Why Empires Need Pictures

On 23 March 1964, the diplomatic corps of Washington, D.C. gathered for a reception in the Benjamin Franklin room of the department of state. Those receptions were always important events, the department served good food and chilled drinks, and they usually involved stirring speeches: enough reasons to go. This reception, however, was different. There was only one short introductory speech by Secretary of State Dean Rusk and no ringing declaration. Instead, Rusk unveiled a model replica of two huge towers that looked like stretched shoe boxes. These towers, he explained, were going to be built in New York, they would be the largest buildings in the world, and their name would be: World Trade Center.[1]

The reception kicked off a series of activities through which the Johnson administration and World Trade Center representatives sought to advertise what its architect Minoru Yamasaki called the "first building of the twenty-first century."[2] Immediately after the reception, representatives of the center drove around in Washington and handed out literature and information materials to embassies. Colleagues flew to Western Europe where they introduced the center to the governments of West Germany, France, Italy, Great Britain, the Scandinavian and the Benelux countries, and explored their willingness to reserve office space in the buildings.[3] Administration officials, meanwhile, showcased them abroad in their own ways. In West Germany, officials of the United States Information Service (USIS) staged an exhibit about the "Great Society," which included photos and a model replica of the World Trade Center. The exhibit traveled through West Germany and was also shown in the halls of the West German federal parliament.[4] In India, the USIS flagship publication, *Span,* carried a photograph of the center's model, describing the

twin towers as “the world’s tallest structures, topping majestic Empire State Building by thirty metres.”[5] Long before it was completed and ever since it was officially opened in April 1973, the World Trade Center became a towering icon of America’s economic power and a symbol of its claim to world leadership.

The World Trade Center, however, also represented something else: the inherently symbolic nature of American empire itself and the degree to which it was built on pictures. Neither the models nor the finished towers, after all, were simply architectural structures standing in miniature in a random state department room or for real on the southern tip of Manhattan Island. Both were strategically represented abroad and multiplied in endless visual images by tourists, news media, or filmmakers.[6] Cinema heroes either saved or destroyed it, King Kong climbed on top of it, aliens destroyed it, and later Homer Simpson took its elevators. This way, images of the World Trade Center became part of an intensifying globalization of pictures, which made them circulate around the world and turned “seeing America” into a global experience. Indeed, in the same moment in which Dean Rusk was speaking to the house guests on 23 March 1964, American communications satellites sped around the world and beamed images across oceans, television sets spread globally in rapid pace, and transnational flows of images connected societies to each other in new ways. Rusk’s contemporaries perceived those changes as the time of a revolution in global technology and mass communications or as the end of the “Gutenberg galaxy”[7] and the beginning of an “electronic culture of the global village.”[8] Or they spoke, like Austrian philosopher Günther Anders, of a “global flood of pictures” and the age of global “icono-mania.”[9]

In this work, I explore how the “global flood of pictures” changed foreign encounters of American empire and explain why the rise of the visual age also transformed American foreign policy. Indeed, as I show, American policy makers began to rely on picture making on such a scale through “photo opportunities,” films, exhibits, and the staging of television events that one could speak of an emergent icono-mania in American foreign policy itself.[10] Often, the making of pictures now became as important for American policymakers as the actual policies themselves: foreign policy transformed into a policy of the picture, by the picture, and for the picture, and with it, American empire, too, transformed—into an “empire of pictures,” which it has continued to be to this day.[11]

Examining the rise of America’s empire of pictures, this book draws widely from what is now often called “visual history,”[12] and,

accordingly, it takes the history of pictures serious as a historical problem in its own right.[13] In recent years, scholars have increasingly drawn attention to the important role that pictures have played in history, and calls for an "iconic turn,"[14] a "pictorial turn,"[15] and a "visual turn"[16] have left their marks in the historical profession. Today, "visual history" is a burgeoning field whose scholars examine how pictures were produced, what they contained, how they were disseminated, or how spectators interacted with them. Visual historians emphasize that no picture emerges naturally, but is always an artificial product that is being produced with specific agendas, intentions, and expectations in mind that historians have to probe and examine. It is one of their premises that, as visual culture theorist Tom Holert has underlined, "visibility is not given, but man made," that optics are a "politics of positioning," that images are tools of power strategies by which those who produce them seek to draw others into their ways of seeing.[17]

This book has been written in the spirit of "visual history," and accordingly it explores similar questions: how did American administrations come to terms with pictures? How did they make, disseminate, and utilize pictures? What did they expect from them? Which representational strategies did they pursue in pictures? How did commercial visual media play along? Did they print and broadcast the kinds of pictures policy makers hoped for, or did they use different ones? Which emotional-aesthetic experiences of empire did those pictures create? How did observers respond to them?[18]

At the same time, the book also addresses a broader issue, namely, the question of how empires consolidate their global rule. As historian Michael Hochgeschwender writes, one can speak of an (informal) empire once a state is "able to create and conserve a hierarchic inter-state order."[19] Such an order is always in a precarious balance and depends on mechanisms of symbolic integration through which it assures the acknowledgment of hierarchies on a mass scale.[20] Pictures, I argue, became a key resource to achieve that aim in the 1960s, because they created sensory experiences of American superiority and thereby strengthened global recognition of and for American leadership.

To understand how that process of imperial integration worked, it is necessary to explore briefly the somewhat broader question of how political orders conserve their existence. In what follows, I therefore outline what I understand to be the crucial axioms of political order, relate those to American empire, and explain why pictures became so important for consolidating it.

Imperial Order Reconsidered

In line with a growing body of scholarship that brands itself as a "new cultural-political history,"[21] this book rests on the general assumption that political order is not something that is simply given via constitutions, institutions, or laws—who ever reads the constitution, after all?—but is constantly being reactualized in symbols, rituals, signs, and aesthetic practices that allow its subjects both the sensory experience of order and lead to its recognition (which then is the process of integration). Particularly medieval and early modern historians have illuminated how rituals and other symbolic practices were vital means for recreating and stabilizing political orders. As their research shows, political interactions usually followed symbolic codes and protocols that were meticulously planned in order to make power relationships visible.[22] Likewise, other cultural-political historians have argued that politics is at its core an "ensemble of symbolic practices"[23] and have extended this argument also to the arena of the nation-state. Accordingly, they do not consider the nation-state as "naturally given" but as a "network of apparatuses and daily practices"[24] that produces the "national" citizen and makes the state recognizable as the best possible model of political organization.

What increasingly emerges from these discussions is a general recognition that no political order of any kind—regardless whether it is a democracy, a monarchy, or a military dictatorship—is viable without a symbolic repertoire that sensualizes the whole and its parts and makes it visible to its subjects. Any political order, as historians and anthropologists emphasize, therefore makes its presence felt through parades and monuments or through mass rituals like inaugurations and elections. Those offer aesthetic and emotional participation, but also compress the larger political context into a concrete sensory event that lets order appear paradigmatically and creates awareness for its reach and its presence.[25]

The mobilization of collective emotions through grand spectacles, in turn, is a fundamental prerequisite for the generation of four other key resources of political integration: trust, identification, loyalty, and the willingness to comply with "the order" political subjects are part of. All of those ingredients are the product of specific emotional experiences of order, and virtually no political order can thrive without any of them. Only if political subjects have trust in a specific political order, that is, if they rely on and believe in the worth of promises and actions taken by that order, will they not subvert it.

Where they identify with it, they will likely actively support it.[26] The degree to which an order can build trust and identification, in turn, also shapes the degree of affirmative loyalty subjects exert toward it. On the other hand, orders can also thrive without trust, identification, and loyalty as long as they succeed to shape a general willingness to comply with it.[27] But that willingness, too, depends on the creation of emotional experiences.

In addition, orders rest on two further pillars: visibility and imagination. Only if people see the nation-state (as one example of a political order) and its power resources can they recognize it as a form of political organization that they reckon with. As Norbert Elias has observed on early modern orders: "The people do not believe in a power which may exist, but does not become visible with the appearance of the ruler. They have to see the power in order to believe in it."[28] Visibility thus is a fundamental constituent of any order. Only that which is visible can be recognized as part of an order. Put differently this means: political order can be interpreted as a hierarchic ensemble of visibility constellations, and the creation and consolidation of political order is therefore vitally dependent on the stabilization of visibility constellations.[29]

On the other hand, nobody can ever see the whole political order, and here imagination becomes important. As Benedict Anderson has famously pointed out on the history of nationalism, the nation is always an "imagined political community," because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion" (Hegel's version of this was that the state was one existing "in the thoughts" of its people).[30] Imagination, thus, is the constructive force that allows a member of a political order to form a notion of the broader systemic context of which he or she is a part.

Political order, then, not only rests on military and economic "hard power" or on "soft power"[31] but also on something one could term "*symbolic power,*" by which I mean the degree of recognition a political order generates for and of itself. Recognition is the integrative core of any order. It emerges from the interplay of visibility, imagination, and the activation of emotions, and is reflected in identification and loyalty. Recognition is never simply given. It has to be constantly reactualized through practices of symbolic integration that keep recognition high—this is why stable systems as well still have their spectacles, emotional events, and rituals of self-celebration. The dissolution of order, in turn, is always the product

of a system's specific symbolic failure to do so, namely, to generate as much visibility, imagination, loyalty, trust, and compliance as would be necessary to maintain its recognition.

Recognition is always a precarious problem in times of change: when new orders emerge, when orders are not yet fully established (i.e., not fully recognized), or when they face a crisis of recognition. But it is all the more critical for another class of political orders—empires. Like any other political order, empires are not merely given macrostructures that rule simply by virtue of their military, economic, or institutional power. They, too, are dependent on symbolic integration.[32] To stabilize their hierarchic order, empires have to create their own symbolic mechanisms through which they make their presence and capacities visible, create sensory experiences of their superiority, and thereby make those they rule imagine that they have a powerful reach. Moreover, to reduce the costs of their rule, empires have to activate enthusiasm for their rule, extend their appeal, and develop forms of aesthetic-sensory involvement that create identification and loyalty among those that live within their sphere of influence.

Those findings, to be sure, apply to every empire since ancient times. Already the Roman Empire, for instance, paid comprehensive attention to imperial representation, which included architecture, coins, entertainment, monuments, statues, and also pictures. Much of the same can be said about nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial empires.[33]

Still, what set America's postwar empire apart in the history of empires were two distinct features: For one, it was an informal empire, not a formal one, a condition that limited the representational options it could make use of. Unlike colonial empires, for example, it could not erect monuments or statues or stage annual imperial parades in the areas it ruled. However, what compensated for those limitations, were the completely new representational and integrational possibilities that American empire gained from the 1950s and 1960s onward thanks to the rise of visual media whose global advance contributed to an important delimitation of imperial visibility. Where before the act of seeing empire (that is, representations of it) had typically been confined to concrete spatial locales—after all, one can only experience the aesthetics of a monument if one stands in front of it—the mass circulation of pictures now led to a delocalization as far as seeing empire was concerned. Thanks to the pictures visual media printed and broadcast, observers could now see American empire without having to travel to specific representational

places (which, in turn, then also opened up new opportunities to use domestic monuments such as the Lincoln Memorial as a symbol for empire, see chapter 3). Moreover, the spread of visual media entailed that representations of empire now also began to conquer private spaces and private homes whereas before they were mostly limited to public places (with the notable exceptions of coins, of course).[34] American empire, in other words, gained a degree of mediated visibility no other empire had before (and those that could have gained a similar visibility, namely, the Soviet, French, and the British empires, either failed to fully grasp those changes or they toppled at the time visual media spread around the world).[35] And this also had an important consequence for the way American empire could build recognition for its rule: because of the evidence effects that pictures have—that they seem to show what really happened or exists—pictures instantly create recognition for that which is immediately represented, say, American missiles, and thereby they also create recognition for the political order that such symbols represent. This means, in turn, that a large degree of mediated visibility also assures recognition on a broad scale.[36]

American policy makers, as this book shows, intuitively understood those changes, and they were quick to seize upon the great possibilities visual media offered them. By making pictures, they understood, they could build visibility and emotional involvement, identification, trust, and loyalty abroad; they could define foreign notions about American empire; and they could affect the willingness of foreigners to go along with American leadership. In the end, they recognized, it were pictures that could make American empire persist, and so they set to work to fabricate them.

Writing the Global Cultural History of American Empire: Media, Pictures, and Emotions

By examining the role picture making played in the process of American empire's symbolic integration, this book seeks to bring up new questions and to map out new approaches for historians of American foreign policy that look beyond the classic military or economic dimensions of imperial rule. This is of course not to discount the importance of those dimensions. No empire, after all, can exist without real military power and economic strength; both are fundamental to imperial rule: economic strength allows an empire to cover the costs of its rule, and military power is essential to get

and consolidate control of areas and to enforce power interests. Yet, to build acknowledgment for their hard power, empires at the same time depend heavily on symbolic and mediating representations of that really existing power, for on the whole relatively few people ever experience it directly: normally, populations only come into contact with it by way of symbolic representations such as pictures that then create their own realities. Hard power, then, depends as much on symbolic power as vice versa—and it is the purpose of this book to sharpen our understanding of those interrelationships.

At the same time, this book also understands itself as a contribution to a number of new research fields, including emotional and media history. Emotional history has turned into one of the most vibrant and fascinating fields of historiography in recent years, and numerous research interests and approaches exist side-by-side now. While nobody is able to define precisely what an emotion is—a side effect of the numerous ramifications into which emotional research has branched out—there is more or less general agreement that an emotion involves a bodily sensation, a cognitive impulse, and a sociocultural context.[37] Also, scholars agree that emotions encompass such different feelings as fear, empathy, love, hate, disgust, anger, solidarity, pride, trust, compassion, joy, bliss, surprise, or sadness.[38] Emotions, as historians emphasize, have their history, and accordingly the way they were expressed, experienced, and regulated were distinct from place to place and time to time.[39]

Like emotional history, media history, too, is a booming field in the United States and Germany. Media historians examine media cultures, media discourses, the broad sweep of media reconfigurations throughout the twentieth century, the role of media in the Cold War, and trace the volatile relationships between media and politics.[40] They also debate concepts such as the public sphere or engage with postmodern media theorists or literary critics.[41] Increasingly, media historians also look beyond national horizons where they investigate "transnational media events,"[42] the mechanics of "transnational public spheres,"[43] the rise of "global TV"[44] or look at transfers of media practices, techniques, and values.[45]

In this context, this book puts forward another perspective on media, one that integrates the intimate relationships between media, pictures, and emotions—and this is the idea of mass media as "mobilizing machines." The concept is based on a simple three-fold proposition: media want to mobilize emotions, media do mobilize emotions, and media are used because they mobilize emotions (as a philosophical speculation, one could also add: most media exist

because they mobilize emotions, but pondering this question would require another book).

As providers of emotional and "aesthetic experiences,"[46] all mass media, except for radio, rely on pictures. With good reasons, of course: as art historians and visual studies specialists emphasize, pictures are not merely simple reproductions of reality but active generators of feelings, and as such have their own actor capabilities.[47] Containing vitality, energy, and a mobilizing "aggressiveness"[48] of their own, they activate emotions in different ways. People, human faces, and specific situations, for example, often generate empathy among beholders. Likewise, their special "sensual immediacy"[49] automatically creates emotional involvement, so do their special aesthetic qualities like perspective, spatiality, light, color, or the arrangement of objects, which draw beholders into the picture and make them eyewitnesses of the situations depicted. Pictures also activate spectators through the productive openness and creative challenge they pose. Because they only show selective parts of a situation, they constantly put beholders under pressure to supplement missing objects outside of the frame, to add smells and sounds, to bring objects depicted to life, and to put what they see into a larger context.[50] Viewers thus have to perform an "imaginary transfer,"[51] and such a transfer always involves the mobilization of feelings.

It is important to note, however, that different visual media of course provide different forms of emotional experiences. The distinct emotional effect of exhibits, for example, rests on the interplays they create between rational engagements with the exhibits on display and the bodily sensations that spectators have of them. At the same time, they offer an emotional experience that has a spatial component insofar as spectators move through aesthetic environments that create several sensory sensations. Thereby, they also open a shared social space of emotional expression. Like exhibits, newspapers and picture magazines, too, offer an aesthetic experience marked by the interplay of rational engagement with a news item and a bodily feeling about it, though with the difference that this act does not take place in a shared aesthetic space. Film and television, in contrast, leave little space for rational engagements and constantly activate the senses and bodily feelings through cuts, camera movements, action, and so forth, an effect that can be explained by the evolutionary constant that movement always draws the attention of humans (which explains why both film and television sometimes can have hypnotic effects).[52]

In the 1960s, as this book shows, U.S. policy makers actively sought to employ and capitalize on those different types of emotional and sensory experience to build enthusiasm for their policies, and it is precisely by exploring those efforts that this book hopes to open up fresh perspectives for a history of American empire that looks beyond decision-making processes.[53] In this sense, the book is also part of a change of perspective toward a sensory history of American empire. Sensory history, as Andrew Rotter has explained, takes it as a premise "that all human relationships, including imperial ones, are shaped by all five senses; how we understand others, even more how we feel about them, emotionally, and thus how we act toward them, have a good deal to do with how we apprehend them through every sense." By taking an interest "in life on empire's quotidian ground," sensory history would thus help historians to "understand how empire functioned, or did not."[54] In this work, I follow Rotter's implicit call to rethink how empire functioned by examining it through a cultural-historical lens—though with a focus on one sense in particular: seeing.[55]

By doing so, this work at the same time seeks to contribute further to globalizing the way we write and think about American empire. This is a task that is especially pressing when it comes to reflecting the relationships between global media and American foreign policy. Most of the histories that examine those relationships still dwell on the domestic context, that is, they look at the interplay between domestic American media and foreign policy making.[56] There are only few works that actually go beyond that context and look at foreign media responses and discourses as well.

In contrast, this work tries to put the media history of American empire into global perspective by examining foreign encounters of American empire in Argentina, India, Tanzania, and West Germany.[57] The choice of those countries, I should note here, is completely arbitrary—of course I could have chosen different countries as well—yet it is not without reason; it builds on the methodological premises that, first, a global history also requires a global approach and, second, that one can only make sound analytical judgments about the globalizing of media, pictures, and of American recognition-building if one covers at least some different continents and cultural contexts (however, it should be noted that I see those four countries not as stand-ins for cultural contexts at large, i.e., for instance Tanzania as reflecting East Africa generally, but am aware that Tanzanian encounters of the United States differed as much from Kenyan ones as West German encounters differed from French ones and so forth). What I

am interested in here, then, is less a global comparison of different national encounters with the United States like the "West Germans and America" vs. "Argentineans and America," etc. Rather, I am interested in understanding the emergence of global interconnectedness itself—and how it changed American empire building.

Accordingly, the narrative is not organized along national lines, though sometimes it shifts to national comparisons where it seems appropriate. Most times, the book utilizes a mobile narrative perspective that often switches back and forth from one actor to another, from the White House to an Argentinean artist, from the local level to the global, and thereby makes the movement between scales a deliberate analytic technique to gain insights about the scope and texture, dynamics, and ruptures of symbolic integration.[58]

In the spirit of a "selective interest,"[59] the book is organized in three parts. Part one maps the various layers of the U.S. "picture state" and shows how U.S. policy makers professionalized their picture making over the course of the 1960s, a process that turned picture performances into a key technique of governance. Focusing on West Germany, Argentina, India, and Tanzania, part one also describes how United States Information Agency (USIA) tried to establish contact possibilities with America abroad and traces the global advance of television as well as the growing popularity of illustrated weeklies around the world during the 1960s, all of which established the primacy of pictures in media landscapes around the world.

Part two zooms in on four early examples of America's foreign policy of pictures: official visits, American development policies, space flights, and the Vietnam War. It shows how in all four instances American administrations began to make and use pictures on a large scale to mobilize foreign emotions, and it explains that thanks to the new mass availability of pictures foreign observers became emotionally involved in American policies like never before.

At the same time, part two also puts forward a more general argument, namely, that empires typically fashion themselves as providers of four broad benefits: of prosperity, progress, peace, and power. This way, they not only construct hierarchical relationships between themselves and those they rule (namely, insofar as each promise of a benefit suggests that an empire has what others lack and that it can establish what others cannot). They also associate themselves with the core expectations that people typically have toward political orders, namely, that they will bring prosperity for all,[60] that they will accelerate the process that leads to prosperity—progress, that they will guarantee a state of untroubled, safe living—peace, and

that they will build up and use their power to assure that state of living and to fight off enemies.

Against this background, part two shows that American empire, too, showcased itself as a provider of those benefits in order to build broad recognition and acceptance for its rule. Chapter 3 shows how official visits were used deliberately as opportunities to shape specific impressions of America and to stage the United States as a "reference society" (Reinhard Bendix) that embodied the kind of prosperity visitors and the societies they represented wanted for themselves too. The chapter is the first thorough study to examine the history of official visits to the United States. Likewise, chapter 4 offers a new perspective on U.S. development policies in the 1960s and examines how programs like the Alliance for Progress were staged through films, exhibits, and cartoons. As the chapter argues, visual representations were part of an American politics of imagination: by showcasing U.S. development policies through pictures, USIS officials sought to identify American policies with collective aspirations for improving living standards. At the same time, such pictures were also intended to demonstrate how American empire responded to those aspirations. This way, they thus formulated visually American empire's promise of progress.

Chapter 5 tells the global media story of American space flights. It explores how space flights became global picture-making events and shows how the Kennedy and Johnson administrations sought to create—and tap into—foreign spaceflight enthusiasm through organizing global tours of the space capsules, film showings, or travelling exhibits. The chapter also describes how American administrations utilized space flights to stage America's peace promise.

Chapter 6, the longest chapter, investigates the global media history of the Vietnam War. Arguing that the war was rather a "picture war" than merely a "television war," the chapter reconstructs how U.S. policy makers sought to draw foreign media into their way of representing the war, shows how those efforts failed abroad, and explores the emotional impact pictures had on antiwar activists. It also explains the war's central paradox, namely, that it was successful in demonstrating American power although the United States, in the general perception, did not 'win' it.

Part three, finally, wraps up some broader findings of the book and explains why, on the technical level of picture making, the Obama administration has more in common with the Nixon administration than one would think at first glance.

This book, then, sheds light on multiple issues and tells different stories. But above all, it is a history of pictures: a book that treats pictures not as a derivative of other historical problems, but understands them as historical actors in their own right, a history that wants to sharpen our awareness for the mechanisms by which American empire generated and employed pictures for its own purposes. This way, it also hopes to contribute to a more thorough understanding of America's empire of pictures today.