

Iconoclasm as a Critique of the Digital Scopic Regime

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Abstract

When faced with the diagnosis of a digital scopic regime defined by the ubiquity of images, iconoclasm emerges as a possible critical approach. By adapting what Spanish author José Luis Brea (2010) called “The three eras of the image”, this paper outlines three eras of iconoclasm. The first era defines iconoclasm as an act of destruction in the age of matter-images. Since Byzantium, iconoclasm has been understood as the destruction of images as-associated with the plastic supports of iconic paintings, sculptures, and architecture, as well as the prohibition of their worship and the blocking of their material circulation. The second era describes iconoclasm as a montage procedure in the history of film-images. As a tech-nique, we would be facing a way of making films out of fragments that destroy the unity of the cinematographic image. In the third era, that of electronic-image, we are dealing with a contradiction regarding iconoclasm. On the one hand, images are now superabundant, to the point of their self-cancellation insofar as they become unconsumable: they are not many, they are infinite, ungraspable to any human gaze. Besides, in this iconoclasm turned system, the image loses its specific qualities, i.e. its aesthetic potential, and is impoverished to sur-veillance technology. On the other hand, at the end of the article, we trace perspectives to recover in the dialectic of iconoclasm its critical potential. Each era presents a case of local iconoclasm, allowing the exposition of the unequal north/south geopolitics immanent to the ocularcentric regime of modernity.

Keywords: Iconoclasm, scopic regime, matter-image, film-image, electronic-image, digitization, screens, critique.

Introduction

This article explores the concept of iconoclasm, the history of its strategies, and its current potential to critique the digital scopic regime¹. The very word “iconoclasm” is based on the image: generally speaking, iconoclasm refers to the act of breaking (*klásis*) images (*eikón*). Therefore, a question arises: In a world plagued by digital images, how can we explore the meanings, contexts, and strategies of iconoclasm today? Several critical diagnoses of the contemporary state of the image coincide in the connection between the ubiquity of digital images and eye anxiety, the weakening of subjective reflexivity, the digitization of the private and public spheres, the manipulation of social opinion, and the crisis of democracy. In the face of the digital scopic regime, we argue that iconoclasm works both as a critical concept to describe the present and as a regulatory strategy

of what is visible. We adopt the periodization of the image proposed by the Spanish critical theorist José Luis Brea (2010), which identifies three eras: matter-image, film-image, and e-image. Based on this framework, we identify three eras of iconoclasm. In the first era, *matter-iconoclasm* is characterized as an act of destruction of matter-images. Both in its meaning circumscribed to the history of art as a prohibition of the worship and destruction of the religious icon in Byzantium (Hauser 1951), as well as its return to modernity in the form of a dispute for visibility in urban space (Freedberg 2017; Durán Medraño 2009), iconoclasm always shows tension between aesthetics, politics, and economics. The demolition of a monument during the University Reform of 1918 in Córdoba, Argentina, unveils the triple colonial power of Church, State, and Capital, which established the modern scopic regime. In the era of *film-iconoclasm*, cinema introduced iconoclasm as a

¹ The term 'scopic regime' is taken from Martin Jay, “Scopic Regimes of Modernity”. In Foster, H. *Vision and Visuality*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1988.

montage procedure, in which films are composed of fragments that destroy the unity of the cinematographic image. According to Susan Sontag (1969), the modernist tradition of cinema is iconoclastic as an immanent critique of the history of images. More recently, a film by Argentinean filmmaker Lucrecia Martel provides an opportunity to analyze a critical use of images within a regime of explicitness, where cutting, framing, and focus become “aesthetic-political decisions” (Schwarzböck 2016, 125). In the third era, *e-iconoclasm* is no longer a political act or aesthetic procedure, but rather a systematic effect of the digital world. The abundance of images on the screen leads to their self-cancellation, to a subjective gaze incapable of perceiving and processing the infinite flow of digital images. The human sensorium is replaced by an interconnected system of cyber surveillance. Chilean philosopher Alejandra Castillo (2020, 13) not only proposes a diagnosis of the ocularcentric regime that has governed imperialist European modernity but also responds with an independent “archive” of “artistic and visual policies of resistance in Latin America”. In line with this principle, we challenge the reductive European canon using three local iconoclastic cases that expose the unequal geopolitics between the global North and South. Although the diagnosis suggests that iconoclasm has transitioned from a critical strategy to a system, this article contends that iconoclasm is still an open question: What other possible and desirable kind of iconoclasm could challenge the digital scopic regime? We suggest three ways of understanding iconoclastic critical power: a cutting and limiting of the administration of images, a subjective escape from the screens, and a de-hierarchization of the sense of sight.

Era 1: Matter-Iconoclasm as a Destruction Act

Within the matter-image age, implying “an image incarnated for eternity (...) that lives chained and indissolubly united to its support-object” (Brea 2010, 11), iconoclasm aims at destroying the icon in its variety of physical materialities. In other words, the first kind of iconoclasm is constituted by its *stricto sensu*

version, that is the physical act of prohibition and destruction of religious icons embodied in material pieces (Hauser 1951). This attack then expands to public monuments devoted to idolized figures, that is, sculptural, architectural, and pictorial works (Duran Medraño 2009; Romano 2018; Brea 2010).

During the 1918 university reform of the National University of Córdoba, Argentina, a group of students left an iconoclastic slogan on the pedestal of an iconic monument of the Jesuitic status quo, after knocking it down.² The University Reform was a significant historic event in Córdoba that inspired other university uprisings in the region and anticipated the student revolts of the 1960s. It constituted a political and cultural battle that made progress in secularizing and democratizing access to higher education. The sculpture paid tribute to Dr. Rafael García, a professor emeritus at the University. It honored him as a symbol of Córdoba's enlightened culture and conservative Catholic values. The attack against the phalluses of the public space, such as vertical icons, obelisks, and columns, involves various creative innervations in the destruction. David Freedberg (2017) provides insights into iconoclastic strategies against public monuments commemorating gods, heroes, or dictators. These strategies include ocular enucleation (removing the eyes), de-rostrification (altering the face), decapitation (removing the head), and toppling the figures from their pedestals. These methods of fragmenting the sculptural body are material operations that mutilate the works. The pedestals are also part of the iconoclastic dispute because they elevate, verticalize, and sustain the monumental sculptures. Analogous to frames for paintings, pedestals are the condition for perceiving any form as a significant and authoritative icon. They also bear inscriptions that guide their reception. Returning to the case of Córdoba, the slogan stated: “In Córdoba, there are too many idols and not enough pedestals”. In her research, art historian Carolina Romano (2018) discusses the iconoclastic movement against the sculpture of the Catholic jurist teacher as a political stance. The movement aimed to challenge the hegemony of the coalition of the Church, the landowning class, and the Jesuit University in Córdoba

² The Jesuits, who permeated Latin America with the scopic regime of Eurocentric modernity, implanted Catholic iconology through the dissemination of frescoes, commemorative statuary, oil painting, and

religious architecture that responded to the order of the Society of Jesus.

(Romano 2018, 7). However, Romano argues that the iconoclasm in this historical event in Córdoba cannot be simplified into a reformist/conservative binary. Instead, it is a contested issue regarding images and visibility in public spaces, which both the conservative Catholic and reformist student groups seek to exploit. In response to the removal of Dr. García's sculpture, the dominant power in Córdoba reinstated and consecrated the monument in the public space (Romano 2018, 10). The case of Córdoba shows that material iconoclasm is historically intertwined with religious, political, and social reasons. Yet, what is subsumed under the idea of material destruction encompasses a range of diverse iconoclastic strategies that already had a long history at the beginning of the 20th century.

In a sense limited to the history of art, Arnold Hauser reconstructs iconoclasm as the prohibition and destruction of the type of religious icon, especially the small figures of Christian saints and Virgin Mary (Hauser 1951, 145). Although Hauser traces Christian iconoclasm back to the beginning of the ancient church and its various moments, he strictly locates iconoclasm between the eighth and ninth centuries of the Byzantine period. The iconoclastic motives of Leo III, then emperor of Byzantium (or the Eastern Roman Empire), are related to the unrepresentability of God's perfection in the material limits of images, the sensuality of ancient aesthetic culture, and the civilizing project of mastering irrational fetishism through icons. But Hauser argues that forbidding the worship of religious icons was motivated by economic interests, in particular the freedom from taxation. The aim was to disrupt the visual propaganda of an expanding church and monastery. "This measure affected them as the producers, owners, and custodians of the images, but most of all as the guardians of the magic spell which the holy icons had woven around themselves" (Hauser 1951, 149). And also within a political tactic related to the preservation of the emperor's power over the armies for the wars against the Persians and Arabs. Therefore, although it influenced later artistic styles, the iconoclastic movement is not anti-artistic itself (Hauser 1951, 146), but has an economic-political background. What is significant about Byzantine iconoclasm is that it was carried out through an edict, that is, a reform of the normative framework of Constantinople aimed at radically

twisting a communal custom around the visual and monastic production, circulation, and reception of religious icons.

Iconoclasm as an act of destruction, which originated from a legislative strategy in Byzantium, has resurfaced in modern times as a collective impulse. In various revolts, revolutions, and social reforms, images have been seen as symbols of established power. Unlike its medieval counterpart, modern iconoclasm is a dispute for visibility in public spaces. Murals, statues, equestrian sculptures, commemorative monuments, and even entire buildings have become iconic. The dispute between iconophilism and iconoclasm has a long historical process, starting from the religious icons in the monasteries' cloisters and extending to life in the bourgeois city. This tension is present in the institutions of the modern State, which are allied with the Church and with early capitalism. An example of this tension is the iconoclastic attack against the Colonne Vendôme during the months of 1871 that lasted the Paris Commune, considered the first proletarian government in history. José María Durán Medraño (2009) analyzes the history of the column built by Napoléon III in honor of Napoleon I. The text exposes the open dialectic that keeps the production and destruction of images intertwined through a sequence of icons that replace other icons: "The intention is to understand iconoclasm within the processes of creation of culture" (Durán Medraño 2009, 51). Durán Medraño's contribution is his post-Marxist approach to iconoclasm, which enables him to reveal the social forces in tension and their historical conditions in the icons. According to him, "mainly the workers, artisans and women were the ones who consciously placed themselves at the center of this appropriation by putting into practice a politically determined class point of view" (2009, 66). Thus, Iconoclasm is no longer a means of perpetuating the Emperor's power, but rather a means of insurrection from below.

From its medieval origins to its modern derivations, the prohibition of the cult of images involved government policies linked to the power of the Catholic Church and negotiations with economic forces. To analyze other attacks on icons, it is therefore necessary to understand iconoclasm as a critical juncture between aesthetics, politics, and economics. The assessment of whether iconoclasm is critical or

conservative of the existing social order depends on the analysis of each case's materiality and the interpretation of its significance within the framework of each scopic regime. The inclusion of an Argentine iconoclastic case in the debate on the contemporary state of the image introduces its geopolitical north/south perspective. The iconoclastic attack of the reformist student movement on Dr. Rafael García's monument symbolizes an insurrection against the scopic regime of the Society of Jesus, which acted as an arm of colonial power in Córdoba until the early twentieth century. This event, although ephemeral, accompanied the democratizing, secularizing, and independentist outcome regarding the triple power of Church, State, and Capital in Argentine university education. From today's perspective, this is a local form of iconoclasm that gains its critical force by revealing the imposition of modes of visibility in the public spaces from the global north over the colonized countries of the south.

Era 2: Film-Iconoclasm as a Montage Procedure

The second moment of iconoclasm that we refer to has become an expansive procedure amid the circulation of technical images, particularly in the 20th century. We are specifically referring to the use of montage in cinema.

Susan Sontag (1969) initiated the interpretation of the avant-garde cinema as iconoclastic when she reflected on possibly the most relevant figure of that period of the history of cinema, Jean-Luc Godard. Sontag considers Godard a destroyer of cinema, especially of the rules of linear narrative and fictional cinema. This iconoclastic destruction is achieved through the use of montage, which denies the essence of cinema *within* cinema. The intermedial relationship between image, language, and sound, particularly in terms of literature, poetry, and philosophy, is at the heart of this procedure. The expansion and radicalization of montage is a self-conscious construction of cinematographic technique. This was carried out from the idea of the *jump cut* that emerged with the first Godard and the break produced by his film *Breathless* (1958). A series of iconoclastic operations began

to emerge, such as the visualization of the editing cut to attack the traditional rules of cinematographic narration. This self-reflexivity of Godard's modern cinema also acquires historical consciousness. Modern cinema is historical insofar as it assumes that the spectator is already accustomed to the rules of classical cinema and therefore can break them.

In line with Godard's work, the cinema of the German filmmaker Alexander Kluge can also be considered iconoclastic. Kluge takes the idea of montage to a radical level and acknowledges his debt to the Russian cinema of Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein (Kluge, Liebman, 1988). This focus on montage is evident in his 2009 film, *News from Ideological Antiquity - Marx/Eisenstein/The Capital*. Yet from its beginnings, Kluge shares with Godard the iconoclastic strategy of the destruction of cinema itself, as Sontag's hypothesis indicates. However, Kluge has placed himself in the tradition of critical theory, making explicit his link to Theodor W. Adorno's aesthetic ideas. In this sense, Kluge's cinema can be seen as iconoclastic, since his aim is not to destroy images in general, but their referential function in mainstream cinema. This type of cinematographic realism is associated with the copy feature of audiovisual images, which is exploited by what critical theory refers to as the "culture industry". To counteract the repetitive nature of the culture industry, Kluge's cinema utilizes parody as a strategy. Godard's search for remaking and appropriating images from the spectacle society of the 1960s is similar to Kluge's and close to Guy Debord's iconoclastic critique. Kluge's modernism is distinguished by his emphasis on the concept of 'the film in the spectator's head.' Therefore, Kluge's work proposes a shift in the basis of iconoclasm. It would no longer rely solely on montage to de-hierarchize images or on parody as a political gesture. Instead, it would focus on the absence of images on the screen. The crucial element would not be the image, but rather the cinematic experience of the spectator.

How is the intervention of the montage procedure in contemporary cinema? Is it enough for iconoclasm to de-hierarchize images and juxtapose them next to other elements? Silvia Schwarzböck provides a clue in her book *Los Espantos. Estética y Postdictadura* (2016)³ when

³ The Spanish term "espanto" is difficult to translate into English. Although it could be translated as ghost (fantasma), apparition (aparición), or specter (espectro), none of them coincide with the triple

meaning it has in Spanish of the supernatural return of the dead; the feeling of fright, terror, horror; and the threat that the communist project represents for the capitalist mode of production.

she interprets a production by Argentine filmmaker Lucrecia Martel: *La mujer sin cabeza* [*The Headless Woman*] (2008). In this film, iconoclasm shifts from montage to focus and framing. The film is visually intricate, playing with what can be seen and the unseen: the trigger is a car accident, but it remains unclear whether the female protagonist, Vero, hit a dog or a child. The film begins by introducing Vero's character and using her to depict the (visibly) cynical world of high society in the Argentine province of Salta.⁴ This social group is middle class but practices aristocratic customs, relying on racialized economic inequality to maintain their privilege. The film employs several iconoclastic strategies, including the absence of certain images and abrupt cuts. Some moments are shrouded in total darkness, and certain topics are discussed but not shown on the screen. Besides, Martel utilizes a montage that could perhaps be named, as the Armenian filmmaker Artavazd Peleshyan did, as a "distance montage" (2015). At the beginning, the supposedly road-killed child does not appear in the street; but later there is a body that falls (dead?) on a soccer field; and towards the end, in a river, another body "appears" -in police terms- but is never seen. Iconoclasm also moves to the portrayal of the female protagonist, Vero. The film centers on the protagonist and her trauma, but she is unable to articulate it in words. Her dialogue is limited and broken, leaving her unable to express her emotions verbally. Finally, the technical image itself, shown through a VHS, is crucial to the plot of the film. At this point, the image appears blurred, and the film alludes to the "espantos", which are apparitions that disappear only *if not seen*.

Hence, iconoclasm does not primarily involve the de-hierarchization of the image, despite Martel's frequent claims to base her cinematic aesthetic on sound. Rather, it concerns the image itself, what is in and out of focus. The distribution of focus resembles the class society of "right-wing life" (Schwarzböck 2016): the bodies that are in focus (the white and bourgeois, aspirational, or in the nineties jargon "new rich" protagonists of Salta society) and the bodies that are out of focus, in a blurred second or third plane (the servant children, maids and brown, indigenous peons). Since Martel's first film in

2001, "La ciénaga" [*The Swamp*], this acts as an immanent critique of the modes of continuation of coloniality in Argentine society. It reconstructs the unequal distribution of power within social relations, marked by racial, class, and gender differentials.

According to Schwarzböck (2016), in this Argentine production the use of montage, particularly cutting, can be seen as an iconoclastic politics against the regime of explicitness. The term "explicitness" here refers not only to obscene content but also to information that is already commonly understood and therefore does not need to be shown, to be overexposed. In Martel's film, the right-wing life is implicit though mostly shared by the viewers due to their social and class assumptions. We do not need more images to make visible something that is invisible; quite on the contrary, we do not need to "see more" because we have already seen it all.

However, if cutting in the film-image era is a typical procedure in cinema based on production decisions, the explicitness of the digital scopic regime presents something different. In social media, for example, a cut of e-images is often pointed out as a form of censorship.

Era 3: E-Iconoclasm as a Digital System

Up to this point, we have reconstructed the history of iconoclasm concerning the history of images. Insofar as iconoclasm seeks to limit, depower, denigrate, destroy, cancel, and implode the power of images, it depends profoundly on them and their historical circumstance. Now, how can we redefine iconoclasm in the age of e-images, that is, in an all-encompassing global scopic regime, where every physical attack on monuments, paintings, or buildings is recorded by smartphones and every montage procedure is already integrated as user options on platforms?

The electronic-image stage triggers the inversion of iconoclasm. In previous eras, acts or procedures of restricting visibility were delimited. However, today, iconoclasm is produced precisely by the unrestricted expansion of digital images. The attack against the sensitive power of the image is not produced by prohibition, attack, or absence. Instead, it is produced by multiplication, saturation, excess, ubiquity, overflow,

⁴ The province of Salta is located in the northwestern region of Argentina, as part of the Andes Mountains. Unlike the capital Buenos

Aires and the central region, the north is characterized by a high indigenous presence in the social composition.

deregulation, and infinity. This iconoclasm could be considered systemic, as it is a global effect resulting from the very structure of digitization.

Iconoclasm as a digital system is characterized by negative mathematics: there are not just many images, but rather countless ones that exist outside any accounting system. According to Brea, we inhabit an "electroluminous *innumerabilia*" (2010, 92). To properly critique this volume of digital images, it is important to consider their material conditions of serialization. Only a political economy of visibility can help explain the overabundance of digital images concerning subjective sensibility and in the face of an overflowing gaze incapable of absorbing and processing the incessant flow of visual data. The excess of images makes them unconsumable, leading to their self-cancellation. Due to the excess, digitization is self-censoring. If, as Joan Fontcuberta states, we are "installed in a capitalism of images" (2016, 7) whose overabundance is described as an "inflationary state", it is logical to think of devalued images, which permanently lose value as they circulate. Devalued images lose their exchange value as their visibility increases. This economy's logic seems to derive its formula from the universal capitalist dialectic between the exhaustion of superabundance and the anxiety of shortage. In the case of digital images: "...the false idea that, as with so many other resources, there are always too few images to satisfy our created needs" (Brea 2010, 93). Considering the digital scopic regime in its double condition of virtual appearance and screen device, the economy of superabundance exposes the benefits of the Internet major technology corporations as well as main IT technology companies interested in driving constant expansion through ocular anxiety. The superabundant expansion of digital images turns digital subjectification into a regime of ocular subjection.

The condition of virtual appearance, the experience of an electroluminescent window that lets us see remote or illusory worlds, is also iconoclastic because of the impoverishment and non-transparency of the image. For the first time in history, images look back at us. The transparency of the platforms has its reverse in a hidden side behind that watches, extracts data, and resells them. Therefore, iconoclasm does not oppose the ocularcentrism of modernity. Instead, it presupposes the importance of vision and its role in the modern regime of truth, which is

developed through the representational techniques of the visual arts and the technological advancements of photographic reproducibility, cinematographic projection, and television broadcasting. On its part, the digital system does not value the image itself, its qualities, material potencies, specific contents, or the sensibility it may enable, except as a mere link in a global scopic web. As a consequence, the image loses its aesthetic potential in the digital system and is reduced to control technologies.

The surveillance function of the digital network is not an added, external use, but rather an inherent feature. The development of Internet technology was originally oriented towards espionage by the intelligence services of the United States during the Cold War. Harun Farocki (2001) notes that the relationship between technical images and surveillance has expanded beyond war contexts to include other areas of life, such as prisons and supermarkets. The Internet's spying function, as a covert collection of user data, and the visual surveillance of operative images are now combined on screens due to digitization. The advent of cybersurveillance has enabled more direct intervention and manipulation in the political sphere, particularly during electoral processes. Given the paucity of scientific sources on this subject, we will avoid direct references to public political figures and specific companies. However, it is possible to say that the Internet giants and technology companies of the North impact the administration of nation-states and the politics of specific communities of the global South. This clandestine business of collecting data and creating profiles of users for political purposes has been described under the phenomenon of liquid surveillance (Bauman 2013). The image is reduced to a superficial trap for the eye, which operates in biopolitical terms, that is, it massively manages the direction of the gaze as well as the content of what is seen: psychometrics and digital psychopolitics are used to influence voting behavior and prevent conscious choices (Han 2022). This situation undermines the foundations of the democratic political system, as it takes for granted that citizens are free and reflective voters within the framework of an autonomous nation-state. Cyber-manipulation of public opinion and its impact on democratic suffrage highlights the need for governments with neoliberal economic policies, particularly in Latin America, to reduce state intervention in macroeconomic measures.

This strengthens the dependence on the global North and undermines the deliberative capacity of individuals. The *trompe l'oeil*, the deception in sight being a pictorial technique, becomes the structural functioning of the system of screens.

Iconoclasm: still open

If it is true that the term iconoclasm describes the immanent reverse of the infinite multiplication of digital images, it means that it still possesses an epistemological capacity to critique the digital era. The destruction of the image as the structural form of the digital scopic regime, which is superabundant and cyber vigilant, is not the final word. We propose to recover for iconoclasm its connection with strategies of alteration of the instituted image, not only to describe it but also to discuss it. The aim is to construct the dialectic of iconoclasm in the contemporary world. On the one hand, it has the negative power to explain the digital visual system. On the other hand, it can illuminate strategies of limitation, reconstruction, and 'rest' of the gaze. It is then worth asking: what other possible and desirable forms of iconoclasm could challenge the digital scopic regime? We propose three paths to explore the critical power of iconoclasm against the digital system.

First, iconoclasm can operate as a cutting and limiting measure of the administration of images arranged by the giants of the Internet. The digital scopic regime inherits from cinematographic and television images a type of visual montage, which is determined by visual overexposure or what Schwarzböck (2016) calls "aesthetics of explicitness". However, iconoclasm as a montage also has the potential to establish a limit. The decision to cut, when faced with the depiction of maximum pleasure (sex) or maximum pain (torture), is both ethical and political (Schwarzböck 2016, 124-125). To achieve an ethical-political approach to cutting, editing, and montage of visual material for online platforms, it is necessary to analyze not only the legal frameworks of broadcasting but also the visual administrations of web transnationals. Iconoclasm *stricto sensu*, the prohibition of religious icons, according to Hauser's reconstruction of Byzantium, actually involved a series of legal edicts and legislative reforms that impacted the monastic social sector, which benefited from the circulation of religious images (1951, 145-146). This first legalist conception of iconoclasm, the struggle against - but also to

decide on - the legal framework of image circulation, brings to the forefront a Hauserian question that today could be transposed to the digital world: which is the social sector of *producers, owners, and custodians of e-images*? Examining the role played today by the web giants that own digital images leads to the composition of the potential of iconoclasm as an insurrection against power. A major social network of e-images *par excellence*, cuts, and censors erotic and sexual images that promote maximum pleasure for violating its "community standards". However, referring again to the poles raised by Schwarzböck (2016), it only blurs and warns users about "sensitive content" of explicit violent images, those that exhibit maximum pain. In this digital era of superabundance of images and extreme explicitness, the ethics-politics of cutting, the dispute over what is exhibited, takes place in the field of user rights and the legal frameworks of each state. This (anti)administrative variant of iconoclasm should be capable of pointing out not only the private administration of what people see on the screens but also the gaze that goes the other way around, that is, cyber surveillance.

Second, iconoclasm reminds us that the image itself is not inherently ocularcentric, digital, or superabundant. Rather, these are historical determinations of scopic regimes. In contrast, the materiality of artistic images can awaken the interconnectedness of sight with the other senses. Juliane Rebentisch's *Ästhetik der Installation* (2003) (*Aesthetics of Installation Art*) introduces an extensive exploration of this de-hierarchization of the sense of sight in contemporary installation works. Rebentisch discusses the effectiveness of intermedial works that combine visual, sound, theatrical, cinematic, and architectural elements to create immersive, ambiguous, and critical aesthetic experiences for the viewer's body. Intermediality of art should not be confused with multimediality, which is, in fact, a feature of today's digital scopic regime through mobile devices (Rebentisch 2003, 82). Multimediality synthesizes various devices such as the camera, television, telephone, musical equipment, and computer into a smartphone with an audiovisual and tactile screen. On the contrary, Rebentisch's approach allows for a reflection on the specific characteristics of aesthetic images, contemporary artistic experiments, and the social experiences they enable. Artistic intermediality unleashes,

according to Rebentisch, a specific type of experience: “an experience of distance, of destabilization of any comprehensive access to the aesthetic object” (2003, 322). This experience makes possible a moment of distance and productive-critical self-reflection concerning the social norms, practical goals, and interests imposed by the capitalist system.

Third, iconoclasm could be configured as a subjective escape from the screens. Cyber surveillance turns the user/screen connection into a very unequal contest because, behind the camera of the screen devices, the powers of the State and of the technological corporations are systemically coupled. But it is also unequal because the condition of the user turns subjectivities into police agents: “Additionally, social networks and cell phone cameras have created a zone of mass mutual surveillance, which adds to ubiquitous urban networks of control, such as CCTV, cell phone GPS tracking and face-recognition software. On top of institutional

surveillance, people are now also routinely surveilling each other by taking countless pictures and publishing them in almost real-time” (Steyerl 2012, 167). Against this, a sense of iconoclasm gains strength in terms of a factual body/device distance. This involves dismantling the digital prosthesis and rejecting the obligation to appear online following Steyerl's diagnosis as an exodus from screens or a collective strike of the digital apparition. Such as people seeking to avoid being represented in photographs or moving images, surreptitiously distancing themselves from camera focus to anarchists smashing cameras or looters destroying plasma screen televisions (Steyerl 2012, 165-166). This iconoclastic variant proposes an escape from screens and the serene ability to choose when to use technology, allowing individuals to say freely yes or no to devices. It has the power to untie the subject from its sole role of user and to liberate the image from its technocratic reduction to a screen format.

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