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Images for Sale: Cards and Colours at the Photothèque of the Musée de l'Homme

Anaïs Mauuarin

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By examining the case of the Photothèque of the Musée de l'Homme created in 1938¹ and its original material conception, this paper wishes to question the values attached to photographs and the means by which these photographs acquire said values. The study of the materiality of photographic objects, which has been promoted by the works of Elizabeth Edwards in particular, undoubtedly offers a good entry point into these issues.² Researches conducted along this line have highlighted a number of mechanisms that bring scientific and historical values to images. However, they have too often overlooked another aspect: the commercial value of images. Only analyses focusing on structures with an explicit commercial orientation (photo agencies, image banks, etc.) have directly addressed this question.³ Such organisms,

* We choose to join this sample of our scholarly work to *4A LABORATORY Application* because it is written in English. We can easily send you another example, published in French in a peer reviewed journal, if needed.

¹ This new photo library was created when the Musée de l'Homme opened in Paris. The museum was officially inaugurated on June 20, 1938 as a substitute for the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro. On the history of the new museum, see §§De L'Estoile_2007§§, §§Laurière_2008§§, §§Blanckaert ed._2015§§. On the Musée du Trocadéro in its early days, see §§Dias_1991§§, and for the transition period, with the arrival of Paul Rivet and George Henri Rivière as its directors (1928–1935), see §§Delpuech, Laurière and Peliter-Caroll eds._2017§§.

² Since the 1990s, this new approach has found its way in the history of photography, as demonstrated by the introduction to the first volume of the new academic journal *Transbordeur*, in which Estelle Sohier, Olivier Lugon and Anne Lacoste insist on the fact that “materiality affects the meaning, the value and the uses attributed to photographs and their performativity” (§Lacoste, Lugon & Sohier eds._2017!10§).

³ See for instance the works of Paul Frosh (§Frosh_2003§) and, with a more historical perspective, those of Marie-Eve Bouillon (§Bouillon_2012§) and more importantly of Estelle Blaschke (§Blaschke_2009§, §Blaschke_2011§, §Blaschke_2016§). On photo agencies and image banks, see a recent volume of *Fotogeschichte*, “Business mit Bildern. Geschichte und Gegenwart der Fotoagenturen” (§Fotogeschichte_2016§).

which particularly emerged after the 1920s, deserve specific attention. But does it mean that they led to a division of labour and prerogatives between those in charge of selling and distributing images on the one hand and, on the other, institutions like scientific museums that were more concerned with accumulating documentary photographs and constituting scientific collections?⁴ Although there was an indisputable specialising process affecting photographic institutions at that time, the case of the Photothèque of the Musée de l'Homme suggests that such a dichotomy should be put into perspective.

The museum's photographs, which had the quality of documentary and scientific objects in full coherence with the status assigned to them since the end of the nineteenth century by anthropology (§Edwards ed._1992§) and sciences in general (§Daston and Galison_2007§; §Mitman and Wilder_2016§), took on an added commercial value promoted by the museum. Under the initiative of the museum's director, Paul Rivet, the various actors involved in the Photothèque created a “commercial department” (*service commercial*) with the aim to make photographs available to clients and to reproduce and sell them to illustrated journals, publishers or private individuals. It was also designed to expand by storing all the collections of prints provided to the museums by its collaborators.⁵ The creation of this department involved a specific reorganisation of all images and the individual treatment of photographs, which were materially arranged in a completely new fashion. Therefore, economic aspects had an impact on the materiality of the museum's vast photographic collections, as much as on their scientific uses, as already mentioned above (§Barthe_2000§). The accumulation and creation of documentary collections on one hand and the commercial distribution of images on the other were considered to be two faces of the same coin: the Photothèque was designed as a tool to promote the numerous photographs collected and preserved by the museum.

⁴ The above-mentioned volume of *Transbordeur* indeed suggests that such a division existed in 1885–1905. While the first lines of the introduction rightly point out that “at the end of the nineteenth century [...] new means of photomechanical reproduction led to a growing number of cheap illustrations in increasingly numerous printed material”, the volume does not tackle the issue of the commercial circulation of images but instead treats independently the question of the deep changes affecting image collections in “heritage institutions, museums, archives and libraries (§Lacoste, Lugon & Sohier eds._2017!9§).

⁵ This phenomenon was by no means specific to photography but was in fact a common imperative for all object collections in the museum, in full coherence with the importance given then to the ethnological study of material culture. On this aspect, see §§L'Estoile_2007§§. On the notion of “collaborator”, to which I shall turn to later, see §§L'Estoile 2005§§.

One of these promotional means was the presentational form of images, which were individually pasted on standardised colour-coded card mounts. This system was the result of numerous experiments and innovations which took place at the Museum during a relatively short time frame around 1938. As suggested by Elizabeth Edwards building on the works of Christine Barthe, such a “regularity of the physical arrangement” of images created “an equivalence between them” (§Edwards_2002!71§). According to these two authors, who have borrowed Johannes Fabian’s critical approach (§Fabian_1983§), these material aspects, along with other organisational elements such as divisions into geographical areas and ethnic groups, contributed to build and develop anthropological narratives behind which the discipline concealed the historicity of its objects of study. Thanks to the recent rediscovery of the Photothèque’s archives at the Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac,⁶ these narratives, which have stressed the epistemological effects produced by the way photographs were classified, deserve further investigation: one must take into account the underlying economic objectives behind the arrangement of these collections, so as to have a finer and more comprehensive understanding of what was at stake in the constitution of these photographic collections. It is necessary to develop a more precise vision of these processes of accumulation and arrangement of images, which are not systematically deprived of any commercial motives.

The organisational plans of the Photothèque, resulting from the efforts of a man called Odet de Montault,⁷ reveal shifting ideas on the manufacturing and format of the cards holding the photographs. The solution that was chosen at the time was used until the 2000s when the Photothèque was closed down and the photographs transferred to the Musée du quai Branly-

⁶ These archives consist of three boxes containing various types of material with no clear order. Among them are plans for the organisation of the photo library, on which this paper relies particularly, as well as Activity Reports covering at least the period 1938–1960. We here refer to the original number of the boxes. However, because this fund is currently being re-organised, call numbers are likely to change soon.

⁷ Son of the marquis de Montault, Odet de Montault was 29 years old in 1938 when he joined the museum staff. Jacques Soustelle immediately put him in charge of the constitution of the commercial department. But he did not stay long at the museum: he was mobilised during the war and then resigned in October 1945. He nevertheless left a deep impression on the department and his collaborators, as evidenced by some very warm letters, for instance those from André Leroy-Gourhan (Bibliothèque Centrale du Muséum/Archives of the Musée de l’Homme/2 AM 1K 67c).

Jacques Chirac.⁸ After reviewing the hesitations and the different options considered for the cards—those that were abandoned as much as those that were finally adopted—, I will examine what these choices materialise. They reflect a pioneering attention on the part of the Photothèque, which was then embracing the model of a modern photo agency, to photographers who were given a legal status based on the recognition of their right to their own images. On the other hand, the materiality at work also contributed to make these images available for sale and distribution by explicitly insisting on their status as commodities.

Materialised values: the origin of a codification

On the card mounts that composed the photo library until it closed, the image is placed at the centre and surrounded by various coloured labels (#Fig.1#). In the top left-hand corner of the photograph entitled “Young Muong girls” (“*Fillettes Muong*”), for instance, which was taken during a field trip to Indochina in which participated Lucienne Delmas before she became responsible of the museum’s photographic fund,⁹ the yellow geographic label for Asia is juxtaposed to the label indicating the disciplinary field to which the image belongs,¹⁰ that is, in this case, ethnology. Both stickers overlap the cardboard edge, thus making the colour visible—and with them the information they refer to—without having to pull the card out from the filling cabinet (#Fig.2#). Christine Barthe has already studied these labels and has particularly underlined the fact that the importance given to geography in the general arrangement of photographs, as represented by the first sticker, reinforced the division of ethnology into areas at the expense of a historicised approach of its objects of study

⁸ This transfer has produced a lot of literature. On photographs, see Carine Peltier’s note (§Peltier_2007§).

⁹ A collaborator to the Asian Department at the Musée du Trocadéro, Lucienne Delmas made this field trip in 1937–1938 with Jeanne Cuisinier; they brought back numerous photographs (BCM/Archives MH/2 AM 1M1d). Lucienne Delmas became officially in charge of the Photothèque of the Musée de l’Homme in 1938 (BCM/Archives MH/2 AM 1D2) and progressively became its prominent figure until the 1950s.

¹⁰ The final arrangement of the Photothèque originally included four main categories: ethnology, (physical) anthropology, palaeontology, and archaeology. In reality, photographs belonging to the “ethnology” category were by far the most numerous, thus echoing the museum’s priority which, even though it was a “museum of man” and not only a museum of ethnology, gave pre-eminence to the discipline (§Laurière_2015§).

(§Barthe_2000§). The chosen colours reflected a caricatured and racial vision (#Fig.3#) inherited from Linnaeus.¹¹

To these two labels was added a third one. Located in the bottom right-hand corner, it has been given little attention and is yet bigger than the other two.¹² Its presence there and its colour answer another question, which is quite unusual in the context of a scientific museum: terms and conditions for the commercial use of photographs. The colour blue meant that the image was owned by the museum. As its owner—whether the author is the museum’s photographic department or a private individual who had yielded his rights—, the museum could have disposed of it, sold reproductions and reaped all the benefits. Other colours included white or red according to legal terms of use. These colours represent the three different legal or commercial statutes of images in the Photothèque, with no relation to any geographic or disciplinary category. This classification was implemented by Odet de Montault around 1939, and yet it was quite vague: neither the code nor the meaning that the code finally came to refer to had been fixed originally.

In one of his first drafts, Montault had only planned to distinguish between two kinds of images: photographs “of objects belonging to the museum taken outside their original environment [and those] of the museum display” on one hand and, on the other, “photographs taken outside the museum”.¹³ Such a distinction was based on the observation that to different images corresponded different uses, some images being much more important visual tools than others and playing a decisive role in the internal organisation of the museum¹⁴ and in the promotion of its activities, especially through the printed media. This fundamental difference, which was consubstantial to photographs, had to be visible in the material itself, that is, the

¹¹ In the final version adopted by the museum, there was a black tab for Africa, yellow for Asia, red for South America, pink for North America, etc. This coloured division finds its origin in the racial classification presented by Carl von Linnaeus around 1758 in the second edition of his *Systema Naturae*. In 1938, however, the plan designed by Odet de Montault was somewhat different: white Africa was green, America grey, Asia orange, Oceania red, while black was already referring to black Africa.

¹² These tabs are of the brand Flambo; tabs at the top are “N°5” and tabs at the bottom are “N°10”.

¹³ MQB/Archives Photothèque/ Box 5.

¹⁴ Photographs of objects were sometimes used to illustrate labels or catalogues. Fieldtrip photographs were inserted in display cases during exhibitions in order to explain how objects were used. They were all made on a very precise model (in terms of size, caption, typography, position, etc.) (BCM/2 AM 1 l2). On this question, which was already at stake at the time of the Musée du Trocadéro (1928–1935), see §§Mauuarin *in* Delpuech et al. ed. 2017§§. More generally, on the various uses of photographs in museums, see Edwards and Lien 2014.

colour of the cards holding the photographs. Even though Montault did not challenge the use of cards measuring 22.5 by 29.5 centimetres already employed at the museum,¹⁵ he suggested that images related to the museum's life should be "pasted on a brown card", while those coming from outside should be "pasted on a grey card".

This distinction, which was based on the content and origin of images, was soon to be replaced by another, as evidenced by Montault's more detailed plans of October 1938. It was driven by the commercial goals of the Photothèque. According to Montault, "the commercial exploitation of the new photo library compels us to improve the material aspects of the classification originally adopted by the Museum",¹⁶ thus implying that "before any arrangement on a methodological or geographical basis should be made, one must classify the photographic prints held by the photo library" under three categories:

1) Photographs that are exclusively owned by the Museum

Fund(s) of the Museum and of the Museum of natural history

2) Photographs that are lent to the Museum

Copies cannot be made or sold by the commercial department outside of the Museum

3) Prints made by the Museum's Photo Department (Service Photo-Musée)

Copies can be made for free when used within the Museum, while a specific contract will be made for their sale; the exploitation of these photographs will be a source of revenue for the Museum (expected profits: 50/50)

These three categories summarize the various reproduction and diffusion modalities of the images in the museum's fund. Photographs that were owned by the institution (1) coexisted alongside others that were only temporarily lent to it and could not be distributed outside the institution (2). There was even a third and more complex category: some authors put their

¹⁵ Cards of this size were used in the early 1930s at the photo library that was initiated within the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, replaced in 1938 by the Musée de l'Homme. On the photo library of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, see §Mauuarin *in* Delpuech et al. ed. 2017§§.

¹⁶ Odet de Montault wrote at least four drafts about the new organisation of the future Photothèque. In this part of my paper I mainly focus on two of them: a manuscript draft, which seems to be the first, and a typescript one, which appears to have been written later and is the only one to be dated, October 15, 1938 (MQB/Archives Photothèque/Box 5).

photographs under a “*contrat régie*”: this “specific contract for sale”, which was being drafted at the time—a point to which we shall return—, stipulated that the Museum managed the prints but had to give half of the copyright profits to the owner of the sold copies (3).

Following Montault’s first project, these three categories would have been embodied materially in the support on which they were fixed. Montault wrote that “in order to distinguish these prints [with distinct commercial statutes], they need to be pasted on cards of different colours”. In a manuscript version, he suggested that for “prints exclusively owned by the Museum” (1) a “grey card” should be used, for those “lent to the Museum” (2), a “brown card”, and finally, for those under “*contrat régie*” (3) a “pink card”. He developed his plan in a typescript version dated October 15, 1938 by giving the precise references from the manufacturer’s colour chart (#Fig. 4#):

Preliminary steps before classification

The distinction of prints fixed on vellum cards: [...] the three main categories of photographs in the new photo library’s fund shall be indicate by vellum cards of different colours

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Photos owned by the museum</i> | <i>(vellum already in use at the museum</i> |
| <i>Photos lent to the museum</i> | <i>(vellum n°4</i> |
| <i>Photos under “contrat régie”</i> | <i>(vellum n°8</i> |

According to such a plan, the various commercial and legal terms for the use of images would seem to be embodied in their materiality itself, that is, the cards on which they were fixed. Before they would even see the image mounted on the card that they would pull out vertically from the filling cabinet, visitors or clients would immediately know, by the colour of the card, the reproduction conditions of the image, that is, its exchange value. These different cards would alone have constituted a code that literally incorporated images, making their legal or commercial statute visually prominent, so much so that it could not be ignored.

As soon as December 1938 this card system was nevertheless replaced by the blue, white and red labels, as evidenced by an invoice dated December 7. There were above all practical reasons. In addition to the material difficulties the Musée de l’Homme faced to buy enough cards, there was an interest in distinguishing between the two steps of recording the

collections and then classifying them. Stickers were preferable to cards because they made it possible to dissociate the fixing of photographs and their precise classification; at the same time they made it possible to include retroactively all the collections already mounted on cards during the early period of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro (§Mauuarin_2017§). More importantly, these labels facilitated the handling of material when an image moved from one category to another: the Museum was more than pleased when photographs originally under “*contrat régie*” (white sticker) were finally transferred to and owned by the institution (blue sticker)¹⁷. This materiality would eventually be adopted for more than 50 years at the museum, thus validating Montault’s pioneering category of the “*contrat régie*”: it was a key element of the museum’s organisation, which undoubtedly contributed to the Photothèque’s success and its collaborative dimension.

The Photothèque as an agency

With the three-colour code first inscribed in the cards and later in the stickers, the museum gave photographers recognition of their authorship in a very material and concrete way. The former Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro had already paid specific attention to photographers, whether amateur or professional, on which it had held a temporary exhibition between 1933 and 1935 (§Mauuarin_2015§). Several members of the photo agency Alliance Photo, such as Pierre Verger, René Zuber and Pierre Boucher, were close collaborators of the museum and of Georges Henri Rivière and must have contributed to draw attention to the issue of copyrights, photographers still then largely being denied their rights by press agencies (§Denoyelle_1997!58–63§)¹⁸. Estelle Blaschke even speaks of a “culture of disregard” at that time: publishers and image sellers systematically showed contempt for the emerging rights of those who took pictures (§Blaschke_2011!45§). In France, only the Berne Convention for the

¹⁷ The history of the Photothèque reveals that at other times—around 1964 particularly—a number of collections originally under “*contrat régie*” were included in the museum’s funds when it appeared impossible to contact authors and update their wishes.

¹⁸ The 1920s and 1930s, however, witnessed a growing recognition of the work of photographers, especially on the part of some French magazines like *Vu*, which started crediting star authors (§Frizot and Veigy_2009§).

Protection of Literary and Artistic Works¹⁹ stressed the importance of granting photographers copyright ownership, with no binding effect however.²⁰

Therefore, members of the Photothèque can be seen as pioneers when they put in place a “*contrat régie*” in 1938 (#Fig.5#). Not only did it turn the photographer—designated as the “owner of commercial rights”—into a contracting party, but it also and more importantly compelled the museum to pay him royalties “resulting from the commercial exploitation of [his] photographs” (point 8). The Photothèque thus took on an intermediary role similar to that of a photo agency: photographers put it in charge of managing their photographs, from their preservation to their distribution and sale. In this perspective, the Photothèque set up a system of collection by author: a series number was attributed to “each contributor or individual under a *contrat régie*” and was “immutable regardless of the year of entry of prints or plates”.²¹ Collection n°21, for example, is that of Pierre Verger, n°33 of Henri de Monfreid, n°41 of Marcel Griaule, etc., numbers more or less following the inventory order.²² The collection number was then included in the identification number inscribed on each photograph,²³ thus making it easy to trace them and to ensure duly payment of copyright fees.

The “*contrat régie*”, which was very favourable to photographers, and the collection system then put in place were a way to satisfy Paul Rivet’s wish to “engage the museum’s

¹⁹ The Berne Convention was signed during the first conference on September 9, 1886, and then was regularly revised until the 1970s. Photography was first mentioned in 1896 at the Paris Conference in the form of an additional act.

²⁰ Until the 1957 law that for the first time included photographs among “works of the mind”, conditions to ensure the protection of photographs were decided by courts when necessary.

²¹ Odet de Montault, *Photothèque*, October 15, 1938 (MQB/Archives Photothèque/Box 5). In documents of the same period prepared by Lucienne Delmas are lists of these first collections (MQB/Archives Photothèque/B4).

²² Before 300, numbers do not necessarily follow the chronological order in which collections were acquired by the Photothèque. After 300, they more or less reflect this order, but it remains approximate because several collections could have been deposited simultaneously, while others were put on hold for months or even years due to the lack of staff, or simply because some of them were so numerically important that they required specific means to be inventoried.

²³ This collection number is added *a posteriori* to the identification number of the collections that were deposited and inventoried at the time of the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro, then comprising only the year followed by the collection number in the year (eg.: 33-2345). From 1938 onwards, a third digit identifying the “collection” was added: in order to avoid a complete re-inventory of all the collections, it was placed after the first two and not in between.

collaborators”²⁴ so that they would give their photographs to the Photothèque. This institution would promote images by ensuring their material protection and control²⁵ and by selling them, while authors could expect benefits in return. Such incentives, which were not unattractive, worked as a lever to expand the museum’s photographic collections: they were always geographically incomplete in the eyes of the Photothèque staff, who favoured exhaustiveness. Two complementary logics were at work here, one scientific and the other commercial, both founded on the need to possess as many images as possible. The Photothèque wanted to have it both ways and to this end created the “*contrat régie*”, which gave its staff some leverage to negotiate with photographers: it allowed the Photothèque to attract beyond the circle of its most “willing” collaborators (*bonnes volontés*) who were already convinced of its scientific mission (§Institut français d’Afrique noire_1953§; §Blanckaert_2001§; §L’Estoile_2005§).

While this contract and the collections put photographers’ authorship at the heart of the Photothèque’s organisation, the general arrangement of the prints remains paradoxically obscure. Collections were in fact classified in the filing cabinets according to geographic and ethnic categories that took no consideration of the place or the date when these pictures were taken (§Barthe_2000§). The cards themselves rarely provided the photographer’s name. On the vast majority of these pictures, only the collection number made the link with the author and was a very indirect way for visitors and clients to have access to this information²⁶. Despite the attention that the Photothèque paid to authors and the museum’s interests in photographers, the materiality of images tended to obliterate their names, to hide them from the view of visitors and clients. It suggests that a name was not yet a sales argument; cards instead put forward the availability of images.

²⁴ Jacques Soustelle, *Note sur l’activité du service commercial de la Photothèque*, n.d. (1939) (BCM/Archives MH/AM 112c).

²⁵ On the way the material organisation of photographs may add to their value, see Estelle Blaschke’s conclusions based on Oliver Wendel Holmes’ writings (c. 1857) (§Blaschke_2011!11§).

²⁶ There is no trace of a free-access database that would have allowed visitors and clients to find the author corresponding to each number. Such a database would have made it easier to obtain the information, while still leaving the photographer in the background.

Making images available

Alongside its activities as an agency, the Photothèque of the Musée de l'Homme wanted to make its images available: its objective to expand its collections went hand in hand with an ambition to distribute photographs beyond the realm of scholars and specialists. In that regard the department went a step further than the project of the Musée du Trocadéro in 1932, where the “photographic documentation room” was mainly designed for the museum’s staff and to specialists and, in some cases and “upon justification, to a restricted audience”.²⁷ In contrast, the 1936 project of the Musée de l'Homme included a “large reading room [...] accessible to the public”.²⁸ Archives related to its operating do not mention any registration book; reports, though not exhaustive, refer to a number of “visits”: visitors seemed to have been able to come and go as they would. In addition to specialists and researchers with appointments, a whole range of different people representing potential clients would also have had access to the collections.²⁹

The white, blue and red code was essentially intended to an external audience; its function was to provide information on the terms of reproduction of images in printed publications or other commercial media.³⁰ Odet de Montault added other precisions on the material conception of the cards, which increased the availability of images [repetition de added]: viewers could think of ways to fix photographs on other supports accompanying or illustrating other discourses. Montault came up with two ideas, which underline the standardisation of images and put their contextual singularity at a distance.

²⁷ Georges Henri Rivière, *Principes de muséographie ethnographique*, February 24, 1932 (BCM/Archives MH/ 2 AM 1 G2e).

²⁸ Anonymous, *Rapport annexe aux plans des nouvelles installations du Trocadéro*, January 27; 1936 (BCM/Archives MH/2 AM 1G3d).

²⁹ During the year 1946 the department dealt with many representatives from magazines like *Tourisme et travail*, *Sciences et Voyages*, *Réalité* or *La Marseillaise* and answered various requests, sometimes quite unusual like that of a Mr Paul-Marguerite, who was looking for a picture of the former Trocadéro to make a “*cul-de-lampe*” (G. Bailloud, *Rapport du 3e trimestre 1946*, MQB/Archives Photothèque/Box Prudhomme 2).

³⁰ Some clients were looking for pictures, particularly of objects, to insert in films. It was for instance the case of “young filmmakers” Zimbacca and Bédouin, who became regular visitors and clients of the Photothèque in 1951 and 1952 (MQB/Archives Photothèque/Box 5).

First, according to Montault's more elaborated project, the caption was no longer to be included beneath the image but "written on the back of the vellum", that is, on the reverse of the card (#Fig.6#). It became impossible to apprehend both the image and its caption at the same time: it was now necessary to turn over the card to move from one to the other. Although indications regarding the general geographical classification remained visible, information on what was represented was physically hidden behind the image, which, when extracted from the filling cabinet, seemed at first sight deprived of any caption. In addition to this process of partial decontextualisation, Montault insisted that prints fixed on cards should all be of the same standard size, and he even recommended that "large existing formats should be printed in a smaller format." He designed a model card (#Fig.7#) of a landscape format in the centre of which he drew a slightly coloured rectangle where the "print" was to be fixed. This rectangle of a portrait format suggests that Montault wanted all prints to be immediately "readable" without visitors or clients having to rotate the card, which means that some images had to be reduced to be seen the proper way.

These two propositions, the first—the disappearance of the caption—being adopted only temporarily³¹, map out the contours of a method of looking at photographs promoted by Montault that neutralises both the original material history of photographs and their connection with the context and the specific narrative of when they were taken. Such a process of decontextualisation of photographic collections had already been initiated in 1935 at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge: images accumulated since 1884 had been reprinted and mounted on cards alongside a distinct file compiling all the corresponding captions, which were thus also separated from images (§Boast and *al.*_2001!3§). According to Elizabeth Edwards, this "regularity of the physical arrangement of image[s]" reinforced the "taxonomic readings" of images and their "visual comparability", thus creating "a cohesive anthropological object" (§Edwards_2002!71§). In his project, Montault presented a similar process of standardisation and homogenisation, even if it was there developed in a commercial perspective before it became a scientific project.

³¹ One finds examples of this in the collections of Gaëtan Fouquet and Jacques Gruault (in particular PP0147853 and PP0147547).

The standardisation of prints as well as the visual dissociation of the image and its caption, which still remains an enigma in the case of the Cambridge Museum,³² aimed above all at creating the best conditions so that these prints, which gave little information, could be looked at in a fairly simplified fashion, like images that visitors could imagine insert in various visual contexts, media and discourses. Formatting and isolating images contributed to put at a distance what Edwards has called their “own semiotic energies” (§Edwards_2002!71§) and what Walter Benjamin would have described as their “presence” (or “*hic et nunc*”) (§Benjamin_2008§). These material modalities also provoked a distancing of the actual referent (§Kracauer_1995§; §Sekula_1981§); articulated with the colour code informing on the exchange value of images, it reinforced the ability of images to circulate and be exchanged and thus turned them into commodities.

The meaning of collections in the light of economy

The fact that images were materialised and made available through colours and cards invites us to return to our analyses of the general organisation of the Photothèque. The choice of a geographical area division can indeed correspond to different goals: if those boundaries reflected the organisation of French ethnology and more specifically that of the museum (§Barthe_2000§), they also appeared to meet the needs of clients, who were particularly interested in what Jacques Soustelle called “geographical news” (“*l’actualité géographique*”).³³ The choice of colours associated with each continent³⁴—black for Africa, red for South America, yellow for Asia, etc.—referred to a popular vision of races, thus made easily recognizable. A later element that reinforced the availability of images is a file classifying images by subject matter (“*fichier-matière*”) created in the early 1940s. Visitors could then search the photographic collections by theme rather than by geographical areas.

³² The works of Boast, Guha and Herle, and Edwards provide no explanation for the physical arrangement of the cards, nor do they make clear how scholars used the captions written on separated files. It is highly improbable that an image with no caption could have been a satisfactory document for any ethnological research; suffice it here to remember that, as early as 1926, Marcel Mauss in his courses of descriptive ethnology insisted upon the importance of systematically recording the context in which the image was taken (§Mauss_1947§).

³³ Soustelle, “Note sur l’activité du service commercial de la Photothèque”, *s.d.* (1939) (BCM/Archives MH/2AM 112c).

³⁴ See above, note 12.

Through the case study of Montault's project and the background of the constitution of the photographic collections of the Musée de l'Homme, it becomes impossible to favour an epistemological analysis over another in order to understand the various tools put in place to manage the photographic collections. Although these various tools contributed to turn photographs into visually comparable elements that could meet the potentially scientific uses of images³⁵ and consequently create an "anthropological object", sources and uses reveal that such an analysis needs to be re-evaluated and that special attention must be paid to the economic objectives and aspects of photographic collections. Therefore the analysis of scientific and documentary collections must be combined with a more economic approach that is more common when dealing with photo agencies. In addition to the Musée de l'Homme, several French scientific institutions possessed a commercial department within their photo libraries or photographic department: this is true, for example, of the Ecole française d'Extrême Orient in the 1930s,³⁶ or the Institut français d'Afrique noire from the 1950s onward (§Touré_2000§). Does it mean that, from the 1930s onward, the objectives behind these large photographic collections were no longer strictly scientific?

If the Musée de l'Homme had indeed earned its place among major scientific institutions,³⁷ the commercial department of the Photothèque had also become prominent in the landscape of photo agencies. The Photothèque's staff in fact clearly spoke of it as a photo agency and compared it to others.³⁸ The logic of image accumulation, which remained an explicit goal of the Photothèque and of the other institutions mentioned above, therefore needs redefining. Whereas at the end of the nineteenth century, as François Brunet and Elizabeth Edwards have shown, scientific and anthropological institutions collected and arranged photographic collections to enhance their scientific authority (§Brunet_1993§; §Edwards_2001§), in the

³⁵ As Elizabeth Edwards has demonstrated in the case of the Cambridge Museum, the arrangement of photographs on cards encouraged a comparative approach, which had been at work in anthropology since the nineteenth century in close connection with the treatment of images. But studies are still needed to understand the actual use that scholars made of photographs in the 1930s, which was probably of an entirely different nature.

³⁶ On this photo library and the work of Jean Manikus as a photographer for the School, see the *Bulletins* and *Cahiers de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient* (1931–1942).

³⁷ It is worth recalling here that the museum had been under the tutelage of the Muséum national d'histoire naturelle in Paris since 1928.

³⁸ The Report for 4th trimester, 1952 is explicit when Lucienne Delmas notes that the prices of the Photothèque are "slightly cheaper than those of other agencies" (MQB/Archives Photothèque/Box 5).

1930s similar practices took on a very different meaning: for institutions like the Musée de l'Homme, they represented opportunities to establish themselves as authorities and economic powers. The challenge was now to make a difference in the market of images.

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