INTRODUCTION

Shocks of Recognition

In late April 2004, photographs taken in the Iraqi Abu Ghraib prison and electronically shared among American troops were leaked, causing outrage around the world. The images showed American military personnel torturing, humiliating, and sexually abusing Iraqi detainees, in some cases to the point of murder, in flagrant violation of the Geneva Conventions. Among all the photographs, one of a hooded Iraqi man standing on a box with extended arms, his hands attached to wires indicating the imminent danger of electrocution, became an icon for the gross human rights violations and war crimes committed by the US military in Iraq and in other “theaters of war,” as was discovered after the Abu Ghraib revelations.

As Peter Selz notes, this image “has for many people around the world replaced the Statue of Liberty as the symbol of what the United States stands for.” In a now-famous mural in Sadr City, the largest Shiite neighborhood of Baghdad, the Iraqi artist Sallah Edine Sallat juxtaposes the hooded man on the box with a Statue of Liberty portrayed as a “Klansman/torturer.” Instead of holding the torch of freedom, the latter reaches up to “pull the electrical switch” that activates the wires attached to the hooded prisoner of Abu Ghraib (fig. 1).

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Far beyond the countries of the Middle East, the Abu Ghraib photograph has achieved worldwide notoriety. The reasons for this fact converge, I contend, in the shock of recognition the image causes in the viewer. On the one hand, there is the recognition by scholars like Alfred McCoy, eminent historian of the CIA and its torture programs, who immediately recognized the CIA’s signature in the photo. It is equally significant, that the photo’s global resonance responds to a subconscious or even unconscious recognition: the uncanny resemblance of the victim with the crucified Christ. I will return to this point shortly.

I open this book with a reflection on this image, because it haunts the illegal or extralegal practices addressed in the chapters that follow. Thus, acknowledging and analyzing the shock of recognition face to face, as it were, with the hooded man from Abu Ghraib opens the way for registering similar shocks of recognition in other scenes of massive violation of individuals’ rights. We cannot think these extralegal practices, if we assume them to be occurring in a faraway world against a faraway ene-
my, who by his hostile actions, often portrayed as “barbaric” and utterly alien, has provoked such retaliation, as illegal as it may be. The readings of literary, philosophical, and artistic texts that follow draw on what Jacques Derrida calls the two “ages of cruelty,” one that is scientifically and technologically sophisticated, allegedly surgical and precise, the other that is characterized as archaic, indiscriminate, and bloody. They set out to explore a mutual implication not only in these “ages of cruelty,” but also in the suffering caused by both cruelties. In other words, the chapters of this book attempt to register and explore shocks of recognition in the “other’s” cruelty and the “other’s” suffering. To initiate and explore such shocks of recognition is, I maintain, one of the major responsibilities but also one of the major promises of the practice called “the humanities.”

However, to acknowledge recognition, there needs first to be the acknowledgement of an address. The cultural (literary, philosophical, artistic) strategies explored here start from a fundamental given, as banal as it is complex: we are addressed, and we have been addressed long before being able to respond, as Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Lacan didn’t tire of recalling, coming from two vastly different (if intersecting) traditions.3 We are addressed, and fiercely addressed, in the photo of the hooded man, all the more so as he was brutally prevented, in our name, from returning the camera’s (and thus our) gaze. We are addressed in the screams that turn a person, tortured in our name, into howling flesh. We are addressed in poems written in the Guantánamo Prison camp, however much American authorities try to censor them, in our name. We are addressed by the victims of the US drone wars, however little American citi-

came a kind of slang condensation for Iraqis, so that they reportedly began to refer to the Bagman himself as the Statue of Liberty, a powerful occasion for jokes about the American promise to bring electricity to Iraq along with freedom” (103–4).

3 In my Verfolgung und Trauma: Zu Emmanuel Levinas’ Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1990), I have tried to develop this common preoccupation in Levinas’s and Lacan’s œuvres.
zens may have heard the names of the places obliterated by the bombs for which their taxes pay.

I would contend that we know well that we are addressed, in spite of all the talk of the “clash of civilizations” and in spite of a number of strategies of brutal refusal of heeding those calls. Strategies of refusal include the acceptance of the knowledge that people are locked up without trial in cages that in any other context would be reserved for animals, the acceptance of their imprisonment in metal containers for weeks, months, or years of solitary confinement, the justifications for shackling them to the ground in freezing or overheated cubicles while subjecting them to deafening music and strobe lights, or the tacit or explicit consent to locking them up in virtual kill boxes whose lethal walls move with the prey. Kill boxes, I argue, in addition to their definition by the US military, come in many shapes.

I take as paradigmatic the resonance arising from the very peculiar address by a hooded man threatened with death by electrocution upon the slightest movement. It is well documented that the torture practices of Abu Ghraib were exported from the Guantánamo Bay detention camp. The hooded man’s conscious and unconscious recognizability is thus a critical factor not only in the discussion on torture, but also in the discussions on indefinite detention without trial, as practiced in Guantánamo, and in debates on the strategies to circumvent the latter altogether, as practiced in drone warfare and its extrajudicial assassination program.

For these reasons I have chosen to open the present volume with an analysis of this image, especially as seen through W.J.T. Mitchell’s eye-opening reading. As mentioned already, the image’s iconic quality is owed to the viewer’s “uncanny sense of recognition,” which Mitchell explored first in an op-ed on June 27, 2004, in *The Chicago Tribune* and later in depth in his book

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The title of the op-ed, “Echoes of a Christian Symbol: Photo Reverberates with Raw Power of Christ on Cross,” summarizes why the photo’s symbolic and “iconographic resonance” transformed it, above all the other photos coming out of Abu Ghraib’s torture chambers, into the “icon” of the Abu Ghraib scandal, figuring both as the “icon of the moment,” and at the same time, “possibly” as a “historical marker.” Evoking the “long history of images that unite figures of torture and sacredness or divinity,” Mitchell deciphers the image of the hooded man as what used to be called a “Christ figure.”

As Thomas Lentes has noted, no other body has “informed the history of Western iconography as deeply as the martyred and wounded body of Christ.” This iconography and the theology that informs it are deeply marked by the practice of torture. Alfred McCoy explains in the introductory chapter to his groundbreaking book *A Question of Torture* that

the impact of judicial torture on European culture went far beyond the dungeon, coinciding with a subtle shift in theological emphasis from the life of Jesus to the death of the Christ—a change reflected in artistic representations, both painting and sculpture, of his body being scourged, tortured, and crucified. From limited details of Christ’s agonies in the Gospels, medieval artists, in the words of one scholar “approximated these grisly violations with the unerring eye of a forensic pathologist,” creating an image of the pain inflicted on his battered body that mimed, and may have legitimated,

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the increasingly gruesome legal spectacle of torture and public execution.8

What then are the specific reasons why this one photograph, rather than any of the many others that surfaced at the same time, became the “icon” for Abu Ghraib? Why, otherwise put, did its “iconographic resonance” go “beyond this immediate event to touch on the contemporary world system” during the era of the War on Terror? The answer to these questions can be found in the fact that the image of the Abu Ghraib Man is, as Mitchell elaborates,

a “world picture” in three senses of that phrase: 1) as a globally circulated and instantly recognizable icon, which requires only minimal cues, visual or verbal, to be called to mind; 2) [as] a symbol of a planetary conflict (the Global War on Terror) that is not confined to the present moment of the early twenty-first century, but resonates deeply within a long history of figures of power and abjection in the repertoire of Christian iconography and beyond; and 3) as a symptom of a new world order of image-production and circulation made possible by bio-digital technologies, the era of “cloning.” The fact that the image goes beyond the specific echoes of the Passion of Christ to evoke medieval and Renaissance images of the human body (and Christ’s body in particular) as an imago mundi or microcosm of the world helps to reinforce the uncanny sense that this image was already, in some sense, quite familiar as an icon, even at the first moment of its appearance in April 2004.9

9 Mitchell, Cloning Terror, 142–43. (Date changed from April 2003 to April 2004, the date when the photographs were aired on CBS’s 60 Minutes).
Mitchell relies for his analysis on Meyer Schapiro’s 1960 essay “Words and Pictures,” which explores the relations between Jewish and Christian icons, and, specifically, the “genealogy that links the figure of a victorious Moses to a crucified Christ.” Schapiro’s “formal distinction between frontal and profile renderings of the human figure” is here of particular relevance, given their “association with the implied ‘address’ of the image as an ‘I’ facing the spectator as a ‘you’.” The formal difference between frontal and profile views corresponds in Schapiro’s analysis to the distinction between “themes of state” and “themes of action”: the former are found in images that confront the viewer “directly with a static, frontally posed figure,” while the latter characterize images depicting a “self-contained action seen beyond the picture plane.” Owing its iconic potential at least partly to the “static, frontally posed figure,” the photograph of the hooded man from Abu Ghraib resonates so powerfully with a Western viewer because the image “remembers,” “recuperates,” and “transforms” representations of Christ “with his arms raised, either at the Crucifixion or the resurrection, or in scenes of prayer and blessing.” And those representations, Mitchell continues, already remembered and recuperated the “figure of Moses raising his arms at the battle of the Israelites with the Amalekites,” absorbing it retrospectively into Christian iconography as a “prefiguration” of Christ crucified, which in turn became the “prototype for gestures of both sacred and secular sovereignty throughout Christendom, including the gesture of the priest celebrating mass, or the monarch addressing his subjects.”

Three main features, then, turned the figure of the Hooded Man into the “universally recognizable icon” of the Abu Ghraib scandal. First, the image “recuperates” and “transforms” the crucified Christ, whose image already “remembered” Moses. Second, this frontally posed figure “faces the viewer directly,”

10 Ibid., 144. Mitchell continues: “a contrast strangely reminiscent of Michael Fried’s distinction between images of theatricality and absorption.”
11 Ibid., 144–47. See also Klaus Mladek, “Folter und Scham,” in Wahrheit und Gewalt. Der Diskurs der Folter in Europa und den usa, ed. Thomas Weitin (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), 262.
hailing the viewer as the ‘you’ who is addressed by an ‘I.’” And third, the “theme of state” is reinforced by the man’s positioning on a pedestal, which precludes any action or movement: “absolute stillness was required to maintain this position.”

If later versions of an image “remember” earlier versions, the same applies to the actual torture practice employed. Indeed, experts like McCoy, who has studied the torture practices of the CIA and US military for more than two decades, “believe that the procedure suffered by the ‘hooded man’ is a standard torture method the CIA has been using for years.” Moreover, Darius Rejali has shown that this particular form of positional torture, forced standing, is an old technique used by many countries (including the US, several European countries, Israel, and a number of Middle Eastern countries) and in many varieties. The Nazis, for example, used a variety called the “standing cell” (Stehzelle). By 1970, the Brazilian variety in which the victim was forced to stand on tiptoes while holding four telephone books in each outstretched hand was referred to as “Christ the Redeemer.” The version that includes electric wires attached to the prisoners was called “The Vietnam.”

One of the facets of the shock of recognition, then, is that Abu Ghraib “remembers” globally applied torture methods, including torture perpetrated by the Nazis, which is evinced not only through the one image referred to here. At the Belgian Fortress Prison in Breendonk, the Gestapo routinely practiced hooding and suspending prisoners from a hook-and-pulley system while their hands were tied in the back. The writer Jean Améry, who was subjected to torture at Breendonk, reflected on his experience in a seminal philosophical essay that still proves extremely

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12 Ibid., 145–47.
13 Ralf Hoppe and Marian Blasberg, “Photos from Abu Ghraib: The Hooded Men,” Der Spiegel, March 22, 2006. Hoppe and Blasberg continue: “Jamie Fellner, Director of Human Rights Watch, also believes that other prisoners were tortured in the same manner.”
15 Ibid., 101, 333.
productive today, because it lays out with unflinching clarity the devastation inflicted by torture.

The first chapter of this book therefore offers an approach to the question of torture through close attention to the textual fabric of Améry’s essay, especially in the original German. Torture, Améry asserts categorically, was “the essence of National-Socialism.” Linguistic creations by the Bush administration such as “ghost detainee” and “ghosting,” while intended to refer to the victims’ invisibility from public witnessing or scrutiny, contain an unintended but revealing proposition about torture that is central to Améry’s reflection: torture subjects the victim to an experience of death while still alive. Part alive, part dead, neither dead, nor alive, the torture victim occupies a zone in-between in which torture never ends. My reading of Améry’s text explores how it traces the connection not between torture and destruction, but between torture and a heightened form of destruction: annihilation. Améry’s remapping of the semantic field of the German word Verfleischlichung bespeaks the “fleshization” of the experience of torture and how the torturer’s perversion of language confirms and underscores the apocalyptic totality of annihilation. This is one reason why in the early modern period in Northern German cities, anybody who had undergone torture lost his or her right to residency forever, even if he/she was able to prove his/her innocence.16 The mere suspicion of being guilty of an infamy so great that it warranted torture in the eyes of the juridical system was sufficient for an expulsion from civil society. Torture threatens to radically destroy the social fabric and thus confronts us with the most urgent question of what it means to live together, especially with the enemy. Recognizing a long iconographic heritage in the hooded man of Abu Ghraib also calls for the recognition of the subterranean levels on which this violence operates in order to make its long history addressable.

The question of “living together” in an age of torture, and thus “with” torture, is central to Chapter Two. Taking as its point of departure the recognition of a shared vulnerability of the flesh through Rejali’s reading of a scene uniting a Jewish guerrilla fighter, tortured by the British CID in Palestine and an old Arab man bringing him food, the chapter offers a close reading of Jacques Derrida’s essay “Avowing — The Impossible,” a text the philosopher describes as a “lesson” on “living together.” Placing particular emphasis on the language of the heart, Derrida explores a “fundamental mode” of living together: compassion. It is now well documented that some of the torture methods used by American interrogators in Guantánamo, Iraq, and Afghanistan aimed precisely at the destruction of compassion for the torture victim, including in the presumed enemy’s own community. The relentless use of euphemisms such as “enhanced interrogation,” the application of “no-touch” or “stealth” torture methods, combined with the persistent use of the singular “the enemy” in the government’s statements about detainees in Guantánamo and other American-run prisons overseas, hollow out the potential for what Frans de Waal calls “the synchronization of bodies,” where empathy and sympathy start, not to form a whole, a totality, but to bridge (not overcome) irreducible differences. Compassion as a visceral response, attested in its Hebrew name, rakhamim, the plural of rechem, “the womb,” and in its Arabic relative rahma, is also systematically undermined in the dichotomies that Derrida scrutinized and deconstructed throughout his career, including the dichotomy between “human” and “animal,” and, as the public debate on torture has evidenced all too clearly, the related dichotomy between “friend” and “enemy.” However, even if the “enemy” is locked away in faraway offshore detention camps such as Guantánamo and in

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overseas prisons such as Abu Ghraib and Bagram in order to deny him a hearing in American courts, one must still live together and, as Derrida underscores, “one must do so well, one must well do so [et il le faut bien],” “one has no choice.” For Derrida, it is not only a responsibility but a necessity to think the “war over the matter of pity” that “we find ourselves waging.”

Almost sixty years prior to Cesare Beccaria’s famous indictment of torture, Christian Thomasius’s *On the Torture That Needs to be Banned from Christian Courts*, published in 1705, castigated the practice of torture as a “godless perversity” exacerbated by the fact that it forces victims to abdicate any pity with themselves. For Thomasius, such “self-betrayal” is constitutive of torture, and its injustice cannot be surpassed by any other punishment. Thomasius insists that the Bible “abhors” torture, and he expresses unending perplexity at the fact that crucifixion is, alongside other “pagan things,” defended “doggedly” as “the holiest.” The shock of recognition between the hooded Muslim of Abu Ghraib and the central symbol of Christianity receives here another deeply disturbing trait: the abuse at Abu Ghraib was done by agents of not only the most powerful Western country in the world, but also of a country that, with all its guarantees of religious freedom and its assertion of the separation of church and state, remains deeply anchored in the Christian faith. In a believer’s perspective, the central symbol of Christianity declares Jesus’s radical and revolutionary solidarity with the least of the least and declares those expelled from the human community as not only human, but also as belonging to God’s kingdom. Addressing the forgotten or repressed memory of this symbol ought to elicit this shock of recognition.

Like Mitchell, Stephen Eisenman has shown that the photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib prison need to be inscribed into the long tradition of Western art indebted to the “Pathos formu-

la” that has allowed “images of torture, power and domination” to be “passed down from one generation to the next” in such a way that they “come to be widely embedded in both visual memory and the physical body.” This is what makes these photos “at once disturbing and familiar in their form and content, demanding yet somehow denying interpretation,” conjuring “a perceptual and imaginative realm that Sigmund Freud called unheimlich, or uncanny.”

In short, for Eisenman the Abu Ghraib photos “can be seen as the product, in the words of Warburg, of a ‘heritage stored in the memory.’” Warburg’s formulation, together with Walter Benjamin’s “optical unconscious,” alluded to by Mitchell, allows us to see the photos in much needed relief, especially in the context of the massive attempt by government officials to downplay the “Abu Ghraib archive” by invoking the “bad apples” hypothesis.

Chapter Three turns to another aspect of that heritage stored in memory, or, in this case, rather embellishingly disfigured, idealized in memory to circumvent shocks of recognition. I propose a close reading of Shoshana Felman’s concept of “literary justice” and examine her assertion that the “promised exercise of legal justice” is a “pattern inherited from the great catastrophes and the collective traumas of the twentieth century.”

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22 Ibid., 17. For the hooded man of Abu Ghraib, Eisenman invokes a similarity with a drawing by Francisco Goya of a victim of the Inquisition. The hood thus recalls the carochas “worn by victims of the Spanish auto-da-fé and typically decorated with flames and devils,” in addition to “dunces’ caps once used to punish schoolchildren, the hoods worn by members of the Ku Klux Klan and subsequent American racist organizations, and the hoods worn both by executioners and their victims” (13). But Eisenman also underlines that already a brief reflection on the two images reveals the similarity between them as “only superficial.” He recalls that not the similarity, but the “fundamental distinctions between modern artworks and the torture images” were often the “reason for making the comparison.” By contrast, Eisenman’s goal is to show the photos’ indebtedness to classical paintings and sculptures (14, 15, and passim).
23 Mitchell, Cloning Terror, 117, 140.
has the War on Terror betrayed this promise time and again, but over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, “Western civilization” has been directly responsible or massively complicit in many of those catastrophes. Analyzing Felman’s distinction between “legal” and “literary” justice, I put it to the test in the context of the utter denial of justice to hundreds of men imprisoned without due process in Guantánamo Bay, and the massive censorship of poems written by some of the prisoners. The fact that, as the Pentagon asserts, poetry “presents a special risk” to national security because of its “content and format” ought to be of great interest to anybody invested in the role of the humanities in our day and age. Like their “legally unnameable and un-classifiable” authors, most of the poems are considered too dangerous for release. The silencing of legal justice here goes hand in hand with the silencing of literary justice. Censorship by the US authorities targeted poems in Arabic and Pashto but also, in at least one case, a well-known counting verse in English. Such censoring zeal reveals that the singularity of the verbal body is invincible not only in foreign languages and their translation, but also in the most familiar of idioms. The medium nursery rhyme captures in nuce the mediation of community and of language necessary for the organization of the infant’s fragmented body into a fictive integrity. The assessment of this medium as intolerable security risk is highly significant, insofar as it indicates that torture is intimately bound up with the elimination of the victims’ language, and, just as intimately, with the attack on their “be-longing” to a community. The shock of recognition in the case of these poems lies in the realization that the address of language (and language is, at heart, address) is inherently subversive. Once language is suspected to be dangerous “code” in one of its forms, for example in poetry, its danger, in principle, cannot be reined in. Rather all of language, in principle, becomes tainted with suspicion.

The subversiveness of language is, however, also its vulnerability. Chapter Four returns to Guantánamo poems, first in a close reading of Paul Muldoon’s poem “Hedge School,” through which I show how Guantánamo leaves its mark on language,
and how it has changed language. This is so not only because the policies responsible for and resulting from the prison camp have given rise to hundreds of euphemisms of which Fred Halliday’s book *Shocked and Awed: A Dictionary of the War on Terror* offers a painstaking account. More insidiously, as Muldoon’s poem suggests, Guantánamo may “force” students to conjugate differently verbs such as the Latin *amare*, to love. Guantánamo leaves its mark on the thesaurus of language, but, more perniciously, it may affect the grammar, the structural rules that govern the use of language. Turning to the poems written within the prison camp, the chapter examines the frequency of the motif of compassion the prisoners employ. Far from exhausting itself in convention, the invocation of the Qur’anic call to compassion in the Guantánamo poems may provide a way to make suffering sharable without drowning in shame. In spite of its very modest volume (only twenty-two from among possibly hundreds), the corpus of poems cleared by the American authorities for publication, after scrutiny and translation by “linguists with security clearance” rather than literary translators, gives an indication of what the censoring agencies might fear more than “code,” namely the shock of recognition that might occur here through the invocation of compassion, and in the realization of a shared vulnerability of the flesh.

Chapter Five approaches the iconographic memory stored in the photograph of the hooded man from Abu Ghraib from yet another angle. As mentioned above, despite the temporal and political specificity of the photograph, it reactivates images widely and deeply “embedded in both visual memory and the physical body” through a number of crucial characteristics the man shares with other images well-known enough to have an iconic status in the Western tradition. Mitchell recalls that for Schapiro the “theme of state” was “not merely a formal matter of figural ‘stasis’ and frontality in the address of the image,” but

a “key resource for the iconic representation of religious and political sovereignty.” The figural “stasis” of the image thus activates the memory, conscious or unconscious, of the Crucified on the one hand, and of the Sovereign on the other. A reflection on the shock of recognition between the hooded Muslim of Abu Ghraib and Christ as victim of the most abject torture thus needs to be paired with a reflection on the other side of this memory, the figure of sovereignty. This chapter, then, addresses Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive treatment of sovereignty as the “keystone,” “cement,” or “weld” of the “onto-theological-political,” which he links directly to “cruelty.” For Derrida, the concept of sovereignty is inseparable from the two “ages” of cruelty of today’s wars: one techno-scientific, from which the cruor of blood seems to have been wiped away, including the supposedly “surgical” war conducted with drones, and another, bloodily “archaic,” reacting savagely to the first, but as dependent as the former on electronic mediality. Derrida and the French-Tunisian psychoanalyst Fethi Benslama examine the two “ages” of cruelty as closely intertwined, with today’s media playing a crucial role for both, as far apart as they may seem in terms of technological sophistication.

For Derrida, the “revolution of psychoanalysis” would consist in addressing cruelty without alibi, without political, moral, theological, or other justifications, while refusing to neutralize ethics and politics, that is, the specific geo-political realm in which psychoanalytic theory and practice intervene. In this spirit, Benslama attempts an analysis and a psychoanalysis of the particular new cruelty with which Middle Eastern and, by extension, Western countries are confronted today. Derrida’s explanation of the disturbingly intimate interconnectedness of the two “ages” allows to understand what drives the auto-immune and mediatic production, as well as the endless mediatic reproduction of today’s cruelties.

27 Mitchell, Cloning Terror, 145.
The prolific reproduction of the photograph of the hooded man whose “original” was produced in an endlessly reproducible medium, turning any distinction between “original” and “reproduction” into absurdity, is here again paradigmatic. As Derrida points out in the context of his reflection on the attacks of September 11, 2001, for the perpetrators and those who declared the “War on Terror” alike, the endless “media coverage was, like the good sense of which Descartes speaks, the most widely shared thing in the world.”

The potential of “cloning” to “accelerate the reproduction of images and to endow them with an almost virus-like vitality” exemplifies the delocalization and expropriation of tele-technoscience and its media. Chapter Five thematizes this delocalization and expropriation and the corresponding attempts at reappropriation especially with regard to the drone war.

Given the hooded man’s haunting significance for all the chapters of this book, I pause here for a short digression to address another crucial potential media of endless reproducibility hold: their promise of subversiveness. The abovementioned mural by Sallah Edine Sallat which quotes and reframes the hooded man is a prominent example for Mitchell’s observation that from the moment it became public, the infamous photograph took on a “life of its own”:

if ever an image has been cloned in the circuits of the mass media, this one was, both in the sense of indefinite duplication and in the further sense of taking on a “life of its own” that eludes and even reverses the intentions of its producers. […] As famous as advertizing logos and brand icons like the Nike Swoosh or the Golden Arches, the image rapidly mutated into a global icon. […] The Man with the Hood appeared throughout the world, on television, over the Internet, in

protest posters, and in murals, graffiti, and works of art from Baghdad to Berkeley. Guerilla artists around the world found ways to reframe, mutate, and multiply the figure in an astonishing variety of ways.³¹

A second example of the photograph’s treatment, this time in an endlessly reproducible medium, gives it indeed a “life of its own” by enormously amplifying its potential of address. The viewer is at first addressed almost surreptitiously, but the address proves all the more persevering for its initial stealth. In 2004, the anonymous artist collective Forkscrew Graphics undertook a particularly ingenious reframing and cloning of the image of the hooded man from Abu Ghraib prison. Under the title “iRaq,” the artists plastered a series of guerrilla posters on billboards, highway walls, and other highly visible public places in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, and some European cities.³² One of the posters featured the hooded man; three others showed armed combatants (figs. 2 and 3).

The “iRaq” posters were offered as free downloads to all visitors of Forkscrew’s website. It was possible to print and circulate them materially, but, “designed to blend into Apple Computer’s own viral poster efforts,” they were also available as iPdfs.³³ Each time a user downloaded one of the posters, the casualty statistics included at the bottom were automatically updated through a link to www.iraqbodycount.org and www.icasualty.org.³⁴ Mimicking the line of the iPod’s ad, “10,000 songs in your pocket. Mac or PC,” one version of the iRaq poster read “10,000

³¹ Mitchell, Cloning Terror, 104.
³² Selz, Art of Engagement, 71. See also Charles Garoian and Yvonne Gaudelius, Spectacle Pedagogy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 81–84.
³⁴ While as of January 2017, “iraqbodycount” is still in existence, Forkscrew’s website and “icasualty.org” no longer exist.
Fig. 2: Forkscrew Graphics, “iRaq,” Silkscreen, 2004, interposed between iPod advertisements.

Fig. 3: Forkscrew Graphics, “iRaq,” Silkscreen, 2004.
Iraqis killed. 773 US soldiers dead.” The version of the graphic with the hooded man read “10,000 volts in your pocket, guilty or innocent.”

A number of scholars has analyzed the visual strategies employed by Forkscrew’s “iRaq” posters and unpacked the interplay between Apple’s advertisements and Forkscrew’s work. Mitchell noted that it was the very ubiquity and recognizability of the hooded man that allowed the image to “insinuate itself subtly into commercial advertisements for the iPod […] where it merged almost subliminally with the figures of ‘wired’ dancers wearing iPod headphones and the ‘iRaqi’ with his wired genitals.” Abigail Solomon-Godeau explained how in public space, the iRaq images seamlessly blend into the urban landscape and, if not really looked at, can pass undetected. But when they are noticed, it is in the split second between the viewer’s automatic — i.e. distracted — perception of the poster as poster, and the shocked recognition of the identity of the silhouetted figures, that the possibility of reflection rather than visual consumption is enabled.

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35 The website Blood for Oil claims to still allow for free downloads of the posters, but at the time of this writing, the download was refused: http://archive.thr5.com/bloodforoil.org/iRaq-posters/. The casualty statistics on this website are no longer updated, even though the date shown is always the date of access. For example, between February 2014, and August 2016, the casualty count has not been changed: “Over 77,566 Iraqis killed. And over 4,025 US soldiers dead as of 19 Feb 2014.” According to Iraq Body Count, as of January 2017, the number of civilians killed since the US invasion in March 2003 is between 170,171 and 189,627, with an estimated total of 268,000 violent deaths, including combatants. The number of civilian deaths in Iraq in December 2016 alone is at least 1,145, with an estimated total of more than 16,000 for the year 2016.

36 Mitchell, Cloning Terror, 105.

Solomon-Godeau distinguishes between two kinds of shock mobilized by the iRaq posters, both of which are crucial for the poster’s effectiveness:

First, there is the shock of recognition: the instant when one recognizes the hooded detainee from Abu Ghraib or any of the posters’ other icons of resistance as the sources for the silhouettes. Then there is the shock of dissonance — the desirable commodity transformed into confrontational emblems of warfare or torture. In this respect, the use of the iPod — a technology not only of solitary entertainment and distraction, but also a globalized commodity that “everyone” recognizes — is significant. Sequestering the user in his or her hermetic aural world, the iPod is thus likened to the indifference or disregard that has, among other things, prevented any serious consequences for those in the Bush administration who sanctioned and indeed prescribed the use of torture.38

Lisa Nakamura contrasts the anonymity of the figure in the Forkscrew image with the way anonymity works in the Apple advertisement:

the facelessness of the masked figure in [this] image with the electrocution wires replaced by white iPod earbud wires underscores the evacuation of personal identity that is necessary to the act of torture. [...] These shocking images critique consumer culture and the military industrial complex with which consumer culture is imbricated; not just anyone can occupy that desired space of musical free volition, expression and consumption.39

This “desired space of musical free volition, expression and consumption” is revealed by Forkscrew’s work as one of consciously

38 Ibid., 127f.
or unconsciously embraced obliviousness to the pervasive practice of torture perpetuated by American officials at the time, and the subsequent culture of almost total impunity, that is still ongoing, in spite of the December 2014 publication of a 525-page portion of the “Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program,” also known as the “Senate Torture Report.”

The effectiveness of Forkscrew’s series and the “shock of dissonance” it administers depend on the iPod’s status as globally recognized commodity. The posters took advantage of the Warholian seriality of the original advertisement, designed for the swiping of iPod and iPad screens. In a similar vein, Mitchell suggests that perhaps the best way to understand the iPod/iRaq culture jamming is to analyze the relation between the self-pleasuring dancers, narcissistically absorbed in a music only they can hear, and the self-torturing stasis of the Hooded Man, absorbed in a pain and terror only he can feel, accompanied by the menacing anticipation of electrocution to come if he

40 The report, written by the bipartisan United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI), counts 6,700 pages, most of which remain classified. After the SSCI worked for five years to compile the report, its publications was blocked numerous times. The unclassified portion is accessible online: http://www.intelligence.senate.gov/publications/committee-study-central-intelligence-agencys-detention-and-interrogation-program. Already in 2012, Alfred McCoy’s book Torture and Impunity: The U.S. Doctrine of Coercive Interrogation (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012) traced the history of public acceptability of torture within the United States, in particular the bipartisan policy of “impunity at home and rendition abroad.” McCoy stresses that impunity and forgetfulness in the US does not mean that the world has forgotten or will forget.

41 As Daniel Weidner has observed, swiping is in principle interminable, but is “irritated” in this one moment when the consumer realizes that something doesn’t fit. Moreover, given that the “minimalist, but extremely eroticized icons of the Apple advertisement” surround Forkscrew’s insertion, the latter heightens the ambivalence between moral compassion and voyeuristic pleasure that always accompanies the viewing of images of torture (Daniel Weidner, oral communication, May 2014).
steps off his box. The intervention of the Bagman icon into the iPod iconography is [...] a provocative to thought on a host of issues — the relation of art and politics, of pleasure and pain, motion and stasis, wired bodies, technologies of the sensorium, torture and sexuality.42

The “shock of dissonance” also depends on the fact that the hooded man from Abu Ghraib is no less globally recognized than the iPod. According to Mitchell, Forkscrew’s version of the image amplifies its iconicity, because the

stasis of the image is further reinforced by its symmetry and contrastive color scheme. It makes a simple and singular impression as a black, diamond-shaped form against a light background, a form that can be instantly recognized from a distance, and copied in a schematic silhouette without any need for further details. The hood covering the face renders the figure even more abstract and anonymous. It could be any Iraqi, or, for that matter, any suspected terrorist captured by the U.S. military.43

43 Ibid., 145–47. Mitchell continues: “The true identity of the Man on the Box was the subject of debate for several years after the first revelation of the Abu Ghraib photographs. He was first identified as Satar Jabar, a carjacking suspect, by a story in Newsweek, July 19, 2004. In the winter of 2006, however, several sources, including the New York Times, claimed that he was a former Baath Party official named Ali Shalal Qaissi.” (ibid., 147–48.) See Julie Scelfo, “Beneath the Hoods”, Newsweek, July 18, 2004. Qaissi’s assertions were put in doubt by the New York Times shortly after they had been reported. Mark Benjamin and Michael Scherer write that the man in question was probably named Saad (Mark Benjamin, Michael Scherer, “Electrical Wires,” “The Abu Ghraib Files,” Chapter 4, Salon, March 14, 2006). “Errol Morris has claimed a definitive identity for the man as an innocent bystander swept up in one of the nightly raids of the U.S. Marines, but we would still have to admit that, if the ‘Jesus position’ was standard operating procedure, there could have been other individuals who played this role at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere” (Mitchell, Cloning Terror, 148). Indeed, the US military’s official “Taguba Report,” written by Major General Antonio Taguba, “cites the sworn testimony of Specialist Sabrina Harman of the 372nd Military Police Company. Harman reports on at least one prisoner whose fingers,
While the question of the hooded man’s identity may be contested, the iconic character of the image is seared into people’s minds around the globe:

Like the image of Jesus “proper,” it has a life of its own that acquires new dimensions of meaning in every new context that it encounters. Among the many images that emerged from the Abu Ghraib scandal, it stands out as the only one that conforms to Schapiro’s concept of the “theme of state.”

Anticipating objections to his assertion that the image resembles Christ on the cross, Mitchell cites differences such as Christ’s upward- rather than downward-stretched arms, Christ’s almost complete nakedness, and the visibility of his face. But these differences don’t invalidate Mitchell’s thesis of an “iconographic resonance.” For Mitchell, another distinction made by Schapiro comes here into play: the “devotional” versus the “narrative” interpretations of sacred images. While a narrative reading would

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toes and penis were attached to wires. But the widely distributed image of the ‘hooded man’ only depicts wires attached to the fingers, suggesting that there were other, similar cases. Indeed, US investigators have reported that a number of prisoners have claimed to be the hooded man hooked up to electric wires, men like former prisoner Satar Jabar – yet another indication that several prisoners were tortured in the manner shown in the photos" (Hoppe and Blasberg, “Photos from Abu Ghraib”).

Mitchell continues: “Although the hood renders him anonymous, he appears as a singular figure elevated on a pedestal, an image of dignity and poise that becomes even more remarkable when one reflects on what we know about the event being captured by this photograph. The most elementary way of doing this is to project yourself into the situation depicted. Imagine yourself balancing precariously atop a cardboard C-ration box, with electrical wires attached to your fingers and genitals, stifled and blinded by a hood. You have been told by your torturers that if you fall off the box, you will be electrocuted. In the context of uncounted days of sleep deprivation, beatings, and cries of pain from your fellow prisoners, it would be something of a miracle to remain balanced on top of this box for even a minute. And yet you do this long enough to be photographed, and thus are transformed into an image that will maintain this pose, this composure, as long as the image continues to exist” (Cloning Terror, 149–50).
recapitulate the identity of the man and specify time, location and circumstances, a devotional reading, by contrast,

is contemplative and empathic, slowing down the time of the image to a kind of stasis that mirrors the bodily state of the figure in the mental state of the beholder. It puts the viewer in the position of the figure, a process that is encouraged by the frontality of the theme of state, in its (paradoxically blind) “face to face” encounter with the beholder.45

Moreover, a devotional reading allows the image to directly address the beholder. Such a reading will allow for the question “what it means to live with the image and the world it depicts,” and, insisting even more, what the image “wants from us”:

Perhaps the most obvious thing the picture demands from the devoted viewer—particularly a U.S. citizen—is an acknowledgment of responsibility. To put it in the crudest terms, this photograph and what it reveals was paid for by our tax dollars. We “own” it, and must “own up” to what it tells us about ourselves […]. Even if we opposed the Bush regime and its war in Iraq, as so many did, we are still responsible for this image.46

As a society we are still responsible for this image. A “devotional” reading of this image is still waiting to happen on a publicly relevant scale. What was revealed in Abu Ghraib, what continues to happen in Guantánamo Bay, and what happens in places such as Waziristan and Oruzgan, whose names are hardly known by American citizens, is massively paid for by American tax dollars. “We ‘own’ it, and must ‘own up’ to what it tells us about ourselves”—we need to own up to such shocks of recognition too. Ulla Haselstein has characterized allegory as a figure that can serve to strategically integrate the culturally “prohibited”

46 Ibid., 152.
or the “politically precarious.” In this sense, the photograph of the hooded man can be read as an allegory of the American torture paradigm. The culturally “prohibited” is to be found in the resonance between a Muslim torture victim and/or terrorist suspect with Christ, bringing to mind Talal Asad’s analysis of Jesus’s crucifixion as an indirect suicide, which in turn brings the “sacrifice” necessary for redemption into resonance with suicide bombing. The “politically precarious” might be found in the fact that the hooded man positions the American spectator as caught between two incompatible positions: in a state of empathy with the tortured victim or as accomplice of the leering torturers. The shaming, which was the avowed motive of photographing these scenes in the first place, comes back redoubled to haunt the photographer, the spectator, and the state of the union and the world that he represents. No wonder that George W. Bush, although both shameless and incapable of admitting any guilt, remarked that “nobody wants to see images like this.”

In stark contrast to Bush’s refusal or willful blindness, an eye-opening and transformational reading of the image and of its tortured body would lead to the realization that it might be a “hermeneutical figure” in the sense explained by Thomas Lentes, who recalls that in the Christian tradition, the “hermeneutical” function of Ecce Homo images of the crucified Christ was even more significant than the devotional. If in the Christian tradition of the Middle Ages, only an accurate reading of the body of Christ made it possible to feel compassion, which, in turn, was considered the conditio sine qua non for a correct reading of scripture, then nothing less than the correct reading of the

49 Mitchell, Cloning Terror, 159.
Gospel was at stake in the contemplation of the *Ecce Homo* figure.50 In the photograph of the hooded man, the “scripture” to be read would be what McCoy has called the “the CIA’s massive mind-control project,” and the multi-layered heritage stored and condensed in it.51

Lentes shows how in images of the crucified Christ from the late Middle Ages, the frontality of the Christ figure not only emphasizes the appeal to compassion, but also “pulls the beholder into the position of being an accomplice to and accused of Christ’s passion.”52 Arguably, this can also be said of the hooded man.

Testimony quoted by Mitchell from Specialist Sabrina Harman, one of the more prolific photographers at Abu Ghraib prison, compounds this complicity by the production of images through torture. Harman testified that she was “prompted to begin taking pictures” when she saw the prisoner nicknamed “the taxicab driver’ handcuffed backwards to his window naked with his underwear over his head and face. He looked like Jesus Christ. At first I had to laugh so I went and grabbed the camera and took a picture.”53 A number of photos taken at the infamous prison were clearly staged. The unsettling consequence is that the hooded man may have, consciously or unconsciously, been *staged* as *Ecce Homo*, and, at the same time, as an allusion to the Ku Klux Klan. Those who produced these images arranged a picturesque torture, a “becoming-art” of torture by those who inflicted it.54 Forkscrew’s rendering of the hooded man of Abu Ghraib mobilizes this heritage, conscious and unconscious.

51 McCoy, *A Question of Torture*, 12, see also 51.
53 Mitchell, *Cloning Terror*, 114, see also 141.
54 For the German art historian Michael Zimmermann, the same applies to Christ’s crucifixion when the inscription is taken into account. It too already worked as production of an image through torture. In an oral communication, referring to Otto Karl Werckmeister’s book on “political image strategies since September 11, 2001,” Zimmermann also recalled that in the
In addition to the hooded man’s iconographic resonance with images of Christ, two more layers of “recognition” reveal the intense political precariousness of the photograph and of Forkscrew’s image. First, the public outrage over the Abu Ghraib images focused mainly on their pornographic aspects and the supposed “collapse of discipline” in military ranks producing a “few bad apples” (as then-US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld put it) or “creeps” (according to *New York Times* political columnist William Safire). Yet, as alluded to above, some scholars, in particular McCoy, recognized immediately the hallmark of the CIA:

If we look closely at those grainy images, we can see the genealogy of CIA torture techniques, from their origins in 1950 to their present-day perfection. Indeed, the photographs from Iraq illustrate standard interrogation practice inside the global gulag of secret CIA prisons that have operated, on executive authority, since the start of the war on terror. These photos, and the later investigations they prompted, offer telltale signs that the CIA was both the lead agency at

very moment in which image-producing techniques participate in war, for example, when surveillance cameras and “the all-seeing eye” (P.W. Singer, *Wired for War. The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century* [New York: Penguin, 2009], 308) of unmanned drones are integrated into the “technology of video-electronic warfare,” war photography becomes “anachronistic” if not obsolete. Werckmeister shows in the cases of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that the “video-electronic capture of reality through war-technology” is part and parcel of the “operative image sphere” which is manipulated and often confined to secrecy by military and governmental power, in stark contrast to the “informative sphere” to which war photography belongs. As a consequence, the war photographer must resort to expedients such as close-ups, aesthetization and dramatization (Otto Karl Werckmeister, *Der Medusa-Effekt: Politische Bildstrategien seit dem 11. September 2001* [Berlin: Form + Zweck, 2005], 27–28). Among the resulting images, those infused with religious allusions are particularly efficient. According to Zimmermann, those “secondary effects” are responsible for the phenomenon of war images being aesthetisized, transformed into art and appearing in art galleries. At the same time, images produced in the “operative image sphere” are withheld from the public in whose name war is fought.
Abu Ghraib and the source of systematic tortures practiced in Guantánamo, Afghanistan, and Iraq.55

The following “telltale signs” are immediately recognizable for those who are versed in the CIA’s repertoire of stealth torture methods: the hood achieved sensory deprivation and disorientation. The extended arms and forced standing in stillness ensured self-inflicted pain, while the threat of electrocution is a third method in the US array of psychological torture. Forced nudity, forced simulation of sexual acts and the use of dogs added massive humiliation and shame, exploiting cultural sensitivities. The CIA’s methods have “evolved into a total assault on all senses and sensibilities — auditory, visual, tactile, temporal, temperature, survival, sexual, and cultural. Refined through years of practice, the method[s] rely on simple, even banal procedures — isolation, standing, heat and cold, light and dark, noise and silence — for a systematic attack on all human senses.” None of these “no-touch” or “stealth” torture methods leave perceptible scars, while their “synergy […] is a hammer-blow to the fundamentals of personal identity.” Adding impunity to a crime that should fall under universal jurisdiction, the absence of visible scars makes proof and prosecution of the psychological devastation caused by stealth torture excessively difficult.56

Second, the Abu Ghraib photograph’s resemblance to christological representations, the “uncanny sense” of recognition, even familiarity, resonated differently in the Middle East. In Rejali’s words, “what is necessary proof of modern stealthy violence […] revives painful colonial memories and ancient humiliations.” The cross, the most visible and most recognized religious symbol in the West, stood for the worst and cruelest of public executions in the Ancient World, a practice early Muslim rulers rejected.57 While no actual crucifixion occurred at Abu

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55 McCoy, A Question of Torture, 5–6.
56 Ibid., 8–9.
Ghraib, many of the characteristics that made it particularly abhorred did, including the denial of a proper burial.

The photograph of the hooded man and, in its wake, Forkscrew’s graphic are then quintessential treatments of the theme of state: Ecce Homo. The image of the hooded man, as forcibly blind as he may be, presents him as an “I,” addressing us as “you”: I am a man being tortured. And you are watching. The injustice denounced by the hooded man of Abu Ghraib is the injustice of a state, and the injustice as a state, in both senses of that word. Forkscrew’s contraband reinforces and allegorizes this denunciation: making everything but the outer contours of the tortured body invisible, it relegates the tortured body to what in graphic design is called “negative space.”

Thereby, the graphic starkly underlines torture’s absence from public space and discourse in the US. A shift of awareness, however, will reveal this absence as overpowering presence.

In the aftermath of the closure of Abu Ghraib and of the disastrous legacy of Guantánamo, capture of suspected combatants has largely been replaced by extrajudicial assassination. The method through which the latter is carried out, a war primarily conducted with unmanned aerial vehicles, is, with a few exceptions, also glaringly absent from public debate in the United States, all the while its impacts in the affected areas, far away from the operational bases on American soil, are wide-ranging, inescapable, and deadly.

Lisa Nakamura described what she named the “iPod Ghraib” series as employing the “basic visual template of the iPod ads: solid […] background colors, the iPod depicted in detail, and the negative space of the alpha channel replaced and filled in by soldiers and torture victims from the infamous Abu Ghraib photographs, as opposed to the iconic dancers in the iPod ads” (Digitizing Race, 115).

“The irony of President Obama’s drone war has been widely noted: an administration that wanted to stop torturing detainees and close down the controversial prison at Guantánamo Bay has wound up with an aerial killing campaign instead. There have been hundreds of drone strikes, killing thousands of people, during Obama’s presidency, but details about the drone campaigns, especially in areas outside Iraq and Afghanistan, have been difficult to obtain” (Jeremy Scahill and Glenn Greenwald, “Death by
“drones substituting more and more for boots on the ground, the conflicts become […] more obscure. The paradox is that while the U.S. military is engaged in more and longer conflicts than ever in our history, fewer people are involved, touched, concerned, or engaged. The public is barely even aware of these conflicts.” Jeremy Scahill points out another paradox: “the more people the United States kills with drones and special forces, the longer its target list becomes.” Drone operations, in other words, do not quell the insurgency, but seem to feed into it, leading Hugh Gusterson to speak of the “insurgency as a perpetual-motion mechanism.”

Metadata,” in The Assassination Complex: Inside the Government’s Secret Drone Warfare Program, ed. Jeremy Scahill [New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016, Kindle Ed.], 169). See also Lisa Hajjar’s insightful analysis in “Drone Warfare and the Superpower’s Dilemma,” Part 1: “The disgraceful legacy of torture coupled with the multitude of cases to challenge aspects of post-9/11 detentions and the treatment of prisoners (many of which continued to be brought and litigated during the Obama administration in federal and foreign courts) had made capture a political liability. This liability was compounded by domestic politics; the Republican Party opposed President Obama’s anti-torture reforms and advocated the resurrection of ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’ (the official euphemism for US torture), and there was substantial bipartisan opposition to the closing of Guantánamo. If terror suspects were to be captured, significant elements in Washington would want them sent to Guantánamo and interrogated violently. Consequently, while kill-or-capture both remained strategic options in principle, the Obama administration rarely authorized the capture of high-level suspects. In 2009, CIA director Leon Panetta made a statement that remains true today: in the fight against al-Qaeda, drones are ‘the only game in town.’ Under the Obama administration, drone warfare escalated dramatically in terms of the number of strikes per month and the widening geographic scope. By 2011, targeted killing operations were occurring at a rate of 1,000 a month” (Jadaliyya, Sept. 21, 2015).

62 Ibid. Gusterson also quotes the counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen: “if there is a way to prevail in counterinsurgency, it is by showing cultural sensitivity to occupied populations, creating widespread new economic opportunities, and refraining from the use of violence as much as possible. Instead, the United States has channeled economic aid to a corrupt few;
Chapter Six returns to the issues surrounding drone warfare discussed in Chapter Five via a reading of Franz Kafka’s famous short story “The Metamorphosis” (Die Verwandlung), whose protagonist Gregor Samsa finds himself one morning transformed into a giant vermin. I show the uncanny premonition, in this story, of what in the vocabulary of the drone war is called a “kill box.” A “kill box,” in the succinct definition of French philosopher Grégoire Chamayou, is “a temporary autonomous zone of slaughter,” meaning that “within a given cube, one may fire at will.” In this operational model, Chamayou continues,

the conflict zone appears as a space fragmented into a provisional multitude of kill boxes that can be activated in a manner both flexible and bureaucratic. As General Richard P. Formica explained, with undisguised enthusiasm, in an e-mail: ‘Kill boxes enable us to do what we wanted to do for years […] rapidly adjust the delineation of battlespace […]. Now with automation technology and USAF [U.S. Air Force] employment of kill boxes, you really have a very flexible way of delineating battlespace both in time and on the ground.”

In the mid 1970s, the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg described the trap as the philosophical concept’s “prototype” and “first triumph,” because it unites in one device the mastery over distance and the mastery over absence, given that during its engineering, the prey is absent, and during the capture or kill, the engineer can be absent or remote. First introduced during “Operation Desert Storm” in 1991, the “kill box” brings the con-

burned down the opium crops on which many peasants rely for income, leaving them angry and destitute; used drone attacks to blow people apart from the skies; and trained troops to bash in the doors of family homes in the middle of the night, pointing guns at women and children, while screaming at them in English. If one set out to create an insurgency, it is hard to imagine a set of policies better calculated to do so. And drone attacks are an integral part of the mix on which insurgency thrives” (109).


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cept truly and literally to new heights. The assertion of mastery and of sovereignty is for Blumenberg in essence one that acts at a distance. The concept of sovereignty, which is so crucial for the entire Western philosophical tradition, is here closely linked to a radical asymmetry, which Chamayou describes as being “able to kill without being able to be killed; to be able to see without being seen. To become absolutely invulnerable while the other is placed in a state of absolute vulnerability.” The concern with “deformities (Verunstaltungen) which have not yet penetrated our consciousness,” which Kafka is reported to have attributed to Picasso’s art, can be detected in “The Metamorphosis” as well.

In the end, Gregor is reduced to bug splat. An analysis of this word in Chapter Six yields some of the deformities that have or should by now have entered our consciousness. These deformities are perhaps best identified as defacements, including in the literal sense of the removal of or abstraction from a face. This is what another frontally posed figure and its treatment of the theme of “state” addresses.

In April 2014, challenging the language of drone operators who reportedly refer to killed drone victims as “bug splat,” an artist collective installed a huge reproduction of a photograph by the journalist Noor Behram on a field in the “heavily bombed Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa region of Pakistan, where drone attacks regularly occur” (fig. 4).

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66 Anon., “A Giant Art Installation Targets Predator Drone Operators.” Chris Woods notes that the origins of the term “Bugsplat” lay “in data modeling carried out by drone crews and analysts, seeking to mitigate civilian casualties” with the help of modeling software. Woods quotes an interview with a former senior US intelligence official who described the process to him: “You say something like ‘Show me the Bugsplat.’ That’s what we call the probability of kill estimate when we were doing this final math before the ‘Go go go’ decision. You would actually get a picture of a compound, and
The 90 by 60 feet portrait featured an unnamed girl who lost her parents and her seven-year-old brother in a drone attack in the village of Dande Darpa Khel on August 21, 2009. The original photograph, published in Wired, shows the girl with two surviving siblings, a younger sister and an older brother. Not yet

Fig. 4: #NotABugSplat, based on a photograph by Noor Behram.

there will be something on it that looks like a bugsplat actually with red, yellow, and green: with red being anybody in that spot is dead, yellow stands a chance of being wounded; green we expect no harm to come to individuals where there is green. ‘I don’t like that bugsplat, we’re not going to use it. What direction are you coming in on?’ ‘I am coming in from the North.’ ‘No, try from the South. Get me a bugsplat from the South’ (Chris Woods, Sudden Justice: America’s Secret Drone Wars [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015], 150). Even though the term may have been introduced in the context of trying to reduce civilian casualties, Woods’s quote clearly shows that in any case, the word replaces the faces of assassinated singular human beings with the amorphous mass of a squashed insect.

67 Noor Behram quoted in Spencer Ackerman, “Rare Photographs Show Ground Zero of the Drone War,” Wired, Dec. 12, 2011. Behram names two of the family members killed in the blast: Bismullah Kahn and his seven year old son, Syed Wali Shah. His wife, also killed in the explosion, and the surviving three children are not named. According to another source, the organization Reprieve/Foundation for Fundamental Rights, the girl lost “both her parents and two young siblings” (Anon., “A Giant Art Installation Targets Predator Drone Operators”).
aware of their parents’ and brother’s death, the three children hold small pieces of the bombed-out remains of their house, “as if the rubble could comfort them.”

Facing directly up from the giant reproduction of the photo, cropped to feature only the girl, her eyes are “squarely trained on the lens of the camera.” She frontally addresses, literally con-fronts the drone operator, thousands of miles away, and with him or her all those in whose name the attacks are carried out, with nothing but the vulnerability of her face, thereby, to quote Mitchell’s formulation again, “hailing the viewer as the ‘you’ who is addressed by an ‘I’.” The result, I would argue, is not so much “empathy,” which, “in the context of empire,” as Keith Feldman cautions, “has the capacity to exacerbate a liberal divide between the civil enlightenment of Euro-American nations and the objects of former colonial rule.” Rather, belying the official discourse replete with words like “the enemy,” “collateral damage,” “targets of opportunity,” a “shadowy foe” to be eliminated in a “signature strike” (in which the killed person’s name is actually not known), the girl’s face is inescapable, and with it the realization that what occurs in a drone strike cannot be called by any other name than murder. For Emmanuel Levinas, the “alterity that is expressed in the face provides the unique ‘matter’ possible for total negation.” What “resists” in the face is precisely the face, “the primordial expression, […] the first word: ‘you shall not commit murder.’” Behram’s photograph reintroduces a face into a war zone where a death sentence can be executed on the basis of fitting the target demographic alone: all males aged 18 to 65, since the United States deems these men

68 Ackerman, “Rare Photographs Show Ground Zero of the Drone War.”
70 Feldman, “#NotABugSplat,” 228. Feldman recapitulates here Sherene Razack’s scepticism.
to be combatants “unless there is explicit intelligence posthumously proving them innocent” — again: “posthumously.” The photograph might puncture what Peggy Kamuf has called in the context of the acceptability of the death penalty in the US the “wholesale anesthetizing of public sensibility.” The image contrasts and confronts the fatal “kill boxes,” into which suspected combatants and everybody else in their vicinity are trapped for extrajudicial assassination, with the wide-open field of a face.

In their reflection on the “ethics of drone warfare,” John Kaag and Sarah Kreps, inspired by and quoting Hannah Arendt, come to the conclusion that the “banality of evil emerges in the tyranny of the thoughtless majority. […] ‘There is a strange interdependence between thoughtlessness and evil’.” They address an exhortation to their readers that is as simple as it is — or should be — heavy of consequences: “let us be shocked.” We “own” the photograph of the hooded man from Abu Ghraib and must “own up” to “what it tells us about ourselves.” We own the drone war no less, and must own up to what it tells us about ourselves.

72 Gusterson, Drone, 87, 94. See also Reprieve, “Investigations: Drones.”
75 Ibid., 120.