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## 'American' Pictures and (Trans-)National Iconographies: Mapping Interpictorial Clusters in American Studies

1

The iconic turn propagated with considerable fervor in the early 1990s and exerting widespread influence across the humanities in the two decades afterwards marked less of a watershed for American Studies. Visual representations of 'America' and visual constructions of 'American' identities and US American ideologies had long been an integral part of the interdisciplinary cultural studies agenda and cultural history project of American Studies when Gottfried Boehm and W. J. T. Mitchell proclaimed their respective versions of what came to be known as the iconic or pictorial turn on both sides of the Atlantic. Alan Trachtenberg's magisterial study *Reading American Photographs* of 1989 with its still noteworthy subtitle *Images as History* as well as Gerhard Hoffmann's exhibition and scholarly catalog *Indianische Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert* of 1985 and also Thomas W. Gaehtgens' and Heinz Ickstadt's *American Icons: Transatlantic Perspectives on Eighteenth- and Nineteenth Century American Art* of 1992 may serve as examples to illustrate that the discipline of American Studies has indeed paid attention to American visual cultures since the myth-and-symbol school of the 1950s and 1960s. In her assessment of American fine arts from 1670 to 1980, Bettina Friedl claims that well into the 1980s American Studies did more for the study of American painting than Art History itself did for this field of American visual cultures. The 1993 and 1994 annual conferences of the German Association for American Studies, "Democracy and the Arts in the United States" and "Medienkultur" (both predating the 2006 conference on "American Studies as Media

Studies” by more than a decade) testify in different ways to the long-established productivity and diversity of visual culture studies approaches and perspectives in German American Studies.<sup>1</sup> American Studies was in no dire need at the turn from the 1980s to the 1990s of calls for a programmatic reorientation of its agenda and practices in order to recognize the significance and complexities of (American) visual cultures.

Nevertheless, the emergence and popularity of visual culture studies as a (new) theoretical and conceptual paradigm has left its mark on American Studies throughout the past twenty years. The pictorial turn affected American Studies in the intensity and prominence of the exploration of (American) visual cultures without, however, fundamentally transforming the discipline’s interdisciplinary orientations, material bases, and theoretical perspectives at large. The concern of visual cultures studies with, among other aspects (and disregarding for the time being important work done at the intersections with the natural sciences and medicine), the contexts and politics of images, the implications of scopical regimes, phenomena of hyperrealities and media cultures, and the social and political dimensions of practices of looking appears to have fallen on particularly fertile and well-prepared ground in American Studies. The special interests of the New American Studies since the late 1980s and early 1990s in identity politics, revisionist history, the rhetoric of different modes and media of representation, and the processes of cultural exchange and circulation have corresponded with key issues and approaches in visual culture studies. The much-quoted visibility of 9/11 and the ensuing controversies over issues of visibility and the implications and limits of visual representation have further enhanced the concern with visual cultures in American Studies.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For publications of the proceedings of the 1993 and 2006 conferences, see Hornung, Hoffmann, and Doerries; Kelleter and Stein.

<sup>2</sup> In my report on the development of *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, the quarterly journal of the German Association for American Studies, from volume 48 (2003) through volume 55.1 (2011), I have identified the increased concern with issues and topics of visual culture studies as one of the major changes of the journal’s scope and contents over the years of my general editorship. See Hebel, “*Amerikastudien/American Studies* 2002-2011.”

Whereto, then, from here with the study of (American) visual cultures in American Studies? In his *Picture Theory* of 1994, W. J. T. Mitchell formulated what still bears special quoting in American Studies contexts: "What we need is a critique of visual culture that is alert to the power of images for the good and evil and that is capable of discriminating the variety and historical specificity of their uses" (Mitchell, *Picture Theory* 2-3). Mitchell's agenda-setting emphasis on the power, functionality, and historical and cultural specificity of images has supported the emergence—in view of developments in Art History throughout the twentieth century, re-emergence—of notions, concepts, and practices of iconography:

Die bildtheoretische Diskussion der letzten fünf Dekaden hat also verstärkt einen kulturellen Blickwinkel eingenommen und damit die Formen des Sagens und des Zeigens in gleicher Weise als kulturspezifische Darstellungskonventionen zu erfassen versucht. [...] Insofern hat der sogenannte *cultural turn* völlig zu Recht auch bildwissenschaftliche Fragestellungen erfaßt. [...] Als Habitus des Bildwissenschaftlers wird damit berechtigterweise nicht länger das Verharren „vor einem Bild“, sondern die Zuwendung zum gesamten Reich der Bilder oder gar aller visueller Phänomene gefordert, was als Akt der Demokratisierung und Pluralisierung des Gegenstands empfunden werden mag. (Sachs-Hombach and Schirra 396-97)<sup>3</sup>

Individual items of visual culture, including the so-called 'masterpieces' of allegedly singular artistry and standing, are considered as "always engaged within a complex system of conflicting or corresponding iconographies of empowerment and disempowerment" (Haselstein, Ostendorf, and Schneck 7). Publications such as, e.g., *National Imaginaries, American Identities: The Cultural Work of American Iconography* (Reynolds and Hutner) and *Iconographies of Power: The Politics and Poetics of Visual Representation* (Haselstein, Ostendorf, and Schneck) illustrate the potential and practice of fusing long-established concerns and materials of American Studies with the agenda and perspectives of iconographic studies. The focus of American Studies on context and function merges well with the interest of iconographic

<sup>3</sup> The German term *Bildwissenschaft* evokes the wider scope of recent approaches in Art History in the wake of the iconic turn; see Schulz.

approaches in Art History in the position of the individual work of visual art in the network of repertoires and conventions. Within the framework of American Studies, iconographic readings perform the re-situating interpretive act that Winfried Fluck, in his article on the visual representation of poverty in the 1930s, describes as follows:

The meaning that we attribute to the image is the result of a narrative context that we bring to it and weave around it. [...] Fortunately, American Studies has always insisted that it is not sufficient to look at single texts or objects. We have to look at the narratives about America that come along with them. (Fluck, "Poor Like Us" 91)

It is from these larger contexts that the present case for the mapping of inter pictorial clusters in American Studies emerges. The focus of the following sections will be on the reconstruction and exploration of the implicit or explicit interplay between pictures, with special emphasis given to political photography. The argument will take its starting point in prominent photographs of US American presidents and project the mapping of inter pictorial clusters with the purpose of tracing the historical and cultural flow as well as mobility of powerful pictures, revealing the possible political impact and function of particular images and repertoire conventions at large.

## 2

Among the public relation failures of the Bush administration, the visualization of President George W. Bush's response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster is generally considered particularly catastrophic. The pictures of President Bush flying high over New Orleans on 31 August 2005 and viewing the flooded disaster area from a bird's eye perspective and from behind the narrow peepholes of the cabin windows of Air Force One were taken as the public revelation of the president's limited vision and disinterested detachment from the needs of the disaster victims and the American people in all respects.<sup>4</sup> When President Obama was confronted with the necessity to show competent disaster

<sup>4</sup> Besides the White House photographs by Paul Morse, see, e.g., the photographs by Susan Walsh (Associated Press) and Mannie Garcia (Reuters).

handling in the wake of the Deepwater Horizon BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, different images and implications were called for. President Obama's repeated visits to the Louisiana coast in late May and early June 2010 were accompanied by pictures that showed him in a different position and in different poses. President Obama was depicted on the ground, i.e., where the disaster was actually happening. He was presented as personally communicating with both the victims of the disaster and the members of the relief units of, e.g., the National Guard, and he was generally visualized as taking an active interest in the proceedings.<sup>5</sup> Bush's remote, marginalized observer position was to be replaced by a position of agency and compassion, albeit symbolically and recognizable as part of a well-staged, media-oriented event.



Figure 1: President Obama, Port Fourchon Beach, LA, 28 May 2010.  
David Grunfeld (*New Orleans Times-Picayune*)

David Grunfeld's photograph of President Obama on Port Fourchon Beach, LA, 28 May 2010 is probably the most-widely circulated image of the presidential visits to the disaster area along the Gulf Coast. It shows the president alone with the (almost invisible) disaster, personally concerned, and physically 'in touch' with the immediate consequences

<sup>5</sup> Besides David Grunfeld's photographs (*New Orleans Times-Picayune*), see, e.g., photographs by Evan Vucci (*Associated Press*), Win McNamee (*Getty Images North America*), and Charles Dharapak (*Associated Press*).

of the ecological catastrophe. The president is presented as participating in the investigation, with the police caution tape marking the scene of danger and a dead bird in the background as the unmistakable proof of the impact of the oil spill. President George Bush's position high up in the air aboard Air Force One, behind the small windows of the hermetically closed-off space of the presidential plane, is countered by pictures of President Obama on the same level with the American people in the open spaces along the Gulf Coast shoreline. With his jacket taken off and his shirtsleeves rolled up to take action, the president is presented as part of the work force on the beach, bending down in a posture of participation, concern, and empathy.

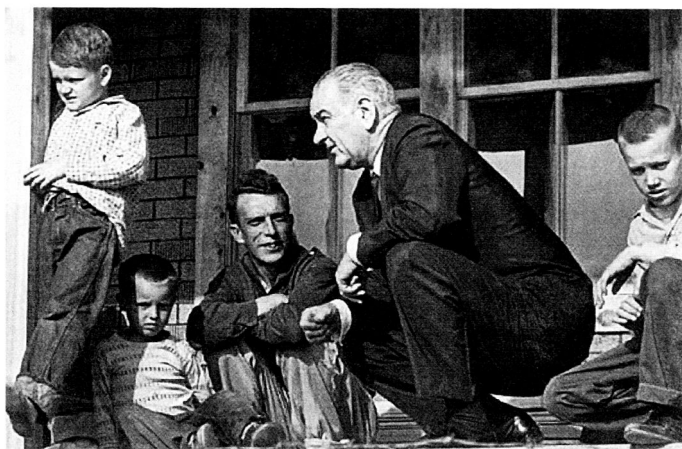


Figure 2: President Lyndon B. Johnson with Tom Fletcher's family on the porch of their home, Martin County, KY, 24 April 1964. Walter Bennett (*Time Magazine*)

In its composition and presidential iconography, David Grunfeld's picture of President Obama resembles Walter Bennett's photograph of President Lyndon B. Johnson's visit to Martin County, KY as part of the public relations campaign for his 'war on poverty' in April 1964.<sup>6</sup> The similarities of Grunfeld's picture with Bennett's well-known photograph

<sup>6</sup> It may bear mention in regard to presidential disaster management that Lyndon B. Johnson personally visited New Orleans on the ground after Hurricane Betsy had hit the city in 1965.



of the Great Society program of the 1960s place Obama in the tradition of Democratic presidents and their work for the social well-being of the American people which dates back to the 1930s and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal in whose larger contexts the political career of Lyndon B. Johnson began. During the 2008 presidential election campaign and in the early days of his presidency in 2009, President Barack Obama was eager to establish a special relationship with Johnson for obvious reasons of political lineage and assumed competence in national crisis management.



Figure 3: Floyd Burrough's Work Shoes, Hale County, AL, 1936.  
Walker Evans.

The salient detail which makes Grunfeld's photograph particularly noteworthy in the present context is the pair of shoes that Obama is wearing, obviously without their laces fully tied. Art historians may point to Vincent Van Gogh's famous 1886 painting of a pair of shoes that has given rise to numerous and competing interpretations, among them those by Martin Heidegger, Meyer Shapiro, and Jacques Derrida, and that was given a special single-painting exhibition by the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne in 2009.<sup>7</sup> From the perspective of Ameri-

<sup>7</sup> On the exhibition and the various interpretations of Van Gogh's painting, see Batchen.

can Studies, the shoes in Grunfeld's photograph can be considered as an "iconographic allusion" (Fluck, "Poor Like Us" 74) to Walker Evans' photograph of Floyd Burroughs' work shoes as taken in Hale County, AL in 1936 and later included in James Agee's and Walker Evans' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941). The prominent element of the work shoes anchors Grunfeld's picture of President Obama on the beach of Louisiana in the visual archive of American social photography of the 1930s and its respective ideological implications and presuppositions. The visualization of President Obama on the polluted Gulf Coast participates in the iconographic repertoire of WPA representations of the plight, dignity, and perseverance of common people during the Great Depression which Walter Bennett's 1964 photograph of President Johnson on the front porch of the Fletcher home in Martin County, KY had already evoked in a similar manner. The affinities between Grunfeld's 2010 photograph and the visual archive of American social photography make Barack Obama look like a common man president and underscore in a subtle, inter pictorial way the parallels between Obama and his Democratic predecessors in the White House.<sup>8</sup> Once the visual rhetoric of the (American) common man has come into view, the associative range is open to include, e.g., further photographs by Walker Evans and his WPA colleagues and, reaching further back into the storehouse of American visual cultures, nineteenth-century depictions such as, e.g., John Neagle's painting *Pat Lyon at the Forge* (1825/26) and the frontispiece portrait to the first edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855).

<sup>8</sup> That the White House may purposefully work with inter pictorial strategies in the choreography of President Obama's public perception can be illustrated by photographs showing the Obama family on a Hawaiian vacation home porch and Barack Obama emerging from the waves on the beach of Oahu, Hawaii, which are reminiscent of corresponding pictures of, respectively, the John F. Kennedy family on a porch of their compound at Hyannis Port, MA, and the three Kennedy brothers emerging from the waves after a swim in the Atlantic off the coast of Cape Cod.

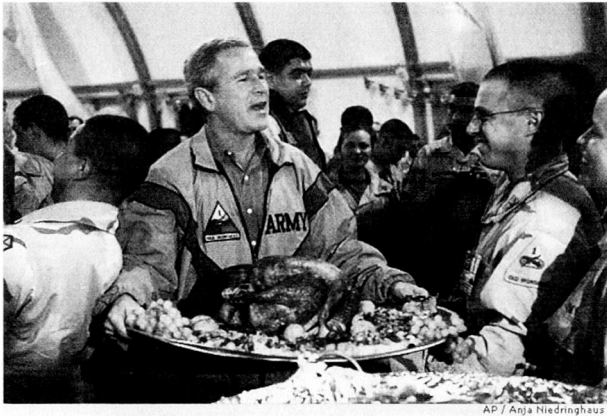


Figure 4: President George W. Bush, Baghdad, 27 November 2003.  
Anja Niedringhaus (*Associated Press*)

The second set of examples to illustrate the political and ideological implications of dialogs between pictures starts with a photograph of President George W. Bush presenting a Thanksgiving turkey to US American troops in Baghdad on 27 November 2003. Anja Niedringhaus' photograph depicts the Commander-in-Chief in the midst of a group of soldiers, wearing an Army windbreaker in an obvious gesture of bonding and solidarity.<sup>9</sup> Bush carries a tray, which evidently bulges under the weight of the festive food and, by implication, under the generosity of the nation's leader toward his soldiers in the field. President Bush is shown as the *pater familias* taking good care of the troops fighting the nation's war against terrorism in far-away lands even on the very day of the celebration of time-honored traditions of American history, culture, and family.

<sup>9</sup> The special moment was captured from slightly different angles by several other photographers, including, e.g., Pablo Martinez Monsivais (*Associated Press*) and Tim Sloan (*AFP* and *Getty Images*).



Figure 5: Norman Rockwell, "Freedom from Want" (1943)

While it was the salient element of the untied working shoes in David Grunfeld's picture of President Obama on the Louisiana Gulf Coast which triggered the evocation of the archive of social documentary photography, it is the gesture of presenting the turkey in Niedringhaus' picture which establishes a relation to the national narrative of Thanksgiving and to one of its most famous visualizations, Norman Rockwell's "Freedom from Want" of 1943. Rockwell's painting is part of his *Four Freedoms* cycle which took its title from President Roosevelt's address to Congress in January 1941 and from Roosevelt's and Winston Churchill's Atlantic Charter of August 1941 (Hebel and Moreth-Hebel). The publication of the series in *The Saturday Evening Post* in February and March of 1943 and its successful tour of the country as part of a US Department of Treasury war bonds drive in the months following made Rockwell's paintings widely popular and inextricably linked it in collective American memory with World War II. Countless reproductions have kept the "Four Freedoms" visible as one of the "icons of American visual culture" (Hennessey and Knutson 95) as inexpensive prints and posters as well as stamps well into the 1990s.

The photograph of President Bush celebrating Thanksgiving with American troops in Baghdad is thus inter pictorially linked with two major national narratives: first, the national myth of Thanksgiving and early New England foundational history that had already inspired Rockwell's painting; and second, the narrative of the so-called 'good war,' which was particularly prominent throughout the 1990s and semi-annually supported the construction of the National World War II Memorial at the center of the National Mall in Washington, DC in 2004, and which, according to the web site of the National Park Service, "commemorates the sacrifice and celebrates the victory of 'the greatest generation' [... and] connects the legacy of the American Revolution and the American Civil War with a great crusade to rid the world of fascism" ("From the Home Front"). Similar to Grunfeld's photograph of President Obama fighting the Deepwater Horizon BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the Baghdad Thanksgiving photograph positions President Bush in positively connoted ideological contexts and in widely accepted collective narratives. Comparable to the inter pictorial associations in regard to the visual archive of the (American) common man, the Baghdad photograph of 2003 reverberates with the visual repertoires of American cultural history. Popular US American family TV series of the 1950s and early 1960s such as, e.g., *Father Knows Best*, may serve to demonstrate how visualizations of President Bush as the national provider of food and family harmony may be taken to allude to the gendered repertoire of post-World War II suburban middle class ideologies.



Figure 6: Screenshot from TV-Series *Father Knows Best* (1954-60)

The series of examples of political photographs and their interplay with the archives of American visual cultures can be concluded by what probably is the most obvious albeit non-presidential example of inter-pictoriality: Thomas Franklin's photograph of the 9/11 New York firefighters raising the US flag over Ground Zero in obvious allusion to Joe Rosenthal's photograph of the Iwo Jima flag-raising in February 1945 (and its reproduction by the US Marine Corps War Memorial next to Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, DC). The visual association invests the visualization of the moment of attack and defeat with the prospect of victory and national glory in a rhetorical gesture reminiscent of the American jeremiad (Chéroux 62-77).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> On the iconography of American firefighters since the early nineteenth century, see Hochbruck.



Figure 7: New York Firefighters Raising the Flag, Ground Zero, 11 September 2011, Thomas Franklin (*Associated Press*)



Figure 8: Marines Raising the Flag, Iwo Jima, 23 February 1945. Joe Rosenthal (*Associated Press*)

3

What may have appeared as a random play of association and the arbitrary establishment of relations and affinities between otherwise unconnected pictures was to serve as an illustration of the practice and

potential of inter pictorial readings of politically and culturally powerful images. The concept of inter pictoriality<sup>11</sup> foregrounds visual dialogs, exchanges, and negotiations whose diverse manifestations have long been considered in Art History in terms and categories such as, e.g., imitation, parody, quotation, variation. Similar to concepts of literary intertextuality, the concept of inter pictoriality goes beyond the mere documentation and description of relations, influences, and sources. It rather emphasizes semantic and semiotic implications of the frame(s) of reference and act(s) of signification added to the respective image by means of its inter pictorial rhetoric. The inter pictorial reading of a specific visual representation underscores the functionality of the semantic surplus produced by the participation in and, particularly significant, possible transformation and resignification of conventions, repertoires and traditions. In terms of their semiotic structure, inter pictorially charged pictures are hybrid systems of signification with both referential and symbolic functions (Nöth 243-44). They are semantically determined and indeterminate at the same time and present multi-layered, palimpsest-like options for 're-cognition' (Thürlemann 219, 223-24). Inter pictorially charged visuals can be considered metapictures (Mitchell, *Picture Theory* 35-82) which, by their very definition and composition, complicate assumptions about the immediate accessibility and comprehension of pictures and expose the possibly manipulative structures and strategies of their own use. The concept of inter pictoriality is thus particularly well-suited to make the American Studies agendas of context, function, and exploration of national narratives and their political, social, and cultural implications interact with the concerns of Art History, *Bildwissenschaft*, and visual culture studies with iconographic conventions, traditions, and repertoires.

The practice of inter pictorial readings can be seen as a variation, if not radicalization, of approaches to iconography and iconology as presented by Erwin Panofsky between 1932 and 1955. Once (again) they are discussed widely in recent Art History, *Bildwissenschaft*, and visual

<sup>11</sup> The term itself is of rather recent coinage and in German at times used interchangeably with *Interbildlichkeit*, *Intervisualität*, *Interikonizität*. See Von Rosen; Rose, *Parodie, Intertextualität, Interbildlichkeit*; and Rose, *Pictorial Irony, Parody, Pastiche*. Isekenmeyer's collection of essays, *Interpiktorialität: Theorie und Geschichte der Bild-Bild-Bezüge*, was published after the completion of the present article.



culture studies (Poeschel; Büttner and Gottdang; Schulz; Sachs-Hombach; Kopp-Schmidt<sup>12</sup>). Without providing a detailed methodology, Panofsky outlines an interpretive trajectory that moves in three stages from the pre-iconographical description of recognizable empirical givens and experiences in the picture under consideration to the iconographical tracing of representational conventions, motive clusters, and archival repertoires, and, finally, to the iconological interpretive synthesis exploring the possible meaning, significance, and cultural impact of the picture. In regard to the sample photographs of US American presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush by David Grunfeld and Anja Niedringhaus presented above, the interpretive acts move from the work shoes and the Thanksgiving turkey as empirically recognizable givens, to the tracing of conventions and traditions of social photography, the common man, and the national narratives of Thanksgiving and World War II, and from the interpretation of the significance of the functional transfer of the iconographical clusters to the politically motivated representation of the two US American presidents in their respective historical positions.

Interpictorial relations are established and analyzed in Erwin Panofsky's second and third stages and located between what Panofsky calls iconographic and iconological interpretation. Although his model has been criticized for the fuzziness of its distinction between these two levels and concepts—especially by Max Imdahl—Panofsky's procedure as well as its very critique enhance our understanding of inter pictorially charged pictures as storehouses and generators of meaning:

Sowohl Erwin Panofsky wie Max Imdahl haben vor allem Ansätze zu einer Bildtheorie im Sinne einer Theorie der *Bedeutungskonstitution der Bilder* geliefert. Die auf einen Blick so unterschiedlichen Autoren haben beide ein emphatisches Verhältnis zur interpretativen Detailarbeit. Für beide ist das eigentliche Ziel der Kunstwissenschaft das Verstehen des

<sup>12</sup> It deserves special mention in the present context that the spring 2012 issue of *Critical Inquiry* prints an English translation of Erwin Panofsky's 1931/1932 lecture and essay "Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst" ("On the Problem of Describing and Interpreting Works of the Visual Arts"), followed by an extended discussion of "the genesis of iconology" by the translators, Jas Elsner and Katharina Lorenz.

einzelnen Kunstwerks als Bedeutungsträger. Deshalb wird ihre jeweils noch zu rekonstruierende Bildtheorie auch einer Theorie der Werkinterpretation gleichkommen. [...] Um die Differenz auf eine Formel zu bringen: Für Erwin Panofsky sind die Bilder *Speicher und Transformatoren* von Bedeutung, für Max Imdahl sind sie *Generatoren* von Bedeutung. (Thürlemann 232-33; italics in the original)

Interpictorially charged pictures partake actively—in a culturally and politically significant way—in what scholars of iconography have called “Bildgedächtnis” (Poeschel 7) and “nationale[r] Bildervorrat” (Böger 106). The individual picture with its possible network of interpictorial references is the tangible site in the cultural flow of images and the stepping-stone into the visual archive of a culture. The individual picture opens up venues for the analysis of (explicit or implicit) processes of generating and transferring meaning and thus for the interpretation of possible processes of cultural and political resignification and reevaluation. Interpictorial readings perform acts of re-situating and aim at revealing the contexts and presuppositions governing the visual rhetoric of specific pictures. They raise issues of visual literacy and of the picture’s investment in the visual archive and collective memory of a culture and/or nation.

## 4

Interpictorial readings are particularly significant in regard to so-called iconic photographs (Hariman and Lucaites; Goldberg 135-61; Sturken and Cartwright 36) or so-called *Schlagbilder* (Diers).<sup>13</sup> In her summary review of major publications in the field, Sara Blair stresses the “after-lives” of popular, possibly controversial pictures and their “agency in competing narratives” (692). Capturing what photography theorist and photojournalist Henri Cartier-Bresson called “the decisive moment,” and “bound in a matrix of cultural meaning” (Goldberg 17), iconic photographs fulfill the “proven formula for reproducing a society’s social order” in their “combination of mainstream recognition, wide circula-

<sup>13</sup> See also the exchange of different views on a photograph’s iconicity by Rob Kroes, Miles Orvell, and Alan Nadel in *Journal of American Studies* 45.1 (2011): 1-20.

tion, and emotional impact" (Hariman and Lucaites 9). Rob Kroes' characterization as "epic concentration" (68), Vicki Goldberg's description as a "public monument" (135), and Sara Blair's assessment as "a meaningful site of civic performance" (682) emphasize from different theoretical perspectives and approaches the structural features, collective impetus, and performative gesture of iconic pictures. For the present context, it is especially noteworthy that iconic pictures tend to be inter-pictorially woven into national political iconographies (Warnke et al.) and provide "a horizon within which the public finds itself, constitutes itself, and deliberates its own existence" (Phillips 4).



Figure 9: Lyndon B. Johnson Taking the Oath of Office, 22 November 1963. Cecil W. Stoughton (White House)

Cecil W. Stoughton's photograph "Lyndon B. Johnson Taking the Oath of Office" illustrates the inter-pictorial dimensions and implications of iconic photographs in the context of political iconographies and collective memory. Stoughton's photograph is part of the visual archive and collective memory related to the traumatic events of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas, TX on Friday, 22 November 1963.<sup>14</sup> Eyewitness accounts of the proceedings inside Air Force

<sup>14</sup> For a more comprehensive analysis of Stoughton's photograph and an extended documentation of its visual contexts, see Hebel, "Replacing the President."

One document that despite the chaotic situation and insecurities of various kinds, the swearing-in of the new president was enacted as a conscious performance of the continuity, functionality, and constitutionality of the US presidency and federal government. Stoughton took twenty-one photographs of the ritual confirming the rightful transfer of power, eight of them during the twenty-eight seconds of Lyndon B. Johnson's taking the presidential oath of office. The complete sequence of photographs complicates the monumental singularity of Stoughton's much-reproduced photograph and dissolves the historical freeze of the one 'decisive moment' into an admittedly brief period of waiting, indecision, and action of some length and complexity. A close analysis of the sequence shows that the one photograph selected for immediate circulation over the wire services—more than any other in the sequence of pictures Stoughton took—is an inter pictorially charged condensation of the iconography of presidential swearing-in ceremonies as "the true crown of American constitutionalism" (Pauley 215).

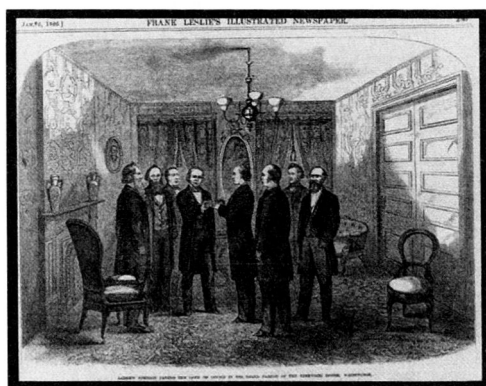


Figure 10: President Andrew Johnson Taking the Oath of Office after the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln, 15 April 1865.  
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division



Figure 11: President Harry S. Truman Taking the Oath of Office, after the Death of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 12 April 1945.



Figure 12: President John F. Kennedy Taking the Oath of Office, 20 January 1961.

Stoughton's photograph—unique as its scene may appear at first sight because of the unusual setting of an airplane cabin—resembles previous emergency ceremonies of this kind, all of which were represented as indoor performances of limited scope and audience. The picture positions the unexpected Constitutional Act of 22 November 1963 in a sequence of historical precedents from the nineteenth century

through the swearing-in of President Truman only eighteen years earlier, and thus normalizes the event. At the same time, Stoughton's photograph corresponds to the visualization of grand presidential inaugurations of, e.g., Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy. Similar to photographs of the festive enactment of regular inaugurations, the composition of Stoughton's photograph is centered around the ritualistic encounter between the president to be sworn in and the representative of the judiciary, in this case Federal Judge Sarah T. Hughes. Lyndon B. Johnson is the most salient participant in the tableau and the nucleus of the proceedings in terms of compositional analysis and vectorial structure.<sup>15</sup> Johnson's physical presence and corporeal centrality radiate stability and order as he performs the constitutional gesture of taking the oath of office. The new president is framed by three women who in different ways represent constitutive features of inaugural visuals: Judge Hughes administering the oath of office acts as the representative of the judiciary; Jacqueline Kennedy stands in as the symbolic remnant of the former presidency; Lady Bird Johnson assumes her new role as the first lady and major representative of the new first family. Extending to the rear cabin door, the new president is surrounded by White House aides, congressmen, security officers, and Air Force One crew members who make for a symbolically representative audience of members of the legislative, executive, and judiciary branches as well as of the larger public. Although the scene in the crowded narrowness of the Air Force One cabin seems oddly decontextualized, the seal of the President of the United States—a salient repertoire component of presidential inauguration photographs (and not visible in Stoughton's other photographs of the scene)—anchors the ceremony recognizably in an official national context, albeit in a fragmentary form at the rear wall of the cabin. All in all, the photograph's reduction and fragmentation in comparison to prototypical manifestations of the iconography of inaugural visuals is compensated for by its structural mimesis and metonymic completeness. Its repetitiveness and interpictureality enables the photograph to perform the political and cultural function of the inauguration ritual itself. Similar to the photographs of President Obama on the Gulf Coast beach and

<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive account of methodological approaches to the analysis of the grammar of visual documents, see Kress and Van Leeuwen.

of President Bush in Baghdad, Stoughton’s photograph of President Johnson taking the oath of office is a representation of a performance with a performative force and function of its own: “In vielen Fällen ist die Erzeugung von Bildern der *performance* für deren (globale) Wirkung wichtiger als ihre Inszenierung und Aufführung selbst. Performance und Bilder sind deshalb in unauflösbarer Weise miteinander verschränkt” (Wulf and Zirfas 10).<sup>16</sup>



Figure 13: Front page of *The New York Times*, 23 November 1963.

The functionality and credibility of Cecil W. Stoughton’s photograph and its performativity emerge to a large extent from its inter pictorial correspondence to the conventions, codes, and norms governing the choreography of inauguration ceremonies. The picture’s evocation of the iconography of the swearing-in process frames the moment of national

<sup>16</sup> See also Susan Sontag’s dictum that “[t]o photograph is to confer importance” (28). It deserves mention that the *Handbook of Rhetoric and Public Address* includes a chapter on pictures as “public address” (Parry-Giles, ch. 10) and thus points to a field more work could be done in.

shock and crisis and normalizes the extraordinary moment of historical rupture. Given the enforced exclusiveness and public invisibility of the ceremony inside Air Force One, the photograph assumed the role of the inauguration ritual itself for the wider public. The NBC telecast of the photograph at 5:40 p.m. EST made the continuity of the presidency and the functionality of the federal government visible to the nation and to the world before Air Force One landed at Andrews Air Force Base at 6:05 p.m. EST and before the first live TV pictures showed the unloading of the dead president's coffin and the first public statement of the new president at 6:14 p.m. EST. As visual proof of the working of the constitutional system and of the new president taking over, Stoughton's photograph filled the gap in presidential visibility and countered immediately circulated documentations of the disappearance of the president such as, e.g., James Altgens' equally famous photograph of the presidential limousine rushing away from the scene of assassination. The iconographic interplay on the front page of *The New York Times* of November 23, 1963 between Altgens' photograph of the vanishing president and Stoughton's official White House representation of the emerging new president taking the oath of office illustrates the substitute function and performance of Stoughton's inter pictorially charged photograph most poignantly.

## 5

The sample analysis of presidential photographs illustrates how inter pictorial readings trace clusters of visual rhetorics and uncover their possible political power and function. Positioned at the intersections of visual culture studies and Art History, on the one hand, and American Studies, on the other, the practice of mapping inter pictorial clusters connects Panofsky's iconographic and iconological approaches with the emphasis of American Studies on trajectories of impact, on processes of appropriation, and on acts of cultural and political signification and resignification. The interpretive practice stresses the political and cultural performativity of inter pictorially charged pictures which may be further enhanced in particular situations and contexts of display in pub-



lic or private spaces.<sup>17</sup> Christoph Decker's call for the "systematic documentation and exploration" (10) of the visual cultures of the US corresponds with the present concern with a more comprehensive assessment of the specificity, historicity, and functionality of individual—and individually powerful—manifestations of American visual culture(s) over the course of American history and in changing national and transnational contexts.

Projects of mapping inter pictorial clusters should not be limited to recent times of increased visibility and virtuality but should embrace the productivity of political iconographies over the entire course of American cultural history. Specific projects could focus on visual representations of historical moments such as, e.g., the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the New World in 1492 and George Washington's crossing of the Delaware River with the Continental Army in 1776. The first cluster would take its starting point in Theodore de Bry's late sixteenth-century engraving of Christopher Columbus' arrival and trace the flow of visual representations of so-called 'landing scenes' and of imperial and colonial acts of taking possession in an archive of historical paintings and prints including, among many others and for the sake of issues of commissioned art, public display, and commercial success, e.g., Henry Sargent's "Landing of the Pilgrims" (1818-22), John Vanderlyn's "The Landing of Columbus" (1837-47), Currier & Ives' reproductions of the arrival of both Columbus and the Plymouth Pilgrims from the second half of the nineteenth century, and, in a gesture of transnational extension toward South Africa, Charles Davidson Bells' painting "The Landing of Jan van Riebeeck, 1652" (1850). The second cluster would take its starting point in Emanuel Leutze's "Washington Crossing the Delaware" (1851) and trace the painting's inter pictorial appropriation in prints by Currier & Ives, Larry Rivers' "Washington Crossing the Delaware" (1953), Robert H. Colescott's "George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page from an American History Textbook" (1975), Grant Wood's "Daughters of the American Revolution" (1932), and a host of commercial items such as, e.g., replicas of the historic

<sup>17</sup> This aspect could be further discussed in the contexts of spatial studies in general and of museum studies and studies of decoration as a cultural and political phenomenon in particular. See, e.g., discussions of concepts such as "Präsentationszusammenhang" and "Dekorationskomplexe" in Sachs-Hombach and Schirra 416; Büttner and Gottdang 24; Peterfy 265-67.

scene with Disney figures. Furthermore, projects of inter pictorial mapping could take their points of departure in nineteenth-century paintings and portrait photographs of Native American warriors and chiefs by Karl Bodmer, George Catlin, and Edward S. Curtis and trace their inter pictorial resignification in photographs and paintings such as, e.g., “White Man’s Moccasins” (1954) and “An American Portrait” (1979) by contemporary Native American artists Lee Marmon and Fritz Scholder respectively. Nineteenth-century paintings of Native Americans such as, e.g., Tomkins H. Matteson, “The Last of the Race” (1847), John Mix Stanley’s “The Last of Their Race” (1857), and Fredric Remington, “The Last of His Race” (1908) could also be taken into account as possible targets of inter pictorial signification and resignification in the visual art of contemporary Native American artists.<sup>18</sup> The sample clusters given here can only indicate the wide range of themes, forms, strategies, and functions of visual clusters in American cultural history, prominently among them parody and possibly subversive appropriations of hegemonic US American historical and cultural narratives with the purpose of resignification. The samples may also serve to suggest how strategies of inter pictoriality contribute to, e.g., popularizing national narratives and claiming recognition for specific groups.<sup>19</sup>

Aby Warburg’s monumental project of a “Bilderatlas Mnemosyne”—described by Michael Diers as “Organon einer transdisziplinären Bild(geschichts)wissenschaft” (Diers, “Atlas und Mnemosyne” 185) and

<sup>18</sup> The mapping of inter pictorial clusters and the tracing of possible transfers, complications, and challenges of meaning by means of inter pictoriality does not have to be limited to the interplay between photographs and paintings. Thus, e.g., viewers of 1950s and 1960s TV series are shown middle class suburban idylls—especially in the opening scenes of suburban family TV series—which contain and continue popular nineteenth-century visualizations of gender roles and spatial ideologies as traceable in popular prints by Currier & Ives such as, e.g., *Four Seasons of Life*. Astrid Böger (129-30) has shown how Robert Capa’s (eleven surviving) D-Day photographs are used by Steven Spielberg in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) to represent the Allied landing in Normandy in June 1944.

<sup>19</sup> See Fluck, “Men in Boats,” and Lemke for further discussions of the construction of American self-images and national icons in processes of transnational cultural exchange.

repeatedly evoked in definitions of iconography—may also remain a point of reference in conceptualizations of inter pictoriality:

Im Zeitalter der Individualisierung und Pluralisierung gibt es keine kanonisierten Bezugssysteme mehr, dafür haben intertextuelle Anspielungen und Verweisungen umso größere Bedeutung. Ihr Nährboden ist das Fortbestehen der Traditionen im sozialen Gedächtnis, das Aby Warburg mit seinem Bildatlas dokumentieren wollte. [...] Aufgabe der Ikonographie ist es, das Verständnis für Kunst und für die in ihr aufgehobenen Erinnerungen wachzuhalten, Bildinhalte zu deuten und die Vielfalt der darin enthaltenen offenen und verdeckten Bezüge aufzudecken und zu erklären. (Büttner and Gott dang 274-75)

In the field of American Studies, Janice Radway's much-quoted emphasis on "intricate interdependencies" (Radway 10) and Shelley Fisher Fishkin's visionary call for the development of "DEEP MAPS" (DPMP / Digital Palimpsest Mapping Projects) may be taken as conceptual frames of reference for projects to map inter pictorial clusters in American Studies and for the exploration of the palimpsest-like structures of inter pictorially charged images.

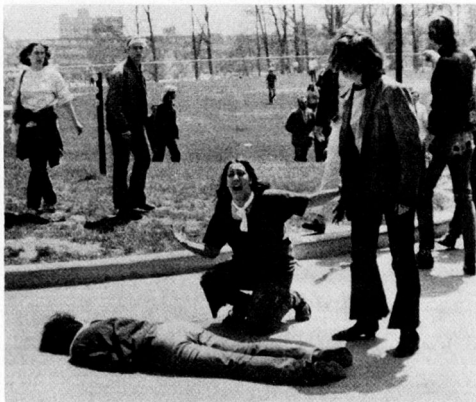


Figure 14: Kent State University Shooting, 4 May 1970.  
John Paul Filo

David Grunfeld's picture of President Obama on the Gulf Coast beach and its allusion to Van Gogh's painting draws attention to the

possible transcultural implications of inter pictorial readings. In a similar vein, Stoughton's photograph can be considered in a transnational network of historical and political iconographies which may include Jacques-Louis David's painting "The Oath of the Horatii" (1784) because of the parallels of the oath scene, the ensuing hasty departure, and the grieving women (Lubin 193-202). Charles Davidson Bell's painting "The Landing of Jan van Riebeeck, 1652," finally, illustrates the transnational productivity of visualizations of colonial arrivals and imperial acts of taking possession. All three examples foreground the possible position and function of inter pictorially charged images at the crossroads of specific national iconographies, on the one hand, and wider transnational traditions, archives, and repertoires, on the other. Grunfeld's and Stoughton's pictures are 'American' photographs because of their "purpose and function within a given cultural matrix" (Orvell 15); but they are also part of an "internationaler Bilderkosmos" with virtually no limits (Wulf and Zirfas 26; also Sturken and Cartwright 36). In these terms, John Paul Filo's Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of the Kent State University shooting of May 1970 is an 'American' picture anchored in the cultural matrix of its own times, spaces, and conflicts, and especially so when resituated in its own visual contexts and the set of other pictures that Filo took on that day on the grounds of Kent State University.<sup>20</sup> However, when placed beside equally well-known—and equally situated and contextualized—photographs of the killing of Benno Ohnesorg in Berlin in June 1967 (Jürgen Henschel), of the killing of Hector Pieteron in Soweto/South Africa in June 1976 (Sam Nzima), and of the suffering of a severely wounded protester in Sana'a, Yemen, in October 2011 (Samuel Aranda), the inter pictorial cluster takes on a much wider scope of transcultural dimensions and transnational implications.

What then are the implications, limits, and purposes not only of tracing inter pictorial allusions and affinities in general but of the specific American Studies concern with mapping inter pictorial clusters? The question raises well-known American Studies issues regarding possible tensions between disciplinary focus and transdisciplinary spectrum. Projects of mapping inter pictorial clusters contain all the potential of fruitful interdisciplinarity and all the possible pitfalls of disciplinary

<sup>20</sup> On the wider contexts of visualizations of "American Pietàs," see Tapia.

hybridization. Keeping their focus on powerful 'American' pictures and on the political, social, and cultural impact of US American national iconographies, projects of mapping 'American' inter pictorial clusters should engage the far-reaching trajectories of transnational iconographies in order to trace and interpret the flow and mobility of images and "the intricate interwovenness of national discourses" (Paul 165).<sup>21</sup> In this sense, Transnational American Studies<sup>22</sup> can provide the conceptual framework and theoretical perspectives for mapping inter pictorial clusters in American Studies.

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<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of "American Studies as Mobility Studies," see Kunow.

<sup>22</sup> For recent summary accounts of transnational approaches in American Studies and bibliographical documentation of seminal studies in the field, see Fluck, Pease, and Rowe; Hebel, "Preface"; and entries in *Encyclopedia of American Studies* by Hornung, Rowe, and Robinson.

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