

REVIEWS

Faber, Sebastiaan. *Memory Battles of the Spanish Civil War: History, Fiction, Photography.* Vanderbilt UP, 2018, 256 pp.

Readers of Sebastiaan Faber's *Memory Battles of the Spanish Civil War: History, Fiction, Photography* would do well to take the "battles" of the title seriously: the book is premised on the idea that culture is at its best when opening up sites for polemics or when the document of culture itself embodies an agonistic process. In consequence, the book strives to do both things: first, it engages with a wide range of realities that bear the trace of such struggle: war photography, legal and disciplinary cultures, academic structures, and, more conventionally, documentaries, essays, and novels. This variety is due to the conviction that the narrow scope of much existing cultural criticism can't yield answers to larger, societal questions. Second, it tries to move beyond the hyperspecialized institutional conversation and away from its monological forms: it includes—along with conventional academic articles firmly grounded in cultural studies—interviews with scholars and a collection of reviews.

The book is divided in five parts dealing with particular discourses and each of these into chapters built around specific cases or works. In "Memory and the Visual Archive," Faber takes on the construction and circulation of the visual archive of the Spanish Civil War. First, he examines at its source the tension between photography's documentary power and its constructedness, as shown by the circulation and resignification of images in press and propaganda during the war. Then, he looks into the circulation and reappropriation of canonical images of the war by Robert Capa and Gerda Taro, which bear the trace of (and enhance) their value as commodities but also as political and aesthetic documents.

"History and Memory" moves from the visual and documentary to the juridical and institutional. Faber locates a generational gap in attitudes toward memory, particularly within history as a discipline in which the rise of memory as public discourse in Spain and Europe has been decried as a sort of state interference by scholars. Faber sides with a different demand (one compounded by moral considerations): that the government take upon itself the recognition of its own history, particularly insofar as it ought to recognize the Other's victimization. Judge Baltasar Garzón's own "memory battle" allows the author to question exceptionalist counterarguments regarding Spanish memory politics: anxieties over legitimacy and the articulation of national and international law's sometimes conflicting principles, as well as Spanish status

within global modernity, shouldn't undermine universalist demands for justice in the name of an idealized, particularist narrative democratic transition.

"Reframing the Past" mobilizes the voices of those who, in various disciplines, are animating the contemporary presence of the past. First, it summarizes Faber's conversations with three generations of Anglophone and Spanish historians: Gabriel Jackson, Ángel Viñas, Paul Preston, Helen Graham, and Pedro Sánchez León, in an interesting polyphonic structure that leaves the reader to sight patterns and draw conclusions. Similarly, Francisco Ferrándiz, Emilio Silva, Gervasio Sánchez, and Montse Armengou model the kind of intellectual who, reaching beyond their field's specific boundaries, has rekindled memory debates in Spain, foregrounding a common interventionist position in the public sphere.

"Intellectuals at War" and "Fiction as Memory" cover recent publications (essays and novels, respectively) by well-known intellectuals born between 1947 and 1962, including Gregorio Morán, Andrés Trapiello, Antonio Muñoz Molina, Javier Cercas, and Javier Marías, whose *Your Face Tomorrow* trilogy receives the most positive appraisal, due to the complex imbrication of past, present, and storytelling that works to convey a truthful and responsible account of the past. Readers of these chapters will recognize them rehearsing points previously published in *Frontera D* and other venues. Faber shows that many contemporary novels entail an "affiliative act" in which authors summon the symbolic ancestry memorializing (or fictioning) a political lineage to be identified within the context of Spain's challenged postmemory.

The question "about the role that literature and art play in the way societies come to terms with recent examples of violence" (178) (and the attempt to arrive at an answer based on their "formal qualities") seems to reduce "literature and art" to more or less formally conventional novels. I remain curious whether the expressive means of other genres and media (those that are less—but also those that are more—popular, from avant-garde poetry and dance to soap operas and video games) come to terms differently, more and/or less successfully than well-established male novelists in their 60s. In fact, what Faber is questioning is not just the expressive means of fictions when it comes to Spanish history. Were that the case, recent novels by Isaac Rosa or a sort of Luisa Carnés "revival" could have been interesting problems to tackle. It is a particular intellectual figure that Faber is interested in: the generation of center-left intellectuals, coming of age mostly, but not exclusively, in the '80s, and identified with *El País*, that arguably prevailed in the struggle for hegemony in narrating the Spanish Civil War (160–161). This would also explain why Faber doesn't tackle César Vidal or Pío Moa, arguably more active "memory warriors" than those he chooses to focus on instead (though he does acknowledge them at times.) Rather than the subject matter of Muñoz Molina's *Todo lo que era sólido* (hardly interested in a "memory war" to the degree of *Las armas y las letras* or *El impostor*), it is the author's notoriety within this generation that warrants its inclusion in the book.

Predictably, this group's paradigmatic figure would be Santos Juliá, whose argument that the so-called memory movement intruded into the realm of (professional) history runs counter to and is often the touchstone of Faber's book, which returns to it again and again. As Faber notes (80), this is by nature the intervention of a public intellectual, which is (of course) fine, but, pace Juliá, belies the self-absorbed specificity of the historian's discourse. *Memory Battles of the Spanish Civil War* is a rejoinder to Juliá's position in the intellectual field despite Juliá's own claims. Faber takes as his own maxim the group Contratiempo's claim, cited in opening and closing the book: the past belongs to everyone. It attempts to make sure that it does by engaging in a metahistory, paved with moral-ethical concerns, and opening itself up to interlocutors. This is a comprehensive yet diverse history of our historical concepts, the narratives with which we thread them, and the voices that speak them, but also an invitation to undertake a historicizing that is always already everyone and anyone's.

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