THE CLASH OF ARTICULATIONS:
AESTHETIC SHOCK, MULTIVALENT NARRATIVES AND ISLAM IN THE POST-9/11 ERA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates a multilingual data set of audiovisual popular culture texts produced in the post-9/11 era, which challenge hegemonic narratives relating to Islam and the War on Terror. The languages represented by the 13 texts are French, English, Spanish and Arabic, and the performative genres are hip hop, comedy, punk and parkour. Using the sociological manifestation of narrative theory as the framework for analysis (Baker 2006, Somers 1994), I explore how a combination of aesthetics and ‘multivalence’ – i.e. the co-existence of seemingly contradictory narratives within a single text (Stroud 2002) – can throw a subject out of uncritical immersion in their normative narrative environment and open up an affective space for new meanings and values to enter. This technique, which I term ‘aesthetic shock’, addresses a widespread critique of socio-narrative theory; namely, the failure to account for how social agents might subscribe to narratives that contradict their worldview.

More broadly, it is argued that the multivalent texts under analysis constitute a form of aesthetic activism that enables individuals to assert themselves against oppressive and essentialist cultural narratives; notably in this case, Samuel Huntington’s divisive ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis (1996) – which remains prominent in public discourse despite being heavily critiqued in academia, given its political expediency in the context of economic globalism. Supplementing the narrative analysis with recent theorisations of affect and Deleuzian philosophy, I contend that aesthetic forms of political resistance, facilitated by digital culture, are becoming more relevant across different language communities as the rationalist, nation-state paradigm loses currency. Hence, the 13 texts are seen as part of an epistemological groundswell that is symptomatic of our time, whereby contradiction and aesthetics emerge as key tools for resistance to neoliberal hegemony.
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For my grandma, Audrey
1929-2016
And we are alive in amazing times,
Delicate hearts, diabolical minds,
Revelations, hatred, love and war,
And more and more and more and more,
And more of less than ever before,
It's just too much more for your mind to absorb,
It's scary like hell, but there's no doubt,
We can't be alive in no time but NOW.

“Life in Marvelous Times” (2008), Yasiin Bey a.k.a. Mos Def
Abstract ideas and concrete realities are not the same, of course, but the journey between them is shaped by the stories we tell and how they are interpreted. The stronger the narrative, and the more successfully it occupies space in people’s imaginations, the more likely is its version of how things are to dominate and direct their energies and choices. (Abdalla 2016: 37)
Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Research Context

This thesis has as its moral concern the everyday citizens across the world whose lives have been more acutely impacted by global politics since 11 September 2001. Through the lens of digital popular culture, it seeks to elucidate the lived experiences of ‘the many’ in our unfolding moment in history, by investigating the dual role of aesthetics and narrative in resisting the hegemonic structures in the post-9/11 era – a temporal context of production characterised by the intensification of pre-existing West vs. Islam public discourse as part of the War on Terror offensive; as well as the sociocultural changes engendered by Web 2.0 and accelerated processes of globalisation at the turn of the century. The empirical basis for the study is an archive (collected by the author) of digitally mediated performances sitting at the interface of protest and the arts. These 13 ‘texts’ are of various languages and popular culture genres (broadly understood as cultural forms reflecting the tastes of the masses); and their narrative traction, I argue, lies in their affirmative and skilful performativity against the abstracted and increasingly rationalism underpinning post-9/11 hegemonic discourse.

As will be shown, not only do the texts thematise the wider shared geopolitical climate as experienced within the artists’ different localised contexts, but they also participate in what I contend is an epistemological shift in contemporary modes of societal construction; namely the politicised deployment of aesthetic forms, and the performative narrativisation of identities and worldviews that challenge hegemonic ‘plots’. The texts are furthermore disseminated online among communities of affinity, helping artists to sidestep the commercial interests of monopolising industrial channels and to reclaim the original force of civil protest behind the aesthetic genres in question. Given the epistemological focus of the study and the digital media context, I propose an original analytical framework through which such textualities can be examined. This combines the sociological manifestation of narrative theory (Baker 2006; Somers 1994) with Deleuzian
philosophy (1987/2013) from a translation studies vantage point. Deleuze and Guattari uniquely presaged the affective workings of neoliberal global society, and their radical model of thought is enjoying renewed interest in the digital age. I will demonstrate here how its complexities can become more accessible when applied in conjunction with sociological expressions of narrative theory. The mutually enriching combination of these two analytical models is the fabric of this thesis, whose pattern, or storyline, is woven by the texts.

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On 23 October 2014, during a televised interview on BBC current affairs show Newsnight to promote his recently published activist book Revolution, British comedian Russell Brand responded, upon being asked, that he was “open-minded” about the identity of the perpetrators of 9/11. He elaborated only briefly before backtracking and changing the subject. In the subsequent media coverage, however, journalists seized upon Brand’s statement, elevating it to the headline quote. Hadley Freeman (2014) of The Guardian stated

There is a difference between noticing people are a bit fed up with politicians and starting a coherent political movement, and you can tell the two apart because a man who truly knows what he is talking about does not start blathering on about 9/11 conspiracy theories.

The topic of 9/11 also permitted Jenn Selby of The Independent to undermine Brand’s political ideas: “As well as shouting about his utopian stance on social reform, he also admitted he remained perceptive to the validity of 9/11 conspiracy theories” (2014). Selby’s article is supplemented by a selection of viewers’ tweets about the interview, which without exception are disparaging. @atheistblobfish led the way with, “Russell Brand. Shouting at a man who is questioning his political views, and then not ruling out 9/11 conspiracies... Viva la revolución”. Other featured tweets contained such descriptive terms as “complete fool”, “hypocritical moron”, and “inarticulate squawk” (2014). Yet the assumed self-evident nature of the article’s premise is challenged by viewer comments posted beneath it, one of which reads as follows:
Shame on The Indie for quoting so selectively from a 15-minute interview. None of the more important questions and answers are represented in this silly piece, with one-sided tweets from uneducated pots calling the kettle black. It is so unrepresentative that I thought I was on the Telegraph site for a moment.

The Russell Brand case exemplifies how among mainstream media the classification ‘conspiracy theory’ acts to ostracise a narrative (and its narrator) from the sphere of legitimate public discourse, as determined by the institutional platforms of liberal democratic society. That is to say, those who hold dissenting views may be technically free to express themselves, but cannot usually do so without their credibility being undermined – which perhaps explains Brand’s haste to cover his tracks. With respect to 9/11, French philosopher Jean Baudrillard describes the possibility that the US government was implicated as “a thesis so unreal it deserves to be taken into account, just as every exceptional event deserves to be doubted” (2002: 59). Yet, despite growing numbers of US citizens questioning the official government account over a decade later, a widespread refusal persists in the mainstream to even countenance the possibility of a different version of events. The strength of this refusal raises some key questions about the lived experience of contemporary global forces at the level of the individual, the implications of which are formative of the context of this thesis. Clinical psychologist Frances Shure, in a video posted on an alternative media platform, poses one such question:

Why do people resist this information – the information that shows that the official story about 9/11 cannot be true? What I’ve learned is that as humans each of us have [sic] a worldview, and that worldview is usually formed in great part by the culture we grow up in. When we hear information that contradicts our worldview, social psychologists call the resulting insecurity cognitive dissonance. (Conscious Life News 2016)

In the same video, clinical psychologist Dr Robert Hopper situates the destabilising effect of cognitive dissonance, when two beliefs are inconsistent, within a specific political context: “9/11 truth challenges some of our most fundamental beliefs about our government and our country (...) the belief that our country protects us, keeps us safe, and that America is the good guy” (Conscious Life News 2016). Here, Hopper presents a
nation state identity formulated in characterological terms, assuming a civilised set of values that in the context of the War on Terror is constructed in relation to the barbaric other “now coded as ‘Islam’ itself” (Butler 2004: 2). This story is not new but draws on Samuel Huntington’s politically expedient Clash of Civilisations thesis from the 1990s, which posits that civilisations are the largest cultural unit that exists, that they are inherently different to each other, and that they pose a threat to one another – particularly the Islamic Civilisation against the West. Hence, the collective experience of insecurity that pervaded the USA immediately following 9/11 was “fleshed out and made real in relation to a particular narrative frame and identity-construct” (Best 2009: 77), that of a moral crusade. This successfully generated popular consent for the military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in response to the attacks, while obscuring the potential for wider discussion and deeper understandings of what had taken place. As Roland Bleiker observes, “[s]uch an approach may make sense in the context of the shock that followed the events of 9/11, but it creates more difficulties than it solves” (2009: 51).

At the time of writing, fifteen years later – and despite the Obama administration’s efforts to tone it down (Farley 2011) – the War on Terror discourse shows little sign of losing its momentum. The character or value system of ISIS, forged in the ruinous power vacuum of northern Iraq and Syria, epitomises the narrative to an extent that is suggestive of self-fulfilling prophecy. Meanwhile, entrepreneur and reality TV star Donald Trump has brought the rhetoric back to the White House in full force, winning the American presidential election in November 2016 on the back of a campaign largely driven by white nationalism and Islamophobia. The belligerent thematising of others was also evident in “racially or religiously aggravated” hate crimes following the UK referendum vote to leave the European Union in June 2016 (Forster 2016). In France, the situation is particularly critical regarding its Muslim minority population, which is locked in a vicious cycle of draconian government policy and extreme societal alienation, giving

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1 Jeffrey Haynes summarises widespread academic critiques of Huntington’s thesis as follows: a) the flawed assumption of a single, unified ‘Islam’; b) the flawed assumption of civilisation as a bounded, coherent entity; and c) following the 9/11 attacks, inattention to the nature and objectives of al-Qaeda as an international terrorist organisation which does not act on behalf of states and equally targets ‘un-Islamic’ governments in Muslim countries (2007: 5).

2 For a discussion of the distinction between the overlapping terms ‘discourse’ and ‘narrative’, see Baker (in press). In brief, discourse is taken here to imply institutionally sanctioned structures of knowledge.
rise to recurrent incidents of indiscriminate violence fuelled by the globalised ISIS mindset: the *Charlie Hebdo*, Bataclan and Bastille Day attacks all happened over the course of writing this thesis. Local authorities in the south of France responded to the increasingly volatile situation with the attempted criminalisation of the burkini in August 2016, when women were fined or forced off beaches at gunpoint for refusing to remove their clothes (Poirier 2016). At the same time, both France and the UK have been embroiled in a media firestorm over the Syrian refugee crisis, with the so-called Calais Jungle a hot point of contention at the borders of the two nations – even more so since Brexit – and the routine dehumanisation of displaced war victims as the situation is exploited by the far right.

The role of belief systems and identity constructs clearly merits close attention in our ever more interconnected global society. Yet in the midst of highly complex social, economic and political processes under conditions of accelerated neoliberal globalisation, it seems our very categories of thought are being stretched to their limit. Even so – indeed, for that very reason – many contest the assumption that a viable way forward lies in clinging to what is most familiar and culturally available, rather than seeking to expand our worldview to accommodate new meanings. As Jeremy Henzell-Thomas states in a publication issued by the Muslim Council of Britain in the wake of 9/11:

> The growing tide of racism, xenophobia and intolerance is nothing less than a fearful retreat from an impending paradigm change which radically extends our boundaries. And the scapegoating of Islam and Muslims is the most convenient expression of our failure to extend ourselves. It is a failure of every level – a failure of the heart, of the mind, of the imagination – and it is a dismal failure to be truly modern in our outlook. The real clash is not the bogus Clash of Civilisations, with its regurgitated clichés about the opposition of Islam and modernity, but the clash between a new way of looking at the world and our own crippling prejudices. (2002: 120)

Given that this is a geopolitical climate that is lived in the everyday in diverse localities across the globe, it seems there is a pressing need to examine what alternative stories are out there, if we are to understand and best cultivate the globalised communities in which we live. In the introduction to the 2016 special issue of *Politics* devoted to everyday
narratives in world politics, Stanley and Jackson point to blind spots in political science stemming from a longstanding "methodological elitism" (2016: 2) that has precluded insight into the political reality of ordinary citizens. In particular, they call for further investigation into how elite-driven discourses are legitimated and challenged and "the perimeters of political possibility reproduced or resisted in the mundane practices of everyday life" (2016: 2). In the post-9/11 context, then, this might entail shining a spotlight on non-elite identities that resist dominant categories of collective identity such as nationhood or civilisation, and are invested in alternative sociocultural spaces of belonging.

Chris Weedon addresses the complexities involved in this type of research area in his 2015 study of the roles of identity, emotion and social media in the growing appeal of extremist ideologies to young Muslims living in western societies. Drawing on Stuart Hall, he makes a call for "located, conjunctural analyses" that take account of the multiple factors at play "ranging from the broadest social processes (the very logic of capitalist and neoliberal modes of production and subjectivation) to the most minute localizations, and 'individual' psychosocial forms" that coalesce to mould young Muslim subjectivities and identities in contemporary times (2015: 111). While seeking to respond to this call, I would nonetheless emphasise that the War on Terror discourse does not impact exclusively upon young Muslim subjectivities, but affects everyone, as exemplified by the Russell Brand case discussed above; and furthermore extremism is not the only option for non-elites at the fringes of dominant identity-constructs. In my view, we would do well to consider how else Weedon’s factors might coalesce, and, in placing emphasis on more socially constructive outcomes, flesh out new avenues that tell a different story.

Investigating new avenues for elaborating alternative narratives brings us to the role of art and culture in shaping the historical present. In his early nineties volume on the mutually informative relationship between popular culture and politics, Lawrence Grossberg discusses the “massification” of popular culture in the twentieth century, referring to the quantitative explosion of popular culture when mass media become its principal distribution system, “bringing the majority of the population into the cultural arena on a national (and eventually international) level” (1992: 37/38). Despite the largely
profit-based interests behind this phenomenon, Grossberg views popular culture not just in economic terms but also “as a powerful force of education and socialization, and as one of the primary ways in which people make sense of themselves, their lives and the world” (1992: 69). Grossberg was of course writing before the Internet revolution; in particular, the creation of what has been labelled Web 2.0, and the shift from mass media to digital media. This happened to roughly coincide with 9/11 at the turn of the millennium, bringing an opportunity for the increased production and dissemination of cultural output outside of industrial channels, and a “decentralized participatory architecture [that] challenges traditional knowledge authorities and hierarchies” (König 2012: 160) at precisely the time when a new hegemonic order was unfolding. Accordingly, Bleiker identifies an ‘aesthetic turn’ in international political theory occurring at around this same point in time (2009: 35), which he contextualises with reference to 9/11:

the significance of 9/11 goes beyond a mere breach of state-based security, which is dramatic but can still be understood through existing conceptual means (...) It is no coincidence that one of the most remarkable but often overlooked reactions to the terrorist attacks is the astonishing outpouring of artistic creativity. (Bleiker 2009: 50)

As Bleiker explains, while art filled a gap in the “fundamental breach of human understanding” caused by the attacks, aesthetic reactions to 9/11 remain largely ignored by security experts and have failed to influence policy against the persistent retreat into dualistic ‘good vs. evil’ ways of thinking (2009: 50-51) discussed above. He argues, nonetheless, that one approach to reclaiming the political value of the aesthetic is to make the aesthetic a more integrated and important element of political struggle (2009: 44). This is the thrust of an article for The Guardian, published online 12 April 2015, featuring interviews with “a new generation of poets, playwrights and painters”: four successful young British Muslim artists – two of whom gave up other careers after 9/11 to turn to art – whose creative work is driven by “the desire to be understood in a sea of misunderstanding” and a need to make sense of the global political situation (Adams

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3 He states that mass media were used in this way for two economic purposes: as a means for well-connected emergent cultural industries to maximise their profits, and “to help create an economy based on mass consumption and ever-expanding demand” (1992: 38).
4 As opposed to seeking to create an autonomous sphere for art (Bleiker 2009: 44).
In their interviews, the artists recall a perceptible change in atmosphere stirred up by the news agenda in the years following the attacks, which settled into a sense of paranoia both within and towards the Muslim community, such that whereas they had previously felt they belonged in the UK, this no longer seemed to be the case. The article reported that all four wished to reopen dialogue, and that art “was the channel for that conversation, a way of undermining polarities and finding some shared ground” (Adams 2015).

It is the ‘low art’ of popular culture that remains of particular interest to our present focus on everyday narratives in post-9/11 world politics, since through its wider reach it can more easily mirror the experience of political non-elites and play a more direct role in societal change than can high art (Bleiker 2009: 43). Grossberg states that popular culture “seems to work at the intersection of the body and emotions” (1992: 79), i.e. it operates with an affective sensibility in which consumers invest themselves as a site of affiliation or belonging, and thus becomes “a crucial ground where people give others, whether cultural practices or social groups, the authority to shape their identity and locate them within various circuits of power” (1992: 83). For artists, the advent of digital media represents an opportunity to harness the power of popular culture – previously controlled by mass media industrial channels – for their own political purposes. The need for this in the post-9/11 hegemonic context inheres in the very fact that cultural agents such as the four Muslim artists interviewed for The Guardian must trade off their desire to creatively and politically assert themselves with the potential for unpopularity, which can compromise their position as a public ‘voice’, and obliges a degree of lateral thinking:

None of the artists saw herself or himself as a spokesperson – that would be a different kind of denial of individuality. As [playwright Yusra Warsama] said: “I could write something about being a subjugated Muslim Somali girl in Manchester, held down and determined to break free of her shackles, you know. That’s what I’m expected to do. It would be really easy to get an audience going. But I wouldn’t be telling the truth. The oppressed Muslim girl is a sexy story. The woman from Moss Side who wears a headscarf and has become an astrophysicist or whatever is not sexy because it doesn’t fit that dominant narrative.” Changing that narrative is frustrating and sometimes courageous work. It is, as they would all agree, also about mischief and surprise. (Adams 2015)
Thus, we are back to where we started in this preliminary discussion: the dominant narrative frame and collective identity-constructs of the post-9/11 era, which clash with emerging forms of thinking and being in the globalised digital context. I would emphasise at this point that "hegemonic struggles can have radically different forms in different social formations and national contexts" (Grossberg 1992: 244). Hence, while our discussion has begun in a British setting, an analytical emphasis on pluralisation can help move us away from blanket Anglo-American conceptualisations of identity and power, reminding us that agency “always exists in the differential and competing relations among the historical forces at play” (Grossberg 1992: 123). The post 9/11 era is in fact marked by a high degree of pluralisation and multiplicity: it is multinational, multilingual, multicultural, multimodal and, as will be elaborated over the course of this thesis, multivalent – all of which qualities are reflected in its cultural forms. This raises the question of how these multiple agencies might make themselves heard, and on which – or whose – terms. Bleiker asserts in the post-9/11 context that reclaiming the political value of the aesthetic must go hand in hand with the challenge of building a more globalised political vision, to guard against “judging interpretations of the international by the extent to which they reassure us of the familiar inevitability of entrenched political patterns” (Bleiker 2009: 47).

We might ask, in that case, what would be revealed in a conjunctural analysis of post-9/11 popular culture that encompasses a plurality of linguacultures, in an attempt to better capture the globalised nature of the political climate? It came to my attention recently that English, Arabic and Spanish were the first languages chosen for translation from French of the electronic version\(^5\) of Charlie Hebdo’s controversial issue dated 14 January 2015 (i24news 2015). This was dubbed the ‘survivors’ issue’, published a week after the Islamist attacks on the magazine’s offices in Paris, in which twelve staff members were murdered. Demand for the issue soared worldwide during that week, with the print run extended from the usual 60 000 to one, three, then five million (BBC News 2015). This attests to the global scale of impact of the attacks and political force of popular culture, while the multilingual production of the electronic version is in line with

\(^5\) In print form, the languages were French, Italian and Turkish (i24news 2015).
the plurality of the post-9/11 digital sphere discussed above. As it happens, these four languages—English, French, Spanish and Arabic—are also convenient for my purposes as a researcher, being myself a native speaker of English with knowledge of French and Spanish and, due to being in the field of Translation & Intercultural Studies, with access to qualified native speakers of Arabic for consultation. It is my contention that a study grounded in textual analysis not restricted by language or aesthetic genre but simply by format—audiovisual—would provide a more aptly diverse cross section of popular culture in the digital sphere, in order to achieve a more nuanced understanding of emerging modes of globalised political resistance among non-elites in the post-9/11 era. Hence the data for this study is a multilingual, multigenre collection of popular culture videos showcasing a contemporary form of aesthetic activism, further details of which are set out in section 1.3.

While aspiring to a global vision, it should nonetheless be emphasised that the present study represents one particular voice from one particular cultural location, originating in the UK, and with the USA and France at an immediate geo-cultural proximity. This positioning has influenced my research interests and data selection, and exposes my limitations. Meanwhile, in acknowledging the subjectivity of the researcher, we arrive at the theoretical framework chosen for the study, presented in section 1.2 below.

1.2 Narrative Theory in the Post-9/11 Context

This section introduces the chosen analytical framework and sets out its broader significance to the context of the study. Chapter 2 subsequently focuses on certain elements of the framework towards which the study seeks to contribute. Given the variety of interdisciplinary strands woven together in the research context—broadly involving translation studies, international relations, sociology and cultural studies—a comprehensive and flexible theoretical approach is required that can accommodate this analytical complexity. More specifically, I wish to account for the ideational within the material on a philosophical level; to analyse a range of creative texts and situate them within their production contexts amid wider socio-political structures and cultural flows; and to make sense of the interplay between different dimensions of social reality—
micro to macro, within and across language communities – in a way that supports and further illuminates my understandings of the post-9/11 context described in section 1.1 above. I therefore subscribe to a growing body of scholarship in Translation & Intercultural Studies, dubbed here the ‘socio-narrative’ approach, which was initially brought to the field by Mona Baker, notably via her 2006 book *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*. This work was instrumental in the conception of the present study, opening a window on themes of power and resistance in the globalised translational context, and offering a theoretical framework that meaningfully ties together many of the themes sketched out above.

Narrative theory in its sociological manifestation⁶ posits that human behaviour is guided not by supposedly fixed attributes, such as a person’s gender or race, but instead by “the everyday stories they live by” (Baker 2006a: 3), that is to say, the beliefs that an individual forms about the events unfolding around them. Within this framework, then, narratives are not an optional genre of communication but the “principal and inescapable” mode through which human beings experience the world (2006a: 9). In this sense, narratives are seen to constitute our reality, rather than merely representing it (2006a: 17). Narratives are defined by sociologist Margaret Somers as “constellations of relationships (connected parts) embedded in time and space, constituted by causal emplotment” (1994: 616, italics in original); hence the core narrative features of temporality, relationality, causal emplotment and selective appropriation, which are elaborated over the course of this section⁷. Relationality is key to the concept of narrative in that it precludes understanding of events as isolated phenomena, with an emphasis instead on the complexity and fluidity of people and events in continual interaction with one another. Furthermore, the elements of a narrative do not have to be confined to one text or stretch of discourse; in fact they are often diffuse, unstable and elaborated across a wide variety of media. Thus, from the outset there is an emphasis on plurality and connectivity that aptly reflects the nature of global media flows in the post-9/11 context.

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⁶ As opposed to narratological/linguistic approaches that treat narrative as a representational and elective form of communication (Baker 2006a: 9).
⁷ The additional narrative feature of normativeness/canonicity and breach, derived from Bruner’s variant narrative terminology (1991), is introduced in section 2.4.
able to deal with the individual text and the broader set of narratives in which it is embedded” (Baker 2006a: 4).

In terms of the ongoing interplay between micro and macro levels of experience, Somers and Gibson identify four interwoven dimensions of narrativity: ontological, public, conceptual and meta (1994: 60). Ontological narratives are narratives of the self, or in other words the stories we tell ourselves about our own personal history and place in the world, which enable us as social agents to make sense of our immediate environment and to construct an interpersonal identity on the basis of which we decide how to act (Baker 2006a: 28-31). A key point to which we will return in section 2.4 is that these stories are “rarely of our own making” (Somers 1994: 606, italics in original). In order to be intelligible and interpretable, ontological narratives depend on and invoke the “symbols, linguistic formulations, structures, and vocabularies of motive” (Ewick and Sibley 1995, cited in Baker 2006a: 28) of collective narratives: public, meta and conceptual narratives. Public narratives are those constructed by and circulating among cultural and institutional entities larger than the individual, such as the family, the workplace, and religious or political bodies (Somers and Gibson 1994: 62). Whilst public narratives can change significantly over the course of a few months or years, meta (or master) narratives – described as the “the epic dramas of our time”, despite often operating beyond our awareness (Somers and Gibson 1994: 63) – take longer to evolve, persist for a longer time and have a far wider reach; for example Capitalism vs. Communism, or The Enlightenment. As concerns this research context, Baker states that:

An obvious potential candidate for a meta-narrative today is the public narrative of the ‘War on Terror’, which is aggressively sustained and promoted through a myriad of channels across the entire world, thus rapidly acquiring the status of a super-narrative that cuts across geographical and national boundaries and directly impacts the lives of every one of us. (2006a: 45)\(^8\)

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\(^8\) To illustrate the point, Baker draws attention to the choice of the word ‘terror’, as opposed to (localised, containable acts of) ‘terrorism’, in the naming of this military campaign; terror being “a state of mind, one that can rapidly spread across boundaries and encompass all in its grip. It may be that a narrative must have this type of temporal and physical breadth, as well as a sense of inevitability or inescapability, to qualify as a meta- or master narrative” (2006a: 45).
Finally, conceptual (or disciplinary) narratives are those constructed by scholars in any field of study about their particular object of inquiry (Baker 2006a: 39). It is emphasised that this type of discourse is always conducted from a specific historical time and location, with nobody being “in a position to stand outside any narrative in order to observe it ‘objectively’” (Baker 2006a: 141); hence the subjectivity of the researcher is acknowledged. Baker cites Huntington’s Clash of Civilisations thesis, discussed in section 1.1 above, as an example of a conceptual narrative that has had significant influence outside of its disciplinary boundaries and shaped contemporary public narratives to pernicious effect:

*The Clash of Civilizations* has been a major reference point for the Bush administration, and the narratives it spawned have been directly linked to the official public narratives of 9/11, the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, and even before all these to the war in the Balkans (...). Huntington’s narrative hardly predicts or indeed tolerates hybridization or acculturation. (Baker 2006a: 40-41)

Indeed, in highlighting that the acceptance of one particular narrative always involves the rejection of others (Bennett and Edelman 1985: 160), the socio-narrative approach is highly political. Baker explains that the impetus for narrative-based research often derives from a desire to expose and challenge (through alternative stories) unexamined assumptions configured by narratives “which exclude the experience of large sectors of society while legitimating and promoting those of the political, economic, and cultural elite” (2006b: 470). However, while socio-narrative shares much epistemologically and normatively with constructivist approaches in political science and international relations (Hay 2002: 201)\(^9\), it goes further than suggesting that the world is discursively constructed by agents by breaking down how this is done into component elements and linguistic/semiotic processes, and applying the analysis to different dimensions of experience. In this respect, it is also a more robust framework than the concept of articulation in cultural studies, which Lawrence Grossberg (1992) applies within a similar context of popular culture and hegemony – a point further discussed in section 2.7.

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\(^9\) Colin Hay points to “the stress placed by constructivists upon the contingent or open-ended nature of social and political processes and dynamics – especially those conventionally seen as fixed (…) [T]he recognition of a constructed nature of the reality we perceive implies that things could and can be different” (2002: 201).
Temporality as a constitutive element of narrativity is key to this thesis. As is elaborated in section 2.2, the emphasis on temporal factors is something that sets the theory apart from many other sociological models with regard to questions of selfhood and identity, and also aligns it with theorisations of cultural hegemony, which Gramsci understood in a temporal sense. Thus, whilst our ontological narratives are, as we saw earlier, seldom of our own making, by “exploring expressions of social being” (Somers 1994: 615) within wider hegemonic structures, socio-narrative enlarges the critical focus to allow for a deeper ontological analysis – incorporating philosophical and psychological perspectives – than most traditional sociological studies of social agency. Conceptualising the identity of social agents in an evolving, relational way furthermore avoids the imposition of rigid and deterministic social categories, in the manner of identity politics, and implies the potential for space/growth, with narrative identities being “constituted and reconstituted over time” (Somers and Gibson 1994: 67). As Somers states:

One way to avoid the hazards of rigidifying aspects of identity into a misleading categorical entity is to incorporate into the core conception of identity the categorically destabilizing dimensions of time, space and relationality (1994: 606).

The philosophical flexibility of socio-narrative in embracing subjectivity and value judgement without discarding reason and logic, making narratives both affective and testable, is another attraction of the framework. The testability of narratives is laid out in Walter Fisher’s 1987 paradigm for the assessment of narratives, further discussed in section 2.4. Yet as Fisher himself puts it, “[t]echnical discourse is imbued with myth and metaphor, and aesthetic discourse has cognitive capacity and import. The narrative paradigm is designed, in part, to draw attention to these facts and provide a way of thinking that fully takes them into account” (1985: 347). The theory thus equips social agents with an awareness of value-laden narrative processes woven throughout the fabric of human society, particularly those of selective appropriation, i.e. the evaluative privileging/exclusion of different elements of experience to create a thematic thread (Baker 2006a: 71); and causal emplotment, i.e. turning a set of independent instances

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10 Theories of identity politics work on “the assumption that persons in similar social categories and similar life experiences (based on gender, color, generation, sexual orientation, and so on) will act on the grounds of common attributes (...) not because of a rational interest or set of learned values” (Somers and Gibson 1994: 53).
into a meaningful sequence, which “charges the events depicted with moral and ethical significance” (Baker 2006a: 67). Characterological factors with an emphasis on values, as we have seen, are central to collective identity-constructs such as the nation; meanwhile the character of individual artists is instrumental in the affective construction of alternative identities and values in global civil society, especially in performative digitally mediated texts in which the artists themselves take centre stage – for example in the case of hip hop music videos – as will be demonstrated. A key consideration here in relation to the research context is that “acknowledging the constructed nature of narratives means that we accept the potential existence and worth of multiple truths” (Baker 2006a: 19, emphasis added). I would argue that the recognition of co-existent, often competing, narrative value systems is even more pertinent in the globalised post-9/11 context. It is captured as a central theme in this thesis via the textual function of multivalence (Stroud 2002), to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

To conclude this introduction to post-9/11 narrativity, it bears mentioning that this analytical investment in multiplicity derives in large part from my conceptual positioning in the field of translation and intercultural studies, which has significantly expanded since its emergence in the 1950s, and has been described in recent times more as an interdisciplinary network than a single field:

The result of this diversification and reformulation is a field rife with potential and bursting with energy, but also one difficult to pinpoint (...) the role of translation in the processes of human cognition, identity formation, and cultural mediation is rapidly taking center stage. (Elliott, n.d.)

Despite “similar shifts” (Elliott, n.d.) also occurring in the field of narratology, as Baker argues, “what no theorist of narrative seems to appreciate so far, is that translation (...) plays a key role in naturalizing and promoting [narratives] across linguistic boundaries” (Baker 2006a: 14). Hence, one aim of the present study is to give prominence to translation as a force driving new patterns of exchange and sharing in the post-9/11 digital context, and translators as social agents expressly called upon to negotiate intersecting narratives of different lingua
cultures. Yet since “translation is something that goes on, not just between languages and between individuals, but among sensory
modalities, procedural habits, and linguistic structures” (Reddy 2001: 80), a narrative perspective enables us to appreciate translation – or ‘renarration’ (Baker 2008) – as a vantage point for the post-9/11 context, from which flows and processes of transfer/change are brought to the fore on all levels of experience. This has epistemological and ontological implications that are explored in Chapter 5 with reference to Deleuzian philosophy. Thus, socio-narrative is a versatile conceptual framework that can meaningfully capture the complexity of analytical strands woven together in this study, provide a depth of insight into the everyday political reality of non-elites, and a means of apprehending emerging modes of social construction within the chaotic and contradictory post-9/11 temporal context.

1.3 Data Material & Research Questions

The data set, tabulated in Appendix 1, is composed of thirteen audiovisual popular culture texts that reflect the everyday narratives of non-elite political agents from diverse localities in the globalised post-9/11 era. First and foremost, the texts all exhibit what I call a quality/function of ‘aesthetic shock’, based on a combination of multivalence (Stroud 2002) and aesthetics, as will be elaborated in Chapter 2. Further selection criteria and a rationale for the inclusion of each text in the study are set out in Chapter 3. Some of the texts were known to the author before embarking upon the study – indeed, they inspired the study – while others were the result of further research. As seen in the research questions listed below, ‘multivalent’ (Stroud 2002) came to be a fitting description for the texts due to its relevance to the socio-narrative framework, in particular Fisher’s 1987 paradigm for assessing the effectiveness of individual narratives. In applying the notion (which is defined in section 2.5) to the texts in the context of post-9/11 narrative hegemony and considering their significance in this light, the following four research questions emerged:

11 Rather than, for example, ‘subversive’ or ‘alternative’ – which are unhelpful descriptions for the purposes of this study since texts of this nature can often attain cult status and be appropriated by the mainstream.
1. Drawing on a multilingual data set of audiovisual popular culture texts about Islam and the War on Terror, what does a narrative approach reveal about the meaning and nature of ‘hegemony’ and ‘resistance’ in the post-9/11 era?

This is the overarching research question. It firstly establishes that the analysis is grounded in a collection of texts that are both pluralised and creative in nature, and then sets out the broader socio-political research context of the study and theoretical framework to be employed. In determining that the primary conceptual focus is on the narrative contestation of global power structures as played out in the domain of popular culture, this question serves as the starting point from which further key themes are teased out in the three subsequent research questions.

2. What roles do aesthetics and multivalence play in shaping post-9/11 narratives of resistance?

This question pertains to the theorisation of the textual function of aesthetic shock that is developed in Chapter 2. In brief, it seeks to apply the idea of multivalent narrativity to the research context, foregrounding the aesthetic element as part of a contemporary political paradigm shift that extends to the epistemological level. While multivalence pertains primarily to the socio-narrative framework, the focus on aesthetics allows us to extend the conceptual scope of the analysis and probe the affective/performative dimensions of narrativity as they relate to the political. Thus, the question seeks to enrich theoretical understandings of the unfolding historical moment and offer a more fluid, creative and ‘embodied’ sense of global society. This is of particular significance given the context of hegemonic rationalism (discussed further in section 2.3) in which the texts are embedded.

3. What features of post-9/11 narratives of resistance emerge as recurrent across different genres and national contexts?

This question seeks to ascertain whether in spite of the pluralised nature of the data set, common aspects and patterns can nonetheless be identified across the texts that go
beyond the limits of language and national context, and which may be more easily overlooked by conventional ‘methodologically elite’ forms of political analysis discussed in section 1.1. It is hoped that any such patterns will enhance understandings of emerging forms of political engagement in global civil society that are not determined by hegemonic structures, but are rather shaped by the affordances of the digital age. Thus, this question seeks to further illuminate and underscore the significance of the personal as it relates to the global under conditions of narrative hegemony, as understood through the lens of popular culture and digitally networked communities of affinity in the public domain.

4. What is the relevance of ‘renarration’ (Baker 2008) to theorisations of post-9/11 narratives of resistance?

This question speaks to the translational perspective of the project; ‘renarration’ being the term used by Baker within the narrative framework to describe translation, as mentioned in section 1.2 above. In privileging flows and processes of meaning transfer over static categories and entities, renarration allows us to consider alternative epistemologies in the post-9/11 context and to probe the texts in this light. In particular, concepts from Deleuzian philosophy are brought into the picture to support an exploration of renarration on different levels of narrative, from the ontological to the meta. This research question pertains primarily to the second data analysis chapter (Chapter 5).

Broadly, the four research questions seek to elucidate key aspects of the research context discussed in section 1.1 above, i.e. questions of identity, values, cultural hegemony and globalisation in the post-9/11 era. It should be emphasised that while describing the texts as post-9/11, my use of this temporal marker is not meant to imply that the world changed in some fundamental way on 11 September 2001. It instead signals a context of production characterised by the intensification of pre-existing West vs. Islam narratives in neoliberal hegemonic discourse as part of the War on Terror military campaign, alongside the cumulative changes that brought about Web 2.0 and accelerated processes of globalisation, as discussed in section 1.1 above. Thus, it marks a confluence of temporal
factors involving elements of both rupture and continuity – a point elaborated in Chapter 5.

1.4 Overview of Chapters

Following this introduction, **Chapter 2 (‘Aesthetic Shock as Resistance to Post-9/11 Narrative Hegemony’)** further develops the initial discussion of socio-narrative theory, presented in section 1.2 above, focusing in particular on the core narrative feature of temporality (Baker 2006a, Somers and Gibson 1994; Ricoeur 1980) and Bruner’s additional feature of normativeness/canonicity and breach (1991), in order to advance a contemporary theory of resistance to post-9/11 hegemonic narrative structures. The first half of the chapter explores questions of personal identity and agency in the context of neoliberal globalisation: section 2.2 examines the underexplored role of temporality in sociological models of the self, drawing on Ricoeur (1980), and applies this perspective to more recent theorisations of precarity and affect (Sharma 2014; Butler 2004); section 2.3 concerns the structural level, considering the temporal dimension of narrative normativeness in terms of the Gramscian notion of cultural hegemony, illustrated by Said’s argument about narrative hegemony regarding Palestine (1980); and section 2.4 critiques Fisher’s 1987 paradigm for the assessment of narratives in view of Bruner’s notion of narrative breach, understood as social agency or a form of resistance. The second half of the chapter progresses into themes of particular relevance to the data set: section 2.5 discusses ambiguity in the context of hegemonic rationalism, and the textual function of multivalence (Stroud 2002) as a means to challenge narrative normativeness and the assumptions of Fisher’s paradigm; section 2.6 then builds on Stroud’s perspective on multivalence through emphasis on the somatic impact of textual aesthetics, which, it is argued, can be deployed along with multivalence in a cross-genre affective practice that I call ‘aesthetic shock’. Finally, section 2.7 draws on Deleuzian philosophy in order to situate the notion of aesthetic shock within the post-9/11 temporal context and supplement theorisations of post-9/11 narrativity on an epistemological level, accessed through Baker’s notion of renarration (2008).
The first half of Chapter 3 (‘A Narrative Methodology’) presents an overview of the data set and description of the methodological approach for undertaking the analysis: section 3.2 explains the criteria for selection of the texts according to their theme, language, temporal spread, format and genre. Section 3.3 provides an overview of the data analysis, which is structured thematically across two chapters and draws on concepts from socio-narrative enriched by theoretical perspectives from other disciplines. Next, section 3.4 introduces the thirteen texts to be analysed – one pilot study text and twelve core texts – in order of production date, providing a brief rationale for the inclusion of each in the data set. Section 3.5 constitutes in its entirety the second half of the chapter, presenting a pilot study that tests out the basic narrative methodology on a single text featuring a mix of performative genres – music video/short film “P.H.A.T.W.A. (Director’s Cut)” by Iraqi-Canadian rapper The Narcicyst (2009). The pilot study begins with a discussion of the text’s formatting and framing, then the analysis progresses to the three key analytical dimensions of character (relating to the theme of identity), temporality, and multivalence. It seeks to demonstrate how the narrator’s multivalent positioning in the post-9/11 temporal order is performatively exploited with a political agenda that is made more credible and persuasive through the affective appeal of character and aesthetics. The pilot study provides the starting blocks for the broader, multilingual, multi-text analysis conducted over the course of Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4 (‘9/11 and the War on Terror: Temporal Multivalence’) is the first of the two data analysis chapters. It draws on eight of the data set texts in total, and fleshes out further the concepts of temporality and multivalence discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, taking into account the artists’ identities, production context, and narrative features of the texts. The analysis starts in section 4.2 with the theme of 9/11, for which three texts are considered: hip hop music video “Bin Laden” (2004) by Immortal Technique featuring Mos Def; comedy sketch “11. Dernier episode” (2009) by Jean-Marie Bigard; and acoustic rock video “Pero” by Mero (2011). Here, the analysis does not proceed by genre but is structured according to the separate subsections of temporality and multivalence. The following section (4.3) deals with the theme of the War on Terror, exploring five texts which are this time divided into the genre-based subsections of hip hop and comedy, merging temporality and multivalence into the single notion of temporal multivalence.

Thus, the analysis of the core data begins with temporality and multivalence in a similar manner to the pilot study, and continues with a contextual and genre-based substantiation of the insights yielded so far. The aim in progressing the analysis in this way is to move away from linearity of thought and towards a more nuanced and multidimensional conceptual model for the texts that more accurately reflects the complexities of the unfolding historical moment. This lays the ground for Chapter 5 to further expand the discussion of post-9/11 narrativity on the epistemological level, drawing on concepts from Deleuzian thought.

**Chapter 5 (‘Clash of Civilisations, Palestine: Renarration and the Rhizome’)** is the second of the two data analysis chapters, drawing on the final four texts of the data set. The texts are presented as subsections in and of themselves within their larger respective thematic categories of Clash of Civilisations (section 5.2, two texts) and Palestine (section 5.3, two texts). Section 5.2 elaborates the theme of Clash of Civilisations from the perspective of religious conversion on the ontological level of narrative: section 5.2.1 discusses American feature film *The Taqwacores* directed by Eyad Zahra (2010), and section 5.2.2 focuses on the hip hop music video “Enfants du désert” (Children of the desert) (2009) by French rapper Diam’s. Section 5.3 elaborates the theme of Palestine from the perspective of spatial narratives and migration on the meta level of narrative: section 5.3.1 considers the ‘tour guide’ video clip “After Banksy: The Parkour Guide to Gaza” by the Gaza Parkour Team (2015), and section 5.3.2 discusses “Somos sur” [We are South] (2014) by French-Chilean rapper Ana Tijoux featuring British-Palestinian rapper Shadia Mansour.

A central aim of this chapter is to rework assumptions of fixedness in the theorisation of multivalent textualities by focusing on processes of ‘renarration’ (Baker 2008) supplemented by elements of Deleuzian philosophy – in particular the rhizomatic model.
of thought and the notion of becoming-minoritarian (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013), discussed in section 2.7. This addresses the fact that the texts can only be seen as multivalent from the vantage point of hegemonic binaries, and posits an alternative epistemological paradigm that, in privileging processes and flows, captures elements of both rupture and continuity and helps to conceptually resolve the contradictions and paradoxes of the post-9/11 narrative order.

Finally, Chapter 6 ('Conclusion') revisits the research questions set out in section 1.3 above, addressing them sequentially in the light of the analytical findings in section 6.2. Section 6.3 then identifies the limitations of study and, finally, section 6.4 outlines recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2
Aesthetic Shock as Resistance to Post-9/11 Narrative Hegemony

2.1 Introduction

Narrative, understood in sociological terms, is the epistemological and ontological texture of human experience itself. As Bruner argues, “its form is so familiar and ubiquitous that it is likely to be overlooked, in much the same way as we suppose that fish will be the last to discover water” (1991: 4). Even with the putative distance of academic inquiry, the circularities and subjectivities of narrative cannot be escaped. As such, the “linearization” problems identified by Bruner (1991: 13) in laying cognition down into communicable utterances apply equally in this chapter, which aims to foreground certain aspects of narrative theory that, it will be argued, have particular resonance with the themes emerging from the data set. Of the many interlaced features of narrativity, those given particular attention in this chapter are temporality (Baker 2006a; Somers and Gibson 1994; Ricoeur 1980) and normativeness/canonicity and breach (Bruner 1991).

These in turn tie into other notions explored by theorists in different disciplines, namely precarity and affect (Sharma 2014; Butler 2004); cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1971; Said 1984); aesthetics in world politics (Bleiker 2009; Best 2009); and the epistemological model of the rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013). As a specific contribution to the existing socio-narrative framework, the chapter seeks to extend Stroud’s discussion of textual multivalence (2002) that critiques Fisher’s 1987 paradigm for assessment of narratives. More broadly, it is hoped that an examination of the interplay between these notions from an interdisciplinary perspective will give rise to new theoretical understandings upon which the data analysis in Chapters 4 and 5 may serve to build.

2.2 Temporality and Selfhood

Since the study is ultimately concerned with mediated expressions of the lived experience of individuals whose identities are not accounted for by dominant ‘mainstream’ narratives, and who enact a struggle for recognition and the reworking of oppressive
narrative structures through performative means, it seems logical to commence by proposing a narrative ontology, before moving on to examine the position of the narrated self within its broader narrative environment. In so doing, we immediately meet an element of the narrative framework that stands out as a pivotal concern throughout the thesis: that of temporality.

Baker clarifies that temporality – termed “narrative diachronicity” by Bruner (1991: 6) – refers not to the order of events in ‘real’ time, but to the way in which they are “embedded [by a narrator] in a sequential context and in a specific temporal and spatial configuration that renders them intelligible” (2006a: 51). The sequencing and configuration are not additional layers of narration, but are rather inherent in or constitutive of a narrative and hence guide and shape its meaning (2006a: 52). In terms of ontology, Douglas Ezzy notes that “one of the most important consequences of a narrative conception of the self is that it incorporates temporality” (1998: 239). He goes on to explain that, unlike the narrative feature of relationality, temporality has largely been excluded from sociological models of selfhood and identity. In other words, sociological studies have tended to focus on the self as located in and constructed through a set of relationships, which overlaps with the assertion among narrative sociologists that

the chief characteristic of narrative is that it renders understanding only by connecting (however unstably) parts to a constructed configuration or a social network of relationships (however incoherent or unrealizable) composed of symbolic, institutional, and material practices. (Somers 1994: 616, italics in original)

However, this appointment of relationality as “the chief characteristic of narrative” does not square with the position of narrative historians who instead foreground temporality as the “ultimate referent” of narrative (Ricoeur 1980: 169; White 1980/1987: 52), as will be elaborated. Either way, an important exception to the exclusion of time within sociological models of selfhood has been the work of George Herbert Mead in the 1930s, who presents a view of the self as a social process:
The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process (…) similarly, we normally organize our memories along the string of our self. (1934/1992: 356)

However, Ezzy states that Mead’s work has been done a disservice by scholars who have separated his work on time and the psychology of the self into the fields of philosophy and sociology respectively (1998: 240). Ezzy re-reads Mead with reference to philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s later works on time and narrativity in order to restore cohesion to and further develop his ideas within the field of sociology. Arguing that action is always symbolically mediated and therefore that lived experience cannot be separated from its narration, Ezzy posits that narrative identities “are necessarily processual because they describe lived time, which is ongoing” (1998: 247); they are emphatically unfinished and continually refashioned as episodes unfold in a person’s life.

Ricoeur’s narrative exploration of temporality takes as its point of departure Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1927); however it seeks to refine Heidegger’s critique of “ordinary” linear representations of time by mapping his framework onto the concept of narrative, both historical and fictional (1980: 170). Ricoeur’s key arguments are as follows. First, he explains that narrativity sits at the interface between time and language, creating a structurally reciprocal relationship whereby, as mentioned above, temporality is the “ultimate referent” of narrativity, or the structure of existence that finds its linguistic expression in narrativity (1980: 169). Second, the multi-layered nature of narrativity can help us better understand and represent Heidegger’s true ‘nature’ of time, which itself operates at three discernible levels: “within-time-ness”, or our subjectively lived experience of time (1980: 170); historicality, or “the emphasis placed on the weight of the past” (1980: 171); and ‘deep temporality’, described as “the point at which temporality springs forth in the plural unity of future, past and present” (1980 171). Thirdly, Ricoeur argues that the temporal implications of narrativity (in particular, emplotment) have been overlooked by both historians and literary theorists, who have tended to reduce the complexities of temporality to a simple anecdotic linearity (1980: 171).
Through his analysis, Ricoeur tackles a paradox in Heidegger’s model which he argues can be further illuminated with recourse to narrativity. The paradox relates to the temporal dimension of historicality, shaped on the one hand by the finite nature of individual existence – the state of being “between” birth and death, or “being-towards-death” (1980: 182) – and, on the other, the seemingly infinite extension of time/nature at a deeper structural level (the deep temporality mentioned above). A concern for the past and sense of common destiny characterises historicality, which contradicts the “impulse toward the future” and autonomous nature of being-towards-death (1980: 182). Heidegger attempts to mediate the conflicts arising from the ramifications of these co-existing concepts through the notion of repetition; Ricoeur, however, is not satisfied with Heidegger’s treatment of repetition and posits that introducing narrativity to the notion might rescue the entire temporal model from persisting conceptual difficulties. As he explains,

Heidegger broaches the topic of repetition in the following way: the analysis starts from the notion of a heritage as something transmitted and received. But because of the preceding analysis of temporality centered on the nontransferable experience of having to die, the perspective under which the notion of a heritage is introduced must remain radically monadic. Each person transmits from him- or herself to him- or herself the resources that he or she may “draw” from his or her past. (...) In this way, each of us receives him- or herself as “fate” (Schicksal). (...) And thanks to repetition as fate, retrospection is reconnected to anticipation, and anticipation is rooted in retrospection. (1980: 182)

In order to account for both the individual and the communal sense of destiny within historicality, Ricoeur argues, the concept of fate must be tweaked, which Heidegger does by combining the notion of “Mit-sein” [being-with-others] with that of “Schicksal” [fate], to arrive at “Mit-geschehen” [co-historicality] (1980: 183). It is here that narrativity is called upon to clarify how the notion of repetition connects the individual self to communal destiny, given that narrative has an inherently communicative quality:

[T]he repetition that Heidegger calls fate is articulated in a narrative. Fate is recounted. (...) In imposing the narrative form on repetition, the chronicle also imposes the priority of the communal form of destiny on the private form of fate.
In other words, narrativity, from the outset, establishes repetition on the plane of being-with-others. (1980: 188)

What implications does this have for questions of identity? Applying Ricoeur’s ideas to the sociological context, Ezzy argues, mitigates the impermeable “sovereign” nature of Cartesian self without falling into post-structuralist models whose emphasis on context and linguistic construction can entirely efface a notion of selfhood. Through narrativity, a balance can be struck between these two conceptual poles (1998: 246). A narrative identity, encompassing individual agency that is at once future oriented, structurally historical and mediated by relationality with others, is both dynamic and coherent; a self that reinterprets and reconstructs in order to maintain biographical continuity and integrity as life progresses.

Such a utopian model of social selfhood, of course, manifests problematically in the public arena, where power differentials come into play, causing insecurity and conflict. This tension is arguably heightened in the context of our globalised times, where risk is the economic driving force. Indeed, sociologist Anthony Giddens argues that the concept of risk is a historically recent one, characteristic of a future-oriented society with a territorial mindset – the quintessence of modern civilisation (2002: 22). In a similar manner to Ricoeur’s “ordinary” time, however, risk tends in its ordinary representations to be abstracted and linear, even calculable. On an ontological level, risk is better captured as precariousness, or precarity – a term Lauren Berlant states was originally used in French to describe poverty, then to refer to social conditions following the introduction of flexible labour contracts in France during the neoliberal markets reforms of the 1980s, but now the term “has become elastic, describing an affective atmosphere penetrating all classes” as society as a whole becomes destabilised (2011: 201). In her analysis of the Occupy Wall Street movement, Sarah Sharma describes the lived experience of neoliberal precarity:

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12 Ricoeur quotes Heidegger to underline how narrative simultaneously confirms both the subjective/individual and the public nature of time: "in the 'most intimate' Being-with-one-another of several people, they can say 'now' and say it 'together.' . . . The 'now' which anyone expresses is always said in the publicness of Being-in-the-world with one another" (1980: 175).

13 ‘Precariousness’ carries an affective weight – it is personal, unmeasurable and power-relational; the term derives from the Latin precārius “obtained by asking or praying” (hence, dependent on another’s will), from prex “entreaty, prayer” (Online Etymological Dictionary).
For Occupiers, sleeping out in public is an act of symbolic expression against precarity – against deepening forms of economic injustice. To be precarious means to be unsure, uncertain, and exposed to forces beyond one’s control. It means to live and work without a sense of a guaranteed future. (2014: 6)

Temporality – understood here as time that is structured within specific political and economic contexts and “lived at the intersection of a range of social differences, such as race, class, gender, immigration status, labor, and sexuality” (2014: 6) – is key to Sharma’s concept of precarity. She explains that to understand precarity as temporal is to shift the emphasis from spatial conceptualisations of the contingency of life (such as location, orientation or socio-economic position) to what is lived as “a transecting form of social difference that changes one’s relationship to time and the temporal order” (2014: 9).

Again, this is made more complex by a temporal characteristic of globalised society: instantaneous mass information flow and accelerated interconnectivity of previously distant narrative environments, with the resulting ideological fusions and fissions. In a context where the state can no longer be considered representative of a monolingual and culturally uniform nationality, yet neither can true global hypermobility and collectivity be claimed, nor the uneven restrictions of border control denied, Judith Butler argues that “precarious life characterizes such lives who do not qualify as recognizable, readable, or grievable. And in this way, precarity is a rubric that brings together women, queers, transgender people, the poor, and the stateless” (2009: xii). In a subsequent article, in a descriptive scenario reminiscent of Heidegger’s within-time-ness, or our “thrownness among things” (Ricoeur 1980: 172) – an “existential now” determined by the “making-present” of preoccupation or care (Ricoeur 1980: 173) – Butler locates ontological precarity within the physiological immediacy of affect:

That the body invariably comes up against the outside world is a sign of the general predicament of unwilled proximity to others and to circumstances beyond one’s control. This “coming up against” is one modality that defines the body. And yet, this obtrusive alterity against which the body finds itself can be, and often is, what animates responsiveness to that world. That responsiveness may include a wide range of affects: pleasure, rage, suffering, hope, to name a few. (2010: 34)
The fact that socio-narrative embraces non-verbal forms of expression (e.g. visual imagery, physical gesture and music) makes the framework particularly amenable to the affective turn in cultural studies and critical theory that has been gaining ground in recent years. Affect is “the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010: 1; italics in original). It is a social and relational phenomenon, and is, as mentioned above, always rooted in the present moment. A focus on affect, I believe, can deepen our understanding of the workings of contemporary narrativity. As Douglas Robinson notes, as part of the human experience, narrative “doesn’t go all the way down” (2011: 168). However, in seeking to account for affect/somaticity in his remodelling of the socio-narrative framework, Robinson separates affect from narrative in a temporally sequential order with affect occurring first. I am more inclined towards Butler’s view that affect is the “very stuff of ideation and critique” (2010: 34), since an implicit interpretative act occurs at moments of affective responsiveness (2010: 34). I furthermore wholly subscribe to Wetherell’s position that “no easy distinction can be made between visceral and cultural meaning-making, [indeed] why should we make one – where is the advantage?” (2012: 67). I would argue, nonetheless, that affect offers a reasonable ontological point of departure for this study, neatly incorporating notions of narrative temporality and selfhood, and driving the ongoing narrative construction of reality, which, while effected by individual agents, is inevitably social and relational in nature. We will return to the question of affect in sections 2.6 and 2.7.

This section has attempted to sketch out the relationship between personal identity and temporality within the narrative framework, with a view to applying it to the contemporary post-9/11 context in which the study is grounded. I have attempted to show that narrative identity is an ongoing, evolving relational process with a privileging of the present moment through interpreted affect. It has also been noted that the fast-paced, shifting dynamics of the globalised world intensify the risk of conflict and adversity, and as a result an individual’s identity at a given location in time and space may be qualified as precarious in nature. The ensuing analysis further probes the question of individual agency from a narrative perspective in order to determine how affect can be recognised and harnessed for individual empowerment and social change. First, to build a
fuller picture of the power dynamics at hand, the following section examines the broader narrative structures with which individual social agents must contend.

2.3 Narrative Hegemony

A feature of narrativity that may be said to resonate with the assumptions of structural linguistics is what Bruner terms ‘normativeness’ (1991: 15), or the existence of culturally contoured discourses that determine the way social agents construct reality. However, the emphasis in the structural approach is once again on relationality – in the sense of language being a system whose constituent units are dependent on each other for their existence and value. Indeed structuralism as a whole appears blind to temporality, its focus being on “particular systems or structures under artificial and ahistorical conditions, neglecting the systems or structures out of which they have emerged in the hope of explaining their present functioning” (Sturrock 1979/1992: 361).

On the other hand, approaching social discourse structures as narrative brings not only non-verbal semiotic systems into the scope, but also the temporal dimension of communicative processes. This is evident in Baker’s claim that narrativity “normalizes the accounts it projects over a long period of time, so that they come to be perceived as self-evident, benign, uncontestable and non-controversial” (Baker 2006a: 11; emphasis added). Moreover, given its acknowledgement of the fact that uncontested paradigmatic values do not emerge in a power vacuum, and hence cannot be viewed as benign and arbitrary constructions of social reality, socio-narrative offers more than its closest political manifestation – constructivism – which has been criticised for its neglect of the presence of structural inequalities and power hierarchies in social organisation (Scholte 2005: 132). Normativeness, as Baker argues, “underlines the central role that narrative plays in policing cultural legitimacy” (2006a: 98). Bruner observes that many narrative theorists, including Paul Ricoeur and Hayden White, similarly foreground questions of rule within the “normative program of narrative” (1991: 16). This is evident in White’s assertion that “narrative in general, from the folktale to the novel, from the annals to the fully realized "history," has to do with the topics of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, authority” (1980/1987: 17). The historical dimension of normativeness, to
return to the core narrative feature of temporality, is actively engaged to strengthen the political influence of narratives underpinning social relations (to the detriment of other possible narratives). As a means of control, individuals are socialised to interpret present events in terms of the “sanctioned narratives of the past” of an established social and political order, which restricts the scope and/or public legitimacy of evolving personal narratives (Baker 2006a: 21).

The temporal dimension to normativeness also finds expression in Gramsci’s revisionist approach to Marxism (1971), which highlights the way in which the interplay between cultural activities and the economy/state leads to “manufactured consent” or “cultural hegemony”. Gramsci was wary of the Marxist notion of class becoming too static and deterministic. Instead, he posited a more fluid model that recognised not only the influence of cultural and discursive factors in the creation of social attitudes and action, but also temporality and flux, captured in the notion of the “historic bloc”, which concerns how social groups are “dynamically created in specific historical moments, or so-called conjunctures” (Leitch et al. 2010: 1000).

The temporal dimension to the struggle for hegemony means that at certain points in history, certain narratives cannot be heard, as there is no ‘space’ for them within currently accepted social and political discourse. The ability of any social group to influence the organisation of the public arena “depends on the relative strength of other ‘blocs’ in a social field marked by conflict and continual jockeying for advantage” (Leitch et al. 2010: 1000). This may induce the ontological precarity discussed above, for example, as is markedly the case for the people of Palestine today. In ‘Permission to Narrate’, Edward Said exposes through the Palestinian case how “[f]acts do not at all speak for themselves, but require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain and circulate them” (1984: 34). To illustrate this, he cites “the Chancellor incident”, in which American news commentator John Chancellor’s first-hand account, broadcast on US national television, of Israel’s ferocity in the 1982 Beirut siege was retracted a week later, with the actions of “savage” Israel re-narrated by Chancellor as unintentional. Literary critic and founder of Raritan Review Richard Poirier stated at the time that Chancellor
unwittingly exposed the degree to which the structure of the evening news depends on ideas of reality determined by the political and social discourse already empowered outside the newsroom. Feelings about the victims of the siege could not, for example, be attached to an idea for the creation of a Palestinian homeland since, despite the commitments, muffled as they are, of the Camp David accords, no such idea has as yet managed to find an enabling vocabulary within what is considered 'reasonable' political discourse in this country. (cited in Said 1984: 35)

Said adds to Poirier’s analysis that, in order for the idea of a Palestinian homeland to gain currency, it would have to be supported by a previously accepted narrative that was cohesive with it. Unfortunately, such a narrative, he argues, has been resisted “as strenuously on the imaginative and ideological level as it has been politically” (Said 1984: 35).

Before the onset of intensified globalisation processes, when nationalism was the prevailing structure of identity (Scholte 2005: 147), it made sense for Gramsci’s concept of hegemony to be applied to the domain of nation states. Now, however, the discursive manipulation of the masses into accepting the normative worldview of the powerful few is part of a much more complex picture. Understanding the idea of cultural hegemony in narrative terms broadens its scope, shifting the analytical focus to specific ways in which discourse is constructed in order to manufacture consent – as well as to contest it – and accommodating new social agencies and relational dynamics that emerge in the globalised context. The Palestinian example clearly demonstrates the temporally shifting processes of narrative hegemony. Said was articulating the above ideas in 1984 – three decades ago at the time of writing. Over that period, whilst the territory remains occupied, the notion of a Palestinian homeland has been appropriated by a range of political and civil society movements outside the Middle East and America as a unifying cause on the level of meta narrative, for example at a demonstration in support of Gaza which took place in November 2012 in London (Figure 2.1), where a Palestinian Solidarity Campaign flag can be seen alongside banners for the Stop the War Coalition and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Photo courtesy of Stop the War Coalition, taken from an article entitled ‘Thousands March in Support of Gaza’ (Descrier 2012).
This demonstrates the spatial as well as temporal dimensions of narrative temporality. With processes of media convergence affording heightened visibility of such movements, counter-hegemonic and separatist groups in different territorial locations can start looking to each other for parallel narratives of state oppression. Fintan Lane of the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign explains with respect to Northern Ireland that “the Nationalist community has often had Palestinian flags flying in the street - and in retaliation the Loyalist community tends to fly Israeli flags” (2010). Lane’s statement is borne out by a graffiti mural painted in Divis Street, Belfast, in December 2002 (Figure 2.2).

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15 And recalls Giddens’ observation that “[l]ocal nationalisms spring up as a response to globalising tendencies, as the hold of older nation-states weakens” (2002:13).
16 Photo taken from article entitled ‘The Irish-Palestinian Connection’ (Crethiplethi 2010).
The Palestinian narrative has been appropriated in a similar manner by the Basque separatist movement, as evident in the fronting of the Palestinian flag (alongside the Lebanese flag) at an independence march in August 2006 (Figure 2.3).¹⁷

¹⁷ The march coincided with the Israeli attack on Lebanon in August 2006, which is deeply embedded in the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Photo posted on Eusko Blog: Ingeleraz (Aleksu 2006).
Yet the Palestinian cause, in evolving a cult “underdog” narrative appeal, has also become a lucrative enterprise for global consumerism, such that the continuing struggle of the Palestinian people may be deemed of lesser importance than the social image of the individual consumer, as exemplified by an iPhone 5 cover available for purchase online (Figure 2.4)\(^\text{18}\), attesting to the complexity of issues of normativeness and breach in contemporary society.

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Figure 2.4: Palestinian flag cover for iPhone

Many questions can be raised here about the nature of global civil society, power structures and information flow in the digital age. On a basic level of analysis, however, the very fact that we are able to look back from our current narrative environment at an evolving history of any kind tells us that, at some point, fissures have been created in the landscape of narrative normativeness by the emergence of new narratives. Therefore, the key question to be explored in the following section is how the agency that creates such fissures operates. In other words, how can social actors, afflicted at a given time by the affective structure of precarity, challenge hegemonic narrative normativeness in order to create space for their own narratives?

\(^{18}\)Designed by Riyawa Gifts, advertised on shopping website zazzle.co.uk [last accessed 23 May 2014].
2.4 Narrative Agency

As mentioned in section 1.2, an advantage of the narrative approach is that it provides scope for a deeper exploration of social phenomena by encompassing questions of personal identity and the interplay between the personal and the public, whether local or global. This should offer empowering possibilities for political activism; yet, at the core of the narrative approach lies the assumption that “[we] come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making” (Somers 1994: 606; italics in original). This means that the social narratives that constitute a given historic bloc – in ontological terms, the stock of plots available for social agents to draw upon in order to make sense of their lives and participate in society – may result in reduced agency on a mass scale, since the majority of people tend to adopt mainstream narratives (Ezzy 1998: 247; Baker 2006a: 29; Somers 1994: 614; Butler 2009: xi).

This phenomenon can be explained with recourse to Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm, which attempts to account for the reasons people subscribe to certain narratives over others, and rejects the assumption that rationality is the only factor at play. Fisher introduces the concept of the “logic of good reasons” as a core criterion for narrative acceptability, allowing for subjectivity and value judgement alongside traditional logic. Good reasons are defined as “elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical” (Fisher 1987: 48, italics in original). The paradigm appears ultimately to suggest that social agents are more likely to accept narratives which are in line with those they already subscribe to, a process which is shaped by their history, culture and experience, thereby reinforcing narrative hegemony (Fisher 1987: 109; Baker 2006a: 153). The logic of good reasons breaks down into five components. In particular, it is the fourth component, that of “consistency”, which points to the conservatism within Fisher’s model:

Are the values confirmed or validated in one’s personal experience, in the lives or statements of others whom one admires and respects, and in a conception of the best audience that one can conceive? (Fisher 1987: 109)
This element of the narrative paradigm is a bone of contention among many scholars, including Baker (2006a) and Kirkwood (1992). While not rejecting Fisher’s paradigm outright, these critics are at pains to emphasise the possibilities within narrativity for the contestation of the very power structures it so often reproduces. The key would appear to be in the conceptual empowerment of agents through their consciously reflecting on the “unexamined assumptions encoded in narratives [which] obscure patterns of domination and oppression” (Baker 2006a: 23). As Bennett and Edelman put it, mentioned in section 1.2, “[t]he awareness that every acceptance of a narrative involves a rejection of others makes the issue politically and personally vital” (1985: 160).

Bennett and Edelman’s observation points to agency in the implicit act of rejection, reminding us that narration is an activity in which all subjects participate. The choice does not lie in whether to participate, but in how to participate. Here, the narrative feature termed “breach” by Bruner may usefully be brought into the discussion. This is the idea that any narrative’s “tellability” as a form of discourse rests on a breach of conventional expectation” (Bruner 1991: 15); breach thus goes hand in hand with “canonicity”, which Bruner treats separately from normativeness in his model, but which Baker (2006a: 98) argues can be grouped together with it as a single feature. It is the possibility of difference represented through the fact of breach that drives the narrative process forward through time and paves the way for social agents to create new narratives. What motivates social agents to do this, I argue, is in the first instance an affective state of precarity brought about by conflicting ontological and public/meta narratives. Even from a (contemporary) materialist Marxist position, comparable assertions can be found of a disjuncture between the dominant discursive construction of a given society and the experience of individual agents within it, creating the space to assert new discourse “which, in the long run, would have more resonance to the extent that it more accurately reflected that reality” (Marsh and Furlong 2002: 161). Narrative theory permits a focus on the human dynamics of this disjuncture, with particular importance ascribed to the role of values:

As story tellers we do more than "choose" from prevalent narratives in our own societies. If we judge the moral consequences of these narratives negatively, we
can look elsewhere for "better" narratives or even elaborate narratives of our own. This is precisely what communities of activists [...] attempt to do - they organize and select narratives on the basis of "good reasons", looking beyond the dominant narratives of their cultures, often selecting counter narratives or elaborating new ones. (Baker 2006b: 470)

Nevertheless, there are varying degrees of difference at play, since normative storylines are often so deeply entrenched that even ostensibly ‘counter’ narratives may play a legitimising role, with their intelligibility deriving from conformity to familiar plots, such that even activists may end up “reproducing much of the same narrative world they set out to challenge” (Baker 2006a: 98, drawing on Polletta 1998). Bruner presents this limitation from a literary (or narratological) perspective, while hinting at the special role of creativity in pushing beyond it, an observation which advances us into the subsequent sections of the thesis:

Breaches of the canonical, like the scripts breached, are often highly conventional and are strongly influenced by narrative traditions. Such breaches are readily recognizable as familiar human plights - the betrayed wife, the cuckolded husband, the fleeced innocent, and so on. Again, they are conventional plights of readerly narratives. But both scripts and their breaches also provide rich grounds for innovation. (...) And this is, perhaps, what makes the innovative storyteller such a powerful figure in a culture. He may go beyond the conventional scripts, leading people to see human happenings in a fresh way, indeed, in a way they had never before "noticed" or even dreamed. (1991: 12)

So far this chapter has highlighted certain aspects of the narrative framework – specifically, temporality, normativeness and breach – which shed light on questions of personal identity and agency in the globalised era. The following sections build on this analysis to further probe the conceptual and creative possibilities revealed by the narrative approach for social agents whose identities do not align with the politically dominant narratives of our time.

2.5 Ambiguity and Multivalence

The “methodological elitism” discussed in section 1.1 has its roots in the eighteenth century European intellectual movement known as the Age of Reason or Enlightenment.
The Enlightenment saw the growth of scientifically-based forms of knowledge and the elevation of the rational human mind over abstract spiritual authority, which could not be measured or proved and was therefore no longer considered an adequate basis of power (Malanczuk 1997: 17). Positivist theory, first developed by Auguste Comte in the mid-1800s, was born of this break from the metaphysical and became central to the subsequent evolution of international relations and international law, with sovereign states assumed to behave logically in accordance with their interests, be they short-term gains or long-term stability (1997: 17). More specifically, the so-called instrumental rationality that emerged during the development of positivist European statecraft and which – despite each nation’s particular political and social trajectory – is still prevalent in state operations and broadly entrenched across modern secular society (Paterson, Doran and Barry 2006: 139), was “devoted to rationalizing and standardizing the complexity and diversity of society into a legible and more administratively convenient form” (Haynes 2007: 280). Instrumental rationality can be broken down theoretically into three elements: the separation of humanity from the rest of nature, and the superior moral and empirical value ascribed to it; the “atomistic” effect, whereby the world is reduced to isolated phenomena better suited to market societies, rather than the more holistic approach favoured by religious frameworks; and facts being made “ontologically separate from values” and knowledge production, in turn, being centred on empirical facts (Paterson, Doran and Barry 2006: 139).

There has been a strong backlash against positivist thought in academia, including hermeneutic and postmodernist approaches (Marsh and Furlong 2002: 27); yet, in their root assumptions, the narratives of contemporary social and political discourse tend to remain implicitly hostile to ambiguity, as is most topically exemplified by Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis (1993; 1996) discussed in Chapter 1. In their study of methods of opposition to hegemonic narratives, Bennet and Edelman identify the problem to be surmounted as follows:

In order to motivate new departures, political accounts must be sensitive to the novelties of situations and to the ambiguities in political positions that hold out hope for softening traditional lines of conflict. Yet it is novelty, uncertainty, and ambiguity that seem least tolerable in mass political discourse. In place of
presenting open and flexible analyses of situations, leaders tend to offer formulaic stories that dissolve ambiguity and resolve possible points of new understanding into black and white replays of the political dramas of the past. (1985: 158)

It can be equally observed, however, that much contemporary religious discourse from cultures espousing a historical worldview that is not positivist in nature has fallen victim to similarly rigid polarisations which are insensitive to the complexities of the human condition. Given the ‘return of religion’ in contemporary international relations – i.e. the largely unexpected resurgence of religiously motivated social and political movements manifesting themselves in various forms and vying for power on the world stage (Haynes 2007: 195) – this could be seen as a reaction to increasing precarity on a global scale. As Nussbaum puts it in the context of what she refers to as “today’s accelerating world”, people now “confront ethnic and religious differences in new and frightening ways. By clinging to a religion they believe to be the right one, surrounding themselves with coreligionists, and then subordinating others who do not accept that religion, people can forget for a time their weakness and mortality” (2004: 44).

If we consider the problem from a narrative perspective – taking into account the different dimensions of narrativity as well as the unprecedented context of globalisation – a vicious cycle can be identified in which, paradoxically, ambiguity emerges as both the problem and the solution: in contemporary global society, the cognitive instinct of humans to resolve ambiguity (Goffman 1974/1986: 338), compounded by normative political, religious and media discourse, comes up ever more urgently against the need to acknowledge and even embrace it. Therefore, if greater integrity of the globalised human experience is to be sought, new epistemologies that mitigate the negative consequences of precarity through acceptance of its inevitability must be found. Such developments are already occurring, for example through the notion of prefiguration within the contemporary alter-globalisation movement, which seeks to oppose hierarchical power structures and instead actualise practices of horizontality and plurality in internal interactions and organisational structures. As van der Sande (2013: 230) explains, “in prefigurative practices, the means applied are deemed to embody or ‘mirror’ the ends one strives to realise”. He highlights three elements as key to this definition – the bridging
of the temporal distinction between present and future; the experimental character of the ideal that is actualised; and a reformulation of the means-end binary opposition.

While acknowledging the significance of such movements, the question remains of how new narratives might be accepted on a wider scale, if indeed we are more likely to accept narratives in line with those we already subscribe to, as Fisher states. Writing before the onset of accelerated conditions of globalisation, Bennett and Edelman discuss the role of literature in creating “new political narratives” that do more than simply evoke passive agreement or disagreement in their public-audience: they engender new insights and affinities leading to new actions (1985: 158). Echoing Bruner’s assertion that the innovative storyteller can reveal fresh ways of seeing reality (1991: 12), they argue that resourceful authors may fashion alternative narratives from combinations of existing ones. The aim is to “focus contradictions and normative dilemmas within the same story” (Bennett and Edelman 1985: 170) and in rendering previously familiar plots uncertain or problematical, challenge the reader into fresh interpretations. Creativity is the key to the import of such narratives. Bennett and Edelman stress that

\[\text{[t]he seedbed of creative use and creative reception of narratives lies (...) in learning to recognize and appreciate the inevitability of contradictory stories, the multiple realities they evoke, and their links to the conditions of people’s lives. (1985: 170)}\]

In a more recent study, Scott R. Stroud (2002) directly addresses the purported gap in Fisher’s narrative paradigm through the notion of ‘multivalence’; more specifically, he uses two Indian didactic texts (gitas) to examine the rhetorical mechanisms at play when a cross-cultural text successfully enters an alien narrative environment. Stroud points out that if Fisher is correct, we could expect the gitas to remain in obscurity in the western world, “[y]et the massive rate of translation and influence of many eastern texts (...) leads one to question the fidelity of Fisher’s explanation of narrative evaluation” (2002: 373). These texts, he proposes, can be viewed as ‘multivalent’ as a means of accounting for their ability to travel beyond their original narrative location. Stroud distinguishes multivalent literature from (a) polysemic literature – when different auditors receive different understandings of what is happening in the text, and (b) polyvalent literature –
when readers may agree on the meaning of a text, but disagree in their evaluations (2002: 379). Multivalence is described as a third type of textual function, whereby a single narrative uses “seemingly contradictory value structures and statements to entice the auditor” (2002: 379). In this scenario, the reader is forced into an active role:

The auditor must then understand and reconstruct how these values, some of which may be familiar and desirable, can coexist without cognitive dissonance or contradiction. The task becomes finding how these disparate value statements can be reconciled in one understanding of the text, not simply finding what one desires in the text (polysemy) or evaluating the text based on one’s held values (polyvalence). (2002: 379)

Thus, like Bennet and Endelman, Stroud argues that ambiguity and contradiction (problematic issues for Fisher) play a key role in breaking through cultural normativeness, offering entry points for novel ideas and values (2002: 388). The focus in Stroud’s study on the intercultural encounter is moreover of relevance to this thesis, with the data set being produced and analysed within the context of globalised intercultural flows ever more frequent and complex in nature. The multimodality of the data set will bring additional considerations into the frame, discussed in section 3.2.5. For now, the issue of multivalent textual coherence warrants further attention. Stroud notes that for a cognitively-sound auditor, it is difficult to simply choose the most acceptable value structure in a multivalent text and ignore what is problematic. Instead, the engaged auditor "must address the equally strong value structures that contradict the one that they find most appealing; if the text is not ignored, the result of this confrontation is more likely to be a permutation of the two value structures" (2002: 386). This process of value reconstruction is aided by a textual feature Stroud labels the “transcendental dissolution” (2002: 386). In the context of the gitas, transcendental dissolutions are statements that hint at a “higher” level – a realm of meaning beyond the text itself – from which the reader may find material to aid the quest for narrative reconciliation, while still allowing for the selection of material from the “lower” textual levels (Stroud 2002: 386). I would argue that this intimation of coherence through transcendence, allowing textual contradictions to be resolved and potentially leading the auditor to accept new ideas and values, can be achieved in a narrative through non-verbal means. Useful to elaborating
this point is Bennet and Endelman’s assertion that “narrative is among the most creative intellectual forms because it can achieve sudden breaks with expectation while introducing new sensory experience” (1985: 162). The term ‘narrative’ is employed here not in the broader sociological sense but as rhetoric or literature. Nonetheless, the notion of a “sudden break” combined with a “new sensory experience” is instrumental. The following sections will elaborate this suggestion further and collate the various analytical strands of the chapter into a suitable framework for the data analysis.

Before moving on, a summary of the argument so far may be useful. The chapter began with discussion of the concept of narrative identity, a dynamic model of selfhood incorporating not only relationality but also the narrative feature of temporality. Drawing on Ricoeur, I argued that temporality is multi-dimensional and complex, implying common historicality as well as individual fate, the tension between which two configurations is resolved through the practice of narrative repetition. It was then noted that temporality, understood as time structured within specific political and economic contexts and weighed upon by power differentials, correlates to the concept/ontological state of precarity – a phenomenon of increasing magnitude and concern for individuals living in the globalised age. Questions of affect and agency came to the fore at this stage of the analysis, set against the narrative feature of normativeness – whereby certain narratives become normalised, or hegemonic, over time. I suggested that the possibility of agency can be approached through the notion of narrative breach, and that this agency may be driven by affect in situations of precarity. The discussion then progressed to the mechanisms of breach; how new public narratives which better align with the lives of marginalised social actors might be actualised and accepted. Two textual qualities were highlighted as key in this process: creativity and multivalence, whereby ambiguities and contradictions which escape the divisive certainties of narrative hegemony are imaginatively exploited.

2.6 Aesthetic Shock

As discussed above, Stroud presents multivalent narratives as a means of knocking the engaged auditor out of their particular narrative world and challenging them to
reconstruct the text’s meaning, thus creating new understandings and values. The texts in the data set are very different in modality, temporality and genre to those Stroud uses for his analysis, yet, as I hope to show, they can all be said to be multivalent in some way. Another feature linking the texts is their aesthetic quality; for example, music and/or humour are employed alongside the visual in the construction of the narrative. This combination of aesthetic devices and multivalence, as I will seek to demonstrate, is not only of potential value to the development of narrative theory in abstract terms, but moreover constitutes an observable epistemological groundswell whose nature is symptomatic of our time. Seen from a different angle, the texts reveal how the affordances of the globalised era are enabling us to witness narrative processes more acutely than at any time in human history, while simultaneously reshaping them.

Significantly, in his book *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, Jan Aarte Scholte contends that “[r]ationalism may be expected to give way to other epistemologies when socio-historical conditions become ripe for such a transformation” (2005: 258). These conditions may well be emerging now; indeed, W.J.T. Mitchell cites a belief among some analysts that new forms of media have brought about a restructuring of the human sensorium, leading to theorisations of a “media aesthetics” which “examines the new perceptual universes opened up by virtual reality, the world wide web, and immersive art environments” (2005: 2). Roland Bleiker lends further credence to such claims in focusing on the role of aesthetics in contemporary world politics:

> Aesthetic sources can offer us alternative insights into international relations; a type of reflective understanding that emerges not from systematically applying the technical skills of analysis which prevail in the social sciences, but from cultivating a more open-ended level of sensibility about the political. We might then be able to appreciate what we otherwise cannot even see: perspectives and people excluded from prevailing purviews, for instance, or the emotional nature and consequences of political events. (2009: 2)

Taking the specific case of music, I would refine Bleiker’s observation that music is in some ways “not much different than language” in its attempt to capture and express emotions. He describes music, in an almost concessionary manner, as “still a form of representation, even though it does not represent anything outside of itself” (2005: 12).
This description of music as self-representational is fuzzy. While it is true that music communicates aspects of affective and emotional experience that words cannot, and vice versa, music contains all the key elements of narrative – perhaps the most obvious being its performative structure based on repetition and contrast, or what Meelberg (2014) describes as “musical tension and resolution”, which evokes temporal development and might be likened to normativeness and breach. As will be further explored in the data analysis, treating music as narrative, and therefore as constitutive rather than representational of reality, reveals it as an equally valid instrument of affective social construction which can be usefully combined with verbal expression to enact agency and engender political change, pushing society further away from the rationalist paradigm.

That said, Bleiker’s argument returns us to Stroud’s notion of the transcendental dissolution – the intimation of an alternative domain of meaning brought to the attention of the reader as a means of resolving cognitive dissonance brought on by textual multivalence. Stroud accepts that an easier option for the reader may be to reject the multivalent text entirely; yet he neglects to address what elements within the text might persuade the reader either way, other than a “wish to understand it (i.e., if they decide it is not nonsense)” (2002: 385), followed by a later observation that the Indian gitas “despite their novelty, captivate many minds” (2002: 389). It seems a logical – even evident – proposition in this context that aesthetics are the guiding force behind such a response to an otherwise challenging text, i.e. the reader experiences some form of beauty via the narrative and is thus enticed to remain engaged with it. If this is so, the question of affect must be reintroduced to the discussion, since the study of aesthetics is primarily concerned with “the sensory, perceptual reception of art” (W.J.T. Mitchell 2005: 1), rather than that of rational cognition. Jeffrey Pence reminds us that the recurring pull of the aesthetic, despite being “a process naturalized to the point of invisibility”, is attributable to the affective and somatic dimension of its impact. The immediacy of emotions, he argues, combined with the complexity of their variation and articulation is an extremely powerful draw to humans (2004: 273).

Berlant notes that “[a] musical phrase is powerful because it repeats; as we become attached to it, it helps us to find a place before the plot tells us what it means and where that place is” (2011: 157).
The mention of immediacy here is pertinent. We saw earlier that in Ricoeur’s model of narrative time the “existential now” is determined by a “making-present” of *preoccupation* or *concern* (1980: 173) – in other words, our capacity for rational abstraction may be highly developed, but it is our affective experience that anchors us in time and space. As such, aesthetics act to disturb the rationalist paradigm which has become normative, throwing a subject out of unquestioned immersion in its sanctioned narrative environment and opening an affective space for new meanings and values to emerge. When combined with a multivalent narrative, which effects breach using ambiguity and contradiction, this may be especially potent – resulting in a form of affective practice (Wetherell 2012: 4) that I refer to here as ‘aesthetic shock’. As a textual function at the interface of protest and the arts, this practice can bring to the surface novel combinations of values and processes of change, turning contradiction and tension into a transcendent aesthetic whole. Denis-Constant Martin (2010: 269) argues that cultural expressions of this type can be seen as contradictory “only if their oppositions are construed on the basis of former dichotomisations that no longer prevail”. Indeed, as instantiated by the texts in the data set, such practices are becoming more prevalent as a means of ‘glocalised’ political expression, as de-territorialising and pluralising processes intensify globally, and the positivist paradigm and nation-state based collective identity-constructs lose currency. Kirsty Best explains that younger generations’ engagement with aesthetics may be misinterpreted as an active refusal to engage in politics because the type of knowing is not the rational, deliberative knowing aspired to in democratic debate. The problem, however, is not of an active refusal to know but of a drive for meaning which takes its route through alternative ways of knowing – identity, intentionality, affect, visceral ethics. It is true that the drive to go beyond the bewilderment of personal experience seems to lead inexorably to the familiarity of the collective, and its closure of the self/Other narrative. Nonetheless, the possibilities for sympathy created by the shock of new forms of communicated imagery and the ambiguous nature of identity are possibilities that flicker with varying degrees of intensity and can be fanned into a strong flame. (2009: 80)

Strikingly, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari theorised an epistemological shift of this nature before the advent of the Internet. Their metaphor of the rhizome – a botanical term for the subterranean stem of a plant – expounded in the 1980 volume *A Thousand*
*Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (translated into English by Brian Massumi in 1987) is of particular relevance to this thesis as an alternative philosophy of thought within which to situate contemporary narrativity. The rhizome model is intended to supplant normative Western ‘aborescent’ conceptualisations of thought, which Deleuze and Guattari argue are hierarchical and restrictive:

The tree and root inspire a sad image of thought that is forever imitating the multiple on the basis of a centred or segmented higher unity (…). In the corresponding models, an element only receives information from a higher unit, and only receives a subjective affection along preestablished paths. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 16)

This description is apt for the positivist paradigm of thought, which, as previously discussed, elevates science and the rational mind above all other forms of knowledge. The rhizome, meanwhile, better captures the moving dynamics of narrativity, rendered yet more chaotic in the digital age:

The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. [...] It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. [...] The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots. [It] is an acentered, non-hierarchical, nonsignifying system [...] defined solely by a circulation of states. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 22)

This conceptual model, elaborated in more depth in section 2.7 below, is widely acknowledged as an ever more fitting depiction not only of the functioning of the human mind but also of processes of globalisation, since the increasingly complex international system can be described in unambiguously rhizomatic terms: “It grows sideways, has multiple entryways and exits. It has no beginning or end, only a middle, from where it expands and overspills” (Bleiker 2005: 6). Hence, it may be surmised that the mechanisms of the globalised age are the actualisation of new ways of thinking and being that were already surfacing, and have been further intensified due to their exponential acceleration.

The final section of this chapter takes the notion of aesthetic shock as it has just been presented within the socio-narrative model, and attempts to map it onto certain elements of Deleuzian thought where relevant synergies are identified. The aim is to propose ways in which the two frameworks might operate in tandem to achieve a
A nuanced and empowering conceptual approach to what we might call the hegemonic ‘historic bloc’ of the post-9/11 temporal order. These preliminary observations will be further substantiated over the course of the data analysis in subsequent chapters.

2.7 Aesthetic Shock and Post 9/11 Narrativity

In his 1992 book *We Gotta Get Out of this Place*, Lawrence Grossberg brings together the Gramscian notion of hegemony (via Stuart Hall) with Deleuzian philosophy in a study of contemporary popular culture – specifically, rock music. For Grossberg, the weaving together of these two conceptual threads is achieved with recourse to the broad concept of ‘articulation’, which he defines as “the practice of linking together elements which have no necessary relation to each other; the theoretical and historical practice by which the particular structure of relationships which defines any society is made” (1992: 397). He argues that this conceptual starting point offers several advantages in terms of locating cultural practices: it is non-representational (1992: 45), non-dualist (1992: 48), and anti-essentialist (1992: 53); moreover, it provides a way to describe active processes of structuration within the post-structuralist approaches he draws upon (which do not preclude examination of such processes, but do not account for them either):

> While it is common to read both Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari as denying that structure has any role in their analyses (other than perhaps as the always negatively weighted form of power), the notion of articulation emphasizes the importance of structure in their critical practices. In fact, the practice of articulation involves the constructing, dismantling and reconstructing of structures which have real effects. (1992: 56)

In this light, it seems reasonable to suggest that narrative, understood in the sociological sense, could occupy a similar position within this conceptual model to that of the notion of articulation, as a means of examining the ways in which social agents both reproduce and contest power structures, as well as how they construct their identities. Grossberg reveals the synergy between the two concepts in his comment that “[t]he notion of articulation prevents us from postulating either too simple a beginning or too neat an end to our story. The beginning point of one story, which we might take as self evident, is the
end of another story” (1992: 53). Dia Da Costa furthermore interchanges the two terms in her appraisal of Massumi and Grossberg’s theorisations of affect (2014: 5). The socio-narrative framework, then, might be said to simply take the concept of articulation further in comprehensively mapping out and highlighting its operative elements, such as temporality and causal emplotment, which are generally left unattended in discussions of articulation. Meanwhile, by bringing affect into the socio-narrative framework, we are naturally brought closer to Deleuze, who is one of the forefathers of affect theory (Gregg and Siegworth 2010: 6).

More than this, however, in the post-9/11 temporal order, during which Web 2.0 has changed the face of the cultural and political realm, narrativity has shown itself to be ever more in line with the chaotic rhizomatic model. Through acknowledging the instinct of humans to narrativise affective reality, socio-narrative appears to offer an empowering and accessible route into Deleuzian thought, which in turn enriches the narrative framework through its alternative epistemology. Within the limitations of this thesis, it is hoped that the rhizome model and the notion of ‘becoming’ in particular will serve to complement the socio-narrative framework in its present application, as will be elaborated.

The rhizome is organised around six principles: 1 and 2. Connection and heterogeneity. This means that “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be” – thus, unlike a tree or root, there is no plotted point or fixed order (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 5); 3. Multiplicity: “A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature” (1987/2013: 7) – in other words, in the rhizome there is

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20 In the preface to his 1987 translation of Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), Brian Massumi notes of the terms affect and affection that

[n]either word denotes a personal feeling (*sentiment* in Deleuze and Guattari). *L’affect* (Spinoza’s *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act. *L’affection* (Spinoza’s *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include “mental” or ideal bodies). (1987/2013: xv)
no unifying pivot, nor overarching dimension; 4. Asignifying rupture: “A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (1987/2013: 8) – for this reason dualisms and dichotomies, which are symptomatic of positivist thought, can never be sustainable: “You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything” (1987/2013: 9); 5 and 6. Cartography and decalcomania21. “[A] rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model (...) [It is] a map and not a tracing” (1987/2013: 11-12, italics in original). The difference between a map and a tracing is methodological – a map is a performative experimentation with the real, while a tracing simply conforms to a pre-existing idea and is endlessly reproductive, inhibiting the possibility of change.

The connectivity and multiplicity of the rhizome means that, as with narrativity, “its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states” (1987/2013: 22). The concept of ‘asignifying rupture’ within the rhizome also offers an interesting perspective on the narrative/affect-based conceptualisation of aesthetic shock discussed in the previous section. This is especially illuminating as it relates to the new ‘lines of flight’22 created at points of rupture, as Deleuze and Guattari explain,

Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. (1987/2013: 8)

Thus, we might view asignifying rupture as the affective space that is carved out by the textual effect of aesthetic shock, and new lines of flight as the possible creative narratives that arise from this. In terms of narrative normativeness and breach, it is pertinent that

21 From the French ‘décalcomanie’, for transfer printing.
22 ‘Lines’ are the continuing, organising substance of the rhizome, as opposed to fixed points or positions, while Massumi defines ‘flight’ - translated from the French ‘fuite’ - as “not only the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance (the vanishing point of a painting is a point de fuite. It has no relation to flying.” (1987/2013: xv)
when the rhizome starts up again after an asignifying rupture, it may be along one of its old lines, or mapping out a new line. Inasmuch as globalised society is structurally rhizomatic, I suggest that power interests will often determine which of these, old or new, occurs at the moment of rupture. Furthermore, even if new lines of flight do escape, conditions of narrative hegemony may render them hard to perceive. Nonetheless, we are reminded again of the power of aesthetics through the example of music, which Deleuze and Guattari state “dispatches molecular flows” (1987/2013: 360), and to which they devote a full chapter of A Thousand Plateaus. In adding that music/art is “not the privilege of human beings” (1987/2013: 360/368), they furthermore acknowledge the quality of aesthetic transcendence that Stroud only hints at in his analysis of the narrative function of multivalence. Engaging these affective and transcendent qualities alongside multivalence in the narrative construction of reality enhances the potential for true breach – i.e. one that is not scripted or imitative – and facilitates an understanding of the ‘real’ as the ‘actual’, that is, of the affective now, with an aspect of futurity, and not excluding artistic forms of expression.

Returning to the realm of popular culture, Jeremy Gilbert paints a rather more pessimistic view of musical expression as it takes shape within the contemporary ‘affective structure’ he labels “disaffected consent”, which he identifies as being prevalent in Western Europe since the 2008 financial crisis (2015: 29). Gilbert argues that this constitutes a profound disillusion with the ideological premises of neoliberalism and its consequences, combined with “a general acquiescence with that project, a degree of deference to its relative legitimacy in the absence of any convincing alternative, and a belief that it cannot be effectively challenged” (2015:29). This leads to a sense of numbness or alienation, reflected in a general lack of innovation in contemporary musical trends – with the possible exception of dubstep, a genre that is dystopian in its imaginaries and characterised by “a kind of shuffling isolation as its most probable mode

Note that ‘actual’ in Spanish [actual] and in French [actuel] denotes what is current, and in verb form means ‘to update’.
Affective structures, which are further explored in Chapter 4, can be understood as “recent refractions” of Raymond Williams’ 1977 notion of ‘structures of feeling’ (Da Costa 2014: 4).
For our purposes, it is pertinent that Gilbert asks his readers to consider the following:

what might be involved in challenges to disaffected consent, in particular at the level of the ‘molecular’, where affects precede meanings, and becomings precede identities. We might suggest [...] that all radical culture has either a militant or utopian aspect, mobilising anger or inspiring hope (or perhaps both at the same time – though I’m not sure this is often as possible as we might wish). (2015: 36)

The invocation here of rare examples of popular culture combining militancy with utopian aspirations as an answer to disaffected consent might be seen as a rough approximation of the notion of aesthetic shock, inasmuch as it speaks to a sense of ambivalence within the musical form. In our case, however, innovation on the level of musical genre matters less than the deployment of a given aesthetic form alongside temporally multivalent narratives within the relevant socio-political context – and a view of such narratives within a globalised epistemological shift away from rationalism. This way we might extend our focus to other affective structures operating outside the Western European mainstream cultural context that is the focus of Gilbert’s analysis; a point further elaborated in Chapter 4. It is nonetheless fitting that Gilbert employs Deleuzian vocabulary in his description – in particular the concept of ‘becoming’. This refers to a rhizomatic/temporal process which, as Abdalla (2016: 42) puts it,

identifies most accurately a way in which material circumstances can exist but be challenged, as an uncertain gesture towards the future to free oneself from the past. When something is becoming, it has not yet become, but nonetheless it has a space in the present.

Becoming involves the competing forces of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation – that is, the breaking up of order and boundaries to produce movement and change, versus the reestablishment of order and stability. Sutton and Martin-Jones explain that this “might also include the incorporation of radical ideas or practices into dominant social formations” (2008: 143). The relevance of this to questions of post-9/11 narrative

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26 It might be added that a recreational drug commonly accompanying the dubstep scene is ketamine – a horse tranquiliser that has a soporific and dissociative effect on users.
hegemony is clear, with deterritorialisation in a broader sense being a frequent recourse to understandings of the globalised age. It is at the ontological (personal) level of narrative that we can connect processes of ‘becoming’ to questions of individual agency within hegemonic structures, as will be substantiated over the course of the data analysis. At present, our focus is on placing the concept within the vocabulary of the narrative framework. For this, and to bring this theoretical review to a conclusion, we might usefully call upon the notion of ‘renarration’.

Baker (2008) refers to renarration in the context of interlingual/intercultural mediation in the public domain. Although she does not explicitly define the term, she advocates it as a metaphor for translation, since it avoids romanticised alternatives such as ‘bridge-building’, reflects the agency of the translator, and privileges translational processes over the static textual unit/product (2008: 16). For the purposes of this analysis, I would venture to define renarration more broadly as a form of narrative agency that involves a perceived rupture from an established narrative, as opposed to a subtle accrual of difference over time that appears more like continuity. It may take place on any narrative level, from the ontological to the meta (since all levels are interconnected anyway), and thus may concern not only transfers of language/code as in the case of translation, but also changes in medium, genre, or identity, such as in the case of religious conversion – a theme explored in section 5.2. In the globalised context, processes of meaning-making and transfer in themselves increasingly emerge as key concerns, as exemplified by two research questions posed by Bleiker in the field of international relations, again using the example of music:

[C]an we gain political insight through music that other sources of knowledge, such as texts or visual arts, cannot provide? And if so, how can these forms of knowledge be translated back into language-based expression without losing the very essence of what they seek to capture and convey? (2005: 1)

With their interstitial (or multivalent) vantage point, translation theorists potentially have much to contribute in this respect. Despite its increasing relevance, however, the role of translation and intercultural mediation is often overlooked in different disciplines that deal with the study of globalisation (Pérez-González 2012b: 6). Addressing this lacuna,
Karin Littau highlights translation in the age of postmodern production (specifically, the hypertext environment\textsuperscript{27}) as “a site where the difficult acknowledgment of the divisions between texts, languages, traditions, cultures and peoples occurs” (Littau 1997: 81). In turn, Butler posits translation as “a crucial way to produce alliance in difference” (2009: ix), and one of “various modes of laying claim to public space and to citizenship” (2009: x). Narrative theory has already brought rich insight into the field of translation studies, allowing for its expansion to reflect more comprehensively the political implications of the work of translators and interpreters (Baker 2006a; Boéri 2008; Harding 2012). Affect has also been highlighted as a key motivator for translation activity among communities of affinity in the digital sphere (Pérez-González 2012a), whether for activist or aesthetic purposes – a distinction which in this thesis becomes blurred. Supplementing these theoretical developments with a Deleuzian-based model of narrativity, which highlights processes of de- and re-terrorialisation in the context of global media flows, invites us to view the textual function of aesthetic shock as operating beyond and between languages and cultures, while facilitating an analytical shift towards the epistemological level of post-9/11 narrative hegemony.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to map out the key theoretical perspectives and concepts against which the data will be analysed in subsequent chapters. These are: narrative selfhood as inflected by the affective structure of precarity; normativeness/hegemony as the wider narrative environment inhabited by social agents; textual multivalence and aesthetics as a method of resistance to narrative hegemony; and the Deleuzian rhizome as an appropriate narrative epistemology for the digital age. It is hoped that in applying these themes to a multilingual, multi-genre group of digital texts that are argued to

\textsuperscript{27} Littau theorises hypertextuality as the next stage in postmodern critiques on authorship and the shift towards intertextuality, following on from Barthes’ \textit{The Death of the Author} and Foucault and Derrida’s ‘différance’. She states that hypertext “fulfils many of the promises of postmodern theory (...). In presenting its readers with a multiplicity of variant translations on the screen, in flaunting before our very eyes the seriality of translation, hypertext confronts its readers with the very impossibility of a definitive translation, and therefore also with the impossibility of the closure of the original; and, by extension, the impossibility of signing a single text with any equally single proper name, since no single proper name can lay exhaustive claim to a proper text.” (1997: 91)
deploy aesthetic shock in resistance to post-9/11 narrative hegemony, the analysis will yield further contributions to the discussion surrounding the conceptual framework.

As a concluding caveat, multivalence as it is theorised here should not be seen as a fixed and immutable textual quality, since it too is contingent upon temporal/cultural factors that make the value systems contained within the text appear contradictory in the first place. The boundedness of the textual unit itself is also a false assumption, as will be elaborated. Accordingly, while Chapter 4 fleshes out the themes of temporality and multivalence with reference to eight of the twelve texts in the data set, Chapter 5 brings the rhizomatic dimension of narrativity into the frame in order to highlight processes of ‘renarration’ over notions of fixedness in the remaining four texts. This will allow for a progressively complex and nuanced narrative model to be built around the data, in which Deleuzian philosophy reveals the limitations of the very starting points of the analysis, leading to new ways of seeing the texts and understanding their implications within the post-9/11 temporal order.
Chapter 3
A Narrative Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data to be assessed against the theoretical framework elaborated in Chapter 2, and the methodological approach for undertaking the analysis. Sections 3.2 and 3.3 below outline the criteria for data selection and structure of the data analysis chapters. This is followed in Section 3.4 by a rationale for the inclusion of each text chosen for the data set. Finally, Section 3.5 presents a pilot study, which trials the basic methodology through a narrative-based analysis of a single text that meets the relevant selection criteria and showcases a mix of performative genres: the hip hop music video/short comedy film entitled “P.H.A.T.W.A. (Director’s Cut)” by Canadian-Iraqi hip hop artist The Narcicyst (2009).

With its focus on narrative, the present study is intended as a qualitative piece of social research, thus the methodological approach involves an interpretive analysis of the production context and socio-political import of the chosen texts. Since the data set in itself reveals observable trends and a wealth of analytical material, further empirical data such as direct interviews and questionnaires with the artists and/or consumers do not fall within the scope of the study. Nonetheless, paratextual information such as consumer reviews and online comments, as well as existing interviews and other publications by/about the artists, will be drawn upon where relevant and available to provide further insight into the data.

3.2 Data Selection

3.2.1 Overview

As outlined in section 1.3, the data set is composed of thirteen audiovisual popular culture texts of various languages and genres, all of which deploy a combination of aesthetics and multivalence in resistance to post-9/11 narrative hegemony. Of these
thirteen texts, one is the focus of the pilot study, while the remaining twelve comprise
the core data set. Beyond the fact that all are subjectively considered by the author to
represent worthy examples of aesthetic shock as defined above, the texts meet the
following selection criteria:

3.2.2 Theme

As a meta narrative of the unfolding historical present, post-9/11 narrative hegemony is
multifaceted and complex. This is reflected in the variety of themes taken up by the texts,
which are to a large degree interconnected, but for analytical purposes are grouped into
the following categories: 9/11, the War on Terror, Clash of Civilisations, and Palestine.
This thematic structuring is further discussed in section 3.3.

3.2.3 Language

The languages represented in the data set are English, French, Spanish and Arabic, all of
which are key global languages and are accessible to the author either through direct
knowledge (in the case of English, French and Spanish), or indirectly via subtitling and/or
consultation with native speakers (in the case of Arabic). As discussed in section 1.1, this
variety of languages is considered apt for the study given the globalised nature of post-
9/11 narrativity, allowing for intercultural patterns and differences to emerge across the
data set, and providing insight into different localised sites of resistance.

Questions of interlingual translation (specifically, subtitling) are addressed in Section
4.3.2. In Chapter 5, translation understood more broadly within the narrative framework
as ‘renarration’ (Baker 2008) opens the door for examining processes of meaning transfer
and change on the ontological and meta levels of narrativity.
3.2.4 Temporal Spread

All of the thirteen texts were produced in the years following 9/11, spanning a decade from 2004/5\textsuperscript{28} to March 2015 – although it should be noted that the 2010 feature film *The Taqwacores*, directed by Eyad Zahra, was based on Michael Muhammad Knight’s 2003 novel of the same title. As discussed in section 5.2.1, however, the fact that a film version was made several years after the book’s publication supports the relevance of the temporal spread of the data, inasmuch as it indicates sustained – if not increased – public interest, concomitant to the evolution of the War on Terror meta narrative, in the themes treated in the novel. It furthermore indicates contemporary market demand for the audiovisual format, as discussed in section 3.2.5.

As a preliminary observation to be revisited in section 4.3.1, within this decade-long timespan the three-year period of 2009-2011 proved especially fruitful in terms of locating suitable data\textsuperscript{29}, with a growing internationalisation (or at least a growing visibility of such from my particular narrative location) suggested by the two most recent texts, both produced in early 2015. These are from Syria and Palestine respectively and bear similar creative qualities to the rest of the texts in the data set that come from countries in a more stable position, i.e. not war-torn with damaged infrastructure and a population fighting for survival. This undermines possible assumptions of performativity and aesthetics being culturally privileged forms of political engagement; indeed, it may point to an increasing momentum for such affective practices among the globally underprivileged, spurred by the affordances of the digital age.

The temporal spread thus captures the evolving nature of audiovisual cultural responses to the War on Terror, from the wake of the 9/11 attacks until the time of writing. This provides scope to identify patterns of resistance on the level of meta narrative, which by definition persist for longer than the public narratives that accrue into it. It is furthermore assumed that complex cultural responses take time to be meaningfully articulated,\textsuperscript{28} The song “Bin Laden” by Immortal Technique and Mos Def was officially released in the summer of 2005, but first appeared on mix tapes in November 2004.\textsuperscript{29} Eight of the thirteen texts were produced during this period, with two before and the remaining three afterwards.
especially given the historical weight behind the War on Terror narrative and its geographical reach. In other words, the texts are the result of (mostly young) individuals across the world processing the ongoing implications that 9/11 and the War on Terror have had for their lives and the lives of others, before developing the critical distance and creative skills required to respond in a sophisticated manner. Indeed, the continued production of such texts over a decade after 9/11, and the impetus it has triggered for harnessing emerging technologies as new forms of social agency, only serve to highlight the depth and breadth of its impact not just on global politics, but also ontologically for individuals caught in the subsequent narrative crossfire. This lends support to the idea that the texts constitute an emerging counter meta narrative; perhaps even a paradigm shift, defined as a historical moment when “one set of governing ideas are rejected in favour of an alternative” (Stanley and Jackson 2016: 3).

3.2.5 Format

Audiovisual textualities have become increasingly prevalent in the digital age and are thus highly relevant to a study of global cultural flows and emerging modes of political resistance in post-9/11 global society. A shift in the way music is consumed, for example, is evidenced by the fact that 75% of the top fifty searches on YouTube are for music videos (Hearsum and Inglis 2013: 495). As explained in the sections above, the present study seeks to foreground pluralisation, which is enabled in the narrative analysis of a group of texts restricted only by the wider audiovisual format. The texts nearly all fall within an approximate range of 3-11 minutes in duration, the exceptions being the two feature films, *Four Lions* (Morris 2010) and *The Taqwacores* (Zahr 2010), which are both over an hour long. That different types and lengths of audiovisual text (i.e. music videos, feature-length films, comedy sketches and short films) are included in the data set is thus in line with the study’s analytical emphasis on pluralisation, and also consistent with the emphasis in the socio-narrative approach upon the power and function of narratives that are articulated across different texts and through a range of media (Baker 2006a: 19).

Audiovisual texts can all be described as multimodal; multimodality understood as “the combination [in a text] of speaking, writing, visualization and music”, which is receiving
growing scholarly interest as a means of approaching the prevalence and interdependence of semiotic resources operating alongside the linguistic, without prioritising the latter (Pérez-González 2014: 185). Hence, the audiovisual format allows us to bring non-verbal narrative forms into the frame – a point further elaborated with reference to genre in the following section.

3.2.6 Genre

Since the analysis tackles the pluralised nature of cultural narratives of resistance in the globalised era, it would seem unhelpful to restrict the scope of the data to a single genre. Indeed, genres are increasingly experimental in the context of digital culture and the distinctions between them often more fluid, as is exemplified by some of the texts in the data set, including the pilot study text in section 3.5 below. What distinguishes the data from other contemporary texts tackling similar themes related to the War on Terror is their use of the affective practice of aesthetic shock. Hence, the study includes a variety of mediated cultural forms – specifically, hip hop, comedy, punk, acoustic rock, and parkour – most of which have historically been associated with protest and subversion, and are understood within the context of the study as performative genres.

Performativity in the field of narratology (as distinct from socio-narrative) refers to “narratives that are corporeally enacted as well as narratives that attempt to evoke or transform – in written, visual or acoustic presentations – the material qualities or dramatic immediacy of performances” (Berns 2009: 94). This is the most common understanding of the concept; however, Berns broadens the definition to include linguistic uses of the term, explaining that “performativity is also at stake when narrative discourse as a whole is treated as a speech act, or when attention shifts to the pragmatic relations within which the narrative turns itself into an act”. Thus, verbal narratives as a mode of action or agency can likewise be extended through an interdisciplinary employment of the concept of performance to include non-verbal or affective narrative forms; in this case, the embodied aesthetics of everyday political narratives in the context of global cultural and media flows.
3.3 Data Analysis Overview

As discussed in section 3.2.1, the core data analysis is structured across two chapters according to four overarching themes: 9/11, the War on Terror, Clash of Civilisations, and Palestine. In Chapter 4, the themes covered are 9/11 and the War on Terror, while in Chapter 5 the themes are Clash of Civilisations and Palestine. The twelve core data set texts are grouped for analytical purposes into their relevant thematic categories, with Chapter 4 focusing on eight texts and Chapter 5 on the remaining four, as detailed in section 1.4. Addressing Research Question 3, the texts are probed for potentially similar features in making use of the narrative function of aesthetic shock in the post-9/11 temporal order; thus, they are analysed with reference to the same interwoven notions of multivalence and temporality that are discussed in Chapter 2 and demonstrated in the pilot study below. At the same time, the thematic structuring of the data analysis allows for a progressively complex exploration of the unfolding historical moment through different aspects brought out by the texts; for example, the genres of hip hop and comedy are given particular focus in Chapter 4, and questions of religious conversion and gender are introduced in Chapter 5.

The study is conducted using analytical tools and terminology provided by the socio-narrative framework, as outlined in section 1.2. The employment of the narrative framework, however, does not preclude references to other theoretical perspectives where conceptual synergies are apparent and are perceived to add value to the discussion, for example the elements of Deleuzian philosophy introduced in section 2.7 are called upon in Chapter 5 to inform the question of renarration (pertaining to Research Question 4). Indeed, the narrative approach is extremely versatile in this respect, and is seen here more as a metamorphic tool than a fixed and conclusive model.

In terms of narrative typology, the texts are considered first and foremost as public narratives, since they circulate in the public domain as forms of affective practice; however due to their performative nature they are also treated as ontological narratives of social agents positioned precariously in relation to the hegemonic meta narrative of the War on Terror. This reflects the acknowledged interplay between different narrative
levels, and is relevant to the methodology inasmuch as it shapes the interpretation of the social function and political import of the texts. The thesis as a whole is understood to be a conceptual narrative.

3.4 Presentation of Data

This section briefly introduces the thirteen texts that make up the data set and presents a justification for their inclusion in the study. Further reference details for the data are tabulated in Appendix 1.

3.4.1 Pilot Study Text

“P.H.A.T.W.A. (Director’s Cut)” by The Narcicyst


This music video, extended to include filmic scenes with dialogue, is the director’s cut of the official music video for the song “P.H.A.T.W.A.”, from the 2009 album The Narcicyst by Canadian-Iraqi rapper The Narcicyst. The video lasts 11 minutes and is freely available on YouTube at the link provided above. It has been selected for the pilot study because it integrates within a single text a multiplicity of narrative modes, representing the variety of formats and genres included in the main data set. Specifically, in terms of genre, the video contains a mix of hip hop and comedy; and in terms of format it is partway between a short film and a music video. The text is introduced in more detail in the pilot study itself, in section 3.5 further below.
3.4.2 Main Data Set Texts

In order of production date:

“Bin Laden” by Immortal Technique featuring Mos Def


This rap song first appeared on mix tapes in 2004 and was released on single in 2005 along with its accompanying video. It is the result of a collaboration between high profile US hip hop artists Immortal Technique and Mos Def, and was produced by DJ Green Lantern. The song was chosen for the data set because it expresses hostility towards the US government and seeks to undermine the official government account of 9/11, blaming the attacks on George W. Bush himself as the figurehead for US foreign policy and US government funding of Al Qaeda during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. Both artists are American citizens from New York; however Immortal Technique was born in Peru and Mos Def is a Muslim convert who has publically adopted the Islamic name Yasiin Bey. The multivalent identities of the artists are pertinent to the themes of the study.

The video is also of interest for its multimodality in that it presents the written lyrics on screen so that they appear in a dynamic and visually arresting manner as they are heard being rapped, which attracts attention to them and aesthetically underscores their political significance.

“12 septembre 2001” by Abd al Malik

June 2006, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tmth0VvvJAI (version with English subtitles) [last accessed 20 February 2017].

Abd al Malik (birth name Régis Fayette-Mikano) was born and raised in Paris of Congolese family origin, and converted from Catholicism to Islam in 1999. He is a prolific artist, author and film director – his autobiographical movie Qu’Allah bénisse La France [May
Allah bless France] was released in December 2014, just before the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks. Malik’s multivalent positioning as a politically conscious French Muslim rapper is of particular interest to the themes of the study.

In this music video, Malik poetically tackles the narrative ‘fallout’ of 9/11 for Muslims living in Europe. His lyrics express from a personal perspective the widespread societal suspicion towards Muslims since the attacks, his disassociation as a Muslim from the attacks, and the importance of secular, humanist values along with religious tolerance. The song is the second track on Abd al Malik’s 2006 album *Gibraltar*, which won the 2006 Prix Constantin for best album of an artist who came to prominence in that year.

**“Le 11 septembre: 11. Dernier épisode” by Jean-Marie Bigard**


This video is the last of 11 episodes of the series *Le 11 septembre* streamed on French comedian Jean-Marie Bigard’s website ([www.bigard.com](http://www.bigard.com)) from June to August 2009. It is taken as representative of the whole series, which consists of short monologues to camera that tackle problematic aspects of the official US government version of the events of 9/11, delivered in an ironic tone with two ‘FBI agents’ standing behind him. They were published a year after Bigard publicly stated he believed the attacks were orchestrated by the American government, which provoked media controversy and condemnation to the extent that he declared in a press release some days later that he would never talk about the subject again (*Le Monde* 2008) – a statement that the videos appear to override.

As a white, middle class, French male, Bigard is an interesting figure to bring into the analysis, since he renounced his once high profile friendship with former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who was both unpopular among French ethnic minorities and on good terms with former US President George W. Bush. His complex positioning as a public figure in the post-9/11 temporal order can be read as a form of multivalence. Bigard’s
textual construction of a counter narrative to hegemony is also multivalent in terms of its mood and genre, as will be elaborated.

“Enfants du désert” by Diam’s


This rap song with accompanying video by French-Cypriote political activist rapper Diam’s (birth name Mélanie Georgiades), taken from her 2009 album S.O.S., was selected for analysis because it was written during a moment of personal transition in the artist’s life, which controversially culminated in her conversion to Islam and withdrawal from the music industry, despite huge commercial success. The song lyrics tell the story of the artist going away to the North African desert to reflect on the empty promises of fame and capitalist society. The video depicts Diam’s long-distance running in the style of Forrest Gump (Zemeckis 1994), with her hair covered in part-urban, part-hijab style. This song is studied with close reference to Diam’s’ personal identity, since to a great extent this shapes critical responses to her music given the prevailing tensions in France surrounding Muslims (and in particular the hijab) which is evidenced by comments underneath the YouTube videos from before and after her conversion.

The inclusion of this song in the data set permits a slightly different angle on the exploration of aesthetic shock and the War on Terror meta narrative – one that is more focused on the deeper spiritual and characterological attributes of the artist than on the textual narrative per se (since the textual narrative cannot be understood in these terms without knowledge of the rapper’s personal narrative), an approach which will foreground processes of renarration taking place on an ontological level.
**The Taqwacores** directed by Eyad Zahra


Based on the 2003 debut novel of the same name by white American Muslim convert Michael Muhammad Knight, this 2010 feature-length film directed by Eyad Zahra depicts the story of a fictitious group of young Muslim punks living together in a house in Buffalo, New York, who, feeling disengaged from traditional Muslim communities, negotiate their own controversial brand of Islamic identity as members of the local punk scene. The term ‘taqwacore’ is a blend of the Islamic concept of ‘taqwa’ [god-consciousness] with the word ‘hardcore’, referring to the punk rock subgenre – a portmanteau that reflects the core theme of multivalence upon which the narrative hangs.

In addition to generating media and academic interest, the book was credited with inspiring a real ‘Taqwacore’ movement in the USA and abroad, which was the subject of a 2009 documentary film entitled Taqwacore: The Birth of Punk Islam, directed by Omar Majeed. The low budget feature film adaptation of the novel that is included in the data set premiered at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival and received mixed reviews; nonetheless, it captures many of the key elements of the novel with the added benefit of the audiovisual format for the musical element. In the interests of brevity – this being one of the two feature-length films included in the data set – one character from the text (Rabeya) is singled out for analysis.

**Four Lions** directed by Chris Morris


Directed by British cult satirist Chris Morris, Four Lions is the second feature-length film included in the data set. It tells the story of four bumbling jihadists (three Pakistanis and one English convert) living in northern England who plot to carry out a terrorist attack on the London Marathon. Despite being initially rejected by the BBC and Channel 4 as too controversial, the film enjoyed critical acclaim, won a BAFTA in 2011, and has been screened on Channel 4 several times in the years subsequent to its release.
The film is notable for its realistic portrayal of the characters and their lives, which makes the playful subversion of Muslim stereotypes all the more shocking; for example, viewers are led to empathise with the ringleader of the attacks, Omar (played by Riz Ahmed), who is more ‘Western’ than his pacifist, orthodox brother, exemplifying how multivalence can be exploited for comedic impact. As above, in the interests of brevity, the character of Omar will be singled out for analysis.

“Osamacide! Rap News 8 with Robert Foster” by Giordano Nanni & Hugo Farrant


Juice Media’s Juice Rap News combines humour with rap to communicate serious socio-political messages online as an alternative to mainstream media outlets and political discourse. It is described on its website as: “the internet nation’s on-beat musical, independent current-affairs programme, responsible for turning bollocks-news into socio-poetical analyses which everyone can relate to and understand – written & created by Giordano Nanni & Hugo Farrant in a backyard home-studio in suburban Melbourne, Australia – on Wurundjeri land.”

This episode from Season One discusses the death of Osama Bin Laden, tackling government inconsistencies in reports of the incident, as well as conspiracy theories that have mushroomed online due to lack of trust in official narratives. The two invited guests – ‘General Baxter’ for The Pentagon and hippy conspiracy theorist Terence Moonseed – present these conflicting perspectives, with news anchor Robert Foster acting as the voice of reason between the two. The piece ultimately calls for a civil movement for justice that would read between the lines of contemporary media and government narratives; in other words, it promotes a multivalent stance against hegemony.
“Pero (11s la verdad)” by Mero
August 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpONwMNzqZ8 [last accessed 20 February 2017].

This video was uploaded to YouTube by its creator – a singer named Mero, about whom there is very little information available online, other than he appears to originate from Argentina, and has produced a number of songs with a similar political agenda. This song, an upbeat acoustic rock number, recounts the details of the official 9/11 narrative so as to ironically expose its implausibility, with the refrain “Pero no lo contó la TV” [But the TV didn’t tell it] as a repeated message to the viewer that underlines the existence of narrative hegemony. The accompanying video uses footage from documentaries on 9/11 and presents the song lyrics visually via intralingual subtitles.

The song is of interest to the study not only for its theme and message, but also because it showcases how multivalence can operate between mood and textual genre as a means to affectively and cognitively challenge the viewer.

“Terrorist?” by Lowkey

Lowkey (real name Kareem Dennis) was born in London to an English father and an Iraqi mother. His connection to Iraq and multivalent identity as a British Muslim are fundamental to his artistic output and his political stance (he is a prominent member of the Stop The War Coalition and patron of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign). In 2012, Lowkey took a hiatus from music in order to pursue his studies. In addition to his solo work, he has collaborated with other high profile activist rappers including Immortal Technique, Shadia Mansour and The Narcicyst, who also feature in the data set.

The rap song “Terrorist?” is taken from Lowkey’s influential 2011 album Soundtrack to the Struggle, which was released digitally on his own independent label Mesopotamia Records. In the track, Lowkey critiques political usages of the term ‘terrorist’ and turns
the label back onto state perpetrators of violence. The lyrics demonstrate the artist’s strong awareness of international politics, which he relates back to the precarity of his everyday lived experience as a Muslim in the UK. The song’s accompanying video, directed by Global Faction, provides a sophisticated visual narrative that is integral to the overall message.

“Somos sur” by Ana Tijoux featuring Shadia Mansour

March 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKGUJXzxNqc][last accessed 20 February 2017].

This rap song with accompanying video, taken from French-Chilean activist rapper Ana Tijoux’s 2014 album Vengo [I come], has been selected for the data set primarily because it features British-Palestinian activist rapper Shadia Mansour, who performs a section of the song in Arabic (the rest of the song being in Spanish). Mansour’s ability to rap proficiently in both English and Arabic endows her with a powerful international reach and makes her of particular interest to the themes of the study. She also provides an interesting example of multivalence with regards to the War on Terror, since she is not Muslim, as might be assumed, but is in fact Palestinian Christian.

In “Somos sur” [We are South], Mansour and Tijoux make a call for solidarity between oppressed peoples the world over, from Latin America to Palestine. The carnival-themed music and visuals are highly uplifting, making use of aesthetics and multivalence to challenge global power structures. While explicit mention is not made of the War on Terror, the very inclusion of Mansour rapping in Arabic and images of the Palestinian flag connect the song to core narratives related to the War on Terror, allowing Mansour’s cause to reach a more globalised audience (i.e. Tijoux’s Latin American fanbase) that might not otherwise have identified on an affective level with what is widely perceived as an Islamic narrative in the collective struggle against global precarity.
“The Prince” [الأمير/al-emir] by Daya al-Taseh


Featured in The Guardian newspaper in March 2015, Daya al-Taseh is a production team of young Syrian refugees based in Turkey who risk their lives by producing online videos in Arabic – posted openly with English subtitles on their website (dayaaltaseh.com) – that lampoon ISIS fighters to expose their stupidity and religious hypocrisy. In so doing, they problematise stereotypes of Islam and Middle Eastern countries not only in religious terms but also in cultural terms through sophisticated participation in global media/cultural flows, which can be viewed as a form of multivalence in the context of post-9/11 narrative hegemony.

The chosen episode (no. 3 of 8) is a short comedy sketch depicting an ISIS fighter with a costume beard sitting by a roadside drinking wine, listening to Arabic pop music and sending a selfie to his girlfriend. The supposed ‘emir’ swiftly changes his behaviour upon the arrival of a travelling jihadi, who he sends to his death by persuading him that some nearby Assad resistance fighters are actually Israelis.

“After Banksy: The Parkour Guide to Gaza” by Gaza Parkour Team

(Abdallah AlQassab et al.) featuring Shadia Mansour


This video is a response to the Gaza tourist video that was created in February 2015 by activist graffiti artist Banksy and posted on his official website (www.banksy.co.uk) in the form of an ad page which had to be skipped before the homepage loaded. Some weeks later, the local Gaza parkour^30 team decided to join Banksy in promoting Gaza as a tourist destination. The tour guides extend their hospitality in the bare face of destruction while

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^30 Parkour, as elaborated in Chapter 5, is a movement-based training discipline whereby practitioners traverse a (usually urban) terrain using only their body and its surroundings for propulsion; the aim being to get from A to B in the most efficient manner, maintaining maximum momentum while remaining safe (Parkour UK website).
performing parkour over the destroyed buildings and walls of the territory, to the sounds of British-Palestinian rapper Shadia Mansour (who also features in the music video “Somos sur”; see above). Narrator Abdallah AlQassab addresses the viewer directly in English to explain what Gaza has to offer for tourists, with intralingual subtitles added for clarity and to provide additional commentary to contextualise the narrative.

The humanising quality of the video in context of the War on Terror meta narrative – which is argued to both draw on and fuel the pre-existing Is[352]rael/Palestine conflict – makes “The Parkour Guide to Gaza” of great relevance to the study as a form of affective digital resistance from a conflict zone.

3.5 Pilot Study: Narrative Analysis of “P.H.A.T.W.A. (Director’s Cut)” (2009) by The Narcicyst

3.5.1 Introduction

The pilot study is intended to demonstrate how the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2 may be applied; it is thus limited to a single cross-genre text with an analytical focus on the narrative-based themes of character, temporality and multivalence. Given that only one text is discussed here, only brief mention is made of wider theoretical perspectives, while an additional section is included on textual format and framing following this introduction. The text in question is the director’s cut of the music video for “P.H.A.T.W.A.” (dir. Hala Alsalman), a song taken from the eponymous 2009 album The Narcicyst by Iraqi-Canadian journalist and activist rapper The Narcicyst (real name Yassin Alsalman). As mentioned in section 3.4.1 above, the director’s cut has been chosen for its multimodality: while primarily a song, it is presented as a short film (duration 11:06 minutes) and creatively combines rap music, humour and spoken dialogue within the same text in order to engage critically with the theme of increased suspicion/targeting of Muslims following 9/11.

The video tells the story of The Narcicyst and a friend/associate attempting to catch a flight from an undisclosed location in Canada to New York for a music event, but missing
the flight due to the former being hauled into an interrogation room on the basis of looking Arab and wearing a T-Shirt bearing the slogan ‘Same shit, different Saddam’. This slogan is a comic play on the well-known T-shirt slogan ‘Same shit/shirt, different day’ (or SSDD), other recent reiterations of which include the Internet meme ‘Same shit, different asshole’, popularly used to compare George W. Bush to Adolf Hitler following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. At the same moment as Narcy is taken away by officials, a young white man wanders past wearing a T-shirt reading ‘Same shit, different hipster’ and a kufiyya. The appearance of the hipster highlights an example of consumer appropriation of cultural signifiers. More importantly in the context of this study, it begs the question of why Narcy was taken in for questioning when the hipster was not. The implication seems to be that a person’s racial profile determines the social meaning of their attire – a kufiyya on a white hipster is non-threatening; while a Saddam T-shirt on an Arab, however, is threatening.

3.5.2. Format and Framing

Whereas the official music video for “P.H.A.T.W.A.” features only the rap song with a short dialogue section halfway through, the director’s cut is composed in the style of a feature film, with title and opening credits, as well as closing credits at the end – both set to hip hop music (also written and performed by The Narcicyst). The video content itself is more or less evenly distributed between Narcy’s rapping and his scripted spoken dialogue with other characters, which are tied together thematically into a coherent audiovisual narrative; as Alsalmann explained in an interview with The Huffington Post, “I like to have a narrative that speaks to the entire record but in a video format” (cited in Rothe 2014). The director’s cut is double the length of the official music video owing to these additional scenes with dialogue, which precede and succeed the song itself, with another breaking the song halfway through (a shorter, key excerpt of which is retained in the official video).

31 A typical Middle Eastern headdress for men, often worn in the West as an expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people and/or a fashion accessory – a point further discussed in section 5.3.
32 A usually pejorative term referring to an artistic and politically progressive middle-class subculture overly concerned with edgy, non-mainstream fashion (Urban Dictionary).
According to the crowd-sourced fan community lyric website Musixmatch (2014), the acronym P.H.A.T.W.A., as listed in the album inlay card, stands for “Political Hip Hop Attracting the World’s Attention”; however the term is also a playful combination of the Arabic word usually transliterated as ‘fatwa’, and the colloquial English adjective ‘phat’, a synonym of ‘cool’ which is commonly used in a musical context, e.g. a “phat tune” to describe a good song (Urban Dictionary). This lends a humorous dimension to the title, derived from a creative use of multivalence, which is then played out in the narrative as a whole, as will be further discussed below. Immediately, however, the title assists in framing the narrative – frames being understood as “structures of anticipation, strategic moves that are consciously initiated in order to present a movement or a particular position within a certain perspective” (Baker 2006: 106, emphasis in original). Thus, frames provide the means for an auditor to ideologically connect with a narrative and find an interpretative footing.

The framing process continues via the visual dimension of the opening credits, which is made up of black and white footage of The Narcicyst walking through the city streets with a backpack, cut with images of surveillance cameras that are presumably in the local area. The acoustics are not sombre (the introductory music begins in a somewhat soulful manner, but quickly builds to a lively bass line and staccato rhythm), however the viewer is visually made aware of the state apparatus that surround the character, watching over him and placing him in state of precarity. This sets the scene and builds narrative suspense.

The narrative proper then begins with a light-hearted, 3-minute long introductory sequence shot in warm, bright colours – in contrast to the black and white of the opening credits – in which The Narcicyst arrives to meet his friend in order for them to travel to the airport together in his friend’s car. There is narrative continuity with the opening credits in that the two characters are on a roadside and it is implied that The Narcicyst’s opening walk through the streets monitored by surveillance cameras had been part of the same journey. Nonetheless, the shift from monochrome to bright colour and humour builds another layer to the narrative’s framing, creating an overall ambivalence of mood.
that suggests the viewer is not to take the following introductory sequence on face value (i.e. for entertainment purposes) alone.

3.5.3 Character: Rapper as Protagonist

The Narcicyst is established as the video’s protagonist from the outset – being the only character listed in the opening credits (“Starring Yassin Alsalman”). In character, he is addressed by his real life nickname ‘Narcy’ by his sidekick ‘Yusho’ (Yushua Scott), which leads the viewer to believe he is playing himself. He also, however, assumes a semi-fictional or archetypal role as any Arab caught in a similar situation of precarity; an observation drawn from the fact that he states his real (i.e. non-rapper) name to be ‘Jamal Abdul’ in the detention room scene (06:18), despite his real name actually being Yassin Alsalman.33 The textual narrative can therefore be said to bridge fact and fiction performatively through the character of Narcy – a narratological device known as metalepsis34 – and extend beyond its own performative world to represent or resonate with other, similar narratives. The metaleptic nature of the text adds political import to the construction of Narcy’s character and his positioning in relation to other characters in the video – at once revealing an affective reality that is shared by the fictive and non-fictive worlds, and changing it by contributing to its narrative evolution through the use of aesthetics. During the introductory sequence, the character Narcy makes a key statement that is revealing of his political approach: “I was just worried it was gonna be another political activist event where we’re ‘preaching to the choir’, you know what I mean?” (01:27). From this, the viewer can infer that there is a political drive to the video, and the statement flags Narcy’s intention to break through to new audiences and distance himself

33 An alternative interpretation of this could be that ‘Jamal Abdul’ is a false name supplied to the hostile interrogator in an act of defiance, but this is unlikely given that, as will be elaborated, the narrative casts Narcy from the beginning as truthful and sincere in nature. He would also have to be in possession of a fake passport to get away with a false name under government interrogation, which would undermine the fundamental basis of the narrative: his innocence.

34 Kukkonen (2011: 6) explains that metalepsis may work, for example, by diegetic characters directly addressing an (implied) audience, or representations of the non-diegetic world entering and interacting with the diegetic world (e.g. an image of the painter’s hand reaching into a cartoon image). In “P.H.A.T.W.A.”, Narcy switches from filmic dialogue with other characters contained in the diegetic world, to rapping, directed at an implied non-diegetic audience. As will be seen in section 3.5.4, the boundaries between the narrative “worlds” of the text are further blurred by the inclusion of visuals that only the implied non-diegetic audience can see.
from traditional forms of political engagement. This can be considered a metaleptic statement and thus invites exploration of both the diegetic and non-diegetic for the assessment of Narcy’s character.

By way of non-diegetic characterological background, which viewers may or may not be aware of, The Narcicyst is of Iraqi descent; he was born in Dubai and moved with his family to Canada when he was five years old. According to his biography on the Internet Movie Database, he is a graduate in Political Science and Communication Studies and has a master’s degree in Media Studies. His thesis project was entitled "Fear of an Arab Planet" (a play on Public Enemy’s album title Fear of a Black Planet [1990] – one of hip hop’s most influential and recognised albums) and focused on identity politics of the Arab-American experience as encountered in hip hop poetics; the thesis was subsequently self-published in book format – The Diatribes of a Dying Tribe (Alsalman 2010). According to his official website, the book explores through the lens of Arab hip hop “the jumbled reality of North American life”, in order to highlight “the destructive components of juxtaposing cultures, the birth of immigrant internationality and the resilient art that comes out of struggle and oppression” (The Narcicyst official website).

While this information is freely available online and central to The Narcicyst’s image as an activist rapper, none of it is explicitly conveyed in “P.H.A.T.W.A” with the exception of his Iraqi heritage, which is stated in the detention room scene – although the ambiguity surrounding fact and fiction in the video means that the viewer may be unsure if this is true biographical information. Instead, an affective narrative that corresponds to The Narcicyst’s lived socio-political identity is performed. Indeed, Alsalman eschews in a 2014 interview with The Huffington Post the label of ‘political artist’ (by which Yusho addresses him in "P.H.A.T.W.A."), emphasising instead the unifying power of music; creativity being the inevitable result of his forced-upon state of ontological precarity,

(...) it's a very natural conversation that I'm having with myself. I have to do it, it's just who I am. An identity crisis but also an identity realization. People used to call me a political artist but I'm not a political artist. Politics divide people, music brings people together. So that's a bit of a clash for me. I'm a politicized person, when I walk in a place (...) and I look the way I look, people are like immediately,
"who's that guy, why does he wear that, what does he stand for?" Then when I go back home, and I walk in with my beard at the airport or somewhere I'm an Arab guy. There's always a political view. I'm never comfortable. (cited in Rothe 2014)

Rather than describing himself in essentialist terms, then, Alsalman instead views his ontological narrative as revealing of his precarious relationship to the post-9/11 temporal order, and understands his role as an artist to be the assertion of self as well as the creation of solidarity. Therefore, the way Alsalman presents himself diegetically as protagonist in order to create affinity with the viewer warrants close attention. This is achieved through a range of verbal and visual techniques that aim to generate positive affect and demonstrate in Narcy what Fisher terms “characterological coherence” (1987: 47). Within the narrative paradigm, characterological coherence falls under the basic tenet of narrative probability (as opposed to fidelity); specifically, it refers to how believable a narrative is in terms of the reliability of its characters – both as narrators and as actors, both of which roles Narcy performs in his capacity as rapper.

Fisher defines ‘character’ as an “organized set of actional tendencies” that reflect a fundamental value orientation (1987: 47/148). These must be perceived as consistent and desirable if trust is to be built and a character’s message accepted, and are an affective quality of a narrative, since values, or “the logic of good reasons”, are treated as separate in Fisher’s model to the logic of reasons (Baker 2006: 152). In “P.H.A.T.W.A”, Narcy’s characterological coherence is conveyed during the introductory sequence, ahead of his interrogation at the airport, through comic juxtaposition with the conflicting set of values held by his friend Yusho. The moral grounding of Narcy’s character becomes the axis around which the entire narrative revolves and the affinitive lens through which the reader views the other characters, who are all presented in relation to him, and who become increasingly politically charged. For this reason of establishing characterological coherence, the introductory sequence is far more important to the activist narrative than it may seem when taken at face value.

To consider the introductory sequence in more detail, its principal function is the presentation of the two characters and their relationship, the amicable dynamic of which
is largely that of a comedy duo. Yusho’s value orientation is revealed as comically questionable from the outset: the first spoken line of the film (00:45) is Yusho calling out to an attractive female passer-by “Yo, let me see your wedding ring!”, for which he receives a rude gesture in return. This is immediately followed by the two friends greeting each other in a complicated ritualistic ‘hip hop handshake’, for which the camera cuts to a close-up (01:00), suggesting its significance in establishing for the viewer the pair’s kinship and their belonging to the wider hip hop community. The pair’s social identity is also reflected visually in their clothing style, which indicates an adherence to hip hop fashion trends (baggy jeans, expensive trainers, ostentatious jewellery – or “bling” as it is commonly known – etc.). However, characterological differences between the two are quickly revealed when two more passers-by greet Narcy from the other side of the street and the following exchange takes place (01:08):

Narcy [to passers-by]: What up man!
Narcy/Yusho [unclear who is speaking]: Who is that?
Yusho: You know what I hate?
Narcy: What?
Yusho: When people ask you what’s going on in your life like they really care.
Narcy: You gonna be PMS-ing this whole trip, man? Are you even ready for the show?

From this brief and ostensibly inconsequential discussion, a fair amount can be discerned about Narcy’s character. Firstly, the viewer now knows that Narcy is a publicly recognised figure, at least in his local area. That the two passers-by are white males suggests that his social identity and circle of influence are not racially bounded (it should be noted here that Yusho is black), but more likely determined by his involvement in the hip hop scene, which was once associated primarily with African American culture in the USA, but whose popularity has spread over time – both geographically beyond the USA and in terms of the social demographics of its production/consumption35. Secondly, with regards to characterological disposition, the viewer sees that Narcy a) does not endorse his friend’s evaluation of the passers-by’s greeting as an act of hypocrisy, and b) possesses both

35 “Hip hop is and always will be a culture of the African-American minority. But it has become an international language, a style that connects and defines the self-image of countless teenagers” (Bozza 2009, cited in Pennycook and Mitchell 2009: 28).
sound reasoning and a sharp sense of humour; his light-hearted, calmly-delivered put-down to Yusho indicates that the viewer need not take Yusho too seriously, while casting Narcy as the more adult of the two. This dynamic will be repeated shortly afterwards, when two attractive women who are fans of The Narcicyst stop to talk to them, and Narcy has to remind Yusho that he (i.e. Yusho) has a girlfriend (01:36-02:28). Both men visibly respond to the women’s appearance, which is heralded by the background music suddenly becoming more prominent and switching from down-beat hip hop to triumphant jazz-funk, suggesting the two men’s shared affective experience of excitation (this is further underlined by the camera scanning the women from the feet upwards in close-up, in the manner of the male gaze36). Although both men greet the women in an identically stupefied fashion (01:48), it is Yusho who goes on to exchange numbers with one of the women, while Narcy is friendly and polite but does not pursue either woman. As the women leave, Yusho comments (repeating the idiosyncratic rhetorical scheme used in his earlier statement about people pretending to care about other people’s lives, thereby enhancing the characterological comic effect): “You know what I love, Narcy? When girls don’t just want to be friends, like they want more than friendship, you know what I’m sayin’, cus?” (02:08).

This time, Narcy’s response (“Dog, you have a girlfriend!” 02:16) is a straightforward rebuke, delivered with a half-amused, half-exasperated smile and hand gesture as he walks away from Yusho to get into the car. This suggests that, while very much human and susceptible on some level to base instincts – allowing male viewers to identify with him – Narcy deviates from the tendency towards macho sexism in hip hop culture and has a healthy respect towards women, which increases the chances of endearing himself to female viewers by garnering their appreciation and trust as a socio-political messenger37.

36 The concept of the male gaze was made famous by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” to refer to the cinematic manifestation of heterosexual male dominance in film, which objectifies the female.

37 Michael Newman cites S.L. Thompson to describe lyrical expressions of misogyny and homophobia as “notorious problems” of rap. In Newman’s analysis, these function to align the rapper with the cult/figure of the thug in the potentially hostile world of the street. A popular motif to emerge in his study of MC lyrics, for example, was sexual penetration as an expression of dominance – as he puts it, “probably the most fundamental archetype of ‘hegemonic masculinity’, an association of supremacy with masculine attributes [which] rests upon a profoundly sexist worldview” (2009: 205). Another detail that hints at The Narcicyst’s conscious deviance from thug culture is the fact that he swaps his sunglasses for regular glasses in order to talk to the women – which lends him an air of intelligence and respectability, even vulnerability.
It is not revealed whether Narcy himself has a girlfriend; more relevant than demonstrating his virility is demonstrating the values he espouses. Nonetheless, this could be interpreted as an ‘evolved’ form of egotism on Narcy’s part, since the whole video is designed to cast him in an attractive light – he is portrayed as having fans, female interest, intellect and humour as well as looking good; however, the elements of egotism that are legitimate in Narcy’s worldview do not contradict values such as respect and tolerance, which he also successfully embodies. Thus, his egotism provides him with cultural capital and traction as a role model while being grounded in and encouraging of social responsibility – such is the nature of hip hop’s conscious individualism; a notion further explored in section 4.3.1.

Thus Yusho, as comic sidekick, throws into relief the moral standing of the protagonist, who also commands respect performatively as a skilled rapper. The comical and musical elements of the narrative therefore have a strong characterological quality that acts to elicit viewers’ affinity with Narcy’s politicised ontological narrative.

3.5.4 Temporality

Having outlined the centrality of The Narcicyst’s character to the affective force of “P.H.A.T.W.A.”, the discussion now turns to the interrelated narrative feature of temporality. The affective role of temporality in the video is attested to by online commentator ‘michaelnewburger’ posting on a blog (Egheitzman 2011) affiliated to New York University, which assesses the official video (i.e. not the director’s cut) of “P.H.A.T.W.A.” with reference to film theorist Tom Gunning’s ‘cinema of attractions’ theory (1993)\(^38\). The comment posted underneath the analysis reads as follows:

\(^{38}\) The concept of the cinema of attractions places an emphasis on display over storytelling in early cinema, a form of exhibitionism which Gunning argues goes against the voyeuristic regime of classical cinema because it does not “hide behind the pretense of an unacknowledged spectator” (1993: 5). Instead, an “aesthetic of attractions” directly confronts audiences, seeking to arouse and satisfy visual curiosity, often through use of shock (1993: 6). Gunning’s account of this filmic strategy is particularly interesting in that it makes a distinction between narrative temporality and the temporality of the attraction. Drawing on Ricoeur, he argues that narrative temporality is a configuration of time that assumes “a sort of shape through the interacting logic of events”; attractions, on the other hand have a basic temporality – an intense form of immediacy – “that of the alternation of presence/absence which is embodied in the act of display” (1993: 6). The idea of temporal irruptions and disjunction is key also to the notion of aesthetic shock; however in separating narrative from attraction, Gunning seems to imply that these different temporalities cannot be viewed as part of the same configuration (at best they might co-exist). This is
I recently traveled to Punta Cana for spring break. On the way back my friend of Saudi Arabian origin, but now a citizen of the states [sic] was detained for no better reason than the phonetics of his name. He was held up for two hours and missed his connecting flight all because of a racist assumption. Which brings me to an actual point of the attractive nature of this video. I think some of the attractive nature of this video is in the fact that it is extremely unique to the world today and the fear of terror from somewhere in the middle east [sic]. The Narcicyrst seems to add a new dimension to the daily struggles that people of muslim [sic] descent face in the modern world. The social context of this music video is the reason for its attraction and makes me wonder if this video would mean anything to someone 20 years prior or 20 years later. (posted 22 March 2011 as comment in response to Egheitzman 2011)

Indeed, the socio-temporal context of “P.H.A.T.W.A.” is signposted early in the video, as Narcy and Yusho arrive at the airport and a boarding call is made for “Flight 9/11 to New York” (02:44). The relationship of precarity that both characters experience towards the temporal order – which is the same one diegetically as for the viewer – is made explicit when Yusho suddenly drops his comedy act and reveals his shared sense of vulnerability to Narcy (03:44):

Yusho: Yo Narcy, do you really think that they’re watching us? I ain’t tryin to get searched, B. Who do you think they’re gon na harass more, man? Me or you?
Narcy: Man obviously me, dog. You know Iraq is the new black.

This last remark hangs evocatively for half a second, along with Narcy’s wistful gaze and some melancholic background music, acting as the bridge into the song proper at 03:57. Given its style of delivery and positioning in the diegetic temporal sequence, this can be understood as the thematic crux of the entire narrative39. The visual dimension displayed when the main beat kicks in further develops the socio-temporal theme at the moment of mode switch (i.e. from spoken dialogue to music/rap) – an airport surveillance camera with an animated blue eye instead of a lens scans the room menacingly, evoking the (white) Western state apparatus (Figure 3.1), which notoriously became more stringent towards Muslims and Arabs in the wake of 9/11, curbing freedoms and rights, while perhaps because his concept of narrativity is limited to literary or filmic representations, and thus fails to follow through the implications of the filmic method he describes for aesthetic social construction. To include a similar notion of attraction within the (sociological) narrative framework, through the concept of affect, enables a deeper understanding of narrative ‘world-making’.

39 This sequence also features in the official video.
spreading waves of suspicion among non-Muslim populations. The surveillance camera is thus suggestive of unseen, all-seeing hegemonic power structures inflecting upon the lived narrative identities of the two main characters. That Yusho also feels under threat is a reminder that Anglo-American society has a well-documented history of oppressive behaviour towards its ethnic minorities. Establishing a temporal relation of this nature between black people and Muslims/Arabs is a powerful emplotment device; it capitalises on the ongoing evolution of racial attitudes in America to sensitise viewers to public narratives driving contemporary Islamophobia, which, while actively contested by some, continue to operate within a generalised condition of social legitimacy. This is a form of textual multivalence, which will be returned to later; however to continue with the topic of temporality, Narcy’s statement “Iraq is the new black” concisely captures his relationship with the affective present in its layers of narrative complexity – the rhetorical humour itself bears a contemporaneous quality, deriving from the appropriation of the well-known ‘snowclone’ “grey is the new black”. This lends support to ‘michaelnewburger’’s contention that much of the narrative’s affective pull on viewers will derive from its expression in the public domain at this particular moment in history, with the dehumanising effect of the current hegemonic meta narrative being both revealed and inverted through the ‘aesthetic shock’ – whether conscious or subconscious – of good humour and affinity built between the viewer and Narcy who is in a state of precarity. This shock factor would stand to be lost from within the perspective of a different temporal order.

40 In October 2001, the UN Human Rights committee expressed concerns about the UK government’s post-9/11 anti-terrorist legislation plans, under which the government derogated on Article 5 of the European Convention of Human Rights in order to detain terrorist suspects without charge in unpleasant conditions (Al Rashid 2002: 77/80).
41 The abolition of slavery and eventual democratic election of a black president, for example, would attest to an evolution in racial attitudes in the United States. The issue remains complex, however, as the Black Lives Matter movement, formed in 2013, revealed.
42 www.islamophobiawatch.co.uk [last accessed 5 October 2014] documents ongoing incidents of anti-Muslim bigotry in the UK and abroad, with examples ranging from extreme right-wing protest marches, to human rights abuses, to media slurs.
43 A snowclone is an “instantly recognizable, time-worn, quoted or misquoted phrase or sentence that can be used in an entirely open array of different variants” (Wikipedia). This would also be a fitting descriptor for the ‘Same Shit, Different Day’ slogan mentioned earlier.
A similar relation to the world immediately outside the video’s diegetic narrative space is set up by the appropriation of the motif of the Guantánamo Bay detainee, in the form of dancing hooded figures appearing at intervals during the song (04:41; 05:04; 05:53; 08:52/Figure 3.2). Egheitzman, in his reading of “P.H.A.T.W.A.” with reference to the cinema of attractions, identifies these as the narrative’s “most spectacular image” (2011). He describes the affective pathways opened up by their inclusion as follows:

According to the video’s director, the detainee characters were intended to call attention to different forms of victimization—not to equate the Narcicyst’s airport interrogation with military torture, that is, but to make viewers aware in a visceral way of less visible forms of victimization and marginalization that Middle Eastern and Muslim people experience on a regular basis. In this way, the iconic image of the hooded detainee (and, in one instance, the suicide bomber (around 2:30)), originated and made ubiquitous by American news media, is redefined: the detainee becomes both a warning to men flying while Arab and a ghost haunting the American collective unconscious. (Egheitzman 2011)

Narcy sees the figures when they first appear (04:44) and initially looks taken aback, but eventually dances along with them (08:52), indicating his solidarity with a touch of irony. The fact that he interacts with them metaleptically blurs the boundaries of the narrative spaces in operation – only Narcy and the viewer can see the dancing figures, bringing one
dimension of the narrative closer to the viewer. The diegetic space becomes both more intimate and more public through its location within a shared affective present; in other words, an affinity space is built in which Narcy’s precarious individual positioning links us to the affective experience of multiple unnamed others.

Figure 3.2: Dancing Guantánamo Bay detainees.

To outline its relation to the temporal order, Guantánamo Bay opened in January 2002 and remains open at the time of writing\textsuperscript{44}, which means that it is both contemporary with the video – heightening its affective potential – and has also existed as a public narrative long enough to accrue a degree of narrative traction through historicity. Historicity, however, is most deeply drawn upon in the video’s temporal-affective emplotment when Narcy finds himself detained and sitting on a bench awaiting interrogation. At this moment, animated cartoon images of The Crusades begin to appear over his head, as if to intimate both his private thoughts and his embeddedness in the greater flow of historicity

\textsuperscript{44} 779 prisoners have been held at the prison in total, with 55 detainees still there in January 2017 (Close Guantánamo website). In July 2013, over 40 detainees were force fed during Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting – these were some of the 106 detainees then on hunger strike in protest against their prolonged detention without trial. This further abuse prompted human rights organisation Reprieve to release a four-minute film featuring high profile hip hop artist and Muslim convert Yasiin Bey (formerly known as Mos Def, who features in the core data set) being force fed while dressed in the distinctive orange Guantánamo Bay jumpsuit, in an attempt to raise public awareness about the brutality being inflicted upon the detainees held there (The Guardian 2013).
(04:30) (Figure 3.3). We are now in the realm of meta narrative; namely, the ever-persisting ‘Clash of Civilisations’ meta narrative. Ricoeur’s notion of narrative repetition, discussed in section 2.2, is recalled here – the private fate of the individual weighed upon by the communal destiny that is prioritised through the narrative form. Narcy’s body language is one of passivity – sitting head bowed, hands joined – against the historical weight that feeds into the meta narrative. Nonetheless, given that an individual’s affective meaning-making may vary according to their positioning within this communal narrative destiny, the historical narrative may both repeat and evolve as social agents are driven to re-appropriate it. The point is that, diegetically, the narrative depicts resignation and lack of agency – the repeated plight of all individuals in the same situation; indeed, it is not clear if Narcy is narrating or being narrated at this point, especially as lightning strikes are depicted pointed at his head, where thought bubbles could be. Yet, at the same time, the very articulation of the narrative is a metaleptic act of defiance and breaks from the historical repetition being evoked.

![Figure 3.3: Crusade imagery over Narcy’s head.](image)

Indeed, according to Egheitzman (2011), Narcy’s act of defiance did not go unnoticed by the US border control. In October 2010, in an incident that further underscores the blurring of fact and fiction in “P.H.A.T.W.A.”, The Narcicyst was detained at Toronto
Airport while attempting to catch a flight to New York. On finding the video for “P.H.A.T.W.A.” on his file, government officials denied him entry to the US. The circularity of this chain of events exemplifies the interplay of dominance and resistance in narrativity; how narrative “both reproduces existing power structures and provides a means of contesting them” (Baker 2006: 23).

The method of articulation is key to the defiance expressed in the above scene; the image of The Crusades aptly exemplifies how aesthetics (in this case, cartoon imagery) can operate to cultivate a broader political sensibility and illuminate marginalised co-historical perspectives, as per Bleiker’s argument (2009) outlined in Chapter 2. The visual aesthetics here bring an ironic contemporary gaze to the historical dimension of the narrative, a form of detachment evolved over time that draws attention to the absurdity without minimising the import. Thus, “P.H.A.T.W.A.” performs, or prefigures, the new modes of political engagement of the global age mentioned in section 2.6 – alternative epistemologies rooted in identity, affect and “visceral ethics” (Best 2009). Through such performative techniques of self-mediation, The Narcicyst works to engage his viewers critically and affectively in their actual socio-political environment, opening a space for new ways of knowing and being in the here and now.

### 3.5.5 Multivalence

This section looks more closely at elements of The Narcicyst’s complex narrative identity, as expressed in “P.H.A.T.W.A.”, which are assimilated within the affective narrative structures of characterological coherence and temporality described above. We have already seen how Narcy uses verbal and visual clues in the opening sequence to distance his identity from certain aspects of ‘mainstream’ activist and hip hop cultures, while aligning himself with other aspects, thereby positioning himself critically between the two in terms of value judgement and social behaviour. Given that this lived identity is presented in textual form, it can be assessed in terms of the textual function of multivalence (Stroud 2002). As explained in section 2.5, the multivalent text forces the viewer into an active role of value reconstruction, which I argue can be effective for social activism purposes. The socio-political relevance of this particular multivalent text is
hinted at in the opening sequence by the traditional Iraqi hat Narcy wears in combination with Westernised hip hop attire (Figure 3.4); and is further developed once the viewer has been able to build affinity with the main characters and see them as ‘normal’ and humanised, at which point their personal narratives start to interact problematically with the wider context in which they are embedded. Narcy’s lived multivalent identity is then played out thematically through his interaction with characterological representations of the temporally-specific, power-relational value systems under critique, challenging the viewer to reflect on and (re)position their own value structures accordingly.

![Figure 3.4: Narcy’s hat.](image)

The first explicit mention in “P.H.A.T.W.A.” of the seemingly contradictory socio-temporal narrative positions that Narcy occupies is a line taken from the song lyrics, which he diegetically raps as the car drives away, bringing an end to the light-hearted opening sequence: “I’ll be an Arab man at an airport, they’ll wonder what I’m there for” (02:35). Once they arrive at the airport, humorous banter between the two friends resumes, but Narcy is now visibly worried, while Yusho’s increasingly outlandish thought processes serve to offset the serious turn of events, retaining the viewer’s aesthetic engagement and acting as a device to exploit the various intersecting narratives of Narcy’s identity. Specifically, Yusho seeks to transform Narcy’s relational feelings of anxiety based on his
ethnicity into an opportunity to increase his street credibility and record sales, by encouraging him to get a fatwa (Islamic decree) issued against himself (02:54):

Narcy: I’m getting paranoid, B. I get to airports and it just starts man.
Yusho: You gotta use that and flip it. You gotta think huge, B. You know what you need?
Narcy: I need a band.
Yusho: Not musically. Narcy, you’re a political artist. What you need is poli-cred. You need a fatwa.
[...]
Yusho: Fatwas are the new gunshot wounds.
Narcy: What?!
Yusho: Think about it. You’ll be all over the news, the Salman Rushdie of the rap game. International fame. You know how many records we’d sell?
Narcy: Yeah I’d get assassinated and go platinum, you’d be chillin’ and rollin’ around in my money and I’d be with Biggie and Pac [gestures skywards]45. Real genius, man. Genius, Yush.

In this exchange, it is clear that Narcy identifies only partially with Yusho with respect to the normative narratives of hip hop culture – a relational dynamic that was first introduced in the opening sequence in the context of interpersonal behavioural standards, notably regarding women, but that here makes overt the political cause in question. Yusho’s effort to make sense of his world through the promise of fame and wealth is not presented as a viable option for Narcy as a way of combating ontological precarity. Via his multivalent fraternal relationship with the character of Yusho, Narcy conveys that such narrative possibilities exist but are not to be aspired to nor taken too seriously. Thus, as well as further demonstrating Narcy’s characterological coherence, the exchange emplots the political cause behind the intersecting value structures that meet in the textual narrative. This is framed as a challenge to widespread beliefs about hip hop as a cultural medium: far from seeking to sell records for material gain, Narcy’s personal identification with Arab/Islamic culture is being mobilised through the aesthetics of hip hop and comedy to reveal “new combinations of values” (Martin 2010: 259) that are otherwise obscured by prevailing meta narratives.

45 The Notorious B.I.G. ("Biggie") and Tupac Shakur ("Pac") are famous rappers who have died.
Narcy’s paranoia is proved well-founded when, having been taken away for questioning on the basis of his T-shirt slogan, a copy of the Quran is found in his bag, which implicates him as a potential terrorist (05:24). From here, the two other key characters who play into the textual web of multivalence become prominent: the hostile airport interrogator and his Arab assistant. The interrogator is a white male who embodies the hegemonic state narrative, a narrative which may have gone unquestioned by the viewer. The interrogator’s relationship to Narcy is not multivalent; indeed it can be construed as oppositional. We are guided to reject any feelings of affinity towards him – and by extension the hegemonic state narrative – through his characterological portrayal as both rude and stupid, as revealed in the following excerpt (06:02):

Interrogator: What do you rap about, Mr Rapper Guy? You rap about, like, shorties wearing burqas and stuff like that? Like Pimp My Camel? Stuff like that?

[Narcy: Man, what is this all about?]

Interrogator: What’s it’s about is you shutting up and answering my questions!

Mr Kareem Abdul Jabbar...

Narcy: It’s Jamal Abdul.

Interrogator: Whatever. Country of origin?

Narcy: I’m Canadian.

Interrogator: I know you’re Canadian. What’s your ethnicity? Ethnicity! Mr...

Jabbir, Kabdul, Kabul, Saddiq, Hussein, Akbar...

Narcy: [shrugs] My parents are from Iraq, I’m Iraqi.

Interrogator: You’re Iraqi? [looks down and makes a note with a smile] Bingo!

Narcy: Bingo?! [looks shocked]

Interrogator: So, when were you last there?

Narcy: About 19 years ago.

Interrogator: 19 years ago, OK, so I guess when Gaddafi was still there?

Narcy: That’s Libya

[Awkward pause]

Interrogator: I know that. I was just testing your Arab knowledge.

The function of multivalence here, I would argue, is activated by the discordance between the interrogator’s offensive character and the value structure buttressing the overarching meta narrative, which is that ‘Western’ values are more civilised and humanitarian than barbaric ‘Eastern’ values. This moral contradiction is present within the text by implication, through the metalectic temporality of the diegetic and non-diegetic worlds. A
viewer subscribing to the hegemonic narrative in question would have to renegotiate that belief if they were to make sense of and accept the text as a whole, a process incentivised by their affinity with Narcy and aesthetic appreciation of the text.

Nonetheless, just prior to this exchange, we are witness to a value contradiction within Narcy which further problematises the ‘us/them’ dichotomy. Specifically, along with the Quran, the security officials find a copy in Narcy’s bag of an obviously fictional magazine entitled *Petrosexual Man*, which features on its animated front cover a scantily-clad woman with some dollar bills tucked into a garter on her thigh, wearing a Saudi-style (male) headscarf and sliding provocatively up and down an oil rig which bursts forth at 05:34 like an ejaculation (Figure 3.5). Pertinently, the lyrics of the rap song which coincide with this image are: “*Pump pain and oil while they murder*”. Displaying to the viewer his ownership of a copy of this magazine perhaps suggests that Narcy does not deny his participation as a consumer in oppressive capitalist structures which take advantage of natural resources and women for profit, while killing innocent civilians; however he is at least conscious of it and honest about it. From this multivalent position, the greater ‘sin’ would not be consumption per se, but the hypocrisy and lies that drive consumerism. Again, this mitigates any notion of Narcy ‘preaching’ to the viewer, while highlighting the greater forces at play. We are invited to accept that the capitalist system, which in various ways we all buy into, is a sham.
The second of the two characters mentioned above who add to the layers of textual multivalence is the Arab security official, assistant to the interrogator, who is complicit in the oppression of those of his own ethnicity. Narcy appears particularly offended by his presence because the natural affinity that could – and in his eyes should – exist between the two has been inverted, creating a multivalent narrative relationship, but one which amounts to treachery. This is evidenced when Narcy directly questions the security official’s positioning in relation to the invasion of Iraq (07:56):

Arab security official: So, says here you’ve performed a lot of activist rap. Do you think we should get out of Iraq?
Narcy: Depends who you mean by “we”.

Narcy later describes this character to Yusho as “an Arab man trying to sell me out man, trying to recruit me on some Uncle Tom shit” \(^{46}\) (09:07), in reference to the fact that he had handed Narcy a business card from the ‘U.S. Department of Arab Man Security’, as if to suggest that Narcy could be saved from his predicament if he too were to join the FBI. By including such a character in the textual narrative, Narcy demonstrates that there are

\(^{46}\) The characterisation of an “Uncle Tom”, i.e. an African-American ‘selling out’ to white people, is a reference to the eponymous hero in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 antislavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, who is a dutiful slave to his white masters.
options available to those in his situation, and thus relationality is not a fixed phenomenon; yet he does not present this as a reasonable or valid option. Underscoring this is the fact that the Arab security official demonstrates a lack of characterological coherence, for example in his verbal attempt to pre-empt any possible charges of racism, which he delivers in Arabic, with the two mens’ faces positioned diagonally opposed across the frame and interlingual subtitles at the bottom reading: “By the way/you know this isn’t a racist thing/Right, bro?” (08:17). This cynical exploitation of the ethno-linguistic link between the two men is perhaps the most morally repulsive moment of the video’s narrative, lacking any humour or visual aesthetic, and is immediately followed by the business card offer, to which Narcy incredulously replies “Damn, son” (08:34), in a line which bridges rap lyric and film script. At this, the Arab security official loses his bravado and bears what can be readily interpreted as a facial expression of guilt (08:39).

To conclude this section on multivalence, the image of the suicide bomber is evoked and re-imagined during the interrogation scene, when Narcy is forced to lift his shirt at gunpoint and reveals that he has CDs strapped to his chest as though they are explosives (05:44). The CDs are of his own music, but the album cover is designed in the manner of Michael Jackson’s iconic 1987 album Bad – a cultural reference that viewers worldwide will recognise (Figures 3.6 and 3.7). Narcy’s expression at this moment is one of supplication, as if to plead “I’m just an entertainer!”, such that one may infer that he might not be politicised were it not for the situation he now finds himself in. Yet music has of necessity become his defensive weapon – one that turns violence into creativity. This image, then, could be read as a motif for Narcy’s multivalent political philosophy of combining entertainment and social struggle, and the plural aspects of his identity, as a way to performatively transcend the enforced contradictions of neoliberal narratives.
In many ways, “P.H.A.T.W.A” is asking the viewer to reflect on which narratives they identify with, and why. The very fact that certain motifs are funny reveals that they draw on narrative environments which are usually construed as contradictory, e.g. the airport interrogator’s allusions to “shorties wearing burquas” and “Pimp My Camel”. Such contradictions are highly temporally specific and unleash a multitude of meanings without needing to be spelled out – indeed, I would argue that their impact is greatest
through the non-verbal communicative elements – yet the viewer has to work actively to follow through the leads and make sense of the multivalent narrative as a whole. The reworking of current prevailing narratives may challenge aspects of the viewer’s own narrative identity; however, since this is portrayed in an aesthetic manner – through the (trusted) narrator’s use of music and comedy which engage the viewer in the affective present – there is at the same time a process of “transcendental dissolution” (Stroud 2002) available to the viewer, pointing to a permutation of the different value structures and the possibility of new ways of thinking and being in the world.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the criteria for data selection and provided a rationale for the inclusion of each of the thirteen texts comprising the data set. It has also put to test the proposed theoretical framework for analysis in a pilot study focusing on the themes of character, temporality and multivalence in a single text showcasing a variety of narrative forms and performative genres. In the pilot study, I hope to have shown how the aesthetic elements of the text are structured with a political agenda that depends on the personal, or characterological, credentials of the protagonist. In other words, through use of music and comedy, the viewer’s affinity with Narcy as a politicised figure is actively elicited. The multivalent nature of the narrative is then exploited to reveal the complexity of each character’s positioning within the temporal order, where positions are not fixed but, due to the existence of power structures, some have more social mobility than others.

The methodology demonstrated here is used as a basis for the two subsequent data analysis chapters, which provide a thematically guided narrative analysis of the twelve remaining texts, drawing more widely on theoretical developments in critical theory and cultural studies to enrich our discussion of post-9/11 narrativity.
Chapter 4
9/11 and the War on Terror: Temporal Multivalence

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses those texts in the core data set that relate directly to the themes of 9/11 (section 4.2) and the War on Terror (section 4.3). In total, 8 of the 12 core texts are brought into the frame, with a particular focus on the performative genres of hip hop and comedy. The remaining 4 texts are analysed in Chapter 5, which is structured around the themes of the Clash of Civilisations & Palestine and introduces some new performative genres (punk and parkour) into the discussion. Both data analysis chapters discuss the artists, production context, and narrative features of the texts themselves.

In this chapter, the key theoretical notions of temporality and multivalence – outlined in Chapter 2 and demonstrated in the pilot study – are fleshed out more fully. They are firstly explored separately in section 4.2; and then in combination in section 4.3, in a contextual and genre-based substantiation of the insights yielded in section 4.2. This lays the ground for Chapter 5 to further advance the analysis by focusing on processes of renarration (as defined in Chapter 2), drawing on concepts from Deleuzian thought.

4.2 9/11

9/11 can be understood as the governing event of the broader situation\(^{47}\) of the War on Terror military campaign, whose coherence as a political discourse hinges on the culpability of the Muslim enemy against the virtuous moral standing of the ‘West’. In the US corporate media there has been a demonstrable trend towards orientalist narratives in the coverage of 9/11 (Powell 2011: 92), alongside the deployment of spectacles of terror “to whip up war hysteria while failing to provide a coherent account of what happened” (Kellner 2006: 44). This has arguably supported the political agendas of both

\(^{47}\) Berlant defines ‘situation’ as “a genre of social time and practice in which a relation of persons and worlds is sensed to be changing but the rules for habitation and the genres of storytelling about it are unstable, in chaos” (2011: 6). Citing Massumi, she posits that in the dialectical relation of situation to event, the event might be understood as that which governs the unfolding situation (2011: 5).
the US government and Islamic Jihadists and has given rise to a cacophony of online voices pushing alternative interpretations of what happened, and why. Even outside America, however, 9/11 scepticism is often treated by mainstream media as heresy and is given coverage “only in its most outlandish forms” (Truscello 2011: 37). It is thus broadly met with ridicule and described homogenously as ‘conspiracy theory’ – a classification which, as argued in section 1.1, acts to remove a narrative/narrator from the sphere of legitimate public discourse, regardless of the individual reasoning or degree of credibility involved.\(^\text{48}\)

For many, however, the sanctioned government account of events published by the 9/11 Commission on 22 July 2004\(^\text{49}\) remains incomplete and inconsistent with other publicly available facts; in Fisher’s terminology, it lacks material coherence (1997: 316). For example, it makes no mention of the sudden collapse at 5:21 pm on the afternoon of 9/11 of World Trade Center Building 7, a 47-storey steel structure which was not hit by a plane (Rudin 2008); while in 2009, Harrit et al. published their findings regarding the presence of nano-thermite in the World Trade Center rubble, which would be suggestive of controlled demolition.\(^\text{50}\) It is only due to the persistence, aided by new media, of groups of professionals and academics – notable among these Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth (ae911truth.org) – that growing numbers of US citizens have started to question the official government narrative over a decade after the event.\(^\text{51}\)

The data set includes three texts presenting multivalent narratives that performatively seek to undermine the official government account of 9/11 while delivering a humorous

\(^{48}\) König (2013) offers an illuminating account of knowledge construction surrounding 9/11 on Wikipedia talk pages. His study observes that conflicting viewpoints overloaded the discursive capacity of the contributors, leading to the marginalisation of alternative theories and – rather than democratised knowledge production – the re-enactment of established hierarchies.

\(^{49}\) A public document, available at: [http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/] (last accessed 8 December 2016). The collapse of Building 7 was however briefly discussed in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) report (2002), and in more depth in the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) report (2008). Both these government reports conclude that the tower fell due to normal office fires.

\(^{50}\) This paper is widely dismissed on the basis of its platform – an open-access journal – despite it being ostensibly peer-reviewed. The then editor of the journal, Marie-Paule Pileni, resigned following the publication of the article, stating it had been done without her knowledge or approval (Suber 2009).

\(^{51}\) Many US citizens have not even heard of Building 7, to the extent that in September 2013, ReThink911 (the public awareness campaign led by the AE9/11 Truth collective), in collaboration with an international coalition of supporting organisations, raised funds to keep an ad running on a Times Square billboard throughout October 2013 highlighting the unresolved matter of its collapse (ReThink911 website).
and/or musical aesthetic experience for the viewer: “Bin Laden” by Immortal Technique feat. Mos Def, produced by DJ Green Lantern (2004); “11. Dernier épisode” [11. Last episode] by Jean-Marie Bigard (2009); and “Pero (La evidencia del 11s)” [But (The evidence of Sept 11)] by Mero (2011), in English, French and Spanish respectively. These texts avoid elaborating a theory of what actually happened on 9/11, and instead present contradictions within the official narrative as evidence for the US government’s guilt in either allowing or orchestrating the attacks so as to capitalise on them domestically by restricting civil freedoms, and internationally by justifying military invasions.

4.2.1. Temporality

A feature of the publicly mediated trauma of 9/11 that arguably facilitated the construction of a hegemonic narrative in its wake is what Cazdyn describes as “an unmanageable surplus of meaning impossible to contain within its usual form” (2004/2010: 452). This is a spatial conceptualisation of the 9/11 trauma, which Berlant describes in similar terms but from a temporal perspective, as a “mess of temporalization” around which “there is always a surplus of signification” (2011: 81). In the midst of trauma on an unprecedented scale, public desire for a normative, graspable storyline heightens and can be politically exploited; at the same time, Cazdyn argues, it is precisely at moments of crisis that the limitations of prevailing frameworks of understanding are exposed. He points to the use of the running subtitle in television coverage of 9/11 as a rupture in traditional compositional approaches of television induced by the magnitude of the event:

[The running subtitle] returns the relation to the equation – the relation between text and image, between the margins of the frame and the centre, between the different speeds of information delivery, and between multiple narrative lines. One can now watch and hear news about casualties at Manhattan’s Ground Zero and at the same time read about preparations for an ensuing war. (2004/2010: 452)

This tension between the instinctive, safe pull of the normative and the need (driven by widespread precarity) for alternative forms of narrativisation that might adequately capture such complexity is conveyed through the temporal configuration of the texts in
question. All three contain vast amounts of information pertaining to the events of 9/11 that must be convincingly emplotted in a short space of time in order to overturn the causal emplotment of the official narrative. In two of the texts – “Bin Laden” and “Pero” – both of which are musical, this is dealt with through speed of lyrical delivery accompanied by written text and imagery to aid comprehension; in two of the texts – “Pero” and “Dernier épisode” – there is an episodic structure, signalled in the former by an introductory frame announcing “10 years - 10 verses”, and in the latter by eleven separate short videos forming a series (the last of which is analysed here as representative of the others).

Let us begin with the musical texts. In multimodal theory music is a core mode\textsuperscript{52}, of which performed music (as opposed to sheet music) is a medial variant (Pérez-González 2014: 192/194), and whose sub-modes include speed, rhythm, melody and lyrics (2014: 208). In situating music within the framework of narrative theory, we would furthermore consider its socially constructive role and contextual temporal factors such as its degree of normativeness and relationship to the mainstream. In these two particular texts, the interplay between the audio and the visual dimensions is also very important, especially with regard to the lyrics. As a rap song, the lyrics of “Bin Laden” constitute the primary musical focus over the backing track, and the fast lyrical delivery is not marked (as is the case with “Pero”) but is a normative feature of the hip hop genre. The lyrics are further emphasised visually, however, which is not common practice, and they drew critical attention with respect to the timing of the song’s release – just three years after 9/11, when sensitivities remained high – due to Immortal Technique’s blunt, repeated assertion in the chorus that George W. Bush was responsible for the attacks: “Bin Laden didn’t blow up the projects/It was you nigga/Tell the truth nigga/Bush knocked down the towers”\textsuperscript{53}, along with detailed critical engagement with the surrounding political events in the verses

\textsuperscript{52} There are four core modes – music, sound, image and language – which can be understood as “those sets of meaning-making resources that we intuitively fall back on to articulate our opinions on the audiovisual texts that we consume or produce” (Pérez-González 2014: 192).

\textsuperscript{53} The refrain “Bush knocked down the towers” is sampled from the 2004 song “Why” by American rapper Jadakiss, which also sparked controversy. Omoniyi (2009: 124) points out that sampling – a widespread practice in hip hop culture, which is “especially heteroglossic: multilayered and infused with multiple voices” (Roth-Gordon 2009: 74) – can be a means of extending recognition towards a certain locality or grouping.
Immortal Technique later qualified his position in a lengthy essay published by American quarterly hip hop magazine *XXL*, stating that he did not believe Bush was intelligent enough to coordinate the attacks himself, while retaining his scepticism of the official narrative of events. Of the song “Bin Laden” he said the following:

I once wrote a song produced by DJ Green Lantern called “Bin Laden,” in which the chorus had already been set and ready to go. I filled this song with a sense of under-reported facts and the real feelings of people who were afraid to speak their minds [...] The beautiful thing about the art form that we created was it’s resounding ability to capture on going events and present them in a rhythmic format that others can appreciate. (Immortal Technique 2011)

Here, the artist foregrounds the affective/aesthetic quality of the narrative as a device to make sense of, and effectively communicate, the unfolding situation that had rendered normative narratives simultaneously inadequate and politically expedient. Reflecting this further is the creative presentation of the lyrics, which constitute almost the entirety of the narrative’s visual dimension, combining simplicity of colour scheme and imagery with a compelling dynamism and complexity of the written text itself. The lyrics appear in black and white block capitals on a bold red background just before they are rapped, not quite in synchrony. There is no set pattern or font size and the words flash or move across the screen, building up from below or down from above, with occasional symbols and images thrown into the mix – including an ornate representation of the Arabic phrase ‘Allahu akbar’ [God is greatest] repeated in a fan-like structure (Figure 4.1) – thus, the visual lyrics are temporally but not spatially linear, which allows for their semantic processing while also disorientating the viewer, in keeping with the challenging nature of the subject matter. To add to the process of narrative destabilisation, the camera also moves around, zooming in and out or suddenly banking to the side like a helicopter, such that there is no fixed vantage point and a sense of depth is introduced to what had been previously a two-dimensional set of images (Figures 4.2-4.6). As the verses progress, it is almost like flying above a matrix or a map unfolding in time, a journey with false starts, diversions and clues, which at the end is resolved and re-humanised through the image of a raised hand composed of the lyrics, suggesting protest as the (affective) moral outcome of the narrative (Figure 4.7).
Figure 4.1: Moving lyrics (building from below; Arabic script) in Immortal Technique’s “Bin Laden” (2004).

Figure 4.2: Moving lyrics (building across and downwards; symbol) in Immortal Technique’s “Bin Laden” (2004).
Figure 4.3: Moving lyrics (scattered around screen) in Immortal Technique’s “Bin Laden” (2004).

Figure 4.4: Moving lyrics (banking to the side; evoking helicopters seen in image) in Immortal Technique’s “Bin Laden” (2004).
Figure 4.5: Moving lyrics (vertical writing; war imagery) in Immortal Technique’s “Bin Laden” (2004).

Figure 4.6: Moving lyrics (sense of depth) in Immortal Technique’s “Bin Laden” (2004).
The temporal structure of “Pero”, meanwhile, is similar to that of “Bin Laden” inasmuch as it delivers a complex lyrical narrative at speed, both acoustically and visually, reflecting the bewildering amount of information to be processed. The primary aim of the video is to expose facts surrounding the 9/11 attacks that are not made available by the mainstream news coverage, and to repeatedly emphasise their omission with the refrain “pero no lo contó la TV” [but the TV didn’t tell it], thereby suggesting a deliberate attempt by powerful narrators such as the media to suppress other emplotments of the events. In outlining the numerous questionable elements of the official narrative, the artist moves very quickly through the information, allowing the key points to accumulate almost too fast for the viewer to process each individual thread. As the piece progresses, however, the affective logic of the song comes to the fore and supersedes the detail: whilst the musical detail of the instrumental backing changes little, the singer’s pitch rises to an insistent, high shouted tone and a harsh reverb snare drum is introduced, synchronising irregularly with the beat, evoking gunfire or shells exploding (the latter seen in the video). The building intensity of the music is mirrored by the vocal improvisation of the singer’s melody and his slight deviation from the set lyrics of the chorus (“No lo contó la TV” becomes “No lo dirá la TV” [The TV won’t say it], 04:51); a basic musical device of repetition and contrast, as mentioned in section 2.6, that evokes temporal development...
and keeps the listener affectively engaged. This recalls Bruner’s description, discussed in section 2.4, of the role of breach in effecting the “tellability” (1991: 15) of narrative, which can be seen actualised across different modes of narration, including music.

As with “Bin Laden”, the speed of lyrical delivery within the confines of a tight beat and structured rhyme scheme is skilful and aesthetically compelling, and, in this case, is more marked for the genre (acoustic rock), adding a touch of irony to the mood. Comprehension is facilitated by diegetic intralingual subtitles appearing alongside the succession of images (Figure 4.8), as well as by the ‘episodic’ ordering of each contradictory element of the narrative into ten verses, an ordering which is signalled at the beginning to represent the ten years that had elapsed since the attacks at the time of production (Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.8: Intralingual subtitles alongside image of WTC 7 in Mero’s “Pero” (2011).
As mentioned earlier, the episodic temporal structure of “Pero” parallels Bigard’s method of dealing with the ‘unmanageable surplus of meaning’ of the meta narrative at hand; each unit or instalment being easier to digest for the viewer, while taking on greater significance in relation to the other units as a dramatic whole. Bigard visually labels each of his eleven sketches as ‘episodes’ (Figure 4.10), with the relevance of their number clear and straightforward, relating to the date of the attacks.
The episodes are rhetorically linked across the series by Bigard’s repetition throughout of the catchphrase “troublant” [troubling]54, a comic understatement which introduces a rhythmic element or ‘hook’ for the viewer to keep hold of in their affective present, similar in function to the choruses of the two songs. Both episodic texts were produced roughly a decade after 9/11, a timespan that presumably assisted in the artists’ comprehension of events, as evolving geopolitical/historical links and patterns became more apparent, and allowed them to develop sufficient emotional distance to introduce an element of irony to their narratives – a key characteristic that is discussed in the following section. In terms of its affective import, Berlant says of the episode,

In an ordinary environment, most of what we call events are not of the scale of memorable impact but rather are episodes, that is, occasions that frame experience while not changing much of anything. (Berlant 2011: 101)

On the scale of meta narrative, then, given that most of the events related to 9/11 addressed in the texts have taken place over a period of time and at some degree of

54 Bigard puns this in Episode 1 with “trou noir” [black hole], i.e. the ‘black holes’ in the official story are “trous blancs” [white holes], which is phonetically the same as ‘troublant(s)’. 
remove from people’s everyday existence, the episodic becomes the temporal structuration of the ‘crisis ordinariness’ induced by “being out of control over the conditions of living, and yet continuing to live” (Berlant 2011: 82) – the tellability of which lies in exploiting precisely that contradiction, as detailed in the following section.

4.2.2 Multivalence

As discussed in section 2.5, multivalence is the combination within a single text of multiple value systems perceived from a given narrative location to be contradictory, and it functions to challenge the reader/viewer into reconsidering their narrative worldview. In the case of the pilot study in section 3.5, the multivalence exhibited was characterological. We might also, however, explore how multivalence can operate in terms of genre/mood and subject matter, whereby the positive affect generated by the textual organising system (genre) is in conflict with the nature of the message delivered. This is markedly evident in both Bigard and Mero’s aesthetic approach to the 9/11 narrative, via the performative genres of humour and acoustic rock respectively, and serves to downplay the enormity of what took place to expose what is perceived as the material incoherence of the official account of events. A striking common feature of the types of humour and music employed by Bigard and Mero is their ordinariness and simplicity, which in both cases bestow an air of naivety upon the texts. Narrative breach is thus effected by exploiting the contradiction of increasingly precarious structural conditions against the myopic continuation of ordinary life.

Bigard performs his comic narrative in a basic face-to-camera setup in a non-descript green room (a nod perhaps to the theatrical ‘green room’, where performers wait before going on stage) with a somewhat makeshift feel to it. Using irony and understatement, humour is largely derived from the content of the official report itself, which Bigard discusses animatedly along with big smiles, playful digressions and the addition of canned laughter to the audio track at particularly preposterous moments, e.g. when he imagines

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55 Bigard makes this agenda explicit, stating “Je vous ai parlé de cette version troublante. On l’a fait d’ailleurs en mettant plein de rire pour essayer de dédramatiser, parce que je pense qu’on a le droit de douter de cette version” [I’ve talked to you about this troubling version. This has been done by the way with lots of humour to try and downplay it, because I think we have the right to question this version] (00:12-00:25).
a black SUV pulling up beside unsuspecting ‘friends of terrorists’ under the Patriot Act (00:50/01:11). Bigard uses few props, the main one being his copy of the official report, and the only other characters are two faceless FBI agents standing silently behind him, whom he tries to distract with various activities so that he can discuss the report ‘in private’ with his viewers, and whom he high fives at 01:22 in a friendly goodbye gesture to mark the final episode. This comedic ‘double bluff’ performatively represents the power dynamics of hegemony that force Bigard to dissimulate in the sanctioned public domain, while blurring the distinction between the diegetic and non-diegetic inasmuch as humour is to be derived from the fact that the viewer knows he is flagrantly defying this via the video itself, which is anything but private. The metaleptic approach (whereby Bigard directly addresses an implied audience, as discussed in section 3.5.3) creates a friendly, straightforward intimacy with the viewer against the dehumanised and threatening institutional backdrop. This supports Lauren Berlant’s account of ‘intimate publics’ that are staged by the non-dominant classes to establish an affective register of belonging and solidarity in an otherwise hostile and precarious social order:

In an intimate public one senses that matters of survival are at stake and that collective mediation through narration and audition might provide some routes out of the impasse and the struggle of the present, or at least some sense that there would be recognition were the participants in the room together. (Berlant 2011: 226)

In “Pero” the sense of contradiction within the narrative is similarly conveyed through the performative structure itself: something as harmless as a cheerful acoustic number is incongruous with the appalling nature of the message and images of destruction presented in the video – which are mixed with animated cartoon images, creating a similarly contradictory mood effect (Figure 4.11). The song has a solid, static musical framework that breaks no new ground; in narrative terms, then, the musical dimension is highly normative. The simple guitar chord sequence, however, provides space for lyrical performance of the singer. For much of the song, Mero deploys a light irony in his lyrics, deriving humour – like Bigard – from the contradictions inherent to the official narrative. He refers, for example, to “un Osama mal doblado” [a badly-dubbed Osama] (03:40/Figure 4.12) and the “flor de mago” [magic trick] ability of a novice pilot to
penetrate the airspace surrounding the Pentagon and make a five-metre hole with a Boeing 757 that was never captured on camera (02:35-02:53/Figures 4.13-4.15).

Figure 4.11: Animated cartoon image in Mero’s “Pero” (2011).

Figure 4.12: “A badly-dubbed Osama attributing the work to himself” in Mero’s “Pero” (2011).
Figure 4.13: “A Boeing 757 that could not be filmed” in Mero’s “Pero” (2011).

Figure 4.14: “Made a hole in the Pentagon of 5 small metres / So precise was the impact that it borders on miracle” in Mero’s “Pero” (2011).
Yet it is notable that both Mero and Bigard conclude their narratives in a tone more befitting the subject matter. The final verse of “Pero” is deeply emotive and entirely devoid of irony (04:30):

\[
\begin{align*}
Es \ tan \ obvio \ que \ debajo \ de \ la \ ruina \ que \ dejaron, \\
[It \ is \ so \ obvious \ that \ underneath \ the \ ruins \ that \ they \ left] \\
Hay \ más \ mierda \ que \ la \ que \ jamás \ hemos \ imaginado, \\
[There \ is \ more \ shit \ than \ we \ ever \ have \ imagined] \\
No \ sabemos \ quién \ gobierna \ este \ mundo \ en \ el \ que \ estamos, \\
[We \ don’t \ know \ who \ rules \ this \ world \ in \ which \ we \ live] \\
Ni \ por \ qué \ clase \ de \ seres \ hemos \ sido \ dominados, \\
[Nor \ by \ what \ kind \ of \ people \ we \ have \ been \ dominated] \\
Somos \ un \ rebaño \ de \ ignorantes \ muy \ bien \ adiestrados, \\
[We \ are \ a \ flock \ of \ ignorants \ very \ well \ trained] \\
A \ pagar \ cada \ cosa \ del \ planeta \ que \ habitamos, \\
[To \ pay \ for \ everything \ in \ the \ planet \ that \ we \ inhabit] \\
Tristemente \ lo \ aceptamos \ sin \ siquiera \ cuestionarlo, \\
[Sadly \ we \ accept \ it \ without \ even \ questioning \ it] \\
Porque \ estamos \ del \ comienzo, \ totalmente \ programados. \\
[Because \ we \ are \ from \ the \ beginning \ completely \ programmed]
\end{align*}
\]
As the song draws to a close, the pace and mood fall away, accompanied by visual images of human tragedy that include people falling from the Twin Towers and an Iraqi mother holding her dead child, confronting the viewer with the reality of the atrocities (Figures 4.16 & 4.17). In a similar vein, following a sexual pun about swallowing the official narrative (i.e. you can choose to swallow or not swallow, like a call girl), Bigard’s final episode ends abruptly with a sudden tonal switch from jovial to deadly serious, now in keeping with the true nature of the discussion: he aggressively growls “Moi j’avale pas” [I do not swallow] (Figures 4.18 & 4.19), allowing the moment to hang for several seconds while a dark atmospheric noise is heard, followed by the echoing slam of a (prison cell?) door, as the clapperboard snaps shut for the last time to cut filming.

After the disjuncture, then, the tension of multivalence is resolved; however it is not a neat conclusion that channels back into existing dominant narratives, but instead a new and unsettling affective space has been carved out which opens the possibility of a new and different narrative; one which takes into account the contradictions operating in the extra-diegetic world. This tactic reminds the viewer of the ultimate aim of the performances: to shock and entice the viewer into re-examining their belief system, and not purely to induce an aesthetic experience.

Figure 4.16: Person falling from Twin Towers in Mero’s “Pero” (2011).
Figure 4.17: Iraqi woman holding dead child in Mero’s “Pero” (2011).

Figure 4.18: Abrupt change from jovial to serious (i) in “Dernier épisode” by Jean-Marie Bigard (2009).
There is also a degree of humour and light-heartedness in “Bin Laden”, for example in the faintly comedic cartoon-like images of George W. Bush and Bin Laden that flash up briefly at the relevant moments (Figures 4.20 & 4.21), and in the song’s 14-second opening sequence which starts with a ‘loading screen’ featuring an image of a smiling Bush lifting a Stormtrooper helmet onto his head – placing him on the side of the ‘baddies’ from Star Wars. This visual irony inverts the War on Terror’s binary divide that places Islam and Muslims on the ‘dark side’ (Figure 4.22). It also portrays Bush as a dispensable and subordinate member of the troop, rather than a leader – as Darth Vader’s helmet would have suggested.
Figure 4.20: Image of George W. Bush in Immortal Technique’s “Bin Laden” (2004).

Figure 4.21: Image of Bin Laden in Immortal Technique’s “Bin Laden” (2004).
The loading screen is followed by a spoken (i.e. not rapped) message delivered verbally by Mos Def and written in block capitals filling the screen, while the synthesiser builds into a crescendo and rises in pitch 3 semi-tones (a common device for raising tension): “MAN, YOU HEAR THIS BULLSHIT THEY BE TALKIN / EVERYDAY MAN / IT’S LIKE THESE MOTHERFUCKERS IS JUST LIKE PROFESSIONAL LIARS / U KNOW WHAT I’M SAYIN? IT’S WILD / LISTEN!” Thus, the bold and colourful visuals are matched by equally bold and colourful language, while Mos Def has a charismatic voice quality that would be instantly recognisable to his (large) fan base and commanding of their attention; even for non-fans, however, his character comes through, for example he laughs as he says in a somewhat conversational manner “you know what I’m sayin? It’s wild” (00:04-00:13).

56 All the words are in black except for “bullshit” and “motherfuckers”, which are in white for emphasis (Figure 4.23). Some of the words also flicker (“talkin”, “man”, “motherfuckers”, “liars”, “wild”).
Indeed, as in the pilot study, the strongest vehicle for multivalence in “Bin Laden” is arguably that of character and identity. Both rappers belong to minority communities in the US: Immortal Technique – real name Felipe Andrés Coronel – is Peruvian-born and able to rap both in English and Spanish, while Mos Def – birth name Dante Terrell Smith – is African-American, converted to Islam at the age of 19, and since 2013 goes by the name of Yasiin Bey. Both are left-leaning activists whose artistic output reveals a globalised worldview and particular concern for immigrant/Third World rights, extending from their personal experience of social inequality⁵⁷. This background problematises their feelings of American citizenship, and puts them among ‘first responder’ creative artists from minority communities who, amid “heightened, reactionary patriotism” in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, produced relatively complex cultural responses that revealed an “ambivalent patriotism” (Jacobs 2011: 48)⁵⁸. Such forms of creative multivalence might be considered weak, since the contentious cultural output of a minority community can often reinforce social prejudice; but this would be to view contemporary hip hop through a narrow lens in terms of its cultural capital and reach. Both are established

⁵⁷ Their activist work includes building an orphanage in Afghanistan (Immortal Technique), fundraising for victims of Hurricane Katrina and raising awareness about force feeding in Guantánamo Bay (Mos Def), as mentioned in section 3.5.4.

⁵⁸ Many African-American comics were quick to make light of the racial dimension of the 9/11 narrative via the trope, showcased in the pilot study, of the Arab as the “new nigger” (Jacobs 2011: 48).
‘underground’ rap stars with international mainstream recognition; and though best known for his music, Mos Def is also an award-winning movie actor. He was included on the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center’s 2011 list of world’s 500 most influential Muslims, among only two other Americans to make the list (The Muslim 500 website). A blogger describes his position and influence as follows:

Mos’ politics are the politics of a people not at home in their own country. It’s a difficult perspective to understand if you’ve never been there, and from the outside, comes off as hate, paranoia and even racism. However, it is the sentiment of millions of Americans and Mos, being one of their most intelligent and eloquent, adds a touch of credibility to their argument. (Kershaw 2013)

“Bin Laden” clearly demonstrates this sense of fighting for the American people against their own government, which includes waking them up to the deception of the neoliberal capitalist framework: while the chorus focuses on government culpability for 9/11, the surrounding narrative constructed by the verses is to a large extent racial- and class-based (00:59-01:04):

This shit is run by fake Christians, fake politicians,
Look at they mansions, then look at the conditions you live in.

Rather than divisive, or aspirational in an economic sense (as is much of hip hop), however, this is connected to a form of humanised or affective ‘glocalisation’ that sidesteps the nation-state, which is implied to be the architect of war and widespread precarity rather than a place of belonging. Thus, the dichotomy of “you’re either with us or you’re with the terrorists” (Butler 2004: 2) is dismantled (01:56–02:01):

Cuz if another country invaded the hood tonight,
It’d be warfare through Harlem, and Washington Heights,
I wouldn’t be fighting for Bush or White America’s dream,
I’d be fighting for my people, survival and self-esteem,

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59 Mos Def was initially signed with Rawkus Records, a dominant label on the New York underground scene. Immortal Technique is an independent hip hop artist, as defined in section 4.3.1 below.
I wouldn’t fight for racist churches from the south, my nigga, \(^{60}\)
I’d be fightin’ to keep the occupation out, my nigga.

Characterological multivalence can also be identified in Bigard’s episodes and in “Pero”. As a white French male, Bigard’s multivalence resides in his political stance, which, as mentioned in section 3.4, has changed radically over time. Once a close friend of former French president Nicholas Sarkozy, whom he accompanied on a visit to Pope Benedict XVI in Rome in 2007, he later stated that this affiliation had been “une vraie vraie grosse connerie” [a really really big stupidity] and renounced all ties to political parties\(^{61}\). In the final episode, in pointing out the hegemonic logic of ‘friend of the U.S. vs. terrorist’ created by the Patriot Act, he clarifies that he is “ni un négationniste, ni un révisionniste, encore moins un ami des terroristes” [neither a denier, nor a revisionist, even less a friend of the terrorists] (00:27-00:31); hence, a multivalent position within the War on Terror meta narrative.

In “Pero”, the identity of the artist himself is not foregrounded in the song; indeed he is little known and effectively anonymous. His performative narrative, nonetheless, is set up to connect affectively with the viewer in shared humanity. In the final verse quoted above, the introduction of the ‘we’ pronoun shifts the focus from the presentation of facts about 9/11 to a direct appeal to the viewer to join in solidarity against neoliberal oppression and deceit, such that the ‘us and them’ narrative becomes those in power vs. the precarious masses, rather than Islam vs. the West. Again, this is a form of characterological multivalence: an affective form of shared identity is extended to the viewer through a culturally Western medium that challenges the hegemonic narrative.

\(^{60}\) The in-group term of address “nigga” used here should not be considered racially divisive. Whilst originating in black communities in the US, its use via hip hop has evolved to become “a general, (usually) male gendered address term for young people of diverse ethnic backgrounds in homogenous groupings. Indeed it seems that “nigga” is developing into a discourse marker that more generally encodes the speaker’s stance to his or her current addressee(s) – a stance that is cool, urban, usually male, and streetwise” (Cutler 2009: 89).

\(^{61}\) In an interview in 2013, he said: “La politique, c’est caca, je ne touche plus. Les hommes politiques sont tous des menteurs et ne veulent tous que le pouvoir. Ce sont des gens intelligents qui ne cessent pas de servir leur propre personne tout en hurlant: ‘Je travaille pour la France’ mais la plupart ne travaillent en fait que pour eux. Je regrette mon soutien et je ne ferai plus jamais ça” [Politics is shit, I don’t touch it anymore. Politicians are all liars and they all only want power. They are intelligent people who do not stop serving their own interests, while shouting “I work for France”, but most of them in fact only work for themselves. I regret my support and I will never do that again]. (Gala 2013)
construction of ‘the West’ from within. As mentioned in section 2.8, this is revealing of evolving combinations of values that might be construed as contradictory only from the perspective of dichotomisations which, for many, no longer (or should not) prevail (Martin 2010: 269). The following section develops the interplay between temporality and multivalence further, moving away thematically from 9/11 itself and into the aftermath.

4.3 The War on Terror

The five texts studied in this section tackle aspects of the broader situation of the War on Terror that was unfolding at the time of production. The section is divided into two parts, focusing respectively on the performative genres of hip hop (two texts) and comedy (three texts) that were introduced in the previous section. Each explores further the socio-political dimensions of its discussed genre, while in both parts this interplay between narrative temporality and multivalence is foregrounded, rather than these themes being separated out, as was the case in the previous section. This shift in angle permits a progressively complex insight into the relationship between the various features of narrative discussed in the thesis.

4.3.1. Hip Hop

Hip hop culture, according to Androutsopoulos (2009: 43), rests upon four performative, multimodal pillars: breaking (a style of dancing), DJing, rapping, and writing (graffiti art). While language is only one element of this, he adds that “more than verbal art, language in Hip Hop is the medium in which artist performances and member identities are contextualized and negotiated” (2009: 43). As mentioned in section 3.5.3, this practice has expanded worldwide since the African-American beginnings of hip hop in the 1970s South Bronx. Hence, whilst the two hip hop texts discussed so far in the thesis (“P.H.A.T.W.A.” and “Bin Laden”) are North American narratives, the rappers presented in this section are European – from France and the UK respectively. This means that the creative negotiation and contextualisation of their identities calls upon different localised
cultural perspectives and forms of linguistic expression, while still speaking to similar themes related to the global post-9/11 temporal order, as will be demonstrated.

The first text was released in June 2006 by critically acclaimed French-Congolese rapper Abd al Malik, a former street hustler raised in a housing project on the outskirts of Strasbourg who converted to Islam as a teenager, and later became a Sufi as he moved away from gansta rap and into the realm of spoken word poetry (Aidi 2012). The song in focus narrates the fallout of the War on Terror offensive for Muslims in Western Europe. Its temporality is signposted in the title – “12 septembre 2001” – which situates it historically in the sense of “conceiving of a contemporary moment from within that moment” (Berlant 2011: 4). The song is markedly different to the texts about 9/11 discussed in section 4.2, firstly in that it does not seek to question the official account of 9/11, and secondly because its mood is introspective and serious. The video is shot in black and white and simply features the artist and supporting musicians (pianist, drummer, double bass player and sound producer) performing the song. The music has an upbeat rhythm and sound that, rather than cheerful, comes off as adrenaline-pumped and earnest. Disturbing flashes of light, smoke and occasional shaky frames in the video combine with this to create an atmosphere of danger (Figures 4.24-4.26).

Figure 4.24: Abd al Malik with supporting musicians in “12 septembre 2001” (2006).
In the lyrics, which are of particular relevance here, Abd al Malik endeavours as a converted French Muslim to defend himself and others against hegemonic castings of Muslims as irredeemably anti-secular and irrational, making a plea for extremists not to be conflated with the majority, on whose latter behalf he speaks. Verse 1 sets out the artist’s psycho-social positioning in affective/embodied language (00:18):
Je fus choqué dans mon intime et je vous jure,
[I was shocked to the core and I swear to you]
Que si j’n’avais pas eu la foi,
[That if I hadn’t had faith]
J’aurais eu honte d’être musulmân,62
[I would have been ashamed to be Muslim]
Après ça, fallait qu’on montre aux yeux du monde,
[After that, we had to show to the eyes of the world]
Que nous aussi nous n’étions que des hommes,
[That we were just people as well]
Que s’il y avait des fous,
[That (even) if there were some crazy ones]
La majorité d’entre nous ne mêlangeaient pas,
[The majority of us did not mix]
La politique avec la foi.
[Politics with faith]

The line “La politique avec la foi” [politics with faith] recurs at the end of every verse, thematising the question of secularism in the lyrical negotiation of his Muslim identity. To understand the localised significance of this, it should be clarified that the place of religion in public life is a highly contentious issue in France, which currently has the largest Muslim population in Western Europe63, but is a stringently secular nation that extends an assimilation model of governance (known as ‘laïcité’) towards its minority communities. This has notably been implemented in the schooling system, where religious education is not taught and all ostentatious signs of religious affiliation are banned64. This model is commonly set against Anglo-Saxon approaches to multiculturalism (Hargreaves 1997: 182) and is founded on the Enlightenment values at the heart of the 1789 French Revolution, i.e. a rationalist view of human nature supporting the Republican principle of universalism, whereby all ‘active’65 citizens are equal and choose to be homogenised as individuals to pre-existing French cultural norms,

62 Interestingly, Malik uses the English term “Muslim” instead of the correct French “musulman”.
63 Estimates are between 3.5 and 6 million, but this cannot be confirmed since ethnic data is not collected in France (Tarr 2014: 517).
64 This law was passed in 2004 (Tarr 2014: 517); however attempts at multicultural policy were first quashed in France during the 1989 Islamic headscarf affair [l’affaire du foulard], when three female Muslim pupils were suspended from school for refusing to remove their veils (Hargreaves 1997: 184).
65 Until the second half of the 20th Century, ‘passive’ citizens included all women, as well as men of low socioeconomic status (Hargreaves 1997: 187).
thus avoiding ethnic subgroupings (1997: 183). Despite the challenges of large-scale immigration from North African ex-colonies in the post-war years, as Silverman puts it, “the pillars of this fantasy are still firmly in place” (2007: 631). In other words, there is a discrepancy between the theory of the nation and the stark reality of ghettoization; a disavowal of lived ethnic/religious difference that has fostered a climate of stigmatization, with hostility increasingly directed towards the visible presence of Muslims, whose way of life is judged to be fundamentally at odds with French society. In the post-9/11 years, this has been especially evident in media and political discourse surrounding female Islamic attire – as is further discussed in section 5.2.1 – and has exacerbated among French Muslims a widespread sense of being targeted and misunderstood (Tarr 2014: 517). Hence, the centrality of the issue of secularism for Malik. He describes this generalised atmosphere (or affective ‘worlding’) of mistrust in a highly personalised manner, for example in verse 3 (01:14):

*Je découvris la suspicion,*
[I discovered suspicion]
*C’est quand un homme a peur,*
[It’s when a person is scared]
*Et que l’autre en face ne le rassure pas,*
[And the one before them does not reassure him]
*C’est quand celui qu’on croyait connaître,*
[It’s when he who you thought you knew]
*Devient soudain celui qu’on n’connait pas.*
[ Becomes suddenly he who you do not know]

Overall, then, the text’s genre and mood are not incongruous with its contextual message of precarity and struggle; it is rather in the artist’s engagement with temporality that multivalence comes into play. This is exemplified when Malik – who has a degree in philosophy – draws on France’s own intellectual heritage in verse 5 to justify his position and challenge the viewer into adopting a more nuanced socio-political approach towards Islam; one which accepts the historical foundations of Western society as a part of contemporary Islam in its many (g)localised expressions across the world (02:18):

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66 As was reported in *Le Monde* in 1993, Pierre Mazaud, spokesperson for the former right-wing political party Rassemblement pour la République [Rally for the Republic] (RPR), stated in Parliament: “The role of Islam stands out more and more – Islam, and particularly the fundamentalist threat, which refuses all adherence to our society” (Hargreaves 1997: 195).
On allait tout déconstruire,
[We were going to deconstruct everything]
Déconstruire avec trois D,
[Deconstruct with three Ds]
Comme Deleuze, Derrida et Debray,
[Like Deleuze, Derrida and Debray]
Ni fondamentaliste, ni extremist,
[Neither fundamentalist, nor extremist]
De l’Islam ou d’la laïcité,
[Of Islam or of laïcité]
Mais là, ça devient lourd je crois,
[But that’s getting a bit heavy I think]
Trop compliqué en tout cas,
[Too complicated anyway]
Et puis moi, je ne mélange pas,
[And me, I don’t mix]
La politique avec la foi.
[Politics with faith]

More intriguingly, temporal multivalence is encoded in the very wording of the song: in combining the language of hip hop with sophisticated cultural referents and sensitive political subject matter, Malik’s lyrics take on a mixed register. Specifically, in the verses he adopts the highly formal past historic tense usually only seen in writing (i.e. “Je fus choqué” [I was shocked], cited above, as opposed to the more common perfect tense: “J’ai été choqué” [I was shocked]), while he uses street slang in the chorus: “J’avais déjà un flow de dengue” [I already had a crazy/sick flow]. This effects a narrative contradiction whereby the steadfast canonical and the transient discourse of a contemporary subculture exist in a new combination, hinting at temporal layers of differing momentums at the level of meta narrative, all feeding into the text via the artist’s lived experience at the margins of the mainstream. The aesthetic harnessing of these layers as a form of multivalence can set up the possibility of a new narrative for the viewer, echoing Pennycook and Mitchell’s observation in their discussion of hip hop as “dusty foot philosophy”\(^67\). They argue that for a subject narrated by the majority according to “a

\(^{67}\)Somali-Canadian MC K’Naan’s depiction of the rapper as a “dusty foot philosopher” (the title of one of his music releases) relates localised expressions of hip hop to the global power differentials influencing its production and reception: “It is hip hop that deals with the politics of location and inequality, Hip Hop that is located in traditions and philosophies embedded in long histories” (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009: 39).
certain bias connected to their own historical reasoning” (MC K’naan, cited in Pennycook and Mitchell 2009: 25), the expression of multiple and heterogeneous temporalities makes it possible “to question the linearity at the heart of modernist narratives about origins” (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009: 40). From Malik’s narrative location, as a black Muslim in post-9/11 France, rapping in the past historic suggests a concern for showing French intellectual heritage as formative of his value system, perhaps even as a bargaining tool to be accepted and to belong despite his precarious social position; but it is equally a challenge to the hegemonic narrative that dictates Islam to be fundamentally incompatible with this positioning. As a dusty foot philosopher, then, rather than simply appropriating pre-existing global discourses (be they of hip hop or Islam), Malik engages in the “self fashioning of the already local”, which entails “uses of language that not only localize but also transform what it means to be local” (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009: 40).

Despite its manifest ‘Frenchness’, however, “12 septembre 2001” is far from inward looking to France: in verse 4 (02:02) Malik refers to “la grande famille de l’humanité” [the great family of humanity], while verses 2 and 3 narrate the consequences of 9/11 for the Middle East and Europe as a whole, implying a causal link between the 2003 invasion of Iraq and events such as the 2004 Madrid train bombings (00:53):

Les canons s’mirent à bombarder Bagdad,
[The cannons started to bomb Baghdad]
Et des corps s’effondrèrent en Espagne,
[And bodies fell in Spain]

This global political outlook also manifests in Malik’s effort to align himself with international hip hop culture, not only through use of language, as discussed above, but also intertextual references; notably, in verse 6, he indexes iconic US rapper Jay Z’s acclaimed album The Blueprint, whose release date was 11 September 2001. He thus situates himself within what is termed the Global Hip Hop Nation: a transnational community of affinity to which rappers constantly negotiate their belonging, described by Alim (2009: 3) as a “multilingual, multiethnic nation, with an international reach, a fluid capacity to cross borders, and a reluctance to adhere to the geopolitical givens of the present.” In setting its sights beyond France and (through creativity) to the future, we
might view the text as an optimistic site of resistance to precarity; yet it is noteworthy that Malik ultimately expresses a sense of defeatedness, evidenced in the above-cited line “Trop compliqué en tous cas” [too complicated anyway] – i.e. pre-emptively shutting down a complex discussion of cultural relations, despite his desire for the same – as well as in his use of the past tense in verse 4 (01:54):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Et en un sens c'était sublime,} \\
\text{[And in a sense it was sublime]} \\
\text{Le grain disait adieu à l'ivraie,} \\
\text{[The wheat was saying goodbye to the chaff]} \\
\text{Alors une parole de paix,} \\
\text{[So a message of peace]} \\
\text{J'allais pouvoir délivrer,} \\
\text{[I was going to be able to deliver]} \\
\text{Ainsi tous se reconnaîtraient,} \\
\text{[That way everyone would be recognised]} \\
\text{Dans la grande famille de l'humanité.} \\
\text{[In the great family of humanity]}
\end{align*}
\]

How then might the text be understood as an aesthetically mediated affective response to the historical present? Gilbert’s notion of disaffected consent, discussed in section 2.7, would appear to offer some insight inasmuch as he argues that “[f]rustration has become a perpetual element of the affective background noise of neoliberal culture: but frustration only occurs when the potency is real, yet thwarted” (2015: 34). Gilbert means by this that capitalism supports the continued existence of creative subjects in order to generate value, but through institutional surveillance it then controls the unwanted excesses of individual productivity. He adds that since the monopolising advent of Apple’s iPod in the early 2000s, “the innovatory potential of music culture has been almost entirely shut down, producing instead a sense of endless ahistorical present” (2015: 37). Such an analysis, while undoubtedly valuable, addresses Western European culture in a majoritarian sense without taking into account factors such as the impact of neoliberal narrative hegemony on Muslim minorities in post-9/11 Western societies. Malik’s

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68 Gilbert contends that it is the hegemonic working alliance between Silicon Valley (e.g. Google, Apple) and finance capital that have created this cultural stasis in a bid to curb any threats to capital: “Before the iPod, the MP3 was nothing but a problem for capital, as the prevalence of peer-to-peer file sharing made it virtually impossible for the established music industry to maintain profitability. After its arrival on the market, digital consumption enabled a rapid intensification of capital accumulation” (2015: 37).
concern is arguably not musical innovation per se, but the deployment of an existing genre in a new temporal context, in order to carve a legitimate space for his multivalent identity within the mainstream. In this sense, his frustration appears to run deeper than is accounted for by disaffected consent.

A similar critique can be levelled at Berlant’s concept of cruel optimism as the “driving aesthetic genre of the neoliberal present” (Da Costa 2014: 6). This occurs when “the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or people risks striving” (Berlant 2011: 2). We might postulate that “12 septembre 2001” expresses a relation of cruel optimism between Malik and his civic identity, in that the historical secular values he strives to embody are precisely what paint him as an outsider. Yet I would argue that this too understates Malik’s situation. As Dia Da Costa points out, cruel optimism applies to Western populations disoriented by a recent loss of belief in the ‘good life’ promised by capitalism; it does not encompass “the historical present of those born into a pervasive and intractable sense of marginality, insecurity and exclusion” (2014: 2). Focusing on an activist theatre group for the stigmatised Chhara tribe in India, Da Costa builds on Berlant’s analysis to posit the affective structure of ‘cruel pessimism’ (which she argues operates alongside three other competing affective structures that are elaborated below) for colonial capitalist contexts outside of Western states, in order to account for “the uneven global histories of colonialism, development and neoliberalism” (2014: 2). I would suggest that despite its French production context, cruel pessimism better describes the affective dimensions mediated by “12 septembre 2001”, as will be shown. This understanding enables a move away from majoritarian conceptualisations of the West, reminding us of the latter’s status as an ‘imagined geography’ (Said 1978) that can mask the lived experience of “internal others” (Berlant 2011: 14).

In brief, the 4 overlapping affective structures identified by Da Costa, between which the postcolonial subject vacillates, are: sentimental optimism, cruel pessimism, betrayal, and ordinary regard (2014: 3). Sentimental optimism and cruel pessimism exist in a mutually constitutive dynamic that is here implied in the past tense usage in verse 4 cited above. To elaborate, whereas sentimental optimism celebrates the creative economy as a socially
transformative space (2014: 7), cruel pessimism inheres in the intractable historical weight that has long held back this possibility for (post/neo)colonial subjects such as Malik – i.e. as opposed to the emergent sense of disappointment in cruel optimism (2014: 9)\textsuperscript{69}. These first two affective structures can be inferred as present in “12 septembre 2011”, but what is perhaps most clearly mobilised in the text is “an aching sense of betrayal by the nation” (Da Costa 2014: 12). According to the lyrics, this third affective structure appears to have set in after 9/11 itself, when pre-existing social tensions were intensified – evident in the line “Après ça on était tous pointés du doigt” [after that fingers pointed at us all] (00:46). Thus, we might understand betrayal in the post-9/11 context as a double layer of persecution: not only does the (French) government participate in the War on Terror upon Muslim countries, but the (French) public now automatically assumes the criminality of their fellow Muslim citizens, at a time when they could (or should) be united in solidarity against neoliberal hegemony and its indiscriminate consequences. Verse 4 articulates how Malik had intended to use the moment of temporal rupture to put forward a new narrative leading out of the impasse, but things only got worse when, as he tells us in verse 3, even his friends turned against him. Finally, as a combined result of the former three structures is the fourth: longing for ordinary regard\textsuperscript{70}. This is overtly expressed in the line “Ainsi tous se reconnaîtraient dans la grande famille de l’humanité” as the thwarted moral outcome of the burst of sentimental optimism he experienced at the moment of rupture; yet as Da Costa argues (2014: 15), the performance itself is where Malik may fleetingly attain a space of ordinary regard, even as he retains critical distance from this possibility and does not get too attached.

\textsuperscript{69} Da Costa connects cruel pessimism to Homi Bhabha’s notion of colonial mimicry, which involves “an ambivalent demand for exact impersonation while constantly producing a difference between the colonizer and the colonized” (2014: 10) – a situation consistent with Silverman’s appraisal of laïcité in contemporary France, where “by attempting to convert the other into the same, the boundaries of the other are, paradoxically, fixed ever more firmly” (2007: 630).

\textsuperscript{70} Da Costa defines this largely in terms of what it is not: “Ordinary regard goes well beyond recognition and political restitution from the state or accepting the benefits of sentimental capitalism. Affect theorists looking for a new mode of belonging may find this vacillation between seeking state and capital and seeking a new ordinary politically contradictory, temporally impossible and effectively schizophrenic. But a global political economy of affect needs to grapple with the uneven effects of colonial, capitalist and national histories on investment in ‘popular’ modes of belonging” (2014: 18).
It should finally be noted that Malik’s political project extends beyond the single text discussed here, and even beyond the genre of hip hop, to a prolific cultural output that consistently showcases multivalence. His film biopic *Qu’Allah bénisse La France!* [May Allah Bless France!] was released in 2014, based on his written autobiography of the same name published in 2004. Notable among his other literary works is *Place de la République: Pour une spiritualité laïque* [Place of the Republic: For a secular spirituality], a short reflective piece published in 2015 following the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks. That Malik has attained mainstream recognition in spite of his controversial subject matter indicates the potential of aesthetic shock as a tactic to create an alternative narrative space where institutional platforms are not available. With France boasting not only the largest Muslim community in Europe but also the second largest hip hop market in the world, there has been growing concern within government circles about Muslim rappers’ influence over youth to the extent that after the 2005 riots, MPs attempted to prosecute seven rap groups whose lyrics they alleged had incited violence (Aidi 2012). In the French context, Malik is considered exceptional:

Malik's music embodies the kind of Islamic piety that can be permitted into the French public square (...) Malik is celebrated, in part because he declares his love for the Republic, sees Islamic identity as compatible with the Republic's values and, while he refers to the country's colonial past, is not enraged at the French state. (Aidi 2012)

This exceptionality risks becoming his very undoing, however, since “hip hop artists rarely appreciate being held up by politicians as models of successful integration, often because government validation separates them from their base – and creates tension between rappers approved by the state and those who are not” (Aidi 2012). It remains to be seen, then, to what extent Malik’s nuanced and sensitive oeuvre offers a way out of the temporal impasse on an wider affective level, or whether, under such extreme conditions of narrative hegemony as provided by the French state, it will only serve to isolate him as an individual appropriated into the neoliberal mainstream as a singular phenomenon – an aberration who merely underscores the ‘barbaric’ Muslim norm.
In October 2011, five years after the release of “12 septembre 2001”, the rap song “Terrorist?” by British-Iraqi rapper Lowkey (real name Kareem Dennis) was released. 2011 was the year when Osama bin Laden was reported to have been killed in a US raid in Pakistan, and US forces withdrew from Iraq after over eight years of military occupation. Since his election to office in 2009, Barack Obama had consciously refrained from employing the problematic phrase “war on terror”, instead reframing America’s war specifically as being against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Farley 2011). By then, however, the narrative was difficult to override, and despite Obama’s protestations of change he proved unable to coherently distinguish his counterterrorism policy from that of Bush (McCrisken 2011). The extent to which radical Islam and terrorism had become conflated in wider society was exposed in the media coverage of right-wing Christian terrorist Anders Breivik’s attack on Utoya Island in July 2011:

Famously, before Breivik’s identity was known, numerous right-wing commentators leapt to the conclusion that it was a violent Islamist attack (...)

Then it became clear that Breivik was Norwegian, white, and had perpetrated the atrocity as a way of “waking” Europe from its sleepwalk into thorough Islamisation by “cultural Marxists”. There was a brief moment when Anders Breivik could be understood as a product of the rise of the Islamophobic Right in Europe. Yet almost as quickly the optic shifted to one of Breivik as a lone madman, because a deranged, self-obsessed and isolated individual was, of course, the only kind of person capable of such cruel and barbaric acts. Unless he had been an Islamist, that is. (Tietze 2011)

This was also the time of the Arab uprisings and the Occupy movement – a global civil society in optimistic revolt. The cluster of texts in the data set produced during 2009-2011 suggests a surge of resistant creativity that belied the seemingly blanket public opinion set up by media and political discourse regarding the War on Terror. Perhaps, then, this was a critical moment, when enough time had passed for the outrage and helplessness that limit the creative impulse to subside, and for a groundswell of more sophisticated cultural responses to gather pace. Emphasising the temporal context, however, is not to detract from Lowkey’s unique skill in producing what I would argue is an especially

71 This observation may simply reflect the subjective narrative location of the author, rather than a wider global pattern. There may also be a connection with Leadbeater’s contention that the growth of user-generated online content from 2007 onwards has ushered in a wave of unprecedented “digitally-enabled vernacular” creativity (2009: 57).
compelling example of aesthetic shock targeting post-9/11 narrative hegemony, as will be elaborated. Like Immortal Technique, with whom he toured and collaborated in 2009\footnote{The duo produced the single “Voice of the Voiceless”, which featured on Lowkey’s album \textit{Soundtrack to the Struggle} (2011).}, Lowkey affiliates himself to the genre of independent hip hop – loosely defined by Vito as “music produced and released by artists outside of the three major record labels and concordant mainstream outlets” (2015: 396). He released his second album, \textit{Soundtrack to the Struggle} (2011), via iTunes on his own label Mesopotamia Music. In so doing, he refused to participate in neoliberal hegemonic structures driving the corporatisation and commercialisation of the music industry, which have diverted hip hop culture away from its original raison d’être as a medium for the disenfranchised (Vito 2015: 397). Lowkey is also a committed political activist\footnote{He is an active member of the Stop the War Coalition, patron of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and member of the artist collective People’s Army along with Shadia Mansour, who also features in the data set, as is further discussed in Chapter 5. He has been detained twice by authorities while en route to perform fundraising concerts in refugee camps in the West Bank (Palestine Solidarity Campaign website).}, whose views are reflected in his music. Born to a Muslim Iraqi mother and English father, raised in London, he articulates through his lyrics his lived affinity with Muslim communities across the world and is staunchly opposed to the occupation of Iraq and Palestine. He does not, however, speak fluent Arabic, and his cultural references and accent when rapping are unmistakeably British (whereas many British rappers adopt American accents for commercial purposes). In April 2012, Lowkey went on hiatus from music. On his retirement, he posted the following statement on his Facebook page, revealing his doubts about the continued suitability of music as a political vehicle for him:

After many months of contemplation I have decided to step away from music and concentrate on my studies. Maybe at some point I will get back into it again but at this stage I feel I should direct my energy in different, more helpful directions. The ego is a destructive thing and I feel this business and these social networks in particular have a tendency to feed it in an unhealthy way. I will be deactivating this page. Thank you for all those who have supported me over the years. See you on the other side people. \textit{(The Student Room} website 2012)\textit{)}

This statement, and Lowkey’s subsequent withdrawal from the music scene, are discussed further below. For now, it suffices that the music video under analysis – “Terrorist?” – remains freely available to the public as a site for the creative harnessing of
temporal multivalence in the context of the War on Terror. As will be shown, the text deploys a sophisticated combination of rationalism and aesthetics to expose the hypocrisy of War on Terror political discourse and to provoke critical reflection in the viewer. The song’s video, directed by digital media production house Global Faction, adds to (or tampers with) the lyrical narrative in that it introduces a layer of temporal multivalence to the semiotic ensemble. This is because, while in the lyrics Lowkey performs one consistent ‘character’ or voice (that of the oppressed), visually he performs two different versions of himself: an unshaven detainee dressed in a plain orange T-shirt (reminiscent of the Guantánamo jumpsuit), and a clean-shaven interrogator wearing a smart suit, expensive watch and glasses (Figure 4.27). Throughout the video, interspersed with assorted, grainy images of contemporary politics and war, the two Lowkeys sit facing each other in tense dialogue, as if arguing their different cases (Figures 4.28-4.30). The chorus and rapped verses are delivered by the detainee, while the spoken introduction plus a later sung section (following the verses) are delivered by the interrogator. So in the multimodal context, the pragmatic meaning of the song is disrupted by the single agent acting as narrator becoming pluralised. This creates a subtle narrative disjuncture that provokes reflection. For example, the sung section following the verses (03:41-04.27) consists of the repeated refrain, “You think that I don’t know, but I know, I know, I know / You think that we don’t know, but we know” (the final word “know” alternating with “do”). Without the visual dimension, this comes across unambiguously as an accusation levelled by Lowkey at those in power. But combined with the visuals, which show the lines as being delivered by the interrogator, it is no longer clear who is accusing whom of what. And if Lowkey is at once the accuser and the accused, what is his position within the hegemonic narrative?
Figure 4.27: Detainee and interrogator in the introduction to Lowkey’s “Terrorist?” (2011).

Figure 4.28: Tense dialogue in section following rapped verses of Lowkey’s “Terrorist?” (2011).
In one reading of this visual multivalence, Lowkey is simultaneously addressing himself and his accusers; trying to make sense of his situation while deconstructing the determinism within hegemonic narratives that casts him as inherently in the weaker position. In presenting his multivalent personal relationship with the temporal order – he is half English after all, and could reasonably feel implicated in both positions – viewers
are challenged not to blindly condemn and perhaps also to reassess their own positioning. Thus, the contradictory performance of the meta via the personal muddies the waters of the temporal order, exposing the fickle nature of power differentials and hinting at the historical circularity of narratives; the rise and fall of empires and the non-inevitability of hegemony. In another reading of the lyrical-visual disjuncture, Lowkey re-appropriates the hegemonic reasoning that has been used against him, and undoes it by its own logic. This can be inferred by the song’s spoken introduction (00:25-01:06), which is delivered at a slow, deliberate pace by the interrogator, who is consulting a dictionary, as if to enforce rationality and order amid the chaos (evoked by an explosion at 00:46 as the beat kicks in):

So, we must ask ourselves, what is the dictionary definition of "Terrorism"?
The systematic use of terror especially as a means of coercion.
But what is terror?
According to the dictionary I hold in my hand, ‘terror’ is violent or destructive acts such as bombing committed by groups in order to intimidate a population or government into granting their demands.
So what's a terrorist?

In visually assuming the role of the powerful, and subsuming their discourse into his lyrics, Lowkey demonstrates that he too has been educated into the epistemological structures of War on Terror discourse, which is precisely why he is able to question its authority in rational terms. He also undermines the hegemonic veneer of rationalism by portraying it as backed not by solid logic but by brute force in the form of a faceless security agent – much like in Bigard’s episodes – who is positioned behind the detainee, and at 02:50 pushes the latter back into his seat when he tries to stand (Figure 4.31).
More than this, however, in performing his rational argument aesthetically, the artist transcends the limitations of the positivist epistemology, as will be elaborated. With the dictionary definition having been provided to frame the debate, the detainee goes straight into the chorus at 01:07. This is sung rather than rapped, and moderate in tone/emotion:

They’re calling me a terrorist,  
Like they don’t know who the terror is,  
When they put it on me, I tell them this,  
I’m all about peace and love,  
They’re calling me a terrorist,  
Like they don’t know who the terror is,  
Insulting my intelligence,  
Oh how these people judge!

The chorus personalises the song’s overall narrative by making it clear that Lowkey himself is directly affected by post-9/11 narrative hegemony. Equally, however, the artist takes on an archetypal role, since the chorus could resonate with any person in a similar situation of temporal precarity, and he is in a sense disembodied by his visual performance of two distinct characters simultaneously. So, again, the meta is performed
through the personal; with the viewer being called to account, in case they should be one to judge him, or those like him. The detainee then proceeds to rap – to creatively prove the intelligence that has been insulted. Over the course of the two rapped verses, Lowkey engages with British cultural discourse and the wider political picture to critique how the term ‘terrorism’ has been socio-politically employed to mask state-sponsored atrocities, deflecting the blame onto vulnerable communities. He begins with a direct challenge to the target viewer, who is implied through cultural references to be white, British and unworldly (01:29):

*It seems like the Rag-heads and Pakis are worrying your dad,*
*But your dad’s favourite food is curry and kebab,*
*It’s funny, but it’s sad how they make your mummy hurry with her bags,*
*Rather read The Sun*\(^{74}\) *than study all the facts.*

The artist’s palpable anger then gives way to serious, eloquent analysis containing a wealth of information. As in the spoken introduction and sung chorus, the verses are delivered at a steady pace so that the reader has time to process all the information – much of which is presented concisely in the form of leads to be followed up (02:36):

*Lumumba was democracy, Mossadegh was democracy,*
*Allende was democracy, hypocrisy it bothers me.*

Recalling Cazdyn’s theorising of the running subtitle in media coverage of 9/11 as a rupture in traditional compositional approaches, discussed in section 4.2.1, subtle written clues are furthermore visible on the wall, apparently unseen by the detainee and interrogator, which provide additional narrative lines to be discovered by the discerning viewer. These include brief references to specific events including “ABU GHRAIB” (01:33), “9/11 WAS AN INSIDE JOB” (02:40) and “GAZA FLOTILLA” (03:30) (Figures 4.32 & 4.33); as well as instructions to the reader, such as the adapted Bob Marley lyric “FREE YOURSELF FROM MENTAL SLAVERY” (02:15)\(^{75}\) and, simply, “READ” (02:08) (Figure 4.34). This form of metaleptic engagement with the viewer helps to navigate the post-9/11 surplus of

\(^{74}\) To illustrate this cultural reference with a relevant example, the headline of *The Sun* (the UK’s best-selling tabloid) the day following the Utöya Island attacks read “Al-Qaeda Massacre: Norway’s 9/11”.

\(^{75}\) From the classic hit “Redemption Song” (1980).
meaning without patronising (in the case of viewers already familiar with the references) or lecturing (in the case of those who are not); it feels instead like a riddle, not unlike the visual mapping in “Bin Laden”. As Cazdyn puts it regarding the running subtitle, the messages help return relationality to the narrative – between text and image as much as between narrative lines (2004/2010: 452) – thereby disrupting the positivist linearity of the post-911 hegemonic narrative, which obscures such connections and forms of expression.

Figure 4.32: Message on wall “GAZA FLOTILLA” in Lowkey’s “Terrorist?” (2011).
The poetics of the lyrics also help to carry the dense subject matter, with a great deal of skill evident in their summarising, synthesising and plotting into a precise and convincing argument. There is a strong sense of artistic control and emotional balance, aided by, for example, subtle dry humour derived from word play (01:58):
It seems nuts, how could there be such agony,
When more Israelis die from peanut allergies.

As well as complex internal rhythm and rhyme, such as in the following line which recurs at the end of each verse, leading into the hook (02:08/03:14):

Irrelevant how eloquent the rhetoric peddler is,
They’re telling fibs, now tell us who the terrorist is.

Like Abd al Malik, Lowkey comes off characterologically as educated and informed, but there is nothing marked about his register, and even the slang terms he uses are very mild (e.g. “nuts” and “fibs” cited above). His engagement with the viewer is frank, open-ended and ultimately self-effacing; as the song fades out, the viewer is left in an active role, being confronted by a series of images related to the War on Terror all posing the same question – “ARE THESE PEOPLE THE TERRORISTS?” (Figures 4.35-4.37). In appealing to the viewer’s artistic/affective sensibilities as much as to their intelligence, the semiotic ensemble goes beyond the experiential closure of rationalism, carving out an affective space where the viewer might resolve the rational contradiction they are confronted with. Thus it could be argued that Lowkey appropriates rationalism and reworks it both on its own terms, and on his terms as an artist, gaining mastery over trauma to achieve transcendental dissolution – a way out of the temporal impasse via aesthetic shock.
Figure 4.35: ‘Outro’ question to viewer with image of Tony Blair in Lowkey’s “Terrorist?” (2011).

Figure 4.36: ‘Outro’ question to viewer with image of dead Iraqi civilians in Lowkey’s “Terrorist?” (2011).
What, then, of Lowkey’s withdrawal from the music scene? In his study of Immortal Technique, Vito situates independent (or underground) rappers within the Marxist framework as ‘organic intellectuals’ who are engaged in the struggle against cultural hegemony by promoting critical class-consciousness at grassroots level (Vito 2015: 398). From this perspective, Lowkey might simply be abandoning his social function. From a narrative perspective, however, eschewing the limiting economic determinism and rationalism of traditional Marxism, and complementing the previously discussed phenomenon of dusty foot philosophy, the notion of ‘conscious individualism’ – or virtuous individualism, as Martin terms it (2010: 264) – may be more insightful. This is a form of individualism evident in the genre of conscious rap that operates via temporal multivalence lived at the margins of mainstream society:

Among deviant norms and values that have been recorded by sociologists since the 1970s, individualism emerged strongly, interacting ambiguously with dominant ideologies. Individualism makes the individual central in social representations, but also generates new forms of sociability; it appears complementary, not antagonistic, to humanism, solidarity, and tolerance. (Martin 2010: 265)

Conscious individualism is thus understood here as the performative expression of identities that have arisen from individualistic capitalist culture, which demonstrate a
sustained artistic investment in communitarian value systems beyond their own commercial interests. Lowkey’s retirement highlights the delicate balance required of this approach, as well as its temporal nature. Having aesthetically captured the moment, perhaps it can only be a matter of time before the attention drawn by performance artists with an activist agenda solidifies into narcissism, which supersedes and undermines the original intention. His self-effacement in the video, through disembodiment and placing the viewer in the active role, hints at the artist’s foresight in this respect. By not allowing his own self to become the stronger narrative, Lowkey prioritises the affective dimensions of his work and demonstrates the role of aesthetics in wider social construction rather than personal gain – an observation further developed in section 5.2.2. The following section continues the analysis of temporal multivalence moving on to the genre of comedy.

4.3.2. Comedy

The ‘outro’ of Lowkey’s “Terrorist?” begins at 04:49 with a brief clip of Texan comedian Jeff Dunham’s ventriloquial act “Achmed the Dead Terrorist” (Figure 45), which he debuted in 2007. Achmed is the skeleton of a dim-witted suicide bomber who sports bulging, articulated eyes, a foreign accent and a short temper. This characterisation is in contrast to Dunham’s calm and rational manner during their interactions. The conversation between Dunham and the puppet in the clip goes as follows (04:53):

Dunham: Evening Achmed.
Achmed: Infidel!
Dunham: So, you’re a terrorist?
Achmed: Yes, I’m a terrorist.
Dunham: What kind of terrorist?
Achmed: A terrifying terrorist...[to laughing audience] Silence! I kill you!

While not the focus of this section, it is worth noting that Lowkey appears to use this clip for its mood contrast with the main body of the video that precedes it, highlighting the flippancy with which stereotypes are peddled in mainstream popular culture. The sound of canned laughter is heard before the visuals change, while Lowkey sits in despair in detention, lending it a callous tone. The clip is then followed by the concluding questions posed to the viewer and images of human devastation mentioned above.
“Silence! I kill you!” – “kill” pronounced “keel” – is the puppet’s famous catchphrase. It became a ringtone that was banned in 2008 by South Africa’s Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) following a complaint from a Muslim viewer (Lewis 2011: 224). Dunham’s get-out clause is that Achmed is not Muslim – a weak defence given the puppet’s Arab name and the socio-political context of its creation. Indeed, sociologist blogger Andrist highlights Achmed’s easy comic effect on the mainstream American audience precisely as evidence of post-9/11 narrative hegemony and its orientalist origins:

Dunham is not deploying social criticism, but is instead uncritically drawing on racist representations for laughs. He is also reasserting and promoting what is by now a worn panoply of orientalist associations. (...) [Comedy] which uncritically trades in the negative stereotypes aimed at Arabs and Muslims and is able to make an audience pop with laughter with references to suicide bombing, is only possible because Arabs and Muslims have been successfully demonized and devalued. (2011)

In this reading, Achmed supports ‘superiority’ theories of humour, proponents of which argue that people essentially laugh at those they consider to be (or who are made out to be) inferior and ridiculous (Berger 2011: 234). Alternatively, ‘incongruity’ and ‘communication’ approaches foreground the surprising or paradoxical aspects of reality.
upon which humour depends (Berger 2011: 235), according to which Achmed could also be interpreted. Between them, these different theories capture the power differentials and multivalence/ambiguity that are key strands of this narrative analysis, yet they do little to illustrate the temporal dimension. While not presuming to elaborate a philosophy of humour\textsuperscript{77}, we might, for the purposes of this study, view it as a special type of breach of narrative normativeness, and thus indivisible from (temporal and relational) narrative processes. Like music, moreover, humour is not inherently ‘good’, but in an embodied sense it carries a positive form of affect with a transcendent quality. It can thus be usefully harnessed for breach on a larger scale, which indeed is the role attributed to the comedic subgenre of satire: in defining satire in comparison with the double-edged mode of communication that is irony, Warner states that almost all satire employs irony, but for irony to be satirical it must have “a grievance with someone or something” (2011: 63). At variance to hip hop, which is a relatively recent form of globalised cultural expression, satire has existed since Classical times. In this analysis, however, we might look to the post-9/11 context as a particular age of satire. As with hip hop, then, we begin our enquiry in America, where in the immediate aftermath of the attacks the ‘end of irony’ was widely declared, and a grave, patriotic mood pervaded most cultural and media output (Warner 2011: 57). This atmosphere was particularly challenging for comics:

As the conditions for comedy are generally predicated on the ability of a humorist to enter a low- or no-stakes play space with an audience, the turn towards a very strictly defined, nearly jingoistic agenda of seriousness put the ability to create such conditions into jeopardy. (Gurney 2011: 9)

Sparse early offerings included Internet memes, “sly” critiques from The Onion (Warner 2011), and comedic responses from African-American artists, who, as discussed in section 4.2.2, were more easily able to articulate themselves within a consistent affective frame of reference of precarity that – for them – pre-dated 9/11. Following these, Lewis identifies a groundswell of satire and parodies in the USA from around 2005/2006

\textsuperscript{77} Berger argues that more useful in the internationalised context is a focus on specific techniques of humour, rather than abstracted notions of what humour is. He identifies forty-five of these, grouped into the four broad categories of language, logic, identity and action (2011: 233).
onwards\textsuperscript{78}, with Achmed uploaded to YouTube in September 2007 after its initial broadcast on Comedy Central and DVD release – becoming the fourth most watched YouTube video a year later (2011: 223). From a temporal angle, therefore, Achmed is perhaps more charitably understood as catharsis\textsuperscript{79}, i.e. a breach of the affective climate of trauma that had set in, and an attempt to return to the comfort of normative, hegemonic storylines, with a fresh set of characters who could justifiably be portrayed as inferior to the rational white man.

Yet reinstating the norm was no longer possible, not only because of 9/11 and its repercussions, but also because of the new mediascape that coincided with the evolution of the global War on Terror. Outside of America, other cultural contexts were weighing in on the post-9/11 narrative order. In Europe, for example, the Jyllands-Posten editorial cartoons depicting Muhammad, which were published in September 2005 and widely reprinted (including by Charlie Hebdo in February 2006), sparked a diplomatic crisis and street protests from Muslims in Denmark, then further afield as the images went viral, leading to frenzied media debates over the issue of Muslims living in the West. This was not long after the Madrid and London public transport bombings, when belligerence under the guise of free speech could be inferred as a stronger motive for blasphemous satire than the betterment of societal relations\textsuperscript{80}. While examples can be found of multivalent comedic output in Europe from this time period\textsuperscript{81}, again it is 2009-2011 that offers particularly fertile ground for sophisticated comedic narratives of various types of media that contend with post-9/11 hegemony. We saw earlier Jean-Marie Bigard’s episode from the 2009 online series Le 11 septembre; however the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks later tragically threw French societal tensions and satire into the global spotlight.

\textsuperscript{78} Examples include the South Park episode “The Mystery of the Urinal Deuce” tackling 9/11 skepticism which aired in October 2006; the 2006 film Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World directed by Albert Brooks; and the ‘Axis of Evil’ Comedy Tour which aired on Comedy Central in March 2007 (Lewis 2011: 214).

\textsuperscript{79} Lewis notes that the puppet “both amuses and soothes” (2011: 223).

\textsuperscript{80} As Lewis argues, “If the Jyllands-Posten editors and cartoonists wanted to use humour to reach across cultural and religious divides, they would have been advised, first, to be funny and second, to work with, and not against, the core values of their audience. (2011: 225).

\textsuperscript{81} One example is “Post-9/11 Blues” by Riz MC (2006). Riz MC is the rapper name of British actor Riz Ahmed, who plays Omar in Four Lions. This satirical rap music video pokes fun at the precarious state many British Muslims found themselves in in the wake of 9/11. The narrative is delivered in an upbeat and irreverent manner that was unusual for the time – a year after the London public transport bombings – and offended to the extent that it was banned from airplay (Hattenstone 2013).
Openings for debate were largely drowned out by a widespread, vociferous deepening of commitment to secular republican values (pitted against Islam), while high profile French-Cameroonian anti-Zionist comedian\(^{82}\) Dieudonné M'bala M'bala was arrested for publicly supporting terrorism after declaring on social media “Je suis Charlie Coulibaly” – referring to Amedy Coulibaly, the gunman in the Porte de Vincennes kosher supermarket siege that took place hours after the Charlie Hebdo shootings. This situation renders the French comedic scene less amenable to an analysis of this kind at the (still sensitive) time of writing.

In the comparatively less fraught multicultural context of the UK, there has arguably been more ‘space’ for comedic exploration of these difficult themes\(^{83}\). 2010 saw the release of Four Lions – a feature-length film directed by cult comedian Chris Morris that, it is argued, uses the figure of the incompetent terrorist to significantly more skilful and thought-provoking effect than that of Achmed the Puppet, and was something of a trailblazer at the time of release. As a satirist, Morris is no stranger to controversy: his 1997 Channel 4 ‘news’ show Brass Eye lampooned media hysteria and sensationalism by duping public figures into supporting fake causes. Notably, the 2001 special edition of the show entitled “Paedogeddon!”\(^{82}\), which tackled the subject of paedophilia, elicited thousands of complaints from viewers, public denouncements from politicians, and a demand for an apology by TV watchdog the Independent Television Commission (ITC). A year later, the episode was nominated for two BAFTA awards and won a Broadcast magazine comedy award (Broadcast website). In a similar vein, Four Lions was initially rejected by the BBC and Channel 4 as too controversial, but went on to attract critical acclaim and won a BAFTA in 2011. The film was the result of five years’ detailed research by Morris, including interviews with terrorism experts and the local Muslim community. In an interview with The Guardian newspaper upon its release, Morris explained the impetus behind the project in terms of the temporal multivalence he observed in the British context:

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\(^{82}\) Or ‘polémiste’ [polemicist], as he is described in the French media.

\(^{83}\) I do not claim there to be no tension surrounding multiculturalism in the UK – as the Brexit referendum result famously revealed in July 2016, there undeniably is; yet there is also a long standing, institutionalised tolerance of minority cultural expression in the UK public domain, which for many would compare favorably to the situation in France.
[The War on Terror] is something that's commanding so much of our lives, shaping so much of our culture, turning this massive political wheel. I was wondering what this new game was all about. But then 7/7 hit that with a fairly large impact, in that we were suddenly seeing all these guys with a Hovis accent. Suddenly you're not dealing with an amorphous Arab world so much as with British people who have been here quite a long time and who make curry and are a part of the landscape. So you've got a double excavation going on. (cited in Brooks 2010)

This apparent disjuncture of narrative worlds is humorously exploited in the film, which recounts the story of five bumbling jihadists living in northern England (four second-generation Pakistanis from the local area and a white English convert from London), who plot to carry out a terrorist attack on the London Marathon while disguised in fancy dress costumes (Figure 46). This is achieved through convincing dialogue and acting, and the dismantling of the hegemonic narrative by mixing up its various components and putting them in the ‘wrong’ mouths, leading the viewer to empathise with the ‘wrong’ people, and “illuminating the rhetorical confusion and knee-jerk pieties surrounding a charged subject” (Lim 2010). In presenting the three Pakistani underlings Hassan, Faisal and Waj respectively as a wannabe rapper, endearingly vulnerable, and plain stupid; while putting the most absurd terrorist pronouncements in the mouth of loose-cannon white convert Barry, the overall effect avoids both political correctness and racial essentialisms. A temporal disjuncture between global and local is also expressed characterologically through the group’s puerile relationship with the digital age: they communicate their terrorist strategy via the children’s social networking site ‘Party Puffin’, and swallow their SIM cards to avoid police detection. A cultural irony intersects this tension, notably when their digital naivety leads their furious mujahedeen superiors to send them home from a training camp in Pakistan, calling them “fucking Mr Beans” (00:20:10).

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84 This tactic inadvertently leads to Barry’s death, when, at the London Marathon with bombs strapped to his body underneath his Ninja Turtle costume, he chokes on his SIM and a passerby performs the Heimlich maneuver on him, blowing them both up (01:22:19).
Within this comedic theatre, a more serious and ultimately tragic relationship of multivalence emerges: that of the protagonist, Omar, and his brother Ahmed. Omar, played by Riz Ahmed, is the young ringleader of the terrorist cell and the only character into whose private life the viewer is given access. A loving husband and father with a comfortable middle class domestic setup, he also displays good leadership qualities, wit and intellectual acuity in stark contrast to his comrades. Alongside his terrorist aspirations Omar embodies secular British qualities, notably in regard to his wife Sofia’s status. The relationship between Omar and Sofia is that of a team of equals; they both go out to work and care for their son, and Omar values the guidance of his wife regarding his comrades’ incompetence. In a dark twist, their moments of happy playfulness and shared confidences include talk of Omar’s planned murder-suicide as though it were entirely unremarkable. Visually, Omar wears trendy Western style clothing and keeps his beard short, and there is no evidence of actual Islamic practice in the family other than Sofia’s (relatively relaxed) adherence to hijab (Figure 47). Nor does Omar foreground Islam in his terrorist pronouncements; instead, his narrative is socio-political and governed by his perception of the values underpinning the prevailing temporal order. During a pep talk to his comrades, for example, he describes contemporary British society as a “bullshit,

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85 For example, Omar uses his linguistic prowess to assert leadership over the others. In particular his colourful mastery of Urdu wins him the respect of the Pakistani contingent, while allowing him to control and undermine monolingual Barry by excluding him.

Omar and Sofia are openly critical of Omar’s pious brother Ahmed, who offers a characterological counterpoint to Omar. Ahmed is a strict Salafi who refuses to be in the same room as Sofia or speak to her directly, and deems her “out of control” (00:42:17). Visually, it is Ahmed who fits the terrorist stereotype with his salwar kameez, skullcap and long beard. His English is furthermore accented to a degree that does not sound native (as opposed to Omar’s second generation British Asian accent). Yet Ahmed is a pacifist, and he makes a concerted effort to dissuade his brother from his murderous intentions. In a poignant scene following the guileless Faisal’s accidental death (he blows himself up along with a sheep while running through a field with explosives\(^\text{86}\)), a troubled Omar goes on a solitary walk to the park where he encounters Ahmed playing football in the rain with his Salafi friends. Ahmed greets him and Omar very nearly reaches out, but reacts viscerally against his brother’s saintly facial expression (Figure 48). Their exchange reveals Omar’s sense of disengagement from traditional religious paths characterised by endless scholarly discussions over the minutiae of life (00:59:58):

\(^{86}\) Barry justifies this as a martyr’s death because he “disrupted the infrastructure” (00:56:57).
Ahmed: Why not come to our study group, Omar?

Omar: What, and get a four-hour dose of that face – the floaty face of the wise bird, hovering on a million different quotes, about to do a massive wisdom shit on my head? Forget it.

A viewer who bought uncritically into mainstream narratives of Islamist terrorism might find this paradoxical – especially when Ahmed is raided by police instead of Omar – but perhaps the greatest irony is that Morris’ fictional narrative, far from a comic subversion of the ‘truth’, has proved unnervingly prescient in its reflection of the mindset of the power hungry, for whom religion is increasingly recognised to be little more than a façade for propaganda and legitimising purposes (Ahmed 2015). It is telling that the final scenes of Four Lions are devoid of humour. The attack on the London Marathon has been disastrous: all cell members die, but only Omar achieves a martyr’s death, and even that is unspectacular. This empty success is compounded by a clip interspersed with the credits in which Ahmed, being interrogated by the police in a bunker, is informed that he is technically in Egypt and can be tortured (01:29:33). Thus, there is no satisfying conclusion to the film, only a sober sense that the cycle of violence will continue unabated within the prevailing political paradigm. And yet, by its very existence, the narrative has effected breach of the cycle, setting up a multivalent affective experience.
for the viewer that does not simply funnel back into hegemonic cultural plots, but instead “introduces new information in terms of unfamiliar dilemmas, puzzles and contradictions of the sort that promotes critical thought and a self-consciousness of problem-solving behaviour” (Bennet and Edelman 1985: 164).

While Morris himself does not appear in *Four Lions*, he broke his usual practice of evading the spotlight to promote the film, giving “unprecedented access to the media, talking over and over again about his motivations for making the movie” (Gilbert 2014). He explained to the *New York Times* that the project emanated not from a desire to provoke but from “an impatience with easy, short-cut thinking” and a commitment to understanding what was happening in the world, adding “[o]nce I started reading I found things that made me laugh” (cited in Lim 2010). This ‘honest’ unearthing of the farcical at the moment it emerges, largely undetected at ground level, resulted in a temporal artefact that has proved larger than the artist himself; one which attracted a mixed response at the time of release, but has only gained more meaning and relevance with the passage of time. This was borne out on the occasion of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing by Chechen extremists, whose uncanny similarities with the *Four Lions* London marathon plot attracted media attention and revived popular interest in the film. It could not be concretely assumed that the film had played a part in inspiring the bombers; instead the notion of life imitating art underscored the text’s continuing socio-political relevance (*Metro US* 2013). Also noteworthy in this respect are the film’s terrorist video message scenes, in which members of the cell take turns in showcasing their terrorist prowess and fail, much to Omar’s chagrin. These include Waj brandishing an undersized replica gun and claiming that he simply has big hands (00:01:23); Hassan attempting to deliver his message in rap form but, as Waj puts it, “rhyming doolally” (01:31:29); and Barry, determined to have his starring moment, sneakily filming a message to claim responsibility for bombing a mosque – a plan already vetoed by Omar, and whose purpose would have been defeated anyway by declaring culpability (00:39:29) (Figures 53-55).

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87 So similar that Channel 4 pulled a screening of the film scheduled for a week after the attack.
88 He tries to get away with the line “for my creed I di-heed” [died] (01:31:11).
Figure 4.42: Waj with small replica gun in *Four Lions* (2010).

Figure 4.43: Hassan "rhyming doolally" in *Four Lions* (2010).
The comedic trope of the terrorist video message engages with a macabre emblem of the digital age: a type of mediated expression that has seen a qualitative evolution since the production of *Four Lions* with the famously sophisticated ISIS propaganda videos that circulate online, despite attempts to block them by social media platforms, and have gained substantial audienceship among young, disenfranchised Muslims (Simpson 2014). Meanwhile, copyright laws control the relationship that *Four Lions* has with information space, since it was released on DVD through industrial channels. This semi-controlled, semi-unfettered digital terrain constitutes a form of temporal multivalence that Cazdyn describes as “one of the great contradictions of our time: between the persistent power of residual national forms and the emerging influence of transnational ones” (2004/2010: 458). As individuals seek to negotiate questions of global political import, this tension takes the shape of Berlant’s temporal impasse discussed in sections 4.2.2/4.3.1:

> The force of this contradiction paralyses our capacity to exist squarely in either dimension. Rather, we exist dead-centre in the contradiction and must wait for the movement of history (which is based on both our individual acts and its own structural logic) to transform the situation. (Cazdyn 2004/2010: 458)

The remaining two texts discussed in this section on comedy do, however, circulate in the same information space as the ISIS videos. Moreover, neither is from Europe, which
fittingly extends the geographical scope of our discussion in the globalised context. The first of these—a 6-minute ‘rap news’ broadcast—was created “in a backyard home-studio in suburban Melbourne, Australia” (Juice Media website) and posted online in May 2011. The Juice Rap News comedy duo are Giordano Nanni, a published author with a PhD in history, and rapper/spoken word poet Hugo Farrant. Juice Media began broadcasting its rap news programme in 2009, describing it as “the internet nation’s on-beat musical, independent current-affairs programme, responsible for turning bollocks-news into socio-poetical analyses which everyone can relate to and understand” (Juice Media website). In the videos, Nanni and Farrant combine their skills as writer/editor and lyricist respectively in a “collaboration of form and content” (Juice Media website). Thus, although performed by Farrant, the two are joint creators of the character of Robert Foster, the friendly news anchor who delivers each episode in rap form to a musical backing track, and of the regular guest characters appearing on the show, also performed by Farrant. Despite using rap and comedy in equal measure, the chosen text is included here in the comedy section since it is framed primarily as a satirical news programme. It is fitting, however, that the text should draw on both performative genres that have been the focus of this chapter, destabilising the fixedness of genre in the context of global media flows.

This episode from Season One, entitled “Osamacide! Rap News 8 with Robert Foster”, parodies government inconsistencies in reports of the death of Osama Bin Laden, and outlandish Internet conspiracy theories that have proliferated due to mistrust in official narratives. The two invited guests are General Baxter, spokesperson for The Pentagon, and Terrence Moonseed, the archetypal hippy conspiracy theorist. These perform equally absurd narratives and personas that are pitted against each other, mediated by Robert Foster (Figure 4.45). The set is a basic newsroom with various captions, images and video clips as visual aids, and costume and props are used to create an air of playful theatrics. In the clip as a whole, temporal multivalence is performed characterologically, providing a framework of understanding that is both rational and aesthetic to navigate out of the temporal impasse of the post-9/11 order. As will be shown, this is done explicitly, and in a way that brings together many of the themes discussed so far in the analysis.
The video opens with a clip from a Fox News report, in which the presenter declares: “There’s a lot of misinformation floating around about the operation that killed Osama bin Laden yesterday, so we will set the record straight this evening.” The statement is also seen in writing on the other half of the screen (Figure 4.46). Not unlike Lowkey’s dictionary definition discussed in section 4.3.1, this statement frames the debate, incorporating an ironic perspective that sets up the satirical tone of the video to come (the music track is playing already, signalling that the text is not the standard newsreel). Juice Media effectively undercut the Fox News statement – i.e. that they will be the ones to set the record straight – by performatively redeploying it as their own, exposing what they see as the irony within the statement’s original pragmatic force, and proceeding to open up a new form of discourse about the War on Terror.
When Farrant’s performance begins, the “low- or no-stakes play space” (Gurney 2011: 9) is entered, aided by the use of costume. Again comparably to Lowkey, there is a pluralisation of voice of the single agent acting as narrator, since Farrant plays all three characters appearing in the episode. Here, however, the lyrics are aligned pragmatically with the visuals, and the performer’s identity is not to be conflated with those he caricatures, so that the ‘ontological’ disjunction simply has a humorous effect. Each caricature channels a distinct narrative dimension of the temporal order; a multivalent triangulation that is key to the text’s affective impact. To look first at the guests, General Baxter and Terrence Moonseed represent problematic narrative forces in the public arena that block possibilities for communally constructive, meaningful social agency. This is conveyed as much characterologically as it is lyrically: both present unappealing personalities and overtly unreliable narratives, believing themselves to be utterly justified and the other evil or insane – Baxter: “You Internet nerd!” / Moonseed: “Distrust every word!” (02:17) – making it hard for a viewer of any persuasion to invest in either perspective.

In argumentational terms, both Baxter and Moonseed present blinkered patterns of reasoning, including ‘facts’ that are dubiously sourced and/or whose relevance is
distorted, pointing to a lack of material coherence in Fisher’s terms. For example, Baxter has a live feed in his ear that corrects him several times as he recounts the events leading up to Bin Laden’s death, “Ok, well then they shot him and took pic... Took no pictures...” (01:24). However, it is Fisher’s ‘logic of good reasons’ (values) that helps us better understand the affective dimension set up by the performance, which relates to characterological factors. As discussed in section 3.5.3, Fisher defines ‘character’ as an “organized set of actional tendencies reflecting values” (1987: 147), and argues that characterological deficiencies, i.e. lack of coherence and fidelity, undermine the probability of narratives on an affective level. Triumphant Baxter is the first to hold the floor, dressed in military uniform, moustached and brandishing a cigar, with aviator sunglasses obscuring his eyes from the viewer, and his face stuck in a toothy grimace (Figure 4.47). Despite the details of his report on Bin Laden’s death being uncorroborated, he remains obstinately jingoistic and warmongering – “You can’t spell justice without the US!” (02:59) / “So who’s next for Shock and Awesome judgement?” (01:40) – as well as ignorant, for example he uses the word “Muslamic” twice and has never heard of the Nuremberg trials despite being a military general.

Figure 4.47: Warmongering General Baxter in “Osamacide! Rap News 8 with Robert Foster” (2011).

89 “They found Osama armed with a Muslamic ray gun” (01:16) (...) “And buried him according to Muslamic scriptures” (01:29). The Urban Dictionary credits this ironic term to a member of the English Defence League (EDL), who allegedly coined it during a televised interview in 2011 (Urban Dictionary).
In evaluating the ‘consequence’\textsuperscript{90} of the values embedded in this message, viewers might well reject Baxter’s narrative, but they are also invited to consider that there is narrative consistency between Baxter’s claims and the global status quo; what is humorous is that he admits it (02:48):

\begin{quote}
  Please, eurofag don’t history lesson me!
  Don’t you get it? The true sign of a supremacy,
  Is who gets to decide at each given minute,
  When the rule of law is applied and when it’s suspended.
\end{quote}

Ironically, then, Baxter displays more characterological coherence than a real military or political spin-doctor would, and placing the message in Baxter’s mouth hints at the value orientation of the satirical narrators. So, Baxter becomes a relatable, embodied exposé of the values underpinning the hegemonic order. Not only does this make the abstract and structural more digestible, but also reminds us of its non-inevitability, since

\begin{quote}
[n]o matter how strictly a case is argued – scientifically, philosophically, or legally – it will always be a story, an interpretation of some aspect of the world that is historically and culturally grounded, and shaped by human personality. (Fisher 1987: 49)
\end{quote}

Moonseed, for his part, almost manages to make Baxter’s logic seem persuasive. A highly agitated and eccentric character – part hippy part wizard – who doesn’t seem to get out much, he claims the hijacked planes on 9/11 were “blue beam holograms” (02:08) and loses the thread upon learning that Bin Laden’s codename is ‘Geronimo’ (the name of an Apache Indian chief). At this he embarks upon a lengthy, inchoate thesis about the codename that misses the moral point entirely\textsuperscript{91} and culminates in the claim that Barack Obama is a clone and Prince William a reptilian overlord (Figure 4.48), before he falls

\textsuperscript{90} Fisher names five criteria for assessing the values contained in a narrative: fact, relevance, consequence, consistency, and ‘transcendent issue’. The criterion of consequence, Fisher argues, can be evaluated as follows: “What would be the effects of adhering to the values – for one’s concept of oneself, for one’s behaviour, for one’s relationship with others and society, and to the process of rhetorical transaction?” (1987: 109).

\textsuperscript{91} The codename did spark controversy among American Indians, but not for Moonseed’s reasons – as the anchor Robert Foster steps in to clarify: “I see many Native Americans consider it dishonourable / To have their hero, ancestor and leader / Associated with terrorism and al-Qaeda” (04:14).
backwards off his chair in a frenzy of excitement (03:25). This enables Baxter to come back with the concise retort: “It's a perfectly good code name, what's wrong with you?” (04:12). Thus, Moonseed embodies the most outlandish examples of those narratives discussed in section 4.2 described as conspiracy theories – so easily dismissed for their structural and material incoherence, but dangerous by association and therefore undermining of other dissenting narratives. In holding this character satirically at arms length, the narrators make it clear that this is not the cultural space in which they are operating, and that more nuanced and reliable narratives of resistance are possible.

In transforming complex global narratives into the manageable affective units of character, the diegetic and non-diegetic worlds become temporally and affectively one and the same – hence one of the Juice Media straplines is “History is happening” (Juice Media website). Temporality is thus thematically central to the text. Visual and verbal references to 9/11, such as Baxter mentioning the temporal marker of “a decade since 9/11” (00:59), make the text unambiguously ‘post-9/11’ in nature; however the narrative scope is broader than this and lends support to the significance of 9/11 in terms of continuity rather than rupture (Rockmore 2006), as explained further in section 5.2. This is partly because the competing value systems presented are not those of Western
civilisation vs. the new threat of Islamic terror, at variance to mainstream comedic characterisations such as Achmed the Dead Terrorist discussed above\(^9^2\). Instead, the hegemonic binary is sidestepped by a focus on American imperial expansion over the precarious masses, including the suppression of American Indians long before 9/11, which is linked rhetorically to the War on Terror via the choice of codename for Bin Laden – ‘Geronimo’, discussed above. This linkage allows parallels to be drawn between past historical events and those unfolding within the post-9/11 temporal order (04:24):

> It wasn't an error; this right here is the War on Terror,  
> And it's a continuation of the nineteenth century,  
> Campaign we had to wage to liberate the territory,  
> Of the United States from the Redskin savages,  
> Who also hid in caves and kept on attacking us,  
> Because they hated our civilised ways,  
> Our Christianity, whiteness and slaves.

From a discursive point of view, we again see the temporal multivalence described by Cazdyn as a “great contradiction of our time” (2004/2010: 458): that between persistent nation state forces and the emerging influence of transnational ones. In the video, this is seen in the depiction of the schematic discourse of the nation state backed by military force, overriding and rewriting history according to its own economic interests (Baxter), set against the more fragmented and unstable type of discourse that proliferates on the Internet (Moonseed). These narrative forces have helped construct the temporal impasse that is difficult to grasp from within. The video itself, however, in raising consciousness of this through the performative embodiment of the impasse, pushes the historical movement onwards.

Guiding the viewer towards this framework of understanding is news anchor Robert Foster, who brings both Fisher’s logics of reason and good reason – discussed in section 2.4 – to the debate, displaying characterological coherence and creating an affective bond with the viewer against his guests. Foster lends a careful and engaged ear to the discussion at all times; and even while critical of his guests’ views he remains well mannered, employing the formal register of BBC English, which in the context of the

\(^9^2\) Indeed, the comedic use of the word “Muslamic” mentioned earlier helps to undermine such discourse by parodying the lack of knowledge behind hegemonic accounts of the Islamic world.
discussion at times amounts to comedic understatement (e.g. “It all seems like an appalling error”, referring to the Geronimo codename [04:22]). He is, nonetheless, more personable than would be expected of a BBC News anchor, allowing himself to be visibly shocked and scandalised by his guests’ pronouncements (Figure 4.49). He also throws the occasional glance towards the camera as though the viewer were physically present to match his facial expression (Figure 4.50) in metaleptic acknowledgement of a shared affective space, recalling Berlant’s notion of the intimate public discussed in section 4.3.1.

Figure 4.49: Robert Foster reacts to guests in “Osamacide! Rap News 8 with Robert Foster” (2011).
Foster might be understood as a performative example of transcendental dissolution in the multivalent text, i.e. a textual device pointing to coherence beyond contradiction, as discussed in section 2.5. This is borne out by the character’s concluding remarks, which offer an ‘evolved’ account of the temporal impasse of globalised society, and merit quoting in full (04:53):

Alright, thank you both for your …interesting views,
Little wonder there’s such confusion in the news,
When we can scarcely agree on historical narratives,
Is there any mystery that we live in diverging realities?
The tides of amnesia seem to be rising like the oceans,
Unchecked by mass media that are steadily corroding,
More concerned with the rush to make headlines by 5,
Than helping us discern the facts from the lies.

But there’s a rival tide, an equal and opposite turn,
A yearning to read between official lines that have blurred,
I’m reassured by the many who were plainly disturbed,
And who questioned the way in which ‘justice was served’,
If it was served, it can be served to us just the same,
So what brand of justice do we want done in our name?
Leaving you now with that thought in your mind,
Robert Foster for Juice Media, proud to ignore deadlines.
As important as the lyrical content, however, is the performance itself. There is an abundance of creative skill involved in Farrant performing all three narratives/personas, including instances of visual humour based on gesture, facial expression and costume; different tonalities of voice (low and gruff for Baxter; nasal and shrill for Moonseed; warm and modulated for Foster); accent (American for Baxter and Moonseed; British for Foster); and the rhythm and flow of his rapping (Moonseed's verbose meltdown is particularly impressive as it picks up speed). The multimodal semiotic ensemble comes together as an affective tactic made explicit on the Juice Media home page: “to restore your faith in the fourth estate [the news media], make you nod your head to the beat even as you shake it in disbelief”; in the context of this analysis, then, the video can be considered a strong example of aesthetic shock.

It is finally worth mentioning that while “Osamacide!” is ‘Anglo’ in the most global sense of the word – produced in Australia, performed by a British rapper, parodying American hegemonic discourse – the team appear wise to the danger of an Anglo-centric view of globalised society: they specify their location in Melbourne as being on Wurundjeri land (the aboriginal name for the territory), and they employ a team of subtitlers to disseminate their work across different language communities (Juice Media website). This co-creational subtitling activity produces a supraterritorial community that is “clustered on the basis of mutual affinity and chosen affiliations” (Pérez-González 2014: 72) and facilitated by the contemporary media landscape. As mentioned in section 2.7, Pérez-González argues that the role of amateur translators (e.g. fansubbers/activist translators) in fluid affinity spaces across different language communities worldwide has largely been ignored in media studies, despite the complex and ongoing interplay between local and global involved in a context of increasing deterritorialisation (2012b: 7). In this regard, he draws on Appadurai’s prescient theory of global cultural flows from the 1990s, according to which contemporary nation state configurations are compromised by an increasing disjuncture between five main categories of cultural transactions or ‘scapes’: ethnoscapes (people); finanscapes (capital); technoscapes (machinery); ideoscapes (ideas and values); and mediascapes (media content). This heightens the need for a “reconceptualization of cultural transactions across communities” (Pérez-González 2012b: 5); yet more so now in the digital age. Focusing on mediascapes, Pérez-González highlights Appadurai’s assertion.
that it is language, in combination with images, that turns these transactions into narrative-based accounts of reality:

At the interface between mediascapes and ideoscapes, language becomes the means through which clashing or mutually reinforcing narratives – understood as sets of worldviews and political values – are negotiated among members of a given community of interest or across different political or cultural constituencies. (2012b: 6)

Thus, he argues, the contribution that translators bring to the emergence and evolution of digital media culture merits greater attention (2012b: 7). This would act as a counter force to widespread assumptions of the dominance of English in globalising processes, as “the instantaneity of the sphere of global media flows appears to be predicated on its monolingual nature” (Pérez-González 2012b: 6), which means the complexities of interlingual and intercultural mediation are habitually overlooked. This is especially relevant to aesthetic activism of the type explored here, since English, buttressed by mainstream media and culture, is the driving language of the War on Terror. Hence, the final text studied in this chapter is in Arabic – a language that I, in my capacity as researcher, do not speak. While this will mean a comparatively briefer and more superficial analysis, by the same token it allows us to further consider issues of translation in the globalisation of post-9/11 cultural resistance.

Our concluding text was produced in 2015 and engages humorously with the theme of ISIS. It thus pushes the temporal boundaries of the thematic section of the War on Terror, since ISIS could be viewed as a consequence of the War on Terror, rather than strictly part of it. Given the nebulous nature of its campaign, however, the group could equally be construed as the realisation of the War on Terror par excellence, since it was born of the destruction of Iraq, and actively seeks to cultivate the historical West/Islam divide in its global marketing and recruitment tactics. The text – an audiovisual comedy sketch – was produced by Daya al-Taseh: a team of four young Syrians from Aleppo (Youssef Helali, Maen Watfe, Aya Bini and Mustafa Aljouri) working in exile from a makeshift studio in Gaziantep, close to the Syrian border in south eastern Turkey, as part of a wider citizen media project of aesthetic activism. The team post weekly videos in Arabic with English
subtitles on their website (dayaaltaseh.com) and Facebook page, as well as on YouTube and subversive Internet television channel HalabToday, lampooning the religious hypocrisy and thuggish stupidity of ISIS fighters (Boltanski 2015). At the time of writing, the opening page of the Daya al-Taseh website features an ‘ISIS Mario’ computer game, which serves to frame the group’s general tactic of utilising contemporary aesthetic forms to problematise hegemonic stereotypes of Islam and the Middle East, which are cynically peddled by ISIS. The specific mission goals are stated on the website as follows:

- Freedom of expression to continue providing an alternative source of information for people.
- Use of different media techniques for [sic] better connect to the community and the public.
- Defense of human rights, particularly the rights of Syrian children.
- Call for freedom, human rights, and democracy.
- Provide entertainment for the Syrian people in this time of crisis, but after publication of awareness and information.

Set up in 2013, the team originally produced videos as part of the revolution against the Assad regime, but shifted their focus to include ISIS when the latter rose to prominence and captured global attention over Assad (Letsch 2015). In producing and disseminating satirical videos online, they risk their lives: they have received death threats and were forced to move location after being put under surveillance93. This puts them in a much more extreme situation of precarity compared to the production contexts of Four Lions and “Osamacide!”, revealing comedy to be an important cultural weapon in the very midst of conflict and not only a product of more privileged cultural milieus. It should be emphasised that Daya al-Taseh is not alone in its approach. As Turkey correspondent for The Guardian Constanze Letsch explains in her interview with the group in March 2015, mocking ISIS is a “growing sport” across the Middle East, with popular forms of entertainment such as television shows and cartoons being increasingly utilised to this end. To illuminate this further, Letsch (2015) cites Samir Alani, a Syrian journalist and former ISIS prisoner:

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93 Aya Bini gave a fake surname (Brown) for the Guardian interview in March 2015, but at the time of writing her name is posted publicly on the website.
It’s so easy to make fun of them – mostly they are making fools of themselves,” he chuckles. “Many people are terrified of Daesh [ISIS], but humour helps to push past that fear. A group like [ISIS] can best be countered when civil society is neither afraid nor impressed by them. This is what these sketches can achieve.

Yet Daya al-Taseh reach out internationally as well, through subtitling, to create a multivalence of target audience in the construction of the text that perhaps better reflects the complexities of the post-9/11 temporal order. The episode chosen for the data set is no. 3 of 8, entitled “The Prince” [الأمير/al-émir]. It is just two and a half minutes long and has a simple plotline: an ISIS leader complete with costume beard sits relaxing by a roadside with a glass of wine, cigarette, and a speaker blaring out Arabic popular dance music (Figure 4.51). He swiftly changes the music to an Islamic nasheed (devotional song), swapping his wine for a glass of milk, upon the arrival of a travelling jihadi from Morocco, who states he is looking for heaven and/or Jerusalem in a politically exploitable conflation of the two concepts. The ‘emir’ hands the traveller a suicide belt and sends him to his death by persuading him that some nearby Free Syrian Army fighters are actually Israelis. He waits for the (off camera) boom, beseeches Allah to forgive the traveller, and finally goes back to enjoying his forbidden pop music and wine.

Figure 4.51: ISIS emir relaxing by roadside in “The Prince” by Daya al Taseh (2015).
Much like the Bigard and Mero texts discussed in section 4.2, the video’s “schoolboy humour” (Boltanski 2015) derives its impact from the contrast of a playful and naïve aesthetic against a backdrop of extreme precarity and ever increasing political complexity. This affective multivalence stands to have an especially strong impact upon Syrian viewers living under immediate threat on a daily basis in the ISIS territorial stronghold, highlighting the significance of positioning in the narrative function of aesthetic shock. For Westerners who can only appreciate at some remove the intensity of the localised dimension, temporal multivalence lies in the mediated performance itself; in other words, the ability of Syrians to be humorous and au fait with Whatsapp and selfies clashes with the hegemonic post-9/11 narrative that seeks to cast Muslims as cold barbarians of a bygone age. In particular, the line “Whatsapp of the infidels” (00:35) – when the supposed emir receives a Whatsapp message from his girlfriend and sends a selfie in response – humorously exploits this binary to reveal its constructed nature and lack of real meaning, at the same time as it undermines the characterological integrity of its narrators, who would happily indulge in social media flirtations while denouncing them as un-Islamic.

Of course, sophisticated participation in global media flows while playing up to the West vs. Islam civilisational divide is actually key to the ISIS brand of shock tactics. The fact that the terrorist group have already reached a global audience in their quest to spread fear and recruit online should in theory enable Syrian cultural narratives of resistance to travel easily as well; however, finding a platform does not always equate to being heard in conditions of hegemony. On top of the death threats the team receive on their Facebook page from ISIS supporters (Boltanski 2015), comments from the UK posted underneath the article in The Guardian include patronising backhanded compliments revealing assumptions of Western cultural superiority, for example from ‘fanofzapffe’: “A step in the right direction, though not really funny just yet”; while ‘GlozzerBoy1’ states,

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94 Many of the team’s fellow citizens live “reduced to a state of refugees”, with no telephones, electricity, or Internet access; however the team claim to receive between 40,000 and 60,000 views per video (Boltanski 2015).
Great to see that some Muslims are now seeing Islamic extremism and ISIS for the collection of ignorant losers and thugs that we know them to be. Would be great to see more of this from Muslims here in the UK, but hats off to these guys in Turkey ... Brilliant!

There are also calls from commentators for Muslim comics to mock Islam itself – perhaps a reflection of the preoccupation with free speech in post-9/11 Western Europe since the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons controversy and *Charlie Hebdo* attacks. However, Daya al-Taseh clearly state that they do not wish to mock Islam and are offended by ISIS’s appropriation of its symbols (Letch 2015), while unambiguously condemning the *Charlie Hebdo* murders as terrorism (Boltanski 2015). There is some room for optimism, however, as the disparaging comments from *Guardian* readers do not go unchallenged; for example, ‘JBowery’ responds directly to ‘GlozzerBoy1’ thus:

Great to see that some media are now reporting on the vast majority of Muslim’s [sic] who see Daesh as a bunch of extremist weirdoes who corrupt the meaning of Islam with their Wahhabi extremism.

Fixed it for you.95

Aya Bini explains why it is important to understand Daya al-Taseh’s position from a wider perspective that respects the interconnectivity of local and global, and to recognise that ISIS are covered by mainstream media in a way that exactly suits them, since they capitalise on the same binary narrative that obscures more subtle thinking:

Western, non-Muslim media portray Muslims as terrorists with very little nuance (...) It looks like they make no difference between Isis and all other Muslims, which is why when they make fun of Isis, it is easily misunderstood here and might drive even more people to join them, out of spite and anger. (Cited in Letch 2015)

Thus, again, the genre of comedy shows itself to be highly sensitive to positioning and power differentials within the temporal order – perhaps it is more high risk than hip hop as an aesthetic medium. The situation in France after *Charlie Hebdo* certainly attests to

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95 Included at the bottom of this post is a link to a compendium of Muslim condemnations of terrorism: http://www.mohammedamin.com/Community_issues/Compendium-Muslim-condemnations-of-terrorism.html [last accessed 10 August 2016].
this, while underscoring the centrality of comedy in post-9/11 world affairs. From my point of view, as a non-Arabic speaking viewer who is dependent upon the English subtitles to access the video’s linguistic dimension, the Syrians’ humour does come through – and it doesn't feel too distant from *Four Lions*; obvious differences between short sketch and feature film aside. Neither did Morris choose to mock Islam, and both productions offer nuanced, multivalent approaches that, as discussed above, unearth the farcical at the moment it emerges – i.e. capturing the affective now in a way that leads to socially constructive discussion and reflection. On the other hand, as a researcher, I am aware that a degree of semantic and cultural detail is necessarily lost to non-Arabic speaking viewers given the spatio-temporal restrictions of the subtitling medium. For example, on consultation with a Syrian Arabic speaker, I learned of an important linguistic dimension of humour that remained inaccessible to me in translation: the manner in which the ‘emir’ speaks. As was explained to me, he employs the classical form of Arabic, which is not spoken anywhere in contemporary times and sounds very out of place and comical – comparable to Shakespearean speech – especially when mixed here with talk of selfies, adding to the video’s effect of temporal multivalence for Arab viewers.

As mentioned above, translational losses are unavoidable in any given subtitled text; however the hegemonic narrative inflecting upon this one conceptually obstructs the very possibility of such differences for many foreign viewers. This creates an affective structure of cruel pessimism for the text, in which light the practice of subtitling (which the team appear to undertake themselves) can be understood as imbued by a sense of longing for ordinary regard – i.e. to be humanised in the eyes of majoritarian society – comparably to Abd al Malik’s rapping in the French past historic. Nonetheless, while the hegemonic divide remains deeply embedded for many despite Daya al-Taseh’s efforts, fringe constituencies still exist which can be harnessed by the active creation of globalised affinity spaces. As Baker argues,

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96 Ruth Abou Rached, a doctoral student in the field of translation studies.
there is always an audience around that is not yet invested in a particular version of the narrative and this audience is worth appealing to (...) Translation and interpreting play an extremely important role in this process, especially given the fact that most conflicts today are not restricted to specific monolingual communities but have to be negotiated in the international area. (2006a: 22)

In this regard, Pérez-González adds that translation channels the hypersociability at the core of digital culture, and that subtitling collectivities can be mobilised as form of cultural resistance “by addressing small-scale communities, rather than large audiences clustered around mainstream corporate media” (2012b: 16). This is supported by comments underneath the YouTube video of the sketch97, which are far more positive overall and include calls for translation into other languages, e.g.:

Pourrait on avoir les sous titres en français s'il vous plait que l'on puisse vous soutenir et vous diffuser?? [Could we have the subtitles in French please so that we can support you and share you??] Alice@NimporteNawak

The following chapter takes up the theme of translation as conceptualised in a broader sense of privileging flows and between-ness over the stable narrative categories upon which multivalence depends, as will be elaborated. For now, this example of online satirical resistance from a Middle Eastern conflict zone in the War on Terror reveals much about the role of affect in contemporary political engagement, the complexities of global cultural and linguistic flows, and the persistence of dehumanising binaries of the post-9/11 temporal order that make the text appear multivalent in the first place. It is finally important to appreciate the significance of such affective practices as part of a larger epistemological groundswell across the globe, as the breadth of this data set indicates, in testament to the claim that the socio-political limitations and contradictions of the globalised age “presuppose aesthetic possibilities and solutions” (Cazdyn 2004/2010: 458).

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97 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VU0xTxZtPaY [last accessed 10 August 2016].
4.4 Conclusion

Considering 8 of the 12 texts in the core data set, this chapter has drawn on the narrative-based concepts of temporality and multivalence to explore examples of aesthetic resistance to the post-9/11 temporal order. The texts were analysed with reference to the artists’ identities and contexts of production. Taking 9/11 as the ‘governing event’ of the temporal order, I first looked at 3 multivalent cultural responses to the attacks themselves, which were produced in different countries up to and over a decade later, treating multivalence and temporality as separate analytical threads. I then applied the interwoven notion of temporal multivalence to a further 5 texts, delving deeper into the respective genres of hip hop and comedy within the unfolding situation of the War on Terror.

In the texts dealing with 9/11, the “unmanageable surplus of meaning” (Cazdyn 2004/2010: 452) or “mess of temporalization” (Berlant 2011; 81) was evident in the bewildering amount of conflicting information clustered around the event and the magnitude of its implications. This was dealt with performatively by techniques such as visual mapping, episodic textual structuring, and understatement. In the genre-based substantiation of the analysis, we saw how hip hop and comedy – or indeed a combination of the two – could be used as techniques to overcome the post-9/11 temporal impasse through conscious individualism and the creation of intimate publics; while cruel pessimism was identified as an affective structure of extreme precarity reflected in some of the texts which could thwart this possibility. Finally, translation was considered as an increasingly relevant form of agency in the globalised era that can enable narratives of resistance to travel more widely, even in conditions of hegemony.

Overall, the texts reveal how the complexities of the post-9/11 era mean even more that people and cultures cannot be conveniently swept into broad narrative categories. They also support the recent proliferation of theories and cross-disciplinary ‘turns’ that emphasise the socio-political import of aesthetic forms of expression previously side-lined by the epistemological norms of Western society (Bleiker 2009: 3). The following chapter builds on this analysis by drawing on Deleuzian philosophy and the notion of renarration.
(Baker 2008) in the theorisation of aesthetic shock on an epistemological level. The 4 remaining texts of the data set will introduce some new performative genres, as well as female artists and characters, and are organised into the overarching themes of a) Clash of Civilisations and b) Palestine.
Chapter 5

Clash of Civilisations, Palestine: Renarration and the Rhizome

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 elaborated the key themes of temporality and multivalence with a particular focus on genre. As such, the existence of more or less stable textualities and identities was assumed. A central aim of the present chapter is to rework this assumption of fixedness in the theorisation of aesthetic shock by focusing on processes of ‘renarration’ (Baker 2008) in order to allow an analytical shift towards the epistemological level of post-9/11 narrativity. The discussion is supplemented by elements of Deleuzian philosophy introduced in section 2.7; namely, the rhizomatic model of thought, and the notion of becoming-minoritarian, which connect the affective present to the temporality of futurity.

The chapter draws on the remaining 4 texts of the data set, which are grouped thematically into the following sections: 5.2 Clash of Civilisations (2 texts), and 5.3 Palestine (2 texts). In both sections, the texts are presented sequentially as subsections in and of themselves. They are ordered so as to substantiate progressively the theoretical postulations set out in the introductory passages. While all levels of narrativity are interconnected, section 5.2 deals primarily with renarration on the ontological level, with a focus on religious conversion; and section 5.3 looks at renarration on the meta level, with a focus on place and migration.

5.2 Clash of Civilisations

The point of departure in the previous chapter was 9/11, understood as the governing event of the broader situation of the War on Terror military campaign. This was presented in terms of temporal rupture and conceptual unmanageability on an unprecedented scale. There are some analysts, however, who insist upon the historical dimensions of continuity of the attacks, and reject the idea of 9/11 as world changing and
Tom Rockmore (2006), for example, views the attacks as part of the deeper structural processes of economic globalism that were under way well before 9/11 (e.g. the US-sponsored overthrow of left-wing Chilean president Salvador Allende on 11 September 1973), and continued afterwards in the form of the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. For Rockmore, the attacks were not unprovoked and attributable simply to cultural and religious differences – an Islamic aversion to ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ – but were instead a symptom of “the economic penetration of virtually the entire world by variations on a single capitalist model which manifests itself throughout all dimensions of the human world” (2006: 38). Jean Baudrillard similarly rejects the clash of civilisations thesis, describing the attacks as “triumphant globalization battling against itself” (2002: 8, italics in original), while Susan Willis speaks of the “continuous globalized circuit of control and domination (...) a Moebius strip on a global scale” (2005: 61).

While appreciating the nuance of these approaches, I would nonetheless maintain that a parallel dimension of continuity associated with 9/11 is precisely that of the historical clash of civilisations narrative, which, as discussed in previous chapters, has been reinvigorated by media and political discourse in the post-9/11 era. This presents something of a paradox that can only be resolved on an epistemological level. If we are to reject Huntington’s popularly accepted binary model of thought, in which deterministic civilisational identities take centre stage, and accept the circular economic matrix as the conceptual ‘bottom line’, we may be closer to a more sophisticated framework of understanding for the material aspects of post-9/11 temporal order, but we are still faced with a hegemonic narrative reality espoused by Muslims and non-Muslims alike; one which feeds off itself and cannot simply be ignored. Hence, to move beyond the temporal impasse, an epistemology is required that can accommodate (and transcend) these divergent dimensions of thought and their interlinking consequences. Such an approach would incorporate the temporal dimensions of both rupture and continuity in the post-9/11 era.

Rockmore points out that the facts of emigration and religious conversion undermine Huntington’s contention that membership in one or another civilisation is a fundamental trait that cannot be altered (2006: 11). It is of epistemological note that both of these are
processual phenomena involving transfer, and both are especially pertinent to an era characterised by high mobility and digital media flows. In foregrounding processes of meaning making and transfer within the narrative model – instead of assuming stable constituencies of, say, text, individual, or civilisation – properties of narrativity that are ordinarily overlooked emerge to supplant epistemological approaches restricted to fixed binary dialectics. It is here that Deleuzian thought, notably the concept of the rhizome discussed in Chapter 2, becomes especially illustrative, as will be elaborated over the course of the data analysis. Thus, firstly, the two texts considered in this section explore the phenomenon of religious conversion (understood as ontological renarration). Both texts are argued to dismantle hegemonic notions of West vs. Islam through use of aesthetic shock, revealing processes of intercultural globalisation through a model of thought that equally resists the assimilation of subjects into a free market society.

5.2.1 The Taqwacores (Zahra 2010/Knight 2004)

The Taqwacores (Zahra 2010) is the film adaptation of white American Muslim convert Michael Muhammad Knight’s debut novel of the same name, first published in 2004. At variance to the texts analysed in the previous chapter, The Taqwacores avoids discussion of political events in the post-9/11 context, and instead “offers a blistering critique of this so-called “Clash of Civilizations” paradigm” (Bowe 2012: 97) that takes shape on a cultural/personal level. It recounts the fictional tale of a group of young Muslim punks living together in a house in Buffalo, New York, who, feeling disenfranchised from traditional Muslim communities, negotiate their own brand of Islamic identity as members of the local punk scene. There is relatively little by way of plotline: the psycho-social worlding of the taqwacore scene is conveyed through the eyes of the homodiegetic narrator Yusef, and the story dramatically culminates with a punk rock concert held in the house. The word ‘taqwacore’ is a blend of the Islamic concept of ‘taqwa’ [god-consciousness] with the word ‘hardcore’, referring to a punk rock subgenre – a portmanteau that reflects the core theme of multivalence upon which the narrative hangs. That is to say, Islamic and punk value systems, which would generally be perceived as incompatible, are brought together in the text in order to challenge the auditor into seeing a new way of thinking and being in the world. The feature film is studied here with
close reference to the novel, highlighting the evolving nature of the narrative and helping us to view the text in rhizomatic terms as an assemblage or multiplicity; in Deleuze and Guattari’s words, “[t]he multiple must be made (...) an assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections” (1987/2013: 5-7, italics in original).

*The Taqwacores* novel had humble beginnings: the first edition was photocopied, spiral-bound and hand-distributed by the author in 2003. The second edition (2004) was published with just a few typographical changes by US publisher Autonomedia, which promotes “books on radical media, politics and the arts that seek to transcend party lines” (Autonomedia website). Autonomedia also made available online every part of the novel that was censored in the UK edition98, published by Telegram in 2007, explaining their decision as follows:

In 2006, Telegram acquired the rights to publish a UK edition of the novel. At the 11th hour, after the book had been announced in their catalog, it was determined that certain of the passages were too blasphemous, and thus too risky to publish in the hypersensitive cultural environment of post-Danish cartoon Europe. After some negotiation with the author, a compromise was reached — the story wouldn't be changed, but "offending" sections would be removed, and replaced with asterisks. As a service to readers of the British edition, then, and in the interest of the right of an author to publish without compromise, we present the passages missing from the UK edition. (Autonomedia website)

It was perhaps due to the evolution of the War on Terror narrative that enough public interest was sustained in the book’s themes to spur the production of Eyad Zahra’s low budget feature film adaptation 7 years later. Despite its apparent niche appeal, the book attracted media and scholarly engagement, as well as a further US edition, published by Soft Skull Press (2009a), and its translation into French (2008), Italian (2009b – under the title *Islampunk*), and, following the release of the film, German (2012a). This travelling and pluralising of the text means it can be viewed in terms of renarration on a number of levels, including those of mediality and interlingual translation. Yet more remarkably – underscoring the socially constructive quality of narrative – a real-life taqwacore

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98 Alongside the feature film, the current study draws upon the UK edition of the book, with reference to the Autonomedia website for censored parts.
movement was inspired by the book, which is the subject of the documentary film *Taqwacore: The Birth of Punk Islam*, directed by Omar Majeed (2009). Some of the music from the documentary is included in the soundtrack to the 2010 feature film, combining fiction and non-fiction in a circular metaleptic relationship (i.e. the music did not exist when the novel was conceived, but it crossed from fiction to real, and is reemployed as fiction for the film adaptation). This blurring of boundaries between reality and fiction is revisited later in the section.

The present analysis focuses on one particular character in the novel/film, a female Muslim punk (or ‘riot grrrl’\(^{99}\)) named Rabeya. Since Rabeya’s fictional personal narrative is intertwined with the non-fictional one of her author, however, our analysis must begin with Knight himself. An American of Irish-Catholic descent, Knight converted to Islam aged 16, inspired by Malcolm X, whom he first heard of via the lyrics of American political rap legends Public Enemy (Hunter, n.d.). At 17, he moved to Pakistan to study Islam at the Faisal Masjid in Islamabad, but returned to the US within a year feeling disillusioned with orthodox Islam (Oppenheimer 2011). In the years of early adulthood that followed, he experienced a crisis of faith that led to his writing *The Taqwacores*. A decade later, by then a prolific author and scholar of Islam, Knight reflected in his regular column for *Vice* magazine on the difficult moment that the novel captured in his ongoing construction of a Muslim identity:

> In the fall of 2002, torn up with confusion and alienation over Islam and my failures within it, I began notes for my novel *The Taqwacores*, which would spill my guts, reveal every heartbreak, defecate on everything that I had held to be sacred, and leave just a shred of hope for myself as a Muslim. I chose to center this fictional treatment of my Islamic experience within the culture of punk rock, because it would allow for characters who held nothing back, absolutely refusing to negotiate with any strictures of organized religion. The spirit of punk, as I saw it, allowed for a “fuck religion” kind of ethos that could be holy in its own way. (2012b)

\(^{99}\) The riot grrrl movement was a feminist punk movement that began in the 1990s in the Pacific Northwest. It rejected received ideas and expectations of women’s looks and behaviour, and through gigs and fanzines aimed to create a space in punk culture “where women could discuss issues of gender, race, sexuality, equality and enjoy being able to crowdsurf without being groped” (Hutchinson 2015).
Describing the text as “sincere and loving blasphemy”, “rebellious and confused”, and “immature and not really all that well-written”, he goes on to state that, “I don’t know what to do with this novel. I can’t disown it, because it was my truth at a particular moment, and I still like the guts if not all of the words” (2012b). It is pertinent that Knight highlights here the temporal quality of the text in relation to his identity. He also evokes the embodied affective force (“guts”) driving the narrative. This reveals a temporally contingent aesthetic of being (if not artistic finesse), which articulates its own contradictions in order to attain transcendence of the wider narrative structures that are constitutive of it and simultaneously curb its agency. Bowe observes that

Knight’s goal is to reformulate the boundaries of Islamic identity, critiquing both American Islamophobia and the Saudi-led homogenization of Islam worldwide that oppresses local variants of the faith and excuses oppression particularly of women and the LGBT community. In the process, he hopes to uncover the potential for liberation within the faith. (2012: 97)

Thus, while not explicitly political, Knight’s multivalent personal/textual narrative challenges post-9/11 hegemonic forces on a deeper and broader level. In so doing, he uncovers the paradox discussed above in section 5.2. That is to say, the clash of civilisations narrative derives its political leverage from the pitting of putatively incompatible cultural value systems against each other, in order to justify economic warfare and state control; yet the hegemonic paradigm of economic globalism, with its positivistic drive towards cultural homogenisation and marketization, poses its own threat to those very cultural systems and increases the precarity of the masses on both ‘sides’. It is of particular note that Knight describes Saudi Wahabism as “The Wal-Mart of Islam coming in and wiping out unique downtown Islams to make it all the same convenient price-cutting religion everywhere” (cited in Bowe 2012: 97)100. Indeed, notwithstanding their divergent political discourses and legal systems, Saudi Arabia and the US are longstanding economic allies.

100 Abd al Malik makes a similar point in his book Place de La République (2015: 17): “A bien réfléchir, je trouve qu’il y a beaucoup de similitudes entre ces matérialistes et les intégristes religieux. Leur vie entière n’est qu’extériorité [On reflection, I find that there are many similarities between these materialists and the religious extremists. Their whole life is just exteriority]”.  

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For Knight, then, ‘rescuing’ Islam becomes a case of freeing it not only from political and economic interests, but from fixedness of thought more generally. Accordingly, narrator/character Yusef describes Islam and punk alike as “flags”, i.e. open symbols meaning only what adherents believe them to mean (Knight 2007: 7). He adds that the two value systems aren’t so far removed as you’d think. Both began in tremendous bursts of truth and vitality but seem to have lost something along the way (…) Both have suffered from sell-outs and hypocrites, but also from true believers whose devotion had crippled their creative drive. Both are viewed by outsiders as unified, cohesive communities when nothing could be further from the truth. (2007: 7)

One can extrapolate from this a view of the construction of social reality as narrative-based, with a rhizomatic epistemology that apprehends and promotes multiplicity. Both critical and emancipatory, rooted in the affective present, such a mindset involves continual processes of renarration, resulting in new lines of flight that weaken hegemonic forces.

As Bowe mentions above, a particular issue for Knight in his negotiation of an American Muslim identity is that of the status of women. Indeed, this is perhaps one of the biggest sticking points in the West vs. Islam narrative at large, evidenced by the fetishisation of the hijab in many Western countries with Muslim minority populations (particularly France, as will be discussed in the following section). Knight confronts this polemic notably through the character of Rabeya – one of three female characters portrayed in the narrative (the other two, Lynn and Fatima, being love interests respectively to Yusef and Jehangir, the charismatic protagonist of the taqwacore movement). Rabeya is the only female housemate and wears full burqa with punk band patches sewn onto it – an immediate visual indicator of her ontological multivalence (Figure 5.1). She is equally capable of reciting the Qu’ran “beautifully” (Knight 2007: 81) as she is of performing oral sex on stage from underneath her niqab during a punk concert (Knight 2007: 235/Zahra 2010: 01:13:02). She self-publishes a fanzine entitled Ayesha’s Hymen (Autonomedia
– a reference to Prophet Muhammad’s child bride – and recites devotional poems at coffeehouses, one of which, entitled “72 Cocks”, ironically elaborates her feminist vision of heaven (Knight 2007: 128). She is also happy to delete passages of the Qu’ran that she finds problematic, something that would be considered highly blasphemous in traditional Islamic cultures (Knight 2007: 128/Zahra 2010: 00:22:11).

Figure 5.1: Rabeya with punk-style burqa in The Taqwacores (Zahra 2010).

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101 While this title is censored in the UK edition of the novel, it appears in the opening credits of the film as part of a montage of images with the song “Sharia Law in the USA” (2008) by real life taqwacore band The Kominas playing in the background (Zahra 2010: 00:00:48).

102 Rabeya justifies this as follows – citation includes a censored passage in square brackets (which is also omitted in the film dialogue): “Finally I said, fuck it. [If I believe it’s wrong for a man to beat his wife, and the Quran disagrees with me, then fuck that verse.] I don’t need to stretch and squeeze it for a weak alternative reading, I don’t need to excuse it with historical context, and I sure as hell don’t need to just accept it and go sign up for a good ol’ fashioned bitch-slapping. So I crossed it out. Now I feel a whole lot better about that Quran.” (Knight 2007: 129/Autonomedia website)
As a radical feminist, Rabeya revels in testing boundaries; yet she does this intelligently and with full commitment to her faith. The self she performs both visually and verbally is powerful and disturbing to Yusef, who is a recent arrival to the house and struggles to assimilate his new environment:

Rabeya sat content knowing that none of my existing scripts for male-female interaction, mu’min or kufr, gave me any frame of reference for dealing with her. We never saw her face, which I think empowered Rabeya with a certain psychological leverage. However, not everything she did with said benefit would find such easy encouragement from tradition. (Knight 2007: 9)

Yusef’s inner reflections on Rabeya in the novel play a mediating role for the reader, providing a psychological handle on the situation from someone actively processing his location at the intersection of dominant narratives of the temporal order (a similar buffer effect is achieved in the film through Yusef’s facial expressions and verbalised reactions). Yet Rabeya also generates an affective response on her own terms, playfully showcasing contradiction to trigger doubt and curiosity in her audience and force them into an actively critical role. While her rationale for wearing the burqa is never made explicit, her appropriation of it and inversion of the meaning and power dynamics usually associated with it challenge the double layer of oppression often faced by Muslim women who wish
to participate in feminist movements without renouncing their religion; an endeavour commonly construed as an insuperable conflict of values (Sotsky 2013: 793). Rabeya’s creative performance of her multivalent identity exposes the non-inevitability of this prevailing contradiction, and the possibility of a new and more empowering social narrative that incorporates elements of both value structures.

Indeed, there is a strong sense in the narrative that one value system cannot be radicalised without the other: it could be argued that Rabeya’s radical approach to Islam makes her more authentically punk, and her devotion to punk makes her more authentically Muslim, since she is not trying to please but to challenge and educate, and servicing both Muslim and non-Muslim value systems through the empowerment of women. This is borne out when she leads Jumma prayer [congregational prayer held on Fridays] and delivers the khutba [sermon] – a role traditionally forbidden to Muslim women, who must pray behind men in a mixed gathering. In the novel, Rabeya kicks off her khutba with a long list of real questions posed to “fatwa-dishing scholars on Islamic websites” (Knight 2007: 78), allowing their collective absurdity to speak for itself,

As they piled up atop each other until the final question (’Is it haram for a woman to donate blood to a non-mahram man?’), I grew embarrassed of Islam – or at least of Muslims – or at least of myself for contemplating the pork gelatin in marshmallows. Were these essential concerns for our spiritual development? (2007: 79)

The khutba in the book progresses onto an argument for Ayesha’s feminist credentials. In Rabeya’s filmic characterisation, the khutba is adapted and she instead puts forward a case for the Virgin Mary to be considered a prophet of Islam (Zahra 2010: 00:14:07). This could be to avoid foregrounding the highly controversial figure of Ayesha in the film; although given the inclusion of the frontcover of Rabeya’s fanzine Ayesha’s Hymen in the

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103 An extreme example of such marginalising public discourse is leader of topless protest group Femen Inna Shevchenko’s statement, “I will never have a discussion about Muslim feminism because it doesn’t exist. It cannot exist. It’s oxymoronic” (Meaker 2014).

104 Relating the ‘story of the necklace’ (a hadith according to which Ayesha refused to thank Muhammad for proclaiming her innocence after being suspected of infidelity), Rabeya concludes: “Thirteen years old in a time and place that gave no voice to women – and here was this little girl standing up strong to the Prophet... You think you cannot criticize Muhammad or it makes you kafr. You think we can’t do anything to improve or evolve Islam. But little Ayesha, thirteen years old in seventh-century Arabia, did it right in Muhammad’s face” (Knight 2007: 80).
opening titles (Figure 5.2 above), the adaptation is perhaps simply intended to make the khutba more immediately accessible (and potentially less alienating) to a wider US audience, by referencing a female figure common to Islam and Christianity. Other adaptations for the feature film include the addition of Rabeya instructing Fatima on how to use tampons, explaining that they do not incur the loss of virginity (Zahra 2010: 00:52:35); and a recurring trope shot in black and white involving each of the main characters in turn, whereby they are seen lying on the sofa in front of the television, via which they are subjected to hegemonic media/political discourse about an issue that concerns them individually. In Rabeya’s case, it is an interview with an unnamed Muslim feminist writer who angrily denounces the burqa (which are referred to as “hideous burlap sacks”) as a male imposition. On hearing this, Rabeya lets out a faint moan and rolls off the sofa (Zahra 2010: 00:49:00/Figure 5.3). This adds another layer to the intriguing mystery of her choice to wear the burqa. Perhaps her distress is connected to Knight’s views on progressive Islam, as compared to creative and embodied forms of resistance to hegemony:

Progressive Islam is purely an academic exercise. It’s not creating a culture. It’s professors talking to each other. What we’re doing is, like, we’re just reflecting the real lives that we have, and empowering others who deal with those same things and have those same kind of lives. (cited in Hunter n.d.)
These additions notwithstanding, in the renarration from novel to feature film a fair amount of characterological detail is lost through cut dialogue and descriptive passages turned into transient images (e.g. the description of Rabeya’s bedroom, Knight 2007: 127/Zahra 2010: 00:20:39). In the film version, however, the affective dimension of the narrative as a whole is arguably enhanced via the sensorial metalepsis of the punk music that is central to the taqwacore lifestyle, but can only be evoked verbally in the book version. That music occupies the centre of Rabeya’s affective world alongside Allah – indeed, perhaps to her they are one and the same force – brings an intimation of coherence through aesthetic transcendence to her ontological narrative. Section 2.6 discussed the narrative properties of music and its role as an affective form of knowledge construction. To add to this in terms of its subversive potential, Deleuze and Guattari posit that

[m]usic has always sent out lines of flight, like so many “transformational multiplicities”, even overturning the very codes that structure or arborify it; that is why musical form, right down to its ruptures and proliferations, is comparable to a weed, a rhizome. (1987/2013: 11)
Fittingly then, it is at the musical climax of the narrative that Rabeya makes her final and most controversial appearance, when, as mentioned above, she spontaneously performs fellatio on a band member on stage during the punk concert, and spits the result over the audience (Figure 5.4). In the novel, Rabeya’s sexual history is not disclosed; however, in general she speaks confidently about sexual matters, advocates masturbation, and expresses contempt at the repression of female sexuality in mainstream Islamic culture, to which she was subjected when younger (Knight 2007: 69). This act, then, might be seen as multivalent inasmuch as she retains ownership of her body while forcing herself sexually upon a man. Thus, she is able to publically reject the binaries of patriarchy without compromising her private chastity; sidestepping through paradox the only two narrative categories available to her as an unmarried woman – virgin or whore. It is a new line of flight. The act has marginally less impact in the film than in the novel, since the visual depiction is necessarily more fleeting than the novel’s detailed verbal description, and amid the sensory chaos of the concert it is not immediately obvious what is happening; yet the film contains a powerful visual addition – a brief glimpse of Rabeya’s face, as she lifts her burqa to spit the semen (Zahra 2010: 01:13:22/Figure 5.5). That her face is beautiful (something Knight as author never suggests), and the camera lingers on it for a fraction of second, could be critiqued as an example of the male gaze which undermines the character’s narrative. On the other hand, in the context of the wider textual function, it could be said to contribute to the effect of aesthetic shock: if in the film her face were never seen, she may risk visual caricature in a way the novel avoids, due to its more in-depth exploration of her psychological makeup. And if her face were revealed to be unattractive, her choice to wear the burqa may be read as a form of insecurity in the last instant. For maximum narrative impact, she has to be beautiful.

\[105\] In the novel, Yusef reports that the audience would have seen her face at this moment, but he does not (Knight 2007: 235).

\[106\] Jehangir, the only character to have seen Rabeya’s face, describes it as follows: “Not what you’d expect, but at the same time you don’t really expect anything so, whatever. I guess she looks like a person” (Knight 2007: 148).
Rabeya can be understood as the staging of an ontological renarration from traditional Muslim female to transgressive Muslim punk, created by an American male as part of his own haphazard process of ontological renarration. Through her, it could be argued that Knight enacts a reflexive experience of femininity – or ‘becoming-woman’ in Deleuzian terminology; a point we will return to shortly. First, our concern is the rhizomatic nature
of the *Taqwacores* narrative – its connectivity; multiple entry points and exits; lack of beginning and end (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 5) – which operates through aesthetic shock to disturb linear narrative hegemonies from the personal to the meta. This is evident not only in the way the affective rupture emanates outwards in a ripple effect among both Muslims and non-Muslims; or its dissemination globally via translation (written and subtitled); but most strikingly, the rhizomatic connectivity is seen to come back on itself through the metaleptic circularity discussed further above. As Knight himself puts it in his later volume *Journey to the End of Islam*, “all borders were erased” (2009c: 220). In this book he recounts how, after making a cameo appearance in the film and spending time on set with the actors and a real-life taqwacore band, he collects some of Rabeya’s belongings and drives away with them. In a moment of abandon, he pulls over, and simultaneously reclaims Rabeya and releases her back into the rhizome:

> I reached behind me into the plastic bin bearing the word PROPS written on a strip of masking tape, recognized the feel of Rabeya’s burqa, and pulled it out. The light blue one, with her feminist patches and pins, the stained one that she had lifted up to spit semen (a vanilla frosting-and-water concoction I had made in the punk house kitchen) at the Wahhabs. I put it on, looked through the fabric grid and the windshield to the parking lot – no one around. No gas station attendants, no Hollywood actors. The parking lot and the novel belonged to me. Made the mess into a spare T-shirt but it wasn’t a sex thing, it was an author-and-character thing. Ritual is imitation. Then I took off the burqa and got back on the road to go home. (2009c: 221)

This passage raises some interesting questions that can serve to introduce us to the Deleuzian notion of becoming-minorititarian, the primary expression of which is becoming-woman. In the Deleuzian view of the self, identities “are never ‘finished’, but embody difference within themselves as a ‘virtuality’ or ‘potential’ to be actualised in different configurations” (Littler 2010: 224). Within this, becoming refers to “an experience of identity (...) an awakening to social structures based on difference” (Sutton and Martin-

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107 “Apart from its travels among Muslim readers, my novel had a strange second life; non-Muslims were also picking it up. Many of them could relate their own spiritual trajectories to the journeys of the characters; my rebellious and confused Muslim novel said something to them about being rebellious and confused Christians, Jews, and Hindus.” (Knight 2012)
Jones 2008: 142). Deleuze and Guattari explain that artistic endeavours such as singing or writing have no purpose other than to unleash different forms of becomings (1987/2013: 317); thus, we might easily interpret Knight’s oeuvre in these terms. And what to make of Knight’s encounter with Rabeya’s burqa? Is this part of the process of becoming-woman? The enigmatic comment “ritual is imitation” seems to indicate otherwise, since Deleuze and Guattari are insistent upon the fact that becoming is never imitation and does not occur in the imagination (1987/2013: 277). Yet the aforementioned textual metalepsis precisely dissolves the binary of imitation vs. reality, and illustrates how it is that “[w]e fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 277-278). Hence, it is not the fact of imagining Rabeya or the act of putting on her burqa that constitutes Knight’s becoming-woman; the becoming inheres in the intensity and conviction of these acts – as Deleuze and Guattari explain, “writing should produce a becoming-woman as atoms of womanhood capable of crossing and impregnating an entire social field, and of contaminating men, of sweeping them up in that becoming” (1987/2013: 322). In this respect, Knight’s engendering of Rabeya is becoming-woman par excellence. The following subsection continues the discussion of Deleuzian becoming in the post-9/11 context, focusing this time on a music video by real life female French rapper Diam’s, produced during the process of her conversion to Islam.

5.2.2 Diam’s “Enfants du désert” [Children of the desert]

French rapper Diam’s – birth name Mélanie Georgiades – was born 25 July 1980 in Nicosie, Cyprus, to a French mother and Greek Cypriote father. Her parents moved to Paris in 1982 and divorced shortly afterwards, leading to her estrangement from her father (Georgiades 2012: 18). The year of Georgiades’ birth coincided with the arrival of rap music to France (Martin 2010: 258), which took off and developed into a strong subculture in the deprived banlieues [suburban housing projects]. While not from the poorest areas herself, Georgiades was nonetheless exposed to cultural/religious diversity, and as a teenager she neglected her schooling to devote herself to rapping (Georgiades 2012: 37). She chose her stage name ‘Diam’s’108 in 1993, was signed by MBG Music

108 An abbreviation of the word ‘diamant’ [diamond].

While Diam’s initially struggled to establish herself in a male dominated rap culture (Martin 2010: 257), her critically-acclaimed third album *Dans ma bulle* [In my bubble], released in February 2006, catapulted her to national stardom (Figure 5.6). With over 800 000 copies bought, it was France’s best selling album that year, won several awards, and attracted fans of other musical genres as well as rap aficionados (Martin 2010: 257). *Dans ma bulle* was notably released in the run up to the 2007 French presidential elections campaign in which the frontrunners were right-wing Nicholas Sarkozy (then Interior Minister) and left-wing Ségolène Royal. The album thematised many of the issues and values surrounding national identity on which the election was fought, to the extent that it was instrumental in an unprecedented “convergence of rappers and politicians” (Martin 2010: 268-269) – the latter of whom became aware during the campaign of the power of rappers over young voters. The huge commercial success and socio-political influence that Diam’s attained, however, proved difficult for her on a personal level. The existential crisis she experienced at the height of fame eventually led her to convert to Islam in 2009, and – in a move reminiscent of Lowkey’s, discussed in section 4.3.1 – to later withdraw from the music scene completely.
Figure 5.6: Album cover of *Dans ma bulle* (2006) by Diam’s.

Figure 5.7: Album cover of *S.O.S.* (2009) by Diam’s.
It is this period of transition for Diam’s, and the controversy her conversion generated in stringently secular France, that concerns our analysis. Her fourth and final album *S.O.S.*, released 16 November 2009 (Figure 5.7 above), is largely an expression of the change in direction in the artist’s life. Underscoring how the album only makes sense within the evolution of her personal narrative, the English-language iTunes Store review, which describes *S.O.S.* musically as “polemic and solemn” with “precious few hooks or melodies”, sees fit to provide contextual detail about Diam’s, including the backstory of her success, personal crisis, and her conversion, as well as some translated lyrics. It concludes that:

> Sympathetic fans who can relate to the world-view of Diam’s will find consolation in *S.O.S.*, an album that recoils not only from fame but from capitalist culture altogether. On the other hand, those who were drawn to feel-good smash hits like “Jeune Demoiselle” rather than Diam’s herself are likely to find themselves alienated by *S.O.S.*, a non-commercial makeover effort that offers no fun whatsoever. (Appendix 3)

As a preliminary observation to the text analysis, the competing affective responses among listeners anticipated in this review are consolation vs. alienation; the underlying values of the listeners being measured against the bar of their relationship with capitalism. Hence, the review emphasises Diam’s’ character and worldview as the principal reasons why listeners would respond positively to the album. On the whole, this is in line with Martin’s assertions that “Diam’s is more of an ‘I’ than a ‘we’ type of rapper” (2010: 261), and that through her musical persona she brings to the surface new combinations of values, as discussed in section 3.5.5 on multivalence. Martin wrote his paper before Diam’s’ conversion to Islam, however, and thus does not connect her socio-political significance to the hegemonic narratives of the post-9/11 temporal order. I would argue that many who are drawn to Diam’s as a person and can relate to her views on global capitalism would challenge the idea that a valid moral outcome of this narrative is conversion to Islam – returning us to the paradox described in section 5.2. This is especially true since Diam’s is a woman; one who had made a name for herself in the

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109 The relative length and depth of biographical detail of this iTunes review could reflect the fact that Diam’s is barely known in the English-speaking world; however, for example, the same attention is not afforded to Abd al Malik’s 2006 album *Gibraltar* – the review for which is four sentences long.

110 He includes a footnote to acknowledge this (2010: 262).
masculine world of rap, and who lives in a country where ethnic/religious difference “is both denied and fetishized at the same time” (Silverman 2007: 631). For many, it would perhaps be difficult to square the tough, independent character she previously presented with the image of the veiled and subjugated woman, except through the lens of complete rupture – which would negate the possibility of multivalence. The problem is that these are static constructions of identity. To unravel the complexities of Diam’s process of ontological renarration, we can usefully call upon the Deleuzian notion of becoming that was introduced at the end of the previous section, as will be shown.

Although several of the songs/videos from S.O.S. make reference to Diam’s religious conversion (notably “Coeur de bombe” [Heart of bomb] and “Lili”¹¹¹), the lead single “Enfants du désert” [Children of the desert] stands out for its aesthetic rendering of the process of the artist’s ontological renarration. Described in the iTunes review as “something of a mission statement”, the lyrics recount the artist’s journey to the North African desert to reflect on the empty promises of fame and capitalist society, while the video depicts her long-distance running in the style of Forrest Gump (Zemeckis 1994), with her hair covered part-urban, part-hijab style. The song is just under six minutes long, and its soft musical backing track is piano-based with added synthesisers and a steady 4/4 beat. The video begins with Diam’s sitting alone on the veranda of an opulent country house, dressed in a white tracksuit, with just the gentle piano riff playing. The opening lyrics are as follows (00:12):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Je suis sortie de ma bulle,} \\
\text{[I got out of my bubble]} \\
\text{J’ai pris le temps de regarder le monde et d’observer la lune,} \\
\text{[I took the time to look at the world and to observe the moon]} \\
\text{Donc voici la nouvelle Diam’s en paix avec elle-même,} \\
\text{[So here is the new Diam’s at peace with herself]} \\
\text{Je préfère que ça parte aux enfants du désert.} \\
\text{[I prefer that it¹¹² goes to the children of the desert]} \\
\end{align*}
\]

¹¹¹ This is done visually in “Coeur de bombe” by Diam’s wearing a Muslim headscarf in the video, with the titular reference to a ‘heart bomb’ also an apparent ironic nod to the post-9/11 sociopolitical climate. In “Lili”, meanwhile, it is done lyrically via the final couplet “C’est de vous dire que je suis l’ennemi / Parce je suis une femme convertie et que je porte le voile” [It’s for you to say that I am the enemy / Because I am a converted woman and I wear the veil].

¹¹² “It” appears to refer here to the artist’s material wealth.
The synthesiser is introduced synchronously with the third line, building up narrative anticipation, while the visuals at this moment show Diam’s lifting her hood to cover her baseball cap and rising out of her chair (Figure 5.8). Next, the camera pans out to show her walking down the veranda steps, and finally starting to run as the beat kicks in. At the very outset, then, we are confronted with an ambivalent head covering, which appears to be connected to a movement of flight/escape\(^{113}\) from a place of rest or confinement – perhaps indeed the ‘bubble’ mentioned in the above-cited lyrics\(^{114}\). The tracksuit is suitably modest (i.e. relatively unrevealing of the body), but also signifies dynamism and struggle (i.e. of the athlete). It is also unisex. Thus, any notion of fixedness is discarded and an active identity in flux – a state of becoming – is staged. Sutton and Martin-Jones emphasise the “overwhelming sense of restlessness” that characterises Deleuzian approaches to identity (2008: 45), adding that “[it] is the simple fact of becoming that is behind the creation of the rhizome, since the rhizome exploits and enjoys continual change and connection, rather than seeking to fix or prevent it” (2008: 46).

\(^{113}\) In the sense of the Deleuzian line of flight [ligne de fuite]; whereby the house/bubble represent territorialising forces (discussed in section 2.7), and the covering of the head and movement of flight represent deterritorialising processes of becoming.

\(^{114}\) This line is a clear reference to the artist’s 2006 smash hit album Dans ma bulle.
We might deduce from the opening scenes of “Enfants du désert” that we are being asked to think of Diam’s as existing in the interstices of the dualistic conceptualizations of gender and civilisation that buttress post-9/11 narrative hegemony. The fluid state of in-between-ness enacted in the video exposes the body’s perpetual potential of “becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010: 2). Indeed, as the video progresses, Diam’s tracksuit keeps changing; refreshing itself and updating, which is suggestive of more subtle processes of becoming that might be missed by an outsider, since they are closer to continuity than rupture. Yet in Diam’s’ case, the ongoing process of becoming is transected by post-9/11 hegemonic narrative forces. In this temporal context, the widely accepted West vs. Islam binary increases perceptions of rupture over those of continuity in understandings of her conversion, thus what to her is a continuous spiritual journey qualifies as a form of ontological renarration in the public domain. In Bruner’s terms, discussed in section 2.4, this sense of rupture (breach) from normative plotlines is precisely what gives her narrative its “tellability” (1991: 15); while as a lived process, it induces precarity.

Leaving the lyrics to one side for the moment, the video next takes on an intertextual dimension, as Diam’s begins a long, seemingly spontaneous run across the country. As mentioned above, this echoes the plot of the Hollywood blockbuster movie Forrest Gump.
(Zemeckis 1994), starring Tom Hanks, which is itself based on a book (Groom 1986). Visual references to Forrest Gump in the video include Diam’s being followed as she runs and attracting media attention (03:38); intermittent shots of her sitting on a park bench recounting her story (i.e. the rap lyrics) to strangers; and the final scene in which she suddenly stops, turns around and walks back through the crowd of runners that has accumulated behind her (Figures 5.9-5.14). It should be noted that the intertextuality evident here is both inter-genre and international/intercultural. As an increasingly characteristic feature of global media flows, this situates Diam’s’ aesthetic expression of becoming within wider processes of deterritorialization, whereby the text, in “visibly bearing the traces of other texts and contexts” becomes “a resource which engenders a multiplicity of rereadings” (Littau 1997: 81/83). In opening the boundaries of the text, shifting the focus from finished product processes of meaning production and transfer, we are encouraged to look upon the artist’s own identity in a similar manner. We will return to this point further below. For now, in terms of affective impact, we might also view the visual referencing of Forrest Gump as a type of characterological safety net in the post-9/11 context. In other words, those familiar with the character of Forrest Gump would understand that he is a non-threatening figure; both humble and inspiring – the antithesis of a self-righteous or combative ego. Thus, the visual dimension of the text helps to diffuse the divisive nature of the musical-lyrical content anticipated in the above iTunes review. In referencing a well-known ‘feel good’ work of popular culture, Diam’s’ personal narrative becomes more accessible and welcoming, reducing the potential for alienation within the hegemonic temporal context. The shots on the park bench in particular create a sense of Berlant’s ‘intimate public’, discussed in section 4.2.2, and furthermore include people of different genders and race, reminding us of the connectivity and multiplicity inherent to the rhizome.
Figure 5.9: Diam’s chased by media in “Enfants du désert” (2009).

Figure 5.10: Forrest Gump chased by media in *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis 1994)
Figure 5.11: Diam’s on park bench in “Enfants du désert” (2009).

Figure 5.12: Forrest Gump on park bench in Forrest Gump (Zemeckis 1994).
Returning to the particularity of Diam’s’ inner journey, we might ask, where is she running to, and why? Or perhaps more accurately, what is the meaning of this line of flight? There are some clues in the visual narrative in the form of those who chase after her. For example, it is telling that her first chaser is a male suitor, who she ignores (01:10/Figure

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115 This question is more accurate in a Deleuzian sense because “[b]etween things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 27).
On a superficial reading of this, Diam’s is simply not interested in a romantic relationship at this time due to more pressing concerns. Digging a little deeper, taking into account the broader narrative context and Deleuzian philosophy, we might interpret this first encounter/rejection as a move away from the figure of man as the molar identity, or the “socially constructed, patriarchal standard of human behaviour applied to both men and women” (Massumi 1987/2013: xvii). To elaborate, Diam’s previously inhabited a man’s world and adopted masculine traits in order to achieve commercial success as a rapper; yet she remained subject to the dualisms and hierarchies imposed by patriarchy. She had to fight harder to be accepted, relying early in her career on the endorsements of male rappers to gain credibility (Martin 2010: 258). Through the creative force of becoming-woman, Diam’s is able to escape this hegemony, since “[t]he only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between, to pass between, the intermezzo” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 323).

Since power relations are inherent to processes of becoming, “all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 339); however, Deleuze and Guattari assert that, “all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman. It is

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116 As opposed to molecular/minor. Molar or major entities are ‘structural aggregates’ from which molecules must break away as part of the process of minoritarian becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 46).
the key to all other becomings” (1987/2013: 323). Thus, for Diam’s, while leaving the ‘bubble’ is the moment of awareness and questioning, raising her tracksuit hood in the video represents the first step in the actualisation of becoming as it neutralises her constructed gender identity. Nonetheless, within the post-9/11 temporal order, this act of minoritarian empathy interlaces considerations of gender with those of global economic inequality and capitalist alienation. That is to say, as a rapper, Diam’s participated in a French subculture associated with minority struggle, yet it was not until she went to Africa (to do humanitarian work) that she truly identified as minoritarian in the global capitalist context. She gives this point prominence within the sung chorus, which is repeated three times overall:

\[
\begin{align*}
J'ai pris le temps de regarder l'Afrique et de contempler la lune, \\
[I took the time to look at Africa and to contemplate the moon] \\
Cette société n'est qu'une enclume, \\
[This society is just an anvil] \\
J'ai couru après le fric quitte à y laisser ma plume, \\
[I ran after cash at the risk of losing my quill]
\end{align*}
\]

For Diam’s, rapping was not conducive to her becoming-minoritarian because it made her a slave to capitalist values as she rose to fame, and drained the creative energies that had brought her success in the first place. The line “Cette société n’est qu’une enclume” [This society is just an anvil] in particular evokes the forcible shaping of people into fixed entities, as well as a sense of difficulty, heaviness and being trapped – the French idiom “entre le marteau et l’enclume” translates as “between a rock and a hard place” – and it is “just” an anvil because it offers nothing more than the material. The rapped lyrics of the verses elaborate in more detail how Diam’s ascended the material structures of global capitalist society, acquiring all the designer labels and gadgets, indulging in expensive alcohol and drugs, travelling in private jets and gaining VIP access; but the higher she went, the more empty she felt (Appendix 4). Meanwhile, in the video, once the media have chased her and she has gathered a following, two business people come chasing

\[117\] This is explained by the special position of women in relation to the man-standard: there is no-becoming man since man is “majoritarian par excellence” (1987/2013: 339) and the molar standard from which all minoritarian becomings are actualised. Yet – in accordance with the relationality element of narrative – becoming-woman necessarily affects men as much as women; thus “[a] woman has to become woman, but in a becoming-woman of all man” (1987/2013: 340).
after her waving documents in her face as she remains resolutely focused on her new line of flight (04:31/Figure 5.16). Here we can see the Deleuzian perspective of “the identity of the individual subject, pressured from all sides by forces that will make him or her, articulate him/her, organise him/her; but also the collective subject, pushed together through environmental, governmental, or social forces, or coming together in resistance to these” (Sutton and Martin-Jones 2008: 45).

![Figure 5.16: Diam’s chased by business people in “Enfants du désert” (2009).](image)

In terms of becoming-woman, it is noteworthy that Diam’s invokes the female figure of Marianne – the emblem of Republican France – when calling on listeners to leave their own ‘bubbles’ and join her: “Venez, on sort de nos cases, venez, on se sert de Marianne pour sortir de nos bulles” [Come, we get out of our boxes, we use Marianne to get out of our bubbles] (03:59). This may appear paradoxical, given that she also points to the role of the State apparatus in capturing capitalist flows and fostering socioeconomic inequality to its own ends:

*Triste pays qui compte sur les voix de Le Pen*,
[Sad country which counts on the votes of Le Pen]

*Pour qu’accèdent au sommet des gros capitalistes de merde*,
[So that big shitty capitalists can reach the summit]

---

118 Jean-Marie Le Pen and his daughter Marine Le Pen are extreme right French politicians.
I know what I am capable of, I know what the State is guilty of
[The State that releases billions, but never for the taxpayer, no!]

Here, again, Deleuzian philosophy can be illuminating. If we understand France as an assemblage of different strata/effects gathered into a single territorialised context, Marianne as becoming-woman deterritorialises from within the rigid (anvil-esque) boundaries of the majoritarian State – evoking the postmodern sense of difference, or as Littau puts it “irreducible heterogeneity” (1997: 88), as an internal form of resistance to totalising tendencies. This requires a mindset that Deleuze terms ‘nomad thought’, which is aesthetically conjured by the motif of long distance running in the video, and also ties in with the song’s titular theme of the desert:

The life of the nomad is the intermezzo (...) it is deterritorialization that constitutes the relation to the earth, to such a degree that the nomad reterritorializes on deterritorialization itself (...) he is in a local absolute, an absolute that is manifested locally, and engendered in a series of local operations of varying orientations: desert, steppe, ice, sea. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 443-446, italics in original)

Thus, what begins for Diam’s in a material sense – i.e. wishing for wealth to be distributed to the children of the desert – concludes as a way of being, evident in the lyric, “On est aussi des enfants du désert” [We are also children of the desert] (04:22). This can be viewed as a desire for humans not to be fixed and categorised, but instead “to experiment and explore, to learn, grow, and boldly venture forth on creative lines of flight” (Rayner 2013). Such a mindset can be adopted beyond the State apparatus within the locality of France, and is actualised through the process of becoming (which always begins with becoming-woman). Indeed, accordingly, the video includes a number of shots of open spaces that Diam’s traverses, and localities where she pauses; presumably to contemplate the absolute (Figures 5.17-5.18). Yet these “smooth” interstitial spaces that are sought by the nomad and evoked in the video “change meaning drastically depending on the interactions they are part of and the concrete conditions of their exercise or establishment” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 451), as will be elaborated.
The chapter in *A Thousand Plateaus* devoted to nomad thought, “Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine”, is dated 1227, i.e. in the middle of the Crusades\(^\text{119}\). Hence, in this chapter Deleuze and Guattari, albeit briefly, discuss Islam. In terms of the clash of civilisations debate, they appear to support the present thesis inasmuch as they

\(^{119}\) In his translator’s foreword, Massumi explains the dating of each chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* as follows: “The date corresponds to the point at which that particular dynamism found its purest incarnation in matter, the point at which it was freest from interference from other modes and rose to its highest degree of intensity” (1987/2013: xiii).
critique the hypocrisy of denouncements by the West of the military enterprises of Muslim States “in order to justify its antipathy towards Islam”, when the Crusades were precisely that (1987/2013: 447)\(^\text{120}\). Beyond this, Deleuze and Guattari take an ambivalent stance towards Islam and Christianity, arguing that on the one hand, as an element in a driving force they term the ‘war machine’ – i.e. that connects to the transcendental idea of holy war –, universalizing religion “mobilizes and liberates a formidable charge of nomadism or deterritorialization” (1987/2013: 447) that is exterior to the state apparatus. On the other hand, the antagonistic relationship of monotheistic religion to the smooth spaces of the nomad, such as desert or ocean, shows in its tendency to ‘encompass’ (or appropriate) these spaces in its very pretensions of universalism.” In so doing, they argue, religion reterritorialises as another piece in the State apparatus (1987/2013: 446). This raises the question of whether, in converting to Islam, Diam’s simply reterritorialises her ontological narrative back into another oppressive patriarchal structure? As Deleuze and Guattari see it, however, this is never a determined outcome:

> ... does not exhaust the question to establish a simple opposition between two points of view, religion-nomadism. For monotheistic religion, at the deepest level of its tendency to project a universal or spiritual State over the entire ecumenon, is not without ambivalence or fringe areas; it goes beyond even the ideal limits of the State, even the imperial State, entering a more indistinct zone, an outside of States where it has the possibility of undergoing a singular mutation or adaptation. (1987/2013: 447)

Furthermore, since the true goal of the war machine is “emphatically not war but transformation and becoming” (Littler 2009: 231)\(^\text{121}\), this ambivalence at the fringes of monotheistic religion can potentially deterritorialise in other ways – i.e. not necessarily violent, but in this case aesthetic – as a means of turning back against the State form (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 447). Diam’s was a conscious rapper before her conversion, thus she was already explicitly critical of many aspects of contemporary French society, while the personal experience of alienation that led her to Islam came

\(^{120}\) While they do discuss the West and the Orient as two separate entities, Deleuze and Guattari do not create a binary in which the West is morally superior to the Orient, and emphasise the underlying commonality of the State form across both (1987/2013: 448-449).

\(^{121}\) “It only results in war when its energies are appropriated by the military state apparatus” (Littler 2009: 231).
from living within the excesses of capitalist society; yet she remains emotionally invested in her country, continues to live there, and does not consider her conversion a rejection of her French or ‘Western’ identity. In one of the two autobiographies she has published since her conversion, she defends herself against the widespread public criticism she faced for becoming a Muslim as follows:

J’ai grandi en banlieue parisienne, auprès de jeunes de toutes origines, de toutes confessions. Nous étions la génération “black-blanc-beur” et nous vivions sereinement nos différentes cultures (...) Oui, la France d’aujourd’hui et multiculturelle. Le nier, c’est nier la réalité des faits. Que faire alors de ces différences? Que faire de ces millions de personnes d’horizons si variés? Les haïr? Les rejeter? Créer des lois pour museler leur liberté d’être ce qu’ils sont? Et sous quelle prétention? Être différent, est-ce vouloir du mal à l’autre? Si moi, Mélanie, je m’habille différemment de mes voisins, cela signifie-t-il que je veux du mal au pays qui m’a portée et éduquée? [I grew up in the Parisian suburbs, around young people of all backgrounds and all faiths. We were the ‘black-white-Arab’ generation and we lived peacefully our different cultures (...) Yes, France today is multicultural. To deny it, is to deny the reality of things. So what to do with these differences? What to do with these millions of people of such varied horizons? Hate them? Reject them? Create laws to muzzle their freedom to be what they are? And under what pretext? To be different, is that to wish harm upon the other? If I, Mélanie, dress differently to my neighbour, does that mean I wish harm upon the country that has carried me and educated me?] (Georgiades 2015: 102)

It should be recalled here that hijabs are banned in French schools, and since 2011 it has been a criminal offence to wear a niqab/burqa in public places in France. These laws purportedly apply to all religious symbols/face coverings but are widely accepted as targeting Muslim women, who, divested of all agency, are deemed victims of Muslim men (Tarr 2014: 517). The polemic surrounding female Islamic attire in the context of French secular values escalated in August 2016 with the controversial burkini ban mentioned in section 1.1. Given that French republicanism remains steadfastly rooted in Enlightenment binary oppositions, and that “to arrive at an opposition between two

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122 Hargreaves supports this observation citing the case of the former Minister of Education François Bayrou, who in 1994 issued a circular justifying the exclusion of all religious symbols from schools in a carefully-worded appeal to Republican values, while openly admitting to the press that in fact “the whole raison d’être of his circular was to ban Islamic headscarves from state schools while continuing to allow the wearing of Catholic crucifixes and Jewish kippa” (Hargreaves 1997: 197).
elements necessarily requires the suppression of the residue, the excess of reference, the
sheer proliferation of signification” (Littau 1997: 84), I would argue that Diam’s’ choice to
adopt Islamic practices can be understood as part of the proliferation of meaning of what
it is to be French – and Muslim – endowing those practices with a localised temporal
meaning that simultaneously migrates beyond the State form. In her autobiography she
asserts the following: “Je suis française et musulmane et je n’ai pas à choisir. Je suis
française et musulmane: j’ai des racines et des ailes” [I am French and Muslim and I don’t
have to choose. I am French and Muslim: I have roots and wings] (Georgiades 2015: 208).
This statement indicates a lived form of ambivalence and difference; a fluid state of
deterritorialisation. In this sense, Diam’s’ religiosity is closer to the “local absolute” of the
nomad cited earlier, and her-between-ness may on the one hand limit her, but on the
other assigns her a “communicational role” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 448).

Indeed, in inhabiting the fringes of French society where there is a surplus of cultural
meaning, and as an artist and public figure, we might view Diam’s as a form of translator;
a figure Littau argues has been inferiorised “because we fear her or him, since s/he is the
very initiator or proliferator of discourses, the multiplier of versions” (1997: 86). Diam’s
asserted her social agency in this respect when on 30 September 2012, following a
number of years spent away from the public eye, she appeared dressed in a jilbab in an
interview for the French national television channel TF1 (Figure 5.19). She used this
platform to openly discuss the reasons for her conversion and to promote tolerance of
diversity in France. Throughout the interview, which is freely available on YouTube,
she elucidates herself logically and conscientiously, displaying characterological coherence;
for instance she points out that quitting the drug scene and adopting a healthy
and peaceful family life should in theory make her a better role model for young girls as
compared with certain other famous musicians, namely Amy Winehouse, who in 2011
died aged 27 due to intoxication (TF1 2012: 03:34). During the interview Diam’s also
confirms the end of her rap career, explaining that she no longer feels the need to rap

123 The precarious position of the translator/interpreter is heightened in situations of conflict, during which
their ambiguous stance can lead to their vilification. As Mairs observes, “interpreters who feature
prominently in historical events tend to do so by being associated with acts of treachery by either one or
both of the parties between whom they mediate” (2011: 67).
124 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5STSqR-o-k [last accessed 25 March 2016].
because she no longer feels angry (TF1 2012: 19:00). Despite her efforts, however, her unwelcome stance in the context of post-9/11 narrative hegemony is evidenced by comments beneath the YouTube clip, including the following inferiorising presumption of indoctrination: “Moi qui étais un fan d’elle. Aujourd'hui ça n’est qu’une pauvre fille qui s’est fait largement influencer lorsque sa vie n’allait pas” [Me who was a fan of hers. Today she’s just a poor girl who let herself be greatly influenced when her life wasn’t going well] (Figure 5.20).

Figure 5.19: Diam’s in televised interview dressed in jilbab, 30 September 2012.
In this challenging narrative environment, the manner in which Diam’s enacts her agency as an intercultural mediator becomes key. By aesthetically performing her process of becoming-woman in “Enfants du désert”, she is able to reframe the terms of the debate away from questions of rupture and fixed civilisational entities, foregrounding instead the relationality and fluidity of identity and culture in the post-9/11 era. In this way, she effects transcendental dissolution of her temporal multivalence on an epistemological level. Her religion “exists only in its metamorphosis” (Thoburn 2003: 7) and does not attempt to reterritorialise or conquer, but through aesthetic shock, to create new lines of flight under conditions of hegemony. With her textual narrative publicly circulating in the rhizome of global media flows, she can then proceed, as did Lowkey, to ‘become-imperceptible’, which Deleuze and Guattari suggest to be the moral outcome of the process of becoming; that is, the “absolute elimination of identity as a goal of self-awareness and resistance to processes and hierarchies of domination” (Sutton and Martin-Jones 2008: 142). In both Diam’s’ and Lowkey’s case, this would apply to their

125 Or as they themselves put it, “the immanent end of becoming, its cosmic formula” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 325).
public identities as rappers that were appropriated by capitalist structures and no longer serve the affective flow of conscious individualism.\textsuperscript{126}

This section has drawn upon two post-9/11 textual assemblages thematising religious conversion that represent challenges to Huntington’s clash of civilisations thesis on the ontological level of narrative. While ostensibly turning to a new theme (Palestine), the following section picks up Rockmore’s other challenge to Huntington cited in section 5.2 – that of migration – and continues to explore the notion of becoming-minoritarian, with a focus this time on the meta level. As will be elaborated, the theme of migration relates to both places and ideas, since for Deleuze and Guattari, territories are not to be understood only as physical entities, but equally as “territories of thought” (Brunner 2010: 148).

5.3 Palestine

This, the fourth and final thematic section of the data analysis, continues the epistemological exploration of aesthetic shock via texts that relate to the occupied territory of Palestine. The emphasis here is not on the historical detail of the conflict itself, but rather the potential offered by Palestinian narratives of resistance to mobilise renarrations of post-9/11 hegemony on the meta level. In this respect – being at the frontline of the clash of civilisations divide in geopolitical terms – I argue that the Israel/Palestine conflict cannot be overlooked in an Islam-focused study of contemporary

\textsuperscript{126} It should be noted that since the writing of this analysis (as he hinted he might in his valedictory statement cited in section 4.3.1), Lowkey has returned from hiatus, releasing a new single “Ahmed” (on the theme of the refugee crisis) and touring the UK in November 2016. His return reveals ‘becoming-imperceptible’ as an ongoing process or moral aspiration, rather than a fixed or permanent state. Commenting on the value of Lowkey’s time away from the spotlight for his future projects, journalist Ali Salaam (2016) states:

> Sometimes it takes a period of solitude, stepping away from the craziness of the world and observing it from a distance to become more mentally mature and develop a greater understanding of the how the world works. Getting his hands dirty in the gardens of knowledge in Palestine, both in academia and experiencing what life is like under the tyranny of Israeli occupation, certainly can contribute towards gaining a certain degree of wisdom that may have not been previously unlocked. The world has yet to see how the return of Lowkey’s powerful music can contribute to society from 2016 on forward [sic] to educate, inspire, and change the masses towards building a movement that permanently creates a world of peace, harmony, justice, and sustainability.
global society. To illustrate the ongoing relevance of Palestine to public narratives pertaining to the War on Terror and the post-9/11 context in general, we need look no further than the artists and texts discussed already in this thesis. Firstly, the viewer comments underneath the Diam’s TF1 interview (Figure 5.20 above) quickly descend into a heated debate on the subject, despite no mention of the conflict in the interview itself\textsuperscript{127}. Within the data set texts themselves, Lowkey’s “Terrorist?” addresses the topic lyrically, in the line cited in section 4.3.1 above (“It seems nuts, how could there be such agony / When more Israelis die from peanut allergies” (01:57)), as well as visually, in the cryptic messages on the wall, one of which reads ‘Gaza flotilla’ (Figure 4.39)\textsuperscript{128}. Meanwhile, one scene (not cited earlier) of \textit{Four Lions} satirises widespread anti-Semitism in Muslim communities as a result of the occupation of Palestine, white convert cell member Barry blames ‘Jewish spark plugs’ for the demise of his car, rather than his own deficiencies as a mechanic, raging that there is a Jewish conspiracy to control global traffic (00:52:44). Finally, as discussed in section 4.3.2, Daya Altaseh’s “The Prince” satirises the exploitation of anti-Zionist narratives by ISIS for their own localised political ends.

Section 2.3 drew on Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said’s essay ‘Permission to Narrate’ to demonstrate the workings of narrative hegemony in relation to Palestine in 1984. In the post-9/11 era, a similar narrative environment can be identified: in his

\textsuperscript{127} An extract of the online chat reads as follows:

\begin{verbatim}
barateq 2 months ago @Nour Triki
Tu parle [sic] d’intolérance, de xénophobie, de racisme et j’en passe. Mais je te pose une question: “Que pense tu d’israël [sic] et des Juifs”? Moi perso j’ai jamais vu un Juif donner un coup de couteau à un autre, braquer, vendre de la drogue, voler… Si tu vois ce que je veux dire… [You speak of intolerance, of xenophobia, of racism and whatever else. But I ask you a question: “What do you think of Israel and the Jews?” Me personally I’ve never seen a Jew stab someone, point a gun, sell drugs, steal… If you see what I mean…]

Nour Triki 2 months ago @barateq
je n’ai aucun problème envers la religion juive. Chaque personne est libre de suivre ses croyances et j’ai de nombreux amis juifs avec qui je n’ai jamais rencontré de problèmes. L’État d’Israël mène une politique que je n’aime pas et c’est mon avis mais je n’aime pas non plus la politique en Arabie Saoudite et pourtant c’est un pays musulman. [I have no problem with the Jewish religion. Every person is free to follow their beliefs and I have several Jewish friends who I have never had any problems with. The State of Israel implements a policy that I don’t like and that’s my opinion but I don’t like the politics of Saudi Arabia either and yet it’s a Muslim country.]
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{128} This refers to an Israeli military operation conducted on 31 May 2010 against six civilian ships that were carrying humanitarian aid and building materials to Gaza, during which nine Turkish activists were killed (BBC News 2016).
preface to Joe Sacco’s award-winning graphic novel *Palestine*, Said observes over two decades later the persisting hegemonic stereotype of the Palestinian people as “rock-throwing, rejectionist, and fundamentalist villains whose main purpose is to make life difficult for the peace-loving, persecuted Israelis” (2003: iii). Likewise, in *Precarious Life*, a collection of five essays written in the aftermath of 9/11, Judith Butler discusses the strategic use of the charge of anti-Semitism to silence criticism of Israeli state policy (2004: 109). Moreover, attempts to include Hamas in mainstream political discourse are often discredited by accusations of sympathising with terrorists. A case in point is the interview broadcast on *Channel 4 News* in July 2015 of UK Labour Party candidate (later to become leader) Jeremy Corbyn, who was repeatedly pressed by interviewer Krishnan Guru Murphy on his use of the word “friends” in 2009 to address Hezbollah and Hamas, to an extent that foreclosed all further discussion about Corbyn’s participation in the Middle East peace process¹²⁹.

Nonetheless, as discussed in section 2.3, it must be again acknowledged that while Palestine remains occupied, there has been increasing recognition of the cause across counter-hegemonic groups worldwide – facilitated in large part by global media flows and emerging aesthetic forms of political engagement. This presents the opportunity for alternative perspectives to evolve, which could help to deconstruct the civilisational divide and foster a truer sense of global community. The two case studies presented in this section – a locally produced video clip and an international hip hop music video collaboration produced in Chile – reflect the globalised nature of the Palestinian cause and its renarrational potential on the meta level of post-9/11 narrativity. They are viewed together as an assemblage, connected by British-born Palestinian activist rapper Shadia Mansour, who features in both.

¹²⁹ The following exchange typifies Guru Murphy’s line of questioning:

Guru Murphy: “Are they [Hezbollah and Hamas] your friends or not?”
Corbyn: “Can I finish?”
Guru Murphy: “You can’t if it’s a long answer.” (Channel 4 News website)
5.3.1 Gaza Parkour Team “After Banksy: The Parkour Guide to Gaza”

This video, featured in The Guardian newspaper in March 2015, is a response to a Gaza tourist video created in February 2015 by activist graffiti artist Banksy, which was posted on his official website (www.banksy.co.uk) in the form of an ad page that had to be skipped before the homepage loaded. Some weeks later, the local Gaza parkour team decided to join Banksy in promoting Gaza as a tourist destination. In this video, which at 02:30 minutes long is just slightly longer than Banksy’s piece, the tour guides extend their hospitality in the bare face of destruction while performing parkour over the destroyed buildings and walls of the territory, to the sounds of British-Palestinian rapper Shadia Mansour. The narrator, Abdallah AlQassab, addresses the viewer directly in English to explain what Gaza has to offer for tourists. English subtitles are added both for clarity and to provide additional contextual commentary. Before embarking upon a more detailed discussion of the text itself, however, the performative genre of parkour, also known as freerunning, requires elaboration from a narrative perspective.

The objective of parkour is “to find new ways of movement in dialogue with urban configurations” (Brunner 2010: 143) by moving from A to B as quickly and efficiently as possible. Now a globally practiced phenomenon, it was founded in the Parisian banlieues in the 1980s, originally named ‘L’Art du Déplacement’ [The Art of Displacement] (Parkour UK website) – a term that reveals it as not just a sport, but an art or philosophy arising from a context of social alienation and oppression. The definition provided on the Parkour UK website reads as follows:

[Parkour is] the non-competitive physical discipline of training to move freely over and through any terrain using only the abilities of the body principally through running, jumping, climbing and quadrupedal movement. In practice it focuses on developing the fundamental attributes required for such movement, which include functional strength and fitness, balance, spatial awareness, agility, coordination, precision, control and creative vision.

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130 Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3e2dShY8jlo&list=PLOgeWiwSgmgsElKjPlttihgyyHd9uhce [last accessed 8 December 2016].

131 This is technically a variation of parkour, rather than an exact synonym; however the terms are often conflated by non-practitioners (Brunner 2010: 143).
The description goes on to explain that the practice aims to encourage both self-confidence and humility, by exposing the physical and mental limits of a practitioner (called a ‘traceur’) while at the same time offering ways to overcome them. It emphasises respect for one’s environment, community spirit, and the importance of play and discovery (Parkour UK website). Safety and liberation are two further values highlighted in the description that take on a particular poignancy in the Palestinian context, as will be discussed in the text analysis. To apply a narrative perspective to parkour in general, we might view it primarily in spatial rather than temporal terms, as a “deterritorializing practice” (Brunner 2010: 143). In so doing, however, we should not discard temporality since, in his discussion of spatial narratives (1984: 115-130), Michel de Certeau differentiates the stable notion of ‘place’ (which refers to the ordering of co-existing elements distributed in their ‘proper’ location, each in distinct relation to one another [1984: 117]), from a temporally dynamic conceptualisation of ‘space’, which merits quoting in full:

A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements produced within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. On this view, in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many conventions, situated as an act of the present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a “proper”. (1984: 117, italics in original)

It is precisely narrative, argues de Certeau, that organises “the play of changing relationships between places and spaces” by either identifying places or actualising spaces (1984: 117) – ‘actualising’ being for the purposes of this analysis a temporally charged term connected to the affective present, as discussed in section 2.7. Parkour can thus be viewed as a form of narrative inasmuch as it performatively actualises a space, similarly to walking, which de Certeau describes as a “pedestrian speech act” (1984: 97). It is noteworthy that de Certeau captures through this metaphor some of the key
elements of narrativity; namely, its socially constitutive nature, and the narrative features of selective appropriation and relationality. Still, as with music, it is on the embodied (affective) realm of narrativity that both walking and parkour are best understood. Unlike walking, however, parkour necessarily involves rupture from normative or everyday practices of the body in relation to a given place; hence, it qualifies as a form of renarration, and is therefore connected to the temporality of futurity as it “opens up the possibility of a differentiation of the actual state by influxes of a becoming Other or becoming different” (Brunner 2010: 144). It should be emphasised at this point that the most common ‘theatre’ of parkour is the urban landscape; a public space that de Certeau argues was conceived within the hegemonic rationalist paradigm (1984: 94). In deviating from the functional administration that regulates urban space and playfully multiplying its “ensemble of possibilities” (1984: 98) by surpassing its interdictions (e.g. walls), parkour can be situated alongside practices de Certeau describes in strikingly rhizomatic terms as “the swarming activity [of] a proliferating illegitimacy (...) surreptitious creativities that are merely concealed by the frantic mechanisms and discourses of the observational organization” (1984: 96).

In this we are reminded that narrativity is not only a question of time and space, but also of power. As static understandings of ‘place’ can be applied to a subject’s ‘place’ within hierarchical power structures, so too can dynamic conceptualisations of space be seen as the potential to actualise new lines of flight away from the gravitational pull of normative narrative structures which are skewed towards the “promoters of technical rationalities and financial profitabilities” (de Certeau 1984: 106), and which flatten affective potentialities into a single narrative of futurity – that of capitalist ‘progress’. It is the very betweenness and relationality of parkour, the fluid “becoming of an environment through movement” (Brunner 2010: 144) where place is deterritorialised and space is actualised, that constitutes the affective potentiality to flow through and beyond dominant public

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132 He states: “The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language (...) it is a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language); and it implies relations among different positions (...) It thus seems possible to give a preliminary definition of walking as a space of enunciation” (de Certeau 1984: 97-98, italics in original).

133 Saville (2008: 892) describes it as “a practice intent upon re-imagining place”. 
discourses; rather than challenging hegemony directly on its own discursive terms in a “self-reflective loop” (Brunner 2010: 146). Thus, Saville argues that while parkour does not provide a discernable blueprint for action in terms of resistance, it opens up ways to prevent “comfortable closure” within an environment (2008: 892). That is not to say there are no points of reterritorialisation in parkour narrativity, but in highlighting relations over discrete entities, its ‘readability’ is compromised from within the narrative worldview of hegemonic rationalism that is hostile to ambiguity, abstracted from affective forms, and normalised to the point of invisibility.

This brings us to the text under analysis, in which parkour is only one among a multiplicity of narrative forms, including verbal and written language, music, and graffiti; yet of these, it is the one that I would argue most compellingly throws into relief the context of territorial occupation in which the narrative is situated. Parkour as performed in Gaza is therefore analysed before broadening the discussion to other dimensions of the textual assemblage. In this particular locality within the post-9/11 temporal order, Saville’s notion of comfortable closure cannot be said to apply, since certain constraints (i.e. The Wall) of the Palestinian territory cannot be overcome through parkour without serious consequence, and within this enforced enclosure the material conditions are far from comfortable due to economic growth being strangled and Israeli bombardments and demolition of homes. It is this environment that enters into a relation of becoming with the traceurs in the video (Figures 5.21-5.22).

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134 “The Gaza Strip, with a population of some 1.5 million people in 365 km2 is one of the most densely populated places on the globe. It is a prison that has been completely surrounded for years by walls and razor wire. The Wall in Gaza extends to about 55 kilometers starting from northwest of Beit Lahia until southeast of Rafah. Along the Wall runs a “buffer zone” which ranges, since the Gaza assault, between 300–600 meters. Anyone approaching the buffer zone runs the risk of being shot. The consequences of the buffer zone have been severe. 25% of the most fertile agricultural lands in Gaza are not useable. 15% of Gaza farmers are deprived of work, joining the ranks of the unemployed and becoming dependent on the food aid.” (Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign website)
Here, the viewer is confronted with the fringes of “panoptic power” (de Certeau 1984: 95); a precarious borderland determined not by religion or culture, but geopolitical strategy in the context of economic globalism. And yet, the very existence of a parkour team in Gaza appears culturally multivalent precisely because post-9/11 narrative hegemony operates to legitimise this strategy by dehumanising the people besieged by it.
Thus, the relationality of parkour as conceptualised by Saville deterritorialises Gaza from a different premise and follows a different narrative line through ambiguity, i.e. not from rationalist order towards unsettling play, but from the breakdown of material order towards comforting play. Both configurations involve movement as liberation, but for the Palestinian traceurs this is paradoxically bound up with a sense of home and belonging, that is, of reclaiming their homeland and connecting with global society. So, the affective carving out of public space through displacement within an occupied territory unleashes ambiguity while enabling the unambiguous narrative moral outcome of a Palestinian homeland to compete for its place in conditions of narrative hegemony that do not, at present, allow it a place.

A second dimension of the parkour team’s performance is that of the guided tour. This combines parkour with verbal narrative in English, and is the video’s raison d’être following Banksy’s satirical tourism advert. The Banksy video sets up the dry humour that is continued in the parkour team’s response, for example the same joke is made in both about the presence of ‘friendly neighbours’ watching over the territory. Both videos also feature a hip hop backing track (albeit just a beat and no lyrics in the Banksy video), and the same pieces of Banksy graffiti sprayed on Gaza walls – of a cat and a watchtower – appear in both. However, there is a significant contrast to be made between the texts inasmuch as Banksy’s video constitutes an outsider’s perspective: although it does give voice to the locals (indeed, Banksy’s own ‘voice’ only features as written captions), this is brief and somewhat defeated in tone. Inadvertently perhaps, this portrayal of the Palestinians does little to alter cultural assumptions rooted in binary thinking, whereby Western cultural privilege presides over the humourless victimhood of the Orient. It is only when the traceurs take up the tourism theme, I argue, that multivalence enters the picture, since their insider status enables a more intimate and uplifting tour of the territory – even welcoming the viewing public into their homes and offering them food (00:16).

The tour begins in the demolished town, goes to their home via a dirt track, and then along a colourful wall to the port, where they look out to sea and perform parkour on the beach. The sense of playfulness created by the parkour element of the trip is matched by the verbal irony deployed by the narrator, team member Abdallah AlQassab – e.g. he states “Nearly 50% of us are unemployed, and we are very available to show you round” (00:22). The team’s message is both humanising and heartening for its fearlessly aspirational quality, which takes on extra poignancy against the backdrop of visible insecurity, acting to subvert hegemonic perceptions of Palestinians as weak victims or terrorists: “We want to see the parkour teams, we want to see everything” (01.42) / “In spite of all of this happening in Gaza we are here and alive and our spirit is very strong” (01.57). Thus, the tour narrative facilitates the textual function of aesthetic shock in the context of post-9/11 narrative hegemony, from which standpoint the very existence of a parkour team in Gaza, let alone a welcoming and good-humoured one, may come as a surprise.

Yet the theoretical implications of the tour narrative go further: de Certeau describes such accounts as a language of space that prioritises the itinerary over the map, the latter being “a totalizing stage on which elements of diverse origin are brought together to form the tableau of a “state” of geographical knowledge” (1984: 121). Since the advent of modern scientific discourse, he argues, the map has gradually colonised space by sidelining and pushing into posterity the itineraries that were the condition of its possibility; as he puts it, “[t]he tour describers have disappeared” (de Certeau 1984: 121). For the Palestinian people, due to the conflict, the plane projection of an increasingly colonised space – as shown in Figure 5.23 below – is among the most visible depictions of their territory in the globalised public domain. So the military occupation of Palestine encourages and is further compounded by an epistemological colonisation – that of the Deleuzian molar landscape “where positions are easily mapped, ambiguities and variations ignored” (Thoburn 2003: 7) – which flattens the heterogeneous narratives of ordinary culture into non-existence. In this respect, the parkour tour narrative becomes a speech act for the traceurs to re-actualise their historical space against the totalizing flattening of hegemonic forces on an epistemological level. De Certeau terms this “delinquent narrativity”, which begins with the reinstatement of the body into the spatial
order, is both playful and threatening, and does not respect place (1984: 130). He elaborates this in a manner epitomised by the parkour video tour in particular, and which more generally recalls the Deleuzian notion of nomad thought:

If the delinquent exists only by displacing itself, if its specific mark is to live not on the margins but in the interstices of the codes that it undoes and displaces, if it is characterised by the privilege of the tour over the state then the story is delinquent. (de Certeau 1984: 130)

Since the parkour tour is digitally mediated and published online, we can group it among delinquent or nomadic textualities viewed on the public level of narrative through the Deleuzian lens of minor literature – referring to a way of reading texts as “creative and critical engagement with precisely the social forces that produce stable, territorial notions of identity” (Littler 2010: 222). Rather than representations of minority groups with fixed categories of place and being, Deleuze and Guattari encounter minor texts on their own affective terms as sites of experimentation capturing processes or flows of “variation and becoming” (Thoburn 2003: 7). Such creative projects are orientated towards the temporality of futurity and are transformative beyond the individual identities of the
authors, i.e. they concern “the actualisation of collective subjects yet to come” (Littler 2010: 226). From this perspective, AlQassab addressing his viewers in English rather than Arabic could not be said to signify his or his fellow teammates’ ‘becoming-majoritarian’ through their individual assimilation into hegemonic Anglo-American cultural flows; this is not possible since, in language as with elsewhere, there is no becoming-majoritarian, only “the becoming-minor of the major language” (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 123). Instead, the textual assemblage is a pluralisation of what, set against the molar standard, it means to be Palestinian in the world. Its creativity emerges from and dismantles the constraints of existing national identities and social discourse, in affirmation of “those who find their movements and expressions “cramped” on all sides such that they cannot in any conventional sense be said to have carved out a delineated social space of their “own” where they could be called “a people”” (Thoburn 2003: 8).

At the same time, from a spatial perspective, the use of English impacts upon the process of delimitation or “marking of boundaries” (de Certeau 1984: 123) of the narrative as it circulates in the globalised public domain. This relates to how narrativity “interminably labours to compose spaces, to verify, collate and displace their frontiers” (de Certeau 1984: 123). More specifically, de Certeau argues that the delimiting role of narratives operates through two spatial components: the creation of a “theater of actions” (1984: 123), and the interplay between “frontiers and bridges” (1984: 126). Creating a theatre of actions involves questions of authorisation and legitimacy, i.e. the means of opening up a space and providing a foundation for “the establishment, displacement or transcendence of limits” (1984: 123). This component is effected here in the digital sphere in part by the logo for The Guardian, which appears centre-screen at the very beginning and remains present in the top right-hand corner throughout the piece; and in part by the opening titles that read “Banksy says make Gaza your destination... / so meet your tour guides” (00:04/Figure 5.24) – drawing on Banksy’s subversive-cum-mainstream cultural capital for further legitimisation. Thus, The Guardian together with the Banksy ‘brand’ create a theatre of actions by opening a space for the video in digital media culture and mainstream news outlets in the English-speaking world. This extends the reach of the text to the meta level of the post-9/11 narrative order. Furthermore, the “heterogeneity of the authorizing references” (de Certeau 1984: 125) means that the founding of the text is
pluralised; an observation consistent with Deleuzian understandings of minoritarian authorship as a multiple voice that forms new assemblages distributed across a social milieu – hence, in turn, the team introduce their own authorship in a “process of continual feedback” (Littler 2010: 226) with the collective: “Yes Banksy come discover my State of Gaza / My name is Abdallah AlQassab” (00:18). The founding of the localised theatre of actions, on the other hand, is expressed visually in a bodily fashion with the team grouped together firmly standing their ground as the camera shakes precariously (Figure 5.25). This establishes them as the protagonists of delinquent narrativity through reinstatement of the body into the spatial order. Then, standing in formation atop a demolished building with their arms raised in the air, the team open up the territory around them as the physical theatre of actions, shouting in unison “Welcome to Gaza!” in the only stretch of speech that is not subtitled (Figure 5.26).

Figure 5.24: Banksy’s authorship in “After Banksy: The Parkour Guide to Gaza”, Gaza Parkour Team (2010).
Figure 5.25: Team establishes authorship in “After Banksy: The Parkour Guide to Gaza”, Gaza Parkour Team (2010).

Figure 5.26: Team shout “Welcome to Gaza!” in “After Banksy: The Parkour Guide to Gaza”, Gaza Parkour Team (2010).

Mention of the subtitles brings us to the second component of the narrative’s marking of boundaries in the global public domain: the interplay between frontiers and bridges. This component involves the previously discussed ensemble of interdictions and possibilities imposed by the hegemonic spatial order, specifically, the relationship between “a
(legitimate) space and its (alien) exteriority” (de Certeau 1984: 126). Frontiers and bridges are migratory processes bound up in contradiction and ambivalence, since each delimitation is in itself mobile and relational:

It hands the place over to the foreigner that it gives the impression of throwing out. Or rather, when it marks a stopping place, the latter is not stable but follows the variation of encounters between programs. Boundaries are transportable limits and transportations of limits. (1984: 129)

This speaks to the Deleuzian relation between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, whereby the rhizomatic potential to produce change through new lines of flight at places “where the multiplicity experiences an outside” is always accompanied by a complementary force attempting to recreate order and stability (Sutton and Martin-Jones 2008: 6). A frontier/bridge relation is illustrated in the video by the unidentified intralingual subtitler – Banksy? – who acts to clarify AlQassab’s pronunciation and phrasing for the English-speaking viewer at moments where it jars enough to impede effective communication, e.g. “But with no construction material coming in we can’t rebuild” (00:50), where the word ‘rebuild’ is pronounced “reblied”; and the subtitle couplet “We are here in the sea port of Gaza / A lot of people come here” (01:32), which corrects AlQassab’s respective phrasings of “port sea” and “There is a lot of people come here”. Here, the subtitler “creates communication as well as separation; [he/she] establishes a border only by saying what crosses it” (de Certeau 1984: 127). Thus, on the one hand, the subtitling underscores the text’s foreignness as it travels, drawing a limit to the becoming-minoritarian of the spoken English by reterritorialising it. On the other, it is a vehicle for the continued migration of the text, providing access on the visual dimension to a wider audience. Hence, the subtitles “mark out limits only by moving themselves (and the limits)” (de Certeau 1984: 129).

The subtitler occasionally goes further, however, by adding an extra, ‘unauthorised’ voice to the textual assemblage which provides supplementary information in brackets about the situation in Gaza: “Gaza’s single power station shut down last week” (01.11), “90% of all water in Gaza is undrinkable” (01.25), “Seeing the world will remain a dream until the borders open” (01.50/Figure 5.27). Here the subtitler enacts a visible yet disembodied
agency with “no readable identity” (de Certeau 1984: 95) – an affective stream of conscious individualism perhaps – which becomes part of the pluralisation of meaning surrounding the text; not only moving bridge/frontier relations around, but also bringing into effect new ones (1984: 98). That is, the subtitler displaces the frontiers of the clash of civilisations binary so that the Palestinian narrative becomes not only ‘theirs’, but everybody’s, since the voice is non-personal and implicates the (English-speaking) viewer by default via the common majoritarian field of discourse. This multivalence, or multiplicity, of discursive styles within the textual ensemble enables it to “elude discipline without being outside the field in which it is exercised” (de Certeau 1984: 96), and, in creating new lines of flight from the interstices of the imposed majoritarian order, to actualise the “[t]ransformation of the void into a plenitude, of the in-between into an established place” (de Certeau 1984: 127).

Figure 5.27: Additional subtitle in brackets in “After Banksy: The Parkour Guide to Gaza”, Gaza Parkour Team (2010).
Moving the boundaries in other directions of travel on the meta level is the musical layer of the video, which includes rapping in Arabic by a female voice – that of British-born Palestinian activist rapper Shadia Mansour, otherwise known as "The First Lady of Palestinian Hip Hop" (O'Keefe, n.d.). The video tour begins and ends with Mansour’s best-known Arabic language rap song “El Kufiyya Arabiyya” [الكوفية عربية/The Kufiya is Arab] (2010) as its soundtrack. The introductory music for the clip consists of the opening beats of the song itself; then it cuts at 00:44 – immediately after the team shout “Welcome to Gaza” – to a more lyrical hip hop beat with no vocals that builds climactically as the narrative progresses. At the end, the music cuts back again to “El Kufiyya Arabiyya” – this time the chorus – while the traceurs perform parkour on the beach with shells exploding behind them. The music switching and changing creates compelling affective ruptures that keep the narrative moving forward. Moreover, informed viewers may know that Mansour wrote the song to critique offensive cultural appropriation upon discovering that an American company had redesigned the iconic Arab scarf in a blue-and-white version with the Star of David (Rolling Stone Middle East). Even without background knowledge of the song, however, the presence of female hip hop vocals in Arabic adds further intrigue and frontier/bridge dynamics to the textual assemblage. This brings us to the twelfth and final text of the data set, via the artist herself.

5.3.2 Ana Tijoux feat. Shadia Mansour “Somos sur” [We are South]

This final, comparatively brief section of data analysis focuses on a music video produced by Chilean-French rapper Ana Tijoux, featuring Palestinian-British rapper Shadia Mansour. “Somos sur” [We are South], from Tijoux’s album Vengo [I Come], released March 2014, is an uplifting call for solidarity between oppressed peoples the world over, from Latin America to Palestine. While explicit mention is not made of the War on Terror or Islam, the video’s multivalent inclusion of Mansour rapping in Arabic and visual images of the Palestinian flag equate the Palestinian cause to Chilean/Latin American counter-hegemonic resistance on the meta level of post-9/11 global society. Hence, as will be shown, the text makes use of aesthetics and multivalence to expose global economic power structures, deconstruct the hegemonic civilisational divide, and displace the
boundaries of the Palestinian cause further afield through embodied processes of variation and becoming. Before embarking upon the text analysis, however, a more detailed introduction to the artists is in order.

In view of her bilingualism, we might compare Shadia Mansour to fellow rapper Diam’s inasmuch as she is positioned artistically as an intercultural mediator, or, for the purposes of this analysis, an ‘agent of post-9/11 narrative multivalence’. Born in London in 1985 to Palestinian parents from Haifa and Nazareth (O’Keefe, n.d.), Mansour initially started rapping in Arabic as a hobby, but this developed into an artistic vocation as she began to “claim a voice” as a Palestinian (Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2011). She is a distant cousin of assassinated Palestinian activist theatre director Juliano Mer-Khamis, and her work has been regarded by the media as a continuation of his:

Mer-Khamis described his efforts to resist the occupation through poetry, music, film and theater as a “cultural intifada.” One that could succeed where the two previous physical Palestinian uprisings had failed. Mansour has taken up his call, and terminology, and refers to her music as part of that struggle. “We are the generation that goes to the battlefield with weapons of creation,” she says. “We communicate, debate and protest through art. This is why I refer to our activities as a ‘musical intifada.’ Our weapons will never run out of ammunition because they are weapons of the soul. (Rolling Stone Middle East 2011)

Along with Lowkey, Mansour is a member of The People’s Army, a non-profit organisation founded by British rapper Logic which aims to energise and politically educate the younger generation via music and arts that promote a positive message (The People’s Army website). She travels widely as a performer and activist, including frequently to Palestine, and acknowledges the creative freedom being based in London affords her (Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2011). It was after collaborating with high profile Israel-based Palestinian rap group DAM (Mahmoud Jreri and brothers Tamer and Suhell Nafar) that her once hardcore nationalistic fervour – born of performing at refugee camps in the West Bank – evolved into a more nuanced, multivalent perspective:

The band revealed the complexities of Palestinian politics and society to her. During the Israeli offensive on Gaza in 2008 Mansour asked the group to guest on her track “Kolon 3endon Dababaat” (They All Have Tanks) – first produced by
Sandhill with an outro by the Palestinian intellectual and literary critic Edward Said. “Suhell was rapping that he supported neither Fatah or Hamas,” she explains. “That was important for me.” Prior to that, Mansour had featured on Mahmoud Jreri’s 2007 track “Badi Salam” (I Want Peace), a call for resolution between Hamas and Fatah. Since then, she says, she has become more “realistic” in her lyrics. “I am a member of the [Arab] diaspora, I am not living under occupation,” she says. “And if we are not aware of our own problems, then we are walking on hot coals.” (Rolling Stone Middle East 2011)

Mansour’s rare ability to rap proficiently in both English and Arabic endows her with a powerful international reach; yet she offers a further level of multivalence with regards to the War on Terror meta narrative, since her family background is not Muslim, as might easily be assumed from her name and nationality, but Christian. Mansour has refused to perform in front of gender-segregated audiences and seeks to challenge oppression in all forms “be it the occupation of her people’s land, the repression of women, or conservative opposition to her music” (Rolling Stone Middle East 2011). Yet neither does Mansour distance herself from Islam, as evidenced by her collaboration with Iraqi-Canadian rapper The Narcicyst (who features in the pilot study in section 3.5) on his 2009 single “Hamdulillah” [Praise to God]. This melodic rap music video promotes a positive image of Muslims both lyrically, through The Narcicyst’s rapping in English, and visually through a succession of close-ups of nearly two hundred Muslims’ faces from eight different countries (Colin 2010). Mansour lends her Arabic singing voice to the track, appearing in the video wearing a kufiyya. Her own religious background is not made relevant to the narrative, the spiritual and humanitarian message of which precisely aims to transcend divisions and illuminate diversity.

In “Somos sur”, Mansour extends her reach further afield by moving into the Chilean hip hop scene. Through multilingual collaboration with activist rapper Ana Tijoux, she articulates her narrative of protest to a more distant audience – i.e. Tijoux’s largely Latin American fan base, who might have otherwise been unable to identify their own situation with Mansour’s politics, since their shared context of neoliberal economic precarity is largely obscured by hegemonic narratives of difference based on religion and civilisation.

136 Singing a refrain that translates as: “Praise to God, our loved ones who have remained for us/Spread my words to those who can’t hear us/For mankind/For you, Basra” (Elaiza 2011).
For her part, Tijoux is the daughter of Chilean exiles who moved to France to escape the Pinochet regime. Born in France in 1977, she returned to Chile in 1993, where she joined the hip hop group Makiza and later found success as a solo artist. In a 2014 interview with independent news channel Democracy Now!, she describes politics as “the DNA” of her work and music as “an amazing weapon”. She recounts the story behind her collaboration with Mansour in terms of their various connections based on shared ‘difference’:

I saw her video, and I was a super fan. I said, "Wow! She’s amazing!" And all this Arabic, like, flow, you know? And I feel that we are not so many MC, female MC, you know? So every time that I see a female MC, I’ve got this very proud stuff, like, "Ah! A woman! That’s amazing!" You know? And so, I meet some friend of her, and as a fan, I ask for her email, and I write her an email. And she knew about me also [...] And also because in Chile we got one of the biggest Palestinian community in the world, so she was very interested to come. And the fact, we bring her. We made a concert, and it was sold out, people outside the concert. Like all the Palestinian community in Chile is big, big to her. We even got a soccer team with this, Club Palestino. So we had so many, like, a connection. (Democracy Now! 2014)

In a separate interview for Rolling Stone magazine the same year, Tijoux explained how the song itself draws parallels between the Palestinian and Chilean contexts of conflict and oppression:

“Somos Sur” is about the importance of resistance, not only in Chile, but around the world. Global resistance movements, whether in Latin America, Africa or the Middle East, are fighting against the same patterns of violence that have repeated themselves throughout history. Which means many of these groups share a similar set of demands. We are asking for a free Palestine just like we’re asking for an independent Wallmapu in Chile, without police control. (Murray 2014)

So, as a preliminary observation, the song displaces the frontiers of the Palestinian cause to create a new assemblage that exposes the incoherence of the civilisational binary as an

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137 Her song “1977” featured on the popular TV series Breaking Bad, and was nominated for the Grammys and Latin Grammys (Democracy Now! 2014).
138 Inspired by her family background and knowledge accrued as an avid reader, e.g. she cites Las venas abiertas de América Latina [Open Veins of Latin America] (1971) by Eduardo Galeano and more recently The Shock Doctrine (2009) by Naomi Klein as formative of her politics (Democracy Now! 2014).
account for increased global precarity. The title itself sidesteps any notion of a West/Oorient clash under the more ambivalent geopolitical banner of the ‘Sur’ [South], which suggests alternative geopolitical configurations that cut through existing ones of the temporal order. As precarity’s inverse, the affective intensity of the music video is signalled in Tijoux’s lyrics to be one of “alegre rebeldía del baile” [joyful dancing rebellion], aiming first and foremost to universally reclaim the vitality of the body in the public arena. Accordingly, the non-verbal dimensions of the text (music and visuals) create a carnivalesque mood of outdoor celebration, with dancing, kaleidoscopic colours, Latin American costume and brass instruments (Figures 5.28-5.30). The rejoicing in embodiment of the performative ensemble not only engages the viewer in the affective now through contagion, but also calls into question hegemonic relations of place, returning us to the bridge/frontier:

The opacity of the body in movement, gesticulating, walking, taking its pleasure, is what indefinitely organizes a here in relation to an abroad, a “familiarity” in relation to a “foreignness”. A spatial story is in its minimal degree a spoken language. (de Certeau 1984: 130)

Hence, Mansour and Tijoux are seen ‘practising’ the same spaces together: variously sitting and dancing among the crowd, and rapping together on an urban rooftop (Figures 5.31-5.32). As they mix Western and traditional clothing, as well as their respective languages, there is a harmony of enunciation and gesture that transcends the multivalence of their collaboration, pushing back the boundaries of their mutual foreignness, which is aesthetically carried over to the viewer as one affective force. Furthermore, the Palestinian flag and kufiyya travel with Mansour into the video to become a visible part of the new locality (Figures 5.33-5.34), pluralising public space and deterritorialising both Palestinian and Chilean social narratives of resistance as they enter into an assemblage of minoritarian becoming with each other. A new affective worlding is created that does not respect the geopolitical status quo and – to return to the theorisation of hip hop as dusty foot philosophy discussed in section 4.3.1 – localises while transforming what it means to be local. Visual close-ups of bare feet during

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139 Lowkey points to the same when in “Terrorist?” (2011) he raps, “is Hugo Chávez a Muslim? Nah, I didn’t think so. Is Castro a Muslim? Nah, I didn’t think so” (03:03-03:09).
Mansour’s rapped section (Figures 5.35-5.36), including her own, underscore the link with dusty foot philosophy, whereby to walk barefoot is to be located with “a particular groundedness, a relationship to the earth that is about both pleasure and politics” (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009: 26). The dusty feet here are dancing, which can be viewed as a deterritorialising speech act – an artful, embodied reconfiguration of spatial ‘grammar’ that is transcultural and primal, not essentialised or fixed. In effect, a theatre of actions is established that legitimises the multiple origins of the here and now. As a post-9/11 minoritarian text, then, the acoustic and visual aesthetics come together to assert “the primacy of flows and difference rather than identity” (Littler 2010: 222). This is further borne out in the lyrics, as will be elaborated.

Figure 5.28: Carnivalesque dancing in “Somos sur” (2014) by Ana Tijoux feat. Shadia Mansour.
Figure 5.29: Kaleidoscopic image in “Somos sur” (2014) by Ana Tijoux feat. Shadia Mansour.

Figure 5.30: Brass instruments in “Somos sur” (2014) by Ana Tijoux feat. Shadia Mansour.
Figure 5.31: Tijoux and Mansour sitting among crowd in “Somos sur” (2014) by Ana Tijoux feat. Shadia Mansour.

Figure 5.32: Tijoux and Mansour rapping on rooftop in “Somos sur” (2014) by Ana Tijoux feat. Shadia Mansour.
Figure 5.33: Kufiya in “Somos sur” (2014) by Ana Tijoux feat. Shadia Mansour.

Figure 5.34: Palestinian flag in “Somos sur” (2014) by Ana Tijoux feat. Shadia Mansour.
Amid the plethora of indigenous sounds\textsuperscript{140}, it is the staccato rhythm of the music combined with the lyrical performances that make the song identifiable by genre as hip hop, and the rap lyrics that give the political message identifiable meaning. Tijoux’s vocals

\textsuperscript{140} Tijoux felt a strong desire to include a range of Latin American instruments in this album, unlike her previous ones (Democracy Now! 2014).
come straight in at the beginning, before the beat starts, on top of the opening trumpet riff (00:10):

*Tú nos dices que debemos sentarnos,*
[You tell us that we should sit down]
*Pero las ideas solo pueden levantarnos.*
[But ideas can only rise us up]

The first question is, whom is she addressing with “Tú”? Possibly it is the molar standard itself, implicating anybody and everybody who conforms to it – and towards whom she declines to afford the respect encoded in the more deferential “usted” form of address, i.e. levelling any notion of hierarchy between the impersonal “you” and the collective “us”. The viewer is free to choose with which pronoun they identify themselves. At the next lines, a fast, hammering snare drum beat comes in to create a rhythmic assemblage with the stress patterns of the words that fall in unusual places – deterritorialising language through lyrical ‘dancing’ perhaps – which culminates on the offbeat with the unleashing of the full sweeping musical ensemble led by a high pitched trumpet cry (00:15):

*Caminar, recorrer, no rendirse ni retroceder,*
[Walk, march, don’t surrender or retreat]
*Ver, aprender como esponja absorbe,*
[See, learn like a sponge absorbs]
*Nadie sobra, todos faltan, todos suman,*
[No one is surplus, all fall short, all add up]
*Todos para todos, todo para nosotros.*
[All for all, all for us]

The repeated emphasis on “todos” [all] can be read as an expression of the connectivity principle of the rhizome: “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2013: 5). As discussed in section 2.7, this leads to the second principle of heterogeneity, since the rhizome has no fixed order and “brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states” (1987/2013: 22). This is consolidated in the chorus, which is a call to individuals from all walks of life whose lives
are affected with precarity and deemed “ungrievable” (Butler 2010: 31) within the hegemonic temporal order (01:08/02:34/03:27):

*Todos los callados (todos),*
[All the silenced (all)]
*Todos los omitidos (todos),*
[All the omitted (all)]
*Todos los invisibles (todos),*
[All the invisible (all)]
*Todos, to, to, todos,*  
[All, all]
*Todos, to, to, todos.*  
[All, all]

The rhizomatic movement of becoming takes further shape in the verse following the chorus, when Tijoux rhythmically lists ‘omitted’ countries of the Americas and Africa (including Tunisia and Algeria), banishing the colonising nations and setting up a pluralised collective identity construct spearheaded by the Palestinian cause (01:31):

*Nigeria, Bolivia, Chile, Angola, Puerto Rico y Tunisia*,  
[Nigeria, Bolivia, Chile, Angola, Puerto Rico and Tunisia, Algeria]
*Venezuela, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mozambique, Costa Rica, Camerún,*  
[Venezuela, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mozambique, Costa Rica, Cameroon]
*Congo, Cuba, Somalia, México, República Dominicana, Tanzania,*  
[Congo, Cuba, Somalia, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Tanzania]
*Fuera yanquis de América Latina, franceses, ingleses y holandeses,*  
[Get out Yankees from Latin America, French, English and Dutch]
*Yo te quiero libre Palestina!*  
[I want you free Palestine!]

This tour in rap form of the global ‘Sur’ appropriates and transcends the hegemonic mapping of the nation state system – a flattening of space epitomised on the meta level by the US-backed Israeli occupation of Palestine. In the paradox of frontier/bridge, the lyrical naming of underprivileged nations reclaims movement “through the very act of fixing, in the name of delimitation” (de Certeau 1984: 129). That is, new deterritorialising boundaries are affirmed by hip hop flows, as a vehicle for nomad thought that “spatializes

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141 Tijoux says this instead of the correct Spanish word ‘Túnez’.
142 The misplaced accent here reflects the pronunciation, whose unconventional stress pattern gives the lyric a playful rhythm.
“time” (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009: 26); or as Tijoux puts it, “the land of the people that doesn’t have a land” (Democracy Now! 2014).

Mansour comes in at 01:48, heralded by the collective of voices shouting “Palestina!” alongside Tijoux at the end of the list of oppressed nations. The sudden codeswitch from Spanish to Arabic, the compelling flow of the Arabic lyrics, and the controlled yet expressive delivery, raise the song to the next level of intensity. The Arabic is left unsubtitled in the official video, which (for Spanish-speaking/non-Arabic speaking viewers) confers on the affective and symbolic dimensions of Mansour’s performance a heightened immediacy over the linguistic, such that semantics are eclipsed by the speech act itself. She does deliver one line in Spanish, however: Che Guevara’s well-known phrase “Hasta la victoria siempre” [until victory always] (02:11). This bridges the perceived frontiers of multivalence and leaves little room for doubt that the essential message of the song’s narrative is coherent. The following extract from an English translation of the lyrics gives a flavour of Mansour’s lyrics, which echo the sentiment of the preceding verses (01:54):

[Singing is the mother of world languages,
It holds our existence and it holds our root to greater Syria, Africa, and Latin America,
I’m with ANITA Tijoux,
I stand with those who suffer not with those who pretend,
I’m with culture, resistance]

Since the video freely circulates online, it is fans who take up the task of translating the lyrics: lyricstranslate.com has two versions translated into English, as well as one into Italian, and one into Tongan. Each is done by a different translator, and all except one of the English versions include translation of the Arabic. A version of the video is also available on YouTube with subtitles in Spanish for both Tijoux and Mansour’s lyrics. The intralingual renarration (from spoken/rapped to written mode) here aids comprehension of the fast flow of words and unusual stress patterns in Spanish, giving the lyrical content higher visibility amid the multiplicity of sensory stimuli. Thus, translators/subtitlers...
become part of the textual assemblage as agencies who benefit from and contribute to the migratory flows of music and ideas facilitated by the digital age, as discussed in section 4.3.2.

That a multilingual anthem of global solidarity should exclude English is pertinent, since hip hop is a globally marketed art form dominated by American English (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009: 28). As Mansour states in her lyrics cited above, however, “singing is the mother of world languages”; hence the formation of “indigenized hybrids where U.S. Hip Hop is no longer the host culture, but Hip Hop is seen as having a direct link back to traditional ways of singing, dancing, and telling stories” (2009: 30). Yet the text should not be viewed as creating another simplistic binary divide: as mentioned earlier, Mansour was born and raised in London, and continues to base herself there. She describes the UK as her “backbone”, attributing to it her open-mindedness and freedom (Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2011). Meanwhile, Tijoux travels to both the US and the UK to perform. This connectivity offers the potential to alert Anglo listeners to Western bias in dominant forms of historical reasoning (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009: 26) as discussed in section 4.3.1; or alternatively put, to inspire processes of becoming-minoritarian from within the molar standard. An example is Tijoux’s sold-out performance in Durham, October 2015:

Despite the language barrier between her songs and the crowd, Tijoux had the whole room dancing and jumping and waving their hands by using English and Spanish between songs (...) Most certainly, the biggest hit of the evening was "Somos sur" (...) Turning the local global, and re-educating the public about the West's current role as a colonizer (...) Thursday night's show proved how powerful people's interest in music can be, even if they don't understand all the words. But what further effect would it have if the crowd did? (Black 2015)

To conclude our analysis, “Somos sur” reveals how the Palestinian case is exceptionally placed on the meta level of global society, carrying the potential to expose the frontiers of post-9/11 narrative hegemony and displace them through their very articulation, as an

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145 This recalls de Certeau’s description of delinquent narrativity as a “challenging mobility [that] extends from the microbe-like forms of everyday narration to the carnivalesque celebrations of earlier days” (1984: 130).
emblem of oppressed peoples the world over. The textual combination of Chilean and Palestinian narratives of resistance dismantles rigid and divisive constructions of identity and nationhood, instead bringing into effect what is shared: conscious individualism and hip hop (i.e. artistic skill, worldwide community of multiple origins). Accordingly, Tijoux describes hip hop as “beautiful rebellion” (Democracy Now! 2014). These attributes come together as a Deleuzian war machine inspired by Palestine that utilises multivalence and aesthetics to renarrate hegemonic narratives of the post-9/11 temporal order; in other words, a “collective enunciation unconstrained by existing national identities and dominant traditions” (Littler 2010: 222) – one that moves social agents towards a more coherent and nuanced meta narrative driven by processes of variation and becoming in the rhizome of digital media flows.

5.4 Conclusion

Drawing on the remaining four texts of the data set, this chapter has approached the theorisation of aesthetic shock from an epistemological angle, with recourse to the notion of renarration (Baker 2008) and Deleuzian philosophy. This is because, since the texts can only be seen as multivalent from the vantage point of hegemonic binaries, adopting a new vantage point which privileges processes and flows over fixedness of text and identity allows for a more complex picture of post-9/11 narrativity that captures elements of both rupture and continuity. The progression of the argument followed the two challenges cited by Rockmore (2006) to Huntington’s clash of civilisations thesis: religious conversion and emigration. Hence, the first two texts presented – The Taqwacores and “Enfants du desert” – were created by Western converts to Islam as forms of artistic capture of their personal identities in flux, which resist binary categorisation and engender processes of becoming-woman that extend beyond themselves and into wider society through multiplicity. The final two texts – “After Banksy: The Parkour Guide to Gaza” and “Somos sur” – were analysed with a focus on the meta level of narrativity, through the lens of Deleuzian minor literature and de Certeau’s spatial stories (1984), in order to explore the renarrational potential of the Palestinian narrative of resistance across global society as a pluralised whole. All four texts were viewed as assemblages that promote processes of variation and minoritarian becoming
under conditions of hegemony by use of the textual function of aesthetic shock. Thus, through the digitally mediated performance of new combinations of values, the artists open up affective space within narrative normativeness and affirm the possibility of alternative futurities for the non-elites of global society.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This thesis has pursued two primary objectives. Firstly, to bring together in a single study a diversity of audiovisual popular culture texts, which, across different national contexts, genres and language communities, share similar features in their method of resistance to post-9/11 narrative hegemony, and which are conceptualised as examples of a textual function I have called ‘aesthetic shock’. Secondly, to contribute to the growing body of socio-narrative research within the field of translation studies by addressing a gap in Fisher’s 1987 paradigm for the assessment of narratives, namely the failure to account for how people might accept narratives that contradict their worldview. To this end, I have presented aesthetic shock as a narrative function combining multivalence and aesthetics in order to open up an affective space in mainstream public discourse for new meanings and values to form. Through its grounding in a collection of textual case studies and considering their wider production contexts, the study moreover offers a response to Weedon’s call, discussed in section 1.1, for “located, conjunctural analyses” (2015: 111) in investigations of young Muslim subjectivities and identities lived in the post-9/11 context of global Islamism and Islamophobia, while emphasising that the post-9/11 context is not restricted in its impact to Muslims alone. Consequently, the study more broadly addresses some of the blind spots in political science identified by Stanley and Jackson (2016: 2), also discussed in section 1.1, which stem from a methodological elitism that has precluded insight into the everyday political reality of ordinary citizens; in particular, it offers one example of how the limits of political possibility can be tested and reworked through the ‘low art’ of popular culture.

My application of the narrative framework has brought to the fore questions of power, temporality and identity in contemporary world affairs, as well as the complex interplay between the personal, the local and the global. In order to achieve a more nuanced understanding of post-9/11 narrativity on an epistemological level, the analysis has been supplemented by recent developments in affect theory and elements of Deleuzian philosophy. This multifaceted approach has allowed me to cross-fertilise areas of
scholarship that are underrepresented in other disciplines; in particular the role of aesthetics in politics and international relations, and the role of translation in globalisation and cultural studies. It is my contention that both aesthetics and translation deserve greater attention in socio-political analyses as forms of communication and social construction evolve along with digital culture and the rationalist nation-state paradigm continues to lose currency. Indeed, understanding translation in a broader sense as ‘renarration’ (Baker 2008) and adopting this as a critical vantage point has offered insight into the paradoxes of the post-9/11 era, such that the dichotomy of rupture vs. continuity in relation to economic and cultural globalisation can be resolved through an emphasis on process, ‘between-ness’ and rhizomatic becoming. On the other hand, I have sought to make the conceptual intricacies of Deleuzian philosophy more accessible through their meshing with narrativity. In this way, the present study offers a means of apprehending the unfolding situations and apparent contradictions of the post-9/11 temporal order, and “conceiving of a contemporary moment from within that moment” (Berlant 2011: 4) as new combinations (assemblages) of values emerge on the affective level, are performed and mediated, and then travel. The following section elaborates the analytical findings in more depth, returning to the four research questions below that were first set out in Chapter 1 in an attempt to provide some answers:

1) Drawing on a multilingual data set of audiovisual popular culture texts about Islam and the War on Terror, what does a narrative approach reveal about the meaning and nature of ‘hegemony’ and ‘resistance’ in the post-9/11 era?

2) What roles do aesthetics and multivalence play in shaping post-9/11 narratives of resistance?

3) What features of post-9/11 narratives of resistance emerge as recurrent across different genres, languages and national contexts?

4) What is the relevance of ‘renarration’ (Baker 2008) to theorisations of post-9/11 narratives of resistance?

Following this, section 6.3 addresses the limitations of the study, and section 6.4 outlines recommendations for future research.
6.2 Findings

1. Drawing on a multilingual data set of audiovisual popular culture texts about Islam and the War on Terror, what does a narrative approach reveal about the meaning and nature of ‘hegemony’ and ‘resistance’ in the post-9/11 era?

Firstly, adopting the narrative approach has drawn attention to temporality in theorisations of hegemony and resistance in the post-9/11 cultural sphere. As discussed in section 2.3, Gramsci’s theory of hegemony centres around the dynamic notion of the historic bloc in order to avoid static and deterministic ideas of class (Leitch et al 2010: 1000); yet temporal factors are often overlooked in sociological models of identity, despite selfhood being in large part a public and relational narrative construction that is forged under historical and/or changing conditions of cultural hegemony. Through its different levels – from the ontological to the public and meta – narrative offers a means to connect dimensions of existence that are often treated as disparate, while politicising the forces that govern them. That is to say, hegemonic power structures are legitimised by narrative normativeness that is accrued over a long period of time (Baker 2006: 11); while resistance/agency, as narrative breach, connects the affective present to the temporality of futurity by actualising space for new political possibilities. In section 2.3, this was illustrated with reference to Said’s account of narrative hegemony surrounding Palestine in the 1980s, in which the absence of a previously accepted narrative and enabling vocabulary meant that the moral outcome of a Palestinian homeland could find no expression in American public discourse. In the post-9/11 context, certain key factors have come together to prompt this study: the exploitation by neoliberal elites of the historical West vs. Islam civilisational divide, the Internet revolution, and the pluralisation of forms of political expression among non-elites in the digital sphere that is driven by the widespread affective condition of precarity induced by neoliberal structures.

Hence, the post-9/11 temporal order has not been presented here as an entirely new state of affairs, but as the reinvigoration in mainstream media and political discourse of a pre-existing narrative environment. On an epistemological level, the hegemonic worldview remains rooted in positivist instrumental rationality, which stems from the
Enlightenment and is geared towards an administratively convenient market society (Paterson, Doran and Barry 2006: 139). This is characterised by binary divisions and an intolerance of ambiguity, along with a treatment of nation states and civilisations as bounded cultural entities (even in the face of economic and technological globalising forces). This ostensibly benign normative framework of thought enabled the active pitting of religious/civilisational groupings against each other in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, in order to legitimise neoliberal warfare and occupation in the Middle East. Yet, the ongoing political expedience of sweeping people and cultures into broad narrative categories and concomitant reinvigoration of essentialist approaches to identity have paradoxically coincided with the rise of the Internet age, which has mobilised social agencies above and below the level of the nation state and accelerated global cultural intersectionality. At the same time, precarity, understood as a “transecting form of social difference that changes one’s relationship to time and the temporal order” (Sharma 2014: 9), has become the affective present of increasing numbers of citizens in neoliberal democratic society, making the latter’s overarching promises start to feel hollow – even cruel – creating a situation Berlant describes in temporal terms as an “impasse” (2011: 4/226). In this context, the ongoing War on Terror/Clash of Civilisations narrative becomes a crudely simplistic smokescreen to displace culpability for growing disaffection onto a swathe of the world’s population who cannot reasonably be held accountable. This both hinders conceptual management of global connectivity and compounds the atmosphere of fear and mistrust towards Muslim minority groups living in Western nations. In marginalising these citizens, the binary narrative of hate gathers traction and risks becoming self-fulfilling prophecy – as evidenced by the rise of ISIS, the far right in Europe, and Donald Trump in the US – thus vitalising the need for counter narratives and a new way forward. It is this complex and contradictory narrative environment that the artists in the data set take to task, through performance and the production of digital textualities.

Resistance to post-9/11 narrative hegemony has been theorised here on a number of levels. Conceptually, in acknowledging that narrative is constitutive of reality, and that every acceptance of a story entails the rejection of other possible ones (Bennett and Edelman 1985: 160), the narrative approach itself fosters meta awareness of the
processes and patterns unfolding in the public domain, while simultaneously opening the possibility of new ways out of the impasse. In this respect, narrative appears to account for human agency within abstracted and deterministic structures. For social agents, insofar as the present is first perceived affectively (Berlant 2011: 4), it is the condition of precarity that signals the existence of hegemonic forces from within the temporal order, indicating the need to move away from normative paradigms. This can begin, as de Certeau argues, with the reinstatement of body into the spatial order (1984: 130). Through affect and performativity, the normative rational abstraction of narrative is supplanted by more creative ways of thinking and being in the world. Especially in view of the affordances of digital culture, the data set presented here supports Scholte’s contention about globalisation: “Rationalism may be expected to give way to other epistemologies when socio-historical conditions become ripe for such a transformation” (2005: 258). This can be framed in terms of a paradigm shift, i.e. when the prevailing set of governing ideas comes to be rejected in favour of an alternative (Stanley and Jackson 2016: 3). Thus, I have argued that different forms of cultural resistance to post-9/11 narrative hegemony, exemplified by the texts in the data set, can be best understood as operating on the epistemological level as part of a globalised affective groundswell that is symptomatic of the shift away from the rationalist paradigm. The specific narrative mechanisms of these forms of resistance are elaborated in response to Question 2 below.

2. What roles do aesthetics and multivalence play in shaping post-9/11 narratives of resistance?

In this thesis, aesthetics and multivalence have been shown to play a combined role in effecting resistance to post-9/11 narrative hegemony. To begin with aesthetics, whilst the normative positivist worldview tends to separate the arts from the political realm, Bleiker argues that a concern with aesthetics can cultivate “an open-ended level of sensibility about the political” which shines a light on “perspectives and people excluded from prevailing purviews” (2009: 2). Thus, it offers a way in to addressing the aforementioned blind spots surrounding the political reality of non-elites. Indeed, the creative impulse is argued here to play a key role in mobilising alternative political agency, since resistance in the present temporal context not only entails the contestation of widespread uncritical
assumptions about social reality, but also the active generation of new worldings that
counteract “the flattening of affective potentialities into a single narrative of futurity:
capitalist progress” (de Certeau 1984). There is a recognised overlap between aesthetics
and somatic affect (Pence 2004: 273), which is captured here through performance. A
variety of performative genres and subgenres have been explored over the course of the
data analysis: music (hip hop/punk/acoustic rock), comedy (satire) and parkour. All were
perceived as diverse forms of narrative, but also as ‘affective practices’ (Wetherell 2010:
4) inasmuch as they exceed the limits of abstracted, rationalist forms of expression and
actualise new spaces for social construction in the affective present. The aesthetic of
music, for example, was discussed in terms of its narrative properties; its ‘tellability’ being
derived in part from structures of repetition (normativeness) and breach. I equally
subscribe, however, to Deleuze and Guattari’s belief, cited in section 2.7, that music
dispatches ‘molecular flows’ – referring to the level of experience “where affects precede
meanings, and becomings precede identities” (Gilbert 2015: 36). Thus, music is viewed
here as a highly affective form of narrative expression, whose potential as a multimodal
vehicle of political dissent is particularly evident in the musical subgenre of hip hop,
where spoken language itself constitutes the musicality. Another aesthetic genre given
particular focus in the data analysis was comedy – in particular, satire. This was explored
contextually and temporally, and evaluated to be more high risk than hip hop in the light
of power differentials and cultural/religious sensitivities in the post-9/11 era; yet,
similarly to hip hop’s ability to bring to the surface new combinations of values (Martin
2010), certain forms of humour were shown to be effective in harnessing the absurdity of
life at the moment it materialises, and exposing “the rhetorical confusion and knee-jerk
pieties surrounding a charged subject” (Lim 2010) as a way to prevent the funnelling of
emerging reality back into stereotypical terms (Bennett and Edelman 1984: 164).

This brings us to the question of multivalence. Since the aesthetic by nature involves an
intimation of transcendence, it can reasonably be viewed as a powerful force for social
change in conditions of hegemony. Narrative theory in its current theorisations, however,
does not account for how social agents may come to subscribe to stories that contradict
their normative worldview. It is here that multivalence became instrumental in this study
of aesthetic narratives of resistance. As discussed in section 2.5, Bennett and Edelman
foreground contradiction and ambiguity as “the seedbed of creative use and creative reception” (1985: 170) – a site for social change premised on an acceptance of the inevitability of ambiguity, and an appreciation of the multiple realities evoked by it. They argue that creative artists may fashion alternative narratives out of combinations of existing ones to produce “new political narratives” which render previously familiar plots uncertain, and challenge the reader into fresh interpretations (1985: 170). Stroud takes this further in an intercultural context through his analysis of the textual function of multivalence, which he argues accounts for the ability of texts to travel beyond their original narrative location, thereby calling into question elements of Fisher’s paradigm for the assessment of narratives (2002: 373). Despite relying on the key notion of transcendental dissolution (2002: 386), however, Stroud neglects to mention the role of aesthetics in the process of value reconstruction in the auditor. I have argued that it is precisely the powerful draw of the aesthetic that keeps the reader/viewer engaged and open when confronted with the challenge of a multivalent text. Aesthetics – leading to positive affect in the viewer and widening the intercultural reach of the texts – were thus a requisite salient quality of all the texts in the data set. In view of the multimodal and diverse nature of the data set, I also extended the definition of multivalence to include the seeming contradiction within the texts not only of cultural value systems, but also of mood, genre, language and/or register; while temporal multivalence was posited as permeating all the texts on the meta level, reflecting the contradictions of the post-9/11 temporal impasse in which they are embedded.

Thus, aesthetic shock (‘shock’ referring to the immediacy of the affective present) was theorised as an emerging form of cultural resistance for non-elites at the precarious margins of the normative, where multiplicity and contradiction abound. Aesthetics and multivalence, it is argued, not only characterise such narratives, but also facilitate their travel into new narrative environments as they are mediated and circulate among transnational communities of affinity in the digital sphere. A greater focus in political and sociological analyses on these factors, I argue, may yield deeper insight into contemporary ways of thinking and being for those whose sense of belonging in the world is persistently obstructed by hegemonic narrative forces.
3. What features of post-9/11 narratives of resistance emerge as recurrent across different genres, languages and national contexts?

The combined use of aesthetics and multivalence as a salient feature of the texts was a condition of their inclusion in the data set, as was the post-9/11 temporal context of their production. Once assembled and interpreted within the same analytic frame, however, the diverse body of texts revealed patterns of consistency that emerged beyond the initial selection process, yielding further insight into the complexities of the unfolding historical moment from which they emerged. In the three texts comprising the first thematic category of 9/11 in section 4.2 ("Bin Laden" by Immortal Technique feat. Mos Def; "Episode 11" by Jean-Marie Bigard; and "Pero" by Mero), it was striking that different creative methods – including episodic narrative structuring, comic understatement, visual mapping of lyrics, and markedly fast speed of lyrical delivery – were employed across the artists’ different languages and national contexts to express and grapple with the same phenomenon: that of the “unmanageable surplus of meaning” (Cazdyn 2004/2010: 452) unleashed by the attacks on the meta level. This was made politically vital since none of the artists were convinced by the official version of events, thus the texts creatively emphasised the discrepancy between comfortable, hegemonic plots and the increasingly complex and precarious global situation. In doing so they exemplified how aesthetics can help to channel the surplus of meaning at the core of post-9/11 narrativity, bridging through affect challenging conceptual gaps where hegemonic rationalism alone is too limited.

The possibility of optimism read into these textual forms was subsequently tempered as the analysis progressed into the thematic section of the War on Terror (4.3). Here, temporal multivalence became the analytical fabric of the discussion, reflecting Berlant’s aforementioned description of the historical present as an impasse. This led to the observation that some of the texts of differing genres and national contexts went beyond Berlant’s theorisation of cruel optimism – i.e. disillusionment with the capitalist good life as the dominant contemporary affective structure. For certain artists on the ‘wrong’ side of the post-9/11 hegemonic binary, for whom precarity is not new but historical, identity-based, and largely unavoidable, it became apparent that cruel pessimism and longing for
ordinary regard (Da Costa 2014) were better descriptors for the vacillating affective structures infusing the creation of the texts. This was true of the Syrian collective Daya al Taseh’s comic text “The Prince”, discussed in section 4.3.2, but it was also evident in Abd al Malik’s case in the French national context, discussed in section 4.3.1, indicating that a subject’s positioning in the post-9/11 temporal order is not a straightforward question of geography as might be inferred from Da Costa’s analysis, which ignores the experience of oppressed minorities within Western national contexts.

Two textual features, perhaps best described as affective practices, were clearly identifiable across different genres and language communities, suggesting a common artistic drive to make sense of the complexities of the global age and utilise its affordances to move beyond the impasse. These were the creation of intimate publics (Berlant 2011), and conscious individualism. An intimate public was staged by Bigard in “Episode 11” through metalepsis – i.e. directly addressing the implied audience in a shared affective space – and was powerfully thrown into relief by the faceless FBI agents standing behind him; it was also evident in “Osamacide!” via news anchor Robert Foster’s personable engagement with the viewer; and in “The Parkour Guide to Gaza” when viewers were invited into the traceurs’ homes and offered food. The practice was viewed in these examples as a humanised or affective form of glocalisation, which encourages a sense of belonging in a fragmented digital sphere transected by hegemonic narratives of exclusion. Intimate publics were staged in less direct ways in some other texts, for example by Diam’s in “Enfants du désert” through intertextual referencing with a characterological bent; in Mero’s “Pero” through the sudden lyrical pronoun switch to “we”; visually in Lowkey’s “Terrorist?” through subtle written messages to the viewer; while metalepsis was used to slightly differing effect in The Taqwacores by the inclusion in the movie soundtrack of music from the actual cultural scene inspired by the fictional novel, collapsing the distinction between the diegetic and non-diegetic worlds as an identity space. Finally, the genre of hip hop was inherently fertile ground for this affective practice, with Immortal Technique & Mos Def, Abd al Malik, Lowkey, and Shadia Mansour & Ana Tijoux all addressing the viewing public directly in their lyrics and drawing them into their affective space as a form of political resistance premised on an aspiration towards belonging.
It was also from hip hop that the affective practice of conscious individualism emerged as a recurrent textual feature. This was based on the term ‘virtuous individualism’ used by Martin (2010) in describing the popular influence of French rapper Diam’s in the run up to the 2007 French presidential election, and accords with the notion of rappers as ‘dusty foot philosophers’ from a postcolonial perspective, discussed in section 4.3.1. Extending the application of the term beyond the genre of hip hop in the context of the thesis as a whole, conscious individualism was theorised as the expression of performative identities arising from individualistic capitalist culture, which hold a sustained artistic investment in communitarian value systems beyond their own commercial interests – an embodied form of meta awareness emerging from the precarious margins of mainstream society (Martin 2010: 265). Whilst rooted in a strong sense of self, it is emphatically not self-serving – indeed, we saw that Lowkey took a hiatus from the music scene precisely to avoid falling victim to the narcissism that comes with fame. Aside from the rappers in the data set, conscious individualism was evident in Bigard’s and the Juice Rap duo’s comedic performances in which they take centre stage; and although he does not appear in the film, Chris Morris arguably exercised conscious individualism in his decision to go public and do interviews about Four Lions to convey the authenticity of the project. The works of Michael Muhammad Knight and Daya al Taseh can also be seen in these terms, and the Gaza Parkour Team were given mainstream visibility thanks to Banksy’s established brand of conscious individualism.

The affective practices discussed here were in several cases undertaken outside the commercial structures of the entertainment industry and disseminated by networked communities of affinity precipitated by the texts in the digital sphere. Being audiovisual in format, this was aided by subtitling, which was either done by the producers of the texts, such as in Daya al Taseh’s “The Prince” from Arabic into English, and “The Parkour Guide to Gaza”’s intralingual English subtitles; or by volunteer subtitlers recruited by the artists, such as the Juice Rap duo, who produce the videos in English and actively ensure their circulation into other languages. Subtitles were also added later by fans, as discussed in section 5.3.2 with reference to “Somos sur”.
As elaborated in section 5.3, a theme that recurred across the texts was Palestine. Another recurring theme was that of neoliberal economic globalism being the real problem faced by non-elites in the post-9/11 order, rather than cultural or religious identity. In my interpretation, these themes unite the artists behind a common political objective: for viewers to perceive dehumanising terrorist rhetoric as a legitimising smokescreen for neoliberal warfare and dominance, which ultimately affects everyone, not just Muslims. This agenda was explicit in some texts, such as Lowkey’s “Terrorist?”; Immortal Technique & Mos Def’s “Bin Laden”; and Mero’s “Pero”. It was also expressed via the character of General Baxter in “Osamacide!”, and in Shadia Mansour & Ana Tijoux’s rallying cry of “Somos sur”. Meanwhile, the alienating/characterologically eroding effects of consumer culture were apparent in Omar’s terrorist pronouncements in Four Lions; in Diam’s’ exposition of the empty promises of materialism that led to her conversion to Islam; and in Lowkey’s rejection of the ego-inflating music scene. Michael Muhammad Knight’s notion of Wal Mart Islam and Daya al Taseh’s line “Whatsapp of the infidels” furthermore revealed how Islamic societies are equally implicated in these processes. These textual themes bring us to the fourth and final research question.

4. What is the relevance of ‘renarration’ to theorisations of post-9/11 narratives of resistance?

The term ‘renarration’ (Baker 2008) was discussed in section 2.7 in a translation studies context as a useful metaphor for translation practice that suggests the agency of the translator and privileges processes of meaning transfer over static textual units. For the purposes of the present analysis, the term more loosely refers to a form of agency operating on any level of narrative that engenders rupture, or perceptions of rupture, from established (normative) narrative structures. This was firstly of relevance to the study due to the multilingual nature of the data set, a choice motivated in part by the desire to buck the trend of globalisation research predicated on a monolingual basis (Pérez-González 2012: 6) and bring intercultural considerations into the analysis. To begin with, for conceptual practicality, the texts were treated in Chapter 4 as stable entities, and discussion of their subtitling was introduced towards the end of the chapter with reference to “Osamacide!” and “The Prince”. This brought attention to the idea of the
texts travelling across different language communities via globalised communities of affinity in the digital sphere.

This paved the way in Chapter 5 for a more substantial exploration of renarration as it relates to the texts. It has been my contention that the translational angle facilitates an epistemological shift away from hegemonic narrative constructions of the post-9/11 temporal order, which, as mentioned above under Research Question 1, are based on rationalist binary divides, static and essentialist understandings of identity, and a general intolerance for ambiguity. Despite originating from them, the complexities of economic globalism and digital media flows exceed these categories of thought – hence the need for more complex and far-reaching theorisations of post-9/11 narrativity that take into consideration the epistemological level. This conceptual exploration began with 9/11 itself and conflicting theories of rupture vs. continuity that emerged to account for the attacks. It was here that Deleuzian philosophy, in particular the model of the rhizome, came into play as an epistemological approach that carried the potential to unravel the paradoxes of the global age and usefully supplement contemporary applications of the narrative framework. In particular, renarration was likened to the rhizomatic process of deterritorialisation, i.e. the breaking up of order and boundaries to produce movement and change (Sutton and Martin Jones 2008: 6), which further illuminated the textual function of aesthetic shock as a form of political agency that seeks to unsettle normative narrative categorisations of being and thought and affectively evoke the temporality of futurity; in Deleuzian terms, as a new line of flight.

This was firstly explored in section 5.2 ‘Clash of Civilisations’ with respect to religious conversion, which was treated as a form of ontological renarration. The two texts analysed in this section showcased female characters (one fictional, one non-fictional) whose multivalent Muslim identities were viewed in the context of the study as examples of Deleuzian becoming-minoritarian. This allowed for an appreciation of their identities as constantly unfolding, never ‘finished’, and embodying difference within themselves as a potentiality to be actualised in a process of awakening to normative social (i.e. narrative) structures (Littler 2010: 224; Sutton and Martin-Jones 2008: 142). Furthermore, as explained in section 5.2.2, Deleuze and Guattari assert that becoming-minoritarian always
begins with becoming-woman; while narrative constructions of the feminine are a key concern for theorisations of post-9/11 narrativity, since gender identity and relations are a recurrent sticking point in West vs. Islam hegemonic narratives, as exemplified by the 2016 burkini debacle in France. Hence, in *The Taqwacores* – a feature film based on a book written by a white American male convert to Islam – attention was turned to how the character of Rabeya renarrated normative significations of the burqa, and rebelliously sidestepped fixed categories of womanhood to exist in the interstices on her own terms. A music video by popular French rapper Diam’s was subsequently presented that aesthetically performed her fluid process of conversion, thus reframing the aforementioned paradox of rupture vs. continuity on the ontological level. Through lyrical references to the desert and images of wide-open spaces, the text furthermore evoked the Deleuzian notions of nomad thought and the war machine operating at the ambivalent fringes of the state apparatus, which recalled the historically ambivalent figure of the translator as a “proliferator of discourses” (Littau 1997: 86). This emphasis on pluralisation accorded with the fact that the texts and identities therein were seen as multiplicities, and underscored the affirmative nature of aesthetic shock despite its divisive potential. This was particularly notable in Diam’s’ case as a female Muslim convert and public figure in the volatile French context.

Finally, drawing on the remaining two texts in the data set, section 5.3 explored the theme of Palestine for its renarrational potential at the meta level based on its unique global positioning at the frontiers of post-9/11 hegemony. The texts were again considered as multiplicities, this time connected to each other – by British-Palestinian rapper Shadia Mansour, who featured in both. In “The Parkour Guide to Gaza”, renarration was approached through the lens of spatial narratives via de Certeau’s notion of delinquent narrativity, viewing rupture from the fixedness of place in a hierarchal sense within the hegemonic temporal order as much as in relation to the material configurations of the urban environment. We saw how the parkour tour narrative acted to transcend the hegemonic mapping of the nation state system that compounds the military occupation of Palestine on an epistemological level, imbuing the deterritorialising practices of parkour and digital mediation with heightened import. The digital expansion of the Palestinian territory was continued in the carnivalesque rap music video “Somos
surr” – a collaboration by Mansour and French-Chilean rapper Ana Tijoux filmed on the streets of Chile and delivered in Spanish and Arabic, which was seen to renarrate hegemonic post-9/11 civilisational narratives by uniting the pluralised precarious masses of the world under the iconic banner of Palestine.

Thus, renarration has been used as means to introduce a Deleuzian epistemology to the narrative framework by placing emphasis on flows and difference above static conceptualisations of place and identity, be that through translation, parkour, religious conversion, or other narrative processes that involve perceptions of rupture. The textual combination of multivalence and aesthetics was revealed in this light as an affirmative pluralisation of what it means to be Muslim, or French, or Palestinian in the world, and to open new possibilities beyond the single dominant narrative of futurity: that of capitalist progress. It is hoped that this shift in focus might engender more nuanced perspectives of post-9/11 narrativity that can embrace ambiguity and complexity and help to resolve the contradictions of the temporal impasse.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the socio-narrative framework acknowledges the subjective and interpretive nature of any theoretical analysis, and discards notions of empirical objectivity. This principle has been especially apparent in the study due to the artistic character of the data set and the analytical focus on questions of popular culture and identity. It is heightened further by the philosophical complexity of concepts such as affect, power and temporality. Thus, no testable truth claims are made and the academic merit of the thesis relies instead on qualitative elements such as structural coherence and argumentational logic and persuasiveness. Whilst I do not view this as a weakness per se, it should be weighed against other methodological approaches and seen as contributing to a broader discussion about the issues at stake. It should furthermore be noted that such a discussion is necessarily interdisciplinary – as is this thesis – which is both a strength and a limitation insofar as mutually enriching connections can be made between disparate fields of study, but an interdisciplinary approach risks comparatively superficial
engagement with different theoretical approaches. It is my hope that this study has avoided these pitfalls as much as can be reasonably expected.

In selecting twelve texts in four languages structured across four broad themes, I hope to have provided a sense of the scale and diversity of post-9/11 narrativity, even as it is localised and experienced on the personal level. Distilling such a vast research context to twelve texts risks being overly reductive; conversely it is a large number for each to be covered in adequate depth within the confines of one study. Trade-offs while attempting to strike this balance were inevitable, and there remains much more to be said about every theme, text and theory included here. The initial choice of the texts was furthermore limited to the languages accessible to me (directly in the case of English, French and Spanish, and indirectly in the case of Arabic) as well as to my own knowledge of contemporary culture. Broadly, these issues relate to Berlant’s notion of conceiving of the historical present from within (2011: 4), that is, attempting to capture and make sense of constantly emergent phenomena with new material constantly being produced amid unfolding political events across the globe.

Lastly, another possible limitation of the study is that of using the rationalist epistemological framework while simultaneously critiquing it by drawing on Deleuzian philosophy. It should be emphasised that my aim has not been to reject the rationalist paradigm entirely; nonetheless I hope that the diversity of the data set and manner of conceptual exploration showcased here has enabled an intimation of the rhizomatic model of thought while adhering to the structural requirements of a doctoral thesis.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Further to the limitations of the study outlined above, it is apparent that many possible avenues exist for future research that would build on the present thesis. Beyond the addition of new audiovisual genres (e.g. computer games, animated cartoons, vlogs) and languages to the current data set, these might include methodological diversifications, for example interviews could be conducted with the artists to hear their testimonies on the production and meaning of the texts; and/or with viewers to gain further insight into the
texts’ audienceship and reception, and the degree to which they challenge or support pre-existing beliefs and worldviews. The inclusion of interpretative voices other than my own would undoubtedly be of immense value to the project as it stands.

Similarly, a more detailed exploration of the translation of the texts could be a fruitful next step. This could take the form of narrative analyses methodologically similar to the present one, that seek to trace the pluralisation of meaning of the texts as they travel through different national contexts and language communities. It could equally entail interviews with the translators themselves about their motivations and practice, or comparisons in audience response to subtitled and unsubtitled texts. New translations could even be carried out specifically for the purposes of the research, for example subtitles could be added to political rap music videos which rhyme; are visually performative in nature (Pérez-González 2014: 258); or contain additional contextual information through hyperlinks. Or indeed a dedicated online citizen media platform could be created to promote the subtitling and intercultural circulation of the texts. The translational angle has become particularly pertinent in the light of the 2016 refugee crisis, with a strong media focus on migratory flows and intercultural encounters, and a proliferation of online popular culture on this theme – much of which is subtitled.

Finally, another aspect of the study that merits further attention, I believe, is the observed surge in creativity connected to post-9/11 themes around the year 2010. To what extent can this be corroborated, and what further questions does it raise? Either way, we might ask how creative latitude can be maximised across the uneven landscape of globalisation, and what public spaces exist – or should exist – for cultural practices and discourses that seek to reframe the very terms upon which power is exercised.

6.5 Conclusion

In line with much narrative-based research, this thesis has been motivated by a desire to uncover and challenge the unexamined assumptions of power-based discourse that facilitate and sustain widespread patterns of domination and marginalisation (Baker 2006b: 470). It has done this by shining a spotlight on alternative narratives that are
performed and circulated among the non-elites of global society; narratives which resist not only the surface level of post-9/11 narrative hegemony, but also its epistemological foundations through use of aesthetics and multivalence. I have named the textual function in question ‘aesthetic shock’, understood here as part of an epistemological groundswell that is symptomatic of our time. It must be emphasised that the socio-political relevance of this study has only increased over the course of its writing, with the rise of ISIS as a deterritorialised mindset epitomising the clash of civilisations narrative in the vein of self-fulfilling prophecy, as well as the highly oppressive and volatile situation in France with respect to its Muslim minority, and the election of an American president who is openly hostile towards Muslims. It is my contention that the War on Terror – as the legitimising ideology of military invasion and occupation in Muslim lands and of deep societal divisions in Western countries – effectively acts as a smokescreen for a far more sinister “enemy within”: that of the increasingly serious divide between the powerful few and the vulnerable masses in the context of neoliberal capitalism. It is my hope that the present study has, at the very least, constructed a site of affirmation and optimism that might help to foster a more nuanced and open-ended view of our unfolding moment in history.
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# Appendix 1: Data Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Album / Series</th>
<th>Production company / Platform</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2004</td>
<td>Immortal Technique feat. Mos Def</td>
<td>“Bin Laden”</td>
<td>Music video</td>
<td>Hip Hop</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>03:56</td>
<td></td>
<td>Babygrande Records, Viper Records, iTunes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 2010</td>
<td>Eyad Zahra</td>
<td>The Taqwacores</td>
<td>Feature film</td>
<td>Drama / Punk</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>80:00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rumnami Filmworks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 2010</td>
<td>Chris Morris</td>
<td>Four Lions</td>
<td>Feature film</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>97:00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Film4 Productions, Warp Films</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 2011</td>
<td>Mero</td>
<td>“Pero (La evidencia del 11s)”</td>
<td>Music video</td>
<td>Acoustic Rock</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>05:31</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2014</td>
<td>Ana Tijoux feat. Shadia Mansour</td>
<td>“Somos sur”</td>
<td>Music video</td>
<td>Hip Hop</td>
<td>Spanish, Arabic</td>
<td>Chile, Palestine</td>
<td>03:46</td>
<td>Vengo</td>
<td>Spin online magazine, Nacional Records</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 2015</td>
<td>Daya al Taseh</td>
<td>“Episode 03: The Prince”</td>
<td>Sketch</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>02:50</td>
<td>ISIS</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dayaalTaseh.com">www.dayaalTaseh.com</a>, YouTube</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
[Intro: Mos Def talking]
Man, you hear this bullshit they be talkin'
Every day, man
It's like these motherfuckers is just like professional liars
YouknowwhatI'msayin? It's wild
Listen

[Hook: Mos Def]
*Bin Laden didn't blow up the projects*
It was you, nigga
Tell the truth, nigga
[Jadakiss] *(Bush knocked down the towers)*
Tell the truth, nigga
[Jadakiss] *(Bush knocked down the towers)*
Tell the truth, nigga

*Bin Laden didn't blow up the projects*
It was you, nigga
Tell the truth, nigga
[Jadakiss] *(Bush knocked down the towers)*
Tell the truth, nigga
[Jadakiss] *(Bush knocked down the towers)*

[Verse 1: Immortal Technique]
*I pledge no allegiance, nigga fuck the president's speeches*
I'm baptized by America and covered in leeches
The dirty water that bleaches your soul and your facial features
Drownin' you in propaganda that they spit through the speakers
And if you speak about the evil that the government does
The Patriot Act'll track you to the type of your blood
They try to frame you, and say you was tryna sell drugs
And throw a federal indictment on niggaz to show you love
This shit is run by fake Christians, fake politicians
Look at they mansions, then look at the conditions you live in
All they talk about is terrorism on television
They tell you to listen, but they don't really tell you they mission
They funded al-Qaeda, and now they blame the Muslim religion
Even though Bin Laden, was a CIA tactician
They gave him billions of dollars, and they funded his purpose
Fahrenheit 9/11, that’s just scratchin' the surface

[Hook]

[Verse 2: Immortal Technique]
They say the rebels in Iraq still fight for Saddam
But that's bullshit, I'll show you why it's totally wrong
Cuz if another country invaded the hood tonight
It'd be warfare through Harlem, and Washington Heights
I wouldn't be fightin' for Bush or White America's dream
I'd be fightin' for my people's survival and self-esteem
I wouldn't fight for racist churches from the south, my nigga
I'd be fightin' to keep the occupation out, my nigga
You ever clock someone who talk shit, or look at you wrong?
Imagine if they shot at you, and was rapin' your moms
And of course Saddam Hussein had chemical weapons
We sold him that shit, after Ronald Reagan's election
Mercenary contractors fightin' a new era
Corporate military bankin' off the war on terror
They controllin' the ghetto, with the failed attack
Tryna distract the fact that they engineerin' the crack
So I'm strapped like Lee Malvo holdin' a sniper rifle
These bullets'll touch your kids, and I don't mean like Michael
Your body be sent to the morgue, stripped down and recycled
I fire on house niggaz that support you and like you
Cuz innocent people get murdered in the struggle daily
And poor people never get shit and struggle daily
This ain't no alien conspiracy theory, this shit is real
Written on the dollar underneath the Masonic seal
Appendix 3: iTunes Store album review for S.O.S. by Diam’s (2009) [last accessed 8 December 2016]
Appendix 4: Lyrics Diam’s “Enfants du désert” (French and English versions)

Je suis sortie de ma bulle,
J'ai pris le temps de regarder le monde et d'observer la lune,
Donc voici la nouvelle Diam's en paix avec elle-même,
J’préfère qu’ça parte aux enfants du désert ok, ok
La vie n'est qu'une course et moi j'étais première dans les starters,
Qu'est-ce t'as à faire quand t'as pas de père hein ?
Dis-moi, qu'est-ce t'as à perdre ? Rien !
Alors tu cours après le flouze, tu coules, sous les coups tu l'ouvres,
Tu cours, tu cours, tu souffres et puis tu prouves,
Bah ouais mec ! Faut être honnête ! Mes troubles m'ont rendue poète
Au point qu'on mette à ma dispo de quoi me doucher au Moët
Hélicoptère, taxi et Jet, je suis montée sans mes tickets,
Du ter-ter t'accèdes au Ciel, mais tout à coup tu fais pitié,
Quand t'as de l'oseille ouais, trop peuvent crève, trop veulent test mec
Ton père revient te check, ton pire ennemi devient ton ex, ouais !
Petite princesse j' n'ai fait que fuir pour mieux reluire,
Première ou Business au pire, tant qu’ j'avais des sièges en cuir,
Dans cette course aux billets roses j'ai vu mourir mes héros,
Dans les coulisses, ça sent la coke et chez les stars c'est l'héro,
Moi comme une tache, j'ai couru après le commerce et les dollars,
Au point d'avoir au poignet la même Rolex que Nicolas
Alors j' suis

REFRAIN
Sortie de ma bulle,
J'ai pris le temps de regarder l'Afrique et de contempler la lune,
Cette société n'est qu'une enclume,
J'ai couru après le fric, quitte à y laisser ma plume,
Dans cette course au succès, j'crois que j'ai connu l'enfer,
Ma soeur, mon frère, j’préfère qu’ça parte aux enfants du désert,
Car je n'emporterai rien sous terre.

Alors j’ai défoncé des portes, collectionné les cartes à code,
Black ou Gold, après le iPhone il m' faut le Bold et le Ipod,
Et puis la Xbox connectée à la Wii Fit,
Soirée Sim's entre filles, on se connecte en Wifi,
Oui, je suis « in », on dit que j’ suis branchée, un peu comme vous tous,
Non, j’ veux pas vous déranger, j’passerai plus tard en Bluetooth,
A l’aise dans mes Air Force, je rêvasse en Airport,
Et puis j’écris des raps hardcore sur le tarmac d' l’aéroport,
J’ai à l’index la même bague que Carla,
Mais elle ne me sert à rien sous les étoiles de Dakhla,
Désert de sable contre désert de désespoir,
Elle a des airs de victoire ma jeunesse, mais pas le choix des armes,
Vu que l'Etat nous prive de tout, elle trime et tousse,
Poussée par le crime, elle trouve refuge dans le Din ou au trou,
Triste pays qui compte sur les voix de Le Pen,
Pour qu’accèdent au sommet des gros capitalistes de merde,
Alors j’ suis ☐

REFRAIN

Petite banlieusarde issue du 91, fière de mon Essonne,
Fière de mon essor, j’ voulais qu’ ma voix résonne dans tous les stores,
Et puis si Dieu teste les hommes, je veux être digne d’aimer,
Et à tous ceux qui triment, sachez qu’ je veux être digne de vous aider,
Parce qu’aujourd’hui j’ai tout connu, l’opulence et la thune,
La déprime, les écus, les ambulances et la rue,
Je sais de quoi je suis capable, je sais de quoi l'Etat est coupable,
Lui qui débloque des milliards, mais jamais pour le contribuable, non !
Moi la boulette, je suis patronne et millionnaire,
C'était soit l'humanitaire, soit tenter d'être billionaire,
J'ai fait mon choix et je t'émmerde, désormais qui m'aime me suive,
Désormais qui m'aime me traîne, beaucoup plus haut que je ne vise,
J'ai besoin d'aide dans ma révolte, besoin de vivres dans ma récolte,
Besoin des cris de mon public, car j'ai besoin de bénévoles,
A c'qui paraît on est des nazes, à c'qui paraît faudrait qu'on s'casse,
Venez, on sort de nos cases, venez, on se sert de Marianne pour
Sortir de nos bulles,
Et prendre le temps de regarder l'Afrique et de contempler la lune,
Cette société n'est qu'une enclume,
Elle nous fait courir après le fric, quitte à y laisser des plumes,
Dans cette course au succès, j'crois que l'on côtoie l'Enfer,
Ma soeur, mon frère, on est aussi des enfants du désert,
Et on a tous un rôle à jouer sur Terre,

Donc j'suis □

REFRAIN

Donc, j'suis sortie de ma bulle, sortie de ma bulle, sortie de ma bulle...
“Children Of The Desert”

I got out of my bubble
I took my time to look at the world and observe the moon
So here comes the new Diam’s, at peace with herself
I’d like for it to go to the children of the desert, okay, okay
Life is nothing but a race and I was first at the starting blocks
What can you do when you've got no father, uh?
Tell me, what have you got to lose? Nothing!
So you run after the dough, you sink, under the blows you start talking
You run, you run, you suffer and then you prove
Of course, man! You gotta be honest! My turmoils turned me into a poet
To the point where I'm offered so much Moët I could shower in it
Helicopter, taxi, private jet, I got in without a ticket
From the quarter to the sky, but suddenly people pity you
When you've got money too many can die, too many want to test you, man
Your father comes back to check on you, your worst enemy becomes your ex-boyfriend, yeah!
Little princess, all I did what run away to better shine
First or Business class, in the worst of cases, as long as I had a leather seat
In this race for the pink banknotes, I saw my heroes dying
Backstage it smells of cocaine, and in the houses of the stars it's heroine
Me, just like a stain, I ran after business and money
To the point where I had on my wrist the same Rolex as Nicolas
So I

[Chorus]
Got out of my bubble
I took my time to look at Africa and gaze at the moon
This society is nothing but an anvil
I ran after cash, to the risk of losing my quill
In this race for success, I think I've known Hell
My sister, my brother, I'd like for it to go to the children of the desert
Because I'm not taking anything underground with me

So I kicked doors down, collected credit cards
Black or Gold, after the iPhone I now need the Bold and the iPod
And the X-Box connected to the Wii Fit
Sim's evening between girlfriends, we're connected to the Wi-Fi network
Yes I'm "in", people say I'm trendy, just like each and every one of you
No, I don't want to bother you, I'll use my Bluetooth later on
Comfortable in my Air Force, I daydream in Airport
Then I compose hardcore rap songs on the airport’s tarmac
Around my forefinger is the same ring as Carla's
But it's of no use under the stars of Dakhla
Sand desert against despair desert
It looks a bit like victory, my youth, but it isn't allowed to choose its arms
Since the State deprives us of everything, it slaves away and coughs
Driven by crime, it takes shelter in religion or in jail
A sad country which counts of the votes of Le Pen
So that big shitty capitalists can get on top of the social ladder
So I

[Chorus]

Little girl from the suburbs of the 91th, proud of my Essone
Proud of my rising, I wanted my voice to be heard in every store
And if God tests mankind, I want to be worthy of love
And to all of those who slave away, know that I want to be worthy of helping you
Because to this day I've know everything, wealth and dough,
Depression, crowns, ambulances and street life
I know what I'm capable of, I know what the State is guilty of
The State which releases billions, but never for the taxpayers, no!
Me, 'La boulette', I'm owner and millionaire
It was either humanitarian help or trying to become a billionaire
I made my choice and to Hell with you, may those who love me follow me
Now may those who love me drag me, way higher than I aim for
I need some help for my revolution, I need some supplies for my harvest
I need the shouts of my public, because I need volunteers
People say we’re stupid and that we should leave
Come on, we’re getting out of our huts, we use Marianne to
Get out of our bubbles
And take the time to look at Africa and gaze at the moon
This society is nothing but an anvil
It makes us run after cash, to the risk of getting hurt
In this race for success, I think we rub shoulders with Hell
My sister, my brother, we too are children of the desert
And we all have a role to play on Earth
So I

[Chorus]

So I got out of my bubble, got out of my bubble, got out of my bubble