

“Irish Icons and Iconoclasts”

The 4th Irish Studies & Cultural Theory Summer School, Vienna
Co-Hosted by the Vienna and EUF Centres for Irish Studies: 10-14 July 2023

Registration is now open for an ECTS-accredited week of lectures, seminars, and screenings with internationally renowned Irish studies and cultural theory scholars at the Vienna Centre for Irish Studies!

From the Gaelic past until the world of today, there has been a constant debate of the representational power of pictorial, written, and other types of signs in the field of Irish studies. Important stages of this debate may be attributed to the pre-scriptural and pre-Christian Celtic tradition, the Catholic veneration of images, the Protestant cult of the written word as an ‘iconoclast turn’ triggered by the reformation movement and inflicted on Ireland by the Tudor Conquest in the 16th century, the symbolism of the 18th becoming markers of national identity in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the post-1990s’ ‘iconic turn’ as a follow-up movement of the twentieth century ‘linguistic turn.’ Understandings of icons and iconoclasm become entwined with questions of representationalism, synecdoche/metonymy, art, resistance, identity, nationalism, and (the breaking of) stereotypes/symbols.

Although the symbolic (written) sign bears absolutely no resemblance to the concept it signifies, semioticians and linguists from the field of ‘iconicity’ claim that – even in the latter case of the written word – there is some non-arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. Are pictorial, written, and other types of signs motivated by a mimetic or an intentional relationship between their material body, the conceptual mind-map, and the ‘real things’ in the material world they are supposed to signify? Or is this relationship entirely arbitrary and constructed by way of sociocultural conventions? Does a sign, as Saussure points out, signify by connecting its signifier with its signified? Or is there a referent it points towards in the material world, as explained by C. S. Peirce? And where does Peirce’s categorization of iconic (pictorial), indexical, and symbolic (written) signs fit in this paradigm? Is there some non-arbitrary relationship between a pictorial (iconic) sign’s signifier and signified, or is it the opposite, as in Saussure’s representational arbitrariness?

These and many other aspects of scholarly debate will constitute a central focus of our 2023 Summer School with its thematic range from pre-scriptural Celtic signs to the recent image (or idolatrous idol?) of the Celtic Tiger, to the representation of and resistance against Irish symbols in the present. In so doing, this summer school positions Ireland as the cradle of the Eurocentric Christian Western tradition on the cultural map of a global village – a cultural sphere dominated by state-of-the-art information technology and digital visual culture from Silicon Valley.

Owing to these and related aspects, the theme of the 2023 Vienna Summer School offers students the opportunity to work with leading figures in the field to develop and deepen their analytical skills and theoretical knowledges in these wide-ranging critical conversations. Through guided close readings and discussions of the interfaces between word and image in Irish literature, drama, art, music, film, television, and popular culture, students and lecturers will explore diverse modes of (mis)representing, performing, articulating, witnessing, and deconstructing the iconic turn.

The Summer School is co-organized by the Europa-Universität Flensburg and Vienna Centres for Irish Studies. It will allow students and lecturers to address a diverse range of topics, genres, media, platforms, and historical-cultural contexts, such as:

- mimetic, intentional, constructivist approaches to cultural representation
- Peircean semiotics, Saussurean structuralism, poststructuralist approaches by Barthes, Lacan etc.
- iconicity: logos in language, logos in pictures
- indigenous Irish cinema and the challenge to mainstream representations of Ireland
- the representational power of the word and the image; intermediality and intertextuality
- pictorial art and mechanical reproduction (Benjamin); ‘authenticity’ and the simulacrum (Baudrillard); the postmodern condition (Lyotard): pre-digital pictorial arts, photography, digital media
- idolatrous (fake) signs, the Catholic Veneration of images, the fetish, the abject etc.
- gender, ethnicity, and semiosis; the phallogocentric and the WASP gaze
- imagology, auto- & hetero-stereotypes
- images of the past: ekphrasis, epic landscape, murals, and other media of cultural memory
- the legendary and the folkloric as archetypes
- iconoclasm and the politics of public space
- film, drama, and performativity: moving pictures on screen, stage etc.
- word and image: the emblem, graphic novels, public monuments etc.
- the living picture as iconographic and iconoclastic
- the uncanny icon and the incarnation of the abject
- caricatures and their role in the creation of “icons”

Accreditation: The Summer School will be accredited according to the ECTS system: 2 ECTS points (attendance) or 5 ECTS points with term paper (to be handed in by 15 September).

Confirmed speakers: Ciara **Chambers** (*University College Cork*), Katherine **Ebury** (*University of Sheffield*), Dieter **Fuchs** (*University of Vienna*), Christopher **Herzog** (*Paris-Lodron-Universität Salzburg*), Barry **Monahan** (*University College Cork*), Jack **Quin** (*University of Birmingham*), Michelle **Witen** (*Europa-Universität Flensburg*); with more to be announced...!

Venue: Dept. of English & American Studies, University of Vienna, Hof 8.3, Spitalgasse 2-4, 1090 Vienna

Organisers: Dieter Fuchs & Michelle Witen

Fee: € 100 for access to all talks, seminars, screenings, social events (€ 30 for students who are fully registered at the University of Vienna)

Registration: Email your name and affiliation to dieter.fuchs@univie.ac.at by **1 July 2023**.