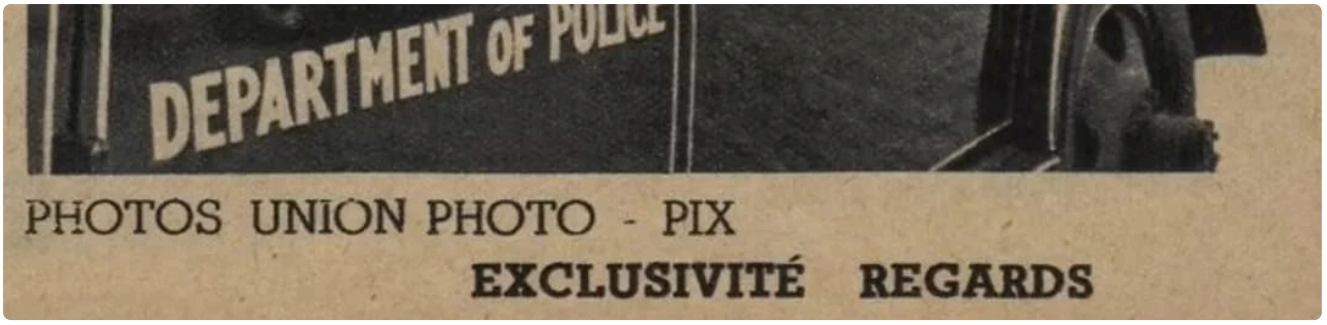
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Photographic Agencies

Clara Bouveresse

Photographic agencies developed at the beginning of the 20th century in the context of a rise of illustrated magazines. They operated at an international level, selling images around the world and establishing contacts with partnering agencies on both sides of the Atlantic.

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Clara Bouveresse is an associate professor at the University of Evry and a photography specialist. She published in 2017 a History of Magnum Photos, based on her PhD dissertation. In 2019, she curated the exhibition Unretouched Women. Eve Arnold, Abigail Heyman, Susan Meiselas at the Rencontres d'Arles, with an exhibition catalogue published by Actes Sud. She also published in the Photo File collection (Actes Sud, Thames and Hudson) the three volumes dedicated to women photographers.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the advent of photojournalism and the illustrated press in Europe and the United States led to the development of photo agencies. Their function was to provide customers with an array of pictures that was as precise and varied as possible, for the purposes of journalism or illustration. Some agencies specialized in one or the other of these areas. For illustration, they simply

assembled huge collections corresponding to a wide variety of demand, from postcards to textbooks. For the press, photographers worked quickly to be the first to cover a subject or event, because news photos were a perishable good. Over time, these photos lost their current news value and became documentation of recent history. Press agencies frequently accumulated archives over the years, thus also effectively becoming illustration resources.

The agency served as an interface between photographer and publication (newspaper, magazine, editor). It allowed reporters to focus on their work on the ground by facilitating the development, dissemination and archiving of pictures, in exchange for a commission on sales. It could offer these reporters topics or job orders and provide them a long-term international network for selling their work. While some agencies operated locally, many reached foreign markets. This internationalization was a good fit for the illustrated press, whose reporters traveled the continents in constant pursuit of distant and exotic stories.

The propagation of the photo-essay

The first French agencies, created at the beginning of the century (Henri Manuel in 1900, Rol in 1904 and Meurisse in 1909), experienced competition in the 1930s from the American agencies Keystone and Wide World, who opened offices in Paris in 1927, and from newcomers like Rapho, Alliance Photo and France Presse, who came to dominate the market. The latter two were developed in the context of economic crisis and the expansion of the illustrated press. They brought together many Jewish photographers and editors who were fleeing the rising Nazi tide. Some later went to the United States to practice their profession. The Pix and Black Star agencies, founded in 1936 by Germans living in New York, employed many immigrant photographers.

Black Star was launched by Kurt Kornfeld, Ernest Mayer (who had created the Mauritius agency in Berlin) and Kurt Safranski, the former editor of *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*. They used their experience in the German illustrated press market to their advantage, developing the photo-essay genre in the United States. Rather than being shown as isolated images, photos were sequenced to tell a story and were given a central spot in the page layout. The founders of Black Star advised press magnate Henry Luce (China, 1898 - U.S., 1967) on the launch of the weekly magazine *Life* (1936), which specialized in photo-essays. Black Star became a platform allowing photographers from Europe to have careers in the United States and to work for *Life* magazine.

In this way practices that were developed in Europe (and especially Berlin) came together in the United States. The photo-essay genre was similarly disseminated through agent networks in the Communist press: in the magazine *Regards* in France and *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* in Germany. This weekly magazine relied particularly on the resources of Russ-Foto, created in 1924 after a meeting at the Kremlin focusing on the exchange and distribution of Soviet photos abroad. Russ-Foto offered images of life and culture in the USSR, and collaborated with foreign so-called "bourgeois" commercial agencies in places as far afield as Tokyo, New York, Washington and Calcutta, though its primary partners were in Germany and France.

In the period between the two world wars, the rise of the illustrated press and the photo-essay format was dependent on international exchange between agencies on both sides of the Atlantic, and on the constant movement of photographers, many of whom emigrated to escape increasing totalitarianism.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Photos distributed by Union Photo/Pix to illustrate and article by Paul Nizan on American labor unions, *Regards*, December 2, 1937, p. 12-13.

Source: Gallica



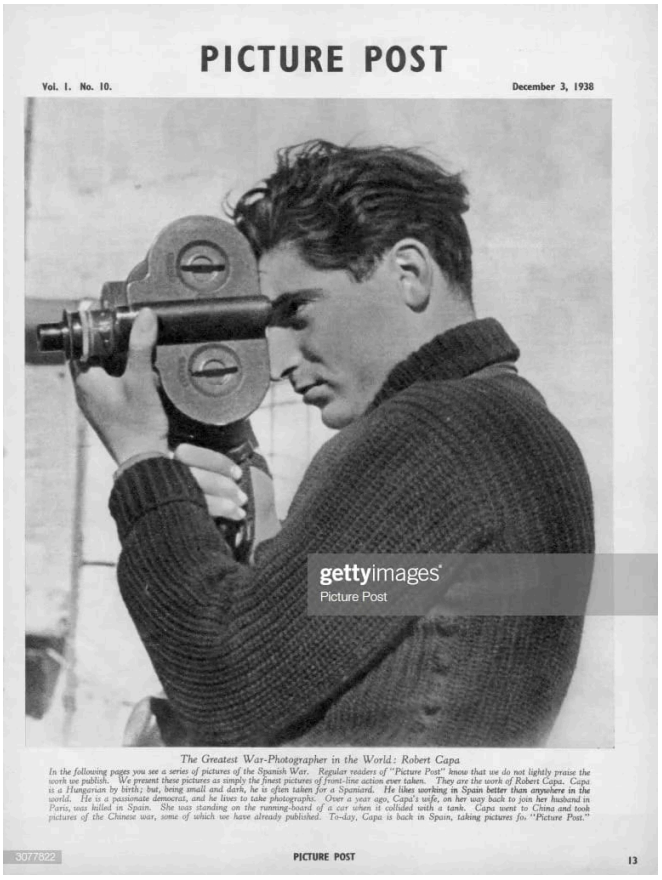
"The face of Madrid", photo-essay by Chim (David Seymour), represented by the Alliance Photo agency, published in the weekly *Regards*, March 9, 1939, p. 8.

Source: Gallica

Cosmopolitanism and Universalist ambition

After the Second World War, this cosmopolitan spirit gave birth to the Magnum agency, which still today is a recognized brand for many photographers. Its founders, whose origins are Hungarian (Robert Capa), Polish (David Seymour, known as "Chim"), French (Henri Cartier-Bresson), English (George Rodger) and American (William Vandivert), chose from the start to have offices in Paris and New York. Maria Eisner (Italy, 1909 - U.S., 1991), after having come from Germany to direct Alliance Photo and taken refuge in the United States during the war, was the head of the Paris office. Magnum's business model was to take advantage of this existing transatlantic structure to sell a single news report to different customers, offering exclusive rights in different geographical zones in Europe or America.

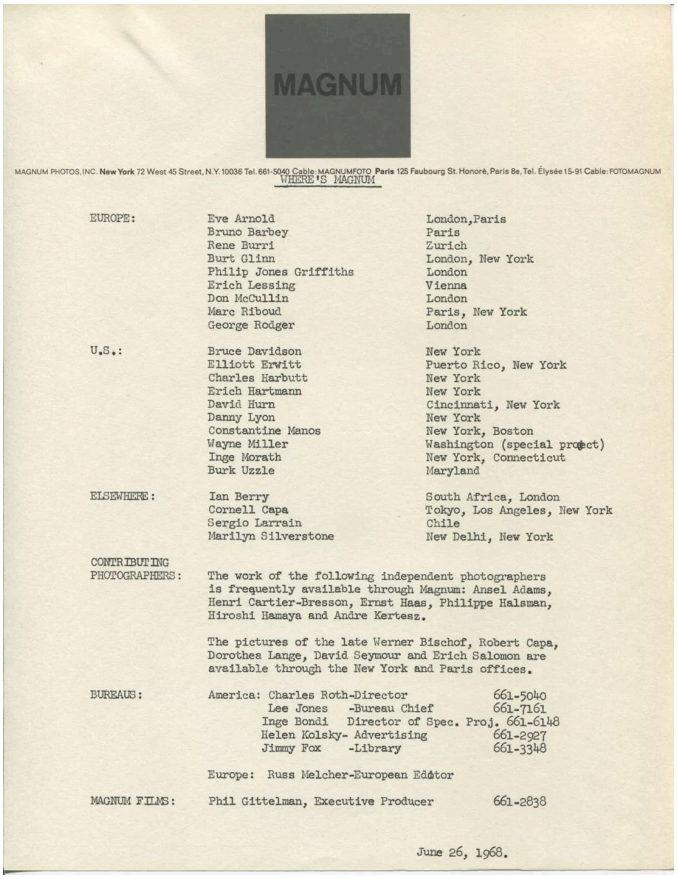
Born Endre Friedmann, Robert Capa (Austria Hungary, 1913-Indochina, 1954) was the key player in this strategy; for him, photographers should henceforth have the status of authors and be paid for each publication. Rather than give up their negatives to customers, they could distribute photos via the largest possible network, while retaining the rights over time, in order to maximize profit. This assertion of authorial rights was part of a continuous overarching expansion of such rights during the 20th century. It first came in response to an economic necessity, but it also corresponded to a journalistic and even artistic ambition: to make a name for oneself, and to be able to put a recognizable signature on iconic images associated with certain historical events. Robert Capa personally experienced such a success, having produced some of the most famous shots of the Spanish Civil War and the D-Day landing.



Portrait of Robert Capa published in *Picture Post* to introduce an article presenting his photos of the Spanish Civil War, December 3, 1938.

Source: Getty Images

Magnum demanded that magazines post the author's name for each image, ban cropping, and use captions that respect the context of the shot. The author-photographers offered their customers full blown investigations constructed around a narrative thread, accompanied by a testimony, and featuring a unique look at exclusive subjects. They could thus expect to sell their customers a series of photos—a photo-essay—rather than individual shots. To do this, Magnum showed its customers on both sides of the Atlantic "distributions" made up of sequenced and captioned images. It also created partnerships with other agencies worldwide, like ABC Press in the Netherlands, Zardoya in Spain, John Hillelson in the UK, and Pacific Press in Japan. Every week they circulated a memo indicating where each photographer was, and what subject they were treating, in order to facilitate relations with potential customers.



MAGNUM

MAGNUM PHOTOS, INC. **New York** 72 West 45 Street, N.Y. 10036 Tel. 661-5040 Cable: MAGNUMFOTO **Paris** 125 Faubourg St. Honoré, Paris 8e, Tel. Élysée 15-91 Cable: FOTOMAGNUM

WHERE'S MAGNUM

EUROPE:	Eve Arnold	London, Paris
	Bruno Barbey	Paris
	Rene Burri	Zurich
	Burt Glinn	London, New York
	Philip Jones Griffiths	London
	Erich Lessing	Vienna
	Don McCullin	London
	Marc Riboud	Paris, New York
	George Rodger	London
U.S.:	Bruce Davidson	New York
	Elliott Erwitt	Puerto Rico, New York
	Charles Harbutt	New York
	Erich Hartmann	New York
	David Hurn	Cincinnati, New York
	Danny Lyon	New York
	Constantine Manos	New York, Boston
	Wayne Miller	Washington (special project)
	Inge Morath	New York, Connecticut
	Burk Uzzle	Maryland
ELSEWHERE:	Ian Berry	South Africa, London
	Cornell Capa	Tokyo, Los Angeles, New York
	Sergio Larrain	Chile
	Marilyn Silverstone	New Delhi, New York

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS: The work of the following independent photographers is frequently available through Magnum: Ansel Adams, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Ernst Haas, Philippe Halsman, Hiroshi Hamaya and Andre Kertesz.

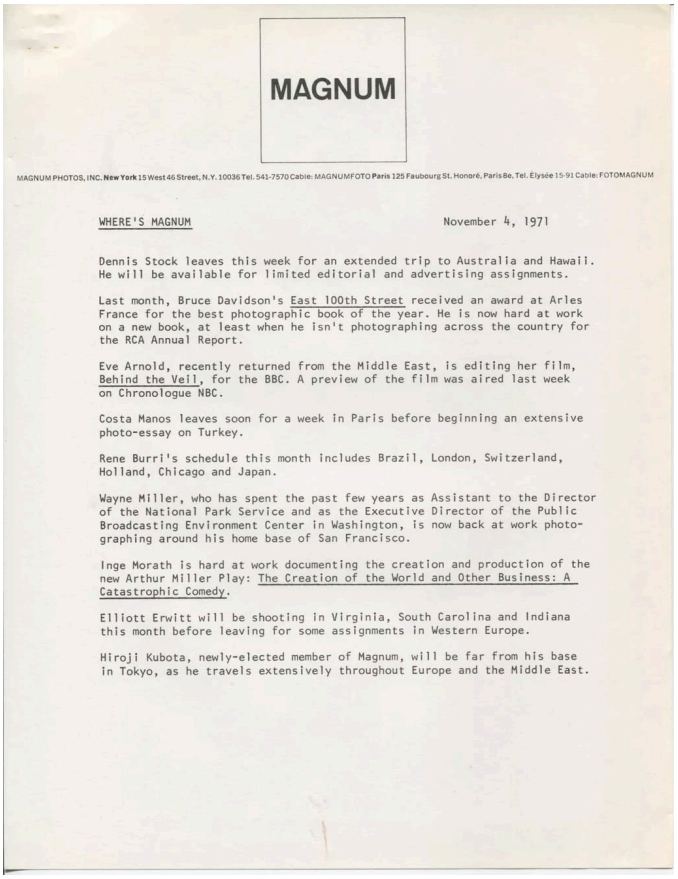
The pictures of the late Werner Bischof, Robert Capa, Dorothea Lange, David Seymour and Erich Salomon are available through the New York and Paris offices.

BUREAUS:	America: Charles Roth-Director	661-5040
	Lee Jones -Bureau Chief	661-7161
	Inge Bondi Director of Spec. Proj.	661-6148
	Helen Kolsky- Advertising	661-2927
	Jimmy Fox -Library	661-3348
	Europe: Russ Melcher-European Editor	
MAGNUM FILMS:	Phil Gittelman, Executive Producer	661-2838

June 26, 1968.

Memo sent by Magnum to its network of agents and customers, June 26, 1968.

Source: Magnum Foundation Archive



MAGNUM

MAGNUM PHOTOS, INC. New York 15 West 46 Street, N.Y. 10036 Tel. 541-7570 Cable: MAGNUMFOTO Paris 125 Faubourg St. Honoré, Paris 8e. Tel. Élysée 15-91 Cable: FOTOMAGNUM

WHERE'S MAGNUM — November 4, 1971

Dennis Stock leaves this week for an extended trip to Australia and Hawaii. He will be available for limited editorial and advertising assignments.

Last month, Bruce Davidson's East 100th Street received an award at Arles France for the best photographic book of the year. He is now hard at work on a new book, at least when he isn't photographing across the country for the RCA Annual Report.

Eve Arnold, recently returned from the Middle East, is editing her film, Behind the Veil, for the BBC. A preview of the film was aired last week on Chronologue NBC.

Costa Manos leaves soon for a week in Paris before beginning an extensive photo-essay on Turkey.

Rene Burri's schedule this month includes Brazil, London, Switzerland, Holland, Chicago and Japan.

Wayne Miller, who has spent the past few years as Assistant to the Director of the National Park Service and as the Executive Director of the Public Broadcasting Environment Center in Washington, is now back at work photographing around his home base of San Francisco.

Inge Morath is hard at work documenting the creation and production of the new Arthur Miller Play: The Creation of the World and Other Business: A Catastrophic Comedy.

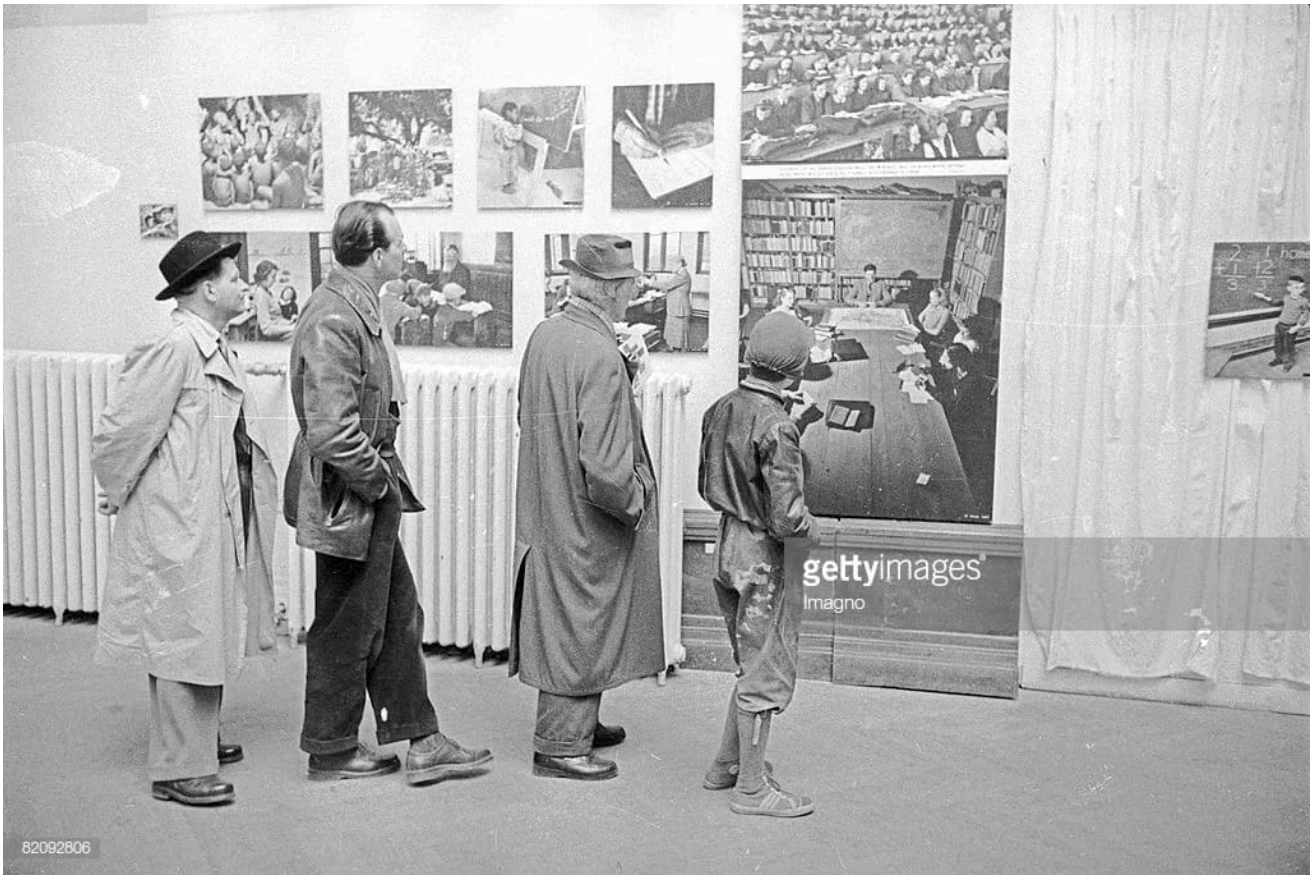
Elliott Erwitt will be shooting in Virginia, South Carolina and Indiana this month before leaving for some assignments in Western Europe.

Hiroji Kubota, newly-elected member of Magnum, will be far from his base in Tokyo, as he travels extensively throughout Europe and the Middle East.

Memo sent by Magnum to its network of agents and customers, November 4, 1971.

Source: Magnum Foundation Archive

This transatlantic business model depended on the valuing of the authorial figure, and on a profoundly universalist ethic. After the war, "concerned" photographers wanted to participate in the reconstruction of a peaceful world; they traveled in the most distant countries to bear witness to the life conditions of the women and men they encountered. Photography was perceived as a universal language, accessible to all regardless of language, revealing the commonalities of our humanity, rather than the differences. This ambition was at the heart of the exhibit *The Family of Man*, organized by the conservator Edward Steichen (Luxembourg, 1879-U.S., 1973) in 1955 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It brought together photos taken all over the world, relying in part on Magnum's resources.

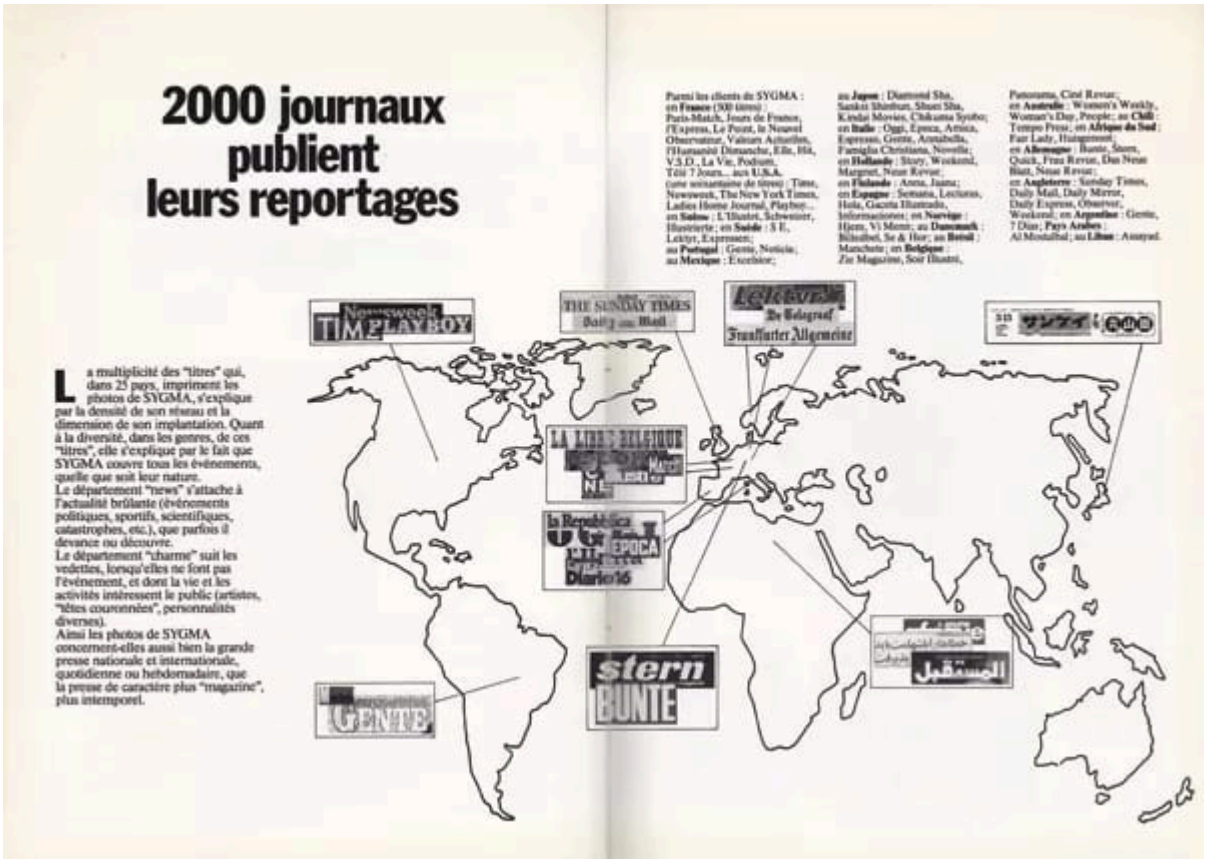


Visitors at the exhibition "The Family of Man" at Künstlerhaus in Vienna (Austria), 1957

Source: Getty Images

Author-photographers and Subjective Writings

But this exhibit and the universalist model soon gave rise to a debate: was this humanist gaze, supposedly understandable by all, nothing more than the gaze of the white privileged reporter, blind to the mechanisms of colonial domination and cultural difference, projecting his stereotypes and his fascination for exoticism as he journeyed indiscriminately? In the 1960s, several photographers adopted a new position. Rather than presuming to embody objectivity or universal values, they forefronted the subjective, critical, and sometimes autobiographical facets of their work. In the wake of the rise of "New Journalism" in the U.S., journalistic writing in the first person gave new momentum to authorial photography, propagated especially in prestigious formats like exhibits and books. Magnum participated in the transatlantic distribution of these creations. In France, the humanist current remained popular, but young photographers were inspired by the experimentations of their American counterparts. During the 1970s, the economic model of the author-photographer was the basis for the creation of new agencies that sought to emulate Magnum, like Gamma, Sygma, Sipa and Viva in Paris, and F4 in Brazil.



Communication brochure for the Sygma agency 1973-1978.

Source: Audrey Leblanc et Sébastien Dupuy, « Le fonds Sygma exploité par Corbis. Une autre histoire du photojournalisme », Études photographiques, n° 35, printemps 2017

The illustrated press market, always more international and competitive, encountered multiple crises starting in the 1960s, in the face of higher production costs and the competition of television. The large text and image agencies, called "wire services," like France Presse, Reuters and AP (Associated Press), had the means to maintain an international network, to invest in the latest equipment and to keep the short turnaround times needed to furnish photos to newspapers. Author agencies targeted specific magazines and adopted various strategies such as specializing in a field like travel or sport, taking a chance on lucrative trades like celebrity photos, or diversifying.

"Corporate" photography—orders for businesses—which had first been developed in the United States in the 1950s, spread through Europe and became a non-negligible source of revenue for some photographers, who adapted the photo-essay or the reporting genres to a business context, to illustrate annual reports or enhance a brand image.

Exhibits and books also offered outlets for agencies that claimed the status of author for their members and participated in the promotion of documentary photography as a cultural heritage. This cultural heritage movement was especially on display in France during the 1980s, when the Ministry of Culture under Jack Lang was highlighting photography.

The U.S. pioneered the development of a market for photographic prints, henceforth collected and recognized as art objects and sought after because of their rarity. The Magnum agency invested in this area by offering limited edition prints and collaborating with galleries, like that of Howard Greenberg in New York. The oldest prints in agency photo libraries started being displayed at international fairs because they

could lay claim to "vintage" status. Author-photographer agencies have thus gotten less and less of their revenue from the press and have adopted a diversification strategy: selling prints, publishing books, doing orders for businesses, and collaborating with NGOs.

Despite this diversification, the agencies' business model remains precarious, especially in the context of the digital transition. This transition represents large investments, including the cost of digitizing archives for the historical agencies, who then make them available online. Author rights, which are the economic foundation of the sector, are also increasingly called into question: images published online evade all control and are drowned in a mass of constant proliferation. The value of an image is attached less to its exclusivity and rarity than to the extent of its visibility. To do well in this environment, agencies and photographers must attract large numbers of visitors to their pages and social networks, so they can have weight in the digital economy. The role of agencies and their networks are called into question by the dematerialization of exchange. Some photographers can get by without them by reaching out directly to their public through social media (especially Instagram), attracting orders because they have a high number of followers, and thus offering a larger media exposure to their customers.

In this globalized and digital context, agencies are still very international, bringing photographers to varied horizons and functioning on all the continents. Most of the market is concentrated in the hands of a few large press agencies and image banks like Getty and Corbis, who bought the collections of many historical entities. At the same time, the small author agencies, collectives, and photo associations endure (Myop, Noor, VU, etc.). The transatlantic dynamics, that had overseen the rise of agencies, is now implanted into a larger network, that of web publications, exhibits and festivals that are held the world over.

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