

Monotheism à la Mode

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There is a specter haunting the world—and, attempts to revive communism notwithstanding, it is the specter of religion. After the much-trumpeted end of ideologies and the alleged end of history, after 1989, the contestation of triumphant capitalism has often taken on overtly religious forms. Even if religion has routinely been criticized by the left for being fundamentally a-historical in its worldview, this has never stopped it from being a major historical force. But to speak about “religion” as such is to accept the simplifications of those secularists for whom all religion is the same, namely unenlightened. What exactly are we dealing with in the apparent return of religion?

The dominant religions in the upheavals after the fall of the Eastern Bloc, and even more so after 9/11, have been the monotheistic “Abrahamic” religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For secularists, the latter in particular has come to stand for the nefarious, fundamentalist nature of religion as such, and especially of monotheism with its intolerant core (“Thou shalt have no other gods”). On the other hand, and rather oddly, some militant anti-Islam agitators claim that Islam is really not a religion at all, but an aggressive ideology masquerading as a faith.¹ One way or another, many parties appear to accept a claim made by both Muslim, Christian, and Jewish fundamentalists: that they represent the essence of their respective faiths, that they speak in its name, in the only authentic voice. This is the real triumph of fundamentalism: that even those who claim to fight it accept its basic (and untenable) claim. While allegedly going back to their religion’s sources, its authentic kernel, the fundamentalists obliterate centuries of exegesis and contestation, of enrichment and polyvalence. If we accept this, then religion will indeed have been permanently remade by fundamentalists from Khomeini to Pat Robertson.

What is the role, or what are the possible roles, of art in all this? Frequently, it is seen as part of the mission of modern and contemporary art to be critical, which means that art should also comment on and intervene in the new “image wars.” However, such a conception remains rather external if we don’t emphasize that *the aesthetic can never completely rid itself of the theological, and vice versa; that art is always already embroiled in image wars, and that these wars are never entirely secular; that we are dealing with*

*branching and multiple histories of iconoclasm, in which both contemporary fundamentalism and contemporary art are inscribed.*²

Return of the Toad

One ironical consequence of the secularization of Europe since the 1960s, which saw an exodus from Catholic and Protestant churches, is that this has proved beneficial precisely to those who stand for everything that the “quitters” resent most: the conservatives, the reactionaries, and the fundamentalists.³ One is reminded here of the famous remark made by Greta Garbo as the eponymous Ninotchka in Ernst Lubitsch’s film (1939), when asked about the latest news from Moscow: “The mass trials were a great success. There will be fewer, but better Russians.” For Pope Benedict XVI, it is a good thing when bad, “modernist” Catholics leave the church; the church will be all the better, purer for it, untainted by a secularist modern culture. In this sense, the “return of religion” is in fact a retreat, a defensive walling-in, quite distinct from, for instance, postwar attempts to forge a modern religious art, for which even atheist modernists like Matisse and Le Corbusier were roped in.

On the other hand, the militant, politicized avant-garde engaged in attacks on organized religion. Blaspheming was second nature to the surrealists, and after the Second World War a younger generation of bohemian artists and intellectuals took over. In 1950, a group belonging to the Lettrist movement disturbed the Easter Mass that was being celebrated at Notre Dame in Paris, a service that was being broadcast live on television. Dressed as a Dominican monk, during a quiet moment one of the conspirators started to proclaim a text that could hardly be more shocking at a ceremony celebrating the resurrection of Christ:

I accuse the Catholic Church of swindling,
I accuse the Catholic Church of infecting the world with its funereal morality,
Of being the running sore on the decomposed body of the West.
Verily I say unto you: God is dead,
We vomit the agonizing insipidity of your prayers,
For your prayers have been the greasy smoke over the battlefields of our Europe.⁴

The affair increased tensions between a more moderate and a radical wing in Isidore Isou’s Lettrist movement, eventually leading to a number of the

radicals forming the Lettrist international, which in 1957 would join forces with a number of other people and micro-movements to form the Situationist International (SI). Attacks on religion, especially the dominant religion in the West, Christianity, remained an important ingredient in the theory and practice of the Lettrist/SI, which Guy Debord increasingly modeled along Marxist lines, presenting it as a new incarnation of the First International, dedicating it to the overthrow of the hyper-capitalist Society of the Spectacle. Any serious contestation of this society could only be hindered by religion; after all, according to Marx the aim should be to tear away the "mystic veil" that occludes our sight of the true nature of productive relations and exploitations.⁵

When students, in part inspired by the SI, revolted in May 1968, some of their slogans were iconoclastic and blasphemous with a vengeance. "A bas le crapaud de Nazareth," "Down with the toad from Nazareth," one slogan proclaimed—as if in anticipation of a small scandal in 2008, when the Pope and local Catholics objected to a sculpture by Martin Kippenberger depicting a cartoon-like frog on a cross, that was being shown at the Museion in Bozen (South Tyrol, Italy).⁶ This affair once more pitted a dogmatic church against irreverent and frivolous modern art—but is a gesture such as Kippenberger's, as an iconoclastic gesture, not also an intrinsic part of the history of monotheism? To be sure, the term iconoclasm is often used in a loose way for various gestures of defacement that have no religious background; and yet, many seemingly secular iconoclasm can be seen as continuing and radicalizing religious iconoclasm. Can the rigid division between secular, critical art and anti-modern religion really be upheld? Is monotheism itself not a machine of profanation?

Iconoclasm: A Modernology

The riots and protests occasioned by the Danish cartoons of the prophet Mohammed reflected not only anger (however manipulated) at the fact that Mohammed was caricatured, but also that he was depicted at all. After all, this is a breach of the ban on depicting the prophet, which is derived from a certain interpretation of the Mosaic ban on idolatry. The current image wars represent a new wave of the monotheistic idolatry critique enshrined in the Second Commandment in Exodus 20:4, forbidding graven images "or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." This is elaborated upon in Deuteronomy 4:15–19, where the Israelites are reminded that they

"saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire," and that representations of people and animals should be avoided because they might lead to "corruption," to worshipping of these images (a similar danger existing in the case of the sun, moon, and stars).

These are, in effect, two prohibitions: God must not be represented, and living creatures (and the planets) must not be represented so as to avoid idolatry. But the first error, or sin, is idolatry as well. Idolatry is not only the worship of false gods but also the worship of Jehovah in an image; the image itself becomes a false god.⁷ At first, worshipping other gods was a real temptation; later, when this was no longer a danger, idolatrous tendencies within Jewish monotheism were seen as a risk. In practice, the degree to which images were made and the way in which they were used over the centuries varied widely in the Jewish religion, as well as in Christianity and—to a somewhat lesser degree—in Islam. The Christian doctrine of the incarnation mitigated the ban on the depiction of God and his creation; God had become man, the word had become flesh, and therefore open to depiction. Of course, Byzantine iconoclasts and Protestants argued that such images could still be put to idolatrous use, sometimes adding that images of Christ could only represent one of his two natures, the physical one, not his divinity.⁸

The Muslim fear of a relapse into *shirk*, the "associating" of other deities or powers with God, manifests itself in a rather extreme ban on *tasweer*, on images that might stimulate such idolatry. While the Qur'an refers to Golden Calf, much more explicit pronouncements against image-making are to be found in the later Hadith, sayings attributed to the Prophet.⁹ But although contemporary Western as well as Islamists ideologues are intent on making Islam appear monolithic, the ban on depicting Mohammed himself was subject to successive waves of radicalization and relaxation and is not as universal as some contemporary ideologists suggest, as quite a number of old miniatures show. The repression of such unwelcome historical complexities allows fundamentalists to create a Manichean dichotomy between Islam and the idolatrous West—the new *jahiliyya*. This discourse can be seen as a more radical form of the Christian critique of Western culture.

For Christians, the Roman Empire remained the paradigm of an idolatrous society. Roman games in particular had been attacked by Tertullian in his *De Spectaculis* as prime examples of *eidolatreia*, and the fascination for Roman spectacle and decadence in late-nineteenth-century

and early-twentieth-century culture, from the paintings of Gérôme and Alma-Tadema to later film productions, suggested that modern society might be a Rome returned—the triumph of idolatry disguised by Christian rhetoric. However, the Christian criticism of capitalist modernity was increasingly supplanted by a secularized discourse hailing from the Enlightenment and shaped by, yet also transforming and transcending, its monotheistic roots.

In *Du Culte des dieux fétiches* (1760), a text that encapsulates the Enlightenment's transformation of monotheistic topoi into instruments of secular critique, Charles de Brosses claimed to unveil the most primitive form of religion, the embryonic first stirrings of idolatry: fetishism, or the worship of random objects rather than statues or other man-made images. Although the Enlightenment submitted religious dogma to an open-ended critique, this opposition of dogma and critique should not obscure the fact that the gesture of "revealing" gods to be idols or long-held truths to be superstitions is fundamentally the same, and that monotheistic discourse on pagan religion constituted a nascent form of critique—an idolatry critique transformed by modern critique of religions and society.¹⁰ Religious dogmatism already contained the seeds of critique, just as critique may still be crucially dependant on dogma. In a letter written shortly after Theodor W. Adorno's death, in which he attempted to explain why his friend had not been buried in accordance with Jewish rites, Max Horkheimer claimed that critical theory was based on the second commandment—the ban on representations of God, or, in more fundamentalist interpretations, of representation of all living beings.¹¹ Modern critical theory, in other words, analyzed and opposed fascism and the culture industry as latter-day idolatry.

Although Horkheimer's remark was obviously made during highly emotional circumstances, it is true that the modern critique of representation is in many ways a transformation of the monotheistic discourse on idolatry: The divine commandment fostered a suspicious and critical mentality that was finally turned against dogma itself. From De Brosses to Marx and beyond, the concept of the fetish as a primitive precursor of the idol still derives from monotheistic idolatry critique; Marx, of course, turned De Brosses's African proto-idol into a capitalist commodity fetish, just as irrational and mystifying.¹² However, in contrast to "idols" according to monotheism, such fetishes are seen as a betrayal of what true humanity might be rather than as transgressions of divine law. The difference between an early Christian diatribe such as Tertullian's *De Spectaculis* and Guy

Debord's Marxian treatise on *The Society of the Spectacle* is immense, even if the latter is indebted—however indirectly—to the former.

The Profanations of Art

Iconoclasm is profanation in action. The opposition of sacred and profane came to the fore in modern theory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when religious scholars and anthropologists moved from a focus on beliefs and myths to a focus on religious practice, on behavior, on the enactment of myth, on the ritualistic and social dimension of religion—a development associated with names such as Robertson Smith and Emile Durkheim and his school. Both time and space now came to be seen as being radically split: Profane time finds its opposite in the sacred time of myth, actualized in rituals, and profane space finds its complement in the sacred space of cult sites.¹³ These oppositions were valid for practically all societies. Only in the West had time increasingly been homogenized, and space as well, major cathedrals increasingly being visited for art-historical rather than religious reasons—a mode of behavior immortalized by E. M. Forster in the "Santa Croce Without a Baedeker" chapter of *A Room With a View* (1908).

But narratives of progressive and linear secularization are highly questionable. In the 1930s, Georges Bataille desperately attempted to create new myths and rituals to counter the appeal that Nazism held for many, with its technocratic re-enchantment of the world. Not all forms of re-sacralization necessarily take conveniently regressive, archaizing forms. A few years after Bataille, Adorno and Horkheimer came to the conclusion that in capitalist and democratic societies the Enlightenment too was reverting into myth—because of the increasing reduction of ratio to mere "purposive rationality," a rationality interested only in technocratic effectiveness. And had not Marx already, polemically, presented the commodity as a fetish brimming with "theological whims"? Bataille had actually seen commodities as the epitome of profanation, as purely useful, "this-worldly" goods that were denied the sacralizing ritual of the Potlatch—a wanton destruction of goods, taking them out of the profane realm. (*Potlatch* was also the title of the Lettrist International's cryptic newsletter in the 1950s.)¹⁴

However, as Giorgio Agamben has argued in recent years, a complete profanation may coincide with sacralization.¹⁵ Agamben has focused on the Latin term "*sacer*," which can refer both to something elevated, dedicated to the gods, and to someone who has been cursed and cast out from society.

Is the commodity, with its seemingly autonomous exchange value, not precisely something that is set apart from lived reality? Is the commodity's use value not an extra-economical surplus? In the current economy, Agamben argues, everything that is produced—including the human body, language, sexuality—is relegated to a separate sphere that, paradoxically, covers the whole of existence; it is the sphere of consumption, which is different from use. Consumption is the spectacle of use. "If to profane means to return to common use that which has been removed to the sphere of the sacred, the capitalist religion in its extreme phase aims at creating something absolutely unprofanable."¹⁶

In the wake of romanticism, modern art in the nineteenth, but also in the twentieth century, has often attempted to "re-enchanted" or re-sacralize the world. Before the somewhat corporate "modern religious art" movement of the postwar years, there had been attempts by artists ranging from Caspar David Friedrich to Paul Gauguin to have their paintings function as altarpiece—to create a new Christian art. For the historical avant-garde, it was obvious that such projects had failed and were bound to fail, and yet, for all their intransigent attacks on organized religion, the surrealists and Georges Bataille's various groups (especially *Acéphale*) attempted to create new myths, new aura.

In many ways, such avant-garde movements were a form of radicalized romanticism, creating a dialectic of iconoclastic profanation and mystification and re-enchancement. As deluded as Breton or Bataille may have been about the possibilities for action in the interwar years, what can be taken from them is the refusal to subscribe to any single linear scenario. Art is always to some extent entangled in its commodified and quasi-sacred status; it may be an important iconoclastic task for contemporary art to critique the aura of today's image commodities, including those produced by media-savvy religious fundamentalists, but this is not to say that art could ever attain a status of pure "profanity."

Among the more successful and important postwar projects that put art in the service of the sacred while (conversely) sacralizing art is the nondenominational Rothko Chapel in Houston (1971)—the chapel of a religion that does not exist, pure religiosity without dogma and even without much in the way of specific content and convictions. The chapel was a commission from patrons John and Dominique de Menil. In 1974 their daughter Philippa and her husband, art dealer Heiner Friedrich, created the Dia Foundation, focusing on large-scale projects by artists such as Walter de Maria and Donald Judd. Having converted to Sufism, the

mystical form of Islam, the couple also funded religious projects through Dia, such as a mosque on Mercer Street in New York, which was equipped with Dan Flavin lights.¹⁷

While Flavin only barely tolerated this recontextualization of his work, the constellation of minimalist aesthetics and ascetic religiosity created by Friedrich and de Menil is suggestive. This is not to say, of course, that the white cube and the mosque can be equated any more than the white cube and the church or chapel. The most productive approach, beyond the equally doomed alternatives of rampant sacralization and pure profanation of contemporary art, might be to treat art as a field that is uniquely positioned to examine and intervene in the dialectic of profanation and (re-) sacralization. A black-and-white photograph by Lidwien van de Ven called *Islamic Center, Vienna* (2000), which shows three believers praying in a space whose ornamented austerity recalls some forms of arts and crafts and art nouveau, suggests parallels with modernist notions of aesthetic contemplation—and enacts a different, critical, and reflective approach to the image precisely by doing so. Rather than proclaiming murky sameness, van de Ven's image relates to the cult space in a complicated game of repetition and difference.

Erasures

If *Islamic Center* was still printed as a photograph in a conventional manner, in recent years van de Ven usually applied her photos—frequently made in the Middle East, including some of the countries where in 2011 non-Islamist revolutions would challenge cherished European preconceptions and fears about the region—directly onto the gallery walls as posters. One important motif in her recent work is the full-body veil, which has figured in Western media extensively since 9/11 as an image of frightening Muslim an-iconicity. The veiling of women is seen as a cognate of spectacular acts of terrorist iconoclasm such the blowing up of the Bamiyan Buddhas—and, indeed, in countries such as Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia it does function as such, women being forced to submit to draconian sartorial edicts. What is problematical is the identification of these unacceptable practices with a monolithic "Islam as such," which ultimately only increases the appeal of full-body veils and encourages their use as an image of otherness in media wars—as shown in van de Ven photographs such as *London, 4 September 2004: International Hijab Solidarity Day*. Like most of her works in recent

years, this photograph is shown in art spaces as a large print glued directly onto the walls, emphasizing the public status of the image.

The photo is a medium close-up of two women of whose faces only the eyes are visible (one wearing glasses) and a similarly black-clad teenage girl whose face is visible, protesting amidst a throng of onlookers, some of whom appear to be taking pictures. A man in the back wears sunglasses, an acceptable form of disguise that functions as the negative of the women's veiled faces. In an exhibition in France, van de Ven had this and other photos covered with a thin layer of white paint, with the image still showing through to some extent—an erasure that heightens the image's potency by problematizing it, making it difficult to read. At other times, the artist has included completely monochrome black or white surfaces in her exhibitions, which contrast with but also complement and complete her photos.¹⁸ While the latter are usually understated and mutated reflections, at times they develop a satirical bite; one shows a banner advertising the “heroes and leaders of Islam,” Iranian Shiite saints such as Khomeini and Ahmadinejad, with a TNT logo in the background—a reminder of the use of contemporary means of global communication by those who pretend to be able to turn back time.

Sometimes van de Ven incorporates external attacks on her images into her work. The photo *Ramallah 11/09/2006 (Boy Sitting)* (2010), printed on a large size as most of her other images, is grainier than most. The boy sitting in a doorway hides his face as if refusing to submit to the photographer's gaze. When the work was shown at the Van Abbemuseum, visitors were informed that the image's graininess was due to the fact that “the artist's films were repeatedly and unnecessarily scanned at Ben-Gurion airport in Tel Aviv in an apparent attempt to destroy the negatives.” The resultant image was questionable from the beginning and questions its own status. Always latently a graven image, the work of art's critique can never be fundamentalist; it is impure and always incomplete, suggesting another step into a history that is, against all odds, open-ended.

Notes

- 1 See, for instance, remarks made by Dutch anti-Islam populist Geert Wilders and his sidekick Martin Bosma: <http://www.depers.nl/binnenland/261089/Islam-is-geen-godsdiens.html>.
- 2 See also my book *Idols of the Market: Modern Iconoclasm and the Fundamentalist Spectacle* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009).

- 3 One needs to distinguish between these terms: Roughly, one might state that conservatives oppose innovations and perverse traditions, while reactionaries actively want to turn back time, though not to the extent of fundamentalists, who aim to recover the lost purity of their religions' beginnings. Catholicism is not conducive to fundamentalism strictly speaking; centuries of exegesis and theological creativity are such an essential element of Catholicism that one can hardly wipe them away and remain a Catholic. To do so would be to become a Protestant, a branch of Christianity much more given to fundamentalism. This is not to deny, of course, that contemporary Catholic reactionaries have much in common with fundamentalist Protestants.
- 4 English translation from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Notre-Dame_Affair. See also Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), pp. 279–322.
- 5 In the chapter on fetishism of *Capital* (“The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret”), Marx writes about a “mystischer Nebelschleier” in the original German literally a mystical veil of mist. This is often simply rendered as “mystical veil” in English, though a popular edition translates this as “the veil”: Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, volume I, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 173.
- 6 A photo of the 1968 graffiti is on page 56 of René Viénet, *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement, France, May '68* [1968] (New York: autonomedia, 1992). For reporting on the Kippenberger affair, see for instance www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/aug/28/italy; www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2008/sep/01/kippenberger.
- 7 Edwyn Bevan, *Holy Images: An Inquiry into Idolatry and Image-Worship in Ancient Paganism and in Christianity* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1940), p. 39.
- 8 Marc De Kesel has analyzed the consequences of the incarnation doctrine with particular cogency; see for instance Marc De Kesel, “The Image as Crime: On the Monotheistic Ban on Images and the ‘Criminal’ Nature of Art,” in Maria Hlavajova, Sven Lütticken, and Jill Winder, eds., *The Return of Religion and Other Myths: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* (Utrecht: BAK, 2009), pp. 98–116. On the Reformation and its consequences, with a focus on Lutheran doctrine and practice, see Werner Hofmann, ed., *Luther und die Folgen für die Kunst*, exh. cat. (Hamburg: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1983).
- 9 Silvia Naef, *Bilder und Bilderverbot im Islam* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2007), pp. 11–22.
- 10 Halbertal and Margalit posit the following “chain of criticism of religion”: the criticism of idolatry by monotheism, the criticism of folk religion by the religious Enlightenment, the criticism of religion in general by the secular Enlightenment, and finally the criticism of ideology. Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry*, trans. Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 112.

- 11 Max Horkheimer, letter to Otto O. Herz, September 1, 1969, in *Gesammelte Schriften, volume 18: Briefwechsel 1949–1973* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1996), p. 743.
- 12 See “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret” in Karl Marx, op. cit., pp. 163–177. Hartmut Böhme traces the tangled history of the concept of fetishism and its gradual “universalization” in *Fetischismus und Kultur: Eine andere Theorie der Moderne* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2006).
- 13 After the Second World War, Mircea Eliade would reduce this approach to a rather schematic but influential model.
- 14 Georges Bataille, “La Notion de dépense” (1933) in *La Part maudite, precede de La Notion de dépense* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), pp. 23–45.
- 15 Agamben’s writings, which combine impulses from Debord and Walter Benjamin, among others, have been attacked for the tendency “to suspect a crypto-theological background for any and all phenomena,” and for creating untenable analogies rather than forging concrete historical connections or writing a coherent history of ideas. Yet making montages of phenomena that may be far apart in time or in context is indispensable if one wants to move beyond history as the chronological arrangement of a series of tableaux that each represent an internally coherent and closed culture.
- 16 Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p. 82.
- 17 See Alexander Keeffe, “Whirling in the West,” in *Bidoun*, no. 23 (2011), www.bidoun.org/magazine/23-squares/whirling-in-the-west-by-alexander-keefe/. When Dia was restructured in the mid-1980s, the Mercer Street Mosque was closed. Its later, smaller post-Dia incarnation was at some point home to Imam Rauf, famous for initiating the so-called “Ground Zero Mosque.”
- 18 In 2011, van de Ven showed one of her “blanks” in response to censorship. Some time before, Bloomberg Space in London had axed a show of van de Ven’s work for political reasons, her work apparently being deemed too critical of Israel. A second attempt by the artist and this institution to find a *modus vivendi* led to renewed censorship. This time a photo of the launch of a new German right-wing, anti-Islam party called Die Freiheit could not be shown, apparently because of Bloomberg Space’s dependency on the Bloomberg headquarters in New York, which involved a long and complicated veto process. The photograph mainly shows a wall with the party’s name in various languages against a blue sky with clouds. This time, the artist let the show go ahead, but replaced the image in question with a monochrome rectangular field. See Monika Szewczyk, “Black, White and Grey Matters” (2011), Afterall online, www.afterall.org/online/black-white-and-grey-matters. The photograph was published as an illustration to Tom Holert’s article “Birth of the Rebel Citizen in Germany,” *e-flux*, no. 22 (January 2011), <http://e-flux.com/journal/view/204>.

Freedom's Just Another Word

Terri Weissman

Protest Scene

Those watching, reading, and listening to the news from November 28 through December 3, 1999, learned that the city of Seattle was effectively shut down by the actions of thousands of citizens protesting the Ministerial of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO is an international trade body that administers global trade rules, though for those few days in Seattle, it became the focal point for concerns not only about WTO rules, but also about how those rules prioritize commercial or corporate interests over environmental, consumer, safety, and labor protections, as well as human rights. The images occasioned by these events could not have been more spectacular, with scenes of lootings, fires, and policeman dispensing tear gas, alongside those revealing women and men stripped naked despite the winter chill in demonstration against brand name bullies (GAP, Nike, Starbucks, McDonald’s, Microsoft ...). Viewers were shown police dressed in riot gear confronting protesters outside the convention center and local hotels: protesters in turtle suits, giant puppets, anarchists who called themselves the black bloc, rubber bullets, pepper spray, broken windows, and buses frozen in place by hand-holding nonviolent protesters. Ultimately, newscasters reported that the mayor declared a no-go zone and imposed a curfew.

Sensationalized pictures of the dramatic violence that transformed Seattle into an abstracted warzone characterized the mainstream news coverage of the Battle in Seattle, as it is now known. These images are what we might describe as sanctioned, by which I mean: official not in the sense of having been approved by some governing body, but conforming to a set of prescribed codes that dictate how information is staged for mediated representation. But these are not the only extant pictures. A series of photographs produced by the artist Allan Sekula in a work titled *Waiting for Tear Gas (white globe to black)*, from 1999–2000, are particularly effective counter-images. Unlike the above-described scenes of near societal dissolution and where predetermined news industry formats triumph over the event itself, his pictures re-appropriate the information process by, for instance, refusing to depict the crowd from above as an uncontrollable