

María Rosón, Crítica(s) de arte. Género, memoria y cultura visual en el primer franquismo (materiales cotidianos, más allá del arte).

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Reseña: María Rosón, *Crítica(s) de arte. Género, memoria y cultura visual en el primer franquismo (materiales cotidianos, más allá del arte)*¹. Madrid, Cátedra, 2016. Virginia Villaplana Ruiz. Universidad de Murcia

The art historian María Rosón analyses the historical value of the documentary image as long-forgotten material from the post-war era. Cinema culture and family photograph archives constitute a visual culture which serves as a testament to post-war Spain. The book *Género, memoria y cultura visual en el primer franquismo (materiales cotidianos, más allá del arte)* addresses the construction and reception of gender identities in the visual culture of autocratic Spain between 1938 and 1953. Studying this everyday cultural material reveals how women negotiated their identities by means of self-determination, in order to challenge the strict orders imposed on them by a deeply patriarchal dictatorship. María Rosón's theoretical stance proposes that there is an unbroken line going from visual studies, feminist studies and cultural memory to the infrapolitics that James Scott defines as the clandestine space between public and private discourse (2003:259). This is pieced together by popular and visual culture as a place of resistance, which would ultimately function as an act of identity and a protest against power. The context in which they are received forms part of the images' communicative process, particularly with photographic images, as the photographer and theorist Fontcuberta (2011) identifies when he revisits Arnheim's classic texts. Thus, the photographic image acts like a kind of presence/absence which brings about a certain experience. He adds: "What defines photography is not so much how we do it or what we do it with, be it the light or the lens, but rather the single photograph itself is what elicits the public's reaction, namely that of affording them the indisputable experience of authenticity [...]. According to Arnheim, what characterises photography is not something intrinsic to its own language, nor something related to its own technique or formative origins, but rather a social and cultural attribute" (p.94). This perspective has not gone unnoticed in Rosón's work, in which she puts forward a comparison between the practices undergone by women, regarding the social imaginary that was constructed by the cultural industries such as film, advertising, the fashion press and photography, all of which helped form a visual regime during the first period of the autarchy. Every society has its true regime, its "general politics" of truth as Foucault claimed (1992); that is, the kinds of discourse which this regime takes in and sets as either true or false, and also the rulings of those who decide what is to function as the truth.



Image 1. Still from NO-DO, no. 344B, 1949. Filmoteca Española.

1 "Art Critique(s). Gender, memory and visual culture during the first period of Francoism (everyday materials, beyond art)."

Research in images, communication and gender helps us understand cultural objects, and the social practices which bring them about, as experiences affected by the body, memory and emotions. In this sense, we can further add that these studies also allow us to consider the history of images as objects produced by social practices related with the construction of identity (Labanyi, 2010) and its material memory. Personal photographs and their everyday practices are one of the cores of Rosón's theoretical proposal which is certainly linked with the phantasmagorical regime as presence (embodiment), absence and indication. Desire, incarnation to help remember faces, bodily gestures, or the performative nature of the amateur image to narrate first-hand experiences of an event or of a place. These everyday practices in which images are used are superimposed upon those which include the photograph as a material object: framing the image, making it disappear, cutting it up, scratching it, burning it, writing on it, giving it away, swapping it, kissing it, saving it or weaving it into the plot of a family album. The concept of the "photograph object", as discussed by Rosón in the book, understands the documentary image as social biography, due to its possessing a material and historic character, given that "the field of photography does not defer to the photograph as a research object, but rather it deems it a theoretical object" (Krauss: 2002, p.14). On the other hand, it can also be considered material due to its condition as a testimonial image. All of this leads to the aforementioned existing relationship between photography and sociological and political aspects, and others which have a bearing on the consideration of the administrative archive as a patriarchal model of family organisation in Spain. This takes up the space of the representational organisation within the wider frame of photography, as a space for organising power within gender relations.



Image 2. Photographic family portrait, 1940, by Vicente Velasco, Lozoyuela, Madrid

Postmemory is the inclination to construct a memory after the event in question. Marianne Hirsch (1997) defines it as "when you are conditioned by the memory of others, despite having not experienced it" (p.11), and postmemory differs from memory in terms of distance and history, which produce a profound and personal connection across generations. It refers to the experience of people who have been brought up conditioned by narratives which precede their own

birth. She also describes the memory of cultural events and traumatic experiences as part of the postmemory process. Rosón, following in Hirsch's footsteps, explores family photographs and the way in which albums are put together, noting that they are created according to the modern family ideal, showing certain cohesion between the recorded events. Photography, therefore, forms an illusion of transcribing reality, and it naturalises those everyday moments kept in albums, which are invariably codified cultural practices. Moving between what is represented and what appears to be irrepresentable for the hegemonic discourses. That would be the way to break with this history of domination. Photograph albums are a memory bank and an instrument for social staging, to aid in the construction of identity, the study of history and the collective memory. The studied photograph albums from Spain's autocratic period (1938-1953) tend to be very alike, because they conform to fascism's family mythology, coming from the desire to belong to a certain social, ideological and cultural regime. The book *Género, memoria y cultura visual en el primer franquismo (materiales cotidianos, más allá del arte)* shows how Spanish society visualised their own mythology and trauma, via the images they produced, hid away, destroyed or imagined, within the visual culture of the Francoist autarchy.



Image 3. Wedding photograph burnt in places, 1945, Madrid. Photograph included in *Madrileños*.

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