

Judul : The images of marilyn monroe as an icon in American
popular culture

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Choosing Subject

America is a country with great cultures and great characteristics. This country has shown their power in many aspects of life and become the leader which is able to spread their influence to other countries in the world. America has very famous symbol, Hollywood, as the center of entertainment. Hollywood is a tower to all film industries from other countries; this is also one of the icons of the American popular culture. In this place, film makers do the film production activity such as shooting, editing, adding effect, and other post-production activity. Hollywood is actually a district where many movie studios are located and this term “Hollywood” often refers to American film industry. Several historic Hollywood theaters are used as venues to premiere major theatrical releases and host the Academy awards. It is a popular destination for nightlife and tourism, and the home to the walk of fame (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/hollywood%2C>, browsed on February 25, 2006). In present time, Hollywood becomes the centre of celebrities’ activity and the stardom of America.

Media is a crucial agent to strengthen the myths, beliefs, and values in American society and even media itself is possible to shape myths, beliefs, and Values. American media also has the contribution to make Hollywood as trendsetter and make the star become role model for the society. It happens because Hollywood and its commodity, either the movies themselves or the stars, are often exposed through newspaper, television, radio, etc to many people in the United States of America. In 1950s, movies from Hollywood production became an interesting phenomenon; most of people put their attention to the product of this movie industry. This 1950s era was called the golden age of Hollywood movie industry, and at that time Hollywood bears the famous actress who became the legend and the icon of modern American popular culture.

In American popular culture, icons mean three dimensional object (or two dimensional images of those objects) which are visible, concrete embodies of myths, beliefs, and values, which form the cultural mindset and convey the 'magical power' upon their defining group (Nachbar and Lause, 1992: 170). A person can be an icon when he or she can unify the people who admire them and who share the same belief and value. Based on its characteristic, icon is divided in to two parts; they are traditional icon and popular icon.

Marilyn Monroe born as Norma Jeane Mortensen on June, 1, 1926, she is arguably the twentieth-century's most famous movie star, sex symbol and pop icon (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marilyn_Monroe, browsed on April 7, 2006). Marilyn Monroe is a popular icon; it means that she presents the role of signification in the

realm beliefs and values; she is able to unite those who believe in her, expresses the important elements of the group's beliefs and values and imparts magical power to her iconic group (p. 171). She embodies the beliefs and values of the people of her era and even people in present day; she projects an image of potent sexuality blended with naïve innocent in order to appeal to a society that was experienced transitioning from 1950's conservatism to the subsequent sexual revolution in the 1960s. Monroe's iconic status in American popular culture is mainly as the result of her ability to construct character that exemplified provocative femininity:

She has one of the most recognized faces in the world. Over thirty years after her death, Marilyn Monroe is still a household name. Her trademark platinum hair and beauty mark, her famous skirt-blowing scene from *The Seven-Year Itch*, all of these things are a part of our culture. Marilyn Monroe is an icon, a legend (<http://www.marilyncollector.com/legend/biography.html> browsed on March 28, 2006).

Marilyn's life becomes the inspiration of many celebrities in America and even in the whole world. One source notices that Madonna, the queen of pop music, idolized her much. In one of her video clip, Madonna imitates the style of Marilyn Monroe when she plays in the movie soundtrack "*Gentlemen Prefers Blondes*" with the song "*Diamonds Are Girl's Best Friend*" in Madonna's song entitled "*Material Girl*".

Monroe's career was built on her beauty, charisma, and sex appeal. She began her career as photo model for a *YANK* magazine. At that time she worked in a factory spraying airplane parts, since her husband left her for participating to the World War II. Ben Lyon was a talent scout who finally found her and brought her

to the stardom of Hollywood. In the beginning she signed a short contract with Twentieth Century Fox, but it was her hardest time because there she played no role in any movie, she was only asked to learn about make up, costume, lighting etc. After her first contract ended, she resigned for the second contract. In this chance Marilyn began to play minor character in her first movie *Scudda Hoo! Scudda Hay!* and *Dangerous* (1947), but unfortunately both of the movies failed to reach box office. She also ever worked with Columbia Pictures in a movie *Ladies of the Chorus* (1948), but still the movie was not successful. Marilyn joined back with 20th Century Fox and played as a leading lady in movie *Don't Bother Knock* (1952). In her early appearance, comments toward acting skill were very common to hear.

The American movie critics at first were unwilling to admit her ability as an actress, but almost all of the people in America had no doubt about her sex appeals. Being in the middle of controversy, Monroe kept struggling for her career by playing in other movies. Some of the movies that she played in 1950s for instance *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953), *There's No Business Like Show Business* (1954), *River of No Return* (1954), etc. The most astonishing movie that put Marilyn as the main role together with Tom Ewell is *The Seven Year Itch* (1955). This movie reached box office in the summer of 1955. A famous scene from this film in which Monroe's character blows upwards her skirt revealing her underwear, grows to become another icon of Marilyn Monroe. Monroe planed *The Seven Years Itch* to be the last movie she played, because after that she broke her contract and left Hollywood to study about acting and movie

production in New York (at The Actors Studio). As she finished her study, Monroe began to produce movie. The first movie produced under her production company was *The Price and the Show Girl* (1957), and get BAFTA Film Award nomination in 1958.

The life of Marilyn Monroe was full of controversy. She married and divorce for three times, she was also reported to have an affair with the family of Kennedy's clan. For the first she was married to James Daugherty, an aircraft plant worker, when she was sixteen, but the marriage failed four years later. Then she married a retired baseball player, Joe DiMaggio. The marriage ended after nine months. Monroe made statement that her husband was a conservative man; he wanted a conservative marriage and had the patriarchal way of thinking which required Marilyn Monroe to be a good house wife, stayed at home and did nothing. She said that she could not follow his thought, and refused to change. Her third marriage was with playwright Arthur Miller. She tried to have a baby this time but she could not, and more over she had several miscarriages. This marriage with Arthur Miller only lasted for five years. People argue that the cause of her failure in love relationship was because her childhood experience where she was in unconditional love from her surrounding.

Marilyn Monroe also made controversy when her nude photo began to surface. This photo was taken by photographer Tom Kelley to use in a 1952 calendar. In another chance, Monroe appeared as the cover of *Playboy* magazine in December 1953, the photo was taken by Hugh Hefner. However, history noted her

as the first woman to be the cover model of this world wide magazine.

Monroe was found death in her bedroom on August 5, 1962 in her 36 years of age. The official issue from California Police Department stated that her death was because of pill over dosed, but there were some speculations over her case. Conspiracy theories mentioned that Monroe's death was because of her scandal with the Kennedy family. Her death has a relationship with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The life of Marilyn Monroe seemed to be the chain of success and tragedy. Her personality characteristic enabled her to become one of the most famous stars in Hollywood. On the other hand, her traits brought her to failure. How ever, Marilyn Monroe is a legend, a sex symbol, and an icon in the modern American popular culture.

B. Scope of Study

The goal of this research is to find out how Marilyn Monroe built her iconic status and becomes legend.

To reach the goal of this research the researcher focuses on the data in the form of pictures from some scenes in the movie *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), produced by Charles K. Feldman, and directed by Billy Wilder, and some photographs on-screen and off-screen of hers taken from the biography "*Marilyn Monroe: Unseen Archive*" by Marie Clayton, published by Paragon book publishing in 2004.

The data that were analyzed are in the form of facial expressions, characters behaviors, and the film techniques such as camera angle, lighting, technique of shot etc (from the captured scene of the movie) and the pose, lighting, and technique of shot (from the printed photograph).

C. Problem Statements

In connection with the background of choosing subject above, the researcher formulated the problems as follows:

1. What were the images built by Marilyn Monroe as an American celebrity in the 1950s era?
2. How did those images bring Marilyn Monroe as the icon in modern American popular culture?

D. Objectives of The Study

Related to the problem statements mentioned above, the objectives of the research are stated as follows:

1. To describe the images built by Marilyn Monroe as an American celebrity in the 1950s era.
2. To explain how those images brought Marilyn Monroe as the icon of modern American popular culture.

E. Benefits of The Study

With all explanations and descriptions in this paper, the researcher expects

that this thesis will give benefits to all the readers and give additional references especially about the American icon and the life of Marilyn Monroe as the icon in American popular culture.

The benefits that are intended to give to the readers in this paper are:

1. Providing additional information for the readers in understanding the images of Marilyn Monroe which made her the icon of modern American popular culture.
2. Giving input and contribution about the life of Marilyn Monroe as the icon of modern American popular culture especially to the academics that do the related research.

F. Theoretical Approach

This research uses semiotic theory, sociological approach, popular culture theory, sociological approach, and biographical approach to find the answer to the problem statements.

1. Semiotic Theory

Semiotics came firstly from the idea of Ferdinand de' Saussure (1857-1913), a linguist from Switzerland, and he is the pioneer of the *semiology*. He sought to explain how word can produce meaning, and the meaning itself can only exist within a system.

In explicating the functioning of the language as a system Saussure distinguished between the signifier and the signified

which together comprise the linguistic sign (typically a word). The signifier is the actual sound (or written, the appearance) of the word; the signified is the concept or meaning attached to it. The relationship of the two is arbitrary, since there is nothing in the nature of things to dictate that a signified should have a particular signifier – the same signified has different signifier in different language (Lapsley and Westlake, 1988: 34).

The point of the Saussure's idea is that in language there are only differences. This so called 'diacritical' theory of meaning was to prove the single most influential idea operative within film semiotics (Lapsley and Westlake, 1988: 34). His idea then was used by Roland Barthes to define what myth is. Myth according to Roland Barthes can still be alive because of the first order sign called ideological. He works to continue and to develop the semiotics from Ferdinand de' Saussure by seeing myth as a sign in first order semiotic. The other who works with semiotics is Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), a philosopher came from America. Peirce and Saussure established the fundamental principles that modern semioticians have developed into the contemporary study of semiotics. He embraces his theory into three terms; they are icon, symbol, and index.

The Peircean sign points in two directions: on the other hand towards the person to whom it is addressed and in whose mind it creates an idea or secondary sign, called the interpretant, and on the other towards that which it stands for, called the object (Lapsley and Westlake, 1988: 35).

According to Peirce, an icon is anything whatever, be it a quality, existed individual or law, in so far as it is like that thing and is used as a sign of it. Resemblance then is the basis of iconity. An index is a sign that

becomes so 'by virtue of a character which it could not have if its object did not exist', irrespective of whether it is interpreted as a sign.

Lastly, a symbol is arbitrarily linked to its object 'by means of an association of ideas or habitual connection. Peter Wollen adopts the idea of icon, symbol, and index by Pierce through *Sign and Meaning in the cinema*. Here he pointed out that cinema operates with all three categories of sign: index (by virtue of being the effect of the photograph real), icon (through sound and image) and symbol (in that it uses speech and writing).

This research used the semiotic theory from Charles Sanders Pierce. In a movie, the sum of the shooting script is divided into sequences, each sequence into scene, and finally the scenes themselves are constructed from a whole series of pieces shot from various angles (Pudovkin, 1933: 189). Since this research is a descriptive qualitative research, the theory of semiotics by Charles Sanders Pierce with the three elements (icon, index, and symbol) is used to find the images constructed by Marilyn Monroe which finally lead her to be the icon in American popular culture.

This theory was used to help analyze the main data such as dialogues, facial expressions, behaviors, camera angles, sound and images, and script. As what has been adopted by Peter Wollen, the virtue of photograph of Marilyn Monroe in her three movies which were analyzed is an index, the sound and image in the movie itself is an icon, and speech or dialogues of the character in those three movies are the symbol.

2. Popular Culture Theory

Since this research was to analyze the iconic status of Marilyn Monroe in popular culture, then it needed to use *Popular Culture Theory*. According to Nachbar and Lause, the definition of popular culture is the product of human work and thought which are or have been accepted or approved of by a large community or population; it ignores notions of quality and includes the study of the culture characteristic of important subgroups within the larger mass society (Nachbar and Lause, 1992: 14). What can be mentioned as popular product is not merely the product which is popular in present time, but also which is popular in certain times in past. Other sources mentioned the definition of popular culture as simply culture which is widely favored or well like by many people, to see how popular a product is we can examine sales of books, sales of CDs and videos, also the attendance of a figure, event etc (Storey, 2001: 6).

Marilyn Monroe embodied the people's beliefs and values of her era and even people in the present day. She lived in the Hollywood glamorous which has put her in fame and popularity. Marilyn Monroe is the product of American popular culture, her ability to appeal the society with her sensual image has made her the icon in modern American popular culture. Nachbar and Lause in their book *Popular Culture: an Introductory Text* state that:

Icon is three a dimensional object (or two dimensional images of those objects) which is visible, concrete embodies of myths,

beliefs, and values, which form the cultural mindset and convey the 'magical power' upon their defining group (Nachbar and Lause, 1992: 170).

There are two kinds of icon based on its characteristic; traditional icon and popular icon:

Traditional icon convert object into signs, but they are more than mere sign, because they are invested with deep-seated belief, significant message of faith, and bind believers together in a community of belief and impart magical power to those who worship the icons (Nachbar and Lause, 1992: 170).

As what have been mentioned before, Marilyn Monroe is the product of popular culture, she becomes icon because she is able to embody people's belief and value and also able to appeal the society; she belongs to what we call as popular icon. Popular icon performs the role of signification in the realm/ secular beliefs and values. Popular icon is meaningful object which unites those who believe in the icon, expresses the important elements of the group's beliefs and values, and imparts magical powers to the iconic group (Nachbar and Lause, 1992: 171).

Hollywood had made Marilyn Monroe the popular product. Through the movie she played, Monroe created her image which finally made her an icon and sex symbol in the American popular culture.

3. Sociological Approach

Sociology is an object analysis about human in society and the process on it. It tries to find out how the society still exists through a long process.

Max Weber is a sociologist that considered society in terms of class conflict. Further he developed a sociological perspective that balances between two views, that he named *verstehen* approach which understanding human action by examining the subjective meanings, such as the personal beliefs, feeling and perceptions that people attach to their own behavior and others.

Sociological approach was needed to apply here since Marilyn Monroe got her iconic status by the American society in her era (1950s up to 1960s). Marilyn Monroe iconic status in American culture was primarily the result of her ability to construct a personality that represented provocative femininity. Marilyn Monroe made herself into one of the most memorable and successful American icons, projecting an image of potent sexuality blended with naïve innocence in order to appeal to a society that was transitioning from 1950's conservatism to the subsequent sexual revolution of the 1960s (Beckwith Robyn, 2003: 1). American people idolized Marilyn Monroe because they could worship her sexuality while relating to the vulnerability of her innocence. She personified the glamorous of Hollywood with an unparalleled glow and energy that enamored the world and America love her for it (Haberman in <http://www.marilynmonroe.com/about/3.html>, 2002 browsed on June 21, 2006).

The issue of sexuality during the 1950s had typically been a dividing factor in America, with one group stuck in the 1950s conservative mentality while the other was at least willing to consider a more progressive attitude

towards sex. Marilyn Monroe was able to combine both perspectives by being naïvely sensual; therefore she was accepted as whole by a culture that had the conflicting views. Both group got what they essentially desired, but by accepting Marilyn Monroe as an icon of the 1950s and the 1960s, they got more than just what they want. She is widely acknowledged as having embodied both sides of the conflict revolving around sexual freedom in American culture, and she was able to unify the American public into a society ready to accept change. It was this duality character that made the society appeal to her and made Marilyn Monroe a legendary star and icon in the American society.

4. Biographical Approach

Biographical approach was needed to apply in this research since the object of the analysis was the life and career of Marilyn Monroe as a Hollywood star and American celebrity. Using biographical approach mean to employ the sequence of life and the personal characteristic (the factors from inside and outside) of the object that was analyzed.

From her biography, we know the life's course of Marilyn Monroe beginning from her childhood, the way to her celebrity, until she could reach the success and became the icon – sex symbol – in America and in the entire world. By examining the biography or the life's story of Marilyn Monroe we

can find her personality which led her to be the icon and sex symbol of America.

Personality theory is needed to be used together with the application of biographical approach. The personality theorist sees motivation, the 'why' or underlying impetus for behavior (Hall, Calvin S and Lindzey Gardner, 1998: 7). Harry Stack Sullivan insisted:

Personality is a purely hypothetical entity, "an illusion" that can not be observed or studied apart from interpersonal situations. The unit of study is the interpersonal situation and not the person only. The organization of personality consists of interpersonal events rather than intra psychic ones. Personality only manifests itself when the person is behaving in relation to one or more other individuals. These people do not need to be present; in fact they can even be illusory or nonexistent figures (Hall, Calvin and Lindzey Gardner, 1998: 157).

In correlation to this research, biographical approach helped to find the factors which made Marilyn Monroe an icon and sex symbol. The life of Marilyn Monroe seems to be one of tragedy and success intertwined, her personality characteristics enabled her to become one of the most famous stars in Hollywood, but the same traits also brought her failures. Her story of life shaped her personality which enabled her to become famous star in Hollywood.

5. Historical Approach

This research also employed the historical approach. Historical approach is social science that provides a chronological record of the past

events. Historical approach was needed to apply here since the object of the analysis was the actress who lived in the 1950s – 1960s era, Marilyn Monroe. She was a great actress at that time; even she became an icon in American popular culture. Her iconic status still exists until the present day. Historical approach helped the researcher to find the factors that drove Marilyn Monroe to be an icon in American popular culture. To know the building of Marilyn Monroe's iconic status, the researcher needed to employ the time-line which spanned the happening from the 1950s until the present days. Besides the biographical factor, the most defining factor of her iconic status was the social condition of the time (1950s). **Goldman**, 1967 in his book *Sociology of Literature* explained the relationship between the appliances of sociological approach with the historical approach:

There is one of the fundamental principles of the sociological method. It asserts among all other things that no sociology can be realistic unless it is historical, just as no historical research can be scientific and realistic unless it is sociological. Not only are there no distinctively social facts and other human facts which are historical, there are not even two analytically distinct dimensions of these facts which could be attached to two different sciences. Thus the need to study human fact both in their essential structure and in their concrete requires a method which is simultaneously both sociological and historical.

By using the historical facts, the researcher was able to find the building of Marilyn Monroe's iconic status. This approach helped to reveal the facts that are hidden by the time and the place boundaries into an understanding of a sociological phenomenon and then create some patterns of a society's behavior.

G. Research Methodology

1. Type of Research

This research was a descriptive qualitative research. Descriptive research is a type of research that aims to make description or picture systematically, factually, and accurately about facts, characteristics, and relations among the phenomena, which are observed (Nazir, 1998: 63). It means that the research described the data and facts without any judgment about the research object. This research is called qualitative research because it relates with verbal data not the quantitative, statistic, or numeral data. This research was also a library research, means that the researcher used books, articles, and other written materials to support the research.

2. Data and Sources of Data

The data were divided into two; they were main data and supporting data. The main data were analyzed by using the theories and the approaches that had been mentioned above in order to find the solution and answer the problem statements provided.

a. Main data

This research used some pictures which are taken from the scenes in the movie “*The Seven Years Itch*” and some pictures from the biography book “*Marilyn Monroe: Unseen Archives*” as the main data. The movie was produced by Charles K. Feldman, directed by Billy Wilder, and distributed by 20th Century Fox. *The Seven Years Itch* was firstly released on June 3, 1955. The casts were Tom Ewell played as Richard Sherman and Marilyn Monroe played as an interesting young lady with strong sexual characterization. The story was adopted from the same title play from Broadway by George Axelrod. *The Seven Years Itch* won many critical acclaims and became box office hit. This movie also contains the most iconic images of the 20th century in which the Marilyn Monroe’s dress was blown up above her waist by passing train underneath subway grate she was standing on. While the biography was written by Marie Clayton and published by Paragon Publishing book in 2004. In this book we can find the photographs of Marilyn Monroe off-screen and on-screen. The researcher chose this movie instead of other movies because this movie was the greatest movie started by Marilyn Monroe, and this has been noted by the critics over a time. From this movie also, Monroe could strengthen her iconic status as an icon of popular culture and the sex symbol through one memorable scene “blowing skirt”.

b. Supporting data

The supporting data of this research were the information about the topics collected from other sources such as references, article from internet, encyclopedia, and criticism toward this movie published in movie magazine or internet, and other related documents. The biography of Marilyn Monroe also became the supporting data in this research to help the analysis of Marilyn Monroe as the Icon in American Popular Culture.

H. Thesis Organization

This thesis contains four chapters and each chapter is divided into some subchapters. Chapter one contains the introduction. This chapter consists of some subchapters, they are background of choosing subject; scope of study; problem statements; objectives of the study; theoretical approach which is divided into three parts: Semiotic Theory, Popular Culture Theory, and Biographical Approach; method of research which is classified into two parts: Type of research and data (which is divided into main data and supporting data), and the last is thesis organization.

Chapter two is Literature review consists of discussion about: popular culture; icon (popular icon), celebrities, and sex symbol; American society in the transition period (America in 1950s and America in 1960s); the history of Hollywood and motion picture industry; and the last is Marilyn Monroe's biography.

Chapter three is the analysis. In this chapter the researcher delivers the result of the analysis of the main data. This chapter is divided into two subchapters. The

first is the images of Marilyn Monroe (divided in to dualism images of innocent and sexual and materialistic image) and the second is how the images of Marilyn Monroe brought her as an icon in American popular culture.

The last chapter is conclusion and recommendation. This chapter consists of the conclusion from the previous chapters and the recommendation from the researcher about this thesis.

