Media Icons of War and the Instrumentalisation of Images in US-American Media Today

Reinhold Viehoff

University of Halle-Wittenberg

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb

Part of the Comparative Literature Commons, and the Critical and Cultural Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

Abstract: In his paper "Media Icons of War and the Instrumenalisation of Images in US-American Media Today," Reinhold Viehoff argues that the destruction of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad in April 2004 by the US army represents an attempt to instrumentalise the logic of mass media as a strategy of public diplomacy. Viehoff explains the logic of mass media and public diplomacy of the US government and US media today in the context of the history of the destruction of monu-ments as played out on the landscape of media during and following the demise of the Soviet em-pire. Viehoff proposes that the media images of the toppling of Hussein's statue is linked, histori-cally, to the iconic representations of the divestiture of Central and East European dictatorships. Further, the divestiture of tyranny of the Soviet empire and its media images have been capital-ised on in the strategic media image construction of the deposition of Hussein's government of tyranny. Based on specific examples of media images, Viehoff analyses the process in which the iconisation of images occurs in the case of Hussein's divestiture. In his conclusion, Viehoff pro-poses that the strategy of media and its icons used in the US media suggest misguided intentions. These misguided intentions are due to particularities in the processes of reflection in current US-American media systems.

Reinhold VIEHOFF

Media Icons of War and the Instrumentalisation of Images in US-American Media Today
   Translated from the German by Daniel Reinhold S. Viehoff

Over the course of the twentieth century as mass media have become primarily visual media, individual images have acquired a force that has often been compared to the religious imagery of old: images become the icons of the media age. Pictures like that of the Vietnamese soldier who is shot, from close up and in full view of the camera, by the South Vietnamese chief of police, or the portrait of Che Guevara that is no longer just the unavoidable paraphernalia of political protest, but has entered popular culture, are just two examples of the powerful imagery that served, in the 1960s, to embody ideological, political and cultural values and thus entered the collective memory of Western societies. The images that photographers sent from Vietnam -- in particular the picture of the shooting already mentioned -- and which were distributed globally by the mass media, first forced the US government to defend the moral legitimacy of their engagement in South East Asia. The public pressure the photos created affected the policy choices of the US government in the Vietnam War; in response to this experience, subsequent US administrations have developed a sophisticated politics of information, and more particularly what we want to call a "politics of images," to avoid the kind of backlash they encountered in the 1960s. After prohibiting images completely during the First Gulf war -- a reaction to the perceived power of pictures to sway public opinion -- the US government decided to change strategies in the Second Gulf war. By "embedding" journalists, US forces gave selected representatives of the media the opportunity to capture seemingly authentic images of the war (see, e.g., Beuthner, Buttler, Fröhlich, Neverla, Weichert; Bussemer).
   In this study, I posit the following questions: how did the US, as part of this new politics of images, manage to establish certain pictures of their defeat of Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein as media icons? Which media mechanisms could they rely on in doing so? When the US expanded its "crusade against evil" on Iraq in 2002, it had already become clear that, in addition to the many political and economic interests driving the war, symbolic ambitions were centrally involved. Since Osama bin Laden, the brain behind the traumatic attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City, had not been caught, another culpable had to be found and presented to the impatient audiences at home and abroad: Saddam Hussein. Yet, even after the military defeat of the Iraqi army Hussein could not be found for a lengthy period of time. Under the rising political and moral pressure they faced from their audience in the United States and the rest of the world, the US government pursued diverse strategies to achieve what would amount to a symbolic divestiture of Hussein. Among these were the images, broadcast worldwide, of US soldiers living in Hussein's palaces, and pictures of the systematic destruction of all public portraits of Hussein. The climax of this *executio in effigie* was the toppling of Hussein's statue, performed by US soldiers for the cameras of the world media. In the process, the US forces sought to employ central strategies of media iconography, in order to turn the fall of the from what would be merely a symbolic act into an iconic image of the US-American victory over evil that, in turn, would invite collective identification on a global scale. For an Iraqi audience, the images were meant to symbolise the liberation of the Iraqi people from Hussein's dictatorship; for the US public and the world, they were to represent the US-American victory under the sign of democracy. Starting from the thesis that the public destruction of Hussein's statue was the strategic *mise-en-scène* of an iconic image, I focus on the following questions: what are the preconditions for creating iconic images in the mass media, and which of these mechanisms did the US draw on in the process? How did US information management during the war influence the effects that the destruction of the statue had? What was the role of the media in all of this? And last but not least, was the attempt to turn the falling statue into an iconic image successful? In the history of Occidental culture, icons constitute one of the oldest visual genres: when images were of primarily cultic use, icons were perceived as authentic expressions of God (see Belting, *Das echte Bild*). As such, they contained two distinct elements: the *imago*, the representation of a holy man or woman, and the *historia*, the corresponding story as it is narrated

in the Bible, and which the beholder of the *imago* is meant to recall (see Belting, *Bild und Kult* 9, 20). Motif, form, and meaning of the icons thus relied on traditional codes which left scant room for change. On the contrary, Hans Belting emphasises that the icon was closely tied to archetypes which were to guarantee the veracity and authenticity of the holy image. At the same time, the icon's aura depended on the specificity that the individual icons had developed in their particular locations; although they were archetypal, each icon was unique in its appearance. According to Belting, it was this unique and location-specific aura of the icon that was celebrated in their reproductions. Clearly, such an aesthetic and functions of religious icons -- derived from their cultic use and oriented towards traditionalist societies -- are diametrically opposed to our current visual culture. However, as I introduced above, in Western culture characterised by visual mass media the urge persists to identify those pictures that stand out from the flood of images and thus provide global cognitive and emotional guidance (on this, see Haustein; Ludes). The German term for images that represent values and thus normatively guide our perception and action is *Leitbilder*. The guiding function (*Leit-*) of these images (*bilder*) is crucial for understanding their ideological, political, and cultural functions. In recent history, political actors in particular have repeatedly tried to take possession of the power of such images, or to univocally impose such guiding imagery; it is thus all the more important to analyse the specific conditions of their creation, interpretation, and canonisation (on this, see in more detail Viehoff). The tradition of religious iconography, deeply anchored in Western culture, promises to be a useful starting point for such an enterprise. Thus, if one considers the aesthetic and functional aspects of the cultic use of imagery that I am referring to above, surprising parallels between religious icons and contemporary *Leitbilder* come to light -- and this despite the fundamentally different worlds they belong to. Since the aesthetics, function, and success of contemporary *Leitbilder* depend crucially on the mass media, I propose that the best term to call such images would be "media icons."

Ever since the invention of printing, Western culture has had a tendency to capture current events in pictures; such representations of the event are reproduced and distributed at a large scale. This tendency has been accelerating rapidly in the last one hundred years. Rulers and revolutionaries were the first to draw on the propagandistic power of such reproductions: famously, images of the taking of the Bastille at the beginning of the French Revolution were reproduced serially and these printed pamphlets were then distributed widely. Thus, the historical actors created a simultaneous *mise-en-scène* of the events and thereby ensured that they were forever part of the collective visual memory of their culture. Even in the era of mass media, such moments of historical change are the main subjects of media iconography, not only because they store the memory of the events, but also, and primarily, because they satisfy the actors' needs and desires to see a version of the events passed on that they can identify with. In the observation of media icons, just as in attending to religious icons, an *imago* (which, nowadays, is the allegedly authentic representation of a historic moment) is linked to a *historia*; this history of the image is part of the discourse of the media, and includes not just an explication of the historical event but also its ideological interpretation. Modern media icons, too, must invite the observer to recall certain images, stories, and values that can be generalised; these images, stories, and values must belong to or at least fit into the models of reality that have been established in the political and ideological discourse of the mass media. The observer of media icons must be acquainted with these images and their history, not just to understand the icons, but also to fully identify with them, or experience what we will call their "identificatory force"; hence, media icons are also emblematic, or linked to the cultural and medial (sub-) text of which they form a part. The perception of authenticity, furthermore, hinges on traditional patterns of imagery, which turns the pictures into evidence that is cognitively and emotionally immediately accessible. Here, again, we may say that the "true" is the result of the "right": pictures are recognised as truthful, original, and authentic if they fit particular visual archetypes, are thus reproducible, and hence become symbolically generalisable (in more detail, see Viehoff 117-19; see also Viehoff and Fahlenbrach). This feature sets media icons apart from symbolically coded "key images" (*Schlüsselbilder*; see Ludes), which bundle the collective memory of a concrete event and symbolically compress it, because the semantic value of such key images barely exceeds the symbolising and visualisation of a concrete event and the interests that

are linked to the event. For example, the Marianne in Delacroix's famous picture *Liberty* is not only associated with the limited context of the French Revolution, but it is, instead, an iconic representation of freedom and democracy, widely used to this day. By contrast, a key image, like the picture of the first landing on the moon, although it conveys the historical importance of the event as well as the collective technical and ideological hopes that it aroused at the time, does not have meaning that would exceed its local and historical circumstances. The historic process of turning pictures into icons thus includes several features: first, historical actors, producers of images, and the media must choose to offer the images as screens on which collective identification can occur; second, they must be accepted as the locus of such an identification by a large group of people; finally, they must be reproduced by the mass media and distributed in a number of different contexts. Only if these three conditions are met can we distinguish, among the mass of images, the true media icons from the many other pictures that, although also adequate and possibly authentic representations of collective events, remain mere "key images." Per contra, media icons are always instances of a *mise-en-scène* and thus subject to sophisticated design and semantic codifications in accordance with the historical circumstances and the demands of the historical actors. When it comes to the iconography of images of war, these actors fall mainly into two categories: the representatives of the politico-military system and those of the media system. The constraints each of them imposes upon the selection of particular war images as media icons is the subject of my subsequent analysis.

As I proposed, nowadays the mass media are among the most important forces in transforming symbolic images into full-fledged icons. To comprehend fully the mechanisms that turn images of war into media icons, one must recall the basic criteria that guide the production of visual media. The media in general, and visual media in particular, are guided by specific selection criteria in choosing subject matter and in deciding on how to report on an issue (see Kepplinger; Kepplinger und Habermeier; Bentele, Liebert, Seeling). In particular, Martin Löffelholz has analysed in several of his studies the factors that determine news and applied the results to war reporting. He suggests that the following list of "news factors" guide media attention and ultimately determine whether "wars" -- as events -- are considered newsworthy: the degree to which the own country is involved; the involvement of elite nations; the possibility of connecting the story to (media) events at home; the degree of surprise; the cultural, political, economic distance from the events; the possibility of personalising the events; and the possibility of visualising the events (see "Kriegs-berichterstattung," "Krisenkommunikation"). As Günter Bentele argues, war by its very nature includes a number of these decisive features, and thus becomes automatically the subject of media attention and turns into a media event, that is, this event is necessarily reported in the media. Violence, that is, war, is thus in a sense a "natural" focus of media interest. Via a careful analysis of the ways in which media events are constructed, Bentele has explicated in some detail the conditions that give war a special role in the reporting of the mass media. He distinguishes between three categories of media events, and suggests that war falls into every single one of them: 1) Natural events as media events: the victims and the destruction of nature and cities are of "interest" to the media because they satisfy the "news factors" mentioned above (personalisation, visual delineation of these events, etc.); 2) Social events as media events: even apart from the specific modes of production that determine news factors, wars are important for the media because they fit into a politically and socially determined structure of relevance; and 3) Authentic and constructed media events: the political and military communication that precedes and accompanies war frequently takes the form of constructed media events -- i.e., events that are primarily or exclusively arranged to attract media attention (PR events, press conferences, etc.). Given this analysis of what makes the construction of media events possible, what consequences can we draw for the conditions that must be fulfilled if individual images of war are to accede to the status of media icons?

Starting from the selection criteria I described, it is clear that war images are particularly interesting for the media if they condense symbolically and unequivocally the "meaning" of the war, that is, if they make the political and moral motivation of the warring parties directly cognitively accessible and emotionally comprehensible to a mass audience. This is most effective if the events

of the war are symbolically represented by the fate of a single individual (personalisation). The media have therefore a structurally determined interest in images that stand aesthetically and functionally apart from other images, symbolically condense the war, and thus have a high identificatory value. Among the most crucial visual mechanisms that fulfil this purpose is, obviously, visual polarisation, such as the symbolic representation of the enemy as enemy and the heroic depiction of the home nation (on this, see Kleinsteuber). In the process of reporting, the media highlight some rather than other events from among the contingent mass they encounter; the media then provide images and a subtext for them, and place them in the sphere of public discourse. This act of "media communication" requires that the events be linked to other media and non-media events; among the means for creating these connections are the following: similarity of presentation (*mise-en-scène*, aesthetics); closeness in time, temporal connections, and seriality of presentation (programming decisions, history of profiling the program); semantics of the medium (narrative, historiography, social discourse); and reference to the pre-medial constellation of events (history of media events and historical events, facts, common sense). How particular war images are evaluated in the media depends primarily on how the war is integrated into a media-specific context. The possibility of canonising particular images of war thus hinges on a high degree of self-referential reporting in the media. Journalistic decisions refer only to other journalistic decisions and not to anything outside the media system. The media produce icons that are subsequently offered as evidence that the media were in fact present at the decisive moments and events and the images are thus repeated on a regular basis. This continuous process of self-assurance of the media by the media insists on the importance of the media as enabling the (medial) participation in world events and offering the primary locus of their cultural interpretation -- since the creation of media icons rests on a foundation of models of reality which, while they are being used, also manifest simultaneously the interpretative power of the media (on this, see Dayan and Katz).

In times of war, governments have undoubtedly a strong interest in using the identificatory power of images to create political, ideological, and moral support for their decisions. During the First Gulf war, the US government used images not only as means of (dis)information, but also to glorify the arms technology that the US troops were employing, and ultimately to inspire public support for the war. Under such circumstances, the warring parties have an obvious interest in transforming pictures that symbolise their military and political successes into iconic images. During the Second Gulf war, there were a number of obvious attempts to streamline the imagery of the war, but here I mention just one: President George W. Bush's appearance before the media in full flight gear upon his arrival in Baghdad was part of the endeavour to turn the President into an iconic US-American war hero who fights for the values of a Western superpower by stylising his appearance in accordance with Hollywood imagery (as suggested widely in the popular media: think of Tom Cruise in *Top Gun*). But the example also reveals that the strategic development of iconic images will only be successful if the other actors that contribute to the process, namely the media and the public, are willing to accept such images as media icons. In this particular case, the attempt was at best partially successful: at least among Europeans, much ridicule was heaped upon the President for this obvious, and thus counterproductive, PR event. This example of failed "symbolic politics" highlights the constraints that political actors must recognise and come to terms with if their message to the mass media is to be visually effective. Bentele defines symbolic politics as political action by means of manifest symbols, a political action that is geared towards media, and in particular television, representation and depends for its success on such representation, and in which the pragmatic or use dimension of the event dominates its communicative dimension (127). In other words, political actors must not only draw upon and use the institutional preconditions and selection criteria that the media employ in order to find an interface for the presentation of their message; they must also take into account the values and positions that are debated and reflected in the existing media discourse. This is particularly true when it comes to launching images that are intended as visual symbols for a message, and whose success depends on widely shared, common sense presuppositions about their symbolic meaning. At the most fundamental level, if the warring parties want to spread successfully their justification of the military action, they must transform their political and military codes into the journalistic code that the media em-

ploy (see Bentele). They must not only take into account the timing and the structure of media content, but also create media events of their own in order to impose successfully their interpretation of the war. Their task is made relatively easy by the fact that in times of war military censorship creates a shortage of information, so that the media become highly dependent not only on media events like press conferences, but also on carefully leaked images and stories (see Bentele). While political actors must hence expend less energy and resources in times of war than in times of peace to gain media attention, the need for publicly legitimising their actions grows exponentially. At the centre of this search for legitimacy usually stands a particular model of reality that the political actors use and propagate in order to justify their political and moral actions. The administration of President George W. Bush thus cast the last Gulf War as part and parcel of their fight against terror and the "axis of evil." The media were offered a binary model of reality that carved up the world into "good" and "evil," and the visual strategies that were employed in this process were correspondingly schematic. In today's globally operating mass media, the political and moral justification of a war depends crucially on an appeal to interculturally acceptable models of reality, without which it is impossible to impose successfully visual symbols and ultimately media icons on a worldwide audience. This implies that images of war can gain iconic status only if their representation of the warring sides appeals to a maximally global or intercultural common sense. This proves to be one of the greatest difficulties in any attempt to strategically create media icons in times of war.

The question of how the collectively acceptable visual symbols of war that must precede the canonisation of media icons, as well as explanatory and interpretative models that are linked to these symbols, can be established in the mind of the global public brings to light that political actors and media actors must interact continuously in order to exchange and establish the relevant texts, signs, and symbols. As mentioned previously, Bentele has highlighted the different levels of interaction among the actors in this process. On the one hand, the political system and the media system develop their own respective codes of communication, including texts, topics, signs, and symbols that are adequate to their respective environments. These different codes must then be adapted to one another in a process of specific rituals (since the media, too, depend for their reporting on the political system). In both intra- and inter-systemic communication, linguistic and non-linguistic symbols stand at the centre of symbolic politics: they include linguistic terms with a connection to the issue, i.e., value-laden terms that can appeal to broad public support and common sense (freedom, democracy, etc.), as well as concrete political symbols that condense and represent visually these values. Within the media system, these linguistic and visual signs and symbols are ritualised and turned into media signs, that is, in both form and content they are adapted to the context of media production and reception. Thus, to turn individual pictures of war into media icons, the political actors must not only offer particular symbolic images, but also launch a coherent story about the image -- in the sense of a modern *historia*: models of reality, legitimacy, and narratives about the genesis of the war that will eventually be incorporated into the media discourse. This process can be supported by intentionally arranged media events, and the images and their story will, if successful, become eventually a ritualised part of programming and turn into media signs or media icons. If the medial constitution of events is used strategically, in particular in the context of war, then such strategies can have different consequences. First, with regards to their immediate effects, the strategically produced images of war will shape the social perception of the conflict, and will do so independently of whether the media will in turn become the locus of reflection on these strategies. Second, in the mid- to long-term, the images of war will enter media archives, survive the process of selection this entails, and eventually -- when viewers return to them after a while and look at them as, say "Photo of the Month," or year, or decade -- they will be remembered as views of a historic moment and provide the interpretation of these moments for future generations. In the United States, the short-term strategy has been implemented by the administration of George W. Bush under the label "public diplomacy." In he following, analogously, I refer to the mid- to long-term dimension of such media events as "public history."

As I suggested previously, it is not sufficient to just present images as media icons: they must also be widely and continuously recognised and accepted as such. The public or the members of the community must be able to recognise media icons and use them as such in their everyday lives. It is worth returning here once again to the Vietnam picture of the shooting mentioned at the beginning of my paper. In the 1960s, this war image was not only used as a visual accusation of US policy in South East Asia during protests and marches, but also found its way into the everyday life of students as a poster -- as an express commitment against US imperialism, a fashion state- ment, etc. It was thus relieved of its initial documentary function and gained a transcendent, sym- bolic meaning through its use as an icon. Eventually, the image would thus come to contain not only political and ideological, but also habitual and cultural values. In no political ritual is the politi- cal power of images as obvious as it is in the traditional divestment of statues that occur when power changes hands. In recent history, the destruction of Stalinist-Soviet monuments have re- mained particularly memorable for the generation born after the Second World Was, such as the demolition of Stalin's statue in Budapest in 1956 which, in turn, became one of the symbols of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Similarly, the large-scale demolition of communist monuments in the former East Germany after the Fall of the Wall stands for a wholesale rebuttal of all that commu- nist East Germany represented (on a theoretical treatment of the "monument," see Mittig). In these rituals, the new authorities draw on the symbolic pact that underpins function and effective- ness of monuments: the image of the ruler is an embodiment of the entire political system. The bodily representation of the ruler has therefore two sides to it: the side of his personal power and the side of the system that that individual represents. The dictator of Iraq, Hussein, has been al- most singular among contemporary rulers in the way he developed a system of symbolic represen- tation that embodied simultaneously his personal power and the "eternal power" of the political system he stood for. Hussein arranged carefully representations on both levels of symbolic political discourse: on the one hand, he produced several doubles of himself in order to protect his (real) body from attacks and who made regular appearances as "Hussein." On the other hand, he com- missioned hundreds of statues, paintings, mosaics, and murals depicting his likeness, as well as an enormous number of gigantic architectural projects that were to demonstrate his imperishability and the principles of his rule. According to cultural systems of interpretation, demolishing one of the enormous statues that stood on a square in Baghdad near one of Hussein's palaces -- it was, in fact, the statue that Hussein had dedicated to himself on the occasion of his 65th birthday -- officially put an end to his rule in Iraq. Picking up from the iconoclastic tradition discussed previ- ously, the destruction of the statue is a globally comprehensible sign, a traditional stand-in for a symbolic tyrannicide. Given its communicative significance, this event is, in a paradigmatic sense, media communication. I would like to make proposition more explicit by way of an analysis of the reporting about the demolition of the statue both on television and in the print media, as follows.

On television, reports on the fall of the statue were broadcast live in news programs world- wide; the pictures were repeated permanently both in the daily newscast and in the weekly news summary in the US and elsewhere. The event thus found an ongoing echo in the daily reporting on television. But the images were also shown continuously in the later commemoration of events. They were an obligatory part of every retrospective as the year 2003 came to a close, not only on television, but also in magazines such as the German *Der Spiegel* as well as in many national and international newspapers. A rather superficial thirty-minute report on "Iraq -- One Year After" by Ulrich Tilgner on 6 May 2004 concentrated on the toppling of the statue; the main interview part- ner was the Iraqi man who, one year earlier, had tried unsuccessfully to destroy the concrete basis of the statue with a hammer. Many newspapers again carried the picture of the statue on the front pages (the key concept here is "ritualising the anniversary"), and contrasted it frequently with the image of a new ("free," "artistic") monument that the US military had helped to erect in the same spot just a few weeks after the toppling of the Hussein statue (see also Tilgner's *Der inszenierte Krieg*). By means of effective media communication, the picture, or better, the series of pictures, of the demolition have thus acquired the features that make icon creation possible by transforming what were merely symbolic images into full-fledged media icons. The press reports after the

demolition were also rather remarkable: the front pages of more than two hundred newspapers printed pictures of the demolition (see "Baghdad Toppled (04/10/03)" <http://www.newseum.org/frontpages/iraq/baghdadtoppled.asp>[inactive]). Even this small sample of images allows us to draw some conclusions about how the communicative process that is intended to turn these pictures into media icons gets started. The semantic context created by combining the images with headlines and through the combination of particular pictorial elements in the photographs is particularly informative in this regard. Notice that the content of most photos is limited to the fall of the statue, while the excited "crowd" is not actually depicted. The images almost always reveal the presence and active cooperation of the US army (-although some of the images do not show the rope around the neck of the statue very clearly, so that an observer unacquainted with the context would not grasp the full meaning of the images). A number of newspapers print a sequence of three or more pictures in order to depict the toppling of the statue; they thereby refer back to the images in live television broadcasts, and remind the viewers of the "authentic" origins of the images. Many newspapers also combine photos of the demolition with images of a joyous and celebrating crowd and scenes of fraternisation among Iraqis and US soldiers, thus suggesting a context of joint action, a cooperative act of the liberators and the liberated. This example of visual media communication, in particular in conjunction with its subsequent global and intercultural representation one year later, indicates that these images require and presuppose a specific context for their use; one of these, the ritualised acts of commemoration in the news media, explains the omnipresence of the iconoclastic images at the moment. Clearly, all this represents further evidence for the postulated mechanisms of icon creation because it shows that that pictures have entered the media archives and are from there available for all kinds of quotations and documentation. There are many more examples for this form of reporting on the "dead" Hussein, for this particular attention to the "demolished images" as ciphers for the "demolished" Saddam, than we can consider here. Jointly, these examples show how before and during the invasion of Baghdad the iconoclastic demolition of the statue, conveniently located right in front of the hotel that housed the international press, was prepared carefully and systematically. The continuous focus on the images of Hussein and thus on the destruction of the "King as principle" that accompanied news reports on the war laid the groundwork for an understanding of the events that made the demolition of the statue both predictable and comprehensible.

The concept of the "embedded" journalist led to the much more frequent appearance -- perhaps even omnipresence -- of some images than others in the print and electronic media. The reconstruction of the visual reports from Iraq during the invasion and the "demolition of Hussein" indicates that the symbolic destruction of the visual signs of Hussein's "body" became a "motif" for photojournalists and press agencies. This applies both to television reports and to international magazines and newspapers. Finally, I would like t consider an example that highlights yet another dimension of the use of images and reveals that the creation of media icons can also develop in more unexpected directions: the process can develop a dynamic of its own and eventually turn against the originally intended "meaning" of the original act. When President George W. Bush visited his ally Tony Blair on 19-20 November in London, several hundreds of thousands people went out to protest against the visit and in particular against the two politicians' common front in the war. This led to a memorable example of the "glorification" of the demolished Hussein statue -- as an ironic, satirical quotation of the original event that the protesters presented as an act of media communication in its most original form. A larger-than-life golden statue with the features of George W. Bush was pushed through the streets of London before it was toppled in an imitation of the destruction of the Hussein statue. The image was obviously intended as an offer to the media who were reporting on the protest (thus extending the ironic analogy even further), but it was only "quoted" or "documented" by a small number of media outlets. This example shows how strongly the images of the toppled statue in Baghdad were already associated in public consciousness with the US victory, the war in Iraq, and the US involvement in the demolition of Hussein's statue. But we must also note that the golden "Bush-Hussein" statue, in spite of its implicit political criticism, contributed further to the reproduction and proliferation of the communicative act that started when Hussein's statue was toppled in Baghdad. The intentions behind the efforst of public diplo-

macy by the US forces has been to create a subtext against which the toppling of the Hussein statue would be seen as an act of public revolt, as an uprising of the victims and an attack on the maligned symbols of oppression. The model for this was provided less by the taking of the Bastille (if only because of the French stance on Iraq before and during the war) than by the popular movements and revolutions in Central and East Europe during the fall of the Soviet empire in the late 1980s. The Hussein statue and its demolition was thus placed, I propose, in the context of the liberation that the countries of the Soviet hemisphere had achieved only recently. Just as the Djerjinski monument in Moscow had been toppled, so the monument to Hussein had to fall, be pulled to the ground. But this intended narrative was not taken up by the other actors in the process and thus the images will enter history with another subtext attached to them: that of Hussein on a rope, on a string, a puppet that is moved by the heavy armour of the US military. In addition, the US soldiers made the "mistake" of covering Hussein's face with a US flag -- a symbolic act that is usually limited to the occasion of official funerals for US citizens, and thus a serious faux-pas that had to be undone immediately; but the symbolic correction occurred too late, the images had already travelled across the world.

Was the administration of President George W. Bush, then, finally successful in launching the pictures of the toppled statue as iconic images of their victory? It is obvious that they provided successfully the initial material for the mechanisms of news reporting. Via military censure, they created a shortage of information, and turned the hand-picked "embedded" journalists into the pivotal suppliers of information and images (see, e.g., Bogen). Since these journalists thus became immediate witnesses to the events, the images they provided had from the start an air of "authenticity" -- despite of severely limited information on the origins of and background to these pictures. Furthermore, the US forces played successfully to the visual-aesthetic needs of the media and thus to the conditions for the creation of media icons. The iconoclastic events they created and offered to the media belong to a long pictorial and political tradition, and were particularly interesting given the visual nature of modern mass media. The massive presence of these images, especially in the Western media, provides evidence for this. However, while the US administration had a first-class handle on the selection mechanisms that guide the creation of media icons, they did not make the grade when it came to shaping the discourse in the global news media. Until the very end, they failed to convince the international public of the political and moral legitimacy of the invasion, this despite of their incantatory invocation of the "war on terror" that provided their model of reality in this context. Thus the images of the symbolic divestiture of Hussein lack, I my opinion, the intercultural common sense that would have made possible their acceptance, first, as positive *Leitbilder*, and later, when they enter the domain of media rituals, as media icons. Against the background of the global criticism of the US war in Iraq (and the impression that the toppling of the statue was a pre-arranged PR event), the images were instead perceived as pure demonstrations of power that drew on traditional symbolic rituals. The images were decoded not in terms of the liberation of Iraq, but rather in terms of an occupation of Iraq. This connotation was even more, in fact much more, at the centre of attention in the Arab media. Thus, at least for West European audiences, the images lacked identificatory force; and more, they were not powerful enough to provide retrospective legitimacy to a contested military operation. Finally, the US administration and media underestimated the explosiveness of such images when they enter the global media discourse and the potential reactions they provoke. These effects were reinforced by the new political power of the Arab media, in particular of television channels such as Al Jazeera. The aggressive symbolic political action that the US administration undertook led, regrettably, to a further escalation of symbolic and real violence on the part of their enemies. The terrorists that the United States are fighting have long since recognised the power of images that depict the destruction of enemy bodies. Horrifically, they are not satisfied with merely symbolic destruction, and undertake real executions for the camera.

The propaganda strategy of the US administration of George W. Bush that is positioned behind the demolition of the statue was therefore effective in one sense: it reverberated, and still reverberates to this day, in accounts on the war in Iraq. But the media have also made public the propagandistic underpinnings of the event and the subsequent public criticism and debate have

created the core for any future understanding of the events. This will make it impossible for any historical reinterpretation of the web of events to simply follow the guidance offered by the US government and their selection of events and images. However, the impact of these pictures in the mass media is a different issue altogether -- in particular with regards to their short-term effect on the mood and opinion of the US public. If we take into account their effects on polls and public opinion, the images of the toppled statue may well have achieved their propagandistic aim. In the future, such paradoxical situations may occur even more often: the increasing regionalisation of the global media and the partitioning of communicative space into distinct "communities," together with the fact that the communicative means of power are held by the dominant groups in society, will make it ever more likely that while some subsection of the media will reveal strategically initi-ated media events as "fake" and propaganda, yet such "partial enlightenment" fails to undermine the intended short-term success of public diplomacy – and may, ultimately, even leave "public his-tory"   unchallenged.

Note: I am much indebted to Daniel Reinhold S. Viehoff, who assisted with the translation and gave critical advices to some of my arguments.

Works Cited

Belting, Hans. *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*. München: Beck, 2000.
Belting, Hans. *Das echte Bild. Bildfragen als Glaubensfragen*. München: Beck, 2005.
Beuthner, Michael, Joachim Buttler, Sandra Fröhlich, Irene Neverla, and Stephan A. Weichert, eds. *Bilder des Terrors. Terror der Bilder? Krisenberichterstattung am und nach dem 11. September*. Köln: Halem, 2003.
Bentele, Günter. "Krieg. Journalismus und Wahrheit. Zum Verhältnis von Kriegsrealität, Medienrealität und symbolischer Politik im Golfkrieg." *Krieg, Aids, Katastrophen. Gegenwartsprobleme als Herausforderung der Publizistikwissenschaft*. Ed. Heinz Bonfadelli, and Werner Heinz. Konstanz: UVK, 1993. 121-47.
Bentele, Günter, T. Liebert, and St. Seeling. "Von der Determination zur Intereffikation. Ein integriertes Modell zum Verhältnis von Public Relations und Journalismus." *Aktuelle Entstehung von Öffentlichkeit. Akteure, Strukturen, Veränderungen*. Ed. G. Bentele and M. Haller. Konstanz: UVK, 1997. 225-50.
Bredekamp, Horst. "Renaissancekultur als 'Hölle': Savoranolas Verbrennungen der Eitelkeiten." *Bildersturm. Die Zerstörung des Kunstwerks*. Ed. Martin Warnke. München: Hanser, 1973. 41-64.
Bussemer, Thymian. "Medien als Kriegswaffe. Eine Analyse der amerikanischen Militärpropaganda im Irak-Krieg." *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 49-50 (2003): 20-28.
Dayan, Daniel, and Elihu Katz. "Medienereignisse." Trans. Christine Hanke. *Grundlagentexte zur Fernsehwis-senschaft. Theorie-Geschichte-Analyse*. Ed. Ralf Adelmann, Jan-Otmar Hesse, Judith Keilbach, Markus Stauff, and Matthias Thiele. Stuttgart: Utb, 2002. 413-53.
Haustein, Lydia. "Globale Ikonen." *Zwischen Nanowelt und globaler Kultur. Science + fiction, Bilder und Texte*. Texte und Interviews. Ed. Stephan Iglhaut and Thomas Spring. Berlin: Jovis, 2003. 129-45.
Kepplinger, H.M. "Der Nachrichtenwert der Nachrichtenfaktoren." *Wie die Medien die Welt erschaffen und wie die Menschen darin leben*. Ed. Christian Holtz-Bacha and Romy Fröhlich. Opladen: Westdeutscher, 1998. 19-39.
Kepplinger, H.M. "Der prognostische Wert der Nachrichtenwerttheorie." *Publizistik* 45.4 (2000): 462-75.
Kepplinger, H.M. "Der Ereignisbegriff in der Publizistikwissenschaft." *Publizistik* 46.2 (2001): 117-39.
Kepplinger, H.M., and J. Habermeier. "Ereignis-Serien. Was kann man nach spektakulären Vorfällen über die Wirklichkeit wissen?" *Markt-Macht-Medien. Publizistik zwischen gesellschaftlicher Verantwortung und öko-nomischen Zielen*. Ed. C. Mast. Konstanz: UVK, 1996. 261-72.
Kleinsteuber, Hans. "Terrorismus und Feindbilder. Zur visuellen Konstruktion von Feinden am Beispiel Osama Bin Laden und Saddam Hussein." *Bilder des Terrors. Terror der Bilder? Krisenberichterstattung am und nach dem 11. September*. Ed. Michael Beuthner, Joachim Buttler, Sandra Fröhlich, Irene Neverla, and Stephan A. Weichert. Köln: Halem, 2003. 206-38.
Löffelholz, Martin: "Kriegsberichterstattung." *Handbuch Journalismus und Medien*. Ed. Siegfried Weischenberg, Hans J. Kleinsteuber, and Bernhard Pörksen. Konstanz: UVK, 2005. 181-85.
Löffelholz, Martin. "Krisenkommunikation." *Handbuch Journalismus und Medien*. Ed. Siegfried Weischenberg, Hans J. Kleinsteuber, and Bernhard Pörksen. Konstanz: UVK, 2005. 185-189.
Ludes, Peter. *Multimedia und Multi-Moderne. Schlüsselbilder*. Opladen: Westdeutscher, 2001.
Mittig, Hans Ernst. "Das Denkmal." *Funkkolleg Kunst. Eine Geschichte der Kunst im Wandel ihrer Funktionen*. Ed. Werner Busch. München: Piper, 1987. 532-59.
"Baghdad Toppled (04/10/03)." *Newseum: The Story behind the News* (2005): <http://www.newseum.org/frontpages/iraq/baghdadtoppled.asp> [inactive].
Tilgner, Ulrich. *Der inszenierte Krieg. Täuschung und Wahrheit beim Sturz Saddam Husseins*. Berlin: rowohlt, 2003.
Viehoff, Reinhold. "Programmierte Bilder." *Programm und Programmatik. Kultur- und medienwissenschaftliche Analysen*. Ed. Ludwig Fischer. Konstanz: UVK, 2005. 113-31.
Viehoff, Reinhold, und Kathrin Fahlenbrach. "Ikonen der Medienkultur. Über die (verschwindende) Differenz von Authentizität und Inszenierung der Bilder in der Geschichte." *Bilder des Terrors. Terror der Bilder?*

Krisenberichterstattung am und nach dem 11. September. Ed. Michael Beuthner, Joachim Buttler, Sandra Fröhlich, Irene Neverla, and Stephan A. Weichert. Köln: Halem, 2003. 42-59.

Author's profile: Reinhold Viehoff teaches media and communication theory in the Department of Media and Communication Studies, University of Halle-Wittenberg, a department he founded in 1995. His recent publications include the edited volumes *Die Liebenswürdigkeit des Alltags* (2004) and *Schriftsteller und Rundfunk* (2002). His next solo book, *Historische Ereignisse im Fernsehen*, is forthcoming in 2006. Viehoff published numerous papers in learned journals and collected volumes, more recently in the volume *Baustein zu einer Rundfunkgeschichte von unten* (Ed. Karin Falkenberg) (2005), in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (2004), and numerous entries on media and communication in *Metzler Lexikon. Medientheorie Medienwissenschaft* (2002). Viehoff is founding and current editor of *SPIEL: Siegener Periodicum zur Internationalen Empirischen Literaturwissenschaft* and he serves on boards of numerous national and international journals -- also on the board of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* and learned associations. E-mail: <reinhold.viehoff@medienkomm.uni-halle.de>.

Translator's profile: Daniel Reinhold S. Viehoff works towards his Ph.D. in philosophy at Columbia University. His interests and publications include studies on Paul Mattick in *Philosophy Today* (2003) and "Dr Seltsam oder wie ich lernte, das Fegefeuer zu lieben" in *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken* (2005). E-mail: <drv2101@columbia.edu>.