Prologue: The *Eikōn-Eidōlon* Dichotomy from Plato to Film

THE HISTORY OF the Western image, substantially marked by Platonic scepticism, Plotinian ambivalence and Christian iconoclasm, is the story of the human relating to the (sensible and supersensible) world and the human capacity to establish links with absence (the physical absence of God, or of the dead, but also the absence of figurative equivalents for thoughts and emotions). Up to contemporaneity, the image has been oscillating between truth (of the *eikōn*) and falsehood (of the *eidōlon*), between the ability to vivify (the dead flesh of the God-made man, for instance) and the capacity to mortify through doubling. Such an ambiguity of the status of the image, which hinges on our complexified relationship with reality and its possible representation, persists in the cinema, in which the seemingly closer relationship with reality (because of the indexical bond of mechanical recording) makes it all the more compelling to understand the relation between film image and referent.

Iconoclastic stances traverse ancient and medieval debates up to current attitudes about visuality. This prologue briefly traces some of the essential turning points in the debate on the Western image, with particular emphasis on the germinating of an iconoclastic perspective, which provides the background for destructive gestures in the cinema. In the film medium, the reality-illusion binary is significant for developing an iconoclastic rejection of artistic mimesis in an attempt to avoid the perils of the *eidōlon* and its consequent impoverishment of reality via its mimetic doubling. The political and ethical potentialities of an iconoclastic approach to cinema reside in the tension between a need to represent and a will to avoid duplication, between the extreme visibility and richness of the mimetic image and the opaque vision of the iconoclastic *eikōn*.

Main Turning Points in the Debate on Images

Platonic philosophy constitutes an essential point of reference in the debate on images and has influenced both iconoclastic and iconophilic thought (Besançon 2000, 25–37; Bettetini 2006; Halliwell 2007; Ladner 1953; Mondzain 2005; Saïd 1987). Although the more widespread interpretation is of a negative conception of images (primarily based on *The Republic*), which makes Plato a sort of forerunner of iconoclasm, there are nonetheless conflicting views on mimesis in his dialogues that challenge the over-simplified idea of Plato as utterly against images. Plato distinguishes between two separate worlds, that of intelligible ideas – the eternal and immutable beings, accessible through the intellect – and that of sensible things. The phenomenal world is a copy (mimesis) of the intelligible world, so that Plato's cosmology can be read as a descent from the perfection of ideas to the lowest copies of copies thereof. There are the ideas, eternal models; then, there are sensible things, copies of the ideas; lastly, there are images and works of art, reproductions of sensible things, images of images. Thus, everything that exists, except for intelligible ideas, is in a mimetic relation with something else.

In this context, mimesis in art tends to assume a negative connotation because it implies an act of producing a tertiary mode of being. Since the sensible world is already a reproduction of the world of ideas, or a secondary mode of being, images and works of art as mimesis of reality are reproductions of a reproduction, three times removed from truth (ideas). Plato explains this logic via the example of a bed: there are three types of bed; namely, the intelligible idea of bed, the material bed made by the artisan and the bed depicted by the painter. While the artisan directly copies the idea of bed, the painter copies the physical bed, which is a copy itself (*Republic*, 596b–598d). Therefore, the issue with images of art lies in their model: rather than imitating intelligible ideas, artworks consist of imitations of sensible things. Accordingly, art can be apprehended exclusively through the senses, and images of art are *eidōla* belonging to the phenomenal world of appearances. Art deceives insofar as it can only reproduce sensible things while claiming to imitate intelligible realities; hence, the more the image visually resembles the sensible model, the more it potentially misleads the viewer. As Suzanne Saïd (1987) remarks, '*eidōlon* appears every time that Plato wants to underline the degradation that accompanies the passage from the intelligible to the sensible or from a degree of the sensible to another thereof' (318). Plato's worries about images of art, which resonate with modern and contemporary concerns regarding visual representations, stem from their 'psychological power' (Halliwell 2002, 73); that is, images' power of influencing thought

and making someone believe in a falsity. Such an attitude is a direct consequence of 'Plato's approach to the psychology of mimesis [which] is grounded in the assumption that there is continuity, even equivalence, between our relations to people and things in the real world and the people and things presented in mimetic art' (Halliwell 2002, 76). Because of this continuity, Plato maintains an ambiguous perspective on images, now repudiating them as deceptive, now granting them some dignity.

Some Platonic dialogues (especially, the *Timaeus*, the *Symposium* and the *Laws*), in fact, provide a more positive view on mimesis within which the image as *eikōn* is slightly rehabilitated insofar as it establishes a connection with what is intelligible. Although the Platonic *eikōn* does not acquire the value reserved for intelligible ideas and remains apprehensible only via the senses, it nonetheless ceases to be a mere visual replica of a physical appearance by addressing the super-sensible sphere. Stephen Halliwell (2002) unpacks some of the intricacies in Plato's thought regarding mimesis, contending that

> such complexity is connected to a characteristic tension between discrepant impulses in Plato's thinking. The first, a kind of 'negative theology', which leads sometimes in the direction of mysticism, is that reality cannot adequately be spoken of, described, or modeled, only experienced in some pure, unmediated manner (by *logos*, *nous*, *dianoia*, or whatever). The second is that all human thought *is* an attempt to speak about, describe, or model reality – to produce 'images' (whether visual, mental, or verbal) of the real. On the first of these views, mimesis, of whatever sort, is a lost cause, doomed to failure, at best a faint shadow of the truth. On the second, mimesis – representation – is all that we have, or all that we are capable of. In some of Plato's later writing this second perspective is expanded by a sense that the world itself is a mimetic creation. (70–71)

In Plato's philosophy, both the image as *eidōlon* and the image as *eikōn* coexist, paving the way for the future opposition between the Christian idol and icon. However, Plato alone is insufficient to account for the influence of Hellenic thought on the Christian theology of the image. Another essential source includes Plotinus's philosophy, which constitutes a significant link between the Platonic interpretation of the *eikōn* and the Christian understanding of the icon.

Plotinus's more positive notion of image derives from his hierarchical cosmology, within which the image becomes an intermediary between the concreteness of sensible matter and the abstraction of the intelligible sphere. For Plotinus, both the sensible and the intelligible worlds derive by emanation

from the first principle of all, the One, which in a downward movement creates everything that exists (*Ennead* V.1[6]). There is therefore continuity between the intelligible realm and the sensible sphere which breaks with the immeasurable Platonic distance between the two worlds. This conception, where everything exists in a single world, shapes the overall Plotinian understanding of the image. While what is intelligible continues to form the highest level of being and sensible matter is the last thing created by the One, images nonetheless belong to, and thus are in a connection with, the same world of what is super-sensible, only at a lower ontological degree (*Ennead* V.8[1]). On the one hand, sensible matter – the lowest level of the hierarchy – corresponds to the *eidōlon* insofar as it is a formless reflection of the One; on the other hand, the image, when it is elevated to the role of intermediary between the sensible and the intelligible spheres, becomes *eikōn*; namely, the first means for carrying out the inner journey towards the One. Such partial rehabilitation of the image hinges on the continuum between the sensible and the intelligible worlds: no longer condemned to the sensible sphere only, the image as *eikōn* positions itself between the two.

However, Plotinus, too, maintains an ambiguous attitude towards mimetic art, now praising it as a means for passing from the sensible to the intelligible world, now diminishing it to a 'plaything' that 'produce[s] a simulacrum [*eidōlon*] of nature' (Halliwell 2002, 318). Art and the image as *eikōn* acquire value as the starting point for the soul's journey towards the One, mediating between sensible and intelligible realms; and yet, the representation of the point of arrival – the One – is interdicted. Christian Catholic thought about images will, however, ignore Plotinus's iconoclastic aspect, instead conceiving of the icon as a way to diminish the distance between humans and God.

The Christian theology of the image intertwines Platonic, Plotinian and Neoplatonic perspectives with the Biblical prohibition of any graven image and the Christian notion of the incarnation of God (Besançon 2000, 81–146; Halliwell 2002, 314, 334; Ladner 1953; Mondzain 2005, 73; Wunenburger 1999, 154). While early Christian theologians (second to fifth century) did not necessarily provide an aesthetics regarding sacred representations, they nonetheless offered two opposite ways of interpreting the sensible world which were to play a fundamental role in the development of iconophilic and iconoclastic arguments. There were conflicting views on the legitimacy of sacred images deriving from different interpretations of, especially, the incarnation, whether as a positive event or, at the opposite end, as an act ontologically inferior to God.[1]

In favour of icons were those theologians who interpreted the incarnation in a positive manner, for God himself had taken a visible, perishable form, and

who promoted a rehabilitation of sensible matter to which the body belongs. Conversely, theologians against sacred representation had an overall distrust in sensible matter and the human body, while they highly valued the intelligible part of humans – the soul. They discredited the body in all its aspects and interpreted sensible matter as lacking being, conceiving of corporeal things as a result of human sin. Moreover, in this iconoclastic perspective, Christ was recognised as the only image of God, sharing the same divine nature, whereas man was 'in the image of the image'. Thus, following a Platonic approach, any representation of Christ would be an image having a tertiary mode of being; namely, as Alain Besançon (2000, 94) notes, sacred images would be images of an image (Christ) of the image (God). The Christian issue of 'in the image of' was thus implicated in a complex web of relations among God the father, Christ the son, humans and sensible matter. Theologians who positively interpreted the sensible world viewed sacred images as possible intermediaries between people on earth and God in heaven (*eikones*); conversely, theologians holding a negative conception of the corporeal sphere could not possibly allow the reproduction of the intelligible God in a material frame. Gradually, two main conflicting attitudes became fundamental in the Christian debate on images, that of iconophilia and iconoclasm, openly and physically clashing in the eighth century.

The iconoclastic crises taking place in Byzantium during the eighth and ninth centuries started with the destruction of an icon of Christ at the command of Emperor Leo III and a ban on sacred images in 726 CE. Existing icons were smashed, and the dispute between iconoclasts and iconophiles within Christianity began. It was to last until 843. The causes were not exclusively religious, but also political and economic (Besançon 2000, 114; Bettetini 2006, 92–93; Mondzain 2005, 76); however, it is the theological debate accompanying the Byzantine crises which concerns the relationship between image and prototype. At the core of this debate was the figurative representation of Christ, and the main points in dispute consisted of the circumscribability of the divine God in the icon and the question of consubstantiality (identity of substance between image and model).

Regarding the issue of circumscribability, the iconophiles denied that the icon circumscribes the divine essence, affirming that only Christ's human nature is depicted in the image. This is directly linked to the incarnation, which constitutes the event through which God has circumscribed himself, assuming a body of flesh. Christ is both man and God, having human nature together with divine essence; therefore, in manifesting God's human essence, the incarnation allows for the production of icons that are in relationship with the human Christ but not with his divine nature, which remains invisible and unrepresentable.

More importantly, the icon is 'not the object of a passive fascination' (Mondzain 2005, 90) but aims at taking the viewer's look beyond the visibility of the representation; that is, at transcending the materiality of the icon to reach the intellectual contemplation of God. In iconophilic thought, what differentiates the icon from the idol resides in the relationship they have with the sensible and the intelligible spheres: while the icon exists as an intermediary between the two realms, the idol purely addresses the world of corporeal things.

Conversely, in iconoclastic thought, the icon is far from diminishing the distance separating humans and God and assumes, instead, the connotations of the idol, a false god that consequently has to be destroyed. The iconoclasts rebutted the iconophilic theses, decrying them as heretic because (1) the icon cannot be consubstantial to the model since what is sensible cannot share the same nature as what is intelligible;[2] (2) the icon circumscribes both human and divine essence of Christ because the two are inseparable – God is the invisible, unlimited and un-circumscribable *par excellence*. In the iconoclasts' view, the gap between the divine model and its material image is therefore unbridgeable.

The same image was thus at once icon and idol, depending on the interpretation of the image-model relationship. Icon and idol, coming from *eikōn* and *eidōlon*, respectively, reiterate the same opposition found in Plato and Plotinus. Accordingly, the idol inherits the negative connotations of the Greek *eidōlon* as something that reproduces exclusively a sensible appearance, thereby addressing only sight, and as an image that implies the possibility of producing a visually identical double of the prototype. The image of God as idol/*eidōlon* is idolatrous because it offers itself as the direct object of adoration, without being a means for passing from the visible contemplation of the image to the intellectual contemplation of God.

While both iconophilic and iconoclastic stances rejected the idol, their conception of the icon differed. The iconophiles attributed to the icon the meaning of the *eikōn* as that which mediates between the here below and the there above, whereas for the iconoclasts the icon as conceived by the iconophiles was nothing other than an idol. The same image, therefore, was caught between two diametrically opposed interpretations.

The iconoclastic crisis of the eighth century eventually led to the second Council of Nicaea in 787 and the victory of the iconophilic thesis. The icon of Christ was legitimated and recognised as an image having a privileged link with the divine model. The sacred icon thus became the intermediary between humans and God, albeit not reproducing divine nature. To look on the visible sacredness ideally leads to the imageless contemplation of God. This legitimation

was to play a key role in the future of Western thought about images: once the praise of images was detached from the religious context, any type of image began to enjoy an ever-increasing power in the social imaginary that still persists today. Therefore, it is possible to trace a pathway that goes from ancient Greek philosophy to the Byzantine controversy up to contemporary Western imaginary and cinema. As Maria T. Bettetini (2006) insightfully observes,

> there is no doubt that the second Council of Nicaea played a role in Western medieval, modern and postmodern civilization. The legitimation of sacred images drawn up in 787 by the council Fathers is universally recognised as the theoretical and political origin of our civilization of images: from Byzantium to Hollywood. (103)

The history of the Western European imaginary is marked by Platonic and Plotinian philosophy, then re-elaborated from a Christian perspective, leading to the paradoxical and ambiguous status of the image. As consequence, the image has acquired a central role, attested by the daily production of images; and yet, the status of the visual image is still often that of a secondary representation incapable of truthfully expressing reality. Such antagonistic perspectives are also present in the cinema, where both faith and distrust in the film image's ability to reproduce reality coexist.

Iconoclasm in the Cinema

My argument develops from the assumption that the binary between the *eikōn* and the *eidōlon* can be found in the cinema as well, generating conflicting stances. More specifically, different interpretations derive from a dichotomy between reality and illusion, which opposes cinema's claim to a mimetic restitution of reality and cinema's deceptive nature. Such antagonism goes back to the beginning of film theory and involves clashing views about the film image (Allen 1993; Andrew 1976; 1984, 37–56; Perniola 2013; Pezzella 2011; Rushton 2011; Thomson-Jones 2008). There are various stances in the spectrum of the reality-illusion dichotomy in the cinema, which range from a quasi-religious faith in the revelatory capacity of the film medium, such as in the writings of Louis Delluc ([1920] 1985), Jean Epstein ([1921] 1977; [1926] 2012), Béla Balázs ([1945] 1970; [1924] 2010) and Siegfried Kracauer (1960), to a fierce disdain for the cinematic image as a deceitful representation, as in the work of the exponents of political modernism (Comolli and Narboni 1971; Fargier 1971; Heath 1974; MacCabe 1974; Rodowick 1994; Wollen 1976). This picture is further complicated by the

formalist position according to which the fundamental aesthetic value of cinema resides in the film image's deviation from reality (Arnheim 1958; Eisenstein 1949; 1957; Münsterberg 1916; Sesonske 1974).

As in religion and philosophy, in cinema too there is a division between a true(r) reality (phenomenal reality or the intelligible sphere of thoughts and emotions), which functions as the prototype, and a less true sensible sphere, that of film images, which stands for the copy. Following a representational understanding of the cinema, it is possible to distinguish between the proponents of cinema as a trustworthy, mimetic reproduction of phenomenal appearances and the advocates of the film image as deceptive and illusory. The first perspective, also referred to as photographic realism, finds its most influential representatives in André Bazin (1967; 1972) and Kracauer (1960), who share a positive account of the indexical relationship between film images and phenomenal referents (reminiscent of the relationship of likeness distinctive of the *eikōn*). Accordingly, the film image has a privileged bond with its model because, by mechanically recording it, it attests that something *has been there* in front of the camera. An extreme and quite negative case of photographic realism is Roger Scruton's (1981) argument on the transparency of photographic and cinematic images, which are deemed surrogates of reality and excluded from representational arts – and therefore from aesthetics. On the other side of the spectrum, the exponents of political modernism best exemplify the interpretation of a particular type of film image as an illusory copy of the real (*eidōlon*) and thus as a means for providing a seemingly objective worldview rather than granting spectators access to an augmented knowledge of reality.

Underlying these various stances there is an understanding of cinema as a re-presentational medium. That is, cinema is a medium which records a reality existing prior to and independently from it; therefore, the film image defines itself according to the relationship it establishes with its phenomenal referent. Among the possible interpretations of this relationship there are the film image that reaches a quasi-complete likeness with its referent (for instance, Scruton's utterly negative transparency of the film image) and the image that distances itself from its referent to the point of great difference. In both limit cases, as in the many stretched between them, the relationship between image and model remains fundamental, whether it is carried out in terms of similarity or alterity.

The copy-prototype relationship, in fact, constitutes the basis for both iconoclastic and iconophilic conceptions, in philosophy as in the cinema. Iconoclasm and iconophilia share the same metaphysical requirement; namely, they posit the existence of a true(r) prototype to which any copy has to be compared.

In the cinema, this metaphysical postulate can be found in the relationship between phenomenal reality and the film image, where the former functions as the prototype for the latter. What is more, the division between sensible and intelligible spheres is also present in a film ambit, although with a slightly different connotation. The sensible stands for what is visible and audible, namely what can be physically seen and heard in phenomenal experience; the super-sensible becomes that which can be shown only through metaphors because it lacks an audio-visual form in phenomenal reality (for instance, emotions and thoughts), or because it consists of something which resists mimetic doubling (for example, the Shoah). The issue of iconoclasm in cinema, then, concerns the problematic relationship between reality and its representation; it explores how emotional and intelligible contents can be transferred into audio-visual images.

What underpins cinematic iconoclasm is an understanding of the relationship between certain film images and their referents in terms of alterity, or at least inadequacy – the image being somewhat insufficient for the representation of the model. Resonating with philosophical interpretations of the *eidōlon*/idol, the cinematic *eidōlon* carries connotations of illusion and deception: it belongs to the sensible sphere only and reproduces the model following a mimetic paradigm. The image as *eidōlon* stands for a figurative image which replicates its model in such a way as to produce an impression of reality. That is, by doubling the appearance of the model, the *eidōlon* has the potential to present itself as if it were the model – which is not tantamount to say that spectators could be tricked into thinking that a moving image of a thing is the thing itself; rather, it refers to the perilous psychological power that images of art can have (see Plato's critique). 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 (hence, for instance, Claude Lanzmann's iconoclastic refusal of re-enacting the Shoah or using photos and materials from archives for his *Shoah* [1985]).

Moreover, the *eidōlon* in the cinema can come to signify the image of classical or mainstream entertainment cinema. Particularly in Marxist-inflected critique, the *eidōlon* corresponds to a self-evident, seemingly coherent image whose constitutive elements are reasoned (sound is in synch with the visual; the elements of the mise-en-scène are logically linked; the editing is invisible; and so on). The critique of the illusory nature of classical cinema echoes the Platonic condemnation of images of art and resonates with theological iconoclastic discourses.

The cinematic *eidōlon* is problematic, from an iconoclastic perspective, because it retains a highly psychological power and is likely to produce an impression of reality in the spectators. It does so by posing itself as objective representation of an uncomplicated reality depicted as if simply being there, beyond the screen. Thus, the cinematic *eidōlon* consists of the seemingly transparent image of the kind of cinema purported as a window into the world. Accordingly, iconoclastic leftist film-makers attack these images to dismantle the worldview they promote – for instance, in Isidore Isou's cinema, *eidōla* often correspond to images of oppressive power; in Guy Debord's films and theoretical works, *eidōlon* is any image produced by consumer society. What distinguishes the cinematic *eidōlon* is, therefore, its capacity to mimetically double the model which constitutes a threat to the uniqueness of certain prototypes and to challenging representations of reality. Everything is perfectly visible on the screen – Christ and its martyred body of flesh; the bodies and corpses in the concentration camps; the other's suffering. However, these images, the content of which is visually consumable in the clarity of figuration, are defective in evoking a relationship with the invisibility and alterity proper to their models, more often producing an unperceived distance between the viewer and the reality represented.

Quite the contrary, the iconoclastic *eikōn*, which incorporates aspects of the *eikōn* without resorting to mimesis, consists of a refusal of certain audio-visual images out of respect for reality, for its complexity and elusiveness. It thus bespeaks a withdrawal of our representational capacities before specific models. I draw the concept of iconoclastic *eikōn* from Alain Besançon's (2000, 319–82), Gérard Wajcman's (1998) and Jean-Jacques Wunenburger's (1999, 357–59) discussion of iconoclasm in non-figurative art. According to these scholars, non-figurative art reiterates the criticism of the image deriving from the arguments of religious iconoclasm. In abstract painting, for example, the image ceases to imitate nature because the representation of the Absolute, whether religious or secularised, cannot pass through the reproduction of sensible forms of reality. The status of the model as that which is beyond the sensible world determines the rejection of images as mimesis of nature. In this respect, non-figurative art recalls a conception of the image and of the copy-prototype relationship akin to that of the iconoclasts during the Byzantine controversy: the inadequacy of the material means for the reproduction of the model and the consequent rejection of any mimetic principle for representing such prototype distinctly bring to mind iconoclastic arguments against sacred images. Additionally, Wunenburger (1999) discusses how, in non-figurative art, the knowledge of the divine (whether intended in religious or agnostic-spiritual terms) is impossible by sensible means. He concludes:

> Iconoclasm, religious or secularised, thus defines not so much a practice of deprivation or prohibition of images as the aspiration not to settle for an image that would claim to exhaust the being, especially when the being posits itself as absolute being. (359)

Abstract painting thus assimilates an iconoclastic component in its refusal to circumscribe an intelligible prototype in a sensible frame, thereby breaking with artistic mimesis. However, the outcome of this process (namely, the negation of the *eidōlon* as a visual double of the model) does not remain grounded in the sensible sphere only. Besançon (2000, 356) delineates the odd peculiarity of certain non-figurative art as retaining some iconoclastic aspects together with the iconophilic intent to represent the absolute being, which was strictly opposed by the iconoclasts. Similarly, Wajcman (1998, 180, 195) addresses as iconoclastic icon an image that deals with both visibility and invisibility without mimetically reproducing the model. This type of image represents something that the eyes can see without however figuratively limiting the intelligible model. While the iconophilic icon uses mimesis to represent the absolute being, reproducing features retraceable in phenomenal reality and thereby enclosing the intelligible prototype in a sensible frame, the iconoclastic *eikōn* respects the unrepresentability of certain models. It is *eikōn* because it mediates between a visual form and its intelligible model, and it is iconoclastic because it refuses mimesis insofar as it would constitute an attempt to reduce what is invisible or unrepresentable to a figurative form; the material means are inadequate for the representation of the model, and yet the model somehow needs to be shown. Hence, the iconoclastic *eikōn* comes to define an image capable of maintaining the unrepresentability and ineffability at the core of those models which lack a visible and audible equivalent in phenomenal reality.

The types of images involved – *eidōlon, eikōn*, iconoclastic *eikōn* – are therefore interpretations rather than fixed categories; that is, an image can be *eidōlon* for some viewers and *eikōn* for others (as in the case of Christian icons and idols). Cinematic iconoclasm does not consist in rejecting every image, but only those images deemed deceitful and illusory. The interpretation of certain images as false or inadequate depends on the prototype, on whether it can be apprehended via the physical senses or, quite differently, can only be thought through the intellect or experienced emotionally. Cinematic iconoclasm thus challenges mimetic reproduction rather than censoring images. It questions the Western obsession with mimesis and extreme visibility, contrasting them with images and sounds that undermine our capacity to represent, see and hear; in so doing, it can nurture our ethical imagination.

Concluding Remarks

There is a contradictory thinking that connects Platonic discourses about the deceptive potential of artworks, Plotinus's partial rehabilitation of images and the Byzantine iconoclastic controversy over sacred icons with cinema's dichotomy between illusion and reality. What ties together these seemingly distant arguments is the issue of mimesis, which concerns the relationship between an image as copy and its sensible or intelligible referent. Cinema addresses and reworks the *eikōn-eidōlon* dichotomy which has haunted Western understandings of the image since at least Plato: the *eikōn* is in a relationship with both the sensible world (of the image and the viewer) and the intelligible realm (of the model), whereas the *eidōlon* is exclusively grounded in the sensible sphere. Drawing on philosophical and theological accounts of the nature of images, I propose to investigate the issue of iconoclasm in the cinema using the *eikōn-eidōlon* binary, differentiating between theories and films mainly concerned with the destruction of the illusory image of mainstream entertainment cinema and others more focused on overcoming the level of critique to produce iconoclastic *eikones*. The criticism of the cinematic *eidōlon* grounds any iconoclastic gesture in the cinema and is emphatically present in the destructive works of the directors discussed in Part I. There are also iconoclastic approaches which aim at a further shift away from cinema as a spectacle for the eyes and ears – the *eidōlon* consumed in the visible and audible realm – to cinema as a sensible stimulus for actively reflecting on the object of our look – the iconoclastic *eikōn* turned to the invisible sphere – which is at the core of the films analysed in Part II. Never a rejection of images *tout court*, cinematic iconoclasm constitutes a way to critique a certain morbid fascination with extreme visibility and to probe our (ethical) relationship with the visual field.