Urban History, **33**, 1 (2006) © 2006 Cambridge University Press Printed in the United Kingdom
doi:10.1017/S096392680600349X

Introduction: an atlas of the urban icons project

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When the World Trade Center towers collapsed on 11 September 2001, many commentators noted that in their short lives, the towers had come to represent many things: American-led global capitalism, the United States and, most of all, New York City. Their brief role as a shorthand way of saying 'New York City' provoked us to ask about 'urban icons' more generally. But we did not need such cataclysm to provoke us to consider the topic of icons and their functioning in contemporary global culture.[1] To help illuminate the usefulness of the concept of 'urban icons' we held an international conference in order to determine whether the category can be used as a conceptual grid for studying the intersection of visual culture and urban history. The conference began with a series of questions:

- What entities, persons (living or allegorical), spaces and structures have represented particular cities, or city life as such?
- How and in what ways have the problem of urban icons and iconicity changed over time?
- What is the relative 'iconicity' of specific cities? (Are some cities, such as Rome and Jerusalem, more readily reduced to their iconic monuments – the Colosseum, the Dome of the Rock – than other cities?)
- Can cities be imagined at all without iconic reductionism, or is the importance of urban icons a product of the modern era, characterized by mass mediated visual culture in which semiotic communication is central to the urban condition?
- What place do icons occupy in the history of cities and how do we know them? What roles have they played in the history of a particular city? Is their greatest function to interject cities into a global urban narrative?

* The authors wish to thank the conference participants for their time, their intellectual openness and the fine research and writing that has made this project possible. We have learned a tremendous amount from them. We also wish to thank Megan Kendrick, our conference director and research assistant for the endless hours of hard work and her always intelligent feedback.

[1] One can hardly read a newspaper or watch television today without learning about 'the top ten icons of the century' or note the celebrations of the 'birthday of an icon'. See, for example, *New York Times*, 26 May 2005, special section on the 75th anniversary of the Chrysler Building.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S096392680600349X Published online by Cambridge University Press

This special issue of *Urban History* and its accompanying Multimedia Companion are the first results of that conference and our on-going research related to urban icons.

The problem of urban icons interested us both because we each have been separately engaged in research that concentrates on the problem of urban epistemology.[2] How can we conceptualize the city? As we looked around at our own contemporary context, we noted that urban culture seemed driven to iconization: the reduction of complex institutions or ideas into simple visual symbols. As historians, we wanted to know whether this had always been the case. As humanists, we understood that the category and object of study, urban icons, needed defining and shaping to make it both descriptively and analytically meaningful.

The conference was also motivated by the conveners' sense that we are in a critical stage in the evolution of interdisciplinary scholarship on urban culture, visual culture and the study of spatial organization and conceptualization, across the human sciences. Urban studies have in recent years been profoundly transformed by the linguistic turn and the rise of semiotics, resulting in a new tendency to read cities as 'texts'. Visual culture has emerged as a major field of investigation, but, as yet, historians have been challenged to show how amorphous concepts such as viewing and visuality are anchored to the material world, the subject of much inquiry in the human sciences. Historians of collective memory such as the contributors to Pierre Nora's *Realms of Memory* as well as art historians have begun to examine monuments, graphic designs, even corporate logos but they have been more interested in questions of nation than city.[3] By focusing quite specifically on city icons and cities as icons we hoped to highlight the centrality of urban representation to the vast field of urban studies more broadly defined.

To those ends, we invited scholars of urban culture and history with a wide range of geographic and temporal specialization, and with different disciplinary perspectives, and commissioned them to write original essays, pre-circulated to the conference participants. It was our desire to consider urban iconicity in the ancient, early modern and modern eras, and to consider examples from Asia, Europe and the Americas. We sought to draw the research from different kinds of cities as well: capitals, imperial

[2] Philip J. Ethington, *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850–1900* (Cambridge and New York, 1994); Philip J. Ethington, 'Los Angeles and the problem of urban historical knowledge', *American Historical Review*, 105, 5 (Dec. 2000), http://Historycooperative.org. Direct link: http://cwis.usc.edu/dept/LAS/history/historylab/LAPUHK/index.html; Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1998); Vanessa R. Schwartz, 'Walter Benjamin for historians', *American Historical Review*, 106, 5 (2001), 1721–43.

[3] See Pierre Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory*, 3 vols., trans. Arthur Goldhammer, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York, 1997); John Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, 1996); Maud Lavin, *Clean New World: Culture, Politics and Graphic Design* (Cambridge, MA, 2001).

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metropolises, colonial cities, political centres and cultural beacons. Of course, while this range excluded many regions and cities, our sample was broad enough, and the participants conversant enough in interdisciplinary research, to assure a significant consideration of the general principles at work across time and space. In addition to the papers, we had two keynote speakers, Kevin Starr and Giuliana Bruno, who spoke about iconicity and urbanism in broad, geohistorical perspective. (Please see detailed documentation of the conference in the Multimedia Companion to this special issue: www.journals.cambridge.org/urbanicons)

Urban visual history

The field of Urban History has firm roots in economic and social history: the historical study of cities began with the consideration of social processes such as class formation, immigration, revolution and industrialization. In this literature, the city operates primarily as a setting, or laboratory for the study of these processes. Grafted sometimes uncomfortably on to this foundation is a cultural historical approach, now several decades old, which figures the city symbolically and decodes meaning in its buildings, spaces, population, usually within the national frame. This cultural-historical approach was widely practised by scholar-critics such as Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch and Richard Sennett, who explored the relationship between the city's built form and its intangible cultural life.[4] That stream of scholarship forcefully entered the historical profession with the publication of Carl Schorske's landmark *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (1980). Schorske, drawing heavily on art and architectural history, showed how the cultural meanings of a city's form could be linked to the larger, national narratives of historical development, especially those of political culture. Schorske also drew on the growing history of urban planning, which traced the intentions and visions of those responsible for self-conscious and deliberate urban development.[5]

While the aesthetic dimension of the urban environment has been central to the cultural tradition and to the planning tradition in urban history, only recently have scholars begun to examine that which is precisely *visual* in urban culture, society and political life. Recognition of visual culture as a field of urban experience arose from many quarters: from Kevin Lynch's focus on cognitive mapping in urban planning; from the rise of cultural

[4] See Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York, 1976); Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York, 1938); Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA, 1960); and Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, 1961).

[5] Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (New York, 1981). See David H. Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton, 1958); George R. Collins and Chistiane Crasemann Collins, *Camillo Sitte and the Birth of Modern City Planning* (New York, 1965); H. J. Dyos, David Cannadine and David A. Reeder (eds.), *Exploring the Urban Past: Essays in Urban History* (Cambridge and New York, 1982).

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geography;[6] from cinema studies and from a broadening of the fields of art and architectural history to include the vernacular and the popular.[7] The idea of a 'cultural' or 'symbolic' landscape, developed most keenly by such geographers as Yi-Fu Tuan and Denis Cosgrove, demanded greater consideration of the connection between the material and the symbolic domains.[8] In the earlier phases of urban history (the economic/social and the cultural) a building or public square was analysed according to the architect's or planner's relationship to the intellectual, aesthetic and national context. The questions of original intent or purpose were of paramount importance. Questions of impact were certainly raised, but the overarching goal was to explain how cities have taken the forms and functions that they have, how those forms and functions operate within national and economic systems and also within distinct epochs such as the Renaissance, Victorian or post-World War eras.

Having already accounted for the myriad built forms (concentric, grid, radial, etc.), having counted the multitudes of urbanites, having assessed their origins, possessions and social conditions, having charted the rise and fall of social movements, it is time to ask new questions. The field of urban visual history asks, how did those urbanites literally see their urban world, and what does it mean to see the larger world through urban eyes? An understandable concern with textual and quantitative sources has accomplished a great deal, but it rather misses the fact that ordinary and elite urbanites create those texts and statistics by inhabiting, circulating through and perceiving their cities visually and 'haptically'.[9] The project of studying 'urban icons' attempts to isolate a critical, *visual* element in the construction of urban experience and identities, and also in the construction of extra-urban developments (nations, ideologies, economies, empires, global culture). There are certainly many other important visual *topoi* to consider within the overall emerging field of urban visual history. Monuments and landmarks are already well studied; street furniture (mailboxes, street lights, kiosks, bus shelters and light rail stations) has been less well attended to.[10]

[6] Lester B. Rowntree and Margaret W. Conkey, 'Symbolism and the cultural landscape', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 70, 4 (Dec. 1980), 459–74.

[7] See Lynch, *The Image of the City*; Giuliana Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (Princeton, 1993); Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge, MA, 1977); Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley, 1993); and David M. Henkin, *City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York* (New York, 1998).

[8] See Yi-Fu Tuan, *Place and Space: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, 1977); Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophila: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1974); Denis Cosgrove, *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge and New York, 1988).

[9] Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London, 2002).

[10] See, for example, Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations*; Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument* (Princeton, 1999); Alan Trachtenberg, *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* (Chicago, 1979).

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Such *topoi* remind us that the recent spatial turn intersects with the visual turn in urban history, most obviously in the burgeoning history of cartography.[11] For the emerging subject area that we are proposing many spatial questions arise. What is the relationship between a city's geography and its visual history?[12] What influence do distinctive cultures of destruction or preservation have on a city's visual history, both material and symbolic?[13] These sorts of questions also open methodological possibilities such as the need for historians to make maps and images in order to advance historical interpretation and narrative.

Topics such as the movement into, out of and through cities have been addressed by many scholars, including Wolfgang Schivelbusch and Giuliana Bruno, in interesting and important ways.[14] The historical construction of the race is another subject that can be turned to a more explicit visual dimension.[15] There are also ways to integrate the visual into a framework that would approach the study of the city through a more integrated approach to the senses. But the history of urban icons and their relation to what we might call 'urban iconicity' is the aspect of urban visual history we wish to take up here.

(Urban) icons

We hypothesize that urban icons may have proliferated as a solution to the challenge of the immensity of urban knowledge. Icons condense and reduce. They transform the chaos of the experience of the city into knowledge and meaning through representational practices. We also believe that the concept of an urban icon helps to forge links between the concrete spatiality of the city and the metaphoric spatiality of 'imaginary

[11] J.B. Harley and David Woodward, *The History of Cartography* (Chicago, 1987); David Woodward, *Five Centuries of Map Printing* (Chicago, 1975); David Woodward and G. Malcom Lewis, *Cartography in the Traditional African, American, Artic, Australian, and Pacific Societies* (Chicago, 1998); Marcia Yonemoto, *Mapping Early Modern Japan: Space, Place and Culture in the Tokugawa Period, 1603–1848* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2003); Valerie Kivelson, 'Cartography, autocracy and state powerlessness: the uses of maps in early modern Russia', *Imago Mundi*, 51 (1999), 83–105; David Buisseret, *Envisioning the City: Six Studies in Urban Cartography* (Chicago, 1998); James Elliot, *The City in Maps: Urban Mapping to 1900* (London, 1987).

[12] See, for example, Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Global Shanghai, 1850–2000* (Routledge, forthcoming); and Edward Dimendberg on Los Angeles and Joachim Schlör on Berlin in this issue.

[13] See Max Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900–1940* (Chicago, 1999); and T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (New York, 1984).

[14] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1986); Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*.

[15] Anthony W. Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco* (Berkeley, 2001); Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC, 2004); Giorgio Bertellini, 'Black hands and white hearts: Italian immigrants' racial dissonance in early twentieth-century American cinema', *Urban History*, 31, 3 (2004), 375–99.

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landscapes'; between the material and the ideal; between the shapes on the ground and the shapes in the mind.

If the study of urban icons is to be considered viable as a sustained research programme, we must first clarify, with relative precision, the very concept of an icon. The Greek *eikon* simply means picture; image in the broadest sense. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives us 'An image, figure, or representation; a portrait; a picture; a picture, "cut", or illustration in a book.'[16] Although the term is ubiquitous in contemporary culture, as in the common reference to someone who has achieved 'iconic status', we insist that to be analytically meaningful, 'icon' must denote a particular kind of *pictorial representation*. Most definitions distinguish 'icons' from 'symbols' by the criterion that icons 'in some way resemble what they stand for',[17] whereas symbols, including the letters and words on this page, bear an arbitrary relationship to their referent. Any mark or shape can become a 'symbol', by 'standing for' any idea or thing, but icons symbolize in a special way. In our account, all icons are symbols, but not all symbols are icons. Iconization thus stands apart from symbolization.

Icons were originally defined as those memorial images of deceased persons made by early Christians – akin to Egyptian mummy portraits – that were later embraced by early Christians and by the Eastern Orthodox Church as cult images. These pictures were imagined as authentic copies of the 'original images' of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the saints or biblical scenes rather than as objects created by human hands. These devotional images were made on small and portable wooden panels. The early practice of using icons in Christian worship raised concern about the proscription of the worship of idols in the monotheistic tradition. The term 'icon' thus developed a connotation of being an object of uncritical devotion. Icons also connected vision to touch by virtue of the ancient theory of vision in which a visual ray is thought to stream from the eye of the viewer to touch its object. The form of the object then moves back along the visual ray to imprint itself on the memory of the viewer. The viewer in this model is active and connected to the object. The worshipper expects to be touched by the object of vision as its image moves back along the visual ray to impress itself on the soul through memory.[18]

While the long history of the icon in Christian devotional practice holds important clues to the application we seek to refine for the study of urban history, its more recent use in the philosophy of symbol systems may be more helpful to that end. After Charles Peirce developed his philosophy of signs in the nineteenth century, 'icon' became a meaningful semiotic term, denoting an emblem or symbol whose form is implicated in its meaning. Peirce famously distinguished between 'icons', 'symbols' and

[16] 'icon, n', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <http://dictionary.oed.com> (10 May 2005).
[17] Quoted in *ibid.*
[18] See Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago, 1994).

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'indexes' as the three principal forms of signs. 'It has been found', Peirce writes, 'that there are three kinds of signs which are all indispensable in all reasoning; the first is the diagrammatic sign or *icon*, which exhibits a similarity or analogy to the subject of discourse.'[19] Peircian semiotics holds that 'symbols' are arbitrarily related to their referent, while 'indexical' signs bear the actual impress of their referent, as does a footprint. In contemporary computer design, the Peircian definition of 'icon' is most faithfully sustained: an envelope denotes mail; a folder denotes a place to store files, and so on.

Working from an entirely different tradition, German art historians associated with the Warburg Library and the University of Hamburg established the fields of 'iconography' and 'iconology' early in the last century. The former term, attributable to Aby Warburg, describes the analysis of the (formal) 'pictorial traditions on which a given work of art depends',[20] while the latter, according to the term's inventor, Erwin Panofsky, 'is that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form'.[21] Panofsky, inspired by his colleague Ernst Cassirer's work on 'symbolic form', influentially sought to establish a method of linking the formal qualities of art to their larger cultural (especially literary) historical contexts. Importantly, Panofsky did not designate an 'icon' as a separate kind of sign, but rather used the word to cover his general contextual approach to all images in the visual field.[22]

We draw on both of these traditions – semiology and iconology to propose that icons are images that circulate as signs and convey meaning in ways that do not always follow the lexical rules of verbal language.[23] Departing from Peirce, we can also say that urban icons are born as visual objects, but they do not necessarily, or even usually, envelop their meaning in their form. For instance, the Eiffel Tower represents Paris, Frenchness, modernity, but none of these concepts looks like the shape of the tower. In agreement with Peircian semiotic terms, however, this is

[19] Charles Saunders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vols. I–VI ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, vols. VII–VIII ed. Arthur W. Burks (Cambridge, MA, 1931), I. III. III 195. Quoted in 'icon, n', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <http://dictionary.oed.com> (10 May 2005).

[20] Keith Moxey, 'Panofsky's concept of "iconology" and the problem of interpretation in the history of art', *New Literary History*, 17, 2 (Winter 1986), 266.

[21] Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York, 1962), 3.

[22] The first chapter of Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology* (3–31), a thorough and systematic explication of the method, distinguishes various levels and dimensions of form ('style', 'motif') and meaning ('symbolical values'), but never mentions the word 'icon'. Panofsky does not even cite Peirce, which supports our contention that iconology and semiology form two distinct traditions.

[23] See William K. Wimsatt, *Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington, KY, 1954). He writes: 'the term *icon* is used to-day by semeiotic [*sic*] writers to refer to a verbal sign which *somehow* shares the properties of, or resembles, the objects which it denotes'. Quoted in 'icon, n', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <http://dictionary.oed.com> (10 May 2005).

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still an iconic 'sign' because it is a representational shape rather than an arbitrary symbol – rather like the pictographic form of Chinese characters. While the signifier is an iron tower of unique shape and specific historical origin, the signified is not the tower itself, but all that the Eiffel Tower has come to represent as part of a global landscape. The Hollywood sign is an even more complicated case: a typographical 'sign', it is also a monumental structure, so its specific, undulating configuration on Mt Lee above Los Angeles is the actual form reproduced. The Hollywood sign (as icon) is a *picture* of the word 'HOLLYWOOD' that sits on the slope of Mt Lee. The iconic sign and the lexical one are mutually influential, however. Saying or writing 'Hollywood' reproduces and circulates meaning that was also or was previously produced and circulated via the visual configuration of the 50-foot tall letter-sculptures on the slopes of Mt Lee.

Urban icons, then, are signs born when symbols become images but are not thereafter limited to their incarnation as images. They originate in specific places – *cities* – and convey meanings that are not only urban but also national, global, religious, ideological, personal, political, commercial, emotional and in all ways historical, *as mediated by the urban context*. While as a subclass of symbols they are also (with signs in general) unstable carriers of multiple, perspectival, ideological and often contradictory meanings, they can also achieve some measure of universal, cross-cultural meaning. They are 'universal' and not necessarily hegemonic because no one ever seems to have intended that they become icons, although some were purpose-built as 'monumental' in one way or another. Perhaps owing to their unintended universalism, they also function as lightning rods for contestation and conflict.

Urban icons, according to Jérôme Monnet, are images of symbols that circulate through material supports such as books, postcards and billboards. In his definition, icons are an image of a symbol in a sort of second-order symbolization. An urban symbol, for Monnet, is a material object such as Mexico City's Angel monument, or the Torre Latinamerica skyscraper, or even the ubiquitous Volkswagen Beetle 'Vocho' ('Bug') taxicabs of that city. They symbolize the Mexican nation, modernity or democracy, but each symbol needs to be iconized in order to 'diffuse its meaning and to structure a collective representation of place'. At this stage in the study of urban icons, we take Monnet's formulation to be plausible and yet still heuristic. While Monnet's distinction between symbols and icons is appealing because it is so systematic, different authors in this collection apply this distinction in a variety of ways. (See essay in Multimedia Companion.)

The articles presented here raise many questions that would be consistent with the definition of 'urban icon' as we have presented it here. Are urban icons more often positive (the Statue of Liberty) than negative (the Guillotine)? Do they encode a devotional quality? Have there always been urban icons or is there an 'iconic' moment of world history, one that

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is inseparable from the rise of global trade and the explosion of printed visual culture during the Renaissance, the later advent of photography and the formation of a transnational global urbanized world? In the on-line Multimedia Companion to this issue, we entertain the very real possibility that the Eiffel Tower is actually the original and defining urban icon, a hypothesis that would ground urban icons in the modern era. If that hypothesis bears out, then is it possible that urban icons are the *corpus mysticum* of modernity?[24]

Drawing on the essays published here and based on the discussions that developed during the Urban Icons conference, we offer the following elements as part of our working definition of icons and urban icons:

All icons

(1) Are graphic simplifications and condensations of meaning. They distil a range of ideas into a single representation and act metonymically as a substitute for a multi-faceted whole.
(2) Circulate across semiotic forms and across media.
(3) Are both singular and repeated.
(4) Function as visual clichés, despite variation.

Urban icons

(1) Approximate the status of an ultimate or summary representation of a particular city.
(2) Embed the materiality of experience but also de-territorialize it through the mobility of the circulation of images.
(3) Are 'visually noisy' attention-grabbers, addressed to a distracted viewer.
(4) Carry the stamp of place and time, usually that of the icon's origin but often of its re-casting in later historical moments.
(5) Depend in part on size and location because these features contribute centrally to the quality of legibility.

The historical narrative

Not surprisingly, the articles in this special issue can be arranged in historical sequence. If one traces the arguments made from Diane Favro's look at ancient Rome through Bronwen Wilson's concentration on early modern Venice and print culture through the other articles each of which principally examines a moment in the twentieth century, we can identify the emergence and proliferation of urban icons over time. The

[24] The concept of the *corpus mysticum* is explicated in Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, 1997; originally 1957).

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critical question is whether and how that sequence matters to the general investigation of urban icons. While this field is too immature to establish certain chronologies, the conference papers and ensuing discussion did reinforce a chronology that hinges on two key moments: the rise of print-media in the early modern era (Wilson's essay on Venice) and the rise of photography in the nineteenth century. These modes of representation seemed to bear equal weight as keys to understanding a history of urban icons with the opening of the Eiffel Tower, which emerged forcefully as the archetype for all urban icons to follow, or at least as the most obvious point of comparison in the conference discussion. Concerning this chronology, the jury will need to remain sequestered until more studies are produced, especially for the period before the modern modes of representation of print and photography.

The clustering of the rest of the articles in and around different moments in the twentieth century leaves too many developments hanging as potential causal factors. The rise and spread of urban icons may result from developments as large as capitalism, as urbanization itself and/or the changes in the technologies of representation already mentioned. But smaller developments may also prove instrumental: those as specific as tourism (and its postcards) and advertising (and its logos). We have probably stacked the deck unfairly by foregrounding our own belief in the importance of the history of representation in understanding what is modern in all this. The image, in such an account, is the gold of modernity's symbolic field, the city its privileged spatial expression. The articles also suggest we need to ask what role local, national and transnational cultural configurations each play in making cities more or less iconic or what roles these contexts play as icons develop in association with a particular place.

Diane Favro's article on ancient Rome argues that Eiffel Tower-type urban icons may not have existed to depict the city of Rome. She suggests that the modern notion of the icon relies on a culture of 'sight-bites', aerial views and the relatively easy global distribution of images. Although she acknowledges that there were graphic simplifications used to signify some cities (the owl for Athens; Icarus for Knossos), she argues that the capital of the Empire operated in an entirely different register because knowledge of Rome as a place could not be separated from the sense that Rome was contiguous with the world itself. Further study is needed in order to determine whether the ancients used the Colossus as a graphic shorthand for Rhodes or the Lighthouse or Library as the icon of Alexandria in the way that we have come to see Paris and the Eiffel Tower.

Bronwen Wilson suggests that the early modern rise of print culture facilitated many of the elements we associate with icons: repetition, circulation and the reduction of many concepts into a summary whole. She identifies two historically specific structures that emerged from print culture and through which Venice became a privileged site: the association

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of costumed people with the city and the bird's-eye view. Again, it is impressive that Wilson's investigation did *not* yield the Piazza San Marco, the Palace of the Doges or the symbol-topped twin columns on the adjoining Piazzetta: the opening to the Grand Canal from the Square and presumably one of the most impressive visual introductions to the city in its golden age. Although she does not address these objects in her article, we could infer from her argument that these landmarks were converted into urban icons much later, as the indispensable commodities of the modern tourist industry.[25]

If the historical narrative we have sketched points to the emergence of urban icons in the modern era, the articles also reveal historical change at a different time scale: the life-cycle of specific objects. As Jeffrey Wasserstrom puts it, is an icon born or does it become one over time? In his case, the Customs House in Shanghai was both: born an icon because of customs houses that came before and especially meaningful as an icon of Shanghai in the years that followed its construction. Then, as his article demonstrates, the Customs House and 'Big Ching' came to work differently after the 1949 revolution and again after Pudong's rise across the river from it very recently.

Joachim Schlör's study of the Berlin Wall foregrounds this process of change at the generational scale of time, but also raises new questions about urban icons in the late twentieth century. The wall became an icon, he argues, only when it ceased to exist. For its almost 30 years of life, people living near it turned away from it. It was, however, immediately appropriated as a symbol by forces on either side of the culture of division that it signified: a political division that became embedded in city spaces. If the Brandenburg Gate is an urban icon of the monumental type, the Berlin Wall seems to fall into some other category. It had neither architectural nor visual ambitions, but gained them secondarily.

The articles also suggest that once an icon, not always an icon. Sometimes they become outdated and overshadowed; sometimes their meanings and uses are transformed; sometimes they take on new vitality through the filter of nostalgia. Icons seem to emerge in a blaze of novelty but often endure as they embed a sense of their historicity. They stand as powerful emblems of what was novel and is now archaic. And sometimes, as with the Eiffel Tower, they endure with an incredibly powerful half-life. Tracking the careers of particular icons over time, we imagine, will tell us as much about icons as a mechanism of representation in a certain historical moment as it will about the place represented. Greater attention to the 'icons'

[25] It is certainly suggestive, however, that the visual commodification of Piazza San Marco was powerfully advanced by Canaletto's prolifically produced and pre-photographic Venetian oil paintings of the eighteenth century (executed with the camera obscura), so successfully marketed among the London bourgeoisie. If Wilson's analysis is correct, then the circulation of these urban icons is a phenomenon of more recent vintage, perhaps a function of photography and the postcard, but the research is yet to be performed.

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element in 'urban icons' will reveal the historically specific qualities of representation and whether they vary more over time or differ more from city to city and thus place to place.

Edward Dimendberg's article asks the challenging question of whether the urban icon's moment has now come and gone. He suggests that the 'static' nature of the singular, monumental icon seems inappropriate to the kinesis associated with Los Angeles' freeway culture. Our own treatment of circulation in the Multimedia Companion to this special issue may cast Dimendberg's post-iconic hypothesis in a different light, however. The urban icon puts static monuments into motion, after all, and it is entirely possible that some processes of iconization, inherent in the global traffic in images, transmute mere urban monuments into icons. Rome's Colosseum may be such an urban icon, for, according to Favro, it did not have iconic status in the era of the Roman Empire itself but has since come to serve as a shorthand graphic for the city of Rome as well as its identity as the greatest of ancient empires.

We hope that this collection of essays will stimulate others to probe these questions of historical change. Whether or not we could isolate the 'modernity' factor was a guiding question of the conference. While we found many clues that suggested we could so isolate it, there remain many questions about its implications. Does each epoch generate icons or urban icons, in ways that are dependent upon the defining communications media of that time? A chronology might be possible in terms of media: coinage for the ancients; typographic text and printed engravings for the early moderns; photography for the moderns; digital 'new media' for the postmoderns. If any such sequence were viable, we think the evidence presented in his collection strongly suggests that forms of each previous epoch are incorporated into the forms of the successive epochs: that the textuality of the early modern era became part of the photographic media of the modern, and so on.

The atlas

This project outlines a narrative of time that also moves across the globe. We suggest the 'atlas' is an appropriate historical model for the structure of our digital Multimedia Companion to this collection of essays. The genre of atlas emerged in the early modern period to describe any compendium of 'global' knowledge: the manner of organization varies almost infinitely. An atlas always mixes typographic and pictorial or cartographic text – that is the sole defining requirement. Giuliana Bruno's brilliant *Atlas of Emotion* is a history *in* motion, of the architectural and cinematic spaces of the modern era. Bruno shows that the critique of the disciplinary knowledge of the modern empires and states does not preclude making humanistic, feminist, counter-hegemonic maps. If the sin of cartography is to freeze

https://doi.org/10.1017/S096392680600349X Published online by Cambridge University Press

life, then the solution is to make maps that move and even emote.[26] All articles from the conference, in this special issue, and in the Multimedia Companion, commit to specific geohistorical interpretation even while asking whether icons participate in a certain de-territorialization of urban knowledge. There is general agreement that urban icons, whether they were born as monuments, as symbols, or of such banal, un-iconic matter as the concrete of freeways or East/West walls – even razed walls – 'take-off' from the ground at certain historical moments and circulate in image form around the globe. We suspect that one could argue that urban icons have intrinsically transnational meaning.

By positing an atlas, we trace a narrative that transpired across city spaces as well as over time. For example, what is the connection between the construction of the Eiffel Tower and the skyscraper race in New York not 20 years later? Most research has explained each project locally by looking at the urban, regional or national contexts that produced these phenomenal projects. If grouped together, they might serve as emblems of the great engineering moment in the West when buildings could embody in form an increasingly grandiose human imagination. But we still do not have a narrative that presumes that there is an actual connection between the Eiffel Tower and the skyscrapers of Manhattan; in which the large Parisian head-turner, whose timing in and around the innovation of the postcard and the world-focus on Paris for the Expositions of 1889 and 1900, made it a reference-point for urban signification. It is hard to believe that the enthusiasm for the skyward building in New York was unrelated to the Eiffel Tower.

The articles here suggest that such connections might yield interesting results. For example, in Jeffrey Wasserstrom's on-line essay, the city images on the walls of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (image 9) feature London as their centrepiece, suggesting that London played a central role in the shaping of the self-representation of banks in China. Wasserstrom also suggests that we might juxtapose icons that represent time with those that represent space or at least question whether there are temporal urban icons, spatial urban icons or whether they always represent a spatio-temporal conjuncture. In his example, the Customs House today serves as a representation of 'Old Shanghai' which became fixed as the Shanghai of the 1930s. Does St Peter's freeze Rome in the Papal Renaissance; St Paul's Cathedral freeze London in the seventeenth century? How does the prominence of the Eiffel Tower, associated with the Belle Epoque, arrest Paris in a look that makes it permanently associated with the start of the last century? The place, Paris, then becomes represented as the time, 1900. Or, for example, did the freeway become the icon of Los Angeles because, at the moment in the 1960s–70s, when important new analyses of the city began to emerge, the freeways were still novel? In what ways do icons

[26] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S096392680600349X Published online by Cambridge University Press

encode notions of novelty and the present? When urban icons get worn out, do they just fade away?

The articles vacillate between considerations of icons within the context of a particular city, with the local urban dweller as their primary audience and those interpretations that hinge on the notion that icons really provide information about the city, condensed and packaged for consumption by people not already associated with it. Schlör suggests that for Berliners, the wall, while it ran its course, served as an obstacle or a boundary but not an icon. But now tourists flock to Berlin to see the wall that is no longer there. In Reyner Banham's Los Angeles, the car serves as the tour guide: Banham's is an outsider's vision of Los Angeles from the start. Wilson explains that the costume images were tailored to non-Venetian audiences but that eventually Venetians started to recognize themselves in the print culture geared to outsiders. Wasserstrom demonstrates that the English-language press cared deeply about 'Big Ching', a popular and spontaneous name that implies the naming of the icon by non-Chinese. The Hollywood sign was never even remotely planned as an icon to stand for a movie industry, much less the entire metropolis of Los Angeles, as it often does. Myriad interests and audiences shaped that sign into an icon – ironically, sarcastically, sincerely or routinely.

Tourism created a flood of representations of place in a summary and telegraphic fashion.[27] Over the course of the touristic twentieth century, advertising has also established powerful conventions of commercial visual and verbal story-telling in which icons have become one of the key visual tools in the construction of branding. The icon transmits narrative information about the city as well as signifying the city in general. Icons help in the 'branding' of cities.[28]

But urban icons also tell us about the history of urban viewing. Whether native or foreign, urban icons imply an aerial perspective in two ways: they seem connected to aerial views (such as the bird's eye or the panorama) but they also seem to have literally left the ground. Unlike a monument, which is firmly rooted in its physical place, urban icons telegraph meaning about place in a way that is not at all dependent on being literally coincident with or physically located at the time in the place it denotes. In fact, the test of an urban icon may be in its deracination and global circulation as an image.

Because urban icons circulate as images, one might argue that they are dematerialized. Yet our sense is that the power of icons resides in the fact that they embed within themselves something of the materiality of urban experience. It was remarked upon during the course of the conference

[27] See Gerry and Chris Phil Kearns (eds.), *Selling Places: The City as Cultural Capital, Past and Present* (New York, 1993); Greg Ringer (ed.), *Destinations: Cultural Landscapes of Tourism* (London and New York, 1998); Orvar Löfgren, *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing* (Berkeley, 1999).

[28] See James Twitchell, *Branded Nation* (New York, 2004).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S096392680600349X Published online by Cambridge University Press

that many of the icons began their lives as objects that could be touched, climbed into, through or onto. This tactile relationship is part of the traditional Christian notion of icons in the first place – why one might think of icons as the 'corpus mysticum' of a secular society. This would hold for the range of objects and experience that become icons but the very sensory nature of the 'thick description' of the urban context makes the urban icon a particularly potent subject for iconization.

This is why a view itself is not an 'icon' although certain views can become standardized as visual clichés. All visual clichés are not icons, but all icons are visual clichés. Icons circulate as images and thus imply mobility. In one conference discussion, participant Jeannene Przyblyski suggested that one of the strengths of the icon as a representation was the way it forged a middle ground between the physical environment and free-floating images. She remarked upon all the images depicting the delight in the physical dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989, or in a different instance, the need the terrorists of 11 September had literally to make physical contact with the iconic towers by ramming airplanes into the buildings that they otherwise knew in image-form. She argued that these moments help us understand what separates icons from other images. They are points of contact between the mobile and the static; the material and the image.

This idea of a residual concreteness in images may not be necessary, however, when it is recognized that all images circulate in concrete media of some sort. Further, Giuliana Bruno suggested that images, considered in the 'haptic' dimension of lived experience, are no less than architectures that can be inhabited. She thus resists the dichotomy between the materiality of experience and the seeming immateriality of images.

The atlas we propose here is, like all atlases, partial and incomplete. So much so, we hope that it suggests much more than it contains, which is not inconsiderable. The five articles in this special issue of the printed *Urban History* yield many urban icons between them. In the on-line Multimedia Companion, we add essays on the Eiffel Tower, the Hollywood sign and Jérôme Monnet's geosociology of Mexico's urban icons. We have also densely hyperlinked the articles with one another through modes of navigation that enable the reader to follow a side range of ideas and facts interactively. We urge you to enter our on-line atlas to examine a very different way of experiencing our research results. (See link at the beginning of this Introduction.) The 'atlas' not only offers a new media version of this project but also suggests, we hope, the profound connection between urban visual history, space, icons and the developing digital environment.

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