

TERROR IN GLOBAL NARRATIVE:
representations of 9/11 in the Age
of Late-Late Capitalism. 2016.
G. Fragopoulos and L. Naydan.
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ISBN 978-331940653-4

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The attacks to World Trade Center on 11 of September of 2001 brought substantial changes not only in the way the United States conceived its homeland security, but also others peripheral nations, which stayed on the side-lines of the previous conflict between Bin Laden and George Bush senior, faced a securitization process accompanied with an unparalleled hysteria. To a major or minor degree, it is safe to say henceforth terrorism unveiled a long dormant fascination and obsession in American spectatorship for gazing death, a new emerging phenomenon theorised by Tumarkin (2005) as “traumascape”. As Luke Howie (2012) puts it, terrorists do not want a lot of people dead, they like a lot of people watching!. This suggests that one of the chief goals of terrorists are not strictly associated to violence as the specialized literature precludes, but preferably to a vicarious sentiment of fear amplified precisely in those who do not stand at the centre of picture. With some hindsight, Howie found a correlation between physical distance and fear-mongering. Precisely, as Howie adheres, those societies situated in the global Southern periphery underwent higher levels of anxiety that often led towards an atmosphere of mistrust and terror than hapless New Yorkers.

In the middle of this mayhem, G. Fragopoulos and L. Naydan present an interesting edited book, which invites well-read and reputed scholars coming from different disciplines and stripes. The main argument of this project toys with the belief that terrorism inaugurated a new artist cult to thematise on the tragedy of 9/11. Such a movement includes novels, movies and visual art as well as others commoditized forms of consumptions. To put this in bluntly, terrorism started an “aesthetic of 9/11” reproducing the cultural basis of earlier trauma to sublimate towards reified forms of dark nostalgia. Most certainly, the art objects displayed to modern tourists transmits a symbolic message, which should be deciphered by academicians, to expand the current understanding of this much deeper seated issue. There is a inextricably intersection between postmodern consumption and terrorism. This point

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suggests that though originally many Americans suffered the violence exerted by Al-Qaeda in their skins, no less true is that it created a “souvenir” around such a founding event which legitimated the post US-led invasions to Middle East. While postmodernism exhibits the needs to think we are living in the borders -or the end- of modernism, the post 9/11 society dangles the possibilities that terror would be only the preliminary stage of a new age, academicians should unravel. This is exactly what editors call “the paradoxes of 9/11”. At the time we try to forget the phantom of terrorism involuntarily we invoke it as the touchstone of lifestyles. By reminding what one day were the Twin Towers, capital owners not only enhance their profits by the commoditization of obliterated-spaces otherwise would remain inexpugable, but also lay the foundations for reasons behind-the-disaster are glossed over. To set an example, uniforms, hoses, and scorched cars were offered as pieces of museums for thousands of tourists interested to visit the ground-zero in NY; and of course next to this sacred space, a fully-stocked gift shop was built. In this vein, Fragopoulos and L. Naydan go on to say that,

“Despite near-immediate controversy because its crass commercialism on a literarily sacred site... the father of a 9/11 victim, the gift shop continues to market its (m)ugs, T-shirt, scarves and other souvenirs to visitors willing to pay the price – be it an monetary one, an ethical one, or some combination. The gift shop emerges because 9/11 happened but emerges to capitalize on 9/11 as though 9/11 as an emotional event never happened” (p. 6)

At some extent, art consumption is aimed to commercialize disasters in order for trauma to be temporarily encrypted in the dark side of unconsciousness -or in the past, whereas a partial (biased but more human) truth of how the original event happened remains in the memory of survivors.

As the previous backdrop, this valuable book is conformed in three parts, which contain interesting chapters carefully selected and sorted by theme. In any case, all them are orchestrated to theorize on the art reactions proper of American society to the terror inspired 9/11 as major event.

The first section, which is entitled *Textual representations of 9/11*, explores –through the articulation of diverse essays- on the textual answers in post 9/11 context. Doubtless, this collection is based on the belief that media and cultural entertainment industry allowed the formation of a terror-centred culture, which evolved systematically through an paradoxical character. Within America’s ideology worked successfully in captivating citizenry respecting to an external imaginary foe, they were never prepared to fight for. The war on terror marked not only the onset of a new kind of other, but the foundations of a new unknown evil. People were ideologically pushed to believe they were living in an ever-changing world where the dangerous other lives in the same neighbourhoods, looking like-them. At a first glimpse, Scott Ortonalo’s chapter debates the Max Brooks’ movie *World War Z* and its effects on social imaginary. To wit, he holds the thesis that September 11

was a disastrous event but far from paving the ways for the real doomsday, it evinces the already-existing climate of exploitation posed by capitalism. In consonance with what Liliana Naydan observed (in the second chapter), though 9/11 constituted as an event resulting from the material asymmetries as well as injustices of the capitalist system, the cultural basis of such inequalities far from being corrected, were widened. In the same direction, E. Trapp (in third chapter) stimulates a critical understanding on the formation of alterity as inherently enrooted in the cultural matrix of selfhood in the West. Terrorism not only opened the doors for the rise and expansion of torture, but also interrogates on how Western nations constructed historically the notion of otherness.

The second section signals to the visual representations around 9/11 in the days of digital technologies. Chapters included in this part focus on the social discourses, stereotypes and imaginaries revolving around a concrete allegory of terrorism. The current codes of ethics that characterized modernity sets the pace to new neoliberal forms, which depoliticise ethics in view of those practices to be economically performed alone. The power of machination not only confronts to the collective nature of history but also engenders mythical archetypes, which are emptied and externally designed to serve as ideological instrument of surveillance. While the re-appropriation of these mythical constructions allows the recovery of the “collective consciousness”, it can be done once history is politicised.

Last but not least, the third section lumps together a bunch of high-quality articles which examine to what extent media screen and the gazed-oriented culture made from terrorism a commodity to captivate the publics and global audiences, at the same time, the possibilities of an apocalypse is packaged and exchanged within the circuits of cultural entertainment. The wake of 9/11 places the American ethnocentrism in the critical lens of scrutiny while explaining the strange intersection of terror and consumption, an slippery matter that received little attention by officials and policy makers. As this reviewer interprets, all chapters integrated in this must-read book, which is highly recommendable for scholars and policy makers interested in themes of terrorism, are orchestrated to stimulate further discussions around the “aesthetic of terrorism” and its intersection on our capitalist culture, a moot-point, which will deserve further scrutiny in the years to come.

References

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