Introduction

WE LIVE IN an age and society profoundly affected by visual images. From the screens of our phones to work computers, from advertising images scattered across towns to films and television programmes, the emphasis on sight and recorded images (both still and moving) is stronger than ever in our quotidian life. And yet, this abundance of images has not brought about a greater awareness regarding their nature. The contemporary 'iconocracy', as Marie-José Mondzain (2019, 17)[1] aptly defines it, allows anyone to become a producer of images but, at the same time, it has not made it any easier for individuals to understand the power and risk of our uses of images. What is more, and seemingly paradoxically, this extremely visible society is characterised by an unprecedented and unnoticed destruction of images on a daily basis. Hardly anybody is immune to this dichotomic situation – for instance, we easily take pictures and make videos with digital technologies, but just as easily we delete them for a variety of reasons, such as the lack of hard drive space or because a beloved face has become intolerable. Hence, the destruction of images – that is, iconoclasm (etymologically 'the breaking of images')[2] – constitutes a pervasive element of contemporary Western society and can, thus, be used as a way to investigate how we interact with and understand still and moving images.

Western Europe represents an exemplary context for exploring iconoclastic attitudes since, historically and philosophically, it has been the ground for competing interpretations regarding visual representations: bequeathed by Imperial Roman and Catholic iconophilia, it is simultaneously heir to Platonic, Biblical and Christian iconoclasm. Contradictory influences have contributed to the shaping of current European imaginary, within which a continuous production of images is accompanied by a sharp criticism and a mistrust thereof. There is

indeed an omnipresence of, if not obsession with, visual images in contemporary Western societies, which has been variously addressed as 'modern ocularcentric culture' (Jay 1993, 44), 'culture of images' (Mitchell 1994, 5), 'bulimia of images' (Wunenburger 1999, 363), 'flood of modern visibility' (Mondzain 2005, 222) and 'civilization of images' (Bettetini 2006, viii; Nancy 2005, 32). And yet, imagination is often relegated to the Platonic level of inferior knowledge. As a place of daily image production, Western Europe also stands out as a site for the critique of visual representations. In such a context, the idea of the image as a faithful reproduction of a portion of reality coexists with the conception of the image as a deceitful and false copy, originating seemingly incompatible attitudes.

Catholic iconophilia, Christian and Biblical iconoclasm and the Platonic tradition are recognised as fundamental influences on contemporary stances towards images. Plato's philosophical objection to artistic mimesis and the Byzantine iconoclastic controversy, on the one hand, and the Catholic legitimation of sacred icons, on the other hand, have significantly shaped Western intellectual history about images. As consequence, contemporary society is characterised by the paradox of a constant production of images which are looked at with a suspicious eye. Jean-Luc Nancy (2005) observes,

> for the duration of the West's history, this motif [of the deceitful image] will have resulted from the alliance (and it is doubtless this that has so decisively marked the West as such) forged between the principle of monotheism and the Greek problematic of the copy or the simulation, of artifice and the absence of the original. Of course, this alliance is also the source of the mistrust toward images that continues unabated into our own time (and this in a culture that produces images in abundance), a mistrust that has, in its turn, produced a deep suspicion regarding 'appearances' or 'the spectacle', as well as a certain self-satisfied critique of the 'civilization of images'. (31–32)

The history of Western thought about images is thus the contradictory result of two extremes: always on the verge of refusing sensible representations, echoing Platonic philosophy and Christian iconoclasm, it has nonetheless welcomed the image following the Christian legitimation of sacred icons. In a culture which constantly communicates through images and in which the individual is surrounded by elements addressing sight, iconoclasm and its opposite – iconophilia – find a place in the spectrum of possible attitudes towards images. The study of iconoclastic approaches to images can therefore contribute to our understanding of current visual culture, further exploring the ambiguous nature of representations. Destructive gestures in the visual arts constitute both

a way to criticise the image's illusory nature and a means for acknowledging the image's ability to provide an alternative engagement with the world when it ceases to be a mere mimetic appearance.

This book develops from the potential value of iconoclasm in the ambit of cinema. While the topic of iconoclasm has been at the centre of many scholarly works in philosophy, theology and history, it has been quite overlooked by the arts and film studies. The core of the book coils around cinematic iconoclasm and what can be termed broken images – both recalling the etymological meaning of iconoclasm and because their relationship with the referent is broken. The audio-visual images analysed throughout are literally or metaphorically broken: no longer functioning as self-evident, mimetic images of reality, these images are either broken in their physicality (the film strip is literally damaged), or broken in their ability to figuratively represent something (hence, monochromatic screens, fades to colour, disruptive sounds and altered motion). Accordingly, I have selected films characterised by an anti-mimetic aesthetics which responds to an iconoclastic understanding of the image-referent relationship; namely, Isidore Isou's *Traité de bave et d'éternité* (*Treatise on Venom and Eternity*, 1951), Guy Debord's *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* (*Howls for Sade*, 1952), *The Society of the Spectacle* (*La Société du spectacle*, 1973) and *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (*We Wander in the Night and Are Consumed by Fire*, 1978), Carmelo Bene's *Our Lady of the Turks* (*Nostra signora dei turchi*, 1968), Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–98), Marguerite Duras's *Le Navire Night* (1979), Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993), Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* (*Viskningar och rop*, 1972) and Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Three Colours: Blue (Trois Couleurs: Bleu,* 1993).

The selected films effectively exemplify cinematic iconoclasm, which refers to the deliberate, literal or metaphorical, destruction of film images and which hinges on an interpretation of the relationship between the image and its referent in terms of alterity. That is, the image as copy is understood as inadequate for the representation of a specific model. My main contention is that the destruction of images in the cinema can be a breeding ground for an aesthetic and ethical investigation of the ways in which we understand and use moving images. Contrary to historical iconoclasm, which consists of a negation of the other's point of view through the destruction of the other's artefacts (an attitude evident in iconoclastic gestures such as the smashing of sacred icons in Byzantium in the eighth and ninth centuries and the destruction of Catholic abbeys in Scotland during the Reformation; or, more recently, in the blowing up of the Buddhas of Bamiyan and the ancient city of Palmira [Besançon 2000; Bettetini 2006, 92–104, 142; Latour and Weibel 2002; Mondzain 2019, 314]),

iconoclasm in the arts has the potential to be an aesthetic as well as an ethical approach. That is, destruction as an artistic gesture within an artwork can be a way to challenge traditional canons, as well as a means to respect reality, its complexity and non-reducibility to a self-explanatory, mimetic reproduction. For example, when Kazimir Malevich creates monochromatic paintings or Robert Rauschenberg erases a de Kooning drawing, they are renewing the criteria for painting and, at the same time, reflecting on sight and mimesis. Similarly, when John Cage makes music with silence and noise or Pierre Schaeffer inaugurates concrete music, they are redefining the concept of music itself (see Belting 2002; Gamboni 1997; Weibel 2002, 570–684). In the cinema, iconoclastic approaches concretise in literal destructions of the film strip or in metaphorical negations of mimetic film images, which resonate with similar destructive gestures in the other arts. The films examined in the book display various iconoclastic gestures against the film image's ability to mimetically represent the referent, thereby echoing philosophical and historical arguments on the deceptive nature of visual images.

I develop my argument on cinematic iconoclasm from the dichotomy between two types of images, the Greek *eikōn*/*εἰκών*[3] and *eidōlon*/*εἴδωλον*. While both terms can translate as image, they nonetheless refer to two quite different conceptions of the image, and as such they are found in philosophical and theological discussions regarding the nature of visual representations. The *eikōn*, which became the icon during the Christian controversy over the representation of God in a material frame, stands for an image that references its model, whereas the *eidōlon*, which came to signify the heretic idol, consists of a deceitful image with no truthful relationship with the prototype. I have chosen to keep the Ancient Greek words rather than using the English equivalent for two main reasons. First of all, while the English 'icon' and 'idol' are strongly related to their usage in theology, where they refer to material representations of God, the Greek *eikōn* and *eidōlon* preserve their philosophical, and pagan, meaning. Secondly, the Greek terms maintain a richness of meanings which the English 'image' fails to convey. Indeed, the single term 'image' condenses a wide range of meanings, from those related to the sensible sphere to ones connected to the intelligible world. Hence, the word 'image' refers to something that can go from the extremely poor quality of appearance to the invisibility of ideas and thoughts. Any English translation of *eikōn* and *eidōlon* thus loses the etymological and philosophical meaning that the two terms contain.

Throughout the book, I rework the dichotomy between the *eikōn* and the *eidōlon* in the cinema, tracing a thread from Plato's philosophy to contemporary films. To better unfold my argument, I consider two main ways in which

the opposition between the *eikōn* and the *eidōlon* can be thought of in cinema, depending on whether the attention is primarily on the *eidōlon* or on the *eikōn*. Accordingly, cinematic iconoclasm can concentrate on critiquing the image as illusory and deceptive copy (*eidōlon*), thereby bearing many similarities to the arguments made by the iconoclasts in the eighth and ninth centuries. Both theoretically and practically, cinematic iconoclasm as critique frequently occurs within the context of a Marxist criticism of commodities, mass media and capitalism's fundamental values. In the films selected for Part I, a certain type of image, that of Hollywood-like cinema, is decried insofar as it produces an illusory 'impression of reality' (Rodowick 1994, xvi), thereby concealing capitalist ideology under non-contradictory images. Particularly the exponents of leftist film theory in their arguments echoed the iconoclastic criticism of the image as a deceitful copy, which is matched practically in the audio-visually destructive works by the likes of Isidore Isou, Guy Debord, Carmelo Bene and Jean-Luc Godard.

Another way of approaching cinematic iconoclasm and its ethical potential is through what I address as iconoclastic *eikōn*. By this term I define an image which retains the character of the *eikōn* of referencing the prototype, while being reflective of an iconoclastic understanding of the image-prototype relationship. That is to say, an iconoclastic *eikōn* maintains at once the quality of being a mediator between two elements otherwise separated and an iconoclastic aspect given by the negation of mimesis; hence, the visual image is in some way insufficient to figuratively represent its model. The theme of the image's insufficiency to represent recalls the ongoing issue of mimesis, which has troubled aesthetics since its inception. How can an image, conceived as copy, represent a referent? And what if the referent lacks a phenomenal equivalent (such that it can only be thought or experienced emotionally)? Assuming that the act of looking is never neutral and that there exists specific subject matter which more forcefully entails a taking of responsibility from producers and viewers of images, iconoclastic approaches to cinema often involve the ethical significance of moving beyond mimesis. The film image as iconoclastic *eikōn* constitutes a way of showing something without making it completely visible and aurally accessible, thereby encouraging an ethics based on the fragile equilibrium between visibility and invisibility. Poignant examples are found in the work of, among others, Marguerite Duras, Derek Jarman, Ingmar Bergman and Krzysztof Kieślowski, where a need to represent audio-visually is met with a striving for an ethical film form at the limits of intelligibility.

The questions tying the book together therefore concern the ways in which iconoclastic film images establish a web of relationships with their models and

the spectator. Can everything have a copy of itself? That is, can we make images of everything? This question, which is more of a quandary, also leads to interrogating the limits of our right to see and show something on a screen. Ultimately, when this right is challenged by iconoclastic gestures, we are left wondering what it is that we see when we see images of imagelessness.

Key Iconoclastic Sources and Methodology

Because of the very nature of iconoclasm and the way in which I explore it in relation to philosophy and cinema, this book is characterised by a lively interdisciplinarity, bringing together works in continental philosophy, medieval theology, history, history of art and film studies. Iconoclasm, in fact, encompasses different ambits and cannot be ascribed to one field without referring to other disciplines. It is impossible, for instance, to discuss the iconoclastic value of a monochromatic image in a film without referencing the philosophical and historical interpretations of the copy-prototype relationship. Moreover, the multidisciplinary approach is also a consequence of the scarcity of scholarly work on iconoclasm and cinema.

In a film context, only two main sources are available, and neither of them is in English. Marion Poirson-Dechonne's *Entre spiritualité et laïcité, la tentation iconoclaste du cinéma* [*Between Spirituality and Secularism, the Iconoclastic Temptation of Cinema*] (2016) represents the only monograph on the topic to date. The book establishes conceptual links between certain aspects of Christian Catholic theology and the film medium, identifying some secularised iconoclastic tendencies in the cinema, and constitutes an important source for approaching the issue of iconoclasm in film. The author discusses iconoclasm in the cinema in a broad sense, taking into account a variety of films, many of which are not iconoclastic *stricto sensu*. While also touching on two potentially iconoclastic devices (the black screen and cacophony), Poirson-Dechonne focuses more on the films' content, investigating cinematic representations of Christian themes, such as the father-son resemblance and the incarnation, in both religious and secularised terms. Her book does however contain an overview of films which directly put into crisis the relation between images and their referents, differentiating among aesthetic, political and ethical iconoclasm. It is in particular her addressing questions on our right to show and see everything on a screen that is significant to my discussion of cinematic iconoclasm. Nevertheless, my treatment of the topic considerably differs from Poirson-Dechonne's since I develop my argument from a more philosophically focused notion of iconoclasm, concentrating on the film form by means of the two opposing notions of *eidōlon* and

eikōn. The other fundamental text on iconoclasm in cinema, to which I often turn throughout the book, is the special issue '*Cinema e iconoclastia*' [Cinema and Iconoclasm] (Perniola 2013), which collects essays ranging from iconoclastic and iconophilic interpretations of the cinematic close-up to the anti-mimetic significance of monochromatic screens. It is an extremely useful introduction to the issue of iconoclasm in the cinema and one of my main sources for discussing an iconoclastic film style.

Dario Gamboni's *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (1997) and Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel's *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art* (2002) constitute essential sources on iconoclastic approaches in modern and contemporary arts. While the former is a fascinating study of destructive gestures in the visual arts as opposed to vandalistic acts at historical turning points, the latter edits together essays on anti-mimetic artworks in painting, video art, music and happenings, as well as on contemporary iconoclastic attitudes in religion and science. I draw on these contributions to highlight an iconoclastic thinking running through Western arts, thus establishing a dialogue between cinema and the other arts based on their shared tendency towards image destruction. What is more, Gamboni's and Latour and Weibel's works are useful for further differentiating iconoclastic gestures within artworks from iconoclastic acts directed against cultural artefacts. Both gestures, however, attest to the political, ethical and emotional charge of images: from the literal or metaphorical dismantling of figuration in the arts to the physical destruction of sacred icons in the eighth and ninth centuries up to recent decolonisation and the BLM movements' efforts to remove statues of supporters of slavery, images rarely leave us indifferent and can often prompt visceral responses. Stacy Boldrick's recently published *Iconoclasm and the Museum* (2020) builds on this idea, expanding on Gamboni's argument and reinforcing the importance of iconoclasm – as artistic practice, institutional attitude and ethico-political approach – at the present moment, focusing on notions of loss broadly understood.

Quite contrarily, there is a wealth of sources on iconoclasm available in philosophy, theology and history. A crucial text discussing the *eikōn-eidōlon* dichotomy in ancient philosophy is Suzanne Saïd's '*Deux noms de l'image en grec ancien: idole et icône*' [Two Names of the Image in Ancient Greek: Idol and Icon] (1987), which also hints at the consequences of this opposition on contemporary interpretations of the image. Gerhart B. Ladner's 'The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy' (1953) offers a detailed analysis of the *eikōn-eidōlon* dichotomy in medieval theology, presenting the conflicting arguments of Christian iconophiles and

iconoclasts. Among the essential works on philosophical and historical iconoclasm is Marie-José Mondzain's *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary* (2005), which effectively explains the iconoclastic and iconophilic perspectives in the eighth and ninth centuries by tracing the influence of Byzantine thought on current interpretations of images. In this work, as well as in *Le Commerce des regards* [*The Commerce of the Gazes*] (2019) and *Homo spectator* (2013), Mondzain elaborates on the constitutive relational character of the image as *eikōn*, building on its etymological meaning as well as ancient and medieval philosophy's interpretations. While my understanding of iconoclasm in an artistic context diverges from Mondzain's (because she rejects an iconoclastic interpretation of anti-mimesis), I nevertheless share her definition of the *eikōn* as relational. Other invaluable sources on which I base my understanding of iconoclasm are Alain Besançon's *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (2000), a detailed study encompassing iconoclasm from the seventh century BCE to early-twentieth-century Russian abstract art, and Maria Tilde Bettetini's *Le radici dell'iconoclastia* [*The Roots of Iconoclasm*] (2006), which thoroughly discusses iconoclasm in history and philosophy, emphasising its enduring effects on contemporary society and the entertainment industry.

As it is clear from these few titles, my approach to iconoclasm is philosophically inflected – not only because iconoclasm originated as a philosophical stance concerning the relationship between images and their models, but also because it has been overlooked by other disciplines, including film studies. Therefore, in developing and defending my argument, I have tried to maintain philosophical iconoclasm in close dialogue with the metaphorical, and at times literal, destruction of images in the cinema. The intertwining of philosophy and cinema on the issue of iconoclasm has also led me to circumscribe the scope of this book to Western European films made after World War II. The choice of Western Europe is a direct consequence of the fact that the currently available works on iconoclasm primarily investigate the topic in the philosophical and historical context of Western Europe, which is also significantly characterised by an increased emphasis on and a contradictory attitude towards the visual sphere. As such, the Western European context is particularly suitable for discussing both the pervasiveness of reproduced moving images and the potential of iconoclasm. The decision to take World War II as a temporal watershed for the book comes from its being one of the defining historical events of modern and contemporary Europe and its cinematic production, as many scholars have pointed out (among others, Aumont 2003, 145–46; Bellour 2012, 133; Daney 2004a; Deleuze 1997a, xi; Grespi 2013, 41; Sinnerbrink 2016, 56; Witt 2013, 130).

This does not mean that films made before World War II cannot be iconoclastic (for instance, there is an argument to be made about the iconoclasm of the historical avant-gardes of the 1910s and 1920s). However, I believe that the war, the Shoah and the Liberation have brought some of the already present issues of images to the limit and have accentuated the feeling of disorientation regarding reality, which find a new expression in the cinema. Moreover, the Shoah has marked an unprecedented crisis in Western representation, famously expressed in Theodor W. Adorno's (1967, 34) then retracted claim on the barbarism of writing poetry after Auschwitz. Rather than placing the Shoah under such an extreme and dangerous ban, it should be considered as one of those historical 'objects' that lack a direct image and yet demand to be made visible (see, Nancy 2005, 27–50; Saxton 2007; 2008; Wajcman 1998).

Following this thread of thought, it would seem that films on the Shoah constitute the most appropriate works for discussing iconoclasm in the cinema, and in a way they are. Nonetheless, I have chosen not to consider such films for several reasons. Firstly, the Shoah is a broad and extremely complex theme which would have taken most of the book if it were to be appropriately considered. My aim, however, is to delineate a wider notion of cinematic iconoclasm and its possible applications. Secondly, the issue of representing the Shoah in films, the absence of images of the event per se and its status beyond mimetic reproduction have already been thoroughly discussed by film scholars such as Joshua Hirsch (2004), Oleksandr Kobrynskyy and Gerd Bayer (2015) and Libby Saxton (2007; 2008). Lastly, the issue of iconoclasm in relation to the cinematic representation of the Shoah has been considered, albeit not systematically, in Ivelise Perniola's *L'immagine spezzata: Il cinema di Claude Lanzmann* [*The Broken Image: Claude Lanzmann's Cinema*] (2007) and Gérard Wajcman's *L'Objet du siècle* [*The Object of the Century*] (1998). Therefore, while my framework can be used to further discuss the problem of representation in relation to the Shoah, I have selected films which deal with a variety of topics, from self-reflexivity to others' suffering. Moreover, the initial selective criteria regarded the film form. Rather than being concerned with depictions of iconoclasm at the level of content, my exploration of the topic focuses on iconoclastic aesthetic forms in the cinema. Accordingly, the film images analysed throughout are characterised by the breaking of a mimetic audio-visual form: I look at monochromatic screens, freeze-framed shots, slow-motion sequences and scenes where sound is disruptive or disjointed from the visual element. Such stylistic devices result from an iconoclastic understanding of the copy-prototype relationship, opening up sudden audio-visual hiatuses that require spectators to fill them with meaning.

Since the book consists of an introduction to the issue of iconoclasm in the cinema, I have selected films that best epitomise deliberate destructive gestures against mimesis to bear witness to the distance existing between reality and its possible audio-visual representation. Accordingly, cinematic iconoclasm as critique of the *eidōlon* is discussed via directors who share an undermining of the film image as referential copy, short-circuiting the harmonic relation between aural and visual elements. Isidore Isou, Guy Debord, Carmelo Bene and Jean-Luc Godard have all been vocal about the film image's deceptive power, explicitly advocating for the destruction of cinema in one way or another. Their critique of artistic mimesis resonates with ancient and medieval arguments against the lure of images, establishing a connection between philosophical and historical roots of iconoclasm with modern understandings of the film medium. Isou's Lettrist film *Traité de bave et d'éternité*, Debord's oeuvre and Bene's *Our Lady of the Turks* are born out of an urgency to literally and metaphorically destroy cinema as a reproductive medium, as attested by their physically manipulating of the film strip and their metaphorically dismantling of audio-visual images as mimetic copies of reality. Godard's entire work oscillates between a critique of the capitalist image (the *eidōlon*) of Lettrist and Situationist tradition, and a liminal ethics when it comes to representing the ineffable and the invisible. Therefore, his magnum opus *Histoire(s) du cinéma* constitutes a fascinating link between the cinematic *eidōlon* and the iconoclastic *eikōn*. In considering in greater detail the ethics of cinematic iconoclasm, I have chosen films where the rejection of mimesis is inextricably bounded to ethical concerns regarding visibility. Marguerite Duras's *Le Navire Night*, Derek Jarman's *Blue*, Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* and Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Three Colours: Blue* are exemplary of an iconoclastic approach to ethically charged topics (such as sexual desire, homosexuality, pain and death), metaphorically destroying an easy audio-visual access to the either invisible or ineffable events of the film.

Although I discuss only one woman film-maker, I believe that the selected works and directors engage with a variety of aesthetic and ethical issues that involve diversity in terms of gender, culture and language; therefore, they are conducive to an exploration of cinematic iconoclasm which transcends a patriarchal perspective. Isou, by means of iconoclastic style (*montage discrépant*, as he himself will term it), develops a critique of French foreign policy, especially of the First Indochina War (1946–54); Debord condemns the alienating society of the spectacle through a dismantling of intelligible relationships between the image track and the sound track; Bene engages with the hollowness of Catholic religion and the motherly essence that it attributes to women by way of unintelligible voices; Godard investigates a number of issues concerning cinema and

history through multiple images; Duras explores sexual desire via the severing of any tie between aural and visual elements; Jarman operates a subversion of the negative representation of the person with AIDS by employing a monochromatic screen as the constitutive image track of the film, thus denouncing the status of homosexuality in 1980s UK; finally, Bergman and Kieślowski destroy female faces through fades out, recalling a long iconographic tradition concerning the face of Holy Mary and women's suffering. The films thus share not only an iconoclastic understanding of cinema and an anti-mimetic approach to film style, but also a lively interest in social, cultural and political issues, which actively contributes to making these works excellent examples of the ethical relevance of iconoclastic gestures.

Iconoclasm in Film Studies

Notwithstanding the scarcity of material on cinema and iconoclasm, there are nonetheless some works in film studies that touch on the issue. Much film scholarship on iconoclasm focuses on three core ideas: (1) the iconoclastic quality of political modernism; (2) iconoclastic and iconophilic interpretations of the face in the close-up; and (3) anti-mimesis as an iconoclastic gesture carrying ethical concerns. I build on such contributions to develop the *eikōn-eidōlon* dichotomy in cinema and explore how film can represent ethically charged topics and stimulate the viewer's imaginative capacity via a disruptive aesthetics.

The Iconoclastic Aspect of Political Modernism

Albeit never explicitly referencing iconoclasm, political modernism's critique of classical cinema resonates with Platonic and Christian arguments on the condemnation of sensible images. The exponents of political modernism, in fact, rejected cinema as a window onto the world in an attempt to 'erode identification with the image as real' (Rodowick 1994, xiii), placing classical cinema and its reproduction of the dominant (namely, capitalist) version of ideology at the core of their critique. Reiterating arguments from philosophical and religious iconoclasm, political modernism and Marxist-influenced film theory contend that the more mimetic the image is the more it lies, misleading the spectator to believe in the objective reality of what is represented on screen. Accordingly, they advocate for the destruction of the cinematic image as deceptive copy (the *eidōlon*) through images that lay bare their artificial nature.

Ann Kibbey, in *Theory of the Image: Capitalism, Contemporary Film, and Women* (2005), identifies an iconoclastic understanding of cinema in leftist film

theorists' opposition between the deceptive images of classical narrative cinema and the true images of counter-cinema. She delineates similarities between the iconoclasm of Calvin's Protestantism and that of Marxism and theories akin to it. It is in particular Calvin's rejection of sacred images as false representations and his welcoming of the sacramental objects as true images which allow for a parallel with leftist film theory's opposition between false and true images in the cinema. Kibbey (2005) maintains that the theories of the image developed in the period from 1960 to 1980 are inherently iconoclastic: 'This era of film theory was fueled by an iconoclastic assault on the false images of Hollywood film, from the theorists of the cinematic apparatus to Laura Mulvey's famous essay' (2). Kibbey likens Guy Debord's spectacle, Jacques Lacan's mirror stage, Jean-Louis Baudry's cinematic apparatus and Laura Mulvey's gendered approach to the iconoclastic distrust in images. In her view, these theorists committed the sin of reiterating the Calvinist precepts of false images in their speculations, without however providing an alternative to the iconoclastic paradigm.

Drawing on Kibbey's argument, Richard Rushton's *The Reality of Film: Theories of Filmic Reality* (2011) expands on the reality-illusion dichotomy in cinema. Exponents of political modernism are understood as 'modern-day iconoclasts' (39), because of their differentiating between the deceptive (false) images of Hollywood-like cinema and the self-reflexive (true) images of counter-cinema. For Rushton, the issue lies in the oppositional logic between reality and illusion, which is grounded in a representational understanding of cinema; that is, phenomenal reality pre-exists the reality of cinema, establishing at least a chronological hierarchy between the two realities of the referent and the image. While decrying this binary logic as limited and limiting, Rushton explains the iconoclastic character of political modernism, for there is a divide between the cinematic image as a visual replica of a portion of reality which alleges to be transparent for its high mimetic potential (i.e., *eidōlon*), and the image of counter-cinema which 'denounce[s] the representation of reality and all cinematic attempts at verisimilitude' (28).

Such a perspective is reminiscent of Plato's ontological hierarchy between the world of ideas and the world of things, wherein images of art's deceptive potential hinges on their inadequacy to represent intelligible models. Rosalind Galt likens the Platonic 'denigration of the image' (2011, 180) to Marxist film theory's rejection of Hollywood cinema and defines both perspectives as iconoclastic. In discussing the Platonic *eidōlon*, she identifies the same conception of the image in the cinema, specifically in the work of post-World War II leftist theorists. As Plato distinguished between perfect, true beings and false, illusory copies, so do leftist film theorists differentiate between the illusionism of classical cinema and

the reality of counter-cinema. Galt (2011) effectively claims that 'in this model of the image [i.e., the *eidōlon*], Plato lays the foundations for an iconoclasm that grounds much modern image theory' (181).

In their critical analysis of the iconoclasm of Marxist-influenced film theory, Kibbey, Rushton and Galt reject an iconoclastic perspective for its supposed reduction of cinema to an opposition between illusionistic images and self-critical images, exhibiting analogies between the Platonic and Christian suspicion of visual images and some of the arguments of leftist film theory. While I agree with their reading of leftist film theory as iconoclastic, I endorse an iconoclastic perspective in the arts, grounding my argument on a representational understanding of the cinema within which images do not stand on their own but relate to a world they re-present and re-produce. In this scenario, the *eidōlon* escapes a reduction to a simple false image. In his poetical delineating of the ancient meaning of *eidōlon*, Régis Debray (1992, 28–30) emphasises its phantasmatic status as a shadow and therefore as a double, connecting the birth of the image to death (via mortuary rites as well as the image's potential to mortify reality). Indeed, the main issue with the image as *eidōlon* is its being a double, a copy that replicates the visible features of its model, to the point of being always on the verge of replacing it, and that retains a power of influencing thought and making someone believe in a falsity. As in Plato and Christian iconoclasm, where the *eidōlon* distracts from the contemplation of intelligible ideas and God, respectively, relating itself only to the sensible realm, so in the cinema the *eidōlon* is an image which overshadows the original and aims at substituting it. In the work of Isou, Debord, Bene and Godard, the *eidōlon* is the kind of film image that hides its character of artificial copy through the naturalism of mise-en-scène and continuity editing, and this carries ethico-political consequences. The limit of this critique, however, is its trouble in overcoming the logic of self-reflexivity and bringing the discourse beyond the criticism of the image as illusory copy. As both Kibbey and Rushton observe, caught in the urge of dismantling the impression of reality of Hollywood-like cinema, some of the exponents of iconoclasm as critique risk remaining trapped in their own criticism.

Iconophilic and Iconoclastic Interpretations of the Cinematic Close-up

The cinematic close-up has been succinctly discussed as a way of exploring the distinction between iconoclasm and iconophilia, opposing the film image as revelation of a human essence and as the place of inhumanity *par excellence*. While various scholars have considered conflicting interpretations of the close-up (among others, Aumont 2003; Doane 2003; Turvey 1998), Angela Dalle

Vacche (2003) and Barbara Grespi (2013) explicitly address the issue of the face in the close-up as a field of debate between iconoclastic and iconophilic interpretations in the cinema. They dwell particularly on the iconophilic stance, identifying a sacred conception of the cinematic medium as a tool for revealing a human essence that finds its most suitable expression in the magnification of the close-up – a position exemplified by early film theorists Louis Delluc's ([1920] 1985, 34–36, 50–61) and Jean Epstein's ([1921] 1977; [1926] 2012) notion of *photogénie*, and Béla Balázs's ([1945] 1970, 52–88; [1924] 2010, 27–51) concept of physiognomy. Accordingly, Dalle Vacche's and Grespi's notion of iconoclasm suggests a disbelief in the revelatory capacity of the cinematic medium and in the close-up's viability as a mediator between a visible, exterior surface and a purported invisible, inner depth. It is 'the face in close-up and the close-up as the face of objects' (Dalle Vacche 2003, 15) that elicits a division between iconophilic and iconoclastic stances in the cinema. The opposition originates from the interpretation of the face, whether as a door to the soul or as a surface of inhumanity.

Grespi is the only scholar theorising a proper opposition between iconoclasts and iconophiles in cinema with specific reference to the face in the close-up, in her article 'L'immagine sfregiata: Il cinema e i volti del sacro' [The Scarred Image: Cinema and Sacred Faces] (2013). On the one hand, she discusses the trust in film images in the work of Epstein and Balázs, and their understanding of the facial close-up as a site for the surfacing of the soul and a manifestation of inner life; on the other hand, she considers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of cinematic close-up as a dehumanising device, consequently understanding the defacement of such a close-up as an iconoclastic gesture – a controversial and imprecise perspective that does not take into account Deleuze's rejection of Platonism and duality.

In Grespi's view, the notions of *photogénie* and physiognomy bespeak an iconophilic attitude, since they hinge on the strong bond between the cinematic close-up and its phenomenal referent. Magnified by the close-up, the face intensifies its expressive power by filling up the whole screen and by connecting interiority and exteriority. In Epstein and Balázs, mystics 'of the 1920s close-up, the filmic face simply constitutes the place of interception of the sacred concealed in man'[4] (Grespi 2013, 42). The face in the close-up is therefore *eikōn* insofar as it is capable of establishing a truthful link with the phenomenal referent in a mimetic manner. This stance is corroborated by other accounts of the privileged role accorded to the face in cinema. For instance, Mary Ann Doane (2003) addresses *photogénie* as a form of cinephilia, and Jacques Aumont defines Epstein's and Balázs's perspectives as idealistic since they presuppose the very possibility of a

nexus between reality and its filmic representation. Aumont (2003) remarks that *photogénie* and physiognomy 'outline an aesthetic of the face in film. Idealistic aesthetic that is, it is based on the hope of a revelation that it believes is possible because it believes fundamentally in the face as organic unit, infrangible, total. The form of this revelation is [. . .] the close-up' (139).

Grespi sets Epstein's and Balázs's iconophilic position against Deleuze and Guattari's account of the facial close-up, erroneously defining the French philosophers as iconoclasts. While sharing some of Epstein's and Balázs's arguments, Deleuze and Guattari conceive of the face as a surface, hence pure exteriority. That is, the connection between the face and interiority is severed, and the face becomes the result of a process of abstraction called 'faciality' [*visagéité*] (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 168). This process of 'making a face' alludes to the frontal part of the head where the eyes and mouth are, but more importantly comes to signify a reference to any surface that functions as the cultural and political construct of face. The process of facialisation designates the imposition of a face onto a subject and is codified by the binary system white wall/black holes which produces the face as a politics. The facialised face is a politics because it consists in the acquisition of a standardised face, that of the 'white man' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 176). Deleuze and Guattari claim that 'the face is [. . .] White Man himself, with his broad white cheeks and the black holes of his eyes. The face is Christ. The face is the typical European' (176). As a socio-political construct, the face is closely linked to Christianity; however, the Christological reference acquires a political connotation rather than a religious one, in the sense of Christianity as the socio-political machine of meaning in Western Europe. Accordingly, the face in itself contains the seeds for racism since it suppresses the other's differences and aims at conforming all faces to its own. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, the face of the other than the white man 'must be Christianized, in other words, facialized' (178). Instead of establishing a relation with the other, the face produces a distance with the specific purpose of ascribing every face to the dominant face, the standardised 'white man'; the facial close-up accordingly becomes the vehicle for the revelation of inhumanity:

> *The face, what a horror.* It is naturally a lunar landscape, with its pores, planes, matts, bright colors, whiteness, and holes: there is no need for a close-up to make it inhuman; it is naturally a close-up, and naturally inhuman. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 190)

In the face's status as entity disconnected from reality in its *hic et nunc* lies the core of Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation of the cinematic close-up.

Complete in itself, the face does not contain the traces of its relationship with the world. Thus, the face in the close-up, far from being the site of human revelation, like in Balázs and Epstein, turns into a means for revealing 'the inhuman in human beings' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 171). The facial close-up is stripped of any connecting capacity and presents, instead, the very void at the core of humanity, the fact that there is nothing to be shown and revealed.

As a result, Deleuze and Guattari advocate for the dismantling of the face, making it a pockmarked face that ceases to respond to the facialisation machine – the white wall/black holes system. Indeed, if the facial close-up responds to a logic of eliminating differences in the uniqueness of the Christ-face, the defacement of this close-up would allow for a deviation from the standard and, consequently, for the expression of a face other than that of the 'white man'. However, defacing the close-up does not correspond to a return to the human head, but constitutes a politics itself. In both cases – the Christ-face and the dismantled face – Deleuze and Guattari's facial close-up ceases to configure itself as the Epsteinian and Balázsian mediator between the individual and the social life in the rising metropolis of the early twentieth century. In the view of Deleuze and Guattari, who write in the context of a globalised, post-war world, the face comes to signify the very impossibility of the encounter with the other. It is possible to trace here a specific change in the vision of the world, taking World War II as the separating event. Both the iconophilic interpretation and that of Deleuze and Guattari assign to the facial close-up a revelatory power. However, in the iconophilic perspective there is always something interior (a soul) to reveal, an invisible life of humans and things that the film medium is able to record and reproduce on the screen. Quite differently, in Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation, the cinema lays bare the absence of revelation in reality, the fact that there is nothing to be unconcealed.

Grespi (2013, 45–49) proposes an iconoclastic interpretation of the inhuman and defacement in Deleuze and Guattari, understanding the facial close-up as a de-humanising device and its defacement as an iconoclastic gesture. For Grespi, erasing the facialised face becomes the iconoclastic re-appropriation of the face, which would allow for the overcoming of the faciality process: from a facial twitch to a deformed or scarred face, the attack towards the unity of the facialised face would enable a breaking with the politics of the faciality process. That is, by interpreting Deleuze and Guattari's concept of inhumanity as something that ought to be escaped, she identifies in the defacement of the close-up an iconoclastic intent to break with a false image of a true model. However, Deleuze and Guattari never mention the possibility of a humanity in humans. Rather, it is inhumanity itself which is constituent of human beings.

Therefore, inhumanity would be the true essence instead of a false appearance. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to discuss Deleuze using the binary opposition true-false, since he overcomes, or at least aims at overcoming, this Western dichotomy in his philosophy.

In 'Plato and the Simulacrum' (1983), Deleuze elaborates on his critique of Plato's oppositional logic between model and copy, namely between what is intelligible and what is sensible. He draws a distinction between two types of images: the *eikōn* – which he calls copy or icon – and the *eidōlon* – which he addresses as simulacrum. However, Deleuze's simulacrum does not correspond to the image as *eidōlon* in the way in which it is considered in this book. After using the term simulacrum with the Platonic meaning of *eidōlon* – namely, a false image, hence an image in a relationship of alterity with a model – he then continues his criticism of the Platonic representational system by employing the same word (simulacrum) with the meaning of an image without a model. Deleuze leaves unexplained the transition from one meaning to the other, employing the same term for two quite dissimilar conceptions of the image. More to the point, what Deleuze reproves to Plato is his representational logic, the enclosing of the image in a relationship with a model. Deleuze rejects this dualism in favour of the simulacrum without model. His overturning of Platonism, therefore, consists of the abolishment of the copy-prototype dichotomy to the exaltation of the image without prototype. Consequently, Deleuze cannot be addressed as iconoclast insofar as his philosophy positions itself beyond the representational paradigm necessary for both the iconoclastic and the iconophilic perspectives: the metaphysical requirement of a true(r) model and the binary vision of the world collapse. In Deleuze, there is no place for images referencing their model, but only for surfaces – *phantasmata*, or the exteriority of the facial close-up.

Without adopting a Deleuzian approach, I build on these contributions about the facial close-up, emphasising the significance of the face for iconoclastic gestures. Indeed, both the destruction of the cinematic *eidōlon* and the creation of iconoclastic *eikones* often involve the human face: in an attempt to break the mimetic relationship between phenomenal reality and its audiovisual representation, faces are physically or metaphorically dismantled. As during the Byzantine controversy, when icons representing the face of Christ were physically smashed, so in the cinema the face in the close-up becomes the privileged site for iconoclastic gestures – from Isou's and Bene's literally scraping of human faces to Bergman's and Kieślowski's poetic fade-outs which plunge the characters' faces into a blank screen. While I consider the significance of the Western concept of the face and its destruction throughout the book, the facial close-up is particularly relevant for the analysis of *Cries*

and Whispers and *Three Colours: Blue*, where iconoclastic gestures occur on the magnified faces of the female characters. The figurative destruction of the women's faces in these films represents a clear passing from a mere rejection of the cinematic *eidōlon* (namely, a mimetic image incapable of representing interiority) to the creation of iconoclastic *eikones* (that is, anti-mimetic images which maintain a relationship with the invisible model). The human face, which is the most emotionally charged part of the body, becomes the locus for an interrogation of visibility and its limits, also developing a criticism of the mimetic representability of the female face and women's suffering – from the iconography of the Holy Mary, the quietly suffering mother, to the iconoclastic rendering of Liv Ullmann's, Ingrid Thulin's and Juliette Binoche's raw pain. Paradoxically, the destruction of the women's figurative faces becomes a way to account for a much more realistic, disorderly pain that rejects a spectacularisation of suffering.

Iconoclasm of Anti-Mimesis

Iconoclasm has been bounded to anti-mimesis since its inception – the biblical ban on any graven image and the Platonic condemnation of images of art, for instance, were fuelled by a rejection of the *eidōlon*'s excessive visual similarity with the referent. Artistic anti-mimesis does not always correspond to an iconoclastic intent, whereas the opposite is true; namely, that iconoclastic gestures within the arts are directed against mimesis. From Russian abstract art's attempts at representing the Absolute via monochromatic paintings to Lucio Fontana's cut canvases aimed at reaching the unrepresentable reality beyond the painting's surface, from avant-garde cinema's and video art's disrupting of habitual engagements with images and sounds to contemporary audio-visual media's uses of blank screens and off-screen sounds, anti-mimetic aesthetics hinge on the distance between copy and prototype, thereby implying that the image cannot truthfully reproduce the model. While intelligible models may appear to place mimetic representation more decidedly in a moral maze (how to figuratively render the invisibility at their core?), also sensible phenomena challenge a seemingly uncomplicated reproduction of reality, especially following an understanding of the visual field as ethically laden. Libby Saxton (2010c) convincingly ties the issue of mimesis to that of ethics, observing that it is from cinema's 'privileged bond with reality' (26) – namely, from its possibility to mimetically reproduce people, animals, objects (their appearance, sounds and movement) – that ethical questions arise. Similarly, Asbjørn Grønstad (2016) stresses the ethical weight deriving from the close nexus between cinematic

reproduction and phenomenal reality, commenting that 'to capture images is "an ethos, a disposition, and a conduct in regard to the world"' (3). Nevertheless, if the filming of reality is thus far from being a neutral, objective recording of the world, then ethically charged models more forcefully question mimesis because mimetic reproduction potentially risks concealing the unbridgeable gap between the image and its model.

In this respect, the possibility of representing the Shoah is one of the most controversial and debated issues, opposing those in favour of its mimetic re-enactment to the advocates of more subtle ways to represent it without doubling it (Hirsch 2004; Kobrynskyy and Bayer 2015; Perniola 2007; Saxton 2008; Wajcman 1998). Gérard Wajcman (1998) and Ivelise Perniola (2007) elaborate on the issue with specific reference to Claude Lanzmann's oeuvre, understanding his refusal of archival material and re-enactment as responding to an iconoclastic ethics. The *eidōlon*'s doubling of the model is what Wajcman most vehemently condemns in discussing the role of mimesis in art after World War II. He decries and rejects figurative representations of the Shoah insofar as they constitute an 'affirmation of presence. [. . .] Thus, any image is a negation of death and loss. A negation of absence' (1998, 242). Wajcman is explicitly against artistic mimesis since it presupposes the very possibility of duplicating an original. While mimesis can be acceptable for some models, it becomes unethical when confronted with what does not (or should not) have a double, such as God for the Christian iconoclasts or death in the concentration camps for Wajcman. The image as figuration, hence imitation as duplication – the peculiar feature of the *eidōlon* as the double – constitutes an affirmation of presence because it implies the reproduction of the model's visual features and, consequently, the loss of the prototype's uniqueness. However, from an iconoclastic perspective, some models should be affirmations of absence: absence of images of the invisible God; absence of images of genocidal events themselves. Perniola (2007) draws from Wajcman's (1998) argument on 'militant iconoclasm' (228), analysing how Lanzmann's documentaries preserve the invisibility at the core of the Shoah by negating any access to the event per se. Through the breaking with figuration and mimesis, there is a shift from the Shoah as a spectacle for the eyes – the *eidōlon* consumed in the visible realm – to the Shoah as ethical interrogation – the *eikōn* turned to the invisible sphere.

The link between an anti-mimetic aesthetics and iconoclasm is also present in Marion Poirson-Dechonne's (2016) book on iconoclastic tendencies in the cinema, Daniele Dottorini's (2013) article on the use of black screens in art house films and Luca Venzi's (2006; 2013) work on colour and the dissolution of the film image. These scholars consider the use of black screens and cacophony

as potentially ethical responses to issues regarding visibility and as ways to disrupt traditional engagements with a cinematic world. Accordingly, the black screen translates a visual impossibility – namely, something that lacks or should lack a visual equivalent, producing a halting of the spectator's look – whereas cacophony, conceived as the aural counterpart of the black screen, renders what is ineffable; that is, something that cannot be said or can only be said by means of unintelligible sounds. Via the black screen and cacophony, cinematic iconoclasm sets limits for the eyes and the ears: not everything can be clearly seen or heard.

These contributions on iconoclasm, anti-mimesis and ethics are essential for my argument on cinematic iconoclasm as an ethics of (in)visibility. Similar to some of the scholars who have delved into ethics and aesthetic forms in cinema (such as Downing and Saxton 2010; Grønstad 2016; Sinnerbrink 2016), I conceive of cinema as a potentially highly ethical medium, for not only does cinema present ethical quandaries in its content, but it can also produce an ethical form in respect to its content and can elicit the spectator's ethical imagination. It is in this perspective that the iconoclastic *eikōn* can at once embody an ethics of film-making and solicit an ethics of film-viewing by circumventing mimetic forms of representation. I propose an ethics of (in) visibility echoing Wajcman's (1998) expression 'ethics of visibility' (292). In his account, artistic iconoclasm constitutes such an ethics because it aims at '"showing" (*faire voir*) and "making present"' (219) unrepresentable and ineffable subject matter by means other than mimetic reproduction so as to preserve their uniqueness.

I have added the parenthetical (in) to underline the significance of invisibility for the ethics encouraged by iconoclastic gestures in the cinema, an ethics which is possible only insofar as what is visually accessible on the screen stretches towards invisibility, incessantly evoking it through an anti-mimetic aesthetics which overflows representation. The iconoclastic *eikōn* offers itself to sight – it is an image – and perturbs the spectator's look by presenting an absence which has become the real subject of the representation; in this way, an imaginative effort towards the unrepresentable model is aesthetically encouraged. Whether the absence with which we are presented is an absence of figurative images or the absence of our quotidian perception of movement, sound and colour, the iconoclastic *eikōn* forecloses mimetic reproduction, thus troubling our more habitual modes of consuming what is visible. Accordingly, this type of image promotes a liminal ethics that sinks its roots in what is visible while reaching out to the invisibility that inhabits, and haunts, every visible image.

Structure of the Book

The book is comprised of a prologue and two parts, which are further divided into four chapters each. The prologue provides a brief philosophical and historical background to the discussion on cinema and iconoclasm, delineating the main turning points in the iconoclastic debate, from Plato's and Plotinus's ambiguous understanding of artistic mimesis to early Christian theology of the image and the Byzantine controversy. Engaging with the *eikōn-eidōlon* dichotomy, the prologue also outlines how cinema reworks such an opposition, arguing for the aesthetic and ethical potential of artistic destruction.

Part I dwells on cinematic iconoclasm as critique of the *eidōlon* via the work of directors Isidore Isou, Guy Debord, Carmelo Bene and Jean-Luc Godard. The films analysed in this part metaphorically and literally proceed to destroy mimetic audio-visual images to counter their illusory power, thereby reiterating the criticism of the image found in philosophical iconoclasm. The first chapter looks at Isou's explicitly iconoclastic project and his avant-garde film *Traité de bave et d'éternité*, which heralds the destruction of cinema and presents several iconoclastic devices. The second chapter considers the iconoclastic use of monochromatic screens, sound-image disjunctions and freeze-frames in some of Guy Debord's films. Specifically, I take into account *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*, *The Society of the Spectacle* and *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, which exacerbate Isou's iconoclastic perspective. The third chapter examines Carmelo Bene's project to destroy cinema as a medium able to communicate meaning by way of linguistic and sonic disruptions. Through an analysis of his film *Our Lady of the Turks*, I explore how the negation of intelligible images via destructive editing chimes with the elimination of intelligible speech in favour of the voice as logos-less sound. To conclude this part, the fourth chapter goes over some of Jean-Luc Godard's narrative films, specifically *Une Femme mariée* (*A Married Woman*, 1964), *Alphaville, une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution* (*Alphaville: A Strange Adventure of Lemmy Caution*, 1965) and *Slow Motion* (*Sauve qui peut (la Vie)*, 1980), as well as the destructive works made with the Dziga Vertov Group, before engaging with *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, which constitutes the work ideally bridging Part I and Part II. In Godard's magnum opus, in fact, are found both the critique of the film image as *eidōlon* and the production of iconoclastic *eikones*, those images capable of establishing a relationship with the model by going beyond mimesis.

Part II focuses on iconoclastic *eikones* in the cinema, exploring their ethical quality, and conceptualises cinematic iconoclasm as an ethics of (in)visibility. Addressing questions concerning our right to show and see something on a

screen, Part II revolves around the problematics of representing others' inner world and suffering and considers ethically charged films which are also iconoclastic in their aesthetic form. The fifth chapter centres on Marguerite Duras's subversion of the traditional hierarchy between sound track and image track in narrative cinema. I look at the contraposition between aural and visual dimensions in her film *Le Navire Night*, an imageless love story based on the impossible encounter between two lovers, arguing that such an aesthetic choice is conducive to a visually inaccessible, ethical representation of sexual desire and alterity. The sixth chapter analyses Derek Jarman's monochromatic film *Blue*, focusing on its radically iconoclastic approach to colour and sound in recounting stories of suffering, death and love, as well as its denouncing of 1980s British gender politics. The seventh chapter examines the iconoclastic use of red fade-outs and red monochromatic screens in Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* which are iconoclastic devices to visually express what goes beyond mimetic reproduction – grief and suffering. Chapter 8 concludes with a detailed analysis of Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Three Colours: Blue*, with particular attention to the black screens that punctuate the narrative and the ethics of film-making and film-viewing that they promote.

Throughout, I trace the thread of an iconoclastic thinking which goes from Plato's suspicion about images of art, through Plotinus's theory of emanation and the Byzantine iconoclastic controversy, up to film theorists' and film-makers' investigation of the limits and ethical implications of mimesis in the cinema. Iconoclasm, as both theoretical approach and artistic practice, has proven to be a useful tool for exploring the aesthetics and the ethics of the film image. It embraces issues concerning the visible and the sayable, bringing attention to potentialities and risks of the film image, and underlines the importance of taking responsibility for the images which we decide to make, look at and share. Ultimately, the study of iconoclasm in cinema, by focusing on difficult images (namely, images which resist an easy and direct attribution of meaning), becomes an exercise in thinking about the ways in which we interact with and communicate through images. From Plato to cinema, our relationship with images is ambiguous and often conflicting: visual images are always on the verge of being considered deceitful appearances; and yet, we continue to interrogate, produce and look at them.