

Gianluigi Ricuperati, « Fucked Up Ville »

On an unspecified day in 2003, a twenty-seven-year-old American citizen who resided in Polk County, Florida, created a website. When he created it, there were many things he did not know. He did not know that it would turn into a porn site. He did not know that it would be amateur porn. He could not have predicted that it would create a community. Nor could he have imagined that it would be the start of his troubles. Only after winding up in prison on 301 counts and risking the rest of his life behind bars did Chris Wilson realize the final and most unpredictable result: that he had helped to create one of the most effective mimetic representations of war in recent memory.

America is advanced citizenship

“America is advanced citizenship.” These were the first lines that you read when you entered www.nowthatsfuckedup.com, the internet site from which the pictures in this book were taken. This sentence is taken from a film starring Michael Douglas titled, *The American President* (directed by Rob Reiner, 1995). Douglas, as the brave Democratic first man, utters them with total nonchalance. “America isn’t easy. America is advanced citizenship. You’ve gotta want it bad, cause it’s gonna put up a fight.”

But before the subtitle, the title: what exactly does the name of this website mean? “Fucked up” is American slang for something that’s disorganized, excessive, completely messed up. A person who always drinks till he passes out is fucked up. A truly absurd situation is fucked up. After a major accident even the car is fucked up. By the same mysterious linguistic metamorphosis, if you’re a seventeen-year-old white man from Arkansas and on the internet you find a nice video-clip of a black girl giving her boyfriend a blow job, going all the way down . . . well, at that point you might take a deep breath and mutter, “Now that’s fucked up.”

What is the site? What good is it? How does it work?

The main purpose of the website, which for legal reasons has its server in Holland (where the laws on sexual and like matters are more indulgent), is to allow registered users to exchange or download amateur erotic material. “Amateur” is any erotic

representation that does not involve the appearance of porn professionals. Amateur, according to Chris Wilson, is the pornographic gold rush of the new millennium: the porn revolution. Because no one cares anymore about the anal proclivities of this or that star or super-hung, Viagra-popping stud. In our world, in the year 2006, every twelve hours millions and millions of pictures shot with every possible type of digital camera, cell phone, or camcorder are uploaded into the web's tentacles, traveling from one hemisphere to the next. And everybody passes on their experiences non-stop, like runners in a relay race, filming, taking pictures, and recording. Mostly men. That mostly get dumped. And that mostly register on Nowthatsfuckedup, and share the materials they have accumulated in the recently-ended relationship.

Registration is free. Once you've registered, you're a member, as you would be for a million other on-line forums. And you can join in the fun. The forum is easy to explain to anyone that is not allergic to the internet universe, today's virtual equivalent of the public square, saloon, or bar. You come, you meet other people, engage in long, remarkably successful threads – interrupted and sometimes uninterrupted. When the discussion is about something that really gets the community fired up, the replies start coming in, setting the thread-counters spinning. On Nowthatsfuckedup the threads are divided according to classic amateur porn categories: pictures of you and your girlfriend, random pictures, video clips, etc. On Nowthatsfuckedup there's no lying about the threads that turn people on. They are truly amateur: rudimentary, you might say, but selected with an ability to identify the difference between something edited and something a little more raw.

Once you're a member, you can join a thread. You can post comments, emoticons, exclamations, and above all, pictures. Once you're a registered member, of course, you can also look at pictures. Amateur pictures sent by other members, or randomly collected, but it is a good idea to know the rules. As with every other American microlegislation, the basic rules are few but unyielding. The first and foremost is that you cannot send professional porn photos. Any attempt to do so will be nipped in the bud by the site administrator – the not very clever euphemism that conceals an elementary pyramid atop a pyramid: Christopher Wilson. If you happen to send pictures of some babe downloaded from another XXX site, he or his underlings will discover it three or four hours later and block it. But if you scan old polaroids from a few years back, stuck in the flaps of books that no one would ever dream of borrowing – shots of

your summertime fling, your one-night stand, the prostitute you hired for a bachelor party; and if the pictures are real; Nowthatsfuckedup will be quick to reward you, and there will be a leap in the fortunes of your avatar, your nickname, your disembodied name in the on-line community. You start out with half a star and can get as high as five full gold stars. (Nowthatsfuckedup has the same features as 90% of the new-generation virtual community, which use the same file-sharing programs. They all end up looking an awful lot alike.) In the community each step up the ladder has an eloquent tag: The half-star is 'the novice,' the newcomer is, "I'm just here to jerk off."

But there's also something extra, a buried treasure: hundreds and hundreds of strictly amateur photos and videos, sent, approved, and commented on in a heated epistolary exchange of bytes from all over the world with America, but especially from all parts of America with Polk County, Christopher's house, where every new hit bounces from the safe Dutch site across the ocean. That something extra has a name: supporter access. Because in the virtual market, as the slogan goes, the universal minimum common denominator is called access. Supporter access means that you can see hotter pics, more stimulating clips, some of which the girls themselves post. And in high definition, no less! Thousands of pages that begin, "Guys, I'm sending you some hot stuff, but if you don't comment I'm going to stop posting. So get busy!" Against a pixilated background appear details of lips, breasts, sexual organs, feet, knees, teeth, and hands in dimensions that literally colonize every corner of the screen. The way Chris explains it is that there are two ways to gain supporter access. The first, which guarantees free access, is to send amateur pics that you took yourself. The jury will then decide whether you deserve entrance. The second is to pay ten or twelve dollars for one to three months of guaranteed access. Most commercial porn sites, both classic and amateur, cost at least twice as much, and don't offer their visitors even half of what Nowthatsfuckedup does. Like a bank, Christopher Wilson sells things that accumulate after accumulating things that sell.

What have the soldiers in Iraq got to do with this?

One day back in 2004 Christopher Wilson decided to open a new area on the site. His country had been at war for a little more than a year. A few seasons had come and gone since September 11. “American soldiers stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan can have supporter access for all the areas on the site without paying a dime.” But they shouldn’t send blurry photos of their sex lives. Or even type in the numbers on their credit card . All they have to do is spend their days at war taking interesting pictures. In exchange they won’t have to deal with any annoyances when they turn on their computers. In a few months his brain child was a big hit. Some of the toughest people in the world, the U.S. Marines, embedded in an endless military occupation, swarmed in like insects to the siren’s call.

After a few months Chris had put together more than a thousand shocking pictures and at least a few dozen co-religionists: the soldiers of the allied mission in Iraq. The operation was a success: in a single summit of needs and desires he had combined a delirious patriotism, the minimal vulgarity of life on the front, and the virtual association of porn and violence. And its message was clear. As the soldiers put it: don’t fuck with the American army.

But what really happened?

Chris’s problems began some time later, although the root cause had been building on the site’s server from the start. Because the pics came in, were archived, commented on, and rewarded with supporter access. It seemed like a perfect circle. The root of his troubles, to put it as simply as possible, was that the pictures sent by the soldiers in Iraq were gory. Granted, on the web there is no end to horror: accident victims, maimings, suicides, close-ups of dead bodies. But the digital images of daily life in Iraq traded for digital images of sex life in America were different. They mattered.

Why do these images matter?

Disfigurement. Aestheticism. Shame. Boredom. None of these images per se had the qualities to win a Pulitzer, nor did they represent anything brand new in the panorama of photojournalism. But try browsing through them all at once, in sequence, arranged according to the feature that best characterizes them, tradability – not unlike the pics you see in this book. Then think of disfigurement, aestheticism, shame, and boredom. And then ask yourselves: in an absolute sense, is this what war really amounts to?

What kind of pictures are these?

The first word, the most generic and the most precise, is disfigurement. Bodies blown apart by a bomb, bodies burnt to a crisp by a fire, bodies of prisoners tied together by huge hemostatic laces or something that closely resembles hemostatic laces. The second word is aestheticism. Pictures of destroyed villages that have the fascinating aura of a cartoon set. Pictures that portray Iraqi insurgents in the cross-hairs of a high-precision rifle. Pictures that show pieces of tanks, weapons, fragments of life on the eastern front. The third word is shame. It's typically déjà vu: just check the private photo albums of any soldier in any war in any decade of any century: smiles in front of defenseless prisoners; the dead body of an enemy; Churchill's V for victory sign; enemy corpses stripped of their clothing to expose their bare buttocks to the camera. The last word is boredom: women soldiers that stick machine-guns between their naked legs; sex acts between enlisted officers in the shelter of the Baghdad headquarters tents; clowning around for the camera; inflatable dolls astride the cannon of a tank, macho poses, mess scenes, dirty laundry.

Can you give us a specific example?

It's eleven-thirty p.m. on a winter night in Iraq. The first months of operation Iraqi Freedom. We are at a check-point commanded by the American army. All of a sudden a rumble sends shock waves through the air, but it's not a bomb. It's a car that's arriving at some speed, a suspicious speed that in other notorious cases generated what not even Nabokov would have called "friendly fire." The first sign of danger and military protocol goes out the window. At the steering wheel is a face that is neither European

nor American. Military protocol speaks clearly. They shoot. The car is an old BMW, black. The driver is a man in a leather jacket, an Iraqi. Outside the car an American soldier follows orders, shooting round after round of 5.56 and 7.62 millimeter machine-gun fire. The windshield is riddled with holes, and less than one second later the skull of the man at the steering wheel explodes. Hit straight on by a 7.62 bullet. As usually happens in these cases, the automatic reflex is to hit the brake. One of the Iraqi man's last sensations must have been the mild resistance of the BMW's brakes. When calm has been restored, two of the shooter's comrades accompany him to the car. The only imprint of the Iraqi that remains is the texture of his clothes – cotton, leather – and a disgusting mass of gory brain matter tumbling out. As if the body had rejected itself. Everything has to be cleaned up. The shooter keeps his distance and starts to take pictures. In a couple of hours the episode is reabsorbed by the night and the calm, and the grind of everyday chores imposed by his rank and duties starts up again. A few months later he signs up as a simple member of Nowthatsfuckedup – strange how the social structure of the site so closely resembles a battalion or an army corps, strange how in both hierarchies the American soldier that did the shooting is on the lowest rung of the ladder, although he quickly reads Chris's invitation and realizes that to rise through the ranks in the on-line porn army all he has to do is perform his duties in the real war's army. To provide visible proof that he is doing an outstanding job of performing his duties. A few months later his nickname becomes "vegetarian." His rank? Two stars. The tag line attached to the two stars? "The truth is that I've only gotten laid once." The pictures of the Iraqi with his head shot off earns him supporter access. Vegetarian's future is guaranteed.

What do the other members of the community have to say?

Some people limit themselves to exclaiming, acting shocked, or sucking in their breath: "Wow, that's so wild, weird, what a story." Others – a minority – are indignant: "Come on guys, it's just not right to post stuff like that." Some crack ideological jokes: "He's better off where he is, with his seventy-two virgins." Some crack non-ideological jokes: "Now you know what it means to drive with your head somewhere else." Some lambaste the two soldiers for approaching the scene of the crime so timorously: "Can you believe those two faggots in the first picture? What the fuck are they scared of? Jesus Christ . . . it's obvious they weren't the ones to pull the trigger." And some dispense a

little wisdom: “These pictures are really raw. They’re showing us the real war.” Finally it’s vegetarian’s turn to add his own words of wisdom to the previous postings: “They’re things that we have to do. Some of us don’t like it but we have to do it, to protect ourselves and our lifestyles.” He does not fail to praise the entire regiment: “These pictures are here just to prove that we don’t take anything lightly.” So if you should happen to think that the space in which this logic moves is hard to cross, think again: it’s as dense as pure lead. It’s impossible to cross.

What’s the big scandal?

Before venturing into the various subgenres of the scandalized reaction to Nowthatsfuckedup, I should say unequivocally that the problem is not how naughty the American soldiers are. They’re just background music compared to the powerful consciousness-raising tool that Christopher Wilson’s site places before our eyes. To fully grasp this all you have to do is dig through the military history archives at any latitude. And read about what the Dutch did in South Africa, the French did in central Africa, the English did in northern Africa. The Italians did in . . . The problem, if you want to make a general rule, has to do with the military set. But to blame the cumulative horrors in these pages on a systemic flaw in the military caste could lead to a further justification: that war per se produces certain excesses of abjection and stupidity. So naturally you would end up not assigning to any one party the burden of atonement, which is the pong for every ping ordinarily called a scandal. Yet there is that ping – which is also a computer term. It jumps out at the moral ear although it is hard to understand in what form. After months of pouring over these images and this episode, I think that I have identified an approximation (that hopefully I will not have to retract too soon!) of who was more guilty than the others. It’s worth writing down, but not right away. Now is the time to describe the series of scandals. (Some phenomena produce a series of dreams, as Bob Dylan sings, and others never fail to unleash a series of scandals.)

Scandal number one is triggered by the mechanism itself: trading pictures of suffering war, death, for porn photos of squalid amusement and repressed virility. Scandal number two is triggered by what some of these pictures show: vulgarity, horror, the infinite comedy of human mediocrity, the persistent tragedy of massacred civilians and bloodshed, the ridiculous and dramatic fate of soldiers recruited desperately and

hurled at the phantom terrorist enemy. Scandal number three is that most of the American media paid little attention to the ferocious but fascinating information resource constituted by *Nowthatsfuckedup*. With the exception of some short reports on ABC and CBS, one article in the *New York Times* and one in the *Washington Post* (in addition to a few short pieces in the Italian press), most of the commentary was on blogs and other passion-driven outlets, which is like wearing glasses when it's freezing cold: as soon as you go back indoors the change in temperature fogs them up and you can't see a thing, erasing all distinctions (and consequently this sad, ridiculous, tragic, and complex story goes up like a giant Bronx cheer sneering at the Stars and Stripes: even though America's mistakes aren't the crucial element). Which brings me to scandal number four, the most insolent, perhaps, regarding the American military and government institutions. Namely, the Pentagon elite.

How did the Pentagon react?

In the February 22, 2005 edition of the *Washington Post*, the following news item appeared: "The Pentagon has blocked soldiers in Iraq from accessing a pornographic website that is posting scandalous nude pictures of their female comrades-in-arms, The Post has learned." The report goes on to describe the ire of the army commanders following a Pentagon inquiry into the circulation of embarrassing photos depicting female soldiers who were either undressed or in the middle of sexual acts. The article also pointed out that although the provider of the American headquarters in Iraq is directly controlled by satellite, it would still be difficult to block access to *Nowthatsfuckedup* through channels such as an internet point or private connections. What's more, the soldiers will return home in a few months, unless they die first. Going down the thread after February 22, 2005, the digital activity of the freedom fighters does not seem to have been compromised in the least: diminished, certainly, but not over and done with by a long shot. The soldiers continued to write, send messages, and post pictures taken in Iraq in March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, and December.

So the question is, did anyone in Washington realize the brutal importance of these images as a whole? Or did they continue to worry about the ridiculous pornography factor, which is the most justifiable aspect of the site, anyway, according to

an indulgent, common-sensical, and time honored lay morality? (Note that the site has never presented erotic material involving children, and that in general it doesn't go much beyond the spectrum of the sexual preferences of the average consenting adult in the 21st century.) The answer is that the mechanisms have moved in such a way as to satisfy both needs. There are 301 charges against Christopher Wilson, all related to crimes against common decency. Not a word about Iraq, the war, the soldiers. So now we are drowning in these images and – after vomiting, cracking jokes, and acting shocked – we don't know what to do with them.

What do these pictures say that's so important?

The pictures on this site show how the tools of death are nothing more than gadgets, on a par with household appliances, and the difference always lies in the human presence. In fact, when someone posts pictures of a helicopter in the air, the site administrator asks, "Don't you have anything more personal?" or "What's the real story?" Often, and much more than our desire for comfort will allow, there is no "plot" for a person on a Western keyboard who has automatically elected to be a *spectator* of anything, thereby turning anything into a spectacle. The adventure *is not there*. Sure, sometimes, as if by accident, you catch a suicide bomber at the steering wheel or a photo sequence of killings, torture, humiliation –the most precious gems in the free market of Fucked-Up Ville. But in the end, the huge stockpile of words and pictures that crowd the site, like any text that finds its *raison d'être* in the pornographic gaze, *doesn't go anywhere*. Every scene, idea, and frame is trapped in the moment of its appearance, but there is no before and no after – which paradoxically is exactly what anyone who shows up on Nowthatsfuckedup is looking for: Tell us the before, tell us the after. We want to know everything. We want to see everything.

One more time: This is war from the trigger's perspective – the mass of ordinary soldiers who are sent in, alive, to set fire to the borders and end up, dead, changing them. It's an inorganic collection of instants flicked through one after the other, without any possibility of growth: the insurgents exploding, children saying hello, soldiers peeing, and women disrobing are arranged in no order whatsoever except for what is proclaimed by the high command. Randomness. Lust. Need.

In the future other books and other minds will try to write a chronology for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Historians will sketch a satellite vision of the conflict; Memoirists, a horizontal vision; Political scientists, an attempt to verify whether the invisible threads were really invisible or were simply never there. Ideologues will supply interpretative directions. They'll start with the ambiguous defeat of Al Gore at the 2000 presidential elections. They'll study the enthusiasm of editorialists at right-wing papers like the Wall Street Journal like the details of propaganda postage stamps, or like naïve showgirls, perhaps, of what it means to raise the volume for someone who is already shouting. Journalists and photographers will be left with the outside skin of things, which is often not seen as clearly as it should be. But if you want the guts of war – once the period has passed – then you couldn't find a more necessary, degrading, and intolerable inspection visit than a cruise through the neighborhood of Fucked Up Ville.

So how does this book work?

The pictures of Iraq on Fucked Up Ville work as a universal instrument for transmitting value. For the soldiers they're the trophies they won. For the users, even the most sporadic, they're trophies to admire. The Milanese artist Amedeo Martegani helped me to build a logical framework for an exhibit of these pictures, which of course have a documentary value but are mainly the most scintillating face of a very significant issue – the exchange mechanism, the community, and Chris Wilson's story. The framework is value: The trophy. The pictures of Fucked Up Ville are a *sequence of trophies*. The soldiers of Fucked Up Ville go hunting – they are in a hunt in the various ways by which we recognize a hunt – and they lure the best, the rarest animals – in other words, the least troublesome—into the community's virtual public square.

The images are subdivided into four sections, each containing photos of growing community value: the first acceptable, the second delectable, the third notable, the fourth formidable. "Acceptable" are the landscapes of constructed or destructed spaces or of living persons. "Delectable," according to the absurd logic of this site, are the scenes from everyday life, comrades' jokes or the ungirded female soldiers who cop admiring gazes from their companions-in-arms; it also included terrorist attacks and pictures of dead people, but only when they are not directly tied to the soldiers' military activity: like watching a car crash with a digital camera in your hand. "Notable" collects similar

scenes, with the difference that maybe you were the one that caused the car crash. “Formidable” are the extraordinary situations, the ones that “tell a story” – the gold bullion of Fucked Up Ville.

Along with the pictures, each section of the book contains captions and one-liners set off with quotation marks. Often they’re remarks by the soldiers that took the pictures. Other times they are the comments of site users. And, where necessary, you will also find captions that describe the subject or the situation represented. The captions were mounted and arranged in an order that reflects the editor’s intention to take his distance from this moral humus, which basically underlines the urgency of our purpose. The intention of this book is not to criminalize or generalize but rather to excavate from this paradoxical brainchild of a young American the learning opportunity that it affords. A representation of war that is certainly savage, certainly unilateral, but, for once, told from the perspective of the person who is fighting the war.

What’s the sense of a book taken from a website?

The only gentlemanly response to this question is that the internet is not a text, which is exactly why it is no less pulsating and vital than the perceivable reality that characterizes our relationship with the world. This book is above all a way of telling a story that deserves to be told – if even one of the hypotheses ventured in these pages proves to be plausible, it would represent an event of enormous political importance (*Fuckedupgate?*). Moreover, this book tries to fix, to capture, an experience that produced meaning, and it tries to do so in only one of the many possible ways. The intention is to provide a gaze that can trigger other developments, other plausible sequences, other individual *Fucked Ups*, other possibilities of organizing and cataloging. Basically the material presented in the pages that follow is just a small part of the what is contained on the site.

But what happened to Christopher Wilson?

On October 7, 2005, the sheriff’s office of Polk County in Florida, USA, in the person of Sheriff Grady Judy, issued an arrest warrant against private citizen

Christopher Wilson, a resident of Eagle Lake, a lovely little city where “it’s nice to live, work, and play,” as the advertising of the local government proclaims. He was accused of 301 counts of possession and distribution of pornographic material. His bail was set at 151 thousand dollars. If found guilty, Wilson’s prison sentence could be in the decades.

On that same day Sheriff Judd made the following statement to the *Orlando Sentinel*: “It is as vile, as perverted, as non-normal sexual conduct – which rises to the level of obscenity – as we’ve ever investigated . . . We have notified the Army’s criminal investigation division. We will forward to them any investigative documents they deem appropriate if they open an investigation.”

On October 13, 2005, Christopher Wilson – going by his usual nickname, Chris, five stars, site administrator – was released on bail, he opened a thread to inform the members of his situation: “I am not allowed to talk about my legal case, but you can find everything that you need at the links that you know. It is very hard to ask for money, it makes me uncomfortable, but I need a fucking lot of money to pay for my legal battle. Any donations will go directly to my lawyers to cover the expenses for what looks to be a tough battle to defend the First Amendment. All proceeds from site registration will be used to pay my lawyers, so please do what you can to help me. My heartfelt thanks for your help, guys!”

On that same day the *Orlando Weekly* published an interview with Wilson’s lawyer, Lawrence Walters, a specialist in defending porn shops and adult bookstores in the Orlando area. His story is a punch in the fundamentalist gut of America, a look at the world of people for whom the truly significant aspect of Nowthatsfuckedup is not the mutilated limbs of Iraqis but rather the sexual tastes of young Americans. His words illuminate some sides of the story that deserve further thought.

The police here think that they’re really working for the Lord, for some reason in this area between Orlando and Tampa, although it is broadly metropolitan, they have established standards totally different from the rest of the state, the nation, and in a certain sense, the whole world. In fact they’re trying to censor websites that are visible anywhere at any latitude. As a legal precedent is rather fascinating, firstly because the site is operated out of Amsterdam, and therefore under the jurisdiction of a foreign nation, and secondly because it represents an attempt on the part of a small portion of a state to regulate the web, which is not only visible throughout the state and throughout the country, but even in other countries. Moreover I believe that an accusation of this kind is in clear contrast to what is expressed in the First Amendment . . . There are no clear differences between the pornographic images contained on this site and those contained in thousands of other sites, and moreover it should be pointed out that my client *never published anything*: the photographs were freely sent by the users of the site, and the users of the site are the only creators of the site itself. The pictures come from all over the world. They are the ones, without restriction, who decide freely to send non-copyright-protected regarding their sex life, or life in general, or their life in war. Whether you like it or not, this is the world in

which we live, and sooner or later Polk County will also have to justify itself . . . The accusation claims that the investigation of my client's site started long before it started to attract some form of media attention. In this regard I will conduct my own investigations, asking questions of the people in charge. These are the facts, for now. First the military higher-ups complained that this site shows very direct photos of what the American soldiers are doing in Iraq, and they certainly don't provide a vision of Operation Iraqi Freedom compliant with the wishes of the Bush Administration. Then, over the space of a few months, the founder of the site ends up in prison. I don't know if there is a connection between the two things. Any reasonable person feels that not everything is as it should be. I will also investigate this. Among other things I believe that it is rather significant that Sheriff Judd declared that all information will be conveyed to the Army. This raised suspicions in a precise direction, in my opinion. That someone intends to find out which soldiers sent pictures, and to identify them by inspecting my client's hard drive . . . Or else we can see it this way: outside there are another million adult internet sites with pictures that are not unlike those contained on Christopher Wilson's site. This means that there are a million administrators of these sites that are free and without problems. The only one to end up in prison is Christopher Wilson. And the only difference with the other million sites is that Christopher Wilson's site publishes pictures from American soldiers in Iraq. I don't want to speculate on this connection because I have no proof that the government put pressure on Polk County to arrest my client. But if that were to be the case – and I repeat, I have no proof – it would be one of the worst violations of civil rights in our time. Any journalist, any editor, any citizen of any country in the world should be worried about the way this case is going.”

Does this site contribute to freedom of speech?

This is what Christopher writes in the first page of the section, “Pictures from Afghanistan and Iraq – Gory,” which contains the most shocking images. “Someone had something to say about the fact that this site publishes sometimes brutal images of war-related violence. All one has to do is look at the history of World War II, when the photographs of dead soldiers were censored by the government, and cameras were banned from the battlefield. Tinkering with the truth is in net contrast with the spirit of the First Amendment and its freedoms, which this country promotes and fully enjoys. Those soldiers fighting for our freedom and the truth about their fate deserve to be made public. As *Life* magazine wrote when it published the pictures of the three downed American soldiers who had washed up on the beach in New Guinea: ‘Dead men have indeed died in vain if live men refuse to look at them.’ We are in complete agreement.”

We could argue about the Geneva Convention's prohibition on the circulation of images of prisoners of war, as Donald Rumsfeld noted in admonishing Al Jazeera for broadcasting videos of Westerners kidnapped in Iraq. You could object that trading images of violated and disfigured bodies for access to amateur porn disobeys the most elementary rules of civility and decency. You could add that Christopher Wilson is some kind of postmodern merchant with dubious moral contours. But it is difficult to object to

the fact that the collection of images that converged on the server of Nowthatsfuckedup constitutes an essential contribution to understanding at least two absolutely significant phenomena: first (before these pages end it will have become a cliché), what really happens when you write the word ‘war.’ Second – what really happens when you write that other word, ‘Iraq.’ On this basis, against every expectation – and against every dictate of the politically correct – the twenty-seven-year old obsessed by amateur sex may become one of the most paradoxical, latiginous personages of the new century: the man who bought the truth of war by selling the truth about fucking.

First coda – when the questions end.

Maybe, before starting to flip through the pages that follow, it could help the reader to know how you might feel; or if you’re reading these words after seeing the pictures, to be comforted about how you do feel. After dwelling on this story for a while, you feel that you’re in a place in which enlightenment civilization is truly fucked up. The on-line communities and others are all Fucked Up Villes. That is the sense behind the title of this introduction. To enter, pass through, witness their productive, expressive, and social practices, helps to know the times in which we live – and it basically makes you “sad.” “Sadness” cannot eliminate these practices: that would violate its principle of containing aggressiveness. “Sadness” cannot censure them: that would quash freedom of speech. “Sadness” cannot be scandalized: that’s just the way things are. “Sadness” cannot become too serious: otherwise it would be rejected by Irony and Play, the two handmaids of the virtual world. The only thing Sadness can do is return to its pedestal in the static pose of melancholy. The Enlightenment is dead, as Hans Magnus Enzensberger said to Alberto Arbasino on the afternoon of the funeral of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, commenting on the exuberance of the youths who were just coming out of 1968. Every time that it dies the arrow of time points backward. Can someone tell me what year it is in Fucked Up Ville?

Second Coda – Hope Deliver Disappear

Chris Wilson's bail was revoked in late November 2005. He had kept the soldiers' pictures up on the site but removed all the pornographic images in the hopes of gaining clemency and not ending up behind bars again. On December 16 it happened anyway, despite his lawyer's appeal and a public campaign in his favor. In the United States and Europe, *no* other individual is in jail for distributing adult material that is in no way related to pedophilia or other deviances – normal stuff, in other words. Rumors are spreading that the upper echelons of the American Army were infuriated by the circulation of classified images. On television Senator Ted Kennedy cited the Wilson case to rebut a Republican on the issue of civil rights and the war on terrorism. On December 28, Christopher Wilson was granted freedom once again on the basis of an appeal filed before Federal Court by his lawyer. On December 29 porn images reappeared on his website. At press time, the legal case was partially concluded. In a bitter note published on various blogs that supported the campaign on his behalf, Christopher Wilson stated that, "A good solution is one in which neither party feels fulfilled." In exchange for the freedom of its founder, the website terminated its activities before the end of March, the expiration date of the last paid subscriptions (a detail that makes one reflect on the American obsession with consumer protection). A twist on Aesop's fable explains the explainable: Christopher Wilson is a fox who barely missed being blown up by an atomic bomb right next to the "sour" grapes.

Translated by Michael F. Moore