Can Images Kill?

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Introduction

The year 2000 was greeted around the world with all the festivity that the introduction of Christianity would seem to deserve. What exactly was the world celebrating? The triumph of Western Christianity through the hegemony of its calendar? In one sense, yes, but something without any religiosity was also being celebrated: the reign of the image. By a sort of tautological artifice, this worldwide celebration could be witnessed on screen. The international sharing of emotion corresponded with the ecumenical ambition of the Church. Over the centuries, images have prevailed, and in 2000 everyone celebrated the undisputed legitimation and domination of the visible and its industries. The Christian revolution is the first and only monotheist doctrine to have made the image the symbol of its power and the instrument of all of its conquests. From East to West, it convinced all those in power that the one who is the master of the visible is the master of the world and organizes the control of the gaze. Such a revelation undermined the book, which was declared weak and slow when compared to the immediate and visible glory of the incarnation and resurrection of the Father's image. Henceforth, beliefs, knowledge, and information were to be transmitted via images. The previous fear of simulacra gave way to the cult of imitation. What could be called an iconocracy was put into place. The celebration in 2000, however, was short-lived because a disaster was on the horizon.

On 11 September 2001, the empire of the visible, the servant of all modern forms of the combined powers of economics and icons, suffered its greatest blow. Coming from the sky like exterminating angels, two planes struck down the twin towers. This was a real crime with real flesh-and-blood victims and as horrific as the worst massacres committed by dictatorships. The event was instantly treated in visual terms, mixing the visible and the invisible, reality and fiction, real mourning and the symbolic invincibility of devices in the greatest disarray. The enemy had organized a horrifying show. In one sense, in massacring so many people and in de-

This essay originally appeared as *L'Image peut-elle tuer?* (Bayard: Paris, 2002). Used by permission of the author.

Critical Inquiry 36 (Autumn 2009)

stroying the towers, the enemy gave us the first historical spectacle of the death of the image in the image of death. The unforeseeable joined the nonrepresentable; the corpses had to be quickly buried and a speech of triumph and resurrection had to be delivered. The president of the United States called for a visual fast: the beginning of an invisible war, a purging of TV and film programs, no dead bodies on the screen. The visible entered a crisis. The aggressor's Machiavellian ruse stemmed from his aniconic culture, whose adherents several months earlier had destroyed the idols of Bamyan[1] and now offered a spectacle to the idolatry of the Western enemy. It was an attempt at exposing the vulnerability of the enemy on account of its symbols; as an invisible adversary it deployed its own image as a redemptive icon in the image of the Christian savior. The terror caused by a political sophism displayed the attacker's extraordinary perversity. In broad daylight, the iconoclastic criminal exhibited his perfect knowledge of and complete conformity to the world he was destroying. Cast in the mold of the enemy, he disappeared and recomposed his image in a new distribution of power. Therein lies the crisis that has since become a war. Going underground, the mastermind of the crime carried on, while his victims sought a new visual vocabulary to show their revenge as divine retribution.

Soon after the attacks there was a murmur, with some suggesting that the crime had been anticipated, indeed inspired, by Hollywood disaster films like, for instance, *The Towering Inferno* (1974). Here we find the argument that images are capable of turning people into criminals. Directors of communication decided to censor the violence of films and changed their programs. This was certainly the only time when America felt itself vaguely responsible for the attacks it had suffered. If analysis of the causes of the tragedy ever matures, images will certainly not be held responsible. If this were the case, we would fall prey to the murderous

1. The Taliban destroyed the great statues of the Buddha of Bamyan in Afghanistan with dynamite.

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sophism of terrorism itself: Islam versus Christianity, East versus West, the shock of incompatible cultures, and so on. The reign of the image always entails the death of the other.

My aim here is not to explain, but simply to understand what an image is and to understand its relation to violence and the chances of it today offering liberty to a noncriminal community. This study will concern itself only with images, as it is with them that one decides the place of the other. But first we must agree on what an image is. We will consider the image in three stages: incarnation, incorporation, and personification. These stages correspond to the analysis of the image in its relation to the visible, the analysis of the visible in its specific appearance on the screen, and the analysis of the appearance of bodies on the screen in their relation to the place made for the spectator. This line of thinking is far from exhausting the question of violence. I shall try to approach the violence of the visible not in terms of content but in terms of its spatial organization. How can we share a visible space with the invisible?

The Violent History of Images

Who today would deny that images are an instrument of power over bodies and minds? Such power, conceived over the course of twenty centuries of Christianity as liberating and redemptive, is now suspected to be the instrument of alienation and domination. Images are considered to have incited the crime when a murder seems to have been modeled after fictions shown on screen. The accused parties blame such fictions. But who is actually guilty, those who kill or those who produce and circulate images? Culpability and responsibility are terms attributable only to persons, never to things. And images are things. Let's abandon this strange rhetoric. If we want to give a particular status to images by saying that they are enigmatically both things and not things, can we go so far as to say they are persons? As both things and not things they fall instead into a singular unreality that could hardly augment their responsibility. And yet undoubtedly we must consider images in their physical reality and fictional operations; we must admit that images stand halfway between things and dreams, in a quasiworld where our bondage and liberty are perhaps at stake. Thinking about images from this perspective allows us to question the paradox of their insignificance and their power. In order to grasp this strange situation that makes so much (liberty) of so little (images), we must examine the history of images in the speech and gestures of those who have produced them. Images exist only through the gestures and words that describe and construct them, which may also dishonor and destroy them. The desire to show leads to the necessity of making and not

necessarily to the desire of making something happen. Didn't Aristotle think that the spectacle of violence suspended its enactment? Could things really have changed?

More than ten centuries ago, Christian thinkers were the first in the Western world to turn the image into something of real philosophical and political importance. Alternately prohibited and celebrated with equal violence, images have from the very beginning aroused strong passions. The ambivalence of the visible is far from new since the real question concerns the state of things in the material appearance of an immateriality. This was the meaning of the incarnation that gave flesh and body to the image, while also giving it the power to make the invisibility of their divine model appear. With the incarnation, a new definition of the image entered into Greco-Roman culture and became the iconic paradigm of all shared visibilities. A common world was built that defined its culture as an articulation and management of the invisible and the visible. People had a passion for images. Naming the life of the Father's image, that of Christ, with the word *Passion*, is in perfect harmony with the iconic. Christ's Passion, that is, the Passion of the image, occurs in the image of the Passion. It is the time spent in darkness until the final triumph. The story of the incarnation is the legend of the image itself. But today there is an additional strange anxiety: the power of images consists in pushing us to imitate them, and the narrative content of images could commit direct violence by pushing us to enact it. Images were once accused of making visible; now they are accused of making us do things. If what seems to be a new problem occults a two-thousand-year-old question, it is mainly for two reasons. The first one stems from a simple observation: acts of gratuitous violence continue to multiply in our society, which is simultaneously dominated by an increase in the spectacle of visibilities. If this first observation is accurate, the link between cause and effect is absolutely contestable and is not confirmed by any real data, as surveys and statistics have shown. I will later return to this important point, namely, that the inflation of visibilities in no way signifies an inflation of images.

The second reason for the current fear—and perhaps the real reason—stems from the fact that visual production has become a market unto itself. The financial stakes are so great; representations of violence sell very well and are the source of such great profits that the debate has been displaced and has become no more than the contradictory tension between economic interests and ethical concerns. Instead of being interested in the images themselves and in the nature of their violence, we pretend that the link of cause and effect between an image and violence is obvious and certain. The question finds its own moral and financial solutions through

legal recourse. The liberty of images, their relative innocence, and their fertile unreality have disappeared behind the financial stakes that today are inseparable from the use and diffusion of images. But how can we question the violence of images and images of violence before we reflect on what an image is? The debates over the increased regulation of photographs, formulated according to what in French is called *droit à l'image*,[2] are a flagrant caricature of the problem, since a decision was made to control the image without knowing what we are speaking about, what image is actually at stake, and if an image has more or less to do with traditional property and rights. The expression *droit à l'image* shows the confusion that is made under the pretext of protecting innocent persons and victims, a confusion that only obscures the constitution of a new market; an image isn't taken because its owner must be paid.

Images appear as objects that can be examined. These objects may provoke speech and may be confirmed by knowledge. Even if their status as objects is fundamentally problematic, images appear as a physical reality that can simultaneously be seen and known. But violence—defined as an excessive sign of force—itself is not an object. Violence designates an excess, so much so that the discourse about it is constituted more by judgment than through knowledge and supposes a constitutional state organized by laws that allow for the evaluation of the norm and its transgression. Such a verdict is made upon excessive energy and denounces such outbursts of violence. Violence is thus a force that is overemployed or poorly employed, and its excess can be recognized by its negative effects when they infringe on the two principles that are the condition of any community: the life and liberty of each and everyone. Violence necessarily implies the existence of subjects.

Because images are considered as subjects, they are suspected of being able to abuse their power. Here begins the source of many misunderstandings. In fact, each one of us has a complicity—if not an intimacy—with the force of violence; each of us has a certain familiarity with it that is not alien to the definition of life itself. Peace without force looks like death, and the force of life is built on reserves of violence. To speak of reserves is also to speak of resources and their withdrawal. In other words, it is only in the capacity to be violent that we must find the strength not to be violent. Violence is thus a power before it is an act. It is obvious that all living beings can only survive thanks to a complex and often contradictory economy of forces that inhabit them, forces that both threaten and sustain them. Be-

2. Literally, the French means "right to the image." English usage is "right to privacy."—Trans.

fore they are judged, the forces of the drives that trouble us are first experienced. Living together requires an immediate mitigation of violence. Must violence be suppressed? Is this even possible? Should we instead imagine the conditions of its transformation within the community? An outburst of violence, without mediation, is never a sign of strength, but of weakness. Such violence is destructive and produces a double exclusion: that of the aggressor and that of the victim, going so far as suicide or murder. There is another violence, linked to the first; it is a fusional violence where the subject can founder and disappear in the unifying engulfment of the All. In both cases, annihilation and death are unavoidable.

The question then becomes: How does this visual production result in a murderous passion or a fusional annihilation? Is the visible merely in the service of a violent desire, or can it be symbolically treated? In other words, is the image a power that cannot be symbolized by speech, or is it, on the contrary, the space of the possible cohabitation of our desires? The visible touches us insofar as it deals with the power of desire and obliges us to find the means to love or to hate collectively. Visibility encourages minds and bodies to have a constructive or destructive dialogue with such violence. This is exactly what Aristotle had in mind when he included tragedy in a symbolic program of passionate violence. The desire to kill and the fear of dying can destroy any project of building a social space where it is impossible for potential victims and murderers to live together. For Aristotle, to make words visible and audible are the only means of rendering living together possible for subjects prone to desire and fear. But he privileged the written word and stories because he doubted the symbolic power of spectacle. He was hesitant about the visible. Today, no one doubts the ascendancy of the visible over passions or the high stakes this has for the community, that is, politically. It is incumbent upon us to know where and how the violence of our images generates the force that is needed to live together. Henceforth, a subject can be shown either as a form that infringes on freedom or as a form that constitutes it. Images of virtue or of beauty can generate violence. This was the case, for instance, in the Nazi films that exalted Aryan perfection and sustained the fusion of the group through the hatred of the other. Speechless visibilities were aroused by a deafening discourse.

When we say that an image is violent we suggest that it can directly act on a subject without any linguistic mediation. That means we are leaving the space of symbolic production and are entering a more elusive space of collective hallucination and private delirium—one where the loss of the real has an almost hypnotic influence. We are thus going to take an interest in the movements communicated by the image and not in its figurative

content. But then how do we distinguish between those visual productions that speak to destructive and fusional drives and those that are responsible for freeing spectators from a deadly tension, as much for themselves as for the community?

If we give short shrift to such an interrogation, we will continue to hold the image responsible not for what it does but for what it encourages us to do. In other words, before the court of reason and morality, images would find themselves guilty of crimes they did not commit, except if we consider that those who commit such crimes have lost all ability to judge and act freely on account of them. It is indeed a matter of judgment and freedom. This is a major issue in the censorship of images.

Supposing that images make us passive, how can they push anyone to act? However, if I hypothesize that I don't receive them passively, it is no longer the images that are at the origin of my acts but rather myself, as a free subject, in which case, if there is a crime, it is not committed by the image but by the hand that perpetrated it. We can only escape from this contradiction and confusion by methodically studying images—their strengths and weaknesses—and by asking ourselves a number of questions. This is the only way to reach a conclusion about the connection between what we see and what we do. In a certain way, it is an interrogation of the performative nature of images, with one important distinction: we do not ask what images do, but what they make us do.

Can images kill? Do images make us killers? Can we go so far as to attribute to them the guilt or responsibility of crimes and offenses that as objects they couldn't actually have committed? What act is an image capable of? As an object without body, hand, or will, can it act as a magical influence? Listening to tales about wolves gives shape to the ineffable fears and fantasies populating our nightmares, thus helping us to overcome them. Do edifying allegories of virtue and patriotism produce a virtuous and patriotic world? Does Picasso's deconstruction of Dora Maar's face provoke the carnivorous cutting up of a loved one? No? Then how could some images be more irresistible than others? These icons of the fear and pleasure of seeing do not provoke imitation. The problem would seem to then concern the intrinsic nature of images and not their narrative or referential content. The history of violence is completely distinct from images as long we distinguish between the fate of critical judgment and of speech, that is, of what the place of our bodies and thoughts is when we are confronted with these images. Speech alone has an effect on the economy of our desires, specifically in the visual world where people all too often believe that the speaking subject has become silent. But is this really our natural disposition? Is it not rather a strategy of enslavement? There is no

reason why the apparent silence of images would want to render us mute. Generally, an image does not want to silence us any more than the sight of a chair obliges us to sit down. Does a church pew force us to kneel down? The visible by itself gives no orders. So who does?

What then is the strength of images? What do those who believe in the violence of images teach us? Let us first remember the so-called magical use of images. The term *magic* is often a catchall that anthropologists at the beginning of the last century resorted to when confronted with any causality different than ours. A similar abuse of language created fetishes to signify the substitutive fabrication of a singular efficacy. It is a question of all these imaginary structures, which in some cultures act upon reality thanks to the efficacy of intermediary objects in a symbolic operation of displacement. It is through images, as facsimiles or as substitutive objects, that a relation of power is introduced. If these images have a power there must be an answer to them because it is always possible to produce counterpowers or counterimages that would deflect or invalidate them.

As an example, I shall cite the magic scrolls used by members of the Ethiopian Church, who were syncretically faithful to animist beliefs. Thanks to some sacrificial and figurative rites, these scrolls could cure the sick. Illness was conceived of in terms of possession by evil spirits; the therapeutic roll, made from the skin of a sacrificed animal, was covered with inscriptions and figures that were alternately prayers, invocations, formulas in a secret language, and representations of saints, angels, archangels, and evil spirits in a certain number of symbolic inscriptions that capture evil and deliver the possessed. The central iconic theme is the image of the eye or, more exactly, the gaze. The operating principle is the following: the sick person inhabited by the evil spirit reveals his or her own image. The evil spirit, upon seeing this unbearable image—which is nothing other than its own image—is frightened and flees, delivering the sick person from illness. It is thus the iconic incarnation of illness that heals the body of the sick person. The idea of an image that kills is familiar to many popular and mythical traditions where simulation, phantoms, and evil spells are mingled. The unbearable image of evil is a recurrent theme throughout antiquity, from Medusa's gaze and the polished shield used by Perseus to overcome her to Narcissus's deadly fusion with his own image. The story of Narcissus speaks to the violence of a deadly reflection. These myths and legends tell us the same thing: images look at us and can swallow us up. All of these structures of belief and fabrication are founded on identification. Becoming one with what we see is fatal, and what can save us is the production of a liberating difference. To live and to be cured is to move away from any fusion and to catch evil at its own game, that is,

identification. The violence of the image explodes when it permits the identification of the unrepresentable within the visible; this is the same as saying that the image is only sustained through a dissimiliarity, in the space between the visible and the seeing subject. But is this space visible? If it were, it would no longer be a space. Thus, in the act of seeing, there is an invisible gesture that constitutes the space of seeing. Perhaps it is established by the voice.

To understand what the power of the image is, we must say not only that it is always the image of something but also that its model is essentially foreign to it. All images are images of something or someone else, even in a self-portrait. This is a space of symbolization, a space that creates a permanent separation from the incorporation of a substantial and deadly presence. Here Greek paganism meets both biblical and Islamic monotheism. All three of these religions are convinced that a face-to-face encounter kills and that representation is only possible if a sacrifice is made for the mourning of an identified presence. If the sick Ethiopian is cured, for instance, it is because the image has transformed the process of identification into one of freedom. This is exactly what happens with Christ's sacrifice; the one who is the visible image of the unrepresentable Father gives access to all images in a lifesaving way by becoming what he least resembles: a dead man. But the link between the visible and the invisible is a homonymic relation. The name given by the voice to what is seen also designates what is seen by the eyes and what is invisibly offered to the gaze.

Ten centuries ago, Christian thought recognized the real question regarding the construction of a community to be how to control the passions and the voice in the visible. That is what first established the legitimacy of the image not only in freeing it of its mortifying and confusing power but also in giving it a lifesaving and even a redemptive power. Not only is the image visible and the face-to-face encounter doesn't kill, but the image also effects a purification of darkness. It is no longer the tragic speech of the Greeks but the image that calms the violence of all passions. Only the image can incarnate; this is the principal contribution of Christian thought. The image is not a sign among others; it has a specific power: to make visible and to show forms, spaces, and bodies that it offers to the gaze. Because the incarnation of Christ is nothing more than God's face becoming visible, incarnation is nothing more than the becoming-image of the unrepresentable. This is the meaning of *incarnate*, to become an image and very precisely an image of the Passion. But is this power to appease typical of every image, regardless of its form and content? Not at all, and it is here that we need to pause for a moment. The only image capable of transforming violence into a critical freedom is the image that

incarnates. To incarnate is not to imitate, nor is it to reproduce or to simulate. The Christian Messiah is not God's clone. Nor does the Messiah offer a new reality to the eyes of the idolatrous. The image is fundamentally unreal; its force resides in its rebellion against becoming substance with its content. To incarnate is to give flesh and not to give body. It is to act in the absence of things. The image gives flesh, that is, carnal visibility to an absence in an irreducible distance from its model. To give body, in contrast, is to incorporate; it is to propose the substance of something real and true to the guests who fuse and disappear in the body with which they identify. To take communion in and through the image is to lack the incarnation of a visibility without substance and without truth. In incorporation we become one; in the incarnated image three indissociable authorities are formed: the visible, the invisible, and the gaze that establishes their relation. The image belongs to a strange logic of the included third.

In this sphere, the teaching of the Church is all the more valuable because it practices both things. On the one hand, the incarnating operations give life and freedom to images. On the other hand, as an exercise of power, the incorporating operations take over bodies and minds through violence. The liturgy of fusional thought is constituted by the Eucharist. In this ritual, what is proposed not to the eyes but to the mouth is the real substance of God, not his image. Those who participate in this ritual in turn become members of the institution's body. What is consumed is not the image of God but God in person. Communion is union. In all other cases an image gives nothing real to be ingested but, by its incarnation, organizes the visible and inconsistent figure of an invisible reality. In an image of God, God is not present, and the relation to such an image is neither magical nor sacramental. In contrast, it's a relation without any mystery that draws its value only from the freedom of the gazing subjects who are free to see or not to see the absence of things that are given to them to contemplate. It is often said that it is possible to have eyes without being able to see. There is a call to construct the gaze upon the visible so that spectators are responsible for their own access to the invisible in the visible. The Christian doctrine about the icon is nothing more than this proposition, whereas the use of holy imagery is part of the Eucharistic arsenal of propaganda and advertising. Such imagery meets the criteria, elsewhere condemned, of a substantialist idolatry.

The dual interpretation of the Last Supper produces, as a ritual of incorporation, an institutional body; as memorial of the incarnation, the image (Christ) shares the symbolic substitute (bread and wine) in the insurmountable space of the invisible. Bread and wine look nothing like God. Speech is performative and establishes a dual regime for the commu-

nity: that of the iconicity of an absence and that of the communion in presence. As an icon, the person of the Son of God is incarnated in the image independently of his substance, thus from his real person. His body has been sacrificed in order to inaugurate the reign of the immortal image. The person in this case cannot be the object of a personification, but the subject of an incarnation that is founded on the sacrifice and disappearance of the body. Conversely, the situation of the body in the Eucharist permits the institutional incorporation to claim Christ's personification in the body of the Church. The Eucharist imposes an identification on subjects that separates them from any alterity and engulfs them in the substance of an imaginary body of which they are both part and whole. That is the basis of all the fusional uses of images. In the case of the icon, the material instances of its appearance are not destined for transubstantiation but for the transfiguration of the gaze. In the case of communion, the visible produces a contract for membership that generates inclusion and exclusion. Is it possible to produce community without fusion?

Henceforth in this tension, the visible and the invisible will be in crisis. This crisis has never stopped tearing the Church apart, to such an extent that the protests against ecclesiastical power have always been accompanied by violent debates about both the image and the Eucharist. The Reformation, in challenging pontifical power, could only denounce the betrayal of the incarnation in the cult of idolatrous visibilities that were the basis of institutional incorporation. Noting that the reign of images was completely subservient to the visible Church, Protestants wanted to reestablish the reign of the invisible and the power of the Bible and the Word. But, at the same time, artists created an iconic world that was faithful to the irreality of images and resistant to all institutional incorporation. Artistic practice broke with the Church in order to remain faithful to the incarnation of the invisible. The image surrendered neither to idolaters nor to iconoclasts. Instead, it implacably followed its own course, far from all attempts to control and all condemnations.

The manifestation of truth entails the incarnation of the world in the flesh of images. The image becomes a human construction, and what gives value to this construction is not to be found outside of the visible but rather within it. The invisible in the image is the word itself. The image produces neither evidence nor truth and can only show what is produced by the gaze. The image awaits its visibility, which emerges from the relation established between those who produce it and those who look at it. As an image, it shows nothing. If it consciously shows something, it communicates and no longer shows its real nature, that is, the expectation of a gaze. This is why, rather than invisible, it is better to speak of an unseen, of what

anticipates meaning through public debate. Such a situation regarding a decision of meaning implies that the image itself is primarily indecisive and undecidable.

The church fathers were the first to become aware of the fact that belief depends upon the gaze. The incarnation of the image is for Paul an enigmatic visibility; it presents the similarity of a reflection in an empty mirror because the divine substance is not visible. There is no substantial vision; meaning cannot be grasped by the eyes alone. There is no face-to-face encounter, only a definitive obliquity that registers the failure of the gaze, which will never see what it desires to see: God. That is why men continue to desire and to make images. This is how the question of the power of images is posed. It can also continue to incarnate desire without ever satisfying it, as it can claim to saturate the eye and destroy all liberty. I thus distinguish between the image and imagery, that is, simple visibility. An image in the singular, a singular image, designates what appears in visibility without being visible. An image's strength comes from the desire to see it and from the visible's capacity to veil and to constitute the space between what is given to be seen and the object of desire. Without the desire to see, there are no images, even if the object of this desire is nothing other than the gaze itself. Recall the words of Lacan: "In our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it—that is what we call the gaze."[3] It is striking to see how psychoanalysis here echoes the prodigious patristic intuition of Gregory of Nyssa, one of the most brilliant of the Cappadocian Fathers. Gregory of Nyssa put it this way: when Moses expressed his desire to see God, God agreed to satisfy him with a trompe l'oeil, so that Moses's desire would always be alive, because God needs to be desired. It is a desire that must never be satisfied. As Gregory of Nyssa states:

> The bold request which goes up the mountains of desire asks this: to enjoy the Beauty not in mirrors and reflections, but face to face. The divine voice granted what was requested in what was denied, showing in a few words an immeasurable depth of thought. . . . He would not have shown himself to his servant if the sight were such as to bring the desire of the beholder to an end, since the true sight of God con-

3. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York, 1978), p. 73.

> sists in this, that the one who looks up to God never ceases in that desire.[4]

This is the trap of the gaze. I have stressed this dimension of the image's invisibility in the singular to better articulate its relation to desire, in this desire to see that must remain unsatisfied. Invisibility does not indicate a beyond that can't be reached; it is neither a transcendence nor a Platonic idea. Patristic—as well as modern—invisibility is that of the immanent elision of the desire to see as object. And it is because we are in the image of the desired object's invisibility that our own image thus becomes the object of an infinite lack for an infinite desire. God is thus nothing other than the name of our desire to see our similarity, a similarity that constantly escapes from sight. In this way, God showed His back to Moses, who was coiled up in the hollow of a rock. The grotto of the deceptive revelation answers by turning around the meaning of the Platonic cave where the shadow of things is an incentive to turn away. In the Christian view, the grotto is the nativity scene of the visible that is given for the opening of the eyes. The invisible inhabits the visible; to see it one does not need eyes but rather ears to listen to the words that will change perception.

Nevertheless, as a temporal institution wanting to take power and retain it, the Church acted like all dictators; it produced programmatic visibilities made to communicate a univocal message. From then on, imagery served operations of incorporation; the image was absorbed as a substance to which the incorporated subject identified, with which the incorporated subject fused without an argument or discussion. These images accompanied conquests; they instigated the most terrible silences and imposed an iron will that limited all objections. Images were called the bible of the illiterate. The Church established an empire, an empire over emotions. In short, little by little it deprived creatures of all the thought and freedom they had originally imagined having received from the creator, thanks to the grace of similarity. Therein lies the critical paradox.

It is obvious that the visual empire to which we are today violently subjected to appears in the struggle between incarnational thought and strategies of incorporation. If the foregoing reflections are accepted, then we must admit that violence within the visible concerns neither images of violence nor the violence of images as such but rather the violence committed against thought and speech in the spectacle of visibilities. Considered from this angle, the question of censorship becomes a false problem that threatens us with a dictatorship of passions, where images are deemed

4. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York, 1978), pp. 114–15.

good or bad according to their content. Is this a neoiconoclastic invitation to suppress all images in order to escape a dictatorship? No, it is a decree of abstinence that infringes on every imaginary operation and, as a result, is another way of destroying liberty. The patristic lesson is rich insofar as it proposes a construction of the gaze by speech in order to give to all persons the freedom of their judgment. Must we conclude, conversely, that everything that is visible is neutral and that it is the responsibility of each and everyone to produce or not to produce meaning? This is no truer than the first question because we established that the image is passionate by nature, and we cannot describe what affects us and what intends to affect us as neutral. In the field of art, over the course of centuries critical judgments have been established that have distinguished and assembled what are generally considered masterpieces. This disparate collection of objects shares the gesture of granting freedom and of giving meaning to that which remains unstable or fragile. There are thus objects that resist the murderous erosion of idolatrous appropriations. These works are all the more authoritative because nothing can exhaust them, as if they invariably escape all fixed and definite meaning. They fully assume a kind of atopia that gives their mortality a semblance of eternity. They operate as incarnations of a dubious and endless freedom. They are real, although they are identifiable not in how they appear, nor in the program they fulfill, nor in the circumstances of their commission. They are real, but free of all conditions. Fictions, semblances, and immaterial shapes have a real goal: to satisfy desire by keeping it unsatisfied.

Yet they can also be put forward for passive consumption in places of worship and cultural spaces where the consumption of their embalmed corpses condemns them to collective gluttony. Images, like all works of art, can be desecrated or deprived of their strength. Institutional forms of academicism have killed more than one masterpiece. Many forms of liberty are destroyed by education's failure to encounter great works of art. And so it is with images. Not knowing how to share our own passion to see with another gaze, not knowing how to produce a culture of the gaze: this is where the real violence begins against those who are helplessly abandoned to the voracity of visibilities. It is thus the responsibility of those who make images to build a place for those who see, and it is the responsibility of those who present images to understand their modes of construction. The image demands a new and innovative management of speech between those who exchange looks in the sharing of images.

The question of the violence of images must therefore be framed differently. In fact, it opens out onto two questions: Are there forms of visibility that keep subjects in the darkness of mortifying identifications while other

images, which may be laden with content just as violent, allow for a salutary meaning? Should we no longer distinguish between good and bad images on the basis of their content, since the image of evil can cure, but on the basis of the symbolization that they induce? Posing these questions allows us to understand why the image of virtue does not render its viewer virtuous any more than the image of crime renders its viewer criminal. Every producer of images who wishes to control the effects of desire's stimulation uses images that keep the spectator in symbolic ignorance. Such is the violence of the visible as long as it participates in a process of identification and fusion. This is why within the visual field it is better to distinguish between images of visibilities according to the strategies that may or may not assign spectators a place of mobility. Without any movement, the image becomes an object of communal consumption without any separation. Forms of propaganda and advertising that reveal a consumption without separation are machines for producing violence, even when they are selling happiness or virtue. The violence of the visible results in the intentional abolition of thought and judgment. This is why, faced with the emotion provoked by images—with the movement that they provoke—we must analyze the passionate regime that they introduce and the place that they reserve for the spectator. A critique of images is based on a community's political control of desire. It should never be a trial aimed at a moral purge of contents because this would put an end to the liberty of the gaze.

The new situation of visibilities comes from the fact that, since the invention of cinema and television, a huge and ever-increasing flood of visibilities simultaneously serves art and commerce. Screens have generated a redistribution of power between the visible and the invisible, a new order in the management of incarnation and incorporation on the screen. Before addressing what happens to speech in specific films, we must first consider the screen's particular function. Speaking of the screen seems to suggest an area of separation, even an eclipse of the visible. The screen is the place for the appearance of images. The screen is both a real space and the condition of derealization for what a *réalisateur* (filmmaker) produces. *Le réalisateur* (literally, the one who makes) is very enigmatic, and in the theatre one prefers in French to speak of a *metteur-en-scène* (literally, the one who mounts on stage). The stage on screen thus involves a strange atopia specific to the realization of an unreal space. The screen is not a fictive space, but it is a place for fiction. It is the condition of fictional operations. The birth of the screen engendered in the space of the social a mechanism as enigmatic as the image that it makes manifest. The screen thus means two things, as it shows neither real bodies nor the material

conditions of its making; it is the substratum of an elision and as long as it supports images it is the veil of an appearance. The screen thus greatly participates in the basic definition of the image itself.

All visual reception on a screen takes place in a kind of fugitive atopia, the duration of the viewing or screening. A process of inexistence takes place in the space of the social. It is from this place that the spectators' space begins to exist; this place is separated from the screen, in a relative darkness that abolishes the real space between bodies and the screen and between the bodies of the spectators themselves. Thus, something is set up in the collective space where a collective viewing and a solitary viewing simultaneously take place. At the same time, places are distributed for each spectator to experience the specific emotions that the images are going to provoke. Something ritualistic and political is at stake because this assembly produces no common vision. From their seats, spectators perceive visible, auditory, and narrative signs, and at the end of the show we may be left wondering what their common experience was. A fusional experience or rather an interrogation of meaning? To answer this question, should we ask each and every spectator what he or she saw, or is it enough to analyze the thing seen in order to define its effects on everyone? In other words, does seeing depend on the quality of the gaze of the subjects who are looking, or does it depend on the quality of the object that is viewed? There is no single answer to such a question. If the construction of the gaze is a political duty, as soon as this construction exists every spectacle is immediately measured by the yardstick of the freedom that it grants. But who constructs the gaze if it is not the one who puts on the show? There is no getting around the fact that the producer of screen images is responsible for this construction. From there, each show invokes the spectator's freedom, according to his or her place, assigned by the film or video director, in front of the screen. The more this place respects all forms of separation, the more the spectators will be able to respond with a critical liberty in the emotional functioning of the visible. It is undoubtedly in these terms that we need to address the education of the gaze. Children can look at anything as long as they have had the opportunity to build their place as a spectator. But this takes a long time. We must conclude that children cannot look at anything unless they are sustained by the speech of those who are also looking and who themselves learned at some point how to see. Images are not an Esperanto accessible to one and all. The image as a passionate object is always violent; what is unknown is the strength or the weakness that we draw from it. The violence of an image gives strength to spectators when it doesn't divest them of their place as speaking subjects. Seeing with others, this is the question, since we are always alone in the activity of looking and

since we can share only what is invisible. This is what is woven invisibly between the seeing bodies and the images that are seen that constitute the framework of a shared meaning, of a choice in the future of passions that go through us. This occurs on the screen but is not visible. The atopia of the image at the center of visibility obliges us to produce the invisible; in other words, we produce a meaning that is constructed and shared by us all, and it is invisible. In the strictest sense, a movie theatre is a waiting room.

Ultimately, the killer is already a dead man. Aristotle speaks to living citizens. He thought that tragedy was the space of the passage from the endured *(pathos)* to its symbolic sharing *(logos)*. Enactment, that is, when we no longer ask actors to be responsible for the theatrical logos, is thus a toppling over not into reality but into fiction. Criminals become actors in a reality that they think is reversible.

Is it because of new technical devices, like the screen, that the image changes its nature and meaning and no longer has the same effect that it has had in theatre or in painting? Should we blame the tool or the use made of it in the commerce of visibilities and by the "iconocrats" of programming? Isn't the tool used like an instrument of hallucination and derealization that deprives spectators of the distance that protects their critical distance? The question of the screen is something that characterizes our world; it is the screen that put in place an unprecedented mechanism for constituting an imaginary and for producing fusional and confusional effects. The screen put in place a new liturgy where the new transubstantiations occur; the word becomes body, the image has lost its flesh. The screen introduces a new relationship between mimesis and fiction. Must I spell out the obvious? The screen is not a stage. It is the very opposite of a stage. Great film and video directors today are fully aware of this change of space for bodies and of their ensuing responsibility, and they are aware too of what compels them to find a fictional writing, which is to say the equivalent on screen of what God's back was for Moses: something that is hidden in visibility. What is the new state of the imaginary when there is a screen and on this screen there is a flood of images that is no longer accountable to the treatment of distance? The right distance or proper place of the spectator is a political question. Violence resides in the systematic violation of distance. This violation results from the spectacular strategies that intentionally or unintentionally blur the distinction between space and bodies in order to produce a confused continuum where the possibility of alterity is lost. The violence of the screen begins when it no longer screens, when it no longer constitutes the surface of a visibility waiting for meaning. What is too close to the eyes cannot be seen and what is too close

to the ears cannot be heard; it is only at a distance that the opportunity offered to the eyes and ears can be measured.

In *The Children Are Watching*, a novel first published in 1970, the following story is told.[5] Five children who are left alone with their babysitter end up killing her because her comings and goings in front of the television set interrupt their viewing. First they kill the babysitter, and then they do away with her Mexican boyfriend by pushing him over a cliff in his car. The story describes the murderous sequence that is calmly perpetrated by the kids. If the hypothesis on which this tale is based is true, the story seems to indicate this loss of reality in the confusion of the space between bodies and spectacle. In the case of the novel's little monsters, there is not the slightest access to separation. The screen did not operate as a screen; it was the babysitter who became the screen by blocking the children's viewing. It is the real that must be killed, and at the same time it can't really be killed. The children really kill the babysitter, but they never feel the reality of the murder. These screens that no longer act as screens provoke a kind of specular vertigo whereby the gazing subjects lose their status as spectators in an indeterminate space that engulfs them. This confusion only increases in the commerce of objects destined to perpetuate the derealizing relationship with things themselves. Today children are invited to shake the hand of a giant Mickey Mouse and live amongst an assortment of consumer simulacra that has invaded the home, school, and playground. A world of ghosts, made up of stuffed or plastic animals, extends the screen world, and takes place among things in the mounting indistinction between physical things and bodies. The visible creates a dense canvas, where emptiness and distance are absorbed by the market of things, necessary for filling all lack. A babysitter, delighted by the calm of the children in front of the screen, would do better as a "babytalker" rather than as a babysitter.

The manipulation of bodies reduced to the silence of thought beyond all alterity is violent. Individuals are never so alone as when they function as One. A family or public gathering of spectators that simultaneously produces communion and exclusion (excommunication)—this is the major problem posed by the use of screens in the construction of a community grappling with its passions. Power always wants to control love and hate and insofar as visual emotion is faced with these passions, the mechanisms that show—the chosen form for showing, the place given to the

5. See Laird Koenig and Peter L. Dixon, *The Children Are Watching* (New York, 1970). This novel seems to have had a bigger impact in France, where it was published in 1972, than in the U.S. It is not listed in the Library of Congress catalogue, but is listed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France catalogue. In addition, a film adaptation was made in France in 1978, starring Alain Delon and Sophie Renoir, entitled *Attention, les enfants regardent.*—Trans.

voice, the risk taken in framing or in editing—are as much political gestures in which the fate of the spectator's very freedom is implicated. With all its decrees, censorship can never replace the education of the gaze and the ethical claim of productions. It will be said that when it is a question of pornography a position must be taken. But the question is, rather, since pornography is a lucrative market, who is ready to give it up? Crime and sex are real experiences that give rise to works of art as long as they are not transformed into merchandise. Money has become the modern version of communal transubstantiation.

Faced with this situation, institutions can only defend a censorship that substitutes for the power of the exchanged word the violence of an authoritarian discourse that decides what is good or bad for the community at large. This is like the rules of hygiene that are distributed during uncontrollable epidemics. We protect ourselves from an evil that we refuse to attack. This politics of health by isolation can only lead to a generalized absence of immunological defenses. Everyone, taken in their particular freedom, is thought to be the inevitable victim of all evils, as if the common discourse prevails over everyone's thought and speech. Censorship poses the weakness of each and the force of all.

We can compare how French Catholics and Protestants reacted to *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988). The Catholic authority in France, Cardinal Decourtray, announced, "We have not seen Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*. We do not know the artistic value of this work. Nonetheless, we protest in advance its distribution. Why? Because wanting to adapt for the screen Kazantzakis's novel with the realistic power of the image is itself an injury for the spiritual liberty of millions of men and women who are Christ's disciples."[6] The Catholic authorities refused to see the film and refrained from making a judgment, while maintaining the paradox of controlling in the name of freedom. In contrast, the Protestant

6. In the 1950s, the Protestant community in France—following the initiative of Jean de Tiendra and the Pastor Boegner—created two associations, Interfilm and Pro-fil, that relied on the following principle: "Following a tradition of encouraging individual responsibility, the Reformed Church of France quickly counted on a dimension of thought and discussion while the Catholic Church chose a more clear-cut approach in issuing official opinions on certain films or directors. Certain directors, anxious to express their own vision of religion or their spirituality, often met with a popular lack of understanding and an institutional condemnation" (Stéphanie Bergouignan, "Faut-il le voir pour y croire?" *Réforme*, no. 3143 [2005], www.reforme.net/archive2/article.php?num=3143&ref=865).

It is worth noting that the American reception of Scorsese's film was somewhat different. While the Catholic Church in the U.S. did condemn the film, the real protest to it came from Christian fundamentalists, led by Jerry Falwell, among others. For more on the American reception of this film, see J. Hoberman, "With God, and the Constitution, on His Side," www.ncsj.org/AuxPages/022004Forward_Passion.shtml—TRANS.

authorities in France announced that no critical appreciation of a work can be based on rumor and cannot be opportunely expressed without being seen and heard. Protestant ministers hoped for interviews and discussions on an object that had to be seen in order to be discussed and that had to be discussed in order to be judged. Credit is given to the spoken word. The visible doesn't kill in the field of an always-active speech.

If violence arises in the failure and impossibility of mediation, what place does the image occupy in relation to mediation? The ambiguity surrounding the topic of images today arises from a misinterpretation or an incorrectly assumed fact concerning the term *media*. Because an object is called media friendly, that is, produced by the technologies of communication, we naively imagine that it is in mediation and immediately give it a symbolic value. We even invent a science for this mediation by reducing it to the strategies and technologies of communication. But in doing so we forget that the fundamental characteristic of the image is its immediacy, its primitive resistance to mediation. We have become accustomed to call all that speaks to a public via a media-friendly channel, and we infer that everything can be channeled. But images can't be channeled. Images greatly surpass channels, and with their ruses they invade bodies and minds that our station managers think they control. By their insistent, passionate, and silent presence images are held together by the speech provided by the pleasure of seeing that they offer. It is not the content of images that makes their violence problematic, because their content can be indiscriminately cruel, wild, or peaceful without harming or destroying thought. There are visibilities that personify a discourse; it is always the discourse of the master. From then on, the visible indoctrinates and incorporates spectators in the visibility of the personifying body, which is no more than the body of its underlying discourse. The master's discourse subjects the gaze to the visible and engulfs it. Visibilities whose forms personify nothing and are inhabited by speech are completely different. In French this is called *incarner à l'écran*, incarnating on the screen. In this case, the visible puts the spectator in a place where the image is yet to be constructed. The visible is shared only in terms of an image educated by the voice.

Incarnation, Incorporation, and Personification on the Screen

If spectators of a crime become criminals, it is because they are no longer spectators. What makes one stupid also makes one malicious. Under the identificatory and fusional regime, even the spectacle of virtue can make one a criminal, just as the spectacle of beauty can give rise to the worst hideousness. This is the real violence; it is the murder of thought by

tyrannical images. Holy images have not prevented some from becoming murderous inquisitors.

But I would like to evoke an exemplary case: a film produced through the criminal violence of its sponsor, the Third Reich, and made by a disciplined filmmaker submissive to Hitler. To the filmmaker's great misfortune, Joseph Goebbels did not like the film, and it was censored. But it so happens that this film was saved by Henri Langlois.[7] The film has escaped its director's apologetic intentions, and it deserves close analysis. During those times of horrifying dictatorship where bodies and gazes were completely enslaved, where filmmakers were the minstrels of unifying incorporation and edifying personification, Willy Zielke produced, against all expectations, a free and contradictory object at the service of a free incarnation of fiction. An unacceptable object whose images did violence to totalitarianism, it triggered the wrath of the Nazi propaganda minister, who wasn't mistaken. The strength of *Das Stahltier* came from its appeal to spectators who were free to construct their place in a narrative space where dreams, hopes, and failures mingled. The questions that interest me are the following: How is it that a work of art is always and inevitably unsatisfying for a dictator? How does a work provoke violence insofar as it implements the violent power of a liberty?

Why, you will ask, immediately confer on this film the status of a work of art? The easiest answer would be to recognize the formal qualities and emotional strength that allow it to be analyzed with the instruments and the references of those who regularly engage in critical work on the history of works of art in general and on that of cinematographic objects in particular, that is, art historians and art critics. In short, it boils down to saying that beauty is insubordinate because it is indifferent to the circumstances that gave rise to it and is independent of its surroundings. Art historians have sufficiently fought over this problem. Without entering into the debate, I would say that at each moment in history a work of art is characterized both by its chosen aesthetic form and by the figure of freedom that it incarnates. But what is the nature of the bond that ties it to the world from which it was born? All that surrounds it determines its form, allowing it to be dated and interpreted as much in its means as in its meanings. But what makes it an event? This event is one with the world, but by its very presence it invariably shatters the predictable order and imposes its own will. This is why, in the present case, to understand what was Zielke's incredible freedom—far from being a tribute to the autonomy of his work

7. Henri Langlois was the cofounder and longtime director of the Cinémathèque Française.—TRANS.

with regard to his patrons—requires that we analyze all the circumstances that determined its birth.

If I had both to summarize the film and describe it philosophically, I would say that it shows the invention of the railroad—marking its one-hundredth anniversary—as a human, intellectual, and technical adventure, which is incarnated on the screen with a weight equal to threats and promises, failure and success. It is historical thought incarnated in a story, played by flesh-and-blood actors haunted by the words that express their hopes and dreams. It is a documentary of the history of technologies, approached, as in Gaston Bachelard's work, in terms of an oneiric imaginary, fertilizing the materialization of scientific thought. Propaganda is abandoned for fiction. These simple phrases could suffice to cut this object from all univocal programs, glorifying a regime—not a mythical personification but a reality whose fictional montage erases no real feature in a design of idealization. This film is haunted by the thought of the greatest epistemologists of its century and the cinematographic model of the Soviet Union. This is made clear, moreover, in its very title, *Das Stahltier*, where Stalin's surname resonates with the steel of its program.[8]

What does it look like? It is composed of a perfectly articulated succession of themes where words and images answer each other without any break, since its underlying thought completely unifies the adventure of seeing and thinking. An engineer dreams, thinks, and plans the making of a machine, and his work becomes simultaneously a reality and a nightmare. His power as a scientist gives him no real competence in daily life; his fantasies and his blunders link him to a whole history of age-old dreams, endeavors, and failures whose outcome is nonetheless positive: the railroad exists and it has transformed the human community. Each historical episode of the railroad related by the engineer is emphasized by scenes from the life of railroad men out in nature, sleeping, playing, bathing, and resting. Nature's proximity, its metaphorical intimacy, allows Zielke to create an analogical work—through the criss-crossing of train tracks, tree branches, and wheat shaken by the wind—as well as an organic model to which the machine itself seems to answer. As a zoomorphic machine—as an animal, anthropomorphic model—it is a lover. The ambiguity between its bestiality and its humanity persists from one end to the other, situating the fate of our inventions squarely in the relationships forged between real persons. This linking of nature and industry, familiar since the end of the

8. Stalin was born Josef Jughashvili. It is thought that his patronymic derives from an old Georgian word for steel, which could explain his subsequent choice of pseudonym: *Stal* is Russian for steel. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stalin#Origin_of_name.2C_nicknames_and_pseudonyms—Trans.

nineteenth century, was at the heart of Soviet aesthetics where the agricultural world of peasants is associated with the industrial and ideological revolution. The acceleration of machines leads to an acceleration of the world, but for Zielke the history of men follows the rhythm of thought and not of things; the history of the train is a slow, human adventure incarnated on the screen by bodies that are never responsible for personifying an idea or for lending their voices to abstractions.

Made up of fairly heterogeneous parts, *Das Stahltier*'s unity is found elsewhere, in what justified its inadmissible strength for Hitler. It is this unity that did not escape the censors' gaze and that made it unacceptable. The questions of time, history, and artistic creation are one and the same question offered under different guises, but without the solution of continuity, and it is the place reserved for the spectator that makes this film uncontrollable. If we reduce it to what directly surrounds it from a political as well as a stylistic point of view, we will cut it off from the history of works and powers over an entire century. But the film is a celebration of a centenary, thus of the interpretation of an entire century that stands behind a conception of time. To understand it, we must reexamine both the historical meaning of the commission itself and its manipulation of memory, the spearhead of Nazism, as of all totalitarian regimes.

First of all, what was happening in Germany over the previous century with the building of the railroad that the Nazis wanted to appropriate? Secondly, how did Zielke introduce by the singular feat of his work, whether he intended to or not, a proper temporality that cannot be subjected to any univocal program and that leaves intact the spectator's critical faculties?

Why was Zielke's film refused first by the Berlin *Reichsbahn* and then by Goebbels? What was at stake in the centenary celebration for the Third Reich in the commission of this film? In what way was it a question of propaganda?

The celebration of the centenary of the German railroad in 1935 was nothing less than the celebration of German unity that occurred under Bismarck in 1870. The project already went against the facts since, in 1935, Germany wasn't one hundred years old. Zielke's film is situated in the lively and dramatic nexus that makes the German railroad a machine of life, with the creation of the *Zollverein*,[9] and a machine of death, when one knows what was the function of the railroad during deportation. The film

9. *Zollverein*: "A union, orig. between certain states of the German empire, after 1833 including all the states, for the maintenance of a uniform rate of customs duties from other countries and of free trade among themselves; hence *gen.* of other countries" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. "zollverein").—TRANS.

is thus both an announcement of birth and of death. The road of iron will turn into the road of hell. *Das Stahltier*: the title is already ambiguous since it expresses both nature and industry, civilization and savagery. Didn't Nazism in fact exploit the murderous identification of the biological with the industrial? Train of life and train of death: it is the same object that distributes life and death, union, communication, communion, and exclusion. The train unites and separates with the goal of creating the territorial, economic, and racial unity of the German nation. Earth and soil assert themselves by the rail. In order to grasp this completely, we must mention someone who is today largely forgotten but whose work is nonetheless officially registered in *Printing and the Mind of Man* as one of the five hundred works that changed the history of humanity.[10] His name is Friedrich List. Born in 1789, he wrote *Das nationale system der politischen ökonomie* (1841). The history of this man is worth summarizing, as it resembles the reverse image of Zielke, who was himself, it should be remembered, a railroad engineer and a tragic dreamer like his novel's antihero engineer, Klaassen.

List—a railroad engineer, an autodidact, and a great dreamer like Klaassen—should have had a political career. Throughout his life, he had but one ideal: German unity. This unity would occur thanks to economic unification; this unification occurred with the abolition of interior customs barriers between the different Germanic states, and it is the railroad that would be the sole unifying machine of an entire people headed towards national fulfillment. Only the train would permit the creation of a national market, which, in its turn, would single-handedly constitute the foundation of the German nation, of Germany as nation. This idée fixe—revolutionary between 1817 and 1820—put List in prison for subversion. Released from prison, he spent time in France, then in England, before returning to Germany to finish serving his sentence. He was freed in 1824 on condition that he leave for the United States, where he stayed seven years. In 1830, he was part of the American consulate in Leipzig. He resumed his battle for national unity and failed in all his endeavors. In 1833, he wrote an unsuccessful tract entitled *Uber ein sächsisches Eisenbahn-System als Grundlage eines allgemeinen deutschen Eisenbahn-Systems* [On a Railway Network in Saxony as a Basis for the German Railroad].[11] In 1847, he shot himself in the head. Still, in 1835, the first German railroad was built between Fürth and

10. See Percy H. Muir and John Carter, *Printing and the Mind of Man*, 2d ed. (Munich, 1983).

11. See Friedrich List, *Uber ein sächsisches Eisenbahn-System als Grundlage eines allgemeinen deutschen Eisenbahn-Systems*, ed. L. O. Brand (Mainz, 1974). This work does not appear to have been translated into English.—Trans.

Nuremberg with the help of the English. History would have to wait until Bismarck for the economic and political union of Germany to be accomplished under Wilhelm II's Prussia.

I mention this history because Zielke doesn't mention this dreamer-engineer in the very technical narrative that he constructs around the failures and difficulties of the French and the English inventors of the first machines. Not a word is spoken about the ideology of national unity of which, from its inception, the German railroad was a messenger. The filmmaker transformed a national adventure into a scientific one. Worse still, he presented a scientific adventure as a universal human experience that, beyond national borders, is haunted by dreams, an adventure that would bear the experience of all the success and failure of every inventor. *Create* is not a Nazi verb. The major importance of List's works for the *Riechsbahn* is well known, as it was for all of industrial Europe, because his works were translated into French by Henri Richelot as early as 1851.[12] The railroad is a political stake of national unity, tied to the history of European nations and debates about free trade. The history of its promoter is as tragic as that of the filmmaker, since Zielke, in turn, made the railroad a machine for producing solidarity and social communication between science and the proletariat. It thus also reconnects with Soviet themes about the social revolution and the equalization of classes via work. Prison, for List, meant a psychiatric hospital and perhaps, it is thought, castration. However, the major difference between the two lies in the fact that for List political action takes shape in a technical object, while for Zielke it is the technical action that incarnates a political action. It is by the formal cinematographic work that Zielke reveals his revolutionary aims. Zielke's train is the one with which his film crew traveled up and down Germany and that produced a disturbing narrative. Nazism cannot tolerate a cinematographic space that is a space of incarnation for political thought. List was confronted with princes and principalities eager to keep their privileges and their autonomy. Zielke was confronted with the constituted Reich that resisted because the very essence of the national-socialist ideal was threatened by this new train of narration. The unifying machine, producer of a national identity, no longer creates the desired unity because it is a machine of distance and incarnation. The history of the railroad is no longer a strictly German history, but a story shared by all those who dream, search, invent, and work. It is not a triumphalist history whose centenary celebrates its apotheosis, but a human drama that is not at the end of its difficulties. This machine that has already killed can kill again. The round-

12. See List, *Système national d'économie politique,* trans. Henri Richelot (Paris, 1851).

ing up of people is not the event of an epic and sacred community entering into the industrial crusade. The train of cinema does not stop in Auschwitz. Except perhaps with Steven Spielberg and Roberto Benigni.

The machine is experienced like a new animality, that is, like an inhuman entity that is nonetheless capable of domestication. A figure of alterity, it also becomes an unpredictable woman and deadly lover. As in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Eve of the Future Eden*,[13] the creator lives a secret and enigmatic life with his creature. We discover here the entire romantic tradition of the monster and demiurge, panic-stricken by what he creates with his hands. The metaphysical vein of romanticism feeds on the exquisite fear that is inspired by its own dreams. There is a monster therein, and the double designation of the mechanical organs by the engineer and the worker constructs the polysemic equivocity of our works. In other words, work does not produce the ideal, but it does construct the obstacle to the domination of fantasies in favor of speech and history. This could not have satisfied those who inscribed, at the entrance of the camps, the place offered to satisfy all fantasies: *Arbeit macht frei*. The Reich did not want to entrust the responsibility of constructing the real to the workers nor did it want to entrust the care of constructing freedom to the dreamers. The German machine of iron opens the centenary of metallurgical death, of machine death. This is why the accidental death of the dreamers in the film was for Goebbels an invalid memory for a mechanism that must triumph. A propaganda film must produce univocal and mythical signs.

The personal adventure of the engineer Klaassen has a philosophical value that Nazism didn't know how to deal with. What Goebbels had expected was a heroic story that would make the German people the train conductor of hate and triumph. Here it is impossible not to think of that train conductor in Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985). There is nothing heroic or epic about the emotion that comes from Zielke's film, whose emotional charge comes from the appearance of bodies troubled by their desire to live a kind of love story, not with some*thing* but with all the images secreted by this thing. The train incarnates an affair of desire and the bonds of pleasure and melancholy that are forged between images and man, nature and things. In *Das Stahltier*, no image of bodies is incorporated in the invisible body that dominates them in the ideal and fantasized body that absorbs spectators and actors in the annihilating digestion of the "disgusting belly." The two controls over the invisible are incompatible: Zielke's was inhabited by speech while the Third Reich's was inhabited by the discourse

13. See Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *Eve of the Future Eden*, trans. Marilyn Gaddis Rose (Lawrence, Kan., 1981).

of fusional incorporation. It was under this second regime that Leni Riefenstahl accepted Hitler's commissions.

This is what Siegfried Kracauer has to say: "While American films usually reflect society or national life through the biography of some hero representative of his epoch, these German films, conversely, reduce individuals to derivatives of a whole more real than all the individuals of which it consists. . . . Hitler himself is not portrayed as an individual with a development of his own but as the embodiment of terrific impersonal powers."[14] This very apt comment immediately poses the problem of personification on the screen. It is well known that Goebbels was fascinated with Russian cinema, in which he saw a mythical, revolutionary dimension. He dreamt of a Nazi Eisenstein. But Eisenstein's cinema represents both persons and personifications. The fundamental difference, whether in Eisenstein or Pudovkin, comes from the existential stature of each individual, considered fully human, even in the cradle. In the image, speech becomes flesh regardless of the discourse that it pretends to serve without question. In a Nazi film, the only thing that matters must be the invincibility of the German hero in a narrative that eludes all temporality. For Riefenstahl, the actors' bodies are only the instrumental personification of an idea, tools for a discourse.

There are perhaps two figures of the invisible in the visible of the screen: the one that assumes incarnation and the one that is only concerned with incorporation. The place made for the spectator in each is fundamentally different. It is in the work of the image itself that this insurmountable space is created and not in the explicit ideological content of the narrative. Thus, for example, D. W. Griffith, whose *Birth of a Nation* (1915) offers a founding myth that nourished the most professed racism, produced a complex confusion where the warlike signifiers of murderous incorporation endlessly intersect with the personal lives of bodies in the images. Remember the kitten that plays in the folds of the young girl's dress, inflated by the wind.

If Hitler's body personifies the German nation, if when he speaks it is the Aryan nation that speaks, it is because every fictional construction of this body and voice refers to a rhetoric and a semiotics common to those who look at him. The eyes of the dumbfounded spectator are filled and fulfilled by this paralyzing agent of all movement. The propagandist is not content to employ already-existent symbols and emblems, but he overdetermines them in order to impose a univocal regime of interpretation and

14. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, trans. pub., ed. Leonardo Quaresima (1947; Princeton, N.J., 2004), p. 289.

to manipulate the desire to kill and the desire to die. This is how fanaticism is produced in the cultural visibilities of idolatry. Visibilities are at the service of communication and are a privileged instrument of doctrine. Personification thus causes the subject to fuse with the sign; there is only one unique sound, one unanimous clamor, uttered by a body without image. When the image dies barbarity begins.

In *The Triumph of the Will* (1935), Riefenstahl fulfilled the desire of Hitler and the Nazi body. She filmed the führer's body for the first congress of the National Socialist party. It is obvious that it isn't Hitler's person, per se, that is of cinematographic interest for her. His "excarnated" visibility, to employ Jean-Toussaint Desanti's expression,[15] is the abstract body of the German nation. Most often she films him from the back or in three-quarters, or she overexposes his face or films him in a low-angle shot in a kind of theophany. It is never a question of making a portrait. Jean-Luc Godard once observed that victims are generally shown frontally, while executioners are shown from the back. We face Hitler's back and we follow him, that is, in the executioner's footsteps. In front of him, the crowd is a compact and indistinct mass, like the corporal entity of a global body. The monolithic cohesion of a body is repeated in the boundless perspective of the troops that engulfs the space of the screening itself. The cinema theatre and the Nuremberg stadium become one and the same space. The camera doesn't linger for even a fraction of a second on a body that would give its flesh to the living image of a subject. The negation of the image goes together with that of the flesh. Instead of a fiction, there is a derealization of filmed bodies, a transubstantiation of reality in a disincarnated simulacra. These bodies that kill and that are ready to die are unaware that they themselves have been sacrificed. Totalitarian cinema is only an abstraction. Personification here operates on all levels; the Germans will have to sacrifice their own image—thus will have to give up life—so that the idea that they are responsible for personifying may live, and those who do not enter into this logic of personification will be deprived of a face and all personal dignity. In order to become a killer, the Nazi population had to sacrifice themselves. In mourning their own image, German citizens would have as much trouble in reconstructing an invisible dignity as they would have in freeing themselves from guilt and shame. Without an image, each one is confronted with the solitude of their irresponsibility. Since

15. Jean-Toussaint Desanti (1914–2002) was a French philosopher who taught at the Écoles Normales Supérieures on the Rue d'Ulm and Saint-Cloud and at the Sorbonne. His students included Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, and Jacques Derrida. He is known for his work in phenomenology; see, for instance, Jean-Toussaint Desanti, *Introduction à la phenomenology* (Paris, 1976).—Trans.

then, German cinema has not stopped looking for new appearances of freedom. But its imaginal flesh was carried away with the real bodies of its victims.

A counterexample will make this point even clearer. In *The Great Dictator* (1940), Charlie Chaplin's incarnation of Hitler gives his iconic flesh, his total ambivalence, and his free undecidability to the same body. The Jew and the dictator are one and the same body offered to a double incarnation. Hinkel's incarnation is enough to deconstruct and collapse all personification. The comic effects displayed with the image of the barber and that of the dictator do not result in the slightest confusion between the two incarnated subjects. Hitler's incarnation provokes an absolute collapse of his image, and his voice is no more than a parodic jumble. The body acts against the script—the actor resistant to history. Chaplin does not play the incarnation of the good against the personification of the bad, no more than the opposite. Instead, he puts two incarnations side by side and face to face. From one and the same body, two incompatible images place spectators there where their judgment is going to be exercised. *The Great Dictator* is a real political object. Chaplin plays the incarnation to the hilt, and it is in the shape of the tyrant that he is destroyed. The violence of the incorporator becomes a force turned against him in the image. We are not far from the therapy that is based on the mirrored reversal of evil. This perhaps is the magic of cinema. The more it incarnates, the more it frees.

To make someone visible and audible: is this incarnation or is this personification? Is this giving speech to flesh or is it giving body to discourse? When the church fathers imagined the relation of the visible to the word, far from securing the image in writing, they sought to make use of the voice within the image itself. The person of Christ, called *prosopon*, that is, the person seen frontally, cannot under any circumstances be called the personification of God who speaks in the place of the Father on the model of prosopopoeia. Littré[16] defines *personification* as a "literary figure that consists of making an inanimate being or an abstraction a real character." And for *prosopopoeia*, we find the following: "A rhetorical figure that lends action and movement to things without movement, which makes persons, inanimate things, and sometimes even dead persons speak, and they are seen as persons." The speech of the prophets is thus no longer a prosopopoeia. The proximity of these two figures, prosopopoeia and personification, specifies and proves that there is a double operation in the Greek

16. Dictionary of the French language first published by Hachette between 1862 and 1873 and named after its principal author Emile Littré. The Littré represents good usage between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.—TRANS.

prosopopoeïa, since we give a face to the person, and we make what has neither face nor phonation speak. A donkey may serve to personify stupidity, but Julien Sorel incarnates ambition.[17] In one case, there is an always substitutable, illustrative program: for the donkey, I can substitute a goose; in the other, there is a subject, and under no circumstance can I substitute Sorel for Rastignac.[18] In a rhetorical context, to personify courage or cowardice is to offer an analogy that can be perceived by reading and looking and that depends on a precoded translation of relevant traits. For personification to be operative, an agreement must be made between the signs and the symbols of its reading or of its inscription in the visible. If justice is represented, it may be a beautiful woman with peaceful features and balanced posture; she will place one hand on a sword, and, in the other, she will hold a pair of scales. Or we could illustrate her triumph by a royal crown and her independence by removing all heaviness, allowing her to float in the ether. For a Chinese person, this imagery is totally illegible because it owes all its metaphorical power to a discourse and the uses of signs of a particular culture. All signs and symbols are here the equivalent of a discourse, set in the field of communication. The soundtrack takes care of the question of prosopopoeia and implies the emotional management of the desire to hear the image's voice. Christian thought indicates an entirely different situation of sound in iconicity. The homonymy of the image with its model, far from being a gesture of identification in the acknowledgement of a resemblance, is on the contrary based on a dissimilarity of the visible with the invisible image that it shows in its sensitive flesh. Writing the name of the represented in the image is to make audible a voice that, coming from elsewhere, comes to inhabit the visible. The idea of the voice inhabiting the visible shifts all illusion of real presence in order to make of the visible the place of an auditory address. The voice-off of the hidden God becomes the voice-in of the incarnation for which he who makes himself heard must then answer in his name. The name in which he answers is that of the invisible Father. This authority of the voice in incarnation refers back to the voice of the author himself because he is responsible for what he shows in his own name.

This authority exists even in silent cinema. The soundtrack of images is certainly where the power of the address within the visible occurs. The indissociable mechanism that produces the visible and the audible carries within it the political nature of the place offered to the spectator. Chaplin

17. The hero of Stendahl's *The Red and the Black* (1830).—Trans.

18. Rastignac is a character in Balzac's *The Human Comedy* who personifies *arrivisme*. Although both Sorel and Rastignac stand for ambition, they have completely different characters.—Trans.

completely understood the function of Hitlerian vociferation, just as Riefenstahl understood the use of warrior hymns. The violence of images is inseparable from the manipulation of sound in the construction of the bodies that receive signals emitted by the screen. On 11 September 2001 the intentional suspension of sound during the immediate retransmission of the collapse of the twin towers simultaneously signified that the spectacle left us speechless and that the political body was still incapable of producing a discourse. A kind of mortification prevented TV viewers from accessing a possible meaning in a cohabitation of voices. Something like a hallucination spread out in an abstract space, until the discourse of the Western Christian body came to place the spectacle's reception in the controllable places of prosopopoeia. The towers personified America and through her, all of humanity, as a victim of a carnivorous invisibility. The power of myth was substituted for the strength of the real. The voice of power was the only alternative to the silence of the visible. Perhaps this is why many began to write, as if writing once again was the only way to escape the silence and the allegorical prosopopoeia of the twin towers. The violence of terrorism, like that of any dictatorship, struck both the real life of the victims and the imaginary life of the living. The execution of the image invariably accompanies the execution of life and liberty.

Epilogue

This brief reflection on the violence of the visible is merely a rough outline for a collective interrogation of the political future of our emotions. I have only pointed to some leads in need of further interrogation, without any pretense of resolving the obvious contradictions of a world that seems to want to defend a representation of democracy and that only follows the inflexible inclination where the nonascribable places of a shared meaning are betrayed and then abandoned. The visible is a market that ceaselessly kills images and with them all hope of freedom. The world of enslavement is that of satisfaction, while the world of images demands that one is never completely sated. The thirst for seeing the invisible and the thirst for hearing voices do not require us to be tied to a mast to protect us from a shipwreck. Every image signifies a dangerous storm, where we must know how to govern. We are all responsible for the visibilities that we make available and want to share. In a politics of the visible it is not a question of counting voices but of giving each voice a place where it can be heard and of giving each spectator a place where he or she can respond and be heard. The violence of the visible is no more than the disappearance of such a place and thereby the annihilation of the voice.

In Western Christian thought, our relation to the image and to images

is indisputably tied to our freedom as well as to all that endangers this freedom, even to the point of destroying it. It is easier to prohibit seeing than to allow thinking. Images are controlled in order to guarantee the silence of thought, and when thought has lost its rights we accuse the image of perpetuating evil under the assumption that it is uncontrolled. The violence done to the image, that is the question. In the violence of every discussion on the visible, we need to clearly understand that the violence of the visible is attached to the war on images and the war on thought. As Godard says in his short film *Changer d'image* (1982) every contract accepted with visibilities opens like a collaboration with the enemy.[19] Defending the image is to resist that which eliminates the alterity of the gaze that constructs the invisibility of meaning. The strength of images is in the power of the voices that inhabit them. It is not by chance that images of war now mobilize the producers of images. Today we commonly speak of the war of images because the violence of situations of aggression is immediately articulated in the management of the visible and the transmission of discourses. The battles waged on our screens call citizens to imagine the visible and the invisible as decisive stakes in political analysis. It is imperative that we take the education of the gaze seriously because every war today becomes an occasion to declare war on thought itself.

To think about images is to respond to the future of violence. To accuse images of violence, when the market of the visible directly attacks our freedom, is to harm the invisible and thus to abolish the place of the other in the construction of a seeing together.

19. This little-known short film was part of an omnibus film commissioned by the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel on the theme of change. It was originally broadcast on French television (FR3).—Trans.