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Establishing an Observation, Producing a Discourse, Illustrating Results Possibilities for the Photographic Tool

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"The social sciences should construct image-tools which will enable them to understand, analyze and explain reality in its visible aspects. They should also specify the approaches to be used to render an account of ordinary or extraordinary subject-images produced daily in the social universe" (Terrenoire 1985:512).

Starting from three concrete examples, we will underline several potentialities of the photographic tool for study in the social sciences.[1] Various research experiences have shown me that the photograph can be both a tool in the development of the anthropological subject and throughout the research process, but also a way to present the research results.

Photography and ethnography appeared at the same time and shared the wish to describe and understand social life. The use of photography in the social sciences is a long tradition.[2] Anthropologists have often had recourse to photography without necessarily theorizing about its use. The first important work using photography as a tool of research is that which Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson conducted in Bali at the beginning of the 1940s. Using their photographs, they tried to determine a Balinese type.[3] Generally, photography is used to illustrate the anthropological text during the reproduction of research results. Some African researchers have, for example, conducted research on images produced in African societies to analyze changes in social relationships[4] or colonial history.[5]

Work using photography starting from the production of data is much rarer.[6] Generally speaking, the social sciences grudgingly recognize that an image might have a scientific quality. Because the image can produce impressions, express feelings, it appears frivolous and its use as a research tool seems suspect.[7] However,

the image is a sign of the real. And as Albert Piette writes, "as an irrefutable witness of the existence of the photographed object, the photographic image contains a power of designation which endows it with a basic heuristic quality: to show, attract our attention to an object, a theme…" (Piette 1992:26). But even the very people who recognize the importance of the image still miss no chance to regularly remind us of the limits of photography.[8]

The Limits of the Photographic Tool

A photograph obviously depends on the choice of the photographer and his or her interpretation. It reflects what the photographer, in a more or less conscious way, wanted to see and show of this reality. One of the dangers of the use of the photograph is the realistic illusion. The photograph represents the direct proof of the presence of the anthropologist on the ground and gives a character of truth to his or her interpretations. Writing also creates this realistic illusion when anthropologists stress their presence on the ground.[9]

Beyond this aspect, the use of the photograph poses a major problem: the polysemy of an image. The photograph is not a linear discourse; the picture has its own peculiar language, the codes of which are shifting depending upon the person looking at it. The esthetic codes, the recognition or misreading of the objects presented, the affective relationships of the person who is looking at what is represented, etc. result in each individual perceiving and feeling different realities – or at least not totally identical realities – in discovering the picture. For this essential reason, in terms of communication, the photograph is very weak. Ernst Gombrich affirms that "the visual image is unequalled with respect to its ability for discovery, its use for expressive ends is problematic and when reduced to itself, the possibility of equally the enunciative function of language is severely lacking" (Gombrich 1983:324). If the image wants to retain a power of communication, it should at least be accompanied by a text.[10] According to Gombrich, the text is not a sufficient condition; the true interpretation of an image is not a passive act. To his mind, "a correct interpretation depends on three variables: the code, the legend and the context. One might think that the legend would suffice to make the two others superfluous. But our cultural conventions are too supple for this to be the case"(Gombrich 1983:328). Indeed, we can apply various readings to the same picture which change its meaning. In some cases, only the context can clear up the ambiguity of a visual message even without resorting to words.

The translation of a context seems possible by viewing photographs in a series. Mastery of the photographic technique also allows for a visual translation of the context. According to Guran, a photograph can have a strong communicative power, if it is effective. For this to be the case,

> the photographic act begins with the recognition of the content of a scene,
> the selection of the aspect which is worthy of being recorded. In the
> viewfinder, we exclude, or not, certain elements – which, however, also

represent data – in order to bring out the essential part of the scene according to the viewpoint chosen. It is totally fundamental to look carefully at the four corners of the viewfinder and to eliminate the maximum number of incidental elements which could pollute the main message (...) [Without doing so] the effectiveness of the communication of the photograph is reduced by the presence of disorganized visual elements. (...) The photographic image is built from the visual element which represents the starting point of its reading. This point should be recognized from the first glance at the photograph. It is the first visual element which attracts our attention, everyone is supposed to begin the reading of the picture from this. The absence of that point, or the existence of several equally prominent points can be an esthetic approach, but in general, with respect to grasping information, makes the picture confused and weak (Guran 1996:367).

For Guran,

the effective photograph does not have the objective of rendering the text useless, but only of creating a photograph which contains more meaning and which is likely to convey it more easily. However, the effectiveness of a photograph cannot always be considered at the very moment of taking the picture. It is often discovered *a posteriori*, just as an effective datum is, once the field work completed and the notes considered in their entirety. Even if the photographer fully masters the codes of photographic language, all of his intention is not contained in the photo; he cannot guarantee that the receiver sees all that he wanted to put in it (Darbon 1994:115).

Semiology has shown the need to distinguish between the transmitter and the receiver; this is true for a text and even more so for photographic language.

The need to master photographic language in order to produce photographs which are tools of research requires the anthropologist to be a photographer himself or to work with a photographer. In the latter case, real team work is necessary to collect visual data and exploit them.

Anthropologist-photographers [11] say it themselves: it is difficult, if not impossible, for a single person to juggle anthropological inquiries and photographic work with the objective of producing a corpus of scientific data. The observation of a ceremony, for example, cannot be done both with the objective of producing a precise and systematic written description and extracting photographic material from it. These two jobs, very different in nature, should be accomplished at different times and according to specific modalities. From this viewpoint, working in a team allows for getting around this difficulty. The constraints and approach of the photographer, however, are not the same as those of the anthropologist. For the photographer, the issue is "to foresee (or better yet to have the intuition) and to capture a representative synthetic moment of the universe being studied. All of this means that the photograph is the product of a strictly personal act, the direct result of the interaction between the

photographer and the content of the recorded scene" (Guran 1996:364). The photographer should keep in mind the various aspects of the use in the social sciences of the visual support (to describe, compare, illustrate an interpretation, to represent actors…) The photographer should immerse him or herself in the questions of the social science researcher, and the anthropologist should be conscious of the constraints of photographic work which is the result of the thought and point of departure of another. Time for photographic work and that of anthropological thought is not the same. The anthropological subject is constructed little by little during reading and research in the field, based on a complex back-and-forth between the two, the final result requires several months of reflection. Certainly, the photograph produced for the social sciences requires a certain immersion of its author in the universe under study, but the result itself is immediate.

Team work allows the ethnographer to observe the photographer at work. He or she can then reflect on what might be significant on the visual level. This collaboration offers the ethnographer the chance to compare his approach and study in progress from a different angle which assumes a different sort of questioning. For the anthropologist, the fact of following the photographer on the ground represents a privileged means of observation, all the while maintaining the distance necessary for the understanding of certain phenomena. The anthropologist observes while the photographer goes to another support with his or her own sensibility, to observe aspects sometimes already seen, sometimes new. The presence of the anthropologist during photographic work is necessary for the understanding and analysis of the interaction between the photographer and the photographed and understanding of the off-camera. Scientific study is significantly enriched by all of these elements.

Photography, we should recall, depends on the selective interpretation of the photographer (choice of angles of view, distance to the object, framing). "We know that it is not the camera that takes the photos, but instead the photographer who introduces his way of perceiving and constructing the world according to subjective determinations (...). In short, the image is not the real" (Piette 1992:28). Photography remains an interpretation. The anthropologist, like the photographer, should be aware of this. If the anthropologist is not the photographer, he or she can more easily distance him or herself from the interpretation of the photographer and think about it.

Here, we are not in any way concerned with denying the limits of the fixed image, but rather of knowing how, despite its shortcomings, the image can be a supplementary tool in the panoply of the social science researcher at the various stages of his or her reflection, i.e., during data production and the reproduction of results and, of course, in the interpretation inherent in understanding the world. The production of images is one tool among many others; it is in no way designed to replace the written description of phenomena observed.

Photography captures specific data which are often difficult to render in writing. The obligatory criteria to which the photograph may be subjected can be as strict as those used for writing in the social sciences. The image can in no way replace discursive production but, when realized according to specific and rigorous modalities, it provides another regard which calls upon us to fully consider the human dimension in our subjects of research.

Most of the images presented here were produced by a photographer, Franck Pourcel, with whom I conducted three anthropological research projects. The first of these projects was an outdoor study in two French industrial cities, Martigues and Cherbourg. The second, conducted in collaboration with another anthropologist, Katrin Langewiesche, dealt with alternative life styles, developed by people who are currently referred to as "neo-rurals" in France. These are people who, mainly after 1968, returned to nature. Whether they live in a community, alone, or in families, the common element is their desire to attempt a new experiment in living on the fringes of consumer society. The inquiry undertaken was neither a classical ethnological study nor conventional photographic research, but a work which combines these two approaches. (See Attané, Langewiesche, Pourcel 2004). Finally, the third experiment in collaboration took place in Burkina Faso during my doctoral research which dealt with family ceremonies and the changes in social relationships of sex, age and generation. At the end of my twelve months on the ground, Franck met me for a month and took pictures of marriage ceremonies, naming ceremonies, and funerals. After Franck Purcell's departure, Abdoulaye Ouédraogo, who accompanied me in my field work, took tens of pictures during the funeral of a religious leader in the village of Bougounam. Informed by anthropological questioning, his photographs are aimed at reconstructing the stages of the ritual. The photographs taken in Burkina Faso did not contribute to the creation of the subject as was the case during my two other experiences in the field, but they enabled me to pay closer attention to certain data. To this extent, they contributed to the emergence of certain analyses. At the same time, they helped in the reproduction of descriptive, comparative or interpretive data thus contributing to the illustration of research results.

These three research experiences show that photography can be used in anthropology on three distinct levels:

1. First, photography can contribute to the construction of the research subject; such was the case during the study of outdoor activities;
2. During the research process, photography can be a full-fledged research tool. It supplements description and comparison. Later, when presented to the actors, photographs contribute to the collection of a discourse on questions which could only with difficulty be organized by themes during the interview;

3. In the reproduction of results, photography becomes an illustration of research. During these three experiences, the use of photography allowed for the presentation of visual data which, if they had been transcribed linearly, would have lost a part of their meaning. These visual data illustrate in turn a description, a comparison or an interpretation (interpretive illustration).

Sometime, a single photograph can be used at each of these levels, whereas another can only be used for one. A photograph can be read alone, but it is the entirety of the photographic corpus which clears the way for the meaning of the visual discourse.

The Construction of the Subject of Research

The image participated in the construction of the research subject in the framework of a comparative study of practices of the environment in the two French cities of Martigues and Cherbourg. Here is a first picture which was taken in the hamlet of Ponteau in the district of Martigues, next to the Mediterranean, one Thursday in June. It was warm; a young woman was sunbathing in front of the huts on the coast.

1. Village of Ponteau (Martigues, June 1996). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

By turning, we can see the chimneys of the petrochemical factories which overhang the huts can be seen ; the photographer gives us a glimpse, once he was able to capture a panoramic view of the site from the other side of the conche.

2. Village of Ponteau (Martigues, June 1996). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

At the same time, a person I was talking to that I ran into on the ground that day exclaimed, "This spot is magnificent! Do you know many places like this on the Mediterranean which are as calm and where there is no crowd?"

This example allows us to grasp the gap which exists between what the external observer can see of an activity and what an actor can say about it. The photograph illustrates this gap and, at the same time, envisaged alongside the discourse, it becomes a datum for reflection for the social sciences. Here, we are not contrasting the discourse of interlocutors and information captured by the photograph (here: a tanned woman, lying on a deckchair, not far from a factory), but rather analyzing them together as two facets of the same reality. On the one hand, an actor produces a discourse on a place, and on the other, an external observer – the photographer – captures what seems surprising and important to him in the reality observed: the fact of devoting one's time to a leisure activity close to a factory. The photographer's look at the activity of an actor gives rise to sociological questions. What are the representations of the space of the actor? What motivates his or her choice of location for leisure activities? What are the modalities that cause a single space to be perceived in very different ways by its users? This rendered by the photographic document, also requires us to ask about the presuppositions in play in any observation of social reality. The recourse to an image at each of the stages of research prompts us both to take the new data into account and to reflect on data production in anthropology.

These cities of Cherbourg and Martigues are hosts to so-called at-risk industries: the nuclear industry in Cherbourg and the petrochemical industry in Martigues. The

very different nature of the industries implanted just as the cultural specificity of these two cities justifies the comparison. In Martigues, the omnipresence of industrial installations strikes the visitor. In Cherbourg, despite the significance of installations using nuclear energy (the city's arsenal, the factory for radioactive waste reprocessing in La Hague, the nuclear plant in Flamanville), the countryside maintains a preserved and "natural" look. The idea of using photography was therefore obvious to represent the specificity of each site. The photographer and the anthropologist wondered about the possibility of producing visual data enabling us to establish comparisons. This questioning underlines the fact that the industrial installation in Cherbourg was not very visible and, as such, was very difficult to represent on a photographic support. The invisibility of the nuclear industry was then obvious as an incontrovertible fact in data analysis. The creation of a comparable visual corpus produced information which contributed to the construction of the anthropological subject. Thus, even before their existence, the possibility of taking pictures or not contributed to our reflection.

One of the aspects of research was to capture outdoor activities in their setting, which the photographer set out systematically to do. After the first investigations (interviews, observations and production of negatives) the existence of two different attitudes vis-à-vis the industrial facilities appeared. On the one hand, in Cherbourg, of process of shunning nuclear facilities was discernable both in discourses, visible in observations and rendered in images; and on the other hand, in Martigues, a sort of invisibility of industries seemed to characterize all of the outdoor activities. Indeed, even though factories cover all of the territory, the discourse of the people encountered would lead us to believe that they are not seen.

The Tool of Photography in the Research Process

The tool of photography can also be used in the research process. It assists in the production of descriptive data.

Description

The photographic support facilitates description for three main reasons. First, it allows us to capture a visual observation; secondly, it establishes a multitude of details that direct observation does not necessarily take into account; thirdly, it allows us to immortalize an instant and the perception of things that the photographer had of the situation at this instant. In this sense, it allows us to transform an impression into data. But a description, whether it be visual or textual, cannot be separated from the interpretation of the researcher, conditions of its productions and its recipients.[12] Thus, the photograph reflects the choices of the photographer; it is partial and biased. The anthropologist must consider the interpretive dimensions of the image. The photograph in its role as the trace of the real also has a strong realistic power. The anthropologist reflects on its realistic effects, i.e. on the information conveyed by the image (clothing of the actors, body language, background, landscape, etc.).

The photograph can facilitate description in the research process because it allows us to visually understand a part of the phenomena observed. Within a study of outdoor activities, the photograph captures data which would be difficult to represent without this support: description of the setting of cities and their surroundings, description of the immediate environment of the interlocutors. In Martigues, the proximity of the industrial facilities strikes the visitor. The chimneys of the factory in Ponteau seem to watch over the near-by houses. Factories are omnipresent; they mark the scenes of daily life.

3. Hamlet of Ponteau (Martigues, July 1996). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

The presence of industries marks the landscape of the village as a whole. The homes in the village of Lavéra are right next to petrochemical facilities.

4, 5 and 6. Hamlet of Ponteau (Martigues, July 1996). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

7. Hamlet of Lavéra (Martigues, July 1996). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

The great visibility of petrochemical industries shown in the photographs and, at the same time their absence in the discourse of the interlocutors, gives rise to specific interpretations. We are aware of the development of the process of rendering the factories invisible and minimal by residents near the industrial sites. The visual description is placed next to the discourse. We thus recognize the process of rendering invisible and minimizing created by the neighbors of the industrial. Visual description placed next to discourse is of indisputable heuristic effectiveness in this case.

The second reason why we are encouraged to use photography for ethnographic description is that the support can record a multitude of details.[13] Thus when the observer needs to note a great number of elements inscribed in the scene observed, the photograph is an essential tool. This is the case, for example, in this image which represents the outside of the house of one of the people whom we met in conducting research on the alternative lifestyle in south-west France.

8. Ponny in front of his house (Forcalquier region, September 1998).
Photograph: Franck Pourcel

As Albert Piette describes, by allowing for "note-taking, potentially on everything in the world from all possible angles" (Piette 1992:27), the photograph facilitates a detailed description.

9. Photograph taken in Ponteau (Martigues, July 1996). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

10. Photograph taken beside pond in Berre
(Martigues, November 1996). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

Thus, in the study of outdoor activities in Martigues, the photographs highlight the behavior: the fishermen, the swimmers bring chairs, food, etc. The nearby car hides the thousand and one familiar accessories. We receive information directly, thanks to the tool of photography, on certain aspects of social life. This possibility for the image to take in a multitude of details in a single shot is particularly interesting to be able to describe the details of a ritual practice.

Finally, the photograph facilitates description thanks to its ability to immortalize an instant. Pierre Verget wrote that it "has the advantage of stopping things... and thus enabling us to see what was only glimpsed at and immediately forgotten because a new impression came to erase the previous one" (Verger 1991:168). The image of a Catholic marriage taken in the village of Ouahigouya in Burkina Faso illustrates perfectly this potentiality of photography.

11. Ouahigouya (Burkina Faso, February 1997). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

This is also the case with respect to the photographs taken in Martigues: the near-by factories are visible from almost everywhere. The visual violence of the industrial facility leaves the visitor with a mixed feeling. By capturing the moment, the fixed image allows us to turn a vague impression into a fact to be examined. The photograph does not accomplish this less well than film; it does so differently. It is not a handicapped image. With the photograph, the movement is not reconstituted but stopped. For example, these photographs mark practices of the environment in their setting:

12. Hamlet of Ponteau (Martigues, June 1996). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

13. Caronte Canal (Martigues, July 1996). Photograph: Franck Pourcel.

In the study of ritual or social practices, the context must be taken into consideration. During research conducted in Martigues and Cherbourg, capturing the context was essential because an outdoor activity does not have the same meaning if it takes place in a natural park or next to an oil port. Because the dominant social norm imposes a "natural" framework for outside activities, these photographs show us activities which by-pass this norm. Direct observation may be sufficient to perceive the context, but the photograph allows us to consider it at each stage in the research. The photograph then becomes a primordial tool for "an ethnography of the unspoken, of that which is not admitted, most often in an awkward position with respect to the discourse" (Piette, 1992:33) and I would add the "unseen." Photographs, the result of an external regard, can show elements of a landscape or an activity which are not necessarily seen by the actor.

Comparison

Images can also contribute to the production of comparative data in the research process. Thus, for example, during the research conducted on the alternative lifestyle, Katrin Langewiesche, Franck Pourcel and I realized that the individuals who attempted this return to nature are from various social milieus. While they shared common ideas on organic agriculture, therapeutic choices, or children's education, these people developed different attitudes as they were confronted with a consumer society and chose to live in a more or less significant material destitution. The following two pictures of these two men taking care of their garden illustrate this point.

14 and 15. District of Mane (Forcalquier Region, June 1999). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

All of the pictures taken in Martigues and Cherbourg provide the opportunity to examine, side by side, the environment of the two villages and the relationship that the actors have with their space. The visibility of industry in Martigues is striking, whereas in Cherbourg, the countryside and green space are very present visually. In the same glance, in Cherbourg, we only rarely see industrial activities and use of space which might be termed "natural." In Martigues, on the other hand, people swim, eat, live right near the factories.

16. Collignon Beach (Cherbourg, August 1996). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

17. Bay of Ecalgrains (Cherbourg Region, August 1996). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

The desire to produce visual data which add to the description of the research universe and the comparison of actions and places has encouraged what Jean Pierre Olivier de Sardan calls the production of "interpretive models coming from the field."[14]

A Photograph for a Discourse

During the research process, the photograph can be used during interviews as a basis for posing questions. The main detractors to the use of photography in the social sciences criticize precisely its shortcomings in terms of communication. Esthetic codes, the knowledge or lack of knowledge of objects presented, the affective relationship of the person who is looking with what is represented, etc. mean that each individual will perceive and experience different realities – or at least not totally identical – in observing the image. It is for this essential reason that photography is a weak tool of communication. The polysemy of an image means that it can give rise to multiple interpretations, and it is for this reason that its use during interviews is rich in information. The view of images facilitates the production of original discourse. Two out of three examples of research presented here provided the chance to show images during interviews with our interlocutors.

Some photographs taken in the neo-rural movement were used systematically as a starting point to ask questions during interviews. Discussions based on the photographs enabled us to compile a corpus of very specific data on representations of landscapes and activities related to nature. Thanks to the photographs, the impressions of the interested parties are transformed into sociological handleable data. The discourse that the view of the photographs evokes proves to be rich in representations of the relationship to space, motivations of the actors in their choices. During the interviews, the images encouraged discussion on themes that might be difficult to put into words (because they are unconscious or hidden). Thanks to its evocative ability, photography translates emotions that the discourse of the ethnologist cannot render in the course of an interview. Finally, photography renders sociological questioning accessible to people encountered in the research setting and facilitates understanding between researcher and interlocutors. This was the case with the following photograph.

18. Skeleton of a goat (Hill in Mane, Forcalquier, June 1999). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

This image refers directly to death, and, at first glance, it does not really reveal an ethnographic meaning. For the photographer, this image represents a form of anchoring; for the ethnographer, it is a signature photograph which, although it presents the sensitivity and individual interpretation of the photographer, did not provide ethnographic data. It was later, when this photograph was shown to some of our interlocutors that its ability to elicit discourse appeared. Not a single one of the people met was indifferent to this photograph. Upon seeing this photo, they spontaneously developed a discourse on the installation in the region. For all, the image symbolized the approach of a number of them who came to settle and build a house. It was a chance for them to evoke the hard labor of construction, but also the affective and symbolic importance attached to the house or break-up of the couple which often happens when the house is finished. This signature photograph is useful for specifying what cannot be shown; information not evoked in the interview because it is too affective. Just as they capture information, photographs translate emotions; they thus have an ability of evocation that the discourse of the anthropologist during the interview cannot evoke. Here, each person evoked the significance attached to the house and the fact of reconstructing it oneself.

About ten images were also presented to interlocutors in Cherbourg. Having recourse to photographs in the interviewed proved to be relevant for five main reasons.

1. The corpus of the discourse collected thanks to photographs was the subject of specific treatment. It allowed for a comparison of what various actors were able to say about the same picture.

2. Photographs visualize certain elements of the research subject. As a result, they provide the actors with the result of an observation made with the objective of scientific questioning. Thanks to photography, the concern of the researcher was able to be better understood by his or her interlocutors, even if they interpreted the picture based on their own referents and not on those of the researcher. Starting with their knowledge or what they wanted to say about the scene represented, the persons interviewed developed a discourse: in this sense, photography has an indisputable heuristic power.

3. Photographs establish a situation and contribute a visual description of a place or an action in the setting. As a result, they were the origin of a set of discussions on a specific activity or space.

19. Port of Cherbourg (August 1996). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

This photograph provoked reflections by the Cherbourg residents
encountered on fishing in the region, on its economic role, but also on the
difficulty of working as a professional fisherman. Thanks to this image, it
was possible to assess the position of the interlocutors with respect to this
activity. The people encountered evoked new themes which did not appear
in the interviews.

4. Once captured by photographs, unspoken or unseen information can be
    revealed to the actors. The discourse, sparked by the view of the
    photographs, turned out to be a wealth of representations of the
    relationship to space, of the relationship to the other and also in justifica-
    tions constructed *a posteriori*. In Cherbourg, whether one is pro or anti
    nuclear, no one is indifferent to the presence of nuclear power. The exis-
    tence of this industry in the region is the subject of stories and jokes of all
    sorts which reveal the effort at acceptance[15] of the existence of a potential
    danger. Those in favor of the nuclear presence generally produce in technical
    discourse. This was the case of an employee of the radioactive waste
    reprocessing factory in La Hague who affirmed his confidence in the
    industry and the insignificance of the risk he runs in working there.

20. Photograph taken in front of the factory in La Hague (north Cotentin, August 1996).
Photograpg: Franck Pourcel

Later, during the discussion, when looking at this photograph in front of the La Hague factory, he states: "The factory is half the size of Chernobyl" After a silence, he adds, as if to explain himself, "And there are animals that are not in a good shape. If you show the photo to someone who doesn't know the region, they would say it was Chernobyl!" By presenting the vision of an outside observer, the photograph set off – beyond a rational and trivializing discourse – the expression of an anguish provoked by the presence of the site. Only a long time on the ground and particularly close contact with the interlocutors would have allowed us to find the ambivalence of feelings produced by the existence of the site, even among its most passionate defenders.

21. Bay of Ecalgrains, Cherbourg Region (August 1996). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

The view of this image of the Bay of Écalgrains (very close to the factory for reprocessing radioactive waste in La Hague) was the occasion for a discourse on the beauty of the landscape. It enabled us to assess the attachment of the people encountered to the preserved and natural aspect of their environment.

22. Beach in the Village of Gatteville, near Cherbourg (Cotentin, August 1996)

23. Beach in the Village of Gatteville, near Cherbourg (Cotentin, August 1996)

5. The artistic dimension of the photograph has its importance because as it captures information, it also translates emotions. The photograph thus has the ability of evocation that the discourse of the anthropologist cannot have during an interview. The role of an activity in the environment in the history or the socialization of an individual, that of the relationship to the presence of an at-risk site, that of the anguish caused by the proximity to nuclear facilities can be more easily addressed. We see an example here:

Upon seeing these photographs, a man met in Cherbourg declared, pensively: "It's funny because there is a timeless side to this photograph; it could have been taken ten or twenty years ago." Another person adds: "For me (whelking) is a culture, a culture in the area, a tradition. Because when I was a kid, everyone always taught me to whelk."

Another interlocutor declared enthusiastically: "Your photos are good because everyone can see his or her life in them!" Precisely, because the photograph has this awakening power, it allowed us to examine the role that whelking played in the socialization of individuals and their relationship to natural space.

Presentation of Research Results

The photographs presented here reproduce a part of the research results. One by one they illustrate the descriptions, comparisons or interpretations. The polysemy of an image is an asset when it is presented during an interview; on the other hand, it becomes a limit during the reproduction of results. If it is to retain a power of communication, an image should be accompanied by a text.[16] The text is not a sufficient condition because the interpretation of an image is not a passive act.[17] Indeed, we can apply different wordings to the same image which can change the reading of it. In some cases, only the context can remove the ambiguity of a visual message. Understanding of the context of the photographed image is essential to correctly interpret an image. Several techniques facilitate the representation of the context: the construction of the image allowed by mastery of the photographic technique, the legend (cf. Gombrich, 1983) of the series of images (cf. Attané, Langewiesche, Pourcel, 2004).

Sometimes, the construction of a shot is enough to provide a correct interpretation of the image. The example of the fishermen at the Caronte Canal in Martigues shows how the construction of an image can situate the context of the instant captured.

24. Caronte Canal (Martigues, June 1996)

In the middle ground, two men are sitting side by side on the rocks. Farther off, fishermen are holding their poles. Here, the mastery of the photographic technique constructs the subject.[18] The photographer, using a wide angle (35 mm), returns human action to its context, its environment. This is not a portrait: the desire is not to capture the regard or the individuality (the man in the foreground is seen from the rear), but rather the action of this man in his immediate environment. The photograph contains sufficient element to read it, even beyond the instant it represents même de l'instant qu'elle représente. This photograph may be termed "effective" because it has a significant power of communication. The "effective" photograph is not designed to render the text useless, but only to create a representation which contains a meaning which it easily transmits. The "effective" photograph is one which, standing on its own, provides sufficient information on the context of the instant photographed. Its use in the representation of results increases their relevance.

The legend, i.e. a written commentary about the image, is most often necessary to allow the viewer to understand what its user means to say about it. This is, for example, the case in the following images which show a part of the funeral of a religious leader, a master of the earth, which were taken in Burkina Faso by Abdoulaye Ouédraogo. Here are the commentaries which precede the presentations of these images in my thesis, commentaries which are indispensable to the understanding of the scene depicted. This example shows how images can illustrate descriptions and facilitate the reproduction of research results. Here, the visual and discursive descriptions are closely intertwined.

In Bougounam, during funerals of the *tengsoba* (master of the earth) of the village around 2:30 P.M., the men are in front of the house of the ancestors (the *kiims-roogo)* which is located inside the courtyard of the *tengsoba*. They surround and wrap the tombstone in a blanket (blanket made of black and white cotton fabric). The women of the deceased's family and the *tengspoko* stand facing the men.

25. Men build a strecher to carry the body of the deceased during the burial.
Photograph: Abdoulaye Ouédraogo

26. Village of Bougounam, Burkina Faso (March 1997).
Photograph: Abdoulaye Ouédraogo

27. Village of Bougounam, Burkina Faso (March 1997).
Photograph: Abdoulaye Ouédraogo

28. Village of Bougounam, Burkina Faso (March 1997).
Photograph: Abdoulaye Ouédraogo

29. Men and women leave the courtyard and walk around it three times counter-clockwise.
Photograph: Abdoulaye Ouédraogo

30. Women, parentes à plaisanterie [social practice consisting of a joking relationship
between people to mitigate potential social tension], walk around
in the opposite direction and pass them three times.
Photograph: Abdoulaye Ouédraogo

A woman, a elder sister of the deceased, opens the procession, she sprays water all along the path, other women follow, one of them carrying millet beer in a little crock, another a basket. The *wemdamba*, i.e., the women in the family of the deceased, are in front and the men follow. The *tengspoko* is there; she is wearing a red hat and white clothing.

31.

32.

33.

34.

31, 32, 33 and 34. The cortege heads towards the cemetery.
Photograph: Abdoulaye Ouédraogo

Everyone follows the group. The numerous children rush ahead and encircle the cortege. Now and then, the elders tell them to move away but they very quickly cluster together again. The carrying of the tombstone is much less solemn and formal that it would be in other villages.

35.

36.

35 and 36. The procession continues to the cemetery.
Photograph: Abdoulaye Ouédraogo

37. Ouahigouya (Burkina Faso, February 1997). Photograph: Franck Pourcel

These photographs show the importance of the role of the sisters of the deceased during the animist funeral rituals in the Mossi culture in Burkina Faso. They emphasize a certain modality of relationship between the sexes during the ritual which brings together hundreds of villagers (Attané 2003). In this way, they illustrate a sort of anthropological reflection. The series of photographs is necessary to limit the scope of possible interpretations. The written description is a representation of the reality (cf. Sperber, 1982: 18), the photograph itself is a representation that the photographer intends to provide of this same reality. Ethnography can be considerably enriched by combining these two representations of reality.

Conclusion

In the three pieces of research presented here, the photographic tool contributed additional elements of reflection which contributed to fleshing out the anthropological subject. First, the questioning before the shots were taken produced data and interpretations. For the anthropologist, watching the photograph work encouraged the confrontation of points of view. The ways of understanding the facts observed, specific to each person, produced information. The dialogue between the photographer and the anthropologist at the time the photographs were being chosen on the proof sheets facilitated the confrontation and combination of a visual language and discursive comment. With respect to methodology, the study of practices requires the development of particular modes of data production encouraging the entry of non-declarative information. Depending on the image can contribute to this. Because the photograph maintains contiguity with the referent but also a spatial and temporal distance in relation to it, the distance between the moment photographed and the image contributes to a surprise effect. During research process, the photograph provides a possibility for the researcher to go back and forth between the image and the subject in order to see more and better (Piette 1992:27).[19] Let's take one of the most important photographs, the one presented above: 11. It shows a relationship of a couple which is both normal and unexpected. This image is surprising; it is bother familiar to a European observer because it shows codes which enable him to affirm with certainty that this is a married couple, and, at the same time, it is surprising because he does not necessarily expect to discover such a scene in West African society.

The existence of these images requires us to fully consider the dimensions that the written word reduces. At the same time, these images constitute reflexive data; they reflect the interpretations of the anthropologist and the photographer produced on the ground; they are the mark of the intuitions of the photographer (Antoniadis, 2000:141). The photograph, the video are essential tools for the data entry of specific observations and also provide information on the "view cast on things."

The reproduction of research results can be facilitated by use of these media. In order to meet these two objectives (collection and reproduction of data), the researcher should meticulously specify the way in which he or she intends to use these tools. He or she should submit the use of the image to criteria as strict as the other approaches of anthropological research (note-taking, writing, etc.). The photograph (like film) is not a tool which can replace other modes of data production. Written notes compiled in the anthropologist's notebook are indispensable. Writing enables the production of explicative discourse and it is essential to the scientific approach. At the same time, in understanding the world through what is visible, we make the subject of research more complex. Collaboration between the photograph and the written is enhanced if it takes effect both during the research process and during the presentation of results.

Notes

1. This reflection is the result of a collaborative work with Katrin Langewiesche, anthropologist, and Franck Pourcel, photographer, cf. Attané, Langewiesche (2000, 2006), Attané, Langewiesche and Pourcel (2004), Pourcel (2003).
2. The photographs of Claude Lévi-Strauss among the Bororo are a good example of this.
3. Cf. Bateson & Mead (1942). On their work method: Jacknis (1988), Tanio (1994).
4. Cf. Fiéloux, Lombard & Kambou-Ferrand (1993), Ouédraogo (1996), Werner (1993, 1996, 2000).
5. Cf. Blanchard & al. (1995), Blanchard & Boëtsch (2005), Boëtsch & Chevé (2002), Boëtsch & Savarese (1999) ; Ouédraogo (1991).
6. Cf. Achutti (2004), Guran (1996), Lombard & Fiéloux (1998), Piette (1992, 1996, 1998).
7. Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (1982) shows the indisputable supremacy of the written over audio-visual production in the field of production of scientific knowledge, and what he writes about the audio-visual tool can go in large part for photography as well.
8. Cf. Darbon (1994), Gombrich (1983), etc. They are also recalled in various contributions in the special issue of *Journal des anthropologues*, 2000:80-81.
9. In particular with the argument that Geertz (1986) summarizes as, "I was there, thus it is true"
10. This can be summed up by saying that this is the basis of the photographic act includes three main elements: the photographer, the photograph (the image) and the spectator (the person looking at the image). This idea, inspired by Barthes (1980), was picked up again by Antoniadis (2000:121).
11. Cf. Darbon (1994); Guran (1996).
12. This can be summed up by saying that this is the basis of the photographic act includes three main elements: the photographer, the photograph (the image) and the spectator (the person looking at the image). This idea, inspired by Barthes (1980), was picked up again by Antoniadis (2000:121).
13. This potentiality of the image is firmly defended by Albert Piette (1992, 1996, 1998).
14. Thus, the production of the photograph becomes, just like the interview or observer participation, "a privileged place of production of "interpretive models from on the ground" tested as they emerge" (Olivier de Sardan 1995:85).

15. "Jokes which (...) are often used in La Hague in which the irony both hides the fears that one does not want to admit and translates the consciousness of the impotence of men to protect themselves, except in a pathetic way, against this energy" (Zonabend, 1989:33). People talk about enormous lobsters said to be under the cod water discharge pipe of the nuclear power plant in Flamanville, or sheep with five legs, cows that died mysteriously.

16. On this subject, see, Sperber D., *Le savoir des anthropologues [Knowledge of Anthropologists]*, 1982:18-19, to which Piette refers. According to Darbon, the language of the image "needs a text to express its full effectiveness*" (1994:116).

17. According to Gombrich, "a correct interpretation depends on three variables: the code, the legend, and the context. One might think that the legend would suffice to make the other two superfluous. But our cultural conventions are too supple for that to be the case" (1983:328).

18. Milton Guran suggests the realization of an effective photograph. (1994; 1996:363 and following). Terrenoire (1985) stresses the fact that the photograph should be scientifically constructed.

19. This is what Albert Piette (1992:27) calls the principle of distance.

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