

THE ICONOCLASTS

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We hated this life, though admit that at first and like everyone else in these times we participated in it. We had turned our cameras on the faces we loved, on ourselves, too, on any known or unknown body dancing or standing or sitting around. We had in unthinkingness and ease recorded the angle of a lover's arm as it rested on the table, recorded the faces distorted by the long and intoxicating ritual of any Friday night. We had turned our cameras to the ceilings or walls of accident, recorded the quiet of a backpack's interior or the dull white of our aunt's kitchen counter. We captured our children's faces from every angle and entered these faces into the databases, and on the same devices we made photos of our genitals, our feet, our breasts.

We thought we were making marks in light.
We did not yet know we were sinners.

We had not yet learned that this was not love, but its absence, and that this was not a way to remember but an aid to the memory of who would do us harm. We had not known what we did was a danger because we had believed in a safety hidden inside a camera's vision, a safety as magic as an idol hides the spirit of any protective god. We believed we would be safe from forgetting, safe from being forgotten, safe from time, too, decay and each other. So we begged our police to strap themselves into the cameras. So we put the cameras in our doorbells, on our mantles, in our teddy bears. So we recorded bad deeds and believed, like children, that any record of bad deeds would mean that the bad deeds would soon end.

And with the innocence of those who believed the face of what is bad could be recognized and by this recognition it could be transformed, we captured our own faces in systems we named security. We had not known yet that the evil-doers were those who always have existed without a face, whose evil did not attach to any but cartoonish, provisional particulars. The faces of the quiet men of power were forgettable and forgotten, but our faces were as if made of cement, heavy and unchangeable. We could never lose them, and that we had them and they could be known was the burden we dragged around with us, through borders, police stations, schools, and malls.

But we no longer wanted to be seen. There had been too many eyes staring in our direction. We had been turned two-dimensional by all the turning cameras and then rendered again into a data set. We had been made into math and our children, our bodies had been made into patterns, and with all this, we were all made sick with identification and made predictable. Wherever we looked it seemed to be a screen in which we were captured and then in return displayed — as a captive — to ourselves.

At first when the security cameras shorted, when the phones were stolen from the hands of those who used them, when the children smashed the cameras left on the table by their mothers, no one suspected a thing. Then the drones fell from the sky. Then the photojournalists became gravediggers. Then the yearbooks disintegrated. Then our faces turned into light-repelling surfaces. Then the links all broke, then this world disappeared.