

THE PIERRE BOURDIEU PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

*A Joint Interview with Christine Frisinghelli
and Franz Schultheis*

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Pierre Bourdieu's influence on the international social sciences is widely acknowledged. Less recognized, however, is his pioneering work in visual sociology, achieved through the systematic and intensive use of photography during his research in Algeria. For Bourdieu, photography was not only a methodological tool but also a crucial element of his sociological perspective. This approach is echoed in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, the journal he founded, which places particular emphasis on iconography.

These photographs, stored for decades in cardboard boxes, were occasionally used as illustrations, primarily for book

covers. In 2001, Bourdieu agreed to use them to reconstruct the development of his vision of the social world. This project, based largely on oral history and intended to involve Bourdieu actively, was unfortunately cut short by his death in January 2002.

Franz Schultheis and Christine Frisinghelli subsequently took up the project, striving to fulfill Bourdieu's vision by creating an exhibition and a book featuring a selection of photographs paired with text excerpts from his Algerian studies. Since 2001, the photographic archive has been preserved, edited, structured, digitized, and published by the *Fondation Pierre Bourdieu* and the contemporary art institution *Camera Austria*.¹ Since 2003, the exhibition has traveled to 20 international venues.² The book, *Images d'Algérie* (Bourdieu, 2003a), has been translated into six languages³ and was recently reissued (Bourdieu, 2024). Both the exhibition and the book situate these photographs as integral to Bourdieu's scientific work, while also underscoring their importance as a visually compelling documentary record of life in the 1950s and 1960s.

Thanks to 20 years of dedicated work by the *Fondation Pierre Bourdieu* and *Camera Austria*, we now have a

¹ For a comprehensive description of the photographic archive, see [Camera Austria](#) and [Archive Description](#).

² For a list of the exhibition venues, see [here](#).

³ *Images d'Algérie* has been translated to German (2003b), Spanish (2011), English (2012a), Italian (2012b), Arab (2013) and Greek (2017).

structured archive available for future research in both social sciences and visual studies. The *Centre Pompidou's* commitment to stewarding this archive, building on the groundwork already laid, presents an exceptional opportunity to expand the reach and visibility of this collection while fostering new and innovative projects.

Christine Frisinghelli and Franz Schultheis have accepted to answer our questions related to their work on the photographic archive. The interview was conducted by email exchanges in English, French and German. Christine Frisinghelli's part was translated by Richard Watts.

Christine Frisinghelli was born in 1949 in Graz, Austria. She studied in Austria and France. From 1975 to 1997 she worked at *Forum Stadtpark*, Graz's main artistic center, with a focus on photography. During these years she also founded a photography journal named *Camera Austria International* that first issued in 1980. From 1996 to 1999 she became director of the Austrian interdisciplinary festival for contemporary art *Steirischer Herbst*. *Camera Austria* then became an exhibition space located in Graz's *Kunsthau*s. Until 2010 Christine Frisinghelli led both the magazine and the exhibition space. During her career, she has also taught in various European universities and institutions in Vienna, Zurich, Graz and Modena.

Franz Schultheis was born in 1953 in Bendorf, Germany. He studied sociology in Germany and France. He obtained a PhD in sociology at University of Konstanz in 1986 and a *habilitation* at *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* in 1993. He taught sociology in various German and Swiss universities, including Konstanz from 1979 to 1992, Geneva from 1994 to 1998, Neuchâtel from 1998 to 2007, St-Gallen from 2007 to 2019 and Zeppelin in Friedrichschafen from 2019 to present.

Q: The history of the photographs is not easy to understand. Between 1957 and 1961, Pierre Bourdieu roughly took 3,000 pictures in Algeria. At the end of the 1990s Pierre Bourdieu decided to give the remaining pictures under different forms (negatives, contact sheets and prints) to you, Franz Schultheis. From what we understand, some other pictures were discovered in 2017. Could you tell us a bit more about the history of these photographs? For instance, how did you discover additional pictures in 2017?

Franz Schultheis (FS): Pierre Bourdieu entrusted me with his photographic archive exactly 25 years ago, after I had already been working as an associated researcher at the *Centre de Sociologie Européenne* since 1986, publishing many of his works in German and supervising the German-language edition of *Liber*.

My first contact with Pierre Bourdieu's photography goes back to a conversation

I had with him at the *Collège de France* in Paris on September 26, 1999. It was about the German language edition of *Algérie 60* (Bourdieu, 1977), which I was preparing at the time. Pierre Bourdieu asked me during the discussion: “By the way, did you look at the interview in *Travail et travailleurs [en Algérie]* (Bourdieu, 1963)? It could easily belong in *La Misère du monde* (Bourdieu (ed.), 1993). There are even photos from the time. Yes, it wouldn't be a bad idea to use some of the photos, they're over in Rosine's [Christin] office.” I asked: “Can I see some?” Pierre Bourdieu told me: “Yes, but I'll prepare them for you. I was still thinking this morning: people keep saying that sociology is an abstract universe, and then they suggest that the Chicago School with its photographic work is something completely different. So, I'll give you these photos... Well, I should have the courage to sort it all out, but I was so attached to it, I had 3,000 photos, I looked at them again and again, and it always hurt my soul so much that... I haven't found the courage to throw myself into it yet.”

Two weeks later, at another meeting, Pierre Bourdieu gave me several photo albums with the prints he had made himself and around 600 negatives – the rest of the 3,000 photos, he told me, had probably been lost in various moves. Fortunately, many years later I was able to track down another 400 photos in the Pierre Bourdieu archives at the *Campus*

Condorcet and added them to the collection.

During the informal handover, after which I left with a bulging suitcase and drove back to Neuchâtel, Switzerland, where I worked as a sociology professor at the university, we agreed that I would attempt to organize an exhibition and that we would reconstruct the context of his work in the form of an oral history. Pierre Bourdieu insisted that his photography should be presented solely as an instrument, method, and means of knowledge for his empirical research, always contextualized with corresponding texts from his Algerian studies. We took this wish very seriously over the following two decades.

A first attempt of such a presentation at the *Musée d'Ethnographie de Neuchâtel* did not materialize, but the following year we found an ideal partnership for the realization of this project with *Camera Austria* and its director Christine Frisinghelli. She, as an expert in photography, and I, as a sociologist and connoisseur of Bourdieu's work, were perfectly complementary and this proved to be very productive over the course of the more than 20 years that followed. By a stroke of luck, 2003 was celebrated in France as *L'année de l'Algérie*. With Pierre Bourdieu's approval, I went to the French museum *Institut du Monde Arabe* and met with Farouk Mardam-Bey, one of the people in charge of the Institute. He responded enthu-

siastically to the idea of an exhibition of the photographic archive. Coincidentally, he was also publishing the Sindbad series with *Actes Sud*, and it was decided to produce a publication for the exhibition that could also serve as its catalog. Unfortunately, Pierre Bourdieu passed away far too soon and we had to complete this project without him, as faithfully as possible to his original studies.

Q: *Christine Frisinghelli, in the late 1990s you were running the magazine Camera Austria International and the exhibition space Camera Austria while Franz Schultheis was teaching sociology in Neuchâtel and translating Pierre Bourdieu's book Algérie 60 from French to German. Could you please start by explaining how you met, how you started working with Pierre Bourdieu, and how the later decided to entrust his photographs to Camera Austria with the intention of publicly showing them for the first time thanks to a book and an exhibition?*

Christine Frisinghelli (CF): The collaboration between Pierre Bourdieu and *Camera Austria* began in 2000 in entirely different circumstances to those which would later lead to the initiation of the exhibition and book project *Images d'Algérie* (Bourdieu, 2003a). For us as “cultural workers” living in Austria, the

year 2000 marked what was a political watershed: with the Austrian Freedom Party (*FPÖ*) entering a coalition government, a xenophobic and anti-intellectual consensus appeared to have become hegemonic in Austria. Statements made by various conservative and right-wing populist politicians seemed to justify concerns that a reduction of complexity could well become the guiding theme of a new (cultural) policy agenda in Austria.⁴ The question was: how could we tackle this dilemma with and in our work?

When Pierre Bourdieu came to Vienna with *Raisons d'Agir* in the Fall 2000 to attend a conference, we reached out to him to ask for his support in the current debate by contributing to our medium. This led to Pierre Bourdieu publishing his first piece in our magazine, “Against the Policy of Depoliticization,” (2000) an article that was written in the course of his *Contrefeux* speeches (1998; 2001a) and that constitutes an important statement in the context of his call for a European social movement in opposition to the politics of globalization and neoliberalism.⁵ This was followed by an interview with our author Cathren Müller (2001b) that not only explored Bourdieu's self-perception as a sociologist with distinctly political intentions beyond academic navel-gazing, but

⁴ There is a certain tragic irony in the fact that, almost 25 years after this “turning point” in

Austria, we are now being forced to oppose the rise of radical right-wing groups across Europe.

⁵ For the original article, see [here](#).

which also gave him the opportunity to make a case against abandoning public support for advanced art: this, he argued, is the only way to safeguard the autonomy of the field of art – an autonomy that is being fundamentally challenged by neoliberal forces.⁶

Franz Schultheis, finally – who took on the key role of liaising on our behalf – drew our attention to the fact that, above and beyond any shared political interests that we wanted to reflect in *Camera Austria International* magazine by publishing Bourdieu's theoretical contributions, there might well exist a number of other, entirely different links to Pierre Bourdieu's work, and he introduced us to that hitherto largely unknown archive of photographs taken in the course of ethnological and sociological studies in 1960s Algeria.

This initial spontaneous curiosity soon gave rise to the project aimed at making this lesser-known facet of Bourdieu's ethnology accessible to the public in the form of a book and an exhibition – a project we were hoping to develop in close collaboration with Pierre Bourdieu and Franz Schultheis. Our first step in this direction was to publish in our magazine, along with an introductory text by Franz Schultheis, an interview with Pierre Bourdieu about his photographic work and the formative experiences of his time in Algeria; the

accompanying illustrations were selected from the archive by Pierre Bourdieu (2001c).⁷ This interview was also published later in the book *Images d'Algérie* (2003a) and has become an important primary source for interpreting the photographic archive.

Bourdieu was initially reserved about the project, as he did not wish for the artistic or aesthetic value of his photographs to be overemphasized. We too had to consider whether an institution like *Camera Austria* – whose main focus is on current artistic practices that engage with the *dispositifs* of photography and new image technologies – was an appropriate place to work on Bourdieu's documentary photographic material. These photographs represent significant primary ethnographic material which, in accordance with the principles of qualitative social research for identifying and preserving traces of an unfamiliar social world, hold as much value as sources of insight as observation records or ethnographic informants. This project thus posed a major challenge for us, albeit not only in view of Bourdieu's early theoretical exploration of the photography medium, as documented in his book *Un art moyen* (1965) and his theoretical essays analyzing the field of art and its effects on society, and vice versa. It is the relevance of Bourdieu's work, which continues to inform current debates in art theory, that made it so

⁶ For the original interview, see [here](#).

⁷ For the original interview, see [here](#).

interesting for us to analyze the photographic documents created by Bourdieu himself and to address this set of issues in close collaboration with the author. Not least, the decision by *Camera Austria* entailed engaging with this highly diverse archive of photographs and working notes, the *Fiches d'Algérie* – physically preserving and structuring the material and putting it into context with the author's writings. However, it also implied harking back to our core remit: working on photographic material and its social, political and cultural significance.

Q: As you explained, this project led to both an exhibition and a book. Could you please explain the process of selection and thematization of the pictures for the exhibition?

FS: The preparation of the exhibition and the work on the book ran in parallel and under considerable time pressure. The concept developed together with Christine envisaged that the whole thing should be based on a common structure. We began with the idea – agreed upon with Pierre Bourdieu – that a dialogue between image and sociological discourse should be established wherever possible. This approach was particularly fitting, as Bourdieu produced his ethnographic notes alongside complementary photographic evidence during his Algerian research. During a weekend in Graz, we sat at a large table covered

with more than 700 photos. We tried to group the photos according to objects and, with knowledge of Bourdieu's studies of the Algerian years, to place them in a thematic context. In the process, four large thematic blocks gradually emerged, which we gave the titles *Habitus et Habitat*, *Hommes-Femmes*, *Paysans déracinés* and *Économie de la misère*. These would form the core of the book and the exhibition. The next step was to identify relevant text passages from Bourdieu's various publications on his Algerian research to accompany the images, providing a kind of discursive framework for their presentation. The chosen method of thematic categorization, going from the photograph to the text, proved to be viable and valuable, as demonstrated by a large number of exhibitions in various countries and the translations of the study into six other languages.

CF: Sadly, Pierre Bourdieu passed away in 2002, just as we were beginning our joint venture. In close collaboration with Franz Schultheis, we consulted and structured the photographic documents, linking them to ethnographic and sociological studies undertaken at different locations in Algeria at the same time. Sometimes, the numbering of the negatives (which is unfortunately not always continuous) allowed us to retrace Pierre Bourdieu's routes and paths; other times, it also allowed us to neatly

reconstruct minor settings — situations, contexts that Bourdieu had found himself in or that had been brought about by his presence. Just by viewing the photographic material, without any well-founded sociological knowledge of Bourdieu's research interests during his time in Algeria, it was instructive for us to retrace and recognize how Bourdieu approached the object of his investigation as a photographer; how he communicated with the people of that country by using the camera and, above and beyond this aspect: the precision with which he approached things and situations, in the sense of complete photographic coverage of a situation. Often, Bourdieu would literally “circle” the objects of his research with his camera — without lapsing into a voyeuristic, exoticizing gaze. Quite the contrary: he would find the appropriate detachment, and as a result — or perhaps despite this fact — the photographs testify to Bourdieu's unconditional empathy with the circumstances and living conditions of the Algerian people. Our overall impression was that of an incorruptible, assiduous worker who wielded the tools at his disposal with great dedication, indeed passion, for the country and people: the camera served not only as a documentary device but also as a means of reflection and communication, a medium with which to connect to and establish relationship with the people in Algeria.

The exhibition and accompanying book present the historical, political, scientific, but also biographical context within which this documentation evolved. The aim was to read and understand the archive of photographs in the context of Bourdieu's studies. Taken together, these photographs and writings afford an insight into Pierre Bourdieu's efforts to carry out research in a situation of war; they demonstrate his reflexivity and his unconditional interest in gaining knowledge — no matter which tools he employed — ever guided by his affection for the people and his empathy with their circumstances and driven by a desire to understand and to render things understandable.

Q: This exhibition has been shown at 30 different locations, including Algiers. How was it received internationally and more specifically in Algeria?

FS: The launch of the exhibition at the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Algiers attracted a considerable number of visitors. During the opening hours, we were able to conduct a series of interviews with visitors in the style of photographic elicitation. For some older people, the pictures brought back personal memories. They shared, “Yes, back then almost every family here, including my own, was affected in some way by these regroupings.” Among the younger people, mostly students who visited the library, we noticed again and

again that the testimonies presented, which depicted a dramatic historical reality, were largely unknown, and they told us that they had never seen any pictures of the *centres de regroupement*. It could therefore be said that Bourdieu's photographic sociology, which was brought back to Algeria, also touched on gaps in the collective memory of the Algerian population.

Q: Could you explain the process of transferring the archive to the Centre Pompidou?

FS: The photo archive later became the property of the *Fondation Pierre Bourdieu*, which was founded in Geneva in 2006 with the aim, among other things, of making Bourdieu's work as accessible to the public as possible while preserving it. After the exhibition and the accompanying book had traveled through many countries around the world for more than 20 years, the *Centre Pompidou's* interest in purchasing the archive provided an ideal end point with the opportunity to bring it back to Paris and make it permanently accessible to the public at an internationally renowned cultural institution, as well as for future research – whether scientific or artistic.

Q: You have been working with these photographs for more than 20 years. Could you please tell us how you think these pictures could be worked in different fields, mainly the sociological

and the artistic ones?

FS: Bourdieu's photographic archive presents in an exemplary way the long-neglected possibility of illustrating social science research using visual elements and demonstrating the heuristic gains that can be achieved through the use of photography as an instrument, method and means of knowledge in field research. At the same time, the archive offers those interested in Bourdieu's work the opportunity to understand Bourdieu's specific view of the social world “in action,” so to speak, to discover the close link between image and text in Bourdieu's research and to understand how his theoretical concepts, as he himself emphasized, are reflected in his photographic works.

For further information please visit: <https://camera-austria.at/en/photoarchive-pierre-bourdieu/>

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