

Scales of photography. World history and connected histories of the medium

Deadline: Dec 15, 2020

Marie Auger

Call for articles / Photographica - Issue 3/2021

Scales of photography. World history and connected histories of the medium

For its third issue, Photographica wishes to explore the scales of photography. That is to say, to engage with the geography of its history as well as the history of its geography, and to measure the significance of the scales adopted - micro or macro - in the production of knowledge.

Since its disclosure to the public, the programmatic discourses and historical narratives devoted to photography have made it a global phenomenon, having had France, Germany and the United Kingdom as its birthplace, depending on the points of view and countries of origin of authors. Not only did photography spread across the globe, but it also emerged victorious from its comparison to printing, as a universal language easily understandable by all.

Historians have frequently underlined its democratic dimension, mentioning the daguerreotype portrait and its "the aspiration to representation of oneself" in many places of the world as well as the widespread availability of cameras at the end of the 19th century and especially during the 20th century. However, far from the irenic speeches on the diffusion of the medium "offered" to the world, some authors would quickly draw attention to the relationship of photography to capitalism.

Gisèle Freund described a medium that ventured out to conquer new national and international markets. Susan Sontag analysed its deeply imperialist nature since it had accompanied the strangleholds of the West (colonial wars, missions, expeditions from the years 1840-1850) and its self-assertion in taking possession of the image of the Other. Recently, emphasis has been placed on the invasive dimension of photography, the violence of images sometimes extirpated or stolen from reluctant populations and brought back to the West as raw materials.

Despite the early recognition of these global issues, the world history of photography has been long overdue, either because historians did not feel the need for it or because they did not have all the materials at hand to do so. And those like Naomi Rosenblum, who did attempt worldwide syntheses, often encountered difficulties in writing a history on a global scale without creating imbalances between regions of the world.

As a result of decades of writing centered on Western Europe and the United States, disparities in the history of photography are not easily to redress and this, despite the growing number of extensive historical studies based on non-western sources.

On the occasion of the exhibition *Open the Album to the World* (2019, Louvre Abu Dhabi) Christine Barthe asked: "What do we know about the beginnings of photography practiced outside Europe

or the United States? [...] The history of the beginnings of photography on a global scale confirms how fragmented and European-centered our knowledge is. " It is to be noted here that this kind of intellectual puzzle remains incomplete within Europe itself. Although early European photographic history is undergoing a revival, the West-East and North-South divides still largely remain to be explored .

If the time of grand syntheses seems outdated, how can we think about the history of photography on a global scale today? From photographic centers to the peripheries (or even areas "spared" by photography), is it possible to draw geographies of the photographic phenomenon and thus spatialize its multiple histories? Should we abandon global ambitions when questioning the decolonization of knowledge? Wouldn't smaller scales – from the street to the neighbourhood or the village , to the photographic object, through individual trajectories (photographers, photographic supply dealers, explorers, ethnographers using photography...) – be equally relevant to re-create cross-cultural and transnational histories? But, in turn, wouldn't this foster the writing of histories that are ever more fragmented?

In parallel to this line of thinking about scales, there is undoubtedly a chronological reflection to be made on the presence and appropriation of the photographic medium across the world.

François Brunet rightly pointed this out in 2017, when he wrote:

"Whereas later, after 1860 and especially after 1875, large documentary initiatives - in geography and anthropology, but also in medicine, police, school, industry - would utilize the veracity of the photographic information for purposes of scientific, economic and social control, the daguerreotype, for its part, has carried the aspiration of representation of the self across the globe, and thus contributed to counterbalance the imperial logics of local visual practices involved, the extreme of which diversity remains to be discovered. "

Echoing this observation, Photographica would like to welcome articles from international scholars who both question the presence of photography in different spaces and regions throughout the world and tackle the methodological implications of their case studies or research themes. Which connected stories for photography are to be written? How do changes in narrative scale affect such histories? Which cases should we investigate, with which sources and methods ? These are the kinds of questions the third issue "Scales of photography: world history and connected histories of the medium" intends to investigate.

What place for photography in world history debates?

World, global and globalized histories are, without any doubt, a field of contemporary inquiry.

French historiography is currently evolving on these topics – see for example *Histoire mondiale de la France* (2017, Boucheron), *Histoire du monde au XIXe siècle* (2017, Venayre et Singaravélou), *Le magasin du monde. La Mondialisation par les objets du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours* (2020, Venayre et Singaravélou – forthcoming), *L'Exploration du monde – Une autre histoire des Grandes Découvertes* (2019, Bertrand) as well as the issue 2018/1 "Micro-analyse et histoire globale" edited by the *Annales*. If the debates are numerous – both on the vocabulary and the stakes of such histories – most historians have agreed on the "gains in terms of knowledge" allowed by world, global and globalized narratives. They acknowledge the heuristic dimensions of such historiographical evolution and view it as an opportunity to break with the "confines of national and colonial histories " to quote François Hartog.

Photography is sometimes included in the above-mentioned references , but the historical and theoretical reflection relative to these transversal inquiries remains marginal in the history of

photography, in France at the very least. In the photographic field, spatial logics, scale games, regional histories, exchanges, "globalized" micro-stories still deserve to be considered for their theoretical, heuristic and methodological contributions. Even more so since global history in the field of photography has recently been approached as a highly contemporary, theoretical problem, both ideological and deeply political.

Drawing from the debates and writings of fellow historians, Photographica wishes to contribute, more specifically, to two avenues of reflection in the history of photography.

The first is that of "connected histories" as developed by the historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam. For him, as for Serge Gruzinski, global history is not meant to replace regional or national history but to supplement it. It is a question of going from the large to the small scale via "different circles". Through the circulation of knowledge, photographers, objects, and photographic images on a global scale, world photography appears to be a field of investigation conducive to the implementation of stories connected on a macro (global) and on micro scales.

The second avenue relates to a "global microhistory". This apparently oxymoronic expression refers to the alliance of microhistory and global history. It generally encompasses studies of the "itineraries and networks of travellers, explorers, diplomats, merchants, sailors, missionaries, soldiers of the modern age" and their contacts with non-European players focuses on "the journey of products and resources" like porcelain, coral, diamonds, and sugar. In this regard, it is important to recognize that the photographic phenomenon (practitioners, cameras, objects, and photographic knowledge) as potential material for this global micro-history has been little explored by historians in France. However, it would undoubtedly be interesting to think about it in this context, especially from the angle of the material history and the history of the idea of photography.

This latter avenue would therefore invite very concrete case studies and investigations, at the scale of the object or of individual trajectories. To quote Romain Bertrand and Guillaume Calafat, it would be a question of "taking the measure of distances" in order to "follow beings and things from place to place" by applying it to photographic cases and thus, to give flesh to a global story that is, as Serge Gruzinski noted, at times a little disembodied.

To sum up, this issue seeks to include debates about world history and connected histories in the field of the history of photography and thus extend the reflection started in Photographica no.2 which was dedicated to itinerary practices of the medium.

Research areas and avenues for this issue

NB: Authors are invited to take into consideration the methodological and heuristic contributions of their case studies, particularly in terms of sources and methods for developing these multi-scale narratives.

- Historical and historiographical debates on global / world history of photography: history of attempted synthesis on a global scale, internationalization and development of national / regional history, critical distance from the history of western-centered photography and its logic of dissemination;
- Concrete surveys and "connected stories": searches on individual itineraries, specific photographic objects or supports on various scales: trajectories of photographers or objects, market for photographic devices and equipment, second-hand objects, photographic routes, etc.
- Study of international phenomena on a transnational scale and presentation of the issues result-

ing from such a research method. Examples: documentary initiatives of the end of the 19th century, worker photography, traveling photography, international photography congresses since 1889, economic history of photography (Kodak throughout the world), etc.

- Sociability networks, circulation of photographic knowledge and productions of geographic scales (regional, national, world or international): correspondence, translations, bulletins and magazine exchanges, multilingual magazines, trade unionism and unions, photographic agencies, the transmission of photographic knowledge.

- Geography of the history of photography and the spatialized history of the medium: centers and peripheries, regions crossed by photographs, regions where the medium is located (photographic studios, photographers, portrait or image shops), trading post strategies, "a-photographic" regions; cartographic analysis (methods, tools, epistemological issues).

Select bibliography

AZOULAY Ariella Aïsha, *Potential History. Unlearning imperialism*, Londres / New York, Verso, 2019.

BAJOREK Jennifer, *Unfixed photography and decolonial imagination in West Africa*, Duke university press, Durham and London, 2020.

BARTHE Christine (dir.), *Ouvrir l'album du monde - Photographies 1842-1896*, cat exp. (Louvre Abu Dhabi, musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac et agence France-Muséums, Louvre Abu Dhabi, 25 avril au 13 juillet 2019), Dijon Presses du Réel, 2019.

BEHDAD Ali et GARTLAN Luke (éd.), *Photography's Orientalism : new essays on colonial representation*, Los Angeles, Getty research institute for the history of art and humanities, [2013].

BERTRAND Romain et CALAFAT Guillaume, "La microhistoire globale : affaire(s) à suivre", *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales*, 2018/1, 73e année, p. 1-18.

BOUCHERON Patrick (dir.), *Histoire mondiale de la France*, Paris, Édition Points, éd. augmentée, 2018. Voir en particulier CHARPY Manuel, « 1839. La France offre au monde son image », dans Patrick Boucheron (dir.), *Histoire mondiale de la France*, Paris, Éditions Points, éd. augmentée, 2018, p. 627-633.

GRUZINSKI Serge, « Les mondes mêlés de la monarchie catholique et autres "connected histories" », *Annales. Histoire, sciences sociales*, 1, 2001, p. 85-117.

GRUZINSKI, Serge. « Les pirates chinois de l'Amazone. Sur les traces de l'histoire-monde », *Le Débat*, vol. 154, no. 2, 2009, p. 171-179.

HARTOG François. « De l'histoire universelle à l'histoire globale ? Expériences du temps », *Le Débat*, vol. 154, no. 2, 2009, p. 53-66.

KELLER Candace, « Framed and Hidden Histories: West African Photography from Local to Global Contexts », *African Arts*, 2014, vol. 47, no. 4, p. 36-47.

LEBART Luce, « L'internationale documentaire. Photographie, espéranto et documentation autour de 1900 », *Transbordeur* n° 1, 2017, p. 62-73.

LEPETIT Bernard, « Architecture, géographie, histoire : usages de l'échelle », *Genèses*, 13, 1993, p. 118-138.

NUR GONI Marian, « Préservation d'ensembles photographiques africains : fragments pour une cartographie de quelques positions, acteurs et initiatives », *Continents Manuscrits*, "Genèses photographiques en Afrique", 3, 2014, en ligne : <http://coma.revues.org/437>

PÉTRÉ-GRENOUILLEAU Olivier. « La galaxie histoire-monde », *Le Débat*, vol. 154, no. 2, 2009, p. 41-52.

ROSENBLUM Naomi, *A world history of photography* (Abbeville Press 1984), traduit en français par *Histoire mondiale de la photographie* (Abbeville 1992), puis par *Une histoire mondiale de la photographie* en 1997.

SUBRAHMANYAM Sanjay, « Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia », dans V. Lieberman (éd.), *Beyond Binary Histories. Reimagining Eurasia to c. 1830*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1997, p. 289-315.

SUBRAHMANYAM Sanjay, *Faut-il universaliser l'histoire ?*, Paris, CNRS éditions, sept. 2020.

VENAYRE Sylvain et SINGARAVÉLOU (dir.), *Histoire du monde au XIXe siècle*, Paris, Fayard, 2017.

VENAYRE Sylvain et SINGARAVÉLOU (dir.) *Le magasin du monde. La Mondialisation par les objets du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours*, Paris, Fayard, sept. 2020.

See also :

- <http://collections.albert-kahn.hauts-de-seine.fr/>
- <http://photographesenoutremerasia.blogspot.com/>
- <https://fotota.hypotheses.org/>
- <https://fca.huma-num.fr/s/fca/page/Home>

Calendar

Call date: September 7, 2020

Deadline to submit articles : December 15, 2020

Committee response date: first half of February 2021

Publication date of *Photographica* (no 3): Fall 2021

Reviewing

Proposals will be read in double-blind peer-review.

They may be accepted, accepted with modifications, or refused.

Submission guidelines

Articles may be written in French or in English.

They should not exceed 30,000 characters, spaces included.

Article files should be anonymised.

Please include your name, email address, occupation, and institutional affiliation (university and laboratory) as well as a short bio-bibliography in a separate document.

Illustrations (up to 15) with complete captions and credits may be joined.

Each image should be signaled by a figure call (fig. 1, fig. 2) at the desired place in the text.

Articles should be sent to: redaction@photographica-revue.fr

For any inquiries, please contact: contact@photographica-revue.fr

Photographica is a bi-annual journal of the Société française de photographie, produced with the support of the Ministère de la Culture, published and distributed in paper form by the Editions de la Sorbonne and in digital form by the journal incubator of the laboratory InVisu (CNRS/Inha).

Photographica - rédaction
Société française de Photographie
71, rue de Richelieu
75002 Paris

Reference:

CFP: Scales of photography. World history and connected histories of the medium. In: ArtHist.net, Sep 13, 2020 (accessed Jul 4, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/23462>>.