

Review / Reseña

Forcinito, Ana. *Intermittences: Memory, Justice & the Poetics of the Visible in Uruguay*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2018.

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In her most recent book, *Intermittences: Memory, Justice, & the Poetics of the Visible in Uruguay* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), Ana Forcinito reads against the grain in the interdisciplinary field of memory studies as she considers the post dictatorship era of Uruguay and its representations within the field. *Intermittences* steps back from the global and transnational focus of memory studies that has been prevalent in the field during the last couple of decades, such as that exemplified in Michael Rothberg's work on multidirectional memories. Instead, Forcinito returns to a national framework and employs this focus in order to consider the specificity of recent memories in Uruguay in their context and to "dismantle decontextualization of the transnational flow of memory" regarding their relationship with human rights (5). The book focuses on the national and local levels while also highlighting the tensions between domestic and international laws, citing several examples of internal clashes of memory at the local and national levels. Building her analysis around the metaphor of *intermittences of memory*, Forcinito establishes two approaches to the study of memory: memory as evidence and memory as poetics. In doing so, she also considers their intersections in the poetics of evidence and evidence of poetics (8). She defines intermittences as "precisely those

attempts to make visible (and audible) the battles over oblivion and silence, and thus to construct an alternative narrative about the past and to expose the blind spots of the model of peace and reconciliation (4). Forcinito juxtaposes such intermittences with those of the more visible/official/monolithic/hegemonic meanings assigned to moments from Uruguay's transitional justice process. The intermittences that the book considers are "all attempts to intervene politically in the process of meaning construction and can be understood as interruptions of silence and negation [...]" (5). In her rich analysis of a plethora of testimonial texts, Forcinito presents a convincing argument for alternative models to consider the issues of collective/public memory, truth and justice, and the issues of forgiveness and reconciliation after state violence. Here, literary, artistic, and other forms of cultural production take a central role in shaping the contours of the discussion on memory politics and alternative forms of justice through an outstanding critique framed by visual studies.

One of the central issues that Forcinito takes up in her investigation is the transitional justice model utilized in Uruguay during the post-dictatorship period, which she asserts was marked by amnesty and impunity in exchange for a path to democracy. Forcinito links these issues to active forgetting through the 1986 "Ley de caducidad" (Expiry Law). The Expiry Law notably granted amnesty to military actors who had carried out human rights violations during the dictatorship and, despite two referendums to repeal the law (in 1989 and 2009, respectively), it remained in effect until it was finally repealed in 2011, thus removing the statute of limitations on such crimes in Uruguay's domestic law. The ideology associated with the Expiry Law was a decided amnesia and an exclusively future-oriented trajectory in Uruguay's pacte democracy that undermined the imprescriptibility of the crimes carried out by the military, despite the nation's commitments to international treaties affirming that same imprescriptibility. The intermittences cited in this book thus serve as disruptions to this process of forgetting by calling into question the political dimension of what is remembered and which subjects may participate in these struggles over the construction of collective memories, particularly those that become public/official memories. In this way, the book also considers the visibility/invisibility of some memory texts as a political process in framing what is remembered and which traces remain at the margins. Forcinito writes, "Intermittence, as a metaphor that encapsulates my argument, invites us to rethink the idea of *visual* framing, but also the idea of the framework of memory: the visible and the invisible, the remembered and the forgotten, the tangible and the intangible, and the link between the law (both domestic and international) and the

framing of images and memories” (8). Forcinito’s analysis argues for alternative avenues of justice in the cultural realm when legal recourse leads to a “truth without justice” model, as described by critic Hernán Vidal (4). Memory therefore plays an important role in transitional justice models because such models require the construction of an alternative history of past abuses, in part through the interventions of institutions such as truth and reconciliation commissions. Such institutions are often detached from the criminal justice paradigm, thus exposing the gap between truth and justice. Struggles over these narratives are consequently a significant part of transitional justice models. Forcinito argues that “[t]he image of intermittences points precisely to the repetitive and inconstant but ever-present haunting of memory and, in that sense, it implies an interruption or a series of interruptions of the model of peace and reconciliation as well as an obstinate exercise against such a model” (4-5). However, in transitional justice models *testimonios* are generally considered as evidence, which Forcinito suggests is only one way of considering memory and only one way of seeking justice. Forcinito writes that “[i]n sharp contrast with judicial and legal impunity, alternative forms of justice are born within the cultural and artistic realm. These cultural practices reelaborate the meaning of justice, which is now understood as an unfinished process of signification and a form of political mobilization” (6).

Taking the study of memory in a different direction from the consideration of *testimonio* as evidence, Forcinito proposes an exploration of the poetics and aesthetics of memory, and, in particular, the artistic and literary practices that engage in a struggle about vision/visibility. For Forcinito, who echoes the philosopher Jacques Rancière, the visible in a political sense refers to “what we can see and what we can say” (9). Forcinito argues that official memory is “theatrically staged by transitional justice mechanisms and discourses,” but that there are traces, fragments, and remnants that exceed the limits of official/hegemonic/visible memories (6). These remnants are in dialogue with other official and non-sanctioned memories and respond to and call into question what is accepted as collective memory. Such traces chip away at the consensus and cohesiveness that make official memory monolithic and hegemonic. Forcinito specifies that “[she is] thinking about peripheral manifestations of memory: the emergence of new subjects of memory (for example, in terms of gender or new generations) or of new poetics of memory that subvert the cohesiveness or the indisputability of interpretations of the past and instead propose aesthetic and interpretive variations that make new contours of the recent past visible” (6). One such example is one of Forcinito’s readings of photography, arguably one of the most reliable

instruments for establishing evidence as “proof” and thus as “truth” of crimes under the transitional justice model. In her analysis of the 2001 exhibition *El ejercicio de la memoria* (“The Exercise of Memory”) which included Ernesto Vila’s “Hechos en Uruguay” (“Events in Uruguay” or “Made in Uruguay”), the photographic installation placed photographs behind bottles full of water, and viewers had to look through the liquid to see the distorted and ghostly images. For Forcinito, this exhibition brought about a reflection on the “dismantling of photography’s evidentiary power [in order] to highlight its intermittent power to evoke” (64). In this way, Forcinito argues that photography poses a paradox: “On the one hand, it is immersed in a revelatory pact: of photography, or truth, insofar as it is supposedly understood as proof, as testimony, ‘faithful’ to reality. On the other hand, it plays with that pact and nullifies it, erases it, and instead displays another kind of knowledge, in which the gaze (and the social meaning associated with memory) plays a central role” (64). Photography in this way is representative in its ability to identify, but also “perform[s] an aesthetic role by expressing new senses through repetition, displacement, and the suspension of the passage of time” (65). Viewing photography as both representative and aesthetic at the same time, it points to both the testimonial and the poetic aspects of memory. This is only one of many salient examples that the book’s analysis provides to show both the evidentiary and poetic aspects of testimonial texts.

Forcinito links her analysis on photography—on the visible/invisible—to *testimonio* as well, focusing on the genre’s key characteristics, the voice of the other (as logos and sound) and the suffering body as rendered visible. She ties the notion of voice (who is heard) to the notion of the visible (who is seen, what is remembered). While Forcinito does not explicitly mention it in her discussion on the voice and the visible, this analysis appears to connect with Judith Butler’s work on precarity and the “grievability” of certain lives in that economy of representation, as discussed in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, 2004). The central issue is that certain voices are heard, certain subjects are visible, certain lives are grievable, and certain others are not—which Forcinito clearly points out in her analysis. However, Forcinito also significantly identifies the poetic processes by which marginalized subjects—the tortured, the imprisoned—become heard and visible through testimony. One notable analysis that Forcinito undertakes is on the 1985 testimonial account *Las manos en el fuego* by the journalist Ernesto González Bermejo, which is based on the testimonies of the Tupamaro militant David Cámpora. Forcinito notes that Cámpora’s political subjectivity is constructed through his ability to reason and articulate his

experience—not just his militancy—as he denounces the torture and murders that he experienced as a political prisoner. She puts González Bermejo’s text into dialogue with Carlos Liscano’s testimonial account, *El furgón de los locos* (“The Madmen’s Van”), which relates to the transport of the last political prisoners in 1985. Liscano’s testimony vividly recounts the details of torture, focusing on the materiality of pain, but from a detached, passive voice. There is a transformation of the scream of torture into discourse, following Rancière’s notion of visibility. For Forcinito, “Rancière notes a conflict between those who have an articulated (logical) voice and those whose voice is mere noise (whose speech is affected by distortion) [...] Politics [...] is driven by logos (reason, meaning). And it is named bodies that occupy the realm of the visible, while those that are unnamed occupy the invisible realm” (84-85). Forcinito notes that testimony has facilitated the creation of visible bodies—highlighting especially the relatively recent discussion of women’s bodies in the context of sexual violence. Indeed, she dedicates two chapters to the issue of gendered violence and another to violence perpetrated against children. The creation of visible bodies takes place through a process of poetics in which there is a complex operation of narrative resignification performed on the testimonial subject that envisions a new form of political expression. She also notes that there is a certain violence that is at times present in the creation of testimonial texts, notably in their translations and transcriptions, a point worth mentioning and deserving of greater discussion in the field of memory studies.

With a focus on visibility/invisibility, as expected, Forcinito also addresses the issue of the gaze with respect to the question of political imprisonment. The surveillance and control aspects of the gaze are read in relation to the film *Les Yeux des oiseaux*, directed by Gabriel Auer, the testimonial novel *El tigre y la nieve*, by Fernando Butazzoni, and the novels *Sala 8* and *Las cartas que no llegaron*, by Mauricio Rosencof. However, the looking relations are considered from either an external position or from a latter moment in relation to the events. In considering the external/temporal position of the posttraumatic subject in relation to the traumatic events, Forcinito suggests that the obstruction of the chronological ordering of time interrupts the testimonial narrative—the logic and reason expected of testimony for it to be comprehensible and thus visible—“to point to creative visions that expose both the pain and the resistance that take place precisely as a battle of vision: a different way to access what is visible and/or intelligible and that is marked by temporal fragmentation” (23). This poetic approach of fragmentation directly addresses the inexpressibility and unrepresentability of trauma, as described in the work of Cathy Caruth, and points to the impossibilities

of a complete testimony while illustrating the shortcomings of the evidentiary model. The poetic model in this case reveals the lacunae of trauma, that which is not visible or representable.

The second half of *Intermittences* focuses on gender and children/new generations as they relate to the issue of memory. Forcinito asserts that gender has been largely erased in the construction of memory and grants considerable space in her book to compensate for that erasure. She “investigate[s] a series of attempts to make women’s participation visible in historical approaches, literary texts, and visual projects that focus on female prisoners and female hostages held in solitary confinement during the dictatorship” (23). Forcinito analyzes works by women prisoners of the dictatorship such as *Las rebenas: historia oculta de once presas de la dictadura*, by Marisa Ruiz and Rafael Sanseviero, *La leyenda de Yessie Macchi*, by Silvia Soler, and the multi-volume narrative project *Memorias para armar*, which compiles the social memories of Uruguayan women under the dictatorship. These interventions are important because they point to the specific experiences of women subject to state violence and highlight the particular types of violence and abuses that are prevalently experienced by women political prisoners, such as sexual violence, in the context of state terrorism. The final two chapters specifically address children, and in the same way that gender has been largely erased from the construction of official memory, children are rarely granted agency in their own experiences or a platform upon which to articulate them. One chapter focuses on the issue of restitution of identity in the reconstruction of memory surrounding the dictatorship, exemplified in the cases of Simón Riquelo and Mariana Zaffaroni, who were abducted as children under the dictatorship. This chapter, much along the lines of issues raised by Gabriel Gatti regarding the complicated mission of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo in his book *Surviving Forced Disappearance in Argentina and Uruguay: Identity and Meaning* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), illustrates the complexities of the failed reunion after abduction and problematizes the enterprise of restitution of identity. The final chapter centers on new generations of memory, that is, those who were children during the dictatorship and as a generation “is today demanding a place in the reconstruction of memories [...]” (25). This chapter, “rethink[s] the fusion of time and the oscillations of memories between the past and present that acquire new meanings when remembered by an adult in the present, via the perception of the child that he or she was in the past” (25). The final two chapters are particularly significant because they represent a necessary intervention in the field of memory studies in treating children’s memories with greater agency and recognition as subjects in their own right.

Forcinito takes on a number of challenging issues in her book and in great depth deftly analyzes a remarkable number of texts in eight chapters. She has a talent for succinctly summarizing complex theoretical concepts in lucid prose and articulates her arguments with great originality. *Intermittences* is theoretically complex, rich in analysis, but approachable for non-specialists in the field of memory studies with its comprehensive literature review. *Intermittences* is a must-read for specialists in memory studies and contemporary Southern Cone studies and makes several important contributions to these fields in its thorough analysis.