
Negotiating images

Dialogical photography practices in anthropology

Special Issue coordinated by **Oriane Girard** ([Ideas](#), Marseille & [EfA](#), Athens),
Lydia Echeverria ([Eclla](#), Saint-Etienne), and **Amandine Turri Hoelken** ([Lincs](#), Strasbourg)



Zone 54 (2012-2017). Fils and Emy looking at prints from a photography project
© Amandine Turri Hoelken 2017

This issue continues the reflections about anthropology and photography (Petit & Le Meur 2023) that started in the previous edition ([Civilisations 72](#)) which highlighted the essential contribution that photographic practice makes to anthropology both as a methodological tool and as a tool for promoting sensitivity. By exploring the way in which images in particular can serve as a mediator in the field, and considering reflexivity in relation to the photographic gaze as well as the ethical and political issues at stake in visual production, the last edition opened some rich avenues of reflection that we will pursue further here. We wish to pay particular attention to the collaborative and dialogical practices which make photography a space for multidisciplinary crossovers, and co-creation of knowledge and visuality (Mirzoeff 2016).

Our reflection is part of a longstanding theoretical debate on the relationship between visual arts and social sciences. In 1996, Hal Foster criticised the “new anthropology” and the “quasi-anthropological” artistic trend, fearing that these would only serve to reinforce ethnographical authority. Ten years later, Claire Fagnard (2007) proposed a more nuanced approach arguing that ethnographic art lent a reflexive and documentary approach to ethnological methodology for exploring cultural representations. For Fagnard, dialogism is at the heart of the confluence between scholarly and artistic writing because it creates opportunities for experimentation. At the same time, anthropology has increasingly been trending towards methods that involve interlocutors in the research process (Tedlock 1991). This has given rise to a range of approaches including interpretative (Geertz 1998), experiential (Goulet 2012), collaborative (Fluehr-Lobban 2008), and dialogical (Clifford 1996; Bilu 2015 ; Turri Hoelken 2024) anthropology. Since they favour collective means of knowledge construction, these methods tend to bring into question the idea that the researcher has a monopoly on knowledge.

In the same vein, this issue will explore dialogical photographic practices in which the image becomes a space for exchange. Photographers, like ethnologists, play a role of mediator, or even an ‘*entremêleur*’ (Von Stebut 2014) who stimulates collective understanding (Azoulay et al. 2023). More than a mere document, photographs here are perceived as a relationship and a site for the co-construction of meaning (Mauuarin 2022). This approach invites us to think differently about methodologies and the restitution of ethnographic works. At the heart of our reflection is the question of what methods are put into place, and the issue of power and control over images, alongside the ethical and economic implications of collaborative approaches used by visual anthropology.

This issue adopts a transdisciplinary approach, bringing anthropologists together with image historians, artists, and practice-based researchers. This call also invites potential contributors to explore innovative forms of visual narration, for example those that make use of dialogical presentations, multimedia practices, practical uses of archives, or even digital tools, in particular *open source* ones.

Central themes

Power and representation

We seek to question forms of domination (class relations, colonialism, globalisation, heteronormativity, etc.) through collaborative photographic practices. Do these approaches generate new spaces for marginalised populations to find representation? What power relations come into play? Who controls the production and distribution of the images? What impact do these processes really have on the communities in question? This edition will pay particular attention to non-European postcolonial contexts alongside work that strives for better representation of underrepresented groups.

Participation and co-creation

When research projects involve participants throughout the workflow, this also raises the issue of what impact the collaboration has on the work that is produced. What methods can guarantee that a collaboration is truly collaborative at all stages of the photographic process? How can we guarantee that the stated aims of a collaboration result in a product that is a co-creation and thus also a mutual production of knowledge and visualities? How can we ensure that a joint interpretation is not reduced to a unilateral appropriation of visual stories?

Artistic and ethnographic confluences

Photographic creation is one ethnographic practice that questions ideas of authorship as well as artistic and scholarly legitimacy. What can artistic practices bring to visual anthropology, and *vice versa*? Is it possible for these practices to enrich the process of ethnographic description and transcription, and offer new perspectives on how we perceive reality, transcending a mere documentary function? Visual anthropological archives also offer a rich source for exploring both these crossovers and the relationships between ethnographic and aesthetic knowledge and collective memories. Can processes of co-creation allow us to go further than simply reusing images, by taking the ethical issues and historical asymmetries into account, in particular in the context of archives that were the product of colonial contexts?

Experimentation and material stakes

Thanks to its material properties, photography is a particularly important way to support collaborative practice. How can the printing, layout, or exhibiting of images influence interactions and the construction of meaning? What role do digital tools play in these processes? What technical and economic systems can allow for more equitable distribution of the images which we produce? What material challenges do researchers face when organising exhibitions, participatory workshops, and public presentations? To what extent does one's access to photographic tools (cameras, software, distribution platforms) impact the options for presenting and reclaiming images?

We encourage contributions that question these issues by means of empirical research, fieldwork experience, and methodological reflections arising from projects which include strong and sustained involvement of the research participants, putting aesthetic and scholarly norms under scrutiny. We are looking for proposals that put into words both theoretical analysis and lived experience, shedding light on the tensions as well as perspectives that are unveiled by these dialogical photographic practices.

Submissions for articles may be sent in French or British English, and should include a title, a summary (500 words maximum) of the proposed article, 4-5 keywords, and an indicative bibliography. Optionally, authors may also include visual elements. The journal also accepts proposals for book reviews linked to the central theme, as well as review articles covering multiple recent publications on this topic.

Information about the *Civilisations* journal is available via: <https://journals.openedition.org/civilisations/>

All propositions should be sent **before 4 July 2025** to the editorial assistant of the journal: revuecivilisations@ulb.be

References cited

- Azoulay, Ariella, Wendy Ewald, Susan Meiselas, Leigh Raiford & Laura Wexler, 2023. *La photo, une histoire de collaboration(s)*. Paris : Delpire.
- Bouveresse, Clara. 2014. « Le renouveau de l'approche documentaire, exemple d'une archive collaborative : Susan Meiselas, Kurdistan (1991-2009) », *Transatlantica* 2 [[en ligne](#)].
- Chambefort-Kay, Karine et Mathilde Bertrand (éds), 2024. *Contemporary photography as collaboration*. Cham (Switzerland) : Palgrave Macmillan.
- Clifford, James, 1996. *Malaise dans la culture : l'ethnographie, la littérature et l'art au XX^e siècle*. Paris : Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts.
- Cuny, Cécile, Alexa Färber & Anne Jarrigeon, 2020. *L'urbain par l'image, collaborations entre arts visuels et sciences sociales*. Paris : Créaphis.
- Edwards, Elizabeth, 2015. « Anthropology and photography : A long history of knowledge and affect », *Photographies* 8, pp. 235-252.
- Fagnart, Claire, 2007. « Art et ethnographie », *Marges* 6, pp. 8-16.
- Fluehr-Lobban, Carolyn, 2008. « Collaborative anthropology as twenty-first-century ethical anthropology », *Collaborative anthropologies* 1, pp. 175-182.
- Goulet, Jean-Guy, 2012. « Trois manières d'être sur le terrain : Une brève histoire des conceptions de l'intersubjectivité », *Anthropologie et Sociétés* 35 (3), pp. 107-125.
- Hal, Foster, 1996. « L'artiste comme ethnographe ou la "fin de l'histoire" signifie-t-elle le retour de l'anthropologie ? », *Face à l'Histoire*, pp. 498-505. Paris : Centre Georges Pompidou.
- Mauuarin Anaïs, 2022. *A l'épreuve des images. Photographie et ethnologie en France (1930-1950)*. Strasbourg : Presses universitaires de Strasbourg.
- Mirzoeff, Nicholas. 2016. « Enfin on se regarde ! Pour un droit de regard » (trad. Maxime Boidy), in Gil Bartholeyns (éd.), *Politiques visuelles*, pp. 31-43. Dijon : Les Presses du Réel.
- Petit, Pierre & Mikaëla Le Meur (éds), 2023. *Anthropology and Photography*. Dossier de la revue *Civilisations* (volume 72) . Bruxelles : Institut de sociologie de l'ULB.
- Tedlock, Barbara, 1991. « From participant observation to the observation of participation : The emergence of narrative ethnography », *Journal of Anthropological Research* 47(1), pp. 69-94.
- Turri Hoelken, Amandine, 2024. « Sortir de l'autorité ethnographique : la photographie documentaire dialogique », *Focales* 8 [[en ligne](#)].
- Von Stebut, Yvain, 2014. *Inventer son métier à la banlieue de l'art*. Paris : L'Harmattan.