

## M. Karavanta on C. Cilano's *From Solidarity to Schisms*

---



### Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/7836>

DOI: 10.4000/ejas.7836

ISSN: 1991-9336

### Publisher

European Association for American Studies

### Electronic reference

"M. Karavanta on C. Cilano's *From Solidarity to Schisms*", *European journal of American studies* [Online], Book reviews, document 7, Online since 16 March 2010, connection on 31 August 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/7836> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.7836>

---

This text was automatically generated on 31 August 2022.



Creative Commons - Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International - CC BY-NC 4.0  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

---

## M. Karavanta on C. Cilano's *From Solidarity to Schisms*

---

- 1 *From Solidarity to Schisms. 9/11 and After in Fiction and Film From Outside the US.* Cara Cilano, Ed. New York: Rodopi, 2009. 327 p. ISBN 978-90-420-2702
- 2 What constitutes a global event? Is the global predominance of an event contingent upon the effect that it has on people and their lives or is it determined by its dissemination through images and discourses? To phrase it differently, is 9/11 a global event because it was first and foremost a global spectacle? Neither its magnitude nor its singularity can alone account for the representation of 9/11 as the “unrepresentable,” the unaccountable event that discloses the liquid borders between reality and what Jacques Lacan has called the real, as that which can only be symptomatically unconcealed when reality suffers a sudden rupture, a sudden break in its otherwise seemingly even continuum, for every disaster is singular, every death is the cause for mourning, every terrorist act, every war crime, every war is unrepresentable, and every loss of life is a unique event that ruptures the symbolic and floods the imaginary. Hence, how can 9/11 be thought--to invoke here William V. Spanos' powerful reading of Edward Said's secular criticism--by “a new decentered, unhomed, or exilic thinking, a radically critical secularism, stripped of transcendental alibis, that would be commensurate to the task of transforming the dehumanizing discourse and practice of global clash into humanized global collaboration: a 'complete consort dancing together contrapuntally'” (Spanos 259)?
- 3 This collection addresses these important questions and the urgent need for a secular and intercultural critique of 9/11 by probing into the possibility for reconfiguring 9/11 “beyond the sphere of American intervention/interference and influence to the wider world” in order to “consider how nations and peoples outside the US contend with 9/11 and its aftermath” (Cilano, “Introduction: From Solidarity to Schisms” 15). The critical analysis and theoretical examination of the narrative and discursive representations of 9/11 in film and fiction produced and disseminated outside the US set the scope and content of this collection. Indeed, fiction and film from Europe, Australia, Canada, Israel, Iran and Pakistan created by artists whose cosmopolitan and hybrid viewpoint feeds on and tries to contribute to a global imaginary that is neither accountable nor

answerable to the framework of a national literature or national imaginary are afforded a central position in each and every chapter of this collection. The *raison d'être* underlying the selection of these texts is not only the drawing of an outside US cartography of post 9/11 narratives that demonstrates once again the global significance of this event but most importantly the analysis and even theorization of the ways by which this event requires that the global be reconfigured and reconceptualized being an event that, despite or even because of its traumatic significance, discloses the opportunity for the materialization of what Gayatri Spivak has called “planetary thinking.” According to Cara Cilano, the collection is driven by a twofold urgency: to present the wide gamut of narratives that, in either abiding by or defying the narrative strategies of their genres, represent what has been deemed the “unrepresentable” and to contemplate the positive and even utopian possibilities that the dystopia of 9/11 can enable as an event that, once repeated, rethought and represented in narratives, discloses the question of the home in an age that Edward Said aptly called the “age of exilic consciousness” in *Culture and Imperialism*, that is, the age of the “unconstituted” constituencies. Hence, the promise of this collection is to “investigate both political and cultural constructions of home, thus gesturing toward what it would mean to become unhomed” (Cilano 17).

- 4 The critical reading of the narratives of post-9/11 is a political act that, according to the collection's editor, recognizes not only Homi K. Bhabha's assertion that “the decision to implement and administer terror, whether it is done in the name of god or the state, is a political decision” (in Cilano 16) but also that the politicization of 9/11 is an event that needs to be critically and politically thought. To this end, a trajectory of concepts and terms that span from narrative techniques to conceptual frameworks is congealed. For example, Brandon Kempner addresses a wide number of British texts that, in framing 9/11, abide by narrative techniques and revise literary genres of the past (like Seamus Heaney's poem “Anything Can Happen” written in the form of an Horace ode) thus performing an act of “literary nostalgia” that resuscitates and repeats the structures of the “universality of Western reason and logic” (55); however “devastated by the events of 9/11, these structures appear in the authors' texts as the last resort in the face of the ruins and the “unrepresentable” destruction. Ulrike Tancke draws on trauma theory to examine what Philip Tew calls the “traumatological aesthetic [that] dominates contemporary writing” (77). Ana Christina Mendes addresses the problematic encounter of the literary and the political in Salman Rushdie's work by reading it as a “contradictory state of affiliation” (93) that is fundamental to the writer's effort to attend to a “new age of the post-frontier” (97). Henrike Lehnguth theorizes the representation of terror as ambiguity by closely reading Benjamin Heisenberg's 2005 feature film debut *Schläfer* (114). Silvia Schiltermandl uses Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith's term “perspectival adjustments” to deconstruct the narrative practices in Alain Brigand's 11'09''01, “a compilation of eleven short movies” (183) that contextualize the local and global perceptions and conceptualizations of 9/11. Carolyn A. Durham ends her essay by problematizing the politics of translation that she, following Jacques Derrida, defines as an act that, rather than appropriating the event, attends to its complexity (181), a case that Durham successfully makes clear in her meticulous analysis of the texts of Frédéric Beigbeder and Slimane Benaïssa, the “first foreign writers to produce original solutions to the representation of 9/11 in literature” (165). Finally, Sharon Sutherland and Sarah Swan analyze Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* through the lens of “the genre and devices

of dystopic fiction” (219) in order to articulate Atwood's “contradictory dystopia” (223). Gavin Hicks, Alison J. Murray Levine, William Anselmi and Sheen Wilson, and Nathanel O'Reilly also engage a rich variety of texts and fields that contribute to the polyphony of viewpoints and voices that represent, contemplate and question the representational politics of 9/11. This polyphony would have been more critically exploited had a more “conversational” methodology been attempted by the contributors with cross-references that would have allowed them to critically respond to each other by reconfiguring and reevaluating their different and similar strategies, analyses and conceptualizations of texts and terms. Such a conversational methodology would have facilitated the effort of this collection to question and articulate the complexity of the “political and cultural constructions of home” (17) for it would have enabled the contributors to more consciously think and act like the intercultural community that they are and they represent through their analyses.

- 5 Amongst all of these essays that critically examine 9/11 films and texts, the ones written by Magali Cornier Michael, Ana Christina Mendes, Carolyn A. Durham, Cara Cilano and Sofia Ahlberg succeed not only in giving their readers the pleasure of close and persuasive readings of texts that range from British to Pakistani and Australian fiction but also in demonstrating how the theorization of the literary and the examination of the literary representations of the political are two indissolubly and crucially related acts. In other words, these essays perform readings that show how the literary can reconfigure and reimagine the political by refusing to access and understand the event of 9/11 through the language of what Theodor Adorno has called the “consciousness industry” (in Spanos 243). Instead, these essays exemplify the effort to understand this event as a plural event, “the events of 9/11,” that contradict the representation of this terrorist act as the one and only world disaster that, once commemorated, repeated and monumentalized as the singular and authentic event (and here I am invoking Slavoj Žižek's definition of the event to counter the representation of 9/11 as such an inaccessible, incommensurable and unrepresentable event), is, alas, forgotten. And in being forgotten, it makes us forget the terrorist acts and war crimes that are still destroying not only the western but also and, more frequently so, the non-western territories. In the name of this counter-forgetting, this collection brings together critics whose essays perform reading as a critical act of remembering, that is, as an act of survival.

6 Works Cited

- 7 Edward Said. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.  
 8 William V.Spanos. *American Exceptionalism in the Age of Globalization*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2008.  
 9 Mina Karavanta, Assistant Professor, University of Athens