

## CHAPTER ONE

### Theorizing 9/11, the Sensible, and Resistance

*Sensible Interventions* establishes a nexus between 9/11, cultural resistance, and the sensible; three elements that are each a complex matter on their own. All carry with them to this juncture their particular politics, histories, and academic mediations that configure their interconnections in intricate ways. The relations between 9/11, culture, and resistance have been broadly sketched in the introduction: the ontology of terrorism that terrifies and haunts a social body, the (televised) spectacularity of the catastrophe itself, the spectacularization of wars, and the process of enemification that ignites a hostile imagination. All these components generate cultural effects that turn the domain of culture into the receptacle of 9/11's major repercussions, acting as the site where meanings, affects, representations, and memories are engendered, propagated and, as I argue in the dissertation, resisted. But how are the sensible and the perceptible embroiled in these discussions?

Catastrophes and terrorism are, after all, on a very basic level, phenomena that fully captivate all sensory faculties. Not only did the toppling of the twin towers provide staggering images that transfixed visuality, but the scene also afflicted audibility (thundering noises of approaching jetliners, deafening sounds of explosion, fire truck sirens); tactility (shards of glass that pierce victims' skin); smell and taste (ash and dust clouds that choke nostrils and throats). Indeed, most people experienced 9/11 only through television, but the hyper-abundance of imagery – both televisual and printed, plus survivor narratives – has provided the imagination with enough details and stimulants for sensing the disaster vicariously. Amid this immersive and demanding sensate encounter, visuality undisputedly dominates with the attacks themselves, and is then perpetuated in a second act with the two wars that boast “shock and awe” as a strategy and hallmark. Away from the battleground, the war on terror, too, calls on all to become vigilant citizens who must quicken all their sensory faculties, and in particular a “watchful visuality,” in order to spot, sense, feel, and even anticipate suspicious circumstances and behaviors and report them.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, this tripartite catastrophe-terrorism-war conjunction insists upon a closer

---

<sup>32</sup> For valuable insights on the “vigilant” or “watchful visuality” of the war on terror, see Louise Amoore's “Vigilant Visualities: The Watchful Politics of the War on Terror,” *Security Dialogue* 38.2 (2007): 215- 232. For a more extensive discussion on the politics of catastrophe and sensing the unexpected, see Claudia Aradau and Rens van Munster's *Politics of Catastrophe: Genealogies of the Unknown* (London: Routledge, 2011), especially chapter six “Aesthetics of Catastrophe.”

investigation into the sensible and the ways in which the myriad of sensorial dimensions of 9/11 has pullulated in an afterlife through cultural responses and artistic interventions.

This chapter begins by introducing Rancière's works on the sensible to provide a broad framework through which the events of 9/11 can be elucidated and rearticulated. Rancière's own piece on 9/11 and the symbolic serves as the starting point, but this realm of the sensible and the perceptible is then further elaborated from a different prism, through Butler's analysis of the post-9/11 "sphere of appearance." Without forgetting the issue of resistance, the question of artistic intervention is reinserted into the debate mid-chapter by asking how can the sensible be resisted. This necessitates a brief return to Rancière and an investigation into his concept of dissensus as a possible act of resistance. I end the chapter by marking the limits of Rancière's works on the dissertation, chiefly at the level of methodology, and by expounding on my own analytical comprehensiveness to contextualize my objects' specific medium, modes of resistance, and significance against the history of opposition in their own field.

### **Rancière and the Sensible**

Although Rancière's works have covered many fields and yielded a number of key thoughts, the singular idea of the distribution of the sensible (*le partage du sensible*) has become his best-known concept and one with which the writer is most identified. It forms the central thread that has travelled through most of his books, appearing in his earlier ones such as *On the Shores of Politics* (1995) and *Dis-agreement* (1999), and later in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (2004), and more recently in works such as *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (2009), *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009) and *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010).<sup>33</sup> Spanning these years and books, this concept has progressed as Rancière himself ventures through the domains of history, philosophy, politics, aesthetics, and cinema. For this preliminary segment, my explorations of this concept are taken from his earlier works, *Dis-agreement*, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, and "Ten Theses on Politics" (which has been reprinted in *Dissensus*), in which he offers more extensive discussions and distinct definitions of the concept. The aim is to provide an outline of this idea, its relationship to traditional conceptualizations of politics and Rancière's own unique notion of politics through aesthetics. Later in this chapter and

---

<sup>33</sup> Henceforth the titles of these books will be abbreviated in references as follows: *On the Shores of Politics*, *OSP*; *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, *D*; *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, *TPA*; *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, *AD*; *The Emancipated Spectator*, *TES*; *Dissensus*, *DS*. For the complete list of abbreviations, please consult Appendix I on page 178.

as the dissertation progresses, my analysis will begin to engage with the concept specifically through issues of audio and (tele)visual representations, thus giving more prominence to aesthetic concerns. As a result, I will concentrate more on his books *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, *The Emancipated Spectator*, and *Dissensus*.

In “Ten Theses on Politics,” the concept of the distribution of the sensible appears in the context of a political community and how it organizes modes of human being-together or being-apart. Rancière, as well as many other commentators, have all pointed to the fact that the French word *partage* means both that which separates and excludes, as well as that which allows participation (*DS* 36), suggesting both exclusion and inclusion.<sup>34</sup> The sensible, as I have briefly described in the dissertation’s introduction, indicates what can be apprehended by the senses (*TPA* 85). The distribution of the sensible points to a structuration of the community that partitions places and ways of participation in a given community. It concerns how the division of the community operates as it fractures into various groups, social positions and functions; a division or organization which simultaneously reveals exclusions and inclusions, and therefore, a division between who might be visible and invisible, whose voices might be audible and inaudible, and what statements are sayable or unsayable in this common world. To put it more directly, the distribution of the sensible might be seen as a distribution of bodies, voices, and roles in a given field and a determination of those bodies’ capacities (Tanke 2). What is significant to know is whether such a governing is based on equality or inequality. Rancière has detailed two opposing forms of this distribution: the police order and politics, the former being based on inequality and the latter on equality (*D* 28-42).

The police mode of governance is neither repression nor control over the population but the enforcement of that exact partitioning of the sensible. The concept is not to be equated with “state apparatus,” which Rancière claims is linked with a presumed opposition between state and society, with the state seen as machine-like and repressive (*D* 29). For Todd May, the historical reference point for Rancière’s police order/regime might be Foucault’s idea of governmentality, which encompasses practices concerned with the health, safety, welfare, and productivity of a given population (*Political Thought* 41 and “Ethics” 23). The police mode of distribution, within Rancière’s model, assigns bodies to their places and specifies their roles according to their presumed capacities and aptitudes. “The principle of this kind of being-together is simple,”

---

<sup>34</sup> For a lengthier discussion on the two meanings of the French word *le partage*, see page 2 of Joseph J. Tanke’s *Jacques Rancière: An Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2011).

writes Rancière in *Dis-agreement*, “it gives to each the part that is his due according to the evidence of what he is. Ways of being, ways of doing, and ways of saying – or not saying – precisely reflect each person’s due” (27). What this mirrors is Plato’s logic of the proper, “a logic that requires everyone to be in their proper place, partaking their proper affairs,” says Rancière in an interview (Panagia 115). In that sense, the police distribution is not a repressive force per se, but a totalizing account of the population. The policing occurs on two levels: the constraining and governing of the sensate life of an individual and the overall sensible fabric/order of the community.

This allocation concurrently signals a form of exclusion in that, while it defines one’s capacity and one’s place and share in the community, it also limits one’s possibility to stray beyond the given apportionment and conquer different tasks, spaces, and times that are not assigned in the first place. It is a distribution/inclusion that actually signals a simultaneous exclusion. This distribution stipulates a hierarchy of places and functions. As the police distribution of the sensible allocates the various parts of the community, determining who has a share where and who does not, it already delimits in advance the sphere of political appearances and participation, revealing the aesthetic nature of politics that Rancière stresses.

In contrast to the police, Rancière introduces the term politics to specify activities that are antagonistic to policing and can interrupt this police distribution of the sensible. In the political community, such activities reconfigure what is given in the sensible with the appearance of Rancière’s famous “the part of those who have no part,” or those who have no part in the community’s configuration. As a result of their appearance, the police order is modified. Rancière argues: “Political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise” (*D* 30).

What political activities manifest is a different logic; a logic of equality that undermines the harmonious police distribution, under which there exists a perfect count and an alignment of bodies. As Rancière stresses in thesis seven of “Ten Theses on Politics,” under the police regime’s perfect fit of functions, places and ways of beings, “there is no place for any void” (*DS* 36). Politics, however, disturbs this with the polemical emergence of the part of those who have no part, which introduces a sense of impropriety and re-counting as opposed to proper distribution and counting. With their destabilizing presence, two possibilities arise: first, their appearance is a display of the logic of equality, for they enact the equality of any speaking being

with every other speaking being; second, if everyone is equal, then forms of exclusion are not natural but purely contingent (*D* 30). The appearance of the non-part thus contests the contingency of those police partitions that determine one's belonging, capacity and roles in society. As a result, the perceptual coordinates of the community are also modified.

Even with this preliminary sketch of Rancière's foundational thoughts on the political community, it can be surmised that he focuses intently on the aesthetic dimension of the political experience. This description of aesthetics in Rancière's system of thought needs to be understood in two ways: first, he uses the term narrowly, referring to the aesthetic regime of art, which is a specific system for defining and considering art (*AD* 27-44). I will detail this later in this chapter and in chapter five. For the second application, which is also more general, aesthetic is conceptualized along the word's own Greek origin *aistheta*, or perceptible things. As he elaborates in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, this aesthetics can be seen as "the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience" (13 and 82).

This second approach to aesthetics via the perceptible reflects Rancière's overall idea of politics envisioned through the distribution of the sensible. What this means is that political life – rather than its traditional and expected manifestations such as parliamentary debates, presidential campaigns, and elections, examples that most people would immediately conjure up when speaking of politics – has more to do, for Rancière at least, with a configuration of the perceptible or sensible: it has to do with what can be seen or heard, with what it is *possible* to see and hear, and with whose voices count (Robson 82 and 88). Rancière is fond of using the phrase "aesthetic of the political" because he views politics as primarily a battle about perceptible and sensible material (Guénoun and Kavanagh 11). Politics – whether referring to the aforementioned expressions of conventional political life, or as in the specific term politics which Rancière has introduced in *Dis-agreement* as an opposing force to the police order – can be seen to circle precisely around "what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time," according to Rancière (*TPA* 13).

Rancière's insights in *Dis-agreement* emerged from his intellectual engagements with classical texts from Plato, Aristotle and others. "The part of those who have no part" (*la part des sans-part*) is derived from Aristotle's description of the Athenian *demos* as that category which

“had no part in anything.” As Tanke has also pointed out, the codified hierarchy of Plato’s *Republic* serves as the prototypical distribution of the sensible (Tanke 43 and 48). Rancière’s analysis in *Dis-agreement*, of course, did mention more recent history such as the French workers’ movement and the thoughts of Joseph Jacotot in the early 1800s.<sup>35</sup> In the ancient Greek context, however, what was at stake was the issue of political participation; who is ruling and who is being ruled, who is qualified to take part in the city’s affairs and according to what qualification: virtue for the *aristoi*, wealth for the *oligoi*, and freedom (exactly their absence of qualification) for the *demos* (D 6). These issues of participation, qualification and equality will take on drastic reconfiguration in a different political and emotional landscape, as I will now relate them to the events of 9/11, which have their own specific historical context and complexity.

### **9/11 and the Sensible**

In most of Rancière’s writings, several elements of this sensible order are underlined again and again: visibility/invisibility, audibility/inaudibility, the reconfigurations of spaces and of time. It is these four components that this study also addresses when speaking of the interactions between 9/11 and the sensible. Against this backdrop, how does one begin to conceptualize 9/11 politics through the framing of the sensory world itself?

When writing on 9/11, Rancière focuses on the symbolic order and points to the rise of ethics that has created a particular form of consensus, which is not about an agreement between different parties in view of national interests, but a concordance “between the political constitution of the community and the physical and moral constitution of a population” (DS 100). As discussed earlier, Rancière’s depiction of the police structuration of the community is also affected by consensus, in which there exists an agreement between (presumed) bodily capabilities, occupations, places, and visibilities in the public sphere. In the 9/11 context, he claims there exists a consensus between America’s moral principle (the symbolic) and its concrete mode of being (the real). Therefore, the answer to the question Rancière poses in his essay’s title “September 11 and Afterwards: A Rupture in the Symbolic Order?” would be a resounding “no.” As he stresses: “... no rupture occurred; there was no revelation of a gap between the real of American life and the symbolic of the American people” (DS 99). This

---

<sup>35</sup> Jacotot was the subject of Rancière’s book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, which I will discuss in chapter three in relation to the hip hop artist Paris.

ethical turn has overtaken both politics and law, underscoring the fact that, as Rancière suggests, “more than just a juridico-political community, the United States is an ethical community united by common religious and moral values” (*DS* 100). Certain aspects of the country’s post-9/11 military retaliatory operations can also be seen in this ascendancy of ethics over the politics proper and the rule of law, not only in the initial name “Infinite Justice” given to those operations and in Bush’s refrain of America’s Good against al-Qaeda’s Evil, which I detailed earlier, but also in the juridical limbo of war prisoners and their “indefinite” detention.

What Rancière did not expand on, and what I argue, is that this symbolic capture of 9/11, this ability to register the attacks through the symbolization of American togetherness, is solidified through a distribution of the sensible that structures the field of visibility and audibility with the appearance of certain bodies and rhetoric, while excluding others. Rancière’s emphasis on visibility and audibility has to do with the general and material appearance of bodies and the emergence of speech acts in public life, but what I focus on in the post-9/11 context, are mediated forms of visibility and audibility: what bodies may/may not appear on television, on magazine/newspaper covers, and in photographs; what sounds and noises may/may not be heard on radio and in music albums. With Rancière’s sensible in mind, I will pursue the following questions briefly here and in the coming chapters: what were the primary sensorial coordinates through which one could engage with this catastrophe? How did time and space configure one’s place in America? In other words, what activities and what spaces (where those activities were carried out) created a sense of post-catastrophe collective belonging, participation, and a sense of one’s place in the community? Moreover, what kinds of bodies became visible? What forms of speech could be heard? If post-9/11 politics has more to do with perceptible/sensible materials, and indeed as a battle over those materials, then the questions are not just what was seen and heard, but also what was *possible* to be seen and heard?

What helped set the perceptual/visibility/audibility boundaries are acts of mourning, remembrance, and patriotism as befitting of American togetherness and that “United We Stand” resolve. The following description in the national daily *USA Today*, penned by staff writer Rick Hampson, highlights how that tripartite grid of mourning, remembrance and patriotism inspires, invites and defines collective civic belonging and post-disaster participation:

In the hours that followed [the attacks], the nation exhausted its symbolic vocabulary of grief and remembrance. People lowered flags, sang God Bless America, planted trees, rang bells, read names, lit candles, gave blood, banged

drums, played bagpipes, released balloons, recited poems, fired salutes, held flowers, and flashed headlights. *And they came together to do it.* (qtd. in Nussbaum 7, italics mine)

Visual images and narratives of these public expressions of mourning, memorializing, and national unity were what dominated nightly television news, newspapers, and magazines in the immediate moments after 9/11, and even ten years later in commemorative issues of popular magazines.<sup>36</sup> Perceptual and visual boundaries are also discernable in the 101 9/11-related covers of American magazines, compiled by the American Society of Magazine Editors to mark the 10-year anniversary of the attacks. The titles included in this survey are: *People*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *US News*, *The New Yorker*, *Sports Illustrated* and more, dating between 2001 to 2011. These are national magazines that are stocked in just about every grocery store, gas station, bookstore, and library in America. If these magazine covers can be joined and seen as a pervasive visual landscape of what people *can* see in their everyday activities of buying groceries, getting gasoline, and ambling in a bookstore/library, then it is instructive to observe what figures have dominated these covers: Bush, bin Laden, and the former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who served as the mayor at the time of the catastrophe. Equally prominent are heroic figures of firefighters (most often photographed in their bulky and hefty uniform) and victims' families. The American flag is ubiquitous, serving as the centerpiece, the backdrop, and the prop in the photographs; it sometimes provides the hues – red, white and blue – to color and decorate the pages. Even when the covers consist of a drawing rather than a photographic image, the themes of mourning and patriotism are still palpable.<sup>37</sup>

It was the terrorist body, the mourning/suffering body, and the patriotic body that appeared and *could* appear; it was the sounds and personal stories of grief, national unity, hope, pride, and American values, both in formal speeches from national leaders and informal utterances from the men on the street, that were heard and *could* be heard. Bin Laden's body could appear, though not as a legitimate and accepted member of this community but as the threat and the target for extermination. It was primarily this grid of mourning, remembrance, and patriotism that temporarily defined in the immediate aftermath of the attacks the various boundaries of the perceptible and the thinkable, plus ways of participation, belonging and acceptance. So much so that some Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians, fearful of backlash, had to

---

<sup>36</sup> See for example the 10-year anniversary commemorative magazine *Remembering 9/11: A Tribute to Heroes*, published by *USA Today*.

<sup>37</sup> To view these magazine covers, visit <http://www.magazine.org/asme/covers.aspx>, accessed July 20, 2012.

inflate their patriotic fervor by donning red-white-and-blue turbans and headscarves. This was no longer just an assimilative tactic for minorities but an act of survival.<sup>38</sup> Mourning, remembrance and patriotism became the dominant ways of sensing and making sense of 9/11; they were the markers that determined visibility and audibility.

This production of the given sensory realm can also be related to the concept of framing. I turn to Butler's writings again to underscore the specificities of the 9/11 context. In discussing post-9/11 politics and the public sphere, Butler, in *Precarious Life*, identifies the emergence of a "frame" for the understanding of violence – terrorist violence on September 11, 2001 and US military violence thereafter – which delimits what is perceivable. Butler writes in *Precarious Life*:

... a frame for understanding violence emerges in tandem with the experience, and that the frame works both to preclude certain kinds of questions, certain kinds of historical inquiries, and to function as a moral justification for retaliation. It seems crucial to attend to this frame, since it decides, in a forceful way, *what we can hear*, whether a view will be taken as explanation or as exoneration [for the attacks] ... (4-5, italics in the original)

This frame is operative on several levels: one, visually as it relates to media representations; two, rhetorically on the usage of controversial terms such as terrorists and acts of terror; and three, narratively on how one begins to tell the story of 9/11 (4-5). Such a frame no doubt establishes interlocking perceptible boundaries, governing what bodies might appear in view via the media outlets, as in visibility for 9/11 victims and "evil" perpetrators, and invisibility for victims of US violence, as discussed earlier in my introduction. The frame also stipulates which speakers, statements, questions, and analyses are precluded by way of stigmatization and labeling (anti-American or terrorist-sympathizing), and thus rendering certain criticisms unsayable. As a result, dissent is quelled. As Butler stresses: "The public sphere is constituted in part by what cannot be said and what cannot be shown. The limits of the sayable, the limits of what can appear, circumscribe the domain in which political speech operates and certain kinds of subjects appear as viable actors" (xvii).

---

<sup>38</sup> For a focused discussion on how South Asians took pains to express their American allegiance after 9/11 and other related issues, see chapter four "The Turban is Not a Hat" in Jasbir K. Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

This framing, when seen in narrative terms, also determines when the telling and explanations of the attacks might begin and by whom: with a first-person narrative point of view and starting on September 11, 2001 would solidify US as a victim of violence that came “out of the blue” and initiate a line of reasoning grounded in revenge and retaliation. In other words, where the story begins already determines the protagonists, villains, victims, plots, and climax of the story. Overall, this frame, operating at multiple levels, can condition what presents itself to perception and knowledge, thus configuring the post-9/11 public sphere of what can be seen, heard, discussed, debated and understood.

Rancière and Butler, no doubt, have very different starting points: Rancière is concerned with the police distribution of the sensible that delimits an individual’s sensate life – functions, places, ways of being – and how that distribution reveals who can have a share or not (visually and audibly, for example) in the sensible fabric of the community. Butler, on the other hand, is alert to what she sees as the post-9/11 rise of anti-intellectualism, acts and tactics of censorship, and forms of media representations that frame the public sphere and how they relate to the precarity of others. Both, nevertheless, seem to arrive at a similar juncture: the policing and controlling of a field of appearance, whether that field is a material domain (a public sphere with political actors) and/or a symbolic/discursive space (images, ideas, statements, narratives), can lead to the foreclosing of certain lines of inquiry and the constraining of forms of relations between subjects or between objects. Butler, once again, argues:

One way a hegemonic understanding of politics is achieved is through circumscribing what will and will not be admissible as part of the public sphere itself ... To produce what will constitute the public sphere, however, it is necessary to control the way in which people see, how they hear, what they see. The constraints are not only on content ... but on what ‘can’ be heard, read, seen, felt, and known. The public sphere is constituted in part by what can appear, and the regulation of the sphere of appearance is one way to establish what will count as reality, and what will not. (xx)

This governing of Butler’s sphere of appearance and Rancière’s police order, however, is never secure and can be challenged. For Butler, in the context of post-9/11 American military campaigns and the erasure from public view of their victims, the inclusion of the previously unseen has wider implications. The framing of what will or will not appear in public life, as well as specific dominant media representations of one’s enemies, dictate one’s responses, affect, and

responsibility towards these faces and the faceless. As she urges: “Certain faces must be admitted into public view, must be seen and heard for some keener sense of the value of life, all life, to take hold” (xviii).<sup>39</sup>

For Rancière, the police order has more to do with partition, circumscription, and delimitation; these are challenges that would require forms of disruption of the distribution of the sensible and a reconstitution of the sensible world. As discussed earlier, Rancière’s concept of politics takes on this exact interventionist role. In the political community, the appearance of Rancière’s famous “the part of those who have no part” can reconfigure what is given in the sensible with their polemical verification of equality through the assertion of a yet-to-exist right. This disruptive process, what Rancière has called dissensus, does not bring about a government or institutional change, neither does it guarantee an elimination of the inequalities in the police order but it alters sensorial coordinates, and thus the aesthetic division of the community (*TPA 3* and *DS 2*). If the order of the police regime is fueled by the logic of the proper that partitions different domains with corresponding activities and capacities, determines visibility and speech, and ultimately binds bodies to their places, then dissensus is propelled by a logic of equality that exposes the contingency of all these distributions.

The aesthetic dimension, once again, lies at the heart of the political experience, and also in acts of defiance, dissent, and interventions, now envisioned as a reframing of perceptual spaces and the disruption of belonging. In Rancière’s earlier works on politics, this aesthetics of politics already begins to narrow the relationship between politics and art. These two fields, often envisioned by others as separate domains, continue to be entwined in Rancière’s later books. Their relationship is then explored by reversing the previous question of “how is the political aesthetic?” to ask “how is aesthetics political?”. This returns us to that knot between politics and art: can the arts only be instrumentalized for politics, accompanying other traditional acts of political struggles, or can it claim some political power of its own? In view of Rancière’s thoughts, a related question is also whether art itself can intervene and perform dissensus, and how.

---

<sup>39</sup> Butler’s thoughts on framing and grievability will return again in my last chapter when I consider a collection of photographs depicting Taliban soldiers.

## Rancière's Artistic Interventions

For Rancière, art's political capacity is not gained by being an instrument of politics, with art expressing messages that denounce the state of the world (*AD* 23). Art, however, is political because its practices and forms of visibility can intervene in the distribution of the sensible; its political potential lies in its ability to suspend the normal and daily coordinates of sensory experiences (*AD* 25). To see how Rancière reaches this conclusion, one has to take a quick detour to consider his analysis on the evolution, or more forcefully, the revolution of art's specificity.

According to him, what is considered art has more to do with a specific regime of identification, or a particular way in which art is recognized as art. What is highlighted here is a specific relationship between artistic practices, forms of visibility, and modes of intelligibility that jointly allow one to designate an object as art or not, as opposed to any intrinsic features that designate an object as an artwork (*AD* 28). Rancière has specified three regimes that designate how art operates and functions within the community or how it relates to other practices; in other words, where and how art is distributed within the larger partition of the sensible of the community. These three regimes, the ethical, the representative, and the aesthetic, mostly define three functions for art and its relation to other activities, and do not refer to three historical ages (Dasgupta, "Art" 73), although the "aesthetic revolution" that changed the identity of art can be dated to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Tanke 73). It is in the third regime that art gains a new potential to enact dissensus.

In the ethical regime, works of art are judged in terms of their intrinsic truth and their ethical effects and impact on individuals and the community. Under such a distribution, works of art do not enjoy any autonomy. In the representative regime, art follows the logic of mimesis and is concerned with imitation. Works of art are subjected to a hierarchy of genres and are assessed on qualities such as skill. A concordance must be achieved between subject matter and representation, in that certain subjects must be represented in specific ways (*DS* 15 and *AD* 28-29). If Plato's *Republic* can serve as a reference for the ethical regime, then the second regime reflects the framework of art in Aristotle's *Poetics* (Rockhill and Watts 9).

In the third regime, art breaks with the normativity and hierarchical relations of the other regimes, rejecting ethical immediacy and representational mediation. Art comes to be identified by its singularity and is associated with a specific sensorium, one that is foreign to the ordinary forms of sensory experience (*DS* 15-18). "Foreign" is in the sense that it deviates from quotidian

and functional sensory encounters. Art is art in this regime not because it has met the criteria for technical perfection (as in the representative regime), but because it is linked to a specific form of sensory apprehension; a “free appearance” that reflects a certain indifference and a lack of concern for purpose and its fulfillment. Such an artwork “does nothing, wants nothing and offers no model for imitation,” says Rancière. It does not play a role in religious or civic rituals, neither does it boast higher aims for the moral improvement or mobilization of the individual or the community (*TES* 69). As Rancière explains:

It stands thus in a twofold contrast to its representative status: it is not an appearance drawn from a reality that would serve as its model. Nor is it an active form imposed on passive matter. As a sensory form, it is heterogeneous to the ordinary forms of sensory experience that these dualities inform. It is given in a specific experience, which suspends the ordinary connections not only between appearance and reality, but also between form and matter, activity and passivity, understanding and sensibility. (*AD* 29-30)

Confronted with this “free appearance,” a term borrowed from Schiller, the spectator finds him/herself in a state of “free play,” says Rancière. This “free play” is not the ludic and the humorous, but runs along the Kantian analysis of aesthetic experience in which “free play and free appearance suspend the power of form over matter, of intelligence over sensibility,” according to Rancière (*AD* 27-31). It has to do with a “free play” of the faculties: intellectual and sensible. No longer does the hierarchy of the active intelligence over the passive sensibility apply.<sup>40</sup> What art possesses in the third regime is a kind of freedom from intentionality, functionality, instrumentalization, and the strict matching of content and form, which are the coordinates that establish daily sensory experiences.

When works, however, are thus severed from these previous constraints, they also lose their previous distribution in the sensible. What belongs to art and what belongs to everyday life begin to blur. “Any profane object could get into the realm of artistic experience. Correspondingly, any artistic production could become part of the framing of a new collective life,” explains Rancière (“FPA” 21). A curious paradox emerges. While art now has its own specificity, its own separate sphere of experience or free appearance, it also does not have a

---

<sup>40</sup> For the sake of brevity, I have summarized Rancière’s explanation of “free appearance” and “free play.” For his full discussion, which incorporates ideas from Schiller and Kant, see *AD* 27-32; *TES* 64-69; *DS* 115-119 and 176. The standard reference Rancière uses to describe this free play of the spectator and free appearance is Schiller’s own scenario involving the statue *Juno Ludovisi*.

specific place in society as before. It faces a tension between being art and fusing with other forms of life's activities, or as Rancière claims, "art is art insofar as it is also non-art, or is something other than art" (*AD* 36). Steven Corcoran has described this paradoxical logic as: "*A* always consists in blurring the boundaries between *A* and *non-A*" (*DS* 3, italics in original). Interestingly enough, it is exactly these two possibilities that become, according to Rancière, the two politics of aesthetics: first, art safeguards its autonomy and refuses to become part of the normal, ordinary forms of sensory experience. Although this commitment to its own specificity leads to a withdrawal from life, it is this autonomy from other forms of activity that yields the artwork's political potential. Second, art seeks its own abolition as it transforms its forms into the forms of the common world. As direct engagement, or "art-becoming-life," aesthetic experiences become similar to other forms of life experience rather than being separated (*AD* 35 and 46). These two politics lead to a contrast between one type of art that is committed to retaining its purity and avoiding all political intervention, but in doing so becomes exactly political, and another type of art that initiates politics by eliminating itself as art through the act of self-suppression (*AD* 40). More importantly for Rancière, critical and political art has to negotiate between these two politics that press art towards "life," and at the same time, claim aesthetic autonomy from other everyday sensory experiences (*AD* 46).

With this necessary and quick detour, it is now time to consider artistic interventions and aesthetic resistance. As these previous pages have demonstrated, the "politics" of art, for Rancière at least, has little to do with the political message of the artwork or the political intention or leaning of the artist. Politics and art are not two separate entities, thus allowing the activities in one to be mobilized for the other. They are related in that Rancière's politics, as I argued in the first section, has to do with the reconfiguration of a specific space and the reframing of spheres of experience, while art with its practices and forms of visibility can also organize and intervene in the distribution of the sensible and its reconfiguration. Therefore, as Corcoran puts it directly, within Rancière's conceptualization "politics has an inherently aesthetic dimension and aesthetics an inherently political one" (*DS* 2). If the politics of art has to do with the two politics – autonomy and art-becoming-life – what exactly is "political art" for Rancière and how does it relate to resistance? If dissensus is the process of transforming the sensible by the appearance of the non-part, dissensus in the artistic context operates in a similar way.

Art can breach the sensible due to the aesthetic sensorality which already suspends those

rules that govern normal sensory experiences and introduces free play. The two politics that Rancière has identified are crucial here; artistic intervention can draw on both of these politics to create dissensus. Political art is neither autonomous art nor art-as-life alone, but one that would play and exploit the tension between these two politics; it would be a shuffling between the clear political legibility that arises from art being directly utilized for political projects (i.e. art-becoming-life) and the sensory foreignness (of autonomous art) that is also present to disrupt that exact political meaning. Rancière describes such political potential in this way:

Suitable political art would ensure, at one and the same time, the production of a double effect: the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely by the uncanny, by that which resists signification. In fact, this ideal effect is always the object of a negotiation between opposites, between the readability of the message that threatens to destroy the sensible form of art and the radical uncanniness that threatens to destroy all political meaning. (*TPA* 63)

Or as Sudeep Dasgupta has summarized trenchantly: “Critical art is to be understood in the oscillation between pure form and pure meaning” (“Spare Image” 8). An element of legibility (i.e. political intelligibility) and another of illegibility (i.e. sensory foreignness) are what can create a rupture in the sensible order and its established framework of perception. This form of dissensus prompted by artistic works will be considered closely through my discussion of the Taliban photographs in the final chapter, in which the issues of illegibility and foreign sensory experiences will be worked through.

### **Rancière’s Effects and Limits**

With this theoretical framework in place, it is now necessary to pinpoint the junctions and fissures between Rancière’s theory and my objects. In all, Rancière impacts this dissertation on two levels: first, he shifts the conceptualization of 9/11 politics to the sensible, thus initiating a line of inquiry into ways in which my objects enact resistance by broadening sensory parameters; and second, he introduces a specific form of resistance through dissensus whose disruptive value will be examined through my first case study *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which underscores the polemical verification of equality through speech, and through my final object of Taliban photographs, which analyzes aesthetic dissensus.

As the following chapters will soon establish, my objects offer forms of perception, not

from the perspective of the included, but the excluded; they introduce new bodies and voices into the existing post-9/11 regime of perception and signification dominated by mourning, remembrance and patriotism. They sense and are making sense differently of Muslims, Islam, enemies, and even American togetherness and belonging. While they separately challenge the various themes of 9/11, they do jointly question the visible and audible parameters of 9/11, contesting what can be seen, heard, and thought. As a result, the practices of dissent in this dissertation are no longer firmly situated in traditional and predictable contestations against sovereignty, global economic exploitation, and various forms of oppression.

Despite this productive encounter with Rancière's theory, there are also chasms, most conspicuously due to my choice to examine different interventionist artistic expressions. Viewing politics through the sensible would suggest a multiplicity of interventions, or moments of dissensus, capable of breaching the sensible order, regardless of whether they have that added dimension of being art objects or not. Rancière, of course, does specifically look at dissensus in an artistic context, which is firmly anchored in his discussion of the aesthetic regime. Rancière's theory, on this specific issue, is very much engaging with the field of contemporary art. In discussing artistic interventions, Rancière usually culls his illustrative objects – art installations, photographs, video works – mostly from the confines of international art exhibits and biennials. Much like Retort and Buck-Morss, an emphasis is given to the art world. Concerning literature, Rancière is fond of using the works of Flaubert and Mallarmé, and for films he turns to Sergei Eisenstein and works of Portuguese filmmaker Pedro Costa. There exists a rarely-changing collection of artworks with which Rancière advances his arguments, a set that is introduced with predictable repetition. His vision of dissensus in the artistic context is very much bounded by his specific art objects. Consequently, his discussions on the actual ways in which creative objects alter the distribution of the sensible in practice through dissensus are limited in scope because only a narrow kind of fine arts is being explored.

In contrast, my project scrutinizes many different forms of artistic and creative practices. My four objects deviate from the traditional high art context in which Rancière's objects circulate, but they do display formal creativity and aesthetic significance. My demarcation of “art” is thus much more fluid and less restrictive than Rancière's own. I will not attempt to categorize these objects as high art, popular culture, or entertainment art, since they do traverse these boundaries. It is more constructive to locate them through their specific production and authorial context, and circulation. These four objects possess very dissimilar forms of visibility

from Rancière's fine arts because they are mass-culture and mass-commodified objects, thus enjoying broader reception and public reach. They operate through the popular genres of hip hop, *Bildungsroman*, television situation comedy, and studio portrait photography. Assisted by these familiar (if not well-loved) genres, my objects feature conventional themes and formulas that are readily and easily legible and relatable. Their necessary entanglements with market mechanisms, syndication, global circulation, and television ratings, to indicate but a few, present questions and concerns that Rancière does not address. More significantly, they devise their own interesting and parallel paths into reconfigurations of the sensible that Rancière does not choose to travel. Being informed by Rancière's theory and yet displacing it to other objects is my own form of intellectual dissensus that pays no heed to any police distribution of the sensible that stipulates which critical theories must match up with which objects.

Practically speaking, our different choice of artistic objects means his theory becomes limiting also at the level of methodology. Focusing on art, Rancière's two politics – art as life and autonomous art – guide an analysis towards the play between form and meaning. I applied this methodological orientation explicitly when considering my final case study of photographs and more implicitly with the other objects. My objects may seem more attuned to the common sensory experiences of everyday life, functioning and utilizable as forms of entertainment, rather than interweaving elements of legibility and illegibility that may yield sensory disruptions to the dominant order. I will, however, explore in the next four chapters how they negotiate sense and meanings and operate as “sensible interventions.” Besides the broader questions for the dissertation, steering my thinking are also these specific Rancière-inspired questions: How does the object's political and resistance content and signification resonate with its sensible attributes? Does the oppositionality diminish or co-exist with the object's formal creativity? Do these objects have the capacity to be both politically relevant and aesthetically complex? Or must they instead, curbed by their functionality and commercial status, compromise both their politics and aesthetics?

Situated outside Rancière's sphere, these case studies also require more analytical preciseness to contextualize their specific medium, forms of resistance, and significance in their own field. My multi-media objects dictate this multi-directional approach, which must highlight the medium-specificity of the object itself. The dissertation, however, is not trying to survey how each of these media, taken as a whole, is engaging with 9/11. Medium-specificity is vital only in the sense that the object's medium impacts the methodology. This study is conducted under the

institutional inspiration and influences of the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, and owing to this, my general methodology orientates toward the process of cultural analysis in its object-focused approach (Bal, *Travelling Concepts* 3-21). This attention means objects are not seen as “isolated jewels” but as things engaging, as “interlocutors” within the culture of their origin. “It is not the artist or the author but the objects they make and ‘give’ to the public domain that are the ‘speakers’ in analytic discussion,” argues Mieke Bal (*Travelling Concepts* 9). Specifically, my close analyses are conducted with attention focused on written and spoken words, sounds, visual signs and visuality, as dictated by each object. For the novel, the inquiry considers the plot, characters, narrative voice and structures; for the hip hop album, the lyrics, rhyme and rhythm, supplementary sonic features, album cover art, liner notes, and audience reception are explored. For the television show, I discuss, among many features, the plotline of a few key episodes, characters’ developments, Muslim/non-Muslim relationships through the whole series, camera shot selections, position and movement of actors, studio sets and costumes (Rose, *Visual Methodologies* 51-53); for photography, the social and geopolitical context of the collection, the identity of the sitters, as well as framing, angle, color, foreground/background, and the photographic surface (Rose, *Visual Methodologies* 13-27 and 39-41). The objects’ genre also informs my investigation since the various genres all contain specific features that guide their meanings, oppositional or otherwise.

In addition, my analysis also explores the external discourse that accompanies the object. I discuss how the object is presented to the audience through marketing/promotional strategies, interviews with authors and producers, and its websites. In the case of hip hop, I also highlight the conditions of production. *Sonic Jihad* was produced through an independent record label in resistance to the mainstream music industry, so claims the artist Paris. As the album engages with politics through its lyrics, it also articulates an anti-mainstream market politics by promoting self-organization and production. In the case of the Taliban photographs, its politics of resistance is also situated in the entanglement of local aesthetics and global distribution and circulation.

Carefully taking stock of these objects’ different media also means comprehending them through the academic disciplines under which they generally fall (literary, media and cultural studies) by aligning with the ways in which these multiple disciplines have envisioned and studied resistance in the past. These discipline-based traditions of opposition evince the heterogeneity so characteristic of cultural resistance. This wide angle extends beyond Rancière,

who does not seem to acknowledge the traditions, strategies, and potentials of many other popular forms of oppositional artistic endeavors that are thriving outside the contemporary art scene. One also senses a general attitude of skepticism in Rancière towards resistance. In a 2007 interview with *Artforum*, Rancière contends that he would rather talk about dissensus than resistance (Carnevale and Kelsey 3).<sup>41</sup> This has much to do with the fact that he has a very specific conceptualization of politics through the sensible, and for him, the police order and power is not about ideology, a certain masking or illusion that can be challenged by knowledge or truth. If that were the case, artistic interventions would easily proceed by aggressively unmasking and exposing the domination, power, and ills of the order and reasserting some truth behind the appearance. This approach poses one main problem for Rancière, in that such an exposure presupposes a hierarchy between the enlightened artist and the ignorant audience who cannot see the hidden and need the artist – conferred with mastery, expertise and knowledge – to guide them. This goes against the grain of Rancière’s advocacy for intellectual equality, in particular one between artists and spectators (this will be explored in depth in chapter three and in the conclusion). Perhaps Rancière’s explanation of his own research methodology intimates what he sees as domination, and hence, helps us envisage what may be moments of resistance for him:

I always try to think in terms of horizontal distributions, combinations between systems of possibilities, not in terms of surface and substratum. Where one searches for the hidden beneath the apparent, a position of mastery is established. I have tried to conceive of a topography that does not presuppose this position of mastery. (*TPA* 49)

Possessing a starting position and presupposition of one’s mastery, then, would likely be Rancière’s critique of many forms of artistic oppositional expressions, within or outside the art scene, that seek merely to expose, unveil, and transmit some political message. While not championing all modes and aspects of cultural resistance, I nevertheless stay more alert and open to the multifarious expressions, origins, motivations, and possibilities of artistic resistance, cautiously tracing and treading their winding trajectories of dissent.

For example, the field of literature as a form of protest serves as one of the theoretical and conceptual wellsprings for this dissertation. By detecting resistance within an object, what I am

---

<sup>41</sup> For the complete interview “Art of the Possible: An Interview with Jacques Rancière” see the March 2007 issue of *Artforum*, pages 256-69. The page number listed here refers to an electronic version of the same interview available at [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0268/is\\_7\\_45/ai\\_n24354911/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_7_45/ai_n24354911/), accessed July 13, 2012.

suggesting is that its content, form, and other attributes – whether intentionally or unintentionally wrought by its author, marketing strategies, or producers – articulate an oppositional message and experience that can potentially open up a space for resistance. This conceptualization of resistance is very much influenced by resistance practices found in textual resistance in colonial and post-colonial writings and in the tradition of American ethnic literature.<sup>42</sup> Contesting colonialist authority, domination, and power, the various and dynamic forms of literary resistance by both novelists and literary theorists have appropriated the colonizers’ language and subverted colonizers’ texts such as histories, fictions, and anthropological accounts, which were utilized in the first place to fictionalize, define, categorize and subjectify the colonized.<sup>43</sup>

Deviating from the post-colonial context, literary resistance has also often been attributed to oppositional narratives by marginalized women and ethnic minority writers, who contested what they saw as patriarchal and phallogocentric traditions of Western literature. These forms of counter narratives target not only domination and power through their themes of gender and racial revolt, but they do so by contesting prevailing literary canons, established genres, narrative structures, and textual representations of women, and ethnic and sexual minorities. Their purpose is often to change perceptions and to insert themselves into the field of appearance through counter-history, counter-narrative, and counter-image (still and moving). These, too, are the preoccupations of my objects, which wrestle with issues of representation (Muslims, Islam, enemy) and indeterminate identities as a way to expose and counter prevailing ideas, norms, and attitudes.

This project also interacts with the two related fields of cultural studies and media studies.<sup>44</sup> The concept of resistance for these fields has been traditionally related to the capacity

---

<sup>42</sup> For the category of American literature, I am thinking specifically of works by authors such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Thomas King.

<sup>43</sup> Barbara Harlow’s earlier but much-criticized work *Resistance Literature*, for example, has identified a particular category of literature which complements a wider political struggle against colonial power, with narratives serving as an explicitly politicized tool in national liberation struggles. See pages xvii and 29 of her *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987). Her notion of a clear binary opposition between colonizers/oppressors and post-colonial writers, as well as between power and resistance, is problematic and, as such, has yielded more questions for the project of anti-colonialist literary resistance itself. That long-running debate on the nature, traditions, sites, and theorizations of post-colonial literary resistance is too extensive to be dealt with here. For an overview, consult part three of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* edited by Bill Ashcroft et al. (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>44</sup> Due to its limited scope, this dissertation does not engage with the tradition of resistance within New Media, which has become an important focus within resistance studies. The relations between resistance and New Media can be discussed, first, with media – global communications and information apparatus – as a target of resistance; and second, with New Media technologies as a weapon of resistance for activists. Social media, for example, has become a new and faster means of organization for protesters. Other oppositional tactical media practices include reverse-engineering, hacktivism, denial-of-service attacks and digital hijack. To explore these ideas, see Rita Raley’s *Tactical Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), which builds on David Garcia and Geert Lovink’s 1997 canonical text “The ABC of Tactical

of consumers and spectators to resist and appropriate the meanings and operations of the cultural commodities produced by mainstream capitalist industries. Dick Hebdige's earlier explorations of youth subcultures, with consumer resistance practices such as bricolage, detail a process of resistance reflected in behaviors, ways of speaking, musical taste and collective fashion styles that contest the process of normalization and the dominant system of social order (Storey 81). An opposition between commercial producers and consumers of cultural objects is seen in John Fiske's theory of popular culture, which emphasizes the consumers' capacity and resourcefulness in counter-translating meanings and constructing pleasures from cultural products for their own purposes (Jenkins xv). In this sense, the numerous and creative ways that consumers/viewers resist and reinterpret intended messages and functions, or evade the constraints of meaning, stipulated by the producers become acts of resistance against the media and the culture industry.<sup>45</sup>

In my study, this form of resistance – coming from viewers and spectators and focused on utilization – is also addressed, although it does not serve as the main axis. Where possible and medium-appropriate, viewers' experience of the cultural object will be discussed by using the informal audience commentary on YouTube, as in the case of the hip hop album *Sonic Jihad*. This viewer/consumer-focused addition is meant to provide some contextual depth but not a full exploration of the spectators' experiences or how they might perform their own acts of resistance by rejecting or misreading the intended message and use of an object.

With this multi-media and interdisciplinary mindset, I explore and combine all these points to chronicle how my four objects are negotiating and operating at the various interstices between their commercial status, political zeal, and aesthetic creativity to express oppositionality. Overshooting the canon examined by Rancière, they jointly formulate an intricate conceptualization and comprehension of cultural resistance with their array of tactics, targets, aims, and even blind spots.

---

Media," which is available at <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9705/msg00096.html>, accessed July 20, 2012. Also refer to Raley's "Border Hacks: The Risks of Tactical Media" in *Risk and the War on Terror*, edited by Louise Amoore and Marieke de Goede (London: Routledge, 2008). Extremely helpful, too, is part I of Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker's *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> For a closer look at the tradition of resistance within media and cultural studies, refer to Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979); John Fiske's *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010). The key theoretical inspiration for these and other everyday forms of resistance is, of course, Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).