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## RESEÑAS DE LIBROS / BOOK REVIEWS

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LILIANA GÓMEZ. *Archive Matter: A Camera in the Laboratory of the Modern*. Think Art Diaphanes, 2023.

*Archive Matter: A Camera in the Laboratory of the Modern* was long overdue. This is a study that shows how a large corporation, or institution as some may argue, is able to exert a profound influence on society. In many ways the information presented in Gómez's book is not new. That enormous corporations can shape practice, perception, and even society itself are ideas that have existed since modernity in the social sciences (and, as historians will point out, the institutions — such as those linked to world religions — have been signaling these same conclusions for centuries). However, where Gómez makes her mark is in discussing the role of photography in evidencing this. In doing so, the reader can understand Latin America better and the role of the United Fruit Company in the shaping of it (and in the formulation of our perception of it).

This study has come into existence thanks to postdoctoral research that Gómez undertook in the United Fruit Company archives at Harvard. Given the company's mammoth role in Latin America, a serious study of its photography archives has always promised to offer keen and interesting insights into Latin America as a location and the role of this transnational company there. However, it should be noted that Gómez is not the first to have undertaken such a task — Kevin Coleman's *A Camera in the Garden of Eden* (2016) was one of the pioneering texts in this area. One of the points that both studies share is to evidence the key role photography can play regarding how history can be written (or rewritten) using photography as a primary source. Both studies are excellent examples of this, and I should note that Gómez openly acknowledges Coleman's work in the introduction and throughout the book.

Where these two studies differ is in their use of theory. Both use it but my observations left the impression that Gómez presses on it with greater strength. To give an example, while I would say that the use of theory in the case of Coleman is more on the par with John Mraz's *Looking for Mexico* (2009), *Archive Matter's* usage of it has more in common with Parvati Nair's *A Different Light* (2012) in terms of how theory informs the analytical discussion. Theory usage is at its best when Gómez is applying visual theory such as that of Alan Sekula and Walter Benjamin.

When considering the usage of visual material within this book, I would be keen to note that the publisher has allowed the book to contain many images of excellent quality. This is to be applauded. While I would have liked to have seen even more engagement with the images themselves in the discussion, the role of these images is key to our ability to visualize the concepts that the author discusses.

In many ways the book is divided into topics that consider how photography can be used to show the vast reach of the United Fruit Company. The first chapter considers the role of photography in connection to capitalism (here the chapter reminds us of the relevance of Kevin Coleman and Daniel James's 2021 edited volume *Capitalism and the Camera*). It looks at how violence establishes hierarchy and how photography can map social structure as well as how photography taken by the United Fruit company was used in such a way as to equate progress with material advances. This study also shows how photography could provide evidence of growth in the field of science and how the company brought technology (such as hospitals and communication lines) to the tropics while at the same time informing our understanding of the tropics via the photography that the company decided to take of the region. Gómez is not blind to the fact that the United Fruit Company was keen to photographically evidence a favorable view of its enterprise, often showing their work (buildings, structures, and so forth) as utopian, while the rest of Latin America that they depict is often pictured as still being in a colonial state.

Gómez's study uses the United Fruit archive to underline one of the points brought out in Ruben Gallo's *Mexican Modernity*, that is that technology such as the radio and photography were some of the instruments that underpinned modernity. Only, in this case, Gómez can evidence the role of the institution in cementing these technological advances in this region of the world.

Finally, the author uses her work to underscore how Latin American fiction has roots in history. In the final chapter Gómez shows the relationship between the massacre in Macondo portrayed in *Cien años de soledad* and the actual events in Colombia (including images from the region that Gabriel García Márquez would have seen first-hand) that inspired that fictional retelling. While the images kept by the United Fruit Company do not show any dead, they do evidence protest and destruction. This closing chapter draws on Ariella Azoulay to remind us that our spectatorship of photographic images invites us (and all who witness) to act.

I recommend this hefty tome (which comes in at almost 400 pages and dozens of images) as an in-depth study of the United Fruit Company's vast photographic archive, as well as a strong example of what is possible when

we choose to study society and its institutions through the photographs they produce. It will be useful to students and researchers alike.

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PAULA BRUNO, ALEXANDRA PITA Y MARINA ALVARADO. *Embajadoras culturales. Mujeres latinoamericanas y vida diplomática, 1860-1960*. Prohistoria, 2021.

En la “Introducción” al libro de Paula Bruno, Alexandra Pita y Marina Alvarado, titulado *Embajadoras culturales. Mujeres latinoamericanas y vida diplomática, 1860-1960*, Bruno, en un texto sólido, realiza, entre otros aspectos, una estupenda revisión bibliográfica sobre el tema. Es un “estado de la cuestión” de los estudios a propósito del mundo de la diplomacia y la incidencia que las mujeres han tenido en él.

Una de las conclusiones a las que se llega después de leer esta “Introducción” —la cual es compartida una vez se leen los tres ensayos que conforman este volumen— es que, como en los demás ámbitos de la historia de la vida en sociedad entre mujeres y hombres, a las mujeres se las ha relegado a un segundo plano. Efectivamente, como lo han demostrado muchos estudios en torno a la mujer, su vida, sus prácticas de todo tipo, su incidencia en el proceso civilizatorio, su aportación a los procesos políticos, su participación en el mundo de la cultura y del trabajo, entre otros aspectos, han sido invisibilizadas o han pasado a un segundo orden. Sin embargo, una segunda conclusión, esto para el ámbito europeo, señala que el protagonismo de la mujer en las lides de la diplomacia ha sido rescatado, estudiado e investigado con el fin de revelarnos la importancia de la mujer en los ámbitos diplomáticos. En menor medida, y en el contexto latinoamericano, esta reorientación de los estudios sobre la mujer en la diplomacia también ha venido siendo abordada. En este sentido, el libro que se comenta tiene gran importancia en su manera de mostrar científica y críticamente la importancia de las mujeres en un ámbito, el diplomático, que por mucho tiempo en la historiografía se ha considerado como exclusivo del género masculino. Este libro colectivo muestra todo lo contrario.

Como se sabe, en el siglo XIX ocurre un quiebre importante en la historia de las mujeres con el movimiento sufragista femenino, cuyo punto de partida fue la importante declaración de la ciudad de Seneca Falls (EE. UU., 1848). En esta “Declaración” se insistió en los derechos políticos, sociales y religiosos de la mujer, particularmente, su derecho al voto. Otro momento paradigmático en el reclamo de las mujeres de todo tipo de derechos aconteció en la década