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Introduction Photography, a Sensitive (Re)Source for Social Sciences

The Production and Circulation of Visual Representations in African Social Worlds

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Introduction

What of the Africas do photographers and their images invite us to see? This issue's point of departure is a set of encounters¹ and a common ambition: to analyze different visual representations of the social world that image producers—researchers or photographers, African or otherwise, working together or independently—generate and disseminate through the social practice of photography in Africa. At its point of arrival, emphasis is placed on analyzing the photographic process as a sensitive resource in empirical research in the social sciences.

Our reflection was anchored in a premise: the capturing of African social worlds in images is the result of different “fields of the photographable”—that is, according to Bourdieu, “[of] implicit models which may be understood via photographic practice and its product, because they objectively determine the meaning which a group confers upon the photographic act as the ontological choice of an object which is perceived as worthy of being photographed, which is captured, stored, communicated, shown and admired” (Bourdieu et al. 1990, 6). The “field

1. First among them being that between the issue's two coordinators, Chloé Josse-Durand (Josse-Durand 2016) and Constance Perrin-Joly (Perrin-Joly 2020), who were able to bring their respective research together during the “Afrique ouvrière” (Working-Class Africa) thematic school as part of the program entitled “Mondes ouvriers en Afrique de l’Est” (Working-Class Worlds in East Africa), led by Chloé Josse-Durand and Marie-Aude Fouéré. A jointly organized study day subsequently brought together social scientists and photographers (<https://cfee.hypotheses.org/8168>). Ultimately, these exchanges yielded an exhibition, *African Workplaces*, which was held on various occasions in Africa and France (2020: <https://ifra.exposure.co/african-workplaces>).

of the photographable” therefore concerns what is identified as worthy of being photographed, in order to later be shown. It also dictates how the subject should be “treated”: its selection, its composition, its staging. Rather than considering these schemas of representation of the social world through images as being objectively determined by the norms of an identifiable group with settled contours, we are interested in the plurality of influences that contribute to their construction and their evolution, on the one hand, and in the circulation of the individuals, the norms, and the images themselves, which all contribute to their plasticity, on the other. Understanding the field of the photographable when it is reformulated in this way makes it possible to explore an approach that is more sensitive to the experience of individuals (Kushtanina and Perrin-Joly 2020, 39) than the approach initially proposed by Bourdieu and his team.

The articles assembled in this issue, written by historians (Américi and Dusserre, Deslaurier, Foliard, Lavernhe), an anthropologist and a photographer (Carbonnel and Dembele), and a sociologist (Perrin-Joly), contribute to this analysis of circulations of visual representations and their place within a journey—be it that of the image itself, the photographers, or the research and collaborations that accompanied the image. However, they surpass this initial objective by inquiring into photographs’ uses as sources “on” and “in” Africa, and specifically Burundi, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Morocco, Niger, and Nigeria, among others. The photographic corpora analyzed were produced between the late nineteenth century and the 2020s. Some come from colonial archives or the private collections of art photographers and fashion photographers, both amateur and professional. Others come from field studies led by the researchers themselves or in collaboration with photographers. This variety of materials meets the aim of a dialogue between analysis of images, analysis through images, and analysis in images, capturing the range of interactions that photography provokes, allows, or is the product of. The way these interactions have been treated has often entailed segmentation: between the individual taking the photograph and the individual who is its subject (Graham 2016; Hummel 2017; Meyer 2013), between “specialists” (photographers, urban planners, researchers) (Cuny et al. 2020), between the photograph and the audience (Nimis 2014a; Perrin-Joly 2022), and so on. This segmentation also involves a division of visual studies between work “on” images and work “with” images (Harper 2002). That dichotomy has since been questioned, either by exploring other facets of visual approaches such as research in images² (Maresca and Meyer 2013), or by demonstrating the interpenetration of social sciences and images, and even their hybridization (“Sociologie et cinéma: vers l’hybridation?” 2012; Truong 2015), a perspective that this issue aligns with.

The articles in this issue also contribute to increasing the visibility of photography on Africa and in Africa. This visibility is to be understood in the proper sense of the term, as the possibility of being seen, or physically captured. But it also refers to a growing social recognition of images produced in Africa. At the same time, this

2. Maresca and Meyer’s (2013) exact term is “sociology in images.”

proliferation of images tends to obscure a central element of visual analysis: the absence of photographs, the difficulty of taking or showing them, the resistance that photographic practice comes up against, or omissions when it comes to the reception of photographs. Integrating this paradox—that is, integrating absence into analysis of the relationships that construct the shot—requires a focus on the process (the taking of photographs and their dissemination), going beyond the results (the photographic product). We will revisit this in the first part of this introduction. Analyzing the shooting process leads us to take into account the specificity of photography in Africa as a source. It can be understood here as a resource in investigation. Both an object to grasp and a medium of interaction allowing an understanding of the social world it bears witness to, it is ultimately a sensitive source in a twofold sense. First, like the paper used for prints, photography reacts when it is brought to light, revealing particularities of a subject that are more difficult to capture by other methods. Second, photography is sensitive in that it mobilizes the experiences of individuals: photographer, subject, and viewers alike. This is what we expand on in the second part of this introduction.

Paradoxical photography: Visible and invisible

The archives are overloaded with images, yet many photographs disappear. This paradox, which Daniel Foliard highlights in this issue, permeates many of the articles and invites us to understand the process of shooting (photographing) rather than its result (the photograph).

Photographic proliferation

The practice of photography spread concurrently in Europe and Africa, encouraging a substantial visual production whose historical interest is increasingly being acknowledged. Photography initially accompanied European exploration expeditions in order to document and categorize people and their surroundings (Gordon and Kurzweily 2018). Colonial administrations followed suit in using this approach, embracing the methods of physical anthropology in particular. They used photography as an instrument of control, imposing highly standardized identity photographs (Awenengo Dalberto and Banégas 2018), a practice that contributed to the imposition of colonial—and, later, postcolonial—domination. However, colonial identity photographs also paved the way for the development of independent studios (Werner 2000), such as that of James Barnor, whose images, analyzed by Margaux Lavernhe in this issue, notably illustrated the pan-African magazine *Drums*. These studios also enabled the proliferation of photographs at family and social events (Nimis and Nur Goni 2018). The opening up of private archival collections belonging to colonial officials such as Désiré Sic, analyzed in this issue by Laurence Américi and Aurélia Dusserre, has enriched the available visual sources. In the case of the most recent archives, digitization is enabling both the preservation and dissemination of photographs, endeavors that more and more actors are undertaking on the continent

(Nimis 2014b) and beyond (see, for example, the “Archive of Malian Photography” project led by Candace Keller).³ The interest being taken by African historians or experts on Africa is contributing to this enhanced visibility of research on or with photography, as well as to recognition of African photographic production. Through online publications such as the Fotota blog (<https://fotota.hypotheses.org/>), these actors are encouraging a proliferation of spaces for discussing visual approaches (Nimis and Nur Goni 2022). Archives are also being highlighted by exhibitions encouraging the reappropriation of colonial collections by the formerly colonized (for example, *Recaptioning Congo* in Lubumbashi [DRC] [Collard 2022]).

Alongside this, the practice of photography itself has experienced exponential growth, helped along not only by the democratization of the medium and its associated technologies but also by an increase in the spaces where it is made visible, from the most select art galleries to museums and social networks, the use of which is being facilitated by the speed of the digital transition in Africa (Chéneau-Loquay 2010). Social networks provide a vast space for exhibiting images and stagings caught up in complex circulations. This enthusiasm particularly concerns images of Africa or those produced in Africa. This is the case on the continent, where festivals (for example, Bamako [1994], Lagos [2010], and Addis Ababa [2010]) and museums dedicated to photography (for instance, Saint Louis [Senegal] and Antananarivo [Madagascar]) are multiplying. But it is even more the case in the Global North. The rediscovery of African photographers such as Seydou Keïta or Malick Sidibé (Nimis 2014b) by actors in the contemporary art market has shone a spotlight on African photographic production. The Musée du Quai Branly has held numerous exhibitions in recent years celebrating the history of non-Western photography (*Ouvrir l’album du monde* 2023) or contemporary African photographers such as the Cameroonian Samuel Fosso (the subject of an exhibition in 2020). The Maison Européenne de la Photographie, which is increasingly hosting exhibitions of African photographs (in 2023, it showed works by Zanele Muholi, a South African photographer), has also honored Fosso with an exhibition. Numerous exhibitions—for instance, *L’Afrique - Vue par ses photographes*,⁴ hosted by the Völklinger Hütte in Germany (2020), or the traveling exhibition *Africa State of Mind*,⁵ which was produced by the New Art Exchange (Nottingham) in 2018 and which toured England and the United States before being hosted at the Rencontres photographiques d’Arles in 2021 (Eshun 2020)—have invited African photographers to present an alternative perspective on the continent to that conditioned by European visions.

This new iconography of Africa complements, competes with, and, sometimes, inherits from the popular representations of the continent that remain prevalent

3. “Preserving Heritage in Mali,” Michigan State University, College of Arts & Letters, February 7, 2018. <https://archive.ph/3P1Qd>.

4. *L’Afrique - Vue par les Photographes*, Patrimoine Culturel Mondial Völklinger Hütte, 2020. <https://voelklinger-huette.org/fr/expositions/lafrigue-vue-par-les-photographes/>.

5. *Africa State of Mind*, New Art Exchange, 2018. <https://www.nae.org.uk/event/africa-state-of-mind/>.

in Europe. For instance, photographs produced for the tourism sector, which have inherited European explorers' photographic norms, continue to highlight the exoticism of certain populations or practices, such as the lip-plated women of southern Ethiopia, living images of a timeless Africa fantasized in the West (Abbink 2009; Turton 2004). Conversely, international urban planning firms propagate representations of a "modernized" Africa by constructing synthetic images that present the African cities of the future as global cities, a symbol of the continent's economic emergence (Watson 2014). Lastly, humanitarian action has relied heavily on photography to mobilize funds (Gorin 2011; Robinet 2011), depicting medicalized bodies that are also used to denounce the violence of colonization (Peffer 2008), with individuals used to embody the figure of the victim (De Laat and Gorin 2016) or a form of suffering that represents the ills of an entire population (Graham 2014).

The photographs we will not see

However, although this (admittedly recent) making-visible of African photography is undeniable, it has a deceptive effect. First of all, it is far from the case that all African photographers or all images taken on the continent are benefiting from it. While a small circle of connected or discovered photographers are benefiting from digital communication mediums, a large majority of African photographers are excluded (Nimis and Nur Goni 2014). The history of African photography is full of omissions; many African photographers are reduced to rare and scattered mentions, their output sometimes lost entirely. The fragility of photographic mediums and the belated interest in African photographic archives (for Burundi, see Mazuela Coll, Schneider, and Nur Goni 2012) and even their dissemination outside Africa (Micheli 2012) are contributing to an imbalance, magnifying the mirror of the European gaze on the continent (Amselle 2005). As in other areas of history, women are the first to be erased from memory, whether as subjects of images⁶ (Bruzzi 2018) or as photographers. Women's photographic practices, although attested by cases such as those of Carrie Lumpkin and Tejumade Sapara-Johnson in Nigeria (Nimis 2006), remain poorly known. The norms on what deserves to be preserved are ultimately volatile, the preservation of photographic archives is subject to the fluctuation of African political regimes, and photographic recognition remains highly dependent on the issues driving the art market, whose actors are generally based in the Global North. These legitimacy-bestowing entities assign photographs their quality. In particular, the places where photographs are exhibited and sold decide photographs' market value (Vokes 2012) and act as key intermediaries between photographers and spaces of preservation and reception.

The articles in this issue therefore invite us to explore the absence of photographs based on those that remain in order to better grasp the photographic process, from the shooting of images to their exhibition. In an astonishing tautology, studying

6. Erotic or pornographic images, shaped by a male gaze, do indeed depict women, but they reduce them to objects rather than treating them as subjects.

existing photographs is in fact necessary in order to grasp those that are not or are no longer available to us. This absence is highlighted by different articles in this issue and can be observed at different levels. Rejection (for example by the Muslim populations of the East African coasts [Behrend 2013]) and concealment of photography or indifference toward it are all postures contributing to the absence of photography.

Daniel Foliard's article focuses on these forms of disappearances of images, each of which sheds light on what is, must be, and can be photographed and then shown. Based on photographic and written sources from the 1870s to the 1910s and from different countries on the continent, his article draws in particular on the private collection of Alex J. Braham, an agent of the Royal Niger Company in Ogugu at the very end of the nineteenth century, whose photographs were taken in Niger and Nigeria. Foliard's contribution invites us to reflect on Africans' resistance to shots orchestrated by Europeans during the colonial period. Negotiations, refusals, sabotage, and taking refuge out of shot were all "tactics," to borrow Michel de Certeau's term (1980), through which the colonized regained control over their image when colonial photographic practice tended to dispossess them of it. Nevertheless, to grasp the effects of this dispossession, we must simultaneously question the reception of images. Some photographs are made to be shown, while others are meant to be hidden or to be disseminated among a chosen audience. This is what Foliard notes in the case of the photographs that Braham surreptitiously took of a secret Igbo ritual: to evaluate the effects of this act, one must ask who saw these photographs. If, as Foliard suggests, they remained in an album meant for a restricted audience and most of the Igbo themselves were never aware of them, then they were not mobilized as relays of colonial violence destroying the sacred nature of the ritual. However, they contributed to the construction of stereotyped representations of colonized populations for the European public.

A second form of exclusion is constructed in research itself. To be sure, visual approaches are benefiting from a resurgence of interest.⁷ In contemporary history, the relative underuse of visual material observed at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Dorléac, Delage, and Gunthert 2001) and its relegation to an illustrative value (About and Chéroux 2001, § 4) are on the verge of being a thing of the past, with various works having helped to raise awareness of the potential of photographic archives and of analysis of the political uses of images (Sohier 2020). They are nevertheless continuing to disappear from much academic writing within the social sciences, where the explanatory force of photography seems to vary according to the discipline. In sociology, outside the identified field of visual sociology, which is itself poorly institutionalized (Chauvin and Reix 2015), photography struggles to establish itself as a source in its own right. In political science, photography is

7. Confining matters to Francophone academia, we might cite the creation of a dedicated journal in 2017 (*Revue française des méthodes visuelles*), as well as special issues in more broadly focused journals, such as one that is due to be published in *Sociologie et Sociétés*.

rarely used, other than as often-secondary documentation within specific research subjects, such as electoral campaigns or national symbols (Pina and Savarese 2017).

Christine Deslaurier's article in this issue offers a valuable account of this exclusion of photographs in research. She recounts how photography was presented as central in the writing of the project on small urban trades in Burundi, a project carried out by a Franco-Burundian interdisciplinary collective.⁸ However, no photograph that could conceivably be part of the initially scheduled exhibition was produced. The article notably highlights not only the contempt of certain colleagues, who gave precedence to writing culture, but also the burden of research conditions in Burundi, where authoritarian repression was at its height and where the act of taking photographs aroused suspicion on the part of the local police toward the research team.

Paying attention to the absence of photography ultimately allows us to move away from a fixation on the photographic referent (Barthes 1980) in order to examine the photographic act itself and the interaction that underlies it: who photographs what and how. This is the core aim of **Constance Perrin-Joly's** article. She details the evolution of her photographic project within companies in Ethiopia. She considers photography as a co-construction, the analysis of which allows individuals' experiential relationship to work to be better understood, and she focuses on two spaces of photographic interaction: first, that where the photographer and their subject interact, and, second, that of the company. In doing so, she shows how certain photographs were not possible: when the photographer was a white man and the model a female Ethiopian worker; and when taking portraits of workers in a Turkish company, whom the management deemed only a variable to be controlled.

Analyzing photographic practice through absence—through that which is not represented or has not been recorded by the camera—therefore gives us more information about the relationship between photographer and subject and about the social dynamics, particularly the power relations, that cut across this relationship. A photograph's existence endures beyond the click of the camera, beyond the life of the photographer or their model. And the circulation of photographs may be accompanied by destruction, reappearance, or appropriation, which change the photographs' visibility and speak to the image's relationship with a public. Some photographs will receive attention in a particular context, while others will not have the same chances of being preserved. Some images may eventually reappear and be reappropriated. As they circulate, photographs become independent of their author's intention and may be diverted from their initial use, or, over time, change in purpose. Certain actors—for example, the village community in the *Voices from the Blue Nile* project in Sudan (Aston and James 2012) or the descendants of photographed models (Haney 2012)—may reappropriate documentary photographs to make them a part of their personal history, even though they were taken within

8. "JÉAI: Subsistance urbaine et mobilisations du travail au Burundi (SUBURBU)," *IRDLab*, n.d. <https://archive.ph/mS2IV>.

ethnographic research serving a more general purpose. The reuse and recirculation of photographs of Africa has also been driven by archival art, which turns sources into living objects, into material for an artistic creation critical of colonial ideology (Le Lay, Malaquais, Siegert, Ricard, and Vierke 2015). Mobilizing photography as a source therefore requires the photographic gaze to be reexamined from a broader perspective, incorporating the entire process of producing photographs, from their conception to their disappearance, and taking into account both the existing shots and those that are missing. On this basis, photography offers the possibility of a research approach that places the sensitive at its heart.

Photography: A sensitive source

This issue also proposes to address the question of the sensitive, the affects and the ethics within the different interactions that a research approach based on photography comprises. In this sense, it offers an analysis of photography as a medium of expression of the sensitive, a concept that goes beyond its usual use in the social sciences to characterize difficult fieldwork scenarios. One of the common characteristics of certain fieldwork scenarios described as “sensitive” (Ayimpam and Bouju 2015; Bouillon et al. 2005) or “difficult” (Boumaza and Campana 2007) is that these unfold in a context where the researcher must keep their guard up or is subjected to various forms of risk, the very least of which is that of being denied access. These fieldwork scenarios are “sensitive” not because they unfold in a potentially dangerous authoritarian context or in a place where there is no rule of law, but because the experience of the field, “charged at least as much with affects and trials as with methodological rules” (Bizeul 2007), puts the researcher’s involvement (Agier 1997; Fassin 2014) and their ability to be “affected” (Favret-Saada 1977) back at the heart of the investigation. In this regard, photography as a source of sensitive research is more a matter of the “sensory” (Brito and Pesce 2015)—that is, it is about an approach that places at the center of analysis the senses and emotions mobilized in research and in the taking of shots. At the intersection of work “with,” “on,” or “in” images, it is a matter of considering photography as a novel and fully fledged research method. The articles in this issue interrogate the sensitive dimension of photography, its evocative power, both as a nonverbal representation and as an act capable of grasping the relationship between the person taking the photograph and the person being photographed. They evoke this by analyzing the photographic posture of researchers and photographers, as well as the use of photography as mediation.

Considering photographic postures

The question of the sensitive pervades all the photographic practices analyzed in the articles, but **Oumarou Dembele and Laure Carbonnel’s** dialogical article places it at the center of its inquiry. The authors fully embrace this interest in the sensitive. The article recounts the meeting between the French anthropologist and the Malian

photographer. Laure Carbonnel proposes to construct her inquiry on the idea of perception, allowing a bridge to be built between ethnology and photography. She turned to the photographer because she was “moved by his photographs” and sought a sensitive approach. This approach is coupled with an interest in the sound recordings that accompany photographic work, proof if ever there was any that “the sound fact maintains multiple relationships with the visual fact” (Boidy et al. 2015).

The confrontation of gazes that Carbonnel and Dembele offer opens up reflection on the particular posture of the photographer within research. The articles in this issue propose different configurations, from collaboration between researcher and photographer to the blurring of boundaries between the two, and the researcher’s analysis of the photographer’s posture. These postures are rarely mutually exclusive: before collaborating with a photographer, it is not uncommon for the researcher to have already tried their hand at photography, even if they may have identified the limit of their own approach. The interest in a photographer’s work may also be stoked by their own practice, even if that practice is amateur: some visual anthropologists entered that career via photography and vice versa. Carbonnel and Dembele focus on disciplinary and/or professional dialogue in photographic practice, as does Deslaurier; meanwhile, Lavernhe, Américi and Dusserre, and Perrin-Joly analyze the photographer’s posture in the light of different social relations—in particular those of gender, class, and race—and the way in which these relations contribute to a unique construction of their sensitivity.

Carbonnel and Dembele’s article therefore evokes a first configuration: that of collaboration between photographer and researcher. Owing to the lack of clarity around each party’s expectations, this collaboration did not yield the expected results. In the end, the anthropologist appreciated the photographer’s artistic gaze, which to her seemed to bend to what he understands of the requirements of the documentary photography that is endorsed in the social sciences. Nevertheless, their exchanges made their respective practices evolve. The dialogical form that their contribution takes manifests these two situated points of view, which are irreducible but in conversation. It therefore does justice to their respective postures, without one mode of writing imposing itself on the other party. Recognizing the specific competencies of each field, Deslaurier advocates for a division of labor, with each profession having its own expertise, and, it might be added, a particular sensitive approach.

The second configuration involves observing the sensitive work of the photographer in the interaction between different universes. Two articles in particular place this configuration at the center of their analysis, offering a reading of the displacement of the gaze and the evolution of photographers’ sensitivity over the long term, at the intersection of colonial, local, or diasporic influences. **Margaux Lavernhe’s** article, first of all, focuses on James Barnor, a Ghanaian professional photographer, and on the visual codes he mobilizes and their circulations. Barnor draws on the codified representations of female bodies in European magazines

from the middle and latter half of the twentieth century. Although he adopted the male and European gaze on women, his vision evolved, incorporating African American and local influences. He has thus contributed to constructing a hybrid aesthetic, which the article highlights in particular. In this sense, Lavernhe's analysis is in line with recent works from the English-speaking West that focus on how the photographic portrait has been produced and understood in specific situations in Africa (Peffer and Cameron 2013). Some of these works indicate how African photography has nourished an African American imaginary of Africanness, contributing to creating an "Atlantic visualscape" (Schneider 2013), a photographic "contact zone," in the sense of Arjun Appadurai (2005). Lavernhe emphasizes the other side of this circulation, showing how Black magazines and African American visual culture made their way into the practices of West African photographers such as Barnor. The article also highlights how this *mise en abyme* is not limited to the photographer's golden years: the reappropriation of Barnor's stagings, as well as reworkings of poses and compositions from his photographs by more recent artists as part of an exhibition on his work, continue to contribute to the circulation of these visual codes.

Laurence Américi and Aurélia Dusserre's contribution focuses on the practice of Désiré Sic, an amateur French photographer and colonial official within the army who was deployed in the French protectorate in Morocco. The photographs analyzed, preserved on photosensitive plates, come from a rich yet little-known private collection resulting from Sic's various stays in North Africa between 1912 and 1934—two decades captured in four thousand shots. In his practice as a demanding amateur, Sic was influenced by Orientalism and the visual codes of the illustrated magazines of the first half of the twentieth century. But he held a modest position in the military hierarchy and in society. Américi and Dusserre describe his shots as a "discreet source," illuminating a familial and private dimension of the colonial enterprise that is often poorly documented. They explain how these shots "provide access to what colonization left out of shot [by giving] access to a visual and affective memory of this colonial situation, particularly through family albums." And they carefully trace how the photographic practice of this noncommissioned officer, who later became an engineering officer, evolved toward a photography that was more marked by scenes of daily life, which speaks to Sic's gradual rooting in North Africa and his growing familiarity with the country where his wife, Fernande, was born, as well as to his close links, and sometimes collusion, with local representatives. The decoding offered by the two historians allows us to grasp "the complexity of the lived experience on Moroccan soil" from both the viewpoint of the "producer" of the sources and that of the social groups represented. Under Américi and Dusserre's magnifying glass, Désiré Sic's photographic collection thus appears as a unique historical source and provides a sensitive portrayal of Morocco at the time of the French colonial enterprise.

Photography as mediation

To share one's photographs is to invoke the viewer's sensitivity. For researchers, this responds to a reflexive and ethical issue. It allows them to draw the attention of an audience, expert or otherwise, to the conditions under which the data from their investigations were produced, and it enables a visual elaboration on the multiple power relations that cut across the interaction between researcher and subject. This sharing is an opportunity for the researcher to re-immense themselves, along with others, in a moment of the investigation when they are often alone in grappling with the social world that they are trying to decipher. This "sociology in images" (Maresca and Meyer 2013) repositions photography as a sensitive source, making it both integral to sociological analysis but also a medium enabling the transmission of scientific information. "The reader does not need to enter the text; the image comes to them, and they can then explore it as they see fit" (Carbonnel and Dembele). This issue therefore offers an opportunity to rethink the visual field when it comes to Africa: the sharing of these photographic sources offers up more complex images of Africa, of colonial and postcolonial relations, and of African societies in general.

The publicization of photographs taken in the field can also assert itself as a useful medium for the researcher as they conduct their investigation. Constance Perrin-Joly in particular explains how a "detour" into exhibition led her to rethink the nature of the photographs she took in the field. She describes the moment she exhibited her shots for the public as a "turning point" in her photographic practice during her investigation, which then moved in the direction of portraits encouraging visitors to identify with the workplace situations exhibited. Christine Deslaurier, meanwhile, rightly draws our attention to a bias within this approach, showing how her research team's difficulties in engaging in photographic practice crystallized around the need to "take a good photograph" for a public exhibition, without the notion of a "good photograph" having been defined collectively. The photographs taken can also serve as a medium for restitution—not only for the wider public, but also for the subjects of the investigation—through the distribution of printed shots in the field, or invitations to participate in the events surrounding these exhibitions, which enable people to become aware of the investigation's results and to become involved in restitution over time.

However, once someone exhibits their photographs for the general public, the thorny issue of their reception becomes unavoidable. Photography enables an appropriation of knowledge that sometimes occurs at the cost of a divergence between the photographer's intention and the reception of the image by a nonexpert public (Perrin-Joly 2022), even if the researcher is present during the exhibition visit. This observation warrants further development through an analysis of photography as a medium of knowledge. This question remains relatively unaddressed by the social sciences, particularly those of the French-speaking tradition, which struggle to integrate the reception of photographs and exhibitions' design elements into their research methodology. One explanation for this is the fact that museum studies,

which deals with these issues, is a hybrid discipline whose output still connects poorly with that of the field of the sociology of reception, for example. If the articles in this issue attempt to identify these possibilities, which vary as much as the situations in which the analyzed photographs are produced and used, they all highlight how photography has a powerful heuristic potential, the functioning of which deserves further exploration.

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