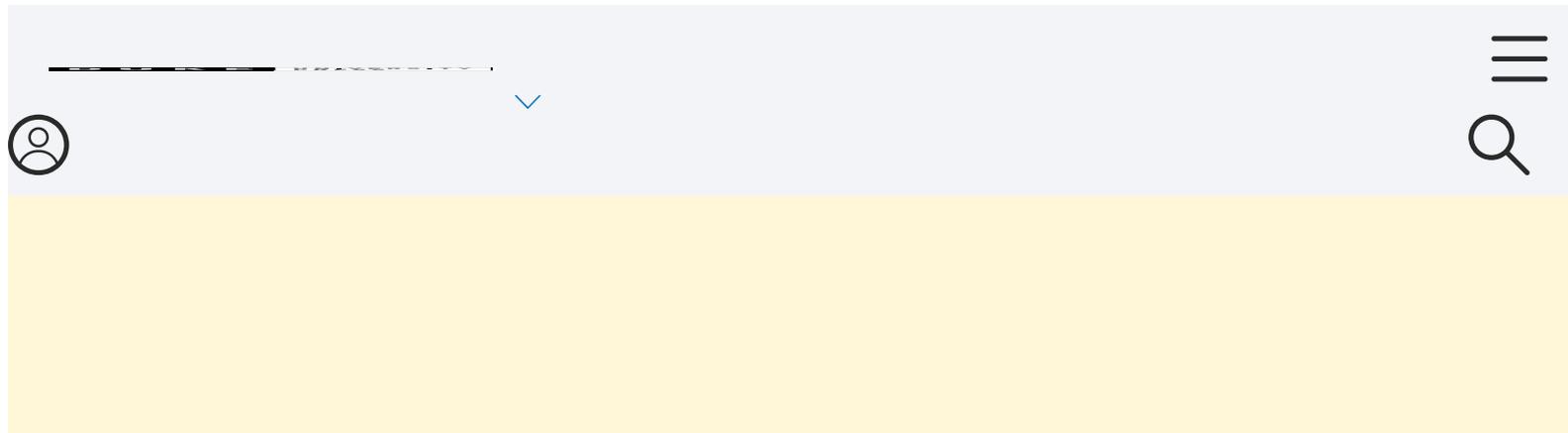


Memory and modernity in democratic Spain: The difficulty of coming to terms with the Spanish Civil War.



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Memory and Modernity in Democratic Spain: The Difficulty of Coming to Terms with the Spanish Civil War

Jo Labanyi

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The essay argues that modernity is best understood not as the cultural expression of capitalist modernization, but as a particular set of relations of present to past. It examines the varying attitudes toward the violent past of the civil war that have characterized Spain since the Franco dictatorship and continuing to the present day. The obsessive memorialization of the Nationalist war dead throughout the Franco dictatorship led, at the time of the transition to democracy, to a desire to break with the past; it was not, as is often argued, a determination to forget, but a decision not to let the past affect the future. Thus attempts toward the end of the Franco dictatorship to deal cinematically with this violent heritage were followed by a ten-year gap, until the appearance in the mid-1980s of a number of novels and films representing the civil war and their escalation since the late 1990s to create a memory boom, which has resulted in the publication of a large number of testimonies. The essay questions whether trauma theory, which has been so important in Holocaust studies, provides an adequate model for understanding the belated appearance of these memories, arguing that the reason is more likely to be a previous lack of willing interlocutors. Nevertheless, it concludes that the present urge to recount every detail of the past is less effective in communicating the horror of the war and its repression than are those accounts—in film at the end of the dictatorship and in fiction in the mid-1980s, with occasional more recent examples—which acknowledge the difficulty of narrativizing the violent past as well as the importance of transgenerational transmission.

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