

Essay

The itinerary approach of a business anthropologist: between mobility, diversity and networks

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Speaking about oneself is always complicated when one knows, as a social anthropologist, that one is not the centre of the world, and that what one has realised is partly the result of the forces which govern us, and partly that of the collaboration of a network of friends, colleagues, and various teams in the field. However, it is also a pleasure—one of witnessing that there is a future, that things are possible, and that the humanities are useful even if their efficacy cannot always be demonstrated. Here I will add that this is like all human activity, as we are reminded by the myth of Sisyphus, who pushed his stone up to the top of the mountain only to see it go down, and then started pushing it up again. Mystery is the source of energy which leads us to go up again.

Religious and political origins of the desire to transform the world: from Vatican 2 to May 1968

In a paradoxical manner, even though today I am entirely agnostic in terms of religion, I think that my interest in the applications of sociology and anthropology stemmed from my Catholic past. It is a progressivist past—in other words, one characterised by the belief that the objective of a Christian is to change the world to make it better, more efficient, and

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possibly more just. In the early 1960s, the Second Vatican Council transformed some Catholics' relationship with the world, being more in favour of the search for a transformation in society than in an improvement of relations with God. In South America, this gave rise to "liberation theology." 50 years later, it is the conservative extremist side of religions which seems to be gaining the upper hand. This means that the content of a religion explains little itself. Social actors select from each what fits in their justification for conservative or transformational action.

Being agnostic does not mean being an atheist, since saying that God does not exist is a belief which is as impossible to demonstrate as the belief in his existence. Instead, it means saying that I do not know. For me it has remained a great epistemological rule to avoid saying that what I cannot see does not exist, as I was to theorise later in the 1980s and 1990s with scales of observation. The latter show that no observation is possible without a sectioning of reality, and that what is observed on an extreme microsocial scale of observation, such as the individual, disappears at a macrosocial scale of observation. This helped me to avoid saying that social classes have disappeared or that individuals do not exist, to pick up on a classic debate in the humanities and social sciences, at least in France, from the 1980s.

May 1968, in Paris and in the western world, was a moment of great effervescence and of the questioning of institutions which had seemed to be well-established—such as the authority of the father and the subordinate role of the woman in the family—and, more generally, of social hierarchies in organisations and society. It was a time of learning of a form of social and intellectual transgression with respect to Catholicism, with the discovery of various Marxisms—from Karl Marx himself to Rosa Luxembourge on imperialism, passing via Kautsky on ground rent and Hilferding on financial capital, to social classes with Pierre Bourdieu in his book *The Inheritors* (original *Les héritiers* published in 1964, translation published in 1972).

In December 1968, I created a reformist political student movement, MARC 200, which stood for *Mouvement d'Action et de Recherche Critique* (Movement for Action and Critical Research). Everything was in it: action, exploration, and deconstruction. What remained of it was this energy to wish to transform and create new things and relativise religious, ideological, and political beliefs in favour of a comprehensive approach which took actors in situations as a point of departure, as well as the progressive adoption of an agnostic position as a scientific rule, and learning transgression. These are probably the elements of personal life which led me at the same time to practise both empirical research with an operational target for companies, administrations, and NGOs, on the one hand, and theoretical research, with the publication of these investigations in the form of books and articles, on the other. Of course, what seems clear today comes from a

“retrospective illusion,” as at the time I acted without clearly knowing where I was going, and very often I did not understand what I had done until after it was done.

Learning the task of contractual investigations: responding to a requirement rather than starting out from one’s own centres of interest

The development of this taste for concrete matters and for empirical investigations, which form the basis of business socio-anthropology, would not have been possible if I had not met the sociologist Michel Crozier in 1967, at the University of Nanterre, next to Paris. He had just introduced to France the sociology of organisations, with *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (1964), which was based on strategic analysis as a mode of explanation of social interactions, on the basis of power relations constructed around zones of uncertainty. This work followed on from Alvin Gouldner’s investigations in *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy* (1954), which he had made us read as students, as well as from *Asylums*, by Ervin Goffman, which had just been published in French by Pierre Bourdieu (1968).

I worked with Crozier at the CSO (Centre de Sociologie des Organisations [Centre for the Sociology of Organisations], which belongs to the CNRS/National Centre for Scientific Research), as well as with Erhard Friedberg and Jean-Pierre Worms, between 1969 and 1971, thanks to some contractual research programmes on industrial politics and the *Corps des Mines*, one of the most powerful networks at the summit of the French state. This meant that at the age of 23, I learnt to carry out investigations not based on my own objectives, but based on the requirements of a sponsor, the French Ministry of Industry. I understood the importance of networks in the functioning of companies and in collective processes of decision-making and innovation. One of the objectives of this finalised investigation was to provide some lines of thought on the ways to improve the system of decision-making in French administration. It was my first experience of action research, and the result was published in micro-fiche by Hachette in 1973.

Strategic analysis is the most operational tool I have been able to deploy, over the past 50 years or so, and which I have been able to use equally well to understand sorcery in the Congo and power relations within the family— in France, China, Brazil, and elsewhere. In other words, it partly explains the consumer choices, the functioning of markets, the survival strategy of the poorest groups with purchasing power constraints, or the social conditions for the realisation of processes of innovation.

In sociology in France the practice of fieldwork investigations was only to become generally established between the 1980s and 1990s.

During the 1960s, sociology was very theoretical, very moral, and very militant. It was centred on the state and the social classes, which, as I was to show 20 years later with scales of observation, may be entirely relevant at a macrosocial scale, but loses a lot of its value at the microsocial scale in terms of interactional strategic analysis, the micro-individual scale, and the person.

At this period, the realist empiricism of Michel Crozier was badly viewed in the university left-wing milieu. This is why he developed his network more towards political and economic circles. His work was taught a great deal in French business schools, but much less in universities, until around twenty years ago. I drew a lesson from this: it is necessary to work on the margins of the academic system, inside or outside, and try to widen one's networks in France and internationally, in order to retain sufficient room for manoeuvre to continue to explore, to make detours, and to innovate, if one wishes to work in the direction of forming a connection between the academic and the business world, but without allowing oneself to be destroyed by one or the other.

The anthropological detour: from imaginary denunciation to realistic description of usages in everyday life

In 1971, I left to teach for four years at the *École Nationale Supérieure d'Agriculture* in Antananarivo, Madagascar, where I led an investigation into the effects of a rural development project on the transformation of the Malagasy countryside. I tried to use simultaneously a Marxist approach, which denounced bureaucratic domination, and a strategic approach in terms of the interplay of actors. I also became the editor of a multidisciplinary review, *Terre malgache*. I therefore learnt to work with engineers and economists, such as Philippe Hugon. I began to discover the diversity of logics in the explanation of human phenomena. It was to be the beginning of a long career as an editor, which was to pass through l'Harmattan, PUF (Presse Universitaire de France) and the review *Sciences Humaines* created by Jean-François Dortier and Jean-Claude Ruano.

Moreover, I learnt to deal with the tension created by my report with the organisation in charge of distributing agricultural rice-producing technologies to the villages of the High Plateaux in Madagascar. The company did not greatly appreciate its actions being denounced—something which I can understand now better than I did at the time! This investigation was published by l'Harmattan under the title *La question agraire à Madagascar* [The issue of agriculture in Madagascar] (1979). I was later to have other tensions with other clients which I would learn to deal with better.

Later, in the Congo, I understood that such denunciations may be of limited effectiveness. Showing the interplay of actors and their power

relations in a realistic and comprehensive manner, without enchanting them with an imaginary aspect which allows them to escape from reality, is often disturbing for social actors, as it shows the constraints—and hence the room for manoeuvre and opportunities—which are within their reach. Once these realistic constraints have been understood, actors can remobilise the imagination which will give them the energy to act as a manager or a militant.

In the Congo, where I worked as an anthropologist from 1975 to 1979, I taught at the *Institut de Développement Rural de Brazzaville* (Brazzaville Rural Development Institute), still with engineers. In parallel, I carried out a new investigation into the effects of a rural development project financed by the UNDP. It was there that I was to refine most of the anthropological methods which I was later to use in order to analyse the behaviour of consumers in France, China, and Denmark, with Tine François and Dominique Boucher; in England, Spain, and Senegal, with Emmanuel Ndione and the NGO ENDA; and in Brazil and the United States.

Observation of the process of agricultural work, from working the earth up to the harvest, inspired me to formalise the “method of itineraries” in order to understand consumers’ collective decision processes relating to usage and purchase; in the city, too, I moved from discussions at home to domestic usages, including the stages of transportation, acquisition, storage and disposal, as Sophie Alami, Isabelle Garabau-Moussaoui and I were to demonstrate later in *Les méthodes qualitatives* [Qualitative methods] (2009). This working method based on itineraries is found in the sociology of science and technology, in the anthropology of sickness, with therapeutic itineraries, as well as in economics, with the study of particular industries.

Unlike marketing, which is focussed on the individual and the moment of purchase, the anthropological approach makes it possible to understand that purchase is only one moment of a collective process. Purchase is under the constraint of the social interplay which develops inside the family in different rooms in a domestic space, such as the kitchen, the living room or the bathroom. These rooms are the equivalent of different kinds of agricultural spaces—lowland fields, hillside fields, the gardens around the house, and orchards—which I observed in the village of Sakamesso in the Congo. Anthropology allowed me to learn how to transpose.

Consumption practices, centred on usages, are embedded in three structures: one of the systems of objects which form material culture; another of social interactions and “pre-digital” social networks; and the third of sense, symbolism, and personal and professional identity. They also vary as a function of lifecycles. Above all, the observation of these practices varies as a function of the scales of observation. This is what I suggest at the end of my book on the Congolese countryside, *Stratégies*

paysannes en Afrique Noire [Farmers' strategies in black Africa] (1987), in which I show that the necessity to reflect on operational solutions leads to a minimisation of determinist approaches. And yet this dimension does exist, even if it does not function in a mechanical manner as in physics, but is only visible at the macrosocial scale, or alternatively at the lowest microscale, as in genetics. At the microsocial and macrosocial scales, what can be observed is the interplay of actors who have room for manoeuvre and who therefore have opportunities to help with the development of the system being observed (1987: 215 ff.). The important thing, therefore, is not to look for the best scale of observation, but to start with the scale in which one is most competent, and to regularly change scales in order to observe what is emerging elsewhere and what is not necessarily visible at the scale of our anthropological observation.

The force of business anthropology: an ability to observe what is emerging based on requests from clients who are faced with unknown or uncertain problems

Between 1979 and 1981, coming back from Africa, I found myself unemployed for two years. When I left for Africa in 1971 there were 100,000 unemployed workers in France. When I came back in 1979 there were 800,000. Today there are more than five million. This period taught me how to develop my profession and become an entrepreneur. At the time this was rather original.

In 1981, I became professor of sociology at the *École Supérieure d'Agriculture d'Angers*, where I was to continue working on innovations in the agricultural field, and to begin developing investigations for companies on the behaviour of consumers, thanks to Bernard Nazaire and ADRIANT, a company specialising in sensorial analysis. In 1985 I did my first investigation on the use of an agricultural book-keeping programme, in a milieu of people who, like me, mixed up the screen, computer, keyboard, and software, and did not even know where they could buy a computer. In 1994, I published a book with Sophie Taponier entitled *Informatique, décision et marché de l'information en agriculture* [Information technology, decisions and the information market in agriculture], thanks to a series of investigations financed by the IT department of the Ministry of Agriculture, directed by Vincent Wahl. We composed the chapter on SIGs (*Systèmes d'Information Géographique*, geographical information systems) which were the ancestors of big data.

Mentioning these investigations and publications makes it possible to understand the long-term contribution of empirical anthropology. Very often, when we work under a contract, the client calls on us because he is confronted with a new problem and does not know how to deal with it. This area is just as unknown for the anthropologist. The method of observation is the strength of empirical anthropology. We know how to locate ourselves in an unknown environment in which we

have no landmark. The great reference here is that of Bronislaw Malinowski, who had to describe the unknown world of the Trobriand Islanders when he found himself plunged into it by chance, owing to the beginning of the First World War in 1914. I had this same feeling of strangeness when exploring sorcery in the Congo in the 1970s, IT in companies and used by French consumers from 1980 onwards, and daily life in China from 1997 onwards. The strength of business anthropology, which works to the requests of its clients, is its ability to understand what is in the process of emerging in the form of a weak signal, without us knowing exactly where it will lead us. Business anthropology is an anthropology of emergence.

In 1988, I was dismissed from ESA d'Angers following a conflict at work. I found myself unemployed, in divorce proceedings, and with the care of my four children, including my oldest daughter who is disabled. Two months later, in 1988, I was appointed professor of social and cultural anthropology at the Sorbonne, the name of which is now Paris Descartes University, Sorbonne Paris Cité, in order to develop an interface between the academic and business worlds. This is what I was to do by taking charge of the Masters Course in Social Sciences, focusing on intercultural matters, consumption, and sustainable development.

At the same time, I joined l'Harmattan publishing house, where I published around fifteen collections over a period of twenty years. My objective was to favour the publication of empirical investigations, whatever the theoretical school of the researchers, and to avoid the publication of purely conceptual books. I made an exception in 1990 with the unconventional thesis of Bruno Péquignot, *Pour une critique de la raison anthropologique* [Criticism of anthropological reasoning]. As an editor I feel incapable of judging the value of a theory, since I find them all essentially interesting. However, I do feel capable of judging the methodological value of a field investigation. Moreover, publishing empirical investigations potentially favours the formation of links between academic knowledge and the world of companies.

Scales of observation, a professional tool which makes it possible to develop an anthropological expertise in multidisciplinary cooperation

In 1990 Sophie Taponier and I created Argonautes, a private research and projects company. She passed away in 2001, a few days before *the 8th Interdisciplinary Conference on Research in Consumption*, at the Sorbonne, which we had organised with Daniel Miller, Russel Belk, Soren Askegaard, Olivier Badot, Alison Clark, Sophie Chevalier, Fabrice Clochard, Peter Falk, Guliz Ger, Isabelle Moussaoui, Peter Otnes, Don Slater, Richard Wilk, and Yang Xiao Min. We carried on with the seminar thanks to the support of everyone. A professional network is also a network of friends.

Scales of observation are the key professional tool which we developed over a period of 30 years, along with Sophie Taponier, Sophie Alami, Isabelle Moussaoui, Fabrice Clochard, Gaëtan Brisepierre, and many others. This is a flexible tool which shows that the system of explanation may vary as a function of the sections of reality examined, following three types of causality: correlation, which is mobilised in quantitative studies and experimental behavioural sciences; sense, which is mobilised primarily when working on individuals; and the effect of the situation, which comes from mobile causality varying as a function of the interplay of actors, uncertainties, and changes in configuration of the situation. Understanding that the system of causality is not the same for all the actors, and in particular that for most clients, whether they are in general management, R&D, studies, planning departments, marketing, or in an ONG as militants, the only scientific causality is that which is proved by correlations, and hence outside of a concrete situation, outside of interactions between members of a family. This makes it possible to understand the difficulties encountered in selling anthropology, and hence to be able to argue better. An unexpected conclusion is that it was my experience in negotiating contracts which allowed me to progress in my practical epistemological reflections, which led to the scales of observation, as I show in 2004 in my book *Les sciences sociales*, published by PUF.

What anthropology shows when applied to consumption is that the brand does not have much explanatory value with relation to the usage and purchase of a product. The purchase is the result of a collective activity, which is visible at the microsocial level, but also of tensions surrounding the definition and regulation of the rules of the game of consumption—as a market and hence as a system of action which is visible at a mesosocial scale; or in the development of modes of life and geopolitics, which is visible at the macrosocial scale. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, large-scale clients in consumption believed that the brand, brand loyalty, the territory of the brand, and its assets were the key explanatory factors for its purchase by consumers. It was therefore difficult to sell anthropology, which disenchant belief in the brand as held by actors in the milieu of large-scale consumption.

By chance for business anthropologists, the 1990s were to see some new customers emerging, thanks to the internet and the rise of new mobile telephones and new communication technologies which required a more complex learning process than soap, washing powder, or shampoo. Our main clients were to be France Télécom, which subsequently became Orange, and Bouygues Télécom. Another unexpected customer was to be linked to electric energy. Electricity determines the functionality of the internet. Its cost also plays a key role in the purchasing power of different strata of consumers. The poorest among them were threatened by the economic crisis following the stock market crash of 1987, and then the rise of the BRICs between 2000 and

2008. These two phenomena were also to be the origin of new markets for anthropologists of consumption. Thanks to EDF (*Electricité de France*) and the numerous investigations with which it assigned us, in 1996 we published *Anthropologies de l'électricité, les objets électriques dans la vie quotidienne en France* [Anthropologies of electricity, electric objects in daily life in France]. A third topic was to be that of mobility, with the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport and the research commission of *La Poste*, which financed an investigation on house moving.

It is always difficult to know whether or not university colleagues appreciate this mixture of academic and business related work. Sometimes a polemic surrounding a book which we published, such as that on *Les méthodes qualitatives* [Qualitative methods] in 2009, shows that some colleagues are strongly opposed to the professionalisation of sociology and anthropology, in the name of scientific purity, even if all of the investigations which we have carried out in laboratories in France and Africa show that there is in fact little purity in the sciences. More and more, I have been asked to explain how I created a professional Ph.D. at the Sorbonne between 2007 and 2014. Very often, in such meetings there has been somebody who opposed this kind of diploma, denouncing the fact that anthropology is “instrumentalised” by companies. However, more recently, in 2016, I participated in a round table facing an audience where there were more than 150 people, most of them Ph.D. students, and encountered no opposition. This indicates that under the constraint of job openings, some Ph.D. students are prepared to professionalise. Business anthropology still remains a divisive subject. However, it is also possible to think that the professionalisation of anthropology and sociology—which makes it possible to confront emerging realities, and hence avoid being trapped in scholastic debates about abstract concepts that have little connection with this reality—represents a new opportunity for academic sociology.

The remaining question to resolve—that of financing—is not simple, as private companies may favour anthropological research more if it allows them to solve their problems better, and if the humanities prove that the way in which they approach problems is more efficient than marketing or that of management consultants. One of the weaknesses I feel about my way of doing anthropology is that I do not seek to enchant reality, which is often something that is asked for by the client. Instead, I seek to show the world as it is—with its resistances, its power relations, and its consumers as autonomous actors, with problems to resolve and, today above all, with the ability to oppose what is imposed on them by companies.

Business anthropology, a practice which demands geographical mobility, networks and a diverse range of investigation topics

Between 1994 and 2001, I taught for one month a year as a visiting

professor at USF, Tampa, Florida. Thanks to discussions with Douglas Harper, I discovered visual sociology. With Eric Arnould, one of the future founders of the CCT (Consumer Culture Theory), I saw for the first time how an anthropologist who had worked on Niger applied his competences to consumption. With Mark Neumann, author of *On the Rim: Looking for the Grand Canyon* (1999), we were to make an audio documentary with a group of Mexican workers who were protesting against the low price of tomatoes. In the decade after the year 2000, with Patricia Sunderland and Rita Denny, later editors of the *Handbook of Anthropology in Business* (2014), we worked on body care for L'Oréal in New York. In Brazil, these were the investigations which we were to carry out further with Roberta Dias Campos, Maribel Carvalho Suarez, Leticia Moreira Casotti, and Estelle Galateau on body care or economic consumption. In China, investigations were carried out with Ken Erickson on cars, with Laurence Varga on infant diarrhoea, and with Anne Sophie Boisard on the Chinese middle classes.

In 1994, I discovered at the congress of the AAA (American Association of Anthropology) in Atlanta that 50 per cent of anthropologists who have a Ph.D. work outside universities. The objective of the Master's course which I directed at the Sorbonne has been to train social anthropologists so that they are capable of working outside academia and, in some cases, of creating their own company, on the model of Argonauts. The latter, therefore, has been of strategic importance for the training of students. It makes us open to companies. It allows students to professionalise themselves. They learn to observe the usage and hence the social conditions of the acquisition of a new technology. Moreover, at l'Harmattan, we created a series to publish the investigations of young researchers, which makes them more attractive on the job market. In 2015, all of this was to lead to the creation of a network of 45 French-speaking business anthropologists, following an idea of de Lionnel Ochs, whom we met in 2014 in London at the conference of the professional network EPIC. We called the new network "anthropik."

This network follows numerous professional networks in which I have participated: APS (Association Professionnelle des Sociologues) in the 1980s in France, with Renaud Sainsaulieu; NAPA (National Association for the Practice of Anthropology) in 1994, with Elizabeth Briody, Julia Gluesing, and Marietta Baba, whom I was to meet again in a project for Motorola with John Sherry, Jean Canavan, Gary Bamossy, and Janeen Costa; in 2007, there was a seminar on qualitative methods at the Sorbonne with our usual American, Chinese, Brazilian, and French network, as well as Hy Mariampolski and Bruno Moynie for visual anthropology. In 2012, came the launch by Robert Tian in Guangzhou, China, of the International Conference on Applications of Anthropology in Business, with Timothy de Waal Malefyt and Maryann McCabe in particular, and around thirty other business anthropologists. The fifth

conference was to be held in Beijing in 2016.

All of these networks show that business anthropology is also the result of a social construction, and that it is not just an individual's work. Moreover, these networks have a particular dimension—the importance of trust. We are in a competitive market, which demands that we must be sure of the reliability of people whom we recommend or with whom we work. The constraint of the market guarantees methodological rigour. Friendship guarantees trust. The constant improvement of qualitative techniques of information collection and observation using the internet guarantees reliability.

Financing of investigations: a permanent uncertainty following geopolitical developments

In 1997, I was invited to Guangzhou in China by my friend and colleague Zheng Lihua, director of the French department of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, to spend three-and-a-half months teaching the methods of anthropological investigation to Chinese students who were learning French. Consumption is in the process of emerging in China. Beaufour Ipsen International Laboratory asked us for an investigation of the social usages of memory in China. EDF asked us to work on the poor outlying suburban areas around Guangzhou. Orange commissioned us to carry out an investigation into usages of the mobile telephone. Next we developed fieldwork with L'Oréal and Chanel on body care and make-up, with Pernod-Ricard on usages of alcohol, with Danone on non-alcoholic drinks, with la Française des Jeux on game-playing practices of the Chinese, and also with Asmodée on parlour games. Most often we worked with the team of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies and Chinese Ph.D. students such as Wang Lei, Hu Shen, and Ma Jing Jing. The interviews and observations were carried out in Chinese, and then translated and discussed in French. For around the past ten years, I have been learning Chinese in order to gain better access to the social and cultural logics of Chinese society. Progress has been slow, but there have been major benefits.

For around the past twenty years, these observations financed by private companies seeking to understand the functionality of Chinese society have enabled us to see the new Chinese urban middle class emerge. Some of these investigations were carried out in the framework of Ph.D. projects co-financed by private companies and the French state. Others were financed by fixed-term contracts. Several of these Ph.D. projects have been published by l'Harmattan. With Yang Xiaomin and Hu Shen, we have just published an article entitled "Classe moyenne et consommation ou les mutations silencieuses de la société chinoise, depuis 1997" (2016) [Middle class and consumption, or the silent changes in Chinese society since 1997]. This publication is a good example of the reasonable compromises which can be made between non-disclosure

clauses to which we are bound by companies (when they think that certain results may be of strategic importance with respect to their development), the quality of fieldwork investigations, and the demands of a scientific publication.

The important point to note is that most of the investigations whose results I have published for the past 40 years have been financed by private companies, administrations, or NGOs, and that for me there is not a great deal of difference between fundamental research and applied research. In both cases, the quality of the field investigation is the same. What may vary is the time required to have between twenty and 50 interviews carried out and then processed. The time may be between two and nine months for a privately financed investigation, and between one and two years for one that is financed by public money. In a university context it may exceed three years. However, it is the use of the results which differentiates an academic study from an applied study. For an academic study, the time spent on modelling and the reading necessary for this modelling will be much greater. In applied research, the time for translation of results into operationalisable information will be much greater.

Conclusion

Today, the main conclusion at which I have arrived, in practical terms, with respect to social usages of anthropology by companies, is that the anthropological tool provides a real contribution with respect to knowledge of the final user—whether it be a consumer, a company, or a department within a company, which orders the anthropological investigation. However, once the results have been presented, the anthropological knowledge is absorbed by the mechanisms which govern the functionality of the organisation. At the stage of output from the company, at the moment of introduction onto the market, the contribution of anthropology is often invisible. Moreover, it seems to me that for anthropology to be accepted in a company, its results need to be reinterpreted and transformed by actors who are seeking to develop a new good, a new service, more economic consumption, or aid for the poorest. This is what I went further into with Annie Cattan and Pragmaty, a company specialising in the carrying out of change, of which I am a shareholder with my company Daize & Co.

However, anthropologists are there to provide a reminder that if the company wishes to innovate, it must constantly take into account unresolved problems in the daily lives of users—something which companies often have a tendency to forget, as they focus instead on the brand and the internal logic with which it functions.

Another conclusion is that anthropology only represents part of the solution. The constraints of production related to the machines which

manufacture the products, the constraints of financing which limit or promote investment in favour of an innovation, and the modes of management, which may or may not promote flexibility within companies, all often have an influence which is greater than the knowledge provided by anthropology.

I have nonetheless noticed that some clients were greatly interested by data relating to cultural or geopolitical contexts, or by comparisons with other situations, which the anthropologist was able to provide them—an interest that extended well beyond the product or new service for which the investigation was originally assigned. A business anthropologist not only provides information on the motivations and sense which a consumer assigns to his practices, but also provides a vision of society, an analysis of the field of forces within which a company is acting, and the emergence of social movements which transform modes of life and political life, as well as paying attention to the new technologies which may or may not threaten its business model—in other words, on all of those contexts that may make the development of a company uncertain.