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Local Space/Global Visions: Archives, Networks and Visual Geography Around 1900

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This project began as a paper given for a lecture series, *The Geography of Photography: American Photography*, at the Art History Institute of the University of Zurich in the Fall of 2009. The title of the series intrigued me. What, in the era of Thomas Friedman's Flat World, was the "geography" of American photography? Can we still, in the 21st century, define a nation's artistic production by the nationality of its maker, or the locale of its production? And was such an idea even valid in earlier stages of photography's history, given the medium's propensity for reproducibility and portability?

My interest focused particularly on the moment around 1900 when small cameras, half tone reproduction processes, and multinational corporations came on the scene, and photographic production and distribution expanded exponentially. The creation of a vast network of photographic (and pseudo-photographic) prints in the late 19th century set the stage for the establishment of what can reasonably be referred to as a "world culture" of imagery. Local representations, stereotypes and conventions, when globally produced, commoditized and exchanged, formed the syntax of an international language, literally the currency for communication between diverse nations, cultures and linguistic groups.

For the Zurich project, I began to explore how this historical shift affected what I'm calling the visual geography of 1900. The first stage of the research centered on two very different projects of this era – Alfred Stieglitz's magazine *Camera Notes* and Albert Kahn's *Archive of the Planet* in Paris – in an attempt to understand the divergent ways in which significant photographic practitioners comprehended, visualized and manifested the spatial and temporal changes that were transforming their world. While working on this paper in Switzerland, I came across the PhotoGlob AG collection, 11,000 photochrom images (mass produced lithographic color prints obtained from black and white photographic negatives, with colors added by hand) stored in the Central Library in Zurich. Between 1896 and 1911 the Swiss company had subsidiaries in England and Detroit and over 200 independent suppliers on every continent. A branch of the tourist industry, Photoglob AG exhibited scenic views at Universal Expositions, on cruise ships and in Thomas Cook boutiques, and published more than thirty sales catalogues containing at least 12,000 images (including post cards). For a scholar obsessed with visual networks and distribution at the turn of the last century, this was the Mother Lode, and the

archives (in Zurich and in the Library of Congress, which houses material from the Detroit subsidiary) quickly became an integral part of the ongoing project.

My paper will present aspects of this work-in-progress, some things I've learned from research in these diverse collections. I will be especially interested in focusing on the ways in which the visual geography of this historical moment – its emphasis on networks, franchises, portability and distribution, its inherent tensions between the local and the global, the artistic and the commercial, the elite and mass – can illuminate the perils and possibilities of our own contemporary image world.

Biographical Note

Arts Professor Shelley Rice teaches in both the Art History Department (Faculty of Arts and Sciences) and the Photography and Imaging Department (Tisch School of the Arts) of New York University. Although she has been employed by NYU since 1982, Professor Rice's teaching experience is international in scope; she has taught workshops and served as a guest professor in many institutions, like Bosphorus University in Istanbul, the Ecole Nationale de la Photographie in France, the Australian National University in Canberra, Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa and, most recently, the University of Zurich. A critic and historian specializing in writing about photography and multi-media art, Professor Rice has lectured throughout the United States, Canada and Europe, as well as in South America, Asia, Australia and Africa, and written for such publications as *Art in America*, *The Village Voice*, *Aperture*, *Artforum*, *Art Journal*, *French Studies*, *Etudes Photographique* and *Katalog*. She is the author of *Parisian Views* (MIT Press, 1997, shortlisted for the Krazna-Krausz Award 1999) and *Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman* (MIT Press 1999). She is also the co-author of numerous catalogues and books, like *Paris et le Daguerreotype* (Paris, 1990), *Jacques-Henri Lartigue* (Paris, 1993), *The Book of 101 Books* (New York, 2001), *Vik Muniz: Obra Incompleta* (Brazil, 2004), *Candida Hofer: In Portugal* (co-authored with the novelist Jose Saramago), *Role Models: Feminine Identity in Contemporary American Photography* (Washington, D.C., 2008-9) and most recently, *The Geography of Photography: American Photography*, a pending collection of Fleischmann lectures at the University of Zurich to be published in Germany in 2011. She was the American consultant for Michel Frizot's *New History of Photography* (Paris, 1995, USA 1999), and curator, with Sandi Fellman, of the Avon Products, Inc. Collection of Contemporary Women's Photography, shown at the International Center of Photography in New York in 1997. She has curated or co-curated a number of exhibitions, among them *Deconstruction/Reconstruction* at the New Museum (1980) and (with Lynn Gumpert) *Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman* at New York University's Grey Art Gallery, which won the International Art Critics' Award for the best American photography exhibition of 1999-2000. Professor Rice has been awarded numerous honors, among them a Guggenheim Fellowship, two Fulbright Fellowships (to France and Turkey), a *Bourse d'Etude* from

the French Minister of Culture, a Hasselblad Center (Sweden) Grant, awards from the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities in the United States and the PEN/Jerard Award for Non-Fiction Essay. In the fall of 2009 she served as the Dr. Carlo S. Fleischmann Visiting Scholar in the Art History Institute of the University of Zurich, and in 2010 she was named Chevalier in the Order of Arts and Letters by the Minister of Culture in France.