

THE DECADE OF FEAR (LA DÉCADA DEL MIEDO.  
DRAMATURGIAS AUDIOVISUALES POST-11 DE  
SEPTIEMBRE), red. M. Fernández Morales, Peter Lang AG,  
International Academic Publishers, Bern 2013, 398 p.

*La década del miedo. Dramaturgias audiovisuales post-11 de septiembre* is the 10th publication in a top-ranking cross-cultural series called *Spanish Perspectives on English and American Literature, Communication and Culture*, aiming to provide “a forum for first-class Spanish scholarship in the field of English and American Studies” (p. 398) and focusing on literature, drama, film, theatre and communication. Testifying to the prominence of the book under scrutiny in the area of research is also the fact that it was published with financial support from the Ministry for Science and Innovation of the Spanish Government, more precisely via the ongoing project “Amenazas globales y miedos de la vida cotidiana en las dramaturgias audiovisuales contemporáneas: La representación de la realidad tras el 11-S”.

The volume is divided into two unequal parts, preceded by a *Prologue*. The *Introduction* together with two further contributions make up the former (*Estado de la cuestión*), whereas the latter, bulkier, part (*El 11-S real y sus ficciones derivadas*) contains no less than nine essays covering the remaining two thirds.

It is Paul Virilio – Margarita Ledo Andión (Universidad de Santiago de Compostela) argues in her *Prólogo* – who, in *Seducidos por el accidente*, makes a brave effort to warn against expecting the unexpected and the consequences ensuing therefrom: total obedience, with one’s eyes “wide shut”. The reason behind this: “as early as the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the major focus in political issues was shifted from the ‘cold war’ and its long forgotten aftermath to the emergence of the ‘cold fear’, of which terrorism, in any of its manifestations, is but a mere symptom” (p. 7; GM translation).

In her rigorously researched *Introducción ¿Diez años no es nada? Consecuencias culturales del 11-S*, Marta Fernández Morales (Universidad de las Islas Baleares) has had clever recourse to a Motto which, besides capturing Ana Pastor in one of her best cogitations (“El siglo XXI nació sin anestesia”), is also intended as a preview of the contributions to come, while foregrounding, in conjunction with the title of this introductory essay, the main topic of debate: the terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda on the US on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, with a whole host of more or less predictable after-effects following in the wake, such as confusion, lamentations, cohesion, magniloquence, wrath, cancellation of rights, persecution and war, all of which attracted the interest of American (screen)writers, playwrights, directors, painters, composers, and the like, who were quick to capitalize on the collective trauma haunting the past decade. Whether deploying postmodernist techniques, such as the collage or multiple narrative voices (e.g. Lynne Sharon Schwartz’s *The Writing on the Wall* (2005), Ken Kalfu’s *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2006), Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007)), or inventing concepts – with appropriate labels attached – to cope with the aftermath of future apocalyptic scenarios (s. Richard Grusin’s “premediación” for premonitory creativity of cinema and television productions), American approaches to the “nine eleven” have given rise, the editor of the book argues, to an idiosyncratic style, pregnant with audiovisual metaphors, and best suited to depict “the howling space” in the Manhattan skyline (cf. DeLillo, *In the Ruins of the Future*, 2001: 39, p. 18). Morales further maintains that cultural critics such as Jeffrey Melnick even went so far as to claim that the “9/11” had developed a language *per se*, boasting a vocabulary, grammar and tone units *sui generis*.

After pinpointing the major idiosyncrasies of the “9/11” type of discourse, the editor then proceeds to analyse one of the first effects of the terrorist attacks – more precisely of the 2,977 innocent victims claimed – on the more or less innocent minds of their fellow countrymen. Thus, human response to the September tragedy is viewed as running the gamut from the at first blush heartfelt-homage-paying Memorial “September 11” to the undisguised trivialization of such places for grieving people by making them over, within only a year of the attack, into a place for sightseers (Gidley, “November Visit to Ground Zero”, 2002: 125). As corroborative evidence in favour of the cultural phenomenon investigated in Section 3 of her *Introduction*, “la cultura de la memoria”, Morales cites specimens like *One Nation. America Remembers 11, 2001*

(Robert Sullivan, 2001), *Rebuilding Ground Zero* (Steven Spielberg, 2011 – Discovery Channel), or *World Trade Center: In Memoriam* (a History-Channel Commemorative Set), as well as apposite Spanish criticism of American public opinion, which would rather be nostalgic and emotional than true-to-fact and reasonable (cf. De Felipe and Gomez 2011: 76, p. 28). In Section 4 the editor subtly reinforces the significant role played by women (stewardesses, fire fighters, physicians, police officers, volunteers) both during the 9/11 attacks and in coping with the aftermath thereof, a role which the media, still under the spell of John Wayne-syndrome grossly understated at the time (cf. Faludi 2009: 78: “[n]o había lugar para las superheroinas de acción”, p. 36), since androcentric celebration would invariably relegate female protagonists to the meek position of frightened victims.

With the previous four sections wisely leading up to the sad truth laid bare in the fifth (“‘No hay alternativas’: La cultura del miedo”), it is here that the US emerge at their most vulnerable, as the very image of acquired defencelessness which Furedy came to view as “cultura de los límites” (2005: 17, p. 40). While surveying in the final section the transdisciplinary range of approaches advanced in the remaining essays of Part One as well as in those of Part Two, the editor decides to end the *Introduction* on an optimistic note, in that she shifts the focus on the resilience of the “American way of life” in the face of transnational vicissitudes.

In *El 11-S como franquicia cultural*, Meritxell Esquirol Salom (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya) claims that the key factors operating in tandem after 9/11 to help the US rise phoenix-like from the ashes are good old patriotism and reinforcing the central position of the US worldwide as leading economical and financial power. She then consistently argues that, due to the political and informative strategies deployed after 9/11, a particular type of meta-narrative or “common hegemonical sense” evolved into the guiding principle of the war to be waged against terror – with a popular culture rhetoric of the spectacular as a legitimate concomitant thereof – , and exemplifies with films featuring superheroes, such as *Spider-Man* (2002), *Spider-Man 2* (2004); *X-Men 2* (2003), *X-Men the Last Stand* (2006), *X-Men: First Class* (2011); *Superman Returns* (2006); *Batman Begins* (2005). After further dwelling on topic-related concepts like “preventive war” (Dunmire 2009), “affective economics” (Jenkins 2008) or the video game “as a primary interface governing the civic experience of war” (cf. Stahl 2010: 18, p. 71), Salom vigorously argues in the final

paragraph of the fourth section, devoted to a new narrative genre, the “militainment” (Stahl 2010), that by allowing war-oriented discourse to be carried into the entertainment province, the consumer not only (un)wittingly promotes the contemporary “war-on-terror” *zeitgeist*, but also helps convert the conflict into a regular recreational exercise of violence, while automatically disclaiming any political responsibility in the matter (p. 71).

A. Patricia Trapero Llobera (Universidad de las Islas Baleares) authors the last contribution in Part One, *La producción audiovisual tras el 11-S, un breve panorama*. Steering a meandering course through the motley assortment of post-9/11 cinematic narrative genres as diverse as mock-documentary (Roscoe and Hight 2001), docudrama, docufiction (Rhodes and Springer 2006), the bio-pic (Bingham 2010), spy television (Britton 2004), Llobera astutely insinuates a most disquieting message: on account of the “America-under-siege” shock doctrine (Klein 2008), launched and supported by Bush Administration, an entire nation was forced to live in perpetual fear of imminent attacks by their mortal enemy. This particular finding, correlated with pre-9/11 philosophical and cultural factors such as the new ethics of violence (McKinney 1993), the aesthetic of hyperreal violence and the “wound culture” (Seltzner 1998), induce the author to conclude that facing us is “El final de una época y el inicio de una (no tan) nueva; en la que el Caballero Oscuro se levanta” (p. 108).

With Part One having provided the theoretical framework, Part Two can now go with a fine-tooth comb over a representative selection of 9/11-related fiction. As if intent on smoothing the transition between the two, A. Patricia Trapero Llobera also authors the first essay in this second part (*Terrorismo(s) en tiempo real: de 24 a Homeland*). While anatomizing transmedia story-telling by comparing *24* (FOX 2001-2010), *Sleeper Cell* (Showtime 2005-2006) and *Homeland* (Showtime 2011-), she tenaciously fits together the pieces in the philosophical puzzle underlying such Islamophobic shows, gradually shifting the focus from terrorism as epiphenomenon apt to convert horror into a positive, *catharsis*-inducing factor (cf. Giroux 2006, Baudrillard 2003, p. 116-117), through “techno-thrillers”, “spytainment” (Zegart 2010), “technological mysticism” (Virilio 2002), “ticking bomb scenarios”, the “Jack-Bauer-smart-warriors” to the metaphor of the labyrinth taken to symbolize the chaos-shaping postmodern mentality (Tani 1984, p. 143) and, last but not least, to the metaphor of the US as “global narrator” and provider of a ‘historical-cum-ideological conceptual

continuum' which Sarder and Wyn Davies (2002: 103) sarcastically label the "hamburger syndrome" (p. 148).

In *Interactuando con el miedo: Terrorismo internacional y armas de destrucción masiva en la trilogía Call of Duty: Modern Warfare y Battlefield 3*, Juan Ramón Molina Pos (Universidad de las Islas Baleares) switches the reader's attention to military-themed video games and, aided by their actual protagonists – "first person shooters" – , from the 'culture of memory' to the 'culture of fear'. The "soft power" (Nieborg 2010) of these joystick soldiers fighting a just "hyper-real" war (Huntemann and Barron, in Leonard 2004; p. 168) is conducive, in all probability, to securing American Empire in virtual space (cf. King and Leonard 2010), if, paradoxically, Pos argues, giving rise to an ambiguous rhetoric: on the one hand, to promoting the return to a virility best epitomized by John Wayne and, on the other, to voicing valid criticisms of the American Army, the CIA, as well as of the US foreign policy (*Battlefield 3*), thus converting video games into politically correct artefacts (p. 171).

While turning to good account, among others, Dittmer's "Reflections on American Identity, Popular Culture and Post-9/11 Geopolitics" (2005)<sup>1</sup> and Fukuyama's (2002) revealing insight into the post-9/11 global change of heart about "selling the American dream"<sup>2</sup>, the psychoanalytically-based approach which Alejandro Casadesús Bordoy (Universidad de las Islas Baleares) and Eva Parra Membrives (Universidad de Sevilla) take in *Lo que queda del sueño americano: The Killing y la reinterpretación del modelo social tras el 11-S* to the canonical "red herring" technique (Such Marina 2012) as employed in the fiction series *The Killing* (AMC 2011, an adaptation of the Danish series *Forbrydelsen* 2007) successfully helps dismantle the US' long-established *status quo*: home(land) security, peace and harmony, which out-and-out champions of American nationalism pretend to defend (cf. Dittmer 2005, p. 206).

An even farther cry from the long-lost idyllic vision of a utopian society is *Sex and the City* as approached by Maria Isabel Menéndez Menéndez

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance his theory on the common identity freely assumed by individuals as a result of linking horizontal identity issues revolving around the Self/Other to vertical issues of scale through geopolitical narratives (2005, p. 189).

<sup>2</sup> "They are inclined to think that American society appeals to people of all cultures. The millions of immigrants from countries all over the world who vote with their feet to move to America and other developed societies seem to testify to this fact. But events since September 11 challenge this view. Mohamed Atta and several of the other hijackers were educated people who lived and studied in the West" (2002, p. 194).

(Universidad de Burgos) in *Cayó el feminismo con las Torres Gemelas? Sexo en Nueva York antes y después del 11-S*. Though rather hastily relegated, Menéndez maintains, to the *chick-lit*-genre (usually opposed to the one taken to refer to more mature, and less superficial writing, hence called *women fiction*), the television fiction under scrutiny stands out as one of the first to break with the long-cherished androcentric stance by shifting the focus from the “male-” to the “female gaze” (p. 222, 224), and with it, from masculine rivalry to feminine solidarity which, for all that post 9/11 celebration of virility, “sigue siendo la tabla salvadora ante el naufragio” (p. 235).

In *Battlestar Galactica y Falling Skies: El impacto del 11 S en la ciencia ficción de las series de EE.UU.* Anna Tous Rovirosa (Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona) undertakes the no less difficult task of capturing the effects of the 9/11 as reflected in the US science fiction series *Battlestar Galactica* (SyFy 2004-2009) and *Falling Skies* (TNT 2011-). The in-depth analysis of the two allegories narrating war-induced crises – in a post-modern (*Battlestar Galactica*) and modern (*Falling Skies*) fashion, respectively –, conducted in terms of characters (the Scientist, the Hero, the Traitor, the Alien, etc.), spaces, themes (technological issues, political issues, dichotomous relationships), yielded some very interesting findings on the more or less antagonistic otherness (cf. Frank 2011, p. 264) of the “alien terrorist”, a term which has come to span a disconcertingly vast semantic area between “extra-terrestrial parasite and ‘foreign enemy’ without any sense of the absurd” (Jackson 2005: 71 in Frank 2011, p. 263).

Plunging the reader into the realm of the macabre is José A. Oliver Marroig in *El hombre es un zombi para el hombre: una lectura post-11-S del fenómeno de los muertos vivientes*, a thought-provoking essay which “unearths” the metaphor of the “Undead America” (Soloff 2006) in George A. Romero’s cinema saga (with a major focus on *Land of the Dead* (2004), *Diary of the Dead* (2007) and *Survival of the Dead* (2009)), the *Walking Dead* series (AMC 2010-) and the movie *Osombie* (John Lyde 2012). Whether envisioned as evil multinational corporations, the military industry complex, runaway immigrants or the uprising of the urban poor (cf. Twohi 2008, p. 276), the zombie apocalypse is a poignant reminder of the sad fact that, Marroig argues, in a post-9/11 society waging an ever-lasting war on terror, the “walking dead” can be ambiguously construed as referring to both zombies and the survivors fighting to stay “undead” (p. 292).

The at first blush more humour-friendly approach in Xavier Fuster Burguera's *Animación y mainstream estadounidense tras el once de septiembre* shows American cartoons and television animation to be equally afflicted by the post-9/11 "unfunny times" (Achter 2008) and retaliate by turning to parody as the safest and swiftest vehicle to scoff at the newly imposed terror-proof world order. As do, Burguera contends, *Team America: The World Police* (2004-2005), by creating "a meta-universe" of Hollywood stars enacting the role of patriotic publics" (Spigel 2004, p. 309); *American Dad!* (FOX 2005-), by exposing to ridicule Stan Smith's paranoical vigilance and authoritarian "ruling" of his family; or *Lil' Bush* (Comedy Central 2007-2008), by calling into question the decision-making capacity of 4 Beltway Elementary School students – Lil' George, Lil' Condi, Lil' Cheney and Lil' Rummy – subversively portraying the Bush Cabinet and Opposition.

Along the same line of "animation", in *La excepción que confirma la regla: La originalidad de South Park (también) con respecto al tema del terrorismo y sus efectos*, Maria Dolores Narbona Carrión closely inspects *South Park* (Comedy Central 1997-) in an attempt to track down the idiosyncratic features of this TV Cartoons Series considered by some analysts (Fickett 2008, p. 332) to be a hi-fi cultural mirror of American society. Wise recourse to carnivalesque subversion, reverse stereotypes, "reverse psychology" (Stratynner and Keller 2009, p. 336), "selective appropriation" (Baker 2010: 352), or "causal arguments" (Baker 2010, p. 350), Carrión claims, make *South Park* out to be the exception to the rule, when, in actual fact, it is but a confirmation thereof.

More precisely, of the rule investing animated cartoons with the humour-induced cathartic function of sublimating a post-9/11 collective trauma – much in the way "post-8/6-9" Japanese animation (*anima*) did – , as Xavier Fuster Burguera (Society of Animation Studies) seeks to demonstrate in *Animación, trauma y vanguardismo: La generación post-11-S*, the last essay in the book being reviewed, by exploring new animated narratives like the science fiction series *Fringe* (FOX 2008-2013), with its use of the stream-of-consciousness technique flashing the World Trade Center across the screen as a bitter reminder of the US vulnerability, or the 24-minute short *9-11/9-11* (TriBeCa Film Center, New York, 2007), with its Goya-inspired, visual style and unhappy ending denouncing the blatant hypocrisy of the world's supposedly 'democratic' leaders.

Synoptically viewed, this slowly growing stream of inter- and trans-disciplinary research into the 9/11-aftermath – of which the present book is a fine piece of scholarship – has so far ferreted out substantial evidence indicating the long-awaited upsurge of a new type of aesthetics which takes it upon itself to challenge the «“necrorealist” satirical sensibility of the American so-called “*South Park* generation”, in which, as in the cable television series *South Park* itself, all political doctrines and sentiments (multiculturalism as well as conservatism, liberalism as well as socialism, fundamentalism as well as atheism) are represented as equally corrupt, deformed and hypocritical» (cf. Boyer and Yurchak 2010: 184).

There is still a question lingering on in the reader’s mind that has been left unanswered: this ambition of the “deterritorialized” public “to create a new home in the moral sensibility of a selfhood that is neither for nor against “ (*ibid.*) is an altogether new tenet, or had it already been there before, for instance in 1945, when American public opinion was informed of the US terrorist attacks – does carrying them out during World War II make them any less terrifying? – on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with the literal “deterritorialization” of the Japanese in its aftermath? Admittedly, back then there was no CCTV to capture the traumatic event, but one cannot help wondering whether a less sit-on-the-fence attitude at the time could have been more likely to prevent the “absence of cause and effect, the enemies and heroes, the sudden perversity of two massive skyscrapers collapsing in place” (Kelts 2006, p. 389).

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