

5 The Unspeakable and the Unimaginable

Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent.

LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

We have met the enemy and he is us.

WALT KELLY

My teacher at Johns Hopkins, Ronald Paulson, exposed the depths of the so-called word and image problem, when he drew a fundamental distinction, located in eighteenth-century aesthetics and semiotics, between the "emblematic" image and the "expressive."¹ The emblematic was the image as word, as linked to, determined by, readable in words. The expressive was the obverse—the unreadable, the mute, the indexical—a "regression into primitivism prior to language, or a leap forward to the ineffable beyond language."² This distinction then was discovered to inform the spaces of the eighteenth-century English garden, in its development from "poetic" and allegorical garden spaces to the wilder, more open, and de-textualized spaces of the landscape garden and the picturesque.

Paulson's lesson still resonates with me, partly because it reminds us of the fundamentally dialectical character of the word/ image problem, the way in which each term simultaneously contrasts itself with and incorporates its partner. The word/image problem is "inside" the problem of the image, and vice versa. I think Derrida would call this an "invagination" in discourse, one that is built into ordinary language.³ The word as image, image as word; the word as a limit for the image, and vice versa. We see this limiting character most clearly when we note the way "words fail" to capture the density of signification in the image,⁴ or conversely we find ourselves unable or forbidden to make an image of that which we can nevertheless mention or name—God, the infinite, absolute chaos, or the void. We see the invagination of word and image when the allegorical or emblematic image dictates a determinate verbal signified, or (perhaps even more dramatically) when the verbal sign itself, as diagrammed by Saussure, reveals the auditory signifier as the bearer of its obverse, a pictorially rendered *signified* that is embedded within the structure of the verbal sign as a concept or mental image.⁴

The dialectical character of the word/image relation may be seen most clearly, however, when we note that this difference, or difference/differend,⁶ is actually a compound of at least two (perhaps more) differences, one articulated at the level of signs and symbols, the other at the level of sensory perception and production. That is, "word and image" is the name of two fields of relationship that intersect one another in logical space: 1) semiotic relations such as Peirce's symbol/icon (signs by convention and by resemblance, with the indexical sign by cause and effect forming a third space), and 2) sensory relations between the auditory and the visible. We see the interlacing of these two fields of difference in a common expression such as "verbal and visual media," in which the verbal denotes a certain kind of sign (the linguistic) and the visual indicates a kind of sensory channel. Signs and senses are interarticulated in the relation of words and images, and part of our work as analysts is to remain aware of these distinctions even as we observe the weaving of their distinct strands in the fabric of representation. We could go on, of course, to elaborate these distinctions in terms of other categories—Lessing's modalities of time and space, the structural and systemic distinctions Nelson Goodman drew between digital and analogical codes, the archaeological "strata" that Foucault called "the sayable and the seeable," or the Freudian drives that Lacan dubbed the "vocative" and "scopic"—the desire that animates the speaking/hearing circuit on the one hand and the optical/tactile construction of the visual field on the other.⁷

But in this chapter I want to explore a limit approached by both sides of the dialectic, namely, the frontiers of the

unimaginable and the unspeakable, the place where words and images fail, where they are refused, prohibited as obscenities that violate a law of silence and invisibility, muteness and blindness. And I want to take this up in order to bring the ancient topos of word and image to bear on the contemporary issue of terrorism, and the role of words and images in the War on Terror. My further aim is to link the phenomenon of terrorism to contemporary developments in the technology of image-making, developments that we have been summarizing under the rubric of *cloning*.

Just to restate the basic argument of this book: both image-making and war-making have undergone a radical transformation in our time, a transformation that can be summarized in the phrase, "cloning terror." By this I mean, on the one hand, the reproduction or proliferation of terror, often in the very act of trying to destroy it, and, on the other hand, the terror or horror of cloning itself, both as a biotechnology and as a figure for the indefinite duplication of life forms, especially those life forms (such as cancers and viruses) that are seen as bearers of death or threats to identity.

It is important to state at the outset that the categories of the unspeakable and unimaginable are anything but fixed and determinate limits on the domain of words and images, respectively. They are, rather, rhetorical tropes that simultaneously invoke and overcome the limitations of language and depiction, discourse and display. The invocation of the unspeakable is invariably expressed in and followed by an outpouring of words: it is a strategy, as Derrida put it in the title of a classic essay, of "How to Avoid Speaking," while of course *failing* to avoid speaking, and *succeeding* in saying a great deal.⁸ The trope of the unspeakable has many names: a rhetorician might dub it a form of *occupatio*, the declaration that one "will not speak" of certain matters, because one lacks time, expertise, etc., a tactic that is usually accompanied by a rather comprehensive inventory of all the things one will not talk about. Or one may adopt the more sublime tones of negative theology and invoke a realm that one "cannot speak of" in a metaphysical and moral sense, because it surpasses human understanding. This version of the unspeakable is generally expressed by the moment of silence, the pregnant pause, followed by the rhetoric of apostrophe, of prayer and invocation, the address to that which remains silent, invisible, and beyond language or even imagining: "For never guiltless may I speak of Him, the Incomprehensible!" Coleridge remarks, confessing his guilt and adding to it in the same sentence. At the other end of the hierarchy of the un-sayable is John Cage's opening to the *Lecture on Nothing*: "I have nothing to say, and I am saying it"—for forty-five minutes, to be exact.

These figures of the unspeakable or unsayable⁹ are condensed into a single axiom in Wittgenstein's famous declaration in the *Tractatus*: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence."¹⁰ Although some commentators claim to know exactly what Wittgenstein meant by this statement, I have always found it to be radically ambiguous. Is the "cannot" based in what he elsewhere called a "metaphysical" can? Is the point that one literally is unable to speak about something because one knows nothing about it, has nothing to say? Is this, in short, something like a grammatical prohibition that says, in effect, "you can speak about this, but your speech will be meaningless, nonsensical, hollow. In that sense, it will not be speech, but merely a noisy form of silence." Or is it, on the other hand, a moral prohibition: I cannot speak of that which I am forbidden to mention; I cannot violate my inner sense of what I should and must say, or refrain from saying. In this latter case, the "cannot" of the introductory clause really becomes synonymous with and anticipates the "must [not]" of the main clause. We might invoke here the first law of Jewish ethics, as articulated by the late philosopher Sidney Morgenbesser: "Can implies don't."

The difference here is between the inability to speak and the refusal to speak, a distinction that might be illustrated by the famous torture scene in the film *Marathon Man* (dir. John Schlesinger, 1976). Laurence Olivier, the Nazi torturer, is interrogating Dustin Hoffman with the aid of a dentist's drill, and he persists in asking Hoffman, "is it safe?" (safe, that is, to retrieve his contraband diamonds from a Manhattan safe-deposit box). Hoffman has no idea what the question even means, much less what the answer is, and says so, but this does not satisfy his torturer, who interprets his refusal to answer the question as a sign that Hoffman is concealing something. Soon Hoffman decides that he had better tell his

torturer what he wants to hear, and reassures him that yes, it is safe—very, very safe. But of course Olivier is skeptical about this and continues to torture him, whereupon Hoffman switches tactics and tells him that in fact it is *not* safe, it is very, very dangerous. By this point Olivier doesn't know what to believe any more, and so he carries on the torture (mercifully, for the viewer, in an unseen—but not unheard—scene beyond the view of the camera) until Hoffman's will is broken and he is reduced to howling animal cries of pain, unable to say anything at all. At this point, Olivier is satisfied that Hoffman "knew nothing—if he had, he would have talked"—and orders his men to dispose of him.

The significance of this horrific scene -is not just the unspeakability of torture—what John Conroy has called "Unspeakable Acts" in his book by that title.¹¹ The real horror, as Conroy shows, is its staging of the unspeakable as conducted by "ordinary means" (not to mention what Errol Morris calls "standard operating procedure") in order to force a subject to speak. Olivier plays Szell, the "Weiss Engel," as a concerned, sympathetic dentist who makes small talk with Hoffman about his interests as a graduate student while preparing his instruments. He never raises his voice, but remains cool and clinical throughout the process, as if he is probing the inside of Hoffman's head to extract its contents, at the same time that the cinematography is carrying the spectator vicariously through Hoffman's experience of the unspeakable, and into the unimaginable (conveyed by a dissolve into audiovisual oblivion at the moment Olivier drives his drill into a nice fresh nerve). We have been forcefully reminded by the events and images produced at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq that torture rarely produces any useful information, that it has instead a kind of mirroring or doubling effect in which the victim simply tells the torturer what he wants to hear. "We have ways of making you talk" is the mantra of the torturer, but those ways tend finally to producing nothing but an echo of the interrogator's question, and finally, the silence of the body reduced to inarticulate animal cries of pain.

Trauma, like God, is supposed to be the unrepresentable in word and image. But we incorrigibly insist on talking about it, depicting it, and trying to render it in increasingly vivid and literal ways.¹² Certain works of contemporary art are designed to transmit trauma as directly as possible, to rub the spectator's face in the unspeakable and unimaginable. The Holocaust industry now combines trauma theory's cult of the unrepresentable with a negative theology discourse to produce a virtual liturgy of the unspeakable and unimaginable, all rendered in an outpouring of words and images, objects, installations, architectural and monumental constructions.¹³ The very term "Holocaust," as Giorgio Agamben has argued, signifies this elevation of the Final Solution from its grisly reality into a divine sacrifice, an apotheosis that produces very mixed results.¹⁴

So far I have been speaking mainly of the unspeakable and the unimaginable as if they were two sides of the same coin, and indeed, that may be the best metaphor available for modeling their relationship. Saussure talks of the relation between the signifier and signified as the two faces of a coin, and represents them as the two faces of the sign, separated by the coin itself, the bar (or what Peirce would call the index) that both separates and unites them.¹⁵ But what is the relationship between the unimaginable and the unspeakable? How are they different, and how are they alike? Clearly both involve the double prohibition on representation, the "cannot" and "should not" of inability and refusal to speak or show something. But what is the difference between the domains of the unspeakable and the unimaginable? How can we contrast these anti-figural tropes? What are their distinct roles?

In one sense, they play exactly the roles of the signified and signifier, with the unimaginable standing in as the absent signified, the thing that cannot even be conjured up in fantasy as a mental image or concept, what cannot be remembered. The unimaginable is thus a trope for the unthinkable. The unspeakable signifier, on the other hand, is the outward sign, the utterance or legible mark that must be silenced or erased. The partial erasure of the name of G-d is one symptom of this, as is the use of circumlocutions and periphrases to "talk around" the unutterable name of G-d with phrases such as "Lord of the Universe" or "the most Holy One" or (in the wonderful coinage of William Blake) "Nobodaddy." (The unspeakability of torture, similarly, is preserved by euphemisms such as "enhanced interrogation

techniques.")

We might also ask ourselves: which is worse—that is, more awful and terrible and unrepresentable—the unspeakable or the unimaginable? Unspeakability is my candidate. It is the more emphatic, drastic interdiction, precisely because it has the most attenuated, indirect, and weak connection to the act to which it refers. Discussions of atrocity, genocide, torture, and terror are more likely to invoke the trope of "unspeakable acts" than "unimaginable" ones, though both are clearly involved. Is this because the signifier, the mere mention of an act, is further removed from the act than the signified, which is, in a sense the direct representation or image of the act? The signified is the ground of the sign. It is the imprint of the trauma itself, the graphic impression left by the injury, while the signifier is only an arbitrary, conventional sound that signifies an absent cause that left a mental trace behind in memory. Or it is the "transcendental signified," God himself, the ultimate object of negative theology. This God cannot be represented in images, of course, and in fact to do so would be immediately to violate the double prohibition of the second commandment: you cannot and must not make a graven image of God (or, truth be told, of anything else). But the continuation of the commandment to avoid the "vain use" of the name of God is seemingly qualified and softened by the possibility of *talking*, however cautiously and indirectly, about God. The speakable, then, is the weaker, more indirect, more removed form of representation.¹⁶ So if even *it* is prohibited, if one cannot even mention the name of the signified, the danger seems proportionally higher.

But the real contrast between the unspeakable and the unimaginable can only be seen, I think, if we remove it from the outer/inner, physical/mental dichotomy suggested by Saussure's picture of the signifier/signified relation, and put the two sides of the coin out in a public space at the same time. I would like to offer the following simple diagram as a quite literal rendering of the two "faces" of the coin of the unspeakable/unimaginable. I ask you to imagine one face of the coin with two eyes, and a gag drawn across the mouth, the other face showing a mouth, with a blindfold drawn across the eyes. One face can see but not speak; the other can speak but not see. Muteness and blindness are the two faces of the unspeakable and unimaginable, understood, however, not as natural, physical conditions, but as imposed and artificial. (I set aside for the moment the associated senses of hearing and touch, which, in Lacan's model of the vocative and scopic drive, are required to complete the circuit of each drive, vision as a form of extended touch, and speaking as part of the "phonation circuit" that includes the ears.) I would ask you to keep in mind this double image of the gagged and blindfolded face as a schematic emblem of the torture victim rendered helpless and anonymous in the by now all too familiar images of suspected terrorists wearing hoods. The hood serves as both a gag and blindfold simultaneously, and mirrors the hood-as-mask that is typically worn by torturers to conceal their identity from victims and the public. This blocking of the scopic and vocative drives receives its most literal rendering, of course, in the scenes of decapitation that circulated on television and the Internet at the nadir of the war on terror. These scenes are in themselves "unspeakable" and "unimaginable," even as they symbolize the ultimate interdiction of speech and vision, and are themselves subjected to censorship on American television, while widely circulated on the Internet.

One further thought on the unspeakable and unimaginable: as tropes, they are *turns* in the stream of discourse, swerves in the temporal unfolding of speech and spectacle.¹⁷ The unspeakable and unimaginable are, to put it bluntly, always *temporary*. Which means they exist in historical time as well as the discursive time of the unfolding utterance, or the temporality of personal experience. What was once unspeakable and unimaginable is always a matter of becoming, of a speech and an image to come—often rather quickly. If I tell you not to think of the face or name of your mother, you will not be able to prevent yourself from conjuring up her image and name. Declare that God is unrepresentable, and you also declare yourself a representative of the truth about him; you make a representation, an authoritative declaration, of his unrepresentability. Declare that something is invisible, inaccessible to visual imaging, and someone (usually an artist or scientist) will find a way to depict it.¹⁸ Prohibit something from being shown, hide it away from view, and its

power as a concealed image outstrips anything it could have achieved by being shown. We should always say, then, this is unspeakable or unimaginable—up till now. The law against the representation of something in words or images must, in effect, always break itself, because it must name, describe, define—that is, represent—the very thing that it prohibits. That is why the law is so parsimonious and discreet in representing that which it prohibits from representation. Laws against pornography (unspeakable, unimaginable acts of lust, sadism, and animality) thus fall back on the "I know it when I see it" formula, to avoid specifying (and thus inspiring) the prohibited acts.¹⁹ Both the divine and the demonic, the ultimate good and the ultimate evil, inhabit the extreme zones of the human imagination of which we cannot or should not speak, and which we certainly should not depict in visual images.

I hope it is becoming clear what all this has to do with terror, which fuses the divine and the demonic in a single unspeakable and unimaginable compound. The terrorist is a holy warrior or a devil, depending upon your point of view, or your historical positioning (yesterday's terrorist is today's hero of the glorious revolution). Terror is also the deliberate combining of the semiotics and aesthetics of the unimaginable with those of the unspeakable. You can't imagine anyone doing this, going this far? You think the unnamable horror, the indescribable, unspeakable act cannot be named, described, and reenacted? Terrorists speak the language of the unspeakable. They perform and stage the unimaginable. Their acts as producers of words and images, symbolic forms of violence, are much more important than their acts of actual physical violence. Strategic forms of violence such as war or police action are not essential to their repertoire. The main weapon of terror is the violent spectacle, the image of destruction, or the destruction of an image, or both, as in the mightiest spectacle of them all, the destruction of the World Trade Center, in which the destruction of a globally recognizable icon was staged, quite deliberately, as an icon in its own right. The people consumed with the image are collateral damage, "enemies of God" who are of no interest. Or they are holy sacrifices, whose innocence is precisely the point. From the standpoint of the terrorist, their innocence makes them appropriate sacrificial victims. From the standpoint of counterterror, their innocence confirms the absolute, unspeakable evil and injustice of the terrorist cause. (There is, of course, the intermediate, compromise position common in state terrorism known as "collateral damage," which expresses regret for the loss of innocent life, but claims nevertheless a statistical kind of justice in [often] unverifiable claims about the number of guilty terrorists killed; see the previous chapter on the very high percentage of innocent civilians killed by bombing and drones.) Either way, the point of terrorist violence is not the killing of the enemy as such, but the terrorizing of the enemy with a traumatizing spectacle. "Shock and awe" are the tactics that unite nonstate with state terrorism, and in both cases the traumatic spectacle can be rationalized as a humane

act of restraint. Instead of killing large masses of people, it is sufficient to "send them a message" by subjecting them to shocking displays of destruction.²⁰

Terrorism, then, is a war of words and images carried by the media, a form of psychological warfare whose aim is the demoralization of the enemy, and not the direct destruction of military personnel or equipment.²¹ I don't mean by this that it is not a real war, but that it is an updated version of a very old kind of war, which is conducted mainly by symbolic gestures of violence, attempting to conquer the enemy through



FIGURE 11.

"Uncle Osama." Antiwar advertisement in the *New York Times*, (September 25, 2002). Courtesy of TomPaine .com.

psychological intimidation rather than physical coercion. Terrorists do not occupy territory. They de-territorialize violence, making it possible for it to strike anywhere. The randomness and unpredictability of terror, coupled with its sense of overdetermined symbolic significance, produce a different kind of battlefield, one that has no front or back. Of course all this means that conventional military means, most especially prolonged conquest and occupation of territory are absolutely useless against terrorism (just as the talking cure of psychoanalysis is worse than useless against psychosis). The whole notion of a conventional, military "war on terror," in this light, is quite incoherent, confusing one kind of war with another. It is the sort of asymmetrical warfare that is doomed, not just to failure, but to actually strengthening the enemy against which it is waged. The futility and incoherence of the war on terror became spectacularly evident in the unspeakable and unimaginable spectacles emerging from the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. But it was already anticipated by an image that eloquently predicted the outcome of the invasion. This was a parody of the Uncle Sam poster circulated in American newspapers by Common Cause, showing the figure of "Uncle Osama" bin Laden, pointing his finger at potential recruits, and declaring "I want you—to invade Iraq." This image condensed in a single potent figure the intentions of al Qaeda, explicitly articulated, as the U.S. counterterrorism czar Richard Clarke noted, in the writings of Osama bin Laden: "The ingredients al Qaeda dreamed of for propagating its movement were a Christian government attacking a weaker Muslim region, allowing the new terrorist group to rally jihadists from many countries to come to the aid of the religious brethren."²² This dream came true in Iraq. Uncle Osama propagated his movement by impersonating Uncle Sam calling American youth to a holy war for democracy and freedom, a crusade against Evil. The national icon of American military mobilization is mirrored by its uncanny double or Evil Twin, the arch demon of terror. One can hardly imagine a more perfect updating of Walt Kelly's famous line in the *Pogo* comic strip: "We have met the enemy and he is us"—which in this case, perhaps should be rewritten, "U.S."

But it is also a perfect emblem of the autoimmune character of the invasion of Iraq. The immune system, you will recall, works by trial and error, cloning new antibodies until it finds one that matches the invading antigen in the way a key matches a lock. This is the process that goes on when the body is searching for the right antibody to fight off a common cold. When the right fit is discovered, the immune system duplicates those antibodies by cloning them and remembering the shape of the "key"; this is in fact what immunization amounts to. The antibody is not identical to the antigen; it is its mirror opposite or negative double. In this case, Uncle Sam, the personification of the American immune system (its military) is transformed into Uncle Osama, the enemy of the body politic and its constitution. The Common Cause image not only brilliantly captures the perverse ignorance of the Bush administration in falling into the trap laid by al Qaeda, but it also exposes to view the systemic biopolitical logic that underlies the entire ruse.

This brings me back to the issue of cloning, which might at first glance seem to be quite remote from the problem of the unspeakable and the unimaginable, much less the question of terror. And yet the clone is, as we have seen, the key figure that circulates between words and images in *our* time of terror. Cloning is, to repeat the testimony of Leon Kass, the former chair of the Presidential Commission on Bioethics, an object of "instinctive horror and revulsion"—a figure-for the unspeakable and unimaginable.²³ As we have seen in the discussion of clonophobia, the clone updates of all the ancient phobias about image-making, mimesis, doubling, mirroring, and copying. The original prohibition on the making of "graven images," given to Moses on Mount Sinai, is really a law that aims at heading off the production of living images, artificial life forms, the most potent and virulent of which is the idol, the image that condenses the collective desire for a representation of the unrepresentable God.²⁴ The clone is, in short, the living image of the unimaginable in our time, and it is very difficult to speak of it without lapsing into the same tones of metaphysical and moral certainty that inform discussions of terrorism.²⁵ The uncanny mirroring of the figures of the clone and terrorist as hooded and masked, respectively, united in their faceless anonymity, unites them as twin icons of the unimaginable. Together they personify twin anxieties about the production and destruction of living images, respectively: The clone incarnates the horror of the biological simulacrum, the uncontrolled proliferation of organisms associated with cancers, viruses, plagues, and autoimmune disorders. The terrorist is the figure of iconoclasm and the destruction of living images, literally in the form of human bodies, metaphorically in the destruction of monuments. Clone and terrorist unite in the image of what Giorgio Agamben has called "*homo sacer*," the human being that may be dismembered for its spare parts, tortured for its hidden knowledge, and killed or sent on suicide missions.²⁶

The images of the clone and terrorist exemplify the new symbolic complex that I call the "biopicture," a fusion of new techno-scientific images and the literalization of image-fears (especially religious) that have emerged in the epoch of the war on terror and

the clone wars. We have already been discussing this concept in relation to biopolitical models of the social grounded in figures of autoimmunity and infectious disease, the master metaphors that depict terrorism as an alien invasion, on the one hand, and an internal threat, on the other, as well as the clone as an impious abomination, on the one hand, and as a violation of natural law, on the other. I want to turn now to what might be called the "mu-see imaginaire" of the War on Terror, a gallery of concrete, visible biopictures. These are the images that punctuate and constitute the memory archive of the war. Some of them, like the destruction of the twin towers, are unforgettable. Others (Colin Powell's phantom truck; Saddam Hussein's dental examination; Mission Accomplished action figures; Bionic Abu Ghraib Man; the iRaq/ iPod) are probably forgotten by most people, but they survive in archives and sometimes in works of art. Still others, primarily the Abu Ghraib photographs, periodically sink out of sight and then return, almost seasonally, like the obscene Christmas presents that spill out of the parents' closet in Norman Rockwell's *The Discovery* (see fig. 1). Many of these are images we would prefer to forget. They brought unspeakable and unimaginable things into view. They also disclosed the ordinary, the everyday, the normal—what turns out to have been "standard operating procedure" (to recall the title of Errol Morris's documentary on Abu Ghraib)—and the more documents that emerge to explain them, the clearer it becomes that these procedures came from the very top of the U.S. government. Why look at them now? Hasn't everything already been said about them? On the contrary: the Obama administration's understandable desire to look toward the future has colluded with the amnesia of the mass media and the all-too-human tendency of a people to disavow responsibility for the terrible things that have been done in their name. That is one of the things we mean when we call something unspeakable and unimaginable. But American citizens have a moral obligation to face these images for whatever shocks of recognition they may provide. At the very least they may serve as diagnostic instruments to understand a historical nightmare from which the United States and the world is still trying to awaken. That which we could not have imagined has become all too imaginable, and the unspeakable has become that of which we are compelled to speak.

Chapter Five

1 This chapter was first written for a festschrift in honor of Ronald Paulson, published by *ELH* 72, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 291-308.

2 Paulson takes his terms from Thomas Whately's *Observations on Modern Gardening* (London, 1771), which link the emblematic garden with legible, readable features, and allegorical monuments, while urging an "expressive" aesthetic that produces "immediate impressions." See Ronald Paulson, *Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 52.

3 See also Jacques Ranciere on the "sentence image," in *The Future of the Image* (New York: Verso, 2007), 48.

4 Paulson, *Emblem and Expression*, 8.

5 For further discussion of Saussure's concept of the signifier/signified relation as a version of the "word and image" problem, see my essay, "Word and Image," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 47-58.

6 I am referencing here Jacques Derrida's concept of difference (a deferring, dividing moment) and Jean-Francois Lyotard's "differend," the concept of conflict or disagreement. See Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. George VanDen Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

7 I discuss the differentiations at length in *Iconology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). The Lacanian distinction between the scopical and vocative is discussed in *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 351-52.

8 In Jacques Derrida, *Languages of the Unsayable*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 3-70.

9 We should, of course, distinguish the unspeakable from the unsayable. In English vernacular, quite different shades of meaning are associated with "I cannot say" and "I cannot speak."

10 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and R. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961).

11 John Conroy, *Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People: The Dynamics of Torture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

12 Ruth Leys suggests that trauma theory as a whole can best be understood

as "simultaneously attracted to and repelled by the mimetic-suggestive" model of trauma. Trauma is seen, on the one hand, as hyper-representational, richly mediated by words and images that "haunt" the victim and require something like hypnotic restaging and working through to effect a cure. On the other hand, contemporary "brain-centered" trauma theory regards it, by contrast as a radically unrepresentable "Real" that cannot be told or

displayed. See Leys *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 6-8. See also Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) for a culturalist version of the antimimetic model of trauma as standing outside representation.

13 See Jacques Ranciere, "Are Some Things Unrepresentable?" in *The Future of the Image*, chap. 5.

14 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

15 Robert Griffin notes that I am fusing (and con-fusing) two different analogies in Saussure: the first is the comparison of "language to a sheet of paper" in which "thought is the front and the sound is the back" (Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966], 113). The second is the coin, as a metaphor for the exchange value of a sign for something different from itself (a loaf of bread) or something similar to itself (another coin). One might reflect at some length on the motivation for Saussure's two metaphors for language as a form of paper versus metal currency, the one an infinitely divisible medium that is "cut" to produce an infinity of relations between thought and sound, signified and signifier, the other as a hard object whose importance resides in its value or fungibility, not its significance. In either case, the limit condition of the sign (either in an excess or depletion of significance and value) is figured at the convergence of trauma and religious experience. As Blake puts it in "The Mental Traveller": "These are the gems of the Human Soul / The rubies & pearls of a lovesick eye / The countless gold of the akeing heart / The martyrs groan & the lovers sigh." The signified that exceeds all signifiers and the priceless commodity are the semiotic and economic figures of the unspeakable and unimaginable.

16 See Moishe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), for a discussion of the difference between verbal and visual representations of the deity.

17 It is tempting to return here to Saussure's other brilliant analogy for language as a relation of "thought and sound" as something like the interface between two chaotic media or "shapeless masses"—"the air in contact with a sheet of water" (*Course*, 112). "The waves resemble the union or coupling of thought with phonic substance." The unspeakable/unimaginable, then, would be the moment when the orderly succession of linguistic "waves" (of thought/sound) is interrupted by some chaotic disturbance or excess—a vortex or maelstrom (or a catastrophic tsunami) in language.

18 See, for instance, Joel Snyder's investigations of photography as a "picturing of the invisible," in his article, "Visualization and Visibility," in *Picturing Science/ Making Art*, ed. Carrie Jones and Peter Galison (London: Reaktion Books, 1997).

19 See Susan Stewart's "The Marquis de Meese" for a canny discussion of the way the Meese Commission Report on pornography, an attempt to justify the prohibition of pornography, was itself consumed as pornography. *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 1 (Fall 1998).

20 See the discussion of violence as a way of sending messages in my article on "Representation and Violence," in *Violence in America*, ed. Ron Gottesman, 3 vols. (New York: Scribners, 1997).

21 The city of Leuven in Belgium, for instance, was chosen by the Nazis in World War II to "set an example" to the Belgians of what would happen to *all* their cities if they did not surrender. Similarly, the execution or torture of non-combatants, or the collective punishment of a people that is thought to be "harboring" terrorists, is itself a form of terror, and a war crime. George W. Bush's declaration early in the War on Terror that we would "make no distinction" between terrorists and those who "harbor" them was a clear declaration of criminal intent from the standpoint of international law, and the "quaint" doctrines of the Geneva Convention.

22 Richard Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 138.

23 See, for instance, Kass's "Testimony presented to the National Bioethics Advisory Commission," March 14, 1997, Washington, DC, for a sample of what passes for reasoning about human cloning:

repugnance is often the emotional bearer of deep wisdom, beyond reason's power fully to articulate it. Can anyone really give an argument fully adequate to the horror which is father-daughter incest (even with consent) or having sex with animals or eating human flesh, or even just raping or murdering another human being? Would anyone's failure to give full rational justification for his revulsion at these practices make that revulsion ethically suspect? Not at all. In my view, our repugnance at human cloning belongs in this category, ([http://www.all.org/abac/clontx04 .htm](http://www.all.org/abac/clontx04.htm), accessed May 21, 2003)

24 See "The Surplus Value of Images," in my *What Do Pictures Want?* for a fuller account of the second commandment's relation to the notion of the living image.

25 Leon Kass's preface to *Human Cloning and Human Dignity* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), the Report of the President's Council on Bioethics, makes an explicit connection between the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the issue of cloning: "Since September 11," notes Kass, "one feels a palpable increase in America's moral seriousness. . . . We more clearly see evil for what is." (xv). Kass recommends "a prudent middle course, avoiding the inhuman Osama bin Ladens on the one side and the post-human Brave New Worlders on the other" (xvi). 26 Strictly speaking, the role of *sacrificial* victim is ruled out for Agamben's *homo sacer*. He is the figure who "may be killed but not sacrificed." But this is a matter of perspective. From the point of view of the terrorist, of course, suicide is normally an altruistic act of sacrifice for the greater good.