

THE VISUAL CULTURES OF SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE: ELEMENTS OF DECENTRED THEORY CONSTRUCTION

KARL KASER

KARL-FRANZENS UNIVERSITÄT GRAZ

Abstract. *The so-called pictorial turn in human and social sciences is embedded in a rapidly changing societal environment that can be suggested incompletely by terms such as ‘mediatization,’ ‘visualization,’ and ‘globalization.’ The ‘new media’ have changed our lifeworlds within the previous two decades more than was the case in the thousands of years before.*

Theory construction in the field of visual cultures, however, is characterized by its Western bias; the history of non-Western visual cultures has been understood as deficit history at best or has simply been ignored. Therefore, a decentred theory construction, in the sense of one not based on Western visual cultures, seems to be more essential than ever. My contribution intends to address several vertices which may contribute to a historical construction relevant to present-day theory. In this regard we are still only at the beginning of the beginning. To launch my ambition as a theory constructionist, I would like to advance seven theses¹ for discussion.

Keywords: visual cultures, visual modernity, Ottoman Empire, religions of the book, secularization

Preoccupation with visual cultures in history and in transcultural comparison is a product of ‘Western’ scientific development; likewise, modern visual technologies are the result of ‘Western’ technological development. No wonder that previous theory construction in the field of visual cultures is characterized by its Western bias, which is caused, firstly, by the almost complete exclusion of other world regions in the international discussions of visual studies, and, secondly, by the fact that other world regions are not yet ‘swamped’ by the ‘picture flood’ and have therefore as yet no urgent need for the study of the visual. In discussions emerging since the middle of the 1990s, and intensifying since then, the history of non-Western visual cultures has been understood as deficit history at best, or has simply been ignored.

1 Six of these seven theses have already been formulated in Karl Kaser, *Andere Blicke: Religion und visuelle Kulturen auf dem Balkan und im Nahen Osten* (Vienna et al.: Böhlau Verlag, 2013), 17–20.

Explicit involvement with visual cultures can be traced to sporadic precursors in the course of the twentieth century, such as to the German art historian and cultural theorist Aby Warburg (1866–1929),² to the German philosopher and essayist Walter Benjamin (1892–1940),³ to the American writer, filmmaker, and theorist on photography Susan Sontag (1933–2004),⁴ or to the French sociologist, philosopher, and semiotician Roland Barthes (1915–1980).⁵ The seemingly relentless rise of interest in visual studies was marked by the proclamation of the ‘pictorial turn’ by the Chicago-based art historian and philosopher William John Thomas Mitchell in 1994.⁶

The pictorial turn was not only caused by intrinsic scientific reasons but is embedded in a rapidly changing societal environment that can be suggested incompletely by terms such as ‘mediatization,’ ‘visualization,’ and ‘globalization.’ The ‘new media’ have changed our lifeworlds within the previous two decades more than was the case in the thousands of years before. Visual anthropology, visual sociology, and visual history – all emerging in the West – still frequently impose on the world concepts of Western modernity and postmodernity, and perceive the rest of the world only selectively or ignore it.

A decentred theory construction, in the sense of one not based on Western visual cultures, seems to be more essential than ever. Therefore, my contribution to this volume intends to address several vertices which may contribute to a historical construction relevant to present-day theory. In this regard we are still only at the beginning of the beginning. My remarks therefore have to be considered as tentative and exploratory.

Two preliminary remarks seem to be appropriate:

1) By ‘Southeastern Europe’ I understand here the European regions of the former Ottoman Empire and its successor states – in other words, the Balkans. For my considerations the three denominations of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which are strongly involved with each other in this region, play a crucial role.

2 Warburg founded the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg and the Warburg Institute in Hamburg. The famous art historian Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968) was among the scholars who belonged to the Warburg circle.

3 Among Benjamin’s most influential works is *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner Reproduzierbarkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963).

4 Sontag’s bestknown works include *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977).

5 Throughout his career, Barthes was interested in photography. In 1977 he began writing *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

6 W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 11–34.

2) We need to develop both a comprehensive and a more specific notion of visual culture. The more comprehensive concept understands visual culture as acts of seeing and being seen, as culturally constructed acts that are neither inherent nor naturally given but learned and cultivated. Visual culture, therefore, involves issues related to viewing and representation as well as the conditions of production and representation of the visual. Seen in this way, the visual is not confined to pictures in the broadest sense but also includes performative processes of depiction and seeing.⁷ I would like to relate the more specific notion of visual culture with the epoch in which the mechanically reproducible picture completes the original.⁸ Reproduction creates the opportunity to bring pictures to the people, but not people to the pictures; this makes a crucial difference in the unfolding of visual culture. I will continually use ‘visual culture’ in this sense. To launch my ambition as a theory constructionist, I would like to begin by advancing the following seven theses for discussion.⁹

THESIS 1

The mechanically reproducible picture was accepted in Southeastern Europe centuries after its introduction in Western Europe, photography was accepted only a few decades later, and the digital picture only several weeks later. This thesis is a good argument for the dynamic potential of change in visual cultures in the region.

The origins of visual culture in Southeastern Europe (in the aforementioned narrower sense) must be located chronologically significantly later than in the West. The earliest manifestations of the mechanically reproducible image in the realm of Western Christianity, the printed picture, were the woodcut, the copper engraving, and the etching. The reproduction technique of the picture is even older than that of the printed text with mobile letters. The earliest known woodcuts date from the late fourteenth century – one generation before Gutenberg’s printing of the Bible. Around the middle of the fifteenth century etching was introduced. Cheap leaflets and broadsides reached the public even in the countryside already by the late fifteenth century. Provoked by a wave of laic piety, the interest in prints increased significantly.¹⁰

7 See, e.g., W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 21, 68.

8 Nicholas Mirzoeff, “What is Visual Culture?,” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), 6–7.

9 Six of these seven theses have already been formulated in Karl Kaser, *Andere Blicke: Religion und visuelle Kulturen auf dem Balkan und im Nahen Osten* (Vienna et al.: Böhlau Verlag, 2013), 17–20.

10 Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 31; Michael Mitterauer, *Warum Europa? Mittelalterliche Grundlagen eines Sonderwegs* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003), 246–247, 263, 265.

Analogous developments were not possible in the Balkans because the Orthodox Church adhered to its canonized iconic painting, which excluded methods of mechanical reproduction. Only in the eighteenth century did the mechanical reproduction of icons seem to be gradually accepted. Also in Muslim art production, mechanical reproduction was barred in the age of traditional quill and calligraphy. Judaism joyfully welcomed the printing reproduction technique but limited printing to its holy texts, since pictures would not contribute to the piety of a believer.¹¹ These are the main reasons why the beginnings of visual culture in the Balkans can be located only half a millennium later compared to the West, and coincided with the distribution of photographic pictures and the beginnings of processes of secularization from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. The visual modernity of the West in the form of photography found the traditional pictorial traditions in the Balkans almost completely unprepared and they could not be linked to each other at the very beginning. To derive from this fact a chronic backwardness would be wrong. The temporal distances between the reception of film, television, and eventually the digital image became increasingly shorter.

THESIS 2

The Islamic, Jewish, and Christian Orthodox iconic traditions, although showing significant differences, share crucial commonalities, for instance with regard to the understanding of images. The attitude of the three confessions towards the image was basically formed by the Old Testament's Second Commandment which prohibits the production of images of God, human, or animal beings. The Eastern Church overcame the prohibition of visualization after serious contentions in the so-called iconoclastic controversy in the early Middle Ages.¹² However, the price the defenders of iconic representation had to pay was a massive limitation of artistic expression.¹³

The question whether all peoples and cultures deal with one and the same visual experience is not far to seek. Of course, they do not. The external world is not identical with that of our internal imagery. The outer world is not reflected identically in the inner world, but is culturally and socially translated and interpreted.

-
- 11 Michael Mitterauer, "Schreibrohr und Druckerpresse: Transferprobleme einer Kommunikationstechnologie zwischen Europa und dem islamischen Raum", http://www.dieuniversitaet-online.at/pdf/Mitterauer_Schreibrohr.pdf, accessed 31 December 2013, *passim*; Karl Kaser, *The Balkans and the Near East: Introduction to a Shared History* (Vienna, Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011), 281.
- 12 Lutz Lippold, *Macht des Bildes – Bild der Macht: Kunst zwischen Verehrung und Zerstörung bis zum ausgehenden Mittelalter* (Leipzig: Ed. Leipzig, 1993), 97–107.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 116–119; Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2004), 194–195, 332.

With regard to the denominations, the relationship between visual culture and religious practice produces 'religious seeing' and a 'holy gaze.' The analysis of religious visual culture constitutes therefore a study of pictures and of the regular seeing of pictures. These rules are adopted and may change over time. Religious seeing constitutes a complex process which is culturally and temporarily shaped and is formed differently by the various denominations. To put it simply, Christianity can be seen in its relationship to painting with a focus on the image/icon; Islam can be seen in its relationship to calligraphy, with a focus on the relationship between words and images; and Judaism can be seen in its relationship to architecture with a focus on memory, when it comes to construct a vision.¹⁴

In the long pre-secular period, which lasted until the nineteenth and in some parts of the Balkans until the interwar period, the pictorial culture was religiously charged. While Orthodoxy elevated the holy icon to a sacral status, Judaism remained hostile and Islam at least very sceptical to images. While Islam and Judaism exclusively accepted the holy scriptures as sources of religiosity and sacrality, Orthodoxy treaded the holy image and the holy scripture equally. The attitude of Western Christianity in this regard was different. Here, the holy images did not acquire any sacral role but only the scriptures. Images were considered as the Bible for the poor and illiterate population and as illustrations.¹⁵ Protestantism strictly rejected the pictorial representation of God, saints, and the Holy Mary.¹⁶ The religious devaluation of holy images in the Catholic Church and by Protestantism opened up various ways of artistic expression. In Orthodoxy, however, artistic creativity was set narrow limits. To a great extent iconic painting became canonized. The result was that the pictorial cultures of the Orthodox and the Catholic/Protestant spaces began to diverge into a conservative Eastern and a more dynamic Western direction.¹⁷

However, there are also important similarities between the Abrahamic religions with regard to images. Similarities of Christian-Orthodox, Jewish, and Islamic understanding of images consisted, for instance, in:

1) the refusal of three-dimensionality. Its chief danger was considered the fact that plastic-figurative representation came too close to an earthly human being.¹⁸

14 Brent S. Plate, "Introduction", in *Religion, Art and Visual Culture: A Cross-Cultural Reader*, ed. Brent S. Plate (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 9–12.

15 Lippold, *Macht des Bildes*, 120–123.

16 Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), 108–111.

17 Helmut Fischer, *Die Welt der Ikonen: Das religiöse Bild in der Ostkirche und in der Bildkunst des Westens* (Frankfurt/M.: Insel-Verlag, 2005), 29–39.

18 Eric Alliez and Michel Feher, "Reflections of a Soul", in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. Michel Feher, 3 vols. (New York: Urzone, 1989), 65–69.

This is why the Ottoman Balkans were free from any figurative monumental art in the public sphere until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first public relief sculpture in Constantinople was commissioned by the Turkish government only in 1928, and created by the Italian artist Pietro Canonica in Taksim Square.¹⁹ Albania's first monumental sculpture in the public space – the equestrian statue of Skanderbeg in downtown Tirana – was constructed only in 1968.²⁰

2) the refusal of the painter's perspective in Orthodox iconic painting, Muslim calligraphy, or Jewish book painting. Since approximately 1300 AD in Western painting the eye of the painter became the central perspectival point of reference. On the contrary, in iconic painting the central perspective was the guiding principle. This meant that God's perspective on the people and not vice versa determined the painting's perspective. The question of perspective also divided Arabic-Islamic and Western geometry. Arabic geometry, which was also crucial in the Ottoman Empire, did not refer to the human view, but a geometric pattern was considered as existing autonomously. In the West, descriptive geometry with a focus on the technical image, mathematics, and the human perspective were dominant since the seventeenth century. Arabic-Islamic geometry considered the human eye as deceivable; objects were depicted without perspective. Whereas in the West descriptive geometry began to dominate, in the Islamic world depicted geometry remained the principle.²¹

THESIS 3

The Western model of unfolding visual culture cannot be applied uncritically with regard to the non-Western world; this would cause severe irritations of the cognitive act. Since the photographic camera has been introduced, the visual cultures of Southeastern Europe are no longer independent from those of the West but they are not simple imitations.

Available empirical data indicates that following the introduction of the photo camera the import of additional Western visual technologies succeeded by and large by the end of the nineteenth century. Architects, painters, sculptors, and actors from the Western hemisphere were invited to the respective countries in order to apply their know-how and to train locals in Western visual technology. Governments despatched first generations of students to Western universities and art academies to be trained and to pass their acquired knowledge on to the next generation.

19 Wendy M. K. Shaw, *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic* (New York: Tauris, 2011), 162–163.

20 Friedbert Ficker, "Bildende Kunst", in *Albanien: Südosteuropa-Handbuch / Handbook on South Eastern Europe*, ed. Klaus-Detlev Grothusen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 711.

21 Shaw, *Ottoman Painting*, 6–8.

Visual cultures began to develop in the years before World War I the greater parts of the Ottoman Empire and in the European countries of the former Empire.²²

We have to consider that these pioneering visual technologies did not originally emanate from the needs of the Balkan populations. On the contrary, there was even to some extent considerable opposition to the introduction of photography and film. Another factor that needs to be considered is that technology had to be accepted as it was; however, the question is how and for what purposes it was used. Was it adapted to meet local cultural needs, or did it enforce cultural reorientations in accord with Western standards of seeing? Empirical evidence indicates an amalgamation of local traditions with Western modernity in the form of cultural adaptations of Western visual technologies. This amalgam was and is not of constant intensity either in the various media nor over time. In Turkey, for instance, Hollywood films were adapted to the needs of the country's population until the middle of the twentieth century,²³ and Western models were borrowed in the area of studio photography.

THESIS 4

Only photography triggered the secularization of visual cultures in Southeastern Europe. The previous visual traditions were ushered in by religious modes of looking.

Our point of departure for analysing the religious glimpse is the Second Commandment of the Old Testament, from the second book of Moses (Exodus 20: 2–5):

You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.²⁴

Accordingly, the visual representation of God, human beings, and animals – fishes included – is interdicted. Despite the clarity of the commandment, the rejection of the image has to be seen against the historical background of predominating heathen images and objects; therefore the commandment has been interpreted differently over the course of time. Even today the Second Commandment is still

22 Kaser, *Andere Blicke*, 317.

23 Ahmet Gürata, "Hollywood in Vernacular: Translation and Cross-Cultural Reception of American Films in Turkey", in *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and Social Experience of the Cinema*, eds. Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen (Exeter: eprints, 2008), 333–347.

24 Quoted from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/587032/Ten-Commandments>, accessed 3 September 2019.

meaningful in Judaism and Islam – and not only for fundamentalists. However, its range has been largely reduced to the non-presentability of Allah and Jahveh and to bodies in revealing dresses.²⁵

In the course of the long pre-secular era pictorial cultures were religiously charged. Whereas Orthodox Christianity elevated the iconic image to a sacral status, Judaism remained hostile to images and Islam remained at least sceptical of images. Judaism and Islam were very close to each other with regard to the rejection of the image on the basis of the Second Commandment, whereas image-affirmative Orthodox Christianity went in the opposite direction. Whereas in Islam and Judaism only the holy scriptures had sacral meaning, in Eastern Christianity holy images and holy scriptures were on an equal footing.

Against this background the Balkan population was hardly touched by the invention of photography and the first marketable camera (in 1839) in the subsequent decades until approximately the Great War – except perhaps for the fact that more and more travellers from Western Europe arrived in Balkan cities and caused surprise with their inconvenient exposure apparatuses. To feel the urge to be photographed was very limited especially since the traditions of visual representation in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity have matured over the centuries and were well regulated. Therefore, the visual revolution was delayed for half a century or so compared to the West.²⁶

However, the first photographers in the region provoked a process that should connect the Balkan population with Western modernity. Whether it was welcome or not, this conjunction was established. The traditional visual cultures had been relatively autonomous and based on religious conviction, but were henceforth no longer so. Cameras not only produced mechanically reproducible pictures but principally secular ones, because making images of icons and of quotes from the Torah or the Koran in the best calligraphic quality no longer made much sense. The photographic eye aimed at other objects. A new era had begun – the era of modern visual culture.²⁷

THESIS 5

All things considered, Balkan societies are less secular than many Western societies. In such 'semi-secular' societies the modes of the religious view are more meaningful than in the more secularized West.

25 Kaser, *Andere Blicke*, 63.

26 *Ibid.*, 131.

27 *Ibid.*, 131–132.

Processes of secularization gained a foothold in the Balkans since roughly the middle of the nineteenth century, and therefore significantly later than in Western Europe. They were accompanied by the elite phenomenon of photography. Empirical evidence does not indicate a radical obliteration of the religious view.

Different religious traditions and modes of viewing – so my hypothesis – were possibly flattened in the course of the previous century; however, they still exist, and evidence indicates that, interestingly enough, they may intensify again in the era of globalization. This hypothesis is also based on the observation that theories of secularization according to which religion will lose relevance in the processes of modernization have not proved sustainable. Therefore, we have to disabuse ourselves of the misconception of an increasingly vanishing religious view of the world. It is now evident that traditional forms of the religious, religions, and religiosity have proved to be more persistent than was assumed – especially in non-Western cultures. Current sociology no longer starts from the incompatibility of modernity and religiosity.²⁸ This observation has to be included in an evaluation of the visual cultures in Southeastern Europe.

Surveys show that in various Balkan countries the figure of those, who claim of being non-believers, atheists or indifferent is decreasing and not increasing. Therefore, even if we interpret the available data cautiously, we must come to the conclusion that the processes of secularization originated in the nineteenth century were not overly sustainable. This, however, does not justify the unconditional assumption of a widespread religious view of the world, because the claim to be religious may mean various forms of life praxis. In this regard the differentiation of orthodoxy from orthopraxis, and the differentiation of just being orthodox from correct behaviour in everyday life seem to be crucial. The question is, how does religious conviction result in conduct derived from it? This question cannot be answered definitely, but basically the orthopractic component is more distinct in Judaism and Islam than in orthodox Christianity – and it is more distinct in Orthodoxy than in Catholicism.²⁹

The far-reaching separation of the state from denominational institutions in the Balkans and in Turkey does not automatically result in a secular society. In the case of Turkey, for instance, this separation cannot prevent the increasing attractiveness of Islam. Also the socialist era with its enacted atheism and its policy of separation of the state from denominational institutions did not result in a sustainable secularity of the population. Nowadays, the secular state is confronted

28 Franz Höllinger, “Ursachen des Rückgangs der Religiosität in Europa”, in *SWS-Rundschau* 45 (2005): 424–425.

29 Kaser, *Andere Blicke*, 294–295.

with a reinvigorated Orthodoxy and a revitalized Islam. Simultaneously, fundamentalist religious movements have become important. In Orthodox countries this is reflected in anti-Western and anti-globalization attitudes. This allows me to conclude that religious views of the world are still meaningful, although the secular aspects of visual culture have become more visible in the course of the past one or two centuries.³⁰

THESIS 6

The first visual revolution triggered by the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) and continued in World War I was initiated just in a period of time that according to Maria Todorova³¹ was constitutive for the formation of Balkanism with its negative stereotyping of the Balkans. It is my assumption that this was provoked less by textual narratives, as Todorova claims, but rather by the many pictures, photographs, and films about the Balkans that were circulated during the long war period from 1912 to 1918.

The Bulgarian-American historian Maria Todorova coined the term ‘Balkanism’ in order to describe the pejorative Western discourse about the Balkans that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in the eyes of Todorova the term ‘Balkanization’ became a new invective in Europe. The term came not only to define the fragmentation of large political units but also became a synonym for the return to tribalism, backwardness, primitivism, and barbarism. The Balkan populations were stigmatized by the other Europeans since they allegedly deviated from the standard behaviour of the ‘civilized’ world. This civilized world was embarrassed about the barbaric cruelties allegedly committed in the Balkan Wars. The two Balkan Wars, their causes and conduct were investigated by an international committee of experts commissioned by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.³² What makes this publication so shocking is not so much the investigated hard facts but the approximately fifty photographs depicting the dead and wounded, as well as disastrous destruction. The region could not get rid of this damaged reputation as being of a barbaric and terrible character, which was reinvigorated by the wars that took place on the territories of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.³³

30 Ibid., 317–318.

31 Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

32 Carnegie Endowment, ed., *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars: The International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars* (Aylesbury: Hazell, Watson & Viney, 1970).

33 Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*.

The Balkan Wars yielded images of marching soldiers, firing artillery, and countless corpses strewn across the fields that soon became part of the popular cinematic perceptions. In the course of the two Balkan Wars, twenty-nine mostly Western film-production companies at and behind the front were active and produced 109 documentary films and an unknown number of newsreels.³⁴ The newsreels were consumed by mass audiences in Western countries. For instance, in England the working class was already the numerically dominant film-going public. In July 1916 twenty million tickets were sold per week.³⁵

Caused by the wars between 1912 and 1918, the devaluation of the Balkans has been condensed to a specific discourse that still is at work. Interestingly, Todorova focuses exclusively on textual discourses and disregards the visual ones, which is reasonable since working with visual material differs completely from the analysis of textual documents. However, this is exactly the point of interest here. As noted, the first visual revolution in the Balkans caused by the two Balkan Wars and World War I occurred at a historical moment which, according to Todorova, was decisive for the formation of the concept of Balkanism by 'the West.' My assumption is that the written narratives Todorova refers to played a minor role in the construction of the negative image of the Balkans compared to the pictures that were produced and distributed in the course of the three wars. However, this is only a hypothesis which has yet to be proved. Practically no research on the visual representation of the Balkans has been conducted.

THESIS 7

Balkan societies were and still are shaped patriarchally – a fact, however, that is hardly mirrored in pre-secular visual representation. Male-centred gender relations in Jewish and Islamic traditions of representation were hardly expressed before the nineteenth century because figurative depictions were avoided. Also in Orthodox icon painting they are hardly reflected, firstly because it was canonized, secondly because most of the saints were male, and thirdly because Marian devotion was popular. This situation changed in the era of photography.

Photographs with women in them were exposed to limitations because of the dominant moral codes in everyday life. Women from the upper strata of society, chastely clothed, might have been admitted for a family photograph; women from the lower strata might have been paid for being photographed for commercial

34 Igor Despot, *The Balkan Wars in the Eyes of the Warring Parties: Perceptions and Interpretations* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2012), 229–231.

35 Nicholas Hiley, "The British Cinema Auditorium", in *Film and the First World War*, eds. Karel Dibbets and Bert Hogenkamp (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 161–162.

purposes. In the early twentieth century the circulation of photographs in secular Muslim and Jewish strata became common practice. However, this was not the case in the conservative middle and lower classes, where, generally, the restrictions on women's photography lasted longer.³⁶

It would be revealing to learn more about women's photography and to debate the question of which fields of action were opened for women by photography. Women – this must be assumed – were objects of restriction in regard to photography. A great many of them were prevented by male family members from being photographed, and some were only allowed to be photographed with a face veil. The low representation of women in pictures is also related to the fact that photo studios were managed almost exclusively by men; women were exposed to relatively intimate male gazes. It seems that up until the 1950s women rarely worked in photo studios – and if so, they were occupied with the retouching and colouring of photographs within the framework of a family business. Obviously, there were single women photographers who went to homes in order to take pictures and so could avoid the woman customer visiting a photo studio. Generally speaking, the photographers were male and they imposed the photographic conditions.³⁷

Professional photographers such as Nelly (Elli Souyioultzoglou–Seraïdari, 1899–1998), with her Turkish-Greek family background, were rare. She was the most important woman photographer in Greece and presumably in the Balkans in the interwar period. Trained as a photographer in Dresden from 1920 to 1925, she was in her aesthetic orientation quite similar to the famous German photographer and film director in the service of the Nazi regime, Leni Riefenstahl (1902–2003). Nelly absorbed the Western image of Greece as the cradle of Europe, which was in strong contrast to the social reality of her time; simultaneously the emerging new Greek middle class also adopted this construction as a desirable image. In her famous Parthenon photographs (1925–1929) she produced or affirmed an image of Greece which suited the Western imagination: a Greece of the classical period that continued into the modern era.³⁸

In wrapping up I want to make explicit the implication that each of these theses needs a more thorough elucidation. This is provided in my monograph *Andere Blicke: Religion und visuelle Kulturen auf dem Balkan und im Nahen Osten*.³⁹ However, my fundamental concern should by now be obvious. Through photography, West-

36 Kaser, *Andere Blicke*, 103–104.

37 Sarah Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 60–65.

38 Nikos Panayotopoulos, "On Greek Photography: Eurocentrism, Cultural Colonialism, and the Construction of Mythic Classical Greece", in *Third Text* 23 (2009): 181–194.

39 Kaser: *Andere Blicke*.

ern visual modernity encountered the visual traditions of the Balkans, which responded to the Western understanding of images with reserve and rejection. The subsequent debates were not conflict-free and ended with the acceptance of Western visual technology. This adoption was not a simple copy of the Western model but an complex amalgamation of Western and Balkan traditions. The systematic study of the history of this intersection of Western modernity with local visual traditions remains a rewarding task for the future.