

CONCLUSION

With the momentous events of 9/11 serving as the anchor, *Sensible Interventions* has crystallized and assessed multiple forms of artistic interventions that counteracted against established and normative narratives, sounds, and images commonly defining the catastrophe. These interventions, developed through four heterogeneous yet interconnected cultural objects, have extended the practice of resistance by shifting the stage of post-9/11 politics to the realm of aesthetics, an approach enabled by the theoretical thoughts of Rancière. His concept of aesthetics refers not to art theory, but more broadly to his much-discussed notion of the distribution of the sensible and the conceptual structures of audibility and visibility that govern the political scene.

Resistance in this mode has endeavored to contest the various aesthetic borders that delimit and constrain the perceptible or sensible, what can be seen or heard. What these four objects have resisted against were more diffused forms of power that were intangible at times, but nevertheless, manifested their forces by constraining, marginalizing or effacing. The underlying power being challenged here was neither the discernable state power and its apparatus nor the favorite target of global resistance movements: the neo-liberal capitalist world order, but rather, the configuration of the sensible order with its distribution and division of roles and associated capacities and competences, which prescribes whose voices are audible and which bodies are visible where and how. Resistance has been envisioned through sensible interventions, with “sensible” occupying both meanings of the word “sense”: first, “sense” as in what is experienced through the senses, thus a contestation at the level of audibility and visibility, and second, “sense” as a regime of meaning and understanding, thus a contestation at the level of signification. The interplay between the sensate and meaning has also been accentuated assertively through Rancière’s notion of dissensus.

My four cultural objects – from the monologic narrative voice of *Changez* to the literal hip hop voice and instrumental sounds by Paris, and from the banal visuality initiated by *Little Mosque* to the counter, ethical, and dissensual visualities generated by the Taliban photographs – all have extended the aesthetic boundaries that have hitherto circumscribed ways of experiencing 9/11. Such a reconfiguration of the aesthetic realm, or Butler’s sphere of appearance, can also disrupt comprehension and meaning since the sensible divisions and structuring also affect what becomes conceivable, discussable and contestable (Tanke 2). The four case studies, while diverging in terms of medium, have jointly problematized the meanings of post-9/11 identities,

be it American/Pakistani, African-American, Muslim, militant, or enemy. Changez's personal memory and Paris's remembrance of black exploitation have also destabilized an understanding of the entrenched national history of 9/11 and the war on terror. Similarly, *Little Mosque* has sought to facilitate popular understanding by inserting recognizable and legible Muslim bodies on television and eschewed more opaque cultural and religious differences, while the *Taliban* collection has advanced illegibility through Rancière's dissensus that prevented the solidification of unequivocal meaning.

At times, these four cases deviated and tackled different concerns; acts of post-9/11 cultural resistance have been diffused because power was also diffused and manifested at various intersections of power relations. But operating concertedly, they have brought to the fore sensible constraints and interventions. Viewing these oppositional objects not through celebratory sentiments but with a proper acknowledgement of their potential power, this dissertation has also pinpointed some of their blind spots, whether it was the knowledge gap enacted by Paris between himself and his listeners or *Little Mosque's* submission to the politics of recognition, similitude, and commensurability when constructing a post-9/11 Muslim televisual identity.

In all, this sustained analysis of 9/11 and cultural resistance has been enlivened by Rancière's sensible. This process, however, has also helped raise two questions for further study, both of which concern his works' impact and limits in relation to the broader theme of resistance. First, while the sensible has offered a befitting approach to rethink 9/11, given the catastrophe's multiple sensible and experiential dimensions, how does it relate to other contemporary resistance projects, whether resistance is envisioned through the more traditional forms of collective protests or through artistic interventions? Indeed, the sensible has propelled the discussion of cultural resistance in this project by identifying a new target and new forms of interventions through attempts to breach sensible constraints, but there is also a gap between the politics of the sensible and the current state of popular expressions of collective dissent.

At the time of writing in the summer of 2013, large-scale protests have swarmed through scores of cities around the world, prompting *The Economist* magazine to dub this latest sweep of popular discontent as "The March of Protest."¹⁴⁶ From Brazil to Indonesia, from Egypt and Turkey to Bulgaria and the Eurozone, these street demonstrators challenged specific targets (the state, incumbent presidents, local authorities) and expressed grievances (failure of government,

¹⁴⁶ See the June 29-July 5, 2013 edition of *The Economist*.

bus fares, fuel prices, building projects, austerity measures). They issued clear demands (overthrow, reforms). While these events are dissimilar with national-specific political, economic, and social circumstances, protestors had, nevertheless, easily accessible, definable and locatable enemies and issues to confront. Transplanting Rancière's politics and his police distribution of the sensible as a source of domination to this familiar scene with clear battle lines, immediately highlights a disjunction. As a resistance target, sensible constraints – arising from a police order that partitions identities, roles, competences, and capacities – do not quickly yield a visible and fixed enemy. The sources of power within the hierarchies of the police order cannot always be so easily and singularly identified. This simple point has much to do with some fundamental differences in Rancière's approach to equality and emancipation that are discordant with these latest protests.

This dissonance evolves around the question of exactly what equality means for Rancière and for these protestors. Rancière's equality has more to do with contesting the police distribution of the sensible by undermining given roles, competences, capacities, and orders. He has enabled the political stage to be shifted, creating a unique space for politics and making us alert to the police framing and the partitions of roles and competences. Within his conceptualization, what is unequal is the embedded structuration of the political community. His egalitarian moment – the emergence of the non-part, the enactment of a previously unacknowledged capacity for enunciation, and the verification of the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being – seeks to alleviate such inequality.

This, however, does not seem to resonate with the outrage and frustrations of these present resistance projects, which point to concrete and pressing aims that often converge on hopes of increased fairness and equality in terms of economic resources and opportunities, education, and better government and public services, to name but a few. These issues are, no doubt, interconnected to the unequal ways that political communities are assembled and partitioned. But if anything, within Rancière's paradigm these protestors might be faulted for protesting within and affirming their assigned roles (the ruled, the dominated) established by the police order, given that they seek changes from their governments and local authorities and see equality as something that is owed to or granted to the population by those who govern (May, "South Carolina" 109-110). For Rancière, equality is not something that is given, but presupposed, demonstrated, verified, and claimed. As Ruth Sonderegger explains: "Rancièrian equality is active, it is *taken* as opposed to *given*. It is made visible on a local and temporal level

only, namely every time that there are subjects who claim and take their part” (68, italics in original). These moments of claiming and seizing can reshape the sensible coordinates but they do not, as I mentioned earlier in chapter one, necessarily lead to new regimes or an elimination of social inequalities (*TPA* 3). Can equality conceptualized on this level and can Rancière’s momentary enactment become a value and an aim for protestors who are contesting material lack and restrictions and who are demanding immediate results? How can these notions help them re-envision their campaigns on the streets? More analysis can proceed to consider how these disconnections between Rancière’s theoretical thoughts and the aspirations of popular protests can be productive rather than unbridgeable.

The second question has to do with Rancière’s dissensus in the artistic context, and specifically relating to the issue of spectators, given their particular role in any oppositional artistic practices. No doubt a book, an album, a television show, and a collection of photographs are not oppositional in a similar fashion as the throngs at Tahrir Square or Gezi Park; artistic expressions manifest different agency and are also animated by aesthetic forms, commercial production, and market mechanisms. Most importantly, their resistance is implicated in a key relationship with an audience, necessitating a tripartite equation of artist-artwork-spectator, in which the latter is also enfolded within the opposition. How spectators may respond to the object, in particular to its oppositional elements and aspirations, and how they may subsequently act and mobilize for whatever contestations to the existing order, therefore, become complementary matters in the broader discussion of artistic cultural resistance.

As stipulated in the dissertation’s introduction, this project aimed to accentuate the first two parts of the triad, mainly looking at the motivations and intentions of the creators and even more intensely at the objects, identifying the resistant possibilities and potentials that have been opened up by the objects themselves. Their resistant designation, as I stated earlier, pointed to their self-assigned ontological status and my descriptive and analytical evaluation. My analysis did not have as its central inquisitorial concern whether and how readers, listeners, and viewers have received these 9/11-related objects as oppositional. Here, the challenge of measure becomes evident. Nevertheless, this issue of spectator engagement was keenly acknowledged in the hip hop chapter via my discussion of the reception of Paris’s music on YouTube, and also prominently in the final chapter on the *Taliban* which underscored, aided by Butler’s reflections, the ethical responsibility of the viewer. Although not always positioned in the foreground, the significance of the spectator still has been recognized in the preceding pages.

Rancière has argued unequivocally for the equality of the spectator. But the question remains how an equality in an aesthetic setting relates to other aspects, more specifically in view of the theme of the dissertation, to broader resistance aims? I will first point out some ambiguities in his arguments then offer a critique of his “emancipated” spectator in view of his earlier works on political equality. I will conclude by suggesting a more congenial artist-spectator relationship already heralded by my case study on hip hop music.¹⁴⁷

As the dissensual visibility initiated by the Taliban photographs has demonstrated, the encounter between a viewer and an object is now contingent due to the aesthetic dissensus. The possibility of opposition is shifted to spectators who are freed from the imposed and intended messages of the artist, contesting the cause-effect assumption of political art. Rancière’s spectator is not bound by the judgment that being a spectator inevitably denotes a state of passivity, ignorance, inarticulateness, and non-creativity. Such a presupposition of spectator incapacity is one that Rancière consistently denounces, especially as it reflects a police distribution of the sensible that prescribes roles and competences, or more accurately, the supposed incompetence and incapacity of the spectator to know and act.

It is helpful to remember that Rancière’s notion of the emancipated spectator arises out of his theory of intellectual emancipation asserted in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, which I discussed in chapter three. Through that work, one sees how the traditional pedagogical model with the teacher serving as the master explicator and the student as the ignoramus underscores and perpetuates an inequality of intelligences. This in turn can also serve as a parallel of the unequal relationship between an artist and a spectator. Challenging this inequality, Rancière advocates, as always, the presupposition of equality. As he argues in an interview: “... equality is not a goal to be attained ... Equality must be seen as a point of departure, and not as a destination” (Guénoun and Kavanagh 3). I see two outcomes from this presupposition: first, there is a rejection of that figure of mastery, whether it is the expert, the teacher, or the artist; second, greater agency now lies with the spectator, as the previous distribution of defined roles, specificities, and competences between artists and spectators becomes more flexible and blurred. Consistent with his conceptualization of equality, the emancipated spectator is another illustration of previously disqualified figures made qualified and the incompetent made competent.

¹⁴⁷ Although Rancière’s discussion of the spectator is primarily related to the theater, he does offer a broader definition of “theatrical spectacle,” by which he means “all those forms of spectacle – drama, dance, performance art, mime and so on – that place bodies in action before an assembled audience” (*TES 2*). I, therefore, have extended spectatorship to the context of a live hip hop performance.

But unlike Rancière's earlier proposition on politics that involves the disruptive presence of the non-part in an act of verification of their capacity, no such act of demonstration seems to be required for the emancipated spectator. In the Rancièrian paradigm, a political activity would disrupt the perceptible divisions of the police order – partitioning of social places or functions – by the appearance and recognition of “the part of those who have no part.”

This kind of polemical verification of equality is vital for Rancière, in that the logic of equality confronts the logic of the police order, which in this case would be preoccupied with partitioning the artist to fulfill a role of activity and competence, and the spectator to passivity and deficiency. Rancière, though, does not seem to stress explicitly or demand this extra act of assertion and demonstration from his spectators. The equality of the spectators remains a principle, one that is affirmed when aesthetic works do not stultify their addressees; but what about the spectators themselves? Agency and capacity are conferred but there is no further probing as to how their newly-supposed competence might first be manifested and be corroborated. This claiming and seizing of a part is significant, and without it, Rancière's spectatorial equality remains an abstract presupposition, and one that idealizes and over-valorizes the spectator. Indeed, the spectator may be equal in intelligence: s/he may be actively, knowingly and creatively interpreting and translating the performance rather than assuming the position of a passive voyeur, but does this equality also extend to being equal to the artists' technical and creative virtuosity or their commitment to their artistic craft?

In addition, it remains unclear how Rancière envisages this artist-spectator relationship now that equality holds sway. A new ambivalence seems to emerge: on the one hand, there is the rupture between the object and the spectator, thus marking an intellectual/perceptual/intentional/creative dissociation between the artist and the spectator, but on the other hand, they no longer occupy distinct roles and functions but share a blurring of competences, which surely suggests a more convivial relationship than the previous one characterized by the active mastery of one and the passive ignorance of the other. The question remains: what comes next? How does this relationship impact the process of social, cultural, and political affiliation? Does this emancipation reveal a power in that it encourages solidarity between artists and spectators and energizes collective mobilization? How can this Rancièrian emancipated spectator be related to collectivity and other hopes of equality, for example, access to education, employment opportunities, and economic resources, as desired by protestors in demonstrations around the world? To put it directly: What resistance potential lies beyond the art

encounter?

For Rancière, the collective power wielded by his spectators does not derive from being part of a viewing community, as in the context of a theatrical performance, nor does it manifest as a result of interactivity; rather, this power lies in each spectator's individualistic, equal, and unique creative mind and intelligence (*TES* 16 and 17). He claims: "What our performances – be they teaching or playing, speaking, writing, making art or looking at it – verify is not our participation in a power embodied in the community. It is the capacity of anonymous people, the capacity that makes everyone equal to everyone else" (*TES* 17). With this equality as the overriding concern, issues such as interaction/participation, solidarity, and mobilization become redundant or unattainable. Spectator participation is no longer stressed, given that within Rancière's paradigm, the viewer is already active and needs not be activated; solidarity is indeterminate since each spectator is plotting her own path, in her own intellectual adventure (*TES* 16 and 17); collective or individual mobilization inspired by artistic interventions, whether the subsequent mobilization would be against globalization, economic exploitation or whatever ills of the moment, seems too optimistic if not unlikely, due to the rupture between the artwork and the spectator. As a result, the potential of art-inspired mobilization is undermined.

Contra Rancière and with these issues in mind, I would suggest a different spectator emancipation model and its relation to cultural resistance. This well-established and popular-culture practice not only predates Rancière's theory, it also extends and challenges his ideas on the three aforementioned issues: the verification of spectator competence, relationality, and community and mobilization. The model is that of the call-and-response mechanism, which I already highlighted in chapter three when exploring Paris's album *Sonic Jihad*. In that case, the call-and-response occurred between Paris and his guest rap artists, but the practice is also common during live hip hop performances when it connects artists to spectators, with artists like Paris initiating the call and the audiences responding.

While often associated with hip hop, the call-and-response strategy springs from broader communication traditions of black cultures, relating to the sacred – gospel music and church worship services – and the secular (Daniel and Smitherman 27-37). As such, its functionality, significance, and instrumentalization offer a richer and more multi-faceted conceptualization of spectatorship than Rancière's emancipation. Call-and-response exhibits a cause-and-effect dynamic which Rancière would surely question, but the tactic distinctively places an emphasis on commonality, communality, and group experientiality. In that sense, the cause-effect has little

to do with a direct transmission of political content or awareness/consciousness, but more to do with a general emotive engagement between artists and spectators. This support for call-and-response should not be confused with my earlier critique of Paris, who champions his own music as a way to “knowledge and truth,” therefore inadvertently presuming the ignorance and incapacity of his listeners.

In a call-and-response, the response by the audience is not merely a sign of a successful activation from their passivity to participation, neither is it the perfunctory reception and repetition of the call. Instead, it punctuates the lyrical content, affects the collective energy, establishes the scene, and helps to define the overall experience. Much is required of spectators to demonstrate their own hip hop skills: proficiency with ever-shifting verbal expressions, and familiarity with popular bodily gestures and dance movements. Rather than just participation, the response sparks a moment of demonstration and verification of the spectators’ own capacity and competence to engage with artists on stage, who in turn, capitalize on audiences’ responses to issue further calls. Performing and receiving become two capacities that both the artist and the spectator must display and demonstrate. Artists may still have the main spotlight; their artistic excellence and virtuosity can still be affirmed via their music’s formal sophistication, but there is also reinforcement from the crowd. This sonic interplay suggests a relationship between artists and spectators that is distinguished temporarily by spontaneity, interdependency, mutual assistance, and complementarity.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, the relationship between the spectators themselves is also communal, for while they may experience and interpret the call individually, they – being under the force of the same rhythm, pitch, and flow – nevertheless act and counter in unison, offering a collective response. No doubt such a relationship can be fleeting, being limited to the concert moment, with spectators sharing only cultural and musical affinities.¹⁴⁹ These connections, however, may also

¹⁴⁸ This interpretation of the call-and-response mechanism might share some affinities with contemporary art’s relational aesthetics, which has been examined by Nicolas Bourriaud and challenged by Claire Bishop. As mentioned earlier, however, the call-and-response communication strategy has a very different genealogy, and it functions in very different musical, social, and religious contexts. For more on the mechanism, see chapter four of Samy H. Alim’s *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip-Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006), and Jack L. Daniel and Geneva Smitherman’s “How I Got Over: Communication Dynamics in the Black Community,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 62 (1976): 26-39. For discussions on relational aesthetics, see Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002) and Bishop’s “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 110 (2004): 51-79.

¹⁴⁹ Some have endowed this moment of live performance with more resistance potential. See Robin Balliger’s discussion, via Paul Gilroy, of the cultural solidarity and empowerment that develop through performance, and of music as the site of the “temporary autonomous zone” in “Sounds of Resistance,” *The Global Resistance Reader*, ed. Louise Amoore (London: Routledge, 2005).

lead to more consistent and long-term manifestations of political identification, providing impetus for other forms of collective material resistance and activism, as some have argued when detailing how hip hop's cultural influence intersects with political forces in America.¹⁵⁰ This is not to advance call-and-response as a perfect model but to suggest its features as contours of what resistance can be and has been.

On account of his commitment to dissensus and spectatorial emancipation, Rancière has fractured the tripartite relationship between artists, artworks, and spectators. Within his model, the power and potential, actual or symbolic, of cultural resistance are downplayed and undervalued. With equality as a starting place, Rancière sees aesthetic engagements as more than just a one-direction artist imposition on the spectator via a “straight uniform transmission” of message, knowledge, and capacity, which no doubt would assume the spectator's lack thereof. More than just this critique, a broader vision of this relationality is needed, one that does not merely emancipate the spectator but one that can also see artists and spectators working in tandem and empowering each other. Call-and-response precisely generates a circular flow between the artist, the music, and the audience. While there is still room for dissensus, when artistic intention does not necessarily match up with interpretation, the three elements nevertheless aggregate and operate in hope of transformation. It is a mechanism that can serve as an analogy for other creative works, in that artists, objects, and spectators, are fused together for resistance. The various links within the triad may not be determinate, but the overall vision and longing is one of contestation. For in these moments when artistic practices are initiating, enabling, uniting, mobilizing, and transforming – for both the artists and the spectators – they become a potent force against the targets they hope to conquer. However imposing the stakes may appear – 9/11 sensory and signification constraints, the war on terror, a repressive state or global finance – even they seem surmountable when set against the boldness of this imperfect but nevertheless creative and formidable resistance.

¹⁵⁰ For more on how hip hop culture's influence feeds into political activism, see Bakari Kitwana's “The State of the Hip-Hop Generation: How Hip-Hop's Cultural Movement is Evolving into Political Power,” *Diogenes* 51 (2004): 115-120, and *The Hip-hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2002). Also consult Angela Ards's “Organizing the Hip-Hop Generation” in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004). Her article identifies some of the earlier challenges and obstacles of politicizing young hip hop communities in America.