteries on the eastern side of the city (near where, I learned later, the incident had occurred the previous day). However, it stopped suddenly after a couple of blocks and the students with their banners, the VIPs with their escorts, and the marchers wandered back down the street. Dignitaries ducked into waiting cars,

and the students headed for the bridge returning them to the youth center that had sent them. The body of Captain al-Baltagi was put on a truck and taken off to his family's cemetery in the Delta. The crowd of spectators, drawn from the busy pedestrian traffic in two of the main squares downtown, dissolved.

Funeral coverage filled the next day's newspapers with photos and interviews featuring relatives, neighbors, and colleagues of the martyred police captain, as well as participants and spectators in what the papers labeled the *mudhahira sha'biyya* (popular demonstration) that accompanied it. The captain was remembered by his mother's sister as an ideal man:

[He was] at the height of his youth and he regularly prayed and fasted, read the Qur'an aloud and prayed the dawn prayer before going off to work. He had high morals and treated all people alike—he was humble and never arrogant—his only aspiration was to work and serve his country. His supervisors at work knew him for his good morals and achievement, and after he graduated from police academy, he decided to marry his work! [Sharshar 1993]

A neighbor testified that "his love of goodness was above all else, and he was a devoted son to his parents, postponing his own marriage after the death of his father five years ago, so as not to leave his mother after his older brother 'Umar went off to Saudi Arabia" (Sharshar 1993). The First Deputy Minister of the Interior affirmed that al-Baltagi "sacrificed with his soul and never thought for a moment about his own life, but thought about Egypt as a country that had to be made safe." As for the neighbors who had pursued and caught the militants, "they acted as one man in the utmost of boldness and decency, undeterred by the bullets. What was seen [that day] among the sons of Egypt is not found in any other country in the world" (*al-Jumhuriyya* 1993b).

The images at play in the cumulative accounts of the Zeinohm incident and its aftermath make visible the cracks in the social order. Social instability is portrayed through a complex rhetoric of age, class, and regional difference, whereas stability and virtue are couched in the language and imagery of locality and kinship that operates at multiple levels. Rootless youths strange to the city lurk at night. Their violence and their international connections—one was found with a telephone credit card for making international calls, suggesting an outside campaign of subversion—pit them not only against the police but against a well-established neighborhood of working-class family men that forcefully resists.

Furthermore, the rampaging youth disrupt, actually and symbolically, the connection between responsible adulthood and the innocence and dependency of childhood. Two of the wounded civilians, a driver and a housewife, were rushed to hospital without their children and pleaded with reporters for information about what had happened to them. The slain police captain was praised for his role as a son and for having the pious and innocent heart of a child. Newspaper stories playing on the grief of his mother report a barber approaching her at the funeral and consoling her, "Don't cry, my mother. Your son the hero isn't dead, for he's in the vastness of God and he will stay eternally in the

hearts of all Egyptians. Don't cry, my mother, for all Egyptians are your sons!" (*al-Akhbar* 1993c). As if to underscore this sense of family, the Minister of Education announced later that the state would pay for all the victims' medical bills and the cost of their children's schooling.

The rhetorical power of the newspaper coverage of the Zeinohm attack and al-Baltagi's funeral lies in the way it modulates the scale of kinship and national solidarity, representing collectives as individuals and individuals as selfless servants of the collective. The captain, married to his work, thinks of Egypt's security rather than himself and sacrifices his life for the greater good. Meanwhile the Zeinohm neighbors acted as a unified subject in confronting the threat to their lives and the security of the nation. When the officer was slain by the enemies of the people, his mother became their mother in turn, as they marched down the street calling for vengeance, shouting "To the Paradise of the Everlasting, O martyr!" and "With our soul, with our blood, may we be a sacrifice for you, O Egypt!" (*al-Jumhuriyya* 1993b). As in other Mediterranean cultures, the virtue of the nation is demonstrated through the *arete* (virtue) of its citizens. National unity is guaranteed by the willingness of each member to contribute to the community and fight for its ideals (Hill 1995:74). In the newspaper's rhetorical framing of public virtue and national unity, the crowd on the street, the police apparatus of the state, and the blood kin of the slain officer merge into a single entity in the expression of their grief and their call for revenge.

Revenge was not long in coming. As in an action movie, the Zeinohm incident spawned a sequel that was even more dramatically satisfying than the original.⁹ Indeed, I would argue that the events that followed owe much of their sound and fury to the intensive newspaper mediation of the Zeinohm attack and Captain al-Baltagi's funeral. Two weeks after the funeral, the real Mustafa 'Awni Zaki—first thought to have been killed beneath the freeway overpass—was captured. He and a colleague, on their way to a meeting allegedly to plan another attack, got lost near a public park in Cairo's Amiriyya neighborhood. They stopped to ask directions of a young peddler who became suspicious when they pulled out a detailed street map of the neighborhood. When a pistol dropped unexpectedly to the ground from the clothing of one of the fugitives, the young peddler began shouting to the scores of people out enjoying the cool evening air. Suddenly another neighborhood, its sensibilities primed by the press coverage of the earlier incident, came alive with indignation as its blacksmiths, fruit vendors, and carpenters gave chase. The militants ran, shooting into the crowd. They stopped a taxi and shot the driver when he refused to let them in, then Mustafa 'Awni jumped over the cab and rushed with his companion into a pickup truck. Still shooting at their pursuers, 'Awni commandeered a bus while his colleague escaped. He held his gun to the driver's neck with an order to keep the doors closed. But the pursuing crowd grabbed onto the open window frames and began pulling themselves up. When the gunman pointed his pistol at them, the driver opened the door and the crowd streamed into the

vehicle, grabbing 'Awni and beating him badly. By the time police delivered him to the hospital, he had lost so much blood that he had to be put on an IV.

Celebratory newspaper photographs of the day after showed the blindfolded 'Awni dressed in jeans and a torn and bloody T-shirt with the word "Sport" printed boldly across the front. His face was swollen and smeared with blood, his upper lip cut. Another photograph displayed his impounded nine-millimeter pistol and forged identity papers. National security investigators fingered him as a leader of the Jihad's military wing and the "prime mover" behind the Zeinohm incident, as well as being wanted for several police deaths and attacks on tourists in Upper Egypt (*al-Ahram* 1993b). As the photographs were being developed for their inclusion in the following day's paper, six teams of security agents combed nearby neighborhoods for 'Awni's escaped comrade.

Plausible Readings

Much photography . . . is concerned with the creation of worlds, rather than their duplication.

—Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs*

Somewhat later, as I examined the newspaper accounts of Captain al-Baltagi's funeral, I was struck by curious differences between what I had observed and the stories the newspapers presented. I was also struck by the obsessive goriness with which photographs of the wounded and dead were displayed in photographic coverage of the Zeinohm attack and its sequel. Postponing a discussion of newspaper representations of violence, I want to begin with an enquiry into the news coverage of the funeral itself. As both Benjamin (1979:256) and Barthes (1985:15) suggest, newspaper stories increasingly act as elaborate captions for their photographic coverage. Descriptions of events provide directions for the reading of the visual images they accompany, as if they were overly ambitious labels in a museum exhibit. For Barthes, the text is no longer the primary communication but is instead parasitical to the photograph. The photographic image becomes the primary focus of attention, while "the text burdens the image, loads it with a culture, a morality, an imagination" (1985:14–15).

Most photographs of the funeral presented displays of emotion: the solemnity of government officials, the agitation of the crowd, and the devastating grief of relatives. Captioning draws the viewer into a field of collectively felt sentiment by drawing attention to those elements that signify the depth, extent, and spontaneity of a primordial personal and popular anger. But there is an absent partner in this process: the photographer himself. The photograph's denotation conceals the conditions of its own creation so that neither the photographer nor the context of his work normally enter into how it is read. The photographic frame draws power and significance from its subject's putative spontaneity and authenticity, but it is not without its own history as a physical object, the result of countless external circumstances.

Analysis of these circumstances can build on Barthes's distinction between two elements of the photographic image, the *studium* and the *punctum*.

To recognize the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them . . . for culture (from which the *studium* derives) is a contract arrived at between creators and consumers. . . . It is rather as if I had to read the photographer's myths in the photograph, fraternizing with them but not quite believing in them. These myths obviously aim (this is what myth is for) in reconciling the photograph with society . . . by endowing it with *functions*, which are, for the photographer, so many alibis. These functions are: to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause to signify, to provoke desire. [Barthes 1981:27–28]

The *punctum*, on the other hand, is a break or rupture of the *studium*, “the element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. . . . A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me” (Barthes 1981:26–27). The *punctum* is an uncoded element, a feature of chance outside the photographer's intention. “It says only that the photographer was there, or else, still more simply, that he could not *not* photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object” (Barthes 1981:47). However, the *punctum* is not a structural part of the photograph as much as it is a feature to which a particular viewer attaches a connotation outside the photographer's intent. Such connotation arises from the intersection of the photographer's presence and the viewer's own knowledge, background, and preoccupations (Barthes 1985:16–17) and helps bring the photograph itself into view.

Looking at the coverage of the Zeinhom attack and Captain al-Baltagi's funeral, I felt myself “pierced” by two aspects of the images that accompanied these stories. The first *punctum* was, strictly speaking, an absence: the human barricade of Central Security forces separating spectators from marchers was not shown. Most of the photographs focused tightly on small groups of family members of the dead, dignitaries, marchers, or spectators, heightening the intimacy between subjects and viewers and emphasizing the spontaneity of the demonstration and the personal engagement of the dignitaries. Only one picture showed police officers, and these were from the regular forces of which al-Baltagi was a member. They appear in the photo as mourners. The second *punctum* consisted of features that clashed with the *studium* of the coverage, the mythology (Barthes 1972) presented by the photographer to the audience. In one photograph, a line of shouting Zeinhom neighbors pointed angrily past the camera, demanding, according to the caption, to assault the body of the dead terrorist. Behind them, however, several men were smiling at the camera (*al-Jumhuriyya* 1993b). In another image, five black-clad women, relatives of wounded civilians, are shown wailing in a hallway at Qasr al-‘Aini hospital. But one woman behind them scowls angrily at the camera, disrupting the display of uncontrolled grieving and drawing attention to the photographer's unwanted presence (‘Iyad and Sharshar 1993).

Certain features of the stories also disrupt a unified narrative. Several photos show narrowly framed shots of crowd scenes, focusing on banners, on

the coffin, or on a man perched on the fire truck leading bystanders in outraged chants. Accompanying text illuminates the depth of their anger, describing the funeral as “a shouting popular demonstration” calling for “execution in public squares [of] . . . the enemies of country and religion” (*al-Akhbar* 1993c). However, despite this very real popular tough-on-crime attitude, the Egyptian state has chosen to display its own restraint by *not* holding public executions. The state media reported popular sentiments at odds with the state’s own position and phrased as the voice of the people in whose very name the government purports to speak. These reports of popular sentiment served to legitimate police and military actions against Islamist groups as having the consent of the people.

Specific elements of photographic technique help convey the message of popular outrage. In news photographs of other organized rallies, shots of the crowd from above use wide-angle lenses to turn narrow streets into broad plazas. In al-Baltagi’s funeral coverage, low camera angles exaggerated the mass of bodies lining the street by hiding the depth of the crowd, which is rendered invisible and therefore potentially endless. As with the identity of al-Baltagi’s dead assassin, published reports varied widely, in this case with respect to the size of the crowd at the officer’s funeral. My head count—perhaps six hundred people in the procession and an equal number of observers—was seconded by a photo caption in *al-Wafd*, the liberal opposition daily, reporting a crowd in the “hundreds.” But the accompanying article counted 5,000 people from every governorate in the country, including 1,000 schoolchildren carrying banners (Zaki 1993). *Al-Ahram* reported 200 students and *al-Akhbar*, 700. The crowd as a whole was represented in some places as in the “thousands” (*al-Akhbar* 1993b; *al-Jumhuriyya* 1993b) and even in the “tens of thousands” (*al-Akhbar* 1993c). What was, from my perspective, a moderately sized and highly orchestrated event blossomed on paper into a massive and spontaneous eruption of popular will.

How can we make sense of these various disjunctures—between the mythology of the photographer and the ambivalence of the photographic outcome, between the photograph and the text, between one text and another, between the coverage as a whole and the experience of a foreign observer? Above all, how did photographic coverage of the execution of the Afghan veterans, the Zeinhom incident and its aftermath, and Captain al-Baltagi’s funeral participate in the representation and mobilization of political collectivities?

Natural Languages

Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see.

—Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*

The central formal characteristic of the photograph is its apparent claim to correspond directly to the real, the quality that led Balzac to describe photography as the capture of an immaterial skin constantly shed into the atmosphere by objects and people (Gunning 1995:43). To its spectators, the photographic image

seems to participate closely in the reality of its objects. Or at least, if “the image is not the reality . . . at least it is its perfect *analogon*, and it is just this analogical perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph” (Barthes 1985:5). The current of Western culture has tended increasingly to esteem visual images in general as more “natural” forms of representation than words, with photography standing at the apex of a hierarchy of more and more natural, and thus more and more truthful, forms of representation.¹⁰ But faith in this truth is incomplete and has been contested above all by visual artists themselves.

The notion of the image as a “natural sign” is . . . the fetish or idol of Western culture. As idol, it must be constituted as an embodiment of the real presence it signifies, and it must certify its own efficacy by contrasting itself with the false idols of other tribes—the totems, fetishes, and ritual objects of pagan, primitive cultures, the “stylized” or “conventional” modes of non-Western art. Most ingenious of all, the Western idolatry of the natural sign disguises its own nature under the cover of a ritual iconoclasm, a claim that *our* images, unlike “theirs,” are constituted by a critical principle of skepticism and self-correction, a demystified rationalism that does not worship its own projected images but subjects them to correction, verification, and empirical testing against the “facts” about “what we see,” “how things appear,” or “what they naturally are.” [Mitchell 1986:90–91]

Paul Virilio recalls a conversation between sculptors Paul Gsell and August Rodin in which the latter denied claims that photography is a more truthful medium than painting or sculpture. Arguing that photography falsifies reality through negating the natural experience of time, Rodin explained: “It is art that tells the truth and photography that lies. For *in reality time does not stand still*, and if the artist manages to give the impression that a gesture is being executed over several seconds, their work is certainly much less conventional than the scientific image in which time is abruptly suspended” (Virilio 1994:2).

The artist, Rodin explained, can craft an image granting the illusion of motion by relying on the movement of the spectator’s eye across the piece. However, to do so he must represent as simultaneous gestures that are in fact sequential, an artifice potentially unmasked by the precision of an instantaneous photograph. Different regimes of truth at play in the photograph and in the plastic arts are capable of representing different qualities of reality. The uses of photography are therefore constrained by the sorts of truths it can most successfully render and the sorts of contexts in which it can communicate persuasively. One way to approach photography then is to consider it as a form of rhetoric and compare how different modes of persuasion and mobilization—whether they are written, spoken, graven, or exposed—organize the relationship between producer, representation, and audience.¹¹

In contrast to most of the influential writing on rhetoric from the classical and medieval periods, modern rhetoric has made the delivery of speech—the performance aspect of oratory rather than its logical or linguistic construction—a central element of theory. Rhetorical theorists have made increasingly acceptable the idea that engaging the emotions (*pathe*) of an audience is properly

achieved not through the cognitive power of words but through mimesis. Jay Fliegelman has argued that from the 18th century, Western rhetorical theory has “elevate[d] the performative aspect of speech over the argumentative” thus “redefining the very function and nature of rhetoric, of oratory, and of language itself” (1993:30). No longer was the purpose of the orator “to communicate thoughts and feelings [through words]. Rather it was to *display persuasively and spontaneously the experiencing* of those thoughts and feelings” through his manipulation of tone, gesture, and facial expression (Fliegelman 1993:2, emphasis added). Oration, according to the new style, was to abandon the ideal of communicating ideas through logical and conventional forms and to be primarily “the active art of moving and influencing the passions” (1993:30), seeking, “like pedagogy, to create within [an] audience a particular subjectivity” (1993:42), a cultivated and predictable set of emotional responses.¹²

Elites of the new American polity sought to popularize rhetoric, transforming it from learned disputations in Latin into moral spectacles for the public (Fliegelman 1993:27). “Where sovereignty resides in the will of the people,” he writes, “language that ‘captivates’ (a word that psychologizes enslavement and renders it benign) is the currency of power. . . . It is not the admiration of the reader or auditor that one seeks to call forth, but captivated surrender to his or her passions” (Fliegelman 1993:188). As against an Aristotelian cognitive theory of emotional influence, the new rhetorical strategy had to attend not primarily to the verbal content of a message but to its tonal, prosodic, and visual shape. New handbooks of rhetoric coached orators in effective facial expressions with the hope that a practiced imitation of the outward forms of a sincere emotion might not only call forth that emotion in an audience but through “sweet contagion” induce the emotion in the speaker himself. The kinesic and paralinguistic contours of speech were felt to be part of a “natural language” absent from lifeless print, a vitalized language whose (sometimes practiced) expression of sincerity was to create in the audience a perception of the truth of the content of speech.

In their desire to discover, to craft, or to recapture a “natural language” more immediate than words, post-Renaissance artists (Crosby 1997), scientists (Darwin 1955), and theologians (Targoff 1997), as well as rhetoricians increasingly elaborated theories suggesting that visual and mimetic idioms, rather than language, are the most fundamental means of expression and influence.¹³ Not even God was safe from this revision of rhetorical thought and practice. English Reformation prayer manuals, for instance, concluded that emotional appeals were the most likely to influence God’s action, and to that end, they provided instructions on how to develop sincere emotional fervor through the performance of its outward signs (Garrett 1993:345). The “sweet contagion” of the performance, with the aid of God’s grace, might then transform the heart.

It is worth pausing here to explore the semiotics of these practices, the relationship between what we generally think of as internal emotional processes and their visible correlates. Both Fliegelman’s rhetoricians and the users of

English prayer manuals were engaging in a semiosis—a making of signs—in which visible markers of emotion represented the experiencing of that emotion, but the source of those markers might be a spontaneous internal feeling in one situation or a movement of the will in another. In Egypt, contemporary religious movements engage similar practices. In women’s mosque study circles, the expression of emotions like humility, shyness, fear, and love are self-consciously developed in prayer and daily life, in the expectation that with time, one’s inner life will come to correspond to one’s carefully cultivated and socially monitored demeanor. For beginners seeking spiritual development, a disjunction between the outward performance of emotion and its absence as a concurrent internal motivation is seen not as hypocrisy but as the sign of the novice not yet having completed transforming herself into a pious subject. Emotions are conceived primarily as ethical states that emerge in conduct rather than as inner feelings (Mahmood 2000:213, 2001:n. 41).¹⁴ The sincerity of a performance is therefore a matter of intent rather than of a one-to-one correspondence between a spontaneously experienced emotion (e.g., fear or love of God) and its expression in action (e.g., sobbing). The sequence can, for the pious beginner, be the other way around, from cultivated tears to the development of the contextually proper affect. Here, as well as in the broader currents of the *da’wa* (Islamic outreach) movement, appropriate performance is not only a condition of creating effective communicative acts but is a means of self-fashioning. Toward that end, Egyptian preaching manuals explicitly address delivery, advising that preachers should cultivate correct pronunciation and speak with a sincerity that “produces . . . words that come from the heart of the speaker. [These words] go beyond the ears of the listeners, to arrive at their hearts without even obtaining permission” (Hirschkind 1999:n. 61). In listening to sermons, one trains one’s sensibilities to be moved in appropriate ways. In this sense, the art of listening, as much as that of speaking, is a fundamentally rhetorical act (Hirschkind 1999, 2001) that participates in the reconciliation of public behavior with personal conscience, replacing will with a properly developed moral sensibility as the object or source of sincere conduct.

The rhetorical effect of the image, as with the Islamic sermon or the daily prayer, requires action by the audience or congregation as well as by the image’s producers. Understanding the potential of the image as a signifier requires a multilayered sensitivity to the formal and practical possibilities of different genres as well as to their context, the “conditions of felicity” in Austin’s terms, of their communication.¹⁵ Rodin sensed that for an audience to achieve a satisfying recognition of truth, to recognize a display as *convincing*, some of its elements might need to assume forms they would never take in life. His insight applies to the representation and experience of emotion as much as to the representation and experience of time. Recall that in his own example, time is simulated by the mobile eye of the viewer taking the place of the moving figure now reduced to sculptural form. Similar logic applies to the transformation of a passionate event to its artistic representation in sculpture or photograph or print. Extending his argument from the visual elements of convincing public

performance to those of graphic representation, Fliegelman points to Paul Revere's 1770 print of the Boston Massacre. The print was meant to evoke outrage in its American viewers in part by portraying British actions as deliberate but unprovoked, when in fact British troops had been incited into firing on the crowd, and there was no clear order given by British officers. In this case:

The misrepresentation of the event serves to make possible the accurate representation of . . . emotions that otherwise could not be represented. Mimetic pictorialism gives way to psychological representation. If oratory, and, by extension, all the rhetorical arts, were defined as provocations to action, made possible . . . by making an audience feel what the speaker or artist feels, then the representation of a targeted feeling displayed for sympathetic experiencing become both the primary subject and primary objective of those arts. [Fliegelman 1993:78]

Picturing the Unseen

Like the sincere emotional display of Fliegelman's orator, whose communication of the passions necessitated a mimetic realism of performance, here the effectiveness of emotional contagion relies on the graphic representation of the artist's presumed internal state. In this case, however, the graphic representation is at odds with what a witness might have observed or a photograph might have captured. Rodin's use of visual anachronism and the displacement of movement from sculpture to eye parallels Revere's use of similar visual techniques to communicate internal states of feeling and being and not merely to represent their external manifestations. The viewer is made to feel what the artist feels through the presentation of a scene crafted to "depict . . . less the 'outrage' committed by British troops than the 'outrage' felt by patriots in response to it" (Fliegelman 1993:76). In the print, the sequence of rifle fire, the grief of spectators, and the carrying away of the wounded and dead are depicted together as simultaneous. Time is compressed, as in Rodin's moving sculpture, rather than arrested, as in a still photograph. Scanning the lithograph not only reactivates time but potentially activates an emotional engagement with the artist and with the patriots he has depicted. The sympathetic viewer becomes one of them and therefore part of a greater whole. More than a symbol or a depiction of political conflict, the print is a means of creating a sense of simultaneous experience (Anderson 1983) and mobilizing groups in furthering that conflict.

Similar logics operate in Egypt, allowing the artist to "picture the invisible" (Mitchell 1986:40). For example, one genre of line drawing or cartoon found often in Egyptian religious periodicals or school textbooks depicts pious families in their homes. Such drawings always represent women with their hair covered, even in contexts where, in the course of everyday life, a woman would have removed her scarf in the company of her immediate relatives. Why is a common practice so obviously altered in its representation, in effect depicting iconically a situation that is visually and contextually false? In these pictures, the *higab* (modest dress for women in which hair, arms, and legs are covered) is drawn as the expression of an unseen reality. The female covering of

virtue is normally visible outside of the home, but here it becomes an indexical sign of the inner character of its wearer even when in private space.¹⁶ It is the outward expression of an internal state.¹⁷

From Icon to Index

In arresting time, photographs require the reader to project onto the image an imagined past and future for its subject. In Egyptian newspaper coverage of the Zeinhom incident, time and social depth were approximated by combining photographs into montages. The events were traced by photographing their outcome—a ruined taxi, a dead body—and playing out those events on the page by relying on the reader's reconstruction aided by the accompanying text. Social relationship and scale were depicted by alternately collectivizing and individualizing the participants. Zeinhom's heroes were granted individual portraits, stressing their ordinary courage, whereas the funeral crowd was portrayed as a roiling mass united in grief and rage.

When using them in an unselfconscious way to gain information about the world, newspaper readers normally expect documentary photographs to be direct representations of reality rather than viewing them as rhetoric or as expressive art. The 15th-century invention of artificial perspective in Western art anticipated the skills needed to read the photograph as the ultimate medium for recording truth.

No amount of counterdemonstration from artists that there are other ways of picturing what "we really see" has been able to shake the conviction that these pictures have a kind of identity with natural human vision and objective human space. And the invention of a machine (the camera) built to produce this sort of image has, ironically, only reinforced the conviction that this is the natural mode of representation. What is natural is, evidently, what we can build a machine to do for us. [Mitchell 1986:37]

Photographs differ from drawings in that their nature as signs is both iconic and indexical. According to semiotician C. S. Peirce's distinction between sign types, an icon bears a formal resemblance to its object, as a painting does to its model, whereas an index is actually connected to its object, as a cloud signifies rain. Photographs, Peirce writes, are "in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature" (1960:159, 281). It is from a physical connection of light between the object and the film, in other words, that the photograph derives its form. As part of a sign, the signifier (in Peirce's vocabulary, the representamen) is in a triadic relationship both with its object or referent and with the interpretant or meaning that mediates object and representation in the mind. The drawing shares features with its object but lacks a point-by-point correspondence. As in the case of the veiled woman at home, its iconicity can sometime force into our vision invisible objects or impossible situations, while stripping away other details to emphasize what remains.

The photograph's indexicality, on the other hand, sometimes requires us to overlook details or ignore the context of its creation to bear the meaning its sponsors intend. For instead of manipulating formal signs and conventions to express meaning, photography requires a manipulation of the visible world itself to produce the conditions under which the photograph can be created as a sign, a relationship forged between the visible and the unseen. Creating a photograph requires creating the "nature" to which the photograph is to correspond. This may involve moving photographers to the "scene," arranging a pose, calculating an angle, creating an assemblage of objects, or the more complex orchestration of events themselves to produce a photographable reality. Thus, although the photograph's meaning is normally derived by viewers from the iconic representamen within its frame, the photographic sign is an index of more than the physical relationship between object, light, and film. It is, more importantly, an index of the presence of the photographer and the institutional apparatus that enables that presence.

Spectacle, Debord suggested, "is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image" (1994:24).¹⁸ What is unique about the contribution of documentary photography to spectacle is the convention that they are *not* expressive art, that what they portray are not parodies, archetypes, or references to fantasy (Pinney 1997) but single real and historical events, making photographic communication—in explicit contrast to painting, drawing, and sculpture—a promise of objective truth. When read through the social frames of journalistic or scientific practice, photographic technology presupposes a "must be" quality such that witnesses of UFO photographs (Stevens and Roberts 1986), photos of ghosts (Coates 1973; Gettings 1978; Gunning 1995), or of faeries (Conan-Doyle 1928; Gettings 1978) can read through their patterns of light and shade a one-to-one correspondence with the world, apprehending them in terms of an objective discovery of reality rather than a metaphorical revelation of meaning or an effort to captivate the emotions and motivate action. We expect to see in the documentary photograph the bare surface of the world rather than the hidden interior of an artist.¹⁹

An Emotional State: Documentary Photographs as Expressive Art

A regulated commotion is still a commotion.

—Émile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*

The spectacle cannot be understood either as a deliberate distortion of the visual world or as a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images. It is far better viewed as a *weltanschauung* that has been actualized, translated into the material realm—a world view transformed into an objective force.

—Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

The spectacle—both as event and as its photographic record—works primarily to create, to fashion collectivities. But because of what Klima (2001:562) calls "the precariousness of photographic meaning," the rhetorical

intent of the newspaper's editors and of the political formation within which they work is countered by a potential for the simultaneous constitution of multiple groups around an image. As we saw with the Zeinoh incident and its aftermath, one effect of the news media's verbal and visual rhetoric was to prime the public, to prepare it for spontaneous mobilization, each individual spurred to "captivated surrender to his or her passions" (Fliegelman 1993:188). In presenting the nation as unified in condemnation, the newspaper coverage spoke as a single diffuse subject, a subject constituted through the communicative act from multiple authors and multiple readers.

However, the effects these images produce are indeterminate. The same photographs and articles the news industry deployed in order to generate public support for the execution of the Afghan veterans were used by the Zeinoh attackers as memorials to martyred comrades and as incitements for vengeance, like bloodied shirts hoisted on a flagpole. One Egyptian friend of mine, an intellectual who had been imprisoned by Sadat in the early 1980s, had on an office bookshelf a pair of newspaper photographs that had been cut out and pasted to a large sheet of cardboard. They showed Sadat's assassin, Khalid al-Islambuli, with his full beard and white "Islamic" dress, thrusting his balled fist through the bars of the cage in which criminal defendants are incarcerated during trial. Originally published as part of the state's publicity campaign against the country's Islamist groups and intended to frighten and repel the public, these tokens had been abstracted from their printed context and turned into a shrine in gratitude to those who rid the nation of the tyrant Sadat. The pasted photographic clippings were surrounded with hand-copied passages from the Qur'an urging steadfastness and calm in the face of persecution. The impulse that leads so many makers and consumers of photographs to use them in the memorialization of loved ones (Benjamin 1968:228; Pinney 1997; Ruby 1995) is transformed here from a personal commemoration to a political one.

If the use value of such photographs can be so far removed from the intention of their producers, what is being *communicated* here? Photographs can be abstracted from their original context to create new signs. These may or may not be intended to subvert authorial intentions or create alternative authorships. They may simply create a private and devotional space whose very significance and power lies in its secret or shrinelike quality (Barthes 1981:90). Abstracted from a disposable and constantly churning medium, such photographs survive as islands of memory, reminding us that "practices of relation to . . . images . . . are ultimately inseparable from the form of social and political relations between ourselves" (Klima 2001:579). Multiple collectivities can be mobilized simultaneously and independently of authorial intention, as was the case with the photograph of Muhammad al-Dura.

The newspaper photograph can also act as an aggressive display whose triumphalist imagery visually fixes the subjugation of foes. This is an ancient practice in Egypt as elsewhere: One might think of temple friezes depicting Pharaoh grasping his enemies by the hair and preparing to strike them with a mace; or Christian desecrations of those same pharaonic temples, in which

crosses were chiseled into the faces of the gods to obliterate their images and demonstrate their powerlessness. More recent examples include Liberian coup leader Prince Johnson's gleeful 1990 display to visitors of a videotape of President Samuel Doe being tortured and killed (Huband 1990), or the distribution of video clips and photographs of the collapsing World Trade Center towers by Osama bin Laden's associates and supporters. Just as the tarring-over of political campaign posters operates not by depriving viewers of information but by synecdoche—destroying the product in place of the producer—such images act as virtual and ever-renewable executions (Garfinkel 1956). The photographic display of the body of the Zeinhom militant served as a substitute for the public execution called for by the funeral crowd, focusing emotional power without serving as an immanent context for further public disturbance as an execution might have done.²⁰

Finally, the documentary newspaper photograph often displays images created or collected solely for the purpose of *being* photographed (such as political photo opportunities, staged events, or aesthetically arranged displays of seized weapons caches, a frequent international convention of crime-control imagery). Although this reveals in stark relief the sense in which reality must be manipulated for the purposes of manufacturing photographs, it is not entirely typical of the creation of spectacle, as witnessed in Debord's avoidance of the label "distortion." Documentary newspaper photography, as the expressive art of an economic and political order, displays and maneuvers the emotions of its diffuse viewer-subjects as a revelation of the emotions of its sponsors. The manipulation of the world that these images require lies primarily in the political and bureaucratic processes that generate manhunts and photograph their aftermath as a matter of course and only secondarily in orchestrating funeral demonstrations so they appear, if you squint, to be spontaneous. If the indexical object of the photograph is the relationship of photographer to subject (and again, it is that presence rather than just optical and chemical processes that "force" the photograph to correspond to nature), the communicative frame of conviction is sometimes broken by puncta that testify to that presence. Elements incongruous to the studium—an individual smiling rather than shouting or scowling instead of wailing—may appear within the photographic frame itself, as well as in the comparison of different accounts or the too-close reading of accompanying articles, which are, in effect, extended directive captions. The punctum may be, in such cases, an element betraying the history of the photograph's creation and an element demonstrating its mediation.

In Fliegelman's view, such details might threaten the rhetorical sincerity that eases emotional contagion. However, their potential exists by necessity in the photograph, as opposed to the iconic drawing. Unlike the plastic artist or the sole orator on the stage, whose skill in manipulating his own tone, gesture, and expression creates a convincing effect, the numberless political actors, photographers, journalists, editors, and censors who cooperate to produce the visual collage of the newspaper can only control the broad outlines of photographed

events.²¹ They can influence the choice or the general content of photographs but not necessarily their details, which must sometimes be overlooked in order to create a sensation of credibility. Barthes notes that Europeans and Americans are uncomfortable with the notion of authenticity or sincerity in staged, posed, or orchestrated photographs because “what is hidden is for us Westerners more ‘true’ than what is visible” (Barthes 1981:100). From this perspective, the authenticity or sincerity of the photograph lies in its apparent spontaneity and the correspondence between the internal states of its subjects and their external appearance. Where these conflict, the internal state is taken to be genuine and the external appearance is perceived as affectation. Given, however, that we cannot hope to gain unmediated access to the internal state, we are faced with a dilemma when we confront signs we perceive as indexical. A particular display of emotion might have its source in spontaneous feeling, or it might be the result of practiced intention. Although we may not know which inner state is its source, the display nevertheless has a conventional meaning. Moreover, it is that conventional meaning that explains the newspaper’s display of a fractured studium. For the newspaper, as for the pious woman learning how appropriately to experience the love of God, it is proper intention, rather than a match between inner feeling and outer display, that constitutes sincerity.

In newspaper photographs, the intent of displaying an orchestrated event is not necessarily to deceive (and, thereby, create a shared false consciousness) but to exhibit a worldview infused with emotion and thereby to move the audience to sympathetic experience and action.²² The work of the documentary photograph is dual: first, to initiate contagion of an emotional worldview by displaying it and second, to portray this experience as the property of a third party—something that *was* (unmediated and absolute and thus objectively real). If, on an analytical level, we apprehend newspaper photography as rhetorical performance and expressive art, should we see such an orchestration of events as any more false than the orchestration and performance of a musical score, which is always something “authentic,” even if it is always more or less skillfully done? Just as the individual in prayer sometimes begins by displaying a rehearsed emotion on the way to inner transformation, so the photograph works on a social scale to create the reality it represents (Klima 2001:577). Captain al-Baltagi’s funeral demonstration as a manufactured event was an expression of institutional rather than individual passion, meant to spread through the population through the mediation of photographic images and realize a spontaneous public sensitivity to Islamist threat. As in the Revere lithograph, the outrage displayed in visual form was a quality of the image-maker’s experience.

Benjamin addressed the notion of authenticity in a statement on the relationship between art and politics:

For the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a

photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the “authentic” print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics. [1968:226]

Benjamin’s quaint confidence that the modern political project was primarily rational rather than ritual cannot be sustained. Nor, for that matter, can his linkage of ritual and the singularity or authenticity of art (Starrett 1995). There is no epistemological break between older and newer expressive forms, merely new occasions on which actors can deploy them. The difference in photography is that its indexicality—not its uniqueness—is perceived as the ground of its authenticity and truth.²³

However, documentary photography as art and as rhetoric—not to mention other mass-reproducible forms, such as prints, plastic statues, stickers, and videotapes—refuses to relinquish its ritual status. In Egypt, the newspaper photograph is part of the machinery transforming a worldview of public unity into the material force of mass action. Photographs testify to the historical veracity of public events independent of their origin and thus lend themselves particularly well to ritual use, which depends fundamentally on the generation of public behavior and disposition and only secondarily on the creation of common belief (Daniel 1996:102; Rappaport 1979; Wedeen 1998).²⁴

The documentary photograph is an object that motivates identification with, or reaction against, its subjects and its sponsors by displaying and evoking emotionally powerful inner states. In this sense, it can itself act as a ritual mediator, serving “to evoke, maintain, or recreate certain mental states of . . . groups” (Durkheim 1995:9). This can be accomplished in broadly different ways. The first is by using photographs to awaken passion or concentration in an established audience. Klima, for example, writes of the general use in Thailand of photographs of dead bodies in political rituals and the way that the shock effect of photographed death is used to “seize control of vision and transfer the witnessing of past atrocity onto a seeing of the present condition” (2001:578). Some Thai Buddhist nuns also use graphic autopsy photos as foci for meditation on their own materiality and ephemerality. They have moved away from manipulating and meditating on actual corpses precisely because of the undecidability or precariousness of photographic meaning: some years ago a British tabloid published photographs of nuns at the Toong Temple dismembering the bodies of their deceased comrades, accusing them of cannibalism (Klima 2001:572).

The second pathway, examined in this article, capitalizes on the mass dissemination of images. Evoking, maintaining, and recreating the mental states of groups—notice here the overlap of ritual and rhetorical aims—does not necessarily take the form of swaying the emotions of citizens already gathered in the forum or nuns now surrounding an altar. Rather, mass-produced newspaper photographs induce collectivities as such. They bring into being a diffuse collective subject. Collectivities are precipitated from a broader audience through

differential semiosis, the perception of broadly different meanings in (and the generation of broadly different emotional responses from) an image, as with the various and sometimes virtual social networks that coalesced around images of the Buddhist Statues in Afghanistan, Muhammad al-Dura, Sadat's assassins, or the executed Afghan veterans.²⁵ Each signified or interpretant, each salient meaning, acts as representamen in a further semiosis, whose object is not the presence of the photographer—as it was in the original photograph—but a new set of ramifying human relationships among viewers. The people of Cairo, otherwise preoccupied with their afternoon routines, act out the furious unity attributed to them in the press. Millions who never knew of the existence of the Bamiyan Buddhas suddenly find themselves moved, transfixed, united in sentiment if not in space. Images of collapsing skyscrapers or B-52s in flight coalesce crowds that unfurl American flags in one place and burn them in another.

Benjamin was correct that the search for the authentic original of the photograph is futile. This is not, as he guessed, because mass production allows for no original but because the original is not an image. The original is not one or another print, or even the negative itself. It is the spectacle of the photographer transported to the scene of the crime, the first silent expression of a cascade of social relationships mediated by the image.

Notes

Acknowledgments. Earlier versions of this article were titled "Newspaper Art and the Public Display of Virtue." The first was presented as part of the panel "Public Virtue and the Righteous Self: Islam and Social Change in Egypt and the Middle East" at the annual meetings of the Middle East Studies Association, 1996. The second was presented as part of the panel, "Hidden Manifests: Newspapers in Ethnographic Research" at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association, 1997; and at the Department of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin—Madison, April 1, 1999. Thanks to comments by those audiences, particularly Akhil Gupta, Barney Bates, Anatoly Khazanov, Kirin Narayan, and Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney. Thanks also for critical readings by the editor, by Charles Hirschkind, and a very intensely critical and perceptive reading by an anonymous reviewer.

1. The statues proved more durable than the Taliban had hoped. Militias had to break for the holiday and vowed to pick up where they left off the day after the holiday.

2. Religious authorities in both Iran (an enemy of the Taliban) and Pakistan (their closest ally) denounced the destruction as irrelevant—because it is the worship of idols and not their existence that offends Islam—and bad for Islam's world image. The Arab League has denounced the destruction as "a savage act."

3. It is useful to recall that most people in the world knew the statues through photographs due to their relative inaccessibility. Their loss, for non-Buddhists, was the loss of photographable objects.

4. As we have seen in the photojournalistic coverage of terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C., on September 11 and the devastating coverage of the recent Israeli incursion into the West Bank, these conclusions about the social and political life of the documentary photograph may be broadly generalizable.

5. This is, of course, an ancient rhetorical technique, labeled by Roman rhetoricians “ocular demonstration” (Murphy 1995:127). Its novelty and success in the genre of Egyptian sermons testifies to the power of television and photojournalism as a cultural context.

6. For Example, the July 3, 2000, issue of *al-Ahram*, for Egyptians the prestige equivalent of the *New York Times*, contained on average more than three photographs per page in its 22 pages.

7. A fuller summary of these events appears in Starrett 1998, chapter 7.

8. This is the organization responsible for Egyptian president Anwar Sadat’s 1981 assassination. See Junayna 1988.

9. The comparison with fictional narrative is not idle. The police-blatter coverage teased the reader with the phrase, “*wa huna bada’ al-tafasil al-muthira* [and here the exciting details began]” (*al-Ahram* 1993b).

10. A similar argument is made by Crosby (1997), who connects visualization with quantification as the intellectual bases of European cultural success since the Middle Ages.

11. See Murphy 1974. Aristotle’s theory of the emotions was a cognitive one; the *pathe*, as distinct from the appetites, are activated through appeals to the imagination. “Auditors,” in Hill’s analysis of Aristotelian thought, “are led to the states of feeling by making judgments on the basis of arguments; once in these states they alter their decisions to accept or reject the conclusions of other arguments” (Hill 1995:89). Like most of his successors, Aristotle criticized as degenerate contemporary sophists who depended on techniques of delivery (the modulation of voice, countenance, and bodily movement) rather than reasoned proof to rouse the audience’s emotion, although as a practical matter he recognized its effectiveness (Murphy and Katula 1995:26). Delivery was a distinctly secondary consideration for most other classical writers and remained almost completely untheorized throughout the Middle Ages (Murphy 1974; Murphy, 1978); even Aristotle’s detailed theorization of the *pathe* was all but ignored until the late Renaissance (Hill 1995:109). The normative and theoretical status of delivery was transformed over the subsequent centuries (Mohrmann 1983), culminating in the 19th century when performance—the concern with voice, expression, and audience contact—was almost the exclusive concern (Miller 1982:50). The practical art of delivery was now a central object of theory. Interestingly, in the Islamic tradition, rhetoric was a hermeneutic rather than a compositional science, concerned with interpretation of the stylistics of texts rather than the cultivation of persuasive speech (Smyth 1992). The contemporary development of an explicit science of persuasion is addressed by Hirschkind (1999, 2001).

12. Hirschkind (2001) has pointed out that rigid distinctions between logic and emotion are neither realistic nor analytically useful because in both classical rhetorical theory and current practice in Egypt the two are tightly linked. In his own case study, he shows how participants in the *da’wa* movement cultivate particular emotional sensibilities as a prerequisite for appreciating the truth of particular arguments. In Fliegelman’s case, it is clear that whether or not 18th-century rhetoricians actually were revolutionizing rhetorical practice, they certainly thought they were doing so.

13. Protestant theology confronted a complicated series of arguments about the moral influence of performance and emotion both in public worship and public theater. While English nonconformists argued in the 16th century that the make-believe of the theater amounted to a morally degrading hypocrisy that would transform the inner self through the taking on of false words and actions, the established church applied the same assumption to a defense of public liturgy. Participation in liturgical worship with a pious congregation had transformative power through mimesis. Prayer was “a performative

act whose external persuasiveness determine[d] the worshipper's internal sincerity" (Targoff 1997:54).

14. One of Mahmood's interlocutors told her "I used to think that even though shyness . . . was required of us by God, if I acted shyly it would be hypocritical . . . because I didn't actually feel it inside of me. Then one day, in reading verse twenty-five in Surat al-Qasas I realized that [shyness] was among the good deeds . . . and given my natural lack of [shyness] I had to make or create it first. I realized that making . . . it in yourself is not hypocrisy . . . and that eventually your inside learns to have [it] too. . . . And finally I understood that once you do this, the sense of shyness . . . eventually imprints itself on your inside" (2000:213). "What we have here," according to Mahmood, "is an instance of repeated bodily behavior, with the appropriate intention (however simulated in the beginning), that leads to the reorientation of one's motivations, desires and emotions until they become part of one's 'natural' disposition. Notably, in this economy of discipline disparity between one's intention and bodily gestures is not interpreted as a disjunction between outward social performance and one's 'genuine' inner feelings; rather it is considered to be a sign of an inadequately formed self that requires further discipline and training to bring the two into harmony in accord with a teleological model of self-formation" (2001:35-36).

15. Here and elsewhere I use the more familiar word *signifier* as synonymous with Peirce's term *representamen*, *signified* as synonymous with *interpretant*, and *referent* as synonymous with *object*. One reviewer of the article argued strenuously that this was illegitimate, because a Saussurean semiotics is allegedly dyadic whereas Peirce's semiotics is triadic, locating the object term within the sign itself rather than outside of the sign, as a referent. For the purposes of this article, I am ignoring this difference for two reasons. First, because Peirce himself was not entirely consistent in his terminology (Noth 1990); and second, because the two systems are not necessarily irreconcilable (Krampen 1987). This is not a silent attempt to smuggle Saussurean connotations into Peirce's framework; it is merely a matter of avoiding wholesale reliance on Peirce's less familiar neologisms.

16. This sort of depiction can sometimes have other intentions, as when, in Egyptian actor Adel Imam's popular movie *The Terrorist*, one of the militant Islamist villains is shown eating at home with his several wives. All these women are covered head to foot in modest dress, including gloves and face veils, forcing them to lift veils from their mouths in order to eat. The movie's producers here display unreality not to communicate virtue but to depict irrational fanaticism or an over-the-top parody. One reviewer of this article argued that the practice of including *hijab* in drawings is merely a convention of the genre. I believe the convention is motivated, because in nonreligious periodicals women are normally *never* depicted this way. Instead, women are drawn either as "bare-headed and modern" or as "lower-class, with traditional scarves."

17. As in the Revere lithograph, one can interpret this as a compression of time, with home activities and street dress depicted as simultaneous, although there are other readings as well. In entering the privacy of the home for didactic purposes, the artist might simply feel compelled to falsify visual reality by drawing women in *hijab* either because their representation exposes them to public view, or because the artist's gaze (even if imaginary) forces him to enter the picture himself, drawing the scene as if he, the artist, were present there. Significantly, this is an adult male gaze, signifying that the artist and/or viewer are males unrelated to the imaginary subject.

18. Obviously such capital accumulation is not strictly capitalistic: there are other paths to the spectacle, whether in China (Schrift 2001) or New Guinea (Tuzin 1980, 1997).

19. For complications, think about the celebrated *Time* magazine cover (June 27, 1994) in which O. J. Simpson's face was darkened to make him appear more sinister or the flap over *National Geographic* magazine's February 1982 digital alteration of a photograph of the Egyptian pyramids, meant to fit the image more pleasingly into the cover's vertical format. Digital manipulation of photographs—a major plot point in, for example, Michael Crichton's novel *Rising Sun*—calls off all bets and changes our understanding of the truth value of documentary photographs. On the other hand, other manipulative techniques such as the cut-and-paste method to produce some early photographs of ghosts, have not entirely undermined our confidence in the photographic image. Just as there are trustworthy and untrustworthy physicians, so viewers tend to remain confident in photography in general even though particular images may be suspect. On how documentary photography may be viewed as archetypal, see Lutz and Collins 1993.

20. The veiling or deferral of violent display—accomplished in the Egyptian case through publishing photographs of executed prisoners rather than arranging public executions in real time—was accomplished differently in the case of the destruction of the Buddhist statues. The Taliban tried to ensure that there would be no photographic coverage at all of the destruction, just as U.S. prison officials would be unwilling to record or display publicly images of lethal injections. However, at least one Afghani freelance photographer was able to smuggle photographs and videos to Western news agencies depicting one of the statues being demolished. The Taliban themselves took the international press to see their empty cliff niches afterward and took them to museums to show them the empty shelves. Some portion of the country's ancient statuary, including rubble from the Buddhas, reportedly escaped destruction and is now for sale in the bazaars of Peshawar.

21. Anatoly Khazanov has disagreed with me on this point, attributing the puncta in these photographs to incompetence. If the Soviet KGB had been in charge, he assured me, the photographs would have been pure studium. I would reply that, at least for purposes of domestic consumption, the puncta do not matter, because the photographs are not intended to mislead.

22. In Daniel's use of Peirce's vocabulary, "The laying bare of energetic interpretants likewise results from the dismantling of the hegemonic dominance of logical interpretants, the world of habit. Uncontained (by logical interpretants) and driven by emotional interpretants they contain, energetic interpretants lead to spontaneous action. Ungoverned by the courtesies of rule-governed behavior, energetic interpretants explode. Their meanings are precipitated, not before, not after, but *in the act*" (1996:102).

23. Photographers understand this is not so. "Whoever it was that said 'the camera doesn't lie,'" commented *Washington Post* photojournalist Michael Williamson, "hadn't shot many pictures" (*National Public Radio, Morning Edition*, week of February 19, 2001).

24. For a powerful counterargument, see Mahmood 2001.

25. Photographs of the flaming World Trade Center or Osama bin Laden, for example, are being used as rallying points against various national and international threats and hegemonies and as targets of attack. After September 11, as crowds in Pakistan hoisted bin Laden's image in street demonstrations, the United States Marine Corps motivated contestants in a military rescue competition by pasting his portrait to steel barrels that they were cutting in half with power saws. By early October 2001, a Texas company was reportedly manufacturing piñatas in the form of bin Laden, and by November, novelty shops across the United States were marketing rolls of toilet paper with bin Laden's photograph surrounded by the notation "Wipe Out Terrorism."

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