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KEYNOTE LECTURES

Ludmilla **Jordanova** (King's College London)

Photographic Relationships: Historians and Photography

Photography appears to be an especially “historical” medium, perhaps the most historical of the visual arts. Common sense suggests that photographs arise from a specific moment in time, and that this form of technology is, by and large, faithful to what was actually before the camera. As a result, photographs are used by historians all the time, for example, to capture a mood, to evoke nostalgia, to make an authoritative statement about the past. Photography is historical in another, different sense; it belongs to a particular era of human development – for most of history there has been nothing like it, and its dominance in our time makes it appear distinctively “modern”. Furthermore, almost everyone is a photographer, so the medium itself holds little mystique, unlike, say, oil painting. Photography has become a source of memory upon which individuals, institutions and whole societies have become reliant. For all these reasons, there is a vast critical literature on photography and its history, which, from a number of perspectives, has focused especially on documentary photography, and on dismantling common sense views of it. Yet practising historians continue to take photography for granted, and frequently use it uncritically in their publications. There are, admittedly, many challenges in using and interpreting photographs, and the sheer volume of photographic material, together with the difficulty in many cases of specifying time, place and maker, and the capacity for visual manipulation need to be recognized.

There are in fact respects in which photography was not as novel as is sometimes supposed. For instance, buildings, ruins, sculpture, people and costumes were all represented in allegedly “documentary” prints for more than three centuries before photography became widespread. So Greeks and Greece were present in visual representations that claimed authority long before the 1840s. We might think, for example, of Sir William Hamilton’s prestigious publication of his collection of Greek vases. Yet prints are different from photographs in some key ways – the nature of the labour process, for example. It may be that by pursuing such comparisons, we can get a better grip on what was distinctive about the era of photography. An effective way of approaching the complexities of photography and its history is to examine, as one would do in relation to any form of representation, the social relationships involved in both production and dissemination. I use “social” here to include the subjective and the technological, the professional and amateur, the commercial and private.

My talk addresses two types of relationship, between photographers and photographed, and between historians and photography. It will attempt to convey some of the issues that have come up in the myriad attempts to understand what photography means for historical practice.

Eduardo **Cadava** (Princeton University)

A Land of Light and Shadows: Modern Greek Literature and Photography

All photography belongs to the sun, which is why, for so many Greek poets, it belongs to Greece. But what is it that encourages these poets to focus, like a kind of camera, on the relations among photography, memory, and the sun? Since its advent in the nineteenth century, photography has been a privileged figure in literature's efforts to reflect upon its own modes of representation.

This lecture will trace the history of the rapport between literature and photography by looking closely at the ways in which the modern Greek poets George Seferis, Odysseus Elytis, Andreas Embiricos, and Yannis Ritsos repeatedly evoke the language of photography to talk about the nature of memory and perception, and to encourage us to register the way in which photography provides an entire vocabulary for what Marcel Proust called "the optics of the mind": the flashes of insight and intuition, the light and shadows that enable and interrupt perception, the workings of memory as it tries to seize or fix an image, and in general the various ways in which we perceive or represent the world around us.

Alexandra **Moschovi** (University of Sunderland)

Greece as Photograph: Histories, Photographies, Theories

In 1941, Alison Frantz and Lucy Talcott, archaeologists and members of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, published a book for “the benefit of civilian aid” in occupied Greece. Contributed by the members of the School and their friends, the photographs of ancient stones and Byzantine monuments, of bucolic scenery and peasant life, of sun-blasted islands, indigenous architecture and customs, which featured in the modestly produced but not so modestly entitled publication *This is Greece*, were selected and edited together with ancient verses to evidence that “in Greece past and present [were] separated by no wide gulf”. Haunting the history of Modern Greece and feeding Europe’s Philhellene sentiments since the early nineteenth century, this belief in the “continuity of tradition” and the inseparability of “the two Greeces – the ancient and the modern” seemed to uniformly underline the travel books and illustrated tourist guides that were published under homonymous or suchlike titles in the late 1940s and 1950s, and which rebranded Greece as a must-see destination for the educated European traveler.

This lecture will argue that similar idea(l)s, thematic and/or morphological, not only informed the ways that Greek photographers, amateurs and professionals, visualized Greece and the “imagined community” of the Greek nation in the post-war years, but would also constitute the point of ideological, conceptual and aesthetic departure from the imag(in)ing of Greece “à ciel ouvert” in the work of succeeding generations. Three distinct moments in the history of Greek Photography, the 1950s, the 1980s and the 2000s, will be cross-examined endeavouring to show how photography from a “nation-building tool” that afforded post-war generations with iconic images of Greekness in an era of political turbulence, would, in subsequent decades, challenge the preconceptions of collective consciousness about national identity and associated motivations, historical narrative and factuality, and as such, at its most elemental, the ontological premises of realism itself. This analysis will be pursued through paradigmatic case studies, discussed against the everyday expediency and vernacular uses of the medium as well as the dominant photographic conventions, artistic and utilitarian, at home and abroad, in the periods in question.

John **Stathatos** (Independent)

*The Three-Way Mirror: Photography as Recorder, Mirror
and Model of Greek National Identity*

From its earliest appearance, photography in Greece participated, perhaps to a greater extent and certainly more directly than any medium other than the written word, in the never-ending enterprise of nation building. This was a far from clearly defined, complex and manifold endeavour: the idea of the nation had to be simultaneously identified, defined, fabricated and promoted. Photography was in many ways ideally suited to the latter three at least of these tasks. At one and the same time, photography provided society with a record, a mirror and a model.

The role of photography most instinctively seized upon is usually that of recorder; individual members of society and the Greek state itself both realised that the medium appeared to offer the promise of an accurate and apparently unbiased record of achievement, whether the rapid Europeanization of the ruling class in the mid-nineteenth century, the industrialisation of the country under the Trikoupis government in the 1890s or the patriotic triumphalism of the first two Balkan wars.

At the same time, photography held up a mirror to the nation, artfully displaying the face the latter most wanted to see reflected; the resulting images, however distorted by wishful thinking, represent an accurate record of a society's aspirations. For example, the enormous popularity of photographic representations of the transhumant pastoralists of the Pindus mirrored a yearning for a national origin myth rooted in the supposed innocence, simplicity and freedom of life in the high mountains; that this popularity developed precisely at the time when these social groups were becoming increasingly marginalised was, of course, no coincidence.

Photography's prescriptive aspect and its contribution to various forms of social engineering are perhaps less immediately evident. Usually in response to a formal commission by interested parties ranging from ministries to commercial concerns, photography's function in this role was to present to the public, or a specific part of it, a usually idealised vision of the commissioner's beliefs or aspirations. Such attempts usually failed when they were overly or intrusively propagandistic: EAM/ELAS's heroic portraits of resistance fighters in socialist sublime style and the 1967-74 dictatorship's images of benevolent colonels in top hats and frock coats both appeared risible or sinister to those not ideologically aligned.

Examples of more successful attempts at leading or at least influencing public perception include the splendid series of landscape photographs of the recently acquired "new lands" commissioned and disseminated by banks and other commercial interests after the second Balkan war, as well as the National Power Company's post-war publicity campaign glorifying electrification. Elly Seraidari's photographs of Crete, taken on two separate occasions in 1927 and 1939 on behalf of the Ministry of Tourism, helped establish the myth of a gallant, freedom-loving and heroic rural population, whilst simultaneously erasing all signs of the island's rich multicultural (and still very recent) past. Once successfully rooted in public consciousness, such models would prove remarkably resilient and long-lived.

The contribution of photography to the construction of national identity is not of course a specifically Greek phenomenon, and similar narratives could no doubt be constructed for most countries. However, the fact that the history of modern Greece and that of the photographic medium share roughly the same time span, as well as the accidents of history and geography which made of Greece such a late developer amongst European nations, have resulted in an unusually dense and rich interpenetration of photography and history.