

Voicing Dissent

American Artists and the War on Iraq

**Violaine Roussel and
Bleuwenn Lechaux**

Foreword

In *Voicing Dissent: American Artists and the War on Iraq*, Bleuwenn Lechaux and Violaine Roussel make an important contribution to our understanding of mobilization. Building on and contributing to a most dynamic line of research that has attracted many younger French sociologists, these authors aim to understand the process of engagement, which requires considering the transformation of the subjectivity and identification process of actors, the motivations and tools they draw upon as they enter into contact with new realities, and their connection with more macro cultural repertoires and social movements. This sociology of engagement, inspired by authors such as Norbert Elias, Erving Goffman, and Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, resonates with the American literature on frame alignment and collective mobilization, to the extent that it considers the intersubjective conditions of possibility for social movements. However, the European and American literatures differ in the emphasis they put on the role of material and ideational support for engagement, with European research being more influenced by development in the sociology of science, in which constraints on action generated by (for instance) the material world are more prominently featured. These contributions hint at a first “good reason” for reading this book, one that has to do with the need to develop a more complex theory of how social actors engage the world around them, in part through politics.

A second “good reason” is provided for us by the sheer importance of the topic. Artists of all sorts—writers, movie directors, performers, visual artists—are “interpelated” by (called by) important social stakes. Like many academics and other social activists, they are drawn to their vocation in part because they are moved by a deep desire to represent and influence the direction our societies take. The Iraq War has played a crucial symbolic role in the American and European collective imaginaries over the last several years. Our relationship to it came to stand for our relationship to the world writ large, for whether one values freedom and self-determination over security, an inner-looking or more generous imperial America, etc. Thus it is not surprising that the public drama around the war came to exercise its attraction on so many artists.

In this book, Lechaux and Roussel give them a public voice, while trying to understand how and why they mobilized. Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's illustrious book *The Weight of the World*, they present iconic figures who reveal to us a broad register of ways of engaging, a repertoire of argument that we could not anticipate beforehand. Thus the reader emerges with a much deeper understanding of the nexus between politics, culture, and human subjectivity. And also, of course, of the topic at hand—how artists tried to make a difference in a very specific episode of contemporary American history. The experience will be enriching and eminently worthwhile. This is why I invite you to spend a few hours with this book. You will not be disappointed.

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