

2016

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

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### Recommended Citation

Guia, Aitana (2016) "Review of William J. Nichols and Rosi H. Song, eds., *Back to the Future: Toward a Cultural Archive of La Movida*," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 41 : Iss. 1 , Article 22.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs/vol41/iss1/22>

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**Nichols, William J. and Rosi Song, H. (eds.), *Back to the Future: Toward a Cultural Archive of La Movida*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014. x + 359 pp.**

William J. Nichols' and H. Rosi Song's *Towards a Cultural Archive of la Movida* is a well-crafted enlargement of a special issue they edited for the *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* in 2009 that will be extensively used by Hispanists, historians of Modern Europe, and cultural theorists. The volume does not pretend to be a complete archive, rather it aims towards moving in the direction of creating a cultural archive of *la Movida*. It begins with "Theorizing *la Movida*" (with chapters by Jorge Marí, Héctor Fouce, Hamilton M. Stapell and Christine Henseler), continues with "Peripheral *Movidas* and Media revolutions" (with contributions by Alberto Mira, José Colmeiro, Jorge Pérez and Francisco Fernández de Alba), delves into "Taking Back the City: Politics of Space and Place in Spain" (with chapters by Susan Larson, Malcom A. Compitello, Juan Pablo Wert Ortega and Pedro Pérez del Solar) and concludes with a discussion of current reverberations and *removidas* in "Still in the Present: Ghosts of *la Movida*" (with contributions by William J. Nichols, Silvia Bermúdez, Jonathan Snyder and Marcela T. Garcés).

The editors argue for a better understanding of this cultural phenomenon by 1) "expanding its definition"; 2) "challenging general assumptions about its social and political influence"; and 3) challenging "its connection to the social and political transformation that the Spanish society underwent after the end of the Franco dictatorship" (2). Let's thus evaluate the work by its own objectives. First, regarding expanding the definition of *la Movida*, which is "roughly defined as the underground cultural phenomenon of the late 1970s and early 1980s that despite the numerous disagreements its only mention produces, it came to epitomize change and the perceived arrival of modernity in post-Franco Spain" (1), the volume falls short of offering clarity regarding the ways in which the concept should be expanded. It does not offer either a clear definition that all the authors subsequently use. An initial chapter on conceptual and historiographic debates on *la Movida*, complementary to Jorge Marí's "*La Movida as a Debate*", would have clarified how this volume connects to and moves beyond current interpretations. It would have also highlighted the novel contributions following chapters make to understanding this certainly elusive phenomenon.

Second, the volume aims to challenge general assumptions about the social and political influence of *la Movida*. Here, the authors identify that the relevance of *la Movida* has been undermined by those interpretations that could not go beyond expressing "nostalgia about its demise, its energy, or ultimately, pity about its political and market-driven co-optation" (5). They also challenge an elitist position that disregards the artistic legacies of *la Movida* or even argues that they did not exist because most of the cultural manifestations associated with this phenomenon were low-brow (comics, music, life performances, fashion...). The volume makes a convincing case for a bottom-up analysis of youth culture of the late 1970s and early 1980s and fulfills its second stated aim by analyzing a variety of low-brow cultural products. Placing the notion of subculture (as well as underground culture or

counterculture) central stage helps our understanding of *la Movida* in its own merits, rather than merely as a tool in the justification of political or modernizing projects.

Third, the volume challenges assumptions about the connections *la Movida* had with the social and political transformations the Spanish society experienced during the Transition years. *La Movida* has been seen as a movement co-opted by modernist political projects and later identified with their political failures. A version of this interpretation argues that *la Movida* was merely a smoke screen used by Spanish politicians to create a façade of modernity and progressivism in Spain in line with what the outside world expected from a newly democratic country. This façade was a key element in the suppression and avoidance of discussions of the victims and disappeared persons during the Spanish Civil War. On this third goal, the volume felicitously challenges dominant narratives that simplistically frame *la Movida* as either “the entry of a tardy modern identity or as a betrayal to the memory of the victims of the dictatorship” (6). In highlighting the artistic creativity and political goals of *la Movida* in its own merits, Susan Larson calls it “a revolutionary political and aesthetic urban movement”, the volume expands our analytical lens and refuses to either look at *la Movida* merely for its relevance to past events (the Spanish Civil War) or for its contributions to a future modern democracy.

*Towards a Cultural Archive of la Movida* is “a careful look into the myths that have (and have been) generated from this so-called cultural phenomenon while closely examining the actual events, players, and practices that dominated during the years that followed the end of the dictatorship” (6). One of the weakness of the volume that future works on *la Movida* might want to tackle is that the focus on “players” is not as thoroughly discussed as *la Movida*’s cultural products, representations and interpretations. An attentive reader would like to know more about who actually participated and in which capacity, as well as learn more about the class and cultural background of the agents that made it possible. While the volume does a great job in highlighting the role of low-brow cultural products, sexuality, and drugs, there is very little about women’s participation in *la Movida*, with the exception of Bermúdez’s article on the singer Alaska. A deeper focus on the contributions of women, as well as a higher proportion of female contributors to the volume (only one in four), could have increased the volume’s usefulness.

Overall, this accomplished volume offers exciting interpretative venues for understanding the complexity of *la Movida*, incorporates spacial and urban analysis to social and cultural movements, and broadens our understanding of culture and political agency by highlighting youth rebellion and low-brow cultural products.

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