

INTRODUCTION

Sensible Interventions is anchored in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in America and their cultural legacies, most prominently in the forms of cultural resistance. It conjoins 9/11 and oppositional practices by probing the politics of the attacks and their repercussions, and simultaneously, by investigating 9/11-inspired artistic resistance and its agents, targets, modes, and motivations.

Like so many other fields such as politics, global finance, and the military, the domain of culture has sustained wide-ranging effects from the attacks, but it has also been, in a strange way, galvanized as well. Scanning through the myriad of American cultural objects with any kind of 9/11 connection, one can quickly see that, whether they merely contain brief 9/11 references or actually portray the catastrophe as their primary theme, these cultural responses (including films, television dramas, documentaries, political cartoons, music, and video games), generally adhere to several conventional themes and functions: first, to eulogize the firefighters, other emergency workers, and the victims through the prisms of heroism and patriotism; second, to create immediacy with both imagined and real descriptions of panic and fears inside the towers and the hijacked planes; third, to enable acts of mourning while providing healing and catharsis through personal accounts by survivors and victims' families. This category also includes the numerous fiction and nonfiction works that chronicle how the attacks have altered personal lives. Fourth, these cultural expressions seek to explain and inform by detailing the inner workings of globalized terrorism, al-Qaeda, and anti-terrorism efforts; and finally, to critique the Bush administration, post-9/11 paranoia, and threats to civil liberties among other woes.

Nestled among these cultural responses are also works that deviate from these main classifications. These objects might share some of the antagonistic vehemence with those works in the last category of critique, but they also exhibit something more. Four such objects serve as the fount of curiosity for this study: the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the hip hop album *Sonic Jihad*, the Canadian television situation comedy *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, and the collection of studio photographs entitled *Taliban*. Because of their diverging genre, medium, themes, and circulation, thus located far off from each other on any schematic of 9/11 objects, their visibility is diminished, operating somewhat inconspicuously as isolated points in a constellation with more illustrious and better-known objects. But taken together, their potential as critical artistic interventions becomes prominent. This dissertation distills their

oppositonality, exploring them at the confluence of aesthetic forms, political ardor, and commercial circulation.

Foregrounding artistic endeavors – literature, music, television program, and photography – and fastening them to politics also forces this inquiry to step into the quagmire that is the tumultuous relationship between politics and the arts. Are the arts only a supplementary element in oppositional movements,¹ or as Boris Groys asks: “Does art hold any power of its own ... ?” (12)². To consider this knotted relationship between politics and the arts, the 9/11 and resistance nexus is further extended by a third component, that of the theoretical works by Jacques Rancière. His thoughts have great relevance here because, although his works traverse different topics and disciplines, they do converge and return time and time again to that exact relationship between politics and aesthetics. The qualifier “sensible” in my title signals Rancière’s presence in this study, as the word is echoic of his particular way of theorizing politics through his best-known concept, the distribution of the sensible. I will chart his arguments shortly, but for now the notion of the sensible can be inaugurated here by highlighting two definitions of the word “sense,” as Rancière himself explains: first, sense as in the realm of sensations and what is apprehended and perceived by the senses, and second, sense as in meaning and the process of making sense and establishing the coherence of something. “Sensible interventions” signify my four objects’ oppositional undertakings at the level of sensory presentations and at the level of meaning and signification, as well as the interplay between the two senses when an object breaches the coherent and determinate connection between the pair.

The word “intervention” indicates a disruption and a contestatory activity hostile to established norms, attitudes, discourses, and visualization. These interventions are “sensible” according to Rancière’s paradigm, but the adjective itself does not necessarily suggest acts of wisdom or prudence. Neither exalting nor dismissing cultural resistance, this study also confronts resistance’s parasitic nature, complicity, and entanglements in the power it hopes to transgress. This last concern is, no doubt, guided by Michel Foucault’s formulation of the relations between

¹ Gene Sharp has listed 198 non-violent forms of political defiance in his popular book *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*, which has become the bible for any aspiring resistor. While he did suggest painting, music, theatre, and literature (items 26, 35-37, 122 and 178) and while many of the other acts he identifies no doubt require creativity and can mutate into artistic works, critical artistic interventions remain in the background, relegated it seems to merely complement existing oppositional movements. For the complete list of these 198 methods, see pages 69-76 of Sharp’s *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation* (Boston: The Albert Einstein Institute, 2003).

² Although this dissertation examines different media that reflect several academic disciplines, the citation style I am using is the MLA (The Modern Language Association) system, which is commonly associated with literature/language departments.

resistance and power (95). In all, “sensible interventions” point to a convergence of 9/11, cultural resistance, and Rancière, where artistic practices counter 9/11’s cultural legacy through the multiple dimensions and definitions of the sensible.

The first central question for this project is: in what ways have the arts been understood and deployed as oppositional practices in the 9/11 context? To address this question, my examination identifies the diverse sites, targets, and methods of resistance through my four case studies. The discoveries from this central question also enable me, in reverse, to show what these contestations reveal about the disputed cultural legacy of 9/11 and the breadth, capability, and stumbling blocks of cultural resistance. The second main question unites all three elements of the dissertation – 9/11, resistance, and Rancière – by asking how Rancière’s concept of the sensible can help advance both post-9/11 cultural politics and oppositional practices. To answer this question, I demonstrate how particular cultural productions from the fields of literature, music, photography, and television, work to challenge and push the boundaries of the post-9/11 sensible order. These cultural expressions can also intimate the possibilities and contours of sensible dimensions as a different approach to post-9/11 politics and resistance.

Throughout the dissertation, the prefix “post” is often attached to 9/11. This refers to a temporal sequencing, as I analyze and call attention to the effects and ramifications of the attacks rather than the actual event itself. *Sensible Interventions* comes more than ten years after the catastrophe whose meanings and significance have evolved, as the war on terror itself had progressed under the former Bush administration and is now continuing under the Obama presidency. Terrorism, too, has advanced with other attacks occurring in Madrid, London and Bali. While being attentive to that original 9/11 moment, my focus also lies in the aftermath.

The “post” designation also does not imply that 9/11 represented a historical rupture. The claim that 9/11 was a turning point in American history is one that has been challenged by scholars who have identified 9/11’s multiple lines of continuity with America’s political past.³ This non-rupture viewpoint, however, does not minimize the catastrophe’s significance, especially as the attacks, the war on terror and the two subsequent military campaigns have introduced new targets of, and motivations for, cultural resistance.

This introductory chapter will first identify some of the key theoretical and thematic focal points in post-9/11 cultural politics, surveying in the first three sections those leading indicators

³ For the debate assessing whether 9/11 represented a historical rupture or continuity, or a tipping point, see Martin Halliwell and Catherine Morely’s edited volume *American Thought and Culture in the 21st Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

that have driven the discussions. Embedded in these central debates is a reflection on the role of resistance and critical artistic expressions in response to 9/11. Following this overview, I will introduce my four cultural objects and establish their convergence with and deviations from these major 9/11 themes, and their separate resistance projects as individual objects. The next section will outline how these four objects amalgamate to contest collectively the realm of the sensible, primarily through audibility and visibility. This major shift to the sensible is aided by Rancière's works which crisscross this dissertation in numerous ways. Some of these junctions will be clarified in this segment and will be pursued even further in the next chapter. I will conclude this introduction with a discussion of the dissertation's own intervention in 9/11 scholarship and provide a chapter-by-chapter outline.

Aesthetizing Catastrophe

The sequence of visual images immortalizing 9/11 is firmly fixed: planes soar towards the towers and strike them with precision. Explosions ensue. Trapped workers protrude from broken windows and flail their arms for help. The towers collapse while ash-coated New Yorkers flee the scene. Deemed sublime, inconceivable, and incomprehensible, these real-time images of a catastrophe immediately created a clash of perceptions and heterogeneity of sensory experiences. They are extraordinary scenes, defying the banality of prosaic images from everyday city life, and yet disturbingly familiar to the artificial aesthetics of Hollywood disaster movies and some popular video games. This mirroring of visuals immediately gives prominence to the aesthetic impact of the attacks, not in the sense of Karlheinz Stockhausen's remark that the incident was the greatest work of art, but in the sense of how such images circulate in a society already abounding in spectacular images and virtuality.

The raw material reality of the event was juxtaposed to America's pre-9/11 society of the spectacle, with a passion for semblance rather than substance, its de-materialization of "real life," and its hyperreality. In what has become a classic 9/11 text, "Welcome to the Desert of the Real," published in 2002, Slavoj Žižek explores this intertwining of the de-realization of reality with the Real, suggesting that the events of 9/11 have exposed America to its own insulated and artificial universe – its deceptive and selective sense of reality that has sheltered most Americans from the horrors, terrorist or otherwise, that are ravaging countries elsewhere – and ushered it

into “the Real world” (389).⁴ The spectacle of 9/11 both made real fantasized spectacles – those semblances of catastrophes that Hollywood had already staged – and momentarily lifted the lull of those spectacles (387).

Embedded in these themes of semblance and the Real is also an explicit connection of terrorism and violence to capitalism and globalization. This can be seen in some of the more obvious indications: the instantaneous disseminations of the images of terror via well-entrenched globalized media networks; the symbolic targeting of the World Trade Center as the center of global financial capitalism, or as Žižek would prefer to describe, the center of “virtual” capitalism where financial activities are severed from the sphere of material production (387); and finally, the parallel development of terrorism and capitalism as effects of globalization, given the similar global functioning and reach of present-day terrorist organizations and multinational companies (38).⁵

As Žižek has already alluded to, this link between terrorism and capitalism also entangles Guy Debord’s concept of the spectacle. In Retort’s *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, published in 2006, the power of the image and the control for the realm of appearance are explicitly related to post-9/11 international politics, both in terms of jihad and American imperial power.⁶ As Retort points out, the terrorist attacks occurred within America’s own symbolic economy called spectacle (25). In that sense, the terrorists took their cue from the culture they hoped to annihilate, mounting a violent negation of capitalism and the spectacle, but still remaining encapsulated within the same logic, as the attacks maximized the media apparatus of an image-obsessed society. To phrase it more simply, the image haters themselves became image makers, enforcing the reign of the spectacle. This entrapment, however, is not the predicament of the terrorists solely; the post-9/11 form of empire, too, is mired in a battle of images and the modern production of appearances. One of the central themes of *Afflicted Powers* is the post-9/11 militarization of neoliberal capitalism, and of equal importance, its deployment under the terms of the spectacle. A “deep and perplexing doubleness,” indeed, states Retort; on the one hand, there exists “a new round of conquest and colonization,” or more accurately what

⁴ There are several versions of “Welcome to the Desert of the Real”: one is the short essay which appeared in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.2 (2002): 385-389; the other is the book version with the same title published by Verso in 2002. My first three references are from the article; the final reference is from the book.

⁵ See previous footnote.

⁶ Retort is a collective of some 30 to 40 “antagonists of the present order of things,” based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Its main writers are: Iain Boal, T.J. Clark, Joseph Matthews, and Michael Watts. See the preface of *Afflicted Powers* (London: Verso, 2006).

they call “primitive accumulation,” using a phrase coined by Marx (11); and on the other hand, the state now functions in and through the regime of image and is implicated in the war of appearances.

While eagerly establishing these global realities, Retort is not content with merely proffering a diagnosis of post-9/11 symptoms; they have plotted, tentatively and cautiously, some coordinates of an opposition. It is unsurprising that *Afflicted Powers* has become, according to one enthusiastic reviewer, “the one indispensable guide to our contemporary conjuncture for anyone hoping to formulate and develop modes of radical resistance” (Glass, 225). What program of resistance, then, both in terms of protest movement in the streets and critical aesthetic practices, does Retort envision as a riposte by the Left to both empire and jihad? Before an opposition can even be articulated, Retort argues how both empire and jihad are implicated in modernity, which is ultimately the real target of resistance; for it is modernity and its twin, “democracy,” that have become the watchwords of the aforementioned resurgent US imperialism (174). Concomitantly, revolutionary Islam – al-Qaeda in particular – as Retort details is born “in revulsion” from many features of modernity (180). If the task of Left politics following 9/11 is to be anchored in an opposition to modernity, then it finds itself curiously, and with extreme discomfort, on the same side as revolutionary Islam. Retort, however, is adamant in the formulation of a resistance that can both oppose modernity and be in contrast to revolutionary Islam. What the situation calls for, Retort writes in awkward prose that reflects the challenge and complexity of such a project, is a “non-orthodox, non-nostalgic, non-rejectionist, non-apocalyptic critique of the modern: that ought now to be the task of Left politics. Otherwise the ground of opposition to the present will be permanently ceded to one or another fundamentalism” (177).

With resistance thus framed against modernity and envisioned through negations or in what opposition *cannot* be, Retort invests its hopes in the ongoing struggle against globalization, in what they call the “movement of movements,” one that is marked by pluralism, by its shifting battlegrounds and deployment of new tactics, and by its “lack of interest in scripts of salvation.” Retort affirms: “This is the ‘multitude’ we place most faith in – and precisely *because* its politics depend so little on the new apparatus of spectacle. In this, as in so much else, it is al-Qaeda’s antithesis” (192, italics in original). But this faith in empire’s countervailing force, Hardt and Negri’s “multitude,” is not without hesitation. As a political force, the multitude has emerged into and out of defeat, most notably in the failed anti-war demonstrations in the lead-up to the

invasion of Iraq in the spring 2003, Retort reminds us. Against these post-9/11 challenges, what might be the potential of resistant aesthetic practices? In an exchange with *October*, Retort states simply that while it is possible for art to reply to the extremity of this juncture, the existing art world has very little to offer (“Exchange” 12). Not one to abandon all hope, the collective, however, did present an installation (consisting of their broadsheets plastered on a wall and a video projection of Picasso’s *Guernica*) in Okwui Enwezor’s second Seville Biennial in 2006, which focused on art’s engagements with global politics.⁷

Retort, of course, was not the first to address this string of post-9/11 concerns: empire/globalization, jihad, modernity, the Left’s oppositional repositioning, and the role of aesthetic practices in response to these challenges. Susan Buck-Morss’ *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left*, published three years earlier in 2003, tackles these exact same topics but with a different inflection.⁸ Retort and Buck-Morss do, however, converge in their assessment of art’s oppositional role. Whilst they see art’s subversive potential, they cite its current irrelevance and impotence. Despite this, Buck-Morss points to artists who are utilizing alternative strategies of critical practice and escaping the “gated community of the artworld” in exchange for their social relevance. In their works, these artists share the themes and gestures of disappearance, escape, and self-erasure as a challenge to the ontological emphasis of the artist identity in contemporary art (70-72). With them as models, Buck-Morss reaffirms art’s critical role, arguing that: “Artistic practice might contribute to a general reactivation of social

⁷ For more details on Retort’s installation, go to <http://retort.ludd.net/msg00691.html>, accessed July 10, 2012.

⁸ Much like Retort, Buck-Morss, in *Thinking Past Terror*, speaks with a certain political urgency regarding what she sees as “the mutation of a new, global body-politics” (21). In the terrorist attacks, not only was the violence staged as a spectacle for viewers in the US but the same images were also played and replayed before a global audience, igniting drastically different affect and effects. Such situation is not just the daily reality of globalized media but reflects equally the condition of global immanence, by which Buck-Morss – borrowing the notion from Hardt and Negri – refers to a reality that our common global space is “overdetermined, contradictory, and intractably diverse.” In view of this immanent global sphere, Buck-Morss poses three interlocking questions: what does critical thinking look like within this immanent world; what would this criticality mean for a critical global public sphere; and most importantly, how might the process of this critical thinking foster a transglobal Left that might be capable of contesting, among many woes, global economic exploitation and injustice, as well as power inequalities. Deviating from Retort, Buck-Morss claims the answer to all three questions lies in a critical exploration of Islamism, a discursive field made up of the various political and oppositional discourses articulated through Islam. While Retort traces the emergence of a revolutionary and vanguardist Islam, rejects its terror, and posits a Left resistance against it, Buck-Morss calls for engagement with politicized Islam. According to her, this way of thinking beyond one’s own discursive terrains and intellectual traditions (hers being the Frankfurt School) is what democracy on a global scale requires (4). Doing so would initiate a rethinking of politics within the changing conditions of a global public sphere, which in Buck-Morss’ envisioning, consists of people who, though speaking different political languages, are united by their target of resistance and unified goals (4-5). If Retort had, by 2005, witnessed the rising of the multitude in its spatially-separated, globally-united, and yet futile opposition against the war in Iraq, Buck-Morss, writing in the fall of 2002, was still investing her faith in the resistance potential of a critical global public sphere.

imagination, circulating via the new media's unprecedented power – nothing less than a grass-roots, globally extended, multiply articulated, radically cosmopolitan and critical counter-culture" (72). Here, Buck-Morss' rather affirmative tone and her positive qualifiers for this critical counter-culture contrast interestingly, as Loren Glass argues, with Retort's drafting of the Left's oppositional project – aided by art or not – which could only be imagined by what it is not through an invocation of "nons": "non-anathematizing, non-regressive, and non-fundamental" (Glass 228; Retort 185).

Unlike Retort and Buck-Morss, formulating a new Left opposition is neither the explicit motivation nor the theme of W.J.T. Mitchell and his various texts on the visual history of the war on terror. But Mitchell has amplified both Retort and Buck-Morss' claims by painstakingly probing this realm of images and detailing the damning visual evidence of the violent reality of neo-liberal capitalism under the conditions of spectacle, as described earlier by Retort. These are images that bring the "unspeakable and unimaginable things into view," claims Mitchell in *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* (68), published in 2011.

With the catastrophe of 9/11 and the ensuing war on terror having bequeathed a trail of images that travels from Ground Zero to Baghdad, to Fallujah, and to Abu Ghraib, Mitchell ventures beyond the art world to examine images from popular culture, such as newspaper photographs, cartoons, and murals, and identifies their intertextuality. His surveying of these images is affixed to another phenomenon: clones and cloning. As Mitchell explains, the onset of this age of terrorism in the fall of 2001 came closely on the heel of an ongoing national debate in the US about cloning and stem cell research. Besides their temporal proximity, other kinships exist between this emergence of international terrorism and the technical revolutions in the biological sciences.⁹ While the insertion of the cloning theme allows Mitchell to discuss simultaneously the implications of biotechnology, and biopolitics and terrorism, it is in his

⁹ Mitchell calls this convergence "cloning terror," by which he refers to, first, the paradoxical, if not tragic, process by which the war on terror leads to more retaliatory terror, "cloning" more terrorists while trying to extinguish them; second, the reproduction of images, with digital images "cloning" themselves and circulating rapidly in a process enabled by the internet and digital photography; third, the cinematic representation of terrorists as clones, with terrorists often portrayed as "a headless or at least faceless automaton, masked and anonymous"; fourth, the doubling and mirroring of the enemies, which creates an uncanny symmetry between figures of the empire and the terrorist, as illustrated by an anti-war cartoon featuring "Uncle Osama" as the graphic clone of Uncle Sam; fifth, proliferation of atrocity photographs and videos (beheading and dismemberment of Americans, for example) and the recurrence of the hooded figure in various genres of photography, from the hooding of Saddam Hussein's statue with an American flag in Baghdad, to the image of the Hooded Man of Abu Ghraib, and to artistic responses to the Hooded Man. One final affinity between terror and cloning is the syndrome he calls "clonophobia," the terror and horror of the process of cloning itself that reflects deeper "ancient anxieties about copying, imitation, artificial life, and image-making" (xiv).

discussion of the Abu Ghraib archive and the Hooded Man photograph (in which he details the image's resemblance to the iconography of the Passion of Christ), that one senses his aim for resurrecting these images of the war; that endeavor being to jolt the public's memory and to avert historical amnesia, as the American public has yet to acknowledge responsibility for these acts of war committed in their name, argues Mitchell (xvi).¹⁰ Confronting these photographs, especially the Hooded Man, means reaching beyond their meanings and operations and asking as spectators what it means to live with them and the world they depict, according to Mitchell (152). What has hampered the acknowledgement of responsibility – given that the release of the photographs in the spring of 2004 caused a scandal but did not lead to wider political effects – seems to be what Mitchell describes as “a peculiar combination of ignorance and idealism, blindness and innocence” on the part of Americans (“Cloning” 206). Here though, lies the potential for aesthetic practices.

In highlighting this American ignorance and innocence, Mitchell turns to two artworks, which either directly show the Abu Ghraib photographs or adopt the iconic hooding sign and theme, thus extending the life of those original images and offering a critique in the process. In this way, Mitchell's usage of Lawrence Weschler and Naomi Herskovic's *American Innocence* (2007) and Hans Haacke's *The Stargazer* (2004) as oppositional materials reaffirm Buck-Morss' earlier claim that artistic practice might assist in reactivating social imagination. Reactivation in this case, however, occurs through a haunting, as these two artistic renderings contain spectral traces of the original Abu Ghraib scene of torture; they are images that have the potential to haunt the public's memory by extending the visibility of the original photographs.

From Images of War to War of Images

The war on terror has produced spectacular military images of “shock and awe” from the battlefield, but away from the war scenes, a different kind of warring has also developed over images of war victims. This last category of people – victims of the war on terror – and their effacement from public view are some of the concerns in Judith Butler's *Precarious Life: The*

¹⁰ By the time Mitchell's *Cloning Terror* was published in 2011, the war had already been downgraded to “Overseas Contingency Operations.” Mitchell, of course, had been studying these images for some time. Chapters of *Cloning Terror* were written either during or shortly after the Bush administration. Earlier versions appeared as stand-alone articles, such as “Cloning Terror: The War of Images 2001-2004” in *The Life and Death of Images: Ethics and Aesthetics*, ed. Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willson (London: Tate Publishing, 2008) 179-207; “The Unspeakable and the Unimaginable: Word and Image in a Time of Terror,” *ELH: English Literary History* 72.2 (2005): 291-308. All my references are from the book, with the exception of the final one, which came from the “Cloning Terror” article.

Powers of Mourning and Violence. Their erasure can be approached, first, through a discussion on framing, the establishment of boundaries that regulates “a sphere of appearance” which conditions “what ‘can’ be heard, read, seen, felt and known” (xx-xxi) (this theme will be discussed in depth in my next chapter and in chapter five); second, such an inadmissibility of victim images into the public sphere, as governed by framing, is then related more broadly: “The question that preoccupies me in the light of recent global violence is, Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally What *makes for a grievable life?*” asks Butler (20, italics in original). Emphasizing our shared corporeal vulnerability, Butler is prompted by what she sees as a differential allocation of grievability, given that certain non-American losses – Afghan and Iraqi deaths from US military campaigns, for example – remain unseen in the media, therefore unthinkable and de-realized, and more importantly, ungrievable. This becomes a nullification, which, in Butler’s mind, robs these victims of their status as “humans.” In contrast, the 9/11 victims were recognized nationally in America with their lives honored in public obituaries, such as the “Portraits of Grief” series in *The New York Times*.¹¹ Their names are engraved on national memorials, and their deaths have been commemorated every year on September 11 in official ceremonies.

This unequal distribution of recognition and grievability is closely intertwined with issues of representation, both concerning an absence of representation and the modes of representation. The framing establishes what images – war casualties inflicted by the US, as just mentioned – are excluded, thus rendering certain groups of people faceless, but it also determines what images must be included and how they might be instrumentalized, as ways of humanization or dehumanization. In discussing these forms of war-related media representations, Butler turns to Emmanuel Levinas’s notion of the “face,” a word which, paradoxically, does not literally refer to a human face but operates more as catachresis; it suggests a series of displacements and actually points to “a scene of agonized vocalization” and “the extreme precariousness of the other.” Through a misrepresentation of sorts, the face is related to human suffering and the cry of human suffering (133-134 and 144). Butler claims: “To respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life or, rather, the precariousness of life itself” (134).

¹¹ These profiles of 9/11 victims first appeared in *The New York Times*, but they became so well-received that they were reprinted in a book entitled *Portraits 9/11/01: The Collected “Portraits of Grief” from The New York Times*; the series is also an interactive archive available at <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/us/sept-11-reckoning/portraits-of-grief.html>, accessed April 20, 2013.

While this Levinasian “face” introduces disjointedly a figure that is not exclusively a human face and reflects more elaborately on a relationality with an Other through an affirmation of that Other’s precariousness, it nevertheless communicates what is human (xviii-xix). Butler relates this metaphoric face to several media representations of the (literal) human faces of the Other, such as images of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, both of whom have mutated into the face of terror and tyranny, respectively. (One is also reminded of the facelessness of Abu Ghraib’s Hooded Man, just discussed by Mitchell). Then, there are images of the faces of Afghan girls who dropped their burkas following the US invasion in 2001 that removed the Taliban from power. And yet, these Afghan images of celebration and liberation are capitalized to symbolize American triumph, Butler argues (142).¹² These faces are instrumentalized to personify evil or military victories, and in them, one can no longer apprehend what is human, or more precisely, human precarity. In the case of bin Laden and Hussein, their faces have become the targets of war; and in the case of the Afghan girls, their faces have become the spoils of war (143). Butler asks:

Where is loss in that face? And where is the suffering over war? Indeed, the photographed face seemed to conceal or displace the face in the Levinasian sense, since we saw and heard through that face no vocalization of grief or agony, no sense of the precariousness of life ... Most importantly, though, it seems we have to ask what scenes of pain and grief these images cover over and derealize. (142 and 143)

Through Butler, one can now identify two forms of power that are operative in this war of images: one that functions through an effacement, an elision of images that consign some to non-existence; and a second that forces faces to be symbolically identified with the inhuman, and as a result, forecloses the viewer’s ability to see and apprehend Levinas’s scene of suffering, precarity and agony (147).

Much more mundane and conventional powers and politics of representation, such as stereotyping, seem also to be at work in this struggle over images. Dominating the copious archive of 9/11 and post-9/11 images are faces and bodies of suspected enemies/terrorists, Arabs,

¹² Unveiling, of course, is a key trope in Orientalist discourse and imaginary. As Michelle Aguayo argues: “Unveiling the Muslim woman both literally and metaphorically has been a fantasy and mission taken on by both Western men and women and currently has worked to ground the war on terror.” See her “Representations of Muslim Bodies in *The Kingdom*: Deconstructing Discourses in Hollywood,” *Global Media Journal* (Canadian Edition) 2.2 (2009): 46-47.

and Muslims, identities that have been connected tenuously in the wake of the attacks. It is this common penchant of yoking together Muslims at large, Islam and terrorism that steers much of the debate over visual representation; this issue of representation has also been magnified by the war-incited process of enemification, a discourse of evil, and the legacy of Orientalism. These matters, too, are instigations of resistant aesthetic practices.

In view of 9/11 and military violence, Butler, via Levinas, focuses on the precariousness of the Other. This primacy of the Other contrasts greatly from both the official and popular discourses of the time, in which the issue of alterity, in this case Arabs and/or Muslims, is entangled in the process of enemification in the war on terror. This battle over perceptions endures, one in which the identities of both “us” and “them” are formulated and solidified dialectically. As James Der Derian sees it, this post-9/11 relationship between “us” and “them” occurs “... along a wide spectrum of familiarity and friendliness, indifference and tolerance, estrangement and hostility. It can result in appreciation or denigration, accommodation or separation, assimilation or extermination” (328). On one end of the spectrum, extermination is reserved for the absolute enemy: the terrorist, whose media representation through the term evil has already been highlighted by Butler. A discourse of evil, too, operates in tandem with such representations.

A hallmark of Bush’s public speeches in the immediate days following 9/11 was his unrelenting accentuation of “evil,” and more specifically, a repeated depiction of a post-9/11 world as “good versus evil.”¹³ As part of this discourse of evil, America is portrayed as an innocent country that was attacked “out of the blue” (Croft 85) and a country that must wage a global war against terrorism in response. Without an evil enemy threatening “our way of life,” the war on terror would be a difficult policy program to defend.¹⁴

¹³ “The evildoers,” “evil people,” “the evil ones,” “instruments of evil,” and “the cult of evil” were all descriptions used by Bush. Here are some specific examples: his utterance on September 25, 2001, “And make no mistake about it: this is good versus evil. These are evildoers. They have no justification for their actions. There’s no religious justification, there’s no political justification. The only motivation is evil.” Bush made the statement following a meeting with former Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. For the complete transcript see http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/president_057.asp, accessed July 9, 2012. Also consider his comment on October 24, 2001: “They (the terrorists) are so evil and so dark and so negative.” For more examples, see George W. Bush, *We Will Prevail: President George W. Bush on War, Terrorism and Freedom* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

¹⁴ For detailed analyses of the rhetorical construction of the 9/11 enemy, see Richard Johnson, “Defending Ways of Life: The (Anti-)Terrorist Rhetorics of Bush and Blair,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 19.4 (2002): 211-32, and Richard Jackson, “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’ in Political and Academic Discourse,” *Government and Opposition: A Quarterly of Comparative Politics* 42.3 (2007): 394-426. For insights into the narrative construction of the catastrophe itself, see chapter two of Stuart Croft’s *Culture, Crisis and America’s War on Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

What this discourse of evil invites is not sustained political debates, negotiations and diplomacy, but military actions and retaliation. That rationale was expressed by the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair on October 2, 2001, when he spoke at the Labour Party Conference: “There is no compromise possible with such people, no meeting of minds, no point of understanding with such terror. Just a choice: defeat it or be defeated by it. And defeat it we must.”¹⁵ With evil and extermination thus fastened together rhetorically, this combination has animated the popular visual imagination and generated wider implications for the representational politics of Muslim bodies. Enmity depends on a propagation of images and stereotypes, and it is unsurprising that popular culture is replete with images of terrorists corresponding to universal archetypes of the enemy, such as barbarians, beasts, and torturers.¹⁶

Media researchers Brigitte L. Nacos and Oscar Torres-Reyna point to the full-page, “heavily red-tinted” facial shot of bin Laden published in the first post-9/11 issue of the popular US weekly news magazine *Time* which, in their view, augments the al-Qaeda leader’s personification of evil, thus dovetailing President Bush’s characterization of him as evildoer (48).¹⁷ That same image, but lacking the hellish color, dominates the cover of the news magazines’ next issue on October 1, 2001; this time, the photograph is only accompanied by the magazine’s name-logo, plus a three-worded declaration: “TARGET: BIN LADEN.” No other text appears on this unencumbered cover. One single photograph, thus, conveniently and economically represents both evil and extermination; two abstractions that eventually converge on that very same photograph.

No doubt even before 9/11, there existed a visual heritage of hegemonic representations of Arabs and Muslims in Western media, and much of it could be considered essentializing representations and negative stereotypes. As many scholars have pointed out, long-standing Orientalist cultural stereotypes have been revived as a consequence of 9/11, underscoring the persistent hostility of Western media towards Islam and Muslims.¹⁸ From moving images in

¹⁵ The full text of the speech was printed in *The Guardian*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2001/oct/02/labourconference.labour6>, accessed July 9, 2012.

¹⁶ If “a failure of imagination” was how The 9/11 Commission described the US intelligence community’s inability to foresee and prevent the terrorist attacks, the expression is also appropriate to depict the absence of creativity among the popular-culture and official images of the 9/11 public enemy. Most of these dehumanizing images and figures are regurgitations of the archetypes of the enemy already documented in Sam Keen’s *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

¹⁷ According to Nacos and Torres-Reyna, that red-tinted photo of bin Laden appeared in the September 24, 2001 edition of *Time*, on page 55. The photo was unavailable in the magazine’s electronic archive.

¹⁸ See Edward Said’s “Orientalism Once More,” *Development and Change* 35.5 (2004): 869-79. His earlier works on this topic include David Barsamian’s *Culture and Resistance: Conversations with Edward W. Said* (Cambridge:

Hollywood films, television news and dramas to still photographs in popular American newspapers and magazines, from political cartoons to public posters, images of Muslim bodies proliferate, but most are considered negatively conceived. Researchers have scrutinized these unsympathetic representations, which they contend that all hold fast to several common stereotypes. In a different context that is not exclusively focused on media stereotypes, Sherene H. Razack states that three allegorical figures have come to dominate the war on terror: “the dangerous Muslim man, the imperiled Muslim woman, and the civilized European” (5). The relationship and dynamic of this trio is, no doubt, one that has been famously and tersely described by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (296).¹⁹ How have these three figures, which Razack transplants to the fields of law and national social policies, been translated into media images in the past and in the post-9/11 present?

In *Reel Bad Arabs*, for example, Jack Shaheen catalogues more than 900 Hollywood films to identify the various stereotypes of Arabs on screen even before 9/11.²⁰ Focusing on the news genre, Nacos and Torres-Reyna examine American news media’s post-9/11 portrayal of Muslims, both living within the US and abroad; among their emphases are visuals in the news, both moving and still pictures. In one specific case study of the two popular weekly news magazines *Time* and *Newsweek*, Nacos and Torres-Reyna suggest, following their qualitative and quantitative content analysis, that Muslim males in general had been “overwhelmingly” depicted as “terrorists, suspected terrorists, sympathizers of terrorist groups, or otherwise utterly evil.” Muslim women had been shown mostly as victims and often as battered by Muslim men.

South End Press, 2003); *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981). For a more general study on the representation of Muslims in the news media in Britain and elsewhere, refer to Elizabeth Poole and John Richardson, ed., *Muslims and the News Media* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

¹⁹ Spivak’s phrase was articulated in a different British colonial context, but this rescue paradigm has been applied as a parallel to the post-9/11 American military intervention in Afghanistan to save Afghan women from the Taliban, as several scholars have pointed out. Consult for example Miriam Cooke’s “Saving Brown Women,” *Signs* 28.1 (2002): 468-470; Carol A. Stabile and Deepa Kumar’s “Unveiling Imperialism: Media, Gender and the War on Afghanistan,” *Media, Culture & Society* 27.5 (2005): 765-782; and page 41 of Butler’s *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

²⁰ According to Shaheen, Hollywood has systematically portrayed Arabs through five archetypes: villains (quintessentially evil and mostly anti-American); sheikhs (ostentatiously oil-rich, lecherous and ogling Western blondes or attended by harem maidens); maidens (humiliated, demonized, eroticized, and as “Bundles of Black”); Egyptians (always linked to “mummies and money”); and finally, Palestinians (irrational, terrorizing, or as terrorists, and as a people to be exterminated), see pages 14-27 of *Reel Bad Arabs*. Rather than taking on Hollywood as a whole, many researchers have also concentrated on representations of Muslims in a single film. For example, Michelle Aguayo has provided an analysis of the post-9/11 film *The Kingdom* (2007), see her “Representations of Muslim Bodies in *The Kingdom*: Deconstructing Discourses in Hollywood,” *Global Media Journal* (Canadian Edition) 2.2 (2009): 41-56.

Moreover, this negative depiction of Muslim males was more pronounced in the context of the war in Afghanistan (46).

As these aforementioned texts demonstrate, while stereotypical and negative representations of Muslims abound, so does the critique of such reductive representational strategies. Given that the critique of stereotypes is always in danger of becoming a stereotype in itself, and therefore diminish its own criticality, this question of Muslim stereotypes and negative representation requires different forms of critical interventions that would outflank the issue of stereotypes. As I will soon demonstrate, this task would fall on creative expressions that confront the hostile discourse and imagination through an alternative strategy of laughter, conviviality, and illegibility.

Crossing Disciplines

The post-9/11 politicization of artistic practices is a topic that has impacted multiple disciplines. Besides involving those disciplines that have been traditionally engaged with the relationship between politics and the arts, such as art history, literature, cultural and media studies, the entanglements of creative productions and 9/11 politics have also energized debates in disciplines such as International Relations and security studies. Take as a starting point the “special issues” relating to art and visual culture that have been published by the *Review of International Studies* and *Security Dialogue* in recent years. For the *Security Dialogue* special issue, which considers the power of the image and its complex relations to reality in the framework of global security, this emphasis on artistic endeavors – cartoon, photography, film, television drama, art, and video game – seems to arise more out of a necessity, given culture and visual culture’s impact on post-9/11 securitization and militarization. The editors keenly recognize how visual culture can both “sustain and disturb,” with some aspects of visual culture “aiding and abetting securitization and militarization and some serving as a domain of critical practice and counter-memory...” While visual culture is entangled in new military strategies, it is simultaneously enabling critical practices to challenge those strategies, stress the editors (Campbell and Shapiro 132-133). Although the word resistance is never mentioned, the editors do acknowledge the oppositional force of aesthetic objects.²¹

²¹ See Campbell and Shapiro’s introduction, “Special Issue on Securitization, Militarization and Visual Cultures in the Worlds of Post-9/11,” *Security Dialogue* 38.2 (June 2007): 131-137.

The themed issue of *Review of International Studies* places an even stronger accent on artistic endeavors as forms of intervention in global politics. In the introduction, the guest editors make an impassioned case for the importance of art in the study of International Relations. Starting with the assumption that “art matters, ethically and politically; affectively and intellectually,” the editors assert that artists’ visions of the world are “insightful, and consequential” and what they think and make is “profoundly interesting and important” (Danchev and Lisle 775). In their assessment, artistic endeavors have the potential to bring different understanding/insights of the world, and they also have an interventionist function. The editors quote Picasso’s words that “painting is not made to decorate apartments” but rather, “it is an offensive and defensive weapon against the enemy”; they then issue the call “Let us mobilize it [art]” (Danchev and Lisle 777). In this sense, art is a highly valued resource.²²

Others in the field of International Relations have articulated similar sentiments. In a series of articles, Roland Bleiker has examined art’s relevance in International Relations scholarship, particularly in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. According to him, 9/11 produced not just a breach of security, but also a breach of human understanding, creating a gap between the violent experience and the apprehension of it by one’s existing conceptual and descriptive grid. Furthermore, he claims that contemporary security threats, terrorism in particular, have become so complex and transnational and yet the conventional means of strategic and policy analyses to address these threats have not changed (“Art, Emotions” 48). He sees aesthetic sources responding to these and other issues in several ways: first, artistic insights have the potential to shed light on that breach of understanding following 9/11, for artistic representations might capture emotional dimensions that are missing from other analyses; second and specifically to International Relations, the arts, thus positioned as an alternative source of insight, can create opportunities to broaden understanding of political and security issues.²³ While not suggesting that one should turn from the challenges of world politics and turn to poetry reading and art gazing, Bleiker says: “The key, rather, is to draw upon the innovative nature of the aesthetic to rethink deeply entrenched and often narrowly conceived approaches to understanding and solving world political problems” (“Learning” 417). To put his thoughts and

²² See Danchev and Lisle’s introduction in *Review of International Studies* 35.4 (October 2009): 775-779.

²³ For Bleiker’s articles on art’s relevance, see “Aestheticising Terrorism: Alternative Approaches to 11 September,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 49.3 (2003): 430-45; “Learning from Art: A Reply to Holden’s ‘World Literature and World Politics,’” *Global Society* 17.4 (2003): 415-28; “Art, Emotions and Global Terrorism,” *Social Alternatives* 23.2 (2004): 48-53; and “Art after 9-11,” *Alternatives: A Journal of World Policy* 31.1 (2006): 77-99.

questions more bluntly, how useful exactly is art for these fields and what is art's added value epistemologically? Can one, through aesthetic sources, gain (emotional) insights into political puzzles?

These various International Relations scholars do not articulate a unified project for the arts and for artistic oppositional practices relating to 9/11; they do, nevertheless, seem to approach aesthetic engagements with greater enthusiasm than the art specialists themselves. If Retort and Buck-Morss both pointed to the oft-perceived feebleness of art, these political scientists seem more hopeful of what artistic endeavors may accomplish: facilitate understanding of 9/11, shed light on global security challenges and terrorism in particular, and invigorate stale political thinking, to name but a few possibilities. The divergence between these disciplines is not just one of optimism or the lack thereof expressed by their representatives, but one of different conceptualizations of politics and the arts. International Relations scholars sometimes efface creative projects' formal distinctiveness, complexities, and autonomy, thus exploring only aesthetic objects' political content, pronouncements, and didacticism. This overlooks the tensions between direct activism and aesthetic virtuosity. Additionally, for these International Relations and security studies scholars, politics and the arts remain two separate realms so that artistic practices can be mobilized and undergo a smooth passage from their own domain to aid the other. My study, using Rancière's particular notions of politics and aesthetics as the theoretical guide, seeks to complicate such easy passages between politics and the arts. Reinforced by Rancière's works, this project aims to intervene into the stalemate over post-9/11 politicized artistic practices. My aim here is not to dampen Bleiker and others' enthusiasm for art's power, but to be attentive simultaneously to an object's political engagement, aesthetic form and other significant challenges such as commercial circulation and profitability.

Artistic Interventions

The previous three sections identify some of the key thematic, theoretical and textual nodes in post-9/11 cultural politics, progressing from Žižek's Real to Retort's capital and spectacle; from Buck-Morss' critical counter-culture to Mitchell's images of torture; from Butler's invisible images and dehumanizing faces to ubiquitous figures of dangerous Muslim males and imperiled women in the media. These issues provide strong impetus for creative interventions that spark both optimism and gloom for scholars in different fields.

Against this backdrop, this dissertation presents a multimedia collection of cultural

expressions – a best-selling novel, a political hip hop album, a television situation comedy, and a compilation of studio photographs – which can be envisioned as artistic resistance, for they not only engage with the aforementioned key themes of 9/11, but also counter the many cultural responses to 9/11 that conform to the conventional grid of trauma, immediacy, and eulogy. Enlivening and advancing the key issues of 9/11, my multimedia objects reflect both the heterogeneity of the field of culture and the practice of resistance. Resistance is by nature a creative and dynamic process that crosses many disciplines depending on how/where that resistance is manifested, which medium is being utilized and the chosen target of resistance. Take the simple act of naming. Cultural resistance goes by many different labels depending on the academic discipline in which one finds oneself: critical artistic practices, socially-engaged or politically-engaged art practices, and subversive art seem accepted terms for art historians.²⁴ Cultural studies, on the other hand, speaks of creative dissent, consumer resistance, and cultural activism, while media studies works with well-discussed concepts such as adbusting, culture jamming, and Third Cinema. Textual resistance has a long history in literature, and has been prominent in recent decades through the emergence of post-colonial, feminist, and ethnic literatures. What binds all these traditions is that force of resistance this dissertation aims to crystallize: a desire to change the state of play and to challenge power, whether that power is globalization, patriarchy, the culture industry, or in this specific case, perceptual and sensory constraints.

My four 9/11 objects consist of different media that are located in several traditional academic disciplines (media, cultural, art/visual, and literary studies). Consequently, an interdisciplinary approach is a given. This eclectic selection aims to highlight the broad category that is cultural resistance, which incorporates a multiplicity of oppositional practices in terms of their forms, agents, scales, public visibility, strategies, and goals.²⁵ I have categorized my objects as cultural resistance in that they, as both cultural and artistic expressions, seek to resist and contest dominant meanings, discourses, affects, and representations, whether consciously or unconsciously. Given that the designation of cultural resistance itself is rather unstable, and my objects are also fluid in terms of their different media, agents, visibility, and scale, to name just a few dissimilarities, it is more important to assess these objects and their resistance in their

²⁴ For a helpful overview of the history of the politicization of art, see Will Bradley and Charles Esche's edited volume *Art and Social Change: A Critical Reader* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007) and Gerald Raunig's *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007).

²⁵ For a primer on the concept of cultural resistance, see Stephen Duncombe's edited volume *Cultural Resistance Reader* (London: Verso, 2002). Duncombe's approach, however, is highly idealized.

specific context and use their categorization as cultural resistance as a helpful starting point. The reference to culture points to these objects' general circulation within the realm of popular culture, as well as their subject matters. Resistance here refers to my objects' self-asserted ontological and potential operational status and my own descriptive and analytical designation rather than a link to a political resistance movement. Not all of the objects ally themselves specifically with broader social struggles. Resistance here also does not presume their reception as resistance objects by their spectators, or any efficacy. Although not the main analytical preoccupation of this dissertation, the issue of spectator is acknowledged and will be addressed more intently at different stages, especially in chapter three on hip hop music and in the conclusion.

Viewing them with a casual glance, an initial inspection may not designate my objects – with the exception of the hip hop album *Sonic Jihad* in which confrontation is outspoken and self-declared by the artist – as explicitly oppositional; these objects might have even passed unnoticed as resistance, as cultural resistance often can be maneuvering unobtrusively in liminal spaces. Resistance here might sometimes feel tentative, fragmentary, inchoate or even confined to just a potentiality. And yet, a tangible resistant energy persists in them, emitting a sudden outburst of defiance at one moment and a surge of antagonism at another. Sometimes it is the producers' intent that directly protests against prevailing attitudes, as in the case of *Little Mosque on the Prairie*; sometimes it is their glaring contrast to the formulaic aesthetic of enemy images that distinguishes them as counter-images, as in the case study of the Taliban soldier studio photographs. And it is also in the way a novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, overshoots the canonical themes and expected pathos of 9/11 and attempts to dismantle the certitude of post-9/11 discourse and identities. This study crystallizes these and their other resistance features. It neither idealizes them nor views them with Retort's gloomy prognosis, but evaluates them and inserts more imagination in our conceptualization of what resistance is and *could* be.

While Žižek, Retort and Buck-Morss position and envision resistance firmly within the tradition of the Left, my four objects cannot be so easily compressed into a Left or Right categorization. While *Sonic Jihad* clearly exhibits Leftist revolutionary fervor, the hip hop artist Paris himself, when away from the microphone, does not necessarily march down a narrow revolutionary road. *Little Mosque on the Prairie* seeks more “accurate” representations of Muslims and Islam, an endeavor which cannot be attributed solely to the Left or Right; the politics of the Taliban photographs, as indicated by the photographer who found the images, are

ambivalent at best and opportunistic at worst and, in any case, the images can function as a counter measure against both the spectacle and the evil/extermination discourse. This underscores the fact that resistance projects might share Leftist vocabulary and targets as merely a starting point but never fully align with its values and ambitions, posing the question whether fidelity to the Left is necessary when it comes to envisaging resistance.

With the exception of the Taliban photographs, the objects were produced in the West, and all of them have an Internet presence, suggesting globalized distribution and circulation. This positioning also reveals an unresolved geographical disorientation that characterizes 9/11's cultural legacy. While these four objects circulate widely outside the US and have as their settings locations such as Lahore, the Canadian prairie, and Kandahar, they exhibit a strong counter tug back to the US with their references to and critique of the former Bush administration, post-9/11 America, American identity, and the war on terror. In other words, they cast their gazes toward the US but they are not always US-centered or -based, reasserting their own varied geographical assumptions and local perspectives. This local/transnational and inward/outward bifocal quality is very much in line with many effects of 9/11 – military, political, and cultural – that defy clear geographical delimitation. This is prominently seen, for example, in the extraterritoriality of the Guantánamo Bay detention camp for terrorist suspects and the transnational juridical entanglements of a global war on terror campaign.

Although the objects are dissimilar, they are connected, with one trailing off on one issue and the other extending it. Take the theme of empire as an illustration. Just like *Retort*, both *Sonic Jihad* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* denounce the post-9/11 militarization of neoliberal capitalism, but neither coupled this to the regime of image and the war of appearances. It is the Taliban photographs that deepen this issue, but not as the incriminating visual evidence of imperial violence akin to Abu Ghraib. They show neither acts of atrocity nor torture and will unlikely have the capacity to nudge the public's conscience and force viewers to acknowledge complicity; an admission that Mitchell believes must still occur. But they do, once again thinking along with Mitchell, raise the question of what it means to live with these photographs that depict one of the prime "enemies" of the war on terror and the precarious world and lives they represent.

Little Mosque on the Prairie mounts its resistance through self-representation by showcasing its own versions of modern Muslim men and women, none of which are dangerous or imperiled, respectively. As a matter of fact, most of the Muslim characters in the show have

assimilated quite successfully into their fictional Canadian lives. In contrast to Buck-Morss' call for a critical exchange with Islamism, *Little Mosque* chooses to depoliticize Islam completely and focuses instead on Islam's religious ideals. Rather than bringing into play politicized Islam's oppositional possibilities, the show offers a post-9/11 road map of sorts for Western Muslims to meet the challenges of living in a modern and secular world, which requires certain creative maneuvering to fulfill their religious duties.

While *Taliban* and *Little Mosque on the Prairie* contest dominant representations of the enemy and Muslims, *Sonic Jihad* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* both frustrate the creation of an "us." These two case studies feature figures who hold multiple cultural and national affinities and allegiances, complicating any fixed categorization and absolute demarcation of identities. Addressing the fundamental mechanism of enemification and hostile imagination, these four cases jointly put the process of consolidating "them" and "us" in disarray. As a result, Bush's well-known "us versus them" or "enemy versus friend" divide is impossible to uphold. Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" paradigm, which gained currency and was adopted by some American media outlets after 9/11 as an explanatory framework for the attacks (Abrahamian 531), also becomes problematic in view of these four objects. Huntington's hypothesis, published back in the early 1990s, differentiated a handful of civilizations ("Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic," among others) with stark cultural differences and predicted that the source of international conflicts would no longer be chiefly ideological or economic, but cultural. "The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics ... The most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations from one another," wrote Huntington in an article published in 1993 (22 and 25). My four objects, however, bring to the fore lives and communities – on a micro level at least – more open to dynamic cultural intermixture, a blurring of lines, interdependence, and cooperation rather than demarcation, antagonism, and opposition.

Resisting Collectively

Though heterogeneous and independent on their own, these four objects are mutually reinforcing, converging on the same targets, tactics, and themes at times, and dispersing to confront other issues. They engage with and extend all the debates already articulated by the key authors in the previous sections. On an individual basis, they might serve as "the points, knots, or focuses of resistance," to use Foucault's imagery (96), which are scattered over the field of 9/11

objects. But taken as a collective, they operate quite differently from the established approaches to 9/11 and resistance.

Current conceptualizations, discussions, and practices of resistance – whether resistance refers to traditional street protests, the more playful and carnivalesque interventions of cultural resistance, and aesthetic resistance that specifically instrumentalizes the arts – are frequently affixed to that mammoth target and enemy: the neo-liberal capitalist world order. The resisters include environmentalists, socialists, anarchists, trade unionists, and artists who are pursuing various aims through a multitude of anti-capitalist/anti-imperialist/anti-globalization movements. Popular targets are the most visible symbols of global capital: multinational corporations, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These developments, succinctly surveyed and scrutinized in Louise Amoore’s canonical edited volume *The Global Resistance Reader*, link resistance – in its various expressions from material to aesthetic – to the contestations of the inequalities and exclusions of global finance, the globalization of production and cultural flows (1-6).

While many of the contemporary resistance movements were already active before 9/11, the terrorist attacks in 2001 have offered global protests new impetus with, in the words of Retort, America’s “new round of conquest and colonization.”²⁶ The war on terror at home and its new anti-terrorism measures, most notably the intensification of surveillance mechanisms, racial, ethnic and religious profiling, and summary detentions, have also spawned protests over the curtailment of civil liberties.²⁷ Relatedly, a new front for resistance is also emerging against the exercise of “sovereign power” on the bare lives of terrorist suspects and combatants in places such as Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib and against these detainees’ indefinite detention.²⁸

²⁶ The activities of these global resistance movements and their developments are simply too complex to detail here. It will suffice to list some of the texts covering the aforementioned issues. Books that have taken into consideration post-9/11 politics are *Implicating Empire: Globalization and Resistance in the 21st Century World Order* edited by Stanley Aronowitz and Heather Gautney (New York: Basic Books, 2003); *Transforming Globalization: Challenges and Opportunities in the Post 9/11 Era* edited by Bruce Podobnik and Thomas Reifer (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005); Part III of Francis Robert Shor’s *Dying Empire: U.S. Imperialism and Global Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2010). For a non-traditional account of the global anti-capitalist movements, refer to *We are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism* (New York: Verso, 2003). For discussions linking creativity, culture and political resistance in relation to neoliberal globalization, see the special issue entitled “The Poetics of Resistance” in *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 6.2 (2010).

²⁷ For a study on post-9/11 violence and racial profiling aimed at Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians, see Muneer Ahmad’s “Homeland Insecurities: Racial Violence the Day after September 11,” *Social Text* 20.3 (2002): 101-115.

²⁸ For resistance against sovereign power in the contemporary world, see the introduction “Life, Power, Resistance” in *Sovereign Lives: Power in Global Politics* edited by Jenny Edkins, Veronique Pin-Fat, and Michael J. Shapiro (London: Routledge, 2004).

My four objects, however, while paying attention to these common points of resistance, go beyond them and introduce a drastically different target: the sensible order. Woven into these objects are preoccupations with post-9/11 visibility, audibility, and legibility; in other words, they are also fighting their battle at the sensible level, over perceptible and sensory materials. This theme of the sensible can be seen in broad terms as in a realm of the bodily and what can be perceived by the senses, as opposed to cognition and rationality. More specifically, the sensible concerns what is seen/unseen, audible/inaudible, and how these forms of visibility and audibility relate to and impact the community. These four objects seem to be attentive to the fact that power is never only wielded through empire and discerned through its obvious effects of exploitation and oppression, but it sometimes finds its acme through a governing of perception and visibility, designating, as I will elaborate through Rancière's thoughts, what one can see, hear, and say, and who can be seen, heard, and speak.

Power, against which my objects are struggling, is not necessarily only concentrated in and articulated by the state and its apparatus, but it is more diffused and consensual, operating through creations of meanings, significations and perception. This form of power helps to formulate what and how meanings are made from sensible givens and what would become conceivable and possible. This can be explicitly normalizing, disciplinary or subtly restricting fields of possibilities both in terms of thoughts and physical actions. Like other forms of domination, however, this sensible ordering is never secured and can be exposed of its contingency and interrupted to present other modes of visibility and audibility. Such is the task of my cultural objects which amplify the role sense occupies in the wake of a catastrophe. They are not one-off, collective, and visually dramatic forms of resistance, like street demonstrations, but struggles in a protracted battle in the visual, textual and sonic realms. These four objects, with two of them focusing on audibility and two on visuality, all confront a given perceptual field, a certain common sense that governs relations between meanings and the visible/audible. It is a pre-determined conceptual and representational framework, or what Butler might call "the sphere of appearance" which determines what we can see and know (*Precarious* 146). It is about *conditions* of representation/visibility that regulate who/what can appear and what can be heard, indeed, what is to become "reality." Having the potential to offer alternative sensible and perceptible experiences and different modes of visibility, these objects seek to alter this sphere of appearances by broadening the fields of what can be seen and heard, and what is perceivable and thinkable.

To help me navigate through this sensible order, I turn to Rancière's writings on politics and aesthetics, starting with his notion of the distribution of the sensible; a concept which scrutinizes the partitions and configurations that determine what is visible and audible, and as a result thinkable, within a particular field, be it material or discursive. Rancière provides the theoretical pivot that shifts 9/11 and post-9/11 politics into the realm of the sensible and the perceptible. When speaking of the sensible, Rancière is not referring to disaster-induced forms of visibility and audibility, but rather a more general configuration and distribution of the sensible order as part of the structuration of the community. This is a form of governing that establishes an "aesthetic" division in the sense that the partitioning results in certain bodies becoming visible, while others remain invisible, and certain voices being deemed speech and audible, while others are designated as merely noise and illegitimate. His broader theoretical framework serves as the vital backdrop against which the particulars of the 9/11 sensible can be discerned.

Rancière has not written a great deal on 9/11, publishing only two brief essays: "Prisoners of the Infinite," which is extracted from the longer piece "September 11 and Afterwards: A Rupture in the Symbolic Order?"²⁹ When asked in 2010 whether he was considering writing more on 9/11, perhaps in conjunction with the tenth anniversary of the attacks, his response was simply "no."³⁰ In these two essays Rancière looks at the structuring of the community in relation to the symbolic but he did not expand on how that process of symbolization – the ways of defining the catastrophe through the symbolization of American togetherness, unity and goodness – has a sensible dimension that governs what kinds of bodies can/should be seen and where, and what voices must be heard. This dissertation addresses this gap by theorizing the role of sensible distributions in the wake of 9/11, thus extending Rancière's line of thinking on 9/11 by using his own concepts.

In addition, Rancière's general reorientation of politics towards the sensible – emphasizing the aesthetic dimension of politics and being alert to the perceptual coordinates and forms of visibility and audibility that are operating in politics – fosters a closer intermingling between politics and art, which consequently advances different impetus, method, and impediment for artistic interventions. As I will detail in the next chapter, his own signature

²⁹ 9/11 did also receive some attention in Rancière's *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*; see the chapter "The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics," in particular page 114. "September 11 and Afterwards: A Rupture in the Symbolic Order?" appeared in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, pages 97-104. Henceforth, the titles of these books will be abbreviated as *AD* and *DS* in the references. For the complete list of abbreviations, see Appendix I on page 178.

³⁰ I posed this question to him during his guest lecture at the University of Amsterdam on September 22, 2010.

conceptualization of aesthetic dissensus overturns Retort's adjudication over the art world's current impotence and corroborates Buck-Morss' mindful optimism of art's relevance.

Advancing 9/11 Studies

As the previous sections attest, this dissertation intersects and enlarges some of the key discussions of both 9/11 and cultural resistance. Much thought is also devoted to Rancière's theories and their intertwinements with both 9/11 and artistic resistance. The aims and contributions of the study can be summarized thus: first, in terms of 9/11 studies, to move beyond themes of trauma, commemoration, and patriotism and focus on cultural objects that express oppositionality. Not only that but also to modify the existing conceptualization of post-9/11 politics with a heavier accent on the sensible. This has the consequence of engendering my second contribution, which is to extend resistance studies by shifting the target of resistance from empire and neoliberal capitalism to this different realm of the sensible. Third, in terms of Rancière scholarship, to appropriate his general framework on the sensible and displace it to 9/11, to build on his own limited writings on 9/11, and lastly, via his idea of dissensus, to analyze artistic interventions more critically.

Finally, mimicking my four resistant cultural objects, the dissertation mounts its own oppositional project by inserting this group of previously under-studied cultural materials, thus enlarging and reconfiguring the 9/11 collection of cultural objects under exploration. If 9/11 readers and special issues of academic journals are anything to go by, a cluster of 9/11 objects is currently enjoying canonical status, both in terms of general popularity and academic interests.³¹ While two of my chosen objects have received some popular acclaim – *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, already a *New York Times* bestseller, has been adapted into a major Hollywood movie, starring Kate Hudson and released in 2013, and *Little Mosque on the Prairie* has also

³¹ In the field of 9/11 literature, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* remains the indisputable darling of academia. Other novels in the canon include Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, John Updike's *Terrorist*, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Deborah Eisenberg's *Twilight of the Superheroes*. Even ten years after the attacks, the special anniversary issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* entitled "Fiction after 9/11" devotes several articles to Foer's and DeLillo's novels. For 9/11 hip hop music, some of the often-cited songs are: "Bin Laden" by Immortal Technique, featuring Mos Def, Jadakiss and Eminem; "Why" by Jadakiss; "Raise Up (USA Flag Remix)" by Petey Pablo; and "Welcome to New York City" by Cam'ron with Jay-Z and Juelz Santana. For television, while many American television series, police dramas in particular, offer stand-alone episodes on 9/11, the best-known shows that persistently engage with 9/11 or related themes are: *Rescue Me*, a dramedy on the FX Network and *Homeland* on the cable channel Showtime. In the situation comedy genre, *South Park* has featured a few episodes with references to 9/11 and bin Laden. In terms of a canon for 9/11 and 9/11-related photographic images, Richard Drew's photograph of a man falling from the burning Twin Towers, no doubt, is the most iconic. The photographs from Abu Ghraib have definitely received significant academic scrutiny, as Mitchell's writings already testify.

attracted media coverage, but mostly in Canada – none of them have received extensive, much less exhaustive, academic consideration. Their scholastic low visibility might be seen as an illustration of an academic trend that converges on certain objects but excludes others from the field of 9/11 studies. This project is an attempt to reconfigure that partition. It heightens these objects' visibility and draws out their significance and contributions to 9/11 and cultural resistance, but does not solicit their canonical status. To do so would reinforce the power of canonization that polices inclusions and exclusions. Instead, this study recognizes these four cases in the hope of animating the collective creativity on how we can continue to explore 9/11 anew, even with a chasm of more than ten years.

Chapter Overview

Chapter one establishes the theoretical foundation of the dissertation by considering Rancière's works on the relationship between politics and aesthetics, beginning with his discussion on the political community and ending with his conceptualization of aesthetic dissensus. In order to avoid the danger of reductionism, Rancière's thoughts are surveyed in great detail because his important concepts, such as dissensus, are often embedded in a long line of argument and should not be merely extracted without specifying their original context. Rancière's realm of the sensible and the perceptible is also connected to the specific events of 9/11 and elaborated from a different angle through Butler's term "sphere of appearance." The chapter concludes by clarifying Rancière's influence on the dissertation, marking both its impact and limits.

Chapters two and three identify the key sites of post-9/11 resistance by exploring disruptions relating to national identity, patriotism, and the war on terror. Both chapters also orient post-9/11 politics toward the aesthetic by considering the issue of audibility, or what can be heard. In chapter two, I examine how Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* challenges the divide of "us versus them," the dominant refrain of the post-9/11 era, by focusing on the figure of the foreigner and its precarious position in America following 9/11. Highlighting issues of national identity, cultural affiliations, and enemification, Hamid's novel features a transplanted and excluded Pakistani protagonist, Changez, whose alternative encounter with the terrorist attacks denies the naturalization and normalization of patriotism and mourning. In the post-9/11 moment, when the enemy and the terrorist are often envisaged as absolutely external and other, Changez is an ambivalent character who is more American than Americans themselves but also a possible enemy of the state. This and other identity disorientations, as a

result of the catastrophe, generate spaces for resistance against prevalent post-9/11 identity categorizations, spatial demarcations, narrative constraints, and a dominant and conventional memory of the disaster. The novel also provides a pathway into the post-catastrophe sensible order that privileges certain victimized or heroic bodies and their narratives. Utilizing the unconventional form of a dramatic monologue for his novel, Hamid highlights the struggle over audibility and inaudibility by allowing Changez to be the sole speaker of the novel, while relegating another character to inaudibility. Thinking along with Rancière, I emphasize this aesthetic of the political; an approach that sees politics as a conflict centering upon the perceptible or sensible.

Building on this, chapter three continues to explore the aesthetic borders that delimit the sphere of appearance by considering the post-9/11 hip hop album *Sonic Jihad* by the American political rapper Paris. Transitioning from the voice and audibility of a character in a novel, this case study considers the literal and ferocious voice of resistance through Paris's sonic attack against Bush's war on terror, and 9/11's military and cultural legacies. Themes from the previous chapter such as national identity, cultural affiliations, and enemification are expanded through an African-American artist who contrasts his national identity with other forms of subjectivity and identification, demonstrating an internal alterity that hampers any facile attempts to distinguish between post-9/11 friends and foes, citizens and aliens, the included and the excluded, terrorists and patriots. Unlike Changez who is more American than Americans themselves, Paris is an American who refuses to be an American and aligns symbolically, instead, with the terrorists. Dissociating himself from the post-9/11 patriotic fervor, Paris restages Bush's war on terror and nationhood and offers an alternative sonic experience of America through the history of black oppression and through his own global and diasporic affinities. Paris's highly politicized music also points to that troubled interface between politics and aesthetics which lies at the heart of artistic interventions. I offer Rancière's thoughts on aesthetic dissensus, efficacy and intellectual equality as a way to reflect on Paris's politics and its blind spots.

Moving beyond the realm of audibility, chapters four and five address the issue of visibility by investigating the multiple catastrophe-induced ways of seeing. To do so, these two chapters concentrate on two iconic and controversial figures in the war on terror: Muslims and Taliban soldiers. The previous questions concerning oppositional identity, both national and cultural, are now complicated with the added dimension of Islam. The object of inquiry in chapter four is the Canadian situation comedy *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, a series that

showcases the everyday, mundane experiences of a Muslim community by translating those experiences into the beloved and easily recognizable television format. This premise offers resistant possibilities as the show contests hitherto hostile terrorism-related televisual representations and inserts a more banal mode of seeing Muslims and Islam. I situate Muslim figures within a wider Rancièrian regime of visibility and detail a new visibility and visuality anchored in what I will call “oppositional banality.” I also question later in the chapter, however, whether this oppositional process of visual normalization also enfolds Muslim identities and Islam too conveniently and uncritically within the bounds of national loyalty.

Disrupting the post-9/11 visual realm by inserting alternative ways of seeing is also central in the final case study which reflects on counter visualizations of the enemy in the war on terror: the Taliban. Chapter five investigates a collection of studio photographs of Taliban followers taken in 2001 by Afghan photographers in studios in Kandahar. Representing the faces of the enemy, these snapshots and portraits are produced away from the battle scene but it is very much against a broader context of war that they circulate and gain their oppositional significance, as they challenge mainstream media visualizations of the Taliban as the terrorist-enemy. Besides troubling the Taliban’s expected militant identity and masculinity, these images also problematize the post-9/11 “us versus them” divide by inviting a more compassionate, and thus countering, form of viewing that no longer sees them as the enemy. This sympathetic visuality, however, is also scrutinized by returning to Rancièr’s notion of aesthetic dissensus, for the final time, in order to assess how a dissensual way of viewing the Taliban may countervail the controlling of the perceptible and the sensible.

In the conclusion, I cast a final glance on all four case studies, pinpointing their moments of convergence and divergence, as well as my main arguments. These concluding pages also enlarge the scope of this dissertation by entering into the broader discussion on the role of the spectator in artistic manifestations of resistance. This invites a brief consideration of Rancièr’s notion of the “emancipated” spectator and my own critical assessment of his thoughts.