

Brad Evans and Sean Michael Wilson, *Portraits of Violence: An Illustrated History of Radical Thinking* (Ottawa: New International Press, 2016). 128pp. Paperback \$21.00.

This slim volume, intended to be used as an educational tool, contains ten illustrated chapters, each centering on an individual who has made—what the authors consider to be—key contributions to theories on violence. *Portraits of Violence* is the product of a collaboration between political theorist Brad Evans and Sean Michael Wilson, a comic book artist. Each of the chapters were written by Evans and Wilson as a summary of a specific theory, and are illustrated by a different artist. Graphic non-fiction books are becoming more prevalent, aiming to introduce complex topics in a way that is more accessible to larger reading publics. This volume similarly promises to provide the “most compelling ideas and episodes in critique of violence” (back cover) in an accessible, condensed form. However, short introductions summarizing theories have been around much longer. What do illustrations add to our understanding of a topic as contested and complex as violence?

The choice to present this work visually is justified in two ways. In the (un-illustrated) forward by Henry A. Giroux, he argues that mainstream media has produced a culture of immediate visual gratification, encouraging ignorance and repressing critical thought. In this climate, education must strive to cultivate tools to critique the violence enacted on us, or on others on our behalf. This book aims to harness the power of visuals to expand the readers’ imagination of the roots, implications, and responses to violence. This commitment to education also means presenting challenging writers, such as Michel Foucault and Noam Chomsky, in an accessible, easily-digestible way. While many readers may be deterred by the idea of delving into dense theory, ten-page chapters offer an easy gateway into complex theories of violence. The images offer an extra-textual aid to concretize and exemplify ideas.

The ten chapters cover theorists from the past century, including Brad Evans, Hannah Arendt, Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Susan Sontag, Noam Chomsky, Judith Butler and Giorgio Agamben. The chapters are generally all well written, and manage to convey the gist of complex theories while leaving the interested reader to dig deeper on their own. However, the degree to which the illustrations offer an understanding beyond the text, or contribute something that cannot be captured in words, varies dramatically between the chapters.

The best chapters are those in which the illustrations are able to elevate the text, creating subtext and nuance. One such example is the chapter on Franz Fanon, “The Wretched of the Earth.” Fanon argued that the colonized viewed violence as the only way to reclaim power, and the illustrations show a young boy furtively throwing a small rock at a tank (43). Fanon worked on Algeria under French occupation, but this image of an unequal power dynamic is suggestive of more re-

cent examples familiar to many news-viewing North Americans, such as the American forces in Afghanistan or Israel in the occupied territories. The illustration also provides visual nuance to a question that arises later in the chapter as to whether Fanon's work can be interpreted as a justification for violence.

Another example of the ability of images to explicate and add layers of meaning is in chapter nine, which focuses on Judith Butler's *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. The four panels in the first page of this chapter compare two scenes immediately familiar to anyone watching or reading the news in the west. The top two panels show the smoking tower of the World Trade Center, after being hit, and the shocked and grieved faces of Americans. The bottom panels show a small building in ruins, only the supporting columns standing, with a similar image of shocked and grieving faces, this time with darker hair, some of whom are covered in a Niqab (110). Butler asks how we can use injury for political change. She argues that grieving temporarily dislocates us from our first-world privilege, a position that allows us to question violence as an automatic response. These four panels and their layout on the page, alongside the text, set up Butler's intervention in a convincing and striking way. This set of images is powerful, since it alludes to other themes that come up in the chapter. First is Butler's application of subjectivity and performance to her theory on violence. The visual cue of a woman wearing a headcover helps us decode the second panel as taking place in the Arab world, as opposed to the west. Butler's argument, as presented in this chapter, is that identities are constructed, with dress norms being an important part of that construction. These norms are also part of how we perceive differences between different social groups. Butler suggests that when we notice these constructs, we can start to look beyond them to focus not on our differences, but at our similarities. The visual indicators of difference between the two grieving groups are a call for us to reflect on the constructed nature of our differences. In both illustrations, of the World Trade Center and an un-named Arab city, the illustrator omitted the perpetrator of the attack. This is meaningful as it turns our attention not to the political causes of violence, but to how we deal with its aftermath, and whether we can find different answers.

However, not all chapters contain such illuminating illustrations. The images in chapter five, "Michel Foucault: Society Must be Defended," do not contribute much to grasping complex notions such as bio-power, as they mostly portray the theorist talking. Other chapters, such as chapter four, "Paulo Freire: The Pedagogy of the Oppressed" and chapter seven, "Susan Sontag: Regarding the Pain of Others," have the same problem. In relying too heavily on the narrative, these chapters do not fully utilize the power that illustration can have in buttressing a text.

While the choice to use illustrations in *Portraits of Violence* is supported by the authors' educational mission, the use of visuals is not equally effective in all chapters. In the most successful ones, the images make concepts and ideas easier to grasp, or offer a layer of added subtlety and nuance that the text alone cannot. However, in other chapters the illustrations add little to the effective and concise introduction provided in the text, and seem gimmicky and superfluous. Overall, the book provides a good introduction to the ten thinkers and lays out thought-provoking questions about violence, in a visual manner that is clearly geared towards a North American reader. This book has the potential to draw in readers to engage with challenging theory.

Noa Nahmias
York University

Nina Caputo and Liz Clarke, *Debating Truth: The Barcelona Disputation of 1263: A Graphic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). 256pp. Paperback \$24.95.

The graphic history promised in the title occupies the first quarter of this volume (84 pages) and is devoted to a portrait of the 1263 Barcelona disputation. The remaining sections of the book provide traditional and useful historical considerations, including translations of the key sources for the Barcelona disputation (Part II, 46 pages), observations on the context of the disputation (Part III, 42 pages), depiction of the historiography of the encounter (Part IV, 34 pages), and directions for further study of the event (Part V, 11 pages). The first half of the historiography section identifies diverse perspectives on the Barcelona event, which has aroused considerable scholarly discord; the second half explains Nina Caputo's decision to present the Barcelona engagement in graphic format.

Prior to engaging directly with the graphic history, let me address key background issues that frame it. What was the precise nature of the engagement that took place in Barcelona in 1263? The title already provides two descriptors—disputation and debate—and both are problematic. In her preface, Caputo notes the ubiquity of literary depictions of Christian-Jewish religious argumentation and suggests that “there is good reason to believe that Jews and Christians discussed and debated theological differences on an individual basis” (xiv). She further indicates that there were occasional “public disputations in which kings played an instrumental role and leaders from the Jewish community were obliged to defend Jewish texts and practices” (xiv). Caputo highlights four such instances: 1240 in Paris; 1263 in Barcelona; 1271 in Paris; and 1413–14 in Tortosa.

This listing points to the loose and potentially confusing meanings of the term “disputation.” The Paris “disputation”—it has been widely agreed—was