

# Images and ethnography: issues of opacity and misconception

## Abstract

In this article I intend to debate the place that images occupy in ethnographic research and their methodological interest, which characterizes the conditions for the insertion of a visual character in the ethnographic narrative. According to Novaes,<sup>1</sup> images communicate and, even in silence, it is necessary to take into account what they have to say, especially in empirical work. In this way, the article will focus on photography as an instrument that opens in gestures and expressions for field research, to think about its use as a production technology for the construction of a visual ethnographic narrative, such as the experience of ethnographic cinema, which will be presented shortly. The hypothesis to be developed here is whether photography can operate as a translation of knowledge gathered in the field. For this, it is important to highlight the methodological interest in the use of the image from the researcher-photographer to the researcher-filmmaker and, as an example, the ethnographic film *Les Maîtres fous* (The Crazy Teachers), by Jean Rouch<sup>2</sup> is analyzed.

**Keywords:** ethnography, image, visual anthropology, translation, ethnographic film

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## Introduction

The use of photography as a research tool in anthropology and ethnography has provoked theoretical discussions regarding its use from a methodological perspective or as a research source. According to Gabriel Álvarez,<sup>3</sup> to do phenomena, even when they are absent or not visible during field research, because it “overflows its visual function” and becomes “a mixture of exterior/interior”<sup>4</sup>.

Following Maureen Bisilliat on “writing with the image and seeing with the word”, I propose to think about the image-word relationship in ethnographic research, considering photography as textuality, since ethnography is nourished by the experience with different forms of knowledge and implies a reflexive movement. In this sense, it is fundamental to think that images also touch the real<sup>5</sup> because, in addition to writing with them, we can listen to what is not said and make visible, to be felt, what is not said. Therefore, the hypothesis I would like to develop in this article is that there is a gesture of translation in the image, constructed in the empirical context. Translating what words do not translate, a reverse movement from Bisilliat’s perspective, from which I propose to review those authors who have problematized this issue.

At first, the purpose will be to understand the word-image in the ethnographic dialogue in order to think about how they are verbalized in fieldwork. Then, I present the experience of anthropology with cinema, starting from what we know as ethnographic film. I use as an example the film *Les Maîtres Fous* (The Mad Masters), by Jean Rouch,<sup>2</sup> to point out the relationships that moving images assume in visual anthropology in order to, in a way, discuss specifically the place of images as a process of translation and writing by images. Finally, in the conclusions, I expose three levels from which to think the ethnographic or video ethnographic practice as translation from the perspective of equivocation and opacity, in a fieldwork with Amerindian peoples.

**Image, body and word:** Thinking about the place of images, according to Hans,<sup>6</sup> implies reflecting, in general, on our body, which occupies different places in the world, in the sense that it is “a place where we create and know (recognize) images”, which we are always using to remember and which, with its visual stimuli, captures our

attention. As the author argues, in our body there is an intersection of a “personal predisposition” that includes life stories, with a collective experience, formed by the environment with social interaction, so that “this duplicity is expressed in the changing acceptance with which we receive the images of the outside world. In one case we believe in them, while in another we reject them”<sup>6</sup>. In the same way, we either love images or hate them, which can be observed in our contemporary world of spectacularization of the visible, “in which the margin of personal action has narrowed in our dealings with images”<sup>6</sup>.

In this process of interaction with the outside world, the “images that are inscribed in the body”<sup>7</sup> are constituted, such as the exchange of traditional knowledge in Amerindian societies. Novaes points out that photography “also implies a type of knowledge that does not pass through the word, but much more through the sensitivity of the eye, intuition through the ability to be in the right place at the right time, the sensitivity to place the body (and the attached camera) at the right distance”<sup>1</sup>.

It is important to think about the nature of the image in relation to bodies. In this sense, Marie-José Mondzain,<sup>8</sup> in an attempt to propose a definition of image, points out that it is “inseparable from the definition of the subject”, since its cause, according to the author, occurs in two ways: by operating a relation and by becoming, in effect, the object of that relation. It is possible to affirm, therefore, that the image should not be understood separately from the elements that constitute it, but through the interposition of the human with the non-human, an aspect very present in the discussions around the work with Amerindian cosmologies.

As Gottfried Boehm indicates, the gesture of thinking about images implies reflecting on the intertwining with what they show, since their logic is one of exposure, at the same time that they “put something ‘under the eyes’ and one proceeds to their demonstration, thus of a spectacle”,<sup>9</sup> of a desire to see and to show. This embodiment of the image, to which Hans<sup>6</sup> drew attention, cuts across experiences in the social relation strongly associated with the foundations of social anthropology in terms of visual registers of the bodily dimensions and material meanings of life. It is in this sense that, according to Fabris,<sup>10</sup> the image creates its own framework in which it reaffirms identities in the social, family or personal sphere. The same author

indicates that “by imposing an identical form of presence on bodies, objects and space, photography makes visible the essential unity of the world, objects and the subject in a space that bathes and envelops them equally”.<sup>10</sup>

Taking society and the subject as a premise, anthropology establishes a relationship with photography in the interpretation of their parallel trajectories, as highlighted by Pinney,<sup>11</sup> who points out some lines of special interest for this article. The procedure proper to anthropological practice highlights the conjunction of kinship with photography, by presenting the intertwining of the domain of language that, in a way, unites them, because, on the one hand, while “anthropology is discovering its condition of anthropography”, on the other hand, “photography is in the process of discovering that it is a language-based or, more correctly, photogrammatical photography”.<sup>11</sup> It is in this direction that the “creative convergence” of the two disciplines points, the author concludes. With this parallel and historical analysis, photography, which has been used by anthropologists since the MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY, makes it possible to access the meaning of the expressive systems of other languages, which, in this case, differs from verbal language without losing sight of it, and although it seeks reconstitution through its absence and its desire to show, its first operation is communicative, even though it does not resort to “either words or writing”, as Maresca<sup>12</sup> states.

So, how to get rid of the idea that “a picture is worth a thousand words”, expression of the Chinese philosopher Confucius, to think about the use of photography in the anthropological narrative? Without reducing the discussion, it is necessary to consider the dimension of the visible and invisible of the image, which is articulated with its visibility and in which, for Mondzain,<sup>13</sup> lies its strength, i.e. “the desire to see”. Mondzain,<sup>13</sup> thus, qualifies that the power of the image is “to make us see, to put forms, spaces and bodies in scenes that offer to the gaze”.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, what gives existence to the image is the desire to see, which, in effect, constitutes its strength in the construction of the distance between the visible and the object of desire.

If, as Rancière<sup>14</sup> emphasizes, the image is constituted by the invisible, “the visible and the word, the said and the unsaid”, in a complex game, thinking about the image in the field of anthropology and ethnography forces to reflect the tension between what gives us to see and the word that accompanies it, since we cannot expect the latter to save the image, according to the recommendation of Roland Barthes,<sup>15</sup> reaffirmed by Sontag.<sup>16</sup> To think about this relationship and its ethnographic dimension, it is necessary to pay attention to the discourses with which they are related, because, in the words of Didi-Huberman,<sup>5</sup> images must be thought in relation to the word or discourses with which they appear.

In this way we can approach the issue raised in this article: the image operating as a translator of social phenomena in field research, like a shaman entrusted with the task of translating cosmological knowledge. I see the same issue involved in the field of cinematic anthropology, where moving images acquire the meaning of translation by harboring, for example, shamanic thought based on audiovisual techniques for the transmission of a particular culture. Therefore, before launching the question about the place of images in ethnographic work and, indeed, their gesture of translation, it is important to highlight this methodological interest of the researcher-photographer for the researcher-filmmaker.

**Writing with moving images: the ethnographic film:** Robert Flaherty is a pioneer and one of the main exponents of ethnographic cinema, through a production that proposes a participatory link with the “other”, with *Nanook of the North*. This characteristic of Flaherty,

underlying the moving images in ethnographic work, is in dialogue with that of Bronislaw Malinowski, who inaugurated participant observation as a methodological instrument and ethnography as a genre of knowledge production through the publication of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. As Malinowski wrote, “the ethnographer is at once his own chronicler and historian”,<sup>17</sup> as he is guided by immersive fieldwork to master the complex set of phenomena studied. Ethnographic film, in turn, relies on audiovisual resources to describe and interpret certain phenomena that are witnessed and transmitted by a tradition of dramatic narrative.

Thus, for example, ethnographic video has gained strength as an instrument of anthropology in ethnographic filmmaking through images, which are constructed using technical recording devices, sound capture and concern for editing and cinematographic practices. The difference lies in the filmmaking process, which is sometimes shared, given back to the subjects involved in it, and the editing itself is discussed collectively. However, a “shared anthropology”, as Jean Rouch called it,<sup>1</sup> is created in the use of canonized audiovisual techniques.

The anthropological filmmaker, as Comolli<sup>18</sup> states, faces a methodological choice in which he himself becomes a “filmmaker-cinematographer”, and “not only a filmmaker, but also a camera operator”, or an “ethnographic advisor” to a team in the making of a film, practices present in the history of anthropological cinema, since the film will not be a means of disseminating only the results of the research, but rather “a means of complete discovery” through extra-filmic techniques. Thus, the place of film in anthropological research is the transformation of the researcher into researcher-filmmaker, “from the moment when data collection participates fully in the discovery of the object of study, on an equal footing with the subsequent examination of the images”.<sup>18</sup> The immersion in the culture and the universe of the other who will be filmed enables the prerogative of the researcher-filmmaker to constitute the images in a shared manner, in which the filmmaker is invited to participate in the cinematographic scene, or, conversely, in which the gesture is the return of the filming process.

In *Les Maîtres fous*, Rouch manifests a reverse anthropology in the sense of Roy Wagner,<sup>19</sup> as the natives become anthropologists and create concepts to interpret our society as we do from anthropology as a discipline. It is looking backwards, as it invites us to see how they see us. It is a savage mode, in the wake of Viveiros de Castro,<sup>20</sup> on the inconstancy that was forged in Amerindian historiography, of a cinema of agitation, in Deleuze’s<sup>21</sup> words, in which everything is put in trance to communicate. In Rouch’s film, cosmology enters into the forms of the film itself, which is not of the order of representation, but of a shared experience. A shared anthropology that we observe in the work of the filmmaker and anthropologist, who will later submit his ethnographic cinema to an agency of shared authorship, when the subject who films is also the filmed subject. In this way, the subject of authorship is transferred to the collective.

In the words of Sztutman,<sup>22</sup> it is a “reverse cinema”, because the film is made by the filmed from the perspective of decolonization, or, to use the concept of the quilombola master Bispo dos Santos,<sup>23</sup> of “counter-colonization”, based on the ways of life, practices and discourses of the native peoples in the processes of resistance to the subjugations of colonization.

<sup>1</sup>Rouch’s work left a deep mark on ethnographic cinematography and on the so-called “indigenous cinema” in Latin America since the 1960s, due to its communitarian, shared, participatory and intercultural aspects, and even as a tool for political, territorial and cultural struggle among native peoples.

In *Les Maîtres fous* the dimension of fickle nature is related to reversibility and counter-colonization,<sup>23,24</sup> as in *Yenendi: Los hombres que hacen llover*, another classic ethnographic film by Rouch,<sup>25</sup> in which the images enhance a possession ritual to ask Dongo to make it rain for the fishermen. After the scenes of ritual and sacrifice, we see a return to everyday life, and the final images frame the movement of the trees by the strong wind, the lightning and finally the rain. The cosmivision employed in *Yenendi* extends to a cosmopolitics in *Les Maîtres fous*, which, through an anthropophagic performance, appropriates the forces and symbols of the colonizers as a practice of counter-colonization. Sztutman<sup>22</sup> points out that this union between madness and civilization posed by the montage is what will show a reflexive place of ritual in the images. He would also add an equation of the “savage soul”, as the Amerindian character was called by the missionaries and Jesuits to the forms of subjugation promoted by the colonizers.<sup>24</sup>

In *Les Maîtres fous*, when the montage cuts, during the ritual, to images of the parades of British officers, the imitation employed by the peoples is a strategy to counteract a European model of civilization: it is an anthropophagic gesture, so to speak, of appropriation of signs of the colonizers to then be returned in a critical and inverse manner, based on the anthropology they make of the colonizer. The montage makes this perspective possible, presenting the natives in their daily chores, ritual, possession and sacrifice, and then a return to daily life, and each one of them does so in a different way than the one Rouch presented to us during the ritual, in what is also a way of confronting the Christian cosmology itself. These images of The Masters, seen from the parade, are themselves a field of tensions, in which what has happened meets the now, depending on how this image is actualized in the present that passes through the montage. This perspective of montage is given when Rouch begins to introduce the film, when in the initial minutes we see each of these people in their daily chores and, through the voice-over, their functions are presented, and little by little we come into contact with each one. This would also be a way of encountering a past of colonization that perpetuates its traces with the actuality of that ritual; penetrating the film from the present, the ritual is thus also a scene in the past, represented in the parade.

What remains as a question, which deserves further discussion, is how from Rouch's cinema, which will strongly inspire ethnographic audiovisual production in Latin America in the 1970s, particularly in Brazil in the 1980s, especially with *Video nas Aldeias (VNA)* and the subsequent formation of indigenous film collectives. The new epistemologies that this cinema creates reveal other methods and procedures of analysis, as if new ways of producing cinema required new ways of knowing cinema. It should be added that the *Video in the Villages* project was created in 1986, with the idealization of Vincent Carelli. These indigenous audiovisual productions are marked by the debate on identity, the politics of images between groups and the struggle for the demarcation of their territories. In 1986, Carelli launched his first work within the VNA, *La fiesta de la muchacha*, with the Jean Rouch-inspired proposal of “shared anthropology” and the gesture of “seeing with”, that is, accompanying with the subjects involved the images of their reception (and creation).<sup>26</sup>

In Rouch's classic cinematography, in which possession and ritual prevail, and then ethnofiction with fabulation,<sup>2</sup> images operate, on the

one hand, as an instrument of struggle in a pedagogical dimension, that is, a political-pedagogical cinema, and, on the other hand, a theorization that is born from practice and recovers experience, like the photographs that will shape the ethnographic narrative in the field of visual anthropology.

#### Translating the invisible: the image in ethnographic narrative:

According to Sontag, we have access to an astonishing amount of conflicts in the world «through the translation of their contents into images. For the author, it is up to photography not only to reproduce the real, but also to recycle it, to give a new meaning to what is captured by the camera lens.

In the form of photographic images, things and facts are given new uses, destined to new meanings, which go beyond the distinctions between the beautiful and the ugly, the true and the false, the useful and the useless, good taste and bad taste. Photography is one of the main means to produce this attribute, given to things and situations, which erases those distinctions: «the interesting».<sup>16</sup>

The image, as presented in this text, communicates something absent, and reproduces its appearance without being imitative, as a «chain of representations» in which «a word is the image of an idea and an idea is the image of a thing»,<sup>7</sup> as we also observed in Jean Rouch. What does it mean to say that an image translates something, such as a time or feelings? In fact, ethnographic narrative is based on the understanding and interpretation of social phenomena collected in the field by the researcher, in which, through narrative forms, they are described, interpreted and, in some way, submitted to a process of translation, with the researcher's effort to transpose what was collected into the narrative and with the articulation of the fieldwork with the construction of the text, as Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira<sup>27</sup> called attention to the anthropologist's work.

In this sense, according to Victor Turner,<sup>28</sup> narrative is a procedural structure that, for different genres, corresponds to the cultural context in which it was constructed, and is an intrinsic characteristic of social life and present in macro-events, especially in the individual dimension, with micro-events. In short, narrative, from the author's perspective, is a structure that arises from social experience and that it is possible to describe from an ethnographic point of view: a translation of social dramas. It is possible to say, following Turner,<sup>28</sup> that this operation of translation as an ethnographic record resides in the paradigm of the visual forms of ethnographic narratives. The use of the image, in this case, «serves» to «translate», to «make understand», to «justify» what words cannot show so effectively, as described by André Alves.<sup>30</sup>

Translation has become increasingly important as a result of ethnographic work in anthropology, a discipline known as anthropology of translation. What matters is how this translation can be evoked through images: the place that images occupy in this gesture of translating. Translation is presented in a dimension of equivocation, following what Viveiros de Castro<sup>24</sup> proposes about Amerindian perspectival anthropology, in which he knows a place «where the difference between points of view is at the same time annulled and exacerbated». And it is in this place where different subjective agencies populate, with human and non-human beings endowed with «cognitive and volitional capacities».<sup>20</sup> For this reason, and from the author's perspective, I start from the assumption that there is, in this gesture of translation through images, an ambiguity, precisely because it is not able to account for all the complexity of the social phenomenon.

categories and consequently begin to fabricate visions of alternative ways of being in this world”.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Fable-making as a creative power in documentary film and, in turn, in ethnographic film, is a concern that has permeated the discussions of the Nanook research group (PósCom/UFBA), to which I belong. According to Ilona Hongisto, reaffirming Jacques Rancière, documentaries have a force to fabulate and, as it were, create resistances to what is observed in the image. “Documentaries, however, observe their subjects in ways that go beyond those

On the one hand, starting from the idea that, in anthropology, photography is at the service of translation, as is comparison,<sup>20</sup> one can think that this operation occurs from the analytical perspective of the concept of equivocation, since it is an equivocal translation, since it is presented as a «way of communication par excellence between different positions of perspective», as proposed by Viveiros de Castro.<sup>20</sup> For the same author, translation potentiates this equivocation by opening an imaginary space of communication for experiences of contact, previously hidden by the same equivocation. Thus,

the equivocation is not what prevents the relationship, but what founds and drives it: a difference of perspective. To translate is to assume that a mistake already exists; it is to communicate through the differences, instead of silencing the other, assuming a univocity -the essential similarity- between what we and the other are saying.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, in this communication through differences, in which we can insert photography in ethnographic work, this translation can take place at the level of opacity, to think along with Édouard Glissant,<sup>31</sup> that the image itself is claimed as a right. “Opacities can coexist, converge, weaving fabrics whose true understanding would lead to the texture of a given weft and not to the nature of the components”.<sup>31</sup> The author’s proposal is that to reclaim opacity is to reclaim the right to identity that each element recovers in relation to other cultures: in the gesture of describing the invisible in images in ethnographic work not everything is seen, thus manifesting a rejection of the templates of transparency. This rejection of the regime of representation under the violence of visibility is the opacity that Glissant<sup>31</sup> mentions and that will guarantee the survival of the images.<sup>32</sup>

For Didi-Huberman,<sup>32</sup> an image that resists this regime of violent representation imposed on the subjects and objects that involve it is one that survives the “dazzling clarity of the ‘fierce’ projectors”. Images would thus be fireflies that reflect their luminous points in the darkness, resisting the dazzling lights and inviting contemplation, “trying to make themselves as discreet as possible, without ceasing to emit their signals”.<sup>32</sup> To close this parenthesis, which poses the challenge of thinking about images and their translation operations, from this perspective, the gesture of translating social phenomena in the field through images - and writing through them - is traversed by the dimensions of equivocation and opacity, because, on the one hand, while in their representational regime images do not account for the complexity of these phenomena, on the other, the elements, in order not to be overshadowed with too much clarity, need to protect their forms of ineligibility from other phenomena and perspectives. I would like to situate this perspective in the following argument: by claiming a certain latent multiplicity in the sensible, images operate under an opacity<sup>31</sup> from which not everything that is shown is somehow visible. That is to say, to escape from “the spaces of visibility that act as complementary to the mechanisms of colonization”,<sup>33</sup> images are not only a “piece of the visible”, but also “a staging of the visible, a knot between the visible and what it says, as well as between the word and what it makes visible”.<sup>34</sup> In this way, translation configures its own ontology of photography, as had already been questioned by Barthes,<sup>15</sup> within the very discourse with which it presents itself. The challenge of translation, then, is “to learn the points of resonance, to make the intent in one language reverberate in another”.<sup>35</sup>

For Carneiro da Cunha,<sup>35</sup> based on the thought of philosopher Walter Benjamin, translation is not about faithfully reconstructing objects, since all objects are part of “different systems” that express what Benjamin defines as “modes of intention”.<sup>35</sup> It is in this sense that Viveiros de Castro<sup>20</sup> defines translation as “communicating through

differences” and assuming that “equivocation” will always exist. The ethnographic image would then be the equivocation as a consequence of the contact between the indigenous person and the anthropologist, since, like ethnographic writing, photography is also a discursive and political practice and appears as a mode of “communication par excellence between different positions of perspective”.<sup>20</sup>

The image in relation to opacity and the invisible, to the body and the word, to misunderstanding and translation, operates in what Eduardo Kohn calls “ontological poetics,” which implies “cultivating representational (poetic) forms that can touch on some kind of generative creativity (poiesis)”.<sup>36</sup> This “ontological poetics,” present especially in ethnographic film, is the result of anthropology’s entry into anthropology, according to the author. Ontological anthropology, or the ontological turn in anthropology, is the theoretical and methodological shift in anthropological thought linked to the works of Philippe Descola, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Bruno Latour, a study of reality whose main interest is not only the “worlds constructed by human beings”. The methodological innovation lies in ethnography, whose practice immerses itself in the everyday “of human life and the wider worlds in which we live, as well as the various more or less reflexive ways of giving voice to this practice”.<sup>36</sup>

This ontology of the ethnographic image, which occurs in the articulation of different perspectives in the process of translation is, in this sense, an “ontological poetics” that is constituted “in the cultivation of representational art as a form of attunement with other kinds of realities”.<sup>36</sup> The image, as a translation, relates different levels and codes that will correspond to a new world,<sup>37</sup> that will be read and seen in the images from different points of view, which, in effect, grounds the relationship of the “difference of perspective”.<sup>20</sup> In these terms, as defined by Rancière,<sup>14</sup> that process can belong to the “phrase-image”, which would represent the production of a third sense. The “phrase-image” is not the text as a complement to the image, but, on the contrary, the “union of two functions to be defined aesthetically, that is, by the way it undoes the representative relationship of the text with the image”<sup>14</sup> to produce “images of rupture” in different points of view.

In conclusion, in the complex task of translating and writing through images there is a “photographic shock”<sup>15</sup> derived from the photograph’s gesture of surprise. This shock, according to the author, “consists less in traumatizing than in revealing what was so well hidden” (Barthes, 1984, p. 54) and until then unknown to the one who captures it. Photography, thus, “decrees remarkable what it photographs”, although in this operation a meaningless action is delimited, that is, the non-apparent motive and interest in photographing, which will make the photograph “surprising”.<sup>15</sup> However, in anthropology, the image, which must establish the “opposition to concepts of aesthetic and technical order”,<sup>6</sup> does not dispense with its representative character, to complete an identity.<sup>7</sup> Images “deceive us in their appearance of naturalness and transparency, which hides the innumerable mechanisms of representation that result”.<sup>7</sup>

In short, translation operates through equivocation<sup>20,24</sup> and opacity.<sup>31</sup> In an ethnographic work, the image does not pretend to dissociate itself from its representative capacity; on the contrary, as a language, it is descriptive and strives to present the elements of the phenomenon observed by the researcher and contained in the field of photography itself. The genesis of the image is the sensitive life that, acquiring other languages and corporeality, becomes “the form that lives in another body or another object”,<sup>38</sup> and is presented as “a mode of presence”, as Novaes<sup>1</sup> emphasizes, “because it associates the object or person represented with its presence”.

## Final considerations

In this article I discussed the dual place of images in ethnography, especially in terms of translating and writing about social phenomena collected in the field in ethnographic research. One of the challenges of thinking along these lines is photographer Maureen Bisilliat's idea of "writing with images," along with thinking about the gesture of translation through the image. According to Del Castillo,<sup>39</sup> Bisilliat seems to disagree with the cliché that a picture is worth a thousand words, as she states that her photographs are "only complete with text." For the author, in each book published by the photographer, with images that dialogue with works by writers of national literature, "there is a double birth" in which the image is intertwined with the text and the text "takes on new life through the image."

Thus, to translate with the image is to give new life and new meaning to the sentient being that is the image itself<sup>38</sup> and, in other words, without the disturbance of visibility and speech, in the challenge of seeking other communicative forms to understand and present phenomena in anthropology, "without having to give up verbatim", as Etienne Samain<sup>40</sup> points out.

In this way, photography in ethnography establishes a dialogue with translation, with the knowledge it relates to, since it implies conditions and forms of recognition of the other, in the relationship between scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge, especially through ethnophotographic work with quilombola or Amerindian communities.

In this sense, it is necessary to define the limits of ethnographic practice in the production of knowledge and how photography, or ethnographic video, can contribute to transform the structure of anthropological knowledge. In this process that seeks to approach a translation, it is necessary to access the dialogue and listen to the other in order to understand what is being investigated and photographed/filmed. This is an image, based on collaborative research networks, on "inter-scientific" relationships, in which a "dialogue is established between the perspective of the scientist and indigenous knowledge".<sup>41</sup>

Thus, from the perspective of equivocality and opacity we can think of translation from three levels in a photoethnographic or ethnographic video research with Amerindian peoples. The first is to know the other in contexts in which specific systems and forms of knowledge are intertwined, such as the shared anthropology of Jean Rouch.

The second refers to the space given to that other in the image as photography, as a medium and as a reproductive technique, as Walter Benjamin<sup>42</sup> emphasizes, and what will connect spheres and worlds, even without physical contact, but maintaining a relationship of continuity with the investigation. According to Coccia, "images - the reality of the sensible - make possible this relationship that is both immaterial and infra-rational: the possibility of being affected by something without being physically touched by it".<sup>38</sup>

The third, which encompasses the last two points, is the relationship between scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge. According to Taylor and Viveiros de Castro,<sup>43</sup> writing with images using technical resources and, on the other hand, writing with bodies and their embodiment of know-how in Amerindian societies constitutes a language. For these authors "the form is determined by the gaze that is directed to it, depending on the relationship that is established with it".<sup>43</sup>

Thus, the question that arises refers to the validity of other epistemological practices that flow in the images, understanding

translation, which protects its equivocity and opacity, as a transit that is not completed, but that is not resolved in any way.<sup>44</sup>

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## Conflicts of interests

Author declares there are no conflicts of interests.

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