Introduction

Origins

The idea for this book can be dated to 2003 and, more specifically, to the fiftieth anniversary of the publication in Nature of a proposed structure for DNA by James Watson and Francis Crick. I had been asked by the science journal Nature to provide an essay on the double helix’s remarkable visual history for their free-standing publication 50 Years of DNA. My contribution was entitled ‘The Mona Lisa of Modern Science’. The original Mona Lisa had much occupied me over the years. I have been researching, teaching, writing, broadcasting, and curating exhibitions about Leonardo da Vinci since the late 1960s. Of course there are also Leonardo’s Last Supper and his ‘Vitruvian Man’ (the nude man tracing the circle and square with his extended arms and legs), which have achieved
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reproductions, versions, variants, pastiches, and parodies. Once alerted, we see them everywhere and begin to realize their ubiquity.

There is also the obvious question of how to define an iconic image. I would prefer in some ways not to give a definition, since this suggests some clear and definable boundary that the image crosses when it moves from being very famous to fully iconic. The problem is compounded by the tendency of the modern media to downgrade such terms as genius and icon and by applying them to too many examples. Elvis Presley, The Beatles, Marilyn Monroe, and Muhammad Ali (Cassius Clay) are undoubtedly icons in their popular domains and even beyond, particularly to my generation. However the term iconic is now scattered around so liberally and applied to figures or things of passing and local celebrity that it has tended to become debased. By contrast, the eleven images here are as secure and universal in their iconic status as any cultural products can ever claim to be.

If I have to give a definition of a visual icon, let me suggest the following. An iconic image is one that has achieved wholly exceptional levels of widespread recognizability and has come to carry a rich series of varied associations for very large numbers of people across time and cultures, such that it has to a greater or lesser degree transgressed the parameters of its initial making, function, context, and meaning. I am aware that this is a bit ponderous. I have developed my own rule-of-thumb instinct for when an image is simply very famous, not least on the basis that the very famous still tends to reside within the parameters of reference that governed its original making. But absolute tests are not to be applied with any degree of confidence.

One striking characteristic of truly iconic images is that they accrue legends to a prodigious degree that is largely independent of how long they have been around. Once one of them crosses a certain boundary, the bald historical facts and the original zone of function and meaning seem inadequate. An extraordinary image demands an extraordinary explanation, ideally involving some kind of ‘secret’, especially when the actual historical evidence points to quite prosaic origins. Over the years I have come to recognize this seemingly insatiable demand with respect to the Mona Lisa. None of the images here is immune from the need for legends. Indeed, they seem actively to incite them.

Even participants in the actual making of the images and their propagation can all too readily become caught up in the myths, becoming
choices and choices
with all his sources from any...
comfort, since their relationships between form and content are different from the other examples. The molecule of DNA features as diagrams and models but is never literally ‘seen’ in itself, while Einstein’s formula is a concept that assumes visual form only when written down.

A more differentiated classification gradually emerged, and was by type. The types came and went, but eventually crystallized into the current eleven chapters. I like eleven rather than the tidier twelve. Eleven is a good prime number and resists regular sub-division. However, the number has no rationale beyond its utility to me and, I hope, the reader.

Where to begin was not the biggest problem. The term ‘icon’ (from eikon, Greek for image) has come to be applied specifically to devotional images characteristic of Greek and Russian Orthodox Christian traditions. We have no difficulty in conjuring up a typical Russian-style icon—a highly formalized and standardized flat representation of Christ or the Virgin Mary or a saint in rich pigments on a tooled gold background. Large eyes, emphatically almond-shaped, stare unblinkingly at us. The eyes, as the cliché goes, ‘follow us round the room’. The icon of Christ serves to define the iconic species in its own right. It is what biologists call the ‘type specimen’.

The cross or cross-shape seemed to follow naturally, given its Christian prominence. It represents the simplest kind of formal or graphic device. It can function in contexts in which figurative images are unwelcome or impractical, and can be drawn or constructed with great ease in almost any medium. The cross also provides opportunities to reach out into another cultural framework, and into a variant form that carries stark implications, the Nazi swastika. The cross exhibits extraordinary elasticity of meaning in different contexts, but tends to have predominantly severe connotations.

The heart refers to something complicated in its original bodily form but has come to assume a special schematic shape—the heart-shape—that carries a wide range of meanings, almost always positive. It functions across the religious and secular with equal potency. It has also come to function as a hieroglyphic word, as in Milton Glaser’s famous slogan, ‘I ♥ NY’. It helps if the heart is blood red.

Animals and to a lesser degree plants have come to signify almost universal meanings or characteristics, and none to a greater degree than the lion. Its designation as the ‘king of the jungle’ crosses cultures and times to an unrivalled degree. The eagle is also strongly present across cultures,
Here is a passage from the text:

"...the Berlin Wall, the iron curtain, and the Cold War. In the last century, the Soviet Union and the United States were engaged in a global struggle for power. This struggle was not just political, but also economic and cultural. The two superpowers were locked in a battle for influence and control, and this competition was reflected in every aspect of society. The Cold War was a time of tension and uncertainty, and it had a profound impact on the world."

This passage discusses the historical context of the Cold War and its influence on global politics and society. It highlights the competition between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War period.
Selecting a commercial emblem or logo obviously presented a wide range of possibilities. The Nike ‘Swoosh’ has already been mentioned. There is also the ‘M’ of McDonald’s—and many others. However, the Coca-Cola bottle, coupled with the cursive script of its logo, seemed to be without a really close rival. Disliking Coke (and Pepsi), even as a teenager, I would have been happy to make another choice, but the myths proved exceptionally lively once I looked into some more-or-less suppressed aspects of its history.

In the twentieth century images specific to science have emerged as a specific visual genre in its own right. The double helix of DNA was a fairly easy choice. It has come to symbolize the human quest to understand what makes us tick, often in a bowdlerized manner. Its fascinating shape has been transferred into areas of art and decoration as a familiar cipher that confers status on its user, even in the most generalized way. Many of its users would be hard-pressed to explain what DNA is and how it works.

It could be objected that E = mc² based on Einstein’s theories, is not a visual image at all. It certainly does not have the pictorial qualities of all the preceding examples, since it does not signify by visual resemblance. However, in its written or printed form, it has assumed a ubiquitous visual presence in the imagery of science. Not only when theoretical physics is involved but also more generally to represent scientific endeavour—with powerful hints of mysterious conceptual realms into which the ordinary person cannot readily venture. It is also indelibly linked with the person of Einstein himself, the supreme modern exemplar of genius, and the nuclear bomb.

Obviously it would be wrong to insist that my choices are definitive. I am conscious that they are those of a British man of a certain age and background (and political conviction). I am prepared to argue that within their defined types each of the chosen images has an arguable case to be the most famous, and would deserve serious consideration in anyone’s list. I am not getting into the game of arguing that there are good reasons for excluding a particular example, say the Nike ‘Swoosh’. I am only claiming that amongst brand images the Coke bottle is in its own right incontestably iconic. I am prepared to stand by each inclusion but I am not aspiring to support exclusions on the basis that they are somehow deficient according to my criteria for an iconic image. Above all, since I am dealing with representatives of types, my list is not an all-time ‘top
A page from a document discussing the impact of Chinese art and culture on modern Japan. The text touches on the influence of Chinese art in Japan, the rise of modern art, and the ways in which Chinese influence can be seen in contemporary Japanese culture. The page includes a paragraph discussing the importance of Japanese art and how it has evolved over time, as well as a discussion on the relationship between Chinese and Japanese aesthetics.
Zeduan, an artist working in the eleventh to twelfth century. It consists of a handscroll over 17 feet long across which unfolds a wonderful panorama of countryside and town, populated with different types of people who are busily engaged in delightfully varied activities during the course of a day from morning to evening. Sections of the panorama have become notably popular through derivations in almost every kind of medium and in restaurant décor. I needed to look it up when Craig Clunas, my successor as Professor at Oxford, patiently answered my important question as to which is the most famous painting in China. This testifies to my (and I think our) general ignorance of Chinese culture. With the rebirth of China as a political, economic, and cultural power, it may be that Zhang Zeduan’s masterpiece will assume its warranted prominence on a worldwide basis.

Even without venturing into what for me would be exotic territories, the range covered by the chapters is very wide, from early Christian evidence of the appearance of Christ to the abstract and counter-intuitive complexities of twentieth-century relativity. Inevitably I am more secure in my knowledge and understanding of some of my topics than others. I have been fortunate that friends with special expertise have been willing to look at the whole or parts of chapters. It would, however, be surprising if some bloomers have not crept through, but I hope that none undermines the arguments of each chapter and of the book as a whole.

The range of material would not have been manageable in practice during the era before the internet. I can, for instance, search the US Patents Office on-line for Coca-Cola bottle designs without the expense, time, and rigours of a journey to Washington. Major archives are increasingly appearing on-line, like the excellent and freely accessible records of the Ava Helen and Linus Pauling papers in Oregon State University, the generous accessibility of which stands in contrast to the more prescriptive and commercial management of the Einstein archive at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Separating the wheat from the chaff on the internet involves much the same skills of evaluation that the historian has always needed, but these skills need refining and fortifying in the face of the apparently authentic rubbish that looks so plausible in many websites. It seems to me that one of the biggest jobs for education today is to educate everyone, young people in particular, about the necessary skills in questioning and evaluation in the digital age. Spurious material can now be readily and freely
THIS WAS TO BE A CONCLUSION, and it still is to a degree. However, for reasons that will become clear, it is very much not conclusive, and I am therefore finishing with a concluding chapter rather than a conclusion as such.

Do iconic images have anything in common? This is the question I posed and partly dismissed in the Introduction. We can now rephrase the question more specifically in relation to what has come in between. If the eleven examples are a reasonably representative selection of types of iconic image, what do they share in common? Again I would say it rests on a false or at least unproven premiss, that is to say it assumes that one iconic image necessarily has anything in common at all with another. Or we can refine the premiss to read: iconic images necessarily share a certain set of key or essential features if they are to achieve the highest status.
Thus far, we have focused on the concept of the sacred, or what some might call the "higher power" or "higher self". The idea of transcending the physical realm to access a higher plane or dimension is a common theme in many religious and spiritual traditions. However, the question remains: how can we access these dimensions, and what are the implications of doing so?

Celebrity and Presence

As we'll explore later, the concept of presence is a crucial element in understanding the nature of sacred dimensions. The idea of being "present" or "in the moment" is central to many religious and spiritual practices. However, the nature of presence is complex and multifaceted, and its implications vary depending on the context in which it is understood.

One way to approach the concept of presence is to consider it in terms of the experience of awe or wonder. When we experience something that is beyond our ordinary understanding or comprehension, we may feel a sense of wonder or amazement. This is often associated with the idea of the sacred, as it challenges our usual conceptions of reality and opens up new possibilities for understanding.

The idea of presence also relates to the concept of the sacred as a source of meaning and purpose. When we experience something that is significant or important to us, we may feel a sense of connection or unity with something greater than ourselves. This can be a powerful source of motivation and inspiration, and can help us to find meaning and purpose in our lives.

The nature of presence and the concept of the sacred are closely intertwined, and understanding one requires an exploration of the other. As we continue to delve into these topics, we'll see how they interact and influence each other, and how they can help us to understand our own experiences of the sacred.
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E = mc² plays a comparable role at a cosmic rather than human scale, and is locked into both the greatest things that human genius can achieve (in the person of Einstein) and the greatest destructive evils it can perpetrate (in terms of the bomb). The COCA-COLA bottle is perhaps the least easy to characterize in religious terms, without debasing the term 'religious' to embrace such things as the worship of material consumption, an Americanized lifestyle, and the cult of youth—coupled with a fierce devotion to a particular brand as a form of individual and collective identity. However, The New Seekers did provide a hymn to COKE: 'I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony...'

We all tend to accord value to things that transcend any kind of financial and utilitarian worth. Recently my fountain pen was severely chewed by a seat in the lecture theatre at St John's College in Oxford. It fell into the hinge and when the seat was pressed down to see if it had dropped onto the floor the mechanism crushed its stout steel barrel. It has been resuscitated, albeit with some residual scarring, by a local jeweller, Julia Beusch.

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The more modern practice concurs on icon having a role in religious and mythological contexts. The images are often seen to symbolize, represent, or convey spiritual or religious concepts. In this sense, icons are not just static representations but dynamic symbols that carry profound meaning.

In the context of the trinity, for example, the Holy Spirit is often depicted as a dove. This image is not just a visual representation but a way to convey the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. Similarly, the figure of Christ holding the book of the Apocalypse is a powerful symbol of divine wisdom and guidance.

The use of icons is widespread in various religious traditions, including Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. In Christianity, icons are often used in liturgical contexts, such as the iconostasis in Eastern Orthodoxy, which serves as a visual representation of the divine hierarchy.

In conclusion, the study of icons is a rich field that offers insights into the religious and cultural practices of various societies. It is a field that continues to evolve and change, reflecting the dynamic nature of religious beliefs and practices.
special beginnings. Historians like breaks, changes, and beginnings, but I tend to see basic human continuities as predominantly at work in the arena of enduring celebrity.

The specific subject here, the icon, certainly is not subject to any definable starting point. It is difficult to argue that the Willendorf 'Venus', the limestone statuette in which a woman's naked body is composed primarily from the more bulbous parts of her physique, is not an icon of some kind, along with a number of such figures (Fig. 12.2). It is generally seen having originated some 25,000 years ago. Although there is no independent evidence of its role, beyond the appearance of the statuette itself, we can sense that it always was intended as an iconic object, and it has now achieved a high level of worldwide fame. If it was in the Kunsthistorisches Museum rather than that devoted to Natural History, on the other side of the grand avenue in Vienna, it might well be even more iconic. Images of the human body, or the divine in human-like form, have been central to

Fig. 12.2
The 'Venus' of Willendorf, c.23,000 BC, Vienna, Naturhistorisches Museum.
Many religious and the emphasis in the "Venus" upon those anatomical
definitions in "Lust". The bride, the only Greek woman of this
classification, who is often the subject of a survey.

"Venus" is the most well-known of the Roman goddesses, and her iconography
demonstrates the ways in which the female body was celebrated and idealized in classical times. The goddess was often depicted as a beauty, with long hair and full breasts, and was a symbol of love and fertility.

The influence of "Venus" can be seen in the art of many different cultures, including ancient Greece and Rome, as well as in modern times. The goddess has been portrayed in a variety of ways, from delicate and graceful to more robust and powerful.

In modern times, "Venus" has become a symbol of female empowerment and equality, and is often used as a symbol of strength and independence.

The goddess's influence has also been felt in the fashion industry, with many designers and brands incorporating elements of her iconography into their designs. This includes everything from clothing to jewelry, and has even been seen in the world of art and architecture.

Overall, "Venus" remains a significant and enduring symbol of feminine beauty and power, and continues to inspire and influence people around the world.
to the teenagers' personal saints. Adults may be less blatant, but I suspect we all create spaces or arrays of cherished possessions that share something of the quality of shrines.

The biologist Richard Dawkins and his followers have claimed that we can characterize the survival of something iconic in Darwinian terms—as a ‘survival of the fittest’ in the jungle of cultural competition. Dawkins has even applied a specific name, the ‘meme’, to the unit involved in the genetics of culture. Inasmuch as an iconic image has manifestly demonstrated its fitness for survival in changing contexts over time, we can affirm that the biological analogy works well enough. However, the analogy does not go all that far once we realize that we are dealing with active and purposeful agents rather than chance mutations and an environment of physical causes and effects. For example, those involved with the design of the Stars and Stripes did so according to a series of clearly defined ends in an environment that they were themselves actively shaping. Even the most teleological form of Darwin’s natural selection cannot be seen as analogous to such processes. There is also another important difference. Icons transgress original form, function, and context so that some or most of the original fitness criteria no longer apply. It is like putting a polar bear in the tropics and finding that its white coat helps to insulate from the rays of the sun. Nonetheless, the bear is unlikely to be viable in searing heat. The ‘commie’ Che somehow needs to survive in posh Sloane Square. His ‘fitness for survival’ is clearly of a very elastic and even paradoxical kind.

In the chapter on Che we encountered the cultural theorist Régis Debray in his Bolivian prison, and noted how he came to emphasize ‘transmission’ rather than just the thing in itself. I described his cultural analysis of images as embracing all the media, mechanisms, technologies, institutions, materials, rituals, conventions, and the circumstances of transmission in and across time. There is nothing very biological in the varied material mechanisms and transformations of form that are involved. However, there are clearly some central perceptual and cognitive mechanisms at work in a way that transcends the particularities of the media of transmission. The medium is not the whole message, as Debray thought. Rather the message somehow seeps through its media transformations in such a way that some aspects of a recognizable core still survive, however much subverted. This core obviously survives in visual form in our eleven examples, and it is to the visual characteristics that we now turn.
to poor replication, and the making of good repiles. However, not all the
some measure of vulnerability reflects basic recognition abilities. However,
and reduced.
main that remains their visual portion, however much they are powdered
Art has been heavily engaged with seis of basic images in the public do-
works, paintings, and sculptures since the mid-1960s. More recently, pop
based on this line for the heart shape in an enlarged sense of graphic
wonder the so-called Pop Artists of Warhol's generation. Jim Dine has
versions of Leonardo's Last Supper
in the decorative style that have shown have emerged in his life to seal
are being created. It is evident in keeping with the creation of images
ages in social repetition, whether it be capturing the birth of a new set of
ion of popular icons. He shaped himself into a monument of iconic in-
known as a symbol, the artistic vision becomes the source of a new set of
triumphs in crafts. Having known accommodation to traditional religious
age of Christ, the Virgin, and saints with decorative patterns and
the years of the current example, and was proposed up with popular in-
world remained a loud canticle in the Polish tradition, even during
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reduces to a rendezvous, reversing the tricks and lights. What was also very
reduced to a rendezvous, reversing the tricks and lights. What was also very
the eyes and mouth are in the lead, and there recognized, while in the eyes of
monuments are erected, and can indeed be erected monuments of our own.
more would share some Formulate visual clues in common. Some com-
we might hope of even expect that such iconic images as we have described

Visual Clues
images are symmetrical and simple. Nick Ut's photograph, even if we analyse it according to the Renaissance rules described by Alberti, presents a complex and not very symmetrical pictorial field with a number of centres of interest. Lions do of course have certain bilateral symmetries and exhibit a simple set of identifiers, but they can be portrayed from the side (as is common) and without obvious pictorial symmetries. And $E = mc^2$ doesn't work at all according to symmetry or the making of good repeats.
There is some composition involved, but nothing sophisticated. There is a photo of a girl named Eliza, and her name is on the photo. The photo is not high resolution, but it is clear enough to make out the details. Eliza is standing in front of a building, and her name is written on the back of the photo. She appears to be a young girl, possibly a child. The building behind her is not very detailed, but there are some windows and a door visible. The photo is well-lit, and the colors are vibrant. Overall, it seems to be a candid photo, capturing a moment in time.
It is immediately apparent that the complex pose of Etienne, as he reaches down to play with a rubber octopus, does not transmit legibly. Indeed, something like a cat has emerged, pawing at Louis's right leg. Alice remains discernible as a little girl, courtesy of her skirt and hair. Louis remains the closest to the original, with even a trace of his infant stare (Fig. 12.8). It takes a lot of effort to unravel the man's disembodied legs originally visible to the right of Alice. Perhaps the image of Louis would have become iconic if he had written War and Peace as an infant.
In the case of fuzzy images, let's imagine a field in which we disperse.

- **Fuzzy Categories**: iterable conditions

   - Essential properties that cover all of them. Can we go beyond this step?
   - Bubbles in the more pictorial of the images more than a fixed set of new
   - Becoming defining characteristics. I think we are starting with what it is
   - Images then secretly transformed yet still think they are well short of
   - Some common threads are emerging, not least the robins of the
ways. It is easy to imagine an image of something extremely famous that is ineffective, while Lisa Gherardini was not famous at all, though Leonardo was and is. Sometimes the interactions will be most powerful with adjacent factors; sometimes the linking factors will just happen to be situated in remote parts of the field. Nor is there any strict ranking, though factors that we feel to be more significant, such as visual robustness, will be deliberately clustered towards the centre. I am not attempting here to identify the actual factor denoted by each of the twenty letters distributed erratically across the field. Rather I am demonstrating a mode of thinking about the category 'iconic image'. The proposal I am making is that it is possible to have three or more things that belong more or less indisputably in the category but do not necessarily share any particular factor or set of factors in common.

There are three groups of letters ('or factors), eleven enclosed by the green border, ten by the blue, and nine by the red. There is no letter that appears in all three, which means that no factor can be deemed to be absolutely necessary. Poor P, in the bottom right corner, is not in any group, but it must be there because it has been identified as a common factor in other iconic images, outside the given three. K, for instance, features in

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12.9

Fuzzy category field, with green, blue, and red groups, 2010.
only the green, while L is shared with red. E and H look a bit marginal, included only once and located at the edge of the field, but they could potentially figure powerfully with other marginal factors in conjunction with the rest of the red group, which includes less than half of the letters, but is strongly represented by the central factors. It would be possible to undertake a precise analysis of the various combinations of nine, ten, and eleven letters, but I want to retain a central element of subjective perception rather than resorting to mathematical theory.

I am envisaging a situation in which we instinctively recognize that the green, blue, and red groups are all readily identifiable as being members of the category of iconic images, without having any necessarily shared factors or critical number of factors. I also envisage that each group has a relatively weak set might be given a great boost from powerful associates.

For an image to be considered an artistic masterpiece, only the Mona Lisa's obvious qualities amongst our eleven, but it can be a hugely significant factor for an image to belong in the category 'Work of Art.' The chapters we may recall, were chosen in relation to different types or categories of factors outside the group. What looks like a brush stroke might be drawn decisively within the boundaries of the group. For instance, it is clearly not necessary for one to recognize a red group as a red group; however, it is possible that the green group might be given a great boost from powerful associates.

Thus, we can argue that symmetry is very common property, but it is not apparent in the Stars and Stripes. Robustness is however a powerful factor with the American flag, even to the point that a fragment of the heart would need to contain enough hints about the shape, such as the central dip, to tell us what it is. But the broad expanse of sky in Nick Ii's photograph would not speak of the whole to a useful degree. It is certainly possible to extract a list of factors from the above discussions. It runs something like this: not excluding the possibility that I have missed something important; a famous subject; a link to powerful factors; a broad, rich, and flexible set of associations; a broadly representable function; personal and even emotional engagement; human
significance; the focus of a cult; a sense of presence that goes beyond its material existence; a measure of symmetry; simplicity of the main subject; tonal and colouristic clarity; robustness in the face of degraded reproduction; making good repeats; recognizable in fragmentary form.

However, the reader might guess that I am rather resistant to such listing, not least because such a list can too easily congeal into an explanatory formula. I do not think that an image consciously composed to embody all the factors would necessarily become iconic. There is no absolute predictability—just a series of extraordinary stories about images that exhibit varied kinds of shared and individual characteristics.

And Finally

On 8 April 2007 Reuters News Agency reported:

An Italian film 7 km from Jerusalem about an advertising executive who is soul searching after losing his job and marriage and runs into Jesus in Jerusalem sparked protest from the Coca-Cola Company. As a result, the film could not premier over Easter weekend as the film maker had planned. The movie showed Jesus drinking a can of COCA-COLA. The Italian division of the Coca-Cola Company demanded that the scene be edited out stating that the use of its brand was unacceptable.

I wonder whose image is being projected here? Christ or COKE? Neither seems to need it.

Reading