

Icons Bridging Past and Present

Brooklyn Bridge (NYC) and Chain Bridge (Budapest)¹

Bridging Icons

Nowadays a shift towards exploiting the power of icons and placing them into the service of education is coming to the forefront. In the field of Global American Studies special attention is given to American icons that have traveled to many parts of the world. In the 1980s the U.S. had been often accused of cultural imperialism, as more and more products became not only known, but due to the market economy, also globally available. This was partly the result of the development and the diversification of media outlets and, from the mid-1990s, following the creation of the Internet and the launch of the Web, media shifted to a new paradigm. Reacting to critical instances, more voices started to be heard, which dismissed the imperialistic claims by explaining that all the products that have ever left the U.S. shores to become icons had first been “digested” and critically evaluated by the residents of the highly multicultural and diverse U.S. society, which homes people coming from the entire world. In 1992 the famous sociologist Todd Gitlin argued that “[b]y the time it leaves our shores, U.S. popular culture has been ‘pretested’ by a heterogeneous public – a huge internal market with hybrid tastes and a tradition of juxtaposition and recombining disparate elements, melting them into a Hollywood *mélange*.”² Consequently, American icons were deemed to find their way also to other continents, as they have always universally carried valid symbolic values. Following the technological developments of the 20th century, we may argue that national symbols from any country in the world could rightfully turn into globally accessible icons.

Similarly to proverbs, whose lexical inventory and sense relations usually provide a snapshot of the longtime forgotten functioning of a society, icons can also behave as bi- or even tridimensional diachronic and synchronic “print screens” of the cultures and nations that have generated them. In order to fully exploit the symbolic load of the chosen two icons – Brooklyn Bridge (New York) and Chain Bridge (Budapest) – the perspectives of analysis have to be established.

From an educational perspective, firstly we have to consider the form and content of the knowledge we wish to impart. With the digital culture gaining considerable

1 This paper is dedicated to Professor Tibor Frank, whom I am crediting for the success I have attained in my professional career in American Studies in the past nearly three decades. For the academic world, to this day, Professor Frank has been and will always remain a pre-eminent iconic scholar, who – with thoughtful guidance and highly seasoned professional background – has bridged past and present, national and international boulevards of knowledge, allowing and providing access to and offering understandings of major global issues.

2 “Tömegkultúra: Változások és változatok,” *USA* 78 (1993): 51–66.

ground, and the young “now” generation of digital natives living in a media saturated world where information is available 24/7 and where news become obsolete in a matter of hours at best, the current educational trends are characterized by an important paradigmatic shift from an old or canonized curriculum based on memorizing information from “Great Books” to a new one aimed at introducing students to major approaches to develop critical thinking and knowledge structures. With this in mind one might have to reconsider the teaching process and adopt what is being labeled currently as “flipped learning,” where students operate with information available from an environment familiar to them, namely with all the information that is available through new media in general, and the presence of the iconic perspective of their micro- and macro society in particular. The current young generation undeniably needs constant stimulation, which can be achieved best through offering them the relevant information – once an organic part of the curricula – through new approaches and devices.

Secondly, we have to analyze the channel through which the information is transmitted. As we have mentioned before, a new – apparently chaotic – communication paradigm is impacting cognitive processes. As media is continuously flooding us, we put our minds on automatic pilot to protect ourselves, which might not be the best solution, as thus our minds are unconsciously manipulated. What is important is to consciously develop media literacy, which is not a palpable “thing” or “product,” but a process in itself.

My decision to highlight the role of the two bridges has a two-fold aim. On the one hand, the paper intends to analyze the process of iconization of two major constructions in the history of both the American and the Hungarian nations, and to provide a snapshot of the societal background against which they had been created. On the other hand, it tries to reveal similarities and an unquestionable link between cultures during a historical time in which information did not travel at such high speed. In this light, the major scope of the paper is to find what approaches should be adopted when exploiting the multidimensional messages of these two icons.

In intercultural communication, the first step in developing cultural awareness, which further generates acceptance and empathy, is to admit that all cognitive processes are highly ethnocentric as any individual starts to dissect the world through their own individual prism. Thus, an icon which has already been evaluated by smaller communities as well as by the society at large over decades or even centuries, first and foremost expresses the idea that the traditional concept of culture is a concept of inner homogenization and an outer separation at the same time. An icon encompasses all the underlying values a smaller or a larger community attributes to a particular construction, which finally labels it as unique. Although this traditional concept of interior homogenization and exterior delimitation might generate cultural fundamentalism, it is important to consider this concept when examining the birth of a construct and how ultimately this can be considered a record of the historical times in which it was created. Therefore, I will consider the two bridges from this perspective, and will analyze what

led to their construction and what values they have been carrying ever since their erection.

In our times, cultures are interconnected and mixed, thus their entanglement engenders new identifications with local and global issues. Icons no longer carry only national values, as they leave the borders of national cultures. Interculturality and multiculturalism have benevolent effects, as they overcome and repair the flaws that can be encountered in the traditional ethnocentric approach to culture and they overcome and repair these flaws. Iconicity begins when a construction or a masterpiece of art moves from very famous to iconic and starts exhibiting also an emblematic power. Iconic images have a set of underlying features, which help them achieve a high status. Once reaching iconic status, they are adapted to commercial and advertising ends.³ Questions arise as to whether icons can travel with the same message load over generations, or to what extent an interest can be raised in people towards feel an inner drive to analyzing and understanding the transformation of icons.

In American Studies, the Brooklyn Bridge might rightfully prove a topic of interest. For pedagogical ends, this outstanding construction can be a starting point in drawing a parallel between the United States and Hungary at the onset of the 20th century, as very often an international icon can place similar national icons on our own radar – for instance the Chain Bridge – which carry similar messages.

Bridging Social, Economic and Political Issues

As to the geopolitical background, Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske, in the Introduction to their book entitled *Budapest and New York, Studies in Metropolitan Transformation, 1870–1930*⁴ argued that in 1870 New York and Budapest were “peripheral cities” on the perimeters of the European core and had metropolitan ambitions which would raise them to the levels of importance of Paris and London for New York City, and of Paris and Vienna for Budapest. This metropolitan ambition also had political significance and was coupled with civic aspirations. In both cases the cities were the expression of powerful and fast modernizing states, which were gradually gaining political significance. For the United States the end of the Civil War (1865), while in Hungary the formation of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867) set the framework for the development. Beyond their historical importance and past, Budapest and New York were striving to become centers for economic modernization. Although in the history of Hungary the Dual Monarchy had left equivocal feelings, we may admit that at that time Austria-Hungary was the greatest multinational state in Europe, with several ethnic groups not having always had a well-balanced presence in the partnership. The two cities, New York and Budapest, wanted to be more a metropolis than a historical center of their countries.

3 Martin Kemp, *Christ to Coke, How an Image Becomes an Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1–10.

4 Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske, eds., *Budapest and New York, Studies in Metropolitan Transformation, 1870–1930* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1994), 1–28.

What is the iconic meaning of a bridge? Literally it fosters mobility and links people on both sides of a water stretch, figuratively it unites values and sets a new pace in the development of a country or region. The Széchenyi Chain Bridge in Budapest, also known as Iron Bridge, was designed by the English architect William Tierney Clark and built by the Scottish civil engineer Adam Clark (1849), while Brooklyn Bridge in New York City was designed and built by German immigrant John Roebling and his son Washington (1867–1883); two bridges whose completion preceded and forecast political consolidation. Important infrastructural steps followed: in Hungary the historical districts of Buda, Óbuda and Pest were united in 1872. Manhattan and Bronx were unified in 1876 with Brooklyn and Queens, and in 1898 with Staten Island. In addition to bridges, urban modernity was also emerging in the form of a new technological invention – the subways – which have become iconic for the respective cities: Budapest (1896) and New York City (1904).

The birth of both cities is closely related to stories and also urban legends according to which physical impediment of crossing the river in wintertime urged the progressive thinkers of the era to design and build a permanent crossing. In Budapest this decision had been taken after Count Széchenyi, the driving force behind the construction of the bridge, could not attend his father's funeral as the drift ice on the Danube had closed the pontoon bridge. In New York a story reveals that

[o]n a wintry 1853 day, John Roebling found himself stranded on the East River between New York and Brooklyn when ice chunks in the East River prevented the ferry from moving. According to his son Washington, the incident inspired the progressive engineer and nascent philosopher to build a bridge that would tame the tumultuous channel and connect the two cities.⁵

Two days after the inauguration on May 26, 1883, commenting on the architectural value of Brooklyn Bridge, *Harper's Weekly* published an article written by Montgomery Schuyler entitled *The Bridge as a Monument*, where the author talks about incorporating tensions in the bridge: "It so happens that the work which is likely to be our most durable monument, and to convey some knowledge of us to the most remote posterity, is a work of bare utility; not a shrine, not a fortress, but a bridge."⁶ Thus the form and function of the bridge integrate the contradictory values of a rapidly changing America. Modernism, while improving communication and transportation, widened the gap between the working and the middle classes, simultaneously unifying and stratifying, and Brooklyn Bridge was situated where the two processes intersected. "The success of a suspension

5 Jennifer Pricola, "Incorporating Tensions in the Brooklyn Bridge," Epilogue; University of Virginia, accessed August 23, 2015, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma03/pricola/bridge/home.html>.

6 David McCullough, "The Great Bridge: The Epic Story of the Building of the Brooklyn Bridge," Erenow, accessed July 17, 2015, <https://erenow.com/common/the-great-bridge-the-epic-story-of-the-building-of-the-brooklyn-bridge/25.html>

bridge relies on the inherent tension of its structure. Just as with the physics of a suspension bridge, tensions bind America; its society stands on – and gains strength from – the incorporation of conflicting interests and ideologies.”⁷

The bridge over the Danube, built between 1839 and 1848, inaugurated on November 21, 1849 and fully accomplished in 1857 with the opening of the tunnel linking it with the Castle area, was not just the embodiment of the export of British technology, but also an ignitor of the reform movement, starting with the traditional Hungarian privileges, and consequently the feudal system, having been breached by compelling the nobility to pay bridge tolls, thus the project had opened the way towards the establishment of a capitalist financial and banking system.⁸ Similarly to Brooklyn Bridge, Chain Bridge, an iconic symbol of Budapest, has been considered not only a magnificent but also a masterpiece of art, useful to the country ever since its erection.⁹

The Bridges as Heideggerian “Things”

Before tackling the physical birth of the two bridges in more detail, I propose to approach the question equally from a philosophical perspective. Quoting Paddock we may say that the concept and the interpretation of bridges is “firmly grounded in the physical and geographical impact that bridges have on space and place.”¹⁰ At this point it is worth remembering Martin Heidegger, who explored the impact that technology has had on mankind’s relationship with its immediate surroundings. According to him, technology has eradicated distinctions created by time and space. Human history in its entirety has been documented, filmed and laid before the audience for consumption. The presentation of distant cultures as final products, without an understanding of the background of the cultures resulted in the transformation of *things* into *objects*.¹¹ During a seminar in U.S. Media and Communication, when analyzing iconic sites in a TV series, blockbusters, on posters and book covers, very few students could talk about the values these two bridges represent, although they had studied both U.S. and Hungarian history, literature or even arts. The question then arises as to how we can incorporate the canonic knowledge of the Great Books in understanding iconicity.

At the time of their construction the two bridges had been the first to link Brooklyn and Manhattan, and Buda and Pest respectively, “physical things” that united two important settlements and spurred the development of the area. Thus, in both countries the bridges had proved to be a tangible symbol of the shift from agriculture to industry. Long Island and Pest meant the agriculture, New York and Buda meant the governance

7 Pricola, Introduction.

8 Troy R. E. Paddock, “Bridges: Technology and the Social,” *Environment, Space, Place* 2.2 (2010): 15.

9 András Török, *A Lánchíd mai fénytörésben* (Budapest: Ingatlanfejlesztői Kerekasztal Egyesület, 2013), 7.

10 Paddock, 8.

11 Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, 143–62 (New York: Harper and Row), 166, quoted in Paddock, 10.

on the way to industrialization and commerce, and a bridge was even more than a financial imperative. Many had been proponents, but at least as many had been opponents. In New York the construction of the bridge was seen as a menace to maritime commerce, a bad decision favoring a bridge that “would join two islands and neither link to the main land.”¹² In Hungary the bridge was felt to be a first step in weakening the feudal system and the privileges of the nobility. But time and fame have turned these two spans into pre-eminent icons, and all the subsequent bridges simply facilitated the further economic and socio-political growth of the two metropolises.

The picturesque opening line of the *Brooklyn Album* sets the geo-political framework for the Brooklyn Bridge at the beginning of the 19th century. “New York is a fantastic incongruity: at once a centralized metropolis through which the wealth of a nation flows and an isolated island community cut from its neighbors and the rest of the world [...]. [In 1811 the entire region was described as] those large arms of the seas which embrace New-York Island: the Hudson and the East rivers.”¹³ Public utility was behind the need of constructing the bridge, which seemed indispensable for the daily supply of the New York Borough and the enhancement of the inconveniences of daily commuting between the two banks. As Haw remarks: “The purpose of the bridge was for swift and sure transportation from bustling Brooklyn and lower New York, not from an unpopulated rural area to another.”¹⁴ Having completed the world’s first and longest suspension bridge carrying also railroad traffic over the Niagara Falls, Roebling designed the modernist iconic Brooklyn Bridge as a “pre-modern creation, built without trucks, telephones or any other now standard technologies [...]. Quite literally, the bridge was hand-made.”¹⁵

Before commissioning the construction of the bridge, count István Széchenyi travelled on several occasions to England to study from the most technologically advanced nation of his time.¹⁶ The “Report” Széchenyi had written included answers he had received from outstanding representatives of civil engineering, Thomas Telford, William Butler Ogden¹⁷ and Marc Isambard Brunel, famous for his tunnel beneath the Thames in London, who had advised him to opt for a suspended bridge in Budapest. For the Brooklyn Bridge, in a period when suspension bridges came of age 1829–1855, Telford’s Menai Straits Bridge in Wales¹⁸ had been a solid and common source of inspiration. As only a highly professional and seasoned architect should be commissioned with the building, Széchenyi argued that “this engineer has to be looked for in Britain and its American

12 Richard Haw, *Brooklyn Album: Art of the Brooklyn Bridge: A Visual History* (New York: Routledge / Taylor & Francis, 2008), 3.

13 Haw, 1.

14 Haw, 12.

15 Haw, 25.

16 Paddock, 14.

17 Lóránt Radnai, *A Lánchíd* (Budapest: Képzőművészeti Alap Kiadóvállalata, 1961), 14.

18 Haw, 11.

ally.”¹⁹ Telford’s former apprentice, Tierney Clark, builder of the wonderful Hammer-smith Bridge in London had been commissioned to design the bridge. The Chain Bridge finished in 1849 was a larger scale version of his suspension bridge over the Thames at Marlow, Buckinghamshire (1829–1832).

In New York, during the construction of Brooklyn Bridge, the physical hardships the workers had to endure while working in the deep caissons to stabilize the two towers in the unstable sandy sea bedrock yielded results and advancement in medical research related to the decompression sickness known as bends or caisson disease. Similar problems had also been experienced while constructing Chain Bridge in Budapest, although the problems with the pillars concerned the leaking of the caissons. As to the cables, both constructions had witnessed issues related to the wiring. In the case of the Brooklyn Bridge, at the beginning of the cabling process, substandard wire had been woven into the cable, causing fatalities among the workers. In Budapest, the members of the Bridge Consortium, in order to avoid fraud, had travelled abroad to check and purchase the best steel cables, trying to oversee their transportation as well, which sometimes took years before they reached their destination. Nevertheless, an incident went down in history when a chain link broke, hitting the working platform from which the workers, and the visiting Széchenyi fell into the river, but as a good swimmer the count made it safely to the shore. This had been his last official presence on the bridge, of which the final completion and inauguration, similarly to the Roeblings, he could not attend.

In addition to the physical construction, contemporary reports and related sources unveil the socio-economic and demographic fabric of the era. Bender and Schorske²⁰ provide an exquisite description of New York and Budapest, both of which having grown much faster than any other European and American cities. At the turn of the 20th century, Budapest grew twice as fast as Vienna, and three times as fast as Paris and London, by 1910 becoming the seventh largest city in Europe by exhibiting an “American pattern of growth.”

As far as the demographics are concerned, in Budapest the Chain Bridge had been a mediator fostering the unification of the traditional aristocratic elite identified with Buda and the emerging bourgeoisie elites identified with Pest. In New York bourgeois values were shared at both ends of the bridge. Another common aspect is that interestingly, the migrants and immigrants of New York and Budapest originated from the same regions of Central and Eastern Europe, but in Budapest the urban demography was very different from New York, where immigration increased the diversity of the population, which till then had predominantly been Dutch, English, German and Irish. In the wake of the 1867 reforms, the Kingdom of Hungary saw a consolidation in the use of the Hungarian language. As a result, and quoting Bender and Schorske, “In 1880, 18 percent of Budapest’s population spoke only Magyar. In 1910, one generation later, 47 percent of

¹⁹ Radnai, 17.

²⁰ Bender and Schorske, 2.

the population spoke only Magyar, with nearly all of the remaining Budapesters speaking Magyar as a second language.”²¹

Valuable information related to the urban fabric of contemporary Budapest can be found in accounts made by travelers. In his book entitled *The History of the Chain Bridge* (1947), Pál Vajda quotes fragments from a German travelogue,²² which among others describes the treatment of social classes and nationalities on the temporary pontoon bridge. From the account we learn that tall, young males with a big moustache standing at both ends of the bridge and “unfortunately speaking only German” allowed free passage on the bridge to the nobility, to the residents of the royal town, and based on well-established common law, to all the well-dressed, affluent people. Meanwhile the poor young craftsmen, the unlicensed beggars the young Jews, or for that matter the entire Jewish community whether rich or poor, the peasants and the poorly dressed foreigners were denied free access. The guards had become skilled in spotting a person’s rank or social status, recognized almost all the residents of both Pest and Buda, and on Sundays and holidays could easily spot the poor youngsters dressed in their most elegant festive clothes that would confer them a higher, toll-free rank. This tourist had witnessed additional inexplicable double standards. On several occasions he had seen that ragged Jewish children were denied free passage. He had also learned that the rich Jewish families from Pest usually paid an annual passage allowance for all the members of their families and to the domestics as well to avoid unpleasant treatment. Another piece of information – according to the writer, coming from an untrustworthy source – informs the reader about the Gypsies, who were always guaranteed free passage, regardless of their financial background.²³ In the book we can also find information about the origins of the workers on the construction site. On a prestige scale, the English workers were at the top as highly skilled, hard-working and extremely diligent. The Italians, usually from Trieste and Venice, were experts in bridge building. The scale continued with the locals – Germans and Hungarians, and ended with workers of Slavic origin at the bottom of the line. The double standards were also visible in the amount and way of payment. The English workers had been paid their weekly wages in separate barracks by English foremen, while the other nationalities got their money at an open air desk. The Italians were considered better labor force than the native German or Hungarian workers, which manifested in the 25 and 10 forints a week wages for the two groups respectively.²⁴

The Chain Bridge of Budapest, as the first permanent bridge linking Buda and Pest, had triggered considerable changes in the Hungarian mentality as well. We know that bridges not only link the opposite banks of a river, but they also unite nations and cultures. In his book dedicated to the birth of the bridge, Radnai²⁵ argued that the lack of a permanent connection must have been the source of the visible and persisting tension,

21 Bender and Schorske, 3–4.

22 Pál R. Vajda, *A Láncid története* (Budapest: Szikra Kiadás, 1947), 14.

23 Vajda, 14–15 (unless stated otherwise, all translations into English are mine).

24 Vajda, 30–31.

25 Radnai, 5.

and sharp differences in the mentality and behavior patterns of the people living on opposite riverbanks. People living west of the Danube had open and easy access to the latest gains of industrialization, could travel and do commerce all-year round. Whereas the eastern bank of the river, due to sometimes 5-month periods of frost and ice drifting on the Danube, remained in temporary isolation, consequently much of the eastern part of the country was disabled in keeping up with the pace of western development.

As a landmark, the Brooklyn Bridge – opened to the public on May 24, 1883, just three years prior to the Statue of Liberty, dedicated to the United States by France on October 28, 1886 – was among the first things the immigrants saw when arriving into the New World. A symbol of faith, “the fact that the bridge had been designed by an immigrant and built largely by immigrant workers did much naturally to enhance the appeal.”²⁶

The Bridges as Heideggerian “Objects”

Borrowing the term from functional-cognitive linguistics and echoing John Haiman (1980)²⁷ and Zoltán Kövecses (1995),²⁸ *iconicity* may also refer to a tendency to create a similarity or analogy between form and meaning. We might infer that icons in a new setting show a tendency of raising a sense of analogy, thus if something is iconic, it carries its own meaning, permeates many walks of life and facilitates the decoding of the message it vehiculates.

The bridge has captivated people throughout the U.S. as it stands for a local and national emblem of pride and achievement. Americans have received a new perspective on themselves and the world. Lewis Mumford argues that “[i]n this structure, the architecture of the past, massive and protective, meets the architecture of the future, light, aerial, open to sunlight, an architecture of voids rather than solids.”²⁹

Let us get a glimpse at some of the instances that vested the bridges with an immense iconic power and have taken them down into immortal history. In terms of mediation, the two bridges have reconfigured the two cities, physically altering the space and how people thought about and lived in that city.³⁰ In the planning phase John Roebling had already predicted that the bridge would also function as a destination: “Strangers in the city will be induced to make a trip for the sole purpose of enjoying the grand sight [...] observatories placed at the top of the towers would further enhance the bridge’s role as a tourism beacon.”³¹ Even during the building process, the workmen, calling themselves “Cowboys of the Skies” swinging on cables in the air conveyed a very cheerful and festive atmosphere to the construction site, creating “the cheapest and

26 McCullough, 547.

27 John Haiman, “The Iconicity of Grammar: Isomorphism and Motivation,” *Language* 56:3 (1980): 515–540.

28 Zoltán Kövecses, *American English: An Introduction* (Budapest: ELTE, 1995), 181.

29 Lewis Mumford, *Sticks and Stones* (New York, 1924), quoted in McCullough, 550.

30 Paddock, 23.

31 Haw, 16–17.

most entertaining circus of the world.”³² These first performances turned the span into “an energetic, fascinating new arena, a new Broadway and a forerunner to Times Square.”³³ Following its inauguration, and supported by the *New York Gazette*, the bridge experienced a cultural change, from a “sublime urban thoroughfare” to a public stage defined by human activity and show. The walkway itself was “alive to the sights and sounds of daily human life.”³⁴ The bridge, as a “thing” is an example of architectural eclecticism, weaving the modern steel filigree of the cables with the monumental Gothic towers. As an “object,” in a city “divided by money, class, and geography, the images showed the bridge as a popular, democratic space where the well-heeled shared space with the down-trodden.”³⁵

When talking about the rich photographic art of both bridges, we borrow Haw’s subtle description of the portraits and still images. “Viewed as a narrative, these static images read like the separate frames of time-lapse cinematography”³⁶ long before the birth of the movie industry. Out of the numerous photographers my interest has been raised by Alvin Langdon Coburn and Alfred Stieglitz, who combined art, science and technology to highlight the multiple faces of the bridge.

Both bridges have gained popularity being the launching pads of massive firework displays during national celebrations. As early as the end of the 1880s in New York Brooklyn Bridge had been the first electrified icon, and the sight of the lit bridge disseminated throughout the world the invention of the electric bulb in 1882 and the first step in the development of the electrified cityscape. The Chain Bridge, originally wonderfully illuminated with gas and oil candelabras finally, in the inter-war period, received magnificent lighting preserved and enjoyed to the present time.

The beauty and value of the bridges opened a new movement, when popular culture reached the realms of high Culture. The advertised icons were present not only on marketable products, but were cherished also in paintings, literature and theatre. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to list all the representations of the bridge, therefore I have chosen some of the masterpieces that have played an important role in shaping my esthetic development throughout the decades.

Very often paintings represented Brooklyn Bridge in the wintertime with reverberations of the river and the snow in contrast with the sky. This is best illustrated in the paintings of the impressionist Childe Hassam, who painted the bridge four times during his lifetime. On his canvases, we can see Roebling’s predictions, and also the “melting pot” concept of the multicultural society, namely that the span and its walkway are an urban thoroughfare in a space where high and low-class people walk side by side. As Henry James remarked, the bridge expressed both the polyglot and the densely inhabited New York City. In 1915 Albert Gleizer, famous Cubist painter and writer paints the

32 Haw, 45.

33 Haw, 108.

34 Haw, 105.

35 Haw, 87.

36 Haw, 61.

first of a series of four abstract representations of the bridge, unmatched to this day. Drawing on the ideology of the Hudson Valley School and of Manifest Destiny, the bridge was a heroic representation of “physical expansion and national glory.”³⁷ For John Marin, the bridge was “an active participant in the process speeding into a new century of modernity.”³⁸ The bridge has always been the reflection of contemporary times. From Haw’s historical album we learn that in the 1930s the Brooklyn Bridge was a reflection of the American crisis rather than of the American dream. Paradoxically, in the wake of the Great Depression, the New Deal Programs supported the work of the artists, who continued to add to the artistic patrimony of the nation. The famous romantic walkway lost its symbolic prevalence, and the bridge was represented as a backdrop for labor. In some paintings we can see the transition from rural poverty to urban development.

In pictography, the Chain Bridge has been immortalized in Miklós Barabás’s paintings depicting the laying of the foundation stone. Highlighting the role of the bridge in the further development of the country, the foregrounded crowd might suggest that collective action leads to independence. The two different versions illustrate the power of the bridge, as in the first one the notoriety of the country are in the foreground, while following the completion of the bridge, the renewed and re-thought painting opened the vantage point and focused on the people, showing how important the bridge had turned out to be soon after its completion. From among the great number of painters, I would like to mention Adolphe Rouargue, depicting the Chain Bridge around 1850, the several winter series painted by Antal Berkes – similarly to Hassan’s Brooklyn Bridge in winter time. Contemporary representations are also available, such as Éva Vaskó (2007) or a painting in the gilded era style by Éva Bényi (2016).

The media has always used the bridges to advertise magazines and books, posters of famous movies, even if the bridges did not play a part in the film. Brooklyn Bridge has been the graphic setting for *Cowboy from Brooklyn*, *Brooklyn Orchid*, *Blonde from Brooklyn*, just to mention a few from the past, current popular culture featuring the bridge in the *Castle* TV series (2008–2016). By the same token, we can also provide a counterexample, with the iconic novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* written by Betty Smith in 1943, whose plot starts in Williamsburg to continue in Brooklyn and New York City. From the title one would expect to see Brooklyn rather than Williamsburg Bridge on the cover of the book.

The Chain Bridge was featured in iconic movies *I Spy*, *Au Pair* and *Walking with the Enemy*. The blockbuster of the Bollywood movie *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (Straight from my Heart) features the Chain Bridge, Budapest, although the plot, parts of it having been filmed in Hungary, takes the viewer to Italy. There might be some reason behind the choice, as interestingly the Chain Bridge does have an alter-ego in the tiny little town of Bagni di Lucca in Toscana, a suspended bridge built in 1860.

37 Haw, 100.

38 Haw, 123–124.

The Brooklyn Bridge also brought changes to New York's physical, and with time the Manhattan skyline grew taller compared to the majestic power of the bridge, which no longer dominated the cityscape. In the past, celebrating the technological achievements of the times, people standing on the bridge were looking into the future. Nowadays standing on the bridge often calls for remembering the past. Since the end of the 20th century, the bridge has become more a symbol of Brooklyn rather than that of New York City, with people longing for quiet, small, tree-lined streets and cozy restaurants. The movie industry positioned the bridge as a cinematic icon on the screens turning it into an enigmatic symbol, carrying the past and heralding the future. The Brooklyn Bridge was the catalyst for the phenomenon of the skyscraper in New York City, foreshadowing a new standard of life. David McCullough noted in his book, *The Great Bridge: The Epic Story of the Building of the Brooklyn Bridge*, that "[e]ven before the bridge was opened it had become a symbol of something impossible to define that made New York different from every other city on earth. The bridge dominated the imagination the way it dominated the skyline."³⁹ The Brooklyn Bridge is the essential symbol of the American dream of success through hard work and perseverance, a perfect balance between the tangible and the ideal. It was tangible proof to the inhabitants of Brooklyn and Manhattan that the two cities could be united and transportation between the two sides became unproblematic. It also had the ideal air that somehow touched the lives of many people and the heart of culture in New York City.⁴⁰

With the help of the new technological devices, icons have started living their own lives. The World Wide Web has allowed the setting up of online summaries, anthologies of literature and arts revolving around an iconic "object," which has its own life. The website *God's Works Are Great, But Man's Are Greater: Bridging the Gap in New York City* provides a most valuable inventory of underlying literary passages dedicated to the bridge. The Brooklyn Bridge, the icon of unity and beauty, has served as a muse for writers since the time of its creation. They have analyzed its importance and used the bridge in metaphors; making the solid structure truly immortal.⁴¹ Lewis Mumford wrote in 1924, "Beyond any other aspect of New York, the Brooklyn Bridge has been a source of joy and inspiration to the artist."⁴² The list of artists who have venerated the bridge in their works is extremely long, therefore I will only highlight a few names that have added to my personal love for and interest in the bridge. Walt Whitman, who was born on Long Island and raised in Brooklyn, had always expressed the need of a bridge that would unite the two separate cities, "joining rural Brooklyn with energetic Manhattan." His poem, *Crossing the Brooklyn Ferry*, heralds the creation of "Brooklyniana" series, a collection of twenty-five histories on Brooklyn, in which "there is ample evidence to suggest that the

39 McCullough, 512.

40 <http://www.mapsites.net/gotham01/webpages/gabbyl/affects.htm>.

41 <http://www.mapsites.net/gotham01/webpages/gabbyl/literature.htm>.

42 Lewis Mumford, *Sticks and Stones* (New York, 1924). In Alan Trachtenberg's *Fact and Symbol*, 139, <http://www.mapsites.net/gotham01/webpages/gabbyl/literature.htm>, accessed August 3, 2016.

overwhelming majority of the material in 'Brooklyniana' was recycled from a book of Brooklyn history that Whitman was planning and drafting in the early 1850s," while editing the *Brooklyn Freeman*.⁴³ More abstract is Hart Crane's epic poem written in 1924 entitled *The Bridge*, in which the author intended to exploit the myths of New York and America. Arthur Miller, as a key figure of American theater, has used the Brooklyn Bridge to provide the background for tensions related to immigration in his ever since iconic play *A View from the Bridge* 1955.

Pál Vajda⁴⁴ considered the Chain Bridge the jewel of the capital, acknowledged as the boldest and best-created bridge of the era. András Török⁴⁵ saw it as a magnificent masterpiece of art, an icon of Budapest. Related to literature, Török mentions a most poetic description of the majestic bridge in wintertime, written in 1908 by Ágai Adolf Porzó entitled *Traveling from Pest to Budapest*.⁴⁶ Another fascinating description of the bridge can be found in a short novel also available in English translation, written by Antal Szerb titled *A Martian's Guide to Budapest* (1935). "Although the Chain Bridge was built most presumably during all the four seasons, nevertheless, it has still remained a winter bridge. A winter and a night bridge, with its distinctive black color, and also chocolate brown, the color of the metropolitan bitumen coating of the road when wet. And it is a winter bridge, because its ancestor wasn't a winter bridge."⁴⁷ József Lengyel's *The Bridge-builders* (1960) tells the story of the three men who built the bridge.

The iconic status of both bridges has always guaranteed open and large publicity, no wonder that from their very creation both protesters and celebrators have used the locations to gain attention.

The 21st century of Brooklyn Bridge as an "object" can be well illustrated in a modern embodiment of the iconic span. At the Digital Media Festival in 2009 an installation called Oporto-Brooklyn Bridge won the 2nd Prize. Jurors Hugh Forrest, Karen Kocher and Cristina Sá described the project as follows: "Based on their observation that the Dom Luis I Bridge and the Brooklyn Bridge roughly reflect one another across a horizontal axis, their elegant project explores the thin line where two different linguistic and cultural territories can connect and engage in conversation. The engaging and very tactile project allows for user created conversation, as well as deep reflection on the metaphor of wire in today's digital society."⁴⁸ Two artists, Israeli New Media Artist Naomi Kaly, and American painter and paper maker Alyssa Casey, have exemplified how the latest technology and the new forms of communication can create a "thought bridge" to fill in cultural, linguistic and ethnic gaps. Prior to the festival, and in line with

43 <http://whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/journalism/tei/per.00255.html>.

44 Vajda, 37.

45 Török, 37.

46 Török, 46.

47 Török, 45.

48 Naomi Kaly & Alyssa Casey, "Oporto-Brooklyn Bridge, Future Places," accessed Aug 24, 2017. <http://futureplaces.org/essays/oporto-brooklyn-bridge/>.

Heidegger's interpretation of a bridge ("The bridge is a location"), pedestrians representing a diversity of cultures, genders and ages, were asked to stop for a short interview while crossing the Brooklyn Bridge in New York and Dom Luis I Bridge in Oporto. Questions had been asked about "personal interpretations" of the bridge.

Individuals were encouraged to go beyond the actual definition, to imagine and describe their fantasy bridge: "Given unlimited resources (time, materials) what would be your fantasy bridge? Where would it lead? What would it be made of? What would be the shape? How would you call it?" Final fragments of audio – syllables, words and sentences – collected, processed, and edited – were merged into a hybrid conversational space: local visitors bring to life distant people and remote locations, challenging notions of community, proximity, connection, and interaction.

[...]

Sliding a small bead along the conductive threads, participants trigger a program that scans, deciphers, and plays the encoded audio; walking to the west or east reveals sections of English or Portuguese audio respectively. The conductive thread is mapped into sections each encoding a pair of English and Portuguese audio tracks that creating a dialogue carefully selected according to content, identity of the speaker, or voice intonation. For example, the final Portuguese track, spoken by an elderly gentleman, "Now I'm waiting for the last bridge to take me to the other side" pairs with a young woman, "To see the people from your past." The illusorily continuous audio offers points of transition; hardware and software allow readers to explore and manipulate the usually inaccessible intersections between two tongues: unfamiliar sounds emerge, new language is born. Sliding the bead along the conductive strings, visitors construct the Oporto-Brooklyn Bridge: linear gesture is translated into a non-linear sonic narrative; the audience decodes the hidden audio, unfolding a multilingual and multicultural intricate oral web of urbanism.⁴⁹

The above project illustrates how powerful icons can exert their influence all over the world and how old and new technologies, mentalities, histories merge into a new icon that spreads over the world igniting new thoughts that bridge people and values. We should not disregard or downgrade the often-criticized icons that pop up on all possible platforms offering themselves for purchase, as they will generate a new interest, a new perspective.

In the end, it may be concluded that the multidimensional messages of these two iconic constructions could be best exploited if one follows the current paradigmatic

49 Kaly and Casey.

shift in undergraduate education aiming at introducing students to the major approaches to knowledge in domains the faculty considers indispensable. Proceeding from the assumption that nowadays students rely extensively on computer mediated communication tools, multidisciplinary knowledge can be enhanced if the significance of icons is properly recognized and their ubiquitous presence is exploited to decode and re-encode old information in the aim to negotiate new meanings.

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