Cultural Icons: A Case Study Analysis of their Formation and Reception

by

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I declare that while registered as a candidate for the research degree, I have not been a registered candidate or enrolled student for another award of the University or other academic or professional institution

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the contested and poorly defined subject area of cultural iconicity. Careful consideration of three specific uses of the term - in the popular media, as a new way of articulating national identity, and in academic publications - reveals the extent to which the term is currently poorly comprehended and misapplied. The research proposes the introduction of tighter defining parameters to cultural iconography and presents an original definition against existing work in the field.

The main aim, therefore, is straightforward; to attempt to answer the general question, what are cultural icons? To meet this end a definition of iconicity will be proposed consisting of four inter-connected conditions comprising, a) distinctness of image, b) durability of image, c) reproducibility of image and d) the tragic-dramatic narrative inherent in the image. The decision to implement such a definition is supported by a range of theoretical influences, from the ideas on perception developed by the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, to recent work on the dramatic impact of tele-visual images. The philosophical influence applies the idea that human perception is strongly drawn towards tragic-dramatic forms - the tragic-dramatic narrative of cultural icons being an essential component of the definition - while new research into how images impact on common memory supports this application.

The method adopted attacks the central question in three ways. Firstly, by applying throughout the work an original and practical working definition of cultural iconicity. Secondly, by differentiating the properties of primary cultural icons from other important cultural symbols (as in, for example, comparing cultural icons to photographic iconography and non-image based cultural myths). Third, a series of in-depth case studies applying the definition to real examples, which will be the crux of the project and, if successful, may prove not only an original contribution to knowledge in

this new and exciting area of research, but should also appeal to a wider, non-academic readership.

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Personal Note to the Introduction

The World as Will and Representation by the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), in my understanding of it, contains two propositions regarding the nature of human thought and existence. The first is that human knowledge is conditioned by our unique, human perceptual apparatus, and that this comes not in the form of a 'blank canvas', but with a very effective Kantian software program - space, time, and causality - allowing all of us to order the information that floods our senses from the beginning of life. The second is that, although knowledge of a physical/empirical 'reality' is always subject to human perspective, there is a non-phenomenal - a noumenal - presence outside of our knowledge that can never be properly known or even adequately described but can, possibly, be felt just through simply being.

At around the time I was becoming familiar with Schopenhauer's philosophy I was to trying to make sense of what, at face value, seemed a very straightforward question, the one that became central to the following academic thesis; what is a cultural icon? Ask people the question - which I have done countless times during the research - and the response generally presents some good, and some not so good examples, but what measure exists to evaluate such opinions? Initial research revealed that, although the term was profligately utilised in the popular media, and often used without formal definition in academic publications, and even promoted strongly in a government-sponsored project, there was no firm basis available to assess the viability of the respective iconic candidates. There was, however, a pattern of responses, together with some implicit assumptions, that confirmed the idea that there are a number of individuals (and some objects and buildings) that are regularly described as cultural icons, the ones, for instance, that seem to be ever-present in collective memory such as, for example, Elvis Presley, John Lennon, Lady Diana Spencer, Marilyn Monroe and

Che Guevara. Putting the Schopenhauerian influence to use as a means to inform an analysis of this intriguing problem seemed to help in the following ways.

Schopenhauer presents the idea that all human knowledge must have ascertainable grounded reasons for being, and that all of its formations relate specifically to our unique perceiving minds. It became evident from this that to think of images - and part of my definition claims that cultural icons are always images - in any other way than as direct productions of human sensibility is misleading. In this understanding of Schopenhauerian idealism, image meaning relates directly to how human beings perceive the world and, as Schopenhauer consistently stresses, image representations often reflect the tragic nature of life itself. All existence, for Schopenhauer, is driven by a blind, relentless willing that has no meaning other than an overwhelming desire to exist. If it is accepted that images are a-priori conditioned by perception, and that the base of this perception is tragic in the sense of its valueless, relentless willing, it seemed worthwhile to try to apply this thought to the manner in which cultural icons are formed. From this came the essential component of the definition; that cultural icons contain a tragic, or at least a highly dramatic, human narrative. The connection between Schopenhauer and a tragic view of life, especially as it relates to cultural phenomena, is well explained by Ulrich Pothast:

> Schopenhauer characterizes the truly philosophical way of life in this world with referring to the same knowledge and the same attitudes which are induced by general tragedy. Therefore, one can say that in Schopenhauer's theory of tragedy, suffering and death of the leading characters become the inspiring genius of a philosophical world view in the spectators. The tragic action enables them to renounce their normal affirmation of the Will-to-live and to temporarily find a new attitude of freedom and calmness. (71)

Connecting the tragic basis of human life with a product of human perception - cultural icons - has not been easy to explain in a manner that avoids diversions into complex philosophical argumentation, and although much ground has been covered and many obstacles confronted, it has to be recognised that this is the first attempt to look at cultural iconicity in this way. However, as I began this research project with the aim of clarifying what the term 'cultural icon' means, I believe I have covered more ground, and opened up more avenues for further research, than any comparable work in this field that I am aware of, and a large debt here is owed to the insights into human life (especially its tragic bearing) provided by Arthur Schopenhauer.

People will always make cultural icons, we always have done. Icons are phenomena that we can see (distinct images) that last with us in collective memory (durability and reproducibility) and they have natural meaning reflecting who we are as human beings. Modern-day primary cultural icons also have great stories to tell, enacting narratives and revealing uncomplicated meanings that are intrinsically formed into iconic images; themes with universal, timeless, appeal such as, sex, rebellion, defiance, murder, intrigue, and love. Schopenhauer's philosophy offers no redemption for the human condition other than to suggest that, through art, we can - for a fleeting moment - forget that we are driven by a blind will just to exist. My belief is that genuine cultural icons are rare instances of public art in this precise sense, a belief that has been nurtured and strengthened by the dramatic narratives I have had the pleasure to research.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: WHAT ARE CULTURAL ICONS?

This introduction will show how evasive the term 'cultural icon' is in its current usage. It will stress the need to introduce tighter defining terminology in order to reflect the importance of what is a fundamentally intrinsic aspect of cultural life. My four-point definition is proposed as a means by which this term can be seen as a category that identifies and separates highly significant retained images. I refer to these images as 'primary cultural icons', and the method I employ to argue for their separation from the mass of 'of the moment' imagery, has produced significant findings - in the form of a range of case studies - confirming that cultural icons contain meaning that reflects the deeply held desires and concerns of receptive communities world-wide and over time.

In current usage the term 'cultural icon' is, at best, confused in general use. In a draft edition of February 2001 the Oxford English Dictionary attempts to define cultural icon as, "a person or thing regarded as a representative symbol, esp. of a culture or movement; a person, institution, etc., considered worthy of admiration or respect. Freq. with modifying word" (oed.com, accessed 11 October 2010). In effect, although superficially straightforward, this definition offers little ground to delimit iconicity, and in addition, strengthens the idea that, given sufficient hyperbole anything can be iconic, an idea that is closely examined and strongly challenged in Chapter 2. The four-point definition that I propose brings stricter parameters for understanding cultural iconicity than is currently available and is as follows:

1)   Cultural icons are always images.

2)   These images are distinct, durable, and reproducible.

3)   They reside in the collective memory of large groups of people.

4)   Cultural icons reveal discernible tragic-dramatic narratives that are formed and received by communities particularly receptive to the development of iconic meaning.

This alternative definition, while not claiming to be an all-encompassing theory of cultural iconicity has, nevertheless, proved effective in a number of applications, some of which are explored in the case study chapters. Further clarification, however, needs to be made as to what is meant by terms such as 'distinct imagery', 'collective memory', 'tragic-dramatic narrative', and 'receptive communities'. This is important as I regard these factors as centrally important to the differentiation and taxonomy of cultural icons.

Connecting the idea of tragic-dramatic narratives to the formation and reception of cultural icons is informed by Schopenhauerian philosophy, especially in regard to the tragic nature of human perception. Although this relationship is explained in the personal note to this introduction, and at other points throughout the opening chapters, detailed knowledge of Schopenhauer's philosophy, or any other school of thought, should not be necessary in order to follow the main argument of the thesis; which is that distinct, durable, reproducible images are retained in collective memory following the formation and reception of natural (non-constructed) tragic-dramatic narratives.

Similarly, although the case studies themselves are detailed historical pieces; and concepts such as 'collective memory' and 'receptive communities' acknowledge the contribution of cognitive and social psychology, the study of cultural icons should rightly be placed within the newly developing disciplines of image theory and visual culture coming, as they do, with their own theoretical issues. Some of these issues, especially in relation to the semiotic analysis of cultural icons, have been covered by Keyan Tomaselli and David Scott in the introduction to *Cultural Icons* (2009) of which a full analysis is presented in Chapter 2. The rest of this introduction aims to position

the following work within image theory in general and, in particular, to prioritise human interest as a correlative to tragic-dramatic iconic narratives.

Reflection on the nature of images is ancient, possibly even timeless, and is intrinsic to what we are and what we do as human beings. From the earliest Palaeolithic cave paintings human cultures have sought to represent what they comprehend through the production of images. Modern societies, in one sense, can be defined by the apparatus, quantity, and sheer diversity of the images that they generate, so much so that the description 'tele-visual age' seems to be an appropriate reflection of our daily experience, and it is mainly to the modern-era that image studies encourages awareness of themes and issues concerning relevant forms of media, including film, television, photography, advertising, and the internet.

Current image theory is inextricably associated with related subject areas including, amongst others, power, class, ethnic and gender relations, cognition, and embodiment theory. As a major commentator on image/visual studies - W J T Mitchell - makes clear: "The tensions between visual and verbal are inseparable from struggles in cultural politics and political culture" (1995 3). The idea that studying images such as cultural icons may involve semiotic, material and psychological theories regarding their production and interpretation is one that is, in relation to semiotics at least, argued by Tomaselli and Scott in that, "semiotics is not just about the "meaning of any image or corpus of images" but about the way images are constructed and work within systems; it is also about the way they are interpreted" (14). Tomaselli and Scott continue this theme by suggesting that, "it follows that any political aspects of such a situation cannot readily be separated out from such a study" (16).

Although there will be a comparative appraisal of Tomaselli and Scott's understanding of cultural iconicity in Chapter 2, my line of argument - especially as it progresses in the case studies - purposefully seeks to avoid entanglement with such

issues. The reasons for this are threefold and are important to the research methodology.

Firstly, semiotics of cultural forms is a well-researched field with many important

contributions over several decades of intense academic debate (as Tomaselli and Scott

note) yet with a definite sense of the issues tending towards "theory of theory" or

"method of method" (6). While this approach is academically significant and has

produced important insights for image study in general, I feel that in-depth engagement

with such theories would distract from the general direction of the case study method

employed, which aims to show that primary iconic images are not consciously

constructed but are formed naturally through the interaction of receptive communities

and potential iconic phenomena. Secondly, as Chapter 2 shows, Tomaselli and Scott's

adoption of Peircian semiotics - in comparison to the applicability of my four-point

definition - clouds the central question as to what can be known generally about cultural

icons, exactly the opposite of the overall aim of this research. From this, and thirdly,

postmodern semiotic interpretations can sometimes be highly intricate which, in turn,

can lead to 'free-play' and the reluctance to anchor meaning to signs. This is probably

the source of negativity in Mitchell's thinking when he remarks that he is likely, "to find

a fear of imagery lurking beneath every theory of imagery" (2002 169), or the even

dourer comment on his own (1995) work on picture theory as being, "a relentlessly

negative book" (6).

My proposal that specific tragic-dramatic narratives produce fixed meaning

leading to distinct iconic imagery is a positive step, and the case studies present an

accessible and broad model of cultural iconicity in general. Although, in making this

claim, I acknowledge that adopting a humanistic methodology cannot fully account for

all of the factors leading to the formation of cultural icons, especially with regard to

power relations and media involvement. In this sense my methodology, together with

certain semiotic readings, may work as complementary studies, informing the development of understanding in this new and important research area.

A central assumption of the research methodology is that there are a number of iconic forms in existing collective memory that can be thought of as 'paradigm' or 'primary' examples, Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe or Che Guevara, for example. If this is accepted then it should be evident that the qualities inherent within these iconic forms - image distinctness, durability and reproducibility - are apparent independently to my definition, although identifying these qualities and using this as a template to assess other potential iconic forms is, nevertheless, an original step. Another term used frequently throughout the case studies is 'receptive community' meaning the groups of individuals actively involved in the development of the tragic-dramatic iconic narrative, and this does need further explanation.

Central to my claim that receptive communities play an important part in the formation and reception of cultural icons, is the natural inter-relationship between the relevant communities and the icons that are subsequently formed. Receptivity to the tragic-dramatic narratives of iconic phenomena, together with retaining the distinct imagery in collective memory is argued as an integrative relationship, working naturally in the absence of constructed, mediatised involvement. Examples of this naturalised dramatic narrative are at the heart of the four case studies, especially so in the Cavern community of The Beatles' early career, and the Paris students of 1968 who adopted the 'heroic guerrilla' myth of the Guevara icon. In order to explain better the process of iconic formation I use the term 'emolliate' to describe how some of the harsher biographical details (of the potential iconic form), or the aspects that do not seem to 'fit' the developing narrative meaning, are altered (in the process of iconic formation) in

order for the image/meaning to be consistent with the needs of the receptive communities.

Another important element in clarifying how the term receptive community is understood is the idea that the narrative relationship between community and icon focuses on broad human themes. George Lipsitz, for instance, identifies a relationship between perennial human themes and specific cultural productions:

> As my students and I used popular texts from the past to gain insight into the complex stories defining our present identities, we found terrains of conflict and struggle in the most unexpected places and allies in the most improbable individuals. Not because these films, songs and shows reflected our lives directly, but rather, because they reflected the core contradictions of our lives indirectly enough to make discussion of them bearable…It was not that any of the texts told our stories directly; rather they enabled us to see the resemblances between our own stories and those of others. (xiv)

In a similar manner the meaning inherent in primary culturally iconic images, I argue, offers accessible human interest narratives in specific contexts. Here the idea is that singular dramatic events - in specific circumstances - can catalyse the receptivity of communities to fundamental human narrative meaning which is then fixed within a distinct image.

The sudden death of Diana, Princess of Wales, on 31 August 1997 initiated a seismic display of public grief both in the UK and worldwide, offering exactly the kind of tragic-dramatic narrative formation essential to primary culturally iconic figures. Examples like Diana's, justify the defining terminology of image distinctness, durability and reproducibility, especially in the nature of their broad tragic-dramatic human narrative themes. A fuller exposition of the concept of distinctness will become clearer

as the work unfolds as in, for instance, the application of the definition to the *Icons of England* project in Chapter 2. With regard to durability the proposal is that an iconic image should be able to transcend at least a generation in order for it to be considered differently from 'of the moment' celebrity phenomena. As for what is meant by the related idea of iconic reproducibility I argue that the name-prompt and the iconic image should be cross-referential, so that the name, for example, Che Guevara, should initiate a distinct image and vice-versa. All of the terms contained in the four point definition will be further developed in the case studies and, in particular, the analysis of photojournalistic icons in Chapter 3 will attempt to show how these terms can be practically applied. In Diana's example the narrative themes are not difficult to uncover - violent death of a young, beautiful woman; emotionless marriage to an unfaithful prince; the motherless young sons, and so on. Such themes are the fabric of primary cultural icons, and the enactment of tragic events such as Diana's death - through the media on a global scale - creates the conditions for iconic reception in communities worldwide.

As a reading of how cultural icons are formed, prioritising a heightened sense of receptivity to naturalised tragic-dramatic events seems to lie well with the evidence presented in the case studies, especially the idea that such events become fixed in collective memory. As inter-related concepts, the relationship between receptive communities and collective memory, when applied to cultural iconography, focuses attention onto themes with transparent human meaning, and this idea is particularly relevant when I use the term 'natural narrative'. The importance of collective memory in the construction of cultural space is noted by Barbara Misztal who observes that: "Collective memory is not only what people really remember through their own experience, it also incorporates the constructed past which is constitutive of the collectivity." (26). In terms of the evidence contained in the case studies the power of

collective memory, in some instances, can be seen to retrospectively embellish or emolliate the manner in which aspects of the development of the iconic form is perceived. In respect to collective memory and history Alon Confino draws a similar argument to the mythologizing of iconic phenomena in that, "contention that the past is constructed not as fact but as myth to serve the interest of a particular community may still sound radical to some, but it cannot (and should not) stupefy most historians" (1388).

One of the reasons for highlighting collective memory as an important factor in the formation and reception of cultural icons is to differentiate the status of primary iconic images from the mass of non-iconic image consumption prevalent in modern life. The proposal here is that interconnecting icon, receptive community and collective memory is an important step, not just in identifying primary cultural icons, but as a useful method in the analysis of iconicity generally, even if this includes a negative evaluation of non-iconic image forms. The prioritisation of cultural memory as an important feature of social development, and even of cultural evolution through the development of community memory, is an idea promoted and developed by Jan Assman and John Czaplicka:

> The specific character that a person derives from belonging to a distinct society and culture is not seen to maintain itself for generations as a result of phylogenetic evolution, but rather as a result of socialization and customs. The "survival of the type" in the sense of a cultural pseudo-species is a function of the cultural memory (125-6)

Assman and Czaplicka refine their concept of cultural memory by differentiating it firstly from scientific memory - meaning knowledge assimilated through empirical traditions - and, secondly, from the 'everyday memory' or 'communicative' memory

that facilitates daily discourse - jokes, gossip, train rides, retail exchanges, to name a few of many. Leaving these two forms of memory aside there remains, for Assman and Czaplicka, "objectivized culture", an area of human knowledge where, "almost everything changes" and which is structured by tangible cultural forms, "texts, images, rites, buildings, monuments, cities, or even landscapes" (128). The move from biological/genetic evidence charting subtle differences in pan-historical human groups (tribes and races) to emphasising cultural traditions as a foundation of collective memory, draws close to the idea I promote throughout the thesis regarding the perceptual receptivity of receptive communities to important iconic phenomena, especially the fixed meaning contained in the image form; "cultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time. These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation" (129).

Assman and Czaplicka go on to sub-categorise the manner in which cultural memory functions as an essential feature of social organization. Firstly, in its capacity to create and maintain identity in that it "derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity". Secondly, in the effectiveness of an "objectivized memory" in recreating a cultural "past". Third the "objectivation or crystallization of communicated meaning and collectively shared knowledge" (130) through the formation of different medium, such as oral traditions, images and written text. Fourth, formal organisation and "specialized practice"; and fifth, obligation from the respective members of the group to maintain cultural memory (131).

Many of these ideas correlate to the manner in which cultural icons are formed and received, especially the prioritisation of specific cultural images in collective memory which, if accepted, establishes primary iconic phenomena, along my line of

argument, as fundamentally important in cultural life. Assman and Czaplicka's claim that objectified products of cultural tradition - crucially distinct from 'everyday' memory and paradigm scientific knowledge - empower communities with a sense of perceptual identity is similar to the way I interpret the formation and reception of primary cultural icons.

This also helps to explain the process by which some cultural icons transcend sub-cultural collective memory and, subsequently, become iconic to larger communities, and the fifth point of Assman and Czaplicka's definition (cultural obligation) fits this aspect of my thesis well. Hells Angels, for instance, offer distinctly iconic imagery that has provenance within their specific sub-cultures yet, for fairly obvious reasons, fails to gain commitment from mainstream cultures, regardless of residual Hells Angels imagery residing in wider collective memory (a full analysis of Hells Angels iconicity is available as a supplementary case study analysis). The importance and relevance of sub-cultures to the wider question of cultural iconicity should not be understated and is given consideration both in the introductory chapters and, especially, in the examination of the formation of primary cultural icons throughout the case studies.

The seven case studies in Chapters 4-7 reveal discernible cultural narratives displaying strong connections between receptive communities and potential iconic forms often leading to the kind of "fixed" meaning in the relevant imagery that Assman and Czaplicka point to in their understanding of "objectivized" cultural products. As this applies to sub-cultural iconography the case studies show that, in exceptional instances, a heightened receptivity to discernable tragic-dramatic narratives produces - in a similar manner to Assman's and Czaplicka's cultural "obligation" - an affiliation to image/meaning allowing the iconic form to transcend to wider communities, facilitating in the process 'primary' iconic status.

Some sub-cultural image forms, however, do offer significant appeal to wider groups of people outside of the communities that originally initiate the relevant iconic forms, and this will be fully recognised and explored throughout the studies. If this feature of cultural iconicity is tenable then the scope for further research is extensive, particularly in the field of sub-cultures just mentioned. In this respect the remit of my argument in this work is limited to the proposition that very seldom do sub-cultural phenomena possess sufficient universal meaning to transcend the paradigms of their formative cultures; and therefore, in the instances that they do, the process often produces iconic forms with fixed, ascertainable, meaning.

The following section will draw together some of the ideas and themes previously discussed by considering the narrative relationship between receptive communities and potential iconic forms. The main aim in doing this is to further support the idea that it is possible to view the formation of cultural icons as naturalised products of object (cultural icon) and subject (receptive community) a position that, in a world of highly advanced media communication (and theories relating to it), can seem particularly contestable, as Andreas Huyssen suggests:

> Whatever the social and political causes of the memory boom may have been, one thing is certain: We cannot discuss personal, generational, or public memory separate from the enormous influence of the new media as carriers of all forms of memory...There is no pure space outside of commodity culture, however much we may desire such a space. (2000 28)

My line of argument, together with the examples contained in the case studies show that, not only is it possible to consider the formation and reception of cultural icons as being minimally affected (in their initial formation) by media influences, but also that structural ideas such as "commodity culture" are less relevant to the formation

of cultural icons than human interest. As previously stated this prioritises the importance of cultural iconicity as a relatively new subject area without necessitating a confrontation with alternative approaches, notably semiotics. In staking the claim for naturalised narratives this does not extend to the idea that the formation of primary cultural icons should be thought of as in some way divorced from material information transmission, especially as singular tragic events are presented through television, newspapers, radio, or the internet. In the Guevara study, for instance, emphasis is given to the communities of young people in the late 1960s that experienced major socio-economic, political, cultural, and technological changes. What matters here is that a change of emphasis - from relatively complex post-modern theories, towards philosophically inspired human interest - can, and does, yield surprising results.

Stressing the relevance of human interest narratives with regard to icon study is not naively promoted and has specific theoretical support from idealist philosophy, especially the Schopenhauerian derived concept that human life has a fundamentally tragic bearing. From this position it is argued that the influence of ideas such as Huyssen's "new media", as they relate to cultural iconicity, are restricted to the transference of naturalised tragic-dramatic events to communities that can both decipher potential iconic meaning and, subsequently, fix this to an iconic form in collective memory. More simply, media and power relations, in this sense, play a minor role in comparison to the manner that receptive communities interact with and mythologize potential iconic phenomena.

Cultural icons can take many forms such as, objects, fictional characters, cartoons, and buildings. But in terms of narrative impact real people, given extraordinary conditions, are the ones most likely to attain primary iconic status. Personal experience narratives, related through the dramatic biography of the iconic image, or through a

singular tragic event, are the sources of meaning contained in distinct iconic phenomena, and this is firmly argued throughout. Clearly though there are many famous individuals with tragic-dramatic narratives that, nevertheless, fail to be termed iconic on the basis offered here. To overcome this difficulty, and by doing so informing the question of cultural iconicity, the case studies focus on fundamental relationships between iconic forms (usually real people) and the original receptive communities that participate in their formation. This is more evident in certain examples than in others: The Che Guevara icon, for example, offers a narrative origin that can be sourced to a particular place at a specific period in time, whereas the James Dean icon is interpreted as containing a culturally linear narrative, thoroughly impelled by American 'rebel' mythology not least of which includes the Jesse James cultural mythology. In all of the case studies the theme of fixed narrative meaning contained in singular imagery is very strong, and it is through the historical interpretation of such narratives that differentiation can be made between the distinct images containing this kind of meaning (primary cultural icons) from those that do not. Examples of these forms are, by their nature, extant in collective memory and are often sourced in the early death of the individual - Dean, Monroe, Kennedy, Lennon and Guevara, for example. Such cases are the archetypes on which my four conditions of cultural iconicity are based yet each one - and each of the case studies accordingly - displays similar yet different patterns of formation and reception.

I also present the idea that primary cultural icons are parsimonious in the sense of their meaning being limited to the kind of broad human interest themes indicated previously. What is meant by this is that the strong narrative meaning contained in primary iconic images is sufficient, not only to prove perceptually appealing to the originating receptive communities, but also proving potently significant to future generations. This is the idea of an iconic form being durable, the second condition of

my definition of culturally iconic images. A continuing theme of the research is that the formation of cultural icons involves unique relationships between icon and community resulting in the retention of a distinct image in collective memory. The meaning of the iconic form, in this sense, is often relatively straightforward to assess - Guevara/Rebel; Monroe/Sex; Beatles/Love - yet the process of iconic reception seems to restrict the production of the forms to a very limited number, in turn suggesting that the primary cultural icon satisfies a kind of conceptual niche in both the originating communities and future communities that perpetuate the form.

If primary cultural icons do satisfy or emolliate certain emotional needs (recalling the Schopenhauerian tragic view of existence) then what of other individual/objects that may, or may not, have equally durable imagery but are not considered here as primary icons? Take the 'rebel' cultural icon, for instance; other individuals from the period in which the major rebel cultural icons (Dean and Guevara) originate could be offered as candidates for the role, Marlon Brando being a good example. The response to this - following the arguments above - is to ask what original narrative evidence, outside of marketed celebrity, do alternative candidates offer, and is it possible to show that the narrative impetus is not already contained within an existing icon? In all of the case studies the evidence will confirm not only the uniqueness of the icon/community relationship, but also the profound and clear meaning evident in the respective iconic imagery.

Seen in this way the value of primary cultural icons as vessels for cultural meaning is immense, helping to explain, in part, why the term is employed as a gravitas aid with such profligacy in the popular media. Read any newspaper or magazine on any given day and it is possible you will encounter the term icon being applied to a specific individual or thing. Chapter 2 applies and compares the four conditions to three

examples of such usage in wider currency. The comparison examines employment of the term in the popular media, by a government sponsored agency, and in a range of recent academic publications. Applying the definition to the three areas chosen clearly shows that employment of the term is commonly utilised, at best, without a clear understanding of what it may mean and, at worst, as an ill-defined hyperbolic term leading to the charge that 'anything can be iconic', grossly understating, I believe, the importance of cultural iconicity as a subject area. Applying my definition to the three areas chosen demonstrates the benefits of adopting a more rigorous approach to the phenomenon of cultural iconicity while, at the same time, thoroughly undermining the claim that the term itself, through its profligate use, has become meaningless (Meades 2009).

Chapter 3 will develop the theoretical structure as it relates to the specific concepts involved in the four-point definition of cultural iconicity. Although some of these issues have been briefly considered in this introduction, the concepts of tragic narrative, collective memory, and receptive communities will be examined in greater depth and will be directly applied to imagery and cultural icons. Recent work in the field of tragic imagery (Greenberg, et al 1995; Newhagen and Reeves 1992; Mitzal 2003) will be offered as support for the claim that the tragic-dramatic narrative is crucial to the comprehension of how cultural icons are formed and received. The tragic-dramatic narrative theme will be further stressed with a close analysis of iconic photojournalism (Hariman and Lucaites 2007). All of the supporting evidence presented in this chapter will be carefully channelled in order to contain the focus specifically onto the nature of cultural icons as it is expressed in the case-study examples that follow.

In conjunction with Chapter 2, which presents the case for the viability of stricter defining parameters for cultural iconicity, Chapter 3 offers evidence that certain tragic-

dramatic images can have a profound influence on memory and perception, this is important as support for the philosophical basis of the tragic-dramatic narrative factor in my definition. The four case studies are self-contained pieces that offer original insights into very well-known iconic forms. Each of the studies starts with my central argument that primary cultural icons are distinct, durable, reproducible images that reside in the collective memories of large communities of people. Explaining how they attained this status is the purpose of the studies, revealing clear lines of similarity, many points of difference and interest, and some unexpected research discoveries.

While the studies require a fair degree of historical analysis they are not, in themselves, formal historical studies, although every effort has been made to ensure an acceptable scholarly standard for each piece. So, although the respective studies can be read as individual 'mini-theses', it is hoped that the combined effect of all four case studies, when viewed as an integral product, will produce an overall impression that will convince the reader of the viability of the interpretation of culturally iconic imagery argued throughout.

Chapter 4 looks at the manner in which two individuals in American cultural history - Jesse James and James Dean - can be generically assessed as, respectively, cultural myth and cultural icon. In this study the importance of terminology becomes immediately apparent, as does the viability of stating a clear definition of cultural iconicity. In one sense, as has been suggested previously, widely accepted cultural icons such as James Dean display by their ubiquity in collective memory the four elements of the definition. Dean's iconicity bolsters the prerequisites of image distinctness, durability and reproducibility, together with the meaning of the iconic form - rebel in this case - being fixed at the moment of the singular tragic event of his early death on 30 September 1955. Dean's position as a universal iconic symbol is also marked by a

willingness of receptive communities since his death to adopt the icon as an acceptable face (literally) of youthful rebellion.

His personal biography and relationship to receptive communities prior to his death, however, fail to display the depth of dramatic narrative connection that can be shown to exist in the formation of comparable iconic phenomena, as other examples will show. James Dean made few films and his status as a mid-ranking film celebrity may not have proved sufficient to form his image into a cultural icon without the event of his sudden death. It seems unlikely that Dean's level of fame at his death would have been the sole reason for his instant iconicity as, in itself, (in my framework for iconicity) fame does not equate directly to iconicity in the absence of an appropriate receptive community. For answers to these issues the chapter looks away from Dean's biography and, for the most part, looks away from the socio-cultural atmosphere of America in the mid to late 1950s. Alternatively, the questions that are posed are; why was American consciousness at the time so receptive to the image of this tragic young man? What need did it fulfil? What cultural icons existed prior to Dean's death that could be seen to 'fill' the rebel niche? The chapter presents the argument that Dean provided the image that America, together with burgeoning youth cultures throughout the world, yearned for, and that the dramatic narrative of the image was already evident in the extensive rebel mythology present in American cultural history. The mythology of Jesse James displayed all of the features required for the formation and reception of primary cultural iconicity - tragic-dramatic narrative, engaged receptive communities, and a well-publicised singular event - what the story of Jesse James failed to provide, however, was a single, distinct image that contained the fixed meaning of the iconic phenomenon, a condition fundamental to the form. From this position it is argued that the reception of the Dean icon represented the need for an image that encapsulated,

among others, the Jesse James rebel myth, and which to a significant degree explains the power and durability of Dean's cultural iconicity.

The importance of a singular tragic event fixing an iconic form in collective memory draws comparison to other theories relating to highly dramatic singular events, such as Barbie Zelizer's connection of collective memory to "critical incidents"(1992). In addition to confirming the importance of specific singular tragic events in the formation of icons I also suggest that the conditions for iconicity do not rely exclusively on such events. Chapter 5 argues that the dramatic narrative development of The Spitfire iconic form was both extensive and prolonged, involving transparent, dynamic, relationships between receptive communities and producing fixed iconic meaning, although arguing this point does not detract from the concentrated dramatic impact of the 'Battle of Britain'. To the present, The Spitfire image is hailed as national iconic form reflecting its (apparently) critical importance during a period in which national sovereignty was under the direst of threats. In this sense the iconic meaning of the Spitfire is as a saviour of a nation, whose absence most probably would have resulted in defeat by the Nazi war machine. An important research finding - one that applies in varying degrees to all of the studies conducted - is that the fixed meaning contained in iconic phenomena is sometimes at odds with the associated historical 'reality' or relevant individual biographies. This feature is well exposed in the examination of the Che Guevara icon and is also clearly evident in the formation of The Spitfire iconic symbol. The evidence presented in the latter example shows that the overwhelming force of the established iconic narrative is inconsistent with an array of historical conditions relating to the vulnerability of the United Kingdom during this period, to the extent that the formation of iconic meaning has strongly influenced the manner in which this period of history is commonly comprehended.

Chapter 6 considers the narrative relationship between two culturally iconic forms and the receptive communities that actively contributed to their formation. The emphasis here is on the naturalised connection between icon and community, the argument being that external agencies have comparatively less influence on iconic formation than the development of natural, discernible, dramatic narratives. The analyses of David Garrick (1717-1779) and The Beatles, although not a direct comparative study, provide evidence of the transition from performer/s to primary cultural icon/s, both examples occurring at unique moments in cultural history characterised by the heightened receptivity of the respective communities to such forms. For the former, Garrick's revolution of theatre practice, together with his innovative acting style, captivated the audiences of eighteenth century London to the extent that his image was retained through memorabilia long after his death. With regard to the argument that this feature of Garrick's iconicity confirms its retention in collective memory, evidence relating to the extensive reproduction of his image, such as the numerous portraits, suggests that his was an early example of the formation and reception of a primary cultural icon.

The Beatles study focuses on two important events in their very well-known and equally well-documented narrative. Although much of the evidence presented here may be familiar, the study will highlight the features bearing directly on the hypothesis that primary cultural icons develop through a tragic-dramatic narrative connection between object (potential icon) and subject (receptive community). Iconic forms contain discernible narrative meaning and, in the case of The Beatles, this meaning was fostered during the early years of their career through an intimate relationship with a highly receptive and distinctive 'Cavern community' in their home city of Liverpool. The sense in which 'community' replaces 'audience' in this context indicates the degree of iconic appeal during the period of their career prior to the influence of external agency,

in this case the management of Brian Epstein. Much has been made of the influence of marketing in the development of 'Beatlemania' (Inglis, ed. 2000; Frontani 2007) which is understandable given that The Beatles phenomenon was possibly the most significant event in the history of modern popular musical culture, however, the central argument of this chapter is that much of the iconic narrative - the dramatic meaning contained in the subsequent imagery of The Beatles - was engendered during the early Cavern years. In particular the argument will stress how the visual aspect of The Beatles' iconicity was formed as a natural, dramatic narrative.

The chapter will also consider the possible impact of The Beatles' decision to relinquish 'live' concert performances in late 1966. I will argue that this action transcended the impact of The Beatles from one, very large, receptive community (the 'Beatlemania' fans) to an even larger and possibly more important community of young people who, with The Beatles at the vanguard, were developing a new culture of ideas in the latter part of the decade. Although The Beatle's narrative is peppered with tragic-dramatic episodes (such as the early death of Brian Epstein) the overall argument relating to The Beatles' iconicity is that unique sets of cultural conditions, initially in the early years of The Beatles' career, confirms the importance of the relationship between receptive communities and naturally formed dramatic narratives; especially as this creates the conditions for a retained visual image.

Whereas singular event iconic forms can be seen to 'fix' meaning to image, as is argued in the formation of the Guevara and Dean icons, iconic phenomena such as The Beatles or The Spitfire reveal more extended, but nevertheless equally dramatic, narrative inter-relationships. The Beatles career from mid-1966 to 1970, focused as it was on the production of some of the most cherished music of modern times, also re-focused their appeal (and with it their iconic image) to communities other than the

manic teenage communities of 'Beatlemania'. The depth of this later narrative relationship helped forge The Beatles' iconic meaning in collective memory as a distinct, durable, and reproducible phenomenon to the present day.

The final case study, Chapter 7, is an exploration of one of the most well-known images in modern history, simultaneously an image of a real person and an image of a myth. The analysis of the Che Guevara cultural icon argues that the fixed meaning of this iconic image was retrospectively embellished to fulfil the cultural needs of a specific community at a time of extraordinary socio-political tension. As with the formation of the James Dean icon, Guevara's biographical details do not seem to correlate to the mythological meaning contained in the iconic image. Here the claim is that Guevara the individual and Guevara the image should be thought of as two separate entities, the former being retrospectively mythologized as a result of the remarkable iconic force of the latter. Today a Che Guevara industry of image reproduction exists that pays homage to an (apparently) extraordinary individual. Hagiographic film depictions - (*Che*. Dir. Steven Soderbergh. 2008; *The Motorcycle Diaries*. Dir. Walter Salles. 2004.) - co-exist alongside biographies, posters, songs, and myriad product embellishments; but what are we really looking at when we see the Guevara image? The chapter will consider evidence that Guevara the individual - as we think we know of him today - has been extensively embellished, and that the iconic image has proved so magnetic that the biography of the man is now simply the re-telling of the iconic image meaning/myth.

That the Guevara icon has durable significance is indicated by the form becoming an embodied iconic symbol that people choose to place on or close to their bodies, in products ranging from tattoos to handbags. As a supplement to the main analysis of the formation of the icon, the chapter will also examine the significance of the phenomenon

to receptive communities since its original inception, arguing that this development shows the capacity of a primary iconic form to contain and transfer narrative meaning past a generation.

The conclusion draws together the themes discussed in the four case studies with the aim of reaffirming and reassessing the ideas contained in my four-point definition of cultural icons. It will also critically assess possible limitations of what is a new and original foray into a developing and, as I argue throughout the thesis, an important area of study, together with indicating areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2 HOW THE TERM IS USED

This chapter looks at ways in which the term 'cultural icon' is used and understood. Careful consideration of three specific uses of the term - in the popular media, as a new way of articulating national identity, and in academic publications - reveals the extent to which it is, on the whole, poorly defined and misapplied. The first section of the chapter will examine the prolific adoption of the term in the popular media. In one reading, this can be interpreted as being the main source of the evasiveness of the term (Meades 2009) although profligate use of the term can be seen to reflect the importance of specific visual symbolism in modern cultural life. The second section looks at issues arising from the classification of national iconic symbols. In particular, this section looks at one example of how a failure to define the parameters of cultural iconicity results in confusion as to what can justifiably be termed a national icon. The final section considers examples of how the term is used in academic publications. Although one example (Tomaselli and Scott 2009) offers an explicit definition of the term it is argued that, whereas the term 'cultural icon' is often utilised with a minimal attempt to explain its possible meaning, several of the publications reviewed offer an implicit understanding of the term that can be seen to support the four-point definition. Throughout the chapter the latter definition will be applied, primarily to underscore difficulties resulting from a lack of common definition, and also as support for the case study analysis of primary cultural icons.

2.1 Use of the Term in the Popular Media

Representational images have always been an essential factor in the way human cultures are defined. In modern societies consumers of images are becoming highly accustomed to symbolic imagery and our perception of such imagery is tuned to

questions of value and meaning. The importance of specific images in regard to cultural identity is a point recognised by Joseph and Kathleen O'Connell: "Ours is a world shaped by symbols and images. We are bound to select from and simplify the infinite complexity of what we perceive. Somehow we must choose and act, must decide what to value and strive for" (961). One term that seems to encapsulate the most valued products of a particular culture at a particular time is 'iconic', and the aim of this chapter is to establish a clearer understanding of how the term is used and what we mean by it when we do use it. At present, far from there being a consensus pointing towards the parameters within which the term can reasonably be understood, the tendency is that it is employed with little or no thought as to what it may actually mean.

In true Warholian fashion, the popular media latch onto the latest vogue celebrity phenomenon, inflating the public profile of individuals for newsworthiness, and in recent years this has been assisted by the adoption of the modifier 'iconic' as a convenient journalistic tool. In "Icon, Adjective of the Age", Jonathan Meades offers an intuitive account of escalating overuse of the term in the popular media since the early 1980s, arguing that such usage devalues the term to the point where, "if a word can signify anything it will eventually signify nothing" (1). Extending the idea that the term is used to add gravitas to journalistic articles it is understandable that this can be seen, at face value, as rendering the term meaningless. The list below is approximately one third of the examples Meades cites of actual uses of the term 'iconic' in recent publications.

> Iconic albino, iconic assassin, iconic baby lotion, iconic brand, iconic bridge, iconic bucket, iconic building, iconic button fly, iconic camper van, iconic car, iconic cassoulet, iconic CCTV camera, iconic celebration, iconic chainsaw, iconic chair, iconic chef, iconic chimpanzee, iconic children's entertainer, iconic clock, iconic cocktail, iconic comb, iconic comb-over, iconic comedy, iconic

cooling tower, iconic Coventry City football shirt, iconic cricket bat, iconic crisps, iconic diaper, iconic doll, iconic dreadlocks, iconic drinker, iconic earthmover, iconic episode of 'Emmerdale', iconic escalator, iconic enema, iconic field armour, iconic film star, iconic fishing reel, iconic flat cap, iconic garden, iconic goggles, iconic gorilla. (1)

My research into the use of 'iconic' as a modifying adjective in the popular media, confirms the idea that there are few, if any, defining parameters that limit the tendency towards hyperbole. Analysis of archive material from a variety of media sources, including newspaper archives from The Times, Guardian, Sun, Mirror, New York Times and Christian Monitor newspapers, together with on-line media archives from the BBC, NBC and Sky, confirms Meades' argument that the term is frequently employed as a convenient journalistic tool. The examples below give an indication of such usage:

Oprah Winfrey: *"The talk-show icon, Barack Obama's flashiest supporter in his bid for the presidency" Time Magazine* 17 December. 2007

Mother Teresa: *"One of the great human icons of the past 100 years" Time Magazine* 3 September. 2007

IPod: *"The iPod is arguably the ultimate cultural icon for the 2000s" BBC News Archive* 29 October. 2004

Homer Simpson: "Homer is a very good western cultural icon for fathers*" BBC News Archive* 19 November. 1999

Walthamstow stadium: *"It's ripping the heart out of East London, desecrating its greatest icon" Daily Telegraph* 8 August. 2008

Colonel Gadhafi: *"An African style icon" Financial Times* 21 January. 2006

Several interpretations can be applied to how the term iconic is used in these examples. Firstly, it could be suggested that the examples are iconic in no other sense than they are, or have been at some point, familiar images in public space. If this is the case then Meades' argument - that the term is totally without meaning - together with the extension that anything can be offered as iconic given a certain level of media exposure, is superficially valid.

Another way of comprehending gravitas or hyperbolic media use of the term is to consider its employment as a kind of cultural touchstone. In this interpretation the argument is that there *are* important cultural icons and that many people have an intuitive appreciation of what these are; that they have important cultural meaning and, when used as a grammatical modifier, iconic inference changes the sense in which the individual/object is understood.

Whereas Meades correlates the proliferation of media usage of the term with lack of value and dilution of meaning, "the most dismal of vogue words" (3) there are, along the lines just indicated, positive aspects to the burgeoning employment of the phrase in the popular media. Although Meades see little worth in describing relatively inane forms with the term 'iconic' in examples such as, "iconic cooling tower" or "iconic crisps", it is valid to ask the question why not? If examples such as the ones indicated are denied iconic status this leaves two clear choices, either the term should cease to be used as a description entirely, or parameters should be established enabling the term to be better understood. If it is possible to make better sense of the term 'cultural icon', initially in the manner in which it is utilised in the media, then an important step is to argue that there is an implicit concept of iconicity in common usage against which 'improper' employment of the term can be judged. Therefore, if issue is taken with an

individual/object being termed 'iconic', the extension is less that 'anything can be an icon' (together with the association that the term has little cultural meaning), than, 'we have images which we value highly and take issue with others being assigned a similar status to them'. The challenge then, if this is accepted, is to define the characteristics of template cultural icons in a manner that is at present absent from image studies.

The following evidence suggests that media use of 'iconic' since the late 1970s reveals an implicit qualitative application of the term to differentiate images, pointing towards a corresponding increase of narrative meaning between image and subject in common usage. Although there are examples here that challenge this claim (the ones highlighted by Meades as representative) the following statistics indicate that employment of the term in the media should not necessarily be associated with total dilution of meaning.

The full list of icons cited by Meades contains 144 unreferenced examples which, "are all found constructions of recent provenance; none is my invention" (2). Of these, 131 (91%) refer to inanimate examples with the remaining 13 (9%) alluding to 'real' individuals, for instance, "iconic surgeon" or "iconic children's entertainer". Again my research suggests that this intuitive interpretation is not a fair representation of how the term is used in the popular media. The tables below indicate that actual individuals far outweigh inanimate objects when the term is used in a journalistic context. It is possible to read into this that - in spite of the term being employed with a lack of formal definition - modified use of 'iconic' as in, for instance, 'sporting icon', 'political icon', 'fashion icon' or 'pop icon', is used with a greater depth of meaning than Meades' superficial analysis initially suggests.

In terms of research methodology the analysis of newspaper and other media archive resources used has been sourced online between 2007 and 2009, and the

benefits of this are as follows. Firstly, the ability to conduct broad searches in the openly available archives enabled quick, contextual, results from a variety of media sources such as the ones named above. In terms of the reliability of information gathered in this way, it is thought that the provenance of such well-known and established public archives is acceptably reliable. Added to this the information is used here only to give a general impression that the term 'cultural icon' is used in a particular way and not as a main source of support for the thesis in general, as this comes in the form of the case study analysis.
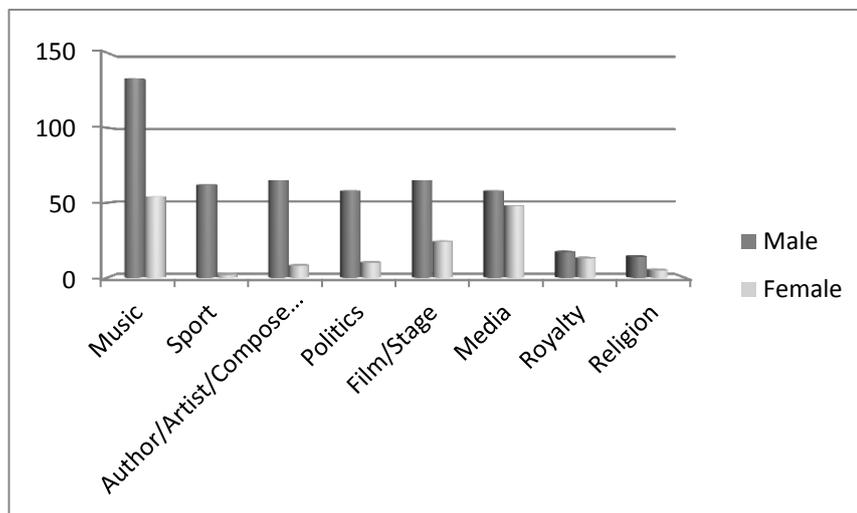
Table 1: Combined references to iconic individuals from a range of media archives accessed between February 2007 and November 2009.
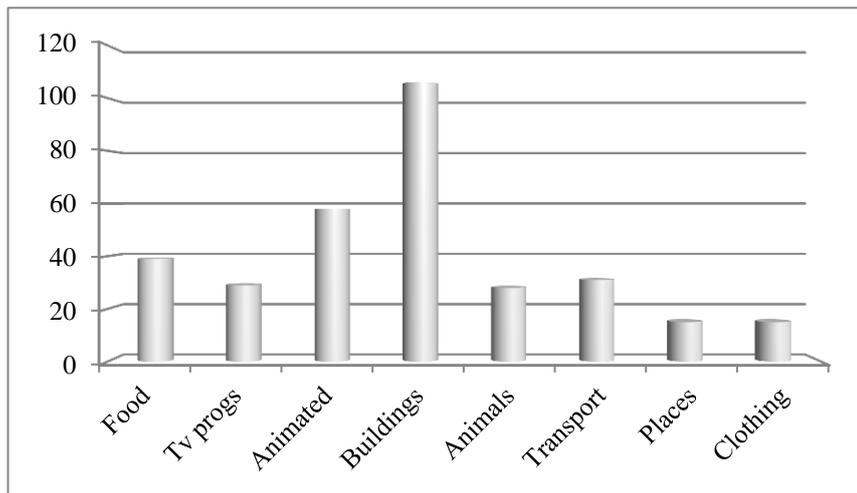
Table 2: Non-human iconic references sourced as Table.1.

The information contained in the tables above is arranged in a way indicating a specific pattern of usage of the term 'iconic' in the popular media. As the vertical axis in both tables relates to the number of times a specific reference is offered, the first indication is that, contrary to the referents offered by Meades, the term is far more likely to be applied to individuals rather than things, with buildings being the possible exception to this trend. A high number of referents in table.1. are from active, participant, cultural activities such as music (187), sport (64), and artistic productions (73), with significant references made in groups that offer potential for dramatic narratives and human interest, film (89) and media (106). This evidence suggests that there is a greater attraction (for consumers of iconic images) in areas of culture offering potential for dramatic appeal. Table.1. also reveals a gender bias towards male as opposed to female iconic referents. While it is necessary to sidestep the important contribution that gender studies may make here, the male bias does indicate journalistic prioritisation of dramatic characteristics in potential icons, assuming it is accepted that males tend to have more media exposure in areas such as sport, rock music and the military. So, as a counter to the claim that the term lacks meaning, or that it is applicable

to any familiar image in the public eye, there are evident factors that can be highlighted in how the term is employed in the popular media, in that iconic referents are likely to be 'real' individuals; they occur predominantly in active, dramatic genres; and they are usually male.

The table of non-human iconic referents shows a tendency towards the term being directed to phenomena with dramatic narrative interest and, in particular, it is significant that buildings are referred to as cultural icons in this respect. In regard to the relevance of buildings as iconic forms the debate is now well established (Jencks 2006) and has been fully considered as a case study not included in this work. Some buildings are also important symbolic images of national identity, and the next section will consider one example of how a government sponsored initiative has applied the term 'iconic' to images which it sees as representative of national essence.

2.2 National Icons

All nations have images that represent intrinsic aspects of their respective national cultures (Smith 1991) and the term 'iconic' is often used as a description reflecting the importance of such imagery. In looking at this aspect of cultural iconography the aim again is to highlight the difficulties involved in categorising iconic images without a sufficient defining framework, and the four conditions will be implemented throughout the examination to test the feasibility of its premises. Specifically, the analysis will indicate that sub-cultural factors should be accounted for in any definition of cultural iconicity. In the previous section the argument was that use of the term in the popular media can be interpreted as a term under construction, and that its profligate use need not necessarily lead to the idea that it is a meaningless term; in addition, increase in use of the term can also be seen to represent a need to differentiate images through the employment of 'iconic' as a description suggesting, as

the tables above show, that the term is applied with implicit cultural value. This argument will be strengthened by considering issues raised when the term is employed to promote the idea of cultural icons as national symbols. In keeping with the method employed throughout, the four conditions will be offered as a comparison to the manner in which the term is used in the following analysis.

The *Icons of England* project (www.icons.org.uk) is a government-sponsored attempt to compile a series of public, on-line, nominations which are assessed by a selected panel in relation to their suitability as English icons. Listed below is the definition used by the project to grade the nominations as national iconic symbols. This definition will be examined in three ways: How the project differentiates the forms of potential icons, and, in particular, the feasibility of including non-image forms into the icons nominations; the difficulties inherent when sub-cultural factors are ignored and regional/class issues are overlooked; and the decision to exclude 'real' individuals from the project.

Icons of England; 'Ground rules'

Icons Are

Icons, for our purposes, had to be uniquely important to life in England and the people who live here. That we can all agree on. Some are obvious. Stonehenge. Cricket. The Crown Jewels. Others are more controversial.

Icons Online agreed on some ground-rules for the project

Icons are symbolic - they represent something in our culture, history or way of life

Icons are recognisable in a crowd - if no-one has heard of it or knows what it

looks like, it cannot be an icon

Icons are fascinating and surprising - they have hidden depths and unexpected associations

Icons Aren't

People. Churchill and Darwin may live on as historical figures but we didn't include them as icons in this collection. This does not mean we ignore key individuals. It just means that we included Shakespeare's plays rather than the man from Stratford, Stephenson's Rocket rather than Mr Stephenson himself. (icons.org.uk accessed 15 January 2008)

The concept of recognisability - *Icons* ground-rule number two - is an important feature of iconic symbolism. Although the emphasis in the 'ground-rules' is on visual symbolism, which tallies with my claim that *all* culturally iconic forms are images, there is a suggestion in the *Icons* project that there are aural forms which may be validated as national icons. The contention here is establishing a context in which a potential icon can be nominated as being 'heard of' in the absence of a reproducible mental picture; many people, for instance, may have heard of the album *Sgt Pepper*, yet this generally is associated with a specific mental image. The idea that language is symbol based is a well-established idea in cognitive linguistics as in this from Ronald W. Langacker:

> There are many different ways to construe a given body of content, and each
> construal represents a distinct meaning; this is my intent in saying that an
> expression imposes a particular image on the content it evokes. The word

symbol refers to the basic claim that grammar is inherently symbolic...By their very nature grammatical structures impose specific images on the conceptual content. (xv)

Although this is one area of several where the study of cultural icons impinges on specific academic disciplines, it is important to state clearly that this research does not recognise the existence of cultural icons in the absence of distinct imagery. Therefore, if potential iconic forms at first hand seem non-image based, a Shakespeare play, for instance, or a song such as *Jerusalem*, it is possible to argue there are associated reproducible images that focus potential iconic meaning. Nevertheless, if it is accepted that the basic foundation of iconic forms is that they are image based the problem still remains as to how they can be differentiated, a centrally important consideration and the impetus behind the implementation of the four conditions. The attempt at differentiation by the *Icons* project suggests that the looseness of the 'ground rules' it employs leads to a fair degree of contestability in many of the iconic nominations, especially on its own terms of recognisability. If national iconic images contain readily comprehensible parameters of meaning (according to the four-point definition) then they should: Exclude phenomena that lack a distinct, durable and reproducible image; exclude images that are only significant at a local or sub-cultural level, although these may be considered iconic in a limited (non-national) sense; exclude phenomena that initiate a wide variety of images, although some of these may prove iconic in their own right and finally; exclude well known 'of the moment' celebrity images that offer little in the way of dramatic narrative. With these points in mind it is possible to re-examine the 100 examples chosen by the *Icons of England* committee as "uniquely important to life in England".

Primary cultural icons exhibit features which can be set as template defining characteristics for the analysis of other applications of the term, such as the one now

under consideration. One of these features is that the durability of the iconic form reflects a simplification, or reification, of meaning allowing distinct iconic imagery to prove significant both to different cultures and over future generations. The meaning of the image, in this sense, is often instigated by a discernible tragic-dramatic narrative that develops through the inter-relationship of receptive communities and iconic phenomena. The practical analysis that follows attempts to show how this idea, together with the interconnected ideas of distinctness, durability and reproducibility, offers a new way of classifying iconic forms.

The list below shows the final nominations chosen by the *Icons of England* committee from the thousands of suggestions offered by the public since the project began in 2006:

Alice In Wonderland. The Angel of the North. The Archers. The Works of Beatrix Potter. Big Ben. Blackpool Tower. The Bobby. Bonfire Night. Bowler Hat. Brass Bands. Brick Lane. Buckingham Palace. The Bulldog. The Novels of Charles Dickens. Cheddar Cheese. Chicken Tikka Masala. The Co-Operative Movement. Coronation Street. Cricket. A Cup of Tea. Damien Hirst's Shark. Doctor Who. The Doomsday Book. English eccentricity. Eden Project. The FA Cup. Fish and chips. Fox-hunting and the Ban. Full English Breakfast. English Garden. Glastonbury Festival. Globe Theatre. Hadrian's Wall. The Hay Wain. Hedges. Henry Moore's Sculptures. HMS Victory. Holbein's Henry VIII. The Iron Bridge. James Bond. Jerusalem. The King James Bible. The Lake District. Land Rover. Lindisfarne Gospels. The Lord of the Rings. LS Lowry's Figures. Magna Carta. Marmite. The Mini. Miniskirt. Monty Python. Morris Dancing. Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management. Narrowboats on Canals. Notting Hill Carnival. Oak Tree. Ordnance Survey Maps. The Origin of Species. Oxbridge. The Oxford English Dictionary. The Pantomime. Parish Church. The

Peak District. The Phone Box. The Pint. Pride And Prejudice. The Pub. Punch and Judy. Queen's Head Stamp. Queuing. Roast Beef and Yorkshire Pudding. The Robin. Robin Hood. Rolls-Royce. The Rose. The Routemaster Bus. Rugby. The Scouts. Seaside Pier. English Sense of Humour. Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. Sherlock Holmes. The Spitfire. SS Empire Windrush. St George's Flag. Stiff Upper Lip. Stonehenge. Sutton Hoo Helmet. The Thames. The Black Cab. Tower of London. The Tube Map. The V-sign. The Weather. Westminster Abbey. White Cliffs of Dover. Wimbledon. Winnie-the-Pooh. York Minster.

(The final 100 nominations from the *Icons of England* project, accessed 19 February 2008)

Not all of the nominations listed above could reasonably be thought of as distinct images, and several of these are difficult to imagine as images at all thereby negating, on one part of the project's own ground rules, their respective potential as icons of England. Some examples that (it is safe to assume) do produce positive, self-referential images include, *Stonehenge, The Mini* and *The FA Cup*. Other examples are less straightforward, *Cheddar Cheese*, for example, probably fails to produce an image that distinguishes it from other generic images of cheeses, together with the additional problem (as with *Cups of Tea* and *Cricket*) that any images recalled are unlikely to be exclusively English, as is not the case with, for example, *Blackpool Tower*. Examples such as *The Weather*, which produces a host of potential reproducible images, none of which are meaningful to English culture without supporting context and further images. Similarly, *Chicken Tikka Masala*, almost certainly fails to invoke an image that would differentiate it from other curries; or even *The Lake District*, which would seem to be a likely iconic candidate, has no *single,* distinct image (as in Mount Fuji) that promotes its iconicity, although The Lake District National Park does use the mountain Great Gable as its representative symbol. Not only do many of the nominations fall short of the four

conditions of iconicity, they also fail to meet the *Icons* project own criterion, especially in terms of meeting the requirements of "hidden depths and unexpected associations" or "if no-one…knows what it looks like, it cannot be an icon" which, in turn, leads to the justification of a critique independent of an alternative evaluation.

The list below contains some of the iconic nominations that are difficult to perceive of as images and therefore - regardless of their status as culturally significant phenomena - are largely unrecognisable and should not be termed 'national icons'. Although the viability of assessing the following list as non-image based is not supported by empirical evidence, together with the possibility of contestation; the aim here is solely to highlight problems inherent in the *Icons* definition:

1.   *The Co-operative Movement*

2.   *English eccentricity*

3.   *Jerusalem*

4.   *Lindisfarne Gospels*

5.   *Mrs Beeton's Book Of Household Management*

6.   *The Origin Of Species*

7.   *Oxbridge*

8.   *English Sense of Humour*

Further to issues resulting from a lack of clarity regarding icons as distinct images is the over-looked question of sub-cultures. In the three specific uses of the term under consideration here - popular media, national symbolism and academic publications - little evidence is presented that that the term is used with a modifier reflecting the crucial concept of receptive communities. Understanding cultural iconicity without acknowledging the community of individuals that recognise the

meaning of the iconic form, leaves any classification open to the question 'whose culture', a theme that will be considered throughout the case study chapters. This position does not ask 'what is a culture?', which is a separate question and a well researched field in its own right, but refers to the receptive communities that comprehend such images as inherently meaningful and therefore retain them in collective memory. Examples of this are popular music and sporting sub-cultures, each containing sub-cultural iconic images that have a depth of meaning, and correspondingly greater dramatic narrative, to the members of these specific communities.

The problems inherent in the classification of national icons expose the difficulties of ascribing boundaries to representative imagery in modern cultural life. In the previous section it was suggested that use of the term in the popular media is often with grammatical modifiers, such as, 'X is a *sporting* icon' or 'Y is a *pop* icon'. This can be understood, firstly, as use of the term 'cultural icon' in a general sense and, secondly, as implicit recognition that particular iconic referents have strong appeal to specific sub-cultures. In this regard we may wish to ask: a) which images are fully contained within these sub-cultures, and therefore are unlikely to be nationally iconic; b) if an iconic image began as a sub-culture icon and subsequently revealed iconic potential on a wider scale, what properties have enabled it to do so; and c) how and why do national iconic images transcend their boundaries of meaning and become culturally iconic to internationally receptive communities?

As these questions apply directly to the primary nominations of the *Icons of England* project it is evident that the issue of sub-cultures/class bias is a significant oversight and, consequently, adversely affects the main aim of the project. The re-classification of the original nominations (below) into sub-cultural/class biased, multiple, non-national, and potential nationally iconic imagery, using the four

conditions, highlights the importance of sub-cultural influence in the nominations, together with a regional and cultural bias evident in the *Icons* programme.

Sub Cultural/Class Biased Images

Damien Hirst's Shark, Globe Theatre, The Hay Wain, Henry Moore's Sculptures, HMS Victory, Holbein's Henry VIII, The Iron Bridge, Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, SS Empire Windrush, Sutton Hoo Helmet, Tower of London, The Tube Map, Westminster Abbey, York Minster, Winnie-the-Pooh.

Multiple Images

Alice In Wonderland, The Works of Beatrix Potter, Bonfire Night, The Novels of Charles Dickens, Coronation Street, Doctor Who, English Garden, Glastonbury Festival, The Lake District, The Lord of the Rings, Monty Python, Notting Hill Carnival, The Pantomime, The Peak District, Pride And Prejudice, Wimbledon. The Pub.

Non National Images

Cheddar Cheese, Cricket, A Cup of Tea, Miniskirt, Oak Tree, The Pint, The Rose, Rugby, The Robin, Ordnance Survey Map.

Potential National Icons

The Angel of the North, Big Ben, Blackpool Tower, The Bobby, Bowler Hat, Buckingham Palace, The Bulldog, Eden Project, The FA Cup, Fish and Chips, Land Rover, Marmite, The Mini, Morris Dancing, Narrowboats on Canals, Parish Church, The Phone Box, Queen's Head Stamp, Roast Beef and Yorkshire Pudding, Robin Hood, Rolls-Royce, The Routemaster Bus, The Scouts, Seaside Pier, Sherlock Holmes, The Spitfire, St George's Flag, Stonehenge, The Black Cab, The V-sign, White Cliffs of Dover.

This attempt to re-classify the primary nominations of the *Icons of England* project serves no other purpose than as a move towards clarifying the question, what is a cultural icon? Within this re-classification there are instances where justifiable contentions can be raised, often based on the inclusion of a particular object over another, for instance why *Land Rover, Mini* and *Rolls-Royce* yet no *E-Type Jaguar* or *Ford Cortina?*, why *Fish and Chips* and *Roast Beef* yet no *Toffee Apples?*; *Wimbledon* not *Wembley?* The intention here is to draw attention to the difficulties of listing nationally important imagery with a set of 'ground rules' that contain a series of contentions. Firstly, do the potential icons offer reasonably distinct imagery rather than an array of competing images? Secondly, if there is a distinct image, has this proved durable over a generation or more, therefore avoiding the charge of topicality? And third, is the image reproducible in the collective memory of the majority of people within the country in question, rather than being sub-culturally familiar, or likely to be more recognisable to a particular social group or class?

Analysing the dramatic narrative of the iconic image, or in other words, the events in the history of the image that may cause it to be retained in collective memory, allows a further re-classification of the *Icons* nominations. In its own 'ground-rules' the *Icons* project acknowledges that the meaning of national imagery should be "uniquely important to life in England", in itself an unambiguous statement that specific images should contain correspondingly significant meaning. If this idea is applied to the *Icons* nominations we find examples such as *The Spitfire, The White Cliffs of Dover, The V Sign,* and *The Bulldog* displaying a fair degree of dramatic narrative relating, of course, to their joint association with England's involvement in the Second World War.

Other nominations in the re-classified list of potential English national icons contain, to a greater or lesser degree, meaning that could reasonably be thought of as culturally important to a discernibly English way of life. Forms such as *The Seaside*

Pier, Bowler Hat, and *Sherlock Holmes* all produce distinct images which, without too much contention, can be argued as being extant in the collective memory of the majority of English people. As the case study chapters will show, the narrative formation of cultural iconography reveals a close relationship between receptive communities and the meaning contained in the iconic form. Quite possibly a case study analysis of the three examples above may yield a similar narrative element to their respective images, for others though this is less likely. *Fish and Chips*, for instance, while producing a fairly distinct image, may not possess the kind of dramatic narrative that enables the image to be considered in a different manner from other distinct images within the genre of food, roast beef, for instance, or bacon sandwiches, both of which, together with many other examples, lay equal claim to iconic status on the grounds offered by the *Icons* project.

As previously suggested, popular use of the term iconic is more likely to be applied to 'real' individuals than artefacts; in this regard it is surprising that the *Icons* project omitted potentially iconic individuals from their classification. Inadvertently this omission reveals an interesting aspect relating to how the term 'iconic' is sometimes applied to historical figures. The *Icons* project states that, although national icons cannot be people, the products of historical figures may be considered potentially iconic. Therefore, Shakespeare's plays and Dickens' characters may be prime candidates as icons but not the individual authors themselves. In one sense this claim is valid in that some historical figures, particularly artists and authors, produce stronger iconic imagery than themselves, Arthur Conan Doyle being a case in point. If Shakespeare is claimed as a universal cultural icon, for instance, we need to ask if the strong dramatic narrative of the Shakespeare icon can be thought of in the absence of the (very strong) tragic-dramatic elements of the iconic characters in his plays. With some historical individuals the difficulty in reproducing a distinct visual image is normally in the powerful associated imagery of the form so, in this sense, the product rather than the individual

may hold the greater iconic potential; although any consideration of national iconicity that fails to account for individuals such as Churchill, Lennon, or even Brunel, is unlikely to be convincing.

The aim of this section has been twofold. Firstly, to show that a major, government sponsored, project attempting to establish definitive English national icons is fraught with difficulties. These difficulties arise from the term 'iconic' - when directed to cultural products - being poorly defined and consequently poorly applied. Secondly, the exercise of applying the four conditions of cultural iconicity to the *Icons* project nominations, while not intended as a watertight framework, nevertheless does offer a great deal more rigour to the general question of what national iconic images could be.

2.3 Academic Publications

This section looks at how the term 'cultural icon' is used in a selection of formal academic articles and books. It will consider how some authors comprehend and define the term and, in keeping with the previous sections, the four conditions will be used as a comparative model in assessing academic usage of the term. The intention here is to highlight the explicit and implicit ideas regarding cultural iconicity when applied to specific examples, while still addressing the question, what is meant by the term 'cultural icon'?

So far the analysis into use of the term - in the popular media and by a government sponsored *Icons* project - has raised some interesting questions, such as:

a) Does the term have any meaning at all and can it be applied to anything?

b) Are cultural icons recent phenomena and does the profligate use of the term reflect their novelty?

c) Are they people or things or both?

d) Can cultural icons be appropriated by a specific culture?

e) What are the 'cultures' we refer to when we use the term 'cultural icon'?

f) If cultural icons exist, how do we identify them?

A recent publication, *Cultural Icons,* (Tomaselli and Scott, eds. 2009) acknowledges the need to examine how the term is used and produces its own definition as an introduction to a case study analysis of *Nelson Mandela* (Keyan Tomaselli and Arnold Shepperson); *The Little Mermaid* (Finn Hauberg Mortensen); *The Eiffel Tower* (Stephanie A. Glaser); Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (Hans Lund); *The Holy Lance* (Volker Schier and Corine Schleif) and *Britannia* (David Scott). The publication is one of the first to explicitly recognise the need for the term to be considered with greater rigour, although my four point definition of the term was published in "Monty Python's Iconicity" (Parker 2007). In the introduction to *Cultural Icons*, Keyan Tomaselli and David Scott argue that:

> Cultural icons purport to represent their object... but, in many cases this representation can be highly problematic. Not least of the challenges cultural icons offer to the modern cultural commentator, therefore, is that of critical investigation or deconstruction necessary to investigate their moral and aesthetic ambiguity. (23)

Listed below are the essential conditions of iconicity (taken from the original text) Tomaselli and Scott suggest, "need to be present for the visual sign to attain to cultural iconic status" (21):

• by accreting layers of meaning or connotation

• by representing continuity

• by multiplying their representative function

• by attaining an exemplary status

• by attracting intense mediatization, very often through various patterns of

intermedial transformation

• by exerting a certain seduction (21)

Although, as Tomaselli and Scott acknowledge, the process of iconicity involves a succession of interwoven events, it would prove useful to carefully examine each of these conditions on its own merits.

Meaning is fundamental to all human culture and its quality and form are vigorously contested in many academic fields. In relation to image studies the cultural context in which important images are placed is crucial to the interpretation of their meaning. In this respect Tomaselli and Scott interpret potential icons as "susceptible to the accretion of layers of meaning or connotation" (21), with the depth of meaning reflecting a gradual increase in iconicity. From this, cultural icons, "are iconic signs to which a transparent but often complex over-layering of connotations has accrued, usually after a certain period of time" (19).The idea that layers of meaning gradually accrue to a symbol justifies a semiotic analysis of these layers and clearly adds knowledge to how modern iconic forms are perceived. However, it is unclear from this definition how - in the first instance - potentially iconic images achieve the initial depth of meaning necessary for them to be retained in collective memory and, consequently, to accrue further significance. I will show that there is clear evidence that the formation

of many cultural icons results from either a significant tragic-dramatic singular event or, in exceptional cases, an extended dramatic narrative that fixes tight parameters of meaning to a distinct iconic image. This method of analysis, which is compelling when considering primary cultural icons, is particularly effective in the analysis of real individuals as opposed to artefacts. Identifying an initial tragic-dramatic event can be employed to fix, and consequently limit, the range of meaning applicable to a potential cultural icon, and it would be useful now to briefly show how this interpretative method might work with one of the case studies presented in *Cultural Icons.*

Example: *Nelson Mandela*

Tragic-dramatic event: Release from prison 11 February 1990 after 26 years of incarceration.

Meaning: Symbol of stoical moral resistance, democracy, freedom, and equality.

Distinct Image:

Figure 1: Nelson Mandela (Chris Harris).

Receptive Community: Politically repressed black communities in South Africa.

Quote: "It's a simple picture, but I think you can see the dignity of the man, his strength and intelligence. He'd been in prison for 26 years and his was the face that everyone wanted to see" (Chris Harris, photographer, Timesonline 6 October 2009).

The idea of singular events fixing meaning onto distinct images is a useful analytical tool when applied to many types of iconic imagery although, as the case studies will show this, in itself, is not the sole condition of iconic status. When used as an analytical tool in the examination of primary iconic individuals it is a more straightforward approach than other, theoretically intricate, methods. This idea will be developed and applied in greater depth firstly, as an interpretive tool helping to explain the initial formation of cultural icons and, secondly, as a core idea in the iconic differentiation of objects and individuals. For now, however, we can look at how the meaning of the iconic form proves durable over periods of time, a key theme in the study of icons, and to which Tomaselli and Scott refer as "representing continuity" (19):

> The longer the history of the icon, the richer the layering of indexical and symbolic significances organically attached to it, though some more recent or contemporary icons (such as Marilyn Monroe or Nelson Mandela) also manage in a relatively short period of time to achieve this status...Visual icons become 'cultural icons' when they take on functions that transcend the immediate or intended role or purpose of the object or sign on which they are based. (19-21)

Tomaselli and Scott's suggestion here is that certain images in common currency *gradually* attain a level of meaning/significance that alters the status of the image form, from a mere "visual icon" to a symbol attaining full cultural iconicity. This process "is usually made possible by the intense iconization/mediatization (especially through cinema and television) of the icon that, through its mass audience and instantaneous dissemination, can rapidly propel an image or object to iconic status" (20). Iconic continuity, for Tomaselli and Scott, is thought of as a gradual maturing of an image - through intense visual media activity - whereby the iconic form takes on "functions" different to its original state. The emphasis in this interpretation of cultural icons is on the *construction* of the iconic form through media agency creating an iconic 'brand' that

becomes - through the application of meaning in public space - significant and recognisable. This definition of cultural iconicity differs in emphasis regarding the importance of external agency (a term that will be referred to in the case studies as synonymous with 'mediatised narrative'). One problem of relying heavily on a high degree of media involvement in the formation of cultural icons, or of media use of the term as discussed previously, is that certain 'of the moment' image forms are sometimes touted as iconic in the absence of both natural, dramatic narratives and receptive communities. As the following chapters will show, prioritising genuine dramatic narratives in the analysis of potential icons is a crucial factor in the attempt at generic differentiation and this will be made clear throughout the case studies. A crucial step in informing the central question of cultural iconicity is the attempt to separate merely famous individuals/objects from genuinely iconic ones, and the historical appraisal of tragic-dramatic narratives - formed between receptive communities and culturally iconic phenomena - offers a different approach to Tomaselli and Scott's semiotic attempt to uncover "hidden" meanings, as the following example will illustrate:

> Madonna, the pop singer, for example, appropriates the status of the icons of early Christian religion, the Madonna who is the subject of medieval painting. She meshes this with other images and styles, past or contemporary, mythical or real, to create and live an image in which everything is fundamentally commodified and sexualized via performance. Madonna as mere woman disappears beneath the various guises that constitute her as an icon...The Madonna as an original medieval icon, on the other hand, being a sacred object, represented a real connection with its object. The religious belief invested in the Madonna enabled this figure as an icon to become attached to divinity. In the icons of today, the religious belief that enabled the icon to become virtually as one with its object is replaced by hypermediated representation that elevates an

otherwise banal icon to celebrity status, one which often occludes the reality of the object it represents (17).

For Tomaselli and Scott, Madonna's cultural iconicity is achieved firstly by her longevity as a celebrity figure "organically" layering meaning onto her image. Secondly, through appropriating the iconicity of a medieval icon by having the same name. Third, her status as "mere woman" is replaced by a complete commodity incorporating an ever-changing variety of "sexualized" styles and images. While the semiotics of this type of analysis may inform us of Madonna's development as an internationally recognisable celebrity figure, together with the role the media plays in this, there is little in it that informs the question of how cultural icons are formed. For instance, it is difficult to extract from Tomaselli and Scott's analysis any common themes that help to explain iconicity in general, other than the idea that there may be some "hidden" meaning underlying high profile celebrities, and that this 'meaning' has been constructed through intensive media involvement. One reason for this is that Tomaselli and Scott's semiotic approach assumes the iconicity of Madonna as a given prior to the analysis, "in the case of an icon, Madonna for example" (19). This type of analysis - useful in the areas of media and power relations - is, nevertheless, more difficult to apply to potential iconic forms than the alternative concept of the four conditions, especially with regard to 'of the moment' celebrity imagery as opposed to potential iconic forms (as they are defined in the latter model). In this case, the level of celebrity media exposure - an unstable source due to hyperbolic newsworthiness - is resisted in preference to natural, non-mediatised, tragic-dramatic themes that fix strong, easily comprehensible, meaning onto distinct iconic images. Rather than the gradual layering of semiotically enhanced meaning, Madonna offers scant evidence of natural, tragic-dramatic narrative that would allow her image to be fixed in collective memory in the manner of other performers with discernible dramatic narratives, Glenn Miller, for

instance, or Buddy Holly. In the latter examples, if Miller and Holly's iconicity is in some sense assumed prior to analysis of their formation and reception, it is through the feasibility of applying elements of the four-point definition rather than the more complex method assumed by Tomaselli and Scott. What is meant here is simply that it is reasonable to assume that there are distinct, durable, and reproducible images of the two individuals that still reside - to a greater or lesser extent - in common memory, regardless of the further identification of tragic-dramatic narratives or receptive communities. Added to this the lack of natural dramatic narrative in the example of Madonna, in contrast to her strongly publicised celebrity profile, suggests an absence of communities receptive to any significant meaning contained in her distinct image, a crucial factor in the formation of primary cultural icons.

Madonna is a world famous individual and has been over several decades. Like other people who are equally well known their public persona does, over time, acquire qualities that are firmly connected to their images. These qualities, however, are often products of efficient public relations machines, especially when contrasted with the non-mediatised relationships between specific receptive communities and the cultural icons considered in the case studies. Tomaselli and Scott view cultural iconicity, and Madonna in particular, as being "a construction, a product deriving from the media, entertainment, or public relations industries" (17). Even without an alternative model of cultural iconicity, it is questionable, in our cynical modern culture, how "mediatized" attempts to connect the singer Madonna to the religious iconic form of Madonna and Child, as in the controversial adoption of a Malawian boy in 2006, are actually perceived in the cultural mainstream.

Figure 2: The pop singer Madonna with adopted Malawian boy David in 2006.

My research into cultural iconography, and the working definition of cultural icons that supports it, offers an alternative interpretation to Tomaselli and Scott's position that the manufactured ("mediatized") transparency of Madonna's fame establishes her as a cultural icon. Although her image has dramatic and sometimes shocking associated elements, there is no seminal tragic-dramatic event or an extended dramatic, natural (non-mediatised) narrative that would suggest her image is anything other than one of a famous celebrity. It is significant that Tomaselli and Scott, while hinting that there may be something special to cultural iconicity, make little attempt to expand on this idea other than indicating "exemplary status" or "a certain seduction", precisely the areas that should be examined closely for the dramatic narratives contained in iconic forms.

The idea that some iconic phenomena take a "relatively short period of time to achieve this status" (19) is a good opportunity to examine why this should be so. The singular tragic-dramatic event is an entry point to the study of cultural icons and its absence is often a good indicator that the 'high profile' celebrity figure of today may not prove durable as a cultural icon to future generations. The final part of this section will consider other examples of how the term 'cultural icon' is used in academic

publications. This will support the claim that lack of defining structure in such publications confuses rather than clarifies the general question of cultural iconicity. The method adopted here is to look at a short extract from the respective publications and to grade the attempt to formally define the term as strong, fair, or weak. A short analysis following this looks at the how the examples chosen in the respective pieces compare with the four-point definition.

Example 1: "The Decline of a Cultural Icon: France in American Perspective". (Bertram 1999).

Definition of term: Weak

> A golden age of French iconicity in the world, even greater than the fin de siecle period, it might have been located in the early medieval era. (649)

> The decline of France as a cultural icon, at least as measured in the U.S. Readers' Guide sequences, most dramatic in the years since the 1970s, is part of a long-term process dating back to when France was a great power and people sailed to it on ocean liners. (651)

It is not straightforward to ascertain the meaning of the term in this usage, other than that it is employed as a descriptive statement of a country, France. Not only does the article fail to spell out precisely how the term is understood in the context that it is used, it also assumes that the reader comprehends what a cultural icon is prior to analysis, a common theme in academic usage of the term.

Example 2: "Rabindranath Tagore as Cultural Icon". (O'Connell and O'Connell. 2008)

Definition of term: Fair

> We, the editors of this special issue of the University of Toronto Quarterly, use the expression cultural icon to mean a symbolic focal point or prism that points toward, sums up, and opens onto a much wider world of meaning. (961)

Attempting to define what cultural icons are and to present this in a comprehensible manner is not an easy task, and, to its credit, this article does attempt to explain what it means when it employs the term, and certain elements in this passage are comparable to the four conditions. In particular the correlation of the idea of a "symbolic focal point" to distinct visual imagery, together with the claim that a potential icon contains meaning ("points towards, sums up") is similar to the claim that the tragic-dramatic event 'fixes' meaning onto distinct imagery.

Other factors in this article should also be noted. The choice of case study - Rabindranath Tagore - confirms issues relating to iconicity already raised, in particular the range and durability of Tagore's specific iconicity. Although his biography lacks a singular tragic-dramatic event, it does reveal a cultural narrative between his work (mostly folk poetry) and elements of the Bengali community to which it was directed. His extensive travels in the West, together with winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, presented his works to a limited audience outside his native country, yet it did not raise the level of iconic potential in a manner comparable to, for example, Mahatma Ghandi, whose fixed iconic meaning - passive resistance - is simple to comprehend and has meaning to receptive communities other than that of his own country or sub-culture:

> Cultural icons is an intriguing question that has spawned endless attempted answers. We do not intend to pursue this enticing question and its elusive answers here. (961-2)

It is this remarkable integration of diverse modes of creativity and productivity

in one individual that makes him potentially so influential a cultural icon. (962)

Even so, not everyone, not even all contributors to this issue of the Quarterly,

may be comfortable with applying the notion of cultural icon to Tagore. (962)

Again, O'Connell and O'Connell allude to the difficult and elusive nature of the problem of cultural iconicity, although in regard to their claim that there are "endless attempted answers" the very limited number found by this research contests this statement. The main objection to this is that application of the term in academic study, on the one hand, tends to avoid problems of definition entirely ("we do not intend to pursue this enticing question") while, on the other, offering cursorily explicit or implicit employment of the term in the respective publications. O'Connell and O'Connell's tentativeness is different in that it does recognise the far-reaching issues inherent in iconicity, although it is only fair to acknowledge that the 'issues' in this respect are ones brought to the fore through implementation of the four conditions. What O'Connell's attempt also indicates is the idea that cultural icons represent human-interest narratives, a primary objective of the case studies that follow. Rabindranath Tagore's sub-cultural iconicity in this sense displays "fundamental human concerns sensitized by the poet-educator's insights and ways of expressing them. It is a non-technical, non-esoteric discourse readily understood by the public at large, not just by scholars or aficionados" (963).

Example 3: *The DNA Mystique: The Gene as a Cultural Icon.* (Nelkin and Lindee 1996).

Definition of term: Weak

> We assume that the images and stories of genes in popular cultural are not isolated artefacts but social products that both reflect and affect the cultural ethos. (XXXI)

> As it has so many times before, DNA functioned as a malleable icon in popular culture, easily adapted to address prevailing social issues and political perspectives. (XII)

> But it has also become a cultural icon, almost a magical force. (2)

This study of the cultural exegesis of the image of genetic structure, the double helix, while offering little in the way of formal definition of iconicity, nevertheless presents a case study that indicates some pre-requisites of an iconic form as stated in the four-point definition. If this is applied to the form in question it could be suggested that the DNA image (in its double helix form) is a distinct, durable, and reproducible image with strong human meaning, and that its significance in cultural life, as Barbara Nelkin and Susan Lindee show, is discernible; although, in saying this, it is difficult to think of communities receptive to the specific meaning contained in the image. In terms of narrative formation Nelkin and Lindee argue that, DNA in popular culture "functions in many respects as a secular equivalent of the Christian soul" (2), and in support of the idea that the image history contains evidence of a singular dramatic event, one could point to the cloning of the first mammal - "Dolly" the sheep - from an adult cell on 5 July 1996.

Example 4: "Willa Cather as Equivocal Icon" (Reynolds 2003).

Definition of term: Fair

> There seems to me something deeply equivocal in Cather's iconicity, not in the
> sense that she might or might not be an icon, but in a deeper, more fundamental
> sense: all icons are ultimately equivocal. When we think about icons, how they
> are created and destroyed, and when we think about the meaning of the word
> 'icon', it is apparent that this sense of ambivalence or equivocation or
> doubleness is built into the very term itself. It is one word that carries its
> opposite around with it like a twin, then it is 'icon.' You can't really think of an
> icon without thinking about smashing icons, about iconoclasm. (1)

Guy Reynolds attempt to define iconicity in relation to Willa Cather (American author, 1873-1947) later developed in an edited book *Willa Cather as Cultural Icon* (2007) while commendable as an effort to explain to the reader how the term is being used in this particular context is, in keeping with other examples considered here, indicative of the difficulties inherent in offering a comprehensive model of iconic forms. Reynolds' idea that "all icons are ultimately equivocal" is less convincing in its capacity to limit the features of cultural icons than the four-point definition that shows, through case study, how meaning becomes fixed to iconic forms unequivocally. Reynolds assessment of iconicity - a tentative attempt at a criterion - fails to differentiate the religious from the cultural connotations of the term, and is not strengthened by utilising obscure phraseology to supplement the idea that iconicity is difficult to pin down such as, "in order to set up an icon, you have to have somewhere to place it" (2) or "but there might be local, historical conditions, too, which inflect Cather's iconicity" (3). This article, in particular, shows the difficulties inherent in assuming the iconicity of an individual/object without questioning the nature of cultural

iconicity in general. By offering obliqueness as a central characteristic of iconicity, together with the argument of iconoclastic deference of meaning, Reynolds, while producing an important work regarding Willa Cather's cultural importance, can only suggest that this individual "might or might not be" a cultural icon, hardly a positive step towards defining iconicity in general terms.

Example 5: *Batman Unmasked: Analysing a Cultural Icon* (Brooker 2000)

Definition of term: Weak

> An attempt to reconstruct their context and hence recover the meanings carried by this cultural icon at key moments in his history. (3)

> In a sixty year career, including encounters with Houdini, Judge Dread, Hitler and the Predator, the Batman has, it seems, come face to face with every major cultural icon but James Bond. (8)

> Neither James T Kirk, Jean-Luc Picard or the Doctor may yet hold the status of cultural icon. (13)

Will Brooker uses the term 'cultural icon' extensively throughout his exploration of the cultural influence of the fictional character Batman. Although there is no formal sense of the term being defined the book, nevertheless, raises some interesting issues regarding the efficacy of fictional characters as cultural icons - as opposed to 'real' individuals - and a full analysis of this is available as a supplementary case study. The weakness in Brooker's approach, as in the majority of examples considered here, is a lack of an explicit attempt to state what is meant by the term in general or, possibly worse, to assume that the term is comprehensibly defined in common usage. The claim that the "Batman of 1943, despite his popularity, did not have the status of a

recognisable cultural icon" (94), although informed by Brooker's analysis of fandom and 'queer' readings, (dramatic narrative and receptive communities respectively), would, nevertheless, benefit from an explicit statement regarding what is meant by the term 'cultural icon' in this context.

Example 6: "The Making of a Cultural Icon for the Japanese Empire" (Park Sang Mi. 2006)

Definition of term: Weak

> This essay traces the contradictory process that enabled a colonial dancer to assume representative status as a cultural icon for the Japanese Empire. (598)

> Korean elites, including Seung-il and An Mak, attempted to make Choe into Korea's cultural icon. (611)

> With Japan's defeat in 1945, Choe's cultural activities as a cultural icon for the Japanese Empire ended. (625)

This analysis of the complex cultural relationships between pre-Second World War Korea, Japan and the USA, explored through the activities of the dancer Choe Seung-Hui, once more relies on implicit notions of cultural iconicity, together with an assumption that there is a common understanding of the term in existence that can be drawn as a general criterion. The purpose of including this brief example is simply to support the argument that a selection of academic publications, while often making very useful contributions to knowledge in relation to specific cultural forms, tends to overlook the general question of the characteristics of cultural iconicity. In this sense it

is not entirely necessary to present a comparative defining model (and thus avoiding the charge of circularity) as the term is generally poorly defined in any reasonable sense, or at best is given tentative and implicit consideration as to possible parameters of meaning.

2.4 Conclusion

Can anything be a cultural icon? In the analysis of use of the term in the popular media, the profligate, hyperbolic manner in which it is sometimes employed makes this a tempting conclusion. However, it has been argued that such a superficial reading is disproved by the direction in which the term is often applied. In this sense, it has been shown that, rather than the term being used entirely without meaning, popular media usage tends to be towards people and objects that are meaningful to modern receptive communities. This does not extend to the idea that the term is used in the media with clear boundaries of comprehension, far from it. Many instances of its use, often to add gravitas to journalistic pieces, are contestable on purely common sense grounds, prompting the idea that there are 'template' cultural icons against which inapplicable usage of the term can be judged, which in turn, prompts the question as to what these could be.

The inherent problems of assembling a group of iconic images that are representative of an 'essence' of English culture is further evidence of the need to offer a tighter defining structure to the term. This section exposed real problems in applying the term 'icon' in a formal programme where the 'ground-rules' are clearly insufficient. Re-examination of the national iconic nominations - using the four conditions of cultural iconicity - shows one criticism of the *Icons* project being the failure to identify the importance of sub-cultural factors. Iconic images have relevance to the receptive

communities that recognise the narrative element in the form and, from this, retain the imagery in collective memory. In this respect images that are potentially iconic to a particular region, a specific sub-group, or even a social class, may not necessarily possess sufficient dramatic narrative for them to transcend to national iconic status. From this position detailed historical examination of a potential icon may reveal a specific dramatic event (or lack of) that assists in the differentiation of primary iconic images. Appropriating meta-cultural iconic forms as national icons is a further difficulty for the *Icons* project. There is a great deal of research needed before objects such as cups of tea; sports such as cricket and rugby; foodstuffs such as cheddar cheese; and plants such as the rose, can be possessively classified as essentially English icons. The provisional attempt here to highlight these difficulties and to re-classify them accordingly, is an important step in this area of image studies.

Many instances of use of the term in academic publications assume that the reader understands what the term means prior to commentary on the respective potential icons and, therefore, offer few formal attempts to define the concept; although the choice of individuals and objects considered sometimes alludes to factors similar to those stated in the four conditions. While my definition is a significant contribution to the current level of knowledge in this field it cannot be viewed as a 'grand theory' of cultural icons, only as a better way of understanding and applying the term than exists at present. Certainly the definition is effective in explaining the formation and durability of primary cultural icons, but is less effective where the tragic-dramatic narrative is narrowly culture specific, as in sub-cultural icons. Nevertheless, as a starting point for a serious approach to this area of image studies the four conditions add rigour to this difficult and elusive subject. The concept of tragic-dramatic narratives enabling meaning to be fixed to distinct image forms is an important feature of the case studies, and the next chapter

looks in detail at support for the prioritisation of this concept, together with presenting

reasons why it is important generally in the analysis of culturally iconic phenomena.

CHAPTER 3 THE TRAGIC-DRAMATIC NARRATIVE

This chapter will further develop ideas such as collective memory, receptive communities, and tragic-dramatic narratives, and aims to explain how these terms relate specifically to the formation and reception of cultural icons. As previously acknowledged, the emphasis here will be on evidence that applies directly to human interest narratives and, in particular, how this assists our understanding of the development of iconic forms. So, although the chapter will begin with a short synopsis recognising the influence of the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (regarding the tragic root of human perception and its applicability to cultural icons), the main text will look at recent research into how certain images in collective memory are affected by tragic singular events (Greenberg et. al. 1995; Newhagen and Reeves 1992; Mitzal 2003). The hypothesis that such singular events - given particular sets of historical circumstances - are an important source of the formation of cultural icons is supported by analysing selected research into television news, oral narratives, terror management and photojournalism. As in the previous chapter, the four conditions will be applied to further test its effectiveness in clarifying the parameters of cultural iconicity.

3.1 Tragic Perception

There are many schools of thought that deal with the intricate subject of human perception and one of them, the philosophical impetus to the prioritisation of the tragic-dramatic iconic narrative, considers visual imagery as a representation of a blind willing in nature and, consequently, of a tragic world view. An exponent of cogently expressed philosophical pessimism, Arthur Schopenhauer saw human existence as driven not by free choice, free will, or reason, but by a blind noumenal (antonym of phenomenal) life-force that cannot properly be known as it is beyond the capacity of our perceptual

apparatus. Indeed, the only aspect of the noumenal force that can be felt by animal perception, and faintly acknowledged by human reflection, is that it wants to be; "every glance at the world, to explain which is the task of the philosopher, confirms and proves that *will to live,* far from being an arbitrary hypostasis or an empty word, is the only true expression of its inmost nature" (1958 350).

If knowledge of noumenal force is conditioned in varying degrees by animal perceptual apparatus, we - as complex animals - cannot make objective judgements that are independent from our unique, conceptualising minds. Schopenhauer, however, offers instinct and innate knowledge of our own bodies as primary evidence of noumenal force: "But it should be said that "perception is already knowledge of the thing-in-itself, for it is the effect of that which exists outside us, and as this *acts*, so it *is;* its action is just its being"'' (193). Although this still fails to be fully objective in that the expression of such knowledge invokes complex concepts, man's unique ability to self-reflect allows the inference that something different to reason and free will must be at the heart of existence. Crucial to this philosophy is the idea that intellect is subservient to innate perception, and Schopenhauer sees the former as predicating on the latter; an important influence on the idea of tragic-dramatic narrative inherent in cultural icons in that the meanings contained in primary cultural icons are closest to (natural) universal human values.

In addition to Schopenhauer's prioritisation of immediate knowledge of ones body as an avenue to knowledge of noumenal will, natural emotional expression can also give a feeling of a blind force of nature which is, for Schopenhauer, whenever we 'lose ourselves' in aesthetic activity. In this sense the best cultural forms transcend complex conceptual models and appeal directly to an inner sense of life force, or at least the values and emotions that are closest to it. As these activities are channelled through

human perceptual apparatus they tend to be expressed in forms that connect to universal human themes; and because these perennial themes hint at the existence of a blind, relentless force in nature, they gravitate more to tragic-dramatic themes than complex, parochial, intellectual constructs. Therefore when the term 'human interest' is used in relation to culturally iconic phenomena it is with this philosophical basis in mind. This theory of culture can also be applied to other genres of art, for example, Shakespearian tragedy over comedy, Wagnerian opera cycles and Hardy's novels; or even, perhaps, more modern cultural events such as dramatic sporting occasions or rock concerts. In terms of its contribution to ideas regarding the formation of cultural icons, the Schopenhauerian tragic root of human self-reflection has been extremely influential, and one way of considering this is to compare the effect of primary iconic images to classical tragic characters.

Ulrich Pothast (2008) neatly explains the relevance of Schopenhauer's life-view to cultural expressions such as music and tragedy. In this work he stresses that a foregoing of willing - the rejection of unrelenting motivation and desire - produces in the tragic character a freedom from the shackles of worldly individuality and, in the process, presents a cathartic representation of man's existence: "The dying heroes, at the end of tragedy, are not driven anymore to pursue the aims they had so far, but, guided by their tragic knowledge, give up their aims and thereby show themselves to be free in a new sense" (71). This tragic world view, in which the dramatic characters condense human meaning into extremely concise (and very often memorable) actions, correlates to the tragic-dramatic narratives identified in the formation and reception of primary cultural icons, especially as they elevate the iconic form above commonplace imagery.

As a method, looking for evidence of tragic-dramatic iconic narratives has not only proved productive in informing the main research question but also, along the lines

just indicated, as support for the application of Schopenhauerian philosophy to aspects of image studies in general, although it is not possible here to explore this further other than as an on-going philosophical backing to the iconic tragic-dramatic narratives.

To support the claim that naturalised narratives have significant influence on iconic formation, comparison will be drawn later in the chapter between photographic iconic images and primary cultural icons, with the argument being that the latter forms are produced through a natural (non-mediatised) connection between subject (receptive community) and object (distinct iconic image). For this connection to take place certain conditions need to be met and focusing on such dramatic events places emphasis on the relationship between image retention and receptive communities. Other research with similar emphasis, although not relating specifically to cultural iconography, includes (Altshuler 2003; Crawford 2004, in particular Chapter 3; and Mitchell 2007).

3.2 Bad News

This section will look at evidence relating to the interaction between traumatic-dramatic tele-visual imagery and memory. Four studies, the first on television news (Newhagen and Reeves 1992); the second on oral narrative history following the 9/11 attacks (Marshall Clark 2005; Simon 2009); the third on terror management (Greenberg, et al. 1995); and the fourth on photojournalism (Hariman and Lucaites 2007) will emphasise the importance of the tragic image as a cathartic product in modern cultures. This will be taken as support for the argument that there is a direct connection between tragic-dramatic narratives, cultural iconicity and collective memory, and this idea will be tested later in the chapter through comparison of photographic and cultural iconography.

The study by Newhagen and Reeves into how television may affect our intuitive perception of visual information, "The Evening's Bad News: Effects of Compelling

Negative Television News Images on Memory", presents evidence that shocking images influence the manner in which information is stored and recalled. Taking as the basis for their research the idea, "that while images of tragedy and human distress are aesthetically difficult to look at, they demand viewer attention in ways that other images do not" (25), together with the acknowledgement that other studies into this area have found only weak correlations between tragic imagery and memory, they argue that such images, "*inhibit* memory for material that precedes them, while they proactively *enhance* memory for material that follows them" (25). This finding indicates that traumatic tele-visual events have a discernible effect on the retention of information, which is further supported by the identification that prior research into traumatic imagery (29) tended to focus on the propositional content of recalled information including the extent that the viewer can repeat the "who, what, where, when and how of a story" (28-29). Alternatively, Newhagen and Reeves postulated, and found, that tragic imagery (mainly newsreel footage) heightened sensitivity to visual mental processing after exposure to bad news, "semantic narrative information is not remembered as well as aural emotion-laden information when they occur during exposure to compelling images" (38). Again this can be taken as evidence that dramatic images - when presented in a certain context - have an effect on human sensibility that bypasses conceptual forms such as the "when, where, how" just indicated. From this a good case can be made that culturally important tragic events, such as the untimely death of an individual whose image encapsulated American rebel mythology (Fig.1.), can have a considerable impact on the manner in which the distinct images of iconic phenomena are retained in collective memory. As my definition claims that meaning attaches to primary iconic forms via tragic-dramatic (usually singular) events, the perceptual effect of these events, as they relate to distinct image retention, correlates to Newhagen and

Reeves's finding that "emotion-laden information" is remembered better than "semantic narrative", meaning, in the latter case, linguistic content.

Figure 3: James Dean: Bravo Magazine Front Cover 16 May 1959.

Newhagen and Reeves chose images of war and civil unrest as the focus of their research and, although their conclusions are valid as a broad support for the idea of a tragic grounding of cultural icons, there is a strong case to be made for the idea that iconic phenomena have a more profound impact on collective memory than the relatively impersonal images of conflicts in foreign lands.

The idea that cultural icons are personalised phenomena formed through the effect of tragic-dramatic narratives is consistently stressed throughout the following studies. For example, the analysis of the iconisation of Che Guevara argues that Guevara's death was considered by large groups of people, at the time, to be a personal loss, similar to that of a family member, regardless of the fact that this could not have been the case. While it is useful to acknowledge that tragic-dramatic images have a direct impact on collective memory - as Newhagen and Reeve's study shows - the emotional narrative inherent in cultural iconography is an extremely important factor contributing to the durability of distinct iconic images. Later in this chapter the analysis of important

American photojournalistic images brings this point to the fore, placing emphasis not just on the dramatic power of the culturally iconic image, but also on the community of people viewing the image at the time of its production (its initial meaning), together with those who view the image in later periods (its significance). Primary iconic images have meaning on a different level than merely shock value, revealing human themes of universal interest. A recent study relating to this idea has revealed some interesting results that support such a claim.

3.3 Terror Management

Terror Management Theory (Greenberg, et al. 1995), subsequently referred to as TMT, has an interesting and, in regard to the tragic-dramatic element of cultural icons, a relevant theoretical framework. The TMT hypothesis follows Ernest Becker's Pulitzer Prize winning work *The Denial of Death* (1973) a work with strong Schopenhauerian allusions, although these are probably arrived at through Freud and Nietzsche, as both thinkers were heavily influenced by Schopenhauer. The following excerpts are from Becker's book and give a good understanding of the basic foundational premises of TMT: "Once you accept the truly desperate situation that man is in" (269); "we must remember that life itself is the insurmountable problem" (270); "the most that any one of us can seem to do is to fashion something - an object or ourselves - and drop it into the confusion, make an offering to it, so to speak, to the life force" (288). TMT argues that human beings imbue in objects properties that reflect an innate fear of their own mortality and that some of these objects become revered cultural icons:

> The human animal imbues life and the world in which it exists with meaning value and, in some domains, sacredness in an attempt to cope with its knowledge of the impossibility of fulfilling its most basic instinct - continued existence…We propose that cultural icons function as concrete manifestations of

the more abstract meanings and values of the cultural worldview, which constitute the individuals psychological equanimity. (Greenberg, et al. 1222)

The implicit assumption that social intelligence serves to protect the individual/culture from the blind unrelenting nature of existence, and with it the fear of inevitable mortality, involves the social formation of a protective worldview - sets of standards which protect individuals from anxiety - and behind which the source of this anxiety - death - can more comfortably exist. There are clear parallels here between this hypothesis and the applied Schopenhauerian philosophy of tragic perception in the four conditions, although, not unexpectedly, there are significant points of difference. TMT's idea that social constructions of human culture are a kind of firewall against the innate realisation (embodiment of will) that the impulse of existence and the imminence of death are outside of human control is an uncommon and brave position to argue. However, although the idea of a tragic element to cultural iconicity is important to TMT, it cannot be overlooked that the theory is unclear as to what it assumes are the fundamental qualities of cultural icons prior to postulating that they have a specific role to fulfil. In the study in question is an implicit assumption that certain phenomena have iconic status simply by being what they are, and in particular two objects - the American flag and the Crucifix - were used as 'cultural icons' in experimental conditions to test the TMT hypothesis. This is contestable on two grounds both of which result, once more, from a lack of comprehensive understanding as to the status of cultural iconicity. Firstly TMT, although correct in its premise that cultural icons reflect the tragic nature of human perception, fails to differentiate between objects that it sees as being imbued with meaning. One consequence of taking the position that "life and the world" (1222) are conditioned by a human aversion to mortality is that all objects, to a greater or lesser extent, contain some symbolic meaning. What seems to be the case with TMT is that it recognises the perceptual implications of symbolic imagery yet does not seem to assign

quality differentiation to specific, distinct images, relying instead on the notion that some objects are more "culturally loaded" (1222) than others. Again, absence of an adequate defining structure for cultural icons results in the assumption that certain objects are automatically iconic. Take, for example, the adoption of the American flag as a predicted inhibitor for the mortality salient group. Here the hypothesis was that the group that was asked to consider thoughts relating to their own death would be less likely than the control group to use culturally iconic objects, such as the flag in question, to perform everyday tasks. In this case the study makes the implicit assumption that the meaning of the symbol is the same, or similar, for all of the participants. Given that the participants in the study were American psychology students it would be reasonable to assume that the receptive community in this case was culturally congruous. This may have been quite different, however, for individuals/groups from other countries, ethnic groups or sub-cultures who - although recognising the American flag as a distinct image - may have an entirely different comprehension of the significance of the symbol as a cultural icon.

I acknowledge here that criticism of TMT's definition of cultural iconicity (and others already considered) could be seen in certain respects as a circular argument, in that the four-point definition of cultural iconicity is placed as a model against which alternatives are judged, with a presupposed assumption that mine is a superior definition. There are some important implications to this objection. Firstly, there is a significant difference between the assumptions of cultural iconicity apparent in the four conditions when compared with other considerations of the term, as in the example under question here. In my definition, although it is argued that there are tangible, primary cultural icons in common memory, this position has been arrived at by asking the questions, what are the features inherent in these examples; how were the icons originally formed and received; and how can these features be used as a comparison

with other potentially iconic forms? The main benefit to this method is that it proposes these questions be asked *prior* to any analysis of the future social/psychological significance of potential cultural icons and, as such, does not necessarily require the positioning of an alternative model to judge the efficacy of any forthcoming answers. In context, rather than looking for the effects of cultural icons on individuals, although as acknowledged TMT theory provides support for the tragic-dramatic root of the four conditions, the questions that need to be raised here are along the lines of, why is the American flag or the Crucifix a cultural icon and what meaning/significance do they have to communities that may be receptive to their symbolism? On the whole, such questions are overlooked, making this oversight a point of contention in assessing alternative definitions and, consequently, limiting their contribution to the main question, what is a cultural icon? It is also argued that criticism of different uses of the term along these lines is valid even without comparing them to the four conditions - although doing this serves the purpose of underlining the superior cohesion and applicability of the latter model - and if this is accepted any hint of circularity of argument is probably countered.

Terror Management Theory offers general support for the idea that there are specific images in collective memory that play an important role in the way cultures define their existence. Specifically, the theory argues that cultural icons are somehow connected to tragic information, in this case as a protection from the inevitability of mortality. However, use of the term cultural icon by TMT, as indicated above, fails to address certain questions pertaining to different aspects of cultural iconicity; in particular the theory, while proving useful in presenting evidence of the power of culturally iconic images on individuals, does not contribute to knowledge as to how such images were formed and received at their inception, and, specifically, the extent to which the meaning of an iconic image is comprehended by relevant receptive

communities. With these points in mind it would be useful to consider another study that places emphasis on a specific tragic event, the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

3.4 Oral History

Columbia University's "Oral History and Memory Project" (2003) researching the immediate aftermath of the terrorist destruction of the World Trade Centre (Twin Towers) gives insights into the effect of a singular tragic event on the collective memory of specific receptive communities. The project interviewed a considerable number of individuals (400) who had immediate experience of the attacks in order to assess their feelings, emotions and memory of the event prior to the development of a formal public narrative meaning, in this case, before media stories about the effect of the attack on communities became available. The immediacy of the Oral History and Memory Project provides important information regarding the specific effect on collective memory and receptive communities of a major tragic event.

The project found a diversity and intensity of emotion in all the groups interviewed in the aftermath of the attacks including, for example, fire-fighters, Muslims, Sikhs, Afghan immigrants, eyewitnesses, volunteers and artists. The initial results revealed common feelings of extreme anxiety, violence (including fears that the attacks would initiate retaliation) and concerns relating to mortality: "We also gathered many more ordinary stories in which the struggle to survive was the primary theme of the interview" (Marshall Clark 2003 574). The project also found that this specific tragic event had a direct effect on image recall and immediate perceptual memory. The prioritisation of the singular tragic-dramatic event fixing meaning onto a distinct iconic image is supported by this aspect of the project research, in that the interviewees offered

no existing narrative or immediate oral history that could compare to the event, so one needed to be found.

> Our interviews revealed the absence of comparisons and analogous historical experiences on the part of most of those we interviewed. Moreover, with the exception of those who had fled to this country to escape oppression, there were almost no collective experiences of prior trauma among people we interviewed that had been passed down in living memory. (575)

Given the intense media coverage of dramatic world events it is apparent from this evidence that, for individuals closely associated with the 9/11 attacks, the personalisation of the tragedy did not allow comparison with events witnessed from a distance, meaning events that are physically and emotionally removed from immediate personal experience, as in highly mediatised narratives. This lack of reference led many of the interviews to be, "characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty and contradiction, as well as meaning, form and purpose" (575). The project also found that people's inability to find catharsis in immediately available reference points necessitated, "a search for ways to interpret their experiences outside of established frameworks" (576) and, for many of the survivors of the 9/11 attacks, these experiences were captured by an existing distinct, durable, reproducible iconic image.

The attack on Pearl Harbor on the morning of 7 December 1941 holds a unique place in American national history. Its status as an exceptional tragic-dramatic event can hardly be questioned, yet the lack of a singular distinct image containing discernible meaning denies its retention in collective memory as culturally iconic, if the grounds proposed by the four conditions are applied. This partially explains why, when this event was offered "as one analogy" (576) to the participants of the OHM project it was universally rejected in that, "the fit was wrong for the lived experience of September

11" (576). However, there was an image, perfectly retained in collective memory, that did reflect the shared experiences of many of the survivors of the 9/11 attacks. This image was the sinking of The Titanic. As the OHM project suggests, the thematic correlation of the two tragic events (9/11 and The Titanic) seemed to have initiated the reproduction of the earlier iconic image as a means of expressing the participant's own horrific experiences:

> The sinking of the Titanic was an analogy used far more frequently by many we interviewed, drawing people's attention to the myth of invincibility, which was difficult for people to reject as a reality in both cases. The analogy fits in some ways as a literal one, as both the ship and the twin towers were reputedly indestructible (in fact, many people in both situations died because they were told that they should not try to escape). (576)

The myth of invincibility is the meaning fixed onto the single, distinct image that, following the tragic event of its sinking, made the image of The Titanic an important, primary, cultural icon. That this was the image recalled by many individuals interviewed by the OHM project is evidence both for the feasibility of the Terror Management hypothesis regarding the protective function of cultural icons, in addition to the main claim of this thesis regarding the fixing in collective memory of simple meaning to a distinct image following a specific tragic-dramatic narrative event.
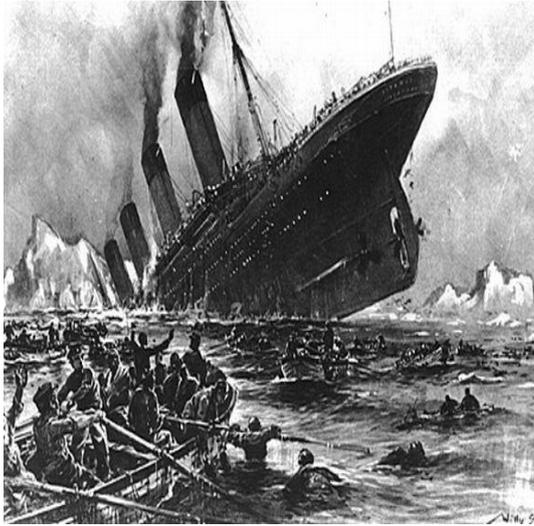
Figure 4: Illustration of the Sinking of the White Star liner Titanic.

The sinking of the RMS Titanic on the 15 April 1912 with the loss of 1517 (68%) people on board is a singular tragic event in the history of the twentieth century. Unlike countless other tragic events that punctuate this period of human history, The Titanic disaster was unique in several respects. In terms of its prominence as a major cultural icon, which it would not have become if the sinking had not occurred, the ready availability of its distinct image (with concurrent meaning) shattered any belief in material indestructibility, and with it exposed the fundamental fragility of human mortality. The tragic-dramatic emphasis placed on iconic forms such as The Titanic explains, in part, why major events such as Pearl Harbor and The Titanic can be considered differently regarding their respective retention and reproducibility as cultural narrative and cultural icon. This approach, together with the ideas promoted by TMT, prioritises the tragic base of iconic forms together with the cathartic role they play as symbolic image narratives. In turning now to look at famous photojournalistic images, comparison will be made regarding the naturalness of the tragic cultural iconic form (of which the sinking of the Titanic is a prime example) in contrast to the relatively synthetic productions of photojournalistic icons.

3.5 Photographs: Cultural Icons?

The definition of iconic photographs offered by Robert Hariman and John Louis Luciates shows similarity to the four-point definition of cultural iconicity. For Hariman and Lucaites photographic icons are: "Widely recognized and remembered, are understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional identification or response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres or topics" (27). Firstly, Hariman and Luciates acknowledge that the photographic iconic symbol should, at the very least, be known to and be retained in the collective memory of large numbers of people ("widely recognized and remembered"). Secondly, such icons should contain a narrative element initiated by a "significant" event. Thirdly, they should be reproducible in order to confirm the meaning and significance of the photographic iconic form to the receptive subject. The main aim of Hariman and Luciates's project is to identify, "important relationships between iconic images and public culture" (28) which compares to the point made in Chapter 1 relating to how selective images are important in defining identity in modern cultures. Specifically, for Hariman and Luciates, photographic icons provide a means to resolve aspects of American public/political culture characterised by dichotomy and duality. In doing this through creative image mediums - as opposed to the text - the iconic photograph offers an alternative performative forum for non-linguistic public communication. The following comparison between the ideas presented in Hariman and Luciates' study, and the significantly different ideas regarding the broader concept of cultural iconography, is a step towards answering the main question, what are cultural icons?

Images analysed by Hariman and Luciates

Figure 5: Migrant Mother (Dorothea Lange March 1936).

Figure 6: Raising the Flag at Iwo Jima (Joe Rosenthal February) 1945.

Figure 7: Raising the Flag at Ground Zero (Thomas E Franklin September 2001).

Figure 8: Times Square Kiss (Alfred Eisenstaedt August 1945).

Figure 9: Man With Shopping Bags: Tiananmen Square 1989.

Figure 10: Accidental Napalm (Hung Cong Ut 1972).
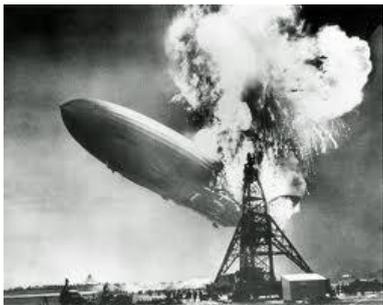
Figure 11: Hindenburg Disaster May 1937.

Figure 12: Challenger Explosion May 1986.

As previously stated, due to the image based nature of both cultural and

photographic iconography, there are inevitable overlaps and similarities to the

theoretical explanation of their respective formation and cultural functions. Both forms,

for example, appeal to and are retained in the collective memory of large communities in modern societies, and to achieve this they must do something extraordinary in order to be differentiated from the mass of transitory images in modern cultures. For Hariman and Luciates:

> Iconic images are shaped by norms of decorum and reinscribe social roles. They always are equally articulate images available for communicating civic virtue or dissent, national resolve, or the horror of war, achievement or hubris, continuity or change. The icon emerges from the welter of images because it evokes the vital center of mainstream public culture. Iconic images capture both the central contradiction and the deepest commonality defining a polity. (289)

This chapter has attempted to reinforce the idea that important iconic images are formed through an inter-relationship between tragic events, collective memory and the receptive status of particular historical communities. When applied to iconic forms this hypothesis is useful in that it focuses attention onto the respective tragic-dramatic narratives of iconic images. The four-point definition - of which the narrative element is an essential component - is equally useful as a practical tool in the analysis of potential iconic images and, here, it will be employed to examine differences between the two genres in question. The extract above refers to photographic iconic images and, while there may be some valid senses in which such artefacts can be understood as cultural, these can be shown as different to the formation and reception of primary cultural icons as proposed and argued in the following case study chapters. One way of differentiating photographic iconography from cultural iconicity is to utilise the idea of reproducibility. In this regard reproducibility, when applied to primary cultural icons, means that the distinct image should refer directly to the name of the iconic form together with the name of the form initiating a distinctly recognisable referential image. So, if this is

feasible, it should be possible to apply the concept of reproducibility back and forth to primary cultural icons, for instance, the image of James Dean should prompt the name of the icon just as effectively as the name initiates the image. The idea of self-referring reproducibility is less convincing when applied to some of the photographic icons shortly to be considered, in that the image itself is often required to be physically in place for the act of recall to be effective. In this precise sense, it is unlikely that textual prompts such as *Migrant Mother* would initiate the kind of instant image recall necessary for rudimentary cultural iconic status, as would be the case with, for example, The Titanic or James Dean, although the recognisability of the photographic image may remain widespread in certain cultures. Although ideas such as iconic reproducibility offer potential for empirical research, the high degree of recognisability of both primary cultural icons and the photographic images in question throughout this chapter should put the reader in a good position to consider the overall viability of such claims. In considering the applicability of the four conditions of cultural iconicity to the photographic examples, the exercise serves to illustrate the benefits of establishing parameters to the two groups of images.

1)   *Migrant Mother:* Distinct: Yes. Durable: Yes. Reproducible: No. Very few people would be able to place an image to the name but, when shown the photograph, may recognise it.

2)   *Times Square Kiss:* Distinct: Yes. There are supporting images that compete for the viewer's attention rendering the artefact relatively complex (when compared with cultural icons) although the photograph can be reduced to its main component, which is, of course, the sailor and the nurse. Durable: probably generationally dependant. Reproducible: As with durable.

3)   *Raising the Flag at Iwo Jima*: Distinct: Yes. Again, it is necessary to ask what influences do associated images such as the American flag have on the impact of the photograph and, in this respect, when set against primary cultural icons, photographs such as this display a relative complexity. Durable: Yes. Reproducible: Very likely.

4)   *Raising of the Flag at Ground Zero*: Distinct: No. Durable: Highly unlikely. Reproducible: Highly unlikely.

5)   *Accidental Napalm/Kim Phuc/Napalm Girl*: Distinct: Yes. Once more with the reservations regarding complexity of image juxtaposition. Durable: Yes. Reproducible: Entirely dependent on the verbal prompt, which in itself suggests a lack of reproducibility or, at least, a further complexity that is uncommon in primary cultural iconicity.

6)   *Tiananmen Square*: Distinct: Yes. Durable: Yes: Reproducible: Possibly.

7)   *Hindenburg*: Distinct: Yes. There are few issues here regarding competing imagery; the central tragic-dramatic image is unequivocal. Durable: Yes. Reproducible: Generationally dependent.

8)   *Challenger Space Shuttle*: Distinct: No. Durable: Unlikely: Reproducible: Unlikely.

It has been suggested that sensitivity to tragic-dramatic events through media channelled formats is an important factor in the formation of cultural icons. There can be little doubt that the events resulting in the photographic images above also include dramatic narrative elements yet, when compared to the formation and reception of primary cultural icons, the intensity of the narrative needs to be considered more closely; especially as the argument is being made that the natural dramatic narratives of culturally iconic forms are reflected in the simplicity and distinctness of their respective visual imagery.

One characteristic of some of the photographic icons above, figures 5 and 8 for example, is that they are fabricated events with poor (prior) connection to public sensibility in that, although the photographic events appear personalised, the narratives have a sense of artificiality when compared with the examples shortly to be considered in the case studies. Therefore, while some important photographic images are retained in collective memory as important cultural symbols, they may not possess the depth of meaning (as revealed in the distinctness of image) that can be seen to be evident in primary cultural icons, an important point of difference between cultural and photographic icons. Whereas the former are often formed through natural tragic-dramatic events in the 'real' world, mostly involving publically familiar individuals and objects, the latter are often staged events presenting dramatic simulations of anonymous individuals/objects. This is one reason why it may seem inappropriate to apply the modifier 'cultural' to any of the potentially iconic examples cited in Hariman and Luciates' work. This point is not meant as a criticism of Hariman and Luciates' excellent study but merely (and probably for the first time) as an attempt to differentiate the two iconic genres. To support this argument it would prove useful to compare the iconic status of one of these examples to a universally accepted primary cultural icon.

Dorothea Lange's 1936 study of an allegedly destitute pea picker (*Migrant Mother*) is a major symbol in the history of governmental propaganda (Fig.5.). Its composite elements - the hopeless, vulnerable gaze, the grime, the positioning of the children - lends emotional energy to the major political force of the era which was economic and social reform. As Hariman and Luciates suggest, the photograph utilises contemporary political conceptualisations to channel the thoughts of the viewer into thinking about social and political action and, added to this, the photograph invokes the need for a strong male influence - a Rooseveltian 'White Knight' to ride in and save the day:

The mother gathers her children to her, protecting them with her body, yet she is unable to provide for her needs. She cannot act, but she (and her children) provide the most important call for action. More to the point the question posed by the photograph is, Who will be the father? The actual father is neither present nor mentioned. The captioning never says something like, "A migrant mother awaits the return of her husband." As with the Madonna, a substitution has occurred. Another provider is called to step into the husband's place. (58)

Employed by the Farm Security Administration it was Dorothea Lange's job to photographically catalogue the experiences of migrant sharecroppers during the pre-war American Depression. Lange's 1936 photograph, her best-known piece, is a masterful composition capturing the desperation of the individual and symbolising the dire condition of a significant section of American society at that time. As Lange was working for the Federal Government the photograph, first published in the San Francisco News on 10 March 1936, was used extensively to spotlight the need for a Federal program of reform to relieve acute poverty and to help revive the ailing United States economy. In this sense the image encapsulated a deeply held fear inherent in American society, as it may still do, that the primary goal of material wealth has a potential nadir in utter destitution. This theme is channelled through the image as an emotional plea for political resolution in a manner analogous to the 'Third-World children' images favoured by modern aid charities. With regard to perceptual appeal the presentation of *Migrant Mother*, with its lack of personalised history, triggers a general empathetic response from the viewer that, while symbolising a general theme of human impoverishment, nevertheless lacks the intensity of dramatic narrative integrity common in primary iconic forms. The alternative narrative behind the production of the *Migrant*

Mother image is evidence that this particular photographic icon implemented a fabricated myth rather than a naturally occurring dramatic event.

Lange had finished her month long remit to produce a portfolio of migrant worker images and was returning to her San Francisco home when she spotted a sign indicating a 'Pea-Pickers Camp'. Following an instinct she hurried off six photographic 'shots', one of which was the iconic *Migrant Mother* image. Recalling the moment in later interviews Lange remarked that, "I knew I had recorded the essence of my assignment" (famouspictures.org accessed 16 2 2009), and recalling the alleged interview with Florence Thompson (the mother in the photograph) she went on to state that, "these people had just sold their tent in order to buy food. Most of the 2,500 people in this camp were destitute" (cited in Sandweiss 195). This, it now transpires, is largely fabrication. Florence Thompson has since stated that not only did Dorothea Lange fail to interview her but, if she had, she would have been given an entirely different story. The need to modify perception of the image is noted by Martha A Sandweiss (2007) who suggests that Lange made no great effort to find out the true story behind the photograph: "But it was in her interest not to know. No Indian woman who moved to California before the Great Depression and subsequently bore a child out of wedlock could embody, in an uncomplicated way, the image of the deserving poor that Lange sought to evoke with her carefully composed portrait" (195). In reality Florence Thompson was waiting in a makeshift shelter while her two eldest adult sons returned with the radiator that had broken as they passed the 'Pea Pickers' camp and that, when the news story (and subsequent image) was published, the family had long since moved to their original destination. The point made here is that this image, at face value a stark narrative of human distress, leaves a subtly different impression than the cultural icons we are shortly to consider, and a brief introduction to one of them may help support this point.

The formation of the Che Guevara icon shows that primary cultural icons have a discernibly different effect on the collective memory of large receptive communities than the *Migrant Mother* photograph considered above. Although the myth of the icon was retrospectively embellished after the murder of Guevara in 1967, catalysed as it was by the coincidental availability of his poster image in early 1968, the impact of the cultural icon is largely explained by the intensely close personalisation of the image narrative to the experiences and desires of the relevant receptive communities. Guevara, although relatively anonymous in the years preceding his death, had a biographical history that, with extensive emolliated mythologizing, comfortably correlated to the distinctness of his overtly heroic image (not forgetting that his iconic image was also originally a photograph). Receptive communities - mainly youth groups involved in late 1960s civil unrest - perceived the battles fought by Guevara as comparable to their own anti-systemic confrontations, not necessarily through the interplay of complex ideologies, but as deeply felt connections between the meaning of the icon and its reception. This point is supported by the emotional reaction to Guevara's assassination in 1967. In common with many primary cultural icons the embodied nature of the iconic form was matched by a wave of personalised sentiment for Guevara equating to the loss of a family member. In this sense the tragic-dramatic narrative of the image can be seen to operate at a fundamentally different perceptual level, a deeper one perhaps, than the photojournalistic icons considered here and, although there may be areas of overlap between the two genres, the differences can be categorically distinguished. Identifying such differences is an important step towards informing the central thesis question, especially as this is the first comparison between the two iconic genres, and to this end it would be useful to clarify further how Hariman and Luciates' comprehension of photojournalistic iconography differs from the four conditions.

Distinctness of Image

Photographic icons are generally singular products often bound to a specific historical event or period (Sandweiss 2007). Although the meaning contained in the photographic icon can be seen to contain dramatic narratives these are often synthetically detached from the communities that consume the imagery, unlike primary cultural icons where the meaning of the imagery is interactively formed through the participation of receptive communities. Therefore, the fixed meaning contained in the distinct culturally iconic image has stronger meaning and greater significance to future generations than the historically limited photographic icon.

Durability of Image

Terror Management Theory offers evidence that treasured cultural icons reflect innate human perceptual fears regarding existence and mortality. The capacity to reproduce distinct images from a single verbal prompt after at least a generation signifies that cultural icons are deeply ingrained in collective memory. The question then is do photographic icons operate in a similar way? The evidence presented in this section suggests that, on the whole, they do not.

Reproducibility

Primary cultural icons produce a distinct image at the initiation of a clear verbal prompt, which is not usually the case with photographic icons, for example, "the Oklahoma City rescue photograph that serves as the iconic and defining image of the photojournalist Allen's career" (Sandweiss 194) does not produce the immediacy of mental image that the verbal prompt 'Elvis' does.

Tragic/Dramatic Narrative

The narrative elements of photographic and cultural icons, while showing occasional similarity of form are, in their respective formation and reception, fundamentally different. As we have seen many photographic icons are fabricated conceptual composites that, although sometimes appealing to universal human themes, often lack the naturalness of personal connection that fixes clear meaning to distinct image. While the meaning of primary cultural icons tends to be fixed, usually following a tragic-dramatic singular event, photographic icons, similar to some works of representative art, can have the meaning of the narrative radically altered by new information. Lange's *Migrant Mother* image, for instance, becomes a different proposition when presented as a woman concerned not with the destitution and potential starvation of her young family, but as an individual anxious to know whether her two eldest sons had managed to repair the radiator on their broken motor vehicle.

Receptive Communities

Part of the analysis to this point has attempted to show how collective memory can be affected by traumatic events, with emphasis placed on the idea that human perception itself is conditioned to be significantly influenced by tragic-dramatic images in certain contexts. Related to this is the status of the receptive community at the inception of the iconic event. In certain instances, the 9/11 terrorist attacks for example, particular receptive communities can be identified and researched with a good degree of accuracy, as the Oral History Project has done in the section considered above, and it is this idea that the last part of this chapter will explore.

People have always expressed their experience of dramatic events through representational symbols, and in the tele-visual era the natural production of cultural icons reflects experience of life in the same manner. Many of the primary cultural icons

in the following case study chapters were formed during a period where the opportunities for image consumption escalated manifold and which, in turn, allowed the images to be retained in the collective memory of communities worldwide. The complexity of interaction between receptive communities and imagery during this period offers the scope for many other detailed research studies following, perhaps, the ideas and direction presented in the following chapters.

Heightened receptivity to potential iconic phenomena is essential to the understanding of their formation, and as previously indicated this idea can be shown with clarity in examples such as the interrelationship between the Che Guevara icon and the French civil riots of 1968. Although this is one of the most overt example of narrative interaction, all of the following studies suggest that this aspect of iconic formation is important in the analysis of this type of culturally unique phenomena.

It is no coincidence that most of the iconic forms in the following chapters come from a period in history that witnessed revolutionary changes in the socio-cultural, economic and political landscapes of many Western countries. The development of group identities from the middle 1950s to the early 1970s is a major factor in why this period is considered fertile in respect to culturally iconic production. Activism in many areas of social and political life re-orientated individual perspectives towards definable parameters; people began to interpret their experiences as groups with identifiable ideological bases. Macro group identities were being forged through struggles fought by, amongst others, women, ethnic groups and gay activists. Within this cultural flux micro identities were becoming defined as sub-texts to the larger identities; youth culture, for example, saw sub-divisions become physically distinguishable, teddy-boys, mods, rockers, hippies, greasers and beatniks to name a few. The combination of identities formed through confrontation and defiance (to all symbols of authority or

repression) charged individuals and groups with heightened receptivity to new representational forms (Kaufman 2009). Novels, art, fashion, and music flourished within the atmosphere of receptivity and cultural expression as did new forms of image production. Television became *the* means of mass communication in the period offering new, personalised information - it was *in* the home rather than *out* of it - to universal receptive communities. On Sunday 9 February 1964, for example, over 73 million Americans watched The Beatles perform on The Ed Sullivan Show, and crime rates during the performance plummeted. Advertising of products in new ways, elicited fresh expectations and created new forms of consumer demands. At specific intervals during this period dramatic world events contributed to the constant flow of tele-visual information bringing real-life drama, and occasionally trauma, to individuals who were becoming conditioned to process such information through tele-visual imagery. This heightened state of receptivity, combined with the rapid transmission of information during the early tele-visual period, cannot be overstated in regard to the perceptual retention of culturally iconic forms in collective memory, and this, in conjunction with the four conditions of cultural iconicity, will be reinforced throughout the case studies that follow.

CHAPTER 4 REBEL MYTH AND CULTURAL ICON: JESSE JAMES AND JAMES DEAN

When Jesse James stepped onto a small chair to wipe the dust off a picture on the morning of 3 April 1882 it is quite possible that he knew he would be shot and killed by his gang associate Robert Ford. As a seasoned self-publicist of his own exploits and myth creation Jesse James would also have been aware that his murder would be a national sensation, and he would have been right. This moment - re-enacted many times since in films, novels, poems and songs - is an established and important episode in American cultural history. In the immediate aftermath of the murder the clamour for news information matched the public demand for an image of the infamous outlaw. A lithograph taken by the novice photographer James W. Graham at the Alex Loco studio showing James's cadaver on a bed of ice (Fig.1.) was used extensively in newspaper and magazine articles at the time as well as selling freely, on its own, at two dollars each (Hansen 2007). However, the image failed to meet people's expectations and it did not enable the, by then, firmly established narrative myth to fix to a distinct reproducible image and, therefore, failed to establish Jesse James as a primary cultural icon.

This chapter explores the idea that the proximity of Jesse James to becoming a primary cultural icon is largely explained by the lack of an appropriate reproducible image at the time of the singular tragic-dramatic event. Utilising the four conditions of cultural iconicity this case study will consider elements of Jesse James's mythological narrative that are fundamental to iconic forms, notably its appeal to receptive communities together with its capacity to be retained in collective memory. That no distinct, durable, and reproducible iconic image of Jesse James remains, or was ever established, does not necessarily foreclose this particular individual's contribution to the genre of rebel iconicity, quite the opposite. Culturally iconic phenomena, in one sense,

are a matrix of dramatic narratives displaying subtle, yet discernible, meaning with each new image production. Here, the argument will be that the strength of the Jesse James myth demanded an image to solidify the rebel narrative in collective memory. That this was not available at the time of James's death created an image void that was filled much later in American cultural history, by an image which resolved the meaning of the mythical elements of the Jesse James narrative enabling it to be retained by receptive communities not only in America but worldwide and through generations.
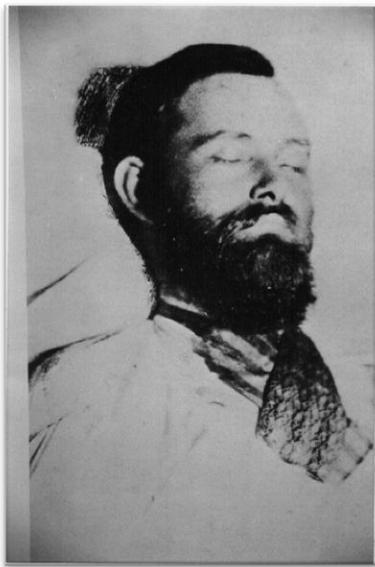
Figure 13: Photograph of Jesse James shortly after his murder.

4.1 Rebel

The epithet 'rebel without a cause' is one that, while being apt as a description of the latter days of Jesse James's life, cannot be applied to most of it. One similarity between the robustness of the Jesse James myth and the durability of primary cultural icons is the ability of both forms to be retained in collective memory when other, often equally dramatic, myths/images are forgotten. In *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* (2003), T. J. Stiles asks a pertinent question regarding the ephemeral nature of prominent post American Civil War individuals, of these, he asks: "Every one has been

forgotten, except for the James brothers and their Confederates. The obvious question is, Why? Why should one set of criminals be so much more memorable than another?" (20)

One difference between the activities of Jesse James and the scores of other lawless rebels operating in the postbellum American South is that his activities were conducted with a mind-set forged by the brutalisation of Civil War and resolutely directed against a perceived repressive force. For Jesse James it was difficult to accept that the Civil War had ended and that the South had surrendered to the North, and in taking this stance he found a great deal of support from large sections of people in both his local community and in wider sections of the Southern States. Very much aware of the impact that his violent bank and train robberies would have on the political atmosphere of the postbellum period, Jesse James made sure that his activities - while he remained necessarily incognito - were nevertheless widely reported. During this period he was enthusiastically assisted by the journalist and publisher John Newman Edwards, this mutually beneficial relationship connecting the lawlessness of the James gang to sympathetic receptive communities, together with justifying James's own perception of his position as a 'Robin Hood' of the South, as Stiles again notes: "If it were not for Edwards, Jesse James would probably have passed into obscurity with hundreds of other criminals; and were it not for Jesse James, Edwards's burgeoning role as a Confederate spokesman within the Democratic Party would never have loomed so large" (226).

Mythical rebels have many threads of similarity. Of these one of the most important is the empathy between the actions of the rebel anti-hero and the community of people the rebel is perceived as fighting for. Although the level of selflessness (regarding the former) in these cases is often overemphasised, the rebel anti-hero is seldom isolated from a cause greater than his/her own personal gain. Some examples of

these (like primary cultural icons) are extant in common memory - Robin Hood, Ned Kelly, Che Guevara, and Boudicca, for instance. Following the discussion of iconicity in the opening chapters, a good case can be made for all of these examples to be considered as both mythical-rebel figures and cultural icons as they all, to varying degrees, fit the four conditions. In a similar manner the myth of Jesse James contained all of the features of primary cultural iconicity lacking only a distinct image to fix the meaning of his myth in collective memory. As the tragic-dramatic narrative is essential to the comprehension of an iconic form being offered here, it is worthwhile considering, in detail, the formation of the Jesse James myth.

4.2 Radicalisation

Many sections of American society were torn apart during the Civil War, the bloodiest and most fractious episode in its history; Michael Fellman makes this observation regarding the cultural impact of the war:

> Normal expectations collapsed, to be replaced by frightening and bewildering personal and cultural chaos. The normal routes by which people solved problems and channelled behaviour had been destroyed. The base for their prior values - their "moral structure" - underwent frontal attack...Such war both exaggerated and undermined fundamental cultural structure. (xvi)

Nowhere was the violent disruption more evident than in Jesse James's home state of Missouri. Typical of many farming families in the state the James-Samuel household was a relatively prosperous, peaceful unit that grew crops - hemp and tobacco mainly - in demand by the rapidly industrialising Northern states. Working side by side with the James brothers, seven slaves were owned by the household in a Missourian culture where the keeping of slaves was perceived as a normal aspect of economic and social life (7). Although, of course, slavery would become the main issue of the war, it was not

the only area of contention leading to the conflict in 1861, and, as Fellman states, during this period in Missouri only one smallholding in eight held slaves. What was different about antebellum Missouri society was its position, both physically and ideologically, between the abolitionists of the North and the secessionists of the South. Situated in a no-man's land between socio-economic revolution, and as a consequence of location, Missouri became a split society; prior to the slavery issue, for instance, most Missourians were content to lead conservative lives within tightly contained small communities, almost all of the inhabitants of pre-war Missouri, for example, lived in communities of less than 2000 people (7), nevertheless, the unavoidable nature of the political debate surrounding slavery forced people to take sides. North and south of Missouri partisanship on slavery was clear-cut, the latter being supportive of it with the former holding a political remit for abolition. In Missouri the Civil War was at its most raw as communities were split into friends and enemies around a debate that mattered less to them than any of the surrounding partisan states; Fellman goes on to argue that slave-holding became less common in the years preceding the war as Missouri inexorably grew closer to the economic pull of the Northern industrial economy. The economic and cultural tightrope that Missouri found itself on resulted in extraordinary tensions, Fellman again: "A majority of Missourians were left confused and feeling caught in the middle of a battle they wanted to avoid. They remained loyal to the Union yet deeply resentful of Federal force. They were to be whipsawed between the two organised poles of power". (11)

Shortly after the commencement of war in 1861 Frank James - Jesse's older brother - joined a local Confederate company and fought in early skirmishes as well as in major battles such as Lexington and Wilson's Creek. Badly injured, he was captured and subsequently pardoned (after being forced to swear allegiance to the Union) returning to the family farm in early 1862. As the conflict in Missouri descended into a

wretched guerrilla war, with neighbours of sectional ideologies performing barbaric actions on each other, the James brothers, like the majority of young men in Missouri as a whole, had little choice other than to fight in an arena of conflict that was thrust on them. For Jesse James one particular incident hardened his view that the war had become clear-cut, not in terms of arguments relating to the rights and wrongs of slavery, but in the much simpler terms as a clear differentiation between old friends and new enemies, and it would be this mind-set that remained with him until his death.

For many northern settlers in the southern states of America, and certainly for the combatants fighting for the Union, the white Missourian farm-worker was regarded as, at best, a moral degenerate and, at worst, a human sub-species. Nicknamed "Pukes" by their Union opponents the disregard shown to proud and family orientated young men such as the James brothers was understandably difficult to accept as Fellman's description confirms: "Missouri Pukes were feared by their northern neighbors as dirt-wallowing, elemental brutes, suspended in a comatose state between bouts of primitive violence...Pukes were often described as being like animals rather than fellow human beings." (14)

In May 1863 a Union militia squad entered the James-Samuel farm with the intent to capture or find the whereabouts of the guerrilla group they believed Frank James was operating with. Not surprisingly, given the attitude of the northern soldiers to the Missouri farm dwellers, the interrogation turned quickly into torture and near murder (Stiles 2003). Reuben Samuel, Jesse's stepfather, was hanged from a tree until he gave information assisting the militia in their hunt for Frank's guerrilla group, and in addition Jesse - a boy of just sixteen - was whipped and severely beaten. There was no recourse to law for such ill-treatment; from all sides Missourian secessionist communities were besieged with genocidal zeal by Unionist groups who saw them as having no place in a developing society. This, from Charles B Stearns a pacifist garrisonian of the period:

"When I deal with men made in God's image, I will never shoot them; but these pro-slavery Missourians are demons from the bottomless pit and may be shot with impunity" (cited in Fellman 15)

Jesse James, an intelligent, reflective individual who, unlike many of his army and (later) his guerrilla/gang comrades had few rough mannerisms (Love 1990), became utterly brutalised by episodes such as the one above, together with many others he would witness and experience in the tit for tat horror that characterised the civil war in Missouri. Developing what may be termed a 'Spartacus complex' Jesse James understood, and would later vigorously express, his situation in simple terms. His was a lifestyle adopted (in his comprehension) not by choice or inclination but by the sheer need to survive, both individually and culturally, against an overwhelmingly oppressive regime. From this point the brutalisation of the individual not only expressed itself in retaliatory violence - Jesse James did not flinch from such acts - but became a noble crusade, a selfless battle in the interests of a greater cause than his own. Both sides in the brutal guerrilla war developed de-humanising ideologies to support their campaigns. Individuals such as Jesse James not only rejected the offensiveness of the 'puke' characterisation, but in contrast regarded themselves as the 'true' stock of the American South, an important element in the formation of the Jesse James myth. The Northern infiltrator, imposing its ethnic zeal with staggering violence, was perceived both as an overt martial combatant and as a clear threat to the continued existence of the Southern way of life. The guerrilla war that the James brothers played a major part in therefore became a 'people's war' fought with a ruthlessness that characterises this type of violent emotional involvement.

4.3 'Bold Robber'

The Civil War in the American Border States - Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri and West Virginia - ended formally with the surrender of Robert E Lee at the Appomattox Court House on 9 April 1865. Given the nature of the conflict in these areas, however, it would have been unrealistic to expect that a shaking of hands could have ended the tribal opposition between two cultures whose ideological distance was as wide as the physical distance between them was small, and returning to a sense of normality, given the atmosphere of the conflict, was almost a contradiction in terms. Nevertheless, many of the Confederate guerrilla combatants realised that further aggression could gain no further advantage and took the various offers of bonds and oaths intended as incentives to facilitate surrender. Brutality however - on both sides - proved difficult to assuage with gentle promises, and the bitterness of the winning side revealed the lingering belief that the secessionist guerrillas were little more than sub-human brutes.

> As Lincoln had observed in St Louis, both the military and civilian leadership were badly divided over what general stance to take towards guerrillas and hostile civilians. Some officials were "softs" – reconciliationists - and others "hards" - punishing law-and-order advocates - while many others vacillated between these two positions, as the blood continued to flow whatever the ascendant policy in St Louis at the moment. (Fellman 87)

For Jesse James the seminal moment that would lead to his postbellum activity as a 'Robin Hood' of the South came in a confrontation with Unionist militia on Slat Pond road 15 May 1865 as Jesse and his guerrilla leader Archie Clement were attempting to cross the Missouri river with the intention of returning home. Unsure, at this stage, whether to claim amnesty in Lexington as many other young guerrillas had already done, the allegedly unprovoked attack by a Union militia made the decision for him:

> This little skirmish was hugely significant in the life of Jesse James. Before it was over, he would be prostrate with the second serious wound of his brief career, a wound that looked like it would be mortal. Such an injury would be important enough, but in surviving it Jesse would swell the memory of this fight to epic proportions. (Stiles 153)

Like the majority of the border state guerrillas Jesse James signed the oath of allegiance to the Union, in his case wracked with the pain of the injury sustained six days previously. Nursed back to health in a hotel room in Lexington by his mother Zerelda, Stiles argues convincingly that Jesse's two year recuperation from the gunshot wound was an elaborate cover for the robberies he continued to commit. During this period Jesse may well have read one of the newspapers reflecting the strife and animosity felt by the community most disenfranchised by the ravages of Civil War. One of these publications, *The Lexington Caucasian,* proclaimed: "We are and have been Southern in our sympathies and opposed to a mongrel breed or a mongrel government" (cited in Stiles 160). Certain aspects of his situation would have been very clear to Jesse James in the first months of the Reconstruction era (1865-1877). Firstly, his society and culture - which to him represented the apex of a noble life - had been utterly devastated. Missouri, perhaps more than any other Southern state, had seen its physical and economic infrastructure destroyed by the guerrilla conflict which was avoided by most of the other states experiencing the conflict (Fellman). With his own family in enforced exile it is unlikely that Jesse James would have considered the possibility that there could be a reasonable compromise to the ravages he had witnessed and participated in since 1861. Secondly, Jesse James would in all likelihood have realised, through his personal experience and the ideological atmosphere of the period, that the moral war was still very much being fought. Thirdly, banditry was Jesse James' 'profession' and he was adept at it. Unlike many battle hardened veterans of the Southern guerrilla

campaigns Jesse James showed no interest in returning to an antebellum farming lifestyle, for him that idea had vanished with the whipping he received at the hands of Unionist militia in 1861, together with the brutalisation and decimation of his society by the same forces. His defiance was (to him) justified by the intolerance of postbellum radical political activists, who demanded harsh retribution against the Missourian rebels. He saw no future in pandering to such people; rather he would hurt them where he could hurt them the most, by directing his honed guerrilla warfare skills at the heart of the economic and social reconstruction - banks and railroads. Fourth, publicity. Jesse James' resolve to maintain hostilities through daredevil robberies was spurred on by the knowledge that the reporting of such activity would be eagerly consumed by sympathetic sections of the Missourian community, and in terms of its relevance to the formation of Jesse James's mythology this last point requires further consideration.

4.4 The Kansas City Times

The following passage is taken from *The Kansas City Times* as cited in the *Liberty Tribune*, 24 June1870, (cited in Stiles 211) and is Jesse James's first statement of intent in the public media:

> But I well know if I was to submit to an arrest, that I would be mobbed and hanged without a trial. The past is sufficient to show that bushwhackers have been arrested in Missouri since the war, charged with bank robbery, and they most all have been mobbed without trials…It is true that during the war I was a Confederate soldier, and fought under the black flag, but since then I have lived a peaceable citizen. As soon as I think I can get a just trial I will surrender myself to the civil authorities of Missouri, and prove to the world that I am innocent of the crime charged against me.

While the political machinations of the Reconstruction period were often complex affairs, with lying and duplicity tactically employed by many of the participants, Jesse James's message was simple, and it was addressed to a community who were extremely receptive to the stance he was taking. As Will Kaufman (2006) states, the end of the Civil War was a starting point of the socio/cultural fight-back for many white Southerners marking, "the onset of a brutal history (beginning with Reconstruction) and the end of a golden age" (21). Unlike the majority of displaced Missourians, who were attempting to make sense of their own positions in the ravaged state, Jesse James perceived a bigger picture and had a clear idea of his own historical purpose within it.

It is immediately evident in the above passage that Jesse James is not simply referring to himself. Jesse James was 22 years old when, together with his brother, he committed the daring daylight bank raid in Gallatin, a small town in western Missouri. This was not a raid with the sole intention to procure money - the James gang had stolen a considerable amount to this point - but was a deliberate action by the outlaw to settle an old Confederate score. Believing the man he murdered in the raid to be the killer of his Civil War guerrilla leader "Bloody" Bill Anderson, Jesse James (after the raid) rode out of the town vehemently shouting at the stunned onlookers that this, and not the money, was the motivation for the attack. The story was a magnet for the press both in the Southern states and nationally providing, for Jesse, an ideal and intentional vehicle for the postbellum Confederate cause. Meant as a declaration of purpose to the Governor of Missouri, the *Kansas City Times* statement opened a curtain to the larger issues regarding the condition of his section of the Missourian community. The first phrase implies both a deep connection to a disenfranchised community - the Reconstruction period saw a significant proportion of ex-Confederates denied what we would now consider basic human rights - together with the implication that the postbellum South was lawless and uncultured. Jesse's self-elevation, in one sentence, to

a position above that of Reconstruction political wrangling was not overlooked by Confederate sympathisers who had similar tragic Civil War experiences and feelings of defiant community. When the Spartans returned a message to the Athenians prior to the Peloponnesian war, in which the Athenians stated that if the Spartans lost the conflict their civilisation would be systematically obliterated, their reply was one word -if. In a similar way Jesse James's use of the word, in the context of the larger tragic narrative of postbellum Missourian life, reveals exactly the opposite of a desire for submission and a "peaceable" life.

As Kaufman argues, the ideology of both post and antebellum Southern culture was defined by narratives communicated through popular channels - novels, poems, song, stories, plays and, of course, newspapers. Technological advances during the period in question, for instance in the use of photography and the telegraph system, allowed news stories to be quickly and tangibly communicated. One of the most popular publications of the time - *Harper's Weekly* - had a circulation of 200,000 at the height of the Civil War and featured - together with national and international news - short stories, poems and political cartoons. Jesse James's chosen vehicle of communication, *The Kansas City Times*, was a relatively new publication at the time the above statement was printed, the first issue appearing just two years previously. Its dramatic reporting of further 'bold' robberies quickly became interesting to a wider audience making Jesse James, at the height of his actions, a nationally well-known mythical figure. One pertinent question in relation to this is why would construction of the Jesse James myth appeal to receptive communities outside of the minority of displaced Missourians that were ideologically represented by his actions? As Stiles points out, "he eagerly offered himself up as a polarising symbol of the Confederate project for post-war Missouri" (6). One reason for Jesse James's infamous popularity is that he came to represent not only provincial defiance of Reconstruction politics but, on a much larger scale, his

mythology developed into a populist totem of resistance to commercial and industrial hegemony.

4.5 Anti-hero

Jesse James did not rob trains he robbed railroad companies (Stiles 251)*,* or this is how the narrative of the Jesse James myth would have us believe. As previously stated Jesse James shrouded his criminal activities with symbolic gestures that elevated his mythology above the provincial into new, broader, territory. As Stiles goes on to note: "By striking the railroads, the Missouri bandits would slice into the monetary pulse of the country. There was symbolism to consider as well. In 1872, many Missourians had grown indignant at how railways had been financed" (230). Perhaps inadvertently, Jesse James had placed a finger on the pulse of a much larger, newer, form of mythological rebel adulation, one that would develop into a recurring theme in twentieth century iconicity - anti-systemic confrontation. In a tangible sense, Jesse James's mythology can be interpreted as a seminal example of a modern sub-cultural rebel anti-hero, and, at this point, it is useful to correlate the elements of the Jesse James biography already considered to the concept of sub-cultures in general.

As defined by Kenneth Gelder (2007) subcultures can be characterised as follows:

1)   Subcultures have a negative attitude towards work.

2)   They are not traditionally 'class-conscious'.

3)   They associate with territory rather than property.

4)   They seek non-domestic forms of identity outside the family.

5)   Style. Subcultures seek to display a liking for excess and exaggeration.

6)   They dislike the banalities of "ordinary" life[1].

It is surprising how consistent many of these ideas are to Jesse James' chosen sub-cultural lifestyle. Taking the points in order we find that: 1) He sometimes tried 'normal' jobs but never lasted more than a few days; 2) he violently refused to accept Missourian culture as inferior; 3) the territoriality of Jesse's various gangs was integral to their lifestyle; 4) his identity was strongly defined by his gang involvement; 5) he had a penchant for the very finest horses, together with the original guerrilla 'uniform' of four cross-linked repeating pistols and black flag; 6) Jesse thrived on the outlaw lifestyle and, when this became increasingly untenable, his life seemed to lack purpose (Stiles 2003).
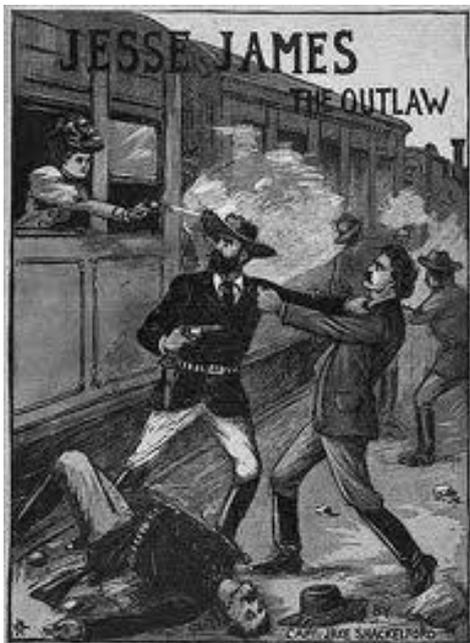
Figure 14: One of many depictions of Jesse James in the 'Dime Novels' of the period.

Understanding Jesse James as an early sub-cultural rebel myth helps to explain the enduring nature of the narrative together with its reception in many Western cultures, which in turn accounts for its replication in an array of novels, songs, films and TV productions. One reason for this is that the transferable narrative of the myth stems from a 'human interest' attraction to the dramatic boldness or edginess of this kind of sub-cultural rebel, a theme that is fully consistent with the idea that particular receptive

communities are pro-actively involved in the formation of primary cultural icons. In this sense the appeal of Jesse James would be meaningless without receptive communities willing to maintain the relatively simple message that his mythology contains - defiance. Similar to the formation of many primary cultural icons, the singular tragic event played out in the public domain is a key factor in the durability and retention in collective memory of the Jesses James myth; and James's proximity to full iconic status at his death confirms that such events are extremely important in sealing the mythlogical/iconic narrative in collective memory. As previously mentioned, however, there is one aspect of the narrative of Jesse James that contributed to the failure of the cultural myth transcending into a primary cultural icon - a distinct image.

4.6 Death

At the end of his life Jesse James, as a perceptive individual, may have concluded two features regarding his extraordinary celebrity. Firstly, that his role as a vanguard for the Confederate renaissance had not only faded but had become limited to a small section of southern extremists. Missouri and the Border States, while retaining strong postbellum sympathies, were stoically rebuilding their socio-economic infrastructures and the removal of the primary symbol of active outlaw organisations proved to be a major deliverance: "It seemed as if a demon had been exorcized from the community. "I shall ask $500 more for my property," declared W. J. Courtney, the former Liberty marshal. "It is a great relief and a great blessing to Kearney to have Jesse James dead. I don't mind saying so much." (cited in Stiles 409)

Secondly, the Northfield raid of 7 September 1876, which saw the death or capture of all of the James-Younger gang except Jesse and Frank, may have changed the public perception of the outlaws as 'bold robbers'. What it also may have done, as a

result of the James brothers celebrated avoidance of capture, was to reinforce the mythology of Jesse James as a character fitting the depiction mythologised in popular newspaper reports and dime novels. This conclusion must have been difficult for the real Jesse James to accept. Maintaining the illusion of respectability under the assumed name of Tom Howard, Jesse James would have perceived his own personality as far removed from the cartoonesque portrayal in general currency at the time. At the relatively young age of thirty four, it is likely that Jesse James realised that his raison d'être was gone.

With an awareness of publicity and drama honed during his criminal 'career' Jesse James is likely to have known what the public effect of his assassination by Robert Ford would have been. The supposition that he knew he was to be shot by Robert Ford is supported by his knowledge that some of his ex-gang members had given information to the authorities; the removal of his gun belt at that particular moment and, perhaps above all; his unwillingness to be captured alive. This impression is argued by Hansen but denied by Stiles the latter on the grounds that Jesse was planning another robbery. Jesse James may also have believed that the established myth of the 'noble robber' would be re-established and that his death would be regarded as a kind of cultural martyrdom, and to a considerable extent it has been. The Jesse James story is useful in explaining the difference between an important cultural myth and the formation and reception of a primary cultural icon. The legend of Jesse James contains all the factors necessary for cultural iconicity, at least on the terms offered by my definition. The tragic-dramatic narrative of the Jesse James legend is of the highest order, Homeric in nature and ending with an Aristotelian catharsis. The receptive communities at the time of the inception of the myth fully comprehended its meaning; on the one hand as representing local defiance (Confederate vanguard) and, on the other, as a seminal figure of anti-systemic rebellion. As for the latter meaning his

mythology has proved attractive and durable with, for instance, motion pictures being made of his story in every decade since 1920 from, *Jesse James, Under the Black Flag* (Dir. Franklin B Coates. Mesco Pictures, 1921) - through to - *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (Dir. Andrew Dominik. Warner Bros, 2007). His name - conveniently alliterative - is universally familiar and its prompt brings with it a good measure of mythological meaning along the lines argued above. What his name does not initiate, however, is a single distinct image. People (it is reasonable to assume) tend to associate his name with a semi-fictional character and this is possibly accompanied by a generic image of a 'wild west' symbol rather than a specific image (as is the case with primary cultural icons) of the real person. Quite what image people were expecting after Jesse James's death relies unavoidably on conjecture, although comparison of the respective durability of other, specific, rebel and 'wild west' symbols supports the argument that image and meaning are indispensible for primary iconicity.

Famous culturally iconic rebels have a distinct image that is associated with their mythology. From Robin Hood to Che Guevara the meaning of the iconic form is inherent in the distinct image to the extent that the name-prompt and the image are mutually responsive. With the possible exceptions of Che Guevara and James Dean what we now think of as specific rebel icons are usually not actual physical representations of real individuals, but caricatures containing simple meaning, often overt defiance represented by some sort of weaponry or disguise.

Figure 15: Ned Kelly?

Figure 16: Ned Kelly.

In the case of 'wild west' iconography the number of competing analogous mythologies, formed during the relative lawlessness of frontier life, allowed the many famous individuals including, William H Bonney (Billy the Kid), Wild Bill Hicock, Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, Butch Cassidy, The Sundance Kid, Black Bart, John Ringo, John Wesley Harden, Ike Clanton, The Dalton Gang, and William Cody (Buffalo Bill) to be subsumed within a generic cowboy/gunslinger image. Primary cultural icons are parsimonious phenomena retained in collective memory only when special conditions are met and, although some of these examples have well known narratives, few of them (if any) exhibit distinct retained imagery on a level remotely comparable to primary cultural icons. Although this argument can certainly be applied to Jesse James, in that his name-prompt seems to initiate a similar generic 'gunslinger' image, there are aspects to his mythology (the ones considered here) that warrant special consideration with regard to their influence on later cultural iconography. His status as an appealing sub-cultural rebel, with a national audience that actively participated in the creation of his celebrity, did not correlate to the image of a cadaver on a bench, regardless of the fact that the image was purchased and used at the time in considerable numbers. Perhaps what the receptive communities required was an image that fully encapsulated the ideal of the outlaw rebel in a form that correlated to the meaning of the myth or, possibly, an

image with some feature that would enable it to be distinguishable from the ordinariness of the actual individual, as in the example of Ned Kelly above. The remainder of this chapter will examine the idea that the absence of a distinct Jesse James image was resolved much later in the form of the primary cultural icon James Dean.

4.7 Legacy

Shortly after the failed Northfield-Minnesota raid of 1876 (the one that Frank and Jesse made their remarkable escape) photographs were printed of the captured and badly wounded Younger brothers. Similar to the cadaver of Jesse James (Fig.13.) it is unlikely that any of these images would have proved captivating to the general public at the time who, nevertheless, eagerly consumed information about the notorious outlaws just as they contributed to the mythologizing of the 'bold-robber' Jesse James.

Figure 17: Cole Younger shortly after his capture.

Although their exploits cannot rationally be thought of as anything other than murderously criminal, the perception of the outlaws as sub-cultural rebels positively glamorised the nature of their chosen 'profession'. To fix the mythological meaning of the outlaw rebel onto the image of a beaten, bruised or dead body (many of the Younger brothers were shown with actual entry wounds) was simply too incongruous for public

perception at the time to accept. The need for imagery that correlated to the emolliated rebel mythology of such individuals impelled the production of cultural forms based on their lives, including songs, novels, touring shows, and, principally, film productions.

None of these representations, however, provided the single, distinct visual image that contained the elements necessary for primary cultural iconic status. Until the death of James Dean on 30 September 1955, no single image had come close to crystallising this specific aspect of American sub-cultural rebel mythology. The argument here is that the *conditions* for retaining a distinct image of James Dean, from the moment of his death and in collective memory, were significantly compelled by the imageless mythology of the American sub-cultural rebel, of which a pre-eminent example is Jesse James. The formation of cultural icons, although often impelled by the impact of naturalised tragic events, should also be considered in relation to other cultural phenomena existing within the collective memory of receptive groups, and, in this sense, connecting the iconicity of the James Dean image with the myth of Jesse James adds a significant dimension to the understanding of both forms.

Primary cultural icons exhibit clear characteristics, one of these being that they are, as previously suggested, parsimonious. What is meant by this is that the need to retain specific images in collective memory is affected by the degree to which the simple meaning contained in the iconic form is met by the needs of receptive communities, and the 'fit' of image to meaning needs to be strong. Recalling his personal relationship with James Dean, together with the legacy of Dean in public consciousness, the entertainer Sammy Davis Jnr had this to say:

> I just think that there's a lot of jealousy about Jimmy, in terms of why should he have all this adoration, why should people, you know, years after he's been passed, why should people have a kind of a thing about him. Well there are only

two people in the world that I can remember within my lifetime that created it, one was Marilyn Monroe and the other was James Dean - in our business I mean - I think it's a tremendous compliment...he had something to say to the youth of America. [2]

Unsurprisingly, given the heightened public attention surrounding the death of James Dean, much commentary relating to his iconicity since then focuses on the individual rather than the historical impetus of rebel iconography that compels the narrative. Related to this, analysis of Dean's cultural impact often focuses on the immediate social context and, in particular, the youth culture at the time of Dean's death. This, of course, is an important factor and much research has been conducted into this specific period although, with regard to the formation of Dean's iconicity, the 1950s youth context is possibly overemphasised, as in this comment from Claudia Stringer: "Despite its ubiquity, then, the rebel icon is a relatively recent invention with a specific lineage in which James Dean figures prominently" (2). This chapter has given a broader insight into some alternative factors at work in the formation of a primary cultural icon such as James Dean and, to conclude, it may prove useful to summarise what these are.

In isolation from an American rebel cultural tradition James Dean, prior to his death, could be considered as comparatively unexceptional. His death and the subsequent availability of a 'perfect' distinct image brought together the already existing simple meaning of this type of rebel figure and fixed it onto a durable iconic form that is retained in collective memory to the present. The period since Jesse James's death has seen many socio/cultural changes, and one of the more radical of these has been the development of counter-cultures. Especially in America, the formation of specific counter-cultures offered an enticing alternative to mainstream cultural life to large sections of society. Germinating in the 1950s and coming to full fruition in the

following decade, specific socio/political (mainly youth) counter-cultures had a tradition to call on that offered the possibility of challenge to conventional lifestyles by implementing codes and mores that were different to the norm. Earlier 'mob' culture, for instance, challenged mainstream American life defiantly and openly, its bi-polar placement of 'good guys' against 'bad guys' proved engaging, not just to the actual mobsters and their police nemesis, but to wider sections of American society who consumed (and still are consuming) their real/fictional activities through popular media and film. The receptivity of large groups to counter-cultural meaning contributed to creating the atmosphere in which the possibilities for primary iconic formation were heightened and the mobster cultural icon - similar to the rebel icon under discussion here - has its own story to tell.

More powerful than mobster/mafia counter-cultures and more deeply ingrained in American cultural consciousness is the mythology of the 'wild west' outlaw/rebel. In terms of its replication and impact its influence is plain to see and the attractiveness of the perceived lifestyle is mirrored in many aspects of contemporary life. One of the most significant instances of the transition of the 'rebel' idea into modern cultural life is the reception of James Dean iconic image. Dean's example captured the expectations of the meaning of the rebel myth efficiently in a single, distinct image, and the emphasis in this chapter has been to show that a significant factor in this process was the combination of the compelling nature of the 'rebel' narrative (in American collective memory) together with the absence of an encompassing iconic image. In this sense the history of Jesse James has played a major part both in the development of 'rebel' mythology and in the need for an image to fit the demands of this important cultural narrative.

Leaving aside the absence of an iconic Jesse James image, the details of the mythology correlate to all of the conditions required for cultural iconicity. From an early age the brutalisation process, of both the individual and the Missourian culture he was part of, polarised Jesse James's belief that his world comprised simply of friends and enemies. Initially the 'friends' were the guerrilla components of the Confederate army and, latterly, the receptive postbellum Southern community who sympathised with his self-publicised outlaw activities. Perhaps because Jesse James postured as a crusading 'Robin Hood' figure that targeted symbols of burgeoning capitalist power, his heavily publicised actions transferred to an American national audience who fully engaged in the creation of the myth of the popular 'bold rebel'. A major implication of its popularity is that the public acceptance of the Jesse James myth was perceived as a counter to some of the early features of industrialisation, for instance the alienating effects of large corporations such as banks and railroads. Whatever the reason, the tragic-dramatic event of Jesse James's murder caused interest on a national scale fixing the alliterative name to the myth in American collective consciousness. By this time both the man and the myth had transcended the parameters of the postbellum Confederate 'bold robber' and, for the real Jesse James, this meant his actual life had been effectively substituted with a semi-fictional mythology. In the larger picture, however, Jesse James had become an important representative - perhaps the first one of the modern era - of an anti-systemic, sub-cultural rebel. Open to interpretation on many levels, yet with the meaning (defiance, bravery, live for the moment) clearly comprehensible, the type of rebel figure mythologised through the Jesse James narrative represented the possibility that authority, in whatever form it took, could be subverted by attitude.

In all cultures the need to represent important narratives in image form is readily apparent, and in the tele-visual age advances in technology allow for these narratives to

be fixed onto distinct images of real individuals and objects, becoming what we now refer to as cultural icons. When James Dean died in a racing car on a public road in 1955 just before his second film *Rebel Without a Cause* (Dir. Nicholas Ray. 1955) had been released, the rebel narrative that he would come to symbolise in iconic form was already, to a significant extent, firmly positioned in American cultural consciousness. Rather than creating a new narrative/icon through the biography of the individual, or the socio/political atmosphere of a period as in, for example Marilyn Monroe or Che Guevara, the James Dean icon fixed an existing narrative onto a universally acceptable image through a tragic and timely singular event. In regard to answering the question what is a cultural icon? this case study has argued that an important cultural phenomenon such as the Jesse James 'rebel' myth can - due solely to the absence of an appropriate distinct image - be differentiated from primary cultural iconography. However, the power of the Jesse James narrative can also be interpreted as a significant element in the durability of the James Dean icon, contributing to the effectiveness of its initial formation and to its continuing significance and relevance to receptive communities worldwide.

CHAPTER 5 THE SPITFIRE AIRCRAFT

The main argument to this point has been that primary cultural iconic status can be understood better by looking towards the tragic-dramatic narrative of well-accepted iconic individuals. One problem with this is that, in our image-drenched world, there are phenomena other than actual human beings that lay claim to iconic status. This chapter will consider the extent to which the four-point definition of cultural iconicity applies to objects in the same, or a closely similar way, to that of culturally iconic individuals. To this end the chapter will consider the iconic merits of two well-known objects, the Apple iPod and the Supermarine Spitfire aircraft.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the term iconic is often applied to objects that possess characteristics that have meaning or value beyond that of the commonplace. Exponential use of the term reflects, in one sense, the manner in which certain images are important to how modern cultural life is defined. This chapter aims to extend and further clarify this idea by looking at how the tragic-dramatic narrative of the Spitfire aircraft compares to the iconic status of the Apple iPod. By analysing the natural development of the Spitfire's narrative meaning against the careful, possibly even cynical, branding of Apple products, the argument will be that primary cultural icons are produced and formed by communities receptive to the former type of dramatic narrative. Prior to the analysis of the two forms it is necessary to offer further qualifications of how the term cultural icon will be applied in relation to objects.

Objects as cultural icons bring new issues concerning definition. Regarding the modifier 'cultural', the intention is to focus on retained images that are familiar to large numbers of people, national cultures for instance, rather than to try to account for potential iconicity within the plethora of sub-cultures in modern societies, each with its own set of potential sub-cultural iconic objects. With this in mind, it is argued that the

boundaries of recognisability between images that are distinctly sub-cultural, to ones that are nationally known, may be prone to overlap, with factors such as generational memory, social class, and gender all having an effect on possible recall. Given this though, it is still assumed, even on common sense grounds, that certain phenomena - to the majority of people at specific moments in time - are recognisable nationally and, therefore, contain potential for primary iconicity.

This though is a first step and needs further clarification. If we are to discount images that are only familiar at a sub-cultural level then this still leaves a number of nationally, or even universally, recognisable objects that may lay claim to iconic status: or in other words just because an image is nationally recognisable does it necessarily follow that it is iconic? It is certainly the case that recognisability alone can, and does, lead to the claim that 'anything can be a cultural icon', the antithesis of this research and a point identified in the examination of the *Icons of England* project. All objects have some degree of meaning and the manner in which we interact with them is a complex and well researched field (Emmison and Smith 2000). While research into the contextual meaning of everyday objects is of obvious importance, there may be a tendency to correlate familiarity (of the object) with automatic cultural value. One of the aims of introducing tighter boundaries for iconicity is to disentangle high profile 'of the moment' phenomena from other well-known images that can be shown to exhibit the kind of dramatic narrative element that is such an important element in primary cultural icons.

This is a good point to turn to the first object of analysis in this chapter, the Apple iPod (the arguments presented below can easily apply to any other Apple products). Comparing the iconic merits of this product to the formation and reception of The Spitfire aircraft raises certain issues relating to choice of subject, especially as the

argument of the chapter is that the iPod is not a cultural icon and that The Spitfire most certainly is. The first issue here surrounds objectivity of choice in that it could be interpreted that the Spitfire may have certain connotations regarding English political/national right wing sympathies, a factor that should immediately be discounted. Added to this the critical deconstruction of the status of the iPod as an iconic product, to the extent that it is argued that Apple cynically manipulated the cultural significance of a number of primary cultural icons as a marketing tool to further its commercial ends, may also imply authorial bias. If the argument here appears over sympathetic towards The Spitfire and seems to be 'shooting fish in a barrel' when it comes to analysing the iPod, then it should also be stressed that, although there is a good deal of qualitative interpretation in the analysis, for the most part the evidence presented is factual, enabling the reader to judge for him/herself. In addition it is hoped that the four-point definition is a reasonably objective tool (or at least a better one than exists at present) with which to interpret the respective merits of certain culturally iconic candidates, and this is what the chapter intends to do.

5.1 Synthetic Narrative

The ubiquitous iPod is an object with a contemporary image, familiar to millions of people throughout the world, and one that is regularly referred to in the popular media as a cultural icon. If this claim is to be considered valid (or not) then there must be reasons why it should be so. In terms of distinctness, durability and reproducibility - together with the tragic-dramatic narrative - analysis of the iPod brings surprising results. The three tangible factors can be dealt with straightforwardly. The iPod is a reasonably distinct product in its genre; it is widely reproducible in terms of image recall; and its image durability is probably solid, although this may be due to its

widespread usage. It is, however, the dramatic narrative apparently inherent in the product that proves the most contentious.

Since its inception Apple Computers (now Apple Inc.) as a marketing company has fully understood the viability and the effect on public consciousness of cultural symbolism. Perhaps more than the technical effectiveness of its gadgets, purchasing an Apple product has been seen (Larson 2004) as more of a 'lifestyle' choice involving themes such as individuality, rebellion (against faceless corporations), brand community and fashionable distinctness. To this day when the iPod in all its variants is a commonplace product throughout the world, owned by all types of people, the claim is still made that the product has an emotional appeal to a distinct type of person: "However, as the iPod market has matured, groups outside of the Mac community have joined the iPod community" (Larson 20). If the "iPod community" in this sense is understood as comprising individuals who actually own the product it would be difficult, due to its ubiquity, to pinpoint a definite receptive community. Similarly, if the term is meant to imply that there is some kind of emotional involvement between product and user, "connecting" people through ownership of the item similar to the manner in which "Saab owners might beep or flash when they pass another Saab" (13) then it should be stated that - in comparison to the personalisation common in the formation of primary cultural icons - any emotional connection between iPod users can be argued as being explicitly manipulated through Apple's 'hijacking' of existing iconic forms.

"People talk about technology, but Apple was a marketing company". This quote, from John Skully a former Apple marketing executive (cited in Larson 19) reveals a great deal about the ethos of Apple and the related strategy it employs to imbue its products with the kind of meaning that would be attractive to modern consumers. Rather

than receptive communities fixing genuine, natural dramatic narrative meaning to important images, as is argued throughout the case studies, Apple's 'creative' marketing campaigns have utilised the existing appeal of primary cultural icons, together with their concomitant dramatic meaning, to attract consumers to its products.

Figure 18: The Beatles Trademark.

Figure 19: Apple Inc. Logo.

The company name itself, grafted onto The Beatles' primary iconic status, has been promoted to be perceived as similar to one of the most influential forces in modern cultural life, prompting the existing Beatles members, through their company Apple Corps, to successfully sue the expanding computer company in 1981 for breach of

trademark (Pilato 1990). Magnanimously allowing the latter company to continue using the brand for non-music related products The Beatles, nevertheless, needed to re-apply legal proceedings in 1989 when Apple Computers introduced the MIDI interface - a specific piece of music technology - to its latest range of computers. Through the Apple iPod the perceived 'coolness' of the product reflects a subliminal attachment to the (still) high culturally iconic status of The Beatles.

When other Apple marketing strategies are considered, it becomes clear that an overt attempt was made to link the Apple ethos to individuals whose established cultural iconicity is transmitted in the form of distinct, durable and reproducible images. John Lennon, Yoko Ono and Mohammed Ali - Fig 4. and 5. - were utilised as specific correlatives to Apple's implied uniqueness of product, together with other individuals whose images and varying iconic status were employed in the campaign including, Bob Dylan, Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso, Alfred Hitchcock and Martin Luther King. Not taking any chances that the meaning of the images may have been confused by the consumer, Apple issued the following statement to be read in conjunction with the iconic image forms:

Here's to the crazy ones.

The misfits.

The rebels.

The troublemakers.

The round pegs in the square holes.

The ones who see things differently.

They're not fond of rules.

And they have no respect for the status quo.

You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them.

About the only thing you can't do is ignore them.

Because they change things.

They push the human race forward.

And while some may see them as the crazy ones,

We see genius.

Because the people who are crazy enough to think

they can change the world,

Are the ones who do.

(The "Crazy Ones" advertising campaign was first aired on 28 September 1997 and is widely believed to have established Apple's current identity. The television advert was directed by Chiat/Day's Jennifer Golub with a voice-over by the actor Richard Dreyfus, the text of the advert was written by another employee, Rob Siltenen: lowendmac.com/orchard/07/apple-think-different, accessed 5 January 2010).

Figure 20: John Lennon and Yoko Ono from the 'Think Different' advertising campaign.

Figure 21: Mohammed Ali from the same campaign.

Figure 22: Apple Computers campaign logo 1995-2000.

The point being made here is that the potential iconic narrative of Apple's iPod - the meaning of the product to the receptive consumer - has been successfully manipulated to contain superficial qualities that could never be apparent in a mere computer or music player. This appeal, however, may be subject to diminishing returns. Apple's success in connecting the force of established cultural icons to its mp3 player

has meant that its initial receptive community has developed into a universal market, leading to the product being less of a lifestyle choice than what it actually is - a product.

5.2 Durability

Very few commercial objects remain in collective memory longer than their actual physical presence in the marketplace. To do so would present a degree of iconicity reflecting naturalised, as opposed to marketed, narrative meaning, actively formulated by responsive receptive communities. Conjecture that the iPod would be quickly forgotten if it were to lose its ubiquitous presence in the marketplace is supported by the change in status of a similar product, the Sony Walkman. Offered as containing a significant depth of cultural meaning, it is unlikely that the Walkman would now be touted as iconic, as it was during its widespread prominence as an innovative product (du Gay, et al. 1997), especially given that its profile is now subsumed under the general mobile music player genre. If this argument is accepted then how does it inform the question relating to the status of objects as cultural icons? The main difficulty in assessing specific well-known products as iconic is that their ubiquity seems to automatically suggest iconicity, a common misconception regarding cultural icons, and this is especially the case with personal, 'lifestyle' products such as the Walkman or the iPod. When the product is taken out of the public realm, usually by being superseded by a superior or more fashionable item then, on the terms offered here, this places into question the durability of the form in collective memory.

The idea that iconicity is conditioned by the extent to which the object in question is still in the 'public eye' is an important factor in establishing the nature of cultural iconicity. Absence of natural dramatic narratives, as in examples such as iPod-style marketed 'coolness' should, if the four conditions are applied, diminish the durability

and reproducibility of the object as a potential cultural icon. While it is not possible to examine in any depth other examples with the exception of the following one, it is argued that images of familiar objects lacking tangible tragic-dramatic narratives tend to fade in collective memory quicker than object images with natural dramatic iconic appeal.

5.3 The Spitfire

In collective memory the Battle of Britain equates to a crucial conflict fought during the early part of the Second World War over southern England in the air. It may even contain some images that are synonymous with the phrase of which, in all probability, the distinct image of the Supermarine Spitfire aircraft would be highly prominent. The analysis of the formation and reception of this principally important British cultural icon brings together all the factors presented in the thesis so far. The natural narrative development of the icon, played out in the most dramatic atmosphere possible, by participants wholly receptive to an all-encompassing image, is now so deeply ingrained in the distinct iconic form that it has come to fully symbolise Britain at war. Analysing the narrative as it was played out during the conflict, and as it has been developed since then, shows clearly the manner in which important iconic symbols come to contain such a depth of transferable meaning. If it is necessary to be reminded of the precarious nature of Britain's vulnerability at this time then the extract below should serve this purpose:

> What General Weygand called the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire. (Winston Churchill, 1940)

The Battle of Britain as an historical idea is now so deeply connected to the Royal Air Force, and to the Spitfire in particular, that it takes a mind-shift to conceive of it as otherwise. This difficulty was demonstrated in 2006 when a group of military historians revisited the period emphasising British naval superiority over the established hegemony of fighter aircraft success (James 2006; Cumming 2006). The prize-winning essay "The Warship as the Ultimate Guarantor of Britain's Freedom in 1940" by Antony Cumming argues convincingly that the need to command the skies was: "A prop supporting the popular belief that Britain was directly saved from invasion in 1940 because the RAF held control of the air in the Battle of Britain" (165). The main thrust of Cumming's argument is that, had the RAF been obliterated in 1940/1941, Britain would have deployed the feared Royal Navy in a 'last ditch' battle for survival in the English Channel. Previous naval encounters during the early months of the war - in Norway and Crete - had seen the Royal Navy learn valuable lessons that would, in all likelihood, have proved this force indomitable. Morale, crucial to hard-fought naval encounters, was high in the Royal Navy at the time (187) and the German Kriegsmarine command was not only aware of this but also, through Admiral Erich Raeder, communicated this concern directly to Adolf Hitler. The underlying potential of British sea power had a crucial psychological effect on the German high command resulting, Cumming argues, in the over emphasis of RAF success:

It is closer to the truth to say that the alleged degree of RAF superiority was a convenient face saving excuse for Hitler not proceeding. Had this excuse not been available, who can say what other reasons for inaction may have been presented? What concerned the German naval staff was less the alleged inability of the Luftwaffe to deal with the RAF, and more the enormous difficulty of balancing German naval inferiority by sinking the Royal Navy from the air. (188)

Prior to the main Luftwaffe attacks on England in 1940 - widely accepted as taking place between July and October of that year - the Battle of Britain was conceived as an holistic conflict involving an intense combined effort, not just militarily, but with the whole will of the British people involved, initiated by a display of unmistakable intent from Winston Churchill:

> I have thought carefully in these last few days whether it was part of my duty to consider entering negotiations with That Man...I am convinced that every man of you would rise up and tear me down from my place if I were for one moment to contemplate parley or surrender. If this long island story of ours is to end at last, let it end only when each one of us lies choking in his own blood upon the ground. (winstonchurchill.org accessed 2 April 2010)

The emotional participation of the British people in defying a tyrannical empire cannot be overemphasised, especially during the first months of the conflict. Whereas Churchill's main speech to Parliament on 18 June 1940 ("Their Finest Hour") clearly stated the armed readiness of Britain to fight a campaign, "if necessary for years, if necessary alone", it is important to note that the speech prioritised the overall holistic nature of the Battle, with the will and morale of the people being the key force. Concerning the armed readiness of the British forces at home, Churchill stressed the size and quality of the army, "we have under arms at the present time in this Island over a million and a quarter men... including scores of thousands of those who have already measured their quality against the Germans and found themselves at no disadvantage"; he reminded the Commons of the power of another British force, "here is where we come to the Navy - and after all, we have a Navy" and, of course, he mentioned the importance of aerial strength, "the great question of invasion from the air, and of the impending struggle between the British and German Air Forces".

It was, however, the defiant morale of the people that Churchill deemed crucial to surviving Hitler's intimidatory military aggression. The "Finest Hour" analogy optimises the sense of connection between British people throughout history during periods of imminent danger, "much will depend upon this; every man and every woman will have the chance to show the finest qualities". The sense of inclusion and patriotism brought with it a unified sense of heightened receptivity to symbols and imagery that reflected the dramatic circumstances of the time. Propaganda through posters was utilised by various war ministries to reinforce both a sense of patriotism and the British government's war ideology.

Figure 23: Three Second World War British propaganda posters.

Although some of the phrases connected to the poster propaganda campaign may still be familiar today such as, 'Dig for Victory' or 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' few of these sound-bites have proved durable in collective memory as text-less iconic forms and, due to the synthetic nature of their production (similar in many respects to the points raised previously regarding photo-journalistic iconicity) this potential is different to the Spitfire cultural icon considered here. In the early part of 1940 the Battle of Britain was perceived by the majority of the British public as a combined effort of resistance where the smallest contribution in factories or on farms was acknowledged - at all levels - as crucial to winning the war. The power of this collective meaning, fanned by the force of propaganda, was precisely the atmosphere of receptivity likely to

produce primary iconic forms, and this shared tragic-dramatic narrative meaning would, during the 166 days of Battle in the air (Schama 2002), become fused to a single, durable, symbol through the reification of iconic meaning. Although this period of the war will be returned to later in the chapter, the next section moves forward to 1969 in order to ascertain how the mythology of The Spitfire was received and, ultimately rekindled, by a later generation.

5.4 1969

By 1969 The Spitfire aircraft had become the iconic representative of The Battle of Britain and it has remained so until the present. In that year the eponymously titled motion picture, *The Battle of Britain,* (Dir. Guy Hamilton. United Artists 1969) re-focused the fixed meaning of the conflict around the now iconic aircraft together with the perceived meaning it contained. Essential to the formation and reception of iconic phenomena is the simplicity of meaning contained within the form and the comprehension of such meaning by receptive, participatory communities. During its inception this heightened sense of receptivity was created through an overt sense of national vulnerability; but what is also important in regard to the durability of the Spitfire icon, is the process whereby the mythology of the tragic-dramatic event (in this case the air battles of 1940) became accepted in collective memory through the power of the icon as historical fact, and close analysis of the 1969 film reveals how effective this process was.

As previously stated, prior to the airborne conflict during the summer of 1940, the term 'Battle of Britain' was thought of as a combined national effort involving all the military and civilian components of Great Britain. The 'Battle of Britain' as it is

understood since then is somewhat different and can be summarised in the following series of propositions.

1)   Great Britain after the fall of France stood alone against the Nazi military tide.

2)   Great Britain was ill equipped to withstand such an invasion.

3)   Germany needed total air supremacy prior to unleashing their ground forces.

4)   'The Few' (mainly young) RAF fighter pilots faced disproportionate opposition and on their success depended the fate of the nation.

5)   At times during the conflict the RAF was perilously close to defeat.

6)   'The Few' beat the Luftwaffe therefore saving the nation and initiating a critical turning point of the war.

This section will present the argument that this historical narrative was strengthened and re-modelled through the reception of the *Battle of Britain* motion picture. This is not to say that the idea of the Battle, or the aircraft that symbolised it, was not well-known prior to the film (the connection between the two will be examined in detail shortly), only that the film took the established narrative meaning inherent in the aircraft and re-applied its iconic meaning to a new receptive generation. Cultural icons *must* have meaning to communities receptive to the dramatic narrative contained within them and, as is often the case, such communities actively participate in the formation of the respective narratives. In relation to the early iconic production of the Spitfire aircraft this narrative inter-relationship was tangible and dramatically personalised, becoming fixed as a myth to the distinct image of the individual aircraft. The generation that experienced the original story of the Spitfire would certainly have known what the aircraft looked like and, consequently, would have retained its image/meaning in collective memory. Yet, I argue, primary cultural icons need to prove durable at least over a generation, and for this to occur the significance of the iconic

form should be transferable to future receptive generations who, in turn, hold the image/meaning in their respective collective memories.

With primary iconic individuals narrative meaning is very often more tangible than for objects and, consequently, the dramatic appeal of the latter form may have less meaning to future generations than for the ones who initially experienced them, and this may have been the case with the Spitfire, as S.P. Mackenzie argues:

> The Battle itself, what was more, was starting to fade into history. Twenty years on, a generation, whose members had no memories of the event, was starting to come of age. The war itself was something increasingly associated among teenagers with parents and their values, while some youths helped perpetuate the national mythology surrounding the conflict through avid consumption of war-related items in bookstalls and on the screen, others sought to distance themselves from their parents by adopting different, often rebellious styles, and tastes up to and including attitudes towards 1940 (75).

It is, of course, not entirely correct to suggest that the Battle of Britain/Spitfire connection was unknown to the generation of youth at this particular time. More accurately it can be argued that the previous phase of iconicity - the one experienced by the actual wartime generation - was, as Mackenzie suggests, fading, and that without a new dramatic narrative infusion, in all likelihood The Spitfire would have lost its iconic durability. One or two additional factors may support this claim. Firstly, the image of the Spitfire prior to the *Battle of Britain* movie may have been too deeply associated with the war itself (again as Mackenzie suggests) together with being allied to the individuals who had first-hand knowledge of it. In this sense, although the meaning of the icon may still have been inherent in the distinct image, the *receptivity* of a new generation to existing imagery at the time (mostly in monochrome) would have been

reduced. Also, during the 1960s to the early 1970s, various authority symbols, including the RAF, were being lampooned by a new generation of young British satirists whose comedy was unflinchingly iconoclastic such as, *That Was The Week That Was* (1962-3) and *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-74).

Figure 24: Period Battle of Britain poster.

Secondly, the physical presence of the aircraft both as an extant object and as an available vibrant image was much less so than today. Mackenzie notes that the producers of the film found it very difficult to locate airworthy or even taxiable examples of wartime aircraft even though the last RAF operational flight of a Spitfire was as late as June 1957. Therefore, although there were many variants of the Spitfire produced during its operational service the absence of available planes, prior to production, suggests that the desire to conserve or re-build the aircraft is a much more recent development, reflecting its newer iconic significance.

If the above points are valid what was the motivation to produce a film that was not certain to prove successful at the box office? One explanation for this is that the producers recognised that a film about an iconic (although fading) phenomenon would

contain sufficient dramatic narrative to be attractive to a newer audience, one with a different aesthetic sensibility to that of the wartime generation. And in terms of its eventual cinematic appeal the main character, with its panache, integrity, grit and good looks overshadowed well established performers in the film such as Michael Caine, Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson, and Suzanna York.

With a desire for realism and historical accuracy the production employed an array of notable consultants including Douglas Bader (indomitable British fighter pilot); Adolf Garland (fighter pilot and head of the Luftwaffe fighter division from 1941-45) and Hugh Dowding (Air Chief Marshall of the RAF during the summer of 1940). The combination of relying on 'experts', who were conditioned to appraise the conflict from understandably biased perspectives (with regard to the importance of the aerial campaign), together with a script that mirrored the mythology of the period, resulted in the film becoming a vehicle for the reinvigorated iconicity of its main character, The Spitfire aircraft.

In the tele-visual era film as a medium for the channelling of iconic meaning to collective memory is a key factor and, in the example considered here, the air battle over England during 1940 is presented as dominated by the efficacy of this specific aircraft. The *Battle of Britain* movie took a dramatic historical narrative and re-charged its meaning by valorising the image of the cultural icon (now in colour) making a fundamentally significant contribution to the retention of the iconic form in the collective memory of British consciousness, where it remains fixed to this day. In terms of understanding how this transition occurred it would be useful to look at some ideas presented in the film that, while pertaining to historical accuracy, nevertheless reflect mainly the mythology of pre-existing iconic meaning.

Two scenes in the film suggest that England was exposed and defenceless prior to the Luftwaffe attacks during the summer of 1940. Early in the film the character Colin Harvey (Canadian Squadron Leader played by Christopher Plummer), on leaving an archetypal English country pub, encounters a small group of Home Guard volunteers armed with farm implements. The explicit intent in this scene is to make the audience aware that a single combatant - professional, confident, prepared and technologically adept - (he is seen driving a Morgan car in British racing green) represents the most likely, or even the only, military defence against a German invasion.

This scene is juxtaposed against a previous one involving a taut conversation between a cabinet war minister (unnamed character) and Air Chief Marshall Sir Hugh Dowding (Laurence Olivier) that neatly summarised the (apparently) perilous state of the British armed defences of the period while, at the same time, focusing attention onto the perceived critical role that the RAF would play:

> Minister: "I want to go back to the cabinet and tell them you're as confident as I am, dammit man we've got 650 planes!"
>
> Dowding: "And they have 2500 aircraft and men".
>
> Minister: "But they won't all come at us at once, and we have radar, Churchill puts great faith in radar".
>
> Dowding: "It's vital, but it won't shoot down aircraft".
>
> Minister: "I must say you don't exactly exude a spirit of optimism".
>
> Dowding: "God willing we will hold out Minister".
>
> Minister: "I see, so I tell the cabinet that you're trusting in radar and praying to God, is that right?"
>
> Dowding: "Well, I'd put it the other way round. I'm trusting in God and praying for radar, but the essential arithmetic is that our young men will have to shoot down their young men at the rate of four to one if we are to keep pace at all".

It is important to remember that dramatizing the vulnerability of the British Isles to German invasion, and the concurrent perception of the RAF/Spitfire as a last line of defence, should not be seen in this case as cinematic licence but as a deeply held comprehension of the state of the war in 1940 at this time. The extent to which this mythology reflects the warping of Churchillian propaganda is difficult to state, but what can be firmly asserted is that, at the time this film was being produced, the Battle of Britain mythology was understood as factual. A significant factor in the hegemony of this narrative is that the power of meaning contained in the Spitfire icon - from its initial inception and through its later development - was, and still is, too robust in national collective consciousness for it to be scripted otherwise. In this sense the receptivity of inter-generational communities to an all-encompassing iconic form, has proved sufficient to maintain the illusion that it was solely the efforts of 'The Few', flying one type of aircraft (who remembers Hurricanes or Defiants?), that defined the concept of the Battle of Britain.

Mythology and meaning, created with the active participation of receptive communities, are essential characteristics of iconic phenomena. In the example of The Spitfire aircraft, the argument presented here is that the mythology of such an important national cultural icon, perceived as singularly vital to victory in the Battle of Britain, repels alternative interpretations of its importance as almost sacrilegious, reflecting fully the status of the fixed iconic meaning. The manner in which the mythology and image of cultural icons become integrated in collective memory is often through the embellishment of certain aspects of the dramatic narrative together with the disregarding of other, possibly contradictory, elements of the story. With the Spitfire this mode of iconic production is discernibly apparent, and it would prove constructive to analyse particular elements of the development of the myth in order to assess the degree to which this is the case.

5.5 Defence

Britain as an island was far from undefended prior to the first Luftwaffe attack over Dover on 29 July 1940 (Spaight19). In the speech to Parliament commonly referred to as 'This Was Their Finest Hour' (June 1940), Churchill gave these considerations of the condition of the British land Army at that time:

> We have, therefore, in this Island today a very large and powerful military force. This force comprises all our best trained and our finest troops, including scores of thousands of those who have already measured their quality against the Germans and found themselves at no disadvantage. We have under arms at the present time in this Island over a million and a quarter men.

Not only was the British Army of sufficient number to stage a protracted defence of the island against a far from inevitable invasion along the English southern coast, as planned in the German Operation Sealion offensive, it was also tactically better equipped as a result of lessons learned following the Dunkirk retreat. In terms of undertaking offensive action in mainland Europe, British forces circa 1940 were, as Churchill openly admitted at the time, incapable of offensive strategy although as a defensive force, the manpower and heavy artillery of the installed British army at home would have proved a different match for a German invasion than a 'Home Guard' equipped with hoes and pitchforks.

In addition to the British Army at home, the Royal Navy, as previously mentioned, would have proved a fearsome obstacle to Operation Sealion with or without RAF support. This statement, or any evidence introduced to support it, does not in any way undermine the crucial role played by the RAF in the Battle of Britain. What it is intended to do is to show how the historical perception of this period of World War Two has become focused, mainly through the dramatic cultural narrative of The Spitfire

aircraft, onto a perilous 'all or nothing' exchange between the Luftwaffe and the brave 'Few' fighter pilots of the RAF. Plainly, the success of the RAF during the summer months of the air battle was critical as a statement of intent, both to the Nazi high command and to the British people; yet placing full consequence of the survival of the British nation on the success of the RAF is clearly overstated. Again, the holistic nature of the conflict is adequately summarised by Winston Churchill: "It [is] impossible for the Army, except in resisting invasion to play a primary role in the defeat of the enemy. That task can only be done by the staying power of the Navy, and above all by the effect of Air predominance" (Directive to the Minister of Defence, 6 March 1941, cited in French 185). Or as David French himself claims: "Home forces contained the majority of British field force formations. They trained to fight a campaign to eject a German army, well equipped with Panzers and supported by aircraft and airborne troops that had landed on southern or eastern England" (196).

Returning to the film *Battle of Britain* the impression given in the screenplay, fully consistent with the idea that Britain was undefended other than by the RAF, is that The Spitfire aircraft was the key factor both in gaining air supremacy and in turning the tide of the war itself. Given the available evidence that Britain - a major military force at this time - could only be defended by a 'few' pilots flying an extraordinary aircraft, was not only too good a narrative to be anything other than the mainstay of the script, it was also one well established in the dramatic narrative of the iconic form itself:

> Air Minister (on the phone): "Look, our people in Washington are having trouble with the American press; it's about today's figures. German sources there are claiming that our figures are wildly exaggerated. (pause) Hello, are you there, is that you Dowding?"
>
> Air Chief Marshall Dowding: "I'm here Minister."

Air Minister: "Well, I mean, can you verify the figures?"

Dowding: (Clears throat) "I'm not very interested in propaganda, if we're right they'll give up, if we're wrong they'll be in London in a week."

The scene following this interchange offers The Spitfire aircraft as an iconic object in a central role in the most dramatic of narratives. Not knowing that the Battle of Britain (as it is scripted in the film) had already been 'won', a single Spitfire is seen being pushed along the airfield in readiness for yet another dogfight in the air. The palpable sense of peril is heightened when, in the next shot, eight, young, weary, and sullen RAF fighter pilots enter the squadron hut in preparation for another Luftwaffe onslaught. As the telephone rings their nervous apprehension suggests 'how much more of this can we take?' and the ensuing relief when the telephone operator says "teas up" is confirmed when one young pilot leaves the hut to vomit. The next scene shows an RAF operational radar control room where Air Vice Marshall Keith Park (Trevor Howard) is met with the statement from an operative "they're late this morning sir". The juxtaposition then cuts to France where a German division is shown retreating, with Hermann Goering (Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe) leaving the coast on a train bound inland. The final scene of the film cuts to Air Chief Marshall Sir Hugh Dowding who - to a rousing score by William Walton - removes to the garden balcony of his headquarters where the camera pans to an archetypical English summer garden with clear, wispy, skies superimposed with Churchill's now famous "This is not the end..." speech.

The meaning inherent in the iconic Spitfire aircraft is the cornerstone of history regarding the attempted German air invasion of Britain during 1940. That this mythology is now so ingrained in collective memory reveals the vigour of the tragic-dramatic narrative when fixed to a distinct culturally important iconic image form. To

present evidence that counters this mythology not only seems patriotically inappropriate but is also evidence that, in this example, historical accuracy is skewed towards the power of the iconic narrative.

It is difficult to speculate on the comparative comprehension of the meaning of the Spitfire icon between the post-war generation viewing a film like *Battle of Britain* and those who experienced the introduction of the aircraft in actual wartime. What can be postulated with some certainty though is that Spitfire mythology has now become firmly set in British consciousness through cultural depictions like the film in question. But what of the aircraft itself, how critical was it to the air battles of 1940 and why is it that its distinct, durable and reproducible form is still remembered when other aircraft in its genre - equally important at the time - have been forgotten or subsumed within its distinct image?

Figure 25: Supermarine Spitfire.

The Spitfire aircraft in all of its 24 variations is an aesthetically pleasing object and full use was made of this in the film under discussion. If the status of the iconic plane was fading at the time of the *Battle of Britain* film, then the implementation of established mythological narrative with effective reconstruction of the aircraft in action

(in a modern colour production rather than dated monochrome) would have proved irresistible to audiences receptive to such an overtly patriotic symbol. Today we take for granted that the Spitfire looks like it does and that the operational actions it undertook were often in dogfights in clear skies over southern England. For many people seeing the film in 1969, however, this was the first time such epic encounters had been seen in this manner. Very few individuals would have been able to witness actual dogfights even during the real air invasion, as most engagements occurred between 15-20,000 feet (raf.mod.uk accessed 2 May 2010) and, although daily reports of engagements may have stimulated public imagination this, for the majority of the population, may not have led to the image being as familiar as it is today.

Central to the mythology of the Spitfire is the idea that during the latter phases of the Battle, RAF operational units were so depleted that the risk of complete annihilation - both of the RAF and the country - was imminent. This again is subject to controversy. Fighter squadrons during the campaign were split into four groups: Group 13 protecting the North; 12 protecting the Midlands and Wales; 10 the South West and 11 the South East. Although the Luftwaffe conducted many serious raids on towns and cities throughout England it was primarily 11 group (South East) that bore the brunt of the attacks (Ponting 1991). So, although the pilots of this particular group were stretched during the autumn of 1940, it is also clear that numbers of both aircraft and pilots in the country as a whole were never seriously compromised at any point during the invasion. As Clive Ponting notes, the resources were certainly available to maintain a strong, long-term defence against the Luftwaffe:

> The most effective British fighter against the ME109 was the Spitfire, but seventy percent of 11 groups' fighters were Hurricanes while other groups were composed of equal numbers of the two aircraft...In total less than a third of Britain's best fighters were operating in the key sector. (131)

This claim is supported by the official statistics regarding the number of aircraft available at certain points of the Battle. On 15 August, for instance, 672 serviceable aircraft were available to Fighter Command while on the same day in September and October the number was 660 and 692 respectively (raf.mod.uk accessed 2 May 2010). The oft-cited claim that it was trained pilots who were in critically short supply, a strong theme in the 1969 film, is equally contestable, with serviceable units readily available in other RAF groups throughout the country. The document below, taken from a National Archive, is firm evidence that the ability to maintain a viable air defence against German hostility was as strong - possibly even stronger - than at the beginning of the air battles:

BATTLE OF BRITAIN.

FIGHTER COMMAND - OPERATIONAL AIRCRAFT AND CREWS

AS AT

	10 JULY, 1940				8 AUGUST, 1940				31 OCTOBER, 1940			
	Sqdns.	I.E.	Service-able a/c.	OPERATIONAL (Serviceable with crews)	Sqdns.	I.E.	Service-able a/c.	OPERATIONAL (Serviceable with crews)	Sqdns.	I.E.	Service-able a/c.	OPERATIONAL (Serviceable with crews)
Hurricanes	27	432	582	344	28½	568	645	370	34	544	561	399
Spitfires	19	304	320	226	19	328	335	257	19	304	294	227
Gladiators	-	-	-	-	½	8	7	7	½	8	9	8
Defiants	2	32	39	24	2	32	30	20	2	32	39	10
Blenheims	6	96	92	62	6	96	83	66	6	96	61	40
	54	864	1033*	656	56	1032	1100	720	61½	984	964	684

* As at 16.7.40 (earliest available)

N.B. Orders of Battle for this period did not show I.R.

Air Ministry War Room.
26th October, 1945.

Figure 26: Aircraft numbers during the Battle of Britain. Accessed 7 June 2009, nationalarchives.gov.uk.

The idea that Britain was in a precarious military position in 1940, and that the RAF singularly won the Battle of Britain has significantly affected the manner in which the Spitfire cultural icon is now perceived. In this respect, both propaganda and iconic meaning have similar narratives; both, for instance, present relatively simple messages which, as is certainly the case with the Spitfire, contain elements of truth that are

significantly inflated. Churchill's speech to the House of Commons on 20 August 1940, now commonly referred to as "The Few" is not, as is perhaps the common perception, solely concerned with the aerial combat, and no mention is made of it outside of its important place in the total war effort. In effect Churchill's speech summarises Britain's experience of the first year at war and to interpret it as solely homage to RAF fighter pilots gives a firm indication of the formation of iconic meaning being fixed onto The Spitfire icon:

> The whole British Army is at home. More than 2,000,000 determined men have rifles and bayonets in their hands tonight, and three-quarters of them are in regular military formations. We have never had armies like this in our Island in time of war. The whole Island bristles against invaders, from the sea or from the air...It is a fact, as I see from my daily returns, that our bomber and fighter strength now, after all this fighting, are larger than they have ever been. We believe that we shall be able to continue the air struggle indefinitely and as long as the enemy pleases.

Although the sentence in the speech, "never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few" is one of the better known Churchillian phrases, its meaning out of context has contributed to the justification of historical overstatement, especially when allied to the formation of Spitfire iconicity. For instance, Group 11 (South East), the fighter group commanded by Air Vice Marshall Keith Park (Trevor Howard in the film) with responsibility for the air defence of South East England, is portrayed as comprising mainly of Spitfire squadrons. In the film constant reference, both in the script and in the action sequences, is made to the Spitfire with just one minor acknowledgement of the more important fighter aircraft (in terms of aircraft numbers and successful combat), the Hawker Hurricane. It is possible to suggest from this that image knowledge of the latter aircraft in collective memory has not only been lost but,

also, that it has been subsumed within generic Spitfire iconicity, a similar claim can be made regarding some other British aircraft of the period.

Figure 27: Boulton Defiant.

Figure 28: Hawker Hurricane.

Another aspect of Spitfire/Battle of Britain mythology is that the air defence of Britain was greatly assisted by an exclusive and technologically advanced radar system. The common impression here (and again it is overtly expressed in *Battle of Britain*) is that the Luftwaffe on entering British airspace were very quickly detected, giving RAF fighter squadrons crucial warning enabling them to 'scramble' and quickly engage the enemy. That this meaning is firmly held in collective memory is typified in this personal

recollection from Gwen Reading, a member of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force during the war:

> Radar was our secret weapon. The secret weapon that allowed our pitiably few fighter planes, to be well placed when Hitler embarked upon the Battle of Britain. The radar stations on the south coast enabled those few fighter planes and pilots to always be in the right place at the right time. Hitler must have wondered how we managed this. (bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/ accessed 11 May 2010)

Radar was tactically important during the Luftwaffe invasion, but it was not exclusive and it was anything but secret. In reality German Radio Detecting and Ranging technology (generally known as the Freya system) was, at the beginning of the war, more technically advanced than any other (Brown 1999). The problem with the German system was that, because of its innovative technology, it was difficult to produce, maintain, and operate. Comparatively, the technical simplicity of the British Chain Home system meant that radar masts and stations could be erected swiftly and co-ordinated efficiently. By early 1940 only eight German Freya stations had been constructed in contrast to the near complete coverage of the British mainland and strategic islands. What is significant about this (in respect to the iconicity of the Spitfire form) is that the personalisation of the mythology - with hundreds of mainly female radar operatives now directly involved in the conflict - added a new dimension to the dramatic narrative of the air battles. This personalisation of meaning, allowing direct, dramatic, narrative connection between receptive communities, is crucial to the understanding of this iconic phenomenon and, to gain some idea of the depth of this personalisation it would prove useful to look at how the icon was originally formed and received.

5.6 Spitfire Funds

It has been argued that the Spitfire mythology in the late 1960s was taken as historically factual and that this narrative was reproduced and fully utilised in the movie *The Battle of Britain.* This production re-familiarised the icon in collective memory in a different and exciting manner, offering colour and verve to the existing monochromatic iconic image. The following section will return to the formation of the original iconic narrative and will look in detail at specific aspects that provide evidence of The Spitfire's unique cultural importance.

The Second World War took place in an age of mass communication. As important as the might of the opposing armed forces was the morale of the respective civilian populations at home and, as an island under threat, public morale was uniquely important to Great Britain at that time. Winston Churchill fully recognised, expressing many times during the war, that the morale of the British people was crucial in establishing production and technological advantages over the Axis powers. Shortly after forming the wartime coalition government on 15 May 1940, Churchill appointed the newspaper magnate William Maxwell Aitken (better known as Lord Beaverbrook) to the ministerial role of aircraft production. Weakened by bureaucratic indecision, aircraft production at the beginning of the war was woefully inadequate for the demands of the approaching conflict (Mckinsty2007) and the arrival of Beaverbrook, with his 'ready for business' approach, proved essential in enabling numbers of new fighter and bomber aircraft, together with the effective repair of damaged planes, to be maintained effectively throughout the war. Part of Beaverbrook's approach was to stimulate public interest in the production of aircraft by the introduction of 'Spitfire Funds', proposing that the public donate money or aluminium kitchen utensils for the manufacture of the (then) state-of-the-art Spitfire fighter aircraft. This initiative was successful both in raising significant sums of money together with, and perhaps more importantly,

integrating the whole of the commonwealth into total war commitment. Through 'Spitfire Funds' the British public became directly connected to a weapon of war in a manner that, possibly, is still unique in the history of martial conflict. In raising monies and materials Beaverbrook - experience gained in creating the Express newspaper group - understood completely the significance of heightened public receptivity to an idea such as this, capitalising upon it by allowing individual aircraft - larger donators had whole squadrons - to be named accordingly (public familiarity of objects with specific names seeming to assist their retention in collective memory, for instance, *Flying Scotsman* and *Mallard* for steam engines).

Figure 29: Period 'Spitfire Fund' poster.

To the present, communities originally involved in collecting for a 'Spitfire Fund' keep alive the memory of their respective planes through dedicated websites and restoration societies that still foster public commitment to remembering and honouring

this very special cultural icon (see, for example, The Manx Spitfire Fund Society). In the months prior to the first Luftwaffe attacks the majority of the British public became familiar with The Spitfire image through Beaverbrook's initiative, facilitating a strong connection between receptive communities and potential iconic object. In the Belfast area alone the original aim of the Belfast Telegraph Spitfire Fund was to produce enough money for just one Spitfire at a price then of around £5,000, although Beaverbrook undervalued the actual cost of producing the aircraft by approximately half. The Belfast donations, assisted by newspaper article titles such as "A Spitfire a Day Keeps the Nazis Away", raised a staggering £88,633,16s.5d enabling several Spitfires to be community personalised with names including, Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, Tyrone, Larne, Ballymena, Bangor, Aldergrove, Mountains O'Mourne, Enniskillen, Mid-Ulster, Belfast, Portadown, City of Derry and Harlandic. (belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news, accessed 30 May 2010)

Today there are more Spitfires in restored condition than when the aircraft took its last operational flight in 1957. The desire to reproduce this culturally iconic object, both materially and as an image in collective memory, reflects the importance of the dramatic narrative in the formation of primary cultural icons. In this particular example, the evidence for the personalisation of the narrative - its highly dramatic role, the durability of its mythical form and its adamant meaning - is historically and culturally discernible. If tragic-dramatic narratives can be shown to be an extremely important element in the production of cultural icons at a general level, then this is overtly demonstrable in the specific example of the Spitfire aircraft.

As serious a narrative as The Spitfire story is, re-visiting the historical impetus of the icon from a modern-day perspective has something of a 'boys own' element to it and, in several respects for many people at the time, comprehending the months of

aerial combat as a kind of game is actually how specific elements of the narrative were created. Newspaper and wireless reporting at the height of the air battles in 1940, for instance, regularly presented the dogfights as sporting contests, with individual RAF pilots and numbers of Luftwaffe losses offered to the public in cricketing format (Campion 2008). The nature of the conflict itself, with individual pilots returning from their sorties to socialise in local communities with their wives or girlfriends (Francis 2008) still seems incongruous in its civility when compared to the brutality and hardships in other arenas of war at the time. Cultural replications of the Battle of Britain - as in the motion picture considered above - often have a similar air of 'comic book' about their productions, which may in part explain their appeal to modern receptive communities. The new language of the time, some examples of which are still familiar - 'chocks away' 'tally ho' 'bandits at 12 O'clock' - masks the dread and horror that was experienced by individual combatants on both sides of the conflict.

Real tragic narrative, of course, was overtly present during the wartime British air conflict. Indiscriminate losses to the civilian population during the Blitz, together with anticipation and daily terror of the next air raid must have been particularly difficult to accept. Specific to the Spitfire aircraft, two examples of tragic narrative can be offered to support the idea that the understated gallantry of the period, together with civilian 'hearts and minds' involvement, was underpinned by profound personalised drama.

The TR-9 radio transmitter, in conjunction with the effective Chain Home Radar system, connected solitary fighter pilots to an operational control system in a manner unique in military history (Dibbs and Holmes 2000). Picked for their clear enunciation the wireless operators of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force spoke directly to both Spitfire and Hurricane pilots during the intense fighting. As the more technologically advanced aircraft, the Spitfire was assigned primarily to engage the Luftwaffe fighter

aircraft while the 'workhorse' Hurricane concentrated on bomber formations. Both aircraft, however, were equipped for the first time with a wireless system that kept them in contact on the ground through the headsets of the young women of the WAAF. A careful glance at an image of either aircraft shows that one crucial technological advance is the aerial wire running from the tailplane of both machines to the aerial mast (behind the pilot cockpit). Previous attempts to facilitate radio communication in earlier bi-plane aircraft were, at best, intermittently functioning, while rapid advances in wireless technology facilitated the development of an effective and relatively lightweight wireless set - the TR9 - that proved both powerful and reliable during the early months of the war.

The personalisation of the dramatic narrative during the conflict could not have been more tangible. Individual, often young, RAF fighter pilots conducting gladiatorial one-to-one battles in defence of a nation, in full radio contact with WAAF radio operatives was simultaneously chivalrous and, very often, tragic. The Hurricane aircraft in particular, due to the percentage of wood and fabric used in its construction (fleetairarmarchive.net) was prone to combustibility, sometimes resulting in pilots suffering a painful, protracted and very distressing death. Indeed, the only mention of the Hurricane aircraft during the *Battle of Britain* motion picture is between a badly disfigured ex-fighter pilot and an attractive, young WAAF officer Maggie Harvey (Suzanna York). Live communication of the aerial combat would have affected the operatives who were actively participating in the tragic-dramatic ordeals at a level that can only be surmised yet, overall, the connection between the tragic, personalised narrative of the events is an important contributory factor regarding the durable nature of the Spitfire iconic form.

At the time air-to-ground communication was not just restricted to fighter pilots, WAAF operatives, and RAF Command Headquarters. In Great Britain at the start of the aerial campaign the number of licensed domestic wireless sets was over 9 million (Donnelly 2008) with many others operating without licenses. Together with newspapers, radio was a front-line method of communicating the day-to-day events of the war and, while it is likely that only a small number of individuals saw the 'dogfights' through wispy summer skies, many more would have experienced the aerial combat in their own homes due to the TR-9 being transmitted in a frequency that could be received by a normal household set. The immediacy of this conflict, therefore, became dramatically personalised by connecting large sections of the civilian population to a tangible sense of life-or-death drama.

It is easy now to underestimate the climate of fear that must have conditioned daily life in the early months of the war. Regardless of the extent to which RAF fighter involvement was crucial to the defence of British sovereignty at the time, the public perception of its importance was clearly heightened by the nature and proximity of the battles in the skies. There are reasons why this heightened perceptual awareness focused on one specific aircraft, rather than on the much more combat effective Hawker Hurricane, and these combine to reveal a fiercely compelling tragic-dramatic narrative that is now resolved into the simple meaning of the iconic aircraft.

5.7 R.J. Mitchell

Sentimentality is an emotion that with historical distance and hindsight can all too easily condition our perception of cultural products of bygone eras. Many individual stories emanating from the Second World War emolliate the fear and anxiety that must have accompanied the every-day lives of most participating individuals. Partly this may be accounted for by the distinctive British undemonstrative stoicism of the era ('Keep

Calm and Carry On'), but equally so, some account has to be made of the manner in which we view such narratives from present day perspectives. This factor is especially relevant in the analysis of one further and last, cultural product from the period. The motion picture *The First of the Few* (1942), produced and directed by the then famous stage and screen actor Leslie Howard, depicts the life story of Reginald Joseph Mitchell, the designer of the Supermarine Spitfire fighter aircraft. Watching the film today it is difficult to suppress feelings of sentimentality towards the production yet, taken in context, the film offers relevant insights into the true and personalised tragic narratives formed during this period that are deeply connected with the iconic plane.

Figure 30: Advertising poster from the American version of *The First of the Few.*

In an open letter to *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper published on Thursday, 15 September 2005, the respective Lords Gilmour of Craigmillar, Heseltine, King of Bridgwater, Mason of Barnsley, Robertson of Port Ellen, together with other notables, Sir John Nott, Michael Portillo and Sir Malcolm Rifkind, had this to say regarding the importance of R.J. Mitchell, aircraft designer:

Sir,

It is always an appropriate time to remember those who gave so much to ensure the freedom of our country, however 2005 has added resonance, marking as it does the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and 65 years since the Battle of Britain. At such a time, it is right to remember the contribution of the many, as well as the contributions of some remarkable individuals, such as R.J. Mitchell, the designer of the legendary Spitfire. Mitchell was a modest man who did not court fame, preferring to channel his considerable efforts into the design of 24 separate aeroplanes during his 16 years at the Supermarine works in Southampton. The Spitfire, loved by those who flew in her, represented the pinnacle of his career. Sadly, Mitchell died of cancer in 1937, aged just 42, without knowing of the vital role his Spitfire would play in making victory possible in the crucial Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940, nor was he to know of the vitally important role that the Spitfire played, as the RAF's primary fighter weapon.

While the Hurricane was the primary fighter weapon during 1940, it is true to say that, in the era of the piston engine fighter, the Spitfire lays claim to being the most durable and accomplished aircraft of the period. As an icon, its dramatic narrative has been enhanced by the idea of a tragic, genius creator ("his Spitfire") who gave Britain a product from his mind and hands that would become a graceful symbol of war-like resistance and courage. Today, some may remember who R. J. Mitchell was, although probably very few actually do, yet his mythological legacy is, nevertheless, further evidence that personalised tragic narrative formation has a profound effect on iconic durability.

R.J. Mitchell was born in the 'Potteries' in 1895 and had a lower middle class upbringing. After attending the Queensbury Road Higher Elementary School and Hanley High school, he was apprenticed to the locomotive engineers Kerr Stewart and co. Nearing the end of the First World War his engineering prowess - combined with a logistical and artistic intelligence - gained him the post of personal assistant to the managing director at the Supermarine Aviation Works in Southampton (Mitchell G 2006) where he achieved rapid promotion to Chief Engineer. Irascible and professionally immodest (Mitchell refused to co-operate with designers from Vickers when Supermarine was taken over by the former company) together with a 'hands on' approach to creative design, the real-life R.J. Mitchell would have been physically, and in character, a somewhat different individual to the privileged and gently mannered depiction offered by Leslie Howard in *The First of The Few*. There are several sound reasons why Howard portrayed Mitchell as upper class, and these have direct relevance to the tragic narrative meaning of the Spitfire icon.

Just as the motion picture *The Battle of Britain* attempted to re-tell the mythical drama of the period as historical fact, *The First of the Few* is wartime propaganda that compels Mitchell's biography to be consistent with the formed mythology of the Spitfire icon. The film opens with a (now) clichéd depiction of Britain standing alone against the direst of military threats, the 'Pathe News' style introduction suggesting that the country stands as the last hope of the Christian world. The scene then shifts to Spitfires landing at an archetypical South East RAF squadron base with the appropriate elements including, young dashing pilots, cups of tea hastily consumed, sporting dialogue, stoical bravery - "it's an aeroplane I need, not an ambulance, there are hundreds of them up there" - and an immaculately clipped Station Commander, Geoffrey Crisp (David Niven), who introduces the character of R.J. Mitchell in the following way:

Scene: RAF Dispersal point.

Crisp: "I heard you chaps had quite a good afternoon"

Pilot 1: "Yes sir six!"

Crisp: "Good! That makes twenty so far"

Pilot 2: "Quite a picnic sir"

Crisp: "Where's Tich?"

Pilot 3: "Sergeant James saw him come down in the drink Sir"

Crisp: "He can swim can't he?"

Pilot 3: "Yes sir, you should have seen him at Brighton last year"

Crisp: "I missed that little party"

Cut to shot of four Spitfires flying overhead

Pilot 4: "Spitfires chaps, just in case you've never seen one"

Pilot 5: "I can't see a 'Spit' in the air without getting a kick out of it, can't help it, after all it's my line"

Pilot 6: "What are you talking about? I thought you were a ruddy artist"

Pilot 5: "That's exactly what I mean"

Pilot 7: "Yes it is an artistic job"

Crisp: "That's not surprising; it was designed by an artist"

Pilot 6: "Do you mean Mitchell sir?"

Crisp: "Yes, R.J. Mitchell"

Pilot 6: "He was a wizard"

This was a time of Empire, with a particular class in British society symbolising its nobility and it was this class, together with its manner of governing, that was perceived to be under the sternest of threats at this moment of the war; the British monarchy, for instance, decided to stay in London during the Blitz rather than remove to safer, but symbolically distanced, parts of the Commonwealth. Unfashionable as it may

now seem, the majority of British people during the war supported monarchy, perhaps in a more heartfelt (though less histrionic) way than the Germanic people supported Hitler and Nazism, and the portrayal of R.J. Mitchell as belonging to that specific social class - although he obviously was not royalty - added gravitas to the tragedy that unfolds in the film. To the ordinary British cinema viewer of 1942 presenting Mitchell as a stern, gruff Midlander (with regard to his manner rather than his material circumstances, which were comfortable) would have been incongruous both in terms of its propaganda value and how it would be expected to be understood by the general receptive communities of the time. Just to dwell on this idea, some popular British films starring Leslie Howard - who was an internationally famous Hollywood actor at the time - and immediately preceding *First of the Few* include *Berkeley Square* (Dir. Frank Lloyd 1933), *Scarlet Pimpernel* (Dir, Harold Young 1934) and *Pygmalion* (Dir. Antony Asquith and Leslie Howard 1938) all, to a greater or lesser extent, presenting Howard as a specific type of 'stiff upper lip' Englishman. Added to this, media communication of the period carried a propriety that may have been perceived as quite normal to the general radio listener, newspaper reader or cinemagoer. All in all, portraying Mitchell as belonging to a specific class would have been a comfortable paradigm for the receptive viewer to comprehend the overall meaning of the film, and there would seem to be no logical reason for this to be altered in the interests of biographical 'realism'. The argument presented here is that portraying Mitchell as a member of a higher social class symbolised not just the power of this established order to withstand onslaught, through intelligence, dedication and sheer hard work, but also that it would have been supported by the majority of people comprehending this manner of presentation.

Together with its corresponding connection to Spitfire iconicity the tragic narrative of the film has several threads that would have been significant to a British audience in the midst of war. The receptive communities, fully aware of the distinct

image of The Spitfire aircraft, were now offered a tragic individual narrative allowing a further strengthening of iconic meaning, not just through the biography of the designer R.J. Mitchell, but also of the actor who played him, Leslie Howard. In the case of the former, Mitchell died of cancer in 1937 nearly a full year before the first test flight of the Mark 1 Spitfire, and in Howard's case his assassination, probably on direct orders of Joseph Goebbels (Mitchell G 2006), would make this his last starring role.

The film presents Mitchell's life as dedicated entirely towards the development and production of the Spitfire aircraft, with the prestigious Schneider Sea Plane racing trophy (won by Mitchell's Supermarine S.6 B aircraft) being an essential precursor to the iconic fighter plane. This depiction is unlikely as Mitchell was a prolific designer producing during his aviation career twenty-four manufactured planes, many of which were both innovative and practical. Mitchell, for instance, designed the Supermarine Bomber (Project B12/36) which had the potential of delivering larger bomb loads, safer, and at much greater speeds than the famous Lancaster Bomber but, due to limited resources, was only in the initial production stages when the original prototype, together with all Mitchell's original drawings, were destroyed during a Luftwaffe raid in 1940. Mitchell was also a highly efficient manager (Mitchell G 2006) organising a strong team of engineers to commit his original ideas to a finished, manufacturable product, and it is likely that, at any one time, he would have been working on a selection of projects rather than just the Spitfire. It should also be noted that, not only did the Spitfire enter production without Mitchell, but its many developments were the products of other very skilled and able engineers.

The romantic notion that an artistic yet thoroughly upper class British individual (Mitchell's first appearance in the film is on a South Coast cliff in summer drawing seagulls on scraps of paper) should dedicate his entire life to the creation of a single,

highly important, national artefact was cinematic licence too compelling for the producers of the film to resist. It should not be forgotten that these were critical times and that any notion of sentimentality is a result of historical hindsight rather than lack of tragic depth in the film; most of the pilots in the opening scenes, for instance, were experienced combatants many of whom would not live to see the film on screen. In terms of iconic meaning the additional tragic-dramatic narrative of Mitchell's biography was particularly viable, both in terms of subject matter and in its emotional impact on the receptive communities of Great Britain during the early years of the war.

R. J. Mitchell in the film is an Aristotelian tragic hero. His death through cancer is changed in the script to create not only a sense of tragic loss, but also to invoke a catharsis connecting his death to national martyrdom. Leslie Howard's portrayal of Mitchell explicitly offers the idea that his death was a result of overwork resulting from an urgent need to complete his most famous design:

Crisp (Spitfire test pilot and later Station Commander): "Can't you ease up a bit Mitch?"

Mitchell: "Not just yet Crisp, not just yet".

Cut to Harley Street doctor's surgery.

Doctor: "Well I presume you knew something was wrong or you wouldn't have come to me".

Mitchell: "I had an idea yes".

Doctor: "I'm afraid you're rather a sick man Mr Mitchell"

Mitchell: "I had an idea of that too; I want you to do something about it"

Doctor: "That's more in your hands than mine".

Mitchell: "What do you mean?"

Doctor: "You need to take it easy for a while"

Mitchell: "For a bit?"

Doctor: "More than a bit and that must stop"

Mitchell: "You mean less work"

Doctor: "I mean *no* work, a holiday, maybe a year, go away - somewhere by the sea - plenty of sun, plenty of fresh air, and a *complete* rest. If you do that there is no reason you couldn't carry on for years."

Mitchell: "And if I don't do that?"

Doctor: "Well"

Mitchell: "Well come on what is it?"

Doctor: "Not a year"

Mitchell: "Much less?"

Doctor: "Perhaps six to eight months"

Mitchell: "*Eight months*"

Doctor: "Well it's up to you Mr Mitchell, you know what to do".

The next scene shows Mitchell immersed in work, and in the scene following this he is shown talking to his wife after returning from work -at dawn. The conversation concerns his imminent demise and impresses on the viewer the further realisation that Mitchell regards the completion of The Spitfire as overriding any personal issues: "Darling, you do believe this work I'm doing is important don't you...I mean *really* important, more important than us, for instance". Such stoicism and selflessness to a greater cause, though patently tragic, would have been entrancing to a wartime audience, many of whom were facing similar personal fears and dilemmas. In its relevance to the tragic dramatic narrative of the Spitfire as a culturally iconic image, the personalisation of meaning and its plausible effect on perceptually receptive communities is - literally in this case - uplifting.

To a stirring score by William Walton (*Spitfire Prelude and Fugue*) a montage of clips show Mitchell overseeing The Spitfire in the final stages of production, culminating with a test flight displaying its staggering aerial agility and aesthetic quality. The test pilot (Gordon Crisp/David Niven) flies over Mitchell's garden and gives a reciprocated 'thumbs up' from Mitchell as he is nursed in a wheelchair. The final scene of the film is simulated footage of the aerial dogfights of 1940, with accompanying air-to-ground and air-to-air radio communication, and, of course, with The Spitfire presented as a peerless aircraft, beautiful to behold, and a pure symbol of freedom against encroaching Nazi darkness. As a lone Spitfire flies through the clouds towards the light of the sun, Commander Crisp offers the final words of the film, "Mitch, they can't take the Spitfires Mitch, they can't take them".

Leslie Howard was killed on 1 June 1943 when his civilian flight BOAC 777 from Lisbon to Bristol was shot down by Junkers JU88 fighter aircraft from the Luftwaffe long rang Maritime Fighter Unit (Goss 2001). To this day the incident is subject to a degree of controversy and speculation that has not been clarified by the re-classification of its official secrets status from the year 1980 to 2056. The conjecture that German intelligence confused Howard and his personal assistant - who apparently resembled Churchill - with the British Prime Minister and his entourage now looks fanciful. More convincing is the claim that Howard was a covert operative of British Intelligence on a mission to persuade the Spanish dictator General Franco not to capitulate to Axis pressure, and was subsequently assassinated on direct orders from Joseph Goebbels. Goebbels was particularly infuriated at Howard's contribution to film propaganda of the period of which *The First of the Few* is a prime example, stating at the time that - should the Germans invade Britain - Howard would be executed. Whatever the truth of the situation - wartime incidents often being amalgams of fact and opinion - it is clear that this highly regarded, internationally famous, British actor, whose last feature film

focused on a machine perceived as critical in preventing Britain from invasion, was murdered by the Nazi war machine.

Reported as a war crime in British newspapers at the time (Daily Telegraph archive accessed 4 March 2009) the death of Leslie Howard, together with his portrayal of R.J. Mitchell, is further evidence that profound tragic-dramatic narrative is fundamental to the production and formation of a culturally important phenomena. The personalisation of the narrative - Mitchell's early death, Howard's murder, the involvement of receptive communities - is a significant factor that must be taken into account if we are to understand why the Spitfire image remains such a strong iconic form in British cultural life. Like other primary cultural icons, the meaning contained in the image was, to a significant extent, fixed at the time of its inception. With the Spitfire icon, not only does the image invoke ideas such as 'backs to the wall' defiance and chivalrous individual bravery, it has also come to signify The Battle of Britain itself, and it does so with panache. That it is likely that Britain would have committed a capable and aggressive defence of the island, regardless of the outcome of the battles in its skies during 1940 illustrates how, in certain instances, iconic meaning can influence how a period of history is commonly understood. The significance of cultural icons to future receptive communities is, of course, open to conjecture, but it is evident that the meaning of the Spitfire icon is still very strong as a symbol of the laudable desire of British culture to be open and free. This partly explains why, in 2009, the hopeless attempt by the British National Party to appropriate the icon for its own political ends achieved the level of public ridicule it deserved.

CHAPTER 6 DAVID GARRICK AND THE BEATLES

Applying the four conditions of cultural iconicity in the opening case studies has facilitated a new way of looking at particular individuals and objects that are very well known in collective memories. As previously stated, the idea that cultural iconicity is often triggered by tragic-dramatic singular events - given certain other conditions - is an important contribution to knowledge in this field of cultural studies; and is a useful starting point in the analysis of iconic phenomena in general. Tragic-dramatic iconic narratives, however, are not manifested solely in discernible single 'critical' incidents; the Spitfire aircraft, for instance - a primary British cultural icon - contains symbolic meaning forged in the tragedy of war and the drama of extended cultural mythology. In this example communities receptive to the meaning of the iconic form developed the significance of the icon over a period of time, either through the Second World War itself, or through cultural reproductions such as the motion pictures considered in the previous chapter. This chapter will develop the idea that primary cultural icons are produced through *natural* dramatic narrative interaction between receptive communities and potential cultural icons. In this sense the emphasis will be on the nature of the receptive communities, how they perceive the respective phenomenon, and how specific circumstances reveal unique conditions that allow iconic forms to be fixed in collective memory as distinct, durable and reproducible images. In terms of clarifying the idea of 'naturalness', the following analysis will argue that cultural icons, although usually formed within capitalist/marketing hegemonies, also retain a good degree of independence from them, a difficult argument to make but one that needs to be stressed in order to emphasise the unique nature of primary cultural icons. The method employed in this chapter is to look at two case studies that offer the conditions necessary for iconicity through the near absence of manufactured marketing activity. The denial of the power of marketing during the initial formation of primary icons, affirms the

importance of how receptive communities respond to significant iconic events, whether this is a single event in examples such as Diana or Kennedy, or more prolonged ones as in the case studies presented in this chapter. In the first study - David Garrick (actor and theatre manager, 1717-1779) - the argument will be that Garrick's unique, innovative theatrical practices and performances contributed to the creation of an original, and highly dramatic, narrative that captivated the hearts and minds of a new eighteenth century London public, to the extent that his fame, and crucially his image, was retained in collective memory over generations.

The formation of David Garrick as an icon developed in a thriving, vibrant, cultural atmosphere and displayed a close connection between artist and audience comparable, it might be said, to a loving relationship. Similarly, if there is a single meaning that can be attributed to the narrative of one of the modern era's greatest cultural icons, The Beatles, then it is love. Throughout their career, The Beatles' receptive communities were various, stemming from small groups of individuals in their early Hamburg tours through, crucially, the Cavern audience prior to Brian Epstein's involvement from November 1961. Eventually The Beatles' narrative, for reasons that will be closely studied here, reached communities of individuals on a global level to an extent unmatched before or since. This interpretation will argue that during the height of their early period fame The Beatles did something extraordinary, they retired from direct performances to concentrate on studio recordings. This important cultural event - a cessation of The Beatles as they were known to that point - is interpreted as a reflection of the creation of the holistic 'Beatles' unit, and the power of The Beatles as a developing iconic force. This reading also suggests that the most important receptive community in the narrative of The Beatles story, especially at this period, was the four individuals captured within the heart of the hurricane.

While not intended as a direct comparative study, the interested reader may find similarities between the respective stories of Garrick and The Beatles, especially regarding the emotional impact on audiences in their early careers. The chapter also claims that the intervention of synthetic narratives, such as overt advertising or other marketing strategies, had little influence on the dramatic narrative connection formed between communities and icons, even during the cultural tidal wave that was "Beatlemania". Primary cultural icons can never be consciously constructed, that is why so few of them exist, and it is the reason why - recalling the previous chapter - the Apple iPod is not one. This is not the result of a lack of talent or originality, patently the world is full of it, or the lack of famous individuals, again awash. What is absent from mere talent, celebrity or originality, is the direct presence of communities that are not only receptive to new tragic-dramatic narratives but are also disposed to contribute to their formation.

6.1 David Garrick

Apart from a small poster advertising his debut (Fig.1.) marketing activity, of course, played no part in the astounding level of public interest following David Garrick's first professional role as Richard 111 on 19 October 1741. As Elizabeth Stein suggests: "Garrick's triumph was phenomenal, London went 'horn mad' after him...Even Pope, who had long since abandoned his visits to the theatre was induced to leave his retreat at Twickenham to view the new wonder" (6). David Garrick, however, was to become much more than just a highly regarded stage actor. His entrance at this moment of the mid eighteenth-century found the pulse of a unique spirit of artistic and intellectual enthusiasm, introducing a budding receptive public to innovative cultural ideas blossoming in new social spaces including clubs, coffee houses and, especially,

theatres (Brewer 2000). The communities of artists, thinkers, and performers, including among many others luminaries such as Samuel Johnson, James Boswell, Henry Fielding, Alexander Pope, Joshua Reynolds, William Hogarth, Colley Cibber and Thomas Gainsborough, delivered their ideas to a new type of receptive public, a public that was developing in a unique atmosphere of cultural participation and consumption, as James Van Horn Melton argues: "Yet there is another, more recent meaning of public. We use it in the sense of audience, as in speaking of the public for a book, a concert, a play, or an art exhibition. Reading public, music public, theater public – such usages began to appear in the seventeenth century and had become common by the eighteenth" (1).

Figure 31: Poster advertising David Garrick's first performance.

Figure 32: Garrick as Richard 111.

It is difficult to fully capture the sense of excitement and expectation that was felt by theatre audiences experiencing early Garrick productions, yet there is a body of evidence that suggests the experience may have been profoundly moving. Prior to Garrick's modernisation of eighteenth-century theatre practices, the participation of the theatre audience was very different from what we might expect today. "The revolution in acting and gesture of which Garrick was the main instrument" suggested by Kalman Burnim (189) altered people's perception of the theatre going event to the extent that it became a radically new experience. Not least of Garrick's changes was that he insisted that the audience listen to what he was saying, a major innovation in itself and one that focused attention onto the drama of the stage. Prior to this innovation it was customary for theatre performances to be rowdy, and at times violent, with audiences more likely to participate in a melee than to enjoy an intellectual, artistic, or didactic experience:

> Seated in the privacy and intimacy of their loges, aristocratic theatregoers more often than not viewed the theatre as an extension of the drawing room. Conversing freely with companions or casting coquettish glances at an object of amorous attention in an opposite box, one considered the play to be of secondary importance and it was a mark of poor taste to listen too closely to a performance. (Melton 176)

Garrick also banished the audience from the stage. Previous to this it was common for the more affluent, or more socially respectable, theatregoers to be seated onstage during a production where they became an obvious object of attention, and would have further detracted from the play itself although, as the above extract implies, the play itself was not the main focus of the theatre audience's attention. In making the stage his own, Garrick re-addressed the balance between actor and audience that would set the standard of practice for theatre performances to this day. What this change also achieved

was to draw the attention of the audience towards what the actors were actually saying or doing, rather than 'cherry picking' moments of specific attention - a battle scene, possibly, or a dance. The dramatic effect of Garrick's modernisation of the stage - for instance, he employed French musicians and scenery makers to add intensity to the performances (Knight 183) - allowed the expertise of the actors to flourish and the plays to be fully enjoyed. In experiencing productions in this new way works such as Richard 111, Macbeth, Hamlet, or even light-hearted topical pieces (see below), became highly dramatic narratives that connected performer to audience in a unique manner. Garrick's fame, in this respect, was an holistic phenomenon formed during a period in which London was ablaze with new ideas which, concurrently, saw the growth of communities newly receptive to such ideas, as Melton notes: "In the theater, as in other areas of Enlightenment culture, the public assumed a new significance" (160).

The dramatic rise in the numbers of theatregoers during Garrick's era, from around a thousand per week in 1732 to over two and a half thousand in 1762 (Melton 160) reflects the importance of the medium as a direct link between artist and audience, greater perhaps than printed publications, musical productions or representative art. During a Garrick play the audience experienced fresh dramatic narratives that fostered their emotional interest, not just through the plays themselves, but also in the individuals performing them; before Garrick's arrival, for instance, seventeenth century stage performers had poor social status, little more, as Kalman Burnim points out, than prostitutes. Focusing on a select group of actors of which Garrick was paramount, a cult of celebrity was created that would be recognised today as 'fan' worship, reflecting the depth of emotional response to this innovative manner of experiencing theatrical productions. The receptive public of the time became significantly interested in the private lives and characters of the performers, largely as a result of the practical changes in the culture of theatregoing noted above. Garrick's audience control innovations

literally turned heads; earlier opening times for productions meant that people could attend at reasonable hours and get home safely; more affordable pricing did what it always does, and, not least, the female demographic was at the centre of it all: "London theatre audiences were also sexually mixed. Nowhere outside the salon did eighteenth-century women have more of a public presence than in the theater" (Melton 175). The radical changes in public culture during the early part of Garrick's career, together with the new dramatic experiences occurring in the theatres, created the conditions of heightened receptivity not only for 'fan' worship but, in Garrick's case, potential iconicity, as Kristina Straub notes with regard to the former idea:

> The curiosity of eighteenth-century "fans" is not dissimilar to that of their twentieth-century counterparts. Particular players, such as West Digges and George Anne Bellamy, were more interesting to the public for the romance of their personal lives than for what they did onstage; or, more accurately, what they did onstage was inseparable from that romance. If information about players was not forthcoming, the public imagination simply made it up. (12)

No one during this period matched the level of public laudation achieved by David Garrick. His natural ability to captivate an audience was aided by the willingness of the mid eighteenth-century theatregoer to participate in the productions, not through the boisterousness of their behaviour, although they were at times still notoriously rowdy, but through their imagination. Now the audience could experience, via Garrick, the tragic drama of some of Shakespeare's main characters, and the curtain of disbelief between the experience emanating from the stage and its applicability to reality was, for this audience, perhaps easier to suspend than it is for us today. Garrick's innovative natural style - a stark contrast to the exaggerated style of previous performers - introduced a new medium for the dramatic narrative relationship between actor and audience, as Ian Mackintosh argues:

The years were golden not because great plays were then being regularly written (they were not) but because this was the age when for the first time theatre captured not only the imagination of a people, as it had in Shakespeare's day, but also a central role in the fine arts of a major civilised nation. "In the days of Garrick [actor-manager at Drury Lane from 1747 to 1776] the theatre engross'd the minds of men to such a degree", wrote playwright Arthur Murphy in an early biography of Garrick, "that it may now be said that there existed in England a fourth estate: King, Lords, Commons and Drury Lane Playhouse." (19)

The tragic-dramatic narrative between potential iconic phenomena and receptive communities is a central factor in the formation of cultural icons, and this is clearly evident in the early career of David Garrick. Although the incidence of a single tragic event is absent from Garrick's biography (unlike many modern-day primary cultural icons) it is argued that the emotional impact of a Garrick play on his audience - mainly through his depictions of Shakespearian tragedy - created a strong bond between object and subject; icon and community. Often tailoring Shakespeare to meet the expectations and sensibilities of his audience (Melton 165) Garrick *became* the characters he was portraying, as Dror Wharman (2004) points out: "A good actor is whomever he represents. This good actor, in mid-eighteenth-century England, was no mere academic ideal type, but rather had a well-known identity and an established name: David Garrick" (171).

In addition to the high drama of his Shakespearian tragedy, Garrick performed a series of enormously popular lighter roles including *The Lying Valet* (1741), *The Farmers Return from London* (1762) and *A Peep Behind the Curtain* (1767). These roles, reflecting topical issues and modes of behaviour, further endeared Garrick to a wider "amorphous audience" (Melton 175). This thorough popularisation of the

individual led to an array of reproductions of his image - an early example of a vital factor in the formation of cultural icons. In "Garrickomania: Art Celebrity and the Imaging of Garrick", Heather McPherson examines the impact of Garrick's image retention and duplication claiming it as a unique event in English cultural life, a precursor to modern celebrity culture, "his features were recorded and widely disseminated in hundreds of images, which amplified his celebrity and posthumous reputation" (n.pag.). McPherson's claim, verified by the multiplicity and range of Garrick's image production, can be extended to support the idea that Garrick was one of the first cultural icons in the modern sense. The retention of a distinct image in collective memory - even in present-day image saturated society - can be partly explained by the manner in which cultures duplicate the image, especially if this can be shown to happen over an extended period of time, and with a discernible dramatic narrative. It is also necessary - if the four conditions are applied - to connect the initial image duplication to a discernible receptive community that has experienced the tragic-dramatic narrative at first hand and this, as with the other case studies, is demonstrably the case with David Garrick.

"Garrick transformed himself into a national cultural icon whose appeal transcended ordinary social and class divisions and narrow professional interests" (n.pag.). McPherson's statement, correct in its promotion of Garrick's iconicity, overlooks the role of the receptive communities in the production of this particular iconic phenomenon. Garrick did not simply "transform himself" into a cultural icon just as the Spitfire aircraft did not transform itself into one. His iconicity reflects the narrative impact on a particular body of public at a specific moment in history, and the high probability that his image/narrative was retained in collective memory through generations is evidence of this. The main body of McPherson's article demonstrates that Garrick's image was reproduced through a variety of different forms, and in quantities

greater than any other individual of the period, including the monarchs George 11 (r 1727-1760), George 111 (r 1760-1820) and George 1V (r 1820-1830), making him - "ostensibly the most painted man in English history" (n.pag.). As his image became well known through portraiture and engravings - he was painted several times by notable contemporaries such as Reynolds, Hogarth and Gainsborough - it also became familiar to the public through the burgeoning popular media - newspapers, magazines pamphlets and advertisements. The interactive development of these avenues of popular expression, taking into account Garrick's unrivalled popularity, compels the argument that his status as a figure of adulation, together with the public desire to retain his image, was an early example of an individual transcending celebrity status and entering the realm of the cultural icon.

6.2 Legacy

Applying the concept of collective memory to the assassination of John Kennedy, Barbie Zelizer suggests that single, radical events are fundamentally important to how we retain the meaning of significant cultural histories: "The term *critical incidents* refers to those moments by means of which people air, challenge, and negotiate their own standards of action. In this view collective memories pivot on discussions of some kind of critical incident" (4). In a parallel manner, the four-point definition of cultural iconicity prioritises the inclusion and analysis of tragic-dramatic narratives. The tragic demise of many modern-day primary cultural icons, in this understanding, can rightly be thought of as "critical incidents", rendering millions with the capacity to recall precisely where, or what, they were doing at the time of the occurrence. Although his was not a tragic or early demise - Garrick lived a comfortably respectable life - the emotional association between the characters he played onstage and the man himself suggests a

deeply held narrative connection between the individual and his community. The public response following his death is comparable to that of some present-era iconic figures such as, for example, Diana Spencer or John Lennon, "Davy's death also set off a flood of public grief without parallel in English Literature, the arts, or the stage" (Burnim 182). Also in keeping with one of the characteristics of modern day cultural icons is that his death solidified rather than diminished his iconic status, "Garrick's death on 20 January 1779 in no way curtailed the production and consumption of his images. Rather, it furnished the occasion for an outpouring of commemorative portraits and memorabilia honouring the modern Roscius" (McPherson n.pag.).

Public and artistic interest in Garrick continued long past his death, not just through image memorabilia, but also in popular theatrical productions such as Thomas William Robertson's play *David Garrick* (1864). The durability of both the memory and the image of Garrick supports the argument that his iconic stature, (and with it the meaning to future receptive communities) transcended his immense career popularity. In *David Garrick: The Play and the Novel*, Talia Felix asks: "Why were romantic comedies about David Garrick so popular a subject?" (3) and part of the answer to this is that the transferable meaning inherent in his iconic form had cultural relevance to communities other than the eighteenth-century London audiences that idolised him. Felix goes on to state, "what caused the work to fall out of favour can only be speculated on" (5). Certainly it does appear that, prior to the Second World War, interest in Garrick remained solid, with plays involving Garrick's persona, for instance, being "relatively standard theatrical repertoire" (5) together with two feature films of his life being produced, *David Garrick* (1913, Leedham Bantock) and *The Great Garrick* (1937, James Whale). After the war, however, cultural interest in Garrick seems to have largely dissipated to the point where his reproducible image and subsequent meaning have disappeared.

The main purpose of this chapter is to support the idea that cultural icons are better understood by prioritising the receptive communities ('cultures') that experience and contribute to their respective initial formations. In this sense the meaning of an iconic form can be comprehended through its relevance to an appropriate community, together with its significance to future communities, who may or may not extend the durability of the form. At some point, however, this meaning and significance - in all but the most exceptional of examples - fails to connect to future receptive communities who may adopt other iconic forms that provide meaning more relevant to their specific cultures. This aspect of the development of cultural icons, not only helps to explain their formation generally, but also highlights the specific focus needed to understand why examples such as David Garrick's iconicity fails to transcend to the present day.

The Second World War was a watershed in twentieth-century history, bringing significant changes in many areas of life. The post-war period offered new challenges and expectations; economically, socially, politically and culturally. Not least of these new developments - one that is a crucial factor in the formation of modern-day cultural icons - has been the emergence of youth cultures and the related concept of the teenager. The dynamics and demographics of these new receptive communities created the conditions for new dramatic narratives that were not long in emerging. The pre-war era, together with the wartime generation itself, offered fewer possibilities for the realisation of iconic representation to communities less receptive to the narratives emanating from this period; we have seen, for instance, how The Spitfire as a modern cultural icon was losing its monochromatic appeal prior to its revitalisation in 1969. Not only were the narratives of the previous generation unrepresentative of the 50s and 60s youth cultures, they often stood as totems for youthful defiance, as in Marlon Brando's famous reply, "what do you got?" to the question, "what are you rebelling against?" in the 1953 film *The Wild One* (Dir. László Benedek). One interpretation of this memorable interchange

is that the character's narrative, and with it a developing youth culture, had not yet gained full means of expression. This type of counter-cultural dramatic narrative, one that would soon be channelled into the primary iconic form of James Dean, contained meaning relevant to those who could understand it - groups of young people who were gradually asserting their own ideas, attitudes and voices. In less than a decade following Brando's defiant statement, a nucleus of four young men from Liverpool, England, would initiate a dramatic narrative that would have profound and universal cultural meaning to the present day.

6.3 The Beatles

This case study will remain focused on the central ideas presented in the thesis thus far, specifically, how the tragic-dramatic narrative relationship between the potential iconic form and the receptive community develops. With The Beatles, I argue, that an initial (highly) receptive community developed, as much as is possible, into a universal community receptive to the meaning contained in The Beatles' iconic visual image. No-one prior to The Beatles (following their initial commercial success) was as intensely marketed as a commercial product (Frontani 2007) yet, I claim, the minimal effect of overt commercial construction of The Beatles as a *product* presents an important example of the naturalised tragic-dramatic narrative argued throughout the thesis, especially in the relationship between narrative, receptive community and retained imagery.

Cultural icons and receptive communities develop interactively and few better examples exist than The Beatles narrative. The first part of this section looks at the impact the group had in their native city, Liverpool. This account follows the tangible and localised receptive community of the early Beatles' career, and implicit

comparisons are drawn between the impact of The Beatles in this unique environment with the theatregoers of Garrick's era as previously discussed. The second section will analyse the group's cessation of live performances, ending with the concert at Candlestick Park, USA in 1966. The focus here will be on the opening three songs of the first album from The Beatles' 'studio years' - "Taxman", "Eleanor Rigby" and "I'm Only Sleeping" (*Revolver* EMI Parlophone (UK), Capitol (USA) 1966). During this period The Beatles gained a depth to their appeal that added gravitas to their physical and emotional iconic adulation ('Beatlemania') In short, they became matchless producers of popular music that, together with providing the soundtrack for a generation, channelled the dramatic narrative of a distinctive generation into one of its strongest distinct, durable, and reproducible iconic forms.

At a time when pop/rock performers were still mining the seam of romantic love The Beatles - as the most successful group of musicians in world history - were producing art that related directly to both themselves and to ordinary people. With subjects such as taxation, social exclusion, and tiredness, The Beatles changed the agenda of how songs were listened to, becoming the first popular performers whose songs were delved for 'hidden' meanings. In this respect the familiar information of The Beatles narrative adds a further dimension to the central research question, what is a cultural icon?

6.4 Liverpool

This section will concern itself with a common theme throughout the thesis - the effect of a unique cultural episode. In this case it is the formation and reception of a localised sub-cultural icon that became, and still is, a primary cultural icon. The focus of

the section will remain within the confines of how an unusual cultural narrative contributed to the retention of a strong visual imagery in collective memory.

In the winter of 1961 the future manager of The Beatles - Brian Epstein - attended a performance in the claustrophobic Cavern jazz club on Matthew Street, Liverpool. What he saw on this occasion was a young audience and a young band, from the same community, interacting in a unique manner. Prior to their arrival back in Liverpool in 1960, The Beatles had completed an arduous yet reasonably successful tour (August to November 1960) as the resident band in Bruno Koschmider's night-club, The Indra, in Hamburg's notorious red-light district (*Anthology* 47). On returning to Liverpool on this occasion four of the (then) members of The Beatles (Best, Harrison, Lennon, McCartney) were no different to the majority of the newly emerging youth culture in the city and, at this time, were far from sure as to the direction they would take, as musicians or otherwise, as Paul McCartney recalls regarding the attitude of his father:

> He virtually chucked me out of the house: 'Get a job or don't come back'. So I went to the employment office and said, 'Can I have a job? Just give me anything.' I said, 'I'll have whatever is on the top of that little pile there' And the first job was sweeping the yard at Massey and Coggins. I took it. (56)

Concern over the immediate future was a relatively new feeling for young adult males in Liverpool at that time. Although the experience of the three (future) Beatles to this point was exceptional, given that few of their peers would have experienced anything like their Hamburg adventure, the idea of a choice of immediate life possibilities - at that age - was a novel one. National Service in Great Britain prior to its abolition in 1960 meant that every eligible male over eighteen years of age had to serve two full years in the British Armed Forces and The Beatles, in 1961, had just missed it.

It is reasonable to argue that, had one or more of the group been enlisted at this point,

The Beatles' story as it is now known would not have emerged. In addition to this, the

abolition of compulsory conscription was significant in other ways, some of which have

a direct bearing on the formation of The Beatles' iconicity. With new found freedom,

and a desire to express this freedom in different ways (Hall and Jefferson. eds. 2006), a

culture of young people in the United Kingdom was, from this point on, fully able to

participate in the burgeoning materialism of the day, as Ian Inglis notes: "Working class

youths of the early 1960s were caught up in the desire to share the 'new affluence'"

(43).

For The Beatles this meant that they had a peer audience. The radical effect that

the ending of conscription had upon the development of British youth counter-cultures,

and specifically Beatles counter-culture, suggests real changes in demographics.

Primarily, there would have been significant numbers of young males in Liverpool,

whereas only a matter of months previously they would have been stationed in different

parts of the country, or even fighting in foreign countries such as Malaya or Aden. With

no lack of employment opportunities, these young men would have had money and

leisure time to spend in their own locale, again a very novel experience. They would

also have had fundamentally different attitudes and perspectives having not experienced

two years of often harsh military life. Young women's socio-cultural life would also

have been radically affected by the ending of conscription. Rather than forging

romances from a distance, young men and women had the opportunity to meet with

each other regularly at places of their choosing such as The Cavern in Liverpool.

Although during this period high street coffee houses were popular as haunts for young

people - as were youth clubs and town hall dances - they were incomparable in terms of

counter-cultural spaces. The Cavern, as its name suggests, was literally underground,

symbolically and physically removed from mainstream life. In this atmosphere the

receptivity to a new cultural form was acute, and with the arrival of The Beatles it was met in the following ways.

Liverpool in 1961 *was* different. Arriving from America through its port, musical productions in a variety of genres - jazz, soul, blues, country and, of course, rock and roll - were eagerly consumed by the young people of the city. Of these genres, rock and roll was not, however, the most popular. Elvis Presley, for instance, the acknowledged 'King' of the genre, following his compulsory spell in the US military (1958-60) was considered to be a different, somewhat 'softer-edged', performer as John Lennon's comments in *Anthology* bear out. The British skiffle craze, a unique blend of country, rock, and beat music pioneered by the singer Lonnie Donegan, while inspiring some young musicians to form bands, as it did with the precursor to The Beatles (The Quarrymen), nevertheless failed to inspire sufficient mainstream appeal to prove viably successful as a lasting genre. If anything, the musical form most popular in Liverpool at the time was jazz, as Neil Aspinall (The Beatles road manager) notes: "You had to try and force your way in. It was Kenny Ball/Acker Bilk sort of stuff at the Cavern. They might let a rock'n'roll group play in the break, before the main band came on, a jazz band". (*Anthology* 57)

In a matter of months The Beatles would revolutionise the youth culture of Liverpool. From being allowed to "play in the break", The Beatles, during the latter half of 1961, were performing lunchtime concerts to packed audiences who saw in them something radically different to anything that had gone before. Prior to Brian Epstein's management influences, The Beatles had returned from a second short stint in Hamburg with a new style, which proved highly significant to their burgeoning sub-cultural visual image (Spitz 2005). Astrid Kircherr, a friend of The Beatles through her relationship with Stuart Sutcliffe would, together with her partner Klaus Voorman, prove influential in changing how the Beatles looked. Firstly, she cut her boyfriend's hair into what she

then termed an 'exi' (an abbreviation of existential subsequently known as a 'Beatle-cut' or 'mop top') and encouraged George Harrison to do the same:

> Astrid and Klaus were very influential. I remember we went to the swimming
> baths once and my hair was down from the water and they said, 'No leave it, it's
> good.' I didn't have my Vaseline anyway, and I was thinking. 'Well, these
> people are cool - if *they* think it's good, I'll leave it like this' They gave me that
> confidence and when it dried off it dried naturally down, which later became
> 'the look'. (*Anthology* 58)

Figure 33: The Beatles 1961.

In Fig.33. we see three of The Beatles - Paul, John and George - favouring the newer fringed haircut with the drummer, Pete Best, retaining a more traditional 'Teddy Boy' style. Much controversy surrounds the replacement in 1962 of Pete Best with Ringo Starr and a good deal of this is focused on consistency of appearance. The argument here is that, in the very early stages of their career, The Beatles sought an homogeneity of visual image that was entirely independent to any formalised marketing strategy, and the effect that it had on the receptive 'Cavern' community was dramatic and thoroughly captivating. The importance of the unification of The Beatles' image

will be stressed further in the analysis of their expansion to the rest of the United Kingdom during 1963, and to America and the rest of the world from 1964 but, for now, it is important to press the idea that the dramatic effect of The Beatles in Liverpool, in late 1961, created a heightened sense of connection between a community in a state of highly charged receptivity, and an emerging phenomenon that catalysed the formative elements of cultural iconicity - narrative and image.

The early 'Cavern' concerts displayed not only the prowess of the band as musicians, but also a natural affinity between performer and audience that would soon be exported to the world. On their return from Hamburg in 1961 they presented a radically hard-edged image, forged through their experiences of violence, sex, drunkenness, and rock and roll to the extent that the newly developing Cavern audience in Liverpool regarded them as an alien, yet extremely appealing force, as George again recalls: 'Direct from Hamburg: The Beatles'… And we probably looked German too; very different from all the other groups, with our leather jackets. We looked funny and we played differently. We went down a bomb (Anthology 56)

The early Cavern performances by The Beatles were lunchtime dates. Young people in Liverpool, having narrowly missed the life-changing implications of National Conscription, were now presented with a phenomenon that, while being innovative and confusing, was nevertheless magnetising and *personal*. Just as David Garrick captivated his audience with a new manner of stage acting, bringing the audience *into* the performance, so to The Beatles as their audience became integrated in an entirely natural and dramatic manner. At this stage of their career no production company manufactured The Beatles and no marketing company sold them. The creative electricity between the emerging cultural icon and the receptive community is evidence

that culturally iconic phenomena are rarely initiated by formal market/media constructs, although such forces inevitably come to play a role in later iconic development.

The Beatles very quickly became the major force in Liverpool youth culture yet, although still self-contained in the rarefied atmosphere of Cavern culture, it soon became apparent that The Beatles had something that would appeal to a wider range of embryonic national and international youth audiences. During the 'Cavern years', however, The Beatles were not yet 'ready' to establish international dominance, in fact, they were not yet 'ready' for the rest of the UK. But what does this phrase 'ready' mean and how does it impact on the formation of The Beatles' iconicity? It has been argued that The Beatles phenomenon in Liverpool was rooted in four essential points. Firstly, that the abolition of National Service in the UK in 1960 came at exactly the right time for all of the members of the group to practically continue playing. Secondly, not having to enlist created ideal conditions for a local subculture to develop in Liverpool during this period; assisted as it was by the influx of musical/cultural influences through the port of Liverpool from, primarily, America. Thirdly, three of The Beatles (Harrison, Lennon and McCartney) were open to new ideas that they encountered in Hamburg, both musical and cultural, some of which they adopted into their act and appearance. Fourth, on returning to Liverpool they were perceived by the local receptive community as dramatically different, integrative, and overwhelmingly magnetic.

Another aspect to the formation and reception of The Beatles as cultural icons is their integral, unified and distinct image. The argument here is that the overwhelming majority of successful artists (possibly even all), from the late 1950s to 1963, were either solo artists, prominent individuals fronting 'backing bands', or groups that played exclusively instrumental tracks. The Beatles, crucially in regard to the impact of their distinct visual image, did not fit these models. It has previously been argued that The Beatles, either mindfully or otherwise, were working towards a consistency of style that

negated the need for a specific focal point during performance. In appearance and name they were *all* front men, with a unified approach that limited the possibility of the all too familiar appearance of ego conflict within young, popular bands. For the Liverpudlian Cavern community the uniqueness of balance in a popular music group, together with originality of style, was a radically different offering to anything they had previously encountered. Even pre-Ringo, the dramatic narrative between receptive community and The Beatles was well established, and through the intervention of Brian Epstein this narrative would soon become fixed to an essential feature of primary cultural icons, a distinct, reproducible image.

As with many phases of The Beatles story the transition from sub cultural icon to national cultural icon offers insights into the general dynamics of this genre of cultural formation. The Beatles/Cavern community of 1962 was, albeit on a small scale, a classic modern-era, counter-culture. Music, fashion, ideas, language, locality, and attitude were just some of the features that this specific group of young people sought to cultivate independently of 'mainstream' direction or influence. As Ken Goffman and Dan Joy suggest: "Countercultures seek primarily to live with as much freedom from constraints on individual creative will as possible, wherever and however it is possible to do so" (15). The adjustment of the dynamics of The Beatles/Cavern counter-culture, possibly perceived by the Cavern community as an external imposition (through their manager Brian Epstein) on the collective 'creative will', was met with stern, and at points, violent opposition, reflecting the intensity of the narrative integration of sub-cultural icon and receptive community.

The reaction of the Cavern audience to the replacement of Pete Best with Ringo Starr as the drummer in The Beatles in 1962 indicates the depth of feeling within this subculture. Many reasons have been suggested as to why this change took place, including Best's frequent illnesses and consequent missed performances, or even his

popularity with local female fans. It seems likely, however, that his dismissal was initiated by a combination of his inability to 'fit' with the other three Beatles, together with the more rigorous musical demands placed on the group as they reached a wider audience becoming, in the process, more standardised. Ringo Starr's first performances with The Beatles were met frostily and vocally, with sections of the audiences chanting, "We want Pete". In *Anthology* the other members of the group verify the initial unpopularity of the change, which eventually turned to physical confrontation: "The first gig in the Cavern after I joined was pretty violent, there was a lot of fighting and shouting…George got a black eye" (72). Eventually a combination of personal charm, together with the extra musical dimension he added to the group, Ringo became a firm favourite with the Cavern community, and completed the cohesive stylistic unit fine-tuned by Brian Epstein (Muncie 2000).

The transformation of The Beatles, from a sub-cultural iconic force, to a cultural icon on a national - and ultimately international scale - gives fundamental insights into the formation and reception of this genre of cultural phenomena. In this example, much of the dramatic iconic narrative was already in place; the singular visual image (without a dominant front-person); the enormous latent youth audience; and the natural power and charisma of The Beatles as performers. However, the image assumed by the 'Cavern' community, mainly the 'hard edged' leather rocker stance, would have been unacceptable, in terms of its associated meaning, to mainstream British consciousness in this period. What needed to happen - as Brian Epstein rightly understood - was an emolliation of The Beatles' aggressive, unpolished, image in order to attract and beguile larger receptive communities.

Changing The Beatles stage attire from leather to more readily acceptable mohair two piece suits with corresponding shirts and ties, in addition to standardising their performance etiquette (including bowing at the end of the act), is a crucial moment in

the development of Beatles iconicity. The importance of this action is that it was the first instance of The Beatles' image being overtly and intentionally altered to accommodate an external market. One of the aims of the case studies is to press the idea that primary cultural icons are produced through a *natural* dramatic narrative between icon and community, and what the modification of The Beatles' image did do was to present the already existing 'Cavern' narrative in a form that was more palatable to a wider audience. In effect what Brian Epstein achieved by modifying The Beatles' image was to export the naturalised Cavern experience - and with it the enormous iconic potential - to latent receptive communities throughout the UK.

Figure 34: The Beatles, November 1962.

As The Beatles conquered new audiences throughout the United Kingdom during late 1962 and early 1963 the Cavern community, deeply possessive of their iconic band,

felt that they had lost an important element of their culture and they expressed this, initially, with emotion and anger. Equipped with a new dynamic The Beatles played their last concert at The Cavern club on 3 August 1963, having performed over 290 times at the now world-famous club. By this time The Beatles had become a national sensation through a combination of extensive touring throughout the country together with major chart success. In achieving this level of accomplishment The Beatles had permeated new receptive communities across the whole spectrum of British society, intensifying the potential for their durable cultural iconicity. As Jonathan Gould argues, the concealment of overt defiance within the Trojan horse compliance of matching suits was a mixture of explosive potential:

> Another attribute that distinguished The Beatles from the beginning was their identity as a *group*: the first such group in the history of mass entertainment...From the outset there was something atavistic about the Beatles' group identity. The most obvious expression of this (apart from their punningly totemic name) was their uniform yet idiosyncratic appearance: the matching clothes and hair that tied them to one another and set them apart from everyone else. (10)

6.5 "One, Two, Three, Four!"

Image alone, however, could not have achieved the level of iconic appeal fostered by The Beatles in 1963 and, of course, The Beatles were a great deal more than just haircuts and suits. The Cavern community who connected to The Beatles with such intensity were attracted both to the visual impact of the group and to the power of their musical performance. Concerning the actual songs, The Beatles' set during this period generally comprised of rock and roll 'standards' that they had perfected in Hamburg, together with little known American R&B/Soul songs that they re-worked with their

own unique ability. On 22 March 1963, The Beatles released the long-playing record *Please, Please Me* (Parlophone) containing a selection of Lennon and McCartney compositions that changed the perception of popular music and revolutionised youth culture, initially in the United Kingdom and soon after, the world. Here, for the first time, a group of young people were talking to and about each other *directly*, through a medium that was accessible, original, and dramatically exciting. Again for the first time, self-penned and self-performed songs were listened to by millions of receptive young (and some not so young) fans, creating an intensity of narrative that cannot be overstated. The following section will look closely at the lyrical content of the early Beatles compositions arguing that this aspect of the dramatic narrative is crucial to the formation of their universal cultural iconicity.

In *From Me to You: Austerity to Profligacy in the Language of The Beatles* (2000), Guy Mercer and Neil Cook provide strong evidence that the narrative interaction between the group and international receptive communities, from 1963 to 1970, was an unprecedented episode in modern popular culture. Of fundamental importance to this narrative was the change in how records were actually listened to. Prior to The Beatles' first productions - Mercer and Cook argue - records were experienced as extensions of live performances, with minimal attention paid to the lyrical content of the productions, "words were often hard to distinguish, and easy to misunderstand in the sound and movement" (96). In the first few bars of "I Saw Her Standing There", the first song on *Please, Please Me*, The Beatles introduced a personalised narrative never before heard on record: "Well she was just seventeen, you know what I mean". This statement/question, following the integrative live introduction "one, two, three, four*"* could have been interpreted several ways, any of which would have connected a youthful audience directly and personally with the singer/band. The original lyric, "Well she was just seventeen, never been a beauty queen", by Paul

McCartney, was a more detailed and fundamentally less intimate statement than the now familiar one. The crucial change of the last phrase by John Lennon (Lewishorn 9) extended the opportunity for the listener to open up the meaning with his/her own experiences or imagination, a technique extensively utilised by the Lennon-McCartney song-writing team from that point. Added to this The Beatles, under the guidance of their producer George Martin, strived on this first album to reproduce the dramatic immediacy of their 'live' performances, and with it the intensity of the 'Cavern' experience. To this end, and limited to four track recording technology, they famously recorded the whole LP in a single fourteen-hour day, a remarkable achievement by any standards. But it was the intimacy of the lyrical content that marked the seminal connection to teenage subcultures, as Mercer and Cook illustrate:

> In these early songs, the use of pronouns without names echoes immediate conversational interaction about known characters. It creates the urgent tone of a close-quarters conversation about shared mutual concerns. We seem to be listening to intense face-to face exchanges in which the participants are either discussing each other (*you* and *I*) or someone who is in their sight or very much on their minds (*I* and *you* talking about *him* and *her*). (90)

These interpretations confirm an important aspect to the development of dramatic narrative between the formation of this type of iconic phenomenon and receptive communities, which is the direct, natural connection between peer performer/s and peer audience. As Mercer and Cook go on to note, the original lyrical style of The Beatles, "creates a sense of immediacy and drama" (92).

Comparing The Beatles direct song-writing approach with similar products during the early 1960s confirms the radical nature of the Beatles' style and the impact it had on burgeoning youth audiences. For example, the well-known and popular song "The

Young Ones" (1961 Columbia Records) by Cliff Richard and The Shadows offers the following lyrical content: "The young ones. Darling, we're the young ones. And young ones shouldn't be afraid". The difference in tone, expression, and intent between this lyric and The Beatles' early songs is palpable. In this example, rather than the direct conversational exchange between singer and audience suggested by Mercer and Cook, the dialogue is confused and hesitant, with the eponymous "young ones" being offered as an abstract, almost parentally defined concept (this interpretation is supported by songs like this being largely written and produced at the time by middle-aged men). There is also timidity in this song ("shouldn't be afraid") that again implies the presence of a negative, external/parental force, one that is entirely absent in The Beatles' lyrical apotheosis of youth.

The idea that The Beatles spoke immediately to both male and female youth audiences (without the spectre of parental voice) meant that ideas could be suggested that were restrictively comprehensible to these audiences. Although it is true to say that sexual innuendo had a history of being offered in popular music 'under the radar' of mainstream understanding prior to 1963, The Beatles initially communicated this without resorting to metaphorical phrasing. "She was just seventeen, you know what I mean", for instance, suggests a previous action, possibly sexual, that, in the same instance, fully *includes* a youthful male community ("*you* know what I mean") while excluding others, especially young female listeners ('you *don't* know what I mean'). The idea that "Beatlemania" in the middle 1960s was a phenomenon exclusively connected to young, screaming female fans is a fallacy. Although the general demographic contained large numbers from this section of society it also contained very large numbers of equally young male fans; this from one of them: "When *A Hard Day's Night* came out we all stood in line like kids did everywhere and then we screamed all

the way through the movie, like idiots. It didn't matter if you were a boy or a girl, you screamed for them" (cited in Berman and Lapidos 104).

The connection between The Beatles and their immediate receptive communities in the early to mid-1960s was on a scale incomparable to anything previous or since, and they capitalised on their huge initial success with songs that, as Mercer and Cook note, are stylistically similar: "Everyone is referred to by a pronoun, nobody is ever named. People are only *I* (the male lover); *you* (the female loved one, or a confidant(e)" (89). Productions such as "She Loves You" (1963); "From Me To You" (1963); "I Feel Fine" (1964), and "A Hard Day's Night" (1964) were formulaic only in the sense that the song-writing team of Lennon and McCartney comprehended fully their established audience's expectations.

It is entirely possible that The Beatles would have found it difficult to maintain their incredible success - and with it the powerful durability of their iconicity - if they had not changed their approach to musical production and performance. For one, youth cultures by their very nature are fluid phenomena, constantly changing and notoriously fickle in their allegiances. The relationship between The Beatles and their communities from 1966 to 1970 - a period that has been noted for a definitive change in their musical/lyrical style (Inglis 1997) - is punctuated by a further development in the dramatic narrative relationship. The Beatles have often been portrayed as pioneers or guides to a great adventure, and during the mid-late period of The Beatles' career the narrative inter-relationship between the band and escalating counter-cultures is saturated with meaning. The change in lyrical and musical direction from 1966 onwards both reflects some of the ideas of the new counter-cultures, and was also a catalyst to their formation. It is particularly evident that, in the context of cultural progress, The Beatles were of paramount influence in the latter half of the decade as John Lennon notes: "We

were all on this ship in the Sixties. Our generation - a ship going to discover the New World. And The Beatles were in the crow's-nest of that ship" (Anthology 201), or as Paul McCartney suggests: "It's very difficult to separate The Beatles' eruption from the fashion or the cultural, or the mind eruption" (201)

6.6 Revolver

Widely regarded as a seminal moment in popular musical history *Revolver* (5 August 1966 Parlophone) was a critical change in The Beatles' cultural direction and, I argue, was a crucial development in The Beatles' dramatic iconic narrative. Gone were the screaming, hysterical concerts - The Beatles played their last formal 'live' performance at Candlestick Park, San Francisco, on 29 August 1966 - and with them the first, phosphorescent outpourings of modern, global, youth-cultures. Through *Revolver* The Beatles developed new relationships with world-wide audiences who responded differently to the emotional rawness that characterised 'Beatlemania. In terms of the formation of The Beatles as a global culturally iconic form, the decision to withdraw from live performance distinguished them further from the influx of other British pop/rock bands entering the international (mainly American) market place during 1966. Following their last concert the first chapter of the Beatles narrative ended, creating a feeling of loss for their legions of followers. a firm indication in itself of developing cultural iconicity. If the retreat to the studio was an end to the beginning of the formation of Beatles iconicity, the songs contained in the first production from the next chapter of their story helped to inspire a narrative impetus that has remained an important element in their durable iconicity to the present day.

Significant academic attention has been drawn towards the lyrical impact of the post-'Beatlemania' period of The Beatles' history, some of it relating directly to its general effect on wider society (Inglis 2000), and some dealing with more technical

aspects of their songbook, (Hyman and Rubin, 1990; Whissel 1996). Stephanie Murphy, for instance, identifies several themes evident in this period of The Beatles' work including Christianity, childhood recollections, social criticism, sexuality, defying convention, peer togetherness, and individualism. While all of these themes are important, especially with regard to the inter-relationship between the ideas developed in the songs and contemporary receptive audiences, the first three songs from *Revolver* - "Taxman", "Eleanor Rigby" and "I'm Only Sleeping" - offer evidence of both a general shift in subject matter, together with the distinct stylistic differences and authorial intent of the two main writers, Paul McCartney and John Lennon. Cultural icons, as I argue throughout the case studies, offer a tangible emotional connection to communities highly receptive to their inherent meaning, and the change of artistic direction The Beatles chose at this time reified this connection and with it sealed their position as a primary cultural icon.

In 1966 The Beatles were in a rare state; unfettered by artistic restrictions other than the requirement to actually produce a product (and they were extremely industrious in this respect) The Beatles retreat to the studio resulted in a unique synthesis of iconic meaning containing both individuality (John, Paul, George and Ringo) together with an holistic unit (The Beatles). In achieving this, the ideas contained in the post 1966 Beatles' music, had a depth of effect on global audiences that may not have been achieved had the songs been explicitly targeted at a specific audience as in the earlier catalogue. This introversion and consequent reliance on self-approval (rather than directing their art to a specific audience) is a point often reflected on by The Beatles themselves and can be interpreted as a solid expression of anti-egoism. From *Revolver* The Beatles ceased to direct their music towards a specific audience becoming, in effect, their own audience.

In contrast to the opening bars of *Please, Please Me* which unequivocally set the tone for the reproduction of a live 'Cavern' experience, the opening bars of *Revolver* intentionally create an atmosphere for a completely different kind of experience, including background mumbling and a clearing of throats. The "One, Two Three, Four' introduction, slower and far more relaxed than the start of "I Saw Her Standing There", is directed not towards an external audience but towards the group themselves in an intimate, studio environment.

George Harrison's opening song took, as the eponymous title "Taxman" suggests, is an unusual subject for a young man to work into a popular song. Although there would be other (though many fewer) mainstream 'romantic' songs to come from them during the 'studio' years, The Beatles largely abandoned themes involving such relationships, understandably so given their previous songbook. From Harrison's "Taxman", The Beatles broadened both the scope of their art and the audience that consumed it. No longer were receptive communities restricted to frantic teenagers eager to respond to octave harmonies or a shake of hair, they now involved people who (though still mainly young) were nevertheless ready to take on broader ideas; ideas that were not presented as dry, academic propositions, but in the most accessible form of barrier-breaking popular songs. By removing themselves from live audiences The Beatles strengthened the dramatic narrative between artist and audience to a point unequalled in the modern era. While "Taxman" broaches the subject of politics, it did so through the feelings of a young man naively encountering, for the first time, the realities of the world of work, a theme familiar to most but never before expressed in such a way through a popular song[3] as Paul McCartney recalls: "They said, 'Look, when you're dead you're going to pay taxes' - 'What?' - 'Death duties'. So he came up with that great line: 'Declare the pennies on your eyes,'" (Anthology 206-7)

Revolver represents a broadening of the scope of The Beatles as artists and, consequently, an expansion of their iconic meaning. Harrison's "Taxman" with its theme of an innocent young man's introduction to the realities of work and money, is a natural expression of a young man's frustration against paternalistic (in this case political) restrictions, an attractive theme for developing mid-1960s counter-cultures. The second song on the album, "Eleanor Rigby", was again a unique choice of subject for a popular music group, and the sublime narrative in the song introduces universal themes of loneliness and human pathos.

John Lennon and Paul McCartney had different approaches to song writing and produced work with characteristic signatures conditioned, and sometimes significantly altered, by the contribution or mere presence of each other. Released in the UK on the same date as *Revolver* on a 'double A side' single featuring "Yellow Submarine", and reaching an instantaneous 'number one' position, "Eleanor Rigby" was a new experience for popular musical audiences elevating The Beatles still further as an artistic force that created, rather than followed, cultural patterns.

Figure 35: Statue of Eleanor Rigby sculpted by Tommy Steele, erected in Liverpool 1982.

Delivered in the third person, the dramatic narrative of this song, even in isolation from the rest of The Beatles' catalogue, has had a unique cultural impact on receptive communities internationally. To the present the song not only invokes timeless empathy for individuals isolated from companionship and community but is also, for some, a cherished fable. In 1982, for example, an actual Eleanor Rigby was found buried in St Peters Parish church in Liverpool, a strange coincidence that has subsequently become a shrine for Beatles communities around the world. On 3 December of the same year a statue was erected (Fig.35.) in Liverpool in recognition of the importance and public affection for a three minute song.

What "Eleanor Rigby" also clearly showed was the separation of McCartney's signature writing style from that of Lennon's and Harrison's. Although all the other Beatles contributed to the song in a minor way it is unmistakably a McCartney composition, characterised by short sketches of individuals brought to blazing life by profound lyricism and achingly original melodies. On its own, the style and quality of McCartney's song-writing would have been enough to gain The Beatles a firm place in the hearts of receptive communities over generations yet, with Harrisons quirky style and Lennon's singular dramatic force, the holistic appeal of The Beatles as songwriters, throughout their career, captivated and changed perceptions through the impact of popular songs.

While "Taxman" revealed Harrison's willingness to engage unusual subject matter, with "Eleanor Rigby" showcasing McCartney's genius for melody and vignette, the third track on *Revolver* demonstrated John Lennon's unique ability to connect directly to his audience through his own personal feelings and experiences:

> JOHN: He makes them up like a novelist. You hear lots of McCartney-
>
> influenced songs on the radio - these stories about boring people doing boring
>
> things; being postmen and secretaries and writing home. I'm not interested in

writing third-party songs. I like to write about me, because I *know* me

(Anthology 247).

Lennon's first song on the UK release of *Revolver*, "I'm Only Sleeping" is a testimony to laziness. His unselfconscious approach to expressing his ideas through song, together with his willingness to articulate his thoughts through other media such as books, films, poems and (later) peace activism, added a further dimension to the already well-established Beatles narrative. Whereas previous Lennon songs presented a highly personalised approach, such as "Help" and "In My Life" (both 1965), his first song on *Revolver* left less room for misinterpretation as to the relationship between the subject matter and the artist. Through this song Lennon, in an effortlessly style, relates a common physical state (tiredness/exhaustion) and in doing so connects to every person who has felt the same way. It was precisely this kind of natural narrative formation that contributed to The Beatles', and his own, profound cultural iconicity, especially in regard to meaning and image retention. "I'm Only Sleeping" features the first mainstream use of the dual backward guitar solo, one of many technical advances initiated by The Beatles that would be widely copied by others. This innovation alters the perception of movement in the song and complements Lennon's desire to slow down the pace of his life after years of incomparably manic 'Beatlemania'. As the backward guitar alters the perception of the normally forward linear motion of the solo to a reversal of time, we are invited into Lennon's personal and physical experience in a manner found only in exceptional art, an achievement that Lennon as an individual, and The Beatles as a unit, would repeat many times from this point.

6.7 Cultural Icon/s

The Beatles present a unique example of a group of individuals - culturally iconic to varying degrees in their own right - that combined to become a distinct, reproducible and durable, culturally iconic force. The main argument of my definition is that primary cultural icons have discernible meaning produced through interactive, natural tragic-dramatic narratives between receptive communities and iconic phenomena; often this narrative is contained within specific parameters, for example, sexuality (Monroe); youthful rebellion (Dean) or defiant national spirit (Spitfire). For The Beatles the iconic narrative meaning is simple and universally comprehensible - friendship and love.

Figure 36: The Beatles postage stamps issued 9 January 2007.

In 1970, when other high profile bands such as Led Zeppelin and The Who were pounding their egos on international stages, in addition to vigorously defining the now clichéd 'rock and roll lifestyle' through Bacchanalian levels of debauchery and intoxication (an interesting dramatic narrative in itself), The Beatles were straining to safeguard the solidity of their unique companionship. Just as The Beatles felt calmness in the eye of the cultural hurricane that was 'Beatlemania', the public perception of The Beatles at the moment of the break-up was somewhat different to how the individuals

themselves felt. Much of the acrimony that occurred during this period is now so well chronicled as to be within the scope of common knowledge including, lack of strong managerial guidance following Brian Epstein's death, musical differences, business wrangling, and, of course, Yoko Ono. The four young men at the centre of the maelstrom, all still under thirty years of age when Paul McCartney gave a press release on 10 April 1970 announcing the break-up, had experienced ten years as an inimitable force, creating a globally dramatic narrative as no performers had done before or since. That there were arguments and accusations at the end not only did little to decrease their iconic status it may, due to their unremitting openness and honesty, actually have increased it, and beneath the surface bitterness at the time of the breakup there remained a tenderness between them of a very special nature:

> JOHN: 'Hey Jude' is one of his masterpieces. He said it was written about Julian, my child...But I always heard it as a song to me. If you think about it, Yoko's just come into the picture. He's saying; 'Hey Jude-hey John.' I know I'm sounding like one of those fans who reads things into it, but you *can* hear it as a song to me. The words 'go out and get her' – subconsciously he was saying, 'Go ahead leave me.' But on a conscious level, he didn't want me to go ahead. (Anthology 297)

The Beatles story is a wonderful monument in modern era culture, its narrative contains universal human themes in a way that still permeate the hearts and minds of millions of people. If cultural iconicity is formed through natural tragic-dramatic narrative interplay between receptive communities and the individuals or objects that are subsequently retained as distinct images in collective memory, then The Beatles are a prime example. This section of the chapter, a good deal of it within the realm of common knowledge, has considered at length how the unique Beatles narrative achieved this status. The last case study analyses another internationally significant

primary cultural icon, one whose arrival shortly before the breakup of The Beatles,

contains all of the factors essential to the formation of primary cultural icons.

CHAPTER 7 THE RETROSPECTIVE ICONICITY OF CHE GUEVARA

"He looked a lot like Che Guevara, drove a diesel van

Kept his gun in quiet seclusion, such a humble man"

(David Bowie: "Panic in Detroit" 1973)

Ernesto Che Guevara died on 9 October 1967. Brutally executed by Bolivian soldiers under instruction from the CIA, it was the final act of a life dedicated to permanent revolution in countries perceived, by him, to be dominated by Western imperialism. Whether understood as a 'terrorist' or a 'freedom fighter' the single image of Guevara is now indisputably an established mainstream cultural icon. Regarding the extent to which his image is now universally familiar Hannah Charlton makes this observation:

> Walk through any major metropolis around the globe and it is likely that you will come across an image of Che Guevara...this single image of a face may be the most reproduced image in the history of photography. It has been endlessly mutated, transformed and morphed - and as such tells the history of the last forty years of visual, popular culture (Cited in Ziff 3)

Contrary to recent work on the Guevara icon (Larson and Lizardo 2007; Ziff, 2006) who see his iconic image as fluid and malleable to the needs of specific interest groups, in particular commercial enterprises and radical political organisations, this chapter follows the same line of argument developed from the application of the four conditions of iconicity. In its simplest form this argument stresses that, given certain conditions, particular receptive communities instil within distinct imagery specific

meaning reflecting an equally specific tragic-dramatic narrative. In this sense the meaning of the Guevara icon can be located in an extraordinary series of events, within a short period of time in 1968 that fixed the mythology of Guevara to the now ubiquitous image.

The first section of the chapter challenges the assumption that the popularity of the Guevara image as a modern cultural icon reflects the celebrity or the biographical importance of the actual individual. Similar to the ideas presented regarding the iconic formation of the Spitfire aircraft, the argument here is that the myth of Guevara during the period in question was retrospectively embellished in order to be consistent with the needs of the receptive communities involved in its formation. At best, the evidence suggests that Guevara the individual and Guevara the cultural icon should be considered as separate entities, if that is now possible given the familiarity in collective memory of the latter. At worst, and this is the emphasis given in this case study, the implication is that the fame of Guevara the individual today would simply not have occurred in the absence of the coincidental availability of the poster image in the months following his death. This argument will extend the idea that, not only did the image create the celebrity of the individual but also that, prior to its availability, Guevara was a relatively unknown public figure.

As Guevara's iconic image today is fully retained in collective memory - fitting perfectly the conditions of distinctness, durability and reproducibility - it may seem counter-intuitive to suggest that, as an individual, he was relatively unknown prior to the continental civil protests of 1968. Nevertheless, the purpose of presenting the argument in this way is less to persuade that Che Guevara was not a famous individual during the 1960s, rather than to show the process of emolliated myth making that occurred in the formation of his extraordinary iconic image.

7.1 Soy Cuba

The critically renowned 1964 film *Soy Cuba* (Dir. Mikhail Kalatozov, scripted by Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Enrique Pineda Barnet) is firm evidence that the now iconic image of Guevara was largely unknown prior to Guevara's demise. Innovative both technically and visually, the film was poorly received by both sides of the joint Cuban/Russian production, the former criticising its stereotypical portrayal of Cubans, while the latter castigated its lack of revolutionary vigour. So, although the film is now recognised as a masterpiece, Chris Barsanti, for instance, suggesting that, "Kalatov's dynamic camerawork creates some of the most thrilling and emotive moments ever witnessed onscreen" (1), it nevertheless failed to charm the ideologies of either regime and remained un-viewed for three decades following its production. Kalatov's use of ground-breaking, stylistic framing and long study shots to achieve emotional and dramatic impact reveals the desire of the director to fulfil his remit of valorising the extraordinary events of the Cuban revolutionary overthrow of Fulgencio Batista's American supported regime in 1959 (Barsanti).

Several of these shots are signature shots of Fidel Castro, with beard, cap, cigar and rifle - all interconnected imagery of the Castro icon. The 'peasant' revolutionary symbolism in the film, the final part of the four discreet stories within the production, is achieved by the dramatic portraiture of the peasant farmer Mariano (Fig.37.) recalcitrant, heroic, white, handsome, unkempt and with long lank hair blowing in the wind. The question that needs to be asked is whether this kind of imagery was influenced by Guevarian iconicity, or through other symbolism such as the recognisability of Fidel Castro's image and the more general 'guerrilla' revolutionary symbolism becoming familiar at the time? What is being said here is that, not only did an iconic image of Guevara not exist when the film was being produced in 1963-4, as it probably did with Castro, but that Guevara himself was not at all well-known to

mainstream western cultures at this time, and that the (now) familiar photographs of him during the early period of the revolution are a retrospective embellishment of his iconic form. If this is the case then the idea that there was an encompassing revolutionary image in collective memory at the time, especially in Russia and Cuba, is far more likely.

Only two extremely brief shots in the film stand comparison to the Guevara image (beret, star, and beard) but these are so fleeting that it is far more likely that Kalatozov drew on an established visual idea of the Cuban guerrilla/revolutionary rather than the specific Guevara template. The reason for this is that both Guevara the individual and Guevara the icon were yet to be established as cultural symbols in collective memory, even in his adopted country of Cuba.

Figure 37: Still from Soy Cuba with the character Mariano.

The now established iconic image of Guevara was taken by the Cuban photographer Alberto Korda on 5 March 1960, and was first published on 16 April 1961 in the Cuban newspaper Revolución to advertise a conference featuring guest speaker Dr Ernesto Che Guevara (Ziff). The initial publication of Guevara's now famous image had no impact at all and, for well over 6 years, there are no other instances of the image being used in any form of media. During the early part of this 6-year period Guevara

was a member of the Cuban Marxist government, holding executive positions and operating as one of Fidel Castro's most influential confidants (Staten 2005). However, despite the Cuban revolution being internationally high profile, Guevara was only one of a number of individuals forming a backdrop to the larger picture and newsworthiness of Cuba at that time. The pre-eminence of Guevara as a central figure during this period stems from an extraordinary series of events many years after the Cuban revolution took place. These events include the French civil riots of 1968, Guevara's preceding capture and assassination in Bolivia in October 1967, and the re-emergence of Korda's 'Guerrillero Heroico' image in poster form around that time. Taken together these occurrences - if the argument that Guevara was largely unknown at the time is accepted - meant that the mythology of Guevara had to be embellished in order to 'fit' the emerging tragic-dramatic narrative of the iconic form. What we are now looking at when we view the Guevara image is not, as such, the biography of an individual as much as the history of the formation of iconic narrative meaning.

7.2 The Guevara Myth

The cult of Che Guevara has valorised the myth of the man to the extent that his actions and deeds now seem morally irreproachable, as Andrew Sinclair suggests: "He seems to have had hardly any contradictions or inner conflicts. He was amazingly consistent in all he thought and said and did...his consistency was almost maddening in its effortlessness" (181). When Guevara was killed in 1967 and Korda's 'Christ-like' image became ubiquitously popular, the sense of loss was felt personally by large numbers of individuals, a consistent feature in the formation of cultural icons. In regard to the manner in which Guevara's death was received Stokely Carmichael comments: "Che Guevara is not dead. I do not wish to speak of Che as if he were dead. It would not

make sense...I never met Che in person, but I know him" (cited in Sinclair 2); or as Andrew Salkey notes: "The news of his death, the most humbling and numbing I have experienced, is similar in personal loss to a death in one's own family" (cited in Sinclair 113).

Guevara's death produced a widespread, deeply felt, emotional response triggering (in the relevant receptive communities) a retrospective embellishment of his mythology in order to correlate meaning with image. Che Guevara was an international insurrectionist who moved from country to country in the middle 1960s leading peasant revolts against political systems that were perceived by him to be imperialistically corrupt, and to achieve this he needed to be strictly incognito. Even during the 1959 Cuban revolution Guevara may not have been as well known as is now thought, in that his imagery from this period is glamorised by the effect of his associated iconic form. From 1964, for instance, he was fighting undercover in Guatemala, Congo and Bolivia, well out of the public eye, in contrast to the idea that his image - at this time - was well known; and although Guevara gave a speech to the United Nations in New York ("Colonialism is Doomed") on 11 December 1964 (Fig.38.) I question whether events like this would be of interest, or even remembered at all, if it were not for the impact (and corresponding interest in the individual) of the iconic phenomenon. The idea that Guevara was not a recognisable public figure in the mid 1960s is succinctly supported by Carmen Ramirez and Peter Suedfeld (1988) who simply state that from around this time, "he vanished from sight" (157)

Figure 38: Guevara's Speech to the UN 1964.

The following comment from Peter Kornbluh, a former senior analyst at the American National Security Archive, is particularly revealing: "When he resurfaced in Bolivia in 1967 you see the CIA intelligence reports and they say "well I guess we were wrong in thinking that he might have been dead these last several years because it appears that he is alive and well and promoting revolution in the jungles of Bolivia"' (videoplay.com , 1:08:37/1:30:20 accessed 4 January 2009). As Guevara was a studious political pamphleteer whose incendiary work, *Guerrilla Warfare* was first published in 1960, some awareness of his existence, post 1964, may be claimed through groups who were attracted to his revolutionary writing, however, it is more than likely that Guevara would have been an inconspicuous figure at this time; the possible exception to this, as will be explained in greater depth later, was in France where intellectuals such as John Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Regis Debray, became intrigued by the Cuban revolution as an apparent physical realisation of their existential principles.

If the claim is accepted that Guevara did not have the level of public profile from 1964 to his death in October 1967, either as an international political figure or as a major 'player' in the Cuban revolution, then his mythology would have been easier to modify than if his biographical details had been familiar in collective memory. The events following his murder in 1967, especially the cultural manipulation of Guevara's biography, are unique in the history of modern visual culture. Perhaps the most

significant of these events was the promotion of the charismatic elements of the Guevara's biography and the disregarding of other, more sinister, features.

A significant element in the formation of Guevara the cultural icon is that Guevara the individual was a selfless combatant representing the oppressed masses of the Latin American Third World. As an Argentinean he became, following the remarkable Cuban revolution of 1959, a prominent member of Castro's post-revolutionary government, yet opted in 1965 to abandon his official duties and to further the revolutionary 'struggle' claiming that, "other nations of the world summon my modest efforts of assistance"[4]. While this sounds commendably selfless, together with being a contextually attractive anti-systemic stance, Guevara's character, nevertheless, had an inveterate wanderlust and craving for danger, a man who quickly became bored with the repetitiveness of civil life, as his father recalls:

> The first thing to note is that in my son's veins flowed the blood of the Irish rebels, the Spanish conquistadors and the Argentinean patriots. Evidently Che inherited some of the features of our restless ancestors. There was something in his nature which drew him to distant wanderings, dangerous adventures and new ideas. (cited in Lavretsky 5)

Guevara himself made little secret of his preference for life 'on the edge', together with a concomitant distaste for 'ordinary' existence, as in this extract from a letter to his mother from Guatemala in 1954: "It was all a lot of fun, what with the bombs, speeches, and other distractions to break the monotony I was living in" (cited in Llosa 7). It is also evident that Guevara was less than successful in his official duties as a minister in Castro's regime, failing to adjust to a non-revolutionary lifestyle leading to friction - both politically and personally - between himself and Fidel Castro, as Ramirez and Sudfeld argue in their analysis of the public statements of both individuals: "Guevara's leaving was associated with a decline in Castro's feelings of personal warmth toward

him, although this was consistently denied in the overt content of relevant statements"
(155). So, rather than Guevara offering his services selflessly to the interests of the
oppressed masses, it is reasonable to claim that this was an individual who actively
sought an unsettled lifestyle and one who was comfortable with the rigours of guerrilla
warfare (Anderson1997).

A more sinister aspect of the mythology associated with the Guevara icon is the
idea that he was by nature a humanitarian who, being both a soldier and a medical
doctor, treated his opponents with dignity and care, as in this reflection from Guevara
himself: "Let me say, at the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is
guided by great feelings of love" (cited in Ziff 30); or this from Fidel Castro: "Che
distinguished himself , not only as a fighter, but as a doctor, helping both his wounded
comrades and the enemy soldiers" (cited in Sinclair 17). The sanctification of Guevara's
biography, together with the strengthening of the fixed iconic meaning, continues to the
present through hagiographic depictions of the Guevara individual/icon in films such as
The Motorcycle Diaries (2004 Dir. Walter Salles) and *"Che"* (2008 Dir. Steven
Soderbergh). The former production, based on Guevara's own diary of his youthful
adventures travelling through Latin America with his friend Alberto Granados,
illustrates the depth to which fixed iconic meaning becomes replicable in cultural
productions, and draws comparison to the manner in which the Spitfire iconic form was
depicted in the 1969 motion picture considered in Chapter 5. *The Motorcycle Diaries*
follows Guevara's developing awareness of the perilous conditions in which large
numbers of the South American peasant class lived, largely as a result (the film
suggests) of the corrupting impact of North American capitalist imperialism. Here a
stark contrast is offered between good (the downtrodden native class) and bad
(dispossessing American economic systems) that fire Guevara's developing
revolutionary spirit together with imbuing his mythology with a high moral stance, a

'David and Goliath' allusion that continues to be an important element in the meaning of the iconic form. The continuation of the mythologising of Guevara's life through examples such as these reflects the power of the meaning fixed to the image in the months following Guevara's death. Tainting of Guevara's character at the crucial point of formation of the tragic-dramatic narrative, would have dramatically impacted - in a negative manner - on the iconic force of the image although, as the evidence suggests, the biography of Guevara the individual was embellished to match the needs of the receptive communities.

The image of a ragged, ascetic, guerrilla fighter would have been a recognisable and attractive symbol to politically active young people in the unique period of civil protest of the late 1960s, especially as images of worldwide conflicts (Vietnam in particular) were regularly broadcast. Guevara's personal success as part of the small band of individuals that overthrew Batista's American bolstered regime became (after his death) a perfect narrative of martyrdom when the mythology was emolliated to correlate with Alberto Korda's re-worked image. The severity of revolutionary struggle - the need to kill and to take stern decisions under martial conditions - was an attractive element in the myth of Guevara during the specific period when his image was in the process of iconic formation, especially as his actions were directed fully against American colonialism. The reality of Guevara the individual however, both as a guerrilla leader and subsequent Marxist despot, strain the reality of this aspect of the myth, suggesting instead that the development of the Guevarian iconic form demanded the mythical meaning be consistent with the distinct, reproducible image. The iconography of Guevara is formed around the heroic, selfless, compassionate, stoical fighter whose cause is the elimination of capitalist enslavement, a powerfully charismatic stance that fitted well with the ideological activism of specific civil protest groups during the late 1960s, especially in France. Recent evidence (James 2001; Llosa

2005), question the overall validity of the humanistic element of the Guevara myth, which is taken here as support for the claim that the mythology of the icon was retrospectively embellished; this, for instance, from Javier Arzuaga, chaplain of La Cabana (the Cuban prison governed by Guevara in the first months of 1960):

> There were about eight hundred prisoners in a space fit for no more than three hundred: former Batiste military and police personnel, some journalists, a few businessmen and merchants. The revolutionary tribunal was made of militiamen. Che Guevara presided over the appellate court. He never overturned a sentence... I pleaded many times with Che on behalf of prisoners. I remember especially the case of Ariel Lima, a young boy. Che did not budge. (cited in Llosa 3)

As part of his eagerness to exterminate the threat of perceived enemies of the newly formed Cuban state, Guevara is now thought to have been a main instigator in the introduction of concentration and forced labour camps, in addition to the imprisonment of 'undesirables' such as homosexuals and drug takers (Llosa 2005). It is also evident from existing evidence that, rather than finding the dilemmas of leadership in armed conflict difficult to cope with, Guevara's well documented statements indicate a homicidal zeal that developed from a natural inclination to murder into a genocidal fervour:

> I ended the problem with a .32 calibre pistol, in the right side of his brain...his belongings were now mine (cited in Llosa 7)

> This country is willing to risk everything in an atomic war of unimaginable destructiveness to defend a principle: If the rockets had remained, we would have used them all and directed them against the very heart of the United States, including New York, in our defence against aggression. (6)

It has been argued here that Guevara was not a well-known figure in mainstream public consciousness at the time of his death in 1967. It does not follow from this that

the generic image of the Cuban guerrilla fighter was equally unfamiliar, as in Kalatov's use of the image in *Soy Cuba* previously discussed. In 1957 the journalist Herbert L. Matthews visited Cuba to interview Fidel Castro in the Sierra Madre Mountains for a series of articles the first of which was published on 24 February in the New York Times (cubarepublicana.org accessed 7 December 2010). In a short piece written in 1961, "The United States and Latin America", Matthews - who experienced the guerrilla group at first hand prior to the revolution and followed their progress closely thereafter - does not make a single reference to Guevara while referencing Fidel Castro strongly (8 times). This is fully consistent with Matthews initial reporting of the Cuban guerrillas (the first mainstream Western reporter to do so) that also featured Castro prominently yet making no mention of Guevara, again evidence for the argument that Guevara's fame has been retrospectively created as a consequence of the power of the iconic image.

Reporting of Cuba's relationship with the USA, which peaked with the CIA led 'Bay of Pigs' invasion of the island on 15 April 1961, was accompanied with image awareness of the archetypal bearded, fatigue wearing, Cuban combatant which, at that time, may have been fairly familiar to Western audiences, especially in the USA, allowing the generic image of this type of revolutionary fighter - and not a specific one of Guevara - to be in the collective memory of the protest groups that would later morph the image to the individual. As a cultural narrative the remarkable success of Castro's revolutionary force (the number of guerrillas that survived the 'Granma' landing on 12 December 1956 is generally estimated at between 12 and 18) became a primary anti-systemic narrative of what could be achieved by a handful of individuals against overwhelmingly powerful opposition. This dramatic narrative, sympathetically received by escalating protest groups in many Western countries during the late 1960s, was particularly well expressed during the French civil protests of spring 1968.

Figure 39*: Fidel Castro entering Havana 1959.

7.3 9 October1967

Guevara's Bolivian diary, printed in1968 by the wealthy and influential publisher
Giangiacomo Feltrinelli (who was given the photograph by Alberto Korda on a visit to
Cuba in 1964), had a front cover of the Cuban photographer's now iconic image of Che
Guevara, prompting the future Italian photographer Giorgio Mondolfo to recall his
feelings on seeing the image:

> The first time I saw the picture by Alberto Korda, I was not even slightly
> interested in the author. I was only fifteen, and it was the picture that had drawn
> us - many for the first time - to gather in the streets, crying Che lives! (cited in
> Ziff 28)

The emotionally charged nature of this recollection neatly summarises some of the
points raised in this chapter. As Trisha Ziff rightly states, the proliferation of Guevara's

iconic image, "seems to have taken place almost immediately after his death" (19) yet, as it has been consistently argued, to suggest a strong relationship between receptive communities - the anti-systemically motivated civil protest groups in the late 60s - with concurrent, mainstream, knowledge of Guevara as a famous individual at the time of his death, is untenable. Mondolfo's statement is an explicit acknowledgement that there were groups of individuals (Guevara's image impact is referred to as happening to a collective "us") who immediately understood that this image, regardless of who the individual behind it was, contained exactly the right kind of 'look' to contain the meaning that they needed to express; and this section will look at some of the events around the period of Guevara's death that offer compelling insights into the formation of this extraordinary cultural icon.

Prior to the recent discovery of an article in the French magazine Paris Match issued in July 1967, it was unclear who produced the first (post 1961) reproduction of Guevara's image. In the Paris Match article, "*Les Guerilleros"* the journalist Jean Larteguy asked the poignant question "Where is Che Guevara?" juxtaposed to the now iconic Guevara image. Although Ziff suggests that Paris Match was clearly responsible for the image being seen and disseminated for the first time, "not only in France but also to a wide European audience"(20) the singular catalytic event responsible for the cultural integration of the iconic phenomena was the death of Guevara himself.

The year following Guevara's murder saw a proliferation of his image reproductions in cultures where the receptive conditions for the myth/image interdependence could be most effectively met. On 18 October 1967 Fidel Castro gave a memorial service praising the bravery and revolutionary fervour of Guevara against a backdrop of Korda's photograph reworked into poster form by the Cuban artist José Gómez Fresquet who, sensing the urgency of the moment, worked through the night to

produce a graphic reproduction filling the side of a five story building. Today the building has a steel facsimile of the original poster to stand as a permanent reminder of the cultural effect of an initial replication of Alberto Korda's image.

Figure 40: Steel facsimile of the Guevara icon in Cuba.

To gain an idea of the dramatic narrative synchronisation of Guevara's image shortly after his death, the extract below is from Castro's memorial speech to Guevara on 18 October 1967 and fully reflects the readiness of receptive individuals, perhaps even Castro himself, to fix the parameters of meaning to the distinct, iconic image form:

> But those who boast of victory are mistaken. They are mistaken when they think that his death is the end of his ideas, the end of his tactics, the end of his guerrilla tactics, the end of his theory. For the person who fell, as a mortal person, as a person who faced bullets time and again, as a soldier, as a leader, was a thousand times more able than those who killed him by a stroke of luck. (cited in Ziff 71)

Leaving aside the post-revolution animosity that had developed between Castro and Guevara (during his capture in Bolivia Guevara repeatedly told his captors "Fidel

betrayed me"[5]) the seminal instances of iconic reproductions of the Korda/Guevara image, mark a retrospective reconstruction of the myth of the individual, compelled both by the dramatic gravity of the image and the receptiveness of the individuals/communities to it. In a sense the claim being made here is that there was no Guevara (as we know him today) before the formation and reception of the iconic image. During Guevara's most active years he may not have been distinguishable from a generic Cuban guerrilla image and his "ideas", "tactics" and "theory" would likely have been known to only a handful of mostly radical, left-wing, intellectuals. Shortly after his death, however, the reproducibly distinct iconic image of Che Guevara became famous on an international scale, transcending national iconic parameters and developing the image into a universal symbol of anti-authoritarian attitude. Only a matter of months following Guevara's death the French student protests of May 1968 produced an acute set of conditions that established the power of the icon to the present.

7.4 Paris 1968

Che Guevara was killed during a period of political and social unrest in societies throughout Western Europe and the USA and the iconic image of Guevara, for some communities experiencing this unrest, was a perfect resource to channel the frustrations rooted in their challenges to dominant ideological hegemonies. France and Italy, in particular, saw escalating student protests that captured the support of large sections of the respective societies, resulting in nationwide strikes and political crisis. In comparison to the civil rights movement in North America, which were fuelled more by political and material inequalities, French civil protest at the time - often referred to as 'May 68' - was initiated more by intellectual, cultural and political issues, including the war in Vietnam, together with perceived restrictions to civil rights and freedom of

expression. The intellectual nature of the French student uprising, as an anti-systemic protest, created perfect conditions for the reception of the Guevara icon. With regard to the general focus of the riots Mark Kurlansky supports the claim that the French students were protesting against systems rather than material inequalities:

> To the establishment, they seemed to be against everything. An April 27, 1968, editorial in *Paris Match* said, "They condemn Soviet society just like bourgeois society: industrial organization, social discipline, the aspiration for material wealth, bathrooms, and, in the extreme, work. In other words, they reject Western society. (184)

Early in 1968 the director of Cinematheque Francaise (an independent film preservation organisation) the eccentric yet popular Henri Langois, was dismissed from his post as curator, sparking a wave of dissent from the influential French artistic community. On 14 February a large number of protesters, again mostly from the artistic community, gathered to voice disapproval against Langois's dismissal and similar dictatorial actions by the French government; the ensuing riot set the tone for the civil French protest in the following months. Holding banners bearing slogans such as "Films Not Cops" the crowd, including many celebrity figures such as Francois Truffaut, Roger Vadim and Jean Luc Goddard, were attacked by French riot police who were aggressively clad in full combat clothing and armed with tear gas and riot batons.

The severity of the police reaction confirmed the strict authoritarianism of the French government, especially towards the artistic community and the intellectual 'new left', as Robin Blackburn notes: "De Gaulle's apparatus of repression in academia was probably stronger in France than anywhere" (videosearch.com accessed 4 February 2008). On the 22 March 1968, 150 students, artists, and left wing political activists, occupied an administration building at Nanterre University (a satellite campus built to facilitate overspill from the University of Paris) leading to further hostile and

inflammatory police reprisals. The following weeks saw more violent clashes between protesters and the police, leading to student groups occupying the Sorbonne University in May subsequently becoming, following its invasion by armed police, the catalyst for other groups to support the students action, including factory workers, high school students, and university lecturers. By 16 May, with President De Gaulle in enforced exile in Germany and over two thirds of the country on strike, the French nation was on the brink of economic and social collapse. With the force of the French protest being youthful, left wing, and anarchistic, this was expressed in slogans and symbolism that reflected this impetus; listed below are some examples of the graffiti utilised at the height of the May riots:

Don't beg for the right to live — take it!

The liberation of humanity is all or nothing!

Those who make revolutions half way only dig their own graves!

Run, comrade, the old world is behind you!

We will ask nothing. We will demand nothing. We will take, occupy!

The revolution doesn't belong to the committees, it's yours!

If we have to resort to force, don't sit on the fence!

No to coat-and-tie revolution!

(Bureau of Public Secrets.org, accessed 15 June 2009)

The intense political atmosphere in Paris during the early summer of 1968 was expressed not only through graffiti but also through the newly developing technology of mass poster production, an important development in the formation of the Guevara icon. The expression of highly charged socio/political sentiment through this type of medium, in addition to the anti-systemic polarity of the participants, was a significant development regarding the inception of the Guevara image, and below are some examples of poster production during the protests.

Figure 41: The Vote Changes Nothing, The Struggle Continues.

Figure 42: Borders=Repression

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Figure 43: Power to the People.

Figure 44: Free Information (Vallen 2001).

The amount of posters produced during the French conflict of 1968 was immense and, as David Singer argues, was an extremely important avenue of anti-systemic expression: "The political vacuum precipitated a political void, and this in turn was filled by posters and pamphlets" (19). Although the slogans and posters of 'May 68' are symbolic of the general fervour of radical left-wing sentiment, they also express the desire to voice these feelings through a specific visual medium. The diversity of production at the Atelier Populaire (People's Studio) within the Ecoles Des Beaux-Arts between May and June 1968, reveals a short, though extremely concentrated, period of artistic fabrication - "600,000 posters made in 350 designs by approximately 200 students" - (Corkran 58) and it is significant that the posters articulate a correspondingly wide range of issues. Fig.41. illustrates that piecemeal reform through democratic channels was seen as a repressive tactic from a central authority bent on maintaining corrupt power relations; the alternative to this, the poster claims, is direct revolutionary action. Fig.42. portrays the French police as agents of state control, with an additional message alluded through the border stripes, claiming countries are falsely segregated in order to prevent worker integration. Fig.43. urges students (represented by books) workers (hammer) and peasants (fork) to form an alliance to achieve power. Fig.44. represents, on the one hand, a critique of the legitimacy of information presented to the

French people, and, on the other, suggests a 'free press' which is itself prevented from operating without state repression (Vallen 2001).

This atmosphere of intense symbolic protest, created the perfect conditions in which ideas relating to political confrontation and rebellion could be, and was, assimilated into one iconic form. Even though the Guevara photograph was utilised in Cuba in October 1967 as a political eulogy to the death of Guevara the individual, and in the *Paris Match* article shortly after that, the mythological adaptation of the Guevara narrative was, to a considerable extent, a French phenomenon with similar, but less dramatic, events occurring at around the same time in Italy and other Western European countries. One high profile intellectual supporter of the 'May 68' student protests was the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who made no secret of his admiration for revolutionary zeal in general and of his veneration of Guevara in particular. In a radio interview at the height of the conflict he offered this opinion:

> These youngsters don't want the future of their fathers - our future - a future which has proved we were cowardly, worn out, weary, stupefied by total obedience…Violence is the one thing that remains, whatever the regime, for the students…The only relationship they can have to this university is to smash it. (cited in Corkran, 2005)

An advocate of Marxist ideology and a seminal thinker regarding atheistic existential philosophy, Sartre discovered the embodiment of his thoughts in the living form of Ernesto Che Guevara. Believing action to be the true purpose of life, together with the need to be authentic to oneself, the retrospectively embellished myth of Guevara correlated perfectly both to Sartre's philosophy, and to the motivating ideology of the French student protests of 1968. In 1960 Sartre, along with Simone de Beauvoir, travelled to Cuba to witness the aftermath of the Castro revolution and to interview

prominent individuals including Guevara: Fig.45. shows the three individuals in conversation, note in particular the attentive reverence of the French individuals, Sartre with notebook hunched forwards while Guevara, not a large individual, appears open, confident, and imposing.

Figure 45: de-Beauvoir, Sartre and Guevara.

Sartre and de-Beauvoir were also on the same platform on 5 March 1960 when Alberto Korda took the now iconic photograph. Following Guevara's murder Sartre famously referred to him as, "not only an intellectual but also the most complete human being of our age". Wholly enamoured with the perception of Guevara as a man of action, Sartre contributed significantly to the retrospective sanitising of the myth at precisely the time when the poster representations of Guevara were gaining rapid popularity. In addition to Sartre and de-Beauvoir's lionisation of Guevara, the French activist and thinker Regis Debray also contributed to the formation of mythology surrounding the Guevara icon. As a professor of philosophy in Havana during the early years of Castro's regime, Debray was closely associated with the ideals and methods of Marxist inspired guerrilla discipline. During Guevara's Bolivian campaign Debray travelled as a 'journalist' to assist the efforts of the small band of revolutionary insurrectionists; the extract below from Debray's account of the last days of the group, gives a good indication of his feelings towards Guevara as an archetypal mythical rebel.

And amidst all that, the solitude of Che himself in the middle of the
encampment, sitting upright on his stool in the evening, by the fire, his khaki felt
hat pushed back, drawing slowly on his pipe, and reading perhaps Leon Felipe's
poem, *La Gran Aventura*. There he sat, impervious, absent, barely noticing the
comings and goings, the bustle, the clatter of cooking pans, the background of
swearing and arguments all round him. He remained motionless and distant, like
a man transported beyond this world, letting his eyes rest on the flames from
time to time with a slight smile, ironic and confident, as though seeing his own
inner monologue, as though savouring in advance the unknown satisfaction
waiting beyond the horizon in a profusion of glorious struggles. (143)

Imprisoned shortly before Guevara's assassination Debray's example, as an active
participant in armed revolutionary struggle, would have contributed to the attractiveness
of the Guevara icon in France during the period under consideration. At this time the
conditions for the creation of a primary cultural icon were firmly in place, resulting in
the meaning of the Guevara myth/image becoming fixed in order to match the needs of
the immediate receptive consumers of the image.

7.5 The Complete Icon

In the latter months of 1968 French student protesters discovered a single image
in which to invest their anti-systemic hostility, and they embraced it with vigour, as
David Singer notes: "They were finally given a hall for political meetings - which they
promptly re-christened for Che Guevara" (64). Soon after this the myth of Guevara
would be inextricably connected to one image which, in turn, would prove to be one of
the most distinct, durable and reproducible iconic images in the modern world. This
analysis of the Guevara icon has attempted to show that the availability of a unique

image at a time of extraordinarily heightened receptivity resulted in a universally transferable iconic phenomenon. Having found a single image in which to discharge the complexity of their feelings, European protest groups in 1968, especially those in France, zealously consumed the Guevara image, and in doing so they found meaning within it that correlated to their own heightened socio/political and emotional sensibilities. It is difficult now to dissociate the retrospectively embellished Guevara myth from the iconic image itself or, as was suggested earlier, the life and biography of Guevara the individual from the ubiquitous image. The degree of anti-systemic fervour of the civil protests in France in 1968 meant that the Guevara image was the perfect receptacle for the (then) complex anti-establishment feelings previously expressed through myriad graffiti and poster productions.

At the time of his capture in Bolivia, Guevara's appearance bore little resemblance to the 'heroic', 'Christ-like' image that millions of people around the world are now familiar with. As suggested at the beginning of the chapter, current debate surrounding the Guevara legend questions the validity of the biographical detail in relation to the meaning of the iconic form, some of which has been considered here. However, shortly after Guevara's death, and in the specific context of the period in which the image became widely available, none of these contradictions seemed to matter. The heightened receptivity of the French protest movement to Guevara's image proved too strong for anything other than the complete, retrospective, sanitising of his personal life. In the case of Cuba, the anti-American inspired success of Castro's insurgents, together with the recognisability of the generic guerrilla symbol, attracted the interest of several left-wing intellectuals of the period, including Sartre, de Beauvoir, Debray and Feltrinelli. The idea that a small, mostly male, band of Guerrillas could take action against the might of American colonialism proved a seductive, 'real-life', embodiment of their anti-authoritarian ideological inclinations. The socio/political atmosphere at the time of

Guevara's death in October 1967 focused an enormous amount of emotional energy onto a single image - Alberto Korda's photograph *Guerrillero Heroico* - and the product resulting from the series of events following Guevara's death was a distinct cultural icon fully encompassing an interactively formed dramatic myth. From this, the iconography of the image - the fixed meaning of the image form - allowed the icon to be utilised in a variety of ways; by groups requiring a strong political image; by non-Marxist civil rights activists; and by individuals who, to this day, regard the cultural icon as universally 'cool'. The utilisation of the icon since 1968, together with the degree to which the significance of the symbol since that time has changed, is examined in the next section.

7.6 Significance and the Guevara Icon

Cultural icons are used. They not only play an important part in the way modern cultures define their existence, their importance is also reflected by the manner in which distinct iconic forms are utilised in daily life. They are kept vibrant in collective memory, not by formal exhibitions, constructed marketing narratives, or academic theses, but through their relevance to people and what people deem important in cultural existence. This thesis states that, at their inception, primary cultural icons exhibit dramatic, human-interest narratives that very often (if not always) involve communities receptive to the potential of their iconic meaning. Although the respective images contain fixed meaning, the significance of cultural icons to future communities (meaning the ones not directly involved in their initial formation) who sustain the phenomena, brings forth a range of further connotations. Some of these have been discussed throughout the case studies as in, for example, the significance of The Spitfire aircraft for the immediate British post-war generation. What this section will examine is

the subtle difference between the formation of the Guevara icon in Continental Europe during 1968 in comparison to its reception and utilisation since that time, especially in the USA. The main argument here is that the later reception of the Guevara icon - its significance not its initial meaning - has been affected by the depth and quality of anti-American sentiment in the (mostly young) cultural communities who sustain the icon to this day.

The person credited with the introduction of the Guevara photograph in Western Europe was the Irish artist Jim Fitzpatrick. Re-working Alberto Korda's photograph into the now iconic poster he replicated the product and personally handed out copies in London in the spring of 1968, and the image caused a furore. How Fitzpatrick came to possess the original photograph is still not positively established, although it is likely that there is a direct connection between John Paul Sartre, who was closely involved in the original photographic production, and anarchistic groups in the late 1960s such as the Dutch organisation 'Provos'. The following extract is Fitzpatrick's own interpretation of the impact of the poster:

> The reaction was extraordinary. The original poster art and an oil painting I intended using as a print went on tour after being exhibited in the Arts Lab and Lisson Gallery in London and guess what? - they both 'disappeared' in Eastern Europe where an individualistic idealist like Che was anathema to their corrupt regimes. Reaction in the West was about the same: my distributor in Spain was actually arrested by Franco's secret police and the poster destroyed.
> But Ireland was the weirdest: Every shop that stocked the poster was threatened or harassed: in the very fashionable Brown Thomas of Grafton Street, which sold cards and posters in those faraway days, a well-turned out lady bought the entire stock, tore them all to pieces in front of the astonished staff and walked out! (www.jimfitzpatrick.Accessed 6 June 2009 n.pag.)

The Guevara icon in its poster form had a meaning that was clearly comprehended by the communities and cultures that encountered it in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Though the general meaning of the icon is explicitly anti-authoritarian, there are degrees to which this meaning has been interpreted by the various individuals and organisations that have used the image since its inception. It is evident from the above extract that reaction to the Guevara icon at the time was quite different to how it might be interpreted today, with its inherent 'coolness' emolliating much of the radical significance of the icon. The argument of the previous sections has stressed the development of the iconic image as a retrospectively embellished myth resulting from the ferment of the French student protests of 1968. During this period the civil unrest and political conflict was a central focus of dissatisfaction not just in France but in many Western countries. In America, the nature of the various protest movements served, in a similar way, as a cultural barometer to the depth of changes taking place. Continental European and American protest movements, however, were ideologically quite different in the direction of the vehemence against America itself, which is a major factor regarding the anti-authoritarian significance of the Guevara icon. To develop this idea, the following analysis will compare the atmosphere of civil protest in the respective countries as evidence for a change in iconic significance.

7.7 Revolution or Evolution?

Muhammad Ali's refusal to comply with the military draft regulations of 23 August 1966 is a distinct footnote in American cultural history. As courageous outside of the boxing ring as he was in it, Ali willingly offered his career, sporting reputation, and ultimately his personal liberty as a price for his belief that the American war in Vietnam was fundamentally wrong. Heavily influenced in his decision making by his

conversion to Islam, together with his allegiance to the radical organisation The Nation of Islam, his views were expressed in a manner designed to cause maximum political discomfort:

> No I am not going 10,000 miles to help murder, kill, and burn other people to simply help continue the domination of white-slavemasters over the darker people the world over. This is the day and age when such evil injustice must come to an end. I have been warned that to take such a stand would put my prestige in jeopardy and could cause me to lose millions of dollars, but I have said it once and I will say it again: the real enemy of my people is right here. I will not disgrace my religion, my people or myself by becoming a tool to enslave those who are fighting for their own justice, freedom, and equality. I either have to obey the laws of the land or the laws of Allah. I have nothing to lose by standing up for my beliefs. So I'll go to jail. We've been in jail for 400 years. (Muhammad Ali 1967 www.aavw.org accessed 1 February 2010)

This powerful statement of intent from Ali has three elements. Firstly it refuses to accept the premise of the war as a perpetuation of initiated conflict to further the interests of "white-slavemasters". Secondly, the statement reveals Ali's clear awareness of his own prominent position in the scheme of events. The final phrase in the statement, and third, firmly states that the socio/political conflict between the discriminated black population and the ruling white hegemony in America is the main motivation for his stance against the Vietnam War. For Ali this is all or nothing, and his impending imprisonment he takes as a willing price in that the continuation of political, social, economic and cultural discrimination against African-Americans, for him, would be a worse kind of incarceration.

The point drawn from Ali's Vietnam protest is that the furore surrounding his refusal to draft brought to prominence (in America) a centrally important issue of the

period - racial inequality. Whereas Jean-Paul Sartre, as we shall shortly see, took the Vietnam conflict as an opportunity to vent his deep-seated anti-American sentiments, Ali - even taking into account his vehement tirades against white rule - is never fundamentally non-patriotic in that his protest was against an America that he, together with the majority of civil protesters in the USA at the time, perceived of as malleable to change.

What Ali saw as a white, paternalistic, oligarchy, with an inherent and intolerant 'slave-owner' mind-set, was not his idea of what America should be like, and neither was it the American ideal shared by millions of people in comparable groups suffering from similar political and material inequalities, and who were determined to change their status through civil protest. These groups, including women, gays, students, Native Americans, African-Americans, and Chicanos, were unhesitant in their dissatisfaction with the ideological status quo. In literature, film, art and popular music, new anti-authoritarian and anti-establishment ideas were challenging existing ways of thinking, and in the late 1960s and early 1970s a new plurality of thought unleashed a torrent of opposition to establishment paradigms, here Will Kaufman indicates the mood of the time:

> Speaking of his *Five Easy Pieces*, which championed the rebelliousness of American youth and inaugurated the decade's auteur-driven cinema, director Bob Rafelson explained: 'It became *permission*-time. Permission was granted in the '70s to behave [and] make work that, in fact, was something you were thinking about doing in the '60s, but nobody gave you permission to do . . . I'm talking about cultural permission.' (9)

Cultural permission implies opportunity for evolutionary progress, rather than the far more radical implications of the French civil protest movement discussed previously. In its relevance to the reception and significance of the Guevara icon in America the

absence of overt revolutionary zeal -as represented by the implicit acceptance by Mohammed Ali of an American ideal worthy of personal sacrifice- helps to explain the difference in significance of the icon in pluralist cultures as opposed to its significance to radical organisations such as F.A.R.C, Sandinista and the IRA.

Jean-Paul Sartre's association with the formation, reception and significance of the Guevara icon is far from co-incidental. Previously in the chapter Sartre's open admiration of the Cuban revolutionaries was argued to be a living realisation of his existential ideas and, following 'May 68', he found in the Guevara image the mythologically embellished symbol representing his concept of the 'great individual'. By considering Sartre as representative of French anti-Americanism at the time of the Vietnam protests, the argument is that the depth of radical feeling directed against America in France at this time, facilitated the reception of the Guevara icon as a representative symbol of precisely this type of anti-Americanism and, by extension, as a representative symbol opposing capitalist ideology in general, which partly explains the vehement reaction to its usage. However, the intellectualism of Sartre's style of anti-Americanism would have made the reception of the Guevara icon - in its radical revolutionary form - unpalatable in the USA due to the far less radical anti-systemic sentiments of the American civil protesters. What did happen regarding reception of the Guevara icon in the United States, (and probably in many other countries as well), was that the staunch anti-American revolutionary nature of the initial Guevara icon, was altered in significance to a quite different, milder, anti-authoritarian radical chic. This important change of emphasis helps to explain why the Guevara image still proves attractive as a primary cultural icon to very different receptive communities to the present day.

Figure 46: Guevara Tattoo on the boxer Mike Tyson.

Figure 47: Sandinista Labour Union utilising Guevara's image.

7.8 Anti-American Sentiment

The Russell-Sartre war crimes tribunal of 1967 was an attempt by an array of prominent intellectuals of the period to re-establish the spirit of the Nuremberg war trials but with the United States in the dock. Having no official mandate the tribunal lacked sufficient judicial credibility for it to be little more than an expression of the

concerns of certain high profile left-wing thinkers regarding reports of atrocities emanating from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos (Duffett 1968). In his inaugural statement to the tribunal, Sartre set the tone for the moral castigation of America's military and imperialistic activity in the countries indicated above:

> Are we therefore so pure? Have there been no war crimes since 1945? Have we never had further resort to violence or to aggression? Have there been no more 'genocides'? Has no large country ever tried to break by force the sovereignty of a smaller one? Has there never been reason for denouncing more Oradours or Auschwitz's?
>
> You know the truth: in the last twenty years, the great historical act has been the struggle of the underdeveloped nations for their freedom. The colonial empires have crumbled, and in their place independent nations have grown or have reclaimed ancient and traditional independence which had been eliminated by colonialism. All this has happened in suffering, sweat and blood. A tribunal such as that of Nuremberg has become a permanent necessity.

Just as Guevara perceived American colonialism as the malady afflicting Central and Southern American countries (in his attempts to instigate revolution in some of them) Sartre placed the USA at the heart of the problem, not only of the conflicts in South East Asia but of the moral direction of the Third World as it was during the period in question. There is a definite sense in the text of Sartre's inaugural speech, and in other commentaries of his on the subject, that he represents not only his own position on American intervention, but also that of France as a moral and cultural voice.

Prior to its subjugation by Nazi Germany, the French nation had colonial ambitions of its own, and from 1954-62 fought a colonial war in Algeria that came close to initiating a civil war in France itself (Horne 2006). The French experience in Algeria and Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) nullified French pretensions to colonial

status and with it the implicit idea that the imposition of French culture would be beneficial to the subjugated country, as Marie-Paule Ha argues: "This conviction presumes on the one hand a certain confidence in the superiority of French civilisation, and on the other a high degree of docility among the colonised" (56). In this sense, Sartre's prolonged, ideological, stance against the spread of American economic and cultural hegemony can be read not necessarily as a polemic against colonialism as a fundamental evil, but as a denial of the benefits of American over French culture in general; as Ha goes on to argue Sartre, "did not really challenge those [colonialist] assumptions and as a result failed to see that the controversy over assimilation rested fundamentally on a French ethnocentric view of the Other" (58).

Returning to the Russell-Sartre tribunal, the unsurprising 'verdict' of the proceedings was that the USA (and to a lesser extent Australia and New Zealand) was found to be unanimously 'guilty' of atrocities against the people of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Of the 11 points comprising the verdict the later one - concerning genocide - was the one that reflects best the tribunals attempt to present evidence supporting a predetermined outcome, and resulted in an adverse media reaction (Klinghoffer and Klinghoffer 8). The Russell-Sartre Stockholm tribunal of May 1967 was less a reflection of genuine humanitarian concern for the welfare of the civilians of the respective South East Asian countries during a particularly horrendous war, than a desire by a group of prominent left-wing thinkers - of which Sartre was paramount - to manufacture a stage for their own intellectual interests. In addition to this the issues surrounding Sartre during the tribunal suggest that the implicit agenda of the tribunal was geared towards a general denunciation of the USA regardless of the evidence presented, as Arthur Jay Klinghoffer and Judith Apter Klinghoffer note:

Jean-Paul Sartre, who later presided at the tribunal, asserted that if the United States was to be found guilty of war crimes, then young Americans would be able to cite Nuremberg precedents in order to refuse military service (110). When it was suggested that postponing the verdict for two weeks could disarm critics who claimed that it had been arrived at in advance, Sartre threatened to resign, go back to France, and issue his own statement. The May 10 verdict was close to unanimous. (131)

Klinghoffer and Klinghoffer go on to detail the comments of Julius Lester an SNCC member (Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee, one of the principal organisations of the American Civil Rights Movement) attending the tribunal: "They seemed to have cared more about their intellectual commitment than about the fate of Third World peoples, leading Lester to resent their "air of unapproachability." [and] "I couldn't help but feel that Sartre was as much my enemy as LBJ."' (129-131)

Contrasting the depth of anti-American sentiment rooted in civil protest and specifically directed towards opposition to the Vietnam War, as represented by Ali and Sartre, offers reasons why reception of the Guevara icon since its inception in 1968 has been universally effective. Vehement, deeply ingrained, opposition to American political, economic and cultural hegemony, a fundamental feature of the natures of both Jean-Paul Sartre and Ernesto Che Guevara, was a characteristic that correlated well with the fervent nature of specific receptive communities at the height of the civil protests in Europe in 1968. Civil protest in America at this time, however, while being firmly directed against particular pillars of the establishment, was not of a similar revolutionary nature. Reception of the Guevara icon in countries experiencing 'evolutionary' protest movements was characterised by a modification of the significance of the anti-systemic meaning fixed in the iconic form. Youthful anti-

establishment rebellion, so perfectly captured within this all-encompassing distinct, durable and reproducible image, altered from violent material opposition in its initial significance to a modified, and much more universal, cultural significance. The Che Guevara cultural icon has been well assimilated into mainstream Western culture nullifying, in the process, its full revolutionary significance; however, the meaning of one of the most universal cultural icons of the modern era still meets the needs of individuals and communities that use the image to express their respective challenges to authority, however clement these may be.

In February 2005 the celebrated rock guitarist Carlos Santana attended the 77th Academy awards ceremony for the film *The Motor Cycle Diaries* wearing a T-shirt with the Guevara icon prominently visible (Ziff 93). Perhaps because Santana is a high profile South American, or possibly because the event was televised internationally, or possibly even because interest in Guevara had been re-kindled as a result of his remains being found and relocated (in Bolivia in 1997 and returned to Cuba), the incident provoked a strong response from some individuals who were aware of the culpability of Guevara the individual, as exemplified here by the Cuban jazz musician Paquito D'Rivera:

> I have been informed by our friend Raul Artiles that you will soon be presenting yourself in Miami, something I believe is not recommendable. I bring this forth to you because not long ago you clumsily appeared at the Oscar awards wearing a crucifix over a T-shirt with the stereotyped image of the 'Carnicerito de la Cabana' (Little Butcher of the Fortress). This is how Che Guevara is known to the Cubans that had to agonise with this character in the prison. One of these Cubans was my cousin Bebo, precisely a convict in this jail for merely being a Christian. He always retells with sourness about the times at dawn when

Christian prisoners were killed without mercy screaming 'Hail Jesus

King'...Furthermore, it is an insult and a slap in the face to those young Cubans

from the sixties who had to hide away in order to listen to your 'imperialist

music'. (cited in Ziff 93)

Figure 48: Carlos Santana.

This examination of the formation and reception of the Guevara icon has argued

that the reasons for the hostility to the icon from some communities are a result of the

emolliated mythologising of Guevara the individual. It has also presented reasons why

individuals such as Carlos Santana may have been justifiably confused regarding such a

reaction to his use of the icon. What this chapter has also accomplished, and hopefully

with it the thesis as a whole, is how important the formation and reception of cultural

icons are to cultural life in general.

CONCLUSION

This work has offered a new way of explaining a phenomenon familiar to the majority of people in modern societies - the cultural icon. As suggested in the Introduction there are candidates that fill the role of cultural icon so well that we can claim that these (mostly individual people) fit the description almost to the point of incontestability: who, if not Che Guevara, is a cultural icon? However, extending the analysis to answer the more general question what is a cultural icon? is an entirely different proposition. My contribution to answering this complex question has clarified many of the difficult issues involved, together with offering a model that facilitates a positive explanation as to what a cultural icon might be.

I suggest that candidates least likely to be denied from the status of 'cultural icon' can be described by the term 'primary cultural icon' and that these primary cultural icons have qualities that are discernible and consistent. The features and the definition that arise from this identification is an original contribution to knowledge in this field.

The primary cultural icons, I claim, are distinct images; they have durability that reflects their cultural value; a mental image of the icon can be reproduced from the name prompt, and vice versa (reproducibility); and they are inseparable from natural tragic-dramatic narratives which have significance for communities receptive to the iconic image.

Throughout the thesis this definition has been used in a case study method to analyse a selection of well-known cultural phenomena. Possibly the main criticism of this method is that it can be seen as self-justifying, in that it sets out to prove its own premises through the implementation of its own definition, and it is important to make clear why this criticism does not detract from the value of my thesis.

The case studies presented here proceed from the premise that the qualities of image distinctness, durability and reproducibility are self-evident factors; the exception being the Jesse James study which argued for the separate consideration of imageless cultural mythology and primary cultural iconicity. I argue that this position is prima facie convincing, and that the case studies demonstrate both the practical usefulness of the definition, together with its capacity to be developed and refined. If the case studies are seen as validating the definition it is through combining the value of the studies as works of independent interest, with the structured model of cultural iconicity, each being mutually supporting. The interaction of the two is not restricted to a 'tick box' validation of iconicity: its main worth, which is apparent in the choice of case studies presented for consideration, is in showing the richness and diversity of the tragic-dramatic narratives inherent in the cultural icon. The thesis aims, not just to provide a better way of determining what a cultural icon is, which can be done by implementing the requirement of the three manifest qualities, but also to present solid evidence of the depth of cultural meaning and significance inherent in the iconic form. The choice of the case study method is intended to show, on the one hand, that a detailed cultural and historical analysis of the formation of the iconic phenomena reveals the depth of iconic significance; and on the other, that cultural icons worthy of the description possess cultural gravitas that, through their retained, distinct images, is different in terms of cultural worth from the mass of media-constructed imagery ever present in the modern world. The remainder of this conclusion will clarify further why this is an important area of research, together with the reasons for choosing the specific case studies, and the original contribution to knowledge that each one makes.

Whereas Chapter 1 set out to explain the relevant terminology used throughout the thesis, especially the inter-related concepts of collective memory and receptive communities, and argued how these concepts can be applied to the core case studies,

Chapter 2 presented the initial evidence that the concept of a cultural icon is poorly defined prior to this work, together with reviewing some existing 'definitions' present in this subject area. As there is little comparable research in this field, I considered three specific areas in which the term is extensively used; popular media, national iconicity, and academic usage. Although profligate employment of the term (in the media) understandably provokes the casual charge that it is used with a lack of meaning, the analysis of media archive material found that the term is often used to describe individuals in active, dramatic contexts, and with a corresponding use of modified adjectives. One implication raised from this is that objection to extensive use of the term assumes improper use, which in itself prompts the counter suggestion that there is a common knowledge understanding of the term that rejects this type of applied usage.

The analysis of what may constitute a national cultural icon exposed the limitations of approaching this idea without a full consideration of defining terminology. In this example, as in the sections relating to popular media and academic use, the critique is valid and relevant without my definition being in place. In this sense, the methodology of this aspect of the research was to analyse how the term is used -in a broad manner- and *then* to apply my definition of cultural iconicity as an alternative model which, hopefully, exposes further the frailties of the other 'definitions'.

This section also revealed how issues regarding sub-cultural and generic imagery - such as roses, cups of tea and sports - are of major importance when considering the general question of cultural iconicity, both intriguing areas for further research. In this respect I argue that, in the absence of supporting context, generic images cannot generally be appropriated as nationally iconic. One reason for this is that the broad nature of generic images seems to lack the factor that this research has identified as crucial in the formation of culturally iconic images - the tragic-dramatic narrative.

Overall, the analysis of use of the term 'cultural icon' in the categories of popular media and national iconicity suggests, firstly, that the term is important as a modifier for culturally relevant imagery, countering the claim that it is a 'meaningless' phrase. Secondly, although the term is in widespread usage its common understanding is not, by any means, clear. Again, this does not pre-suppose that my definition stands as a necessary model in clarifying the parameters of meaning (although it certainly can be used in this way), only that, in this instance, introducing the definition helps bring to the fore a range of issues that this research has attempted to fully consider - an important step in the study of culturally iconic imagery.

The third section - usage in academic publications - found that employment of the term can be categorised as follows. Generally, and consistent with the previous two examinations of the term, I found that there are many instances of the term being used in academic publications without a serious attempt at explaining what it means. Nevertheless, it is clear that, in many examples, there is an implicit assumption that the relevant culturally iconic phenomena contain some properties that distinguish them as culturally significant, although the publications rarely venture further than this; and, in some cases, although the implicit assumptions of the terminology could be seen as analogous to my definition, rarely does this extend to an explicit attempt to explain what the author of the publications means when the term is being employed.

Formal attempts to define the idea of a cultural icon are rare, and the examples that do exist are often tentative and hesitant, reflecting the newness and difficulty of the subject. An exception to this is Tomaselli and Scott's recognition that the term should receive a more serious attempt at definition and theirs is a laudable attempt. For Tomaselli and Scott semiotic analysis is necessary for the formal construction of iconic phenomena, especially through power relations and the media, a method of analysis that

I see as over-played. However, the broad nature of the subject should not limit theories of iconicity to any one model, making Tomaselli and Scott's contribution to the debate, together with others that may follow, important to the overall comprehension of the subject.

The relationship between tragic-dramatic iconic narratives, human perception, and Schopenhauerian philosophy is vital to the overall force of my thesis: which is the identification of how cultural icons are formed and received using the four-conditions as a method, resulting in the presentation of studies that validate the definition in addition to being of independent value in themselves. The supporting evidence suggests that imagery, perception and tragic narratives are strongly linked, especially in examples such as how the Titanic icon connected to the raw, emotive sensibilities of the communities experiencing at first hand the 9/11 attacks.

Columbia University's Oral History Project collated information relating to a singular tragic event in modern times - the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in America. The study is support for the claim that iconic image formation involves receptive communities who are deeply involved in the event; together with the iconic image capturing the meaning of the tragic-dramatic narrative. Significantly, part of the Oral History Project's analysis was to establish what images were likely to correspond to the emotional state experienced by the appropriate participants. One image emerging from the study was the distinct, durable, reproducible iconic form of the Titanic. The recall of this image at this time, together with the participant's rejection of Pearl Harbor as offering similar relevance, is evidence for the tragic-dramatic narrative significance of primary cultural icons.

How some sub-cultural iconic forms transcend into mainstream consciousness is, as previously stated, a strong candidate for further research, as is the differentiation

between other types of iconic forms. The comparison between photographic iconography and primary cultural icons is an important step in this differentiation and the analysis in Chapter 3 demonstrated that that the divisions are both necessary and viable in this area of image studies.

The first case study was chosen in order to explore the genre differentiation (myth and icon) of Jesse James and James Dean. If any phenomenon can be described as culturally iconic then it is James Dean, an individual whose early death catalysed an eruption of eulogy, hagiography and, above all, image reproduction that appears out of all proportion to his fame or quality as an actor during his short film career. As Claudia Springer suggests, "the rebel icon [has]…a specific lineage in which James Dean figures prominently" (2). The point of difference between this observation and the central argument presented in the case study is that the James Dean rebel icon has a mythical rather than an iconic lineage. In this sense the lack of iconic precedents may be explained by the absence (prior to Dean's death) of an appropriate image capturing the anti-authority meaning of the rebel myth already present in American cultural life at that time. The dramatic mythology of Jesse James is a familiar American cultural narrative lacking only a suitably distinct image to elevate the myth into primary iconic status. The differentiation of rebel mythology from rebel iconicity - not just in American culture - is another strong candidate for future research, and this chapter alone could have been extended into a much broader work, reflecting the research opportunities arising from the ideas and method applied in this thesis.

The Spitfire case study is an original deconstruction of an iconic form that is now firmly fixed in British collective memory, so much so that the meaning contained within the icon tangibly influences the manner in which the period of history commonly referred to as 'The Battle of Britain' is perceived. If there is doubt that primary cultural

icons are a significant factor in how large communities of people define their cultural life then this study may convince otherwise. The study confirms that primary cultural icons are formed through interactive tragic-dramatic narratives involving communities receptive to potential iconic meaning. Whereas many iconic phenomena result from singular tragic occurrences, examples such as The Spitfire form discernible meaning over longer periods yet, nevertheless, still contain a depth of narrative characteristic of primary iconic forms. The meaning of The Spitfire icon - as a saviour of British sovereignty at a time of critical threat - was challenged as an exercise in demonstrating the extent to which historical evidence can be mythologized and exaggerated in order to 'fit' the narrative of the icon; and this was the main reason for its inclusion as a case study. The degree to which this mythological 'history' is now established as 'factual' is continually reinforced through regular use of the image in the media, together with depictions of the icon in films such as *The Battle of Britain* (1969).

The transcendence of some iconic phenomena from their initial inception as sub-cultural forms to their reception in mainstream cultural life is a feature of cultural iconicity that is informed by my definition, especially as it relates to transferable dramatic narratives. An important aspect of such narratives is that they are naturally formed and received by the relevant receptive communities and, in this respect, I have argued consistently that the influence of external agency is not of paramount importance in the initial stages of iconic formation. In an age of intense media relations, marketing strategies, and image control this argument is open to criticism, especially as it plays down structural factors such as power, gender and class relations. In order to spotlight the importance of natural narratives I examined (albeit in different chapters) two very familiar phenomena - the Apple iPod and The Beatles - and a less familiar one, the Georgian actor David Garrick, with the intention of showing that dramatic iconic narratives are often formed relatively independently of external structural agencies.

The contrast between the formation and reception of the iconic phenomena of David Garrick and The Beatles to that of an object often described as a 'cultural icon' (the iPod) is both stark and informative. The strategy of the Apple marketing company in overtly utilising the value of primary cultural icons reveals, on the one hand, the power of the narratives contained in the respective images and, on the other, the synthetic, marketed, narrative inherent in the iPod as a cultural symbol. In contrast the formation and reception of The Beatles iconic narrative informs the main question of cultural iconicity in the following ways. Firstly, and most importantly, The Beatles - as a sub-cultural force in their native city of Liverpool - flourished due to the natural interactive narrative between a sub-cultural iconic form and an engaged receptive community. Secondly, the intense dramatic power of The Beatles narrative, emolliated through the adoption of neat suits and conventional stage performances, transferred to receptive communities worldwide on a scale never previously experienced. The extension of the phenomenon of 'Beatlemania', as it relates to the formation of the form as culturally iconic, is that the contained dramatic narrative of The Beatles was, by and large, received at a time when burgeoning youth cultures were intensely receptive to the messages it contained. Thirdly, The Beatles' narrative is punctuated with 'Moon Landing' (singular tragic-dramatic) moments which contribute to the retention of The Beatles as a distinct, reproducible and durable image in collective memory. Fourthly, at the height of their fame The Beatles removed themselves from live performances becoming, through the process, free to produce art that strengthened the natural narrative connection between themselves and receptive communities worldwide, and in a manner never previously attempted by popular performers.

If primary cultural icons like The Beatles contain identifiable factors characteristic of the genre, then correlations should be able to be made between other cultural forms displaying similar patterns of formation. By offering the example of David Garrick,

whom few people today would know of and even fewer would recall as a distinct image, my argument again stresses that unusual conditions should exist for important iconic figures to emerge - and David Garrick was an iconic individual. Considering Garrick as a figurehead of a new 'public' - a cultural icon - revealed fundamental changes in how a specific community in London during the mid-late eighteenth century experienced the drama of the stage. Garrick was not simply a great actor; he was an integral part of an explosion of new ideas and means of expression where actors took centre stage. At the end of his life the general public - a new phenomenon in itself - received Garrick as an icon of their unique experience, displaying this public sentiment through representational imagery. Following Garrick's death the extensive production of memorabilia and formal art works reflected the desire to preserve his image in collective memory, again firm evidence of cultural iconicity.

Reproducibility of image, meaning the interchanging of name prompt and image recall is, on the terms of my definition, an elemental feature of primary cultural icons and there is no better example of this than the ubiquitous image/name Che Guevara. Although this is the final case study it was the first one to be researched, and the ideas that stemmed from the early stages of this study offer an original perspective in regard to the formation and reception of a cultural icon. Just as James Dean's death in 1955 drew existing strands of 'rebel' mythology to the image - embellishing the perception of the actual individual - the events following Guevara's death in October 1967 can clearly be seen as a separation of the mythology of the icon from the biography of the man, a method of analysis that offers possibilities for future research. To an even greater degree than the mythological embellishment of The Spitfire icon, the iconic formation of the Guevara phenomenon was a natural retrospective merger of the emolliated details of his biography to the power of the iconic form at the point of its reception.

Distinctness of image, durability and reproducibility, together with discernible tragic-dramatic narratives involving interactive receptive communities, are features of primary cultural icons not superimposed on abstract entities by an academic thesis, but are there for all to see. What my research has established is that primary cultural icons not only exist as discernible images in modern cultural life, but also that their retention in collective memory reflects the powerful relevance of the meaning contained within their rare image forms. On its own the four-point definition of cultural iconicity is an effective tool to differentiate highly valued cultural image phenomena. The analyses of the tragic-dramatic narratives inherent in the case studies are, I believe, fundamentally convincing, and, when considered in conjunction with my definition, present very strong arguments for their integral role in the formation and reception of cultural icons. My thesis shows that cultural icons cannot be consciously constructed and neither are they ephemeral, 'of the moment' products of our image drenched age. I have shown, through careful analysis, that these forms reflect the deep desires of very large communities to retain meaning within an image. This is 'culture' in its truest, most natural sense, and the icons that are formed from it stand as rare totems of collective meaning reflecting the dramatic nature of human life itself.

Endnotes and Works Cited

[1] The study of sub-cultures as an academic field is well-established with many

significant contributions especially the work of Richard 'Dick' Hebdige.

[2] www.ganges.com/Sammy Davis_Jr on_James_Dean, accessed 30 March 2009.

[3] The song "Sunny Afternoon" (released 3 June 1966 on the Pye label) by the

pop/rock band The Kinks, although featuring Ray Davies' lyric, "The taxman's taken

all my dough" is a song very much in the country-blues mode of an individual having

"lost it all". Later lyrics in the song such as, "My girlfriends gone off with my

car...And gone back to her Ma and Pa" bear this out. Harrison's song is

unequivocally about the condition of the British tax system as it was in 1966, and

sardonically names two Prime Ministers of the time, Harold Wilson and Edward

Heath.

[4] Farewell letter from Che Guevara to Fidel Castro. Retrieved 9 April 2009

www.marxists.org/archive.

[5] Interview with Nino de Guzman, USA TODAY 1 May 1998.

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