

CULTURAL ICONICITY

An Emergent Field

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This issue of *Academic Quarter* on the topic of **Icon** has aimed to bring together scholars from the following fields: Imagology, cultural semiotics, star studies, fashion studies, film and media history, art history, literary history, and cultural studies to initiate a further exploration of the phenomenon of 'cultural iconicity'. We have sought contributions analyzing the phenomenon of cultural iconicity in the following areas of study: literature, music, art, fashion, film and other visual media, including photography. We called for both papers that contribute further to the theorization of the field and its concepts, and papers that offer analyses of specific cases of cultural iconicity; and not surprisingly the latter category has predominated in the responses to our initial call.

From an editorial position the main ambition in putting together this Icon issue is to explore the potential reach of and possible limits to the concept of cultural iconicity. With this issue we wish through

exemplary analyses of a number of highly diverse cultural icons to test the contours and boundaries of the theoretical frame outlined in this introduction.

For the purpose of this issue we proposed the following definition of a cultural icon: *A commercialized, yet sacralized visual, aural or textual representation anchored in a specific temporal/historical and spatial/geographical context, broadly recognized by its recipients as having iconic status for a group of human agents within one or several discursive fields/communities.*

Such a capsule definition is of necessity both broad, abstract and to an extent reductive. The work of concretizing the analyses of iconicity under our broad umbrella is naturally primarily carried out by the contributions within the volume at hand, but here we, as editors, wish to elaborate a little further on what we see as the contours, and eventually the boundaries, of the new and still emergent field of cultural iconicity.

Cultural iconicity can be carried by the representation of a person, a place, an object, a phenomenon, or an epoch/historical moment – or a combination of any of the abovementioned in interaction. An iconic human agent such as a romantic wanderer set in an iconic sublime landscape wielding an iconic object such as an iPhone based on Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea Fog* is an example of such a combination of carriers and an example of some of the central complexities in the logic of cultural iconicity¹.

The iconicity of a human representation is furthered through the human icon having agency to act in a cultural space anchored in time, and by the consumers of cultural iconicity having agency to do 'icon work' on those representations, whether taking the form of collaborative iconolatry or adversarial iconoclasm. Sørensen, in a 2007 article, defined 'icon-work' as an interactive process, which allows anyone to become a textual agent or producer, to manipulate existing iconic textual images, or create new additions to the bank of already existing iconic representations of a given cultural icon. "Images enter the cultural field of cultural iconicity and everyone may contribute freely to elaborate and reinterpret their iconic status," he writes (Sørensen, 2007, 157-158). As such human agency is an inherent element in the production of cultural iconicity. However, iconicity embedded in non-human forms of representation is also open to manipulation and re-mixing and re-purposing. Even

objects or design details and practices (i.e. phenomena that are inanimate, and in some cases exist only as digital files) can be of sufficient cultural significance for large groups to become exposed to icon-work practices (Google doodles are an example of this type of icon). These practices are usually complex and often involve a tension between branding purposes and consumer criticism.

Regardless of the specific kinds of cultural icons on which one is focusing, a cultural icon can also be defined as a stereotype undergoing icon-work in a cultural context – whether collaborative or adversarial. Thus, cultural icons are related to stereotypes and in this regard the study of cultural icons is particularly akin to the discipline of imagology (particularly the ‘new’ intermedial imagology proposed by Johnson in his 2005 article “Notes Towards a New Imagology”). The concepts of auto- and hetero-images as developed by Leerssen are also particularly useful in such analyses.²

In this process of investigating the defining characteristics of the phenomenon of cultural iconicity it is crucial to emphasize that such an analysis of cultural icons in our view is best carried out as a cultural semiotic text study based on a broad understanding of what constitutes a text. As such our theme issue engages with iconicity as it manifests itself in cultural texts across a wide spectrum of genres and media. When we analyze a cultural icon we are analyzing visual-textual representations of this icon through a reading method, which we might term ‘cultural iconology’ (See also Sørensen 2006). Central to this approach to doing cultural studies is a charting of the various cultural and textual agents’ icon-work. In the following we will try to point to the broad field of possible analytical objects, as well as to some of the elements we find it most logical and beneficial to take into consideration and investigate when practicing cultural iconology on these objects.

For scholars in the field of star studies, fashion studies and other branches of cultural studies, the usual object of interest will be the biographical or fictional/mythologized representation of a real person or fictional character. Such iconic personalities and characters will most often have been constructed by a complex interaction between the human behind the character (say, an actor) and handlers and marketers of the character and the artifact, product or cultural text he or she is found embedded in (this range of co-producers of iconicity would include, say, a film or record company, producers,

designers and marketing personnel – making such contemporary icons the product of multiple authorships).

For scholars in art, music, literary history or visual culture, the iconicity of time and place in representation will be the natural point of entry into the field of iconicity studies. For instance, an iconic shot, scene, dialogue sequence, special effect or sound element from a film (the *Battleship Potemkin* baby carriage, the burger dialogue from *Pulp Fiction*, the shower scene from *Psycho*, the wail of a harmonica in a Leone spaghetti western – are all examples of iconic instances in film history), or a well-known motif in pictorial art (a Degas dancer, a dripped stream of paint on a Pollack canvas, or the fist of the thinker in Rodin's sculpture), or the visual tropes of photo journalism (the open road, the bread line or the nude female or male form) – all can be argued to form cultural icons. Similarly a whole work (for instance a seminal film such as *Breakfast at Tiffany's* that has iconic status in both film and fashion history), period (such as a decade denomination, for instance 'The 20s'), or site (the ghost town, suburbia, etc.) can become a cultural icon under specific circumstances of reception, usually through a theorization in cultural history or other types of history writing, and many more global phenomena could also be analyzed through iconicity theory.

As editors we have formulated a set of dichotomies that contributions could explore, discuss and /or supplement. The cultural icon is bound up at least on the following semiotic chains of meaning:

Stylization/Sacralization
Familiarity/Transgression
Immortality/Historicity
Communion/Consumption
Overexposure/Iconoclasm
Martyrdom (Apotheosis)/Reduction (Translation)
Transcendence/Revelation

Cultural icons signify through a combination of 1) a reduction to the simplest forms of signification (as does the commercial, representational icon, found for instance in signage or on computer screens); and 2) a (re)sacralization of the signs in question (as does the religious icon found in faiths which do not interdict the use of images in act of worship – archetypically orthodox Catholicism). An example

of the tensions in this first chain of iconic signification is how Marilyn Monroe is metonymically reduced to her bloneness, bustiness, red lips and beauty spot – all features that are extensively resacralized and sexualized in her iconic representations, most notably in strongly manipulated art works such as Andy Warhol's serial Monroes. Similarly, place can be metonymized through a single establishing shot that sets the scene using a specific icon to represent a whole site (Eiffel Tower = Paris, etc.). Simplification is a reductive maneuver but seems to be the precondition for mass dissemination and recognition. There is eventually no Freud without a cigar, to give an example from one of the articles within. However, Freud's cigar is exactly the semiotic carrier of new meaning in cases where the icon's image is recuperated or critiqued through *détournement* in the icon's afterlife as a cultural text.

Cultural icons presuppose familiarity in a group context (indeed, one could argue that without the common and participatory element, they would not fully be 'cultural'), yet is fuelled – and to an extent constituted – by transgression of the same group's cultural norms. Here, again the study of cultural iconicity is very akin to imagology, where such norms are considered to be expressed via a gamut, or canon if one likes, of auto-images, and conversely deviations from the norm often lead to adversarial hetero-images of Otherness.

The significance of time as well as place is highly relevant in the study of cultural iconicity. Cultural icons seem immortal for their historically synchronic period, but are in reality as historically contingent as any other cultural construct. Some cultural icons turn out to have a short life span (see the Madonna example below), and others to endure and develop over generations and even centuries. Active icon-work can extend and revitalize an icon's significance in the iconosphere, whereas indifference and lack of references to prior icons can further their demise as significant icons. An example of how one icon can be superseded by another very similar one in the same field seems to be unfolding at this very moment when Madonna's iconicity is largely being usurped and then supplanted by that of Lady Gaga.

Also place – and the specific cultural groupings doing icon work in a specific place – becomes a relevant site for investigation and consideration when doing cultural icon analysis. Some of the most

familiar cultural icons, such as for example highly polarizing political figures (Stalin) or heroes (Che Guevara), are associated with very different and maybe even oppositional attributes in different places in the world and in different cultural groups. Some cultural icons are quite local and primarily recognized as a cultural icon to a limited number of people in a specific cultural context in a specific area of the world, whereas others have a more global identity, being broadly recognized as cultural icons by diverse cultural contexts and people across the world – and in this day and age especially across the World Wide Web. For the cultural icon analyst the degree of transgression (or entire lack thereof) of a cultural icon in terms of time, place and cultural context is potentially of great importance.

These focus areas are ultimately what take the study of a cultural icon and its specific production from the field of a limited, local visual-textual analysis to the field of a broader, more generally valid and interesting cultural analysis. However appealing in its own right a narrow semiotic analysis of a specific cultural icon may be, an approach also taking directly into account trans-textual and contextual aspects of cultural icons facilitates rich comparisons and points to be made across the histories of even very different cultural icons and their production. This ultimately furthers our general understanding of cultural icon production as a phenomenon all the while and, when successfully carried out, brings us valuable new insights into processes of human agency, time and place, in short into the human condition and Culture as such.

The consumer of cultural iconicity is inevitably in the position of the voyeur, seeking to force a communion with/of the iconic object. The consumption of icons can take many active forms, for instance in the shape of iconoclastic manipulation, or other more collaborative forms of icon work (fan fiction, art, and other forms of iconolatry.). The question ultimately is, whether any icon can be effectively established and sustained without constant *post festum* icon-work of either type. While icons are constantly in peril of overexposure, they require exposure to survive, and one is tempted to suggest that the more transgressive the exposure the more secure the position in the iconosphere becomes for the individual icon³.

Overexposure, however, can lead to aggressive adversarial icon intervention on the part of the public in the form of backlashes. For a living human icon, this process can resemble a form of pub-

lic martyrdom, as punishment for transgression – creating a balance between apotheosis and translation. One could mention sports icons such as Tiger Woods as evidence of the frequency of such a process.

The processes involved in cultural iconicity are thus a battleground between transcendence and revelation, and this opens up a fertile space for cultural analysis. The individual articles in this issue exemplify these processes in great detail, whether the iconic object in question is an abstract concept, a concrete object or design practice, or specific human carriers of iconicity and transgression. We are pleased to include a highly diverse group of articles in terms of the types of iconic objects addressed as this diversity serves to show the broad reach and potential of the discipline of cultural iconography.

The first portion of contributions in this issue all approach the topic of cultural iconicity through iconic objects and to an extent with analytical perspectives that do indeed broaden the field of cultural iconicity and take it further than the investigation of iconic human figures – fictional or real – which are at the center of the articles in the second portion of our issue.

The first analytical article is “Deep England” by Jørger Riber Christensen. His iconic object is an abstract concept related to a specific place, i.e. England. He explores the concept of ‘Deep England’ – an icon that arose during the Second World War – as a unifying concept of everything English. This icon, however, has deep historical roots, and its significance is not only patriotic, but also a reaction to modernity. The icon is materialized in a fictitious southern, rural and pastoral England with close-knit communities centered on the village green. Through a number of analytical samples Christensen explores the cultural meaning of the icon in the light of the theories of Svetlana Boym (nostalgia), Marc Augé (places), Angus Calder (cultural history) and Paul Kingsnorth (sociology). Based on analyses of these samples the article finally suggests a cultural, semiotic definition of icons.

In “Affective practice in the icon-city. Ownership, authenticity and fictionalization of urban space” Anna Klara Bom also addresses a ‘place-object’ as she introduces the concept of icon-city. She defines icon-city as a city where a pervasive narrative about an iconic event or figure is intentionally and explicitly attached to an urban space – an action that supplies the city with symbolic meaning because it is

staged and experienced as the city of the specific icon. In her article the focus of attention is on an icon-city where the iconicity is attached to a historical person, namely the author Hans Christian Andersen and his city of birth, Odense. Bom presents the concept icon-

city as a setting for glocal heritage tourism and posits it as an experience-scape where people represent themselves through the connection between the icon and the urban space. Methodologically, the discourse analytical concept 'affective practice' is put to use in as a sensitizing concept in an analysis of the inauguration of the itinerary "Hans Christian Andersen's Odense". In the analysis, three significant themes are identified as pivotal research themes: Ownership, authenticity and fictionalization of urban space.

In "Circus days. The 1990s as an iconic period of time for Swedish Internet entrepreneurs" Lisa Wiklund addresses not a specific place, but a time-space conjunction, through providing an important framework for the making of a space in Michel de Certeau's sense of the word. Her article is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out on behalf of a research project about the Swedish startup/internet community. Wiklund suggests that the 1990s can be seen as an iconic period of time for the Swedish Internet scene. It is argued that mental associations and imaginations associated with the 1990s are still relevant for the intellectual construction of the present-day Internet scene. The article presents recurring themes from the interviews with the informants, highlighted as examples of important stories about the 1990s that are active in constructing the framework for the organization of later experiences.

Staying within the realm of the Internet Iben Bredahl Jessen takes us on a journey of exploration of an iconic brand logo in her article "Variations of a brand logo. Google's doodles". Provisional changes of the well-known Google logo have been a recurring phenomenon on the front page of the search engine since 1998. Google calls them "doodles". The doodles are variations of the Google logo that celebrate famous individuals or cultural events, but the doodles also point to the iconic status of the Google logo as a locus of creativity and reinterpretation. The article explores the iconic status of the Google logo and on the basis of a multimodal typographic analysis of a sample of Google's doodles from 1998 to 2013, Bredahl Jessen identifies different types of relations between the well-known

Google letters and the new graphic features. The article examines how these relations produce and communicate brand iconicity, and how this iconicity has developed from a typographic perspective.

Moving from the Internet to lifestyle magazines, Stinne Gunder Strøm Kroager's article "Den androgynne figur som ikon (modefotografi). Om *Euromans* brug af ikonografiske forlæg i modereportagen" takes as its topic fashion photography and particularly the notion of androgyny in relation to cultural iconicity. Kroager argues that lifestyle magazines not just communicate consumer-oriented fashion and lifestyle in the fashion editorial, but often also functions as a tool for the magazine to orchestrate its cultural identity, which can be perceived as the magazine's work of art. As an autonomous work of art it involves the reader by a vast use of iconic references that draw on a comprehensive variety of historical, literary, cultural as well as artistic icons, symbols and representations. These are staged delicately, in an ironical and aesthetic act of sexualization, and they function as visual appetizers as well as challenges of decoding for the reader. Through analyses of selected fashion photographs from a fashion editorial from the Danish lifestyle magazine for men, *Euroman*, this article argues that the use of iconic representations mirrors the reader and his intellectual competence.

From here we move on to two articles, which in term of topic may be said to broaden the scope of the study of cultural iconicity while zooming in on micro-iconic objects and practices. In his article "The Iconic Microphone. Insight and Audibility: Iconic Sound in Media" Jos Mulder enters the area of sound studies, as he takes as his topic both the visuality and the aurality of the microphone. Mulder discusses the iconicity of the microphone both as a physical object, but also as a transducer and shaper of a distinctive mediatized sound. Different facets of iconicity are examined in his article in order to tease out the multiple meanings and usages of this ubiquitous artifact. In addition to the physical object, whether hidden or highlighted, used as a prop or as a crutch, common microphone usages since the early days of radio have resulted in an iconic mediatized sound, which has realigned the way we experience the spoken word and the musical voice, Mulder argues.

Moving from the realm of sound effects to the realm of visual temporal effects, Steen Christiansen, in "Bullet-Time. A Temporal Icon", investigates *The Matrix's* use of 'bullet time', the extreme slowing

down of the cinematic image, which instantly became iconic for action cinema and has almost become as recognizable as Hitchcock's famous dolly zoom in *Vertigo*. Circulated so much as to almost render the effect meaningless, this article proposes the question of what purpose, in a time of incessant acceleration, the slowing down of time could have and why it has become so iconic. Christiansen argues that bullet time in action films is, paradoxically, an intensification of speed, a different but related way of making movement felt. Although difficult to delimit, speed and its felt sensations are central concerns for contemporary culture. These intensifications of moments are ways not only to express narrative momentum but also to provide distinct pay-offs, durations of pure sensation and astonishment. Time is tamed in bullet time. Rather than the transcendent desire of slow cinema, we find a kinesthetic desire in cultural acceleration, a desire that is attenuated in contemporary action films and their use of bullet time.

Compared to the somewhat intangible object/practices of cultural icons addressed in the articles presented above, we are continuing now to three articles each concerned with fictional figures: action-adventure game characters, the figure of the zombie, and the circus spectacle, respectively.

In his article "An Animated Adoration. The Folk Art of Japanese Gamers" Dale K. Andrews argues that consumers of manga (comics), anime (cartoons), and video games increasingly search for alternative ways to forge a connection with their favorite characters. In Japan, many of the actual places used in such media as models for background scenery have within recent years become popular as tourist destinations. In an effort to connect with the characters from the action-adventure game *Sengoku Basara*, female gamers have begun to gather at a shrine dedicated to Japan's war dead. At the shrine they choose to express their adoration for the game characters by drawing comic illustrations on votive prayer tablets. Based on a field survey of the votive prayer tablets found on display at the shrine, Andrews argues that through the production of folk art, i.e. religious icons, fans engage with the game characters in a personal and spiritual manner, while simultaneously creating communal bonds with other fans.

In "The Icon of the Zombie Mob" Jørgen Riber Christensen puts this research question forward: "In the film *World War Z* (Marc For-

ster, 2013) not only the iconology of the zombie has changed, also its iconography is new. How does this double alteration of the zombie influence its iconic significance?" Christensen proposes a hypothetical answer to this question based on an investigation of the locations of the film, including the climactic battle scene with zombies in Moscow's Red Square, which was dropped from the final cut. This answer is contextualized in a description of the relatively short cultural history of the zombie with its most recent manifestation in this film. The article sees this zombie manifestation as a mob, a new kind of magnification monster that has entered the global body politic. This shows the zombie as an icon of fear of globalization which is a new twist on the cultural critique of mass society as expressed in for instance George Romero's zombie film trilogy. If the zombie has become the mob, then a reciprocal question remains. Why has the mob been depicted as zombies in *World War Z*? Here a historical contextualization can provide an answer, and the article connects the historical role of crowds and mobs in the world of politics, including the so-called "Year of the crowd", 1989 to contemporary media iconography of mobs in especially Middle Eastern politics. Finally, the article connects the double nature of a cultural icon as both a popular and a hegemonic tool to the historically dualistic conception of mobs.

In "Circus, Sexuality and the Catholic Imagination in Jordan's *The Miracle* [1991] and Heaney's 'Wheels Within Wheels' [1991]" Ellie Lavan explores how Young male protagonists in Neil Jordan's *The Miracle* [1991] and Seamus Heaney's 'Wheels Within Wheels' [*Seeing Things*, 1991] gain sexual experience and excitement from circus spectacle. Lavan highlights how Jordan's film confronts the taboo of an incestuous relationship between a starlet mother and her abandoned son through circus scenes, and in comparison how Heaney's poem deals with the process of sexual maturity from onanism to shared pleasure through similar circus imagery. She compares these two texts and questions how it is that the circus seems to speak so eloquently of juvenile sexuality. Further, Lavan connects sexuality as rendered in these circus stories with the Irish Catholic imagination, considering the function of the religious icon in Jordan's film, and the tension between past and present selves that is conceived in Heaney's poem in religious terms.

This concludes our first section of articles centered on somewhat abstract and untraditional iconic objects in the study of cultural iconicity. The next section contains the more traditional, yet certainly not less interesting or relevant, contributions addressing real human icons.

Opening this section is Helle Kannik Haastrup with “Hollywood Icons. Contemporary Film Stars in Celebrity Genres”. Haastrup’s article is an analysis of how Hollywood stars are represented in three central celebrity genres – the fashion magazine interview, the endorsement advertisement and the appearance of the red carpet live broadcast. In contrast to recent research in celebrity culture this is an investigation of how specific media texts articulate key concepts central to an understanding of contemporary celebrity culture, such as the star as both ordinary and extraordinary, the star as resource and the notion of intimacy at a distance. Thus the article offers a useful framework for analysis of traditional celebrity genres and how Hollywood icons - in this context exemplified by Benedict Cumberbatch and Lupita Nyong’o - are represented.

Also focusing on the iconicity of the Hollywood star, Penny Spirou focuses on a single transgressive Hollywood icon in her article “He’s Still Here. Joaquin Phoenix as Transgressive Hollywood Star”. On 11 February 2009, Joaquin Phoenix announced that he would be retiring from acting to pursue his ambition of becoming a hip hop musician. One year later, ‘documentary’ feature film *I’m Still Here* was theatrically released, chronicling the life of Phoenix that followed the announcement of his retirement. A week into its release in the US, director Casey Affleck confessed to *The New York Times* (Cieply 2010) that the film was in fact a mockumentary. *I’m Still Here* is Affleck’s (and Phoenix’s) statement film, inviting the audience to reflect on their own contribution to celebrity culture. The film draws attention to both the star and the fan and their joint contribution in developing the myth of the Hollywood star. However, this paper argues, it primarily shows Phoenix’s transition from star to celebrity. This case is framed by the scholarly study of stars, iconology and celebrity, and argues that the series of media events created by Phoenix and Affleck provide a commentary on the contemporary notion of Hollywood stardom.

From the Hollywood stars of today the next article takes us back in time to the 1920s. In “Josephine Baker’s Image, Identity & Iconic-

ity” Gary L. Lampley investigates Harlem Jazz icon Josephine Baker from her arrival in Paris in the summer of 1925, during the height of France’s obsession with American jazz music and all things exotic. Immediately after her famous semi-nude banana-clad performance on October 2, 1925, Baker appeared in a jazz club wearing an ice-blue dress, cut on the bias, which had been selected for her by a Paris design house. This glamorous side of Baker quickly dispelled the notion of her as primitive, and Baker quickly became a woman others wanted to copy. In his article Lampley maps the huge influence of Josephine Baker, who symbolized the beauty and vitality of African American culture during this time. Baker influenced architecture, urban and interior design, fashion, sculpture, graphic arts, painting and photography, and this influence establishes her as one of the most famous symbols of the jazz age, the first African American superstar and a universal icon.

Turning from performance culture to sports with Nicolás Llano Linares’s article “Your blood is our blood. The metaphorical extensions of ‘Lucho’ Herrera’s glory” on an iconic Columbian cyclist. On July 12 of 1985 at Saint-Étienne, France, Luis Alberto ‘Lucho’ Herrera, the first Colombian cyclist to have won a Tour de France stage (1984), became an international hero and a national martyr. Not only did the image of Herrera’s bloodied face staring at the horizon after winning the 14th stage acquire cult status within cycling circles around the world, it also established a subtle, yet passionate, connection between the figure, his performance, and Colombian reality. Linares argues that Herrera’s image worked as a metaphorical extension that stimulated the association between Herrera’s martyred image and the collective struggle people had to go through on a daily basis, accentuating the strongly Catholic iconographic dimension attached to popular sport practices in Colombia (faith, endurance, and suffering). Using applied elements of Charles S. Peirce’s semiotic apparatus, this article analyzes three symbolic elements embedded in Herrera’s image – blood, struggle, and redemption – to discuss the photograph’s power to resonate with the average Colombian at a time when narcotics terrorism ruled most of the territory and the escalation of insurgency and paramilitary violence were daily occurrences.

In “The Iconicity of an ‘Immigrant Writer’. Jonas Hassen Khemiri and Yahya Hassan” Natia Gokieli asks: “What do Jonas Hassen

Khemiri from Sweden and Yahya Hassan from Denmark have in common? Besides the visual commonalities – they both have a non-white physical appearance – they share an outstanding commercial and critical success. Through examples of these young, highly hyped bestselling authors, this article aims at discussing the iconic function of the ‘immigrant writer’s’ authentic body in the public discourse on ‘national’ and ‘immigrant’ identities. The emphasis lies on the marketability of an ‘immigrant writer’, which derives its commercial value from the iconicity based on ethnic visibility, recognizability and exemplarity. Gokieli draws a connection between the existing fixed iconography of an ‘immigrant’ in the mass media and the visual ethnicized representations of Khemiri and Hassan in the daily press and puts their literary performance into a socio-political context. Her article considers their popular author-images as objectified icons of hegemonic normative discourses on national culture, while it simultaneously understands their subversive literary and extra-textual renegotiations of national self-imagery as iconoclasm of traditional order of ‘Swedishness’ resp. ‘Danishness’.

Taking the connection of cultural iconicity and politics even further than in the three previous articles, Erja Simuna discusses hunger strikers as cultural icons in her article “The Northern Irish hunger strikers as cultural icons”. Simuna points out that fasting is a non-violent way of communicating a message or achieving a goal. It is a process that includes and reveals poignant cultural values, and can be regarded as a symbolic gesture. It is also a phenomenon recognized by many cultures. As the nature of this recognition can vary between different cultures, wider cross-cultural aspects of iconicity can be reached. Specifically this article examines the 1981 Northern Irish hunger strike to find out what iconic attributes are connected with the hunger strikers. A special focus is given to the role of international news media as an intensifier of iconicity.

The “ultimate political figure” of the 20th century, Adolph Hitler, is the topic of Mirjam Gebauer’s article “The Pop-Icon Hitler as a Trope of Critical Reflection on Media Society. The World’s Most Recognisable Face”. Gebauer argues that countless representations in different media and genres make Hitler one of the most productive icons on a global scale. The analysis of this icon seems of fundamental theoretical interest as its original semantics as the embodiment of evil challenges common notions of icon work between collaborative

iconolatry, on the one hand, and adversarial iconoclasm, on the other. However, the range of different significances to be found in contemporary Hitler representations suggests that the icon serves to work through issues of the respective context in which it is used. Gebauer argues that, interestingly, especially representations claiming to do justice to history and to the historical person Hitler might be problematized and seen as part of a “remembrance industry”, while pop-cultural, often humorous representations of the icon establish a critical meta-level allowing audiences to reflect on certain phenomena in contemporary media society.

Ending this issue on cultural iconicity is Bent Sørensen’s article “Images of Freud. Icon Work” about the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. Sørensen points out that not many cultural critics or other academic figures become so well known in the general public that one can argue that their physical image (whether based on photographs, films, portraits and caricatures) has become iconic, along with a wide-spread dissemination of their intellectual ideas. This however is undoubtedly the case with Freud, whose image is still immediately recognizable to a majority of the population of at least Europe and North America. Freud’s ideas (albeit in popularized form) also travel with ease in current public discourses, ranging from cartoons, jokes and other forms of comedy to serious essays, fictions and films. This is, Sørensen argues, a phenomenon, which reflects the extent to which ‘Freudian’ ideas are incorporated in the dominant Western middle-class culture of the early 21st century, and he shows multiple examples of the practice of collaborative and adversarial, recuperative and *détournée* icon work on Freud’s image.

As a concluding remark in this introductory article it should be pointed out that it has – besides from bringing forth some interesting analytical work and bringing attention to the topic of cultural iconicity – also been our hope to have our conceptual work here brought to the test, expanded upon, potentially criticized and entered into dialogue with. This has to some extent indeed happened – explicitly as well as implicitly – through the more or less elaborated theoretical reflections and discussions within the contributing articles. We hope the enclosed articles will inspire further work by scholars in this emerging field.

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Notes

- 1 <http://www.ageofartists.org/make-space-for-playing-interview-with-tim-leberecht-part-1/>
- 2 See for example: <http://www.imagologica.eu/leerssen>
- 3 The term 'iconosphere' was introduced by Polish architecture critic Jan Bialostocki in an unpublished series of lectures. Anthony Johnson gives the following explanation of the term's potential use in the discipline of imagology and by extension in cultural text studies pertaining to icon-work and the decoding of cultural iconology in Johnson, 2005: "[T]he iconosphere connotes [...] a mapped world of possibilities from a particular period which has been realized in material form: whether it be in paper, parchment, wood, silk, canvas, clay, stone, plastic, film, or even digitized and encrypted in binary code. Shored up against the irrecoverable horizons of knowledge which were available to past minds, the iconosphere of a period consists of the traces that have survived, in whatever form, from individuals of that passing world." (Johnson, 2005: 52-53).