

PHOTOJOURNALISM AND PROXIMITY IMAGES:

two points of view, two professions?

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ABSTRACT For many decades, classic photojournalistic practice, firmly anchored in a creed established since Lewis Hine (1874-1940), has developed a *praxis* and a *doxa* that have barely been affected by the transformations in the various types of journalism. From the search for the “right image” which would be totally transparent by striving to refute its enunciative features from a perspective of maximum objectivity, to the most seductive photography at supermarkets by photo agencies, the range of images seems to be decidedly framed. However, far from constituting high-powered reporting or excellent photography that is rewarded with numerous international prizes and invitations to the media-artistic world, local press photography remains in the shadows. How does one offer a representation of one’s self that can be shared in the local sphere? That is the first question which editors of the local daily and weekly press must grapple with. Using illustrations of the practices, this article proposes an examination of the origins of these practices and an analysis grounded on the originality of the authors of these proximity photographs.

Key words: Journalism. Photography. Proximity. Ordinary. Local media.

INTRODUCTION

How to represent the life of the area in the local media?

Long after the birth of photojournalism and reporting, there exists no single answer to this question. Though photojournalism occupies an important place in the domain of journalism research, today it is difficult to find adequate answers regarding representations of the “local”. How does this “local” appear merely as “elsewhere” for others? An “elsewhere” with a touch of “picturesque”. How are the views of nearby inhabitants of the immediate environment expressed in the local media? The focus will be placed here on anonymous photojournalism which makes up 70% of the regional daily and weekly press images. How do these images and their authors refer to journalistic principles while at the same time producing a singular

genre within photojournalism? The object of analysis here is as much the nature of these images as the *sense of community* constructed by the local press in using the artisans of this photography.

Proximity photography before photojournalism

Before the daily press even had access to photographic reproduction, representation of the world constituted an important part of journalistic publication. “Illustration” appears as the clear title of reference for this press but it is merely the emerging form of a practice that is well-anchored in the second half of the 19th century¹. Demonstrating through images what the world looked like was one of the virtues which colonialist societies attributed to these publications, but it would be impossible to discard the attempt to bring it to the attention of a wider public. This fixed and lasting form allowed reporters to write their fictions without having to provide substance to back up the accuracy of their views (MOUILLAUD; TÉTU, 1989). The genre “illustration of the world” thus became predominant in the press, in line with this logic of otherness in all its forms.

A place represented by exoticism and the picturesque

In parallel with the birth of the illustration press, with the generation of painters-reporters who were the orientalists (Géricault, Ingres, etc.), the emerging photography took over and was captivated by the same themes, and thus Le Gray took his first snapshots for « *Le monde illustré* » in Syria as early as 1860, though he mainly drew upon his resources from the workshop he had set up on site. This type of photo of “elsewhere”, not only orientalism, gave rise to an economy based around the diffusion of rare images of “elsewhere”, without yet involving photojournalistic publications. Thus, through subscription, Edward Curtis financed his work “The North American Indian”², entailing the obligation of producing financial return which led him to make some accommodations with regard to his anthropological work. To cite only the most famous case, the publications of **Lehnert & Landrock** shared this common predilection for the genre of exotic publications.

At that time, the most classic photographic practices were concerned with subjects that “provided a change of scene” on account of their inaccessibility or strangeness, and that are occasionally geographically close. Such is the case of spectacular shots of glaciers, which account for the success of alpine photographers like the Bisson

brothers in Chamonix in the second half of the 19th century. The richness of photographic finds like this one contrasts starkly with the relative scarceness of immediately accessible documents published on scenes and scenery.

One might think of Bérénice Abott's rediscovery of the prodigious account of Eugène Atget, whose view of the ordinary Paris that surrounded her during the *Belle époque* had never captured the attention of photographers. Such accounts of proximity were above all attributable to practitioners who had no intention of publishing and who placed little distance between themselves and their subjects. This applies to studio portraitists³ but even more so to itinerant portraitists, most often anonymous, who roamed across rural zones as early as the 19th century.

The other sign of visual arrangement and publicizing is to be found in the prolonging of the practice of painters-reporters (RUELLAN, 2010). The Pictorial School continued their work and found that their original photographic plates provided opportunities for publication. This tool for recording images of the nearby and banal environment was shared with naturalist writers who, following Emile Zola's example, very much appreciated these resources (GROJNOWSKI, 2002). It is a practice one also finds in the national press. When Albert Kahn decided to launch his ambitious project *Archives de la planète* in 1909, he made a point of finding this picturesque, following in the footsteps of the painters who had discovered it in Brittany twenty years earlier. The visual arrangement of daily life and aestheticized representations of highlights of local life thus provided the first "autochromists" with a strong base upon which to build.

It was at this very time that photography in the information press appeared, thus superseding the engraving of which it preserves a certain number of narrative rules. From then on, the point of photography was no longer merely to demonstrate the otherness and the picturesque but also to show the state of a changing world. This paved the way for news photography.

Portraying the local without showing it

The insertion of photojournalistic genres sought above all to offer alternately to the reader images from "elsewhere" and astonishing images, sometimes both at the same time. Several defining stages were needed before the stabilization of photographic practices. First, the exhibition of technical performances helped to demonstrate the quality

of printed photography. The second stage involved authenticating the real, the conformity of the copy with the original was left to the subjects themselves to determine since “the illusion produced by photography depends first, naturally, on its exactness”⁴.

Photo reporting led to the recognition of the most widely-known areas or series of subjects that became important on a long-term basis (sports, patriotic and military events, paintings, etc). These major genres went on to structure the iconography of a national press in which illustrations from the periphery were met with outside eyes that were more astonished than distant. The testimonial value of press photography was measured by the sum of information brought by the framing. There was no place for illustrating an environment considered unimportant. The narrative eloquence of the journalist was more suitable for producing mental images that authenticated their comments (HAVER, 2009). In turn, the regional press adopted the two stages of this step by also privileging the photography of international and national subjects. Photography was only produced locally to illustrate “extraordinary” subjects or archetypal events brought to the attention of the national press. The illustrated magazine press did not come to the fore at the regional level until after the Second World War⁵. Through their respective publications, certain protagonists used images of local life to promote their ideological positions, especially during the First World War. Thus it was not a question of representing local life but of portraying it in order to advance partisan viewpoints.

It was during the first quarter of the 20th century that the dogma of the *reality effect* became well-established, from which photojournalism struggled to free itself until the 1970s, but the particularities of the photographic treatment of local information remained largely unthought-of. The magazine press established itself in the world of fashion (*Vogue*, 1920) and in the news press which promoted the magazine *Vu* in 1928. These types of photojournalism made up the fundamental objects of reflection on photojournalistic activity.

“Great photojournalism”

At the end of World War II, it was the conception of a prestigious photojournalism that provided this genre with its credibility, along with a thriving magazine press industry. The legendary figures of “great photojournalism”, Robert Capa, David Seymour and Cartier-Bresson,

founders of the agency Magnum, imposed the incontrovertible dogma of a “perfect” and “extraordinary” image. The great photographic agencies as well as the publications of the illustrated magazine press (*Life*, *Du*, *Stern*, or in France, *Paris-Match*) captivated definitively the market, paving the way for a kind of photojournalism that went on unfettered until the mid-1970s. The link to otherness and the ordinariness of proximity did not differ massively from the situation that prevailed several decades earlier while the genre was coming into being. “Great photojournalism” rejected the image of the local if the latter was neither picturesque nor strange.

Local press photography: the unthought-of in photojournalism “Pure photojournalism”

The situation that has just been described encompassing a period of almost seventy years of press photography ended up forging by default a major photojournalistic genre which swept all others aside. In effect, great reporting emerged as the best way of satisfying the needs of press industries which became internationalized in order to decline other, very similar products, but whose principal characteristics combined the international, sensational and current. This model was also useful for photographers working for publications which guaranteed them very attractive working conditions as well as an assured notoriety.

As long as they (Werner Bischoff, Eugene Smith, Don McCullin or even Marc Riboud,) established themselves within a genre that had set the standards for the job. They were all guaranteed their place in the hall of “great photojournalism” and the opportunity to carry out their activity throughout the world, not just working on current affairs concerning their neighborhood. This popularity allowed them to establish their practices within photographic dogmas such as Cartier-Bresson’s “decisive instant” or Capa’s “even closer”. There thus remained little room for those who produced the photographic portrait of their neighbors on a day to day basis....

It is also this photography which Luc Boltanski contemplated⁶ when he took an interest in photojournalistic practices in 1963: a kind of photojournalism that anchors historical events in collective memories, which for Boltanski “is first and foremost the photography of big events which constitutes the great photography of the daily press”⁷. But so many others share this point of view that it is today very difficult to cite some important publications on local photojournalism.

In effect, whereas the era of “great photojournalism” was in decline at the same time as the opulent illustration press that was challenged by the advent of television, the place reserved for local subjects remained very limited but there was no disaffection from readers. It is nonetheless necessary to mention, in the same period, the emergence of major reporting from Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and William Klein in the USA who broke with great reporting by looking to see what was happening closer to home⁸. The point was still to encounter the shocking subject, the subject of society but without revealing much about the daily existence of the subjects. The other approach which persisted throughout this same period was that of French humanist photography in which Janine Niepce, Edouard Boubat or Izis excelled in depicting the life of modest France on a daily basis. However, this life remained for them the hunting ground for a popular and picturesque France. Extending these photographic currents, the reporting which depicted a very ordinary daily life became geared towards the revitalization of the forms of this expression, thereby departing from the *reality effect*. For photojournalists like Ralph Gibson and Mario Giacomelli, the surprise of the image no longer emerged from exoticism but from work on the code itself. With this formal work, the reflexivity *vis-à-vis* subjects who could no longer recognize their universe in these images disappeared little by little.

In a final period, beginning at the end of the 20th century, several phenomena emerged which called into question the *praxis* of photojournalism. The first was of an economic nature insofar as the activity of photographers no longer benefitted from the durability of agencies that were met with competition notably from the multiplication of online sources which evaded all professional regulation, but also from specialization in the illustration and the people. These transformations precipitated modifications in multi-support diffusion practices, for photographers who privileged long-distance shots (Sebastiao Salgado, Patrick Zachmann, Valérie Winkler) or who switched between reporting and public tender. These practices gave rise to subjects of proximity which sometimes associated the actors of local life with the production or diffusion of the images. Here one thinks of the work “Gang” regarding suburban youth, whom Yann Morvan asked to carry out themselves the production of portraits which glorified them in the eyes of their neighbors. This new kind of photography helped to bring back subjects of proximity to the center of photographic interest, in competition with great reporting which

was becoming more and more difficult to accomplish and diffuse.

A glance at local photography in France

All the aforementioned practices based on proximity that have been featured throughout the history of photographic reporting tended to discard local photojournalism which has nonetheless been prominent. Yet this press publishes more photos than the national publications with the concern of representing fairly the different *communes* where readers live. It is also necessary to distinguish the general information pages from the local pages, which make up 50% of the images of each booklet while representing only a third of the total number of pages. Taking into account the fact that at least 50 local images are published every day by the daily regional press, more than 2 billion photos are printed each week in France⁹. It might seem astonishing that this production was so often able to escape from the investigations of researchers seeking a basis to analyze press images.

First of all, let us explain clearly how these publications work in France.

The regional press is more often linked to a geographic territory such as a *région*, *département* and more rarely a town or area of life experience (*bassin de vie*)¹⁰. There is a notable difference between daily publications composed of general information pages, sometimes with special sections dedicated to foreign affairs, the economy etc., followed by pages on the *région* and *département*. The latter are produced at the newspapers' headquarters which are historically closest to the printing works, while the rest of the information is produced in decentralized editing offices: the local ones. In these local editing offices, one finds on-duty journalists who report back on the different facets of the news in very fixed ways and who rarely engage in investigation. They are especially responsible for handling news in brief and it is they who produce or collect the relevant photos. This local, daily press also has the specificity of relying on a highly developed network of local press correspondents who recount and illustrate the daily life in French *communes*. These pages constitute an important component of the informational product for those who buy it, and they are the best illustrated as they concentrate more than 70% of the photos of each edition.

The weekly regional press provides within its general pages local information in the form of dossiers, investigations, carried out by professional journalists. One also finds here many images taken of

the *communes* by local press correspondents. The general news and news in brief are treated differently according to the editorial lines of the publications, but very rarely do correspondents intervene in these sections. For certain weekly publications, the insertion of photos is relatively recent, dating from two or three decades ago in some cases.

The photographic genre being studied here is the one which concerns these community pages and which is handled by local press correspondents. On average, the latter are five times more numerous than journalists and produce most of the images in this type of publication. One also understands the importance they occupy in the French media scene in which the regional press still remains relatively safe on the short-term, compared with the national press.

Characteristics of proximity images in the local press

As has just been indicated, the first observation is that the images are far more common in local pages. Also, by glancing through the local newspaper, it becomes apparent, through distancing one's self from the local information pages, that the size of the photos becomes smaller and that color appears less frequently. As much in the daily as in the weekly press, the most common size is that of "two columns", with other combinations linked to regional editions, to special journals, to news, etc. But in all cases the presence of a large number of images is more important than their readability. Often, it matters little what the nature of the picture is, as long as it is present to signify the importance of the event in question. The second function that is clearly attributed to the images is that of dividing up the layout. This general readability of the local information pages clearly takes place through the division of sections according to *commune*, and in certain cases, it can even be enhanced by a characteristic view of the site concerned.

In the majority of publications, photos of the "local" are rarely in color except when the layout of the advertising pages in process printing so permits. The treatment of news in black and white could be seen as a sign of weak interest in these images. Yet this choice encourages a certain reading that needs to be considered insofar as it refers to a photographic tradition which still remains strongly connoted for many readers. This type of printing is implicitly responsible for the hallmark of a traditional photography that indicates the durability of information that perpetuates itself, generation after generation. In the private sphere, black and white photography constitutes a

reference to the photography of the family saga. In the face of an influx of numerical images believed to have been manipulated, this traditional photography in black and white continues to be perceived as a guarantee of “authenticity”.

Readers could well expect from daily information a multitude of illustrations of current events similar to those of general information pages or the national daily press. Yet, this is not the case in reality and sensitive news is actually rarely illustrated; unpredictable events are depicted six times less than in local pages or pages concerning the *région* and general information. It is also true to say that news images tend to accompany articles on pages dedicated to *départements*, even *régions*. Apart from a few exceptions, these photos are produced by journalists from the newspaper’s local agencies, or more rarely, by photo-reporters from the newspaper’s central editing office, if the news in question *deserves* such attention. It can be said that the images which are subject to this process are often closer to the classic photojournalistic ideal whereby the exceptional or spectacular is captured, in order to satisfy the apparent wishes of the readers. The dominant genre in the weekly or daily press is group photography¹¹ and in such cases, the caption that provides updates concerning the event displayed is sometimes rather short. Correspondingly, individual portraits are far rarer:

* *General information*: The theme of the images of general and regional information pages is generally divided into 3 equivalent blocks of volumes, including portraits of one single person, groups of individuals and general themes (general views, objects, illustrations).

* *Local information*: the theme of local images is predominantly made up of group photos (65%-70%) whereas portraits never represent more than 20% of the images. Other themes account for 10%.

The images produced in this context are very clearly lined up in rows, although sometimes the way the scene is set is more complex. The interviews conducted with the authors of the images helped to put into perspective the argument that a form of marketing was behind these images, aiming to increase the number of buyers by increasing the number of subjects. Above all, these pictures reflect the specificity of the representation of local activity, in which it is especially the cooperation of actors rather than individual charisma that is seen as being the main protagonist. In reciprocal fashion,

this logic becomes even more applicable when taking into account national and international news.

The implicit in local representation

Are we illustrating the setting for local information in order to discuss the local representation? In principle, the answer is no, as the remarkable sceneries and monuments are practically absent from photography on local pages. But in fact, reference to the area occurs in a far more indirect manner, clearly revealing a register of generalized mutual awareness. In effect, the shots, the functions, even the names of the people featured in the local pages are often implicit enough so as not to require being mentioned in captions. There lies a recurring practice in local photography which, in publication after publication, constructs a frame of reference that requires no metadiscourse to inform readers. It is precisely the specificity of this information; it is only aimed at a closed group that neither expects nor wishes for the procedure to change. The persistence of this feature for several decades thus encourages one to favor the conformity of a system of representation of real activity rather than an exogenous photojournalistic code. Similar remarks can be made about other aspects under analysis in the local press.

Equally, the temporalities of illustrations of life as it occurs vary from newspaper to newspaper, demonstrate a lesser degree of febricity in depicting events through symbolic images, and describe even more the processes. Thus, reports on work being carried out on public roads, the construction or renovation of buildings, give rise to a multiplication of illustrations while general information pages tend to focus on the photogenic event of the official inauguration. It thus becomes apparent that the *temporality* of events grows with the proximity of the media, thereby multiplying the images.

The major difference with the set of photographic approaches of the “local” mentioned here concerns the photographic construction of an *ordinary* space-time framework and not setting the stage for *extraordinary* information.

Small events, small photos?

A close look at proximity photography allows one to explain its mechanisms and above all to show that the durability of the latter is no accident, nor a sign of incompetence on the part of photographers. We will attempt here to show that this logic, of

which important traits have been outlined, is also to be found in the definition of a media product which still remains highly proficient and emerges from the excellent knowledge of practices possessed by these photographers. A widely accepted opinion is that the range of iconography is of poor quality in light of “great” international photography. Taking into account the criteria set out by the bastions of an aristocratic form applied to all other journalistic practices, this seems evident. But if one is willing to question this by changing the focus, a different analysis emerges.

The effectiveness of these images for the readers targeted by regional press companies remains undisputed and above all, if one takes the time to analyze rigorously a considerable number of images, it becomes apparent that photos which possess several major defects (for example bad framing, lack of readability, blurriness, poor illumination), never represent more than 3-4% of the total number, and this figure has decreased with the ascendancy of numerical photos. This is unsurprising given the comments of correspondents who explain, without indicating whether they are professional photographers or artists, that they endeavor to be honest reporters of their environment. For this, many willingly put considerable time and resources into perfecting their technique.

The correspondents’ relation with their photojournalistic practice

The local press presents the specificity of producing the basis of its informative content by taking advantage of the vastness of its network of local press correspondents. Correspondents reside in places where they often (but not necessarily) occupy positions that make them very visible in the eyes of their neighbors. Even though their status indicates that they are totally uninvolved in editing¹², they are perceived in their environment as *the* journalists of proximity. Thus, they are neighbors who share the common experience as well as representatives of newspapers that are strongly ingrained in rural zones.

Which photojournalistic setting?

It is commonplace to highlight that year after year, the financial results of regional press companies resist decreases in readership and that, in certain cases, they can be positive. The local press is not only the vector (with little competition) of the circulation of information, but it also represents a powerful source of cohesion for the actors in the area. This function is considered in the specific

context of press photography, which does not serve to provide new information on changes affecting living areas. It is a question of “being in the paper”, a type of recognition that draws attention to the mundane things of daily life, making them worthy of being illustrated and published. For this, it is necessary to have a setting and rules capable of satisfying readers.

The forms expected stand out first and foremost because of their great stability; the function of the treatment in black and white has already been explained in this context. If one compares these images to the popular photographic forms analyzed around half a century ago by Bourdieu (1963), one finds striking similarities with a genre that is totally obsolete today in family practices. Conventional poses, customary subjects, the visual arrangement of socialization; all the ingredients are present to offer to contemporary images from the local press the illusion that they are evading the effects of fashion and absorption by mass iconography. The photos in which local inhabitants wish to appear refer as much to idealized images as to family photo albums.

Despite their technical imperfections, their less important subjects, their poor informative qualities, each of these images is imbued with the strong intentionality of the *operator*, as defined by Barthes¹³. Local press photography records a fragment of collective life which it seeks to preserve in order to ensure that each piece of the puzzle of life thus preserved bears the trace of the *Spectrum*.¹⁴ Each photograph is thus a slice of attention accorded to fellow inhabitants by the correspondent and not a tool for illustrating an article. By asking correspondents about their way of treating the subjects covered for their newspapers, they refer to their professional routine and to the prevalence of the bond that unites them with the subjects of the images. Their *responsibility*¹⁵ applies above all to these neighbors who will criticize them or thank them for the image published in the newspaper. The selection criterion is not whether the subject is photogenic, but rather the nature of the sense of community that unites the correspondent and his subjects. Viewed in this way, press photos are akin to the classic practices of family editing which reign supreme when putting together family albums. In this case, it is not a question of recounting ordinary news to close friends and relatives but rather of sending to them a gratifying image of themselves, the consumption of which will go beyond a mere glance through a newspaper. Local press photography is often archived as a partial way into local fame.

Each photo taken under these conditions thus constitutes the object of a reading contract that is unique to each one, whereby it is first and foremost the trace of this recognition that is sought after. This relation to the image of the other involves an ambiguous combination which reconciles the presence of the trace of the enunciator, in this case the *operator*, as an act of recognition of the subject, and in the same act of writing, inserts this recognition in a journalistic genre that neutralizes the singularity of this relation.

The practice of proximity photographers

The correspondent photographer develops his practice via a sort of constant do-it-yourself method, consisting of the generic activity of an institutionalized actor in the local public space, a relational activity mediated by technical prowess which is assigned to him, and an idealized relation to journalistic practice. Let us return to these three points: first, it is worth remembering that it is on the recognized function attributed to the regional press that other items depend. Photographic production must therefore be clearly situated in the genre under analysis, to which the durability of this press is attributed. Due to the precariousness of the link between these professionals and press companies, the latter are unlikely to introduce changes to the genre and thus tend to consolidate it in a predictable fashion. The very little inventiveness, even permeability, of this genre compared to what press photography has dared to do, demonstrates how much their practice reinforces the laws of a partially obsolete genre.

Part of the recognition of the press correspondents by local populations can be attributed to the setting of their activity via the aid of two objects: a notebook and a camera. The latter is used to conclude interviews and reports and allows the correspondents to display their technical prowess in the same manner as portraitists from the 19th century. Just like the latter, one expects from the local press correspondents that they represent a “reality” which is in line with the subject’s expectations. To achieve this, they bring out all the vigor of a “good” family photo. They need to be both technicians of the photo that is close to the subject and technicians for whom separation from higher knowledge is too great. In this way, despite the satisfying practice, there are few photo-reporter correspondents who also undertake another activity that is directly linked to photography, be it technically or artistically. In this sense, they occupy the interesting position of “professional amateurs” (THIERRY, 2010b).

The third point concerns the negotiation local press correspondents are constantly involved in between their “unofficial” activity and the standards of the job of a photojournalist. This negotiation is based on the ethics of the profession which do not constitute any particular set of rules, since the law of 1987 governing this activity stipulates that the employer cannot define the scope of their functions. And indeed, correspondents often insist on this particularity to be sure of their freedom of action in their practices. They all refer to representations of an idealized journalistic practice and to discursive forms of photojournalism. Ethics in photojournalism are often referred to, yet constitutive elements are often fragmentary, favoring changes relating to the context itself (THIERRY, 2010a). Discourse on the readability of images being considered for publication is strongly reasserted, but production is not necessarily in line with these expectations since, for example, many images aim more and more to place value on those involved in popular manifestations rather than to report on the activity per se. Another standard is the distance the journalists place between themselves and their environment in order to work with a distant viewpoint; the corpus of images invalidates this assertion.

The sphere of legitimacy of local photojournalism

The concept of *mirror press* does not encompass the photojournalistic practice being explored because it undervalues the role of direct mediation between the reporters and the population they frequent. Yet, the activity of this third party is relevant. This section analyzes the vectors of legitimacy that are unique to proximity photojournalism.

Focalization

Focalization that is internal to the community is often mentioned; it operates at several levels: the first corresponds to the identity of the medium that forms an integral part of the territory's history. It bears the name of the region, the city or sometimes even a particular territorial entity that inserts its content in the common bond of “our newspaper”¹⁶. These words are immediately audible in the cacophony of the media and they benefit from a favorable disposition on the part of readers. The subject of interest here is immersed in this framework and will therefore lead to analyzing images charged with an aura of connivance with readers that is stronger than that of information from the outside.

The reading contract is established via the sharing of a frame of reference, but also by the emphasis sought after by the journalistic space of the publication. It is a matter of taking scenes from the ordinary environment so that they may be valued in the columns of local publications. It is important to abide fully by this constraint and to produce images that bear a hallmark of authenticity that can only be defined as long as the life experiences of the territory are not shared. It is thus possible to pay attention to the minor anecdotal facts that are part of local life, such as roadwork and inaugurations, birthdays and promotions of well-known people, even if they are not notables. Thus, one regularly finds the portraits of primary school teachers or deans from the *commune*, as well as the presentation of new municipal cleaning material. The events reported on here reinforce the image of the stability of the environment, while whatever could potentially show signs of fragmentation is relegated to the pages concerning the *départements*, or even the general information pages in which a more classic external focalization is adopted. In this way, news items are treated by the local journalists of the regional newspaper but this news is not dealt with by the press correspondents.

Nonetheless, the right distance offered by the focalization of the proximity photo of the press does not emanate from an innate form of spontaneity. The study of these images has demonstrated the structural, thematic and temporal invariants that prevail in the production of photos by press correspondents. This adjustment in perspective is acquired through contact with other photographers and a *mimesis* with the group of images of this press. This constitutes the main reference of local press correspondents to define the characteristics of what they regard as a good photo. This focalization inserts the subjects in a larger frame, hence the frequent recourse to medium shots which one finds less frequently in other forms of publication that privilege bust shots or medium long shots. Conversely, general shots and medium long shots are almost nonexistent since these photos could not bear relevant information in the setting of daily life. The scenes of life published in local pages present the peculiarity of showing exceptional ruptures that only local residents can distinguish. Often, these same residents are the only people who can identify portraits of the groups. It is a result of the choice of framing, the choice of people who appeal first and foremost to knowledge associated with a habit of frequenting the places and inhabitants who will appear in the photos. However, this

practice is so integrated in the correspondents' routine that it is necessary to distinguish it in their discourse on a generic vision of photojournalism which has little to do with what has been described.

The local press correspondent

Local press correspondents constitute the main element of this genre of photojournalistic proximity. Their characteristics emanate from the type of notability that their status as ultraproximity journalists brings them, and also from their insertion in the life of the *commune*. Very often, they are people of a certain age who are active in the *canton* (administrative subdivision of a French *arrondissement*).¹⁷ They benefit from an internal recognition that reinforces their notability. These correspondents have a complex relationship with the populations they work with. While these populations expect from journalists that they have an outward-looking stance, the correspondents have a similar outlook with respect to the people. The ambiguity is thus considerable when the correspondents are called upon to photograph daily events. In the end, it is expected that they fulfill the role of mediator with the newspaper as an institution. However, they are also asked to act as the *operator* of a reality they are capable of seizing and writing, in the interests of the group concerned.

Thus they must apply efficiently their technical abilities in constructing the information by articulating written discourse and the projection of an idealized image in the limited space for the visual arrangement of the place. They undertake this task to the best of their abilities by negotiating the content of the images with the subjects¹⁸ according to criteria that do not jibe neatly with the precepts of journalism. Secondly, they negotiate the place and nature of the articles published in the newspaper since they know they are responsible for this edition vis-à-vis their peers. In this individual role, photojournalism as practiced by correspondents presents many particularities that characterize the final editorial form. They result from this negotiation between fidelity to an implicit genre expected by readers and economic and structural constraints of the newspaper. Thus, exceptional news can influence the page setting of the images, just as a change of model can lead correspondents to alter framings.¹⁹

The legitimacy of the proximity photographer

Firstly, it is the readers who determine this legitimacy. They expect the images to be compatible with a stabilized genre which

represents for them the photo of the newspaper. The correspondents must be sure that their shots are satisfactory since each person, in seeing their neighbor, can verify the conformity of the portrait with the referent; “that’s him alright”. But to reach this stage, it is necessary to know the referent well. Knowing the subjects well also means taking into account the relationship the correspondents have with them, thinking about the photo sequences to take place during the reporting. The discovery of a subject is ultimately quite rare as far as local notability is concerned. Every move is planned, the photos are prearranged by photographers and this planning even applies to the pose and framing of the portraits of subjects. The taking of the photographs simply represents the moment of the implementation of and control over an operation of representation in its early stages. This routine marks the strong point of the correspondents’ professionalism.

This legitimacy is also maintained through considerable attention paid to the practice of producing portraits, whereby everyone expects the photograph to show the best of the subject and the environment. Correspondents thus find themselves undertaking the individual task of the photographer taking their family portrait to enrich their family album. They all experience this tension, aiming for the best result possible in taking the shot. As the novelist Anne-Matie Garat used to say: “(our father) was a mediocre photographer and used to get irritated in trying to ensure that we resembled what his expectations dictated, seeking to satisfy completely his expectations”²⁰.

The legitimacy of the professional exercise of proximity information

This legitimacy among residents of the area would not exist without the recognition of the work on the part of the newspapers. Above all, it is based on the irreplaceable character of the posture of the local press correspondents inserted in the area where they benefit from the perception that has just been described. It is symptomatic that when certain newspapers have tried to make the most of informal links via readers’ blogs for example, in order to take the place of correspondents, this has generally resulted in failure. It is therefore not the technical abilities in journalism per se that are important in the production expected from correspondents but their participative accounts which are similar to the model of “citizen journalism”.

This genre would not exist without this model of collaboration. First and foremost, because it is worth remembering, the point is not

to reflect local life but to use it to construct a public representation from an internal focalization. The weekly press, and to a lesser extent the daily press, construct a sum of these representations that must be read over time. Several decades of editions with few changes made have helped to define forms and genres that today constitute a distinguished object in the French media sphere. For press companies, this is borne out by a certain stability in markets insofar as these publications do not face competition from others with the same range.

Through this example of the proximity press in France, it is possible to perceive a relationship to information that is not based on news and journalistic expertise, favoring the *function of emphasis* that the media offer to construct the image of the life of a territory in the public space. One discovers in the local information pages galleries of portraits of a world of anonymous people who seek to remain so while leaving their (short-lived) mark on the collective history of their territories. The type of journalism that best serves this purpose is not one which follows closely the conventional rules of the profession. On the contrary, this becomes apparent when looking at how these “unofficial” (also anonymous) professionals proceed, who, image after image, construct and defend the imagery of an ordinary world which enriches in time the collective memory of their co-citizens. Proximity photography thus constitutes a journalistic genre in its own right and defines a vocation that is not a devalued declension of photojournalism.

NOTES

- 1 Cf. BACOT, Jean-Pierre. **La presse illustrée au XIX^e siècle. Une histoire oubliée.** Limoges: Presses Universitaires de Limoges, 2005. p. 235.
- 2 CURTIS, Edward S. **The North American Indian** (1907-1930).
- 3 D’HOOGHE, Alain. **Norbert Ghisoland.** S.I. Ed La vie volée, 2002, w/ pagination. (Coll. Vue d’ici).
- 4 MOUILLAUD, Maurice & TETU, Jean-François. **Le journal quotidien.** Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1989, p. 82.
- 5 There of course exists an important regional press that publishes images but it is not possible to classify it as magazine press in its own right as long as it appears as a supplement to regional publications, otherwise they

- constitute denominational or political publications for which illustrations remain quite rare but which represent strong ideological expression.
- 6 BOLTANSKI, Luc. La rhétorique de la figure. *In* : BOURDIEU, Pierre (coord.). **Un art moyen, essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie**. Paris: Ed. Minuit, 1965. 356 p.
 - 7 *Ibid.*
 - 8 Cf. BIROLEAU, Anne (s/Coord.). **Le choc de la photographie Américaine**. Paris: Ed BNF, 2008. 328 p.
 - 9 Based on figures from the OJD (*Association pour le contrôle de la diffusion des médias*) of 2010.
 - 10 The term refers to an area in which people live, work and generally live their lives.
 - 11 Here, “group” is taken to mean the representation of at least two people.
 - 12 The law of January 27th 1987, amended in 1993, regards local press correspondents as independent workers. However, independence vis-à-vis the title they work for is exercised at several levels and leads them to adopt behavior that is similar to that of a professional journalist whose advantages they do not have.
 - 13 Cf. BARTHES Roland. **La chambre claire**. Paris: Ed Gallimard-Seuil, 1980. p. 22.
 - 14 *libid*, p. 22.
 - 15 Responsibility here denotes the ability to be held accountable for one's actions.
 - 16 Cf. MOUILLAUD; TÉTU. **Le journal quotidien**. *Op. Cit.*, p. 102-112.
 - 17 ROCHARD Yvon; RUELLAN Denis. Un journalisme au coin du feu. *In*: **Recherches en communication**, n. 20, 2003.
 - 18 Today, this collaboration is often borne out by a common selection of the images on the numeric camera screen.
 - 19 Thus, the choice of two columns which tends to become generalized requires that groups be photographed with more emphasis on the background, or with more people in the group photos.
 - 20 GARAT, Anne-Marie. **Photos de familles**. Paris : Le seuil, 1994. p.54. (Col. Fiction & Cie.)

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