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William J. Nichols and H. Rosi Song, eds. *Toward a Cultural Archive of La Movida. Back to the Future.* Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2014.

Jorge Gonzalez del Pozo
University of Michigan - Dearborn, jorgegdp@umich.edu

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Abstract

Review of William J. Nichols and H. Rosi Song, eds. *Toward a Cultural Archive of La Movida. Back to the Future*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2014.

Keywords

la Movida

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The edited volume entitled *Toward a Cultural Archive of La Movida. Back to the Future*, compiled by William J. Nichols and H. Rosi Song, exposes yet another look at the socio-cultural scene during the *Transición*, the period after Francisco Franco's regime. The diverse pieces that form the book aim to further enlighten the controversial and lively times of a new Spain after the dictatorship. Following a certain quest to understand if *la Movida* was truly a foundational trend, a mere pose, an anecdotic game of shadows, or not even a movement, like some of the main authors and artists claim, this book presents a different angle when approaching cultural production in Spain during the 1980s.

The contextualization of this study stems from the classic explanation of *la Movida* as an answer to years of repression by transgressing as many orders of life as possible, but mainly the sexual and the artistic; by developing a frivolous concept of popular culture that aims to define this culturally complex phenomenon; and in turn, converting culture into a vehicle to shake off repression and articulate—perhaps unconsciously—the drastic political change: “After Franco's death in 1975, the focus on Spanish society and its cultural production has been overly determined by notions of ideological and social transformation, however real or imagined, postulating a concept of radical cultural and political shift towards freedom and democracy” (3). Up to this point, the study presents a common look at the movement, but from there it engages in the actual debate that has been brewing for the last three decades. This collection presents a recent and valuable bibliographic review, bringing to the table the question of whether or not postmodernism (according to Baudrillard and Debord) is the appropriate frame to use. Moreover, the authors question the main critical voices, namely Vilarós, Medina, or Moreiras-Menor, that do not align with the concept of the *Transición* as the perfect environment for a new society.

Probably the most interesting and burning question that this book pursues is a clear explanation on why there is still light to be shed on this period, mainly due to the incapability of the different fields (literature, film, sociology, political sciences, or even anthropology) to provide a clear description of the experience during *la Movida*. This lack of a strong and autonomous definition results from the phenomenon's link to a bibliographical perspective, a political reading or a state bound positioning as metaphor of democratic liberation. Although many studies have denounced the elitism of some of the main authors, a step beyond the usual cultural analysis is taken by its editors through bringing to the table the somewhat forgotten aspect of social class disparities that were coexisting in the places where *la Movida* was built. This debate is brought to the attention of the reader by

providing a heterogeneous corpus of chapters with different points of view that analyze a wide range of artists, media, and manifestations. The book starts with the section “Theorizing *la Movida*,” which sets the tone of the debate and the conversation that this book, in clear dialogue with other studies about *la Movida*, presents amongst its chapters. After this section, “Peripheral *Movidas* and Media Revolutions” deals with cultural manifestations considered as peripheral, an honest declaration of intentions by bringing the so-called peripheries to the center. The third section, “Taking Back the City: Politics of Space and Place in Spain,” covers space and urban contexts, a common focus for postmodern studies over the last fifteen years in an attempt to understand a definitely urban movement such as *la Movida*. The last section, “Still in the Present: Ghosts of *la Movida*,” far from closing the volume, opens a rich debate on how the period will integrate cultural imaginary, individually and collectively, but more importantly, institutionally, as a result of official discourses on the recounts of Spain’s recent cultural and socio-political history.

The volume states explicitly that *la Movida* needs further explanation as a cultural movement and a clear dissociation from the traditional hegemonic narratives that connect the movement exclusively with a tardy modernity or with a betrayal of victims’ memory of dictatorship. The concept of *la Movida*, as a spectral archive—using Derrida’s terms—shapes, presents, and sometimes represents the devastation found after almost forty years of oppression. This presence is crucial to the text in its quest to clarify this cultural explosion as it navigates the different close analysis of many myths, events, and players that were created during those years. In sum, the book draws some new lines of thought to the understanding of *la Movida*, and although a clear definition of it is still pending, the study fulfills the promise of enlightening the era by keeping a critical eye on a period that is yet to be understood fully from the standpoint of a strict cultural analysis.

Jorge González del Pozo
University of Michigan-Dearborn