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Catherine E. Clark, *Paris and the Cliché of History: The City and Photographs, 1860–1970*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. xi + 310 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$74.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9780190681647; \$72.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9780190681659.

Review by Laurie Dahlberg, Bard College.

One might suppose that Paris has historically been the world's most photographed city, even if today that distinction would simply follow the city with the greatest density of cellphones. But Paris had a tremendous head start as the nominal birthplace of the daguerreotype and first capital of photography. Even while the daguerreotype process was still under wraps in early 1839, government officials were already calculating the medium's potential and envisioning the role photography might some day play in historic preservation. In 1851, the Commission des monuments historiques bore out that prediction when it hired five newly-minted photographers to survey the condition of the nation's architectural patrimony. Other similar initiatives were not far behind, notably the Haussmann administration's hiring of Charles Marville in 1858 to document the arduous demolition and rebuilding of Paris. This was the first concerted attempt to document the city photographically, but with new technologies making photography easier and more accessible at the end of the century, many more would follow.

In her new book, Catherine Clark has written a meticulous, engrossing cultural history of the photographic portrayal of Paris. This is rich and virtually undisturbed terrain, particularly for English language scholars. While photographs by the city's celebrated photographers like Marville, Eugène Atget, Brassai, and André Kertész have often been the subject of art historical studies, Clark's interest is not in the individual makers and photographs but rather in the ideals and institutions that called for, produced, conserved, deployed, and governed the visual construction of "Paris." Other recent books by Jillian Lerner and Peter Sramek have treated adjacent topics, but Clark's approach has significantly more in common with Elizabeth Edwards' social ethnography, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885–1918*.^[1] Drawing upon the disciplines of communication studies, visual culture, and cultural geography, this book will be essential reading for anyone interested in the history and visual culture of Paris, and will also be of great use to those interested in visual media's relation to urban history and development, tourism, urbanization, and the anthropology of leisure.

At issue is the fluid role photography has played in the formation and maintenance of the idea of Paris, and the ways in which photography has been more than a mere copyist of the city's physiognomy. This knot of related topics—Paris as image, the past as image, photography as

memory, memory as history—has already nourished its share of theorists and cultural critics, including Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord, and Roland Barthes, to name a few. Clark establishes her independence from these well-used sources, noting that while theorists have typically regarded history and the image in metaphorical terms, her goal is to grapple empirically with photography as “both tool and agent,” to tease apart specific messages embedded in actual photographs as seen in particular contexts (pp. 5-6). Indeed, as Clark presents a suite of linked examples across the decades, she shows that photographs at every juncture were the starting point for future plans, policies, and commercial endeavors, which in turn led to wide-ranging encounters with the public, who internalized, selectively embraced, and recycled the imagery of Paris in their own photography. One last caveat concerns that over-used, amorphous term “memory” itself, which Clark wishes to set aside in favor of “historical imagination,” a term better suited to help “historicize ideas about how exactly pictures worked to conjure the past” (p. 5).

The book is chronologically arranged, as Clark works through the phases and watershed moments in the city’s depiction by photography, beginning with the Haussmann era in chapter one. As is well known, Second Empire officials deployed the new technology of photography to create a thorough record of the buildings and neighborhoods slated for demolition, leading to Marville’s extensive photographic project. These photographs have been much discussed elsewhere, so Clark quickly moves beyond them to consider the bureaucratic apparatus constructed to govern them: the offices, services, and agencies that were created or adapted to collect and manage these and other documents related to the history of Paris.^[2] As she proceeds to excavate the history of the Musée Carnavalet (opened in 1880 after a twenty-year gestation); its satellite institution, the Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris (separated from the museum in 1898); and the Bibliothèque nationale’s Service des travaux historiques (opened in 1865), she brings to light a history of institutional competition, missed opportunities, abrupt stops and starts, and general confusion about how to use these new photographic documents.

Here Clark draws out several interesting facts. First, prior to the twentieth century, the institutions rarely used their photographs in exhibitions, but kept them filed away for archival consultation. Second, this ambivalent treatment of photography within the very institutions that collected them was the product of some emerging tensions, such as competing views of what makes a better depiction of history: non-photographic representations of Paris (e.g., prints, drawings, dioramas, and paintings, which ran the gamut from the romantic to the meticulous) or the new photographic documents, which were perceived as accurate and scientific, but also possibly dull. The partisans of these competing forms of visual history cohered around the disciplinary rivalry developing in the field. The older generation of amateur historians—antiquarians, collectors, and history buffs—preferred the affective qualities of non-photographic representations (particularly when it came to cultivating the public’s love of history through exhibitions), while the new historians, fresh from professional training in universities, rejected the “subjective representations of the past whose ties to romantic forms of history made them unreliable” (p. 14). The view that photographs were purely objective would change over time, as photographs began to be read as both factual witnesses and objects of reverie and nostalgia, but the final paradox of the chapter is that, just as the preferences of historians began tipping in favor of photography over other forms of depiction, historical institutions began to phase out their photographic collecting (p. 47).

The reason behind this development sets the stage for chapter two, which considers the rise of the photographically illustrated history, which Clark terms the “photohistory.” If museums and libraries had formerly been the places where images of the city and its history were collected, organized, and consulted, this role was increasingly supplanted in the twentieth century by these picture books and the illustrated press, which now took the more active role in casting, recasting, and disseminating the images of Paris and its history. The photohistory boom was made possible by new and improved photo-mechanical technologies that allowed photo reproductions and text to be printed together on the page. It helped, too, that the onrushing modernity of the new century was spurring an almost “pathological need to feel connected to the past” (p. 71), creating a new generation of history amateurs who avidly consumed photohistories, and in many cases, wrote them. The rise of this format of visual history in the early twentieth century also helped redefine what was worth preserving photographically. This judgment had once been dominated by the nostalgic fantasies of “vieux Paris,” but Clark notes that in the traumatic wake of World War I, the ordinary fabric of the city, its special customs, familiar places, and mundane activities, now seemed precious, driving what she calls a “pre-nostalgia” for everyday life (p. 83).

Chapter three concerns the wartime occupation and liberation of Paris. The image culture of this era, initially curtailed by the dangers and privations of the Occupation, was strongly motivated after the war by the need to rewrite history in order to shake off the suffering of the Occupation and the shame of Vichy collaboration. Clark uses the term “repicturing” here to describe the interpretive strategy that reconciled images of the city’s past with the present, which trained the viewer to imagine a contemporary image as an accretion of historical layers. She argues that this strategy, literally demonstrated in the popular press with side-by-side then/now image pairings, was not just a novelty, but a complete “visual epistemology that framed the use and understanding of photos in general” (p. 85). The operation of creating a “historical montage, either on the page or in the viewer’s mind,” was necessary to infuse painful or banal images of contemporary Paris with rich memories of the city’s endurance through history, to “build temporal depth into the picture of the present” (p. 121).

Entering into the postwar era in chapter four, Clark turns the reader’s attention to the Bimillénaire de Paris. This spectacle, taking place in the summer of 1951 to celebrate the city’s putative 2000th birthday, was created as a patriotic occasion to look back on the city’s history, and it naturally provided a multitude of photographic imperatives and opportunities. Conceived just as the nation was slipping from importance as a world power, and Paris was facing its own obsolescence as a city of international commerce and industry, one of the festival’s aims was to galvanize the surging tourist industry that was poised to become the city’s economic salvation, and as Clark notes, “photographs had never played a greater role in both exacerbating the sense of Paris’s decline and providing a means to alleviate it” (p. 127). Even as the photographic discourse of the 1950s popularized the rhetoric of the photographer’s unique, even poetic subjectivity, the visual culture produced for the Bimillénaire was encumbered by the state’s/city’s/festival’s entwined political and economic exigencies, which required uncomplicated, familiar images flavored with the right combination of nostalgia and flair. Clark notes that the experience of the Bimillénaire “points to two important ideas: the reduction of history, in Paris, to a set of visual clichés and to history as a style and visual aesthetics rather than content” (p. 133).

Clark’s final chapter concerns an episode in the city’s photographic history that has been all but

forgotten: the amateur photographic contest staged in 1970, dedicated to the strange, backward glancing prophesy, “C’était Paris en 1970.” It was proposed as a chance for the people themselves to create collectively *the* complete portrait of what the city was to *them*, and as such, it was a radical proposition. It ultimately attracted some 2,800 photographers who produced around 100,000 pictures, few of which have even been catalogued by the housing institution, the Bibliothèque historique. Born of an alliance between private and public entities (chiefly, the progressive/left electronics company FNAC and the Bibliothèque historique), it was dedicated to aim of documenting every part of Paris, not simply the picturesque bits that now circulated as the city’s clichés. It was an unwieldy concept from the start, launched in a politically tumultuous era, in a city that was caught at the moment in a particularly aggressive campaign of urban renewal. Perhaps not surprisingly, Clark reads many of the pictures as sites of public resistance and political speech, which may also help account for the fact that they were so quickly whisked away to the Bibliothèque’s archive. The tensions and outright controversies that flowed from this seemingly innocent contest brought to bear debates (art vs. document, amateur vs. professional, the city vs. the individual) that lead almost uncannily back to Clark’s key questions and make a fitting coda for the book.

If there is a weakness in Clark’s book, it is that occasionally the text runs roughshod over the images, as when her choice or exegesis of the images does not support her arguments as well as one would like. [3] But this quibble is minor in light of the book’s remarkable breadth and depth, and Clark has made a terrific contribution in several respects. First, she has illuminated chronically understudied material by diving deep in the archives, libraries, and city collections. Her wide-ranging intellectual curiosity often leads to unexpected topics and ideas as she traces threads of inquiry. More importantly, carefully working through this mountain of varied material, Clark wrestles with the most pressing and challenging questions. What is the value of the photograph as a historical document? How has the answer to this question changed over time, or with different constituencies? How have photographs been used to portray Paris, and how have ideas of what Paris *is* changed? Finally, how have photographs driven or followed behind these ideas? What Clark achieves is a nuanced and comprehensive account of the transformations in how photographs were regarded, used, and recycled as markers of history. Best of all, she never shies away from offering a concrete response to any of these elusive questions.

NOTES

[1] Jillian Lerner, *Graphic Culture: Illustration and Artistic Enterprise in Paris, 1830-1848* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018); Peter Sramek, *Piercing Time: Paris After Marville and Atget, 1865-1912* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2013); Elizabeth Edwards, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885-1918* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

[2] See Sarah Kennel, with Anne de Mondenard, Peter Barberie, Françoise Reynaud, and Joke de Wolf, *Charles Marville: Photographer of Paris* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2013).

[3] In one example, a nineteenth-century Épinal print depicting Bordeaux, used in an advertisement for the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, is misidentified as a twentieth-

century retro style illustration of Paris. Clark's point, well made in general, but incorrect in this specific example, is that illustrators often drew upon historic styles and imagery in order to overlay "visions of the city's past" onto the images of Paris produced for the Bimillénaire (pp. 136-37).

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