Photographs in Two Works of Life Writing:
L'Afrique fantôme by Michel Leiris and *L'Africain* by J.-M.G Le Clézio

by

Matthew Rushton

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Carleton University
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Matthew Rushton

Abstract:

This dissertation looks at the role of photographs in two works of autobiographical, travel-based life writing. Michel Leiris' 1934 travel diary, *L'Afrique fantôme* features 31 ethnographic photographs taken during a French ethnographic expedition that crossed sub-Saharan Africa at the beginning of the 1930s. J.-M.G. Le Clézio's 2004 memoir *L'Africain* includes 15 photographs taken by his father, a British medical doctor stationed in remote areas of Cameroon and Nigeria in the 1930s and 1940s. What brings these works together in this research has surprisingly little to do with the readily apparent commonalities in subject matter between the two photo sets—peoples and places of the African continent during the high colonial period. Rather, we focus here on text-image relationships, examining how, in each case, the photographs are *made to be* autobiographical. Taking an intermedial approach to literary studies that raises the photographs up from a subordinate illustrative function, we consider the primarily textual operations that, in plays of meaning and intention, work to appropriate and incorporate into these texts photographs that can be resistant or disruptive to those efforts. Our readings of these works contribute new insight into the use and function of photographs in life writing.

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Table of contents:

Title page	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Photography in Autobiographical Life Writing	16
Chapter 2: Michel Leiris' <i>L'Afrique fantôme</i> . A Critical History	56
Chapter 3: Michel Leiris' <i>L'Afrique fantôme</i> . The Photographs	106
Chapter 4: J.-M.G. Le Clézio's <i>L'Africain</i> in words and pictures	180
Conclusion	239
References	247

Introduction:

This study looks at the role of photographs in two works of autobiographical life writing. Michel Leiris' 1934 travel diary, *L'Afrique fantôme* features thirty-one ethnographic photographs taken during a French ethnographic expedition that crossed sub-Saharan Africa at the beginning of the 1930s. J.-M.G. Le Clézio's 2004 memoir *L'Africain* includes fifteen photographs taken by his father, a British medical doctor stationed in remote areas of Cameroon and Nigeria in the 1930s and 1940s. The photographs that illustrate Leiris' *L'Afrique fantôme* were chosen from among thousands collected by a French ethnographic mission as it traveled from Dakar to Djibouti between 1931 and 1933. Le Clézio's *L'Africain*, which revisits that author's childhood voyage from postwar France to Nigeria to meet his father, a field doctor, for the very first time, is a generation—and several decades—removed from Leiris' work, and so it offers a more contemporary retrospective of the era. Yet it shares with *L'Afrique fantôme* a lived experience, and Le Clézio uses his father's personal photographs to anchor his story to that specific time and place in which the images had been captured.

Photographs that appear in non-fiction are generally expected to corroborate or supplement a text (Adams xxi). However, these two works have been selected for how they challenge those expectations, for how the literary use of photographs in each work engages with the book's textual elements. Taking an intermedial approach to literary studies that raises the photographs up from a subordinate illustrative function, we examine ways that photographs contribute to the literary construction of the self. What we consider are the primarily textual operations that work, in plays of meaning and intention, to appropriate and incorporate photographs that frequently prove themselves to

be resistant or disruptive to those efforts. In one respect, this study is about the role they play as illustrator, as a visual medium in collaboration¹ with a written text. But the authors employ their photographs in intentional and deliberate ways. It is those intentional actions and their effects that are the primary focus of this study.

Le Clézio's familial photographs hold a direct connection to the author's past, yet they also serve to fabulate his memoir, reenacting and elaborating an escapist childhood fantasy as the author renegotiates the troubled relationship he had had with his father. As for Leiris' image choices, they are strangely and deliberately banal. As ethnographic photographs, they are almost insignificant. The ceremonial masks, mud huts, and sun-baked faces squinting for the camera are all old hat by the time the book was published in 1934. But within the text of *L'Afrique fantôme* they can prove formally challenging and provocative, regardless of their actual subject. It is such details that begin to disrupt the narrative expectation² of the visual content of these books.

The two works also share a focus on those personal experiences of travel that are often negative, eliciting feelings of detachment or of isolation when they are not merely mundane. Leiris wrote *L'Afrique fantôme* during the interwar period, when at the age of thirty, he embarked upon a two-year journey across the African continent. The British novelist Graham Greene whose own travelogue, *Journey Without Maps*—about his reckless decision to walk across Liberia in 1935—, was published only two years after *L'Afrique fantôme*, writes of this particular generation of writers,³ that:

¹ This project takes what Irina Rajewsky calls a "literary approach" to intermedial studies; it examines "forms and functions of intermedial practices in given media products" ("Intermediality" 49).

² See De Man, Paul. *Aesthetic Ideology*: 178.

³ While Greene, here, speaks of his British compatriots, similar things could be said of French scribes of the era, Leiris included. See Debaene...

We were a generation brought up on adventure stories who had missed the disillusionment of the First War; so we went looking for adventure [...]. (ix)

It was a period when ‘young authors’ were inclined to make uncomfortable journeys in search of bizarre material, Peter Fleming to Brazil and Manchuria, Evelyn Waugh to British Guyana and Ethiopia. (ix)

In a race to prove themselves, this generation of interwar writer-travellers were nonetheless beset with a certain melancholy. Adventure-seeking was their outward compensation, from a sense of belatedness, a sense of having “missed the authentic experience once offered by a world that was already disappearing” (Behdad, *Belated Travelers* fourth cover), that had already been discovered. The world did not match the excitement of adventure stories with their “energizing myth[s]” of Imperial glory (M. Green, *Dreams of Adventure...* xi; qtd in Zilcosky *Writing Travel* 5). And, besides, those adventures had already been written; many an interwar travel writer would thus go to near extremes to carve out his own place, to show “the radical singularity” of *his own voyage*. (Debaene, *Far Afield* 133).

With *L’Afrique fantôme*, the novelty was quite grandiose, if rather institutional. The Dakar-Djibouti Mission that was the catalyst for Leiris’s book had been orchestrated by the French government, and its launch was a grand affair that aimed to profit both from the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition and from the popularity at the time of jazz and black culture, by “riding the crest of the wave of enthusiasm for *l’art nègre*” (Clifford, *Predicament of Culture* 136). But the mission, itself, was belated: its mandate involved not the discovery and documentation of new cultural practices or languages, but rather the preservation of cultural effects that were disappearing due to colonial contact and a changing world (cf. “Instructions sommaires” in *Cahier Dakar-Djibouti* 174). The Dakar-

Djibouti mission also came decades after similar expeditions by other colonial powers, and so its leader, Marcel Griaule, prided himself, rather, on this mission's advanced and state-of-the-art technology, which included equipment for capturing sound, images and moving pictures—Griaule even bragged of a boat that served as a mobile laboratory (Clifford, *Predicament of Culture* 56). However, in the oft quoted *prière d'insérer* from *L'Afrique fantôme*, which reads, in part:

Qu'y trouve-t-il ? Peu d'aventures, des études qui le passionnent d'abord, mais lui semblent bientôt trop abstraites. De plus en plus, il est le jouet de ce qu'il fuyait: obsessions sexuelles, sentiment d'un vide impossible à combler⁴ (748),

Leiris cuts down the grandiosity of the mission in a single stroke as he illustrates his unfulfilled desires and his disenchantment in a manner that sets a melancholy tone for the book before the reader even cracks the spine. And through the diary's confessional conceit, *L'Afrique fantôme* demystifies not only the colonial enterprise and scientific fieldwork, but also travel literature and even travel itself. He returns home to Europe exhausted but essentially unchanged.

Leiris' travels were by no means futile or uninteresting, it is moreso that his original aspirations and expectations were deflated by everyday banalities. This is not insignificant; the realization that "the ideal conceived by the imagination is not found in real life" (Bowman 8), ultimately shapes the work. A similar realization shapes Le Clézio's work as well, though in a different, far more retrospective way, as *L'Africain* offers a reflective meditation on the past, on youth and aging; *L'Africain* presents parallel stories of displacement and alienation: one is that of a husband and father who, separated

⁴ ["What does he find? Few adventures, research that initially excites him but soon reveals itself too inhuman to be satisfying, an increased erotic obsession, an emotional void of growing proportions." (Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* 165-166)].

from his wife and children by the violences and blockades of World War II, has committed himself to caring for others as a doctor in colonial West Africa; the other, that of a child, born into the fearsome realities of that war, who is taken to a new land, far from the home he had known, to live among strangers, the strangest being the father he has only known through stories and with whom he struggles to find a connection, a missing piece of his young and still-forming self. For Le Clézio, travel to Africa was not a choice, but the sort of situation for which a child has no control. It was a question of adaptation, which, from his recollections in *L'Africain*, it was far easier for a boy of eight-years-old to find a place for himself in a remote village in Nigeria, then to return to France as an outsider. Le Clézio recreates the Africa of his childhood in dreamlike fashion, utopic in its freedom and its energy (17). But he does so always with a keen awareness that this gentle nostalgia, « [c]ette vie de liberté totale, je l'aurai sans doute rêvée plutôt que vécue »⁵ (20).

However, what is perhaps surprising about our findings in this study is that they show how the melancholy tone, present in both of these books, is not the defining characteristic of either, which, we admit, had been our initial assumption—our expectation—at the outset of this project. *L'Africain* is ultimately a generous and accepting homage to a difficult and distant father, and Le Clézio uses photographs as a means both of finding and of expressing a connection with his father. As for *L'Afrique fantôme*, Leiris' many laments—and there are many—are mostly affectations, and the photographs, by the moments and the objects that Leiris elected to show, largely reflect a

⁵ [“I must have only dreamt of this life of absolute freedom rather than having really lived it.” (C. Dickson, *The African* 15)]

genuine interest and enthusiasm toward his experiences during La Mission Dakar-Djibouti.

It must, of course, be stressed that *L'Afrique fantôme* and its photographs are the documentation—themselves, the product—of in-the-field operations of the French colonial apparatus, and *L'Africain*'s photographs only exist because of the colonial activities of the British Empire that were responsible for sending Le Clézio, the father, to Nigeria and Cameroon. *L'Afrique fantôme*, in particular, is a problematic and criticized work for how it exemplifies colonial ethnographic practices and mindsets, such as “gain[ing] ownership of African cultural identit[ies]” through the acts of theft and extortion (Larson 236) that were practiced by the Mission; or the indulgent attempts at “self-othering” (Foster, *Return of the Real* 175) that Leiris pursued throughout his travels across the African continent. And, moving beyond the specific events recounted in *L'Afrique fantôme*, simply the photographic act, in the contexts of colonialism and of colonial ethnography, was itself a tool of “control and visual privilege” (Childs 52) that could wield powerful and negative effects of racializing, distancing, and othering (Poole 164, 166). It is also important to note, however, that this dissertation *is not* a study of colonial photography in any significant way. *It does not* investigate the important sociopolitical aspects of these photographs' creation or the impacts of their circulation. *It does not* offer a new postcolonial reading nor critique of either *L'Afrique fantôme* or *L'Africain*. Rather, this dissertation, quite differently, and perhaps surprisingly to some, is a theoretical study of literary intermediality. It looks at these two books, by Leiris and by Le Clézio, as two separate and individual case studies, in which we explore how, within each work, photographs have been made to be autobiographical. In

this way, they might very well have been titled *L'Europe fantôme* or *L'Européen*, our critical stance would have been unchanged. Indeed, these books were chosen for this study precisely for the particular manner in which photographs operate (and are operated upon) formally within each text. This dissertation endeavours to reorient the reading of such photographic illustrations, to consider them within the specific context of the works within which they appear. What we examine, here, are quite specifically the text-image relationships in these books, and this exploration leads us toward a very close reading of each, which effectively keeps us 'inside' of the books to be able to consider the ways through which each author was able to both appropriate and incorporate photographs into his work.

A note on genre

This study deals with *autobiographical life writing*, meaning that it deals with works that are self-referential and, most often, written in the first person. The two works that make up the corpus of this study—one a field diary, the other a memoir—might be better be qualified as *autobiographical travel narratives*, or they might more simply have been labeled, following Smith and Watson's categorization, as *travel narratives*—

usually written in the first person and focus[ing], in progress or retrospectively, on a journey. Subordinating other aspects of the writer's life, they typically chronicle or reconstruct the narrator's experience of displacement, encounter, and travail and his or her observations of the unknown, the foreign, the uncanny. (our emphasis)(Reading Autobiography 284-285)

But we insist upon *autobiographical life writing* for these works, in order to highlight their intensely subjective natures, which, in both cases, holds primacy over the book's travel elements, and this subjective nature is a key focal point of our work. Admittedly,

these are rather straightforward, unassuming vocabulary choices: *autobiographical life writing* and *autobiographical travel narratives*. However, we make mention of them largely in recognition of the term *autobiography*. As a specific generic term, *autobiography* carries with it some exclusive parameters that often guide its critical applications, and it has been criticized for its privileging and universalizing effects (*see* Smith and Watson 2-5; *see also* Couser, “Genre Matters” 126 qtd. in Smith and Watson 4). This has given rise to greater adoption of the term *life writing* for reasons of greater inclusivity and broader applicability across genres and forms—we recognize the utility of *life writing* as a broadly applicable term.

That said, the term *life writing* is by no means universal and, certainly for first-person narratives, *autobiography* remains both a slippery and sticky term that, in scholarship, is often applied in its broadest sense to a variety of first-person life writing narratives that may fall outside the specific parameters of the term put forth by Philippe Lejeune. Most scholars in this field will acknowledge the specific conventional elements of the genre of autobiography that Lejeune identifies. In practice, however, many only go so far as to apply the test of Lejeune’s referential condition—that the author, narrator and protagonist of a work being identical (*see On Autobiography* 5)—in their use of the term.

Timothy Dow Adams’ book *Light Writing and Life Writing*, for example, which uses “life writing” in the title, carries the subtitle *Photography and Autobiography*, and Adams proceeds to employ the latter as the default term throughout, despite a variety of forms and modes (memoirs, fictions, hybrids, etc.) studied within. Therefore, to borrow from the disclaimer presented by Smith and Watson in their work *Reading Autobiography*, in this present study we “use the term *autobiography* only to refer to the

traditional Western mode of the retrospective life narrative;” we employ the term *life writing* “as a general term for writing that takes a life, one’s own or another’s, as its subject;” and, like Smith and Watson, we also “often use the adjective *autobiographical* to designate self-referential writing” (original emphasis)(*Reading Autobiography* 4).

Chapter summaries

The direction in which we have oriented this study is not an effort to move around or away from postcolonial criticism of these works or of their photographic imagery. Indeed, this project was conceived, in no small part, in response to certain and specific analyses of Leiris’ *L’Afrique fantôme* and its photographs, which, in their efforts to level such criticism, either fail to engage with the book itself, ultimately impeding the greater critical understanding of Leiris’ journal. It is from the necessary work of addressing those analyses (see Chapter 3) that this larger project has taken shape.

The first chapter of this dissertation serves to contextualize the critical and theoretical approaches that we have adopted for our subsequent studies of Leiris’ *L’Afrique fantôme* and Le Clézio’s *L’Africain*. To begin, the chapter looks at the scholarly and critical study of photography in autobiographical life writing. This is an area which has really only been establishing itself over the past twenty-five years, and if this seems to be a late emergence—considering that photography, as a technology and as a medium, is more than 175 years old and that life writing traces at least as far back as St. Augustine’s *Confessions* at the turn of the fifth century (Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self Portrait* 14)—, it is likely because this field of academic interest is primarily the territory of a generation of scholars and scholarship arriving after the 1970s. It was

during that “Me” decade that Philippe Lejeune would publish *L’autobiographie en France* (1973) and *Le pacte autobiographique* (1975), the latter of which sought to outline the limits and characteristics of autobiography, and which remains an important and influential hallmark in defining autobiography as a genre. Equally important, and arguably more influential would be Roland Barthes’ *Roland Barthes* (1975) and *La Chambre claire* [*Camera Lucida*] (1980), which, together, have served, ever since, to both inspire and popularize more ambitious and creative involvement of photographs and photography in literature and, particularly, in autobiographical writing.⁶ However, this is not to suggest that ambitious and creative use of photography in autobiographical writing was ever exclusive to Barthes or his more contemporary—and French—literary successors. Timothy Dow Adams in his 2000 monograph *Light Writing & Life Writing*, looked, among others, at works by Michael Ondaatje and N. Scott Momaday, from 1970 and 1976, respectively; and Linda Haverty Rugg, in her 1997 volume *Picturing Ourselves*, examines the blending of photography and autobiography by the likes of Mark Twain and August Strindberg dating back to the nineteenth century—not to mention that a significant portion of this very dissertation is dedicated to a photo-illustrated travel diary published in 1934.

The first chapter then looks toward the field of intermedial studies to be able to model an approach to reading and studying our corpus that better positions the photographs to be integral elements of their respective books. To accomplish this, we adopt a method of close reading that permits us to look at the books’ “intermedial

⁶ As we discuss in the fourth chapter, for example, Le Clézio’s *L’Africain* was a work commissioned for the collection *Traits et portraits* by Colette Fellous, who had been a student of Barthes and who developed *Traits et portraits*—which today boasts more than two dozen titles—as a collection of works that explicitly engage photography and autobiography.

dynamics” (Baetens “The Photographic Novel” 238) by looking “within the literary text itself” (Hallet 603). What will ultimately be produced is a pair of formal intratextual studies that examine the text-image interactions inside each of these works. Because of this, we borrow conceptually from the practice of collage, whose processes involve the selection and appropriation of distinct elements that operate together to create a new and unified work, but whose interactions between elements still allow multiplied meanings and formal ironies that leave that unified work nevertheless unstable. The final section of our first chapter returns to reflect upon Barthes, whose influence on the study of photography dates back to the 1950s, whose entire body of thought on photography and photographs is essential, and whose two later works, *Roland Barthes* and *La chambre claire*, served to usher in what might be called the photobiographical era.

The second and third chapters of this dissertation are devoted to Leiris’ *L’Afrique fantôme*. Chapter two traces the divided and divisive critical history of *L’Afrique fantôme*, as this is crucial to understanding the book’s changing reception over many decades, which would influence critical scholarship, and specifically that critical scholarship dedicated to the book’s photographs. Mostly unnoticed upon its 1934 release and suppressed under the Vichy regime, *L’Afrique fantôme* essentially disappeared before it ever made a mark, until it was republished in 1951 with some added notes by the author and a preface that looked back on the diary twenty years onward. The book would see a pair of critical mentions in the mid-1950s, which would mark the two very distinct ways that *L’Afrique fantôme* would be received and interpreted over the next sixty years: it was going to be read either as a work of Freudian self-analysis and self-exposure, not unlike the autobiographical experimentation that Leiris would pursue with his later and more-

widely read *L'âge d'homme* and the eventual four volumes of literary self-portraiture that are known collectively as *La règle du jeu*; or it would be read as an ethnographic work, usually on its own, but sometimes as a building block of Leiris' ethnographic and political writing that had both merged and culminated with his 1950 essay « L'ethnographie devant le colonialisme ». But *L'Afrique fantôme* was nevertheless, largely ignored, apart from finding its way into university ethnology and anthropology syllabi (see Jamin, "Les métamorphoses" 204-205; Guiart 104). It would only come of age in the early 1980s, when it was evoked in rather exciting fashion by James Clifford in his seminal article "On Ethnographic Surrealism." That work looked back upon interwar Paris as the centre of intellectual dalliances between the surrealist and modernist affections for primitivism and the burgeoning institution of professional ethnography that was then beginning to venture out across the world to cultivate understanding of the peoples and cultures of France's expanding colonial interests. Clifford paints a seductive and effervescent picture of the era in which *L'Afrique fantôme* was produced, and he suggests Leiris' journal to be perhaps the single ever example of "surrealist ethnography" (Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* 142). The label is a contestable one (see Hollier, « La valeur de l'usage de l'impossible » x, n.1; Jamin « L'ethnographie: mode d'emploi » 53). But it is also quite sticky, and it has shaped the way that *L'Afrique fantôme* has been received by many readers—and certainly the book's Anglo-American readership—in all the years since. The book saw an extended period of visibility throughout the 1980s and 1990s, becoming a useful object of debate in the fields of anthropology, art history, and literature, and in postcolonial studies at large: it has been celebrated as a proto-postmodernist experiment by Clifford, and it has been criticized—

even derided—as exoticist, primitivist fantasy by the likes Hal Foster, Phyllis Clark-Taoua and Marie Denise Shelton. These divisions have long fed the book’s perpetually difficult reputation, and collectively, they continue to influence how the book is received today. Indeed, *L’Afrique fantôme*’s literary reputation is one of divisiveness and faces accusations of mischaracterisation by almost all who read this ‘impossible’ book. This chapter’s survey of the book’s critical history and reputation is indispensable to understanding and evaluating how the book’s photographs would be received by scholars beginning in the 1990s.

Chapter three continues to look at the critical reception of *L’Afrique fantôme*, and it is in this chapter that we come to consider the book through an intermedial lens and conduct our own critical work. Here, we turn our attentions to the photographs, and we engage critically and directly with the small body of scholarship that surrounds them. Through a close reading of the journal and its photographs, we carefully consider, and frequently challenge, the critical findings and (mis)interpretations proposed in the existing scholarship. Of note is the fact that the first critical work to ever study the photographs in *L’Afrique fantôme* only appeared in 1995. That first article, along with the small handful of others that have followed since, are all reflective of *L’Afrique fantôme*’s divided and divisive reputation in how they approach the book and its photographs, which is either wholly ethnographic or wholly personal. All of these attempts prove problematic. Those that read the photographs as documents of colonial ethnographic practices that reflect exoticism and domination are challenged by a text and captions which never deny the photographic subjects their agency or autonomy. Conversely, when the photographs are read as being personal and revealing of Leiris’ psyche or desires, the

documentary context of the mission and Leiris' daily activity bring these fully subjective readings into doubt. The interaction between the documentary photographs and the diary entries that they illustrate never allows for the ethnographic or the personal to claim exclusivity; there is always a destabilizing back-and-forth that, far too often, has pushed these scholars to look outside of *L'Afrique fantôme* in their efforts to study and explain the book's images—indeed, what becomes apparent is that these critics often apply certain rather broad and largely postcolonial critiques to *L'Afrique fantôme* without any real engagement with the book. Through close reading, therefore, we draw our own efforts back into the book in order to explore the mechanisms that keep these photographs in flux. Let it be restated that we are not conducting a postcolonial rereading of *L'Afrique fantôme*, but rather, we are examining, in both books of the corpus, the disruptive role of the photographs within each narrative, as well as the ways that photographs are used by each of the authors. What is achieved in our study of *L'Afrique fantôme* is a necessary preliminary step, as we mention above, of reorienting the reading the work to address these shortcomings in the existing scholarship.

The final chapter of this dissertation looks at Le Clézio's memoir *L'Africain*. It is a significantly different case study from that of *L'Afrique fantôme*, as *L'Africain* is very different book. Firstly, it is far shorter and far more refined. But also, where Leiris' journal recounts his experiences as they occur, Le Clézio's African experiences that he revisits in *L'Africain* had been those of a child, and therefore he is looking back on them from a distance of more than fifty years. This means that his memories require a fair deal of reconstruction and, in this way, photographs are used as building blocks of the very

substance of the book. The photographs that he uses to do this are taken from those snapshots that his father had taken, most between 1928 and 1940, before Le Clézio's birth. The book plays with these images, having them stand in to illustrate events of Le Clézio's own African experience decades later, creating parallels between the experiences of father and son. But the effect is mostly jarring, as the photographs are never quite the perfect fit, and because Le Clézio plays with what he chooses to reveal to the reader and what he chooses to conceal from view. What our reading of *L'Africain* ultimately reveals is a richly complex interaction between text and images that challenges readers to continuously reevaluate both, while on an imaginative journey into childhood memories and their lingering effects.

Chapter 1: Introduction: Photographs in Autobiographical Life Writing

*Although photography's material base is a mechanical and chemical process, the medium offers a melancholy poetics—traces of things and places that-have-been, a capturing of time lost, a specter of our imminent death—imparting an element of romantic mourning to this very banal object.*⁷

Scholarship surrounding autobiographical life writing has long addressed “notions of reference, authenticity, and the autobiographical self as [being] *indeterminate and resistant to objectification*” (our emphasis)(N. Edwards et al., *Textual and Visual Selves* 2). With Philippe Lejeune's *Pacte autobiographique* in 1975, the form's “referential credentials” (N. Edwards et al., *Textual and Visual Selves* 2) were established through the agreement undertaken by a reader that “the author [...] and the narrator are identical” (Lejeune 4). Lejeune also provided a valuable discursive tool in laying forth the conventional framework of the specific genre of *autobiography* as being, a “[r]etrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (4). While it is spelled out rather plainly, Lejeune's pact provides, importantly for scholarship, what Paul John Eakin calls “a reader-based poetics” of a genre that, in its writing, is ultimately “a self-referential gesture” (Lejeune ix-x). And while Lejeune presents the pact clearly, it is not perfect, and he is careful to qualify its terms:

[I]t is a mode of reading as much as it is a type of writing; it is a historically variable *contractual effect*. [...] Whence come its relativity and the absurdity that there would be in wanting it to be universal; whence come also the

⁷ Kriebel, “Theories of Photography” 20.

difficulties encountered in this undertaking of definition.” (original emphasis)(30)

Yet, there remains, unacknowledged in the pact itself, a power differential, as well as some canonical assertions and generic assumptions within Lejeune’s reader-based poetics, that others have indicated and challenged,⁸ showing that, at the very same time that Lejeune was searching for ever “stricter criteria” (*On Autobiography* 3) for *defining* autobiography, others—other scholars, other writers, and other artists—were experimenting with broadening its scope. Just a few short years after Lejeune’s *Pacte*, Michel Beaujour published *Miroirs d’encre* [*The Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*], in which he focuses on autobiographical works— *self-portraits*—that fundamentally defy that conventional form, that eschew standard chronology and continuous narrative for a more thematic logic and order—“I won’t tell you what I’ve done, but I shall show you who I *am*” (original emphasis)(*Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait* 11). And Lejeune’s *Pacte* was published the same year that Roland Barthes published his autobiographical experiment *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, a book so full of deliberate and subversive self-referential intention that it gives the impression of having always already been disrupting those notions and conventions that Lejeune was so carefully presenting.

In the scholarship that relates to life writing, there is a subfield that focuses particularly upon autobiographical life writing that incorporates or engages with

⁸ Moore-Gilbert, for example, reasserts the necessary importance of author-based self-reference and, with it, self-representation, for those literatures that are marginalized and underrepresented, noting different generic conventions across cultures and between sexes, and arguing that, in postcolonial life-writing, fiction is often used “to challenge the epistemological status of authorial/autobiographical identity as outlined by Lejeune, and thereby to contest the wider truth claims conventionally made by, and on behalf of, canonical autobiography” (*Postcolonial Life-Writing* xxii); and drawing on travel narratives, Moore-Gilbert illustrates, for example, how, in V.S. Naipaul’s 1971 novel, *In A Free State*, the author “scrupulously evades Lejeune’s ‘pact’” (*Postcolonial Life-Writing* 74-75) in how he plays with the identity of the narrating subject. See also Smith and Watson 2-5; Couser, “Genre Matters” 126, qtd. in Smith and Watson 4.

photography in its projects of self-construction and self-representation. In it, we see further examples of conventional notions being upended,⁹ for the ways in which photographs ultimately impose themselves into these works. Whereas photographs are so readily associated with memory and with history and with place—a certain quality of what Barthes had, at one time, called *having-been-there-ness* (*Image/Music/Text* 44, “The Rhetoric of the Image”)—, simple assumptions of reference or of authenticity¹⁰ put photographs in the often risky position of being passively accepted at face value when they appear as illustration in books. And as Rugg points out, in autobiographical life writing, familiar tropes encourage this passivity: childhood, family or candid photos, yearbooks, homesteads, etc., are the stock-in-trade of photo-illustration in popular autobiography; Rugg calls such instances “naive” (*Picturing Ourselves* 2, 14, 21) incorporations and receptions of photographs in autobiographical writing.

However, as artists and scholars demonstrate over and over again, photographs play a far more significant role in crafting, in shaping, and even in altering a text from what it might have been in their absence. Photographs within an autobiographical work “intensify [...] the complexity and ambiguity of each taken separately” (Adams, *Light Writing* xxi), and “the mere presence of photography challenges traditional forms of autobiographical narrative by calling into question essential assumptions about the nature of referentiality, time, history and selfhood” (Rugg 231). Adams argues that whenever *any* photograph is placed within a book, there is a very deliberate construction taking place, that “just as autobiographies are obviously artificial representations of lives, so

⁹ Barthes’ *Roland Barthes* is routinely cited as the prevailing archetype.

¹⁰ Further to this, the assumption of photographs’ apparent “indexicality” is a contentious topic among photography scholars (See *Photography Theory* for an extensive, prolonged—and at moments heated—debate).

photographs are clearly manufactured images” (*Light Writing* 5). Photography *is*, after all, the manufacture¹¹ of images and, as David Nye writes, “photographs are powerful *precisely because they are crafted, shaped, and directed toward a certain end*” (our emphasis)(“Photography as Communication” 30).¹² At the same time, however, Solomon-Godeau argues that “any conceptual thinking on photography require[s] that we consider all those elements of photography that *exceed the camera, the individual picture, and the individual photographer.*” (our emphasis) (“Ontology, Essences” 268). Such is the work of scholarship.

In volumes such as Rugg’s *Picturing Ourselves* (1997), Timothy Dow Adams’ *Light Writing and Life Writing* (2000), and the Edwards, Hubbell and Miller-edited *Textual and Visual Selves* (2011), scholars and critics have explored the many ways that the presence of photographs can complicate and compound autobiography and other works of autobiographical life writing. Rugg’s enquiry in *Picturing Ourselves* is one that delves into the “referential paradox” of “seeing both the material body and its constructed nature at the same time” (20); this paradox, Rugg asserts in her work, applies as much to life writing and to photography apart from each other as it does when they are combined.¹³ And what joins her subjects of study is the anxiety surrounding, sometimes even engulfing, that *self*-construction. In *Picturing Ourselves*, Rugg elaborates on the carefully-considered images and personas that were crafted and maintained by the likes

¹¹ Photographic technology traces back to da Vinci’s camera obscura, often metaphorically seen as passively projecting an image (see Doy 111; Kofman 39), but one must not forget the manipulation, redirection and focusing of light required to produce it. The first viable mechanically-captured images, however, were the daguerreotypes and calotypes in the late 1830s.

¹² See also Edwards and Hart, “Introduction” in *Photographs, Objects, Histories*.

¹³ Her book’s introduction cites, among others, Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, WJT Mitchell, Susan Sontag and Alan Trachtenberg [in consideration of this paradox in photography]; Paul John Eakin, Michel Beaujour, Paul de Man, Philippe Lejeune and Janet Varner Gunn [in consideration of this paradox in autobiography]; Elizabeth Bruss, Louis Renza, and Barthes (again) [in consideration of this paradox in the combined].

of iconic American writer Mark Twain and Swedish modernist playwright August Strindberg, each of whom, in their own autobiographical projects, “employ[ed] the photograph to remind the reader of the man holding the pen” (36).¹⁴ In the case of Mark Twain, there is the problem of imposture, as “Mark Twain” is the pseudonym and persona of the man and writer Samuel Clemens; the struggle of ‘keeping up appearances’ proved to be life-long. The Strindberg case is one of “self-anatomy”¹⁵ (84) from a man who strove to produce life-sized photographic images of himself and of loved ones, believing photographs to perform as actual stand-ins for their subjects and onto which he bestowed his beliefs in telepathy and the occult (118). Rugg’s study, overall, casts a skeptical glance toward the existence of any sort of “profound self”¹⁶ (*Picturing Ourselves* 85) that life writing and photographs are so often purported to plumb.

Rugg’s embrace of that skepticism and anxiety allows for others, then, to acknowledge those traits in order to move beyond them. In *Light Writing and Life Writing*, Adams fully embraces the ambiguity of the literary self-portrait. Borrowing from Beaujour twenty years onward, Adams employs the term more broadly, a reflection of the changes both in the production and in the study of the genre over that time. His work centres around the sometimes indiscernible divide separating fiction and nonfiction, the way “photography and autobiography operate in a parallel fashion, both deliberately blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, between representation and creation” (20). Of particular interest is the section of the book subtitled “Collage: Autobiographies

¹⁴ Also presented in Rugg’s study are the examples of Walter Benjamin and Christa Wolf, both of whom actively avoided actual photographs in their autobiographical works, even when the power of the photographic image remained such a central theme for each.

¹⁵ The term “self-anatomy” is well described by Walton and Hass as “the careful dissection of [one’s] being” (*Self/Same/Other* 25).

¹⁶ Rugg credits her own skepticism to Paul John Eakin (*See Eakin, Touching the World* 18-19).

that Combine Words and Photographs.” This title helps Adams to problematize both the interaction and the recontextualization of combined media. In this section, he devotes a chapter to the work of Michael Ondaatje, in which he questions how the Sri Lankan-Canadian author and poet “[undercuts] the authenticating power of photographs” (108) in works such as *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems* (1970). In *The Collected Works*, the photographs selected by Ondaatje have been “edited, rephrased and slightly reworked” (*The Collected Works...* iv ; qtd. in Adams, *Light Writing* 104). Adams notes that, while Ondaatje may desire to present the outlaw Billy the Kid in a new light (*Light Writing* 105), “one of [his] major reasons for including photographs within the text is to demonstrate that, despite their reputation for historical authenticity, they can often be misleading as documentation” (107). Indeed, the final photograph of “Billy” appearing in *The Collected Works* is, in fact, a childhood photo of Ondaatje in a cowboy costume.

The Edwards, Hubbell and Miller-edited essay collection *Textual and Visual Selves* casts its focus upon genre and upon how photographs contribute to sub-genres and subversions of life writing, with essays that look at fractured and fragmented subjectivities. Along with contributions that look at now-emblematic works by Annie Ernaux and Marc Marie, Sophie Calle, and Hervé Guibert,¹⁷ there are essays examining various intersections of photography and life writing. In her essay “Beyond Autobiography,” Véronique Montémont examines the effects of photographs on “biographical reality” (31): “For some, a photo involves a kind of irrecoverable distortion

¹⁷ For mention of other notable works, see for example, Eakin, *Touching the World* 23; or Montémont, « Le pacte autobiographique et la photographie » 45.

of experience, while for others it is instead the indispensable means of activating the process of memory” (36). Also raised in this volume are questions about how lived experience is narrated, certainly in the postmodern context. Floriane Place-Verghnes draws on André Rouillé to argue that the intimacy, the personal, of both autobiography and of photography, when combined, “destroy any sense of the universal in art” (Rouillé 478; qtd in “The Photobiographical Today” 103), thus occupying the whole of the narrative space with individual experience.

We mention these volumes for what they show in terms of the breadth of literary works of life writing that engage with photography, and for how they reflect the type of scholarship that has been produced, along with the direction that this scholarship has taken. They show that works of autobiographical life writing that engage with photography have been being produced for well over 100 hundred years—crossing three centuries—, but they also reveal that such works have really only become an object of study—of any significance, at least—over the most recent two to three decades (*see* Montémont, « Le pacte autobiographique et la photographie » 44; Arribert-Narce, “Roland Barthes’s Ghosts” 140).

Much of this has to do with Lejeune’s *Pacte autobiographique*, first published in 1975, and with his earlier *L’autobiographie en France* from 1971. Montémont rightly states that Lejeune’s efforts brought much needed academic legitimacy to a genre—autobiography—whose common limits and features had prior been inadequately or, at least, insufficiently defined; Lejeune, therefore, had articulated a clear set of analytical tools (Montémont « Le pacte autobiographique et la photographie » 43, 46). But this really only accounts for one aspect, being the availability of critical tools for engaging

with autobiographical life writing—because Lejeune, in his pact, simply does not address photographs.¹⁸ Not that it was expected of him, but it does mark a clearly identifiable omission in his work. And while Lejeune offers one toolkit, it is arguably somewhat secondary, as the chief interest of all of these works is, indeed, the work of the photographs.

A photobiographical pact

In their 1983 collaboration *L'été dernier. Manifeste photobiographique*, Mora and Nori, in a gesture and a work that exhibits the wide-ranging interest, at that moment, in photography as an element of literary self-construction, declared an enthusiastic commitment to using photographs in autobiographical works « *jusqu'à ne plus savoir s'il convient de vivre pour photographier, ou l'inverse* »¹⁹ (our emphasis)(11; qtd. in Montémont, « Le pacte autobiographique et la photographie » 44), arguing for the degree to which photographs duplicate and intensify our lives. But their term « photobiographie »²⁰, Mora would later admit, was ultimately more effective as a publicity hook for publishers than as a rallying cry for artists (Montémont, « Le pacte autobiographique et la photographie » 44).

Montémont agrees that, as a manifesto perhaps, the term *photobiography* was a non-starter, but she retains it (as have others),²¹ tempering the manifesto's most

¹⁸ Lejeune does address photographs in a later work, but this amounts to little more than the halfhearted proposal of an awkward neologism—« Je proposerai d'appeler cela de *la phauto* » (our emphasis)(*Moi aussi* 82).

¹⁹ [Our translation: “until we no longer know whether we live to make photographs or we make photographs to live”]

²⁰ [Our translation: “photobiography”]

²¹ See for example Floriane Place-Verghnes' 2011 article “The Photobiographical Today” (cited above) or Fabien Arribert-Narce's 2014 book *Photobiographies: pour une écriture de notation de la vie*, which discusses works by Barthes, Ernaux and Denis Roche. Both Place-Verghnes and Arribert-Narce use the term descriptively (in its

ambitious, enthusiastic, and *exclusive* claims, choosing to modify—and to mobilize—*photobiography* to include more or less all literary works that both respect the terms of Lejeune’s pact *and* contain photographs (45).²² She proposes a second, *photobiographical* pact, one of « cohrence entre le caractre autobiographique du texte et la nature autobiographique des photographies, qui se traduirait par une non-contradiction entre le discours textuel tenu sur la photo [...] et l’existence de l’image elle-mme »²³ (49). Much like Lejeune’s, Montmont’s pact is a rather straightforward declaration, but a welcome—and arguably necessary—articulation of the specifics of a particular, intermedial, mode of life writing. But later, in her 2011 essay “Beyond Autobiography,” Montmont must acknowledge the photograph’s resistance to hewing to the terms of Lejeune’s pact:

[I]t arises out of the structural impossibility of extending to photography one of the key elements of [Lejeune’s] pact: enunciation [...] On this point, photography reaches an ontological stumbling block: it possesses no resources, other than linguistic ones, to say “I,” and this refers the question of identification back into the textual sphere. (43)

In other words, the photograph cannot adhere to the referential pact that is at the centre of Lejeune’s *Pacte*. Yet, while the attempt to raise the term *photobiography* to a level of standard nomenclature is unsuccessful, what is perhaps most notable is that which Montmont calls the *autobiographical nature* of the photograph, which she locates not within the image itself, but rather in the *relationship* between image and text. She writes:

portmanteau form combining “photography” and “autobiography”), but it is only Montmont who seems to subject the term to scrutiny and elaboration.

²² Montmont includes, as well, those works that engage with photographs *in absentia* through ekphrasis. It is worth noting that, in *conventional* autobiographies of the sort for which Lejeune was defining the key traits, the use of photographs, while by no means uncommon, would not, as Rugg points out, be considered *essential* (see *Picturing Ourselves* 2-15).

²³ [Our translation: “coherence between the autobiographical character of the text and the autobiographical nature of the photographs, which is manifested in a non-contradiction between the textual discourse surrounding the photo and the existence of the image itself.”]

La rencontre du texte et de l'image [...] crée des interactions, mais aussi des interférences, qui font qu'aucun des deux éléments ne peut sortir indemne de la relation photobiographique, dès lors que chacun est tributaire de l'autre dans sa construction du rapport au réel. C'est pourquoi la photographie perd assez vite, dans les textes autobiographiques, sa valeur d'illustration ou de preuve. Ce qui semble compter davantage est le processus de mémoire qu'elle met en marche chez l'auteur, lui permettant de reconstituer un segment de temps, de rechercher un climat, une atmosphère, une expérience. (« Le pacte autobiographique et la photographie » 49)²⁴

Ultimately, the argument that she is advancing is that of a text-image relationship in an autobiographical context, not one that is uniquely *photobiographical* in the manner of her proposed pact.

In the two works that are subjects of the case studies in this dissertation, that autobiographical context differs quite drastically between them. Le Clézio's use of photographs in his 2004 memoir *L'Africain* might be seen as the more conventional with respect to the relationship that Montémont outlines above. He mines a family collection of photographs dating from the late 1920s to the late 1940s, mostly taken by his father and many before Le Clézio's birth, as a way to access his family's history and his father's past. This is an attempt to better understand the man who had given him life, and through that process, better understand himself. The photographs published in Leiris' 1934 travel diary *L'Afrique fantôme*, however, exist in the very moment of the work is being produced. Being of the same time and place and events that Leiris' daily journal recounts, they are not about accessing the past, but rather about capturing and preserving something of that present.

²⁴ [Our translation: "The encounter between text and image [...] creates interactions, but also interferences, that make it so that neither element escapes the photobiographic relationship unscathed, each henceforth being dependent on the other in its construction of the real. This is why photography loses, rather quickly, in autobiographical texts, its illustrative or evidential value. What seems to carry more weight is the memory process that it triggers in the author, permitting them to recreate a segment of time, to find an ambiance, an atmosphere, an experience."]

L'Afrique fantôme and *L'Africain* are works of life writing that have travel as a primary element of the text, and it is this travel element that is most directly communicated by the photographs. Both works are written from and about the European experience in colonial Africa, with almost all of the photographic images being of African peoples and African landscapes. This creates a contrast of identity and place, and it visually reaffirms the experience of displacement, of travel. But in neither of these works are the photographs published in any way inherently personal, or what might ordinarily be labeled autobiographical: neither author's photographic likeness appears in his respective book, nor is either man the author of the photographs that are published with his text. The photographs that illustrate Leiris' journal are all ethnographic documents collected for ethnographic purposes, and while it is certainly possible, and likely, that Leiris would have pointed the lens or engaged the shutter for some of the photographs that feature in *L'Afrique fantôme*, all photographic credit is given, generally, to *La Mission Dakar-Djibouti* as a collective, and more specifically to the Mission's leader, the ethnographer and anthropologist Marcel Griaule; furthermore, nowhere in the text does Leiris profess authorship of any of the photographs that feature in the book. Le Clézio, on the other hand, has a personal and hereditary connection to the photographs.

The text-image operations in each of these works perform quite differently from one another to shape autobiographical context. Of course, image selection plays a role. In Leiris' *L'Afrique fantôme* those selections may at first appear random, or their significance uncertain, but both general textual cues and more direct acts of textual appropriation of the images—through captions, for example—, work to establish and legitimize these ethnographic photographs' autobiographical status inside of Leiris' work.

Le Clézio's father's photographs, too, at times seem out of place or disruptive to his memoir. But in the case of *L'Africain*, Le Clézio engages fully with this uncertainty to incorporate the photographs, quite fundamentally, into the book.

Beyond illustration: intermediality

In one chapter of his 1992 book titled *Illustration*, J. Hillis Miller presents a study of Charles Dickens' 1836 first novel *The Pickwick Papers*²⁵ and that work's Phiz-penned²⁶ illustrations, which, Miller argues, offer "meaning that exceeds, and to even some degree subverts, Dickens's text" (111). He notes the existence in the work of a certain harmony between image and text (*see* 96, 102-103), but what he seeks is the "irreconcilable doubleness" (96) that, he writes, "may be located in a heterogeneity between media" or in the "failure of any sign to be self-identical or univocal" (95). Miller considers the relationship between Dickens' words and Phiz's images that serve to illustrate them from what might only be called a Heideggerian perspective of difference, wherein

[o]nly the same can mean the same. Neither the meaning of a picture nor the meaning of a sentence is by any means translatable. The picture means itself. The sentence means itself. The two can never meet, not even at some vanishing-point where the sun has set.^[27] (*Illustration* 95)

Miller's objects of study differ from our own, in that a commissioned hand-drawn illustration, is not a photograph. This is indeed true in Miller's Heideggerian sense of

²⁵ *The Pickwick Papers* (or *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*) is Charles Dickens' first novel. It recounts the mere adventures of Samuel Pickwick and members of his Pickwick Club.

²⁶ Phiz (real name Hablot Knight Brown) was illustrator of many of Dickens' works and was also an artist-contributor to *Punch magazine*.

²⁷ Miller, here, is making explicit reference both to Heidegger's "The Thing" and "The Origin of the Work of Art" (*see* Miller 79-96 ; Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 163-184; and Heidegger *Basic Writings* 139-212), as well as to Charles Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* and its "brief sunshine of the world" (qtd. in Miller 100). *The sun* becomes Miller's leitmotif in his analysis of the Phiz illustrations of the Dickens classic. (*see* Miller 96-111)

thingness and in the simple material sense, but it is also true of the ontological differences between photography and drawing or painting (*see, for example*, Bazin 6; or Barthes, *Image/Music/Text* 17-18, 43). But we speak, here, rather more to Miller's approach to the relationship and interaction between visual and textual elements. While Miller's approach is certainly a conventional way to look at illustration or at text-image relations, in his analysis he insists so strongly on the differences, on the borders, on the distinctions between these media (*see* Rajewsky 44), that such an approach, we would suggest, is ill-equipped to address the uses and the functions of photographs in works of life writing, as it would deny investigation of the referential relationship that is shared between photography and literature, particularly non-fiction literature, and which connects them (Böger 175) .

The photographs that are the object and focus of this dissertation hold no such obligation. Photographs, it has long been said, are unmoored fragments of reality, free-floating and code-less messages, ready-made to adapt to and adopt whichever meaning comes to beset them in any instance²⁸. It is their promiscuous nature (Sontag, *On Photography* 129), the dislocation inherent within photographs that Leiris and Le Clézio each, to different aims and to different degrees, exploit in their work. It is this same promiscuous nature that permits the consideration of these photographs—much like in a collage painting—as constitutive and integral “elements” of complete *media products* rather than any sort of “reductions” (Barthes, “Photographic Message” 196) of the texts they illustrate. In this way, it is important that the works that make up the corpus of this

²⁸ See Metz, “Photography and Fetish” 84; Sontag, *On Photography* 71; Barthes, “Le rhétorique de l’image” 44; Barthes “Le message photographique” 127; Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde* 206.

dissertation be considered not merely as photo-illustrated texts, but rather as “medial constellations” (Rajewsky, “Intermediality” 49), or

the result or the very process of combining at least two conventionally distinct media or medial forms of articulation. These two media or medial forms of articulation are each present in their own materiality and contribute to the constitution and signification of the entire product in their own specific way. (52)

Whether one applies the terms *medial constellation* or *media product* as Rajewsky does; *synthetic intermedia* as does Jens Schröter; or the French *message mixte* (Abastado 233; qtd. in Tilleuil 76), the label that is applied to an object of study suggests nonetheless “[the] fusion of several media into a new [intermedium] that supposedly is more than the sum of its parts” (Schröter, “Four Models...” 16) and is bound up in the essential premise of intermediality studies, that media “do not exist disconnected from one another” (15). Intermediality is to be understood as a “communicative-semiotic concept” that implies integration—to varying degrees—of a media product’s constitutive elements (Rajewsky “Intermediality” 52). It is about medial tension in the way that, in their copresence, “different media complete each other,” and in the way that this tension is “[e]mbedded in intentional acts” (Oosterling, “Sens(a)ble...” 36).

Indeed, it is the suggestion of *intentionality* that is perhaps the most compelling argument for our looking toward intermediality to conduct this study. What we explore is *how* both Michel Leiris and J.-M.G. Le Clézio engage with photographs in their respective works of life writing, and in so doing, we engage in very deliberate acts of close reading. Jan Baetens, in his studies of *photo-romans* [photographic novels], for example, shows close reading to be more than simply attentive reading, but rather attentive reading that “provides us with new insights into the intermedial dynamics”

(“The Photographic Novel” 238) of text-image relationships.²⁹ And Florian Sedlmeier argues for the method as a means of reestablishing within literary works their individual and specific merits. On close reading, Sedlmeier writes of

privileg[ing] the microscopic over the macroscopic, [...] where comparison is grounded in intermedial constellations, the construal of which requires a close reading for literariness and form, the conditions of artistic representability, and their material manifestations and mediations. (Against Totality” 69)

Like Rajewsky, Sedlmeier employs the term “constellation,” though he more specifically adopts and adapts Theodor Adorno’s concept of the term,³⁰ which he positions as being “[the] understanding [of] literatures as singular textual events” (“Against Totality” 75). For Sedlmeier, close reading also serves to challenge the “macroscopic” methods of Franco Moretti and Gayatri Spivak, which, he argues, have become entrenched in comparative literary studies (“Against Totality” 66-67), and which have resulted in overly broad “totalit[ies]” (64) of literary understanding.

Another recent work, Annette Federico’s *Engagements with Close Reading* (2015), takes a similar position of reacting against dominant literary scholarly practices of the past several decades. We do not intend to wade into this particular debate in this research, as our interest is not so much with disrupting the institution of literary studies. Admittedly, though, our adoption of close reading does serve well to challenge some of the received wisdom surrounding the use of photographs in our case studies, particularly with regard to Leiris’ journal and the reputation that it carries, which we explore in Chapters two and three.

²⁹ Baetens has also written about close reading in the digital realm. See *Close Reading and New Media*. Jan van Looy and Jan Baetens (eds.). (2003).

³⁰ Adorno, himself, writes, “The constellation illuminates *the specific side of the object*, the side which to a classifying procedure is either a matter of indifference or a burden” (our emphasis)(*Negative Dialectics* 162).

In both of our case studies, close reading allows us to contextualize the photographs explicitly within each work. Close reading permits us to examine each author's position toward their respective collections of photographs, as well as how each author acts, through their writing, to incorporate the photographs as autobiographical elements. In this, there is the implication of authorial intent, at the very least insofar as each author has played a visible hand in the selection of images,³¹ which, in itself offers an initial recognition of the photographs' objecthood.

These photographic elements transform as much as they are, themselves, transformed through a formal system of irony that registers with the reader-viewer, thus imbuing them with the tension of a permanent and simultaneous doubleness of meaning. And such operations, we contend, are best evidenced through the intermedial nature and processes of collage. As will be noted in the sections to follow, irony is foremost an intentional act, as are the fragmentation and assemblage of collage. Furthermore, in our labeling of the autobiographical travel narratives of the corpus as *media products* we are adopting not only a terminology but also an approach that permits engagement with the particulars of the *photographic* image-text relationship: this approach treats the photographs as integral, rather than subordinate—or paratextual in the Genettian sense³²—, to the texts they illustrate.

³¹ In both case studies there is both explicit and implicit evidence to support this, whether the photographs find themselves addressed in meta-referential passages within the body of the texts, in comments made in author prefaces, or in interviews with the authors.

³² See Genette, Gérard. *Seuils*. Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1987.; Hutcheon, Linda. "Postmodern Paratextuality and History." *Texte*. 5-6 (1986-87) : 301-312.

Irony and doubleness of meaning

Perhaps the most basic and generally understood model of irony is that of “a binary opposition of meanings” where one says “x” but what one means is in fact “not-x” (Finlay 12). In a larger sense, however, irony is understood as being the doubling of the intended meaning, so that “x” might mean *both* “x” and “not-x” (Colebrook 12). Where the model of simple opposition “x” / “not-x” carries with it a suggestion of deceit such that in not saying what one means it could be assumed that one is lying, the larger sense indicates, rather, a questioning of “fundamental concepts” of language and meaning (Colebrook 2).³³ In analyzing the German Romantic Friedrich Schlegel, literary theorist Paul de Man writes of irony as being, rather, a “permanent disruption” of narrative expectation (*Aesthetic Ideology* 178-179). Now, *saying one thing while meaning its opposite* may certainly disrupt narrative expectation, yet this sort of substitution marks only a single interruption, a shift in meaning that, once recognized, shifts narrative expectation along with it, and plays itself through. The permanent disruption of irony, on the other hand, is a tension that persists and that isn’t very easily resolvable. This tension stems, not from one meaning substituting for another, but rather from those two meanings being present simultaneously, and as such, they unsettle each other.³⁴ Of this broader understanding of irony, Linda Hutcheon writes,

Irony is a semantically as well as ideologically slippery beast. Its very doubleness—the need to keep literal and ironic meanings afloat together—

³³ A classic example of irony comes from Plato’s *Republic*, in which Socrates calls the sophist Thrasymachus “clever” and “wise” (Plato 13-14). This is an example of irony in its simplest form because, rather than paying compliment or respect, Socrates is in fact casting insult upon the sophist’s intelligence and undercutting his moral authority. But in the episode, Socrates might also be seen to reveal the broader intent of his irony, which is not the mere injury of one’s character, when he responds to the sophist’s accusations and demands, “how can anyone answer, my distinguished friend [...], if in the first place he does not know or claim to know...” (Plato 14; *see also* Colebrook 2-3, 23-25).

³⁴ Could one consider this a dialectic without an antithesis?

disrupts any notions of meaning as single, stable, decidable, complete, closed, innocent, or transparent. The double, complex meaning of irony is graspable only in context and understanding of simultaneous double-voicing. [...] [T]he doubleness is held in tension always. (*Splitting Images* 11-12)

Over time, interpretations of irony have shifted and evolved: it is the *eironeia* of Socrates and the *ironia* of Cicero³⁵; it is medieval rhetoric and the romantic embrace of chaos and contradiction; it is modernist consciousness and postmodern referentiality.³⁶ The understanding of irony, however, has continued to involve questions of meaning and intent, along with irony's essential reliance upon recognition (Hutcheon, "Complex Functions" 220). Should irony go unnoticed, should its contextual clues not be received or deciphered, it will ultimately fail in its "intended force and effect" (Colebrook 11); as Friedrich Schlegel wrote of irony in 1797, "For he who hasn't got it, it will remain a riddle even after it is openly confessed" (*Lucinde* and *The Fragments* 155; see also de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology* 163-164). It is in this respect that the artistic practice of collage is able to be seen as a material manifestation of irony's necessary self-reference.³⁷

Collage as irony

« La notion de collage, » wrote Aragon, « est l'introduction d'un objet, d'une matière, prise dans le monde réel et par quoi le tableau, c'est-à-dire le monde imité, se trouve tout entier remis en question »³⁸ (*Les Collages* 118-119). Born of the analytical cubism of

³⁵ What sets these two apart is that Socratic *eironeia* is the embodiment, in sensibility and attitude, of the Socratic method—the dialectical method of question and answer intended to reveal rather than deceive (Guthrie 127)—, whereas *ironia* is more an artful device of language and rhetoric. (See Colebrook 2, 6)

³⁶ See Bové; Colebrook; Finlay; Guthrie; Hutcheon, "Complex Functions"; Mellor; Wilde

³⁷ It will be worthwhile to investigate this particular idea of self-reference within irony—irony's need to be noticed—in respect to Luhmann's "social systems." See Luhmann *Social Systems*; Jørgenson 290; Rasch 67-68.

³⁸ [Our translation: The notion of collage [...] is the introduction of an object, of a material, taken from the real world and through which the painting, that is to say the imitated world finds itself put in doubt.]

Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso in the early 1910s³⁹, collage saw the deliberate introduction of non-painterly items and objects into those artists' paintings:

[...] nothing is either figure or ground; rather the collage juxtaposes “real” items—pages torn from newspapers, color illustrations of apples and pears taken from a picture book [...] and patches of wood-grained or painted paper—so as to create a curiously enigmatic pictorial surface. (Perloff, *The Futurist Moment* 48-49)

Of the bits of newsprint, fragments of wallpaper, wine labels, or scattershot small objects that the artists would integrate into their paintings, Katherine Hoffman asks, “were [they] part of another context or object from which [they were] taken, or signposts to pointing to other meanings and questions ?” (“Collage in the Twentieth Century” 7). In Picasso’s words, the integration of such non-painterly elements “was to give the idea that different textures can enter into a composition to become the reality in the paintings that competes with the reality in nature”; in Braque’s more succinct description, “[they] make their effect through the simplicity of the facts” (qtd. in Hoffman 7). It is perhaps for this reason that Clement Greenberg suggested that those early collage works from Picasso and Braque depict “a transfigured, almost abstract kind of literalness” (“Collage” 75). But as the methods and techniques of collage would quickly be taken up by the Futurists, the Dadaists and, later, the Surrealists, that literalness seen by Greenberg would be swept aside, the facts blurred⁴⁰. Collage would become better known as “a creative act of *détournement*,⁴¹ through the subversive manipulation and creative transformation of

³⁹ The poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire is often credited with having conceptualized and popularized the term “collage.”

⁴⁰ In this respect, consider Max Ernst’s surrealist ‘collage-novels’ of the 1920s and 1930s, whose collage illustrations were first assembled, photographed and then printed as photogravures—or *clichés-traités* (Adamowicz 112)—for publication; the printing technique intentionally and effectively erased the discreteness of the individual segments of the collages, with the resulting images offering new, “synthetic representation[s]” (Seitz 41).

⁴¹ This idea of *détournement*, of the processes of fragmentation, abstraction and reorganization—is neither new nor exclusive to collage. Friedrich Schlegel, in his “Discourse on Poetry” (1800), wrote that art is autonomous within its

ready-made elements” (Adamowicz, *Surrealist collage* 17) (original emphasis)⁴². It has been called the “organizing principle” of modernist art (Kuspit) and the most important artistic development of the 20th Century (Ulmer 384) and, over the course of that century, collage spread beyond the visual and plastic arts into literature and music, developing, along the way, into a metaphor of the century itself⁴³.

Looking at it on a formal level, Rosalind Krauss writes that one finds within collage a “systematic play of difference” wherein a single collage element can function simultaneously on different planes of representation:⁴⁴ “[E]ach element is fully diacritical, instantiating both line and color, closure and openness, plane and recession” (*Originality...* 35-37). Hutcheon, too, writes that collage engages “the structures of irony” (*Splitting Images* 121) and Bruce Elder, even more explicitly, states that collage makes visible the “process of ironization” :

In collage art the new meanings do not eradicate the old, and often assertively vernacular, meanings of the incorporated fragments. Allowing such assertively vernacular meanings into artworks was among collage art's most revolutionary steps, [...] the ability of an artist to elicit tension through maintaining a fragment's original meaning while, at the same time, allowing the nexus of relations into which the element is inserted to superimpose a second, and usually conflicting meaning. So, generally, individual fragments that constitute a collage do not meld together in a seamless fashion, as they do in most artworks, but clash with one another. (Elder, *Body of Vision* 27)

own material construction and that the material process of fragmentation is a defiance of closure of the work (in Finlay 174-175).

⁴² See also Kuspit 42-43.

⁴³ See Brockelman; Cran

⁴⁴ See Altieri, “Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry” for some criticism of Krauss’ reading of collage. See also Polkinhorn, “Space Craft” in Hoffman, *Collage: Critical Views* 213-223, for a critical analysis of “collage discourse”.

It is this conceptualization of collage, that of a formal and rhetorical system of irony, really, that allows it to be abstracted from the visual arts and essentially textualized⁴⁵, permitting its transferability to other media and, thus, its entrance more broadly into the cultural discourse of the 20th Century. The conception has been evoked to varying degrees in Art History and Criticism (Daix; Krauss; Perloff; Altieri); in Literary and Cultural Studies (Ulmer; Brockelman; Cran); in Film Studies (Elder); and in Semiotics (Groupe μ).

Rajewsky writes that "the point of intermedial practices is precisely a perceptible medial difference between two or more individual media" ("Intermediality" 62), and so it is in this way that collage can serve as an effective framework for examining medial difference and the "constant dialectic" (Bolter and Grusin 50; qtd. in Rajewsky 64) of intermedial practices in text-image relationships.⁴⁶ Collage and irony are useful concepts for understanding those moments of direct interaction between image and text, moments that seem disruptive, discordant or uncanny,⁴⁷ when the photographs become unexpected or unpredictable in their presence within a narrative, moments where passive acceptance of the photographs as simple illustration becomes challenging. But the interaction is not limited to that point of direct contact on a single shared surface, nor are its effects limited to triggering a pause in which to engage only in a rereading or reinterpretation of the image as it stands on the page. Any shift or substantial questioning of narrative

⁴⁵ See Lowry; Metz

⁴⁶ Regarding complex systems of text image relations, see Montémont, "Beyond Autobiography" 31-42.

⁴⁷ On the disruptive quality of Le Clézio's *L'Africain*, see Meynard 47-48. Regarding Leiris' *L'Afrique fantôme*, see I. Walker 643.

expectation that is the result of such an interruption can, and may be intended to, alter one's entire reading of the text as a whole.

Intermedial echoes

In acoustic physics, *echo* is the phenomenon which occurs when sound waves, traveling outward from the source from which they have been emitted, come into contact with an obstacle, a surface through which the sound waves can neither fully pass nor be fully absorbed; as a result of this contact, some or all of these sound waves will be reflected off that surface. The reflected waves, then, are what is to be called the “echo” of the original emission (*Wonders in Acoustics* 80). But the form that this echo takes is rarely if ever a perfect replica or simulacrum of its original, as the surface of has now served as an interference, a disruption. The degree to which the original emission might pass through or be absorbed by the surface of contact will affect the amplitude and the intensity of the reflected waves; the angle of contact with that surface will determine the angle of reflection. So when an echo is received, while it carries traces of the original, it has been altered, changed into something new, and which is sometimes not immediately recognizable.⁴⁸ However, it is rare for an echo to be so isolated as it is in its singular definition. A polyphonic echo, then, is one that results, as is often the case, when points of reflection are multiple or many (83-84).

⁴⁸ In *Wonders in Acoustics*, Radau shares a fabled anecdote of a man frightened by his own echo from failure to recognize himself in the fractured reflection of his voice (82)

In intermedial studies, the invocation of such a conception of polyphony frequently occurs in relation to music and sound. Writing about Jackie Kay's 1998 novel, *Trumpet* and its protagonist, Joss Moody, for example, Birgit Neumann writes:

In fact, it is only through the polyphonic multiplicity of perspectives [...] that readers gradually come to grasp the multifaceted complexity of Joss's identity. The multi-perspectival narrative – just as Joss's identity and jazz music – thwarts any attempt to be fixed within stable patterns, requiring readers – and listeners – who are willing to orchestrate different voices and to accept partial truths, improvisations and disharmonies. (“Intermedial Negotiations” 652)

In using the term “intermedial echo,” Wolf suggests the idea of a single story being presented from multiple perspectives as a sort of polyphony (*The Musicalization of Fiction* 226), and we see polyphony evoked more broadly in discussions of intermediality. Schawelka, for example, writes of the painter Paul Klee's concept of polyphony, “which allowed him to combine disparate materials into a higher entity, provid[ing] the theory necessary to legitimize his work.” (“The Role of Synesthesia” 211); and Straumann, on film, writes that “[a]s a multi-track medium, film can create ironic contradictions by juxtaposing word, sound and image and, in so doing, produce a cinematic polyphony that resembles novelistic discourse” (“Adaptation - Remediation - Transmediality” 251). But along with its multitudes of perspectives, of concepts, the term “intermedial echo” also has the inherent suggestion of movement: the perspectives, the concepts, the disparate materials, they all *come from* either different sources or different points of reflection, and intermedial analysis often involves the locating and the tracing of these elements.

The long shadow of Roland Barthes

In his introduction to the 2012 collection of essays, *Travels in Intermediality*, Bernd Herzogenrath writes of how Roland Barthes evokes intermediality in his 1971 article « De l'œuvre au texte » [“From Work to Text”], and Herzogenrath quotes the following passage:

Interdisciplinarity is not the calm of an easy security; it begins effectively (as opposed to the mere expression of a pious wish) when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down - perhaps even violently, via the jolts of fashion - in the interests of a new object and a new language neither of which has a place in the field of the sciences that were to be brought peacefully together, this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation. (*Image/Music/Text* 155)

Herzogenrath then continues in his own words: “Since then, the ever-expanding and heterogenous field of intermediality and visual studies has grown to [contest] both the sustained hegemony of logocentrism and the conventional and disciplinary boundaries between different arts and forms” (“Travels in Intermedia[lity]” 2).

It is a sentiment that can be found, too, with Place-Verghnes, who writes in “The Photobiographical Today” that “our faith in the capacity of photography to offer a transcription of the real has become eroded, [and this] is what has allowed photography *to show something different*—since it is no longer the guarantee of an external referent, *it can move inward*.” (our emphasis) (105).⁴⁹ This statement, we would argue, encapsulates an essential factor that motivates this entire area of literary scholarship that examines photographs in life writing. Place-Verghnes, here, is drawing on Frederic Jameson, who

⁴⁹ We turn to W.J.T. Mitchell and to the very staid position that he takes regarding crises of representation* in “What is An Image?”: “Perhaps the redemption of the imagination lies in accepting the fact that we create much of our world out of the dialogue between verbal and pictorial representations, and that our task is not to renounce this dialogue in favor of a direct assault on nature, but to see that nature is already part of the conversation.” (531-532)

* For the origin of the term “Crisis of Representation,” see Marcus and Fischer 7; for a list of such “crises” throughout history, see Nöth 9-11; for a summary and analysis of the postmodern “crisis,” see Ebert).

himself has written that, for photography, “the older relationship of image to referent is superseded by an inner or an interiorized one.” (Jameson 179 qtd. in Place-Verghnes 105).⁵⁰ But Place-Verghnes, and even Jameson, are very much echoing the photographic theory of Roland Barthes.⁵¹

Indeed, in all of the studies mentioned above, all of the complications, all of the questioning, all of the doubts⁵² that are placed (by scholars and critics, as by artists and writers alike) onto those photographs that come to illustrate or otherwise shape works of autobiographical life writing, rather than turn to Lejeune’s pact—or to anywhere else—, all of these lead, far more instinctively it seems, to Barthes.⁵³ As a theorist of the photographic image, Barthes is paramount, though his contribution extends beyond theory. In the study of photography in life writing, one also finds in Barthes an artist of unparalleled influence.⁵⁴ Two of his final works, *Roland Barthes* and 1980’s *La chambre claire*, are at the pinnacle of the form; they interrogate and challenge ideas of

⁵⁰ Jameson, earlier in his book, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, points to Guy Debord, writing: “[The past has] become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum. Guy Debord’s powerful slogan is now even more apt for the ‘prehistory’ of a society bereft of all historicity, whose own putative past is little more than a set of dusty spectacles. In faithful conformity to poststructuralist linguistic theory, the past as ‘referent’ finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts.^[*]” (our emphasis)(Jameson 18). Place-Verghnes, however, quotes Jameson from a later chapter in order to comment on photography’s “renouncing reference as such in order to elaborate an autonomous vision which has no external equivalent. Internal differentiation now stands as the mark and the moment of a decisive displacement in which the older relationship of image to referent is superseded by an inner or an interiorized one.” (emphasis added in quoted text)(Jameson 179 qtd. in Place-Verghnes 105).

* See Bateman (13-18) for a brief and efficient outline of the multiple uses of the terms “text” and “image” as well as some cautions surrounding both their application and interpretation.

⁵¹ For Jameson and the influence of Barthes, see Helmling, notably 15-19, but also throughout.

⁵² The academic—the intellectual, philosophical, scholarly—discussion surrounding the photograph, not just in life writing but in general, remains contentious. For just a couple of examples of how problematic that discussion continues to be in the 21st century, see Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero*; Elkins (ed.), *Photography Theory*; Sutton et al., *The State of the Real*.

⁵³ See, for example Adams xiv-xv, 1-22, 26-27; N. Edwards et al., *Textual and Visual Selves* 2-19; Rugg 8-15)

⁵⁴ This is perhaps never more apparent than in the 1992 book *Touching The World. Reference in Autobiography*, wherein John Paul Eakin not only opens the book’s Introduction by quoting from Barthes, but he devotes the full first twenty pages of the book to the French philosopher; it is only following this that he then moves on to discuss Lejeune—for fewer than four full pages (See Eakin, *Touching the World* 3-28).

referentiality, representation and authenticity while fully engaging the photograph in the crafting of the literary self.

*On Barthes*⁵⁵

Barthes' preoccupation with the photograph arguably surpasses that of any thinker of the 20th century, and that preoccupation was one that persisted throughout his entire intellectual career. From his semiological studies and structural analyses in the 1950s and 1960s to his ontological searchings later in life, Barthes' thinking on photography has shaped the collective understanding of the medium and of its interpretation—certainly in literary fields—for more than sixty years. As Geoffrey Batchen writes,

Terms established by Barthes, such as *studium* and *punctum*, have become part of the standard lexicon of photographic debate, along with a particular understanding of photographic time and of photography's relationship to death and a certain narcissistic way of speaking." (original emphasis)(*Photography Degree Zero* 3)

Barthes' thoughts on the nature of the photograph would indeed culminate⁵⁶ with the duality of *studium* and *punctum* in *La chambre claire* [*Camera Lucida*],⁵⁷ but even this signature pair of characteristics, considered to be so definitive of Barthes' philosophy on photography (see Batchen "This Haunting" 284), should more accurately be given

⁵⁵ Fabian Arribert-Narce presents similar arguments and observations to those laid forth over the next several pages. (See Arribert-Narce, "Roland Barthes's Ghosts" 140-144).

⁵⁶ This culmination is due, of course, in part to Barthes untimely death in 1980, which makes *La chambre claire* the last book he would publish in his lifetime.

⁵⁷ Because of the ubiquity of Barthes in studies in photography, we will be citing from widely read and familiar English-language translations of his work.

consideration as part of a lineage of related and evolving ideas about the photographic image.⁵⁸

While some of Barthes' early conceptualizations, such as those of *denotation* and *connotation* in « Le message photographique », have fallen into limited applicability, other arguments and observations put forth by Barthes throughout his career, though perhaps diminished in stature or simply overshadowed by *La chambre claire*, continue to have currency.

An image at one's disposal

From his earliest writings on photographs,⁵⁹ Barthes was suspicious, mistrustful in that Benjaminian sense that he strove to discover and expose the deceptive ways that photographs could be used to persuade or manipulate.⁶⁰ His thinking on photography first found expression in 1957 as mythical speech;⁶¹ it was what he called a “second-order semiological system” in which a sign was reduced to merely a signifier (*Mythologies* 137, “Myth Today”). Or put more simply, it was a system in which an image could become “an *image-at-one's-disposal*” (original emphasis)(173).⁶² For more than a decade he would pursue the photograph from a structuralist point of view, examining the ways in

⁵⁸ See Arribert-Narce, “Roland Barthes's Ghosts” 142. He, similarly, writes, “I believe that Barthes's reflection on photography follows an evolution, a trajectory.”

⁵⁹ See “Photography and Electoral Appeal” (*Mythologies* 105-108) and “Myth Today” (*Mythologies* 131-187).

⁶⁰ In his essay “Photography and Electoral Appeal,” for example, he wrote: “What is transmitted through the photograph of the candidate are not his plans, but his deep motives” (*Mythologies* 106)

⁶¹ Here, Barthes treats as “speech” the following: oral speech, writing and drawing, photography, film, reporting, advertising and entertainment (*Mythologies* 132, “Myth Today”).

⁶² In his essay “Myth Today,” the photographic example used to illustrate this, a *Paris-Match* cover photo of a black soldier giving the French salute, was “the *alibi* of French imperialism” (*Mythologies* 153); through this image, France's colonial past was mythologized, made to be something far more palatable than facts might suggest.

which the photograph was *made* to signify—the “institutional activity”⁶³ (*Image/Music/Text* 31, “The photographic message”) of signification. In « Le message photographique » [“The photographic message”], Barthes would elaborate on the photograph’s duality, expounding upon its denoted “first order” and connoted “second order” messages (*Image/Music/Text* 18). As for what Barthes meant by “an image at one’s disposal,” it is the very same thing he meant in declaring in this essay that a photograph is “*a message without a code*” (17)⁶⁴

Having-been-there

In 1964, Barthes afforded the photograph a small degree of agency. In « La rhétorique de l’image » [“The Rhetoric of the image”], “[A]n awareness of its *having-been-there*” (original emphasis)(*Image/Music/Text* 44) is how he first elucidated the effect that a photograph could *possess*, the effect that it could bring to its viewer. *Having-been-there-ness* suggested a certain (a)temporal quality, an uncanniness of sorts, that went beyond simple acknowledgement of a photograph’s historical reality, its referentiality (analogicality), or any legacy of its unmediated mechanical creation or unfiltered *truth*.⁶⁵ This was a permanent pastness existing in the present.

It is this quality which, with its “spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, [...] an illogical conjunction between the *here-now* and the *there-then*” (original

⁶³ His subjects of photographic study during this period had included politics, news reporting and editorial journalism, and advertising.

⁶⁴ Barthes illustrates this concept well at the beginning of “The Photographic Message” when he writes that photograph’s malleability; of how its meaning changes considerably, perhaps completely “as it passes from the very conservative *L’Aurore* to the communist *L’Humanité*.” (*Image/Music/Text* 15).

⁶⁵ By “truth,” here, we do not mean absolutes, but rather the denoted message (see Barthes, “Message” 197-199; “Rhetoric” 119-121; and for a direct (and skeptical) correlation between denotation and truth see *Roland Barthes* 67).

emphasis)(44), partly established the ambiguity—the paradox—that made for one to be able to say of the photograph, as Barthes himself already had, that “*it is a message without a code*” (original emphasis)(*Image/Music/Text* 17, 36). For Barthes in 1964, the photograph was still of semiological concern—“the denoted image [...] innocent[ed] the semantic artifice of connotation” (*Image/Music/Text* 45; see also *Mythologies* 168-172, “Myth Today”)—, however the awareness of *having-been-there-ness*, once arrived at, would prove to be unshakeable.

*The obvious and the obtuse*⁶⁶

In the 1950s and 1960s the photograph had been useful to Barthes in the exploration of structural linguistics and the *production* of meaning, but in the decade that followed, his interest in the photograph would shift toward meaning itself⁶⁷ (see Ungar 69, qtd. in Shawcross, *Roland Barthes on Photography* 8). In his 1970 essay « Le troisième sens » [“The Third Meaning”], Barthes states that a semiotic mode of analysis “will be of no further concern here”⁶⁸ (*Image/Music/Text* 52). Instead, Barthes begins to contend with the enigmatic power of the photograph, which will occupy his thinking on the subject moving forward. One sees in “The Third Meaning” the impulse in Barthes “that the

⁶⁶ This subheading we borrow from *L'obvie et l'obtus*, the title given by editors to *Essais critiques III*, the 1982 essay collection which gathers together much of Barthes' writings on Photography and the Visual Arts.

⁶⁷ Regarding photographs particularly, one might argue that hints of this concern with meaning itself were already (latently) present in his earliest writings on photography. In the essay “Photography and Electoral Appeal” Barthes writes: “What is transmitted through the photograph of the candidate are not his plans, but his deep motives, all his family, mental, even erotic circumstances” (*Mythologies* 105) and “a photograph is a mirror, what we are asked to read is the familiar, the known” (106). But even then, as can be seen in “Myth Today” in the same collection of essays, *production* of meaning was the primary interest.

⁶⁸ Earlier problems of denotation and connotation seem all but fully resolved, here, having been compressed into what Barthes now calls, more simply, communication at the informational level (*Image/Music/Text* 52). In a general sense, with *S/Z* in 1970 and *The Pleasure of the Text* in 1973, Barthes was moving beyond semiological enquiry (Shawcross, *Roland Barthes on Photography* 8; see also Barthes, *S/Z* 12-13; *Pleasure* 32-33, 54-55), but this shift was equally seen in his writing on photographs.

photograph may contain more than that which is intended by the artist” (Shawcross, *Barthes on Photography* 24). He is looking for and toward the “penetrating trait,” (*Image/Music/Text* 57) the “disruptive force” (58) of the image, the “counter-narrative” (63) of what, here, he calls the image’s *third* or *obtuse* meaning—for Barthes, and per the word’s etymological scope (54-55), this obtuse meaning is variably the obscuring or “blunting of a meaning too clear” and yet it is “open to the field of meaning totally, that is infinitely” (55). This concept of *obtuseness* is something that Barthes has difficulty fully expressing—it is “without language” (61)—, it is something that he can only “sense” (Shawcross, *Barthes on Photography* 19) and even then, not in every photograph (Barthes *Image/Music/Text* 60). Barthes perhaps best describes this *obtuseness* as “gloss” (65), that is to say, as a “multi-layering of meanings which always lets the previous meaning continue” (58).

Signifiante

While they are different, *obtuseness* and *having-been-there-ness* share in the uncanny awareness that each evokes—the awareness of something more, of something beyond the “obvious” (57). Indeed, the constant, perhaps the singular quest, of Barthes’ ever-evolving photographic thought was the *awareness* of a photograph’s purest⁶⁹ essence—its *signifiante*⁷⁰ (*Image/Music/Text* 54), that “infinitely plural labour of differentiation,

⁶⁹ Possibly one of Barthes favourite words, “pure”/“purity” is evoked throughout his body of work, and almost always in a careful manner that suggests the unadulterated, the essential—as opposed to the emphatic usage synonymous with words such as “sheer” or “simple”.

⁷⁰ See “Translator’s note” (*Image/Music/Text* 10-11) for a concise and effective explication of the term *signifiante*. For the term’s initial introduction, see Kristeva, *Séméiotikè: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* 8-12), see also Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, in which Kristeva restates that “*signifiante*, then, is precisely this unlimited and unbounded generating process, this unceasing operation of the drives toward, in, and through language; toward, in, and through the exchange system and its protagonists—the subject and his institutions.” (17)

stratification and confrontation” (Kristeva, “Roland Barthes” 410) that opens a photograph to interpretation.

The loss of meaning

In the last decade of his life, Barthes produced three works—one of travel and two of life writing—that engaged with photographs in changing and complex ways, and which reflected his own changed relationship with photography; its myths would be “tamed” (Prosser 50; see Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 117-119), but its uncanny qualities, as well as Barthes’ mistrust, would persist. In the same year that he published “The Third Meaning,” 1970, he also published *L'Empire des signes* [*Empire of Signs*], which is perhaps the most emblematic example of his philosophical shift.

Empire of Signs is a rather singular work of travel⁷¹ literature with a focus on Japan. It is a deliberate act of *dépaysement*, both physically and philosophically, through which Barthes “challenge[s] himself to locate significance⁷² and take on knowledge outside the crucible of the written language of his own culture [...] forming a system based on observation alone, without having to deconstruct a preexisting mythology” (Shawcross, *Roland Barthes on Photography* 13). The Japan that Barthes professes to present to the reader of *Empire of Signs* is not *real* per se; it is, by his accord, an imagined, “fictive nation” of his own construct, “a reserve of features whose manipulation—whose invented interplay—allows [him] to ‘entertain’ the idea of an

⁷¹ What connects *Empire of Signs* to the corpus of this dissertation a quality of the work best described by Unger, who writes that it is “the self-reflexive quality that collapses the conventions of travel narrative into something more personal” (Unger 50)

⁷² This could potentially be read two ways. See *supra*, this chapter, “The obvious and the obtuse” and accompanying footnote.

unheard-of symbolic system, one altogether detached from [his] own” (Barthes, *Empire* 3). Photographs are made a part of this system, and they are approached with the same detachment—“The author has never, in any sense, photographed Japan” (4). They are used, like the other symbols he employs in his constructed “Japan”—food, maps, galleries, haikus, Buddhist tenets, calligraphic characters—to evoke, to represent “emptiness” (*ibid.*). The book opens with the epigraph:

The text does not ‘gloss’ the images, which do not ‘illustrate’ the text. For me, each has been no more than the onset of a kind of visual uncertainty, analogous perhaps to that *loss of meaning* Zen calls a satori. Text and image, interlacing, seek to ensure the circulation and exchange of these signifiers: body, face, writing; and in them to read the retreat of signs. (original emphasis)(xi);

and it closes by stating that “the content [of the image] is irretrievably dismissed [...] there is nothing to *grasp*” (original emphasis)(Barthes, *Empire* 110). Indeed, emptiness pervades *Empire of Signs*, and these stated intentions and conclusions appear to be an about-turn from the contemplations in “The Third Meaning,” but this is not entirely the case. *Empire of Signs* is perhaps overly ambitious in these declarations, as the emptiness they purport is really more of a presence than a void. For example, one the “signifiers” mentioned in the epigraph is the hand-written Japanese character *mu*, meaning “emptiness”, the image of which occupies an entire page (*Empire* 5). This is a performative emptiness that fills the role of meaning. In other words, the “loss of meaning” *is* the meaning that Barthes extracts, that he derives.

The photograph is not of “me”

With 1975's fragmented autobiography⁷³ *Roland Barthes*, his relationship with photographs was seen to be drifting from their being purely objects of clinical analysis⁷⁴ toward something *approaching* the personal. Barthes opens *Roland Barthes* with more than three dozen reproductions of family photographs, of postcards and of other collected personal ephemera⁷⁵; the timeline of these images stretches from before the births of Barthes' parents to the time of the book's drafting in 1974, and their captions vary in length from a few words to an entire page and frequently veer into prose: one caption may provide some family history while another may question it; yet another draws upon memories of places or of experiences while others, still, are but simple maxims. However, what is interesting about *Roland Barthes* with regard to its photographs is that Barthes, here, engages with them differently. He does not analyze⁷⁶ the photographs in *Roland Barthes*. Instead, he uses them to construct a narrative, to tell a story: the first half-dozen photographs establish the setting—street scenes of Bayonne and shots of the family home and gardens; next is presented the cast of characters—“the two grandfathers,” “the two grandmothers,” “the father's sister,” etc.—, followed by what he terms a “family novel,” a story told through subsequent photographs and their captions, which really do narrate the images rather than simply identify their subjects.

⁷³ *Roland Barthes* is not an autobiography by most metrics. Michel Beaujour considers it to be a literary “self portrait”, and Philippe Lejeune, in a later reprise of his 1975 *Pacte autobiographique*, writes that *Roland Barthes* is the “anti-Pact par excellence” (original emphasis)(*On Autobiography* 131).

⁷⁴ It remains a preoccupation, and he writes later in the book, “The vital effort of this book is to stage an image-system.” (105)

⁷⁵ There is ephemera such as an old I.O.U. belonging to his paternal grandfather and one of his own temperature charts from his time spent in a tuberculosis hospital—“a farcical way of writing one's body through time” (Barthes, *Roland Barthes* 35).

⁷⁶ Barthes does not parse them as he famously does the *Paris Match* photograph in “Myth Today” or the “Panzani advertisement” in “Rhetoric of the Image.” For a concise and entertaining description of Barthes' traditional method of analysis, see “vi. step by step” (*S/Z* 11-13) .

The images function, in one sense, as a prologue to the remainder of the book: they serve to summarize—almost as montage—Barthes' life before and until the writing of this very work. Yet, it is this very *usage* that Barthes is putting forth to be questioned. Nancy Shawcross writes that in *Roland Barthes* he was “a step away from acknowledging part of the power and fascination of photography's potential” (*Roland Barthes on Photography* 21), and that “step away” is actually quite literal, as the photographs are actively excluded from the text, they are withdrawn (Purves 67). In the prefatory text that announces the collection of images, Barthes writes,

To begin, some images: [...] [I]t is not a nostalgia for happy times which rivets me to these photographs but something more complicated. When consideration [...] treats the image as a detached being, makes it the object of an immediate pleasure, it no longer has anything to do with the reflection, however oneiric, of an identity [...] It follows that the childhood photograph is both highly indiscreet (it is my body from underneath which is presented) and quite discreet (the photograph is not of "me"). (Barthes, *Roland Barthes* 3)

It is an uneasy statement. The mistrust from his earliest writings on photographs remains, still, but it is now more intimate; it insists upon distance between the author (who is equally a viewer of the photographs) and his own self depicted within—“it is my body [but] the photograph is not of ‘me.’” In a fragment later in the book that carries the title “Myself, I”, Barthes writes of subjectivity as if being in a crisis of paranoia⁷⁷ and displacement:

Yet today the subject apprehends himself *elsewhere*, and ‘subjectivity’ can return at another place on the spiral: deconstructed, taken apart, shifted, without anchorage: why should I not speak of ‘myself’ since this ‘my’ is no longer ‘the self’?” (original emphasis)(168).

⁷⁷ Indeed, the entire book could be characterized by paranoia, suspicion and doubt: “Discreet—ultra-discreet, the motor of paranoia,” Barthes writes in another fragment, “[...] The motive is erased, the effect subsists: this subtraction defines aesthetic discourse.” (original emphasis) (140); he is making reference to texts, here, but he could just as easily have been referring to photographs.

What one sees in Barthes' engagement with the photographs in *Roland Barthes* is a return to the awareness of *having-been-there-ness*, but that awareness now complicated by memory and self-reflection and self-reference: "[I]n the field of the subject there is no referent [...] the fact is I have nothing to compare myself to." (56).

The photographs in *Roland Barthes* constitute what Barthes calls his "image-repertoire," (4) the collection, the parcel of images that a person has of oneself or, rather, imagines (*see Barthes, Roland Barthes* 126) oneself to be. The photographs, then, are that imaginary, realised (Longolius 102). But this imaginary-made-real is ultimately an experimentation, theoretical play, deliberate, "vulgar" (Barthes, *Roland Barthes* 126) Barthes uses the photographs to display both their potential and their limitations—the fullness *and* the emptiness—of their depiction of his imagined self.

The Intractable

Barthes' final published work before his death in 1980 was *La chambre claire. Note sur la photographie* [*Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*]. In this work, one finds a re-embodiment of many of the concepts that have been outlined above, but what was fragmented in his past writings is now more of a "mosaic vision" (Shawcross, *Roland Barthes on Photography* 72). He revisits the Zen Buddhism of *Empire of Signs*, for example, but the "emptiness" of satori is now filled by the punctum (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 49), the latter which has become perhaps the most ubiquitous of Barthesian terms. However, and this might simply be because of its relative understatedness with respect to the punctum, it is Barthes' idea of "the intractable", which is laid forth as the abstract

essence that is sought when one looks into a photograph, that is perhaps *La chambre claire*'s most valuable offering. As the work's final lines profess:

Such are the two ways of the Photograph. The choice is mine: to subject its spectacle to the civilized code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it the wakening of intractable reality. (*Camera Lucida* 119)

Death and beyond

This chapter opens with a quote-in-epigraph from Sabine Kriebel that speaks of photography as a “medium offer[ing] a melancholy poetics—traces of things and places that-have-been, a capturing of time lost, a specter of our imminent death—imparting an element of romantic mourning to this very banal object” (“Theories of Photography” 20). It was chosen, in part, for the simple reason that we feel it reflects well some of the underlying themes of the books that make up the corpus of this present study—two highly subjective works of travel-based life writing illustrated with photographs. But Kriebel's words are also a perfect encapsulation of Barthes,⁷⁸ and her characterization of Barthesian theory, here, is largely the dominant one; Batchen, too, is quoted above relating Barthes, photography, and death⁷⁹—Batchen also writes elsewhere of *La chambre claire*'s haunting legacy for photographic theory, writing that “every photograph, no matter what its subject matter, speaks, not just of ‘what-has-been,’ but also of the catastrophe of death in the future.” (“This Haunting” 286). Curiously though,

⁷⁸ Kriebel's statement directly references *La chambre claire* and, more precisely, the book's chapters 31 to 33, in which Barthes writes of mourning his dead mother, of the melancholy “of Photography itself,” and of the photograph's intractable essence, its noeme—its “That has been”—, “this place which extends between the subject and infinity.” (*Camera Lucida* 75-79)

⁷⁹ Barthes was deeply affected by his Mother's death in 1977, and *La chambre claire* is evidence of this. For this reason, it is widely and often considered primarily a book that relates photography and death: *See, for example*, Gudmundsdóttir 232-242; N. Edwards et al., *Textual and Visual Selves* ; Kriebel, “Theories of Photography” 19-20, 34; Prosser 19-52; Rugg 25-27).

the fragment of Kriebel's quote that is repeated here could, in abstraction, be just as pointedly and aptly a description of autobiographical works .

Photography and autobiographical writings, both, are often considered in funereal terms, associated with death and remembrance—and not just through Barthes. André Bazin, in 1945, writes about photography and death, and although he challenges the association, writing, “Today the making of images [...] is *no longer* a question of survival after death” (our emphasis)(“The Ontology of the Photographic Image” 6), he nevertheless goes on to compare photography to a death mask (7, footnote). Pierre Bourdieu writes of the family photo album as “a faithfully visited gravestone” (*A Middle-Brow Art* 31); and Susan Sontag, in a likely echo of Bazin, too calls the photograph “a death mask” (*On Photography* 154) and photography “a mournful vision of loss” (67), writing that “[p]hotographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photographs and death haunts all photographs of people” (70). It carries through as well, into theory itself; Thierry de Duve writes,

Seen as live evidence, the photograph cannot fail to designate, outside of itself, *the death of the referent*, the accomplished past, the suspension of time. And seen as deadening artifact, the photograph indicates that life outside continues, time flows by, and the captured object has slipped away. (our emphasis)(“Time Exposure and Snapshot” 109-110)

Similarly, autobiography is often seen as “a devotional act [serving] as a preparation for death” (Couser 53; *see also* Rugg 26). Michel Beaujour writes of the literary self-portrait as “an anticipated funeral eulogy and a gospel in the first person” (*Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait* 309), and he traces a connection back to Saint Augustine's *Confessions* from the turn of the fifth century, writing of finding in its tenth book “certain essential

traits of the self-portrait” locatable in “the tomb of writing, between Invention and Memory” (Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait* 14). Rugg joins these associations, likening photographs and autobiographies, together, to memorials—“which both represent an originating act of remembrance and serve to invoke the act of remembrance in those who view [them]”—and to cenotaphs, monuments that mark “empty tomb[s],” that “indicate through their presence what is no longer there” (*Picturing Ourselves* 25). While all of this “autothanotography” (Derrida, *The Post Card* 209), as Rugg argues, seems to be a preoccupation of postmodernism (*Picturing Ourselves* 25-26), not all life writing is writing toward death.

Of the two case studies that will be laid out in the following chapters, J.-M.G. Le Clézio’s *L’Africain* (which we will examine in Chapter four) certainly fits this mould. The memoir, written when Le Clézio was sixty-four years old, takes a contemplative look back to a period of the author’s childhood after World War II, and it considers the life of his late father, «[qui] est mort l’année où le sida a fait son apparition»⁸⁰ (Le Clézio, *L’Africain* 96). The photographs that feature in the book hold sentimental value for the author, and they are treated with nostalgic reverence and affection. In Michel Leiris’ *L’Afrique fantôme* (which we examine over the course of the next two chapters), the photographs featured had been taken in the context of information gathering during an expedition that was essentially one of salvage ethnography;⁸¹ indeed, organizers of the Mission Dakar-Djibouti expressly announced its urgent importance in such terms:

Du fait du contact chaque jour plus intime des indigènes et des européens, et de l’application croissante des méthodes politiques et économiques modernes,

⁸⁰ “[who] died the year AIDS was discovered” (Dickson, *The African* 97)

⁸¹ See Forsdick, “Sa(l)vaging Exoticism” 31, 40-42; see also Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, throughout.

les institutions, les langages, les métiers indigènes se transforment ou disparaissent et l'on peut prévoir le temps déjà prochain où seront abolis à jamais des faits et des objets dont la connaissance aurait été très importante pour l'histoire de l'humanité.⁸² (our emphasis)(“Instructions sommaires” 174)

In his influential book *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes its Object*, Johannes Fabian calls this sort of (usually ethnographic) discourse “denial of coevalness” or the act of “distancing the observed from the [t]ime of the observer” (25), in how it frames observed cultures as being both historical and primitive. For this very reason, it might be fair to argue that the photographs in *L’Afrique fantôme* would suggest a “mournful vision of loss” of entire cultures, much as Edward S. Curtis’ photographs of Native Americans from the turn of the twentieth century are often seen (see Poole 165). However, *L’Afrique fantôme* is a daily diary that captures the quotidian events of a near-two-year period of the author’s life, and the photographs within the book are immediately concurrent to the events recorded in the diary, and, in this way, they counter such nostalgia. They instead remain very much in the book’s present.

This fact is one that has tended to be overlooked in the small amount amount of critical scholarship that has, until now, addressed the photographic content of *L’Afrique fantôme*. As we will see in Chapter three, much of that scholarship has had a tendency to take these photographs outside of their context within the journal when making attempts to analyse or study them. Such a tendency, we believe, is motivated less by the book itself than by a reputation of “impossibility” that has followed *L’Afrique fantôme* for the much of the past forty years. In one respect, there is the lamentable impossibility of

⁸² [Our translation: “Due to contact between Indigenous and Europeans that becomes closer every day, and due to the growing imposition of modern politics and economics, indigenous institutions, languages, and practices are transforming or disappearing and we can foresee a time already near when ”]

transformation that Leiris highlighted in the the preamble to the 1981 reedition of *L'Afrique fantôme*, writing of « cette Afrique en laquelle j'avais trouvé beaucoup mais non la délivrance »⁸³ (37; *see also* Cogez, « Objet cherché, accord perdu » 240, n.14). But the other impossibility that surrounds *L'Afrique fantôme* is the book's resistance to easy classification,⁸⁴ and it is this resistance that challenges interpretation of the photographs that we will see in Chapter three.

Prior to that, however, this next chapter looks at the critical history of *L'Afrique fantôme*. From the first reviews in 1934 through to the twenty-first century, critics and scholars have been divided as to how *L'Afrique fantôme* should be read—as something ethnographic or something personal ? Most choose one side or the other, but rarely comfortably, for the book itself is uncomfortable, as Leiris, in his diary, constantly alternates between the inner and outward experiences of his travels in Africa.

⁸³ [“that Africa where I found many things, but not deliverance” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 59)]

⁸⁴ *See* Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* 165-167; Côté, “La fuite impossible” 859; Debaene, “*L'Afrique fantôme* ou la bifurcation”; Slaney 225.

Chapter 2: *L'Afrique fantôme*. A Critical History

Michel Leiris' *L'Afrique fantôme* is a work that has proven evasive to questions of classification and genre for more than eighty years. The book's form could never be disputed—it is a diary, with individually-dated entries recorded almost daily and that vary in length from a single paragraph to a few pages—, however critics and scholars have never truly been in consensus with regard to how that diary should be read. In part, this is because the diary was kept during what was a nearly two-year ethnographic expedition that crossed the African continent in the early 1930s. And so, by this simple fact, all of the book's contents either directly relate to, or are inevitably framed by the rather encompassing and enduring task of twenty-two months of near-continuous travel and ethnographic study in the field. And so many who have read, appraised or studied *L'Afrique fantôme* have taken it to be the ethnographic field journal that, arguably, it is.

Except that, in so many ways, it isn't. Indeed, the diary's only inarguably “ethnographic” moments are actually quite few, and they appear mostly over a roughly two-week span of the diary in September of 1932,⁸⁵ a period during which Leiris frequently finds himself simply too busy, too occupied with his fieldwork, to be able to write in the evenings as is his usual habit. And so, in those moments, he resorts to copying into the journal his field notes, recorded over the course of his daily work, as a way to at least remain faithful to his nightly diary-keeping ritual (Price and Jamin 171; *see also* Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* 496). But these moments are the exception. Beyond the fact of circumstance that saw the diary recorded during an ethnographic expedition,

⁸⁵There is a brief reappearance during the following month, October 1932.

these field notes are intrusions—so much so that they are very clearly set apart from the rest of the text, printed in italic font in the manner of all passages in the book that are shown to be quoted from other sources. This separation is both visual and semantic.⁸⁶ Like other outside sources, the field notes are written with a different voice, from a different perspective. They very clearly and explicitly do not belong to the personal project that Leiris, with this diary, was attempting to craft.

Leiris argued rather persistently⁸⁷ that *L'Afrique fantôme* should be taken, essentially, as « rien d'autre qu'une chronique *personnelle* [4 avril 1932] »⁸⁸ (original emphasis) (*L'Afrique fantôme* 309),⁸⁹ and that it could just as well have been written in

⁸⁶For a discussion on the use of italics to indicate semantic shifts, see Korchagina, “The Use of Italics in the English Translations of Dostoyevsky’s *The Gambler*”; and Lotman, *Analysis of the Poetic Text*.

⁸⁷ It was an argument that he would repeat on numerous occasions in his writing and in interviews throughout his life. Indeed, Leiris declared *L'Afrique fantôme* to be a personal diary in:

1932 : « Malgré qu'on y retrouve le canevas du voyage, des échos du travail qui y a été fait, les plus marquantes de nos tribulations, [ces notes] ne constituent rien autre qu'une chronique *personnelle*, un journal intime qui aurait aussi bien pu être rédigé à Paris, mais se trouve avoir été retenu durant une promenade en Afrique. [4 avril 1932] » (Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* 309)

1934 : « Le long de ce journal où sont notés pêle-mêle les événements, observations, rêves, idées [...] » (Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* 747-748)

1951 : « Cette chronique qui mêle des faits de tous ordres (choses intimes aussi bien que choses de l'extérieur) laisse entrevoir le début d'une prise de conscience [...] » (Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* 748)

1966 : “[a] book of *personal moods*, par excellence” (our emphasis) (Gobeil, Leiris and Lovitt 54)

1981 : « ce journal à double entrée, essentiellement succession des flashes relatifs à des faits subjectifs aussi bien qu'à des choses extérieures (vécues, vues ou apprises) » (Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* 39)

1988 : « Je ferai remarquer que [...] sur le champ, quand je rédigeais ces notes quotidiennes qui constituent la matière de *L'Afrique fantôme*, je ne pensais pas du tout faire de l'ethnographie. C'était en marge, vraiment en marge de mon travail ethnographique. » (*C'est-à-dire* 34-35)

1988 : « J'écrivais essentiellement pour moi. Je l'ai dit je crois, c'était un livre expérimental. J'en avais par-dessus la tête de la littérature, du surréalisme notamment, par-dessus la tête de la civilisation occidentale. Je voulais voir ce que ça allait donner de m'astreindre à consigner à peu près tout ce qui se passait autour de moi et tout ce qui passait dans ma tête. » (*C'est-à-dire* 46)

⁸⁸ [“does not constitute anything other than a *personal* chronicle” (original emphasis)(Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 320)]. All translations from *L'Afrique fantôme* are taken from Brent Hayes Edwards' 2017 English translation, *Phantom Africa*.

⁸⁹ Passages quoted from *L'Afrique fantôme* are cited from the critical edition of the work, published in the collection *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* in 2014. However, because there are numerous editions of *L'Afrique fantôme* still in print and/or still in circulation in libraries and other archives, as well as translations of the work into numerous languages, when the passages are excerpted from diary entries, we have opted to include the dates-of-entry into the diary, which, unlike page numbers, remain a constant across the many editions of the work. Photographs, prefatory texts and other annotations and materials referenced from *L'Afrique fantôme* are also cited from the 2014 *Pléiade* edition unless noted otherwise.

Paris (309). Furthermore, the motivations that guided him were writerly above all and little else: « Je voulais voir ce que ça allait donner de m’astreindre à consigner à peu près tout ce qui se passait autour de moi et tout ce qui passait dans ma tête » (Leiris, *C’est-à-dire* 46). *L’Afrique fantôme* is certainly “a book of personal moods, par excellence” (Gobeil, Leiris and Lovitt 54). If one is to open the book to a passage at random—be it the description of a village, a mask, a ritual, or a ceremony, of traveling by cargo, by lorry, or by mule, of bureaucratic red-tape, of a cocktail reception, or of political or personal scandal—, the chance is quite high that the passage will be presented in some way as the portrait of quotidian banality; the chance is better than average that this portrait will be punctuated by some degree of humour; lesser is the chance that it might display very much enthusiasm (but if one is indeed so lucky as to encounter the latter, reading just a little further will show how quickly that such a moment of elation can dissipate). What is almost certain, however, is that the passage will be about Leiris, himself. Whether it be his annoyances, his curiosities, his sensitivities, his insecurities, his restlessness, his uprootedness, his depression, his obsessions, his neuroses, his aggravations, his confusions or his discomforts, most everything that is recorded in the diary is filtered through the personal experience of a situation or an event, so that the diary’s entries, while almost always observational, are far more impressionistic than objective.

Nevertheless, despite Leiris’ argument that the diary could just as well have been kept in Paris, the fact remains that it wasn’t. And so, however mundane and however subjective, the diary relates in so much intimate and earnest detail the protracted journey and inner-workings of a trans-African ethnographic field expedition at the height of the

Colonial Period between the World Wars that the author's protested intentions can easily be overlooked, since he's telling a good story—and telling it well. Yet, it is still the overall ambivalent, equivocal character of *L'Afrique fantôme* that has kept scholars and critics if not divided then at least hedging, and it is this character that has given the book an air of “impossibility” that has grown into reputation.⁹⁰

This chapter traces the impossibility that is inherent to *L'Afrique fantôme*, which begins with the book's protracted genesis, written into being, often uncertainly, across the pages of Leiris' field journals, over the days, weeks and months of a transcontinental colonial ethnographic expedition where, at any given moment, any mood that may seem to be marking the trajectory of the diary could be thrown into a completely new direction by a sudden inspiration or by a more predictable bout of depression. This impossibility continues as the book's controversial release damages professional relationships to such a degree that colleagues (left unnamed) are rumoured to have done the manoeuvring that saw *L'Afrique fantôme* banned during Vichy Rule in France, and others are seen to still be holding grudges about the book fifty years onward. Never blind to the book's contentiousness, Leiris, over time, would reframe the work, adding prefatory notes in 1950 and again in 1980 that are at moments confessional, corrective, or conciliatory, but consistently defiant. It is the impossibility of a book that, after fifty years of relative obscurity with almost no critical notice, is then suddenly transformed into a celebrated postmodern object of dislocation (see Hand, *Writing the Self* 205) and later a postcolonial example of colonial privilege and abuse of power. It is the impossibility of a book whose

⁹⁰ This is both the “impossibility” of the book's classification—Is it ethnography or is it life writing?—, and the impossibility of the very project that Leiris was attempting with *L'Afrique fantôme*. See particularly Côté, “Michel Leiris et la fuite impossible”; Debaene, *Far Afield* 173-176. See also Clifford, *Predicament* 167; Leiris, *L'Âge d'homme* 891

most consistent, and arguably most attractive, feature is a divisiveness that remains, to this day, irreconcilable.

Yet, while that divisiveness, in many respects, has come to be comfortably accepted (*see* Debaene «*L’Afrique fantôme* ou la bifurcation

»), it faces noticeable resistance once it is extended to the photographs (which we will examine in Chapter 3). These are photographs that were captured as part of an aggressively orchestrated method of information gathering that sought, above all, to maximize the quantity of cultural data that could be brought back to the French capital for further study and for later absorption, not only into the French museum system but also into the country’s cultural—and colonial—fabric; the photographs evidence the violence and the othering that were part of the French colonial system’s exercise of power. Yet, they are also photographs that illustrate a diary that is largely intimate and self-reflective. As such, they highlight some very personal, very human moments, experiences and emotions. And while *L’Afrique fantôme*’s subjective and (largely implicit) anti-colonial viewpoint does not negate the institutional and systemic violence of colonial power, nor does it allow that violence to remain hidden behind the veil of benevolent scientific pursuit of knowledge⁹¹; the book’s often extreme subjectivity effectively and forcefully challenges otherness as Leiris dismantles his own primitivist and exoticist personal myths.

Writing a Mission

Michel Leiris kept the diary that would be published as *L’Afrique fantôme* while traveling and working as secretary/archivist with France’s state-sponsored Mission Dakar-Djibouti.

⁹¹ See Côté, Larson; Perloff; Shelton

Between May, 1931 and February, 1933, this linguistic and ethnographic research expedition crossed the African continent. Starting on the Atlantic Coast at Dakar, Senegal, it traveled through French West Africa and Abyssinia,⁹² finishing at Djibouti, whose port lies in the Gulf of Tadjoura at the mouth of the Red Sea. This traverse across the continent yielded quite a large haul for the French cultural establishment⁹³. The role of secretary/archivist—as much by circumstance as by design—made this 30-year-old surrealist poet, writer and occasional art critic into a fledgling apprentice ethnographer. By the time he would join *La Mission Dakar-Djibouti*, Leiris had already taken in some classes given by the very founder of the French tradition in anthropology, the sociologist Marcel Mauss, at l'*Institut d'ethnologie de l'université de Paris*,⁹⁴ and he had also already encountered or collaborated with a number of his Mission colleagues, including the Mission lead, Marcel Griaule, while at the Georges Bataille-helmed publication *Documents*.⁹⁵ So, while he may have been inexperienced in the field, Leiris was not entirely unprepared, and by all evidence he was both competent and capable in his work from the very start.

He also kept his field diary, which, in a very straightforward sense, adhered directly to one of the primary and essential elements of ethnographic fieldwork outlined

⁹² The mission traveled through what are contemporary Mali (Kayes, Bamako, Mopti, Sanga, Tombouctou); Burkina Faso (Pama); Niger (Niamey); Benin (Natitingou, Porto Novo); Nigeria (Kano); Chad (Garoua, N'Djamena (Fort Lamy)); Cameroon (Mora, Yaoundé); Central African Republic (Bangui, Bangassou); South Sudan (Juba); Sudan (Khartoum, Gallabat); Ethiopia (Gondar, Addis Ababa); and Eritrea (Asmara, Massawa).

⁹³ The Musée d'ethnologie du Trocadéro in Paris would add thousands of artifacts, objects and specimens to its collection, along with reams of research documentation, audio and cinematic recordings, and more than 6,000 photographic negatives, slides and prints; a collection that is today housed at the Musée du Quai Branly, steps away from the Eiffel Tower, not far from its original home. For an accounting of all that the Mission collected, see Griaule, « Les résultats de la Mission Dakar-Djibouti ».

⁹⁴ He would only begin to study in earnest, however, upon his return from the Mission (See Leiris, *C'est-à-dire* 30-36).

⁹⁵ These encounters and collaborations included Mission organizers Georges Henri Rivière and Paul Rivet, as well as fellow members of the mission, the musicologist André Schæffner and the artist Gaston-Louis Roux.

by Mauss in his foundational *Manuel d'ethnographie* (1926), a handbook intended for the new post-Great-War generation of professional—that is to say academically trained and institutionally affiliated—ethnographic field workers: « La première méthode de travail, » Mauss wrote, « consistera à ouvrir un *journal de route*, où l'on notera chaque soir le travail accompli dans la journée : fiches remplies, objets récoltés, entreront dans ce journal qui constituera un répertoire facile à consulter »⁹⁶ (original emphasis) (16). It is true that *La Mission Dakar-Djibouti* would prove perennially fruitful for Leiris' ethnographic career: in the years immediately following the Mission, he would publish a number of articles on various cultural practices, including articles on circumcision and rites of passage in Ethiopia and Sudan, on Abyssinian graffiti, and on spiritual cults; his dissertation, which he successfully defended in 1938, would be published a decade later in 1948 as *La Langue secrète des Dogons de Sanga (Soudan français)*; and another major work, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar*, would see publication in 1958, a quarter-century after Mission's end. However, the diaristic record that Leiris kept during the Mission itself was neither a logbook nor a repository of practical details or information to be consulted after the fact, as per Mauss' counsel (See Jamin “Les métamorphoses” 207). It was something quite different, and that difference has made *L'Afrique fantôme* a difficult book to classify.

⁹⁶ [“The first working method is to start a *fieldwork diary*, in which the work done during the day should be written up each evening: cards filled out and objects collected should be entered into this diary, which will become an easily consultable catalogue.” (Mauss and Lussier 16)]

While this field diary frequently seems to be in equal parts a travel book and an ethnographic work, what exactly it was that Leiris kept was, indeed, a record of himself, and in that record he would document the mission through an intensely and deliberately subjective lens. If one aims to look, they will certainly find glimpses at his research, but those glimpses really offer very little in practical terms of field notes (apart from those mentioned above) or detailed observation. But what they do offer, instead, is at times much more compelling:

Cette nuit, j'espère dormir mieux; je me suis fait un matelas avec une jupe et un masque de feuilles tels qu'en portent les circoncis namchi durant la retraite de onze mois qu'ils effectuent en brousse.⁹⁸ (*L'Afrique fantôme* 255 [28 janvier 1932])

J'interroge le gardien de campement sur la circoncision. Je lui demande où on cache 'le couteau pour couper les garçons'. Ne comprenant pas qu'il s'agit du couteau de circoncision, il me répond que "certains faisaient avant l'arrivée des Français, mais, maintenant, on ne fait plus cela" !!⁹⁹ (*L'Afrique fantôme* 268 [14 février 1932])

These passages, not unlike hundreds of other entries that fill the diary, are infused with a dark humour and a cynicism¹⁰⁰ that filter the daily trappings of the mission, whatever the situation or event, exclusively through Leiris' own lived experience, and they follow a style of self-referential intervention (Hand, *Writing the Self* 36), or that of a struggle with narrative position (Clifford, *Predicament* 169) that Leiris had demonstrated beginning

⁹⁷ This was the original "working title" that Leiris contemplated giving to his diary while it was still being written (see *L'Afrique fantôme* 310)

⁹⁸ ["I hope to sleep better tonight, having made myself a mattress from a skirt and mask of leaves like those the circumcised Namchi boys wear during the eleven months they spend in the bush." (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 268)].

⁹⁹ ["I question the guard at the resthouse about circumcision. I ask him where the 'knife for cutting the boys' is hidden. Not understanding that I mean the circumcision knife, he replies that 'some people did that before the French came, but it's not done any more now!'" (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 281)].

¹⁰⁰ Clarck-Taoua has labeled Leiris' attitude in this regard as being "detached amusement mixed with a sense of self-satisfaction" ("In Search of New Skin" 484) but our reading is that the diary is more sincere than Clarck-Taoua's description here might suggest.

with his writings in *Documents*.¹⁰¹ What is surprising, however, is the degree to which Leiris could intervene, as the following passage illustrates, going so far as to even step outside of himself to comment on own diary in its very pages. Eleven months into the nearly two-year Mission, Leiris writes,

Malgré qu'on y retrouve le canevas du voyage, des échos du travail qui y a été fait, les plus marquantes de nos tribulations, elles ne constituent rien autre qu'une chronique *personnelle*, un journal intime qui aurait aussi bien pu être rédigé à Paris, mais se trouve avoir été tenu durant une promenade en Afrique.¹⁰² (original emphasis) (*L'Afrique fantôme* 309 [4 avril 1932])

This attests, in seemingly no uncertain terms, to what Leiris considered to be the almost exclusively personal nature of the journal and to his desire *not* to write just another travel book (see Leiris, *Journal 1922-1989* 335).¹⁰³ It also attests to his very writerly intention behind keeping the diary at all. The passage above is excerpted from a presumptive “Avant-Propos” that was written at roughly only the half-way point of the Mission and, yet, already in anticipation of the diary’s eventual publication. Leiris called that eventual

¹⁰¹ In an article published in *Documents* in 1930, titled « Le ‘Caput mortuum’ ou la femme de l’alchimiste », for example, Leiris begins by describing an encounter at a hotel café in Toulon with American writer and traveller W.B. Seabrook. He recounts the men’s shared interests in primitivism and in the occult, as well as their shared scepticism of Western society. He comments, almost as an aside, of how Seabrook, a man he has just only met, may be one of the only people that he will miss during his forthcoming voyage to Africa. However, still to follow is the main thrust of the article—and the subject of the article’s accompanying photographs: women dressed in leather bondage masks and the psycho-socio-sexual questions that such attire raises. Leiris then finishes the article by inserting himself once again, this time in the temporal present, writing, « où je me trouve moi-même, mon stylo à la main, écrivant cet article pour *Documents*. » (« Le ‘caput mortuum’ » 466)—this closing is not altogether different in its motif from the closing passage of *L'Afrique fantôme* (see *L'Afrique fantôme* 696). But perhaps a more striking example of this self-referential intervention can be found in another piece, published in a prior issue of that same magazine. « L’œil de l’ethnologue » was the official announcement inaugurating La Mission Dakar-Djibouti, and it opens with remarks from Georges Henri Rivire, director of the Trocadro museum, and his remarks are filled with the sort of platitudes most befitting such an announcement. However, at the moment where Leiris picks up the pen following Rivire, the article veers into a muddle of childhood memories, some self-aware racism, and the complete reprinting (in its French translation) of a children’s book that Leiris had come across titled *The Story of Little Black Sambo* within which he claims to have rediscovered his own “childhood wonder and exotic fears.” [our translation] (« L’œil de l’ethnologue » 407).

¹⁰² [“Although one finds in them the canvas of the voyage, echoes of the work that was carried out, our most lasting tribulations, they do not constitute anything other than a *personal* chronicle, an intimate journal that could just as well have been written in Paris, but as it happens has been kept during a trip in Africa.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 320)].

¹⁰³ *L'Afrique fantôme* is also well known, much like 1939’s *L’ge d’homme*, for the “passive masochism” [our translation] (Leiris, *Journal* 283; see Yvert, “Chronologie 1931-1940”) with which Leiris wrote about himself.

publication a “poisonous idea” with which he’d wrestled since the beginning (*L’Afrique fantôme* 309). There are other moments in the diary, too, where he appears to betray this intention. Several months earlier, he had written,

Discussion littéraire avec [André] Schæffner au sujet de l’intérêt des journaux intimes en général et du présent journal. Lui, le conteste ; bien entendu, je le défends. Doit-on tout raconter ? Doit-on choisir ? Doit-on transfigurer ? Je suis d’avis qu’il faut tout raconter. Le malheur est qu’on n’en a pas le temps...¹⁰⁴ (*L’Afrique fantôme* 228 [28 décembre 1931])

And again, in his presumptive “Avant-Propos”, Leiris goes on to declare with a touch of Surrealist flourish, « C’est [...] par le maximum de subjectivité qu’on touche à l’objectivité »¹⁰⁵ (*L’Afrique fantôme* 310 [4 avril 1932]; see Maubon, *En Marge* 119). This ethos of « *tout raconter* » underscores the entire work. And, as we will see later in this chapter, it is this ethos that would both shape and confound *L’Afrique fantôme*’s reputation and legacy.

Framing and Reframing L’Afrique fantôme

When *L’Afrique fantôme* would first be published by Gallimard in 1934,¹⁰⁶ it would be in the series *Les Documents bleus in octavo*, a collection of popular, general interest non-fiction titles relating mostly to politics and culture that included works on the future of

¹⁰⁴ [“A literary discussion with Schæffner concerning the interest of private diaries in general and of this diary in particular. He dismisses their interest; I defend it, of course. Should one tell all? Should one select? Should one transfigure things? I am of the opinion that one should describe everything. The trouble is, there isn’t the time...” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 242)].

¹⁰⁵ [“It is [...] in carrying subjectivity to its peak that one attains objectivity” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 320-321)]

¹⁰⁶ The book’s publication caused a stir within Leiris’ new professional circle. Both the patrons of the Mission and the expedition leader, Marcel Griaule (to whom Leiris had dedicated his book) were injured by its tone and its content; they felt the book unjustly tarnished and even undermined the image of a burgeoning professional institution into which they were rallying every effort (see Leiris, *Miroir* 71-73, 1381). The fallout from the publication of *L’Afrique fantôme* would include an end to the friendship between Leiris and Griaule—the dedication to the latter is gone from future editions of *L’Afrique fantôme*. But Leiris would nonetheless establish and maintain a life-long career first at the Trocadero and later at the Musée de l’Homme and advancing roles with the CNRS.

radio technology; on the state of culture; on the Soviet and American ascents upon the world stage; on Capitalism; on Internationalism and the Working Class; and on Sexuality.¹⁰⁷ The series is such a miscellany that no title, *L'Afrique fantôme* included, really seems in or out of place, but neither is there any real sense of belonging or cohesion among them. Perhaps the one uniting feature—and on this point we can only speculate—is that they all seem to look outward upon the world, beyond France's physical and cultural borders.

Early reviews of *L'Afrique fantôme* were mixed. Those who attempted to read the work as ethnography tended to be ambivalent or dismissive—“[T]he book has little scientific value” (Evans-Pritchard 62); “Beaucoup de lecteurs regretteront que ce point de vue strictement subjectif ait amené l'auteur à mettre en relief certains détails de sa psychologie qui ne peuvent intéresser personne”¹⁰⁸ (De Cleene 243)—. Those who embraced the personal narrative, however, were far less disappointed. A reviewer in the *Journal of the Royal African Society* wrote, “The book makes interesting reading, and one can take it up at any time with pleasure and find something fresh and stimulating on every page” (F.W.H.M. 317). And, to close out his own rather glowing review of *L'Afrique fantôme*, Philippe Soupault¹⁰⁹ wrote,

¹⁰⁷ Jamin, in « Les métamorphoses de *L'Afrique fantôme* », mentions the book's belonging to the collection *Les Documents bleus*, but refers to the collection's first series. *L'Afrique fantôme*, in fact, belonged to the second series, to which was added the extended title *in octavo*—which also refers to the size and format of the publications in this second series. The list of titles published in *Les Documents bleus in octavo*, which was active between 1931 and 1937, is available through Gallimard online: <http://www.gallimard.fr/Catalogue/GALLIMARD/Les-documents-bleus-in-octavo>. Accessed May 23, 2016.

¹⁰⁸ [Our translation: “Many readers will be disappointed that this strictly subjective point of view leads the author to highlight certain aspects of his personal psyche that should be of interest to no one.”]

¹⁰⁹ Soupault was a founding surrealist who co-authored the seminal work of automatic writing, *Les champs magnétiques*, with André Breton. There is also a rather famous incident in surrealist lore of a 1925 banquet that descended into chaos and saw Soupault swinging from a chandelier and Leiris shouting « À bas la France ! » to passersby, nearly inciting, as rumour would have it, his own lynching. (see Leiris, *Miroir* 1376; Nadeau, *History of Surrealism* 114).

L'apparence de ce livre risque de tromper les lecteurs non avertis. L'Afrique qu'il nous découvre est celle, plus vraie sans doute que les livres dits de voyage nous la présentait, d'un homme qui se déplace dans son propre univers. L'Afrique est un mot, un prétexte dont, il faut le reconnaître, il n'abuse jamais.

Je ne crois pas qu'on puisse trouver beaucoup de livres qui rendent un son plus authentiquement humain, je veux dire, d'une humanité plus dépouillée de toutes les légendes dont elle est généralement accablée.¹¹⁰ (300)

But apart from these and a handful of other reviews that appeared during the first eighteen months following the book's publication, not very much was made of *L'Afrique fantôme*. The book wasn't exactly obscure, but Jean Jamin, writing in 1981, characterizes its original release as being rather quiet, or « quasi-confidentielle » (« Les métamorphoses » 201). One reason for the lack of an impression left could be the fact that the book physically disappeared: on October 17, 1941, it was banned by the Vichy Regime, seeing its existing copies ordered destroyed¹¹¹ (Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* 41, 1048, 1051 n.2 ; see also Jamin, « Les métamorphoses » 201) and, of course, one cannot discount the general state of war across Europe as drawing attention away from the book.

In 1951, a decade after its disappearance, *L'Afrique fantôme* would be republished,¹¹² again by Gallimard, this time as a stand-alone special edition.¹¹³ Notes—

¹¹⁰ [Our translation: “This book’s appearance risks fooling unwarned readers. The Africa that he shows us, without a doubt more real than that which so-called travel books present, is that of a man who moves about in his own universe. Africa is a word, a pretext, it should be noted, that he never exploits. I don’t believe we could find many books that produce a more authentically human voice, for which I mean, of a humanity stripped of all the legends that tend to weigh it down.”]

¹¹¹ This tale of *L'Afrique fantôme*'s banishment has been scrutinized. See Yvert, *Bibliographie des écrits de Michel Leiris* 67-69.

¹¹² See *L'Afrique fantôme* 1048.

¹¹³ Jamin observedly questions the cover-art change for the 1951 edition in his 1981 piece « Les métamorphoses de *L'Afrique fantôme* » (201)

mostly for clarification—were added,¹¹⁴ as was a untitled preface written by Leiris.¹¹⁵ This new opening looks back upon la Mission Dakar-Djibouti and *L'Afrique fantôme* from a distance of twenty years. Those years were marked not only by the catastrophic turmoil of the Second World War, but also by the rise of anti-colonial, democratic, and emancipatory movements such as Négritude within the colonized world. And Leiris had experienced both. His anti-colonial views, already nascent in *L'Afrique fantôme* (and likely prior),¹¹⁶ had been crystallizing throughout the 1940s.¹¹⁷ More than this, however, he had lived through the wartime occupation of France.¹¹⁸ He had seen *L'Afrique fantôme*, his first major literary work, targeted, yes. But during the rule of the Vichy Regime he had also participated, if cautiously, in the Resistance, collaborating on clandestine political journals, but also sheltering friends and colleagues—notably Deborah Lifchitz and Paul Éluard¹¹⁹—forced into hiding. All of these elements come to bear in various ways upon the book's prefatory remarks.

¹¹⁴ The notes actually date from the time of first publication. They are largely innocuous, though some, certainly those regarding the young woman Emawayish who had become Leiris' object of desire, have been scrutinized (See for example Coge 255).

¹¹⁵ The preface does not borrow any elements from the "avant-propos," which still sits midway through the book. That "avant-propos," however, had inspired the *prière d'insérer** that had accompanied the book's first run and itself would be reworked for this new edition (see *L'Afrique fantôme* 747-749).

* In *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation*, Jane E. Lewin's translation of Gérard Genette's *Seuils*, Lewin translates « *prière d'insérer* » as "please-insert" (104), but for a concise explanation of this now-antiquated publishing norm see Clifford, *Predicament* 166.

¹¹⁶ See *supra*, this chapter, n.109.

¹¹⁷ The 1950 essay « L'ethnographie devant le colonialisme » (*Cinq études* 83-112) is perhaps the culminating expression of Leiris' anti-colonial viewpoint. See also: Leiris' personal diary entry for 26 octobre 1945 (*Journal* 1922-1989 421); the 1948 paper « Message de L'Afrique » (*Miroir* 871-887); Leiris' remarks within the preface itself (*L'Afrique fantôme* 42-44); as well as Yvert ("Chronologie 1941-1950").

¹¹⁸ The threat of war, it seems, was a constant and worrisome preoccupation for Leiris, even during la Mission Dakar-Djibouti, as well as upon returning to France. See, for example: the diary entries for [25 février 1932], [2 mars 1932], [30 mars 1932], [12 février 1933] and n. 16 (*L'Afrique fantôme* 1202); Leiris, *Journal* (1922-1989): p. 221, 242-243.

¹¹⁹ The ethnographer Deborah Lifchitz (spelled Lifszyc by Leiris) had been a member of La Mission Dakar-Djibouti and was both a friend and a colleague at the Musée de l'Homme. A Polish Jew and naturalized French citizen, Lifchitz saw her French citizenship revoked in 1940. She would be arrested by the French police and turned over to the Nazis in February 1941, and she would later die at Auschwitz. Leiris dedicated *La Langue secrète des Dogons de Sanga* in her name (see Yvert "Chronologie 1931-1940"; "Chronologie 1941-1950"). Paul Éluard, the poet and

The preface opens with a quote¹²⁰ from Rousseau's *Confessions* that, in part, challenges: « *Si la nature a bien ou mal fait de briser le moule dans lequel elle m'a jeté, c'est ce dont on ne peut juger qu'après m'avoir lu* » (Rousseau, *Les Confessions* 33; qtd in Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* 41). The citation is as much a protective cloak as it is a declaration, as Leiris' own words that follow are coloured by sentiments of culpability and regret. In this preface, Leiris acknowledges the fact that *L'Afrique fantôme* ended his friendship with his one-time mentor Marcel Griaule¹²¹, and he admits to his own naïveté,¹²² ignorance, bigotry and racism. But his words are neither wholly apologetic nor wholly defiant (see Maubon, *En marge* 121). Rather, they are quite sober and hold a steady tenor of « *moi-même, tel que je suis* »¹²³ (*L'Afrique fantôme* 44). In this way, the preface is very much in line with one of the notable elements of *L'Afrique fantôme*, which is the absence of change: « *Le voyage ne nous change que par moments. La plupart du temps, vous restez tristement pareil à ce que vous aviez toujours été.* »¹²⁴ (268, [15 février 1932]).¹²⁵ Over the course of La Mission Dakar-Djibouti, there was no

surrealist, was famed as “a poet of the Resistance” for among other things, his poem “Liberté.” It has been said that Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir also sought shelter with Leiris (see Thomas 26).

¹²⁰ The full quotation is as follows:

« *Moi seul. Je sens mon cœur, et je connais les hommes. Je ne suis fait comme aucun de ceux que j'ai vus ; j'ose croire n'être fait comme aucun de ceux qui existent. Si je ne vaudrais pas mieux, au moins je suis autre. Si la nature a bien ou mal fait de briser le moule dans lequel elle m'a jeté, c'est ce dont on ne peut juger qu'après m'avoir lu.* » (Rousseau, *Les Confessions* 33 ; qtd. in Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* 41) [“Myself alone. I feel my heart and I know men. I am not made like any that I have seen ; I venture to believe that I was not made like any that exist. If I am not more deserving, at least I am different. As to whether nature did well or ill to break the mold in which I was cast, that is something no one can judge until after they have read me.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 62)].

¹²¹ See *supra*, this chapter, n. 106.

¹²² See also Leiris' personal diary entry for 29 janvier 1941 (Leiris, *Journal 1922-1989* 334)

¹²³ [“myself, such as I am” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 65)]

¹²⁴ [“The voyage only alters us for brief moments” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 281)]

¹²⁵ Leiris would repeat this sentiment in a 1966 interview with Madeleine Gobeil: “You can't escape, I've said it before, you always remain yourself.” (Gobeil, Leiris and Lovitt 54)

transformation, no great awakening for Leiris—there was just the passage of time, and this had become one of his many preoccupations throughout.¹²⁶

L'Afrique fantôme would see another new edition in 1981¹²⁷, for which Leiris would write a second prefatory note. This second note, titled as « Préambule à *L'Afrique fantôme* » takes a decidedly different tone from that of 1951, and quite understandably. This is now 50 years past the start of the La Mission Dakar-Djibouti. In this second note, Leiris writes, « je constate que ce continent, déjà fantôme à mes yeux en 1934, m'apparaît aujourd'hui plus fuyant que jamais » (38). The preamble is what Genette would call a “pre-posthumous” preface—“one last ‘examination’ of [one’s] own work by an author who will perhaps have no further chance to return to it [...] a way to confront

¹²⁶ The examples of this preoccupation are numerous throughout the text. The following is but a sampling:

« Au retour, je constate que je suis décidément nerveux et que j'ai le cafard. Le but du voyage s'estompe aussi et j'en arrive à me demander ce que je suis venu faire ici. » [5 juin 1931]. [“Upon returning, I notice that I'm quite nervous and depressed. The goals of the trip are growing dim, too, and I'm starting to wonder what I'm doing here.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 82)].

« La vie que nous menons ici est au fond très monotone, comparable en cela à celle des gens de cirque qui se déplacent tout le temps mais pour donner toujours le même spectacle. J'ai une grande peine à prendre des habitudes de discipline et ne me résigne guère à supprimer cette équation : voyager = flâner. » [4 juillet 1931]. [“In the end, the life we lead here is very monotonous, comparable in this respect to the life of circus folk who move constantly but always perform the same act. I find it extremely hard to stay disciplined in my habits, and can hardly resign myself to suppress this equation : traveling = hanging around.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 105)].

« Partant en Afrique, j'espérais peut-être avoir enfin du cœur ! J'ai plus de trente ans, je vieillis, et toujours cette intellectualité... » [16 novembre 1931]. [“When I left for Africa, I hoped that I might perhaps at last develop a heart! I am more than thirty years old, I am getting older, and still this constant intellectuality...” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 212)].

« Nouvelle saute d'humeur : indifférence de voyager, sottise de travailler pour un musée. Vivement que l'on soit... où? Je me le demande ! » [27 novembre 1931]. [“Another fit of temper : the indifference of traveling, the stupidity of working for a museum. I long to be—where ? I wonder.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 218)].

« Autre changement de perspective : lorsque j'ai quitté Paris, le désir de rompre avec la vie futile que j'y menais était le premier attrait qu'avait pour moi ce voyage en Afrique. Aujourd'hui, c'est la vie que je mène ici qui me paraît futile à l'échelle de la partie qui se joue en Europe. » [27 février 1932]. [“Another change of perspective : when I left Paris, it was a desire to break with the futile life I was leading there which first attracted me to this African voyage. Today, it is the life that I am leading here which seems futile compared with what is going on in Europe.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 288)].

¹²⁷ In 1968, Gallimard parlayed *L'Afrique fantôme* from a special edition into a more standard edition in its Collection “Blanche”—noted for the iconic cream-coloured covers with red-printed titles. This standard edition was identical to the 1951 edition; in fact, existing copies of that prior edition were simply re-bound with the new cover (see Yvert, *Bibliographie* 71; Jamin, *Miroir de l'Afrique* 65). However, apart from those that were re-bound, subsequent copies produced in La Collection Blanche did not reproduce the photographs, which would only reappear for the 1981 edition of *L'Afrique fantôme*.

posterity” (*Paratexts* 175)¹²⁸—, and as Catherine Maubon notes, it is free of the confessional guilt of the earlier note : « [Leiris] a été ce qu’il a été—au moment où il l’a été. Et pour le reconnaître il n’est plus besoin de s’en remettre à Rousseau »¹²⁹ (*En Marge* 123).

The addition of these two prefaces to *L’Afrique fantôme* did not alter the book’s central content, but they did have the effect, nonetheless, of framing reader experience, leading to questions of how sympathetic or critical of a reading or interpretation of the work is warranted (see Genette, *Paratexts* 196-236). *L’Afrique fantôme* in 1951 was already no longer only the diary of a writer feeling out of his depth as he travels, lives, and works his way across a foreign continent in the early 1930s; it was now seemingly to be read with a knowing acceptance of the naïveté of a much younger, more innocent version of that writer who, of course, no longer existed. And the *L’Afrique fantôme* of 1981 only serves to heighten this remove by yet another generation.

*Critical Divide : A Timeline*¹³⁰

Little critical attention was paid to *L’Afrique fantôme* for its first 40 years. There were, of course, reviews upon its initial release in 1934, but the 1951 edition is surprisingly absent of critical appraisal.¹³¹ During the 1960s it would find its way onto the reading lists of

¹²⁸ Already in 1975, Leiris was musing about his death from old age (see Gobeil, Leiris and Lovitt 55).

¹²⁹ [Our translation: “[Leiris] was who he was—in the moment in which he was. And to recognize this, he no longer needs to fall back on Rousseau”]

¹³⁰ Over the next twenty pages, there will be but two individual mentions of the photographs in *L’Afrique fantôme* that are central object of this study. That is because over the six decades that this timeline covers, that is the number of times that these photographs were mentioned by scholars and critics of the work: once in 1967 by Michel Beaujour, and once in 1982 by Jean Jamin.

¹³¹ This could be due to the fact that between 1934 and 1951, Leiris’ literary profile had risen significantly: he would publish three major poetry collections, *Tauromachies* (1937), *Glossaire j’y serre mes gloses* (1939) and *Haut Mal* (1943); a novel, *Aurora* (1946); the literary essay *Miroir de la tauromachie* (1938); the two autobiographical works

anthropology students (Jamin, « Les métamorphoses » 204-207; Price, Jamin and Leiris 168; see Guiart 104), and Jean-Paul Sartre would make brief mention of the work in a parenthetical note in his 1960 essay « Question de méthode » (*Critique de la raison dialectique* 53), and Michel Beaujour would mention the book in a 1967 article relating to André Breton's *Nadja* (see below). But as far as critical writings on *L'Afrique fantôme*, only two works seem to make their presence known during the period between 1951 and 1970. These two essays, published in the same year, by J.-B. Pontalis and by Édouard Glissant, respectively, would establish prototypes for what would become two rather disparate viewpoints from which *L'Afrique fantôme* would continue to be read by critics and scholars.

1956

In his essay « Michel Leiris ou la psychanalyse sans fin », published in two parts over consecutive issues of *Les temps modernes* in late 1955 and early 1956,¹³² J.-B. Pontalis shows interest in Leiris' "ethnographic" approach to his autobiographical works *L'Âge d'homme*, *Biffures* and *Fourbis*, in how such an approach attempts to mimic psychoanalytic method (*Après Freud* 338). Perhaps the first to brand Leiris an « [e]thnologue de ses institutions personnelles » (334),¹³³ Pontalis argues that Leiris' deliberate adoption of an outside point of view in these autobiographical works displaces the "psychological" problem of sincerity toward scientific techniques of investigation"

for which he is best known, *L'Âge d'homme* (1939) and *Biffures* (1948), the first of his four-part *Règle du jeu* ; and even a dream journal, *Nuits sans nuits* (1945). It's quite possible that there was little interest in re-reviewing a book in reissue, which, at that moment, could be seen as an early or minor work.

¹³² The essay reappears in Pontalis' *Après Freud*, first published in 1965, and from which we cite the 1968 expanded edition.

¹³³ A characterization that Leiris would refute. (see Price and Jamin 172)

[our translation](335).¹³⁴ He writes, « Décrivant son individu comme il le ferait d'une mythologie, il découvre son propre moi comme la racine de cette mythologie, mythe soi-même dans lequel il s'interdit de s'aliéner »¹³⁵ (338). In this, Pontalis treats La Mission Dakar-Djibouti as a catalyst and finds within a certain fascination with death that would continue through Leiris' subsequent life writings¹³⁶ (see Thomas 42; Gobeil, Leiris and Lovitt 45, 55-56):

[L]e voyage en Afrique, qui se révèle être une confrontation de fantômes plutôt que l'avènement d'une vérité ; aussi Leiris s'y découvre amèrement « nomade rien que spatial qui traîne derrière soi—renforcées plutôt que diminuées par son isolement relatif—ses inquiétudes et ses manies.^[137] » C'est que toute tentative de rupture radicale se nourrit d'un désir impossible : être mort et s'en apercevoir ; contradiction que résout imaginativement le mythe du double et qui fascine dans l'idée du suicide (non dans son accomplissement, car il n'y a pas de mort privilégiée). Et puis, pour vraiment rompre, il faudrait détenir par-devers soi une vérité qui permettrait de dénoncer le masque, le faux-semblant, le reflet ; autrement ce n'est qu'une nouvelle fuite, un mirage répété. (Pontalis, *Après Freud* 345-346)

There are a couple of interesting points to be made about Pontalis' essay. The first is its influence. Leiris' history with Surrealism and his own psychoanalysis¹³⁸ are fundamental to all of his life writing (see Gobeil, Leiris and Lovitt 49, 53) and are even seen to reveal themselves in his chosen objects of ethnographic study.¹³⁹ So, in this respect, Pontalis' essay has become canonical. What else that is interesting is that, despite its invocation in this article, evidence in the text suggests that Pontalis may not have read *L'Afrique*

¹³⁴ Similarly, Soupault, in his 1935 review of *L'Afrique fantôme* remarks how Leiris' deflects sincerity through cynicism (299).

¹³⁵ [Our translation: "Describing himself as he would describe a myth, he discovers his own self as the root of this myth, a myth from which he cannot separate himself"]

¹³⁶ It is a fascination that is not only Leiris' own, but a fascination that is at the very centre of the autobiographical act (see Jenn Stevenson 131-132)

¹³⁷ This quoted passage, slightly misquoted and uncredited on Pontalis' part, is from *Biffures* (Leiris, *La règle du jeu* 217).

¹³⁸ Leiris underwent psychoanalysis between 1929 and 1931.

¹³⁹ See *supra*, this chapter, "Writing a Mission"

fantôme. The “ethnographic method” applied to Leiris’ autobiographical writing only develops following La Mission Dakar-Djibouti (see Price and Jamin 172)¹⁴⁰ and is perhaps only first acknowledged, and then only vaguely, in « De la littérature considérée comme une tauromachie » in 1946.¹⁴¹ Another indication is that Pontalis only mentions *L’Afrique fantôme* indirectly, never naming the book as such, instead acknowledging it by employing the title almost as wordplay when he writes « après avoir parcouru une “Afrique fantôme”, [Leiris] se décide à examiner un peu sérieusement cette société qu’il est condamné à ne jamais quitter : lui-même » (*Après Freud* 334).

So while Pontalis recognizes the effect that Leiris’ time in Africa had had on his work, he does not apply any psychoanalytic critique to *L’Afrique fantôme* itself. This is not to say, however, that this is a bridge not easily crossed by others; an idea that Pontalis raises in the passage above, for example, that of « dénoncer le masque, le faux-semblant, le reflet », is one that he touches upon repeatedly in the article, notably when he writes: « Où saisir cet homme vrai, sinon dans un va-et-vient entre ses masques et son visage, entre sa mythologie et son histoire visible ? » (Pontalis, *Après Freud* 331); and again when he writes of Leiris’ autobiographical method as having “[une] intention qui à la fois masque et se trahit dans les thèmes mis au jour.” (338) This is a theme that will follow *L’Afrique*

¹⁴⁰ Michel Beaujour, however, has argued that the technique can be traced back to *Simulacre* (*Poetics of the Literary Self Portrait* 121-123) Leiris, too, may corroborate Beaujour’s timeline in a 1966 interview with the statement: “These index cards go back forty years !” (Gobeil, Leiris and Lovitt 53)

¹⁴¹ In “De la littérature...”, the essay that serves as a preface to *L’Âge d’homme* in its 2nd edition, Leiris writes: « Envisageant mon entreprise à la manière d’un photo-montage et choisissant pour m’exprimer un ton aussi objectif que possible, tentant de ramasser ma vie en un seul bloc solide (objet que je pourrais toucher comme pour m’assurer contre la mort, alors même que, paradoxalement, je prétendais tout risquer) [...] » (*L’Âge d’homme* 762) [“Looking on my enterprise as a sort of photomontage and choosing for my expression a tone as objective as possible, trying to gather my life into a single solid block (an object I can touch, as though to insure myself against death, even when, paradoxically, I am claiming to risk everything)[...]” (Howard, *Manhood* 161-162)].

fantôme through the following decades, both for its Freudian connotations and for its symbolism as an African or primitivist motif.

The other article to appear in 1956 is Glissant's "Michel Leiris ethnographe."¹⁴² It both traces Leiris' development as an ethnographer—"« La notation a cédé à l'écriture, l'élan au thème, les 'pensées' à la pensée, la rupture à la continuité »"¹⁴³ (617)—and situates *L'Afrique fantôme* liminally between Leiris' ethnographic and literary output—"« par l'exercice de son métier, Michel Leiris [s'est] amené à renouer pleinement avec la littérature, dont il s'était lassé »"¹⁴⁴ (613).¹⁴⁵ Glissant also identifies the social and political implications of Leiris' merging of the ethnographic and the literary, positioning *L'Afrique fantôme* in line with his ethnographies and his more politicized writings on race in « Contacts de civilisations en Martinique et en Guadeloupe » and « L'ethnographe devant le colonialisme ». Glissant writes that what Leiris had come to achieve in his writing was having demonstrated how « les civilisations peuvent évoluer, se heurter, se comprendre et se compléter »"¹⁴⁶ (614). Glissant, in his essay, focuses mostly on the content of Leiris' ethnographic production, even highlighting the beauty of Leiris' ethnographic prose: « En dehors de leur enseignement sociologique ou rituel, les traductions de Leiris, mot à mot expliquées, réussissent cependant à s'ordonner en poèmes [...] »"¹⁴⁷ (615). What is perhaps most interesting, or surprising, reading "Michel Leiris ethnographe" today,

¹⁴² A modified version of this article would later appear in Glissant's *L'intention poétique* (1969).

¹⁴³ [Our translation: "note-taking gives way to writing, impulse gives way to motive, 'thoughts' give way to Thought, fragment gives way to flow"]

¹⁴⁴ [Our translation: "by practicing his craft, Michel Leiris brought himself fully back into literature, from which he had strayed"]

¹⁴⁵ Glissant, here, is making reference to the preface of the 1951 edition, where Leiris writes, « Passant d'une activité presque exclusivement littéraire à la pratique de l'ethnographie, j'entendais rompre avec les habitudes intellectuelles [...] » (*L'Afrique fantôme* 42)

¹⁴⁶ [Our translation: "civilizations can evolve, collide, understand each other and complete each other"]

¹⁴⁷ [Our translation: "Beyond their sociological or ritual instruction, Leiris' translations, explained word for word, succeed at arranging themselves into poems [...]"]

however, is how unproblematically Glissant is able to manoeuvre *L'Afrique fantôme* within, around and throughout Leiris' larger œuvre ; changing politics of identity and culture had not yet challenged or complicated the work.

1967

The April 1967 issue *La Nouvelle Revue Française* was dedicated to André Breton and the surrealist movement, honouring Breton, the movement's founder, who had died in September of the previous year. In that issue, in an article by Michel Beaujour titled « Qu'est-ce que *Nadja* ? », an interesting comparison is made between the photographs featured in Breton's novel *Nadja*, and those images that are published in *L'Afrique fantôme*, and really the two book in their entirety. Beaujour writes—of *Nadja*—the following passage which fully and beautifully confounds the two,

Hanté, peut-être par une illusion, ramenée à lui-même, le voyageur fait le bilan de son expédition manquée aux confins de l'Autre Monde. Est-il déjà transformé en fantôme, comme il le soupçonnait au début du livre ? Sommes-nous des fantômes dans un univers d'ombres, assoiffés d'une bolée de sang qui nous rendrait un semblant de vie ? N'y a-t-il personne d'autre au monde, et ma voix devrait-elle sombrer dans le silence ?¹⁴⁸ (Beaujour “Qu'est-ce que *Nadja* ?” 795)

Apart from Philippe Soupault's glowing review in 1935, this marks the first real connection made between *L'Afrique fantôme*, Leiris and the surrealist movement to which he had belonged for the better part of the 1920s. And Beaujour's remarks on the photographs, which will be the only acknowledgement they receive until Leiris himself will make mention in 1981, are as follows:

¹⁴⁸ [Our translation: “Haunted, possibly by an illusion, brought back to oneself, the traveller takes stock of his missed expedition at the ends of the Other World. Is he already a phantom, as he had worried at the start of the book? Are we phantoms in a universe of shadows, thirsting for a drop of blood the would give us a semblance of life? Is there no one else in the world, and must my voice sink into silence?”]

[L]es illustrations de *Nadja* ne se distignent pas des dérisoires clichés qui ornent *L'Afrique fantôme* et tant d'ouvrages de voyage et d'ethnologie. Leur banalité tient moins à la maladresse du photographe qu'à sa volonté de ne pas infléchir le sens de son cliché, de ne pas lui en faire dire plus que l'œil froid du savant n'a saisi. La vraisemblance exige une certaine désolation. (Beaujour, « Qu'est-ce que *Nadja* ? » 797-798)

Beaujour acknowledges the images not for their content or subject matter, but for their aesthetic derision and banality. It is an important acknowledgement, and one that holds true, even if it tends toward universals and speaks far more to *Nadja* than to Leiris' diary or its own images.¹⁴⁹

1970

The French traditions of ethnology and sociology had been evolving since the establishment of *L'Institut d'ethnologie de l'université de Paris* in 1926, and by the end of the 1960s these social sciences, along with their Anglo-American counterparts, were becoming more introspective, more self-reflexive (see Hefner 138).¹⁵⁰ In the 1968 book, *Le Métier de sociologue*, for example, Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron would write: « C'est dans la sociologie de la connaissance sociologique que le sociologue peut trouver l'instrument qui permet de donner sa force pleine et sa forme spécifique à la critique épistémologique » (103; qtd. in Leenhardt 235).¹⁵¹ And it is very much in this

¹⁴⁹ Our own acknowledgement goes to Ian Walker who, we have found, is the only scholar to resurrect this article with respect to *L'Afrique fantôme* (and through whom we located Beaujour's text), in his article "Phantom Africa. Photography Between Surrealism and Ethnography", which we consider closely in Chapter three.

¹⁵⁰ For a summary of that moment in Anglo-American anthropology, see Stocking, *The Ethnographer's Magic* 8-9; For a summary of that moment in France, see Meunier, "Ethnologists Perturbed by Their Success"; and for an alternative consideration of the "American" moment in respect to Europe, see Angermüller.

¹⁵¹ Bourdieu would in 1972 publish *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*, a further critique of phenomenology within the social sciences.

vein that Jean Guiart¹⁵² writes a 1970 commentary in *L'Homme*. Guiart's is an argument for rigour in the French social sciences. Painting a picture of the ultra-competitive and toxic world of Academia, he writes of the desperate and naked ambition to succeed— itself not far removed from the basic fight for survival—amongst one's peers that has diminished the quality of research being produced: « Les “Belles Lettres” », he writes, « notre commune mère, restent à la source de nos malheurs. » (« Méthodes ou procédés scientifiques » 103). Writing, he argues simply, must be at the service of the research and not the writer, and throughout the essay, he highlights a number of writerly or rhetorical traps into which academics are prone to fall. And in his defence of academic and scientific rigour, there arrives a moment where Guiart writes the following:

Comment par exemple comprendre tout ce qui nous choque aujourd'hui dans *L'Afrique fantôme* sans replacer l'auteur dans son cadre ultra-urbanisé, dans son milieu professionnel d'artistes et d'esthètes, sans savoir quels salons il fréquentait, sans connaître les thèmes agités à ce niveau, thèmes qui définissent une certaine culture française entre 1920 et 1940 ; sans savoir par quel processus l'état du moment de l'anthropologie anglo-saxonne était disséqué, dirigé, et retransmis sur Paris, en particulier par Marcel Mauss qui avait tout lu ; sans savoir quels étaient les alibis du moment que se donnaient les intellectuels de gauche vis-à-vis d'un colonialisme dont ils vivaient plus ou moins explicitement; sans savoir ce que pouvait recouvrir de mépris serein vis-à-vis des hommes l'attrait professé alors pour les sociétés exotiques ; sans rechercher le lien entre le voyage de Gide en Afrique noire et celui de Michel Leiris ? L'hagiographie n'est pas plus de mise aujourd'hui au niveau des « idées générales » qu'à celui de la « légende dorée. »¹⁵³ (« Méthodes ou procédés scientifiques » 104)

¹⁵² Guiart belongs to the second generation of French ethnologists that followed the generation of Griaule and Leiris at *l'Institut d'ethnologie de l'université de Paris*. Guiart was, like Leiris, a student of Maurice Leenhardt, as well as a student of Claude Lévi-Strauss.

¹⁵³ [Our translation: “How, for example, do we understand all that shocks us today in *L'Afrique fantôme* without situating the author back into his ultra-urbanized setting, in his professional circle of artists and esthetes, without knowing which bars he frequented, without knowing the topics debated, topics that defined a certain element of French culture between 1920 and 1940; without knowing how Anglo-Saxon anthropology had been dissected, reshaped and retransmitted over Paris, particularly by Marcel Mauss, who had read everything; without knowing which were the justifications that leftist intellectuals of the moment gave for a colonialism in more or less actively participated; without knowing how his professed interest in exotic cultures could disguise his sheer contempt for men; without researching the connection between Gide's travels to Africa and that of Michel Leiris; hagiography is no more appropriate today in terms of ‘general ideas’ than it is of the ‘Golden Legend.’”]

Leiris' work is not of great importance to the argument that Guiart is presenting, but rather it serves as an apt illustration of one particular point. Guiart is clearly writing about *L'Afrique fantôme* in respect to its use in university curricula,¹⁵⁴ and so this moment offers the briefest of windows into how the book had come to be considered within this educational milieu. *L'Afrique fantôme* is presented here as an interesting case study, having become both problematic—« tout ce qui nous choque aujourd'hui »—and also emblematic of this particular moment within French social sciences—« Comment, par exemple, comprendre tout ce qui nous choque dans *L'Afrique fantôme* sans replacer l'auteur dans son cadre [...] ? »; and we see hints of the type of postcolonial critique that will later come to bear heavily on the book. Guiart's mention of *L'Afrique fantôme* serves a twofold purpose, too, it seems. He uses it to illustrate the importance and the value of rigorous investigation and objective scrutiny in the way he situates Leiris in his time and place with the interwar French intelligentsia, and the final line in the passage, regarding hagiography, is both a subtle nod of appreciation toward the work and a note of caution to young scholars that this is an example of a work that one should perhaps not try to emulate.

1975

Five years later, in 1975, Leiris and his work would see far less muted recognition when the American literary journal *SubStance* would devote a full double issue—in English—

¹⁵⁴ See Jamin, « Les métamorphoses » 205; Price, Jamin and Leiris 168.

to Leiris, his life, and his writings.¹⁵⁵ The volume, in its enthusiasm, is prescient of the kind of popularity that Leiris' writings would see in the following decades. In a comprehensive 40-page opening essay, Jean-Jacques Thomas gives an exuberant and fawning introduction of Leiris to a new and assumedly unfamiliar American and English-speaking audience.¹⁵⁶ The bulk of the essay is devoted to Leiris' autobiographical project, known collectively as *La règle du jeu*, and it shows eager anticipation of the fourth volume in that series, *Frêle bruit*, slated for release the following year. *L'Afrique fantôme* is given mention but little consideration—a short paragraph of acknowledgement and brief summary (“The One-Dimensional Poetics of Michel Leiris” 25)—, though it also sees a slightly more impressive name-drop in a pull-quote from Simone de Beauvoir (Thomas 18). The book does get attention, however, in two other pieces in the issue: in the translated publication of a 1966 interview Leiris had undertaken with Canadian journalist Madeleine Gobeil in which they discuss broad swaths of Leiris' life as defined through his literary works, and in an essay by Robert Hefner titled “Michel Leiris and Anthropology.”

Gobeil's interview with Leiris is important in respect to *L'Afrique fantôme* because, apart from being a rather enjoyable conversation to read, there is a point in that conversation at which Leiris offers his renewed insistence upon the personal nature of the

¹⁵⁵ The issue did include one hors-dossier, but nonetheless appropriately-themed, item : an excerpt from Deleuze and Guattari's then-forthcoming *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, titled “Psychoanalysis and Ethnology” (see Thomas 33).

¹⁵⁶ There was a dearth of English-language translations of Leiris' work for most of the 20th century. At the time of publication of the issue of *SubStance*, it was mostly Leiris' art criticism that had seen translation into English (see, in that issue of *SubStance*, “Bibliography” 155) *L'Âge d'homme* had been translated, as *Manhood*, by Richard Howard in 1963, and for the longest time, this was the only literary work available in English apart from the occasional poem. Lydia Davis' translations of *La règle du jeu* are still in progress: *Biffures* (as *Scratches*) and *Fourbis* (as *Scraps*) first appeared in 1997 with *Fibrilles* (as *Fibrils*) arriving in 2017. Translation of the fourth volume, *Frêle bruit*, has, as of this moment, not been announced. *L'Afrique fantôme* saw its first published English translation as *Phantom Africa*, from Brent Edwards, in 2017. A translated manuscript by Robin Chancellor from 1951 is recorded as existing, however, in the archive of Pennsylvania State University Libraries, University Park, PA. Though there had been discussions with Leiris about the translation, it was never published. [<http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/51220408>].

work: “*L’Afrique fantôme* is a diary, a book of personal moods, par excellence” (“Interview with Michel Leiris” 54). And although casual and nonchalant, the statement is nevertheless a gentle corrective to the interviewer’s even mild suggestion of *L’Afrique fantôme*’s ethnographic nature. We see, here, that his concern is about readers misinterpreting the nature of *L’Afrique fantôme*, about mistakenly treating the book as something that it is not, because for him, the distinction has always been clear.¹⁵⁷

Conversely, Hefner, like Glissant, examines *L’Afrique fantôme* in relation to Leiris’ body of ethnographic writings. And he does justify rather succinctly the ethnographic reading of *L’Afrique fantôme* when he writes,

The ethnographic merit (despite itself) of this non-ethnographic work thus lies in its inadvertent condemnation of a romantic aura that still surrounds so much anthropological hearsay, and similarly in its presentation of a subjective impasse that can only be resolved by a more sustained excursion into ethnography. Such was Leiris’ impasse, and his later work testifies to his subsequent decision as to its resolution. (Hefner 139)

And so this sets up an interesting conversation about the book. Hefner’s argument is straightforward enough in its valuation of *L’Afrique fantôme*’s merit to the study of French ethnography, but his theoretical framing is one that had yet to be seen applied to the book. Consider the following passage,

[I]f ethnography is an exercise in décentrement, as Derrida has suggested^[158] and as Leiris, here, seems to be hoping, it is a primarily if not purely a formal décentrement founded firstly upon the realization of one’s “centrement” apart from the peoples one studies. And thus if anthropology contributes to a loss of self, such a loss occurs only within the already given framework of a socially-rooted subjectivity. (original emphasis)(140)

¹⁵⁷ So much so, that the ethnographic field notes that found their way into *L’Afrique fantôme* were distinctly set apart with italic font (See *supra*, this chapter, “Introduction”).

¹⁵⁸ For Derrida’s concept of “décentrement,” originally a critique of Lévi-Strauss’ Structuralism see “La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines” in *L’écriture et la différence* (409-428).

Indeed, Hefner's reading of *L'Afrique fantôme*, as the essay moves forward, encapsulates the climate and the mood of American anthropological studies in the 1970s. At the time, American anthropology may have had, as Debaene points out, a certain image of itself as being the standard-bearer of "true anthropology" (*Far Afield* 10).¹⁵⁹ This was the era during which Clifford Geertz's highly interpretive "thick description"¹⁶⁰ method of field research and reporting was introduced and quickly gained attention. At the same time, this was the moment of French Theory in American cultural thought that, between the 1960s and the 1980s would see poststructuralism, deconstruction and postmodernism forever shift the intellectual landscape of the West.¹⁶¹ There was a literary impulse as well. Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes tropiques* (1955) had been a phenomenon since the mid-1950s, being if not the most important, the most widely read book about ethnography and cultural contact ever written. And there was Malinowski's posthumous *A Diary in the strict sense of the term* (1966), another renowned exposé of the ugly personal truths behind field work, a diary in which (much as had been the case with Leiris and *L'Afrique fantôme*), "the ethnographic encounter is hardly the only subject of Malinowski's daily

¹⁵⁹ Debaene concludes this observation writing, "But one should be a little more 'Foucaultian' and not assume the naturalness of one's own theoretical framework" (*Far Afield* 11).

¹⁶⁰ A philosophy of anthropological methodology for "doing ethnography" (original emphasis)(Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* 5), thick description refers to the many layers of information and meaning with which an anthropologist must contend, and it emphasizes, above all else, the interpretive nature of anthropology (see 6-30). Thick description is embodied in Geertz's own 1972 essay "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" (*Interpretation of Cultures* 412-453) a first-person account of the wagering bloodsport in Southeast Asia, an account that is most notable for its wealth of observational detail of the experience and its care to not leave any such detail unanalyzed. Intended to essentially let the information 'speak for itself' thereby shifting authority away from the anthropologist-observer—an authority which Geertz, would later critically label "I-witnessing" (*Works and Lives*)—and onto the event, "thick description" nevertheless elevates the role of the interpreter. It would become both representative of the "literary turn" in ethnography (See Clifford, "Predicament" 38), and a key target for criticism (see Crapanzano; Scholte; Trencher). For example, Crapanzano problematizes Geertz' position, writing: "Despite his phenomenological-hermeneutical pretensions, there is in fact in 'Deep Play' no understanding of the native from the native's point of view. There is only the constructed native's constructed point of view." (*Writing Culture* 74)

¹⁶¹ For an overview of the moment, See Cusset, François and Jeff Fort (trans.) *French Theory. How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008. Notably, Chapter 3 "The Seventies: A Turning Point" (54-75).

notes, which also concern his state of health, his sexual frustrations, his romantic torments, his ethical qualms, and his scholarly projects” (Debaene, *Far Afield* 65). It is such a climate that sees *L’Afrique fantôme* made into an attractive foreign object, for it was so very unconventional and so intensely subjective; while it was not unlike *Tristes tropiques* (Hefner 138-139) or *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*—the comparisons were inevitable and would ultimately be made¹⁶²—, it seemed it was not at all like anything written before or since.

Until this moment—looking backward to Guiart, Pontalis and Glissant, for example—*L’Afrique fantôme*, regardless of whether it was being read as ethnographic or autobiographical, had its place in a continuing *œuvre*: near the beginning, and rather minor in relation to the more substantial works that would follow; in Guiart’s view, for example, *L’Afrique fantôme* seems rather simply to be a part of the history of French ethnography and therefore, a case to be studied. But with this new way of reading of *L’Afrique fantôme* that is seen with Hefner and that will continue into the 1980s, the book will become more of an individual critical artifact and will see its currency, in this respect, raised significantly.

The 1980s

When Leiris re-published *L’Afrique fantôme* in a third major edition in 1981, he would write, in his newly-added preamble, a mention of thanks to his colleague and friend Jean Jamin. At that time, Jamin was a young ethnologist; he had joined Paris’ Musée de

¹⁶² See Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, for example, for multiple comparisons, both direct and implied.

l'Homme in 1977.¹⁶³ Similar to Leiris, Jamin's ethnographic research had focused on initiation practices, and he had written about the social function of the secret, including secret languages and secret societies.¹⁶⁴ With time, Jamin would become a close confidant to Leiris. They would, together, found the journal *Gradhiva* in 1986, and Jamin would ultimately become executor of Leiris' intellectual estate after Leiris' death in 1990. But before this, especially during the early 1980s, Jamin would grow into becoming a scholar—and defender, of sorts—of *L'Afrique fantôme*.

With the 1981 re-release of *L'Afrique fantôme*, Jamin published a personal and literary history of the book titled « Les métamorphoses de *L'Afrique fantôme* » in the March, 1982, issue of *Critique*. It begins with Jamin's own discovery of the book when, as a teenager, he had “gone up to Paris” in the summer of 1967 (202); it was his summer reading, a copy of the book's 1951 edition borrowed from a school library that he would read in the Jardin des Plantes. For Jamin, *L'Afrique fantôme* was travel writing—a “*Heroïc Fantasy*” (204) in the vein of Rimbaud, Melville or Conrad—that he associated with his own youthful adventure to the Metropole. But when he encounters the book again, once he's begun to study ethnology, Jamin is faced with a new edition of the work—from 1968, in La Collection Blanche.¹⁶⁵ He remarks on the implied status of La Collection Blanche, noting that this meant that Leiris's diary would now share shelf space with the likes of Malraux, Melville and Michaux (205). But he doesn't do so without

¹⁶³ While Leiris had officially retired from the museum in 1971, he would keep an office there until 1984 (see Jamin “L'air sec un peu”)

¹⁶⁴ Jamin, Jean. *Les Lois du silence. Essai sur la fonction sociale du secret*. Paris: Éditions François Maspéro, 1977.

¹⁶⁵ See *supra*, this chapter, n. 127.

complicating both *L'Afrique fantôme*'s literary status and its relationship with—or its place in—ethnographic writing:

Ce n'était pas un mince paradoxe que de voir un enseignement officiel d'ethnologie conseiller la lecture de *L'Afrique fantôme*, livre passé au rang d'œuvre littéraire [et dans lequel]—phrases qui littéralement au fil des humeurs, ne pouvait manquer de frapper l'imagination de l'apprenti ethnographe—l'ethnographie elle-même, sans ménagement aucun, était prise à partie [...] ¹⁶⁶ (205)

From this, Jamin also notes the book's difficult professional reputation, from Leiris' falling out with Griaule to the many detractors the book has seen—from the early reviews in the 1930s ¹⁶⁷ to colleagues who still roamed the museum halls 50 years later. ¹⁶⁸

Jamin's position is very much like Guiart's in the sense that it considers *L'Afrique fantôme* to be a well-known piece of the history of French ethnography, but Jamin is much more engaged. As an object, he considers how the book had changed with each subsequent edition: the original 1934 edition, published in *Les Documents bleus*, placing it in the same collection as works by Freud, Melville and Gide (200); ¹⁶⁹ the 1951 edition, with an added preface and a new cover (201); the 1968 edition that gave the book—or not—a higher literary status (204); and then the 1981 edition in which Jamin, himself, had received thanks in Leiris' newly-added preamble. The context of those thanks are related in the following passage from that prefatory note:

Or, en ce qui concerne du moins l'Afrique, je constate que ce continent, déjà fantôme à mes yeux de 1934, m'apparaît aujourd'hui de manière plus fuyante

¹⁶⁶ [Our translation: "It wasn't nothing to see official ethnological training advise the reading of *L'Afrique fantôme*, a book that had achieved literary status [and in which]—with literally emotional sentences that couldn't help but strike the imagination of an apprentice ethnographer—ethnography itself, is bluntly taken to task"]

¹⁶⁷ Reviews of the 1981 edition upon its release proved equally dismissive. See, for example, Binet; Willis.

¹⁶⁸ Without naming names, Jamin makes note of a comment made to him by Denise Paulme, a former museum colleague of Leiris who had been a member of Griaule-led Missions subsequent to La Mission Dakar-Djibouti: « Méfiez-vous de Leiris, jeune homme ! Il a raconté des horreurs dans *L'Afrique fantôme*. » (209)

¹⁶⁹ See *supra*, this chapter, n. 107.

que jamais, ce qu'il faut bien—après des espoirs passablement irréalistes de désaliénation—appeler sa dérive agissant dans un sens non moins négateur que la gomme du temps. N'était le journal ici republié (sans l'alourdir de notes autres que celles qu'une première réédition m'avait paru exiger et en l'illustrant, grâce aux soins de mon collègue et ami Jean Jamin, avec sensiblement le même matériel, clichés Mission Dakar-Djibouti, que j'avais utilisé pour imager, au gré presque de ma fantaisie, l'édition originale et ladite réédition),—n'étaient divers autres écrits issus à plus ou moins long terme de l'aventure mentale plus encore que physique que fut ma première expérience africaine, celle-ci aurait pour le vieil homme de 1981, bien que ma haine ancienne pour tout ce qui tend à dresser des barrières entre les races n'ait fait que se confirmer, si peu de réalité qu'elle ne pèserait pas beaucoup plus, dans mon souvenir, que celui de maints rêves évanouis dont seul les récits qu'à peu près de tout je me suis attaché à en faire ont encore quelque cohésion.¹⁷⁰ (*L'Afrique fantôme* 38)

Here, we see in the words of Leiris, a man knowingly approaching the end of life, the admission that the toll of time has changed his own relationship with *L'Afrique fantôme*. It no longer seems as real as it had once been, it no longer feels as important as it had once felt. In an odd way, this contrasts quite nicely with Jamin's rather more vivid—notably more recent—memories of experiencing the book during his own most formative years. It is also interesting that Leiris makes mention here—his *only* mention—of the photographs that had illustrated this diary since 1934. And it should be noted that he connects them, as he does, to memory and its erasure in time; even as the photographs stand as visual traces that confirm his “having been there” (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*

¹⁷⁰ [“But, at least concerning Africa, I note that that continent, already phantom to my eyes of 1934, today seems as elusive to me as ever, still marked—after my rather unrealistic hopes of overcoming my alienation—by what can only be called its drift, which has as much of a negating effect as the slow erasure due to time's passing. Were it not for the journal republished here (which I have avoided weighing down with footnotes, including only those that had seemed necessary for a first reprinting; and which I have illustrated thanks to the work of my colleague and friend Jean Jamin using more or less the same material, *photographic plates from the Mission Dakar-Djibouti*, that furnished the images, selected almost according to my whim, for the original edition and the reprinting)—were it not for various other writing that have emerged over the intervening years, more out of the mental than the physical adventure of my first African experience, that first voyage retains so little reality for this old man of 1981 that, even while my old hatred for all that tends to erect barriers between the races has only increased, that voyage is not much weightier in my memory than any number of vanished dreams, which still have some cohesion only in the tales that I have nearly forever been attached to making out of them.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 60-61)].

44), Leiris associates them, rather, with a past that now seems to be nothing more than imaginary.

Jamin, too, considers the photographs in his inventory of the book. After all, it is he who was responsible for recompiling the photographs for the 1981 edition. For Jamin, they are tangible, practical and do play a significant signifying role. He mentions first the cover of the original 1934 edition of *L'Afrique fantôme* that featured the photograph of a masked dancer. With the 1951 edition of the book, however, the cover image was replaced with the reproduction of a hand-drawn sketch by a boy named Tebabou with whom Leiris had become somewhat friendly during the second stage of the mission. For Jamin, this substitution is meaningful. Seeming to, in part, channel Leiris' preamble, he writes:

Comme si, au cours des années séparant les deux éditions, le « ça-a-été » de la photographie avait soudain perdu de sa présence, de son acuité, de sa réalité et était désormais plus fantôme que le dessin d'un adolescent. Comme si également ce petit voyage dans le temps de *L'Afrique fantôme* avait changé ses coordonnées spatiales, fait basculer ses points cardinaux de sorte que d'entrée, dès la couverture, le sens du voyage se trouvait inversé : le danseur masqué de l'Afrique de l'Ouest disparaissait au profit du mince dessin au trait, représentant un esprit, d'un gamin de l'Afrique de l'Est. Comme si enfin était là signifiée, voire privilégiée, la plongée dans l'archaïsme que fut, au fond, ce voyage à travers « l'Afrique fantôme » [...] ¹⁷¹ (footnote in original)(« Les métamorphoses » 202)

Jamin's questioning the changing signification of the book's cover between editions is certainly the kind of questioning that comes from someone who knows the book well, and Jamin clearly knows the book better than most. In this respect, he questions the

¹⁷¹ [Our translation: "As if, over the years separating the two editions, the "that-has-been" of the photograph had suddenly lost its presence, its acuteness, its realness, and was now more of a ghost than the sketch of an adolescent. As if *L'Afrique fantôme*'s voyage in time had also altered its physical coordinates, knocking its compass out of balance, such that, from its opening, beginning from the cover, the direction of the voyage had been reversed: the West-African masked dancer was displaced in favour of the line drawing of a spirit by an East African kid. As if, finally the plunge into archaism, which is what that voyage into 'L'Afrique fantôme' essentially was, is what is important, what is privileged."]

photographs' removal from the 1968 edition of *L'Afrique fantôme* in Gallimard's Collection Blanche: while he recognizes this as a purely editorial decision (204), Jamin hints that with their loss in that version, the documentary, « ça-a-été » element of the book was diminished, as *L'Afrique fantôme* in 1968 no longer held any images of a “real” Africa. Once again, the contrasting parallels between Leiris' preamble and Jamin's homage are evident: Jamin sees in the photographs visible traces of the Dakar-Djibouti Mission, traces that Leiris himself no longer recognized.

In these same early years of the 1980s, the American cultural historian James Clifford wrote about Leiris in several of his essays, and he would become another important scholar of Leiris, or more precisely, of *L'Afrique fantôme*. Indeed, from the Anglo-American anthropological perspective—or, more generally, for the English-speaking world—Clifford's would become the pre-eminent voice on the book. His perspective and approach are drastically different from those of Jamin. Continuing from the likes of Hefner, Clifford treats *L'Afrique fantôme* less in terms of its established place in the French ethnological tradition and far more as a unique and singular artifact. As Seán Hand suggests, Clifford's intent is seemingly to configure Leiris as “a model of postmodern dislocated consciousness” (*Writing the Self* 205).

In essays published throughout the first half of the decade, Clifford considered the writings—alternately experimental and traditional—of the likes of Bataille, Aimé Césaire, Joseph Conrad, Griaule, Leiris, Bronisław Malinowski, Mauss, Alfred Métraux, and Victor Segalen (see Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* 371-372), constructing along the way a general theory that “[c]ultural' difference is no longer a stable exotic, otherness and [that] self-other relations are matters of power and rhetoric rather than of

essence” (14). While many of his essays were published separately between 1980 and 1986, once they are gathered together as the 1988 collection, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*, they become cohesive and complementary, and Clifford’s larger, more ambitious project comes into view. With the influence of Geertz¹⁷² and with theoretical toolkits borrowed from Deleuze and from Michel Foucault (Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* 23), Clifford engages with Bakhtinian¹⁷³ literary concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia to “[reject] essentialist models of culture” (Handler 600), developing arguments that counter traditional ethnographic authority with alternative approaches.

The core of that project can be found in Clifford’s seminal 1983 essay “On Ethnographic Authority” (*The Predicament of Culture* 21-54), as he traces the changes that occurred in the authoritative voice in Western anthropological research over the course of the twentieth century. Charting four models—experiential, interpretive, dialogic, polyphonic—Clifford follows the evolution of norms and of style in anthropological research, as well as the shifting of power, influence and agency across political and cultural spheres and the effects and anxieties of a globalizing world. Clifford has an enthusiastic and optimistic worldview—his fourth model, labeled “polyphonic” is an admittedly utopian ideal of truly “collaborative production of ethnographic knowledge” (51) in which every voice would speak and be heard—that carries through

¹⁷² On Geertz and his method of “thick description,” see *supra*, this chapter, note 59.

¹⁷³ It has been suggested that Mikhail Bakhtin offers an optimistic response to the postmodern angst of Derrida or Lyotard. Bakhtinian theories were heralded in the 1980s as having described a “democratized language, one that is ‘dialogic,’ ‘heteroglottic’”; as being a way “to analyze ‘modernism’ and modern ‘democracy’”; as having social force (Hirschkop, “Introduction” 2-3). For a contrast of Bakhtin with Lyotard, see Hutcheon (84-85); for a contrast of Bakhtin with Derrida, see Holquist, “Introduction” (xxxii); and for more sources, see Hirschkop, “Critical Work...” 199-200.

his entire project, and it is through this ideal, and a prism of subversiveness and hybridity, that he directs this utopian vision onto the era that shaped Leiris and *L'Afrique fantôme*.

In an essay titled “On Ethnographic Surrealism” (*The Predicament of Culture* 117-151), originally published in 1981, Clifford borrows from Maurice Nadeau (*L'Histoire du surréalisme*) to set the stage of 1920s & 1930s Paris, a scene filled with booze and jazz and the bourgeois cultural rebellion of the avant-garde intelligentsia. But Clifford spends much of the essay inside university classrooms presided over by Marcel Mauss, in museum halls, and between the covers of the magazine *Documents*, its pages filled with “subversive cultural criticism” (*The Predicament of Culture* 129). The “ethnographic surrealism” of the essay’s title is the height of experimentation: a collage of juxtaposition and subversiveness that contests accepted realities, provoking instead “extraordinary [ones] drawn from the domains of the erotic, the exotic, and the unconscious” (118):

The surrealist moment in ethnography is that moment in which the possibility of comparison exists in unmediated tension with sheer incongruity. This moment is repeatedly produced and smoothed over in the process of ethnographic comprehension. But to see this activity in terms of collage is to hold the surrealist moment in view [...] Collage brings to the work (here the ethnographic text) elements that continually proclaim their foreignness to the context of presentation. These elements—like a newspaper clipping or a feather—are marked as real, as collected rather than invented by the artist-writer. (146)

It is an incredibly seductive scene that Clifford constructs, bringing the effervescence and unpredictability of Parisian nighttime abandon into the sober and orderly world of academia. Here, the image of ethnography has become daring, defiant, unconventional, and—through Clifford’s exciting evocation of collage with its disparate elements and “unmediated tension” to describe the construction of ethnographic knowledge—

ultimately “polyphonic” (see Jamin, “mode d’emploi” 48). It is this seductive image that is then carried forth when Clifford turns his attention to Leiris and to *L’Afrique fantôme*.

Indeed, quite seemingly, a single sentence penned by Clifford in this essay has come to have the single most profound effect on shaping how *L’Afrique fantôme* has been read and received since: “His provocative journal, *L’Afrique fantôme*, remains an isolated example of surrealist ethnography.”¹⁷⁴ (*The Predicament of Culture* 142). This label that he applies to *L’Afrique fantôme*, a mirroring inversion of the essay’s title and, by extension, his novel conception of the period. Furthering his argument later in the essay, Clifford writes,

Ethnographic surrealism and surrealist ethnography are utopian constructs; they mock and remix institutional definitions of art and science. To think of surrealism as ethnography is to question the central role of the creative “artist,” the shaman-genius discovering deeper realities in the realm of dreams, myths, hallucinations, automatic writing. (Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* 147)

In referring to these twin expressions, ethnographic surrealism and surrealist ethnography, as utopian constructs, Clifford makes and strengthens the connections between these and his fourth and ideal polyphonic model of ethnographic authority. As such, he paints *L’Afrique fantôme* in this image while, in the process, elevating the book from the moody and introspective work it had remained for half a century into something exciting, almost operatic.

¹⁷⁴ In Clifford’s original essay from 1981, the line reads as follows: “And his provocative journal, *L’Afrique fantôme*, remains an isolated example of ‘surrealist ethnography.’” (“On Ethnographic Surrealism” 506). While the removal of the word “And” at the beginning of sentence appears likely to be a simple stylistic edit, the removal of the quotation marks from around the term “surrealist ethnography” in the later, revised version seems to suggest greater assuredness and/or greater acceptance regarding the term. It is also possible to interpret this as resistance to the criticism raised by Jamin at Clifford’s attempt to merge these two intellectual worlds (see Jamin, « L’ethnographie : mode d’emploi » 50-53).

Clifford's praise and validation of the work would continue. In 1985, he guest-edited an issue of the literary journal *Sulfur*, which was dedicated to the writings of Leiris. The editorial essay that he wrote for the issue had the title "The Tropolgical Realism of Michel Leiris," suggesting the near-religious manner that Leiris interpreted the world around him, searching, so to speak, for *le sacré dans la vie quotidienne*: "Leiris was torn between the two poles [of 'Conception' and 'Reality'] and his life's work has been an endless, imperfect attempt to bridge the gap" (8). The essay delivers a concise biography of Leiris's life and work, and it briefly explores how, during La Mission Dakar-Djibouti, Leiris would so very intimately question the role/rôle of the ethnographer and subjective influence on fieldwork data ("The Tropolgical Realism" 10).¹⁷⁵ It is for the most part a celebratory piece about Leiris, serving to proudly introduce a collection of new English translations¹⁷⁶ (fragments mostly) of Leiris' work.

Similar things could be said about "Tell Us About Your Trip: Michel Leiris," a brief 1988 essay, complementary to "On Ethnographic Surrealism" and included in *The Predicament of Culture*. As closely as it relates to the essays discussed above, it is very much a showcase for *L'Afrique fantôme*, a portrait of "the surrealist-ethnographer enmeshed in writing—himself through the others" (*The Predicament of Culture* 168). Clifford, again, paints a rather adoring picture: "Leiris' life of writing combines an acute sense of the futility of existence with a tenacious desire to salvage its meaningful details [...]" (173). And for Clifford, *L'Afrique fantôme* stands at the apex of subversive, questioning and experimental ethnography:

¹⁷⁵ See also "role playing" in *The Predicament of Culture* 79, 137, 169.

¹⁷⁶ These include translations from Lydia Davis—the preeminent translator of Leiris into English, most notably all four volumes of his autobiography *La règle du jeu*—, Paul Auster, and Clifford himself.

L'Afrique fantôme begins a writing process that will endlessly pose and recompose an identity. Its poetics is one of incompleteness and process, with space for the extraneous. Interrupting the smooth ethnographic story of an access to Africa, it undermines the assumption that self and other can be gathered in a stable narrative coherence. (*The Predicament of Culture* 173)

Clifford offers *L'Afrique fantôme* a level of recognition little before seen in the Anglo-American anthropological establishment.¹⁷⁷ What is certain is that he saw in Leiris a model—whether one of “postmodern dislocated consciousness” (Hand, *Writing the Self* 205), or that of the surrealist-ethnographer—that espoused the challenges and virtues of the experimental ethnographies that appealed to theorists and thinkers caught up in discoveries and debates approaching the end of the 20th century.

After Clifford: Criticism divided

In writing “On Ethnographic Surrealism” and “On Ethnographic Authority” Clifford begins propelling *L'Afrique fantôme* forward at the same moment that Jamin is looking backward upon the book and Leiris himself is considering that the experiences recorded in his diary were no longer anything more than fading memories. In carrying *L'Afrique fantôme* forward, however, Clifford is in fact setting the book upon a very different trajectory. In the French ethnographic tradition, *L'Afrique fantôme*, whether read as life writing or as ethnography, has always remained part of a continuum; it has held a fixed and unique place at the beginning of both Leiris’ ethnographic and life writing careers. Clifford takes the book out of that tradition entirely, placing it into his own and, in so

¹⁷⁷ Consider Evans-Pritchard’s wholly dismissive three-sentence review of *L'Afrique fantôme* that appeared shortly after the book’s 1934 release: “This is a travel diary of the French expedition from the Atlantic (Dakar) to the Red Sea. There are a few interesting photographs. Otherwise, the book has little scientific value.” (Evans-Pritchard, E.E. « Review : 63. » *Man*, vol. 35. (April 1935): 62)

doing, into fresh and contemporary discussions and debates—literary, cultural, political and intellectual—that would make the book both a postmodern and postcolonial concern.

But Clifford's is anti-tradition: disruptive, premised on reshaping, retooling, rethinking, and reinventing. The academic climate of Anglo-American anthropology in which Clifford was operating in the 1980s was one of crisis,¹⁷⁸ described here by Geertz:

What [was] at hand is a pervasive nervousness about the whole business of claiming to explain enigmatical others on the grounds that you have gone about with them in their native habitat or combed the writings of those who have. This nervousness [brought] on, in turn, various responses, variously excited: deconstructive attacks on canonical works, and on the very idea of canonicity as such; *Ideologiekritik* unmaskings of anthropological writings as the continuation of imperialism by other means; clarion calls to reflexivity, dialogue, heteroglossia, linguistic play, rhetorical self-consciousness, performative translation, verbatim recording, and first-person narrative as forms of cure. (*Works and Lives* 131)

Several months before Clifford published "On Ethnographic Authority," Marcus and Cushman, as well, offered a new critical perspective on ethnographic writing, highlighting the "considerable self-consciousness of recent writers^[179] [...] pertain[ing] to how ethnographies achieve their effect as knowledge of 'others'" ("Ethnographies as texts" 25). What Marcus and Cushman observed is an experimental trend toward self-reflection that questions and challenges the authority and dominance of ethnographic realism, prevalent in ethnographic writing since Malinowski (26-29). Like Clifford, their criticisms raised issues of authority, authenticity and plausibility in ethnographic writing and, in part, what they concluded is that techniques of self-reflection (Marcus and

¹⁷⁸ French ethnology was not facing this same crisis. See Debaene, "Preface to the English Edition" (*Far Afield* ix-xv).

¹⁷⁹ *Our footnote*: Their large inventory notably includes Geertz and his 1972 essay "Deep Play. Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." (Geertz, *The Interpretation...* 412-453) Highlighted by Marcus and Cushman, its thick description (See Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* 6-10) becomes both representative of the literary turn (See Clifford, "Predicament" 38), and a key target for criticism (see Crapanzano ; Scholte ; Trencher). For example, Crapanzano problematizes Geertz' position, writing: "Despite his phenomenological-hermeneutical pretensions, there is in fact in 'Deep Play' no understanding of the native from the native's point of view. There is only the constructed native's constructed point of view." (*Writing Culture* 74)

Cushman 48)—including a shift from “us-them” to “me-them” dynamics within a narrative (50)—enhanced the plausibility of representations of difference, “achieving the effect that native worlds are authentically different” from our own (48). In such a climate, it is not difficult to imagine why *L’Afrique fantôme* was such an attractive object for Clifford—Leiris is arguably the most self-conscious and defiant of them all, as *L’Afrique fantôme*’s own unique “me-them” dynamic exists not only between Leiris and the “other” but between Leiris and his own colleagues and compatriots.

Prior to Clifford, what had divided critical approaches to *L’Afrique fantôme* had essentially been interpretive and associative choices¹⁸⁰ that, with the book’s own divided attentions (and intentions) and its uniqueness as a piece of writing, seemed equally relevant and justifiable and were rarely seen to be in conflict with one another despite their differences. But Clifford, heeding Barthes’ late-1960s deconstructionist credo “The Death of the Author,” justifies an alternative and ambitious viewpoint :

the ability of a text to make sense in a coherent way depends less on the willed intentions of an originating author than on the creative activity of a reader. To quote Roland Barthes, if a text is "a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture," then "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" [*Image, Music, Text* 146, 148]. The writing of ethnography, an unruly, multi-subjective activity, is given coherence in particular acts of reading. But there is always a variety of possible readings (beyond merely individual appropriations), readings beyond the control of any single authority. (*The Predicament of Culture* 52)

But his particular reading does not go unquestioned. Shortly after the release of *The Predicament of Culture*, for example, Frances Slaney challenges Clifford’s portrayal of

¹⁸⁰ Glissant connected *L’Afrique fantôme* to Leiris’ ethnographic and political writings, for example, while Pontalis considered instead how it shaped his later autobiographical work.

L'Afrique fantôme (while also echoing criticisms that *L'Afrique fantôme* had faced since 1934):

Clifford asserts that: "Its ethnographic collecting is without clear guidelines, aesthetic or scientific [*The Predicament of Culture* 167]. But is an introspective account of Leiris' experiences traveling through Africa as a clerk for an anthropologist really an ethnography? Is it a novel? Is it without form? Read as ethnography, it's a bit frustrating because Leiris often mentions that he collected interesting data from informants, but he doesn't pass the gems on to the reader.^[181] ("Psychoanalysis and Cycles of Subversion in Modern Art and Anthropology" 225)

Furthermore, Clifford's scene-setting of interwar Paris as a cultivator and generator of avant-garde, radical surrealist ethnography may be an example of overconfident retooling. In essays published in 1985 and 1986—before *The Predicament of Culture* gathered Clifford's work into a whole—Jamin had already criticized Clifford, along with others who were looking to the past for models to support their contemporary concerns, of Nostalgism:

[U]ne anthropologie du monde moderne ne peut se concevoir qu'à condition de refroidir la modernité, de rechercher du fondamental dans le phénoménal et de poser, au moins méthodologiquement, une homologation entre le simple et le complexe, le sauvage et le civilisé, le traditionnel et le moderne... C'est au fond contester ou plutôt refuser que les faits de société et de culture soient soumis à une linéarité historique. Disposition d'esprit par excellence post-moderne qui n'est pas sans contredire la position « moderne » qu'a tenue l'ethnographie [et qui] prend le risque de la parodie [...].¹⁸² (« Le texte ethnographique. Argument. » 16-17)

¹⁸¹ Our footnote: See for example the month of October 1931 (*L'Afrique fantôme* 156-181). During this leg of the Mission, Leiris learns elements of the secret ceremonial language of the Dogon people of Sanga in Mali. The knowledge he acquires will be used in his dissertation and will later be published as *La langue secrète des Dogons de Sanga* (1948). However, within the pages of *L'Afrique fantôme*, no details beyond his personal interactions with informants are shared.

¹⁸² [Our translation: "An anthropology of the modern world cannot conceive of itself except through the slowing of modernity, of searching for the fundamental within the phenomenal and to pose, at least methodologically, a homology between the simple and the complex, the savage and the civilized, the traditional and the modern... It is, in essence, contesting, or rather, refusing that societal and cultural facts are subject to a historical linearity. A postmodern disposition par excellence, that is not without contradicting the "modern" position that ethnography held and which risks becoming a parody."]

Il convient donc de se garder d'une illusion retrospective—courante en histoire des idées—qui, au vu et au su d'un même souci de l'autre et de l'ailleurs que partagerent réellement l'ethnographie et le surréalisme, ferait que ces deux activités se seraient découvertes naturellement alliées sinon complices dans la manière de les atteindre et la façon d'y cheminer. La réalité historique est tout autre.¹⁸³ (« L'ethnographie mode d'emploi » 53).

Or, as Denis Hollier would later paraphrase quite simply, « il n'y a pas eu “d'ethnographie surréaliste.” Il y a simplement eu [...] des rencontres avec les ethnographes »¹⁸⁴ (« La valeur de l'usage de l'impossible » x, n.1). Nevertheless, Clifford's impact on *L'Afrique fantôme* cannot be understated. The success of *The Predicament of Culture* would bring to Leiris' diary a visibility and a popularity that it likely would never have achieved otherwise.¹⁸⁵ But Clifford's ambitious and near-appropriation of *L'Afrique fantôme* drives a permanent wedge into the book's critical narrative.

Into the 1990s, scholars and critics were less convinced of Leiris' anti-colonial posturing in light of all of the evidence provided in *L'Afrique fantôme*. In 1995 Marie-Denise Shelton writes,

Of course, Leiris's attitude toward the Africans is itself the most powerful refutation to the myth of communion with the Other. According to his detailed account, the theory and practices of the Dakar-Djibouti expedition systematically violated and brutalized the very object of study. It is therefore surprising to read James Clifford's dithyrambic statement that “the work of Griaule and his followers is one of the classic achievements of twentieth-century ethnography” (*Predicament of Culture* 58). Such a claim forces us to

¹⁸³ [Our translation: “It is enough, then, to guard oneself against a retrospective illusion—popular in the history of ideas—that, in light of a similar concern for the other and elsewhere that is shared between ethnography and surrealism, would find that these two endeavours would be naturally aligned if not complicit in their methods and their development. The historical reality is altogether different.”]

¹⁸⁴ [“There has never been ‘a surrealist ethnography.’ There has only been [...] ‘encounters with ethnographers.’” (Hollier and Ollman 7, n.12)]

¹⁸⁵ Leiris had been happy enough that *L'Afrique fantôme*, with its 1981 edition, had made it into Gallimard's collection *La Bibliothèque des Sciences Humaines*—« Ça m'a fait plaisir comme à un truand très content si on lui fout la légion d'honneur. » (Leiris, *C'est-à-dire* 42)

mediate somberly on the theories and ethos that govern the discipline of ethnology. (“Primitive Self” 334)

To read *L’Afrique fantôme* only in terms of an individualized quest, as some have done, is to distort its meaning and erase its syntax, which is at once mystifying and revealing. The indirection and indefiniteness of the text, which oscillates between the self and the world, lucidity and duplicity, define its character. The excess of truth about the self often blurs the reality of the world, the colonial space and the ethnographic practice. Leiris, as we have seen, is not a mere voyeur or somnabulist crossing a phantasmatic Africa. On the contrary, if we are to believe his own account, he was one of the mission’s most intrepid agents. *L’Afrique fantôme* records much more than the angst of a morose man engulfed by his obsessions. It can be read both as an extended and exuberant celebration of European colonial power and as a testimony to that authorized mayhem in colonized Africa which for a long time passed for scientific investigation. A composite account of ethnological notations, dastardly deeds, poetic reflections, and erotic broodings, *L’Afrique fantôme* provides insight into the primitivist mentality. It poses in a troubling manner the question of the writer’s involvement in promoting the colonialist worldview in the politics of meaning and knowledge. (“Primitive Self” 338)¹⁸⁶

There were also criticisms that were quite different. One in particular is a very near *ad hominum* attack on Clifford, and his entire project that was *The Predicament of Culture*, by art historian-critic Hal Foster in “The Artist as Ethnographer?”. While Foster launches criticisms against Leiris, Bataille and the *négritude* movement of Césaire and Senghor as toiling in primitivist fantasy—writing that *L’Afrique fantôme* “indulge[s] in a ritual of self-othering” (*Return of the Real* 175)—that may certainly be valid but which Foster does not elaborate, there appears throughout his piece a sustained attack on Clifford.¹⁸⁷

But not all criticism is negative. At the very end of his book-length study of Michel Leiris, *Writing the Self* (2002), Seán Hand mentions Clifford and *The Predicament of Culture*:

¹⁸⁶ For further examination of the “exuberant celebration of European colonial power,” see Larson. For further examination of Leiris’ “primitivist mentality,” see Clarck-Taoua.

¹⁸⁷ See Foster 304, where the criticism begins. It continues throughout and into the endnotes, particularly note 11 on page 308.

the whole of Clifford's book repeatedly advances the positions of Leiris as evidencing an exemplary exploration and retention of the complexities inherent in oppositional projects, and his often pioneering work as an early formulation of a dis-located identity and critical role in the general culture of conjuncture arising out of this new, heterogeneous historical situation. (*Writing the Self* 205)

Hand's observations regarding Clifford's work are neither entirely critical nor entirely praising (though they lean more toward the latter). Certainly, Clifford's work is instrumental in locating Leiris in postmodern and postcolonial discourse (see Hand 204-205). But is he correct to do so? Jean Jamin remained critical of such positioning into the following decade. In his 1996 introduction to *Miroir de l'Afrique*, he is quite adamant to keep *L'Afrique fantôme* in its own era and not project upon it every *latest vision*.¹⁸⁸ "On ne peut cependant réduire *L'Afrique fantôme* à des annales de la Mission Dakar-Djibouti pas plus qu'on ne doit y voir l'amorce de cette anthropologie réflexive et critique mise au goût du jour voici dix ans par des chercheurs américains [...]"¹⁸⁹ (*Miroir de l'Afrique* 69). However, regardless of Jamin's objections, Clifford's work reintroduced Leiris and helped to frame his work for the twenty-first century, as Seán Hand writes,

At the beginning of the twenty-first century (and post-globalization), then, the new and emerging locations of Leiris should confirm his status as a major French writer of his age, an exemplary intellectual of the postmodern period, and, above all, a revolutionary contributor to the exercise of writing the self. (*Writing the Self* 205)

At the the turn of the century

¹⁸⁸ See Hand, *Writing the Self* 204

¹⁸⁹ Ten years earlier, though, Jamin had taken a somewhat more neutral stance toward the literary turn. See Jamin, "Le texte ethnographique. Argument." in particular, see page 17.

The 1990s saw other examinations of *L’Afrique fantôme*, not at all framed by Clifford’s point of view. Catherine Maubon, in her 1994 monograph *Michel Leiris: en marge de l’autobiographie*, takes a rather comprehensive view of the work, seeing in it the beginnings of Leiris’ lifelong autobiographical project, or « auto-critique » (122), that would be developed through *L’Âge d’homme* and the four-tome *La règle du jeu*, and she embraces the work’s « double statut de journal intime et carnet de route » (Maubon 123).¹⁹⁰ While Maubon does not avoid the ethnographic context nor content of *L’Afrique fantôme*—quite the contrary—, she does not characterize the book as such. Instead, she highlights the textual strategies that Leiris employs within that ethnographic content, strategies which erase any semblance of objective authority: phrases such as « paraît-il » and « je suppose » (Maubon 126; *see also L’Afrique fantôme* 156-157) that immediately cast subjective uncertainty. She also notes that, when an excerpt from *L’Afrique fantôme* was first published in the first issue of the magazine *Minotaure*, the excerpt was annotated with « un important appareil de notes qui fournit le supplément d’informations nécessaire à la bonne compréhension—ethnographique—du texte »¹⁹¹ (Maubon 127), further acknowledgement that, from its inception, of *L’Afrique fantôme* had been clearly seen to be lacking in ethnographic weight.

More than many others before her, Maubon also focuses on the travel aspects of the journal, arguing that Leiris’ focus on the quotidian in his daily journal is likely both a symptom and a reaction to the predetermined and rigid nature of the Mission’s itinerary, as well as to his own preconceptions of which he was unable to fully let go (152-153).

¹⁹⁰ [Our translation: “double status as personal diary and log book”]

¹⁹¹ [Our translation: “a significant spattering of notes which provide the supplemental information necessary for a sound—ethnographic—understanding of the text.”]

But what is perhaps most interesting is Maubon's focus on *how* the realities of travel are reflected in the journal's writing, in terms of structure and style:

Tour à tour, et à distance rapprochée, le paysage africain, l'enquête ethnographique, la vie communautaire, le contact avec les populations indigènes, le voyage, ses déplacements comme ses haltes prolongées, sont occasion d'exaltation ou d'abattement. Aucune expérience n'échappe à cette tonalisation dont dépendent du reste les attitudes de locution, le récit de style télégraphique et la description ethnographique l'emportant dans les moments où la saisie de l'objet oblitère le sujet, le commentaire caractérisant au contraire ceux où, cette saisie se révélant illusoire, le sujet occupe de nouveau la scène de l'écriture [...] ¹⁹² (Maubon 136-137) ¹⁹³

Following Maubon, Nathalie Barberger published *Michel Leiris: l'écriture du deuil* (1998). Barberger does not focus on *L'Afrique fantôme* in her work, but rather on *La règle du jeu*. Nevertheless, she recognizes its role in the development of Leiris' autobiographical project in ways that go beyond the noting of his oft-cited method of classifying thoughts, dreams and ideas—any sort of details—on index cards just as he had classified ethnographic objects and information during La Mission Dakar-Djibouti (Leiris, *L'âge d'homme* 762-763). Notably, Barberger identifies what she deems « la figure du maudit [...] l'aspect d'une fatalité irrémédiable » (*L'écriture du deuil* 191) ¹⁹⁴ that has haunted his life writing since *L'Afrique fantôme*.

What connects Maubon's and Barberger's works is the ease with which they handle *L'Afrique fantôme*. Since Clifford, *L'Afrique fantôme* had routinely been presented seemingly as a new discovery—and for many it often was—, despite its having

¹⁹² [Our translation: "In turn, and from close range, the African landscape, ethnographic enquiry, communal life, contact with indigenous populations, travel, with its displacements and its prolonged stops, are moments for exaltation or despondency. No experience is safe from "]

¹⁹³ [Our translation: "Alternately, and from on close, the African landscape, ethnographic enquiry, communal life, contact with indigenous populations, travel, its displacements like its prolonged stays, are occasion for exaltation or despondency. No experience escapes this tonalization on which speech attitudes, the telegraphic writing style, the ethnographic description depend"]

¹⁹⁴ [Our translation: "the figure of the damned [...] this aspect of an irremediable fate"]

been in print for half a century by that point.¹⁹⁵ With Maubon and Barberger, their approaches either addressing elements not previously addressed or addressing elements of the work in different ways, Leiris' African journal is viewed with established legitimacy. Maubon, for one, positions *L'Afrique fantôme* as being wholly literary, wholly *leirisien* (*En marge de l'autobiographie* 87, 135, 136, 147), which, counter to much of the scholarship that had been produced since the 1980s, anchors the book squarely back within Leiris' œuvre. This is a significant gesture, as Maubon recognizes *L'Afrique fantôme*'s idiosyncrasies without treating the book quite so much as an anomaly, a treatment of the work that carries forward into the new century.

Sébastien Côté's 2005 article « Michel Leiris et la fuite impossible: Ethnographie, autobiographie et altérité féminine dans *L'Afrique fantôme* » continues in treating *L'Afrique fantôme* with the grounding of its significant historical presence, while giving consideration to its various competing themes. Côté analyzes *L'Afrique fantôme* as literary *and* ethnographic—as « un texte hétérogène aux contours indéfinissables » (« ...la fuite impossible » 854)—while, at the same time, problematizing both. He addresses how codependent, how inextricable are the ethnographic and the autobiographic within the pages of *L'Afrique fantôme*:

Sans ce déplacement du carnet de voyage au journal intime, ce va-et-vient incessant entre l'observation de l'Autre et l'introspection et, enfin, cette fructueuse transposition du questionnement ethnographique à l'exploration acharnée de soi-même, qui sait à quel moment il aurait amorcé la quête impossible de son projet autobiographique ?¹⁹⁶ (Côté 868);

¹⁹⁵ It is nevertheless worth noting that so many of the articles about *L'Afrique fantôme* written after (and possibly modelled on) Clifford include variations on an origin story of the book, as if it is being discussed for the very first time. See, for example, Clarck-Taoua; Larson; Shelton.

¹⁹⁶ [Our translation: "Without this shift from travel journal to personal diary, this incessant back-and-forth between observation of the Other and introspection and, finally, this fruitful transposition of ethnographic enquiry onto the unbridled exploration of the self, who knows when he might have begun the impossible feat of his autobiographical project"]

and, similarly to Maubon, he notes how the content and writing style in the journal's entries are effected by mood, as well as by the events of the Mission,

[Leiris] pressent très tôt que sa condition d'Européen neurasthénique introduit automatiquement un biais dans sa manière de mener les entretiens, ce qui oriente évidemment son interprétation des données ainsi recueillies. Il remarque également que son humeur changeante modifie à la fois son point de vue et sa manière d'écrire, tant sur le plan de la qualité stylistique que de la production textuelle, selon qu'il traverse une période d'euphorie ou de déprime.¹⁹⁷ (Côté 857)

From his vantage point, Côté examines the book in light of the critics and criticisms that shaped the book's reception in the 1980s and 1990s, summarizing previous debates, and potentially establishing new ones; he challenges, for example, the wholly literary approach of the likes of Maubon and Barberger, among others (Côté 859), and his text, in its own approach, inherently argues for a reevaluation of the book's *ethnographicity*.

Another take on the book comes from Vincent Debaene, who proposed in 2010's *L'Adieu au voyage* [*Far Afield*] that *L'Afrique fantôme* be considered an ethnographer's "second book" (*Far Afield* 6), that is to say, "a more 'literary' work that [does] not adhere to the canonical forms of the scholarly monograph" (4), akin to Griaule's own *Les flambeurs d'hommes* and Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes tropiques* which also feature in Debaene's book. While the premise of a "second book" is admittedly an awkward fit in the case of *L'Afrique fantôme*, which preceded Leiris' scientific writings by a number of years, it is Debaene's returning *L'Afrique fantôme* into its own era, into the social and intellectual climate that would generate the impulse toward its creation, treating it as a textual object

¹⁹⁷ [Our translation: "[Leiris] senses early on that his condition of being a depressive European automatically places a bias on his interviewing methods, which evidently influence his interpretation of the information he gathers. He also remarks that his moodiness modifies both his point of view and his way of writing; the quality, style, and even the quantity of writing he produces are all determined by whether he is in a period of euphoria or depression."]

“historically situated and speak[ing] to the epistemological configuration of [its] time” (Debaene, *Far Afield* 11) that is of most value.

Looking at L’Afrique fantôme

There are thirty-one images that illustrate *L’Afrique fantôme*, and because the book has at its core this internal contradiction to which Leiris seemed so absolutely and compulsively committed, through these photographs we are able to see that most every element of the work is implicated. The photographs are, in many ways, very much like the copied field notes. They, too, come from outside the diary, and they, too, are inarguably ethnographic. They were selected by Leiris from the 6,000 photographs (Griaule, « Les résultats de la Mission Dakar-Djibouti » 1222) that had been captured over the course of expedition in order to document the journey taken, the people encountered, and the material cultures and traditions that were being studied. Unlike the copied field notes, however, which are explicitly set apart, the photographs are drawn into *L’Afrique fantôme*; they are *made* to be personal while, all the while, remaining to be ethnographic documents.

However, this *making personal* involves more than the simple insertion of the images into the diary; the transition is uneasy, challenging and, ultimately, incomplete. As will be shown in the following chapter, when the photographs are examined in relation to the passages that they serve to illustrate, when consideration is given for the captions that serve to label them in the book, what is revealed is a tension, an intermedial form of irony that persistently oscillates between the intimate and the objective. Further to intermedial and intratextual relations, however, there are also the quite contrasting

ways—similar to with the book as a whole—that the photographs in *L’Afrique fantôme* have been critically received.

Overall, though, these very tangible, and often quite striking, visual elements of the book occupy a surprising blindspot in academic research. In fact, within the significant body of scholarship devoted to the writings of Michel Leiris, even in those studies that give substantial attention to *L’Afrique fantôme*,¹⁹⁸ the photographs are rarely acknowledged—if they are mentioned at all. It is only a very small handful of scholars who have even attempted to interpret them, and even within this small coterie, each has presented approaches and arguments that have had the tendency to strongly reinforce one aspect—the intimate *or* the ethnographic—while giving far less or even no attention to the other. Such a divided critical reception serves to amplify the tension of the photographs and, likewise, the book. But it should be noted that the first of these photographic inquiries didn’t even appear until 1995, more than 60 years after *L’Afrique fantôme* was first published,¹⁹⁹ which means that these inquiries are, themselves, equally shaped by all of the critical scholarship and by the book’s “impossible” reputation that have preceded them.

¹⁹⁸ For example, those works by Clifford, Côté, Debaene, Jamin, or Maubon.

¹⁹⁹ See Dauge ; Walker; Novello-Paglianti; Rushton; *see also* Phipps for an interesting if brief mention of the photographs.

Chapter 3: Michel Leiris' *L'Afrique fantôme*. The Photographs

Les Clichés Mission Dakar-Djibouti

During *La Mission Dakar-Djibouti*, photography was a collection tool, one among many. The Mission's chief, the ethnologist Marcel Griaule, had as his intention to maximize the mission's abilities to collect artefacts and information. In a speech he delivered in December, 1930, officially announcing Mission, Griaule spoke of ethnography in the moment—however interesting previous ethnographic studies may have been, they had been guided solely by the instincts of the inquisitor; what they lacked was a honed set of skills, a professionalism: “[L]e fait social nécessite l'apprentissage du métier d'observateur. Il faut en connaître les méthodes, les tours de main, les trucs, exactement comme pour la serrurerie, la navigation ou la sténographie.” (« Buts et méthodes » 105).

Further into his speech, he would speak briefly of those methods:

La nouvelle méthode enseignée à l'Institut d'Ethnologie consiste à envisager l'objet en fonction, non de l'effet artistique, mais de l'enseignement qu'il est possible d'en tirer. [...] [I]l faut que cet objet reste enveloppé en quelque sorte du reflet de sa vie quotidienne. Chaque document devra être étayé d'une longue série d'observations dont les racines s'étendront dans toutes les directions de l'activité humaine. Dans ce but, on prendra pour chaque objet une photographie de son cadre, de son milieu, on filmera toutes les phases de sa fabrication, de son usage.” (111)

Griaule's *nouvelle méthode* was actually that of sociologist Marcel Mauss and, in his speech, Griaule is essentially recounting what Mauss himself instructed in his 1926 *Manuel d'ethnographie*. Griaule's application of these Maussian methods during *La Mission Dakar-Djibouti* developed into a divide-and-conquer strategy²⁰⁰ of

²⁰⁰ In *The Predicament of Culture*, James Clifford criticizes Griaule's Maussian “documentary” method as being overly juridical: “a clash of interests and partial truths” and a “perpetual struggle for *control* (in the political and scientific

simultaneously engaging in any combination of shooting film, recording audio, and capturing still photographs from different vantage points upon a scene or object, while all the while conducting interviews, and jotting down one's own observations and field notes. Transcriptions, documentation, indexing and filing would come later—in the evenings or while traveling or during other moments of downtime. This extensive—exhaustive—approach to information gathering is reflected in the the fact that more than more than 6,000 photographic images captured over the course of the expedition. Griaule's method makes clear that the photographs were intended as records—« que [l']objet reste enveloppé [...] du reflet de sa vie quotidienne »—, that is, intended to “reproduce the reality in front of the camera's lens, yielding an unmediated and unbiased visual report” (Schwartz 120).

The Thirty-One

The thirty-one photographs that illustrate *L'Afrique fantôme*, in general terms of their visual content, can easily be categorized as follows: nine photographs of people; seven photographs of objects; seven photographs of events; and eight²⁰¹ photographs of landscapes or locales. These categories are neutral and objective in the sense that they are plainly observable. But this accounting is rather arbitrary, and it does not reveal anything that might offer much insight as to why these photographs were chosen or what role they

senses)” (original emphasis and parentheses) (67), and Clifford is critical of what he deems Griaule's reliance on visual observation as a way to control the narrative: his penchant for aerial photography Clifford calls “a disturbing fantasy of observational power” (69). Even Leiris criticizes the mission's collection practices in *L'Afrique fantôme*, including in the oft-cited passage, « Pourquoi l'enquête ethnographique m'a-t-elle fait penser souvent à un interrogatoire de police ? » (*L'Afrique fantôme* 305, [31 mars 1932]) [“Why does ethnographic inquiry often make me think of a police interrogation?” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 316)].

²⁰¹ Generally, eight locations are represented. For details on the varying photo count, which is attributed primarily to some editions featuring multiple photographs of certain locales, see “Notes sur le texte” (Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* 1049)

have in the book. One might notice patterns, noting that each category is allotted roughly equal representation—at nine, seven, seven and eight images, respectively, but it is uncertain whether something meaningful would come from this. It could also be observed that, collectively, these photo-illustrations roughly cover the progression and duration²⁰² of the journey, and from this, it may be thought that the photos could offer a sort of visual chronology of the expedition.²⁰³ Except, they do not, really, since absent from this collection of images, for the most part, are any major *landmarks* or *milestones*—be they geographical or narrative—that might grant the photographs the sort of linear or sequential unity that could be followed in such a way. There is not much that is readily apparent about them beyond their apparent arbitrariness except, perhaps, for one rather striking detail. Of the thirty-one photographs selected for inclusion in *L’Afrique fantôme*, not a single image features Leiris.²⁰⁴ The absence of the self in the photographs is striking for such a subjective piece of writing. This merits mention, firstly, because Leiris and all of the Mission’s participants feature extensively among the thousands of photographs that document the mission, and secondly, the absence of Leiris’ “self” from the photographs published in the book increases their documentary air.²⁰⁵

²⁰² The first of the photographs dates from July 14, 1931, eight weeks following the Mission’s departure from France, and the last dates from January 21, 1933, roughly four weeks prior to the return trip home.

²⁰³ Jamin, in his consideration of the book covers of the 1934 and 1951 editions of *L’Afrique fantôme* followed a similar line of questioning. (See *supra*, this chapter, “The 1980s, Part 1: Jean Jamin”)

²⁰⁴ And in any of the few photographs in which any Mission members may appear—e.g. in the photograph captioned “La caravane en marche dans le Wolqayt (6 décembre)” (*L’Afrique fantôme*)—, they remain unidentified and unidentifiable.

²⁰⁵ *Miroir de l’Afrique* (1996), a posthumous collection of Leiris’ African writings compiled, edited and richly annotated by Jean Jamin includes another reedition of *L’Afrique fantôme*. In this edition, however, the text has been reformatted, Jamin includes extensive margin notes, including many samples of Leiris’ personal correspondence during the Mission, and along with this, the visual element—i.e. the photographic content—of the work has been completely reimagined; this edition features hundreds of photographs of the mission, many of which feature Leiris, Griaule and other members and associates of the Mission, at work and at play.

L'Afrique fantôme's images are not completely inert in this process; they do not simply nor passively transition into being personal photographs. If anything, they oscillate. Beyond the attribution given to them, all that the photographs have on offer are ethnographic objects of study: they are photographs of Indigenous peoples and their territories, along with examples of their social mores and material cultures. In viewing them, there is nothing to be seen that could be identified as personal: not a single image features Leiris or his colleagues, nor really much actual visual evidence of the expedition at all.²⁰⁶

What is personal about them is their having been selected by Leiris over the 6,000 other images collected by the Mission. In Leiris' single published mention of the photographs, which occurs as part of his mention of thanks to Jean Jamin in the preamble to the 1981 edition of *L'Afrique fantôme*, he writes of them only as « [les] *clichés mission Dakar-Djibouti*, que j'avais utilisés pour imager, au gré presque de ma fantaisie, l'édition originale [...] »²⁰⁷ (original emphasis)(38). It is a simple acknowledgement, save for the slightly ambiguous « au gré presque de ma fantaisie ». While this phrase can be read as dismissive—"almost according to my whim" taken to mean careless, random or spontaneous—, it arguably is not.²⁰⁸ It could be a polite shrug of modesty, a gesture to recognize the efforts made by his friend and colleague in recompiling the images for the reedition; or it could be a way to understatedly show his own appreciation of the

²⁰⁶ There does appear in one photograph, upon close inspection, a figure dressed in what appears to be a pith helmet, which is certainly emblematic of colonial garb, but that figure, being in the distance, is unidentifiable by sight and remains unacknowledged and unidentified by the caption.

²⁰⁷ ["[the] *photographic plates from the Mission Dakar-Djibouti*, that furnished the images, selected almost according to my whim, for the original edition" (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 60)].

²⁰⁸ We would discount this having been written in a dismissive tone, as such a manner would undermine his giving of thanks to his friend. Secondly, there is the fact that, in preparing the 1951 edition, Leiris had showed concern and worry regarding the photographs (see *L'Afrique fantôme* 1049).

photographs. It could also be a further comment on memory and the passage of time, which is an overarching theme of the preamble.²⁰⁹ It is perhaps all of these things. Perhaps none of them. With so few words to parse, it is difficult to conclude a decisive meaning, and the phrase certainly offers no hint of the motivation behind the photographs' selection. However, being that these few words comprise the entirety of Leiris' discussion of that process, and with the addition of the qualifier *presque* [almost], it is reasonable to give them consideration.

These photographs are the most understudied element of *L'Afrique fantôme*. To date, there really seems to be only six published works in French or in English that expressly study these images to any degree.²¹⁰ That said, despite the very limited amount of scholarly writing that is indeed devoted to these images, the writing that does exist manages, all the same, to reflect the dominant critical perspectives that generally encompass the whole of the scholarship that is focused on *L'Afrique fantôme*. The articles each consider the images from a different critical or analytic viewpoint, whether that be psychoanalytic, surrealist—which has its own psychoanalytic preoccupations—, ethnographic, or postcolonial. Among them, none is larger than a single book-chapter. Three of the these studies deal with a same single photograph from the book, and two articles never addresses a particular photograph at all, but rather treats them collectively.

²⁰⁹ What I've quoted above is actually just a small excerpt from a single, paragraph-length sentence (commonplace in Leiris' prose) whose primary clause, when isolated, reads as follows: « N'était le journal ici republié [...], [ma première expérience africaine] aurait pour le vieil homme de 1981[...] si peu de réalité qu'elle ne pèserait pas beaucoup plus, dans mon souvenir, que celui de maints rêves évanouis dont seuls les récits [...] ont encore quelque cohésion. » (*L'Afrique fantôme* 38) ["Were it not for the journal republished here [...], [my first African experience] retains so little reality for this old man of 1981 that [it] is not much weightier in my memory than any number of vanished dreams, which still have some cohesion [...]"] (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 60-61)]

²¹⁰ The first article to engage with *L'Afrique fantôme*'s photographs was only published in 1995, six decades after the book's original publication; in comparison, in the single decade since the appearance of Le Clézio's *L'Africain*, there exist an equal number of texts that deal with that book's photographic content.

The sixth, our own article, which we only touch upon near the end of this chapter, uses a photograph from *L'Afrique fantôme* only as a starting point, as a way to explore the transformation of an object taken during La Mission Dakar-Djibouti that would go on to be considered a “masterpiece” of African Art.

By looking closely at these articles together, they begin to construct a rather substantive picture of the book's—and its scholars'—recurrent themes and preoccupations. If, in the following chapter, we appear overly or overtly critical of these texts, it is not to discount their insight nor their scholarship, which have undeniably informed our own understanding and appreciation of *L'Afrique fantôme*. However, it is our deliberate action to highlight that much of this scholarship, in its study of the photographs that feature in *L'Afrique fantôme* systematically avoids critical engagement with the book itself. Rather, the photographs are effectively extracted away from the text, in some cases, almost entirely recontextualized in the process. What we endeavour to demonstrate, above all, in this chapter is that, consideration of the photographs as participatory to the construction of *L'Afrique fantôme* will ultimately and unavoidably challenge some of the conclusions previously made by others.

Celebrating Transgression

Let us first consider Peter Phipps' 2006 article “Michel Leiris: Master of Ethnographic Failure.”²¹¹ In this essay in which Phipps ventures to chart Leiris' ethnographic career in

²¹¹ Phipps' article would technically be the sixth piece of scholarship to address the photographs. We haven't included his work in our accounting above because his mention of *L'Afrique fantôme* and its photographs is limited to a single statement that lacks further analysis.

terms of an unconventional evolution from reluctant sceptic to politicized anti-colonialist, about a third of the way through, the following passage appears:

Leiris' avant-garde European obsessions with the primitive, eroticism, violence and death are reflected by the sequence of photography in [*L'Afrique fantôme*], with the images reproduced in the 1934 edition a truly fascinating part of the text. One sequence of photographs from the beginning of the book runs as follows (if one skips the written text): near-naked adolescent girls working bent over [See Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* 103]; the opposite picture is of adolescent boys standing in their special circumcision costumes [133]; image of a phallic looking bull sculpture acquired by the "Mission" [137]; a mask parade entering the village [161]; close-up of one of the male mask dancers in 'drag', 'with their breasts in baobab fruit [183]; 'The "mother of masks" discovered by Griaule and Schaeffner on a bed of human skulls' [189]; an exotic town 'la Rome lunaire'! [191]; 'The sanctuary in the form of a vulva' [197]; view from the waist down of a man naked except for a penis sheath and a leather strap holding a knife to his thigh [209]. (author's translations)(Phipps 186-187)²¹²

There are a couple of interesting things about the passage. First, it does present a nice and compact summary of nine of *L'Afrique fantôme*'s thirty-one photographs, and the summary is one that attempts to place the images into conversation with each other. Phipps, here, presents the photographs as a sort of montage of what he calls Leiris' "avant-garde European obsessions with the primitive, eroticism, violence and death," and certain of the pairings of photographs that Phipps observes—adolescent girls and adolescent boys ; vulva and penis—are indeed compelling in this respect. However, the passage also has its drawbacks. Phipps writes immediately following this passage that he has

highlighted *the exotic and almost consistently sexualized emphasis* of [Leiris'] photographs and some of their captions; *they reflect a continuity with surrealist and psychoanalytic concerns and projections which saw Africa as a*

²¹² The page numbers for photographs in the original passage correspond with the 1981 edition of *L'Afrique fantôme*. We have modified the page numbers to correspond with the 2014 *Pléiade* edition.

reservoir of the rejuvenating, sexualized, violent, primitive powers of ritual which had been lost by European modernity.^[213] (our emphasis)(Phipps 187).

His reading of the images wants them to be wholly transgressive, but—and this is the second interesting thing about the passage—his reading, as well as the conversation that he is attempting to generate through it, really has little interest in the photographs themselves or in their relationship to the text of the journal. Rather, it serves quite simply as a way to promote a certain literary persona that surrounds Leiris, namely that of the author as having an ‘avant-garde European obsession’ with a ‘primitive’ Africa.²¹⁴

By his own admission, Phipps neglects the text of *L’Afrique fantôme* entirely in his reading of the photographs, relying instead on a reputation regarding the book that he has compiled, it seems, from the quite incompatible²¹⁵ critical viewpoints of James Clifford and Marianna Torgovnick.²¹⁶ Nevertheless, Phipps’ approach is understandable, if one considers that his article appears in a collected volume titled *Celebrating Transgression*, which was the product of a conference honouring the work of German anthropologist Klaus-Peter Köpping. As the volume’s title alludes, Köpping’s research is largely focused on the subjects of transgression, ritual and taboo. But Köpping’s research, too, is often more reflexively focused on the very field of anthropology and its practitioners’ perennial interest in these subjects. And so it is in this respect that Köpping has written about Leiris’ own interests in transgression and ritual as expressed in *Miroir de la tauromachie*. In a 1998 article titled “Ritual Transgression Between Primitivism

²¹³ Phipps cites (Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive*)

²¹⁴ Phipps cites Torgovnick, but this is a characterization of Leiris that has been argued, as well, by others such as Hal Foster and Marie Denise Shelton.

²¹⁵ See Perloff, Marjorie. “Tolerance and Taboo” (339-341) for a brief but important critical contrast of Clifford’s and Torgovnick’s respective readings of Leiris.

²¹⁶ In fact, Phipps doesn’t engage directly with *L’Afrique fantôme* at all.

and Surrealism,” Köpping writes of Leiris’ aestheticized and eroticized view of the *corrida* as a modern site of pre-modern festive and transgressive ritual:

In both games, in the *corrida* and in the erotic encounter, Leiris is intrigued by the impossibility of fulfilling the yearning for merger, which implies total communication that only death can bring. (Köpping 20).

Phipps, then, in his own article, takes from Köpping in order to read this same aesthetic eroticism into *L’Afrique fantôme*. But in his attempt to illustrate this through *L’Afrique fantôme*’s photographs, Phipps confuses the erotic and the transgressive for the lewd, and so he instead casts Leiris as almost obscenely lustful or lecherous. And this is a significant misrepresentation both of the author and of the work. When one consults the images that Phipps references, his description of “near-naked adolescent girls working bent over,” for example, while perhaps descriptively accurate, seems both excessively and unnecessarily sexualized in its suggestion, and his characterization, as well, of an animalistic sculpture—Leiris’ beloved « cochon de lait »—as “phallic” is wholly inaccurate.

Furthermore, the assumptions that Phipps injects into his descriptions are, at times, misinterpreted in translation²¹⁷ and, in many cases, not at all supported in the text. This is not to say that there are not elements of “European obsessions with the primitive, eroticism, violence and death” in *L’Afrique fantôme*—there most certainly are. But Phipps is neglectful, here, of the fact that, quite the opposite of constructing or perpetuating any sort of colonial exotic or primitivist fantasy, as Torgovnick or Foster might argue, what *L’Afrique fantôme* reveals is rather that, in the lived experience that

²¹⁷ Phipps seems to be implying a Freudian connection with “mother of masks” when the French « mère » in this usage actually often refers to the term of “mother mould,” used in sculpture and ceramics to denote a master mould used for casting multiple copies of an object, but in the context of *L’Afrique fantôme* refers to a series of particularly large masks.

Leiris recounts in his diary, any exotic, erotic, or primitive encounters are mostly absent, and when any do, or come close to occurring, they are disappointingly incomplete.

*La pose d'une odalisque*²¹⁸

There are comparisons to be made between Phipps' approach to the photographs and the approach taken by Nanta Novello-Paglianti in her 2011 essay, « La construction de la représentation de l'autre. Le cas de photographie ethnographique. » The primitivist critique is more latent in the latter, stemming rather from a legacy of 19th-century colonial ethnographic and travel photography that still held presence in the 1930s; and unlike Phipps, Novello-Paglianti takes up photography as her primary concern, giving close attention and individual detailed analysis to one of *L'Afrique fantôme*'s images. But similar to Phipps, the approach taken neglects the crucial importance of the text and what that brings to bear upon the reading and understanding of the photographs. In Novello-Paglianti's essay, avoidance of the text of *L'Afrique fantôme* significantly compromises her analysis of the photograph. The conclusions that result from this, we examine below in order to highlight some of the formal and structural elements that quite inextricably connect *L'Afrique fantôme*'s images to the content and the context Leiris' journal.

In « La construction de la représentation de l'autre, » Nanta Novello-Paglianti highlights two photographs taken during La Mission Dakar-Djibouti, one of which appears in *L'Afrique fantôme*, as well as a third photograph, taken on a later Griaule-led mission—this mission to French Sudan (present-day Mali) in 1948—, to illustrate her argument that ethnographic photography functions to legitimize ethnographic discourse

²¹⁸ See Novello-Paglianti 180.

(173), and that such photography is essentially the foundation of the “expressive canon” of Western visual ethnography, « [le] regard qui sera appliqué à l’Autre pour le classer, l’archiver et surtout l’immortaliser » (174). It is a familiar argument, that of a continued tendency in Western tradition toward the construction of exotic otherness, a construction shaped by distance and by difference whose function is not to reveal any truths about itself but rather to serve as a useful, convenient, and manageable representation in the Western imagination (*see* Said 60; Breckenridge and van der Veer 6).²¹⁹

Since the Middle Ages, European explorers, in their written accounts of voyage and discovery, have implored that the reader believe in their words, for what they were recounting was that which they had seen *with their very own eyes* (Affergan 144). Through this privileging of the visual experience, Western travel writing and, later, ethnography, have pretended to an objective, observable truth. Johannes Fabian has labeled this *visualism*, the belief that one’s ability to ‘visualize’ a culture would become synonymous with understanding it (*Time and the Other* 106). While in both travel and ethnographic writing, visual experience has been mediated and primarily transmitted textually, the inclusion of images has offered important supports to written accounts, providing a “tangible and lifelike” realism that signalled both the authenticity and the authority of the texts (Steiner 207).

For centuries, these images were produced through hand drawings and engravings, illustrations created by “European observers who reduced [non-Western peoples] to a metaphor of Otherness that served only to confirm European expectations of

²¹⁹ Said writes, for example, that “the nineteenth-century French pilgrims [to the East] did not seek a scientific so much as an exotic yet especially attractive reality. This is obviously true of the literary pilgrims, beginning with Chateaubriand, who found in the Orient a locale sympathetic to their private myths, obsessions, and requirements.” (*Orientalism* 170)

the exotic rather than to challenge those assumptions” (Steiner 203). As Steiner notes, the illustrators were most often not the travellers themselves, but rather trained artists at home in Europe who relied on voyagers’ written descriptions along with their own artistic training to compose their images; the resulting illustrations were often wildly inaccurate composites, borrowing from and combining previous and disparate sources of exotic imagery while applying the classical artistic styles and techniques the artists themselves were trained in, ultimately establishing new “conventional” portrayals of non-Europeans (206-211). And so, for centuries, these illustrations constructed, disseminated and proliferated fictions, falsehoods and stereotypes of non-European peoples that nurtured Western primitivist mythologies.

With the advent of photography, it was presumed that technology would now allow for inarguably accurate visual *proof* to be provided in the form of photographic images²²⁰:

Photography was quickly recognized as a vital tool in the transmission of data, and what was thought to be reliable data at that. Photography’s chemical connection to what it depicted, the fact that, as Benjamin wrote, it was ‘seared with reality’,²²¹ suggested that it might be capable of capturing and conveying ‘facts about which there is no question’.²²² While the anthropologist was sundered from the ‘man on the spot’, photography was recognized as a crucial mediator. (original footnotes)(Pinney, *Photography and Anthropology* 15)

However, it is widely argued that the same fictions and falsehoods, the same metaphors of Otherness persisted all the same. Childs writes that through the latter part of the 19th

²²⁰ Steiner suggests the same hopeful belief in technology even occurred with the 16th-century advent of copperplate intaglio engraving. (206)

²²¹ *Original footnote (formatted for style)*: Benjamin, Walter. “Little History of Photography” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Vol. 1. Part 2: 1931-1934*. 510

²²² *Original footnote (formatted for style)*: Read, C.H. *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* [1899]. p. 87. qtd. in Roslyn Poignant. “Surveying the Field of View: The Making of the rai Photographic Collection.” in *Anthropology and Photography, 1860–1920*. Elizabeth Edwards (ed). New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. 62.

century, photography became “a crucial element of control and visual privilege,” that even beyond being a convenient and affordable means of communication, the photographic image became “an ethnographic source that authenticated the appearance and culture of the Other in the colonial sphere.” (52). The newly ‘photographed’ Other would thus be integrated into the workings of the colonial apparatus, promoting the “colonial idea” (Chafer and Shackur) at home in travel books, in magazines and the press, and in the general consumer and tourist marketplaces, through collectibles like postcards and photographic prints of ‘exotic’ peoples and places.²²³

In « La construction de l’autre », Novello-Paglianti criticizes the othering powers of this ethnographic and photographic gaze, focusing specifically on the use and representation of the “native” body as evidence of scientific proof and legitimacy: « [L]e corps doit être une donnée objective, » she writes, « Les corps des populations sont représentés pour leur ‘enveloppe corporelle’ perçus pour leur surface. La simple monstration du corps fait épreuve de diversité » (177). It is this concern that governs her selection of images—all three of which feature native bodies as their subjects—to argue how the ethnographic photograph is pure construct, how it perpetuates the Western canonical image of otherness. In her analysis of the photograph that she selected from *L’Afrique fantôme*,²²⁴ she writes,

²²³ See Chafer and Shackur, *Promoting The Colonial Idea* (1-9).

²²⁴ The other photographs discussed by Novello-Paglianti feature in Isabelle Fiemeyer’s 2004 publication, *Marcel Griaule citoyen Dogon*. The photographs, captioned as « Enquête avec des jeunes bergers au village Dogon de Pèguè. En haut, Germaine Dieterlen, en bas, Gnvive Griaule » (73) and as « L’enfant au crocodile. Pays Dogon, annes 1930. » (97), are credited to Les Fonds Marcel Griaule, bibliothque Eric-de-Dampierre, laboratoire d’ethnologie et de sociologie comparative, universit de Paris X-Nanterre. A copy of the second photo is also part of La Collection Mission Dakar-Djibouti at Le Muse Quai Branly Jacques Chirac under the title « "Soudan franais. Sanga. Cercle de Bandiagara. Dogon. Jeune garon portant un caman tu. Mission Dakar Djibouti. 319". [Garon debout portant un petit crocodile sur sa tte] » (N de gestion: PV0070071).

[L]a photo intitulée « Jeunes gens filant le coton en courtisant les femmes (Poli, 25 janvier) »^[225] [*L'Afrique fantôme* 253] remet en scène deux thématiques chères à l'ethnographie. Il s'agit de la représentation des autochtones qui sont en train de filer le coton. Au premier plan on note un homme assis par terre occupé dans cette action de filage avec des moyens traditionnels : une main qui teint la matasse de coton et l'autre qui tend le fil. Au deuxième plan un autre homme, à demi-couvert par le premier, a les mains occupées dans différentes actions et, au fond, nous apercevons une femme dans une position oisive. Elle est semi-allongée et elle est la seule figure à ne pas être impliquée dans quelque occupation. Notre attention est centrée sur le premier homme donc les bords de l'image, qui sont marquées par une autre figure masculine assise dont on peut entrevoir que la moitié du corps, n'attirent pas notre regard. L'évocation de la séduction se fait à travers la seule figure féminine présente qui incarne plus la pose d'une odalisque que la courtisanerie masculine.

D'une part nous notons la division entre eux et nous, *eux* photographiés là-bas, et *nous* « simples » spectateurs et chroniqueurs de mœurs. D'autre part, on assiste à une réévaluation de l'idée de l'authentique qui devrait être, pour l'époque, un des traits de la vie « sauvage » et la volonté de l'anthropologue de ramener dans son pays une partie de cette authenticité. Le sauvage représenterait une diversité qui garderait à son intérieur une idée de pureté.

Le mouvement cueilli dans ces clichés d'autochtones affiche des corps qui agissent et qui ressentent, qui éprouvent des émotions, etc. Ce vécu a ici valeur de vérité, de témoignage réel. (original emphasis)(Novello-Paglianti 180)

That Novello-Paglianti has selected this image over others is understandable. As she describes it, the figures are in motion, the “bodies” here are acting, being, living. And for this, she is at once admiring and critical of the photograph: she acknowledges the captured moment's “purity” while admonishing the ethnographer/photographer for mythologizing that very purity as yet another “savage” or primitive trait.

However, beyond the image's subjects—these active and emotive bodies—, the photograph's rather high aesthetic qualities further contribute to the constructed reality that Novello-Paglianti criticizes. The image, titled « Jeunes gens filant le coton en

²²⁵ [“Youth spinning cotton while courting women” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 266)]

courtisant les femmes » is quite possibly the most visually compelling image published in *L'Afrique fantôme*: its composition is strikingly well-balanced and engaging—a unique feature, we would suggest, among the thirty-one images that illustrate the journal—; the architectural lines of the beams supporting the pergola under which the young men are gathered are repeated near-perfectly in the foregrounded figure's upwardly stretched arm, and their angle is repeated again in the thread of cotton that he pulls and manoeuvres in his hands. The camera's focus is soft, the light hazy and diffuse—the image itself is charming, seductive. Even the photograph's caption, « Jeunes gens filant le coton en courtisant les femmes », is noticeably poetic, having internal rhymes and alliterations that point to Leiris' penchant and talent for wordplay.²²⁶

In fact, we would argue that the caption²²⁷ is actually the most significant element in play, here. Earlier in her essay, Novello-Paglianti has written that

la légende qui accompagne les photographies est essentielle pour [l'authentification]. Chaque assertion figurant à côté de l'image est acceptée comme vraie. Le discours verbal a le rôle de légitimer la trace indicielle de la photographie. Une des caractéristiques de la photographie ethnographique est que le verbal ne doit pas rentrer en opposition avec l'iconique. Le discours verbal semble surgir de celui iconique qui en même temps le confirme grâce à son caractère mimétique. Le mécanisme se construit comme une boucle dans laquelle chaque partie soutient l'autre grâce à un principe de compatibilité recherchée. [...] L'anthropologue détient ici tout son savoir et son autorité d'explication. [...] Enfin, le lecteur a besoin d'être guidé dans son interprétation par un expert qui peut lui expliciter les mœurs locales. (178)

And while the *L'Afrique fantôme* photograph was selected by Novello-Paglianti for its display of the human form, it is the caption, more than any other element, that guides her reading and interpretation of the image. However, the reading that she ultimately

²²⁶ Leiris' *Glossaire, j'y serre mes gloses* (1939) is an entire volume of wordplay and poetic, reconfigured and (re)imagined definitions and meanings of words.

²²⁷ Sontag has written that "all photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions." (*Regarding the Pain of Others* 10).

extrapolates from the photograph comes from a rather significant misrepresentation of the scene.

Reading the caption, « Jeunes gens filant le coton en courtisant les femmes », one is informed of two activities—the spinning of cotton and the courting of women—being performed *in tandem* by the young men in the photograph. The first of these activities is readily apparent in the image: one sees an outstretched arm, its hand grasping a white thread of cotton, the line of which draws down the centre of the image to connect with another busy, motion-blurred hand. In this respect, the relationship between image and caption is exactly as Novello-Paglianti argues it should be: the caption, conjured from the photograph, mimics and confirms the visual display.

The second activity, courtship, which may often be more social than demonstrably physical, proves more elusive. In the photograph, one sees no overt displays—nor even hints—of flirtation, of attraction or of seduction; in fact, one sees perhaps the very opposite. The first two figures appear fully and simply engaged in their work: each faces forward, back turned to the figure behind, eyes focused upward or downward upon one's own busied hands. The third figure, conversely, appears to be rather *disengaged* from any activity: body reclining, face expressionless, gaze adrift. In this respect, caption and image appear to be fully at odds. Yet, in her analysis, Novello-Paglianti wishes, nonetheless, to maintain the relationship between caption and image, but to do so, she is required to resituate the visually-absent courtship away from the two young men busily spinning cotton, placing it instead upon the third, idle, reclining figure.

Framing this third figure, as she does, as an « odalisque »—described as such due to the languid pose reminiscent of European orientalist paintings such as Ingres' *La*

Grande Odalisque (1814) and *L'odalisque à l'esclave* (1839), paintings in which “a nominally eastern woman lies on her side on display for the spectator” (DelPlato 9)—suggests the photograph, then, to be more an image of subjugation than of courtship. Essentially, what Novello-Paglianti is offering here is a criticism of the French *mission civilisatrice* and of the general machinations of colonialism, which, in itself, is certainly fair and warranted—the main thrust of her essay, after all, is an examination of the ethnographer’s exercise of colonial power (183)—, and so, it is not surprising to find, within the article, criticism suggesting the image to be yet another in the continuing stream of colonial-era stereotypes of non-Western peoples (*see* Steiner; Childs). However, to be able to arrive at this conclusion, a number of elements have been misconstrued.

Firstly, the supposed submissive nature of the photograph is one that Novello-Paglianti herself has constructed. In her reading of the image, she has had to alter the active meaning of the verb « courtesan » in the caption so as to have it represent rather more passive qualities that are better suited to the related noun *courtisane*. The impacts of this transposition are significant: whereas the caption attributes all agency to the young men in the image—they are spinning cotton *while they court the women*—, Novello-Paglianti’s reading revokes this agency, giving it instead, and exclusively, to the photographer/spectator in the form of a “colonial gaze” (*see* Alloula 92) that is being cast, desirably, upon a submissive, feminized Other (*see* Said 137-138).

Secondly, there is the fact that the « odalisque » figure is also quite clearly a man—the women who, the caption suggests, are being courted do not even appear. Granted, the odalisque figure’s reclining pose and tunic-covered torso—in contrast with

the other two more active and exposed male figures—can be read as feminine, but such a reading is derived from a Western-coded image of femininity (e.g. from Ingres' paintings) and does not necessarily reflect the types of gender performance expressed by the Kirdi people who are the subjects of the image.

Indeed, in the text of *L'Afrique fantôme*, Leiris has written of the Kirdi that « [l]es femmes sont nues, à l'exception de deux touffes de feuillage »²²⁸ (252 [24 janvier 1932]). This simple statement, which is supported by a number of photographs taken by the Mission though not published in Leiris' book,²²⁹ suggests that Kirdi women (at least those encountered by Leiris) tended in their dress to remain exposed above the waist. This simple statement is also telling of Novello-Paglianti's own reading of the photograph, showing, in part, that her reading is the result of having isolated both image and caption away from the text of *L'Afrique fantôme*.

Leiris' description of the Kirdi women's dress appears in the entry for January 24, 1932, which is just one day before the photograph was made, and it refers to the same village, Poli, and the same community of people that feature in the photograph. The description does not, by itself, refute Novello-Paglianti's reading of the photograph, but its close proximity in the journal and its rather direct relationship to the subjects of that photograph immediately raises questions as to the degree to which the text may have been consulted in informing Novello-Paglianti's analysis. And these questions only become more pronounced when one reads the entry for the day on which the image was actually captured. Writing the entry dated January 25, 1932, Leiris begins,

²²⁸ “[t]he women are naked, except for two bunches of leaves” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 265)]

²²⁹ See quaibrantly.fr : search terms: “Mission Dakar-Djibouti” and “femmes kirdi”.

Nouveau tour au village kirdi. Sous un abri de tiges de mil, des jeunes gens filent le coton à côté des femmes. Peut-être leur font-ils la cour. Nous offrons une tournée de pipi.²³⁰ Tout le monde y participe [...]»²³¹ (*L'Afrique fantôme* 252 [25 janvier 1932]).

In this opening passage, one reads the line from which the photograph's caption is derived: « Sous un abri de tiges de mil, *des jeunes gens filent le coton à côté des femmes. Peut-être leur font-ils la cour.* » What is notable is that this is merely a passing observation, a suggestion—*maybe* they are courting the women—, one that is made quickly, casually, before moving on to other details and recollections from the day, which will include a shared round of the alcoholic drink « pipi », then on to Leiris' complaining that travel by horseback is painful and, therefore archaic, and his having demonstrated to him, in mime, the manner of circumcising a penis: « ainsi qu'on pèle une banane »²³² (253 [25 janvier 1932]).²³³ This day's entry, like the vast majority of the diary entries in *L'Afrique fantôme*, is personal, filled with the mix of wit and cynicism that, throughout the journal, tend to be Leiris' stock-in-trade.²³⁴

That the photograph's caption is derived directly from this entry and not conjured from the photographic image is significant in a number of ways, as it is ultimately this fact—this relationship—that challenges the tenability of the Novello-Paglianti reading. Being a reiteration of the diary, the caption is, more than anything, an extension of the text that cannot simply be read as a mimetic description of the photograph. Nor, in this

²³⁰ A beer made from millet (see Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* 232)

²³¹ [“Another visit to the Kirdi village. Beneath a shelter made of stakes and millet stalks, young men are spinning cotton with the women. Perhaps they are courting them. We offer a round of pipi. Everyone partakes [...]” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 265-267)]

²³² [“as one peels a banana” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 267)]

²³³ Leiris, at the time, was inquiring about circumcision and other rites of passage.

²³⁴ Worth mention, as well, is the fact that this entry is not printed in italic font. See *supra*, Chapter 2, p.54-55. for a discussion on the use of italics in *L'Afrique fantôme*, used, in part, to distinguish ethnographic entries from personal entries in the journal.

way, can caption and image be extracted away from the text, both of which Novello-Paglianti had done. To borrow Novello-Paglianti's own model for a moment, it is not two, but indeed these *three* elements—image, caption *and* text—that constitute the loop of mutual confirmation, the mechanism that, in her argument, codifies or legitimizes the photograph (*see* « La construction de l'autre » 178). And with three as opposed to just two elements in play, the apparent ambiguities between the photograph and its caption, those ambiguities that forced Novello-Paglianti into a variety of semantic acrobatics in order for them to be reconciled, are dispersed.

Simply speaking, the text offers a much bigger picture with which to inform, to contextualize, or to situate the photograph, as the photograph is understood here to be read, not as a complete document unto itself, but as an element of the larger whole. In the case of « Jeunes gens filant le coton en courtisant les femmes », while the women mentioned in the caption remain absent from the photograph, they are fully present in the text. Furthermore, the text having situated the women as being « à côté » in relation to the young men, they are easily, and unproblematically, situatable outside the frame of the image without being absented from the scene.²³⁵ Similarly, with the courtship mentioned in the caption being quite underplayed in the text, the impulse to seek it out visually in the photograph is also lessened, perhaps even quelled entirely. And all the while, the photograph continues to perform its function of visually confirming the presence—in both caption and text—of the spinning and courting young men; and with mutual

²³⁵ There is another photograph of the scene, not published in *L'Afrique fantôme*, that was made from a different vantage point that confirms this, displaying the scene in the way it is described in the text, with a line of women, grouped together *next to* the men spinning cotton (*see* www.quaibranly.fr: n° de gestion: PV0075889). It is, however, a far less visually-appealing image than the one selected for publication as, notably, it lacks a clear subject.

confirmation being equally returned from both—and not just caption alone—, their agency, too, remains securely intact.

Novello-Paglianti's reading of the photograph is compromised not from error of theory but from a failure to recognize or to consider that the most important mediating actor upon the photographs is the journal itself. And the caption, here, owing more to the diary's description of events than to the image contents, demonstrates perhaps most effectively the extent to which the text of *L'Afrique fantôme* operates as the "dominant informative element" (see Baptista 259). Not every caption in the book weaves together image and text quite as poetically as « Jeunes gens filant le coton en courtisant les femmes », but we would argue that, by and large, they hew more closely to the content of the text than to the descriptions of the images they support.

There are some instances in *L'Afrique fantôme* where a caption will provide information that is not at all available in nor expressly relevant to the visual element, such as in the caption that reads « Un coin du quartier Saint-Michel où habitait la borgne Dinqié »²³⁶ (*L'Afrique fantôme* 577). As the photograph in question is a wide panoramic shot taken from above that includes separate clusters of ruins across the foreground as well as a spate of thatched roofs that extends in a line toward and then across the horizon, one is surely not able to identify which anonymous dwelling may belong to the woman named. But, having read the journal, upon arriving at this photograph, one will have become quite familiar with the one-eyed woman Dinqué, and one will have also been made privy to some of the melodramas that have unfolded across the city whose skyline is pictured and in Dinqué's very neighbourhood, including a fight among schoolchildren

²³⁶ ["Part of the Saint-Michel quarter, where the one-eyed woman Dinqie lived" (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 589)]

that was instigated by Leiris himself and an attempted murder possibly the result of a love triangle that had soured (578). The caption, here, serves to contextualize the image rather than to simply identify its contents; we find that it is not mimetic description that the caption offers, but far richer memories of place.

In another instance, Leiris interjects even more directly into a photograph's caption :

Visite du guérisseur Alaqa Taggagn (l'homme au parasol) à Malkam Ayyahou (tête couverte, debout devant le seuil de sa case hôpital). La scène—qui se passe dans le cours—est vue du perron où je couchais (13 octobre).²³⁷ (*L'Afrique fantôme* 556 [13 octobre 1932])

What is actually surprising about this caption is that it does begin very much as mimetic description, complete with added precision to identify individual figures pictured in a crowd of several. But the intrusion by Leiris himself into the caption—« du perron où je couchais »—changes the operation of the caption entirely. The intrusion draws the reader/spectator's focus away from the crowd that is central to the picture to instead position them, as Leiris, onto the porch, apart and excluded from the scene playing out before the camera. Despite the fact that it is 'behind the camera' where the reader/spectator essentially rests in regard to a photograph in all situations, we would argue that it is rare for a caption to actively and intentionally work to maintain that distance. Rarer still is a caption, such as this one, that first draws a reader/spectator into a scene only to pull them back to its periphery. But this caption, too, is functioning more in service to the diary than to the photograph. The distance that the caption creates for the

²³⁷ ["Visit from the healer Alaqa Taggagn (the man with the parasol) to Malkam Ayyahou (with her head covered, standing in front of the threshold of the hut). The scene—which takes place in the courtyard—is viewed from the landing where I was sleeping (13 October)."] (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 585)]

reader/spectator actually mirrors the very real exclusion that Leiris experienced—and was slightly wounded by—on the day in question, as his diary notes:

Bien que couché encore à 1 heure du matin passée, je me suis levé de bonne heure, désireux d'assister à la cérémonie promise. Mais, arrivant à la maison des *wadadja*, j'apprends qu'elle a eu lieu sans moi. Nous étions encore endormis et l'on n'a pas osé nous réveiller. Il n'y avait du reste pas grand-chose à voir. [...] Pour pallier ma déception, Malkam Ayyahou recommence la cérémonie pour l'herbe qui est restée sur les banquettes. Elle sort en tête de la procession et revient en queue. Danse guerrière en rentrant [13-10-32].²³⁸ (*L'Afrique fantôme* 572-573 [14 octobre 1932])

The captions in *L'Afrique fantôme* are less involved in the “veridiction” (see Baptista 261) of the photographs, which is the truth-affirming assumption under which Novello-Paglianti conducted her analysis, than they are in establishing authorship (see Scott 82) over them. And what is meant by authorship, here, is not photographic credit.²³⁹ Rather, authorship, in this sense, is about authority, about control over the narrative of the whole of the work.

Actual credit for the images published in *L'Afrique fantôme* rests with the Mission's leader, Griaule.²⁴⁰ And by way of this attribution, the photographs are official, sanctioned—like the Mission itself—; and it is in this way that they register as

²³⁸ [“Although I didn't get to bed until after 1 a.m., I got up early, anxious to attend the promised ceremony. But, reaching the house of the *wadadja*, I found that it had taken place without me. We were still asleep and nobody had dared wake us. There wasn't much to see in any case. [...] To relieve my disappointment, Malkam Ayyahou repeats the ceremony with the grass left on the benches. She goes out at the head of the procession and returns at its rear. A war dance upon returning.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 584)]

²³⁹ Sontag, for example, writes in *On Photography* of authorship being identification of the photographer, often distinguishable through photographic style—“It requires a formal conceit [...] or a thematic obsession [...] to make work easily recognizable” (134)—, positing Man Ray's quite identifiable body of work as an example (136).

²⁴⁰ Full attribution is as follows: « Photographies de la Mission Dakar-Djibouti (deuxième Mission Marcel Griaule. Collection Musée de l'Homme - Clichés M. Griaule) » (Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* (Tel) [1988] insert) It has been suggested that this attribution embodies the same “collective spirit” that Leiris had demonstrated when he refused credit for his work editing the 1933 issue of the magazine *Minotaure* which served as a de facto catalogue for the exhibition staged at the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro celebrating *La Mission Dakar-Djibouti*'s successes (Walker, “Phantom Africa” 641; see also Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* 1047). However, concerning the images' propriety, while preparing the 1951 edition of *L'Afrique fantôme* Leiris showed concern that image rights would not be able to be secured again due to the fallout between himself and Griaule upon the book's original publication (see *L'Afrique fantôme* 1049). Further to Griaule's propriety over the images, see A.-L. Pierre 107.

ethnographic documents. It is as an ethnographic document that Novello-Paglianti attempts to address the image captioned « Jeunes gens filant le coton en courtisant les femmes ». The caption, however, resists this status and complicates her analysis. The casual partialness of its observation, the form and structure that are more poetic than scientific, and the indebtedness it has to the text all demonstrate how the captions in *L'Afrique fantôme* actively operate to appropriate the photographs away from this official attribution, away from a documentary or ethnographic status (Rushton 170).

Whether they are direct extensions of the text, as with « Jeunes gens filant le coton... », or they imprint Leiris' full subjectivity onto the photograph, as with the intrusive « où *je* me couchais », what these captions are doing, essentially, is *writing* the images into the journal's narrative, operating to make them as personal and subjective as the diary itself. Nevertheless, Novello-Paglianti's ethnographic reading of the photograph « Jeunes gens filant le coton en courtisant les femmes » clearly shows that such an operation is never a complete one.

However, should one take a converse approach, that is to say, if one is to read the photographs in *L'Afrique fantôme* from an entirely *personal* perspective—as opposed to from an exclusively ethnographic point of view—, such a reading will do little to avoid similar tensions. It will face similar resistance to that which has been shown above in the case of Novello-Paglianti, and it will do just as much to underscore what Michel Beaujour has called “the punctilious honesty about the author's own contradictions” (“Ethnography or Self-Portrayal?” 477). Indeed, it is in light of such contradictions that reading the photographs as being strictly of a personal nature can be the greater challenge.

In the next half of this chapter, we look at three separate studies that all, coincidentally, concentrate on the same single photograph from *L'Afrique fantôme*. While each study comes from a different perspective, and each takes its own unique approach, they all share in the fact that they associate the photograph with the *personal* rather than the *ethnographic* character of *L'Afrique fantôme*. Another element they share between them is that they each critically address the “primitivist” inclinations of Leiris’ journal, notably the book and its photographs’ representations of sexualized or eroticized otherness. In this respect, many of their individual arguments are not so very different for those of Novello-Paglianti or Phipps, above. But, whereas Novello-Paglianti, above, considers how the photograph « Jeunes gens filant le coton en courtisant les femmes » represents the subjects portrayed within, in the three studies that we will examine next, the photograph will be considered for how it reflects upon Leiris, himself.

But before moving forward, it would be useful spend a moment to elaborate more specifically on the concept of primitivism and its criticisms. In the previous chapter, we had made mention of some of the postcolonial critique that has been leveled against *L'Afrique fantôme*, namely the arguments of Mary Louise Shelton and of Hal Foster (who also criticizes Clifford), which highlight Leiris’ primitivist “mentality” (Shelton 338; *see also* Clarck-Taoua) and “fantasy” (Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer?” 303). Recall, too, that Shelton frames *L'Afrique fantôme* as

[a] composite account of ethnological notations, dastardly deeds, poetic reflections, and erotic broodings, [which] provides insight into the primitivist mentality. It poses in a troubling manner the question of the writer’s involvement in promoting the colonialist worldview in the politics of meaning and knowledge. (“Primitive Self” 338)

And earlier in the present chapter, we touched upon Fabian's *visualism*, Steiner's "metaphor of Otherness" and Childs' argument that photography is an element of control and privilege, and how all of these are wrapped up together within the ethnographic gaze that *L'Afrique fantôme* projects. This gaze is certainly imperialist and colonialist in its power and control, but the manner in which it is seen to objectify its subjects in stratified and racialized terms offers not just a metaphor of Otherness, but one of primitiveness, as well (see Acheraïou 70).

The term "primitivism" as we are using it, here,²⁴¹ is understood as coming from the twentieth-century concept in the fine arts which is aesthetically located in the often "overdetermined" (Solomon-Godeau, "Going Native" 320) representation and imitation, in Western artistic practices, of the plastic and musical arts of non-Western "tribal" (Rubin 1) cultures. It has several popular origin stories, such as that of Paul Gauguin leaving his wife and five children to live as an artist in Paris and eventually moves to Tahiti (Solomon-Godeau 315); the story of Fauvist Vlaminck acquiring African masks and sculptures in Paris in 1906, which then circulated among his contemporaries Derain and Matisse (Aka-Evy 563; Debaene, "Les surréalistes et le musée d'ethnographie" 71; Rubin 2); or that of Picasso's illuminating inspiration at Paris' Musée d'ethnologie du Trocadéro in 1907 (Debaene, "Les surréalistes et le musée d'ethnographie" 71; Rubin 2). As such, Primitivism sees itself associated with Avant-Garde movements throughout the first decades of the twentieth century—the Fauvists, the Cubists, Dada and Surrealism—

²⁴¹ While we do our best, here, to present a compact and overly concise summary of Primitism and its critiques, we strongly recommend that one reads Barkan and Bush's "Introduction" (1-11) in *Prehistories of the Future*, which offers much greater narrative clarity and completeness in just a few pages. For further reading, as it pertains to how this present study and much of the scholarship we reference herein has been shaped, see Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*.

and reflected in American Jazz and the French *Negrophilia* of the 1920s (Clifford, *Predicament* 117-151; Jamin, « Introduction » 27-36).

Of course, there is also the *japonisme* of the impressionists and post-impressionists before them (Aka-Evy 563), but primitivism's truer origins stem most immediately from the late nineteenth century, when colonial expansion around the world brought about an increased circulation and exhibition in European metropolises of indigenous cultural objects from across the colonies (Aka-Evy 563-564). But, as Solomon-Godeau notes—here, with specific regard to Gauguin—, “overdetermined representation[s]” (“Going Native” 320) of Polynesia as seductive and docile—for which Gauguin is the exemplar—had long before been circulating in the writings of Wallis, Cook, and Bougainville, and iconic depictions of othered polynesian bodies had been appearing in lithographs, and later photographs, from at least the beginning the 19th century (320-323). And in all truth, representations of otherness have been circulating for as long as humans have traveled and made contact with one another.²⁴²

Discursively, primitivism has come to be associated more broadly, much like Orientalism, with colonial power and with the exotic, often feminized othering of non-Western peoples. In this sense, the term encompasses not only the arts, but anthropology as well, which, as a discipline, is essentially a product of European colonialism whose main currency is the study and exchange of cultural mores (*see* Barkan and Bush 1-11). But it is the critique of Primitivism that is our primary concern here. That critique, such as it involves a self/other dynamic, is most often elaborated through postcolonial and psychoanalytic critical theory. Hal Foster writes of how, beginning with Fanon's *Peau*

²⁴² *See supra*, this chapter, p.113-117.

noire, masques blancs [*Black Skin, White Masks*], “fantasies of racial otherness and female sexuality” have clearly shaped the psychoanalytic discourse and critique of both Primitivism and of anthropology (Foster “Primitive Scenes” 69-74),²⁴³ and Mary Ann Doane writes of how Freud’s terming of female sexuality as an unknowable “dark continent” has come to be associated with racialized blackness (*Femmes Fatales* 210). Similarly, Solomon-Godeau writes of “the paradigm for primitivism [as being] a white, Western and preponderantly male quest for an elusive object whose very condition of desirability resides in some form of distance and difference, whether temporal or geographical” (“Going Native” 314).²⁴⁴ Postcolonial theory frequently shows how primitivism, as a “process of objectification which sub-humanizes and drains [its targets] of moral and cultural significance” (Acheraiou 64), is a hegemonic weapon.

To look at Leiris through this lens, one will find that they can check most every box: he was a Surrealist (turned dissident), an ardent lover of jazz and *l’art nègre*, a modern art critic and friend of Picasso; he was a sexually neurotic, psychoanalysed depressive who joined a State-sponsored trans-African ethnographic expedition on which he found « [p]eu d’aventures, des études qui le passionnent d’abord mais se révèlent bientôt trop inhumaines pour le satisfaire, une obsession érotique croissante, un vide sentimental de plus en plus grand »²⁴⁵ (*L’Afrique fantôme* 747) but which he documented compulsively, regardless; and he was a careerist in the French museum and cultural

²⁴³ On Primitivism as critical discourse, see Clark-Taoua; Foster, ““Primitive Scenes””; Doane, “Dark Continents” in *Femmes Fatales*; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*; Miller, *Blank Darkness. Africanist Discourse in French*; Solomon-Godeau, “Going Native.” See also Freud, *Totem and Taboo*.

²⁴⁴ If there is an apparent de-emphasis of “blackness” in Solomon-Godeau’s expression, certainly when placed in the company of Doane and Foster, it is for reasons of finding place for the problematic racialization of Polynesian peoples by the West (see “Going Native” 321).

²⁴⁵ “[f]ew adventures, research that initially excites him but soon reveals itself too inhuman to be satisfying, an increased erotic obsession, an emotional void of growing proportions.” (Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* 165-166).

systems, working both as an ethnographer and critic of African art. To read *L'Afrique fantôme*, then, as a primitivist work has been, not surprisingly, standard practice for the past thirty years. Even as far back as 1956, J.-B. Pontalis had explored Leiris' primitivist tendencies and the psychoanalytic method of his writing.²⁴⁶ As this chapter moves forward, we will see these tendencies one again be brought to the fore. At the same time, we will see photographs that, while they might appear to reflect these tendencies, cannot clearly or fully be seen to represent them.

*Entre ses masques et son visage*²⁴⁷

The 1995 essay « Photos, fantômes, fantasmes. Michel Leiris et les clichés de *L'Afrique fantôme* » was the first piece of scholarship to ever really address *L'Afrique fantôme*'s photographs.²⁴⁸ In the piece, Alexandre Dauge addresses the photographs through what he sees as the *confessional* aspects of *L'Afrique fantôme*. Confession is among Leiris' most prominent literary conceits. One only need read the opening pages of *L'âge d'homme*, where Leiris proffers a detailed list of personal shortcomings and insecurities—

Je viens d'avoir trente-quatre ans, la moitié de la vie. Au physique, je suis de taille moyenne, plutôt petit [...] un front développé, plutôt bossué [...] Mes mains sont maigres [...] mes deux majeurs, incurvés vers le bout, doivent dénoter quelque chose d'assez faible ou d'assez fuyant dans mon caractère [...] j'ai horreur de me voir à l'improviste dans une glace car, faute de m'y être préparé, je me trouve à chaque fois d'une laideur humiliante. »²⁴⁹ (765-766)

²⁴⁶ See *supra*, Chapter 2, “1956.”

²⁴⁷ See Pontalis 331.

²⁴⁸ As we saw in the previous chapter, Michel Beaujour made mention of the photographs in a 1967 article on André Breton's *Nadja*, but Beaujour's engagement remains with the latter, and the only insight given on *L'Afrique fantôme*'s photographs is a comment on their banality. See *supra*, Chapter 2, “1967.”

²⁴⁹ [“I have just reached the age of thirty-four, life's mid-point. Physically, I am of average height, on the short side [...] a broad, rather bulging forehead [...]. I loathe unexpected catching myself in the mirror, for unless I have prepared myself for the confrontation, I seem humiliatingly ugly to myself each time.” (Howard, *Manhood* 3)]. All translations from *L'âge d'homme* are taken from Richard Howard's 1984 [1963] translation, *Manhood*.

—to encounter one of the most emblematic examples of his use of the device. And, in what since 1946 has been *L'âge d'homme*'s introductory essay, « De la littérature considérée comme une tauromachie, » Leiris writes of confessional writing as being the very risk that a writer must take:

[C]e qui se passe dans le domaine de l'écriture n'est-il pas dénué de valeur si cela reste 'esthétique', anodin, dépourvu de sanction, s'il n'y a rien, dans le fait d'écrire une œuvre, qui soit un équivalent [...] de ce qui est pour le torero la corne acérée du taureau, qui seule—en raison de la menace matérielle qu'elle recèle—confère une réalité humaine à son art, l'empêche d'être autre chose que grâces vaines de ballerine ?²⁵⁰ (*L'Âge d'homme* 756)

Even outside of his autobiographical writings, the laying bare of himself is still very present in much of Leiris' poetry, in his pieces in magazines such as *Documents*, in conference papers, and in his novel, *Aurora*, whose protagonist is a barely-veiled surrogate of the author. His 1939 collection of poetic wordplay *Glossaire, j'y serre mes gloses* includes an entry for the word confession, which reads: « confession : nous effondrant de fond en comble, les faits que nous confions »²⁵¹ (Leiris, *Mots sans mémoire* 80)—these words make for a fitting credo for much of Leiris' literary œuvre.

Yet before all of these examples, in a liminal note that featured in the first edition of *L'Afrique fantôme* in 1934,²⁵² Leiris had quoted from the opening of Book I of Rousseau's *Confessions*, a quote which, in the 1951 reedition of *L'Afrique fantôme*, would come to serve as epigraph to the book's preface:

²⁵⁰ [“[I]s not what occurs in the domain of style valueless if it remains ‘aesthetic,’ anodyne, insignificant, if there is nothing in the fact of writing a work that is equivalent [...] to the bull’s keen horn, which alone—by reason of the physical danger it represents—affords the torero’s art a human reality, prevents it from being no more than the vain grace of a ballerina?” (Howard, *Manhood* 154)]

²⁵¹ Our translation: “confession: collapsing us completely, the facts which we confide.” Compare the rhythm and alliteration of this passage to the photo caption « Jeunes gens filant le coton en courtisant les femmes. »

²⁵² See *L'Afrique fantôme* 1051 n.1

Moi seul. Je sens mon cœur et je connais les hommes. Je ne suis fait comme aucun de ceux que j'ai vus ; j'ose croire n'être fait comme aucun de ceux qui existent. Si je ne vaudrais pas mieux, au moins je suis autre. Si la nature a bien ou mal fait de briser le moule dans lequel elle m'a jeté, c'est ce dont on ne peut juger qu'après m'avoir lu.²⁵³ (Rousseau 33; qtd. in *L'Afrique fantôme* 41)

And so it is of little surprise, then, that Dauge might choose to frame his essay, in part,²⁵⁴ around how this quote from Rousseau underscores Leiris' own « vision du sujet comme objet et foyer privilégiés d'une écriture visant à la connaissance de soi » (Dauge 180).²⁵⁵ And it is from this perspective, then, that Dauge argues that Leiris, in giving only divided and distracted attention in his journal to the multiplicity of cultures and to the colonial context in which he was operating, in effect subordinates the documentation of other peoples and cultures to his own self-discovery and to his desire for a « métamorphose de soi », a desire premised on exotic Otherness (181).

To be able to carry this perspective over to the photographs, which, unlike the text, are the express documentation of other peoples and cultures, Dauge turns to Susan Sontag—who writes that photography “is the paradigm of an inherently equivocal connection between self and world” (*On Photography* 123, qtd. in Dauge 184) and that “in a world ruled by photographic images, [anything] *can be separated, can be made discontinuous, from anything else*” (our emphasis)(*On Photography* 22, qtd. in Dauge

²⁵³ [“Myself alone. I feel my heart and I know men. I am not made like any that I have seen ; I venture to believe that I was not made like any that exist. If I am not more deserving, at least I am different. As to whether nature did well or ill to break the mold in which I was cast, that is something no one can judge until after they have read me.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 62)].

²⁵⁴ Dauge also frames his look at *L'Afrique fantôme* through the lens of a hermeneutics of self (181). Ricœur's “three major features” of such a hermeneutics, “the detour of reflection by way of analysis, the dialectic of selfhood and sameness [and] the the dialectic of selfhood and otherness” (*Oneself as Another* 16) most certainly appear to apply here, but Dauge seems to evoke a hermeneutics that is more of a Foucauldian sort, one that speaks to transformation through confession, such that “you will become the subject of the manifestation of truth when and only when you disappear or you destroy yourself as a real body or as a real existence” (Foucault, “About the Beginning...” 221).

²⁵⁵ [Our translation: “vision of the subject as uniquely both object and source of writing that strives for knowledge of self.”]

187)—and to Barthes' notions of *punctum* and *biographeme*,²⁵⁶ which, when taken together, can “[enable] what [Barthes] calls the ‘essential identity’ (*Camera Lucida* 66) of a person to be revealed” (Arribert-Narce, “Roland Barthes’ Photobiographies” 244).

Of this, Dauge writes:

L’identité se livre alors à travers le type de rapport qu’établit Leiris avec les divers repères qu’il convoque et à partir desquels il se décline. Par le découpage qu’elles opèrent, les focalisations qui en résultent, le « punctum » qu’elles signifient et leur valeur configurante, les photographies sélectionnées par Leiris peuvent donc être lues comme des « biographèmes ». (Dauge 188)²⁵⁷

As such, he argues that, while the images selected by Leiris certainly cast a view upon a diversity of African cultural productions of both material and social value, *their very selection* does just as much to cast light upon the author, himself, as subject—« En livrant au regard du lecteur des photographies qui l’émouvent, Leiris se livre, laisse entrevoir l’objet et la forme de son attention » (184).²⁵⁸

There is a subtle acknowledgement, here, of the photographs’ source as “intentional documents” (B. Osborne 179) that are separate from *L’Afrique fantôme*, but this positioning serves as a way to refocus that intentionality onto the author and onto his construction of the book, which Dauge ultimately sees as an act of constructing of an identity:

²⁵⁶ In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes coins the term “biographeme” in the following passage in Chapter 12: “[Photography] supplies me with a collection of partial objects and can flatter a certain fetishism of mine: for this “me” which likes knowledge, which nourishes a kind of amorous preference for it. In the same way, I like certain biographical features which, in a writer’s life, delight me as much as certain photographs; I have called these features “biographemes”; Photography has the same relation to History that the biographeme has to biography.” (*Camera Lucida* 30)

²⁵⁷ [Our translation: “Identity is therefore revealed through the connection that Leiris establishes with the various reference points that he assembles and from which he comprises himself. By the fragmentation they create, the focus that results, the ‘punctum’ they signify and their configuration value, the photographs selected by Leiris can therefore be read as ‘biographemes.’”]

²⁵⁸ [Our translation: “The images selected by Leiris inform us henceforth not only of his gaze upon the diverse facets of African cultures, but also, by ricochet, upon himself, all visibility reflecting back, ultimately, more onto a subject than onto a motif. In delivering to the reader’s gaze photographs that move him, Leiris also delivers himself, allowing a glimpse of the object and the form of his attention.”]

Les photographies prises dans le cadre de la mission afin de restituer le contexte d'usage de certains objets, se voient dès lors détournées de leur finalité initiale et acquièrent une dimension symbolique qui engage l'identité même de Leiris. [...] Les clichés participent donc, aux même titre que les autres modes de référence, au réseau de positionnements qui motive et que suscite la rédaction du journal.²⁵⁹(188)

It is a compelling reading that Dauge proposes, one that transposes onto the photographs the exploration of self and the desire for exotic Otherness that Leiris was performing with his writing.

The desire for the exotic, « de se frotter à l'exotisme » (Côté 853), is, indeed, expressed at numerous moments in *L'Afrique fantôme*. However, the entire narrative surrounding exotic desire is constructed, essentially, around its failure—« Que je suis donc resté un Européen ! »²⁶⁰ (305 [31 mars 1932]). In *L'Afrique fantôme*'s first *prière d'insérer* from 1934, Leiris had written that « [s]a tentative d'évasion n'a été qu'un échec » (*L'Afrique fantôme* 747), and in the 1951 preface, he writes of having held, when first embarking on the journey, a perspective that was nothing more than « un fallacieux essai de se faire *autre* en effectuant une plongée—d'ailleurs toute symbolique—dans une “mentalité primitive”²⁶¹ dont j'éprouvais une nostalgie^[262] » (original emphasis)(43). And one of Leiris' grandest exaltations in the book—« Combien de kilomètres a-t-il fallu que

²⁵⁹ Our translation: “The photographs that had been taken as part of the mission, to capture the usage context of certain objects, see themselves diverted from their original purpose and acquire a symbolic dimension that engages with Leiris' very identity.[...]The shots, then, participate at the same level of the other modes of reference, a network of rankings [«*positionnements*»] that motivate and instigate the writing of the journal.”

²⁶⁰ [“Thus I have remained European!” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 316)].

²⁶¹ Editor's annotation from the 2014 edition of *L'Afrique fantôme*: Le 17 mai, 1929. *La Mentalité primitive* (1922) de Lucien Lévy-Bruhl figure parmi les livres qui étaient en souffrance sur le bureau de Leiris (voir *Journal* p.166)—à moins que ce ne soit l'opuscule que Maurice Blondel avait consacré à la pensée de Lévy-Bruhl (Maurice Blondel, *La Mentalité primitive*, préface de Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Stock, 1926) auquel il se référera dans son entretien avec Jean Jamin et Sally Price (repris dans *C'est-à-dire*, Jean Jamin éd, Jean Michel Place, 1992, p.19). Quoi qu'il en soit, le 30 mai, 1929, Leiris note: « Hier, j'ai balancé *La Mentalité primitive* et décongestionné un peu ma table. Je me sens respirer » (*Journal* p.188). Quelques semaines plus tôt, il avait noté sa décision de se « mettre un peu au courant des questions ethnographiques et sociologiques » (*ibid.* p.142). » (*L'Afrique fantôme* 1053 n.10)

²⁶² Our footnote: This sentiment of nostalgia is well expressed by Leiris in the 1930 article « L'œil de l'ethnographe », which announces the mission in the pages of *Documents*.

nous fassions *pour nous sentir enfin au seuil de l'exotisme !* »²⁶³ (our emphasis)(327 [18 avril 1932])—, which emphatically marks the close of Part I of *L'Afrique fantôme*, is cut short to an almost comical degree when, from the opening of Part II, the Mission is immediately and abruptly halted at the Abyssinian border for an entire month.²⁶⁴

While there is a fair amount of interesting and entertaining political intrigue that plays out during this unplanned and extended sojourn, there is also a notable lessening of Leiris' enthusiasm for *the exotic*, as boredom and frustration build among the group as they deal with a corrupt bureaucracy and with delay upon delay; Leiris goes so far as to disown the term « exotique » from his own experience, to instead apply it to one of the Mission's Senegalese porters:

Le pauvre type, il est de plus en plus dépaysé ! [...] À quel point un type comme Malkan peut être plus malheureux que nous dans une aventure pareille [...] Privé de noix de kola, il fait son service de plus en plus mal et se fait constamment engueuler. [...] Si le mot “exotisme” a un sens, c'est pour lui qu'il doit en avoir un...²⁶⁵ (350 [13 mai 1932])

And nearing the very close of the mission, whilst recalling a day's activities, which included seeing torrents of rain melt away salt dunes at a quarry, Leiris declares with notable dramatic effect, « Pour moi, le mirage exotique est fini. »²⁶⁶ (675 [12 janvier 1933]), a statement that effectively concludes what might be called the book's arc of disillusion.

²⁶³ [“How many kilometers have we had to cover to feel ourselves at last on the threshold of exoticism!” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 339)]

²⁶⁴ See *L'Afrique fantôme* 328-373 [28 avril 1932 - 1 juin 1932].

²⁶⁵ [“The poor fellow is increasingly out of his element! [...] It's hard, I think, to imagine just how much more unhappy someone like Malkan can be than ourselves on an adventure like this. [...] Deprived of his kola nuts, he does his work less and less satisfactorily and we have to yell at him all the time. [...] If the word ‘exoticism’ has any meaning at all, it must have one for him...” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 364)]

²⁶⁶ [“For me, the exotic mirage has vanished.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 684)].

Reading through the text of *L'Afrique fantôme*, declarations of having *finally* discovered *the exotic* come rather early—largely limited to the first half of the book, and even then, there are still expressions of doubt. One sees a steadily-building disenchantment with that exotic ideal as the journey progresses, and one finds that what are, at first, declarations shift into laments of the exotic's fleetingness or unattainability—and back again.²⁶⁷

For Dauge, the photographs are, in many ways, an element of this arc. They serve as a reaction to the failure of seeing this desire remain unfulfilled, and as a projection of that which was ultimately unattainable to Leiris. But at the same time, Dauge argues, they reveal elements, if only in fragments, of a realized vision of this imagined self that might have been:

Si la valeur d'usage du masque dans les cultures africaines est souvent d'ordre initiatique ou renvoie à un rituel de passage, *il en va donc de même pour*

²⁶⁷ See, for example:

« C'est la grande guerre au pittoresque, le rire au nez de l'exotisme. Tout le premier, je suis possédé par ce démon glacial d'information » (120 [15 août 1931])

« Nudités idylliques et parures de paille ou de cauris, jeunes gens aux cheveux très joliment tressés et femmes au crâne souvent rasé (surtout les vieilles), c'est plus qu'il n'en faut pour me séduire, me faire oublier toute piraterie et ne plus penser qu'au genre Robinson Crusoé et Paul et Virginie »¹ (138 [7 septembre 1931])

« En route le caractère exotique s'accroît. Les tropiques exactement tels qu'on les imagine. » (214 [9 décembre 1931])

« Il faut tomber dans des endroits bien extraordinaires pour avoir un peu l'impression d'exotisme. » (244 [12 janvier 1932])

« De plus en plus diminue l'étiage de l'exotisme. » (256 [31 janvier 1932]; see also 1108, 31 janvier n.1)

« [...] Je n'ai jamais couché avec une femme noire. Que je suis donc resté un Européen ! » (305 [31 mars 1932])

« Voici enfin L'AFRIQUE, la terre des 50° à l'ombre, des convois d'esclaves, des festins cannibales, des crânes vides, de toutes les qui sont mangées, corrodées, perdues » (326 [17 avril 1932])

« Combien de kilomètres a-t-il fallu que nous fassions pour nous sentir enfin au seuil de l'exotisme ! » (327 [18 avril 1932])

« J'ai besoin de tremper dans leur drame, de toucher leurs façons d'être, de baigner dans la chaire vive. Au diable l'ethnographie ! » (481 [27 août 1932])

« Pour moi, le mirage exotique est fini. » (675 [12 janvier 1933])

¹ Debaene notes that, in *L'Afrique fantôme*, the references to Paul et Virginie—of which there are several—tend to note a nostalgic primitivism akin to “dreams of innocence” (*Far Afield* 183)

*Leiris qui s'envisage à travers le masque des photographies pour se dévisager autre »*²⁶⁸ (our emphasis)(191).

One could make the argument—though Dauge makes no explicit reference in his text—that there is a channeling, here, of Pontalis, who had written with regard to Leiris, « Où saisir cet homme vrai, sinon dans un va-et-vient entre ses masques et son visage, entre sa mythologie et son histoire visible ? »²⁶⁹ (*Après Freud* 331). Dauge also seems to be delivering a wholly—and quite on-the-nose—Lacanian²⁷⁰ reading that suggests Leiris' image choices to be psychoanalytic acts, the unmasking of his own unconscious desires through the mirrored gaze of the photographs.

Above all, what one finds is that Dauge interprets the images to be operating on a symbolic level: « Leur valeur est avant tout symbolique et non référentielle, [les clichés] recèlent aux yeux de Leiris un 'punctum' qui n'a d'existence et de visibilité qu'à travers eux et ils sont les signes poétiques à travers lesquels Leiris s'appréhende » (191). This

²⁶⁸[Our translation: "If the use value of the mask in African cultures is often one of initiation or that relates to rites of passage, it goes the same for Leiris who sees himself through the mask of the photographs to consider himself other."]

²⁶⁹[Our translation: "Where to find the real man, if not in this to-and-fro between his masks and his face, between his mythology and his observable history?"]

²⁷⁰ In *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan : Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique (1953-1954)*, not only do we find photography be related to Freud's schema of the imaginary (75, 145), we find numerous locutions surrounding *gaze*, *masks* and *masking*, which ultimately relate, in the contexts from which we extract them below, to symbolism and to perversion*:

"From the moment this gaze exists, I am already something other, in that I feel myself becoming an object for the gaze of others. But in this position, which is a reciprocal one, others also know that I am an object who knows himself to be seen." (215)

"[...] in this double gaze whereby I see that the other sees me, and that any intervening third party sees me being seen. There is never a simple duplicity of terms. It is not only that I see the other, I see him seeing me." (218)

"The gaze is not located just at the level of the eyes. The eyes may very well not appear, they may be *masked*. The gaze is not necessarily the face of our fellow being, it could just as easily be the window behind which we assume he is lying in wait for us. *It is an x, the object when faced with which the subject becomes object.*" (our emphasis)(220).

"What is fundamentally at issue in transference, is how a discourse that is masked, the discourse of the unconscious, takes a hold of a discourse that is apparent." (247)

"If one qualifies everything which is made manifest at the outset as a defence, everything can be legitimately considered as a mask, behind which something else is hidden." (285)

* Lacan writes: "Perversion, in sum, is the privileged exploration of an existential possibility of human nature—its internal tearing apart, its gap, through which the supra-natural world of the symbolic was able to make its entry." (218)

idea is the central claim of his argument. There is a particular passage in « Photos, fantômes, fantasmes » in which Dauge mentions several of *L'Afrique fantôme*'s photographs, and it is the one passage that really mentions the book's photographic content in any detail:

Les clichés retenus dans *L'Afrique fantôme* recoupent ainsi les pratiques subversives citées dans *Documents*, privilégiant tour à tour, quoiqu'à des degrés variables, « mysticisme, folie, aventure, poésie, érotisme ». L'exotisme tel qu'il est appréhendé par Leiris—homme en transe, nudité des corps, étui pénien, habits de circoncis, masques à attributs sexuels, sacrifices, ossements de charogne, sanctuaire en forme de vulve, avancée de la caravane—. (186)²⁷¹

However, in this mention, Dauge frames the photographs not in relation to *L'Afrique fantôme* itself, but rather in relation to Leiris' prior work in and with the magazine *Documents*.

The line that Dauge quotes in the passage above, « mysticisme, folie, aventure, poésie, érotisme », is taken from an article published in *Documents* n°8 in 1930 titled « Le 'caput mortuum' ou la femme de l'alchimiste. » That article relates a meeting between Leiris and the American occultist, explorer, and writer William Seabrook, for whose work—*The Magic Island*—Leiris had quite a fondness (see Leiris « L'Île magique » 334). The phrase quoted by Dauge is from a statement made by Leiris regarding the two men's shared point of view, such that one must strive, whether through mysticism, madness, adventure, poetry or eroticism, to abolish the unbearable duality that is body and soul, mind and matter (Leiris, « Le caput mortuum » 462; qtd. in Dauge 185; See also *L'Afrique fantôme* [21 janvier 1932] for a mention of the article). Seabrook, along with being a writer-explorer-occultist, was also a purveyor of erotic fetishism, and

²⁷¹ This passage, in the context of this study, seems to recall Phipps, quoted earlier. See *supra*, this chapter, p. 110-111.

« Le caput mortuum » features a series of Seabrook's photographs of a woman (or various women) bound in erotic leather bondage masks that had been created by Seabrook himself.

However, the comparisons that Dauge makes to this previous work in *Documents*—and to one of Leiris' most notable pieces for the magazine—is arguably superficial. There is no real continuum between Leiris' engagement with the erotic leather masks that Seabrook designed and photographed, and the masks pictured in *L'Afrique fantôme*. Seabrook's photographs are intense, sexually charged, violent. About them Leiris writes,

Grâce [aux masques], la femme devient méconnaissable, plus schématique, en même temps que l'image de son corps s'impose avec un surcroît d'intensité [...] Il ne s'agit plus d'une personne déterminée, mais d'une femme *en général*, qui peut être aussi bien toute la nature, tout le monde extérieur, que nous sommes ainsi mis à même de dominer. Outre qu'elle souffre sous le cuir, qu'elle est vexée et mortifiée (ce qui doit satisfaire nos désirs de puissance et notre fondamentale cruauté), sa tête—signe de son individualité et de son intelligence—est insultée et niée. Devant elle, le partenaire n'est plus en présence d'une « créature de Dieu » dont la face, hissée au sommet des épaules semble faite pour contempler les astres ou tout autre symbole d'élévation ou de pureté, mais il se trouve en mesure d'user, avec quel plaisir sacrilège ! d'une simple et universelle mécanique érotique [...] L'amour réduit ainsi—très lucidement—à un processus naturel et bestial, du fait que le cerveau, grâce à ce masque, est symboliquement écrasé, la fatalité qui nous oppresse enfin matée (puisque cette femme entre nos mains n'est plus, grâce à cet instrument que la nature elle-même, pétrie de lois aveugles, sans âme ni personnalité, mais, pour une fois, enchaînée totalement à nous, comme cette femme est enchaînée), le regard—cette quintessence de l'expression humaine—pour un temps aveuglé (ce qui confère à la femme en question une signification encore plus infernale et souterraine) [...] (Leiris, « Le 'caput mortuum' » 465-466).

What Leiris sees in these photographs, and in the masks that they depict, is the power to *dehumanize*, both in terms of physical and sexual domination—« notre fondamentale cruauté »—and in terms of liberation through transgression:

[A]utant d'éléments qui font de ces morceaux de cuir [...] des engins prodigieux, admirablement adéquats à ce qu'est au vrai l'érotisme : un moyen de sortir de soi, briser les liens que vous impose la morale, l'intelligence et les coutumes, une manière aussi de conjurer les forces mauvaises et de braver Dieu ou ses succédanés, cerbères du monde en possédant et contraignant l'univers tout entier, leur propriété, dans une de ses parcelles particulièrement significatives, mais qui n'est plus différenciée. (466)

But what one sees in this text is really quite different from what one finds in *L'Afrique fantôme*. In « Le caput mortuum », Leiris engages with the photographs quite directly—« je me la remémorai quand je reçus les photographies de masques de Seabrook et je compris [...] pourquoi l'on peut tirer une jouissance profonde [...] du simple fait de masquer—ou de nier—un visage » (463)—, and they are as much the subject of the article as is Leiris' encounter with Seabrook. And in this engagement, the masks and their use value depicted in the photographs are neither strange nor mysterious nor culturally different. Leiris knows them and understands them intimately; even if he has not engaged in such practices—he does not disclose—, they are indeed familiar, they speak to his own culturally-defined sexual and behavioural norms and transgressions that have been informed by his own society's history, religion, art, literature and his personal lived experience.

Dauge certainly recognizes this perspective in Leiris—and its limitations—as seen in *L'Afrique fantôme*; he notes moments in the book where the author relates the unfamiliar surroundings of the African continent through the familiarity of home and through his own cultural knowledge: « un air de paysannerie bretonne »; « l'air de proverbes ou de contes de Perrault... »; « Cela me fait penser à certaines choses de

Picasso »²⁷² (Dauge 182). In his larger argument, however, Dauge appears to take this dissonance to be a permanent or static state of affairs, and he writes,

En établissant un régime d'équivalence qui subordonne ce qui est vu ou commenté aux références qui structurent l'imaginaire de Leiris, ces allusions personnelles constituent un réseau de connotations qui articule et évalue l'ailleurs en fonction de son lieu d'énonciation et des attentes du sujet. (182)

And in his article, too, Dauge refers back to Leiris' previous points of reference—namely « Le caput mortuum »—to inform his own reading of *L'Afrique fantôme*'s images. However, there is notably little specific engagement from Dauge with the images themselves, and with the book's image count numbering more than thirty and the photos covering a time span of more than two years, it is a challenge to be fully persuaded without a more deliberate illustration of his argument.

Overall, Dauge informs his interpretation largely from *L'Afrique fantôme*'s paratextual elements, namely the book's prefatory notes—the quote from Rousseau, for example—and its cover image. In fact, the cover image of the 1934 edition is the only photographic element that Dauge addresses *directly*:

Le masque est en cela une figure emblématique du discours autobiographique, du journal intime ou de la confession, discours où il convient d'énoncer sous le couvert d'une médiation symbolique sa face cachée ou supposée telle. *Ce n'est pas par hasard que la première édition de L'Afrique fantôme a pour couverture le cliché du masque de la femme du cordonnier avec ses seins en fruit de baobab.* Les clichés retenus par Leiris peuvent être analysés dans une optique similaire à celle du masque. Leur valeur est avant tout symbolique et non référentielle, ils recèlent aux yeux de Leiris un « punctum » qui n'a d'existence et de visibilité qu'à travers eux et ils sont les signes poétiques à travers lesquelles Leiris s'appréhende. (our emphasis)(« Photos, fantômes, fantasmes »191)

²⁷² See *L'Afrique fantôme* 67 [14 juin 1931]; 81 [30 juin 1931]; 222 [17 décembre 1931]

And this cover graphic, ultimately, is also the only photographic image that may rightly operate “symbolically” in *L’Afrique fantôme*, for it is the only image in the book²⁷³ that, in its operation, does not carry a direct and explicit association to a particular episode of the text; the cover image’s primary association would appear to be purely editorial, promotional.

Gérard Genette writes of a book’s cover being wholly in the “zone” of the publisher’s domain (*Paratexts* 16): on the front cover of the 1934 edition of *L’Afrique fantôme*, below the title and printed within parentheses in smaller, italicized font are the words « illustré de 32 planches photographiques ».²⁷⁴ It is only below this announcement that appears a reduced version of the photograph « Le masque ‘femme du cordonnier’ avec ses seins en fruit de baobab (Sanga, 1^{er} novembre) » (*See L’Afrique fantôme* 183 [1 novembre 1931]). Genette, in his taxonomy of elements to feature on a book’s front cover, includes “Likeness of the author” and “Specific illustration” (*Paratexts* 24 [*Seuils* 27]) among the possible elements.

The photograph « Le masque ‘femme du cordonnier’ » is most easily classifiable as the latter; it can clearly be seen to serve as a representative sample of the photographs to be encountered inside the pages of *L’Afrique fantôme*. As well, it could be seen to symbolize a general Western European popular—stereotypical²⁷⁵—conception of

²⁷³ Apart from the image of a map of the Mission’s trajectory (*See L’Afrique fantôme* 45 [ahead of 19 mai 1931]).

²⁷⁴ [*Our translation*: “illustrated with 32 photographic plates”]

²⁷⁵ Binyavanga Wainaina wrote in his scathing and now quite famous 2006 *Granta* article on African stereotypes in Western literature: “Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these. If you must include an African, make sure you get one in Masai or Zulu or Dogon dress.” (“How to Write About Africa” 92).

“African-ness” in order to appeal to reader expectations.²⁷⁶ Its full purpose as a “specific illustration,” it seems, could likely be executed in either or both of these ways, and a reader-viewer would require no further knowledge of the book to be able to render an opinion of interest (*see* I. Walker 643).

In Dauge’s reading of the photographs, though, the symbolism that he evokes would position the cover image of « Le masque ‘femme du cordonnier’ » as being closer to Genette’s “likeness of the author.” Following, then, from Dauge’s reading, the photograph might be taken to symbolize Leiris, himself: the image could be interpreted in one respect, as Leiris being the *masked* figure whose *unmasking* will ultimately occur through the confessional passages delivered across the pages of the journal; and in another respect, as embodying *the realized transformation* into his *imagined othered self*, with the image’s androgyny—a female-breasted mask draped over a male body—accentuating Leiris’ « obsession érotique croissante » (*L’Afrique fantôme* 747) that was promised—or perhaps confessed—in the book’s original *prière d’insérer*.

But such an interpretation is difficult; it can really only be applied retrospectively. The book’s original cover gives little indication as to the actual content of the document to be found within—or at least a far too narrow indication—, and so to assume or to suggest the inaugural cover image to be a likeness—even symbolically—of the author, and thus able to symbolize Leiris or his intentions in such a way, may be overly presumptive: in 1934, Leiris was still relatively unknown, he would not gain popularity as a writer until the late 1940s after the release and positive reception of *Biffures*, and so

²⁷⁶ The 1951 edition of *L’Afrique fantôme* also has a “specific illustration” on the cover—a reproduction of a sketch made by one of Leiris’ informants, a young boy named Tebabou (*See* Jamin, « Métamorphoses » 202)—that could be seen to carry comparable symbolic meaning. Unlike the photograph on the 1934 cover, though, this image does not appear inside the book.

reader interest in *L'Afrique fantôme* in 1934 would be less likely to have been generable through author recognition.

Furthermore, that first cover-image was never repeated in subsequent editions of the book—indeed, the cover for each edition of *L'Afrique fantôme* is significantly different (see Jamin, « Métamorphoses » 202). It is perhaps only the 1988 cover, published in the Gallimard collection « Tel », that could be fairly considered in such a symbolic manner as to represent Leiris' own “metamorphosis” into exotic other: the 1988 cover image is the detail of a collage painting by Lou Laurin-Lam titled « Portrait de Michel Leiris » (1979, materials unknown). The detail features Leiris represented as a small brown ape—the large bald head and furrowed brow are unmistakably his—, possibly as an infant or a juvenile, its eyes fixed with either studious interest or innocent wonder upon a yellow red-footed tropical bird while offering an outstretched arm as a perch. Here, the transformation is quite literal, and such an image is so stereotypically “exotic” and “primitivist” as to be emblematic.²⁷⁷

The focus of Dauge's « Photos, fantômes, fantasmes », though, is not the cover image; it is the photographs within the book. He concentrates on a near-psychoanalytic role for these images, a confessional role that is symbolized, he argues, through the several photographs that depict masks, photographs which he argues « conjurent

²⁷⁷ There is a line in *L'Afrique fantôme*, « Au jardin zoologique, des enfants tout nus s'extasiaient devant les oiseaux et les singes » (our emphasis)(*L'Afrique fantôme* 113 [6 août 1931]) [“In the zoo, naked children are ecstatic over the birds and the monkeys” (our emphasis)(Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 132)] , that could *potentially* be interpreted as an inspiration for the artwork; such, however, is not our interpretation. Curiously, though, however tenuous a connection might possibly be made between Laurin-Lam's artwork and that isolated passage from Leiris' journal, following this link brings one, coincidentally, to Leiris' first notes, in the very same journal entry, about female circumcision (see 113 [6 août 1931]), knowledge that becomes a factor in his « obsession érotique croissante », particularly with regard to his interactions with the *zar* informant Emawayish while in Abyssinia later in the Mission (See « Rares épisodes érotiques de ce voyage [...] » (666 [27 décembre 1932])[“Rare erotic episodes” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 676)] and that passage's accompanying footnotes.

l'irréalité » (183). He argues that they come into play in Leiris' search for identity, that they represent not only the Otherness and the difference that Leiris encounters while traveling through Africa but, more so, that they represent the unrealized fantasy that Leiris held of himself becoming Other (193). And it is true that this argument is supported by those texts that surround Leiris' journal: the preface, the preamble, the earlier writings—even the later *L'Âge d'homme*, whose writing was in development during the same period as the Mission and *L'Afrique fantôme* is indeed an act of laying oneself bare. But Dauge's article, with a focus that limits itself by and large to paratextual elements, is missing a direct engagement with the text and with the photographs as they appear inside of the book and, therefore, it remains amiss of their operations within the journal itself.

As such, if one were to look at even just those images in *L'Afrique fantôme* that depict masks and consider the entries in the journal that these images punctuate, one would quickly discover that the photographs remain far more involved with goings-on of the Mission than with Leiris' own internal dramas.

Leiris' first written encounter with masks, for example, appears in the journal entry dated July 14, 1931, roughly two months into the Mission's journey. In celebration of *La Fête nationale*,²⁷⁸ Leiris, along with the other members of the mission, is invited to participate in a local colonial administration's festivities in the village of Kita.²⁷⁹ In his description of those festivities that he records in his diary, Leiris writes,

Des hommes déguisés en antilope-cheval à 5 cornes et 6 yeux de miroir dansent, avec d'autres entièrement costumés et cagoulés, portant à

²⁷⁸ Commonly *Bastille Day* in English

²⁷⁹ A village in Western Mali.

l'emplacement du nez une longue touffe de crin blanc qu'ils tirent de temps en temps et sur les fesses des bouquets de poil de mouton.²⁸⁰ (*L'Afrique fantôme* 94 [14 juillet 1931])

In this first mention, Leiris' interest in these masks and costumes does not appear to go beyond their simple description. He seems far more interested in the goings-on surrounding the main celebrations, those occurring « [d]ans un coin un peu plus sombre, moins 'officiel' » (94 [14 juillet 1931]). Following his description of the masks, Leiris writes a far more engaged passage describing a group of women dancing frenetically and with complete abandon²⁸¹:

Parfois, lorsque l'une d'elles a trop dansé et que la tête lui tourne, une plus vieille vient la chercher et la ramène, comme chancelante ou pâmée, vers le fond sombre où je ne sais quelle secrète magie doit la faire revenir à elle.²⁸² (94 [14 juillet 1931])

However, this first encounter with masks is represented in the first of *L'Afrique fantôme*'s photographs, « Danseurs masqués en antilopes, s'exhibant à l'occasion d'une parade administrative (Kita, 14 juillet 1931) »²⁸³ (93),²⁸⁴ though what is perhaps most notable about this photograph is how it jars with Leiris' written description of the event.

The image, overall, is a mixed bag of information: the masked dancers appear in the foreground, one in the bottom left corner and the other centred in the lower half of the

²⁸⁰ [“Men, dressed up as antelopes with five horns and six mirrored eyes, dance with others in full costume and hoods wearing long tufts of horsehair for noses, which they pull on from time to time, and bunches of sheep's wool on their behinds.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 114)]

²⁸¹ One might argue that this passage telegraphs Leiris' later interest, during the second half of the Mission, and beginning almost exactly one year later, in the *zar* cultists who would become the subjects of Leiris' most intense interest and ultimately of his book *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar*.

²⁸² [“At times, when one of them has danced too much and her head is spinning, an older woman comes to get her and takes her, tottering or swooning, into the dark background, where who knows what secret magic makes her come back to her senses.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 114)]

²⁸³ [“Dancers with antelope masks, performing on the occasion of an administrative parade (Kita, 14 July 1931)” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 113)]

²⁸⁴ This image remains unacknowledged by both Phipps and Dauge in their respective overviews of the photographs' thematic content.

image; from the distance from which the photograph has been taken, little in the way of detail of the masks is delivered to the viewer beyond the long horns visible atop each dancer's head; the dancers also appear rather still—there is little indication of their movements or gestures. Behind the dancers, a gathered crowd is equally motionless and unexpressive, and their simple muslim dress—most in white tunics or boubous—stands in contrast to the animalistic costumes and masks of the dancers. Furthermore, the scene within the photograph is taking place in full daylight, rather than at night, as was described in the diary. This latter detail is likely explained in the following day's journal entry: « Prise cinématographique et enregistrement sonore des attractions de la veille,^[285] dans le plus joli coin du village,—coin choisi par l'administrateur lui-même »²⁸⁶ (95 [15 juillet 1931]). Such re-creations or re-staging of events were commonplace during the mission, and Leiris' divulgence of these questionable, criticized methods²⁸⁷ in *L'Afrique fantôme* is arguably one of the aspects of the book that stirred the displeasure of Griaule and others. If *this* photograph is *confessional*, it is not confessional in the intimate manner that Dauge proposes, but rather, it is in the photograph's demystification of the daily operations of ethnographic fieldwork that it might be seen to reveal any sort of hidden truth.

²⁸⁵ *Our footnote:* Based on the collection practices of the Mission (see Griaule, « Introduction méthodologique » 1246), it is reasonable to assume that this photograph, despite a discrepancy in the caption regarding the date, was likely taken part and parcel with the other recordings that Leiris mentions here; there appears very little, if any, nighttime photography in *Les photographies Mission Dakar-Djibouti*, and relatively few low-light images—in *L'Afrique fantôme* only « Le sanctuaire en forme de vulve (Sanga, 18 novembre) » (197 [18 novembre 1931]) is relatively dark, and even though it is shrouded in shadow, one can see that the photographer nevertheless took advantage of available sunlight—, which speaks, more than anything, to the technological limitations of the equipment.

²⁸⁶ [“Mad a film and sound recording of last night's entertainment in the prettiest corner of the village—a spot selected by the administrator himself.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 115)]

²⁸⁷ See Clifford, *Predicament of Culture* (55-80) for analysis and critique of the “Griaule School” (57) of in-the-field information gathering and ethnographic representation.

Another reading of this first photograph could be simply that of a novel image of *La Fête nationale* as it is celebrated in the colonies, in contrast to the sorts of military parades and « bals de la veille » that one saw at home in France. Except that, Leiris, in his text, doesn't make any such comparisons that would emphasize difference, but rather, he treats the general festivities as quite standard and familiar:

Nous assistons avec [l'administrateur] à la fête donnée pour le 14 juillet: tamtam, joueurs de xylophones, chanteuses, fillettes de l'école qui chantent et dansent surveillées par les religieuses, agent de police noir qui fait reculer la foule en frappant le sol à coups de chicotte après des moulins terrifiants,^[288] course de vélo, courses en sacs, etc. Le soir, feu d'artifice, que nous tirons, et lancer d'une montgolfière.²⁸⁹ (94 [14 juillet 1931])

What would appear to be this photograph's most direct operation in *L'Afrique fantôme* would be its serving as a marker to acknowledge the beginning of Leiris' first actual foray into ethnographic enquiry. During this period prior to the *la Fête nationale*,²⁹⁰ what Leiris records in his diary mostly involves the protocol of socializing with colonial officials, and short day trips to surrounding villages—contact with the locals is treated by Leiris with little enthusiasm:

La vie que nous menons ici est au fond très monotone, comparable en cela à celle des gens de cirque qui se déplacent tout le temps mais pour donner toujours le même spectacle. J'ai une grande peine à prendre des habitudes de discipline et ne

²⁸⁸ *Our footnote:* While indeed a comment on colonial power, this mention of an overzealous police officer, positioned as it is between mention of singing schoolgirls and bicycle and sack races, is clearly a shot of Leiris' own brand of humour.

²⁸⁹ ["With [the administrator] we attend the party for the 14th of July: tom-toms, xylophone players, singers, schoolgirls who sing and dance under the watchful gaze of the nuns, a black policeman who keeps the crowd back by hitting the ground with his chicotte after whirling it in a terrifying manner, a bicycle race, a sack race, etc. In the evening, fireworks, set off by us, and the launching of a fire balloon." (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* XX)]

²⁹⁰ The mission had departed France on May 19th of 1931 and docked at Dakar on May 31st; the first 12 days ashore were spent in preparation of the Mission ahead; and throughout of second half of the month of June and the first half of July, the Mission, having departed the Capital, progressed through colonial towns and villages in French West Africa reaching Kita (in contemporary Western Mali) just ahead of the French national holiday.

me résigne guère à supprimer cette équation : voyager = flâner. » ²⁹¹ ([4 juillet 1931])

Yet, two days *after* la *Fête nationale* and that evening's masks and dancers that succeeded in piquing his curiosity, he writes,

Sous le rocher, un bout de corde : attache mouton que tous les ans, à la même époque, on sacrifie aux caïmans dont les guides disent que la mare est remplie. La découverte de ce bout de corde me comble de joie, *car je commence à entrevoir ce qu'il est de passionnant dans la recherche scientifique* : marcher de pièce à conviction à pièce à conviction, d'énigme à énigme, poursuivre la vérité comme à la piste... ²⁹² (our emphasis) ([16 juillet 1931]);

and then, the day following that, Leiris purchases a mask « à cornes d'antilope-cheval comme en avait les danseurs de l'autre jour » ²⁹³ (99 [17 juillet 1931]) and his interest in the masks is promptly reinvigorated. ²⁹⁴ He learns of a legend dating back to the 13th century that speaks of a woman changing into a similar beast, as well as into a porcupine, but he proclaims,

mais je ne parviens pas à obtenir la moindre indication permettant d'établir un lien entre cette légende et ce masque. Je sais pourtant que les danseurs que j'ai vus lors du 14 juillet étaient déguisés, les uns avec des masques à cinq cornes d'antilope, les autres avec des cagoules garnies, entre autre matériaux, de piquants de porc-épic... ²⁹⁵ (99 [17 juillet 1931])

²⁹¹ ["In the end, the life we lead here is very monotonous, comparable in this respect to the life of circus folk who move constantly but always perform the same act. I find it extremely hard to stay disciplined in my habits, and can hardly resign myself to suppress this equation : travelling = hanging around." (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 105)].

²⁹² ["Under the rock we pick up a rope: the tether of the sheep that is sacrificed annually to the crocodiles the guides say fill the pools. I am overjoyed at the discovery of this piece of rope, because I am beginning to see what is thrilling about scientific research: moving from one piece of evidence to another, from enigma to enigma, pursuing the truth the way one hunts game..." (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 116)].

²⁹³ ["with roane antelope horns, like the ones the dancers were wearing the other day" (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 119)].

²⁹⁴ Jolly et al. write: « L'intérêt de Michel Leiris est antérieur à la mission et renvoie sans doute à son attirance—esthétique, érotique, littéraire et ethnographique—pour ce qui est caché ou ce qui cache, des voiles du corps féminin à la langue secrète des Dogon, *a fortiori* si cet artifice renforce sciemment l'étrangeté et la beauté des mots et des formes » (*Cahier Dakar-Djibouti* 313). They also mention Seabrook's masks and « Le caput mortuum »

²⁹⁵ ["but I have not been able to obtain the slightest indication of a link between this legend and the mask. I do know however that the dancers that I saw on July 14th were disguised, some in five-horned antelope masks, others with crows adorned with porcupine quills, among other things..." (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 119)].

And so he enthusiastically puts himself « à la piste », making attempts on three occasions (July 19th, July 27th, and July 29th, 1931) to learn more, though his plans are unfortunately hampered at each attempt: « il nous est impossible d'obtenir le moindre explication »²⁹⁶ (*L'Afrique fantôme* 107 [27 juillet 1931]), he writes.

While this mask that Leiris purchases, the activities of the 14th of July, and the photograph « Danseurs masqués en antilopes s'exhibant à l'occasion d'une parade administrative » all mark a beginning to Leiris' ethnographic curiosity, he can still only, at least at this early stage of the trip, relate to these objects through his own established cultural references,²⁹⁷ and so, unlike with the Seabrook masks, he is unable to interpret their material or cultural significance. Not long after this first encounter with masks, the Mission settles into several weeks of intense interviewing of locals to collect their stories; Leiris writes:

Rien autre que l'usine. Trois enquêteurs fonctionnent simultanément et à jet continue [...]. Tous les spectacles possibles croulent et s'évanouissent derrière la magie des récits, qui rendent cette vie sédentaire dans un bâtiment de gare beaucoup plus intense que celle nous pourrions mener si, touristes, nous nous promenions.²⁹⁸ ([15 août 1931])

But as is the nature of an ethnographic expedition, Leiris will inevitably continue « à la piste ».

There are three other photographs featured in *L'Afrique fantôme* that depict masks. They date from a period of the Mission—between 29 September and 19

²⁹⁶ ["we are unable to obtain the slightest explanation of its meaning" (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 126)].

²⁹⁷ This is not unexpected, and it is really the only factor that is able to mark these artefacts as *strange* or *foreign* or *exotic* to begin with. (See Forsdick, *Victor Segalen* 30).

²⁹⁸ ["It is a factory, nothing more or less. Three investigators work simultaneously and non stop [...]. Every sight one might have seen crumbles and vanishes behind the magic of these narratives, making this sedentary existence in a train station much more intense than the life we might be leading if we were tourists on a trip." (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 139)].

November, 1931—spent with the Dogon people of Sanga (Mali), during which, according to an official communiqué released by the Mission,

[ont] été faites des observations et des collections *de la plus extrême importance* : études de la Société des Masques avec ses cérémonies et ses danses funéraires [...], ses grandes fêtes d'initiations secrètes; religion, magie, jeux [...], organisation politique, vie sociale, techniques, linguistique [...], anthropologie et ethnogéographie. (our emphasis)(Anonyme, “Communiqué n°2” *Cahier Dakar-Djibouti* 424)

It was, indeed, an incredibly important point in the journey. For the Mission's leader, Marcel Griaule, a relationship with the Dogon people had been established during a prior expedition,²⁹⁹ and he would study their culture and their customs throughout his entire career. It is also during this segment of the Mission that Leiris decided upon the topic he would, himself, pursue at l'EPHE³⁰⁰ upon his return to France. As well, Leiris would go on to publish a number of articles about Dogon masks, about secret languages, and about rites of passage and circumcision practices.³⁰¹

The first of the three mask-related photographs³⁰² from this stage of the Mission is captioned « Les masques entrant au village. En tête, les croix de Lorraine; derrière 'la

²⁹⁹ That expedition, undertaken in 1928-1929 in known commonly as *La (Première) Mission Griaule*.

³⁰⁰ EPHE = École Pratique des Hautes Études

³⁰¹ The studies conducted during this segment of the Mission would contribute to Griaule's doctoral thesis that would be published as *Masques Dogon* in 1938; Leiris would publish an article in 1933, also titled « Masques Dogon », in the n°2 issue of *Minotaure* (republished in *Cahiers Leiris* 313-321), the magazine issue that served as de facto catalogue to the exhibition held at Le Musée d'ethnologie du Trocadéro after the Mission's return in 1933—Jolly et al. describe Leiris' article as « très technique et ethnographique » (*Cahier Dakar-Djibouti* 314). Another article published by Leiris in the same issue of *Minotaure* titled « Objets rituels dogon » (*Cahier Dakar-Djibouti* 271-281) is similar, though perhaps only slightly less clinical in its language. Leiris' own research toward his diploma from l'EPHE in 1938, which would be published in 1948 as *La langue secrète des Dogon de Sanga*, began from 9 October 1931, when he first started interviewing the initiated elder Ambibè Babadyi (see *L'Afrique fantôme* 698). From this leg of the journey, Leiris would also publish, among other texts, « Les rites de circoncision chez les Dogon de Sanga » with André Schaeffner. (see *Cahier Dakar Djibouti* vi; 397-420).

³⁰² There is a fourth image that dates from the Dogon stage of the Mission; it is captioned « Yougo, la Rome lunaire, et ses greniers sous roche (10-12 novembre) » (*L'Afrique fantôme* 191 [10 novembre 1931]). [“Yougo, a lunar Rome, and its grainaries under the rocks (10-12 November)” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 209)].

maison à étages' (Sanga, 2 octobre) »³⁰³ (*L'Afrique fantôme* 1082).³⁰⁴ The photograph depicts a procession of masked dancers entering the village at the start of the ceremony. The caption is entirely descriptive in this respect, and little seems immediately apparent as to what might be its key significance for Leiris. The diary entry for 2 October, 1931, to which the image relates, is one of the longer single-day entries in all of the book; it covers a funeral ceremony in quite laborious detail, the account beginning from around three o'clock in the morning (158 [2 octobre 1931]).³⁰⁵

In Leiris' roughly fifteen-hundred-word reportage, what a reader can note is that there is a seemingly sudden dedication, here, to ethnographic fieldwork; while the language is not clinical or scientific—nor is the text italicized—, the focus is resolutely on the event and its happenings. Sticking almost entirely to description of the events of the day, Leiris' personal intrusions into this entry are all but non-existent. A small intervention, however, does sneak through: at one moment in the text, Leiris breaks from his description to opine that, of all the performances witnessed, « la danse du masque à étages est la plus admirable »³⁰⁶ (160 [2 octobre 1931]).³⁰⁷ The intervention isn't much,

³⁰³ ["The masks entering the village. In front, the cross of Lorraine; at the back, the 'storied house' (Sanga, 2 October)"] (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 179)]

³⁰⁴ This image was substituted in the 1981 edition for another from the same occasion, captioned « Les masques montant sur la terrasse de la maison du mort (Sanga, 2 octobre) » (161 [2 octobre 1931]) ["the masks climbing onto the roof of the dead man's house (Sanga, 2 October)"] (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 179)] and both photographs appear to be of the same group of masked dancers, but taken at different moments from near the beginning of the ceremonial performance (see 158 [2 octobre 1931]). The second image, « Les masques montant sur la terrasse », provides a better representation of « la maison à étages » than the prior image, though the mask is no longer referenced in the caption. The second image, furthermore, resembles closely one published alongside Leiris' 1933 article « Masques dogon » in the issue of *Minotaure* dedicated to La Mission Dakar-Djibouti (see *Cahier Dakar-Djibouti* 312), though again, the image « Les montant sur la terrass » shows « la maison à étages » most clearly.

³⁰⁵ This entry, along the three previous, dated 29 & 30 September and 1 October 1931, were published prior to the release of *L'Afrique fantôme* in the inaugural issue of *Minotaure*, under the title « Danses funéraires dogon (extrait d'un carnet de route) » (73-76) (See also *L'Afrique fantôme* 1047, 1077-1078).

³⁰⁶ ["the dance of the storied masks is the most wonderful"] (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 177)]

³⁰⁷ Beyond these two comments, it is only in the final paragraph of the journal entry for this day, after the conclusion of the funeral ceremony, that Leiris writes anything that might be considered to be of personal note, and even then he

but it is the only dance for which he makes the effort to qualify, and in this brief moment that retreats from the purely documentary, not entirely inward but still giving a brief glimpse into the personal, we can locate a possible connection between photograph and text.³⁰⁸

In this respect, Dauge is quite correct in his interpretation that Leiris delivers to the reader's view the photographs that move him (Dauge 184). However, we would argue that Leiris' appreciation for the dance and for the mask—and by association, his selection of photograph—, contrary to Dauge's reasoning that it conjures something unreal (Dauge 183), are very much grounded in reality.

During the seven weeks that the Mission spent among the Dogon people, Leiris writes about *les mères du masque*³⁰⁹—the admirable « masque à étages » is one (179-180 [28 octobre 1931])—nearly a dozen times, demonstrating a persistent interest and a dogged pursuit.³¹⁰ That pursuit culminates with the discovery of one of these *mères du*

recounts a story shared by an informant, Ambara, and closes with the line, « Ce soir je lui donne un cachet d'aspirine pour faire passer le mal de tête qu'il doit au bolo bu hier. » (162 [2 octobre 1931])

³⁰⁸ This is not quite the *punctum* that Dauge suggests (« Photos, fantômes, fantasmes » 188)—a suggestion that is problematic in itself: Barthes notion of the *punctum*, as personal as it is to be to the individual viewer of a given image, is difficult to declare on behalf of another.

³⁰⁹ Our translation: “The Mothers of the mask” or, alternatively “Grand masks”

³¹⁰ Leiris writes about « les mères du masque » on September 29, 1931 ; on October 1, 3, 9, 14, 28, 30, and 31, 1931; and on November 5, 6, and 8, 1931. He essentially documents a complete process of ethnographic enquiry, beginning from his introduction to the object: « La mère du masque est un ‘bull-roarer’,—une pale fixée au bout d’une corde et qui vrombit [...] On l’appelle la ‘mère’ parce qu’elle est la plus grande, qu’elle boit le sang des femmes et des enfants » (156 [1 octobre 1931]); going through the gathering of details and precisions and through misunderstandings: « On m’a dupé: la véritable mère du masque n’est pas le bull-roarer, mais un gigantesque *sirigué* ou ‘maison à étages’ » ([28 octobre 1931]); through deceptions: « [Q]uelques heures à peine ont suffi pour posséder les vrais rites [...] concernant la mère du masque, et démontrer que le vieil Ambibè, d’un bout à l’autre de mon travail avec lui, m’a menti, me donnant une foule de détails, certes, mais omettant à dessein les choses essentielles » ([30 octobre 1931]); and, finally, to their documentation and collection: « La plus grande, nous la sortons de la caverne comme un long serpent, pour la photographier. Tout ceci clandestinement » ([31 octobre 1931]) et « Nous lui offrirons sa revanche en manifestant le désir d’acheter une ‘mère du masque’ » (5 novembre 1931). For comparison, one can read Leiris’ ethnographic, and wholly objective, description of *les mères des masques* in the *Minotaure* article « Objets rituels dogon » (republished in *Cahier Dakar-Djibouti* 271-281; see 272-276)

masque « soigneusement étendue sur un lit de crânes humains »³¹¹ ([8 novembre 1931]).

This last discovery³¹² is displayed in another of the mask photographs in *L'Afrique fantôme*, captioned « La 'mère du masque' découverte par Griaule et Schaeffner sur un lit de crânes humains (Sanga, 8 novembre) »³¹³ (189 [8 novembre 1931]). Without question, the appeal in this is the macabre; it is there in the caption, in the image that displays a bed of human skulls, and Leiris writes further in the same day's journal entry,

Le soir [...] nous ferons une découverte au moins aussi troublante : dans une cachette [...] deux crânes, dont l'un assez frais, et un paquet de broussailles. [...] C'est à peu près le seul endroit dont les enfants aient réellement une peur terrible et duquel il soit totalement impossible de les faire approcher.³¹⁴ (188 [8 novembre 1931])

And in this respect, Dauge might have reason to argue « mysticisme, folie, aventure, poésie, érotisme » (« Photos, fantômes, fantasmes » 186). However, apart from one final statement the following day—

De plus en plus, l'atmosphère de sacrifices humains s'accuse. Plus de doute. Outre les découvertes matérielles, des expressions fugaces de tel ou tel construisent un faisceau de preuves. Mais on n'avoue ces pratiques que pour d'autres villages ou pour le 'vieux monde' ...³¹⁵ (Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* 190 [9 novembre 1931])

³¹¹ ["carefully laid out on a bed of human skulls" (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 205)]

³¹² Leading up to this discovery, the members of the Mission had learned the Dogon had long practiced human sacrifice—replacing these human offerings with dogs under the French regime ([2 novembre 1931].

³¹³ ["The 'mother of the mask' discovered by Griaule and Schaeffner on a bed of human skulls" (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 206)]

³¹⁴ ["In the evening [...], we make an equally disturbing discovery: in a hiding place [...] there are two skulls, one of them fairly new, and a bundle of brushwood. [...] This is perhaps the only spot of which the children are really terribly afraid, and it is completely impossible to get them to approach it." (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 205)]

³¹⁵ ["The atmosphere of human sacrifice is becoming more and more pronounced. No doubt of it now. Aside from the material discoveries, fleeting remarks from various people are adding to the accumulation of evidence. But these practices are only admitted for other villages or in the 'olden days' ..." (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 205)]

—, Leiris never makes mention of this again³¹⁶: he does not meditate, nor ruminate, nor dwell. It is a moment that he deems worthy of record, yes, but equally so is the loss of a pair of tweezers that he records in his diary just four days prior (186 [4 novembre 1931])—and this other moment is perhaps even more worthy in Leiris’ eyes, as he annotates that loss with an additional note in *L’Afrique fantôme*’s 1951 reedition.³¹⁷ As such, when the Mission will move on to its next discovery, Leiris’ attention will move with it. All thoughts of masks and of human sacrifice seem forgotten the moment that they are written down—in the very next paragraph of the same entry for 9 November, 1931, Leiris has already moved on to other things.³¹⁸

There is a third mask image from the time spent with the Dogon, and it is situated in *L’Afrique fantôme* between the images « Les masques entrant au village » and « La ‘mère du masque’ découverte par Griaule et Schaeffner sur un lit de crânes humains ». It is the photograph captioned « Le masque ‘femme du cordonnier’ avec ses seins en fruit de baobab (Sanga, 1^{er} novembre) », and it is the same image that features on the cover of the first edition of the book, the same (and the only) image that Dauge directly engages in « Photos, fantômes, fantasmes ».

³¹⁶ Later in the journal, in the entry dated 1 January, 1932, Leiris does make mention of « un sacrifice humain » (230 [1 janvier 1932]), but this is in the completely unrelated context of a dream, seemingly à propos nothing. And in one of his overtures to exoticism, he declares: « Voici enfin L’AFRIQUE, la terre des 50° à l’ombre, des convois d’esclaves, des festins cannibales, des crânes vides, de toutes les qui sont mangées, corrodées, perdues » (326 [17 avril 1932]), but this is pure fantasy borne of adventurist nostalgia and enthusiasm just before crossing into Abyssinia at the end of Part 1 of *L’Afrique fantôme*—and before the sudden, disheartening stoppage at the border.

³¹⁷ See *L’Afrique fantôme* 699, note du 4 novembre.

³¹⁸ The rest of the entry for 9 November, 1931, completely unrelated to the paragraph before it, reads as follows: « Auprès des jeunes, notre popularité est grande. Ce soir, au lieu d’un qui venait d’ordinaire, trois enfants couchent chez nous : Abara, Binèm, Amadigné » (190 [9 novembre 1931]).

As its name and as the photograph's caption attest, this mask is that of a female figure. In its design it is similar if not quite identical³¹⁹ to some of the masks that Leiris had encountered and mentioned in his description of the funeral ceremony of 2 October, 1931.³²⁰ In his description of that earlier ceremony, Leiris had commented of the young dancers wearing these masks that their dancing consisted of « [des] mouvements lascifs, torsions du buste et du bas-ventre »³²¹ in contrast with the older dancers, of whom he wrote:

Tous ces hommes ont des allures louches d'hermaphrodites. Quand ils quittent la place après avoir dansé, ils courent lourdement [...] comme des hommes qui voudraient tourner la terre sous leurs pieds.³²² (160 [2 octobre 1931])

While his use of the words *lascif* and *louche* are, indeed, rather pointed qualifiers, they seem to operate, here, quite squarely in the descriptive mode, as they effectively mark the differences that Leiris perceives between the performances with regard to their quality and conviction.

A month later, a number of masks of this very type are brought to Leiris' colleague André Schaeffner for the latter to study their dances. Leiris, present for the display, later records the event in his journal. He writes the following entry about the event, rendered here in full:

³¹⁹ A photograph of captioned « Masque 'jeune fille' » was published alongside Leiris' 1933 article « Masques dogon » in the issue of *Minotaure* dedicated to La Mission Dakar-Djibouti (see *Cahier Dakar-Djibouti* 319). A simple visual comparison of these two photographs attests to their close similarities. They are of the same category and they dance together; what sets them apart is the three balls or tufts atop the head of « Le masque 'femme du cordonnier' ». The chant or song—in the secret language of the Dogon—speaks of the relative wealth of the « femme du cordonnier »'s father (or husband), stating that he weaves cotton, has meat and salt and cowrie shells and a horse (see Leiris, *La langue secrète des Dogons de Sanga* 297-298).

³²⁰ He describes those masks as follows: « D'autres, dont le déguisement comporte des seins postiches couverts de terre noircie, représentent des jeunes filles; ils sont portés par les garçons les plus jeunes. » (159 [2 octobre 1931]) »

³²¹ [“lascivious movements, contortions of the bust and abdomen” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 177)]

³²² [“All the men have the louche look of hermaphrodites. When they leave the square after having danced, they run heavily [...] like men trying to make the earth spin beneath their feet.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 177)]

Des masques ont été convoqués, pour que Schaeffner étudie de près leurs danses. Malentendu : tous viennent le matin, alors que nous les attendions l'après-midi. Nous devons les renvoyer. L'après-midi il n'en vient que quelques-uns: une femme européenne, une croix de Lorraine, une jeune fille, une femme de cordonnier. La femme européenne^[323] a une sorte de chignon ou chapeau 1900 à arrière relevé et nous reconnaissons sous la cagoule noire notre ami le gros chasseur Akoundyo, « grand frère » d'Ambara, à qui ce dernier m'avait confié lors de la sortie nocturne des masques.^[324] La femme du cordonnier a de merveilleux seins pointus et dressés, en demi-fruits de baobab, beaucoup plus excitants que des vrais. La cagoule de fibre entièrement couverte de cauris, surmontée d'une coiffure en crête à trois pointes, fait au danseur un visage lunaire extraordinairement séduisant. Tandis que Lutten palabre avec le chef de canton et renvoie les masques, qui sont trop peu nombreux, arrive le traître Ambibè Babadyi, une bouteille à la main. On ne l'a pas vu depuis deux jours, et il vient tout simplement faire renouveler la médecine que Larget lui avait donnée pour ses yeux... Je suis abasourdi par son cynisme.³²⁵ (181-182 [1 novembre, 1931])

There is a striking shift in this passage. As Leiris passes from describing the mask « femme européenne » to the mask « femme du cordonnier », his writing about the latter becomes rather evocative—the breasts of this particular mask are marvellous and even more arousing than actual ones, and the face, moon-shaped, is extraordinarily seductive. This burst of eroticized detail seems both sudden and abrupt; there is no real sexualization in his description of the « femme européenne » just prior, and following his

³²³ *Our footnote:* A photograph of this mask also appears in Leiris' 1933 article « Masques dogon » with the caption « Masque 'Madame', représentation de femme européenne (Sanga, Soudan français. N° 2026). » (see *Cahier Dakar-Djibouti* 319)

³²⁴ *Our footnote:* See *L'Afrique fantôme* 157 [1 octobre 1931]

³²⁵ [“the masks have been convened so that Schaeffner can study their dances at close hand. A misunderstanding: they all come in the morning, when we were expecting them in the afternoon. We have to send them away. In the afternoon, only a few come: a European woman, a cross of Lorraine, a young girl, a shoemaker's wife. The other dancers have gone to work in the bush. The European woman has a sort of chignon, or 1900 hat turned up in the back, and under the black cowl we recognize our friend the fat hunter Akoundyo, Ambara's 'big brother,' to whom he entrusted me when the masks came out the other night. The shoemaker's wife has marvelous breasts, raised and pointed, made of half-sections of baobab fruit, much more exciting than the real thing. Her fiber cowl, entirely covered with cowries and surmounted by a triple-crested headdress, gives the dancer an extraordinarily seductive, moon-like face. While Lutten is arguing with the district chief and sending away the masks (there were not enough of them), the traitor Ambibe Babadyi shows up with a bottle in his hand. We haven't seen him for two days, and now he comes simply to replenish the medicine Larget had given him for his eyes... His cynicism leaves me speechless.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 198)]

description of « un visage lunaire extraordinairement séduisant », he shifts topics entirely to complain about the “traitor” Ambibè Babadyi.³²⁶

As for the discrepancy between Leiris’ descriptions of these two particular masks, one explanation may be simply that their features are patently different. The respective photographs of these masks certainly show us that the mask « femme européenne », which was published in *Minotaure* and in Leiris’ *Langue secrète des Dogons de Sanga*, lacks the most distinguishable feminine features of the « femme du cordonnier » and other « jeune fille » masks, namely the protruding breasts made from hollowed baobab fruit. Furthermore, the veil of the « femme européenne », as opposed to being one of bright, white cowrie shells, is dark and muted, less elaborate, crafted from a single square piece of embroidered cloth. Beyond these material features, though, Leiris also reveals in his text that, behind the « femme européenne » stands a large man, the hunter named Akoundyo whom Leiris recognizes, a fact that further lessens the mask’s apparent degree of femininity in comparison with the others. In this way, much like in the way he had contrasted the dancers at the funeral with the terms *lascif* and *louche*, Leiris’ emphasis upon the feminine features of the « femme du cordonnier » might simply be a way of emphasizing the contrast of his impressions.

However, in this case, much like in the cases of many of the other photographs in *L’Afrique fantôme* the caption for « Le masque ‘femme du cordonnier’ », in many respects, relates more to the text than it might serve to simply describe the content of the image. Considering the caption « Le masque ‘femme du cordonnier’ avec ses seins en

³²⁶ Ambibè Babadyi is the initiated elder and Leiris’ chief informant with regard to his research into the secret language of the Dogon people.

fruits de baobab », it is the use, here, of the possessive pronoun « avec *ses* seins en fruits de baobab » as opposed to the more objective—and generalizing—indefinite article that Leiris might have used, « avec *des* seins en fruits de baobab », that takes the caption away from mere mimetic description. In an earlier description of very similar « masques filles », he had written: « le déguisement comporte des seins postiches couverts de terre noircie » (159 [2 octobre 1931]). With that language, the breasts are never more than material elements of a costume, even labeled as false. The use of the possessive « *ses* » in his description of the « femme du cordonnier » has the effect of animating, personifying—and thus sexualizing—the mask in the photograph in a manner which is then only heightened by how Leiris’ description in *L’Afrique fantôme* sexualizes that very object on the written page. But even more, as we explored earlier in this chapter,³²⁷ the caption also has the effect of *writing* the photograph into *L’Afrique fantôme*, essentially anchoring the photograph within diary.

It is indeed curious, then, that Dauge, in « Photos, fantômes, fantasmes », did not choose to address this instance of the photograph over its appearance on the cover of *L’Afrique fantôme* and the general—and somewhat removed—role that it plays in that situation. If one considers this episode’s explicit act of eroticization, both of the image and of the mask itself, as well as the fantasies that this act is capable of evoking, it is quite effortless to then make a connection to Seabrook’s erotic fetish masks and to Leiris’ phrase, « mysticisme, folie, aventure, poésie, érotisme », that is twice repeated by Dauge. And the argument that Dauge presents at the close of his essay—

³²⁷ See *supra*, this chapter, the section titled: *La pose d’une odalisque*.

En dépit de leur caractère attendu, les photographies de *L'Afrique fantôme* jouent un rôle dynamique dans la mesure où elles attestent une forme d'altérité, certes stéréotypée, mais qui, valorisée pour sa différence contraignante et symbolique, est la prémisse d'une refiguration de soi. Certificats d'altérité et écrans d'un « punctum », les clichés de *L'Afrique fantôme* sont ainsi et avant tout les signes et la médiation d'un saisissement avec tout ce que ce dessein comporte de fantasmatique.³²⁸ (“Fantômes, photos, fantasmes” 193)

—might also have been well illustrated through association to this episode of the book.

Ian Walker's 1997 article “Phantom Africa. Photography between Surrealism and Ethnography” is a second piece of scholarship that addresses the « femme du cordonnier » photograph. In many ways it could be seen to complement Dauge's « Photos, fantômes, fantasmes », as it arrived only a short time after Dauge's own piece was published, and it reaches similar conclusions—like Dauge, Walker sees the book and its images as “a complex celebration of otherness that at the same time suggests its own self-critique” (651). But “Phantom Africa” gives more explicit attention to the explicit eroticization of the « femme du cordonnier ». Differently from Dauge, however, Walker, in his search to understand this particular photograph in *L'Afrique fantôme*, does not stray so far from the text.

As the title of Walker's article alludes, he looks at *L'Afrique fantôme* largely through the lens of James Clifford's concepts of “surrealist ethnography” and “ethnographic surrealism” that had framed and popularized Leiris' book in the anglo-American realm beginning in the 1980s.³²⁹ He presents *L'Afrique fantôme* alongside the

³²⁸ [Our translation: In spite of their intended nature, the photographs in *L'Afrique fantôme* play a dynamic role in that they attest to a form of otherness, certainly stereotypical, but which, valued for its compelling and symbolic difference, is the basis of a refiguration of self. Certificates of otherness and shrines to a “punctum”, *L'Afrique fantôme*'s images are first and foremost the signs and the mediation of a captivation, with all that is phantasmic in their design.

³²⁹ See *supra*, Chapter 2, the section titled *The 1980s*

films of Luis Buñuel and Jean Painlevé, and he draws comparisons to photographs published in André Breton's surrealist novel *Nadja*³³⁰ and, similar to Dauge, to many of the photographs that had been published in the magazine *Documents*—photographs of Paris streets by Brassai and by Lotar, which “[cast] an unflinching gaze at the primitive scenes that were to be found on the margins of the urban metropolis” (649). Walker frames *L’Afrique fantôme* as an artifact of Clifford’s “surrealist moment in ethnography” (*The Predicament of Culture* 146), and by viewing *L’Afrique fantôme* through this lens, he looks for evocative “surrealist” elements such as striking juxtapositions (I. Walker 642), or what Laxton calls the “exploitation of chance” (“Moholy’s Doubt” 143), and this helps to define, as well, how he looks at the « femme du cordonnier » photograph.

In his own reading of the image, Walker, much like Dauge, sees it as something mystifying, writing that “one part of Leiris's excitement [lies] in the *unknowability of the mask*” (our emphasis)(643), which one could easily read as a callback to Seabrook’s leather masks and what Leiris had written of them in *Documents*. But Walker is also looking for that surrealist element of juxtaposition, of chance. He locates it quite easily, in the diary entry that immediately follows Leiris’ description of the « femme du cordonnier » with its breasts of baobab fruit. In his journal, the following day, the first words that Leiris writes are: « Pollution nocturne, après rêve à peine érotique, qui se terminait par une pollution involontaire »³³¹ (*L’Afrique fantôme* 182 [2 novembre 1931]). The sexualized description of the mask, then, is heightened further by this intimate confession that follows so closely. As such, the photograph—or moreso the mask

³³⁰ Walker recalls Beaujour (*see supra*, Chapter 2, “1967”), observing a very pointed connection between *L’Afrique fantôme* and Surrealist art made before Clifford.

³³¹ [“Nocturnal pollution, after a dream that was hardly erotic at all, which ended with an involuntary pollution.” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 199)]

therein—is now seen more directly as a sort of fetishized object (I. Walker 645), the type of which Dauge only alludes when he quotes from « le ‘caput mortuum’ ». Fetish, not only in a psychosexual sense, but also in both a marxist and anthropological sense, enmeshing it within discourses of power and othering, and framing it through an essentially postcolonialist primitivist critique.³³²

Walker, however, is cautious in his own observation, and in the connection he makes—as obvious as it may seem—between Leiris’ description of the mask in his journal, and his sharing, the following day, of the experience of the wet dream. Walker admits to such a connection being selective and an “extreme example,” noting that

[Leiris] didn't say whether this 'wet dream' was related to the 'extraordinarily seductive' face he'd seen the day before, but the proximity of these two entries does demonstrate the extent to which he was interested not only in documenting Dogon culture, but also in documenting himself. (“Phantom Africa” 645);

It is an important acknowledgement that Walker makes here, this is recognition that such a cleverly opportune juxtaposition may not have been an intentionally crafted one, but simply moment of chance.

The challenge and the difficulty that Walker rightly acknowledges are elemental to *L’Afrique fantôme*, as even its most provocative moments are often tempered by abject banality. As we illustrated above, Leiris could be rather fickle with his attentions, when

³³² Walker, in his article, quotes Foucault (see Walker 643-646, 645 n. 20; Foucault, *The Order of Things* 379), and he cites Golan who, himself, writes: “Key to the Surrealist project was the triangulation between the sexual fetish (Freud), the commodity fetish (Marx) and the tribal fetish (ethnology)” (“Triangulating the Surrealist Fetish” 52) and refers back to Apter and Pietz’ *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*. To quickly illustrate this postcolonial primitivist critique which both Walker and Golan evoke, let us quote briefly from Hal Foster’s contribution to Apter and Pietz’ collection, titled “The Art of Fetishism: Notes on Dutch Still Life,” in which he writes, “These works emerge in an interstice between, say, the ritual order of tribal artifacts and the exhibitional status of modern art, as in primitivism; between the mundane realm of commodities and the hermetic realm of autonomous art, as in the ready-made; between the sexual register of part objects and the social field of objets trouvés, as in the surrealist object” (Foster, “The Art of Fetishism” 251; see also Apter 7).

the loss pair of tweezers can be just as memorable as even the most evocative of masks. And the photographs act to further complicate matters. The « femme du cordonnier » can certainly be seen as a provocative image, and its provocativeness comes as much from the language text of the journal as from the photograph itself. But its documentary role should not be forgotten.

In a third study of the « femme du cordonnier » photograph, found in Nevine Nabil Demian's 2003 dissertation, "Modernist Primitivism: Seeking the Lost Primitive Other in the Works of Georges Bataille, Michel Leiris, and René Char," a connection is again made between the photograph and questions of identity and the becoming of an exotic other. And Demian, like Walker, attaches importance to the explicit eroticism of the image. Regarding the photograph, Demian writes that:

Leiris's nostalgia for the primitive goes along with his hope for personal transformation. He feels the need to fuse with the primitive as a means of escaping the subject/object, male/female, split that causes his sexual anxiety. Among the selective photos that he inserts in his journal is the illustration of cross-dressing, entitled "Le Masque 'femme du cordonnier,'" which shows a man wearing a female mask and false breasts. *Behind the simple act of wearing a mask and false breasts, Leiris, who dreams of breaking down sexual boundaries, more likely envisions in this ritual a way of hiding one's identity.* (our emphasis)(123)

One can also see a clear parallel, here, with Dauge's evaluation of the photograph, as both scholars address Leiris' desire for personal transformation. However, to then provide support to this argument, she turns to Leiris' autobiography *L'Âge d'homme* and to a passage in that book that recounts an episode during which an eighteen-year-old

Leiris, along with his lover—a woman called *Kay*³³³—and second couple, engaged in an evening of bawdy dress-up:

Kay revêtit mon complet veston, prit ma canne et mon chapeau, me prêta une robe et divers effets à elle, m'aida à me maquiller ; [l'autre couple] troquèrent de même leurs vêtements. Les deux couples ainsi formés exécutèrent des numéros genre music-hall, firent semblant de flirter. J'étais très fier d'être bien, plutôt que ridicule, en femme. Toute difficulté était pour moi levée, vu que, grâce à mon travestissement, je n'avais qu'à me laisser faire. Je trouvais aussi un plaisir positif dans cet apparent changement de sexe, qui transformait les rapports sexuels en jeu et y introduisait une espèce de légèreté. Feignant de me courtiser, Kay m'appelait de mon nom féminisé – Micheline – prénom que projetait de me donner ma mère alors que grosse de moi, elle souhaitait d'avoir une fille. Couchés sur le divan [...] nous passâmes insensiblement des baisers de théâtre à d'authentiques baisers.³³⁴ (Leiris, *L'Âge d'homme* 872)

It is a curious but fortuitous connection that Demian makes between this youthful episode of cross-dressing and the photograph in *L'Afrique fantôme*. She qualifies the passage in *L'âge d'homme* expressly as “confession” (“Modern Primitivism” 123). Indeed, it is. But in connecting the episode to the « femme du cordonnier », she extracts it away from its larger story: in *L'Âge d'homme*, the episode marks the beginning of a tumultuous³³⁵ four-year relationship (873) with *Kay*, who, within a week of those kisses on the couch, would take Leiris' virginity. As such, Demian's extraction somewhat skews the cross-dressing episode away from what seems, overall, a rather commonplace experience of navigating

³³³ He introduces her in the text in the following manner: « Kay (tel est le nom que je lui donnerai) » (*L'âge d'homme* 861) [“Kay (for that is the name I shall give her)”, Howard, *Manhood* 107]

³³⁴ [“Kay put on my suit coat, took my cane and my hat, lent me a dress and various jewels and accessories and helped me to make up; [the other couple] exchanged their clothes in the same way. The two couples then performed various music-hall numbers and pretended to flirt. I was very proud of being credible instead of ridiculous as a woman. Every difficulty was solved for me, since, thanks to my disguise, I had only to let myself go. I therefore took a positive pleasure in this apparent change of sex, which transformed sexual relations into a game and established a kind of frivolity. Pretending to woo me, Kay called me by my feminized name—Micheline—a name my mother had planned to give me before I was born, when she had hoped for a daughter. Lying on the couch [...] we gradually passed from stage kisses to the real thing.” (Howard, *Manhood* 118-119)].

³³⁵ She was older, in the throes of divorce when they met (*d'homme* 861), and her divorce settlement was ultimately compromised by this affair (877); he later proposed marriage while serving in the military; she accepted and he regretted the fact that he would have to give up his writerly dreams to support her; he maintained the engagement until, shortly after the death of his father, and having seen true love in the eyes of his parents as his father lay on his deathbed, he told Kay he was no longer in love (877-878).

oneself toward sexual discovery and maturity—or « l'âge d'homme » (see *L'Âge d'homme* 1275, n.28). In a similar manner, in drawing a link to the « femme du cordonnier », Demian concludes from the episode that

transvestism and African masks produce the same effect on Leiris: they accommodate well an interest in hiding one's identity by hiding one's sex. By eliminating the distinction between male and female, the roles of who is subject or object is no longer in question: *the two merge and become one as Leiris attempts to do with African cultures.* (our emphasis)(“Modern Primitivism” 124)

And elsewhere in “Modernist Primitivism,” she points to Leiris’ “subjective selection of information” (113) that he records in his journal, noting that he often frames this information in erotic terms. This is certainly true, but we would argue that, when reading *L’Afrique fantôme*, it is important to consider that the most immediate influences upon the text are, by and large, the the daily events of the Mission itself.

Demian, for example, quotes a description that Leiris gives of some huts in which he uses the term « autels érotiques »³³⁶ (Demian 113; see also *L’Afrique fantôme* 212 [8 décembre, 1931]). She suggests this word-choice to be a projection of Leiris’ own sexual fantasies (Demian 112-113). However, she neglects, here, the fact that the most prominent religious icon in the region in which Leiris finds himself at that moment—Dahomey³³⁷—is the *Lègba*, a conduit of the gods that is represented—at nearly every home—by a phallic-focused statue whose key feature is an exaggerated erection made of wood or steel. Leiris writes in the very same paragraph from which she quotes that «[I]es *lègba* de terre séchée, à verge de bois en érection, se multiplient »³³⁸ (*L’Afrique fantôme*

³³⁶ [“erotic altars” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 227)]

³³⁷ Present-day Benin

³³⁸ [“[t]here are more and more legbas of dried earth, with erect wooden penises” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 177)]

212 [8 décembre 1931]; *see also* 1094, 8 décembre, n.2). We would argue, then, that there is another explanation for these eroticized descriptions, whether of altars or of the « femme du cordonnier », and that explanation would be that these objects, quite simply, are inherently sexualized, and to isolate such instances to attribute them elsewhere is to ignore the documentary aspect of *L'Afrique fantôme*.

We argue this not to deny the fact that the photograph, and the description of the mask along with it, participate in Leiris' erotic obsessions. They certainly do. But such subjective elements of the photographs in *L'Afrique fantôme*, and particularly, here, those of the « femme du cordonnier » photograph, cannot be so readily separated from their equally-present documentary aspects. Demian's abstraction of the « femme du cordonnier » photograph away from *L'Afrique fantôme*, so as to associate it with Leiris' adolescent sexual awakening of more than a decade prior, results in a misrepresentation of the content and context of both the image and the book.

In fact, within Demian's observation, the context of the « femme du cordonnier » photograph—a month of persistent and continuous study of language and customs of the Dogon people—is not given consideration at all. Instead, she frames the photograph—and *L'Afrique fantôme* in its entirety—through a rather harsh prism modeled exclusively on Torgovnick's highly problematic analysis³³⁹ of Leiris' primitivist tendencies, and from

³³⁹ In her 1990 monograph *Gone Primitive*, Marianna Torgovnick offers a problematic analysis of Leiris' primitivist tendencies in a chapter titled, "The Many Obsessions of Michel Leiris." The text has an aggressive agenda, which has the promise of being intriguing. However, she sprinkles it with insults such as "crony" (108) and "intellectual bridesmaid" (105) that are distracting and confusingly inaccurate, demonstrating a poor understanding of Leiris' place in the cultural & intellectual scenes of interwar Paris and within the French literary establishment of the twentieth century (*see* Perloff, "Tolerance and Taboo" 339-342). Her vitriolic tone and spurious, overly-broad statements—"let us simply say that things African, black, primitive mesh thoroughly with Leiris' fixation on subject/object relations and with the sexualized nexus of pain/ pleasure/ wounds/ decapitation/ death which he sees everywhere" (112)*—overshadow and overwhelm her legitimate aim to challenge misogynist and primitivist language and imagery in Leiris' writings. Add to this her awkward and ultimately unconvincing approach of decontextualizing violent and sexual imagery from Leiris' autobiography *L'âge d'homme* and layering it atop a sober,

this perspective the image is treated, rather than as an actively engaged element of the book, as something purely symbolic,³⁴⁰ a hypersexualized avatar of primitivist desire. However, much like the photograph « Jeunes gens filant le coton en courtisant les femmes » that was discussed earlier this chapter, this perspective does not find grounding or support within *L'Afrique fantôme*.

Indeed, it is incredibly difficult to locate the singular importance of the photograph of the « femme du cordonnier » in *L'Afrique fantôme*. Demian has ventured to look elsewhere, Dauge keeps his analysis at a certain remove, and Walker finds himself quickly obstructed in his attempt—and it is notable that Walker remains hesitant to connect this episode to what is its most plausible support: the wet-dream incident that is mentioned in the journal entry that immediately follows the description of the mask; this is primarily because he recognizes that Leiris' own engagement is not committed enough, at least not in the isolated moment, to provide any clear understanding.³⁴¹

During the month that passed between the funeral ceremony of 2 October, 1931, where Leiris first encountered the « jeune fille » masks, and the afternoon of 1 November, 1931, during which those several masks were brought about to be studied, Leiris had been studying the secret language of the Dogon people under the tutelage of

plainly ethnographic description of body modification practices—tattooing, scarification, and excision—from *L'Art Africain* that was written thirty years onward (Torgovnick 112-115). Majorie Perloff offers a fair, well-reasoned and highly necessary refutation of Torgovnick's analysis in her own essay titled "Tolerance and Taboo" (see *Prehistories of the Future* 339-354).

* Phipps paraphrases this statement in his own description of *L'Afrique fantôme*'s photographs. See *supra*, this chapter, p. XX.

³⁴⁰ This in contrast to Dauge, who, while he prioritizes the symbolic, nevertheless recognizes the documentary nature of the photographs in *L'Afrique fantôme*.

³⁴¹ Leiris downplays this second incident—« après rêve à peine érotique » (our emphasis) (*L'Afrique fantôme* 182 [2 novembre 1931])—and, as Walker notes ("Phantom Africa" 645) he never quite makes the connection back to the mask of the day before.

the “traitor,” Ambibè Babadyi. While it is true that he does not share the details of this research in the pages of *L’Afrique fantôme*, he does nevertheless mention his studies (see *L’Afrique fantôme* 169-173 [9-12 octobre 1931]). Later, in *La langue secrète des Dogons de Sanga*, whose data is comprised of this very research, Leiris explains that these masks—which are distinguished from all the others distinctly by their baobab breasts—specifically represent “nubile” young women (294); and the transcriptions that he provides of the songs and chants that accompany the dances for both the « jeunes fille » and « femme du cordonnier » masks are filled, almost exclusively with invitations for the dancers to move their bodies, in reference to the masks’ projected characters’ sexual desirability (294-299).

In this respect, there is the argument to be made that Leiris, in *L’Afrique fantôme*, with a comment on the sexualized features of the « femme du cordonnier »—a comment that is but two sentences long and which has no follow-up—, is projecting an acquired knowledge, a developed familiarity with these masks and with Dogon traditions. And one must remember, still, that the « femme du cordonnier » is but one of three photographs in *L’Afrique fantôme* that portrays Dogon masks, so neither in this sense does it stand alone as a singular representation. Furthermore, it is difficult to ignore the degree to which the episode of 1 November, 1931, demystifies all of the masks that were paraded out for the Mission. When the masks had been donned for the funeral ceremony at the beginning of October (and when Leiris had seen them for the first time), he writes of their lascivious movements and contortions. The dancers are animated and so the masks come alive, he is seduced by the performances. When they are paraded out for himself and his colleagues a month later, however, he has already spent weeks studying their ritual significance. There

is no anticipation. The masks first arrive inconveniently early, and so they are sent away; when they return, there are disappointingly few ; and when Leiris describes them in his journal, they are but objects. Beyond the sudden and brief burst of vivacity in his description of the « femme du cordonnier », there is truly little enthusiasm. The banality of the scene as a whole removes much sense that he is truly charmed by the « femme du cordonnier » at all. Indeed, Leiris seems more amused to malign the old man Ambibè Babadyi or to find the hunter Akoundyo behind the mask « femme européenne ».

In fact, this latter act might be more significant than Leiris' description of the « femme du cordonnier ». In his 1933 article « Masques dogon » that would appear in the issue *Minotaure* celebrating the Mission Dakar-Djibouti's successful completion, Leiris notes that, should a dancer be recognized behind his mask, he is required to immediately return to the cave from whence the mask was retrieved, and he must destroy the mask on site or face a curse of certain death (*Cahier Dakar-Djibouti* 318). Jolly et al. remark in a footnote to this detail: « L'insistance de Leiris à décrire les 'tabous' et les transgressions témoigne là encore d'un intérêt privilégié pour cette question »³⁴² (*Cahier Dakar-Djibouti* 318, n.2). It is not unreasonable to presume that he may have, himself, been most amused, here, by his reveal of Akoundyo's identity; as it was not the first time during the mission that he had reveled in such transgressions.

Two months before this episode with the masks, one of most scandalous and certainly one of the most famed (Clarck-Taoua 490) events of the the Mission occurred. Widely referred to as « le vol du kono », the event that unfolded over two days in early

³⁴² [Our translation: "Leiris' insistence on describing such 'taboos' and transgressions shows yet again just how much he is interested in the question."]

September 1931, as recounted in Leiris' journal, is a delirious carnival of threats, thefts and forced acquisitions committed by the Mission members wherein they wielded all of the powers afforded them by their privileged position in Colonial French West Africa.³⁴³ The spirit of these events might be best summarized through the following oft-quoted statement that Leiris commits to the page: « [J]e constate avec une stupeur qui, un certain temps après seulement, se transforme en dégoût, qu'on se sent tout de même joliment sûr de soi lorsqu'on est un blanc et qu'on tient un couteau dans sa main... »³⁴⁴(*L'Afrique fantôme* 138 [7 septembre 1931]). The statement is shocking and scandalous and speaks the often unspoken violence of colonial ethnography. Yet, as with all of the most provocative moments in *L'Afrique fantôme*—and we would include the description of the « femme du cordonnier » among them—it remains, nevertheless, entirely self-aware. And while Shelton rightly argues that such self-awareness does not mitigate Leiris' involvement (“Primitive Self” 338), it does establish a reasonable degree of distance between himself and his objects of study.

³⁴³ The following snippets offer a glimpse of the unforgettable and almost unbelievable episode :

« Griaule décrit alors [...] que, puisqu'on se moque décidément de nous, il faut, en représailles, nous livrer le *Kono* en échange de 10 francs, sous peine que la police [...] prenne le chef et les notables du village pour les conduire à San où ils s'expliqueront devant l'administration. Affreux chantage ! » (*L'Afrique fantôme* 135 [6 septembre 1931]).

« Le chef du village est écrasé. Le chef du *Kono* a déclaré que, dans de telles conditions, nous pourrions emporter le fétiche. Mais quelques hommes restés avec nous ont l'air à tel point horrifiés que la vapeur du sacrilège commence à nous monter réellement à la tête [...] » (135-136 [6 septembre 1931]).

« À peine arrivés à l'étape (Dyabougou), nous déballons notre butin: c'est un énorme masque à forme vaguement animal, malheureusement détérioré, mais entièrement recouvert d'une croûte de sang coagulé qui lui confère la majesté que le sang confère à toutes choses. » (136 [6 septembre 1931])

« Mon cœur bat très fort car, depuis le scandale d'hier, je perçois avec plus d'acuité l'énormité de ce que nous commettons. » (136 [7 septembre 1931])

« [J]e constate avec une stupeur qui, un certain temps après seulement, se transforme en dégoût, qu'on se sent tout de même joliment sûr de soi lorsqu'on est un blanc et qu'on tient un couteau dans sa main... » (138 [7 septembre 1931])

« Très peu après le rapt, arrivée à San, déjeuner [...]. Nudités idylliques [...], c'est plus qu'il n'en faut pour me séduire, me faire oublier toute piraterie et ne plus penser qu'au genre Robinson Crusoe et Paul et Virginie. » (138 [7 septembre 1931])

³⁴⁴ [“I realize in a dazed stupor, which only later transforms into disgust, that you feel pretty sure of yourself when you're a white man with a knife in your hand...” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 156)]

One of objects taken during these raids was a thirty-pound animalistic statue made of mud and beeswax and covered in a crust of coagulated blood that Leiris affectionately (and pejoratively) named a « cochon de lait ». A week later, he would learn that

[c]et animal n'est autre qu'un *koma*, le plus fort de tous les fétiches bambara, beaucoup plus fort que le *kono* lui même et peut-être même plus que le *nama*!³⁴⁵ [...] J'admire la petite bête ronde et trapue et je caresse sa bosse, prenant plaisir à en sentir le craquelures. Je crois avoir volé le feu...³⁴⁶
(*L'Afrique fantôme* 143 [14 septembre 1931])

While interested in the figure's religious significance, Leiris is far more amused by the superstitious reactions of the men who inform him of its power, and he relishes in his own facetious profanation of the object. Furthermore, in the photograph of the object that appears in *L'Afrique fantôme*, it is captioned neither as a *kono* nor a *koma*, but rather as: « Le “cochon de lait” de Dyabougou, photographié dans notre entrepôt de Mopti » (*L'Afrique fantôme* 137 [7 septembre 1931]),³⁴⁷ connecting the object not to its cultural significance but rather, again to a event of personal significance to Leiris himself, the story of its theft (Rushton 170).³⁴⁸

What we have endeavoured to illustrate throughout this chapter is that, in the study of the photographs that illustrate *L'Afrique fantôme*, engagement with the text is crucial, not only as a method through which to confirm or contest critical interpretation of the

³⁴⁵ Our footnote: The day following this, Leiris will be disappointed to learn that this is, in fact, untrue. See *L'Afrique fantôme* 143 [15 septembre 1931]

³⁴⁶ “[t]he strange animal is actually a *koma*, he tells me, the strongest of all the Babara fetishes, much stronger than the *kono* itself and perhaps even stronger than the *nama*! [...] I admire the squat, round little animal and stroke its hump, enjoying the feel of its cracks. I feel as if I have stolen fire...” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 161)]

³⁴⁷ The same image, when published in *Minotaure*, however, has a far more ethnographically descriptive caption : « Animal recouvert de sang coagulé, provenant d'un sanctuaire de “kono” [...] » (*L'Afrique fantôme* 1072, 7 septembre n.1)

³⁴⁸ Today, this object is on display at the Musée du quai Branly in Paris, and in 2015 it was featured as part of the exhibition *Leiris & Co.* at the Centre Pompidou in Metz, France. After its theft by Leiris in 1931, the object would go on to become a celebrated work of African Art. We write about its transformation in our 2012 article « L'étrange cas du cochon du lait » (see also Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique* 196 n.66; Jamin, « La règle de la boîte de conserve »).

photographs' role, but, furthermore, it is required if one is to develop a more complete understanding of that role, whatever it may be. Engaging with the photographs is not always a clear or simple task. *L'Afrique fantôme* is an unwieldy text, one that has been called "a monster" (Clifford, *Predicament of Culture* 165), and with good reason. Abrupt changes of tone and content, and bursts of emotion are a constant feature of the book. Whether they be from one entry to another or even from one paragraph to the next, they not only have the effect of fragmenting what limited narrative there might be,³⁴⁹ they also render difficult the reader's task and desire of determining what might, indeed, be of more lasting value or import to Leiris.

Walker's analysis of the « femme du cordonnier » photograph is a clear example of this: in his analysis of the image, he does not get any further than a single paragraph beyond the the mask's description before he is rightfully hung up with questions that cannot quite be resolved. Also evident of the difficulty of this task is the tendency shown across much of the scholarship to avoid specific engagement with the text of *L'Afrique fantôme*, giving over, instead, to the book's—and its author's—long and divided reputation. But the images prove resistant there, too.

The photographs are not purely subjective. They document La Mission Dakar-Djibouti, an ethnographic expedition tasked with the collection of cultural material object and the documentation of customs, ceremonies and traditions. No *new* meaning has been imposed or imagined upon them. And it is this fact that complicates any reading of these photographs as being wholly personal. During the La Mission Dakar-Djibouti, Leiris

³⁴⁹ Clifford, for example, charges that "*L'Afrique fantôme*, stubbornly naïve, holds off acceptable forms of narrative, while hinting at their necessity" (*Predicament of Culture* 172). The only true through-line of the text, really, is the forward progress made by the Mission in relation to its itinerary.

studied circumcision and other rites of passage; as such *L'Afrique fantôme* features a photograph of a group of boys in their ceremonial dress, no different than the caps and gowns of many a commencement ceremony. He studies and collects examples of penile sheaths worn in parts of Dahomey, and he studies the masks worn and dances performed by the Dogon people—these were professional and academic pursuits. To read into the photographs of these objects and these events the suggestion that their inherent sexual nature stems only from Leiris' primitivist psychological obsessions is to be willfully blind of all circumstance and all context of *L'Afrique fantôme*.

Yet, neither are the photographs purely documentary. The attempt to treat these photographs only as ethnographic documents issuing from La Mission Dakar-Djibouti must contend with photographic captions that go beyond, and even eschew, neutral scientific description. These captions, which hew more closely to the contents of Leiris' journal, draw the photographs into that subjective field. The photograph captioned « le “cochon de lait” photographié dans notre entrepôt à Mopti »³⁵⁰ in *L'Afrique fantôme*, for example, is not the same « Animal recouvert de sang coagulé provenant d'un sanctuaire de “kono” »³⁵¹ that would appear in the pages of the magazine *Minotaure*. The photograph in Leiris' journal does not even attempt neutrality; it not simply an example of a religious idol, it is the image of Leiris' pilfered trophy (Rushton 166). It is for this same reason that one cannot deny the « Jeunes gens filant le coton en courtisant les femmes » the courtship that is rightfully theirs. The caption has imbued the photograph with the journal's subjectivity, and the journal had never taken that agency away.

³⁵⁰ [“The ‘suckling pig’ from Dyabougou’ photographed in our warehouse in Mopti” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 155)]

³⁵¹ [Our translation: “Animal covered in coagulated blood, from a ‘kono’ shrine”]

Actions such as these, both textual and contextual, show that, more than anything, Leiris' desire to merge (Demian 124, Köpping 20) with the cultures he was studying—« de tremper dans leur drame, de toucher leurs façons d'être, de baigner dans la chair vive »³⁵² (Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* 481 [27 août 1932])—was fleeting and impressionable, and oftentimes little more than words. In these respects, we agree with Shelton, who argues that “*L'Afrique fantôme* records much more than the angst of a morose man engulfed by his obsessions. It can be read [as] an extended and exuberant celebration of European colonial power” (“Primitive Self” 338). What one finds is a quite sober document, and much of what *L'Afrique fantôme* recounts is the *experience* of discovery and of contact.

These previous two chapters examined a book with a storied past that has evolved over time. It began as a rather scandalous exposé of the colonial enterprise that raised eyebrows and damaged friendships. It was blacklisted during wartime (possibly as a personal vendetta), but it would reimmerge twice over the next forty years, each time ever more reflective of its own history. For its first half-century, though, the book remained a rather minor work within its author's stable: an early work, more shapeless and unclear than those that would follow it, those it would inspire, those from which the author would make his name. Then, after almost fifty years, it rose out of obscurity to be celebrated and debated (for its very obscurity), and it is studied still today. It is a difficult book in many ways, as we believe the past two chapters have shown. It is a challenge to read—long and quite burdensome, but with enough intrigue and moments of oddity or curiosity to inspire

³⁵² [“I need to submerge myself in their drama, to touch their ways of being, to bathe in living flesh” (Edwards, *Phantom Africa* 490)]

some dedication from its readership. Those who persist in that challenge, however, are then faced with the impossibility of trying to define just what exactly the book is, or what it is that the book wants to be. The next chapter sets that task aside to now embark on another. Our next object of study could be seen as the mirror opposite of the previous. Small, inviting, and offering immediate reward to readers, it arrives late in the career of a writer whose seasoned mastery of the craft is evident at the turn of every page.

Chapter 4: J.-M.G. Le Clézio's *L'Africain* in Words and Pictures

L'Africain is a short memoir by French novelist J.-M.G. Le Clézio³⁵³ that tells the story of a journey taken by the author, while still a young boy of eight, to live in Nigeria in the years following World War II. Born in Nice on April 13, 1940, mere weeks before the German invasion of France, Le Clézio would spend his early childhood living through wartime in that country's occupied South.³⁵⁴

La guerre, le confinement dans l'appartement de Nice (où nous vivions à cinq dans deux pièces mansardées [...]), les rations, ou bien la fuite dans la montagne où ma mère devait se cacher, de peur d'être raflée par la Gestapo³⁵⁵ (Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 14-15).

The journey that would then take him away from France in 1948, along with his mother and his brother, would be significant in a number of ways. It would present the young Le Clézio with a newfound freedom—to roam, to explore, to play—that, until then, he had never truly experienced: « Nous courrions à toute vitesse, pieds nus, loin de la maison, à travers les hautes herbes qui nous aveuglaient, sautant par-dessus les rochers, sur la terre sèche et craquelée par la chaleur [...] »³⁵⁶ (28). It would also reunite the young boy with the father whom he had never met.

³⁵³ The initials J.-M. G. stand for 'Jean-Marie Gustave'

³⁵⁴ Germany invaded France on May 13, 1940. Nice fell under the governance of the Vichy Regime beginning on July 10, 1940, though Italy held economic control over the region from July 22, 1940, and the latter occupied Nice from November 11, 1942 until the Armistice of Cassibile was signed between Italy and Allied Forces on September 3, 1943. From this point, Germany occupied the city until Nice was liberated by Allied troops on August 28, 1944 (see Sica xi-xv; Girard 174-176).

³⁵⁵ ["The war, the confinement in the apartment in Nice (where in two attic rooms five of us lived [...]), the rationing, or the flight into the mountains where my mother had to hide for fear of being rounded up by the Gestapo" (Dickson, *The African* 9)]

³⁵⁶ ["We went running as fast as we could, barefoot, far from the house, through the tall grasses that blinded us, jumping over rocks, on the dry sun-crackled earth [...]" (Dickson, *The African* 23)]

The same war that had kept the young Le Clézio confined to a two-room attic apartment and that had held his mother in fear of capture³⁵⁸ (14-15), had also kept Le Clézio's father separated from the family unit for the war's duration—« Plus aucune nouvelle ne circule. Au Nigeria, mon père ne sait que ce que transmet la BBC »³⁵⁹ (80). And so, after war's end, the journey to Nigeria would enable a reunion between this man, his wife and their two sons after more than eight years; it was to be a personal triumph for the family. It wasn't. There is a moment approaching the book's midpoint at which Le Clézio contrasts 'what might have been' had his father chosen otherwise with the decisions and the events that did, in fact, guide the course of both their lives:

J'ai essayé d'imaginer ce qu'aurait pu être sa vie (et donc la mienne) [...] [s'il] s'était installé comme médecin de campagne dans la banlieue londonienne [...], ce que cela aurait changé en l'homme qu'il était, qui aurait mené une vie plus conforme, moins solitaire. De soigner des enrhumés et des constipés, plutôt que des lépreux, des impaludés ou des victimes d'encéphalite léthargique. D'apprendre à échanger, non sur le mode exceptionnel, par gestes, par interprète, ou dans cette langue élémentaire qui était le *pidgin English* [...], mais dans la vie de tous les jours, avec ces gens pleins d'une banalité qui vous rend proche, qui vous intègre à une ville, à un quartier, à une communauté.

Il avait choisi autre chose. Par orgueil sans doute, pour fuir la médiocrité de la société anglaise, par goût de l'aventure aussi. Et cette autre chose n'était pas gratuite. Cela vous plongeait dans une autre monde, vous emportait vers une autre vie. Cela vous exilait au moment de la guerre, vous faisait perdre votre femme et vos enfants, vous rendait, d'une certaine façon, inéluctablement étranger.³⁶⁰ (43)

³⁵⁷ Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 16. ["I recall the violence of it all" (Dickson, *The African* 11)]

³⁵⁸ This fear, Le Clézio notes later in the book, was largely due to her husband's position as a doctor in the British military (47)

³⁵⁹ ["No news could circulate. In Nigeria, my father knew only what was transmitted by the BBC." (Dickson, *The African* 79)]

³⁶⁰ ["I tried to imagine what his life (and therefore mine) might have been if [...] he'd become a country doctor on the outskirts of London, [...] what it would have changed about the man himself, to have lived a more conventional, less solitary life. To have treated colds and constipation, rather than leprosy and malaria or lethargic encephalitis. To have learned to communicate, not in that singular fashion, with gestures, with interpreters, or in that rudimentary language

War,³⁶¹ Le Clézio makes clear throughout *L'Africain*, has been a spectre everlasting on his life. And while the book is neither *directly* about the war or its traumas, both of these are persistent undercurrents that surface repeatedly.³⁶²

Indeed, war has long been a theme explored by the author in his fiction. Le Clézio's first novel, *Le Procès-verbal* (1963), already draws out the traumas and chaos of human conflict through the alienation and eventual incarceration of its mentally unstable protagonist Adam Pollo, possibly an army deserter, who, at one moment the book, upon encountering a uniformed soldier at a bar becomes overwhelmed by obsessive fantasies and thoughts about war—

Ça n'existe pas, la guerre. Il y a des gens qui meurent tous les jours, et puis quoi ? La guerre, c'est tout ou rien. La guerre, elle est totale et permanente. Moi, Adam, j'y suis encore, finalement. Je ne veux pas en sortir. »³⁶³ (Le Clézio, *Le procès-verbal* 51; see also 42-43)

And in *Le Chercheur D'or* (1985), the Mauritian protagonist enlists to fight for England in World War I. But Le Clézio's relationship with war—in much of his writing—is less about the dramatization of war than it is about the rejection of a world that seems to clamour for it. In *L'Africain*, the themes of war and of its rejection come out from behind the protective curtain of Le Clézio's fiction to both reveal and perhaps finally tend to

as pidgin English [...], but in everyday life, with completely ordinary people who make you one of them, who make you part of a city, of a neighbourhood, of a community. He had chosen something else altogether. Out of pride probably, to flee the mediocrity of British society, out of a desire for adventure too. And there was a price to pay for that something else. It plunged you into a different world, swept you away to another life. It condemned you to exile when war broke out, cause you to lose your wife and children, and in a certain way, inevitably made a stranger out of you. (Dickson, *The African* 36-37)]

³⁶¹ It is not only World War II that leaves a mark on Le Clézio's family, but also the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970)—« [Les] Ibos et Yoroubas s'exterminent, sous le regard indifférent du monde occidental » (Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 98)—, which had a significant personal, professional, and political effect on Le Clézio's father (cf. 85; 93-100), and which can be seen to be foreshadowed, if subtly, already from the book's opening pages: « où l'humanité, pour l'enfant que j'étais, se composait uniquement d'Ibos et de Yoroubas. » (9)

³⁶² See, for example: 16, 29-30, 46-47, 77, 104.

³⁶³ ["There's no such thing as war. People die every day, and so what? War is all or nothing. War is total and permanent. I, Adam, I'm still in it, come to that. I don't want to get out of it." (Woodward, *The Interrogation* 42)]

some of the real personal wounds that war had inflicted: « Était-ce la guerre, cet interminable silence, qui avait fait de mon père cet homme pessimiste et ombrageux, autoritaire, que nous avons appris à craindre plutôt qu'à aimer ? »³⁶⁴ (41).

Mon père est arrivé en Afrique en 1928 ³⁶⁵

L'Africain tells also of another journey, a journey taken by that father in *his own life*, a journey that would keep him forever at a distance. That father's journey, as Le Clézio tells it, had been one of exile and displacement, of duty and discipline, of liberty and compassion, and, ultimately, one of disillusionment:

Il avait choisi autre chose. Par orgueil sans doute, pour fuir la médiocrité de la société anglaise, par goût de l'aventure aussi. Et cette autre chose n'était pas gratuite. Cela vous plongeait dans une autre monde, vous emportait vers une autre vie. Cela vous exilait au moment de la guerre, vous faisait perdre votre femme et vos enfants, vous rendait, d'une certaine façon, inéluctablement étranger.³⁶⁶ (43)

His is the story of a young Mauritian-exiled, British-trained medical doctor who, after completing his medical studies, left England for Guyana before spending the largest part of his career, and a large part of his life, in rural Colonial West Africa until being forced into retirement and living out his last years in France, as a stranger in a strange land.

³⁶⁴ ["Was it the war—that interminable silence—that had made my father into that pessimistic and cranky authoritative man whom we learned to fear rather than love?" (Dickson, *The African* 35)]

³⁶⁵ Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 39. ["My father came to Africa in 1928" (Dickson, *The African* 33)]

³⁶⁶ ["He had chosen something else altogether. Out of pride probably, to flee the mediocrity of British society, out of a desire for adventure too. And there was a price to pay for that something else. It plunged you into a different world, swept you away to another life. It condemned you to exile when war broke out, cause you to lose your wife and children, and in a certain way, inevitably made a stranger out of you. (Dickson, *The African* 37)]

*C'est le même voyage que j'ai fait, vingt ans plus tard*³⁶⁷

At its core, *L'Africain* tells of both of these journeys: a life's path blazed by a man, which is later explored and charted by his son. And in charting the path that his father, before him, had blazed, Le Clézio repeatedly writes in *L'Africain* of his father's life choices. He does so, in part, with admiration for « [c]e pays d'Afrique où il avait connu le bonheur de partager l'aventure de sa vie avec une femme »³⁶⁸ (92), but also with much reflection upon the consequences³⁶⁹ of those choices: « J'ai essayé d'imaginer ce qu'aurait pu être sa vie (et donc la mienne) [...] [s'il] s'était installé comme médecin de campagne dans la banlieue londonienne »³⁷⁰ (43). Ultimately, though, the book is an intimate exploration a son's conflicted but loving quest for understanding a father who could not love him back. Filtered through memory and through loss and through the passage of time, the journey is at times beautiful, at times painful. It takes the reader through a boy's experiences of wonderment and confusion, of fear and joy and discovery, and through a man's acceptance of himself and his forebears. In these ways, *L'Africain* addresses some consummate Le Clézian themes of inheritance, of adventure, of the quest, of utopian ideals and of their more dystopian realities.³⁷¹ But these tales are told in way that hold to

³⁶⁷ Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 54. ["It is the same journey I took twenty years later" (Dickson, *The African* 48)]

³⁶⁸ ["[t]hat African land in which he had known the happiness of sharing his adventurous life with a woman" (Dickson, *The African* 92)]

³⁶⁹ In a conversation with Keith Moser in 2011, Le Clézio addresses both inheritance and consequence when he speaks of "trying not to be too aggressive because everything bounces back to you and your descendants will suffer from this aggression." (Moser, *Le Clézio: A Concerned Citizen*... 191)

³⁷⁰ ["I tried to imagine what his life (and therefore mine) might have been if [...] he'd become a country doctor on the outskirts of London" (Dickson, *The African* 36)]

³⁷¹ On these Leclézian themes, see also Le Clézio, "Freedom to Speak"; Chahine, *Le Chercheur d'or de J.-M. G. Le Clézio* 13; Cortanze, « Le Clézio: errances et mythologies » 18; Dutton, « Le Clézio l'Îlien »; Gallimard, "Rencontre avec J.M.G. Le Clézio"; Gillet, "The Novels of Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio" 382-385; Martin, *The Fiction of J.M.G. Le Clézio*; Moser, *Le Clézio: A Concerned Citizen*... 157. Thibault, *Métaphore exotique* 207-221.

question the writer's memory of events and experiences, the tenacity of familial and filial bonds, and the conceptions of one's origins and one's self.

*Ceux que je vois sur quelques photos de l'époque*³⁷²

L'Africain is illustrated, and the work is as much about its visual elements as it is about its themes or the story of the text. The book opens upon a frontispiece image of a hand-drawn map, creased and wrinkled from use, and sprinkled throughout the text are fifteen³⁷³ photographic images: 1. a pair of children playing at a river's edge, peering curiously or suspiciously at the camera lens (11); 2. inscriptions (shapes, forms and *tamasheq* writing) etched into the stone floor of a barren desert landscape (14); 3. warriors dancing in a village square, dressed in their expressive costumes and raffia headdress (18); 4. a pair of palm trees standing tall above a valley at sunset (21); 5. a thatch-roofed house standing in the midday sun, with a man barely visible at the photo's right edge (36); 6. Europeans dressed in pith helmets and sun hats disembarking from a ship at port (44); 7. rugged cliffs that rise above a sandy shoreline (48); 8. a colonial encampment house at a river's edge and surrounded by jungle forest (62-63); 9. a village chieftain wearing his regalia (68); 10. a herd of long-horned cattle grazing in mist-covered hills (72); 11. a European who stands in the middle distance on a rope bridge spanning a river, dressed in a pith helmet and posing for the camera (75); 12. an elderly man, looking beyond the camera lens or possibly blind (84); 13. a young boy, pressed in between two women as they dance in celebration, peering curiously or suspiciously at the

³⁷² Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 24. ["[Those that I see] in the rare photographs of that time" (Dickson, *The African* 19)].

³⁷³ In the 2013 English-language translation, *The African*, translated by C. Dickson, the final photograph is curiously absent.

camera lens (93); 14. a woman smiling, in profile, with a young child nestled in a sling at her back, peering curiously or suspiciously at the camera lens (101); and finally, 15. a European, dressed in a pith helmet, far in the distance and with back to the camera, wading through a forested river on horseback (105).³⁷⁴

The visual aesthetic that the map and the images create could easily be taken to mimic a piece of colonial travel literature: the photographs are bathed in gentle sepia-tinted nostalgia and they seem banally exotic, offering little more than stock images of a colonial myth of Africa. But these visual elements play a fundamental role in *L'Africain*, as they serve as crucial building blocks in Le Clézio's construction of his familial past. The map and the photographs all belonged to Le Clézio's father—the map drawn in his own hand, the photos taken with his Leica Bellows camera. Their inclusion in the book provides *L'Africain* with «une dimension émouvante, en tant qu'elle constitue l'inscription concrète du père dans le livre»³⁷⁵ (Meynard «Une quête des origines» 61).³⁷⁶

Le Clézio has said in interview that while writing *L'Africain*, he drew from his father's photographs, «qui [lui] avaient permis d'accéder à la mémoire et de la matérialiser»³⁷⁷ (Cortanze, «Le Clézio mon père» 70). In this way, then, the map and photographs that illustrate *L'Africain*—along with others that are mentioned or described but otherwise kept from view—act as memory tools that allow Le Clézio fully realize his

³⁷⁴ A similar accounting of the photographs was made by Meynard («Une quête des origines» 46-47).

³⁷⁵ [Our translation: “a emotional dimension, inasmuch as it constitutes the father's very inscription into the book.”]

³⁷⁶ Le Clézio, himself, has made a similar statement about the presence of the book's photographs: «Je n'imagine pas ce livre sans les photos. Je n'aurais pas été porté de la même manière, j'aurais eu le sentiment de quelque chose d'abstrait. Les photos sont aussi un peu la participation du sujet au livre qui parle de lui. C'est presque un livre écrit à deux. Un dialogue qui se noue maintenant.» (Cortanze, «Le Clézio mon père» 70)

³⁷⁷ [Our translation: “which allowed [him] to access and to embody memory”]

and his father's personal pasts and act as surrogates when his own memories fail. But their operation is complex and at times enigmatic, interwoven with the text in ways that are challenging and disruptive. Frequently, there is at play what we might best describe as an act of orchestrated anonymity: the photographs are in the text without captions, and while they do relate to the text with general and reliable consistency, it is often with puzzling inexactitude and even moments of purposeful misdirection.

*Une véritable enquête sur les origines*³⁷⁸

In the years since *L'Africain*'s release, scholarly enquiry into the role that photography plays in the book has, thus far, remained modest, and the critical work that exists has focused largely, and unsurprisingly, on the filial relationship that sits at the core of the book. In the 2005 article that begins the critical text-image enquiry surrounding the book, « Le Clézio en noir et blanc: la photographie dans *L'Africain* », Mary J. Vogl considers the role of photography in *L'Africain* primarily in terms of its being inspiration for the book's writing (« Le Clézio en noir et blanc » 81). She highlights both Le Clézio's historical engagement with photographs in his literary work, as well as his use of photography as a memory tool:

L'image photographique fait partie des textes de Le Clézio de façon concrète: les photos représentent près d'un tiers de son livre *Haï* sur l'art indien, et *La Guerre* comprend quatorze pages de photos [...]. Plusieurs textes non-illustrés de Le Clézio évoquent, verbalement, les images photographiques [...].³⁷⁹ (80)

³⁷⁸ Meynard, « *L'Africain* de Le Clézio. Une quête des origines entre images et mots » 44. [Our translation: "a veritable quest for one's origins"]

³⁷⁹ [Our translation: "The photographic image is a concrete element of Le Clézio's work: photos make up almost a third of his book *Haï*, on indigenous art, and *La Guerre* contains fourteen pages of photographs [...]. A number of Le Clézio's non-illustrated texts verbal evoke photographic images [...]."]

L'œuvre entière de Le Clézio s'appuie sur le travail de la mémoire. Les faits historiques sont évoqués, et dans *L'Africain*, les photos servent de preuve: ceci a existé, l'Afrique fut ainsi au temps du bonheur de mon père. Mais l'œuvre littéraire exige à mesure égale un travail d'imagination. [...] Les photographies prises par son père servent la même fonction [...] : elles ne remplacent pas le travail de la mémoire ni l'effort de l'imagination; au contraire, elles les inspirent.³⁸⁰ (84)

Importantly, Vogl identifies the photographs' generative contribution to Le Clézio's writing—memory, after all, is the *raison d'être* of *L'Africain*: « *En souvenir de cela, j'ai écrit ce petit livre* »³⁸¹ (our emphasis)(Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 7)—, and similar observations about the photographs' role in memory work would appear in subsequent articles by Isabelle Roussel-Gillet and by Béatrice Damamme-Gilbert:

[L]a photographie entre en résonance avec un vécu et joue une fonction d'embrasseur de l'écrit [...].³⁸² (Roussel-Gillet, « Les paradoxes... » 290)

L'enjeu [mémoire] est multiple [dans *L'Africain*] : reconstruire le regard de son père et donc son histoire, mais comprendre aussi la source profonde de ses émotions à lui [...], mémoire que sa famille lui a léguée, si vitale pour lui. Plus qu'une preuve de « réalité », c'est l'empreinte du regard lisible dans la photographie qui le fascine et guide son imagination. Il ne s'agit pas d'inventer mais bien de reconstruire patiemment à travers les traces qu'a laissées le réel. [...] Photographies et objets sont les marques du sens d'une vie que l'écrivain construit, mais ce sont aussi des formes de dialogue avec le père, dialogue à peine amorcé dans la réalité, peu de temps avant sa mort [...].³⁸³ (Damamme-Gilbert 29)

³⁸⁰ [Our translation: "Le Clézio's entire œuvre draws on memory work. Historical facts are evoked, and in *L'Africain*, the photos serve as evidence: this existed, Africa had been a time of happiness for my father. But a literary work equally demands imagination. [...] The father's photographs serve the same function [...]: they do not replace the work of memory or the effort of imagination; on the contrary, they inspire it."]

³⁸¹ ["I wrote this little book *in memory of that experience*." (our emphasis)(Dickson, *The African* 1)]

³⁸² [Our translation: "[P]hotography resonates with a lived experience and serves as a bridge to the written"]

³⁸³ [Our translation: "The issue [of memory] is multiple [in *L'Africain*]: reconstructing his father's perspective and, therefore, his story, but understanding, as well, the profound source of his own emotions [...], memories that his family had passed down, that are so vital to him. More than evidence of "reality" it is the mark of a certain perspective that is perceptible in photography that fascinates him and guides his imagination. It is not a question of invention, but rather of patient reconstruction from traces left by the real [...]. Photographs and objects are signs of meaning of a life that the writer creates, but they are also a form of dialogue with the father, a dialogue barely begun in life, only shortly before his death [...]]"]

But we would argue that Vogl limits photography to a passive role and that, as such, her article seems to miss on an opportunity to give full consideration to those photographs that appear in the book. Vogl argues that

*la photographie ne peut qu'en représenter la surface. Ce sont les commentaires du fils sur les images prises par son père qui font le portrait; les photos en elles-mêmes ne font que suggérer certains aspects de sa vie.*³⁸⁴
(our emphasis)(82-83);

and she concludes the essay by remarking that the photographs, in her words, offer only a superficial view onto the past; she also posits that « la vraie compréhension de ce père [vient surtout] du travail de la mémoire et de la reconstitution que les photos rendent possible »³⁸⁵ (85). Rather than connect the visual and textual elements of the work, Vogl seems to be working to maintain a distance between them.

Others, though, have built upon Vogl's foundation. Béatrice Vernier-Larochette and Roussel-Gillet each deepen and expand upon photography's role in the memory work of *L'Africain*. Like Vogl, they both explore how Le Clézio uses photography to be able to write about his father:

La photographie génère une écriture et des images personnelles, mémorielles. [...] À défaut de rencontrer le père, il s'agit de se rencontrer dans le regard porté sur, vers... et de pouvoir raconter.³⁸⁶ (Roussel-Gillet, « Les paradoxes... » 287)

Ce témoignage photographique sur lequel Le Clézio se penche [...] est utilisé ici de deux façons: d'abord dans une démarche scripturale personnelle où l'examen de l'image paternelle est nécessaire pour compléter ses propres

³⁸⁴ [Our translation: "the photograph can represent but the surface. It is the comments made by the son toward the images taken by the father that make the portrait; the photographs themselves do little beyond suggesting certain aspects of his life." (our emphasis)]

³⁸⁵ [Our translation: "true understanding of the father [comes overall] from memory work and the re-enactment that the photos make possible"]

³⁸⁶ [Our translation: "Photography generates a writing and images that are very personal and related to memory. [...] Unable to be with his father in person, he can nevertheless be with him through one's perceptions... and to be able to tell that story."]

souvenirs d'enfant souvent imprécis, ensuite dans la redécouverte de l'homme intime. Cette entreprise, partagée avec le public à l'écrit, concourt à rétablir un lien de filiation. En effet, si Le Clézio a exploré sa mémoire d'enfant et celle de son père par le truchement des clichés pris par cet homme, il comprend à la fin du récit que cette démarche lui a permis d'accéder à sa propre mémoire et de prendre conscience de ce qui a marqué son existence [...] ³⁸⁷ (Vernier-Larochette 277);

Both also go beyond this, to more directly engage with the images that appear in the book. Each argues how the photographs that are displayed in *L'Africain* represent a shared experience, between father and son, of the carnal and physical power of Africa (Vernier-Larochette 276; Roussel-Gillet, « la liaison au défunt » 159, « Les paradoxes... » 296). Vernier-Larochette writes of how the photographs represent the father's personal path, a life « marqué par des lieux, des rencontres humaines qu'il a désiré fixer, afin de laisser implicitement une trace pour autrui » ³⁸⁸ (277), and how Le Clézio, the son, uses those photographs in the book as markers of his own experience: « les photos qui correspondent à la période, où jeune, [le père] puise son enthousiasme dans cette terre africaine qui imprégnera ensuite son fils » ³⁸⁹ (277). Similarly, Roussel-Gillet writes of Le Clézio's boyhood experience in Africa as a rebirth—she writes that « *L'Africain* concrétise le rêve de la terre originelle, [...] le besoin de renaître latent dans l'œuvre [...] » ³⁹⁰ (« Les paradoxes... » 290) and « Le Clézio rêve un pays natal » ³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ [Our translation: “This photographic account that Le Clézio contemplates [...] is used here in two ways: first, as a personal approach to writing when this examination of the paternal image is necessary to fill out his own incomplete childhood memories, and then in the rediscovery of the man's inner life. This undertaking, shared with the public on the written page, works to reestablish a filial connection. Indeed, if Le Clézio explored his own childhood memory, as well as his father's memory, by way of the snapshots taken by his father, he understands, at the end of the story, that this approach allowed him to access his own memory and to be made aware of that which has marked his being.”]

³⁸⁸ [Our translation: “marked by places, human encounters that he wanted to preserve, as to implicitly leave a trace for others”]

³⁸⁹ [Our translation: “the photographs from the period, where young, [the father] draws his passion from this African land, which will later engulf his son”]

³⁹⁰ [Our translation: “*L'Africain* solidifies the dream of origins [...] the book's latent desire for rebirth”]

³⁹¹ [Our translation: “Le Clézio dreams of a homeland”]

(original emphasis) (« la liaison au défunt » 166)—that, they argue, can be seen as being reflected in the photographs.

Yet, each of these articles either miss or attempt to explain away the fact that the photographs that appear in *L'Africain* can be so very jarring. Despite the fact that within *L'Africain*, all of the rather natural engagements with a collection of family photographs: the memory work, the memorializing, the consoling and mourning;³⁹² the images, in most every instance, are actively challenging the written word.

Conversely, Cécile Meynard, too, looks at the photographs' memory function—« La fonction des images est dans ce cas de se trouver à la source de la mémoire » (« Une quête des origines » 52)—, but she does venture further to explore their almost impenetrable allure (48), calling out the very perceptible oddness of their presence :

Le lecteur ne peut tout d'abord qu'être frappé par l'étrangeté de la présence de certaines images, qui ne sont nulle part mentionnées dans le texte, ne serait-ce que de façon indirecte ou allusive, et qui peuvent par conséquent se caractériser par une forme d'autonomie, voire de gratuité.³⁹³ (51)

[S]i ambiguës que certaines puissent parfois sembler, les illustrations ont une dimension de spatialisation du texte tout à fait originale, en ce sens qu'elles ne sont pas équitablement réparties dans l'ouvrage et entretiennent [...] un rapport assez lâche avec les mots, [...] semblant presque intentionnellement aléatoire, comme si les images obéissaient le plus souvent à leur propre logique et leur propre rythme, indépendamment de l'écriture.³⁹⁴ (50).

³⁹² Bourdieu writes: "[T]here is nothing more decent, reassuring and edifying than a family album; all the unique experiences that give the individual memory the particularity of a secret are banished from it, and the common past, or, perhaps, the highest common denominator of the past, has all the clarity of a faithfully visited gravestone." (*Photography. A Middle-Brow Art* 31)

³⁹³ [Our translation: "The reader cannot help but be immediately struck by the strangeness of the presence of some of the images, that are mentioned nowhere in the text, but indirectly or elusively, and which, therefore, can be characterized by a certain autonomy, even gratuitousness"]

³⁹⁴ [Our translation: "[S]o can certain of them sometimes seem, the illustrations have this completely original characteristic of spatialising the text, in the sense that they are not evenly distributed throughout the work and they maintain only a loose relationship with the words, [...] seeming almost intentionally random or aleatory, as if the images mostly obey their own logic, their own rhythm, independent of the writing."]

Meynard looks at this play between image and text as a key feature of *L'Africain*, writing that in every case, there is disruption—a contradiction that is set into place, « et cette ambiguïté non résolue soulève la question de la fidélité et de la trahison par rapport à l'image et/ou à l'intention originelle »³⁹⁵ (53). She argues that each photograph is its own articulation in the operation of the larger mechanism of the book as a whole (50). Meynard invests heavily in the enigmatic power of the photographs, and in doing so, she reveals much about the book. But a closer reading of *L'Africain* reveals substantially more.

Traits et portraits

L'Africain is the book that it is precisely because of the collection in which it was published. It was released in 2004 by Mercure de France in what was then a brand new collection titled *Traits et portraits*. Le Clézio's book was commissioned³⁹⁶ by the collection's editor, the writer and media critic Colette Fellous, who had conceived and established *Traits et portraits* as a series of books with a focus on literary self-portraits. The collection's titles, now numbering in the dozens, come from a cross-section of writers and artists and thinkers as diverse as J.-B. Pontalis, Jan Voss, Christophe Honoré and Chantal Akerman. Le Clézio's *L'Africain* was among the very first to be published in

³⁹⁵ [Our translation: "and this unresolved ambiguity raises questions of fidelity and betrayal with regard to the image and/or the original intention"]

³⁹⁶ A detail that is perhaps more a curiosity than anything else, but we feel it worth mention: the production *L'Africain* was a rather swift undertaking: it was written between December 2003 and January 2004 (Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 104), and was released on March 11, 2004, no more than 10 weeks after the ink was left to dry on the manuscript.

the series; it was published near simultaneously³⁹⁷ with Jean-Christophe Bailly's *Tuiles détachées* in March of 2004.

The promotional copy for *Traits et portraits* quite concisely highlights the collection's most defining feature, which is that « [l]es textes sont ponctués de dessins, d'images, de tableaux ou de photos qui habitent les livres comme une autre voix en écho, formant presque un récit souterrain »³⁹⁸, (Mercure de France, online). In a 2008 interview that sheds much light on the collection and its editor, Fellous credits inspiration for the collection as coming from the late-1960s Skira³⁹⁹ collection *Les sentiers de la création* (Ferrato-Combe and Fellous 58), which, between 1969 and 1975, had published new works focused on art and the creative process,⁴⁰⁰ and those from a cross-section of writers and artists and thinkers as diverse as Aragon, André Michaux, Jean Dubuffet and Claude Lévi-Strauss. *Les sentiers de la création*, too, was centred around the text-image relationship, and the collection also included Roland Barthes' *L'empire des signes* (1970), as well as Le Clézio's own *Haï* (1971).

³⁹⁷ The two books were released a week apart, with *Les tuiles détachées* arriving on shelves on Thursday, March 4, 2004 and *L'Africain* on the following Thursday, March 11, 2004 (Mercure de France, online).

³⁹⁸ [Our translation: "The texts are punctuated by drawings, images, artworks or photos that inhabit the books like another voice, in echo, creating an almost secret narrative."]

³⁹⁹ Coincidentally with regard to the subsequent chapters in this study, the Swiss publishing house's founder, Albert Skira, in 1933, had launched the arts & culture magazine *Minotaure* which, in its inaugural issue, published excerpts from Michel Leiris' then-forthcoming *L'Afrique fantôme*; *Minotaure*'s second issue, published concurrently with the first, served as the catalog—for which Leiris served (anonymously) as editor—for the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro's exhibition celebrating the successful conclusion of La Mission Dakar-Djibouti in 1933. See *infra*, chapters 3 and 4.

⁴⁰⁰ That collection's *préface* reads: « Pourquoi les sentiers de la création ? De l'émotion à la création, le poète, le peintre, l'écrivain, le musicien, le savant, l'architecte ont parcouru de nombreux chemins où ils ont cherché avec inquiétude ce qui pourrait leur donner une raison de vivre. L'œuvre achevée, il ne reste plus aux créateurs que le souvenir lointain de l'inattendu qui les guettait. —Albert Skira » (see Le Clézio, *Haï* XX) [Our translation: "Why *Les sentiers de la création* ? From emotion to creation, the poet, the painter, the writer, the musician, the thinker, the architect, have followed numerous paths down which they have searched with inquietude that which could give them a reason to live. The work completed, all that remains for the creators, the distant memory of the unexpected that was their torment.—Albert Skira"]

Fellous, in the 1970s, had been a student of Barthes, having begged to join his Petit Séminaire at the École des Hautes Études (Ferrato-Combe and Fellous 62). Of Barthes' influence, she says,

Il a libéré aussi la critique en nous autorisant à croiser les disciplines, à parler autant de peinture que de musique ou de cinéma. Nous pouvions accorder des choses discordantes, utiliser nos failles, nos défauts, il s'agissait de tout transformer au bon moment et de trouver sa voix juste, c'est en tout cas ainsi que j'ai compris son enseignement. Il nous éveillait [...]. Quand j'ai créé cette collection, j'ai retrouvé ce plaisir de croiser les disciplines et j'ai voulu l'ouvrir à d'autres artistes, à des peintres, des photographes, des stylistes, des acteurs, peut-être à des cuisiniers, pourquoi pas? Chacun doit montrer ici son savoir-faire, sa manière de penser et de rêver le monde, de le construire.⁴⁰¹ (Ferrato-Combe and Fellous 58)

Quand j'ai commencé à éditer les premiers livres de la collection, j'ai immédiatement pensé que j'aurais adoré lui proposer d'en écrire un, s'il était vivant, même si en un certain sens il l'avait déjà écrit son autoportrait...⁴⁰² (62)

But at its core, the collection *Traits et portraits* was born of Fellous' own literary work, namely her sixth novel, 2001's *Avenue de France* (2001). In the same interview, Fellous notes that during the development of her novel,

Je me suis aperçue que j'avais eu un grand plaisir à travailler une matière qui mêlait très librement photos, images et textes. C'était la première fois que je découvrais cette façon d'avancer dans un livre en compagnie de documents iconographiques et je les voyais prendre un tout autre visage dès qu'ils étaient associés à mon récit. Ils avaient leur propre battement et donnaient du relief au texte, ils devenaient une espèce « d'arrière-pays ». J'ai vécu cette expérience

⁴⁰¹ [Our translation: "He also liberated criticism in authorizing us to cross disciplines, to talk as much about about painting as about music or cinema. We could connect discordant themes, use our flaws and our faults, it was about transforming everything at the right moment and finding one's voice, that, at least, is how I understood his teachings. He awoke something in us [...]. When I created this collection, I rediscovered this pleasure of crossing disciplines and I wanted to open that up to other artists, to painters, to photographers, to fashion designers, to actors, maybe even to chefs, why not? Each individual must show, here, their know-how, their way of thinking and dreaming about, of building, the world."]

⁴⁰² [Our translation: "When I started to publish the first books in the collection, I immediately thought of how I would have loved to have invited him to write one, had he been alive, even if, to a certain degree, he had already written his self-portrait..."]

comme une réelle découverte et aussitôt le livre fini, j'ai eu envie de la faire partager à d'autres écrivains.⁴⁰³ (Ferrato-Combe and Fellous 58)⁴⁰⁴

This statement might appear conveniently attuned to the collection's promotional strategy and to its signature attributes, but it remains nevertheless a sound description, not only of Fellous' own novel, but also of those books that feature under the *Traits et portraits* banner.

Consider that Michèle Bacholle-Bošković has described Fellous' *Avenue de France* as being a

[p]romenade dans le passé, dans un ailleurs révolu, entre sérieux et légèreté, [...] entre texte et images—il ne figure pas moins de trente-neuf cartes postales, photos, peintures, affiches, clichés de films, *pas toujours synchrones avec une narration souvent malicieuse*, à la manière de *Nadja*.⁴⁰⁵ (our emphasis)(“Review. *Avenue de France*” 638)

Comparably to this, Marie NDiaye's *Autoportrait en vert* (2005), which, itself, features seventeen photographs—all of different women, a half-dozen of which are credited to the French photographer Julie Ganzin (with the rest being of found or unknown origin), has been called “the dream of a self-portrait, in a text that plays cannily with narrative meaning, refusing conventional strategies of coherence” (our emphasis)(Motte 70). And

⁴⁰³ [Our translation: “I noticed that I had had great pleasure shaping this material that very freely mixed photos, images and texts. It was the first time that I discovered this way of advancing in a book thanks to iconographic documents, and I saw them take a whole other shape once they become associated with my narrative. They had their own rhythm and they highlighted the text, becoming their own sort of ‘hinterland’. This was an experience of real discovery for me and, as soon as I finished the book, I wanted to share that discovery with other writers.”]

⁴⁰⁴ In a subsequent passage, Fellous explains: « [P]endant que j'écrivais, je m'entourais de documents, de cartes postales, de photos, de publicités de l'époque, d'images de cinéma aussi, qui m'inspiraient beaucoup pour passer d'un lieu à un autre, d'une époque à une autre, dans la même phrase parfois. J'installais ce «décor» autour de moi, sur ma table de travail, c'était à la fois un rempart que je me fabriquais et un texte parallèle. » (Ferrato-Combe and Fellous 59) [Our translation: “[W]hile I wrote, I surrounded myself with documents, post cards, adverts from the period, also movie images that inspired me greatly to be able to pass from one location to another, from one time to another, sometimes in the same sentence. I set up this ‘decor’ around me, on my work table, it was, at once, a rampart that I was building for myself, as well as being a parallel text.”]

⁴⁰⁵ [Our translation: a “[s]troll into the past and into a bygone era, which wanders between gravity and lightness, [...] between text and image—there are no fewer than thirty-nine postcards, photos, paintings, posters, film stills, *not always in step with a narration that is often mischievous*, like *Nadja*.”]

Akerman's Prix-Médicis-shortlisted *Ma mère rit* (2013), which includes more than thirty photographs and film and video stills from the filmmaker's own body of work, has been touted as “*a labyrinthine project of self-representation where the visual and the verbal, documentary, fiction and autobiography intersect in a complex crisscrossing between art and life, creation and experience*” (our emphasis)(Schmid 1133). It is likely no coincidence that these works might be received in a such a comparable fashion, for in all of *Traits et portraits*' diversity,⁴⁰⁶ there is very clear intent and editorial vision behind the collection, which aims, above all, to further the entanglements of the literary text-image relationship.

*Comme une autre voix en écho*⁴⁰⁷

As noted above, *Traits et portraits*' promotional copy professes that the images which feature in all of the books, whether these be photographs, drawings, paintings or other reproductions, are all images « qui habitent les livres comme une autre voix en écho, formant presque un récit souterrain. »⁴⁰⁸ Le Clézio, too, has said almost as much of *L'Africain* while promoting his book, saying in a 2004 interview that « [l]es photos sont aussi un peu la participation du sujet au livre qui parle de lui. C'est presque un livre écrit à deux »⁴⁰⁹ (Cortanze, « Le Clézio mon père » 70). If there is a single term that might define the editorial vision of *Traits and portraits* and Fellous, it is likely that “echo” would face very few contenders.

⁴⁰⁶ Jacques Ferrandez' *Entre mes deux rives* (2017) marked the introduction of graphic novels into the series.

⁴⁰⁷ Mercure de France, online. [Our translation: “Like another voice, in echo”]

⁴⁰⁸ [Our translation: “that inhabit the books like another voice, in echo, creating an almost secret narrative.”]

⁴⁰⁹ [Our translation: “[t]he photos are also somewhat the participation of the subject in the book that talks about them. It's almost a book with two authors”]

The idea of “echo” is raised at numerous moments in Fellous’ 2008 interview about the collection, and what is interesting is the rich fluidity of the term that is put on display. In one instance, speaking about Bailly’s *Tuiles détachées* (2004), she says, « [I]l a préféré jouer avec l’illustratif, mais aussi avec les répétitions, les échos, j’ai aimé le voir travailler ainsi »⁴¹⁰ (Ferrato-Combe and Fellous 64); of Denis Podalydès’ *Voix off* (2008), she says, « Le thème est défini [...], mais tout autour bruissent des fragments, des échos, des portraits de famille, d’amis, de maîtres, c’est précisément le caractère fragmentaire de son livre qui signe ici l’autoportrait »⁴¹¹ (64-65); later, speaking in regard to Christian Lacroix’s book *Qui est là?* (2004) she remarks, « [I]l prend un détail d’un tableau, le met en écho avec une scène d’enfance ou le motif d’un imprimé, c’est vertigineux et j’ai adoré l’accompagner dans sa recherche pour fabriquer ce livre »⁴¹² (65); and finally, at the close of the interview, Fellous states, « Un autoportrait est parfois l’écho d’une autre figure, plus secrète en soi, un double avec lequel on joue. On se cache, on disparaît, on revient »⁴¹³ (66), and the final line of her statement is: « L’image de l’autre aide à mettre de la lumière sur sa propre histoire »⁴¹⁴ (66).

Each time that Fellous effects the word “echo,” here, she is saying something different. In the first instance, echo is repetition, much as it is in poetry and music composition. The second, « des fragments, des échos », seems to suggest something more

⁴¹⁰ [Our translation: “[H]e preferred playing with illustration, but also with repetition, echoes, I liked watching him work in this way”]

⁴¹¹ [Our translation: “The theme is clear, but all around it are rustling fragments, echoes, pictures of family and of friends and of teachers, it is exactly that fragmentary character of his book that makes it a self-portrait”]

⁴¹² [Our translation: “[H]e takes a detail from a painting, puts it in echo with a scene from his childhood or with a fabric’s printed motif, it’s dizzying and I loved accompanying him in his research to make this book”]

⁴¹³ [Our translation: “A self-portrait is sometimes the echo of another figure, hidden inside oneself, a double one plays with. One hides, disappears, and comes back.”]

⁴¹⁴ [Our translation: “The image of the other helps to shed light upon one’s own story.”]

shapeless, an ephemeral sort of memory; the third instance, « mettre en echo », means to place into parallel or in tandem, into conversation to be experienced concurrently and to be compared; and in the fourth instance, « l'écho d'une autre figure, un double » is different, yet again, as Fellous, here, brings in the concept of othering. From just these examples, from a single conversation no less, one sees just how fluid, how versatile the term “echo” can be, and also how applicable with regard to the text-image relationship—the term “intermedial echo”, as we saw in Chapter one, has been used to express the idea a single story being presented from multiple perspectives as a sort of polyphony (Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction* 226).

Fellous’ interview also illustrates how directly she has been involved in the development of the collection’s titles: in the excerpts quoted above, she speaks about the dizzying enjoyment of frequently working side-by-side with an author as a collaborator on a book’s materialization—the phrase « une autre voix en écho » rightly apply to Fellous, as well. Indeed, with regard to *L’Africain*, Fellous played a rather significant role: To a question from her interviewer about the visual elements of *Traits et portraits*’ titles, she responds,

Par exemple, pour *L’Africain* de Jean-Marie Le Clézio, j’ai établi moi-même le choix et la place de chaque élément et je les ai proposés ensuite à Le Clézio qui les a acceptés tel quel. Il m’avait donné de nombreuses photos faites par son père mais je ne voulais pas que ce soit trop illustratif par rapport au récit.⁴¹⁵ (Ferrato-Combe and Fellous 63-64)

Within Fellous’ interview, this statement is but a minor aside—and her only mention of Le Clézio’s book. We mention it, however, because there exists an understandable but

⁴¹⁵ [Our translation: “For example, for Jean-Marie Le Clézio’s *L’Africain*, I, myself, made the selection and determined the placement of each element, which I then brought to Le Clézio, who accepted them as is. He had given me numerous photos taken by his father but I didn’t want it to be too illustrative of the text.”]

ultimately erroneous assumption that Le Clézio, himself, selected and positioned the photographs that appear in *L'Africain*, and that has had a fair degree of influence in guiding critical analysis of the work. Meynard, for example writes of « une volonté de la part de Le Clézio de rendre visuellement manifeste le mystère du passé » (« une quête des origines » 51) and that « Le Clézio met aussi en relation directe image et texte » (52). Such assumptions are understandable because Le Clézio, himself, has never outwardly (nor needfully, for that matter) acknowledged that aspect of the collaboration. In interview, in response to a question speculating upon any hesitation that in publishing the book, the author responded:

Non, l'incertitude s'est portée surtout sur le choix des photos. Il y en avait plus de cinq cents. J'ai éliminé toutes celles où [mon père] apparaissait, et qui étaient parfois remarquables. J'aurais pu n'en mettre aucune. Mais c'étaient ces photos qui m'avaient permis d'accéder à la mémoire et de la matérialiser. [...] Les photos sont aussi un peu la participation du sujet au livre qui parle de lui.⁴¹⁶ (Cortanze, «Le Clézio mon père » 70)

And in another interview, Le Clézio talked, similarly, about how publishing the photographs, how giving his father a voice in the book that his son had written, was, in a way, an act of absolution (Payot, online).

But with regard to *L'Africain*, such an active editorial influence on the part of Fellous instills the book's visual elements with a further degree of independence from the text. The fact of this collaborative effort—« j'ai établi moi-même le choix et la place de chaque élément [et Le Clézio] les a acceptés tel quel »—makes the images themselves, then, more collaborative with the text than subordinate to it. This is important to note, as

⁴¹⁶ [Our translation: "No, the uncertainty was surrounding the choice of photos. There were more than five hundred. I eliminated all of those in which [my father] appeared, and they were sometimes remarkable. I could have not put in any of them. But these photos are what allowed me to access and embody these memories. "]

from a critical perspective, it changes how the text-image relationship in *L'Africain* might be interpreted and analyzed.

Si je fais un effort de mémoire ⁴¹⁷

L'Africain is a book about memory. It begins with the author looking back upon his childhood arrival in Nigeria, an experience that would offer to a young Le Clézio nothing short of an awakening, a first awareness of the world around him:

De ce temps [...] date l'apparition des corps. Mon corps, le corps de ma mère, le corps de mon frère, le corps des jeunes garçons du voisinage avec qui je jouais, le corps des femmes africaines dans les chemins, autour de la maison, ou bien au marché, près de la rivière. [...] J'ai cette impression de la grande proximité, du nombre des corps autour de moi, quelque chose que je n'ai pas connu auparavant, quelque chose de nouveau et de familier à la fois, qui excluait la peur.⁴¹⁸ (Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 10)

L'Afrique c'était le corps plutôt que le visage. C'était la violence des sensations, la violence des appétits, la violence des saisons. Le premier souvenir que j'ai de ce continent, c'est mon corps couvert d'une éruption de petites ampoules causées par l'extrême chaleur, une affection bénigne dont souffrent les Blancs à leur entrée dans la zone équatoriale [...] L'Afrique qui déjà m'ôtait mon visage me rendait un corps, douloureux, enfiévré, ce corps que la France m'avait caché dans la douceur anémiant du foyer de ma grand-mère, sans instinct, sans liberté.⁴¹⁹ (13-14)

⁴¹⁷ Le Clézio, *L'Africain* (15) ["If I search my memory" (Dickson, *The African* 9)]

⁴¹⁸ ["Also dating back to that moment [...] is the emergence of bodies. My body, my mother's body, my brother's body, the bodies of the young boys in the village with whom I played, the bodies of African women on the paths around the house or at the market by the river. [...] I recall a feeling of extreme closeness, of many bodies all around me, a feeling I had never known before, a feeling that was both new and familiar, one that ruled out fear." (Dickson, *The African* 4)]

⁴¹⁹ ["Africa was more about bodies than faces. It was an explosion of sensations, of appetites, of seasons. The very first memory I have of that continent is my body being covered with little blisters caused by the extreme heat, a benign disorder that affects white people when they enter the equatorial zone [...] Africa was already taking my face away and giving me a painful, feverish body in return, the body that France had hidden from me in the anemic comfort of my grandmother's home, devoid of instinct, devoid of freedom." (Dickson, *The African* 7-8)]

Relating his responses to that arrival as he does, here, in such physical terms—« La liberté à Ogoja, c'était le règne du corps »⁴²⁰ (15)—Le Clézio attempts to bring those memories that he is recalling back to the experiences of a child, which, he notes, are far more visceral than cerebral: he writes that « [q]uand on est enfant, on n'use pas de mots (et les mots ne sont pas usés). Je suis en ce temps-là très loin des adjectifs, des substantifs. Je ne peux pas dire ni même penser [...] Mais je suis capable de le ressentir »⁴²¹ (11) and later that « peut-être qu'à l'écriture, je rends trop littéraire, trop symbolique la fureur qui animait nos bras [...] »⁴²² (29). These visceral, corporeal memories are those that Le Clézio retains most clearly. While he writes that « [l]a mémoire d'un enfant exagère les distances et les hauteurs »⁴²³ (23), he declares that very same *mémoire d'enfant* to be « extraordinairement précise pour toutes les sensations, les odeurs, les goûts [...] »⁴²⁴ (104).

So many of Le Clézio's memories of childhood experience in *L'Africain* are recalled through sensations—the smell of peanut soup and manioc bread or the taste of quinine pills (36-37); the chill of the wind (25) or the heat of the sun (29)—while other memories, of places or of dates or of events, do not come as easily or reliably: « [l]es souvenirs trompent, sans doute »⁴²⁵ (20); « J'ai du mal à croire »⁴²⁶ (20); « J'ai du mal

⁴²⁰ ["Freedom in Ogoja was the supremacy of the body" (Dickson, *The African* 9)]

⁴²¹ ["[w]hen you're a child you don't use words (and words don't get used). Back then I was a very long way from adjectives, from nouns. I was incapable of saying, or even thinking [...] But I could feel it." (Dickson, *The African* 5)]

⁴²² ["perhaps in writing about it, I'm making the furor that ran through our arms [...] too literary, too symbolic." (Dickson, *The African* 23)]

⁴²³ ["A child's memory exaggerates distances and heights" (Dickson, *The African* 17)]

⁴²⁴ ["extraordinarily precise with regard to all the sensations, the odours, the tastes [...]"] (Dickson, *The African* 105)]

⁴²⁵ ["Memories can probably be misleading" (Dickson, *The African* 15)]

⁴²⁶ ["It's hard for me to believe" (Dickson, *The African* 15)]

aujourd'hui à me souvenir »⁴²⁷ (34). There is a clear distinction between those visceral memories that are truly Le Clézio's own, and those that may have been either misremembered or borrowed—« D'où me vient cette idée ? »⁴²⁸ (43)—, or passed down as family lore : « Avant ma naissance, raconte ma mère [...] »⁴²⁹ (32); or even simply imagined. In one recollection of a childhood encounter with a colony of soldier ants, Le Clézio makes that distinction rather clear: of a memory that he partially dismisses as undoubtedly being « mêlé de légende, de rêve »⁴³⁰ (32), he writes that « [c]e n'est pas tant des fourmis que je me souviens, *que de la peur que je ressens* »⁴³¹ (our emphasis)(31).

*Quelqu'un qui aurait gardé la mémoire photographique*⁴³²

For those other memories, those less reliable, less visceral, even untrustworthy memories—« D'où me vient cette idée ? »⁴³³ (43)—, Le Clézio turns to photographs. Indeed, from the very opening paragraph of the book's first chapter, photographs are invoked:

De ce visage que j'ai reçu à ma naissance, j'ai des choses à dire. D'abord, qu'il m'a fallu l'accepter. Affirmer que je ne l'aimais pas serait lui donner une importance qu'il n'avait pas quand j'étais enfant. Je ne le haïssais pas, je l'ignorais, je l'évitais. Je ne le regardais pas dans les miroirs. Pendant des années, je crois que je ne l'ai jamais vu. *Sur les photos, je détournais les yeux,*

⁴²⁷ ["Today it's difficult for me to remember the feelings that motivated us" (Dickson, *The African* 29)]

⁴²⁸ ["What makes me think that?" (Dickson, *The African* 37)]

⁴²⁹ ["Before I was born, from what my mother tells me [...]"] (Dickson, *The African* 26)]

⁴³⁰ ["half legend, half dream" (Dickson, *The African* 26)]

⁴³¹ ["It's not so much the ants that I recall, *but the fear I feel*" (our emphasis)(Dickson, *The African* 25)]

⁴³² Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 15 ["Someone who [would have] kept photographs" (Dickson, *The African* 9)]

⁴³³ ["What makes me think that?" (Dickson, *The African* 37)]

*comme si quelqu'un s'était substitué à moi.*⁴³⁴ (our emphasis)(Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 9);

and from that moment forward, photography plays an elemental role in the book.

Le Clézio next mentions photography again several pages later, this time in remembering to the house in which he'd lived in Nigeria, and here, he places what can be captured in a photograph into cold contrast to what can be observed through a child's wonderment: « quelqu'un qui aurait gardé le mémoire photographique du lieu [de la maison d'Ogoja] serait étonné de ce qu'un enfant de huit ans pouvait y voir »⁴³⁵ (15), he writes. Yet, despite his claims of what an eight-year-old child could see, Le Clézio's memories are actually shown to be not quite so faithful. What he is actually able to produce are only half-remembered recollections, and they are surprisingly full of uncertainty:

*Sans doute un jardin [...]. Quelque part vers l'arrière de la maison [un poulailler] dont l'existence ne m'est signalé que par la présence, à la verticale dans le ciel, de vautours [...]. Un jardin, soit, puisqu'un des employés de la maison portait le nom de "garden boy." À l'autre bout du terrain, il devait y avoir les cases des serviteurs [...].*⁴³⁶ (our emphasis) (Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 15)

As such, when Le Clézio then moves on to describe the vast landscape surrounding that ill-remembered homestead, he abandons his attempt at mining the photographic. The

⁴³⁴ ["I have a few things to say about the face I was given at birth. First of all, I had to accept it. To say I didn't like it would make it seem more important than it was to me as a child. I didn't hate it, I ignored it, I avoided it. I didn't look at mirrors. I think years went by without my ever seeing it. *I would avert my eyes in photographs, as if someone had taken my place.*" (our emphasis)(Dickson, *The African* 3)]

⁴³⁵ ["Someone who had kept photographs of [the Ogoja house] would surprised at the things a child of eight was able to see there." (Dickson, *The African* 9)]

⁴³⁶ ["A garden, *probably* [...]. *Somewhere* [...] in the back of the house [a chicken coop], *the existence of which I was only aware of due to the presence—directly over it in the sky—of vultures* [...]. All right then, a garden, *since one of our servants was called a 'garden boy'*. At the other end of the lot, *there must have been* the cabins for the servants [...]." (our emphasis)(Dickson, *The African* 9-10)]

fixed and the static of time and space now become sweeping and cinematic, and also far more assured:

Devant la maison [...] commençait une étendue sans horizon, avec une légère ondulation où le regard pouvait se perdre. Au sud, la pente conduisait à la vallée brumeuse de l'Aiya, un affluent de la rivière Cross [...]. Vers le nord et l'est, je pouvais voir la grande plaine fauve semée de termitières géantes, coupée de ruisseaux et de marécages, et le début de la forêt [...], le tout recouvert par un ciel immense, une voute de bleu cru où brûlait le soleil, et qu'envahissait, chaque après-midi, des nuages porteurs d'orage.⁴³⁷ (16)

It is a beautiful composite, rich and vivid, but which shares nothing in common with what the naked eye or the camera lens could ever take in—it is a dreamscape.

Several pages later, evoking what he says is the single actual photograph that he has kept of that house in Nigeria where he went to live at that young age, Le Clézio writes: « Si je regarde aujourd'hui la seule photo que j'ai conservée de la maison d'Ogoja (un cliché minuscule, le tirage 6 x 6 courant après la guerre), j'ai du mal à croire qu'il s'agit du même lieu »⁴³⁸ (20). The veracity of the photograph, with its dull certainty, is a disappointment. His recollection that he attempted to conjure from memory, while inexact and unreliable, was not at all the anemic image of the homestead that faces him from the photograph. Le Clézio will admit at chapter's end that « [l]es souvenirs trompent, sans doute [...] je l'aurai sans doute rêvée plutôt que vécue »⁴³⁹ (20). And from this first chapter, a reluctant though necessary relationship with photographs begins to take shape.

⁴³⁷ ["In front of the house [...] began an endless, slightly rolling, open stretch reaching out as far as the eye can see. To the south, the slope led down to the misty valley of the Aiya, an affluent of the Cross River [...]. To the north and the east, I could see the great wild plain scattered with giant termite mounds—cut off from the streams and the swamps [sic]—, and the beginning of the forest [...], and, stretched over it all, an immense sky, a raw [sic] blue dome, in which the sun burned down, invaded by storm clouds every afternoon." (Dickson, *The African* 10-11)]

⁴³⁸ ["When I look at the only photograph I've kept of the house in Ogoja (a tiny snapshot, the standard 6 x 6 centimeter post-war format), it's hard for me to believe that it's the same place" (Dickson, *The African* 15)]

⁴³⁹ ["[m]emories can probably be misleading. I must have dreamt [...] rather than having really lived it." (Dickson, *The African* 15)]

It is suggested above that photographs are the building blocks of *L'Africain*. But from these first instances in the text, Le Clézio shows a certain hostility toward them: that it should not be him, *not the real him*, in those photographs to which he alludes in the book's opening paragraph; and that the far-too-small 6 x 6 postwar snapshot of the house at Ogoja, cold and austere (20) as it is, betrays nothing of the place that, in childhood, had been seen and experienced so vividly. Curiously, however, it is only toward these particular photos—these photographs that the text suggests belong to Le Clézio himself—that he exhibits any such animus. While this is never explained—and these first photographs never again mentioned—in the book, it would not be too much of an overreach to suggest that Le Clézio's closer, *truer* connection to these particular photographs prevents him from projecting upon them the same imagined world that will be created from, and around, the hand-drawn map and the photographs that had belonged to his father.

As Le Clézio moves beyond the first chapter in *L'Africain*, he also starts to move the story beyond confines of the house at Ogoja, which, in that single kept photograph « évoqu[ait] l'empire, mélange de camp militaire, de pelouse anglaise et de puissance naturelle »^{440,441} (20). The subsequent chapters of the book take the reader first out into the surrounding landscape, full of rolling plains and misty valleys, of forests and streams and termite mounds, before drifting backward in time to explore the life that Le Clézio's father (and mother) had lived before his birth.

⁴⁴⁰ [“evoke[d] the empire, an odd combination of military camp, a well-kept English lawn, and the forces of nature” (Dickson, *The African* 15)]

⁴⁴¹ *Our footnote*: This could further account for Le Clézio's hostility toward the photograph.

Le Clézio has no difficulty to continuing to draw out the lush landscape of his childhood —thanks partly, still, to his recall of the visceral, the physical:

De loin en loin, au milieu de la savane, se dressaient de grands arbres au tronc très droit [...]. Nous courrions presque sans nous arrêter, à perdre haleine, dans *les hautes herbes qui fouettaient nos visages* à hauteur des yeux, guidés par les fûts des grands arbres. Aujourd'hui encore, quand je vois des images de l'Afrique [...], *je ressens un élan du cœur* [...].⁴⁴² (our emphasis)(26)

However, through the second chapter, he will continue to rely on photographs for support when his uncertain memories of events seem to fail him:

Je ne me souviens pas du jour où nous nous sommes aventurés, mon frère et moi, pour la première fois dans la savane. Peut-être à l'instigation des enfants du village [...]. Ceux que je vois sur quelques photos de l'époque, autour de nous, très noir, dégingandés, certainement moqueurs et combatifs, mais qui nous avaient acceptés malgré nos différences. »⁴⁴³ (24-25)

He does not reach for a photograph at every uncertainty: some doubts will be left unresolved, others supported, for example, by family stories passed down and repeated over time: « Cette histoire, combien de fois ai-je entendu ma mère la raconter ? »⁴⁴⁴ (32). That is not say, however, that every photograph leads to the answer sought—the photograph of the village children mentioned above ultimately provides no detail as to when Le Clézio might have first ventured out into the savannah, but it nevertheless fills out this world of his childhood that Le Clézio is in the process of recreating, of reimagining. But, overall, photographs see themselves privileged with regard to memory: even with Le Clézio's first memory of meeting his father he presents to the reader by

⁴⁴² ["Here and there, in the middle of the savannah, stood tall trees with straight trunks [...]. We ran, almost without stopping, *through the tall grasses that whipped our faces* around the eyes, guided by the stems of the tall trees. Even today, when I see images of Africa [...], *I feel a thrill in my heart*." (our emphasis)(Dickson, *The African* 20)]

⁴⁴³ ["I don't recall the day my brother and I first ventured out into the savannah. Maybe we were needled into it by the children in the village [...]. The same ones I see surrounding us in the rare photographs of that time, very dark-skinned, gangling, undoubtedly jeering roughnecks, but who had accepted us in spite of our differences." (Dickson, *The African* 18)]

⁴⁴⁴ ["How many times have I heard my mother tell that story?" (Dickson, *The African* 27)]

comparing the father to portraits of famous men—Louis Jouvét and James Joyce,⁴⁴⁵ « avec qui il avait du reste une certaine ressemblance »⁴⁴⁶ (43).

*Les photos que mon père a aimé prendre*⁴⁴⁷

The act, in *L'Africain*, of returning to photographs at such moments of uncertainty in the narrative is one of the more regular occurrences, certainly in the first couple of chapters of the book. And because of that regularity, already by the moment of the third instance, early in the second chapter, where Le Clézio evokes the photograph of the village children, a reader quite likely will have begun to notice that these photographs that are being mentioned and shared by Le Clézio in the text, appear to have no correlation with the sepia-toned photographs that have already begun to punctuate the narrative: the first chapter of *L'Africain* already contains four photographs, and by the end of Chapter two, the reader will have encountered a fifth.

This raises the question with the reader as to what, then, is the operation of these photographs, if not to lend visual support to the narrative of the book? The short answer to that question is that the photographs, indeed, do lend visual support to the narrative of *L'Africain*, but the manner in which they accomplish this requires some illustration. We have already suggested, above, that the photographs could potentially⁴⁴⁸ be taken or even

⁴⁴⁵ Louis Jouvét (1887-1951) was a French stage actor and playwright; James Joyce (1882-1941), an Irish author and poet

⁴⁴⁶ ["whom he slightly resembled for that matter" (Dickson, *The African* 39)]

⁴⁴⁷ Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 51. ["The pictures my father liked to take" (Dickson, *The African* 45)]

⁴⁴⁸ Such round dismissal would not be without precedent. British novelist Graham Greene's 1936 travelogue *Journey Without Maps*, for example, features thirty-one photographs in its original edition (later reduced by half to sixteen). In the seventy years since that book's publication, no scholarly mention of its photographs seems to exist beyond a single mention—in footnote only—in a 2002 article, which suggests with no support that "[t]he photos draw upon another discourse, that of 1930s anthropology, to construct this travel text" (Thacker, "Journey With Maps" 27 n.16)—they do not. Furthermore, Burton comments in her 2014 study, *Travel Narrative and the Ends of Modernity*,

dismissed as merely providing ornament, something of a nostalgic colonial aesthetic, to the book.

One factor that, at least partially, contributes to this potential is the fact that the images that feature in *L'Africain* are all presented within the text without captions. When a reader first encounters one of these photographs, therefore, it lacks an anchor that could readily implicate it within any play of meaning with the text (see Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* 37). Secondly, most images in the book are placed in-line with the text, and a photograph will frequently even split a paragraph in two. A somewhat unconventional image placement such as this can further provoke the image to compete with rather than complement the narrative of the text (Shawcross, "Image-Memory-Text" 100). Disruptive, unanchored, and in disconnect with the photographs being referenced or described in the narrative, it is a challenge to the reader to be able to establish the operational logic of these photographs.

There is, however, a table of illustrations provided at the close of *L'Africain*.⁴⁴⁹ It lists the hand-drawn map and the fifteen photographs that appear throughout the book, and credits them all as belonging to the author's personal collection. This formal acknowledgement, if nothing else, legitimizes their presence within the book. But it also provides information about them. It provides details as to the geographic location at

that "remarkably, scholarship on travel narrative scarcely mentions, much less analyses, the presence of photographs and visual images." (47). The first article to ever address the photographs in Michel Leiris' *L'Afrique fantôme*, first published in 1934, for example, only appeared in 1995, and only a very small handful of articles have appeared since, much the reason for our study of the book in the previous chapters of this dissertation. *L'Africain* has already garnered a fair degree of scholarly attention for its photographic content, though it is approached, as in this present study, primarily as a work of life writing as opposed to travel literature. A comparable approach is taken toward Leiris' *L'Afrique fantôme*.

⁴⁴⁹ In the French publishing tradition, tables of contents and tables of illustrations conventionally appear as back matter. In the English translation, *The African*, these tables appear in the front matter, per English-language publishing convention.

which each image had been taken, and several of the photographs are given brief, if vague, descriptions—« Danses “samba,” Bamenda » or « Hoggar, inscriptions tamacheq (Algérie) ». While these sparse details do inform the visual content of the photographs themselves, they still offer little that could assist the reader to easily contextualize the photographs while reading the book.

Were one to take this mostly geographic information provided in the table of illustrations, for example, and have that information assume the role of the captions that are absent in the text, this might only aggravate the challenges that the photographs present within the pages and chapters of the book. The geography of the book's first chapter is the village of Ogoja, in southeastern Nigeria. Of the four photographs that illustrate this chapter, two of the images purportedly depict locations or people in the neighbouring country of Cameroon, another is of the Hoggar Mountains of Algeria, and as for the one photograph in the chapter that does depict a location that is to be found within the borders of Nigeria—the photograph of two children playing at a river's edge (Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 11)—, that location is still hundreds of kilometers away from Ogoja; it was taken in Ahoada, in the country's coastal south. In short, even geographic knowledge of the photographs does little to effectively situate them within the text or the narrative of *L'Africain*.

The table of illustrations, essentially, then, is little more than an index of locations. The reader, thusly, learns that the photographs that illustrate *L'Africain* were taken in Algeria, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Ghana. In this respect, the photographs do tell a story. They plot (if they do not exactly trace) places to which Le Clézio's father had traveled (and which he had photographed) at some point during the twenty-two years (Le

Clézio, *L'Africain* 55) of his life that he had spent living and working as a field doctor in British colonial Africa.

And while the table provides no dates for these photographs, details about the “when” and the “where” of the father’s life that are speckled throughout the narrative of the book slowly reveal to the reader that many of the photographs date from before Le Clézio’s birth, and most if not all of them date from the time and place before Le Clézio’s own arrival in Nigeria to be with his father. On this level, then of the photographic index and of photographic origin, the images are indeed often set quite apart from the narrative of *L'Africain*.

And from this perspective, the visual photographic content of the book can and is seen as separate, as really « une autre voix en écho », ⁴⁵⁰ as a tracing the life of the father—an homage to his adventurous life in Africa: « Les photos insérées dans le récit soutiennent les affirmations de Le Clézio sur l’existence du père, représentent une preuve des territoires traversés et des êtres rencontrés par ce médecin » ⁴⁵¹ (Vernier-Larochette 273). Vernier-Larochette, for example, observes how *L'Africain* reveals « une difficulté à retracer la vie de cet Autre » ⁴⁵² (270) that is Le Clézio’s father, and so the act of letting the photographs ‘speak’ for themselves by inserting them into the text (273) can be seen as an acknowledgement of this difficulty: « [L]es clichés semblent être un moyen fort utile pour appréhender un portrait plus vaste de cet être en accédant à sa mémoire puisque les photos que cet homme a prises avaient pour objectif de conserver des instants de sa

⁴⁵⁰ [Our translation: “another voice in echo”]

⁴⁵¹ [Our translation: “The photos inserted into the narrative support Le Clézio’s affirmations of the existence of his father, they represent proof of the territories crossed and of the people encountered by this doctor”]

⁴⁵² [Our translation: “a difficulty in retracing the life of this Other”]

vie »⁴⁵³ (270). Remember, too, that Le Clézio himself, said in interview that the inclusion of the photographs as a sort of absolution for having written about his father: « Publier quelques-unes de ses photos dans ce livre est d'ailleurs une façon de me dédouaner, de le rendre complice »⁴⁵⁴ (Payot, online). Vernier-Larochette also offers the suggestion that the photographs displayed in *L'Africain* could be seen as evidence of his using photographs as memory and research tools:

En insérant ces quelques clichés après la rédaction de ce récit de vie, l'auteur souhaite évidemment associer le lecteur à son entreprise postscripturale [...]. Ces clichés agissent donc comme une mise en scène de l'écriture, la photo étant elle-même, rappelons-le, une mise en scène de la réalité.⁴⁵⁵ (273)

But to assume that the inclusion of the published photographs is simply to allow them 'speak' in these rather passive ways, or that the photographs act as a mise en scène for the text, at least in the way that it is suggested here, fails to address the photographs' rather imposing disruptive character, when disruption is effectively their very way of being within the pages of the book.

Furthermore, such an argument, when taken alone at least, effectively acts to subjugate the photographs, relegating them to be little more than ornament. Such an argument does not connect at all with the nature of the collection *Traits et portraits*—for which *L'Africain* is essentially the archetype—, a collection whose aim is, rather, to engage with and entangle the text-image relationship. The photographs in *L'Africain* do

⁴⁵³ [Our translation: "[T]he shots seem to be a very useful means of capturing more complete portrait of this being through access to his memory, since the photographs that this man took were taken to preserve certain moments of his life"]

⁴⁵⁴ [Our translation: "Publishing a few of his photos in the book is really a way for me to clear myself, and to satisfy him"]

⁴⁵⁵ [Our translation: "In inserting these few shots after the writing of this life narrative, the author clearly wishes to include the reader in this postscript activity [...]. These shots, then act as a mise en scene of the writing, the photograph being itself, don't forget, a mise en scene of reality."]

serve this indexing role, they do mark the Barthesian *ça-a-été* of the father's life: « les photos servent de preuve: ceci a existé [...], les photos accentuent l'effet de réalité dans le texte » (Vogl, « Le Clézio en noir et blanc » 84; *see also* Meynard 53). But the photographs' operation in the book as whole goes beyond this.

Already in the book's first two chapters, the dynamic engagement between photography—as both illustration and narrative device—and the text has started to become evident, and this, even before Le Clézio begins to fully engage with his father's photographs within the narrative. The four photographs that illustrate the opening chapter, as we mentioned above, seem disjointed, uncooperative with the text. Firstly, they share no evident connection to the photographs that Le Clézio describes or otherwise references in the narrative—none is the 6 x 6 snapshot of the house at Ogoja—; and secondly, the geographic information that is given by the table of illustrations has no correlation with the place of the text. But visually, there is a disconnect as well.

The four images that feature in the book's first chapter are the following: a pair of children playing at a river's edge; inscriptions (shapes, forms and *tamasheq* writing) etched into the stone floor of a barren desert landscape; warriors dancing in a village square, dressed in their expressive costumes and raffia headdress; a pair of palm trees standing tall above a valley at sunset.

Yet, nowhere in the chapter is there any mention of inscriptions or rock carvings⁴⁵⁶, nor of warriors or costumes or native dress. Children are mentioned, though mostly it is Le Clézio and his brother and not the dark-skinned boys of the photograph,

⁴⁵⁶ It is only in the sixth chapter of the book that we learn Le Clézio's father took this photograph after crossing the Sahara in an attempt to reach his family during the war. (*see L'Africain* 81)

and besides this there is no mention of playing or bathing in a river. The fourth photograph, at least, that of the palm trees, is generic enough, much like mass-market postcard, to close out the chapter with an innocuous image of ‘African-ness.’

However, starting with the fifth photograph, which appears at the end of the second chapter (36), the visual elements begin to find harmony with the textual elements in *L’Africain*. The close of chapter two takes place inside the house at Ogoja, after nightfall, when the insects would start to stir, start to invade the family’s home so that they would rush to eat their peanut soup so they could then rush to safety under their mosquito nets. Nightfall was when the family was together, after the day spent running breathlessly through the savannah or spent treating patients in hospital or spent managing the household, were complete. And of this time, Le Clézio writes,

Je ne sais pourquoi, il me semble qu’à aucun autre endroit je n’ai ressenti cette impression de famille, de faire partie d’une cellule [...]. Là, j’étais vraiment à l’abri, comme à l’intérieur d’une grotte. L’odeur de la soupe d’arachide, du fufou, du pain de manioc, la voix de mon père avec son accent chantant, en train de raconter les anecdotes de sa journée à l’hôpital [...]. Oui je crois que je n’ai jamais connu de tel moments d’intimité, un tel mélange de rituel et de familial.⁴⁵⁷ (Le Clézio, *L’Africain* 36-37)

The photograph that shares its space with this passage is that of a large thatch-roofed building standing in the midday sun, with a man barely visible at the photo’s right edge (36). The table of illustrations at the end of the book will simply identify its location as « Bansa », which, again, is in truth hundreds of kilometres away from Ogoja, and also in Cameroon. But on the page, at that moment that it appears, splitting up a paragraph so as

⁴⁵⁷ [“I don’t know why, it seems to me that I’ve never had that close feeling of family, of being part of a unit, anywhere else [...]. In there I was truly safe, like being inside a cave. The odor of peanut soup, of *fufou*, of cassava bread, my father’s voice with its sing-songy accent relating anecdotes about his day at the hospital [...]. Yes, I don’t think I’ve ever again experienced such moments of intimacy, such a mingling of ritual and intimacy.” (Dickson, *The African* 31-32)]

to come into more direct contact with the narrative, there is no question that this is the photograph of the only place that Le Clézio had ever felt truly ‘at home.’

The sixth photograph, too, will see itself harmonize near perfectly with Le Clézio’s prose. At the moment in the book’s third chapter where Le Clézio writes of first meeting his father—

Je crois que dans les premières heures qui ont suivi mon arrivée au Nigeria—la longue piste de Port Harcourt à Ogoja, sous la pluie battante [...]—ce n’est pas L’Afrique qui m’a causé de choc, mais la découverte de ce père inconnu, étrange, possiblement dangereux⁴⁵⁸ (45)—

the page facing the passage is filled with a most fitting image to mark a young Frenchman’s arrival on African soil: a photograph of Europeans dressed in pith helmets and sun hats disembarking from a ship at port (44). Again, the geography is askew—the photograph is actually of the port at Accra, in Ghana, more than a thousand kilometres to the west—and where his father had first landed in Africa (*L’Africain* 57)—but the photograph is, nevertheless, here, a perfect stand-in for Port Harcourt. And since the visuals communicate so beautifully, here, with the text, for a reader to be bothered by this minor factual inconsistency, which has already proven itself consistent throughout the book, would be an act of sabotage upon the experience.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁸ [“I believe that in the hours following my arrival in Nigeria—the long dirt road [sic] from Port Harcourt to Ogoja in the driving rain [...]—it wasn’t Africa that had been a shock to me, but discovering that odd, unfamiliar, possibly dangerous father.” (Dickson, *The African* 39)]

⁴⁵⁹ See also Meynard 59: « Le rapprochement entre texte et image peut devenir toutefois beaucoup plus subjectif, le lecteur faisant lui-même le lien entre un récit et une photographie qui s’en trouve proche ou lointaine, mais toujours avec la conscience de la ténuité et peut-être du caractère fallacieux de ce lien. » [*Our translation*: “The rapprochement between text and image can become much more subjective, the reader themselves making the link between a narrative and a photograph, whether close or distant, but always with an awareness of the tenuousness and maybe the illusory character of that link.”]

Les rares photos de lui ⁴⁶⁰

No other photographs illustrate the short third chapter of *L'Africain*, and there is little talk of pictures, at all, that might stir up any discord anew, though it is here that Le Clézio evokes the image of his father through comparison with portraits of Louis Jovet and James Joyce (43). But from the beginning of Chapter four, photography once again becomes prevalent within the text. This fourth chapter opens with the words,

À l'âge de trente ans, mon père quitte Southampton à bord d'un cargo mixte à destination de Georgetown, en Guyane britannique. Les rares photos de lui à cette époque montrent un homme robuste, à l'allure sportive, vêtu de façon élégante, complet veston, chemise à col dur, cravate, gilet, souliers de cuir noir.⁴⁶¹ (49)

Much as earlier in the book, no photograph is displayed, here, that might correspond with the photograph that he describes. Instead, the photograph that faces this opening passage is one of rugged cliffs that rise above a sandy shoreline. One could see echoes, if one so desired, of England's southern coast past Southampton, whose cliffs, in many places, look similar, but the photograph here is of the Hoggar Mountains of Algeria. Out of place, but like the snapshot of a pair of palm trees at sunset at the close of Chapter one, the image is generic or anonymous enough to be innocuous.

But the image of his father that Le Clézio conveys in the text is seemingly so complete—right down to the shoes—that no visual support is really necessary. This ekphrastic description of his father, young and sharply dressed, also sets this man in the photograph in sharp distinction from

⁴⁶⁰ Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 49. ["The rare pictures of him" (Dickson, *The African* 43)]

⁴⁶¹ ["At thirty years of age, my father left Southampton aboard a mixed cargo headed for Georgetown in British Guyana. The rare pictures of him at the time depict a robust, athletic-looking man, elegantly dressed in a suit, a stiff-collared shirt, tie, vest, black leather shoes." (Dickson, *The African* 43)]

[l]'homme qui m'est apparu au pied de la coupée, sur le quai de Port Harcourt [...] vêtu d'un pantalon trop large et trop court, sans forme, d'une chemise blanche, ses souliers de cuir noir empoussiérés par les pistes.⁴⁶² (89)

The distinction is an important one. Le Clézio never knew, never could have known, the man in the photograph of 1928. In this fourth chapter of the book, Le Clézio begins to reach more and more for his father's photographs, but instead of using them to recall moments and locales of his childhood, as he had done earlier in the book, he uses the photographs, now, to look into his father's past, to imagine and to create his father's world.

Shortly after this introduction of the father as a young man, Le Clézio again draws upon photographs, but this time with a profound degree more of contemplation, as he looks into to them to find traces of who that young man had been:

Il prend des photos. Avec son Leica à soufflet, il collectionne des clichés en noir et blanc qui représentent mieux que des mots son éloignement, son enthousiasme devant la beauté de ce nouveau monde.⁴⁶³ (51)

Sur ses photos paraissent la solitude, l'abandon, l'impression d'avoir touché à la rive la plus lointaine du monde.⁴⁶⁴ (51).

He quickly runs through the kinds of photographs that his father liked to take—«celles qui montrent l'intérieur du continent,»⁴⁶⁵(51) he writes, like waterfalls and rapids, riverside shacks and diamond hunters' trading posts.

⁴⁶² [“[t]he man that appeared before me at the foot of the wharf at Port Harcourt [...] wearing a shapeless pair of pants that were too baggy and too short for him, a white shirt, his black leather shoes dusty from the dirt tracks.” (Dickson, *The African* 89)]

⁴⁶³ [“He took pictures. With his Leica Bellows camera, he collected black-and-white snapshots that depicted, better than any words, the remoteness of the post, the enthusiasm he felt at discovering the new world.” (Dickson, *The African* 45)]

⁴⁶⁴ [“His pictures show loneliness, abnegation, the feeling of having reached the most distant shore in the world.” (Dickson, *The African* 45)]

⁴⁶⁵ [“those that showed the interior of the continent” (Dickson, *The African* 46-47)]

These photographs, in Le Clézio's eyes, are able to evoke emotions like enthusiasm and loneliness, but also something more that catches his eye: « Soudain une bonace sur un bras du Mazaruni, un miroir d'eau qui étincelle et entraîne vers la rêverie »⁴⁶⁶ (51-52). And from this almost hypnotic cue, Le Clézio goes on to describe in detail,

Sur la photo apparaît l'étrave de la pirogue en train de descendre le fleuve, je la regarde et je sens le vent, l'odeur de l'eau, j'entends malgré le grondement du moteur le crissement incessant des insectes dans la forêt, je perçois l'inquiétude qui naît à l'approche de la nuit. À l'embouchure du rio Demerara, les palans chargent le sucre à bord des cargos rouillés. Et sur une plage, où viennent mourir les vagues du sillage, deux enfants indiens me regardent, un petit garçon de six ans environ et sa sœur à peine plus âgée, tous deux ont le ventre distendu par la parasitose, leurs cheveux très noirs coupés « au bol » au ras des sourcils, comme moi à leur âge. (52)⁴⁶⁷

This is a moment really unlike any other in the book. His engagement with this photograph taken by his father, which begins as ekphrasis, slips almost into memory—his own—, and then into fantasy as an entire scene plays out on the page. But what this moment perhaps shows most, is the impenetrability of his father's memory, or rather, the impossibility of gaining true access to it, at the very least, not in this way.⁴⁶⁸

When Le Clézio writes almost immediately of feeling the wind and smelling the water hearing the insects and sensing the anxiety, while it certainly breathes life into the

⁴⁶⁶ ["A sudden calm on an arm of the Mazaruni, a sparkling mirror of water that sweeps you away into a dream" (Dickson, *The African* 47)]

⁴⁶⁷ ["In the photo, the stem of pirogue can be seen floating down the river. I look at it and I can feel the wind, smell the water, despite the rumbling of the motor, I can hear the unbroken whirr of insects in the forest, can feel the anxiety springing from the coming of night. At the mouth of the Rio Demerara, the hoists are loading Demerara sugar onto rusty cargo ships. And on a beach, where the wash comes rippling up to die, two Indian children gaze out at me, a small boy of around six and his sister hardly any older than he is, both with bellies distended from parasites, their black hair in a "bowl cut" just over their eyebrows like mine at their age."]

⁴⁶⁸ In *La photographie et le sensible*, Bernas writes, « [S]i l'image existe en ce qu'elle excite le sensible, sa nature appartient, au nom du discours, à l'infranchissable limite de la matière et du *pathos* » (original emphasis)(23). [*Our translation*: If the image exists in what it excites of the senses, its nature belongs, discursively, at the impenetrable border between matter and pathos.]

photograph through an enhanced ekphrasis,⁴⁶⁹ the dream that he is swept into is a dream of his own making: he is drawing once again upon his own strongest memories, those same physical, visceral memories that he had invoked to be able to recreate the Ogaja of his childhood. And as the passage continues, drifting into a more sweeping and cinematic dreamscape, much like his own dreamscape of the savannah surrounding the house at Ogoja that he delivers in the book's opening chapter (16), there is here, again, a beautiful composite: the details, the scope, the panorama of the scene that Le Clézio evokes, makes it difficult to imagine that all of this could have been captured in a single image.

The children in the scene, too, raise some questions. They evoke another, earlier photograph—the first that appears in the book, of the two children playing at a river's edge (11). The ages are different, but the way in which these two children—with their bowl-cut hairstyles much like Le Clézio's own at that age—apparently gaze at him clearly echoes the two boys playing at a river's edge years later in Nigeria, who peer curiously or suspiciously into the camera lens. But it remains unclear whether the Guyanese children that Le Clézio describes are looking at him through the photograph—that is to say, peering curiously or suspiciously—or whether this look exchanged between them happens within the fantasized dreamscape of the scene; one might assume it to be the former, but what he writes is « ils *me* regardent », not that they look into the camera. And the ambiguity in this is tenacious: Meynard even questions whether these children are even a part of the photograph at all:

Ou bien s'agit-il de la description d'un autre cliché du père ? Le texte ne le dit pas clairement. Toujours est-il que la description de la photographie est

⁴⁶⁹ In *The Material Object in the Work of Marcel Proust*, Baldwin writes of enhanced ekphrasis “in which purely mimetic considerations seem to override any fundamentally ekphrastic intention” (23).

troublante, tant par les effets d'échos entre ces différentes situations et époques, que par sa dimension d'hypotypose [...] [L]e jeu entre mots et image crée un effet de proximité, comme une sorte de circularité du temps et de l'espace. Cet effet accentué par le recours dans le texte au présent de l'indicatif et à la première personne du singulier (« me regardent ») semble ainsi rapprocher les deux enfants de Guyane, les deux petits Africains, et le jeune Le Clézio lui-même.⁴⁷⁰ (« une quête des origines » 60)

In looking at and into that photograph (or photographs), Le Clézio ultimately finds nothing of his father but, instead, sees only himself. He sees himself in the pirogue on the sparkling mirror of water, feeling the wind and smelling the water and hearing the insects at the approach of night; he sees himself *being seen* by children on the beach, and he *sees himself in those children*, with their black bowl-cut hairstyles « *comme moi à leur âge*. »

The dreamscape is unceremoniously broken as Le Clézio exits the realm of the photograph immediately after the line « *comme moi à leur âge* », to turn the narrative swiftly back toward his father: « De *son* séjour en Guyane, mon père ne rapportera que le souvenir de ces deux enfants indiens [...] qui *l'*observent en grimaçant un peu à cause du soleil »⁴⁷¹ (our emphasis) (Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 52). This repositioning of his father, back into place to rightfully receive the gaze of those children from so long ago, should settle some of the confusion, as Le Clézio had placed himself into the photograph in order to see that world through his father's eyes. But just a few moments later, he writes, « Plus tard, longtemps après, je suis allé à mon tour au pays des Indiens, sur les fleuves. J'ai

⁴⁷⁰ [Our translation: "Or rather is it the description of another of the father's photographs? The text isn't clear. Still, the description of the photograph is disconcerting, as much from the echo between different episodes and different eras as from its hypotyposis [...] [T]he play between text and image creates an effect of closeness, of circularity in time and space. The effect is heightened by the use of the first person and the present tense ("gaze out at me"), which seems to connect the two Guyanese children, the two young Africans, and Le Clézio himself. "]

⁴⁷¹ ["From *his* stay in Guyana, my father brought back only the memory of those two Indian children standing at the edge of the river, watching *him*, grimacing a little from the sun." (our emphasis)(Dickson, *the African* 46)]

connu des enfants semblables »⁴⁷², sowing ever more endless doubt upon what this hypnotic scene truly conjures.

This entire moment doesn't even fill an entire page in the book, but it has a profound impact on how the reader sees the role and the relationship with photographs in *L'Africain*: the blurring of memory and fantasy, and of photographs shown and unshown, while perhaps never so disruptive before this moment, come to illustrate certain liberties taken by the author, to let the photographs, more than anything, be an inspiration to him. And the echoes and the circularity between time and place, and between photographs, moves the reader back and forth through the text, to revisit, to reevaluate and to look anew.⁴⁷³

As the narrative advances, Le Clézio continues to trace his father's past and the path that led him to become the man that he was. In *L'Africain*'s first chapters, as Le Clézio revisited his own childhood, he was forced to revisit much of his childhood pain and fear: of the war; of being uprooted and transplanted into a whole other world with its whole host of new dangers—real and imagined—for a child. And there was the pain and the fear of his father, « inconnu, étrange, possiblement dangereux »⁴⁷⁴ (45), who, having been absent from Le Clézio's life for so long, had been, in many ways, a violent intrusion into his life by a man who seemed not to want to be a part of it. But he also recalls those moments of adventure, freedom, and the feeling to have been, for once at least, part of a loving family unit.

⁴⁷² [“Later, a long time afterward, I too traveled to the land of the Indians, along the rivers. I met similar children” (Dickson, *The African* 47)]

⁴⁷³ See Meynard 59.

⁴⁷⁴ [“odd, unfamiliar, possibly dangerous” (Dickson, *The African* 39)]

And as the book moves forward, Le Clézio comes to view his father in a more understanding, and a far more sympathetic, light. Le Clézio's archive of photographs, most of which his father had taken and kept, continue to be an elemental force, as they continually refresh, repair and replace old memories, and provide him with both inspiration and insight into his and his family's history. More than just tools, however, they are also mementos: while that photograph of his father as a strapping young 1920s gentleman in a tailored suit and polished shoes might be difficult to reconcile with haggard and ragged old man in ill-fitting khakis that he would meet in 1948, Le Clézio looks upon the photograph with warm admiration. And, despite all of the complexities that we may have laid forth above, warmer still is his association to his father's photographs of the South American wilderness, into which he momentarily loses himself into memory and reverie: by revisiting his own past, he is able to somehow put himself in his father's place.

*À la source de mes sentiments et de mes déterminations*⁴⁷⁵

L'Africain's fifth chapter begins: « À partir de mars 1932, mon père et ma mère quittent la résidence de Forestry House à Bamenda et s'installent dans la montagne, à Banso, où un hôpital doit être créé^[476] »⁴⁷⁷ (67). It is titled « Banso » for the place where Le

⁴⁷⁵ Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 101. ["To the source of my feelings, to that which molded my character" (*Dickson, The African* 102)]

⁴⁷⁶ *Our footnote*: This detail, « où un hôpital doit être créé », sheds light on the documentary aspect of a photograph that appears earlier, on page 36 of *L'Africain*, and is labeled in the table of illustrations simply as « Banso ». That image is of a long, high thatch-roofed building with multiple windows, a building that—despite the role that the photograph takes with regard to its placement in the book's second chapter—seems far too large to be the sort of living quarters that Le Clézio evokes at several moments in the text: « le logement *de fonction* que le gouvernement anglais a prévu pour les médecins militaires » (9); « ces *maisons de passage* africaines » (61); or, « la case de terre et de branches *qui n'est pas plus grande qu'un abri de poules* » (76). (all emphasis is ours). For that reason, it seems fair to assume that it is, in effect, an image of the hospital mentioned in this passage.

Clézio's father would settle for fifteen years of his working life, where he would establish a hospital and begin to live the best years of his life. The opening line echoes the opening passages of the two previous chapters in the book, which begin « Mon père est arrivé en Afrique en 1928 [...] » (39) and « À l'âge de trente ans, mon père quitte Southampton à bord d'un cargo mixte [...] » (49), respectively. And Le Clézio completes a sort of trilogy, as he continues to explore his own origins through the tracing of his father's life's journey, of his arrival in Africa, and of the circumstances—pride? restlessness? adventure? (43)—that had led him to the continent.

However, this fifth chapter also marks a significant turning point: there is mention, now, of Le Clézio's mother, who had joined her husband in Africa once they were married: « C'est à Bamenda que mon père emmène ma mère après leur mariage, et Forestry House est leur première maison »⁴⁷⁸ (64)—, and so the story of Le Clézio's father has become the story of Le Clézio's parents and is now moving closer to being the story of Le Clézio's own 'origins.'⁴⁷⁹

Le Clézio treats this period, that he recognizes as being that to which he owes his very existence, with a particular reverence, and the result is a chapter that is almost ethereal. This fifth chapter is also the sole chapter of the book in which Le Clézio does not bring himself directly into the narrative. Even in the two chapters that directly precede it, and which both focus on the father's journey rather than his own, Le Clézio

⁴⁷⁷ "In March of 1932, my mother and father left the Forestry House residence in Bamenda and set up house in the mountains, in Banson, where a hospital was to be built." (Dickson, *The African* 63)

⁴⁷⁸ "My father brought my mother to Bamenda after their marriage and Forestry House was their first home." (Dickson, *The African* 60)

⁴⁷⁹ In this way, this fifth chapter, more than any that precede it—even more than the third chapter, « L'Africain », which shares its title with the book proper—, relates to the book's opening line, that « [t]out être humain est le résultat d'un père et une mère » (7). In fact, this fifth chapter ends with a scene of lovemaking (76) that can quite arguably be read as the moment of the author's conception. See also 77, 104.

nevertheless was able to interweave his own lived experience with the experiences of his father: perhaps most significantly through that moment shared, over time and space and memory, floating in a pirogue on a distant river in faraway Guyana.

In this fifth chapter, however, Le Clézio attempts to explore, more exclusively, the life that his father—and now mother—had led in the time before his own birth, in a place called Banso. And it begins quite truly as an exercise in world building. Le Clézio writes,

Le territoire qu'il a en charge est immense. Cela va de la frontière avec le Cameroun sous mandat français, au sud-est, jusqu'aux confins de l'Adamawa au nord, et comprend la plus grande partie des chefferies et des petits royaumes qui ont échappé à l'autorité directe de l'Angleterre après le départ des Allemands: Kantu, Abong, Nkom, Bum, Fouban, Bali.⁴⁸⁰ (67)

But to build this world, Le Clézio will be required to rely more pointedly on his father's photographs and other souvenirs⁴⁸¹ to be able to relate a time and place that he, himself, never could have known.

*Il avait rêvé devant les cartes*⁴⁸²

Le Clézio's description of the territory of Banso is sprung to life from one of his father's own hand-drawn maps of the region, a map onto which « mon père a noté les distances, non en kilomètres, mais en heures et jours de marches ».⁴⁸³ Drawing from the map in the

⁴⁸⁰ ["The territory he was in charge of was immense. It stretched from the border with Cameroon under French mandate in the southeast, all the way to the limits of the Adamawa emirate to the north and included the majority of chiefdoms and small kingdoms that escaped the direct authority of England after the departure of the Germans: Kantu, Abong, Nkom, Bum, Fouban, Bali." (Dickson, *The African* 63)]

⁴⁸¹ In the fourth chapter, Le Clézio recounts his father's return to France in retirement, along with many of the objects and habits that returned with him (55-57), and he reflects, as well, on his own relationship with those objects—« Ils étaient ma part africaine » (65) ["They were my African side" (Dickson, *The African* 61)].

⁴⁸² Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 100. ["He had pored [sic] over the maps" (Dickson, *The African* 101)]

⁴⁸³ ["my father noted the distances, not in kilometers [sic], but in hours or days of walking time." (Dickson, *The African* 63)]

same manner that he has drawn from his father's photographs, « qui [lui] avaient permis d'accéder à la mémoire et de la matérialiser »⁴⁸⁴ (Cortanze, « Le Clézio mon père » 70), Le Clézio writes of Bansa's mountains and valleys, of its twisting trails and of its tumultuous rivers (*L'Africain* 67-69), and of the vastness of the space between them all.

The map that he describes, and from which Bansa is sprung, is that whose reproduction serves as the book's frontispiece. It is the first image that a reader encounters upon opening *L'Africain*. As Meynard argues, the map presents in this way « une dimension émouvante, en tant qu'elle constitue l'inscription concrète du père dans le livre »⁴⁸⁵ (« Une quête des origines » 61)⁴⁸⁶, and the map's prominent placement in the book suggests quite a particular significance. And just as with the river photograph that Le Clézio describes in Chapter four of the book, the reader is now drawn back through the narrative, this time to the very beginning of the book. Prior to this evocation, the map's privileged location had remained rather understated, if not entirely overlooked. Even if one had more than glanced upon the map, even if they had studied it before this moment in the book, the names and the tracings and the landmarks on that map would have meant little, as the only connection they would have had with the book would have been the simple African-ness of the place names.

But from the start of the fifth chapter, the map is summoned, and the reader travels back through the narrative, back to the very start of the book to behold those names and those tracings and those landmarks that had been sketched by the father's own

⁴⁸⁴ [Our translation: "which allowed [him] to access and to embody memory"]

⁴⁸⁵ [Our translation: "a emotional dimension, inasmuch as it constitutes the father's very inscription into the book."]

⁴⁸⁶ Le Clézio, himself, has made a similar statement about the presence, in general, of the book's photographs: « Je n'imagine pas ce livre sans les photos. Je n'aurais pas été porté de la même manière, j'aurais eu le sentiment de quelque chose d'abstrait. Les photos sont aussi un peu la participation du sujet au livre qui parle de lui. C'est presque un livre écrit à deux. Un dialogue qui se noue maintenant. » (Cortanze 70)

hand, and suddenly that map has a newfound significance. As Le Clézio states in the text, the map is said to evoke Banzo's vast expanse of mountains, valleys, rivers and plains; he writes that his father preferred his own hand-written map because « [l]es précisions sur la carte donnent *la vraie dimension de ce pays* »⁴⁸⁷ (our emphasis)(69), not only in contrast to official— colonial—maps, which were ridden with gaps and inaccuracies (*L'Africain* 69-70), but also in that « il est probablement que personne ne l'aura mieux ressenti que lui, à ce point parcouru, sondé, souffert »⁴⁸⁸ (69).

*Pendant plus de quinze ans ce pays sera le sien*⁴⁸⁹

Le Clézio sees Banzo as the time and place of his parents' halcyon days, about which he writes: « Ici, c'est un pays aux horizons lointains, au ciel plus vaste, aux étendues à perte de vue. Mon père et ma mère y ressentent une liberté qu'ils n'ont jamais connue ailleurs »⁴⁹⁰ (71). And of photographs his father had taken during this time,

Les clichés que mon père prend avec son Leica montrent l'admiration qu'il éprouve pour ce pays.⁴⁹¹ (71)⁴⁹²

Malgré la mauvaise qualité des tirages, le bonheur de mon père et de ma mère est perceptible. Au dos d'une photo prise quelque part dans la région des Grass Fields, en pays mbembé, qui montre le paysage devant lequel ils ont

⁴⁸⁷ [“The details noted down on the map reveal *the true dimensions of that country*” (our emphasis)(Dickson, *The African* 67)]

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⁴⁸⁹ Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 69. [“For more than fifteen years, this would be his country.”(Dickson, *The African* 64)]

⁴⁹⁰ [“This was a country of distant horizons, with vaster skies, with lands stretching out as far as the eye could see. My mother and father felt a sense of freedom they had never experienced anywhere else.” (Dickson, *The African* 67)]

⁴⁹¹ [“The snapshots my father took with his Leica show the admiration he felt for that country.” (Dickson, *The African* 67)]

⁴⁹² This passage echoes an earlier passage from the book: « Il prend des photos. Avec son Leica à soufflet, il collectionne des clichés en noir et blanc qui représentent mieux que des mots, son éloignement, son enthousiasme devant la beauté de ce nouveau monde. » (51) [“He took pictures. With his Leica Bellows camera, he collected black-and-white snapshots that depicted, better than any words, the remoteness of the post, the enthusiasm he felt at discovering the new world.” (Dickson, *The African* 45)]

passé la nuit, mon père écrit avec une emphase inhabituelle: « L'immensité qu'on voit au fond, c'est la plaine sans fin. »⁴⁹³ (71)

One particular photograph that he describes in the text is of a scene of a herd of cattle:

À Ntumbo, sur le plateau, ils croisent un troupeau, que mon père photographie avec ma mère au premier plan. Ils sont si haut que le ciel brumeux semble s'appuyer sur les cornes en demi-lune des vaches et voile le sommet des montagnes alentour.⁴⁹⁴ (71)

And when the page is turned, one encounters the image: the horned cattle are there, as is the heavy mist obscuring the mountains in the distance. But there is no mother. There is barely a foreground in the photograph at all, and in what foreground there is, there is nothing but rocks and scrub.

Perhaps the photograph is a substitute, much like the photograph of the wharf at Port Harcourt that is actually, the table of illustrations tells us, the port at Accra, in Ghana. However, the table tells us this photograph is, indeed, « Troupeau vers Ntumbo, pays nsungli. »⁴⁹⁵ Similar questions arise that were raised about the Guyanese children on the beach by a river: one must ask if there is another photo, one that Le Clézio had chosen to describe but had declined to show; or if the mother was, for whatever the reason, cropped from the image that appears in the book; or if she was ever in the image at all (*see* Meynard 55).

Perhaps because of the earlier moment on the river in Guyana, that which leads a reader to question what is true and what is not with regard to a photograph being evoked,

⁴⁹³ ["Despite the poor quality of the development [sic], my mother and father's happiness is tangible. On the back of a picture taken somewhere in the Grassfields region, in Mbembé country, depicting the landscape where they must have spent the night, my father writes with uncanny grandiloquence: 'The immensity one beholds in the background, is that of the endless plain.'" (Dickson, *The African* 68)]

⁴⁹⁴ ["In Ntumbo, on the plateau, they passed a herd that my father photographed with my mother in the foreground. They are at such a high altitude that the sky [sic] seems to be resting on the moon-shaped horns of the cows and veils the mountain peaks all around them." (Dickson, *The African* 68)]

⁴⁹⁵ ["Herd of cattle near Ntumbo, Nsungli country" (Dickson, *The African* front matter)]

this moment perhaps does not seem quite so jarring. That is, until it occurs yet again. Only a couple of pages later, as he is describing the way of life of a colonial doctor in a region where he is the only one, and where he and his wife are the only Europeans for hundreds of kilometres, Le Clézio writes,

Quand ils arrivent dans un village, ils sont accueillis par les émissaires du roi, conviés aux palabres, et photographiés avec la cour. Sur un de ces portraits, mon père et ma mère posent autour du roi Memfoï, de Banzo. Selon la tradition, le roi est nu jusqu'à la ceinture, assis sur son trône, son chasse-mouches à la main. À ses côtés, mon père et ma mère sont debout, vêtus d'habits fatigués et empoussiérés par la route, ma mère avec sa longue jupe et ses souliers de marche, mon père avec une chemise aux manches roulées et son pantalon kaki trop large, trop court, serré par une ceinture qui ressemble à une ficelle. Ils sourient, ils sont heureux, libres dans cette aventure. Derrière le roi, on aperçoit le mur du palais, une simple case de briques et de boue séchée où brillent des brins de paille.⁴⁹⁶ (Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 74)

Here, again much like the description of the photograph of the children on the beach by the river, the description has an echo. Not to a distant photograph far earlier in the book, however, but just as far back as the beginning of the chapter, to the image of a village chieftain wearing his regalia (68) that appears in the middle of Le Clézio's bringing-to-life of his father's hand-drawn map.

In this image we see a man who, by every appearance, we can now assume is King Memfoï of Banzo: naked to the waist and sitting on his throne [a simple folding chair], he has a fly whisk in his hand, and behind him, at photo's edge, a wall of the palace can indeed be seen, a simple dwelling of dried mud bricks with shiny bits of straw.

⁴⁹⁶ ["When they arrived in a village, they were welcomed by the king's emissaries, invited to the palabers, and photographed with the court. In one of those portraits, my mother and my father pose around King Memfoï, of Banzo. According to tradition, the king is naked to the waist, sitting on his throne, with his fly whisk in hand. On either side of him stand my mother and father wearing worn clothing, dusty from the journey, my mother in her long skirt and walking shoes, my father in a shirt with rolled-up sleeves and his khaki pants that are too baggy and too short, held up by a belt that looks like a piece of twine. They are smiling, they are happy, fancy-free on that adventure. Behind the king, a wall of the palace can be seen, a simple dwelling of dried mud bricks with shiny bits of straw." (Dickson, *The African* 70-71)]

But there are no smiling faces surrounding him. The king stares with regal seriousness into the camera. And the king is alone. Even the third photograph to appear in the chapter, the image of a European, standing in the middle-distance upon a rope bridge that spans a river, dressed in a pith helmet and posing for the camera (75), has their face and features frustratingly out of focus.

Why these acts of effacement? Natalie Edwards writes that, normally, “[i]ncorporating photographs into an autobiography would appear to be *an appeal to the real*, providing evidence of the author’s lived reality beyond the way that she or he may manipulate it in words” (“The Absent Body” 80), and Linda Haverty Rugg writes that the incorporation photographs of the subject further “embodies” that subject into the narrative (*Picturing Ourselves* 16; qtd in N. Edwards, “The Absent Body” 81); these apparent uses can be seen in all from the popular autobiographies (*see* Rugg 2) to Barthes’ ‘album’ of family photographs that makes up the first section of his eponymous autobiographical experiment *Roland Barthes*.⁴⁹⁷

Of those cases that Edwards has studied in which incorporated photographs do not include the subject, however—works by Hélène Cixous and by Annie Ernaux and Marc Marie⁴⁹⁸—, she sees this as way of “subverting the way in which a photograph freezes the body within a frame” (“The Absent Body” 89), for representing the subject in a photograph would have rendered it into something fixed or static (89). Absenting the body is therefore a means of exerting control over the narrative and maintaining control over the body (93), control that a photograph might have wrested away.

⁴⁹⁷ See *supra*, Chapter 1, “*The photograph is not of ‘me’*”

⁴⁹⁸ Edwards looks at Cixous’ *Photos de racines* and Ernaux and Marie’s *L’Usage de la photo*.

Of the photographs incorporated into *L'Africain*, Le Clézio has said in interview, rather simply, that « j'ai éliminé toutes celles où [mon père] apparaissait, et qui étaient parfois remarquables, » and shortly thereafter adding, « En même temps j'avais besoin de cette marque d'admiration ou de respect pour ne pas dire d'amour »⁴⁹⁹ (Cortanze, « Mon père L'Africain » 70). Le Clézio offers that his father would not have approved of the book had it been written during his lifetime (70), and so the exclusion of photographs in which the father appears can be understood as an appeasement to this fact.

Larochette suggests that it could also be Le Clézio's desire to only show the outward side of his father: the places traveled, the people encountered:

Ces photos sont là pour honorer cette terre qui a également éduqué Le Clézio et qui donc le lie à son père, à défaut de l'avoir eu présent pendant son enfance. C'est cette contrée que tous deux ont habitée, ces êtres humains qui les ont habités qui importent, comme ce pays qui marque dans leur existence respective une césure.⁵⁰⁰ (« Photographie et récit de filiation » 276)

But this idea that the visual elements would simply be some sort of celebratory nod, however respectful, to the pristine beauty and noble people of Africa is so very dissonant with what is an intimately personal, subjective memoir that has so much engagement and interplay with the photographs that are at its core.

Vogl, for her part, argues a general mistrust that a photograph could do Le Clézio's father proper justice:

Or, toute représentation—visuelle ou verbale—risque d'enfermer son sujet. Le fait de nommer le père par son prénom, de le décrire physiquement de façon trop détaillée, de le montrer de trop près sur une photographie, tout cela nierait

⁴⁹⁹ [Our translation: "I eliminated all of those in which he appeared, and which were often quite remarkable [...] At the same time, I was needing [to include] this mark of admiration or of respect, not to say love"]

⁵⁰⁰ [Our translation: Those photographs are there to honour this land that had equally made Le Clézio who he is, therefore, which connects him to his father, despite the latter's not being present during his childhood. It is this land that both had lived, these human beings who lived there who, like the country, mark a transition in their respective lives.]

le désir d'autodétermination qui a toujours poussé le père à l'errance, à l'exil.⁵⁰¹ (« Le Clézio en noir et blanc » 82).

This argument is quite similar to Edwards' position about photographs fixing a subject in a certain way and about maintaining control over the narrative. However, Le Clézio does not shy away from describing his father: we are told a fair amount about the man's features, from his athletic build—as a young man at least (Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 49)—, to his rigid posture, his steel-rimmed glasses and his hardened stare, and the vertical wrinkles between his eyebrows, not to mention his resemblance to James Joyce (43-45); and we also know of the too baggy, too short khaki pants and the black leather shoes that were the staples of his wardrobe (49, 56, 74, 90). And from the degree to which Le Clézio exalts his father's freedom, especially throughout the fourth and fifth chapters of the book that recount the father's departure from Southampton to Guyana and then to West Africa where he would begin to make a life for himself and his bride in establishing a new hospital in the “Banso Medical Area” (frontispiece map), freedom that Le Clézio, himself, infers primarily through his father's photographs, it does not seem altogether certain that publishing such images would compromise that freedom.

Meynard, although she will ultimately pursue an answer similar to that presented by Vogl, more acutely connects this act of effacement back to the opening pages of the book. In discussing the photo of the man on the bridge, she writes:

le lecteur en est réduit à se contenter des mots pour imaginer ce visage [...]. En ce sens les images elles-mêmes participent à la mise à distance de ce père, perçu comme étrange et étranger, aussi bien par l'enfant que Le Clézio était que par l'adulte qu'il est devenu au moment de l'écriture de son récit. Ce flottement de la description ou du portrait photographique qui figerait les traits

⁵⁰¹ [Our translation: “Any representation—visual or verbal—risks limiting its subject. The fact of sharing his father's first name, of describing him physically in too much detail, of showing him up close in a photograph, all of that would stifle the desire for self-determination that had always pushed the father toward wanderlust and exile.”]

correspond d'ailleurs bien à la théorie selon laquelle l'Afrique donne un corps mais efface les visages.⁵⁰² (« une quête des origines » 49)

She then carries her argument back to that moment near the beginning of *L'Africain* where Le Clézio declares so very explicitly: « Il me semble que c'est de l'entrée dans cette case, à Ogoja, *que date l'effacement de mon visage*, et des visages de tous ceux qui étaient autour de moi »⁵⁰³ (our emphasis)(10). In the opening chapter of *L'Africain*, this erasure of the face is a lovely and poetic concept to illustrate a child's coming to discover his burgeoning sense of self.

The chapter's opening line is « De ce visage que j'ai reçu à ma naissance, j'ai des choses à dire »⁵⁰⁴ (9) which is closely followed by the announcement of that face's erasure upon his arrival to the house at Ogoja. Shortly thereafter, Le Clézio writes that « L'Afrique, c'était le corps plutôt que le visage »⁵⁰⁵ (13) and slightly further along, « L'Afrique qui déjà m'ôtait le visage me rendait un corps [...] »⁵⁰⁶ (14). And from that moment forward, for young Le Clézio, and for a time, at least, it would be absolute liberty, « le règne du corps »⁵⁰⁷ (15). This shedding of his past identity—that of a helpless, cloistered child living in fear during the war—meant being reborn wild, free and fearless. Here, again, we see the circularity of the operation between image and text, this

⁵⁰² [Our translation: “the reader is reduced to accepting mere words to envision this face [...]. In this sense, the images themselves participate in the distancing of the father, perceived as odd and as a stranger, as much by Le Clézio when he was a child as by Le Clézio the man at the moment of writing this narrative. This fickleness, then, of the description and of the photographic image that should rightly capture those traits, relates rather well to the theory that Africa gives one a body but erases faces”]

⁵⁰³ [“It seems to me that the erasing of my face, and of all the faces around me, dates back to the moment I entered that cabin in Ogoja.” (Dickson, *The African* 4)]

⁵⁰⁴ [“I have a few things to say about the face I was given at birth” (Dickson, *The African* 3)]

⁵⁰⁵ [“Africa was more about bodies than faces” (Dickson, *The African* 7)]

⁵⁰⁶ [“Africa was already taking my face away and giving me [a body]” (Dickson, *The African* 8)]

⁵⁰⁷ [“The supremacy of the body” (Dickson, *The African* 9)]

time the echo of the text being manifest, later, in the images displayed in the fifth chapter, which then draw us back to the beginning again, this time to read the opening text anew.

*C'était lui l'Africain*⁵⁰⁸

These are photographs in which the faces—and at times the entire bodies—of Le Clézio's parents are intentionally and deliberately withheld from view. We would argue that these photographs are actually operating, inasmuch as they are capable, to depict Le Clézio's parents in the time at which their own faces had been erased, the time when they, themselves, became 'African.' This is not an altogether far-fetched notion, and it can be substantiated consistently throughout the entirety of *L'Africain*.

Of the fifteen photographs that illustrate *L'Africain*, ten of the images feature persons; of those ten, only four feature any Europeans. They are: the image of a thatched-roofed house standing in the midday sun, with a man barely visible at the photo's right edge (36); the image of Europeans dressed in pith helmets and sun hats disembarking from a ship at port (44); the image of a European who stands in the middle distance on a rope bridge spanning a river, dressed in a pith helmet and posing for the camera (75); and lastly, a European, dressed in a pith helmet, far in the distance, back to the camera, wading through a forested river on horseback (105).

In not a single one of these four images is the face of a European clearly discernable: the man standing next to the thatched-roof building is too far in the distance to be in any way identifiable, as is the man standing on the rope bridge that spans a river; the person on horseback has their back to the camera and, among the Europeans

⁵⁰⁸ Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 7. ["[I]t was he who was the African" (C. Dickson, *The African* 1)]

disembarking at port, not a single individual has their face toward the camera or otherwise unobscured. Furthermore, this tally does not include those photographs described in the text, such as that of Le Clézio's father as young man, which limits its description to his father's physical build and articles clothing, but shares nothing of the then-young man's facial features (49); nor does it include the two photographs in which Europeans—Le Clézio's parents—have been effectively erased from the portraits they are alleged to have shared with King Memfoi of Banson or with a herd of high plains cattle (67, 72).

Compare these four photographs, then, to the six remaining photographs of persons, which all depict non-Europeans. Of these six, only in one is it not possible to discern the faces of any individuals, and that is the image of warriors dancing in a village square, dressed in their expressive costumes and headdress (18)—the dancers' faces, here, are obscured only by result of their elaborate costumes. Yet, even this image, like that of the long-horned cattle, may or may not have cropped out the image of some Europeans; Le Clézio writes in the fourth chapter:

Une photo prise par mon père, sans doute un peu satirique, montre ces messieurs du gouvernement britannique, raides dans leurs shorts et leurs chemises empesées, coiffés du casque, mollets moulés dans leurs bas de laine, en train de regarder le défilé des guerriers du roi, en pagne et la tête décorée de fourrure et de plumes, brandissant des sagaies.⁵⁰⁹ (64)

However, in the photograph, as it is published, we see only the warriors.

The remaining five photographs—those of a pair of children playing at a river's edge (11); a village chieftain wearing his regalia (68); an elderly man who is possibly

⁵⁰⁹ ["A picture taken by my father, undoubtedly somewhat satirical, shows these officials of the British government, standing stiffly in their starched shorts and shirts, wearing helmets, calves sheathed in their woolen stockings, watching the parade of the King's warriors, in loincloths, heads decorated with fur and feathers, brandishing their *assegaïs*." (original emphasis)(C. Dickson, *The African* 60)].

blind (84); a young boy, pressed in between two women as they dance in celebration (93); and finally, a woman smiling, in profile, with a young child nestled in a sling at her back (101)—, by contrast, all feature at least one face in full, unobstructed view, with most looking directly into the camera's lens. The contrast is far too striking, far too deliberate, to be for naught.

When Le Clézio writes of the photograph taken by his father on the pirogue on the Rio Demerara in British Guyana, recall that he sees himself in the two children standing on the beach and squinting in the sunlight as they look out toward his father, with their bowlcut hairstyles « comme moi à leur âge ». When Le Clézio had been these children's age, however, his father was alone in Africa, separated from his family who remained in wartime France, and so such a photograph of his own children at that age could never have been possible. However, as this unseen photograph from Guyana echoes back to that which is presented early in the first chapter of the book, it can be seen as the photograph that Le Clézio's father should have taken of his own two sons playing at river's edge during their African childhood, had he not failed in his attempt to reach them during the war. The same could be seen in other of the photographs, as well. Certainly, near the end of *L'Africain*, there is a moment of lament for a childhood that never was:

Il aurait fallu grandir en écoutant un père raconter sa vie, chanter des chansons, accompagner ses garçons à la chasse aux lézards ou à la pêche aux écrevisses dans la rivière Aiya, il aurait fallu mettre sa main dans la sienne pour qu'il montre les papillons rares, les fleurs vénéneuses, les secrets de la nature qu'il devrait bien connaître [...] (92-93)

In the middle of this passage is placed another photograph, the image of a young boy, pressed in between two women as they dance (93). Placed here, it carries the same sense

of what was missed or what never was, namely any number of photographs of a young Le Clézio at any number of celebrations that never took place. that just as the photograph of a woman smiling, in profile, with a young child nestled in a sling at her back might have been Le Clézio's mother with either of her two sons as a young child. Of course, such readings of these photographs are subjective and not altogether seamless—such readings cannot be applied to every photograph equally, and the table of illustrations—the reality of the photographs—challenges these interpretations. But such readings do serve well to further illustrate Le Clézio's indulgence into an invented story—into dreamscape and fantasy—that the these photographs, at many moments, provoke.

*Je m'étais inventé une histoire*⁵¹⁰

The pattern of effacing European faces and showcasing African ones is systematic throughout *L'Africain*, and it begins to be telegraphed from the first chapter:

*De ce visage que j'ai reçu à ma naissance, j'ai des choses à dire. D'abord, qu'il m'a fallu l'accepter. Affirmer que je ne l'aimais pas serait lui donner une importance qu'il n'avait pas quand j'étais enfant. Je ne le haïssais pas, je l'ignorais, je l'évitais. Je ne le regardais pas dans les miroirs. Pendant des années, je crois que je ne l'ai jamais vu. Sur les photos, je détournais les yeux, comme si quelqu'un d'autre s'est substitué à moi.*⁵¹¹ (our emphasis)(9).

From this very first stanza of Chapter one, both faces and photographs are already being evoked, and already implicated within them are questions of identity and of its refusal. And these questions will become ever more explicit when, in the very next paragraph, Le

⁵¹⁰ Le Clézio, *L'Africain* 7. ["I'd made up a life story" (C. Dickson, *The African* 1)]

⁵¹¹ ["I have a few things to say about the face I was given at birth. First of all, I had to accept it. To say I didn't like it would make it seem more important than it was to me as a child. I didn't hate it, I ignored it, I avoided it. I didn't look at mirrors. I think years went by without my ever seeing it. I would avert my eyes in photographs, as if someone else had taken my place." (our emphasis)(Dickson, *The African* 3)]

Clézio writes of « l'entrée dans cette case, à Ogoja, *que date l'effacement de mon visage* » (10), and they will continue to be explored throughout the entirety of the book.

Indeed, such questions begin to be raised even sooner than these passages that open Chapter one. For even ahead of the opening chapter, Le Clézio introduces *L'Africain* with a brief prologue, which we render here in full:

Tout être humain est le résultat d'un père et une mère. On peut ne pas les reconnaître, ne pas les aimer, on peut douter d'eux. Mais ils sont là, avec leur visage, leurs attitudes, leurs manières et leurs manies, leurs illusions, leurs espoirs, la forme de leurs mains et de leurs doigts de pieds, la couleur de leurs yeux et de leurs cheveux, leur façon de parler, leurs pensées, probablement l'âge de leur mort, tout cela est passé en nous.

J'ai longtemps rêvé que ma mère était noire. Je m'étais inventé une histoire, un passé, pour fuir la réalité à mon retour d'Afrique, dans ce pays, dans cette ville où je ne connaissais personne, où j'étais devenu étranger. Puis j'ai découvert, lorsque mon père, à l'âge de la retraite, est revenu vivre avec nous en France, que c'était lui l'Africain. Cela a été difficile à admettre. Il m'a fallu retourner en arrière, recommencer, essayer de comprendre. En souvenir de cela, j'ai écrit ce petit livre.⁵¹² (7)

In these two short paragraphs, the whole of *L'Africain* is laid out quite plainly before the reader. In the first of these paragraphs, Le Clézio writes in the most literal and physical terms about progeniture; he writes of the face and the features and the mannerisms—all of that which we receive, passed down to us by our parents from birth. What he writes in that first paragraph is matter-of-fact—we know these things to be absolutely true.

⁵¹² ["Every human being is the product of a father and a mother. One might not accept them, might not love them, might have doubts about them. But they're there, with their faces, their attitudes, their mannerisms and their idiosyncrasies, their illusions, their hopes, the shape of their hands and of their toes, the color of their eyes and hair, their manner of speaking, their thoughts, probably their age at death, all of that has become part of us.

For a long time I dreamt that my mother was black. I'd made up a life story, so I could flee reality when I returned from Africa to this country, to this city where I didn't know anyone, where I'd become a stranger. Then when my father came back to live with us in France upon his retirement, I discovered that in fact it was he who was the African. It was hard for me to admit that, I had to go back in time, start all over again, try to understand. I wrote this little book in memory of that experience." (Dickson, *The African* 1)]

However, the second paragraph of this prologue shows that, while these things may be true, they are not the absolute truth. These things passed down are *what* we are, yes. But they are not necessarily *who* we are. Nor, for that matter, are they necessarily *who we want to be*. In the second paragraph, Le Clézio writes of having invented a story for himself, one through which he could flee the cruel realities of late childhood and adolescence when, back in France, he would find himself « rejeté de mes camarades de classe du fait de mon étrangeté »⁵¹³ (20). The story that he invented? It was an absolute reinvention of who he was, of from where and from whom he had come. It was the adoption of a new and different identity, not only for himself, but for his family, an identity that he had discovered in Africa when he had discovered his father, an identity that his parents had, themselves, discovered before him, an identity that he understood and to which he could relate, and that could help him to explain his oddness and his foreignness—if to no one else, then at least to himself.

L'Africain is that story. In its words, it tells of how Le Clézio as a young boy, after living his earliest years in fear and confinement during wartime, first felt the energy and the mysteries of life when he arrived to that house at Ogoja and to a barefoot and sunburnt freedom the likes of which he had never before experienced. It tells of the moments of happiness that he felt in the evenings, when his family was together and safe inside that same house. It tells, too, of his father's flight from civilization to chart his own path in life, one of adventure and meaning, but also of alienation and loneliness and only occasional bouts of happiness—most of those during his time with his young bride in Bansa. But that father was also one who had scolded and disciplined and frightened Le

⁵¹³ ["rejected by my classmates because of my oddness" (Dickson, *The African* 15)]

Clézio, a father from (and for) whom he had felt little love. And so, *L'Africain* is Le Clézio's effort to empathize and to sympathize, to better understand the man who was his father, so as to better understand himself. At book's close, he will write:

Si mon père est devenu l'Africain, par la force de sa destinée, moi, je puis penser à ma mère africaine, celle qui m'a embrassé et nourri à l'instant où j'ai été conçu, à l'instant où je suis né.⁵¹⁴ (104)

This final line of *L'Africain* echoes back to the book's opening one with « ce visage *que j'ai reçu à ma naissance* » (our emphasis)(9), but also to the prologue's very first declaration, that « [t]out être humain *est le résultat d'un père et une mère* » (our emphasis)(7). This circularity, then, carries Le Clézio's greater understanding of his father, and his discoveries about himself, back through the whole of the book, reverberating new meaning into those words that set the story in motion, and even into title itself: the African of the title is not only Le Clézio's father or his mother, it is also Le Clézio, himself.

⁵¹⁴ ["Though my father became the African by force of destiny, today I think I can truly believe in the existence of my African mother, the one who embraced and nourished me at the moment of my conception, the moment of my birth." (Dickson, *The African* 106)]

Conclusion:

L'Africain is one of the original titles in *Traits et portraits*, a curated collection of dynamic and experimental photobiographic self-portraits made by writers, artists, filmmakers, and other cultural influencers. But a mention of its place within Le Clézio's own body of work is worthwhile, as well. *L'Africain* is not the first of Le Clézio's literary works to incorporate photographs. *La guerre*, from 1970, contains just over a dozen images, gathered together at the end of the book; these photographs are cold and isolated, showing the urban landscape as impersonal, anonymous and cruel. Apart from their sharp contrasts, these two works share very little. There are others as well, but *Haiï* is a *beau livre*, not a novel, and *Gens des nuages* is a different sort of collaborative project between Le Clézio, his wife, Jemia Le Clézio, and the photographer Bruno Barbey. *L'Africain* is far more connected to a pair of later literary works by Le Clézio. Its closest relationship is with the 1991 novel *Onitsha*, which is in many aspects a fictionalized account of the stories and relationships he bares truthfully in *L'Africain*—a child, though this time a twelve-year-old, travels to Africa to live with the father, this time a businessman, whom he has never met. Le Clézio, himself, is hesitant to compare the two works too closely—he is adamant that the father in *Onitsha* bears no resemblance to his own—, but there is no question that the novel is premised on the same lived experience; Le Clézio even made use of the same collection of his father's photographs to help him in creating that fictional world (see Cortanze, « Mon père l'Africain » 70). There's a rather curious comparison that, too, can be made with Le Clézio's 2006 novel *Ourania*, whose premise, very much like *L'Africain*, is that of a boy in wartime France imagines a utopian world for himself as a means of escape.

L'Afrique fantôme, too, is a book that fits closely to those around it in Leiris' œuvre. Its direct influence on *L'âge d'homme* is declared by Leiris himself (*L'âge d'homme* 762), and the documentation practices of La Mission Dakar-Djibouti would influence his autobiographical writing process for his entire life (see Price and Jamin 171-172). *L'Afrique fantôme* also holds direct lineage with Leiris' ethnographic writings, *La langue secrète des Dogons de Sanga (Soudan français)* and *La possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar*, as all three originate with La Mission Dakar-Djibouti.

But outside Leiris' own body of work, *L'Afrique fantôme*, as unique of a book as it is, still has its confrères. It does owe a debt, both aesthetically and fundamentally, to the magazine *Documents*, as it was through Leiris' association with the magazine that he met Griaule and became a member of the ethnographic Mission. It has an aesthetic and perhaps even ideological debt, as well, to André Breton's *Nadja*, the 1928 experimental photo-novel whose disruptive visual banalities Michel Beaujour connected with *L'Afrique fantôme* as far back as 1967⁵¹⁵—whereas Walker readily evokes this surrealist connection in his article on the « femme du cordonnier » photograph, it is a surprising little blindspot for Clifford, who was either unaware or failed to acknowledge Beaujour's more tenacious linking of *L'Afrique fantôme* to the surrealist movement.

There is also a book, published just two years after *L'Afrique fantôme* that could be seen to be its English-language counterpart. British novelist Graham Greene's 1936 travelogue *Journey Without Maps* documented his reckless decision to travel by foot across the forests of Liberia with his twenty-three-year-old cousin, Barbara, in tow, and

⁵¹⁵ See *supra*, Chapter 2, the section titled "1967"

in search of an adventure that never materialized. In truth, the trek recounted within the pages of *Journey Without Maps* is mostly miserable,⁵¹⁶ “a slow foot-sore journey literally into the unknown” (G. Greene xii). Over the course of their four-week forest trek, there would ultimately be no adventures, but rather “a deeper boredom on the long forest trek than I had ever experienced before” (xi). Rats came in hordes—as did cockroaches, chiggers, and fire ants—the carriers they had hired threatened mutiny, and illness brought Greene to the brink of death, as the best medicines they had brought with them amounted to nothing more than quinine, whiskey and epsom salts (*cf.* B. Greene, *Too Late...* 159). Yet, even these quite tumultuous events were far from exciting as they actually played out. Greene’s recovery to health was rather swift,⁵¹⁷ the carriers were easily placated, and as for the vermin, well, “you soon got used to rats” (G. Greene, *Journey* 106; *cf.* 206). Indeed, the journey was, in execution, just about as painstaking and dull as just about any prospect of traveling 350 miles on foot⁵¹⁸ might suggest.

The misery in *Journey Without Maps* is far more genuine than Leiris’ affected laments in *L’Afrique fantôme*, but misery is not what draws these books together. Rather it is the fact that Greene, like Leiris, rejects the precepts of writing a travel book and turns his gaze inward, ultimately producing what Casey Blanton has called a psychological journey and “the real beginning of heightened subjectivity in the genre” (*Travel Writing* 60). *Journey Without Maps* is also illustrated with “a number of photographs taken with

⁵¹⁶ John Aiery has called it, quite aptly, a “misery tour.” (“... Fascination of the Abomination” para.11).

⁵¹⁷ His cousin would write, “To my great surprise Graham was not dead in the morning. [...] I went to his room expecting to see him delirious or gasping out his last few breaths, and I found him up and dressed.” (B. Greene, *Too Late...* 176). Greene was still suffering from illness at this moment, but he was no longer bedridden and would steadily regain his health.

⁵¹⁸ “[I]t was March the second, we had been walking for exactly four weeks and covered about three hundred and fifty miles.” (G. Greene, *Journey* 262)

an old vest-pocket Kodak” (G. Greene xi), which might have made the book an additional case study in this project. However, one key element of Greene’s book could not respond to our enquiry. The photographs in *Journey Without Maps* are intriguing; they are as dark and as moody and as miserable as the text that they illustrate. The problem with these photographs, the reason that *Journey Without Maps* could not fit into this study alongside *L’Afrique fantôme* and *L’Africain*, is that the photographs fit far too comfortably into *Journey Without Maps*—they illustrate the text perfectly.

In both of the works that we have examined in this study, we have looked at ways in which these two authors have subverted, recontextualized, or reimagined photographs in their works. Their actions do not supplant meaning but, rather, multiply and challenge it. The photographs are never *not* what they originally were—ethnographic documents in the case of Leiris’ *L’Afrique fantôme*, and a personal collection of family photographs in Le Clézio’s *L’Africain*—, but they are almost always *more*.

Of these two works, engagement with photographs is certainly fullest in *L’Africain*. With subtle fictions, Le Clézio transforms photographs that had traced his father’s life and experience into images in which he, himself, could find belonging. *L’Africain* is a story in those photographs, in those portraits of people and places that Le Clézio’s father had encountered during his years living and traveling in Guyana, Cameroon, Nigeria, Algeria and Ghana. The photographs that Le Clézio shows, as well as those that he only describes, anchor and shape his memories of the past. But Le Clézio unsettles them, using the photographs to quite literally realize a childhood escapist fantasy, so that the images in the book come to serve, at the very same time, as family

photographs for the bonded unit for which Le Clézio, as a boy, had longed and rarely found beyond those evenings spent together after nightfall in the house at Ogoja.

The result of Le Clézio's fabulation sees the photographs in *L'Africain* operating simultaneously on two planes, one that involves the exploration of the life that Le Clézio's father had lived, and another that resurrects the author's boyhood imaginings, and which does so with subtle and curious grace. In *L'Africain*'s circularity, in the echoes that carry meaning back through pages and memory and time, one can read and understand the photographs, with their effacement of European faces and their showcasing of African ones, as being the illustration of Le Clézio's boyhood fable. To read *L'Africain* as such, the images become those photographs that should have been but never were because of a war that had kept a family divided and forever fractured.

In the case of *L'Afrique fantôme*, the photographs are ethnographic documents at their source, but appropriated as they are into Leiris' diary, they can no longer be looked at *only* as such. But conversely, neither can their ethnographicity be ignored. In short, this is because it has not been ignored by the author. Leiris illustrated his diary with photographs that he had chosen from among the 6000 taken by the anthropologists, musicologists, writers and artists—himself included—that made up La Mission Dakar-Djibouti's team of fieldworkers. These were photographs taken for scientific purposes that mission chief Marcel Griaule decreed should show the utmost concern for the “reality” of the object or scene being captured to film (*Cahier Dakar-Djibouti* 203), documents entrusted with preserving evidence of cultural practices and material artifacts. Within the pages of Leiris's journal, however, these documentary and scientific photographs come to take on remarkable personal significance.

But the degree to which they become personal, we have seen, really is contingent on the book, and on the way in which the text of Leiris' diary operates upon the photographs. There are the captions, for example, which effectively dismiss much of the scientificity that the photographs might have been purported to have: rarely do these captions settle to offer neutral mimetic description; instead, they are so very often injected with some fibre of Leiris' own personality, whether it be poetic wordplay, facetious commentary, or more directly subjective imposition into the scene of a photographic image.

However, this contingency works both ways: these textual acts modify and they appropriate, but they do not completely transform. Claims that they might penetrate into the depths Leiris' psyche or that the photographs might symbolize his intimate or latent desires find little actual support in *L'Afrique fantôme*, as the often banal realities of the ethnographic expedition are a constant intervention that cannot be overlooked. One truth about *L'Afrique fantôme* that has been quite effectively overshadowed by Clifford's tantalizingly seductive label of "surrealist ethnography" (*The Predicament of Culture* 142) is that the diary reveals, perhaps more than anything else, that Leiris took his work on this Mission seriously and that he took to it rather expediently—as Shelton has said, "he was one of the mission's most intrepid agents" ("Primitive Self" 338).⁵¹⁹ But expediency does not preclude self-awareness or conscientiousness, nor do the latter preclude expediency. The trouble with Clifford's label is that it suggests a degree of experimentation, juxtaposition or chance that simply aren't present—*L'Afrique fantôme*

⁵¹⁹Further to Shelton, Perloff has observed that Leiris' erotic fantasies "were primarily directed inward" ("Tolerance and Taboo" 342). Michel Beaujour that "[Leiris'] succubus is science, rather than a phantom Africa" ("Ethnography or Self-Portrayal" 477).

is far more grounded than one might wish it to be. And we saw this, repeatedly, in the third chapter of this study, when even the most provocative of connections—the « femme du cordonnier » and the wet dream that would follow—still cannot quite connect.

In this study we essentially conducted a close and attentive reading of each of the books in question. Doing this allowed us to contextualize the photographs within the works in which they were featured. With *L'Africain*, this allowed for a deeper exploration into the form and function of the book, and it allowed us to reveal *L'Africain* to be quite a masterful little book. It's difficult to imagine that this book that ties so very perfectly together from its first page to its last, and which is so richly involved and indebted to its photographs, was crafted and published all within less than four months' time.⁵²⁰ With *L'Afrique fantôme*, a close reading of the images and the text enabled a degree of correction, or at least attenuation, of the more primitivist or exoticist readings of *L'Afrique fantôme*'s photographs. Edwards and Morton, Poole, and Forsdick, for example, have all called for cooler heads in this way, with regard to scholarly criticism surrounding travel writing and ethnographic discourse.⁵²¹ Heeding these suggestions, in our endeavour to better contextualize the photographs in both *L'Afrique fantôme* and *L'Africain*, we ultimately isolated the books in our analyses. To a large degree, this was intentional—a narrowing in upon each book as a media constellation or singular textual

⁵²⁰ See Le Clézio, *L'Africain* front matter and p.104.

⁵²¹ Edwards and Morton, in their introduction to *Photography, Anthropology and History* write, "it has become necessary for contemporary methodologies to look beyond narrow disciplinary concerns with, on the one hand, decoding or recoding historical images, and on the other to look beyond the reductive and universalizing tendencies of Foucault-inspired readings of the 'colonial archive'" (1) ; Forsdick in "Sa(l)vaging Ethnography", argues that , "In contemporary critical currency, the term [exoticism] has almost universally pejorative overtones and is restricted by its coupling to colonial discourse. Close analysis, however, reveals a need for more attenuated understandings, which, avoiding pan-European generalizations, explore specific cultural traditions, and not only encompass reflexivity but also propose a potential challenge to the reductive overtones implied above" (31); and Poole writes that "it is possible to reclaim suspicion as a productive site for rethinking the particular forms of presence, uncertainty, and contingency that characterize both ethnographic and visual accounts of the world" ("An Excess of Description" 159).

event (Hallet; Rajewsky; Sedlmeier). With our approach, we came to be faced with certain challenges and choices to be able to produce a study that could reasonably incorporate both of these works. And certain limitations, particularly of scope, were necessary in order to maintain a degree of balance. *L'Afrique fantôme* is a much larger work than *L'Africain*. The former carries with it a much longer history that needed to be addressed—hence, the inclusion of a chapter dealing with *L'Afrique fantôme*'s critical divide that has developed over a great many decades. Understanding this critical divide was crucial to understanding the critical positions of the scholarship relating to *L'Afrique fantôme*'s photographs. In our third chapter, we addressed and challenged that scholarship on the grounds that the scholarship—in general, and in specific ways by individual scholars—avoided directly engaging with the text of *L'Afrique fantôme* in its engagement with the photograph. It was *this lack of engagement* that we aimed to address, above all, and it was through the formal analysis that we conducted that we were able to argue how and why such engagement is crucial. We limited our study of *L'Afrique fantôme*'s photographs to this question of engagement. To have gone further in that analysis, by engaging with more photographs for example, or by reengaging the critical questions posed by these scholars, would have taken this dissertation in a different direction. These are important questions, and they remain necessary next steps. But they could not be properly pursued without the groundwork that this dissertation has laid forth.

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