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Fieldwork: The “ArlesianWoman” ofGeographers?

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Introduction

Thecombined talents of Alphonse Daudet and Georges Bizet constructed an image of ‘*l’Arlésienne*’ (the Arlesianwoman). The novella—an extract of*Lettres de monmoulin*(1866)—is about a dramatic (because impossible) love affairfull of disillusionment and deceitbetween a boy from the countryside and a young Arlesianwoman, which is recounted by the narrator. Adapted for the theaterwith music composed by Georges Bizet (1872) as a melodrama in which the Arlesianwoman is physically absent, it was greeted with tremendous successand led to a popular expression that is usedto refer to a focal point of the plot that is never seen. As the assumptionbeing made here is that fieldwork is (also) a shared, collective “fiction” and that, except for the person who conducts it, it is known only through the account that is made of it, we will be exploring some of the aspects underlying this metaphor. The novella will be used as a basis for three ways of understanding the field as an “object,” and the relationship we develop with it, in terms of the theme of presence-absence. The choice of this reference—a literary monument of the French Republic*par excellence*—

and the expression, which is a rather outdated cliché of the French language, is also an indication that the "field" of this article will be limited to the customs and habits of French geographers, and in particular those who have standardizedthe use of fieldwork.

Accounts of fieldwork are made through various media(including the written word, maps, and photographs),which means the ultimate method of describing and sharing fieldwork will always be a device and strictly speaking, therefore, a fiction.Like the Arlesian woman, it reveals itself only through the writing of the author-geographer (the only person to have experienced it firsthand) in the form of an account/recollection of a past experience anda vanished co-presence. The knowledge of faraway or nearby places, sources of imaginings of a foreignness and otherness that are more or less perceptible,brings about a sense of wishfulness (presence in the field) combined with a sense of reality (the full sense being indissociable from presence in the field), both approximating but neither being equivalent to being in the field with its charms and pitfalls.

Presence and absence, fiction within fiction, and underlying psychological factors will serve here as guiding lines to grasp the questions that are raised by geographers' fieldwork. The main proposition is to recognize the field's full legitimacy as an object of research for geographers andto participate in the process of reflection on fieldwork that has now begun, long after other disciplines have studied itand other recognized narratives have demonstrated its interest.[1] Fieldwork practices involved in a geography driven by action and landscaping are not specifically dealt with here. This is not because the questions brought up would be radically different in nature, but because it leads to a more effective debate on the relationship to space. In doing so, it brings many additional considerations which decenter the finalities of the relationship with fieldwork as understood here. The fieldwork practices involved in the context of an operational purpose go beyond the scope of investigation of this article, which has a more general aim of dealing with three analytical areas—seduction (*pathos*), representation

[1]Among the most well-known and highly ironic successes, in terms of both works that are split between categories are Nigel Barley, *The Innocent Anthropologist: Notes from a Mud Hut* (London: Colonnade Books, 1983) and*A Plague of Caterpillars: A Return to the African Bush*(Harmondsworth, UK: Viking,1986), and works that are pure fiction: Alison Lurie,*Imaginary Friends*(London: Abacus, 1967).

(*ethos*),and lastly discourse (*logos*)—in the discipline's epistemological sphere, which is adjacent to that of the clarification of the approach to research used in geography (Gumuchian, Marois, andFèvre 2000).

1 An Epistemological Paradox

We begin with a self-evident observation, that of a paradox and the first "presence-absence." The normative nature of fieldwork limits our research practices. This normativity is brought up in every aspect of academic life, whether it is the acceptance of young researchers (rite of passage) or signs of respect awarded to highly experiencedgeographersand constitutes one of the generally accepted and recurring evaluation criteria. Research conducted on "a difficult field site" will often be accorded special praise by a thesis committee or evaluation body. The nature of the difficulty will not necessarily be explained, as it is obvious among geographers that factors such as distance, difficult access, and dangers in the field contribute to the value of the work accomplished. Conversely, an "easy field site" (in terms of access, proximity, shorter expeditions, and lesser language requirements) will need to meet(to a greater degree?)demands of a different nature. A "great field site" refers as much to the quality and richness of the materials collected as to the pertinence of its choice, and often implies the wisdom and boldness of the researcher for having "blazed a trail" in such-and-such new area. The field site, therefore, either through its choice or experience, carries with it an intrinsic value that wins geographers the recognition of their peers; its evaluation is itself inseparable from a group of values that are expressed, but only reflected upon to a moderate degree. Its qualification suggests and instills a mixture of scientific production and moral (courage, determination, etc.), or, even more ambiguously, aesthetic (beauty) evaluation. We will return to this point.

As a consequence, fieldwork is a means of mutual recognition or, to put it otherwise, plays the role of a transitional object within the community of geographers. It is true that there are some nonconformists who dare to speak their minds. They do exist, as we know a few of them! Their numbers remain few, however, and the paradigmatic changes

that have taken place within the discipline, in particular the neo-positivist formulation of spatial analysis, have hardly altered the collective prevalence of this "object" (Volvey 2003), andneither have the current broadening of geographicity and the enlargement of the approaches/objects used (Gorrha-Gobin 2007).

The "field geographer-desk geographer" comparison can even be viewed as a common point, mandatory up until the current today, of any history or epistemology of geography. This opposition has structured the history of the discipline, spanning the most important moments and the establishment of its institutionalization. The founding Humboldtian figure, who is more highly regarded in France than actually read in full (Péaud 2009), establishes the journey as a practice necessary for innovation, and highly discontinuous Kuhnian epistemological interpretations have made it the seminal historical threshold of the fieldwork obligation. This continues to be the case, even though the current progressive exploration of the origins of scholarly European geography seems to be shifting the points of reference by rediscovering points of continuity (Blanckaert1996). Elsewhere, from Humboldt to Reclus and Vidal, the practices used are essentially mixed and will remain so. This cannot be otherwise, as the field does not provide for all of the requirements of investigation. Historians of the discipline adopt an analytical framework that favors abrupt changes, and have, therefore, established this term used to describe geographers who, at the beginnings of modern science, chose to go and see the places they had decided to investigate in person.

At the same time, and this is an apparently paradoxical and important—perhaps even essential—point, the practice of fieldwork recycles the culture of the explorer, a tutelary figure of original production and originator of geographical knowledge in the era of *terra incognita* and therefore ensures an affiliation with the historical discoverers from the beginnings of modernity. These people (dis)covered the world; they "saw" it for the first time. During the second half of the nineteenthcentury, as both a positivist and inductive protocol,the field—"this is where the facts grow" (Achard 1981)—attested to the desired scientificity. While the methods selected by a geographer to comprehend and describe his field are varied, while his personal empirical experience is only one

approach among others with which it combines in different ways according to the chosen paradigm (archives, investigations, mathematization/modelization), fieldwork remains the most important sign of legitimacy and added-value and, therefore, undoubtedly constitutes the first instance where the individual and scientific collective are combined: "That is why geographers have always considered that the map is the instrument of access to the document, but that the geographic document in itself is the *field*" (George 1970,24). The "field" forms part of the discipline's imagination and representation.

However, in comparison to other field-based disciplines, reflexivity among geographers has remained, until very recently, very limited. The reassessment of theoretical issues linked to this practice has become less common since the premises of *Hérodote*(Lacoste 1977) and often remains suspect for those who declare themselves unabashedly to be "field geographers" (Calbérac 2005). While ethnologists (Perrot andSoudière 1994; Denis andPontille 2002), anthropologists (Pritchard 1969; Geertz 1988), and sociologists considered and formalized the position, status, and pedagogy of fieldwork a long time ago, little has been done by geographers (Vieillard-Baron 2005and2006; Volvey 2003; Baudelle et al. 2001; Robic 1996) beyond the recurring affirmation of its necessity.

The aim here is not to analyze the substance of this discrepancy and reticence on the part of geographers, but to continue the reflection on what remains a blindspot in the learning of the discipline (Gumuchian, Marois, and Fèvre 2000). Should it be inferred that evidence from the field can be as blinding for geographers as it is a matter of common sense and concern for objectivity to understand it? The assumption made here is that geography is peculiar in this matter and that this peculiarity does not reside solely in the desire for fieldwork (to go where the world is different), nor in the writings and descriptions of fieldwork, but more fundamentally in the specificity and prevalence of the initially selected determining scientific criteria—the visual.

2 Fieldwork and Desire

It is not only a desire to enter the profession that drives geographers into the field; it is simply the desire to make a part of the world their own and to receive recognition for having done so. So many geographers have spoken of their childhood love of atlases that one can only imagine that, once they reached adulthood, they profoundly wished to become those discoverers and producers of maps themselves and realize the geographical reveries of their youth. They were fascinated by maps in their youth and, in turn, they make their own, like Robinson Crusoes grasping all aspects of their fields—islands, great or small, of knowledge (without intending to be demeaning, the size of the island remaining a true problem of meta-geography). Is the island not an archetype of the geographical field (Robic 2001)? This situation is implicitly valued: "I'm in the field; I'm leaving for a field assignment; on my field site, etc." Talk of the field and, in particular, the perceptible joy, bring up imaginings of discovery, importance, singularity, and self-worth. While the exceptionality previously attached to a time-space of great remoteness is today put into perspective by the ease of modern mobility, and despite the increased proximity of field sites, the expression "in the field" suggests a world of differences, discovery, presumed constraints (family, financial, etc.) andalso happiness. "Being in the field is a *pleasure* that deeply marks the researcher. The *wonder* of beholding an unknown landscape can be a source of *excitement*: one is overcome by *enchantment* and everything seems easy and welcoming. [. . .]. As in *love*, it is the moment when a stranger becomes *close* and *familiar* that is particularly precious." (Bataillon 1999,114. Our italics). When experienced and expressed in this way, the relationship with the field surely involves more than just the geographer's intellectual interest; rather it involves the geographer as a person, in both psychological and intimately personal dimensions: the geographer "enjoys walking, looking around himself, smelling the scents and feeling the atmosphere" (Claval 2001,43). "Put simply, it is a powerful experience; it gives rise to a strong emotional investment" (Vieillard-Baron 2006,413) and brings deep emotional energy into play.

“The geographer must be curious and patient, and possess observation skills to acquire unfamiliar data and note a pertinent characteristic where it is observed” (Claval 2001,41). Curiosity, desire, drive, and interest in worldly things are required. Without these, a career in geography and discovery are not possible. More fundamentally, this “interest” calls into play an intrinsic relationship with the world that drives the person. “Not intellect alone, but the thing that enables and maintains it: *interest*. What would the work of the mind be without this primordial trait? Just beneath the will to know lies the desire to understand and to be understood, to love and to be loved. Desire? Libido? It is difficult to say; it is a sensibility, on the interface between the emotional and the perceptive without which humanity cannot flourish” (Janicaud 1985,106). This interface brings into play sensory, sensorial, aesthetic, and more generally synesthetic factors that geographers in the field are subjected to, endure, and bear tautologically, with patience (passion). Patience is, therefore, required, but geographers are not the only ones among their colleagues in the social sciences to be confronted with the challenge of finding evidence: “Let there be no mistake: by viewing the field here as a challenge, by singling out the suffering involved, the idea is not to show sympathy for the researcher, but for his profession: research” (Soudière 1988). Geography is in no way singular in this respect.

Having said this, field sites are not always all that distant and are becoming less so today, with a form of repatriation of exoticism, or its displacement by the rediscovery of everyday locations around us: “The dilution of the exotic, the repatriation of study topics, and the deterritorialization of our objects have led us to ask questions about what it means to ‘take the subway’” (Durand 2001). Even though this remark comes from an ethnologist, and it refers to the history of a discipline whose sole object was, for a long time, to report on primitive peoples that were distant from the scholar, this distinction is not insignificant. In the process whereby disciplinary fields were formed, well-identified core targets, methods, and subjects (areas to be constructed or defended) have become common to all fields of knowledge (Wallerstein 2004). Ethnology and anthropology have historically forged a particular relationship with fieldwork (linked to the otherness of civilizations), which no doubt explains the early manifestation of methodological and theoretical reflection on professional practices (Bonnin 1982; Bromberger 1987).

It is, therefore, useful to distinguish field situations in terms of their distances, both physical and cultural. A high degree of otherness forces approaches to be taken that geographers always link with a particular situation. “It is the situation encountered in areas occupied by primitive societies and those that are home to pre-industrial civilizations. The pattern of research becomes triangular: the researcher is faced with an observable reality, which he wants to explain, but he can only do so by sounding out the intentions of the local populations, by analyzing the means they employ” (Claval 2001,42). Otherness—culture, lifestyles, the relationship with nature—would, therefore, seem to give rise to a different approach that is common to both geographers and ethnographers. Yet classical geography, while not averse to research in distant places (although often in French territories), placed particular emphasis on metropolitan France. It was these field sites that founded its archetype, standardized requirements, and created a systematic approach. Distance is, therefore, not a necessary factor and nearby locations deserve to be observed just as closely: geographers did not radically limit their scientific scope to the cultural otherness of societies, but looked rather at wide-ranging relationships between natural and cultural phenomena, taking into account people and physical materiality, the geological substrate and phenomena of mobility and trade. In doing so, nearby locations also satisfied their desire—that of an integrated approach. This is because the geographer’s desire for fieldwork is a total desire—“the Earth is a whole” (Vidal)—and the holistic project has been established as one of the touchstones of fieldwork’s heuristic motivations. Because of this, in comparison with the projects of other disciplines, the empirical aspect of being in the field while studying it is terribly overladen with a demiurgical ambition that takes in both Nature and Man, the immobile and mobile, the permanent and changing, uncharted territory and iconography . . .

Whatever its physical and cultural distance, the field is always linked to foreignness: wherever they are, researching geographers are in a position of exteriority and, therefore, hospitality, always subject to situations of welcoming and reception. The thanks dedicated to people who gave valuable contributions at the beginning of a thesis are evidence of this. This debt of gratitude is expressed to family and friends (personal

and, sometimes, pecuniary sacrifices), but also to all those who provided explanations and advice, contacts, specific knowledge, etc. in the field. All those who enabled the researcher to acclimatize and immerse himself, to select the correct distance, the correct lens and the correct scale, and to acquire the familiarity required to comprehend the whole. This debt and feeling of gratitude result in a desire to give something back to the scientific community and the groups/societies that received and welcomed. Fieldwork entails a relation of hospitality vis-à-vis the place and the people and, therefore, a relationship of sharing and reciprocity, as well as a feeling of adoption. Geographers may feel sufficiently familiar and accepted for this initially foreign place—where a significant, and undoubtedly intimate, part of their existence took place—to become a second home. Mapping out geographers' holiday home locations or the places where they would like to become residents would almost certainly be a revealing exercise.

Hospitality leads to the gift. Like the ancient Greek *xenia*—epigrams or paintings/mosaics, reproductions of victuals to be shared and/or commemorate a past joint-presence—accounts of fieldwork attest to this dual relationship, which begins with hospitality (receive/give back). Like the reciprocity of giftgiving, fieldwork practices involve the forming of an emotional bond, "relating"in both senses of the word—being intersubjective and reporting—both intertwined with the principle of reproduction via images (*imago mundi*).

The word "image" used here is less rich than the Greek terms, which describe the various meanings more precisely: *eidôlon*, *eikôn*, *phantasma*, *emphasis*, *tupos*. More subtle and complex in their reference to visible objects that project different images of themselves, they hark back to ancient Greek debates over reality and truth. In particular, we find here the two basic types of geographical accounts: the map (*eidolon*) and text (*eikon*). More precisely, we find the effectiveness of the latter, as, in Aristotelian rhetoric, persuasion, and what it holds up as convincing, is the measure of what is true. The importance that Aristotle gave to rhetoric, as a force of persuasion to effectively assert reality and truth, is wellknown.[2] If this is so, it is because *eikos*—something that is

[2]Aristotle,*Poetics.Rhetoric I*, 1, 1355a 21–b 7, trans. S.H. Butcher(New York: Hill and Wang, 1961).

convincing (resembles reality)—is always prone to be more real than reality. Herein lie the inner workings and superiority of the poetical invention: "it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen—what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. [. . .] Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular."[3] "With rhetoric as with poetry, what is convincing is the measure of reality or, in other words, what resembles is the measure of reality" (Compagnon 1998). Writing from the field, a realistic depiction of the empirical experience, becomes a true poetic process, i.e., a creative and persuasive interpretation of a reality, the rhetorical qualities of which suggest the truth/truthfulness. These *imago mundi*, which are reinterpreted each time a written account or map is read, continue to produce and feed new imaginings of the world and new desires for geographical "realities." These "field writings are first and foremost works through which the reader progresses with the ground of their words, relief of their style, and verbal space, which together form a landscape in which the mind can wander with its thoughts, dreams, and desires. But other works also resemble a field of sorts: those that are based more firmly, more clearly, on what Merleau-Ponty called the *flesh of the world*" (Richard 1996, 9).

Like the *xenia* that inhabitspaces and continue to display what was once shared, writing from the field is never entirely a still life, appropriated and owned once and for all. The scope of the geographical project is global and, therefore, there are multiple sources of desire. The experience of the field leads to a dual usage: that of bare ownership and that of usufruct.

3 The Geographer as Author and the Field as Representation

In Daudet's novella, the Arlesian woman is a vacuum at the center of a plot told by the narrator, who knows of her only from the hearsay of those who have seen her . . . .The events reported are, therefore, put together to make a story–one of many possible—and the resulting plot is reconstructed *a posteriori* by the narrator. In this way, the novelist

[3] Aristotle, *Poetics,* 9, 1451a 36–38.

objectifies the story. This way of writing, using distance and successive transmissions, contributes to the story's suspense and tension, all in a manner highly characteristic of nineteenth-century realist novels and novellas (Patron 2009). In a similar way, all field writings are, first and foremost, a constructed and organized narrative of an experience, which is thereby altered and translated (Ricœur, 1983). The geographer is always an intermediary playing a balancing act, and to varying degrees a smuggler of sorts, who tries to reconcile the heteronomy of research procedures and the autonomy of being a researcher, the rationalization of events and the empirical nature of the data they produce. Once the evidence of the autopsy has been torn apart, the means of reconstruction can be nothing more than methods to be used and other processes open to question. We would like to highlight here some of the issues related to this approach.

Similarly to what is expressed by ethnologists and sociologists, and in a literal sense, geographers are the authors of their fields: they do not simply record the field, limiting themselves to recognizing data and its positivist illusion. This status involves textualist readings, an approach which is legitimate and fertile in more ways than one. Legitimate firstly because geographers produce, or contrive the field—"there is no geography without drama" (Dresch): they create it in all its specificity and factuality (the "harvesting" of facts: "The collection of data *attracts* geographers to the field" (George 1970, 7). Legitimate also because, like writers, they put their name on the front page or in the article's reference, thereby signing the text that contains their experiences; in doing so, "their" field becomes a badge, a symbol of their pedigree. The academic nature of fieldwork is such that it is conducted individually. It is true that contemporary practices are evolving and the institution looks positively on the capacity to publish collectively, but it remains the case that the initial work involved in writing a thesis is always based on the work of an individual. "The fact that one is able to say 'such and such was written by so and so,' or 'so and so is the author,' indicates that this discourse is not part of everyday speech or indifferent [. . .], but that this speech must be received via a certain mode and must, in a given culture, receive a certain status (Foucault 1994, 798). As authors, geographers establish or consolidate a position of authority as stakeholders and members of the scientific community (Couturier 1995; Rouaud 2004).

Notwithstanding the above, these arguments are obviously not specific to geography. However, the praise given to evocative descriptions and literary qualities ismore specific to geography and puts the emphasis of the question firmly on textuality. The question of authors and their status was a popular subject of debate in the field of literary study at the beginning of the 1960s (Barthes 1967, Foucault 1966). In calling for an end to the interpretative practices used in the convergence of literary works and biographies (biographical positivism), the structuralist announcement of the "death of the author" advanced pure textuality as the only pertinent means to grasp the literary object. This linguistic turning point could not fail, therefore, to clear the pitfalls of rhetorical evidence for depictions of the field, by highlighting the intellectual issues and challenges associated with written accounts (Orain 2009). Here again, following the interest shown by other disciplines (Goody 1977) and several innovative works, the field became a form of leverage to reassess the methods used in geography: work on the field notes in which Paul Vidal de La Blache underlines the "peculiarly geographical pleasure" he experienced while travelling through "a section of the terrestrial globe in six weeks on the fly"; understanding of intermediary writings; updating of intertextuality; status of notes (Loi, Robic, and Tissier 1988; Loi, 1998).

Conducting an analysis via the author opens up new avenues. The first is that of the absence-presence of geographers who, by imitating the role of narrator (a category that establishes the effect of objectivity), are able to proceed omnipotently but with masked identities. From this point of view and in contrast with other related disciplines in the social sciences, rhetorical expressivity was for a long time valued. During the classic Vidalian period, thesis reports, obituaries, and even certain publications (Sion 1934) would underline the rhetorical qualities of the geographers concerned. Conversely, the great achievements that were certain volumes of *Géographieuniverselle* were regularly praised for their descriptive and evocative qualities when the authors had not even been in the field! Comments would note the suggestive abilities or the "art of description" of such and such an author. Such statements never seemed to cause any particular methodological concerns for anybody, while at the same time the "scientific" aspect of the work was loudly acclaimed. One can only conclude that these literary aspects were considered to be a part of the exercise, and should even be aspired to, and that rhetorical

skills were an integral part of a geographer's qualities. Once the illusion of transparency between the word and object vanished, these qualities became flaws; but even so, the concern for literary aspects did not disappear entirely. In the middle of the neo-positivist period, certain reformist dictionaries included a large number of references to literary works, a true innovation, in order to better support work in the discipline (Brunet, Ferras, and Théry 1992). These ingenious works have the great merit of not frowning upon a certain usage of poetry, together with approaches formalized in different ways. Spatialism and the increased firmness of its theoretical position, rejecting the metaphorical usages of a language permeated with influences and indefinable subtleties, has not always avoided the use of a consummate art of persuasion (Lefort 2003). Ultimately, literary influences roam freely and are no strangers to geographical production. As with all social sciences that have not formalized their discourse according to specific technical languages, geography is riddled with the problems associated with writing that uses non-technical vocabulary and common expressions and constructions (Cornilliat and Lockwood 2000). This relationship with literary expression opens up avenues of thought on the necessity not only of using geography as a literary corpus and source, but of reflecting on its own literary nature. Far from conceding to having a weakness that needs to be compensated for by the use of the unequivocal language of mathematics, we can choose to confront the magnificent heuristic richness of our ways of writing and use itto convey our thoughts between the lines.

However, in the conventional form of the fieldwork account, geographer-authors wish to be absent and represent themselves as such: their absence is underlined through the use of impersonal turns of phrase, forbidding the word "I," and the nonexistence of personally expressed feelings. They are absent as they erase the traces of their experience at the same time as they use them as evidence, in the manner of the untouchables who had to erase their footsteps. But they are present and all-powerful in the use of terminological language, semantic worlds, commonly-used tropes, and above all else in the panoptic reconstruction which is held together and made coherent by the style alone. They are always present, in whatever period of the discipline, by the repeated use of the metaphor, a rhetorical vehicle that operates by transferring

intelligibility (organicism, naturalization) (Berdoulay 1988) but also as *the* rhetorical figure which enables the here and there to be “naturally” convened and thus achieve the vast geographical aim of comparison, distinction, selection, and re-cognition (rediscovery) (Ricœur, 2004). They are present also in the many voices subsumed by the geographer (*verbatim* had no place in the classical paradigm), which are today better rendered by knowledge of ethnological protocols, but still laidout and constructed. Lastly, they are present through the mastery of ellipsis: writing stitches the space travelled through back together, joins up points and places, and produces an unbroken stretch. By the performative nature of its discourse, the linearity of the text ensures the continuity of space. Because fieldwork and the experience of the field are always nothing more than individual fragments of time-space, only writing can produce their wholeness, their interpretative joining up, by an intention of truth which brings out, or distinguishes, the elements that produce a meaning (Ricœur, 2004). Demangeon introduces his thesis (1905) with a long sentence: a single long sentence to fully describe the field and to list and present the various classification sections; a single, very long sentence punctuated only by semi-colons, a punctuation mark whose grammatical function is limited to linking without logical connection or viewpoint. The field’s textual relationship therefore functions as a spectacular and effective global chronotopic inversion (here-now/elsewhere-before). Furthermore, this concept, which comes from literary analysis (Bakhtin1975), is a rather effective working concept to understand the various moments in a text and the joining up of space-times in the description. Presence is erased, but it is replaced by the demiurgic and panoptic absence of the geographer, whose task is to reconstruct the “great summary that is nature taken as a whole” (Gallois 1927). We can thus fully grasp the prevalence of the only two-dimensional writing, that of map-making, even though it does not bring into play the full range of senses which are constantly referred to when attesting to the veracity of facts, and even though it leaves out much of the field. The blank spaces on the map, which are purely topographical, provide much fuel for the imagination.[4]Somewhere between writing

[4] Vasset, Philippe. 2007. *Un livre blanc. Récit avec cartes*. Paris: Fayard. In this work, the author sets out on a voyage of discovery of the blank spaces on maps, and discovers that they conceal: “it was clear, nothing strange, but shameful, unacceptable, and almost unbelievable.”

anderasing, the surveyed area is concretized into something referred to as "the field": apartial and frustrating concretization of a far richer reality.

Furthermore, the textualist and rhetorical approachessubject writing on the fieldto the doubt of perception and the crisis of perception. Post-modern enquiries into the specificity of scientific writing, in respect of fiction,have reopened debates on perception. Here, we touch upon the question of ethos. Defined as a discursive construction, ethos establishes from the start a very clear distinction between man and his image in discourse (Barthes 1970; Amossy 2006). Its primary nature is to determine the success of the speaker's attempt at persuasion: this is why ethos is considered to be a major component of the art of persuasion—demonstrative force and the principle of credibility. To seducethe reader andmake the evidence credible, the geographer-author must be at once demiurgical and worthy of confidence. As a rhetorical method, ethostherefore brings up the questions of meaning and truth.

Finally, considering the geographer as an author opens up doors to understanding, in the same way, the underlying sensory, aesthetic, and knowledge-related aspects. As the scientific (Masseau 1994) and artistic fields, in particular literature (Bénichou 1973), have concomitant chronologies and emerged at practically the same time (Bourdieu 1966, 1992),they strengthen the intellectual and professional function performed by fieldwork. Individuation, a major component factor in the modern relationship with the world, finds here an interesting expression in the human sciences. Significantly, the principle of scientific ownership is contemporary with that of literary property (Edelman 2004). Despite the fact that the principle of the thesis clearly came before the era of modernity, the new mark of ownership as part of the framework of the Vidalian contract (fieldwork practice) marked a turning point from the practices of compilation to those of original creation. An era of assemblage and copying, second- or third-hand summaries, and successive arrangementsmoved aside to make room forpersonal investigation, a guarantee of knowledge (new and real) and recognition (institutionaland professional). Knowledge and recognition operated in conjunctionwith the "field" acting as a body of individual and collective legitimacy, a guarantor of authenticity and reality, at once original and originating. In doing so, it held an essential

position in theepistemologicaldevelopment of classical geography, a veritable promotional coupduring the breaking up of thePangaeaof Humanities into the various continents ofhuman and social sciences (Sapiro 2004). It also held an essential place in the differentiationof geography from history,in particular, and also sociology (Chartier 2009).

Thoughts and considerations regarding fieldwork in geography obviously involve gauging the evidence produced from the field (Dumont 2007), reassessing turning points in the history of the discipline in relation to the field (see above) and making full use of what it means, at a time of reflexive developments in the social sciences—biographism, deconstruction of all sorts, culturalism, etc.—to be “an author of one’s field.”

4 The Order of Discourse or Bringing Order to Confusion

A reference to Foucault seems necessary here and the call to put in order has a dual value: putting in order as a progression of the approach—sequencing and standardization of the practice—and putting in order as a means of controlling practices—inclusion/exclusion of legitimate objects (Foucault 1971). A selective account of fieldwork is made: there is no room for affinities, emotions, and anxieties,for example,in scholarly usage. Its writing/reconstructionis the subject of censorship, or more precisely self-censorship in the majority of cases, via the internalization and acceptance of scientific protocols. Even “off the record,” fieldwork taboos are rarely explicitly expressed and circulate covertly, covered up by the very scientific habitus that overvalues it.

Putting discourse on fieldwork into order and accordance with normsis built on the inseparable concepts of presence and absence. The field is the Arlesian woman, the object at the heart of the plotand always invisible yet transcribed:an “elusive truth” (Achard 1981). The field, as well as its written and visual representations, stabilizes the relationships of coexistence and interactionas both an empirical presence and an

attempt to produce intelligibility. The transmutation of the former by the standards of the latteralchemize the geographer-author-professional's desire for knowledge and, therefore, power, while transcending the limitations of what is experienced through the intent of truth. The order of the discourse arranges and controls the real, but according to procedures that are undoubtedly more complex than geographers often realize: "the configuration of research is simple: on one handthere is the researcher; on the otheris observable reality" (Claval 2001,41).

In terms of empirical aspects, a few obvious points open up avenues for consideration. Firstly, the hierarchy of the senses, a cultural heritage (at least Western) of the modern period, gives priority to sight (the noble sense,*par excellence*) over and above the other senses (base, by extension) and, furthermore in ideological terms, constructs a principle of order and classification between the sexes and races (Dias 2004). "The emergence of fieldwork investigations was, from the eighteenthcentury onwards, homologouswith the way in which observation became"a perceptible form of knowledge accompanied by systematically negative conditions": "exclusion of hearsay"and removal of intermediaries; "almost exclusive privilege for sight" [Foucault 1966,144]" (Durand 2001). As we know, the inclusion of sounds, smells, and tastes in geography occurred only recently, and on the margins of the discipline, benefiting from the phenomenological expansion of geographicity. While the prevalence of the visual aspect interferes with our perception of geographic reality (Deleuze 1981) it has also, in a certain manner, enabled the congestion and surplus of ordinary perceptions to be bypassed. By going straight to the point, the dominance of the visual aspect made the empirical findings of fieldwork clearer, was based on tangible utilization of materiality (because it is seen), facilitated familiarity with knowledge of the earth and nature previously constructed on this prevalence, and formed a certain disciplinary uniqueness via the paradigm of the form. In short, it enabled and consolidated the definition of a sphere of scientificity, which was already marked out to some extent.

The choice of landscape, religiously neutral, as a central object of choicein the geographical approachwas consequently related toa "natural" and naturalizing adherence to values and ideological codes (but evidence is always ideological),and

builtthe system of values on a sensorial hierarchy that gave importance to space and "obviously" equated to a principle rationality. Beautiful works on the landscape (Dagognet...; Roger 1995;Cauquelin 2000) have subtly shown how, amid the more obvious cultural and intellectual issues, via the intermediary of an artistic genre (pictorial) and a visual technique (the "legitimate"and natural perspective),both anature-landscape equivalenceand evidence of the view that connects us to the worldin immediate transparency were constructed (Starobinsky). "Perspective lays out reality and creates an image of it that we view as being real: this process succeeds beyond all expectation as it remains hidden, as we ignore its power, its existence even, and we firmly believe that we perceive according to nature that which we lay out implicitly by a "perceptual habit."The difficulty of even becoming conscious of this implicit "self-evidence"that is perception in perspectiveclearly showsthe extent of our blindness: we can see neither the organ that gives us sight, nor the filter and screen through which and with which we see"(Cauquelin 2000,100). Perspective, the "symbolic form" (Panofsky) which was born during the Renaissance (the Greeks had no "landscape" category or even a word to name it, and nature was, therefore, not a landscape), a feat of the modern subject, shifted the focus of knowledge and its (re)production, and "naturalized" and informed our view. Geographers consequently cultivated a paradigm of the form (morphologyof all kinds) (Robic 2000) andthe recognition of these forms provides as many signs (Deleuze 1981) that are (re)identified by sight. The form is perceived by sight, which gives rise to the pertinent and thought-provoking questions raised by Reginald Golledge. If"you don't have to have sight to have vision": how can one be a geographer when one cannot see? (Golledge 2002,102).

Against all evidence, therefore, a geographer's view over his field is always informed by at least two factors: because he sees forms as they really are, in perspective, and because the field is neverblank. On the contrary, the geographer's view is always saturated by acquired facts, prior constructions, representations of varied detail, and projected knowledge, which are all perceptive and imaginary influences that filter perception of the here and now. Because "the truly new would be perfectly inexpressible" (Valéry), by the same token, the field is always a test of truth: the evaluation of its extent produces reality—makes reality—whileat the same timethe veracity of the experience attests to its

reality. This makes the verificationunfalsifiablebecause the experience of it and its reconstruction can only ever be strictly personal, filtered through*representations*, in the strictest sense of the term, of the geographer-subject.

The evidence of sight which, in the capturing of a frame (the regional perimeter, the view point from a summit), gives the geographer the impression that the whole offers itself up to him ("The landscape is for him an inexhaustible source of information that is directly offered to him":Claval 2001,41), has enabled the visual aspect to gain its ideological efficiency in the positivist paradigm. Furthermore, the culture of perspective and the perception of nature,which it constructed over several centuries, has meant that the feeling of harmony—a recurring theme in geography, because the perception and what is seen are assimilated—has been taken for granted.

For geographers in the field, the overriding power of the visual aspect requires an overlooking standpoint, and thus elevation, without which a panoramic capture and, therefore, a point of view are impossible. "They [geographers]are not explorers, ordinary travelers,or tourists that content themselves with following an itinerary. Their aim is to move from local observation to a viewpoint that leaves out no part of the surrounding area: surveying the landscape from a vertically elevated standpoint makes this possible" (Claval 2001,43–45). The search for the highest point of elevation is undoubtedly the preferredchronotope of geographers; they can grasp everything, from the nearest to the farthest, make out material forms and large masses in three dimensions from a mounted viewpoint, and appropriate vast stretches as far as the eyes can see. In short, "to be a real geographer, one must know how to acquire an Icarian point of view" (Claval 2001: 26).

As long as the landscape is considered to be an essential object-document, as long as geographers equate their discipline with that of a crossroads between science/science of relationswith the vast ambition ofgrasping all aspects of this single palimpsest, evidence from fieldwork maintains an essential cultural optical illusion (the most damaging and epistemologically serious aspect of which is undoubtedly the landscape-nature equation). However, for all this, written accounts of fieldwork have not appeared any

less convincing and seemed true because the rhetoric developed enabled the creation of an effect of reality,and the intelligence with which the ideas were expressed gave an overall coherence.

The evidence and reality of fieldwork stem tautologically from here. The vast ambition of the evidence produced by geography, which combines both natural and cultural objects, is undoubtedly one of the reasons why geographers have proved to be less eloquent concerning their fieldwork practices than their colleagues in ethnology and anthropology,and have shown a preference for focusingtheir methodological and self-reflexive considerations on mapmaking—the panoptic translation of the field. The map reproduces the all-inclusive desire, achieves the holistic temptation, and succeeds in taking total possession of the tract of space it is translating. It enables the use of“the true method[which] consistsintaking a step backso that the whole becomes clear” (Claval 2001,53).Even if“the map will never be able to replace the need to turn to firsthand knowledge of the fielddue to the single fact that it provides a static image, whereas moving through the field enables circumstantial elements of diversity (the seasons) to be felt, as well as the various forms of movement” (George 1970,24). The makeshift nature of observation, the most commonly used method—“The first aspect of any geographical approach is observation” (George 1970,19)—is all the more opaque because observing does not mean“seeing”but noticing/distinguishingand, rather interestingly, supervising and controlling. Observation, which is visual by definition, is a practice that involves order.

5 Bypassing the Eye

Rejecting the evidence of one’s own eyesrequires a certain reflexive distancethat, due to theirintellectual objectives as well as cultural and technical modes of representation, was inconceivable for the classical geographers. Later debates over visibility and invisibility (partially) dismantled the evidence. “Visibility and invisibility share the common characteristic, at least in part, that they can be governed by measurement. Elsewhere, there is a certain margin of interference between visibility and invisibility

when situations and structures give rise to exteriorized outcroppings, which fall within the scope of observation, while overall remaining a matter for investigation, statistics, or laboratory research[. . .]. Visible aspects are attained through observation, invisible aspects through methods specifically suited to their nature and, therefore, differentiated insofar as invisible aspects are diverse. [. . .] The problem is complicated, furthermore, by the imprecision of limits between visibility and invisibility" (George 1970,19). It is, therefore, significant that geographers are finally grasping the field as an object to be questioned at a time when technological innovations (computer-generated imaging of various types with spectacular scalar precision) are no doubt radically altering the relationship with visual aspects and the veracity of their perception. "From the image relayed through cameras, we are given onlydigital data on screens,with no vanishing point, and illegible, even indecipherable, for the uninstructed. The distance that the processes of painting and literary description maintain and erasein turnhas become an opaque obstacle;there is likely something to be perceived but we do not know [how to do it] by which sense, approach, with which sensory tool or prosthesis?"(Cauquelin 2000,163).

Computer-generated images, which have been produced only through new intellectual technologies, no longer *represent*, but*present* and update spaces, differently with each mathematical operation, according to the variables chosen and their sets of constraints/variables. Beyond the vast representation of the earth covered byGoogleEarth, which is in itself somewhat destabilizing, what is at stake is the cultural transformation of a visual relationship that enables us to "view" and not "see" submarine forms or those of Saturn,for example, without it being possible to experience them. Thesevisualizationsare the pure conceptual and technological productsof a collective intelligence and are updated by software, without the involvement of any co-presence, which is not only methodologically remote (mathematized geography) but radically impossible. "Landscapes" (the term should be discussed in relation to this subject) may remain in the memory: digital that is, neither retinal or sensorial. Digital protocols make them possible and have definitively reversed the order of evidence: no longer from phenomena to ordering/layouts, but from the latter to a mathematically

possible or probable appearance, radically disturbing the “evident” etymology of the visual.

Conclusion

In epistemological terms, these spaces, pureartifactsof cognitive activity, involve many other things besides digital models of the field, the experience of which remains possible, or spatialist logarithms. Neither do they pertain solely to the numerous scientific approaches and reinterpretations in the social sciences that have altered the relationship of science with the landscape, from phenomenological trends to cultural, culturalist or psychoanalytical approaches (haptic approaches, for example). Rather than invisible regularities or perceptions differentiated according to cultures or groups, these working methods create visual possibilities, conceivable visions unattainable through the known senses. These“fields,”purely abstract writing, could not be translated into sensory forms of any sort. Something akin to a weightlessness of the senses is produced, in an expanded universe in which forms are studied through the necessity of their calculations, no longer through a perceptibly recognizable appearance. To be more precise, one usage remains, that of the mind:cognitive intelligence that recognizes itself. However, the visualization of these spaces is done without the experience of space and timeand the intellectual digital technicalitythus produces a purely theoretical geographical narrative. Gaining an understanding of this will involve theoretical and epistemological considerations of the “field”and the categories that geographers use to grasp it, whether modern or otherwise.

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Abstract

Until now, French geographers have rarely questioned their intellectual and disciplinary relationship with fieldwork. Using the image of the "Arlesian woman," a French cliché of simultaneous presence and absence, the author develops the hypothesis of a collective "fiction," always evoked but almost never clarified. The paper presents successive analytical levels to assess the disciplinary issues stemming from a reflexive approach to "the field" as a subject of research. Three specific approaches have been chosen: first, the place and status of "fieldwork" in academic useand epistemological analyses of the discipline, then the complex relationships between scientific and literary ways of writing (the geographer as an author), and last the consequences of the dominance of visualization in the relationship between geographers and their fields. To conclude, the paper invites us to collectively engage in reflection on "fieldwork" at a time when digital technologies are fundamentallyaltering the codes of representation, in particular visual representation.