

Transformations

ISSN 1444-3775

2011 Issue No. 19 — Rancière: Politics, Art & Sense

The Spare Image in an Unsparing World: Framing the Soldier in an Indeterminate War

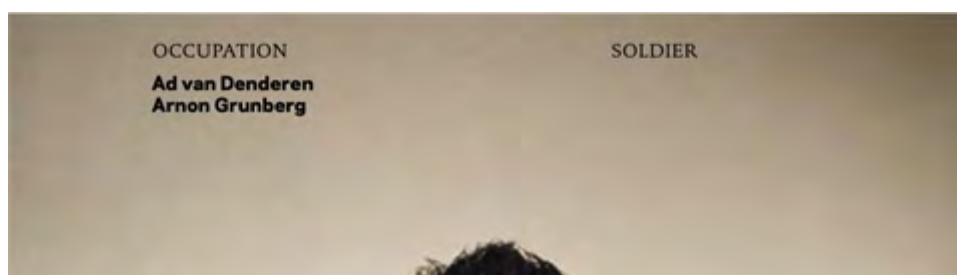
By Sudeep Dasgupta

[1]

“The work which builds understanding and dissolves appearances kills the strangeness of the resistant appearance that attests to the non-necessary and intolerable character of a world” Rancière, “Problems and Transformations in Critical Art” (45)

In the midst of the multiple wars being waged around the world, the image of the soldier proliferates in fiction films, documentaries, photography and art. This very proliferation of the image undermines semantic consistency, unfixing it from any pre-ascribed meaning. For all that, no happy pluralism of meanings is achieved. A cultural dominant is surely emerging among the welter of meanings and an example of this dominance is discernible for example in Tim Hetherington’s much lauded documentary *Restrepo* (2010) and Kathryn Bigelow’s *Hurt Locker* (2009). Tim Sharp in *The Independent* described Hetherington’s photobook *Infidel* (2010) as a collection of “intimate portraits of US soldiers at rest” which in their “sleeping beauty” belie “the danger of their situation.” [2] The “intimacy” of such portraits of the everyday life of soldiers distances the work of war from combat to focus on individual “combat fatigue” instead and stages the life of the soldier as a complex of stress, aggression, danger, boredom, exhaustion and banality. This multi-perspectival figuring of the soldier has gained dominance in contemporary visual culture and its ideological function combines discourses of aestheticism (“sleeping beauty”), brute reality (“danger”) and banality.

In this context, Ad van Denderen’s book of photographs *Occupation Soldier* (2009) stands out precisely because it avoids either the pathos or aestheticism of the everyday life of the soldier. [3] Van Denderen avoids the newly emerging cultural dominant of the multi-faceted “beauty” of the exhausted soldier in his complex individuality. Instead, he highlights the framing of the soldier as an object of the camera lens, calling attention to the contemporary mode of visibility through which the soldier emerges as the surface on which so many perspectives of the reality of war are projected. The cover of the book *Occupation Soldier* has circulated as a detached image from the



book, in posters on street walls and in the displays of bookshops, in newspapers and magazine pages. This essay will



analyze this one photograph as a *spare image*, which eschews the bombastic aestheticism of the contemporary “perpetual emotion machines” (Anderson 89) of visual culture. By staging the intolerable character of war outside the histrionics of aestheticised aggression or contemplative beauty, the image, in its muteness and sparseness, speaks volubly on the contemporary *framing* of the soldier as object of contemplation while countering the

“artistic” renditions of soldiers so prevalent today. In its muted, almost passive rendition of the soldier, the spare image is a riposte to the spectacular and aestheticised renditions of war by making sense of it otherwise. [4]

The spare image is marked by a distancing yet interrogative stance toward the object. Encouraging engagement precisely by the scarcity of sensorial elements in the image, it redirects the visual encounter away from immersion while nevertheless maintaining an invitation to interrogate and explore. The spare image invites a distanced engagement through interrogation rather than through the paradoxical passivity of immersion. The sparseness of the image thus avoids both a traditional contemplative stance and a sensorially-intense immersive one. Its logic is not that of aestheticization but the modest and silent foregrounding of the object in its staging. Where contemplation erases the staging of “beauty” for example, the spare image produces an interrogative distance from which to contemplate the staging of the object as an object of contemplation. Eschewing bombast, sensorial overload and the aestheticised composition of the elements of the image, in its modesty and muteness the spare image volubly speaks by posing questions.

Framing the Image

The cover photograph of *Occupation Soldier* did not circulate in a vacuum. It is important to recall that in 2009 within the Dutch context, there were growing qualms both in the general public and in the coalition government, around the Dutch involvement in Afghanistan. The indeterminacy between occupying a land as part of a multinational armed force and purportedly doing humanitarian work was highlighted by casualties suffered by the Dutch detachment. The coalition government fell around precisely this question of engagement in Afghanistan. The subsequent government formed in 2010 could not escape the consequences of the ambiguous role

of military intervention in Afghanistan. Soon after the new coalition was formed, a debate began to rage around a new proposal to despatch Dutch forces to train police personnel in Afghanistan. But sending this detachment of forces could not be separated from possible attachments which could develop in Afghanistan. In particular, could the training of police personnel for defence be separated from the military purposes of attack? Could the aim of training for the defence of civilians be separated from the ongoing military engagements with insurgents? The impossibility of controlling the consequences of sending a Dutch detachment highlighted that attachment and detachment could not be separated, that soldiering for purposes of attack in war and training for purposes of defence of civilians were inextricably linked. Protecting civilians by policing criminals and attacking insurgents in an international war cannot be separated.

The two words "Occupation Soldier" signal a designation, but one which has a double meaning. Firstly, "Occupation soldier" signifies a particular *kind* of designation. The first word "Occupation" functions as an adjective to the noun "soldier." This *kind* of soldier is not one that wages war and then leaves a territory, but by "occupying" it, perpetuates an ambiguous situation of continuous war rather than "perpetual peace" (Kant). The current controversy about whether a police force can take on a military function attests to this dilemma. Paradoxically, it seems that perpetual war and perpetual peace have become indistinguishable. This ambiguity of detachment becoming a sustaining attachment is captured in the name "Operation Enduring Freedom" given to the initial military effort. The ambiguity resides in the fact that the Dutch, along with the other occupying forces, formed part of what has been officially termed a "3-D" approach – Development, Diplomacy, and Defence, which paradoxically necessitates attack as an integral component of it. Detachment and attachment, defence and attack, civilian involvement and military engagement, are combined in a manner whose effects cannot be predicted, the one often spilling into the other. Indeed, the growing opposition to this uncontrollable situation, in the Netherlands, and elsewhere, was a consequence of the impossibility of separating one from the other. The fall of the previous government was predicated on this indiscernibility which the present government continues to be embroiled in.

The encounter with the photograph and the words of the book title begins a process of reframing that signals this ambiguity. The historical and political context of the Dutch engagement in the war in Afghanistan, and the mode of framing the image in *Occupation Soldier* coincide. For the image and the text that comprise this spare image partake in the staging of a world where the sensible apprehension of the politics of war and the play with the senses occupy the same social surface. In this common world, where making sense of war and sensing a world in which images circulate are inseparable, the spare image interrupts the valourisation of the soldier as an aesthetic object of contemplation and redirects the senses toward an active interrogation of the figure of the soldier. The static, posed and explicitly framed image of the soldier speaks in its sparseness, by posing in its turn questions around the relationship between the meaning of war and the images of those who participate in it. The ambiguity between detachment and attachment in military strategy and the play between the two in the photographic image exacerbate the uncertainty of the meaning of the soldier. The "contingency of patterns of social meaning and forms" (Ross 128) reveals a productive and disruptive understanding of the potential of art as one element in staging a social world rent by war. How can what Walter Benjamin excoriated as the aestheticisation of war be countered, not by rejecting "aesthetics" but reframing it to exploit its link with politics?

Sensing the World

In "The Ideology of the Aesthetic," Terry Eagleton (1983) argues that the ideological character of the discourse on aesthetics derives its power through a particular coordination of sense with understanding. Eagleton argues "the 'aesthetic,' at least in its original formulations, has little enough to do with art. It denotes instead a whole program of social, psychological and political reconstruction on the part of the early European bourgeoisie" (327). The aesthetic as the realm of

the bodily, of sensations and intuitions, as opposed to logical rationality and understanding, was a crucial historical resource in consolidating social power precisely because sensate life posed a threat to the developing philosophical reliance on rationality and understanding as the basis for the definition of man. He argues:

It is as though philosophy suddenly wakes up to the fact that there is a dense, swarming territory beyond its own mental enclave, threatening to fall utterly outside its sway. That territory is nothing less than the whole of our sensate life - the business of affections and aversions, of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces, of what takes root in the guts and the gaze and all that arises from our most banal, biological insertion into the world. The aesthetic is thus the first stirrings of a primitive, incipient materialism, politically quite indispensable: for how can everything that belongs to a society's somatic, sensational life - "experience," in a word - be allowed to fall outside the circuit of its reason? (328)

It is precisely in this sense, that the sensory encounter with the image of the soldier is part of a politically-interested staging of the experience of a society at war. The argument below derives from the potential of the senses to be re-oriented through the spare image, redirecting sensate life away from the contemporary spectacularisation of war as an aesthetic experience of contemplation to interrogate the common-sensical assumptions that ground it.

In Eagleton's account, the place of the aesthetic in consolidating bourgeois social power is developed convincingly precisely because the "common-sensical" is revealed as ideological and not neutral or natural; the sensual is seen through the lens of a specific coordination with understanding. His argument is right in its critical reading of the place of sense in understanding ideology, though it is limited as well, since he sees sense primarily as a resource colonised by the bourgeoisie for its own material and ideological interests. But need sense and the entire realm of sensate life be cast only in this negative light? And need the aesthetic be framed only as ideology?

Jacques Rancière proffers an answer by forging a particular relationship between understanding and sense. Or rather, between the two senses of sense, sense as meaning ("understanding"), and sense as the *sensible*, as that which is felt through the senses. Recently, he has increasingly systematised his writings on aesthetics by producing categories of aesthetic strategies, which in their complex inter-relation recuperate the realm of the senses from Eagleton's baleful characterization casting them as a critical resource in interrogating how the world is staged. In what follows, his recent work on aesthetics will itself be framed through an exploration of the indiscernible boundaries that separate detachment from attachment. Detachment and attachment emerge as continuing and crucial *modes* through which the tolerable or intolerable "character of a world" is staged, apprehended and misunderstood. By analysing *Occupation Soldier* through a discussion of detachment and attachment, the essay deepens, inflects and extends the sense-art relationship in Rancière's argument.

While detachment suggests the opposite of attachment, how they *relate* to the other is a deeply political question. Detachment, for example, is precisely what attaches a military force to a population elsewhere. The transformation of an opposition into a substitution is one example of the shifts that the labour of war, and its framing in images, accomplishes. Visual encounters also foreground that frames are themselves detachable - indeed, their detachability is the very condition of possibility of their labour. Foregrounding the politics of detachment and attachment frames encounters with images of war as politically productive visual encounters. The contingent relation between detachment and attachment makes possible thinking of transformation, equalisation, substitution as operations in war, and operations in images.

Rancière (1998), like Eagleton, does acknowledge that the sensate potentialities of humans have been circumscribed according to the dictates of what he terms the "police" regime, which

apportions particular social positions to particular capabilities. Workers are incapable of aesthetic appreciation, the story goes, precisely because their being as workers precludes the possibility of appreciation of beauty. Unlike Eagleton however, who focuses on this ideological circumscription of sensate life, Rancière (1989) reveals how the history of nineteenth century workers' movements is exemplary of the deliberate transgression of such aesthetic norms, where workers engaged in writing poetry, imagining and constructing alternative worlds which derived from and deranged bourgeois desires and interests. Where Eagleton sees aesthetics as only hegemonic power, Rancière sees aesthetics as a resource against hegemonic power too. Alison Ross (2009) succinctly puts it: "The connection between Jacques Rancière's political theory and his writing on art pivots on a conception of the contingency of patterns of social meaning and order" (128). This linking of aesthetics to social resistance rather than social power in Rancière's work was continued by engaging with specific discourses on art and aesthetics.

A twinned historical perspective on "sense" provides a suitable framing for an understanding of the place of the sensible in Rancière's argument. [5] The first traces Rancière's argument by moving backward to the crucial place of Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Schiller's *Letters* begin by promising an enquiry into Beauty but very quickly it becomes apparent that both the understanding of aesthetics, and the focus on education will be transformed beyond narrow considerations of art. Technical rationality ("understanding" in the epigraph above), evidenced in philosophy, is one place where utility's growing predominance of the senses becomes apparent. Schiller argues "[I]n this great balance of utility, the spiritual service of art has no weight, and, deprived of all encouragement, it vanishes from the noisy Vanity Fair of our time The very spirit of philosophical inquiry itself robs the imagination of one promise after another, and the frontiers of art are narrowed, in proportion as the limits of science are enlarged" (4). The robbing of imagination is tied to the narrowing of "the frontiers of art" and the expansion of the reach of science. This diagnosis sounds familiar enough, yet already in 1800, Schiller undermines any temptation to simplistically valorize the free-play of the imagination, and foresees the compromised character of surrealist forms of day-dreaming or the unconscious as the realm of revolution. The aesthetic becomes precisely the complex and continual knotting together of sense and sensation, the affective and the comprehensible. Secondly, this play is integrally political, for already in Letter II, the "theatre of political events" is central to the play of aesthetic education (in the wake of the French Revolution, the Weimar Romantics would not extricate the political from the aesthetic).

The reciprocal determination of subject and object keeps missing the trajectory of the other, and in the swerving of these determinations, the human subject comes into play, as the play between subjective and objective determination. The "instinct (*Trieb*) of play" renders "both our formal and material and formal constitution contingent" (27-8), he argues in Letter IV. The formlessness of sensually encountered objective matter, and the formalizing impulse of the human subject define the human as the playing human. The object of the play instinct, represented in a general statement, may therefore bear the name of living form; a term that serves to describe all aesthetic qualities of phenomena, and what people style, in the widest sense, beauty. (28, Letter XV). Beauty emerges not as the product of an artistic genius but as the object of the play instinct between form and matter. Schiller goes on: "There shall be a communion between the formal impulse and the material impulse - that is, there shall be a play instinct - because it is only the unity of reality with the form, of the accidental with the necessary, of the passive state with freedom, that the conception of humanity is completed" (Letter XV).

Keeping the frame of detachment and attachment in mind, a number of points may be made: firstly, the expansion of logical thought exemplified in philosophy that underscores the detachment of sense from understanding as a *historical* phenomenon; secondly, the aesthetic and therefore political education of humanity consists in the *articulation* of sense to understanding, coordinating every aesthetic encounter as the configuration of sense and understanding, matter

and form. Precisely because sense and understanding are separable, detachable components of the aesthetic encounter, their detachability is the condition of possibility for thinking the contingency of the aesthetic encounter; thirdly, sense does not override understanding or vice versa, rather it is the *play* between the two which comprises aesthetic education; fourthly, play is the crucial “essence” of what comprises being human, and humanity must be understood as always only contingently “completed.”

This retrospective account of Schiller’s notion of play and the place of sense in this argument can be thought through the most recent argument made by Rancière (2009) in his essay “Problems and Transformations of Critical Art.” Echoing Schiller’s critique of rationality, Rancière claims “the work which builds understanding and dissolves appearances kills the strangeness of the resistant appearance that attests to the non-necessary and intolerable character of a world” (45). Here again, “understanding” gives form to resistant materiality and constrains it within the protocols of logical thought and received frames of comprehension, thus constraining the sensible experience of the world’s fleeting contingent character and sedimenting this experience into finite, known “meaning.” [6] In terms of the present argument, the sensate staging of a world at war is made to mean through coordinating the senses towards a “comprehension” of war and erasing all contingency. The importance of saving sense from the power of understanding, and putting it *into play* with understanding is the basis of Rancière’s notion of the “*partage du sensible*.” Framing Rancière’s argument through detachment is revealing. Firstly, aesthetics is political precisely because sense can be detached from understanding, the “police regime” functions precisely by closing the gap between sense and understanding, attaching them to each other, often by converting ideology into *common* sense. Secondly, the status of the “common” is precisely what is at stake in politics. “Partage” itself separates and conjoins two meanings in one word. The power of the word resides in detaching *partage* as sharing in common with *partage* as that which separates and distributes differentially. The modalities of detachment and attachment structure the multiple meanings of the word “partage.”

Critical art is to be understood in the oscillation between pure form and pure meaning. Rancière argues that it is better to see “the plurality of ways in which they [art and politics] are linked” (46) rather than simply label this or that kind of art as political or critical. Plurality here is the plurality of the ways in which the separate, detachable realms of sense and meaning are knotted together, and the ways in which these contingent attachments reverberate in the separate though linked spheres of aesthetics and politics: “Critical art has to negotiate between the tension which pushes art towards ‘life’ as well as that which, conversely, sets aesthetic *sensoriality* apart from the other forms of sensory experience” (46, emphasis added). He goes on that critical art is “capable of speaking twice over: on the basis of their legibility and their illegibility” (46). The illegibility of critical art resides in resistant materiality, or in Schiller’s terms in pure matter (*Stoff*), while legibility is conferred by converting the resistant materiality of forms into understanding. The criticality of art derives from the *play* between the illegibility engendered by sense not yet converted into understanding, and legibility that seeks to understand and convert sensoriality into meaning. [7]

The “aesthetic revolution” (Rancière, “The Aesthetic Revolution”) puts into play a contingent relationship between the sense as sense and sense as meaning. This notion of play between the two senses of sense (as sense and meaning) is then categorized through their *historical* forms of appearance in contemporary art (“Problems”). The historical specificity of these categories cannot be over-emphasised. They are also linked to each other in multiple configurations. That is, no artwork or aesthetic encounter can neatly fall into just *one* of the categories. Rancière argues:

[T]he sensible heterogeneity on which art feeds in the aesthetic age can be found anywhere at all and most especially on the very terrain from which purists want to divest it . . . by becoming obsolete, unfit for consumption, any old commodity, any object of use whatsoever, becomes available for art, and in diverse ways it can be

separated or conjoined as a disinterested object of satisfaction, as a body ciphering a story, or as a witness to an unassimilable strangeness. (50)

This is the “third way,” the “political third” (51) of art. This rendition of the “political third” of art, moving beyond the first and second, sense and understanding distinctions, lays the ground for understanding contemporary art. It is striking again that detachability and attachability figure prominently. At the art-historical level, the third way implies that the self-same object can become detached from itself and become other *at the same time*. The heterogeneity of art means that that artwork is both art and non-art, an object of aesthetic pleasure in the traditional sense and just any other kind of disposable, utilitarian or commodity object. The artwork is both the object of detached aesthetic contemplation *and* a “body ciphering a story,” open to interpretation and the ascription of meaning. With regard to the political dimension of aesthetics, and the staging of a sensible world, this “political third” also *expands* the understanding of sensoriality and art since *every* sensory encounter links politics to aesthetics. It is in this context of the openings provided by the political third of “sensorial heterogeneity” that Rancière (“Problems”) offers four forms through which contemporary art may be understood.

[1] *Play* is the form through which art “claims at once to sharpen our perception of the interplay of signs, our awareness of the fragility of the procedures of reading these same signs, and our pleasure in playing with the undecidability” (54). It marks the transition of art from the dialectical clash and the provocation of shock to a “ludic register” (54).

[2] *Inventory* is the “encounter of heterogeneous elements” that no longer “aims to provoke a critical shock” but to “reappropriate the world of things, seize back their potential for the shared history that critical art dissolved into manipulable signs” (54-5). Rancière argues that “[I]n the space reserved for art the artist strives to make visible the arts of doing which exist scattered throughout society” (55-6).

[3] *Encounter/Invitation* is a form of aesthetic experience where the artist transforms exhibition space so as “no longer to create objects, but situations and encounters” (56). Art “no longer tries to respond to an excess of commodities and signs but rather to a lack of bonds” (57).

[4] *Mystery* also attempts to respond to the lack of a social bond though it does this by both attaching and detaching elements “cut out of the same sensible fabric and are always open to being linked together [through] “ ‘the fraternity of metaphors’ [Godard’s *Histoire(s) du cinéma*]” (58). These artworks veer “towards a wholly indifferent interest in the indefinite boundaries between the familiar and the foreign, the real and the symbolic” (59).

In all of the above categories, detachment and attachment figure prominently even though Rancière does not formulate it explicitly. *Play* depends on an “interplay” between signs that are detachable from each other, just as the possible meanings of these signs are separable from and therefore combinable with each other. A soldier’s helmet for example is both sign of militarism and bellicosity, a designed object appreciable for its form, an upturnable vessel for placing an object, and a sign of nationalism. A piece of clothing is both a utilitarian object, a sign, and a combination of functionality and signification. The heterogeneity of the elements in an *inventory* make their attachability precisely the *mode* through which their belonging to a common world is produced by the artist. The heterogeneity of the objects populating exhibition space is the result of the blurring of the lines between spaces detached from each other, that is, museum and gallery space from the external world outside the walls of a museum or the white cube of the gallery. *Invitation* responds to the detachment of situations and people through the breakdown of the social bond and reattaches them to each other through invitations for social interaction within exhibition space. *Mystery* exploits the expanded common terrain of the entire world of the sensible world, taking images and sounds and sensorial experiences out of their specific contexts and reconstellating them by weaving them into new sensorial experiences. However, unlike the

inventory, this form of critical art downplays their heterogeneity, substituting instead their almost indiscernible specificity and materiality. The twin perspectives of detachment and attachment within these four forms of critical art, and the crucial play between sense and meaning will now be brought into play again, through a reading of Ad van Denderen's *Occupation Soldier*.

Reframing the Image

Sensoriality extends beyond the specific artwork to the aesthetic experience of the world itself. Art and sense, when understood through Rancière's argument of the "aesthetic revolution" and "the political third" above, are thus crucially related to the *experience* of the world and its intolerability. War is directly relevant to this argument, for war is a form of intolerability often made tolerable through discourses of political or nationalist or civilisational discourses of expediency. War is also, of course, a series of operations, often military, which combine detachment and attachment of military forces, civilians (refugees, for example) and material (bombs, aircraft, tanks).



The words of the title, and photograph displayed on its cover, explicitly foreground framing and the ambiguous relation which detaches and attaches the words from each other, and the photograph from the words. The words are, of course, also images, and by their placement, the relationship of the words "Occupation" and "Soldier" to each other starts to become problematised. The first word "Occupation" is placed on the extreme top left while the second word "Soldier" is placed, not immediately next to the first, but to the top right. A significant, and signifying space separates the two

words.



If read or heard as words immediately following each other, the title, as mentioned earlier, reads like a designation of a type of soldier. However, seeing the words as images forces an acknowledgement of the gap between the two, transforming what was a designation of a type of soldier into the more neutral identification of a kind of work – “Occupation” (space, or silence) “Soldier.” The words in the image which frame the photograph can thus be figured in two ways: Occupation + Soldier, where the “+” sign signifies the absence of a gap describing a kind of soldier; and Occupation – Soldier where the gap between the two words is a neutral designation. The occupation of the *person* is identified as that of a soldier in the second, visually-spurred meaning, which stands alongside the earlier meaning not of a person but a *kind of soldier*. Encountering the words as images and noticing the significant spatial gap between them, while also reading the words as words immediately following each other, refracts the surface of the book and calls attention to the fractured historical moment of its inscription.

The spatial gap between the two words “Occupation” and “Soldier” functions like a border, doing two things at once. It detaches the words from each other, producing a neutral meaning, and it attaches the words to each other producing a problematic and critical meaning: that of a soldier occupying another’s territory. The space separating the two words has two senses: it is apprehending by the viewer as pure space, as an empty materiality, that takes on a solidity of its own. The space is both empty and material. On the other hand, the space between the two words “Occupation” and “Soldier” also *produces* sense as it suggests a double meaning -- Soldiering as a

job, a neutral designation, and occupation as an adjective attached to soldiering, a critical designation. The surface of the photograph becomes the surface on which is put into play these two senses of sense as pure materiality and pure meaning. This play (*jeu*), Rancière's first category, enters into a relation with the fourth, mystery, by producing a destabilization of meaning that is modest and gradual rather than bombastic, shocking or preachy. This is why the photograph is a *sparse* image. In its sparseness the photograph forms part of the sensory world, circulating in public space and staging a certain form of the social world that is rent by war.

The photograph which accompanies the title, as text and image, or text as image, furthers an interrogation of war by foregrounding framing. It is a photograph of the registration of a recruit



of the First Airborne Division. If the registration is the framing of a recruit in his transformation into a soldier by the military, its registration by the photographer's camera reframes the first. The double-framing underscores the soldier as a *staged object* of the lens rather than a "found object" for example, captured in the "everyday life of waging war" – no "intimacy," banality or "beauty" here. The recruit is posed holding up a placard on which his military number is inscribed. This is an odd image to encounter, precisely because the routine registration of recruits by the

military does not often enter public space. The image directly conjures up another meaning of "framing": the frame-up of the criminal, even though it is perhaps a form of framing carried out routinely during registration. The image as frame is the effect of two actions, a military and a photographic registration. The doubly-framed image can be read as highlighting the discursive coincidence of military occupation with that of a soldier's occupation. This discursive coincidence is also a photographic coincidence. Van Denderen is photographing a soldier who is being photographed by the military. We do not know if the soldier posed at different moments for this photograph - first for the military and then again for van Denderen, or whether van Denderen took the photograph at the same time that it was taken by the military. This strategy of staging through reframing is reminiscent of previous artworks. Louise Lawlor, Sherrie Levine, Hal Prince, Cindy Sherman and others have in different ways, through reposing, reframing and reproducing originals drawn attention to the ideologies of authorship and hegemonic framings of visual culture. In van Denderen's case, a particular twist is given to this strategy. Given that military

framings of the soldier in his or her passage from recruit to soldier are not only rare in public visual culture, but hardly canonical, there is no original that is being reframed for *us*. He reframes a missing original. In that sense, the reframing is a framing of an absent initial frame, turning the image itself into a frame.

Describing the location of the frame in *Truth in Painting*, Derrida writes “The parergon inscribes something which comes as an extra, exterior to the proper field . . . but whose transcendent exteriority comes to play, abut onto, brush against, rub, press against the limit itself and intervene in the inside only to the extent that the inside is lacking. It [the inside] is lacking in something and lacking from itself” (56). Derrida suggests a counter-intuitive thinking together of an intervention from the outside by the frame into an inside that both resists (“press against”) and is structurally open (“lacking in something”). The undecidable location of the frame is a consequence of it being both an addition (“extra, exterior”) and a *necessary* filling-in of a lack. In van Denderen’s image, the frame comes into play by putting into play the border between what comprises an image (the soldier) and what frames it. The “proper” place of the image *within* a frame is undone. Since the military’s framing of the soldier is the object of van Denderen’s camera lens, the coincidence of the image with the frame is one consequence of the unstable relation (“brush against, rub...intervene in the inside”) between inside and outside. In this sense, the image of the soldier puts into play the inability to separate image from its framing given the undecidable relation between the two.

The frame becomes the picture in another way too: detachment, as Derrida argues, suggests the following: the “separation of a member” and the “delegation of a representative; sign or symbol charged *on assignment*” (39, emphasis added). Military missions *as occupations* are coordinated precisely through detachments – a detachment, from the French word *détachement* [8] is a section of the army sent out from home territory beyond its borders. Less semiotic than military, detachment in framing as the more neutral “delegation of a representative: sign or symbol” is charged, in war, with a mission. A detachment force now has as its mission occupation. The ideological dimensions of the term “military detachment” are highlighted in the encounter with the photographic image which soldiers occupation with soldiering.

Like the text which is split and conjoined in two words “Occupation” and “Soldier,” the photograph can also be sensed as the conjunction of different elements. Some of these elements include the items of clothing the soldier is wearing. The torso of the soldier is covered by



recognizable military fatigue material. But as the eye travels down the photograph, one sees blue jeans and a white belt, which do not comprise the expected uniform of a

soldier. The military and civilian combination which covers the soldier’s body comprise, in Rancière’s terms, something like an “inventory” of disparate objects on the same surface, akin to the surrealist surface where incommensurable elements are brought into contact on the same surface. The combination of civilian and military clothing make the border between war and peace, attack and defence indiscernible. Keeping in mind that the invasion of Afghanistan by multinational troops was sold to the world as a military and a *humanitarian* operation, the political and semiotic indeterminacy of this form of detachment and attachment is figured in the play between the civilian items of clothing (white belt, blue jeans) and the military garb of the jacket/shirt.

In his essay “The Intolerable Image,” Rancière argues that the image is “not a duplicate of a thing.

It is a complex set of relations between the visible and the invisible, the visible and speech, the said and the unsaid" (93). By producing on the same surface a multiplicity of relations between image, word and speech, the frame *as image* produces "a certain connection between the verbal and the visual" (95), the words and the photograph, thus bringing to crisis the ideological equalisation of war with peace, defence with attack, unsociability with sociability. With the choice of words "Occupation Soldier," the gap between the two, the framing of the soldier, and the specific items of clothing, all become elements whose manipulation produces an array of meetings. The objects are both pure sensory stimulation, as images and outlines and colours, and the very material for making meaning. Yet, the words and the image are not coordinated to *fix* meaning; rather, they produce indeterminacy and put into play multiple senses of the word and image of the soldier. Crucially, this indeterminacy and play produce historically-specific meanings, meanings which have a critical function in problematising the meaning and effects of war. This muted, static photograph of the staging of a civilian becoming a soldier is a *spare image* that avoids the contemplative stance of admiring in a detached way the aesthetic beauty of an object (the soldier), underscoring instead the soldier as a staged, framed object in the making. In its spareness, the image volubly underlines the indeterminate character of contemporary war as peace-keeping.

Detachment and attachment operate on two levels. At the level of sense as sensation, the letters/images of the words, and the images themselves, and crucially the *space* between the words, produce on the same sensible fabric of the page an *inventory* of multiple elements. Sights, images, spaces and forms are detached and attached in multiple ways, as the reading above has shown. Detachment also works on the other level of sense as meaning, with the shifting relationship of detachment versus attachment, detachment *as* attachment being the modes through van Denderen puts into *play* multiple irreducible meanings. By attaching multiple meanings and at the same time putting them into play around the *same* words and images, *Occupation Soldier* instantiates what Rancière calls *play* while at the same time, in a very specific way the artwork also refers to a social bond, producing one while breaking another. The social bond in question is a world of being-in-common (a *partage*) that is made into another form of commonality or togetherness through detachments of militaries that produce spatial proximity with those they attach to, while at the same time *breaking* a social bond of peace by producing wars. All of these operations of detachment reverberate within and between the four forms of critical art Rancière outlines.

Conclusion

The contemporary focus on the soldier in visual culture as an object of beauty goes hand-in-hand with an aestheticisation of war. Unlike the Futurist glorification of the experience of war as the sheer adrenalin-driven excitement of men playing with/as machines, this trend is far more complex. By figuring the "sleeping beauty" of a half-naked soldier resting in his barracks (Hetherington) or the mind-numbing boredom of war in *Jarhead* (2005), the experience of war is visualized and narrativised as a detached object of contemplation in a manner not dissimilar to the how photographs objectify and separate an experience of a holiday into discrete objects of consumption (Jameson). *Occupation Soldier* interrupts this aestheticising discourse by foregrounding the work of framing, and exploiting the ambiguity between detachment and attachment that attaches to war. The composition of word and text introduces multiple relationships between the components of this spare, stripped-down image. Visual experience becomes a resource in staging an interrogation of hegemonic images of war. The spare eloquence of the image exploits the gap between sensing an image through the senses, and making sense of an image as the bearer of meaning.

Sudeep Dasgupta is Associate Professor at the Department of Media and Culture, University of Amsterdam. He has published in critical theory, global media studies, aesthetics and politics, postcolonial studies and queer theory. His publications include (edited volume) *Constellations of the Transnational: Modernity, Culture, Critique* (2007), "Jacques Rancière.", in F. Colman (ed.), *Film, Theory and Philosophy: The Key Thinkers* Ed Felicity Colman. 2009; "Words, Bodies, Images: Queer Theory before and after Itself", *Borderlands* 8.2 (2009), "Conjunctive Times, Disjointed Time: Philosophy between Enigma and Disagreement", *Parallax* 52 (Special Issue: Jacques Rancière – In Disagreement)

Endnotes

1. This essay is a substantially reworked version of a talk presented at the Centre for the Humanities, University of Utrecht in January 2010. It was written as part of a conversation with Judith Butler, at whose invitation the above contribution was written for a symposium titled "Frames of War."
2. "Combat Fatigue: Tim Hetherington's intimate portraits of US soldiers at rest reveal the other side of Afghanistan", Tim Sharp, *The Independent*, Saturday, September 11, 2010. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/combat-fatigue-tim-hetheringtons-intimate-portraits-of-us-soldiers-at-rest-reveal-the-other-side-of-afghanistan-2073877.html>(Accessed Feb. 26, 2011)
3. Winner of the prestigious Perpignan prize in photography in France, van Denderen's previous project Go-No Go was on refugees, and combined photography, video installations and computer-aided audience interaction. All photographs were accessed at http://issuu.com/xparadox/docs/occupation_soldier
4. The spare image can be seen as a riposte to both the spectacularisation of war by the state and mainstream media, as well as by image-events such as the attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. For an incisive analysis of the logic of the spectacle in relation to war, see the article by T.J. Clark, Iain Boal, Joseph Matthews and Michael Watts, "The State, the Spectacle and September 11."
5. An exploration of the links between Schiller and German Romanticism in general, and Rancière's development of "aesthetics" can be found in Sudeep Dasgupta. "Jacques Rancière."
6. Theodor Adorno's scathing critique of the conceptual imperialism of Enlightenment thought that overrides the "object" is one form through which this same argument was made. See Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*.
7. This play between sense as pure materiality *sans* form (attributed meaning) and sense as meaning takes on an historically specific form in the early twentieth century with the distinction between the artistic strategies of modernists such as, on the one hand, Boccioni and Joyce with their emphasis on art as pure materiality, and on the other, those of the Russian avant-garde for whom art dissolves into life. Here too, Rancière resists typologies such as "modernism" and their purported critical political character. See Jacques Rancière, with Artemy Magun, Dmitry Vilensky, Alexander Skidan, "You Can't Anticipate Explosions: Jacques Rancière in conversation with Chto Delat."
8. The Collins Roberts dictionary includes one specific military accent to the word

détachement, that of ‘soldats’ (soldiers) and an extension of it: “[de fonctionnaire] temporary assignment” (154). Detachment as the attachment of soldiers to another territory, and the contingent temporal character of this “detachment” is problematised in wartime, particularly by van Denderen, where the “temporary” character of the detachment of “functionaries” is interrogated precisely because “occupation” suggests a more permanent temporality. In English, the word attaché is used precisely for detached representatives of governments: hence, cultural attaché, military attaché, etc.

Works Cited

- Adorno, Theodor. *Negative Dialectics*. Trans. E.B. Ashton. London: Continuum, 2005.
- Anderson, Perry. *The Origins of Postmodernity*. London and New York: Verso, 1998.
- Clark, T.J. Iain Boal, Joseph Matthews and Michael Watts. “The State, the Spectacle and September 11.” *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*. RETORT. London and New York: Verso, 2006. 16-37.
- Dasgupta, Sudeep. “Jacques Rancière.” *Film, Theory and Philosophy: The Key Thinkers*. Ed. Felicity Colman. Durham: Acumen, 2009. 339-348.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Truth in Painting*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Eagleton, Terry. “The Ideology of the Aesthetic.” *Poetics Today* 9.2 (1987): 327-338.
- Jameson, Fredric. “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture.” *Social Text* 1 (1979): 130-148.
- Kant, Immanuel. *“Towards Perpetual Peace” and other Writings on Politics, Peace and History*. Trans. David L. Colclasure. Ed. Pauline Kleingeld. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Rancière, Jacques. “Problems and Transformations in Critical Art.” *Aesthetics and its Discontents*. Trans. Steven Corcoran. Cambridge: Polity Press. 43-60.
- , *The Future of the Image*. Trans. Gregory Elliot. London: Verso.
- , “You Can’t Anticipate Explosions: Jacques Rancière in Conversation with Chto Delat.” *Rethinking Marxism* 20.3 (2008): 402-412.
- , *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Trans. Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- , “The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy.” *New Left Review* 14 (March-April 2002): 133-151.
- , *Nights of Labor: The Worker’s Dream in Nineteenth-century France*. Trans. John Drury. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.
- Ross, Alison. “The Aesthetic Fable: Cinema in Jacques Rancière’s ‘Aesthetic Politics.’” *SubStance* 118 38:1 (2009): 128-150.
- Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967 [1793].
- Van Denderen, Ad. *Occupation Soldier*. Amsterdam: Paradox, 2009.

