Theoretical Framework of the filmed Interview in Communication Studies

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Abstract: In the Social Sciences today, there are a variety of ways to approach the various areas of investigation and a wide range of observational methods. Depending on academic background and research interests, researchers explore and emphasize certain approaches and categorizations at the expense of others in the implementation of their audiovisual investigations. These observations lead us to first question the definition of image in its connection to the object of research and its status and, secondly, to identify the diversity of current practices and uses. Indeed, the status of an image changes according to the media used and the contexts of reception. The circulation of images promotes exchange and connection between the various groups of actors. If we awkwardly accompany images, we risk unwittingly betraying their original meaning. Furthermore, there is the possibility of conflicts or unintended distortions linked to the activities of projection and identification. Our goal will be to propose a methodological framework and establish an initial model for all researchers in Communication Studies using the audiovisual method. Finally, the researcher accepts not only to properly conduct his research, but also to present an audiovisual project taking into account from the start advantages, constraints, issues of influence and scientific impact.

Keywords: Research methodology in Social Sciences, information and communication, qualitative audiovisual research, filmed interview, image and power

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Pour une épistémologie de l'entretien filmé en Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication

Résumé : Aujourd'hui, il existe en Sciences Sociales, une multitude de façons d'appréhender les terrains d'investigation et un large panel de méthodes d'observation. Selon les parcours et les intérêts qui sous-tendent leur recherche, les chercheurs explorent et privilégient certaines orientations, certaines catégorisations aux dépens d'autres dans la mise en œuvre de leur enquête audiovisuelle. Ces constats nous conduisent d'une part à nous interroger sur la définition de l'image dans son rapport à l'objet de recherche et de son statut et d'autre part, à identifier la diver-

sité des pratiques et des usages actuels. En effet, le statut des images change selon les supports utilisés et les contextes de réception. Leur circulation favorise les échanges et les liens entre les différents groupes d'acteurs. Si nous accompagnons maladroitement les images, nous risquons à notre insu de trahir leur sens originel. De plus, il peut en résulter des conflits ou des distorsions non prévues liées aux activités de projection et d'identification dans laquelle chaque récepteur est placé. Notre objectif sera alors de proposer un cadre méthodologique et une ébauche de modélisation à destination de tout chercheur en Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication ayant recours à l'audiovisuel. Il faut noter que le chercheur s'engage alors non seulement à bien mener sa recherche mais aussi à réaliser un projet audiovisuel en mesurant dès le début avantages et contraintes, enjeux de pouvoir et impacts scientifiques.

Mots-clés : Méthodologie de recherche en Sciences Sociales, information et communication, recherche qualitative audiovisuelle, entretien filmé, image et pouvoir

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Introduction

This article is the result of lengthy reflection based on our scientific and professional research and experience. Our work in Communication Studies, documentary film training, audiovisual experience, intermediality research and familiarity with sociology and ethnomethodology have led us to develop an outline of a theoretical framework of the filmed interview. The goal is to outline the basis of a methodological framework for researchers in Communication Studies and to question the logic applied to the use of digital tools. There are many ways of negotiating research fields and a wide range of observational methods. Depending on their backgrounds and interests, researchers explore and prioritize certain approaches and categories over others in the definition of their projects. Work on qualitative audiovisual research is abundant in Anthropology and Sociology (Maresca & Meyer, 2013), however, there is still much ground to be covered for researchers in Communication Studies.

Faced with this theoretical deficit, we have decided to outline our initial reflection on the question in order to make a new contribution to the wide scope of work on the audiovisual in qualitative research in Communication Studies.

1. Research methods for the filmed interview

In Social Science, research on interview methods that reveal a variety of conceptions, methods and tools have served as the primary framework for the methodological principles of the filmed interview.

The advances of the Chicago School (participant observation) have structured research methods relating to both qualitative and quantitative study since the 1940s, whether the approach be inductive or hypothetico-deductive. Many researchers associated with this school have worked to develop the procedures required for the elaboration of methods of analysis, showing the complexity of transmission when

rules of interview codification go undefined. Scientific inquiry is more interested in the signification of words than the words themselves (Miles & Huberman, 2003).

Although qualitative research has by now acquired epistemological legitimacy, problems still arise in determining the boundary with quantitative research. We have no desire to take sides in the debate over qualitative versus quantitative research; rather, we see an obvious paradigmatic complementarity between the two.

Qualitative research on the interview allows one to take into account both the experience and the speech of the interviewee. It creates an opportunity for closeness to both the actor's reasoning and practices. Amongst the different fields focusing on the actor and his experience such as symbolic interactionism (understanding the meaning people give to their actions in terms of the context of their social interaction), ethnomethodology (understanding the meaning people give their activities through classification, transfer from factual to conceptual understanding) or phenomenology (conceptualizing an experience through reflection on our degree of consciousness in our relationship to phenomena), the definition of a methodological framework and choice of tools rests largely on the structure pre-defined by the researcher in reponse to the unique context with which he is presented. His talent, ethics and methodological rigor throughout the research process guarantee data quality, interpretation and the obtention of results (Strauss, 1987).

The choice of a qualitative methodology implies reflection on the type of interview, whether it be recorded or not, or even filmed.

Whichever technique he selects, the researcher must control interaction conditions between interviewer and interviewee, define the manner of speech collection and organize it in an "objective" manner.

2. Film or be filmed : a suggested typology of intentionality

In an era of digital equipment and its miniaturisation, the question of filming and being filmed is important as it concerns everyone in a variety of daily routines. Audiovisual recording, much in the same way as the elaboration of a semi-directive interview guide for collecting witness testimony, aims to understand actor practices and the resulting images. For this reason, it can be considered an important research tool (Terrenoire, 1985). We agree with the idea that the image is the trace of a reality at once social and fictionalized (Joly, 2006).

Thus, filmed speech, no matter how "natural" seeming, is neither neutral nor natural. The subtilty of the approach is linked to the definition of what is determined important to film and in the mastery of technical and esthetic languages. For this reason, any research based on the filmed interview must be begin with clearly defined intentions and establish operational rules.

Within a trans- and multi-media framework, scientific use of images and their distribution present the researcher with multiple configurations – both theoretical and practical – that allow projects to be at once dynamic, reflective and interactive.

We have identified a series of image uses available to Communication Studies researchers. This can be seen as an initial tool in configuring aresearch methodology. According to the methodology selected, the image completes or accompanies the audio interview. However, it is also a legitimate subject of study for those disciplines focusing on non verbal, spatial and esthetic questions. Furthermore, the image constitutes qualitative data available to researchers seeking to validate quantitative data. More broadly, in the context of digital networks, it can function as an agent of illustration and animation to the scientific community. In this way, it becomes a trace – endlessly reflected – allowing the researcher to reexamine his hypotheses once out of the field. In addition, with the help of the image he can observe, for example, his posture at the time of the interview, allowing him to consider any methodological bias he may have engendered.

Finally, diffusing filmed interviews to actors in the field helps validate the data and engages a critical response necessary to the continuation of the work. When made available to the public and multimedia ressource centers, the image as an archive document participates in the storing of cultural memory.

3. Methodological stakes and stances

Lengthy preparation is necessary before using a filmed interview. Researchers cannot bypass a certain number of material, technical and film questions. For example, in organizing collection mechanisms and information recording, the researcher must decide on equipment and film format, team members and the organisation of post-production, from editing to archiving. The researcher must master each parameter of the filmed interview process.

The researcher, open and responsive to the image, commits not only to properly conducting his research, but also to producing an audiovisual project which takes into account from the start advantages and constraints, stakes and drawbacks. These parameters taken as a whole are essential in getting *to the heart of the data* (Miles & Huberman, 2003). These parameters concern a variety of issues that we have identified – while making no claim to comprehensiveness – and referred to as POETEISS :

Power: The researcher's disciplinary field and training confer upon himstatus and competency that he will apply to his research. As a result, he holds a certain power that he must acknowledge and use wisely in relating to the various actors – relevant bodies – implicated in the multimedia project process. For example, researchers in different disciplines such as film studies and history will not take the same approach, share the same vision of the reality to capture or draw on the same knowledge base for understanding the approach to a project.

Organisation: The various actors involved belong to organisational cultures that may be antagonistic yet compatible and with which they must deal in order to interact. The production chain of any audiovisual project brings together actors from different professional cultures such as sponsor, scientist, technician and financial backer.

Ethics: The researcher's code of ethics must be precisely stated and contractually communicated to the various actors given that research projects based on filmed interviews present problems related to image reproduction rights and copyrights, and can run the risk of misuse leading to infringement of privacy laws.

In an age saturated by images that take the place of speech and are to be understood as a mixture of reality and fiction, confusion reigns and the symbolic inscription of the image can escape the control of those responsible for it and even be prejudicial: images of interviews can be shown in the context of conferences without the systematic or active involvement of the protagonist in the researcher's process.

Technique: The researcher must master technical knowledge and norms in a digital sector whose development is both volatile and exponential, requiring him to seek training as technological innovation occurs. His knowledge of languages, tools, materials and modes of diffusion all have an impact on his research choices. Indeed, the choice of a professional camera or a Smartphone (due to non mastery or lack of technical means) inevitably impacts production conditions and scientific utility of the filmed interview.

Economic factors: Economic stakes must be identified – from conception to filming, production to diffusion, and archiving to data circulation on digital networks – and inner workings of production mastered as much in terms of negotiation between the different partners involved in financing the research as in the stakes of their participation. A Ph.D. candidate without financial backing of his research risks not being able to accomplish all the stages of the filmed interview process or skipping some. On the other hand, with an institutional backer, the student risks taking the backer's expectations too closely into account.

Interculturality: For the researcher to internalize the cultural codes of all protagonists, he must be open and capable of adapting to the various contexts that present themselves. Empathy, listening, respect of others and an appreciation of sharing are indispensable if a project is to be conducted in a climate of mutual trust between implicated parties. If the researcher is unable to create a favorable environment for the actors in the field, it will be all the more difficult for them to open up in front of a camera.

Scientific factors: Implicit and tacit intentions must be formalized and invested in a methodological framework which aims to underline the degree of objectivity of the process. The researcher's orientation and epistemological position must be defined in order to conceptualize future models in the area of e-research. The researcher must concern himself with the indexation of his audiovisual data in terms of various organisational contexts (online university ressource banks, public and private platforms).

Symbolic factors: The person observing the image identifies with it and projects themself into an imaginary field in which its memory and socio-cultural markers are reactivated. The researcher must not favor or be seduced by the image object but rather learn to detach himself in favor of its heuristic pertinence.

Conclusion

Given that the organisation of any audiovisual project involves a team, albeit a limited one, the researcher must clarify his methodological, film and esthetic positions, define the status of the images as an ethnologist or an anthropologist would do or follow in the footsteps of the documentary makers that marked the history of Cinema of the Real. Any absence of rigor compromises the project's objectives. However, this does not completely rule out any place for the unexpected. The image and sound editing phase is as important as the filming itself and also involves various info-communication factors.

Filming without advance planning can distort the perceptible cognitive experiment that the scientist seeks to reproduce and occult the real rather than reveal it. The research goals must be explained to those involved in order to provide a framework for interpersonal exchange. To this end, the way in which the researcher introduces himself to the various interviewees is not negligible. Indeed, the researcher who presents himself as sociologist, semiologist or film scholar positions himself first and foremost in terms of his disciplinary field. This posturing may help or hinder the interviewee's enthusiasm towards the project. The researcher must be able to answer a series of questions: How to prepare actors for filming conditions so as to avoid too much *over-acting*? Which framing to choose and why? What filming angle to choose for each actor and context? Where to film?

Editing decisions must take into account intended audience, distribution and reception circumstances, and circulation modes.

Finally, one must be able to assess the added value of the images and be aware that qualitative audiovisual research is in constant evolution and evolves within a dynamic context of complementarity and convergence of practices and materials.

It is important to remember that the status of images changes from one format to another, one reception context to another. Circulation of images privileges exchange and reinforces relationships between the different actor groups. However, this is not without risk. Indeed, incorrect handling of images may risk betraying their original meaning. Furthermore, unintended conflicts and distortions may arise from the projection and identification processes in which each viewer watches and shares the images. Ultimately, the filmed interview constitutes a data bank of sorts that can be distributed within the scientific community. It is also a rich interface for teamwork between the scientific community and institutional partners in exploring future societal evolution. Today, we are experiencing the reconfiguration of research organisation in view of e-research, a new challenge for the 21st century as we experiment with sharing, organising, mutualising, circulating digital data and networking the building blocks of Knowledge.

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