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A JOURNEY THROUGH REALITY
TOWARDS AN ANTHROPO-SEMIOTICS OF TRAVEL REPRESENTATION
LITERATURE, PHOTOGRAPHY, CINEMA
1861-1961

By

Benoît Mauchamp

A DISSERTATION

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This study inquires about the aesthetics of reality at the edge of modernity, through different media and from a traveling perspective. Based on a definition of the journey as an experience of reality and a "decentering" of the mind, it examines the works of three subjective and Parisian realities and proposes a comparative media analysis, ranging from the preface to the Spleen de Paris, written in 1861, to the release of Chronique d’un été in 1961. Through a close analysis of Baudelaire’s poetry, Atget’s photography and Rouch’s cinematography, I approach these narratives as textual and visual productions that foreground the dual process, cultural and aesthetic, travel accounts encompass.

More specifically, this study reflects on the dynamic dialectic involving a spatial and physical practice with a representational one, and thus questions the enunciation of the natural world through a sensory body by looking at the relationship between the world and the texts on the one hand, and between different modes of languages on the other. I contend that a semiotic body, and its corporeal trace, stands as the matrix for both relations. First, on a vertical level, it mediates, in an indexical and contiguous way, the experience of traveling with that of its representation, allowing conversely, an access to the context via the text on a reinforced basis. Second, in a horizontal way, it conjoins the three semiotic modes under consideration, for this semiotic body is the common rooting
to any kind of mediation. Central to this study is the fact that travel narratives, which are usually the domain of literary scholars, are nevertheless also ethnographic documents. Consequently, it articulates internal and external determinations of an interdisciplinary object, and it carefully combines resources of semiotic theory with cultural anthropology, without giving way to a temptation of contextualization that would bear the risk of distorting textual immanence.

The body of this research consists of an introductory chapter in which I revisit the interpretation of travel writing throughout the academic discourse of the postmodern era. I insist on the role of the medium, thus putting emphasis on representation and referentiality, and finally rethink the way of doing comparative media studies. The three subsequent chapters follow the diachronic logic of these journeys taking place in the modern city of Paris in three particular moments: Baudelaire discovers the city on the eve of its dramatic changes caused by Haussmann’s intervention during the Second Empire; Atget explores the surviving fragments of a pluri-secular capital during the Belle Epoque; Rouch, along with Morin, meet with a few Parisians to sound out the post-war atmosphere, in the middle of the Trente Glorieuses. Although the three chapters inquire about the literary, photographic and cinematic representations in a separate way, they do it with a similar concern for the dual process mentioned earlier. They also articulate the structural invariants of any journey, moving from the self, through the space, towards others. These three elements meaningfully correspond to three types of semiotic prints described in the concluding section, which detects in the end the fundamental attitude of the three travel authors: by contrast with the flâneur, they explore reality just as a prowler will look for its prey.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Julie Samit for she has witnessed and supported its whole process, _envers et contre tous_. She also knows the dilemma I had endorsing the academic standards and formal requirements of what is currently done, commonly accepted and often advised in the field of “Cultural Studies”.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the helping few.
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Un voyage se passe de motifs. Il ne tarde pas à prouver qu’il se suffit à lui-même. On croit qu’on va faire un voyage, mais bientôt c’est le voyage qui vous fait, ou vous défait.

Nicolas Bouvier, L’Usage du monde

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION: A JOURNEY THROUGH REALITY

“Traveling and storytelling are fundamental to human existence, yet work together in highly complex ways,” writes Tim Youngs in the closing paragraph of his introduction of The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing. My inquiry on travel representation will delve into these complex ways further detailed as “involving all sorts of stage between perception, experience, narration and reception.” More precisely, the predominant focus of this research regards the passage between the travel experience and its narration. Because it appears impossible to ignore the perceiving and re-ceiving dimensions at stake, this introduction will emphasize the circular process in which travel texts are caught. As I will show, before introducing my primary sources, travel representations both reflect and pervade our relation to the world and to ourselves. Let us begin by reading scholars’ concerns regarding travel writing studies.

In a presentation on travel writing in which she pays attention to the way introductions of such studies are structured, Dinah Roma Santuiri noticed a recurrent pattern, unsurprisingly comprised of similar issues and expectations, although displayed in

1 Tim Youngs, The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing, 2013, p.15.
various orders. In what could be viewed as a self-conscious critique of standardized introductions then, Tim Youngs quotes the Filipina Doctor observing the necessary commonplaces in opening remarks of travel book inquiries: a relatively new “resurgence in critical attention;” a genre having for specificity “its heterogeneous nature,” and thus challenging literary and other disciplinary fields; a body of texts long overlooked, either relegated as mere material, or as being “amateurish and sub-literary;” and finally the acknowledgment of “its so called imperial origins,” which raises along this crucial and current concern: “can [the genre] divest itself from its imperial origins? Can it, despite being reminded of its violent beginnings, move forward and achieve discursive maturity?” The phrasing of this key question for modern and contemporary travel writing theory reveals a rather strange positioning: that of a scholar regretting the past of its object of study, making amends for it, and longing for a reasonable and more appropriate discourse.

While clarifying this apologetics, this introductory chapter will of course not avoid the truisms previously mentioned. Whether it is aesthetic value, factual anchoring, the complex definition of travel genre, or its political role and implications in colonial history, to name the main issues at play, those apparently cannot be escaped when reflecting on the act of traveling and its representation. As a result, I address in what follows the exact same topics; yet, in doing so, my approach will offer a slightly different or renewed light on them. At the very least, this chapter situates the interdisciplinary mapping, epistemological stance, and academic intentions of my research. I propose to

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3 Santiuri, quoted in Tim Youngs, op.cit., p.3.
undertake three goals: resituate travel studies through an overview of academic evolution over the past four decades or so, and thus clarify my reasons for an anthro-po-semiotics; examine carefully recent critical approaches to travel narratives and posit my own contribution to the field after defining what I mean by travel representations; describe and justify my selection of primary sources for this dissertation, comprised of literary writing, photography, and film.

1. An Academic Traveling

1.1 Dialectic of Praise and Disdain

*History of a Popular Success*

Reproducing the usual meta-discourse that characterizes scholarly introductions, I will start by considering a recurring dialectic travel studies display. Roughly confronting popular praise and experts’ disdain, this dialectic brings into play the on-going success of a “sub-literature” on the one hand, and its critical appreciation within academia on the other. Indeed, travel writing has had a strong influence on its readership right from its “official” beginnings about four centuries ago. Travel writing as it is known today, that is, in the modern form Casey Blanton labels “post-enlightenment narrative” (as opposed to a “pre-travel” format), is seen as starting at the turn of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century.\footnote{These are Casey Blanton’s terms and definition of modern and contemporary travel writing. The characteristics of the “post-enlightenment narratives” are the following: “a narrator-traveler who travels for the sake of travel itself; a narrative style that borrows from fiction (…); a conscious commitment to represent (…); a writerly concern,” *Travel Writing: The Self and the World*, 2012, p.5. Moreover, she also...} Although they
never omit acknowledging noble and ancient origins (Homer, Herodotus, Pausanias), nor evoking more recent yet dubious ones (Marco Polo and Petrarch), there is a consensus among scholars that travel writing originated as a genre around this time in the early modern period. Around 1600, travels become more of a social phenomenon instead of individual and specific achievements, and their accounts are an almost systematic trend of publishing houses (just as the novel form, similarly seen as a trivial yet pleasant literature at that time). Richard Hakluyt’s English collection of early travel accounts and the popularity of Jean de Léry’s narrative in France, give evidence of that. From that time until nowadays, travel writing has always been a flourishing literature. Much like the imaginary descriptions of the medieval past, yet in a more realistic way, modern travel books satisfy the public taste for exoticism and adventure, and consequently achieve, and benefit from, great success among common readers.5

In spite, or rather because of this “low-culture” appetite, travel studies per se and even the travel genre did not officially exist... until a very and surprisingly recent time. It is only about three to four decades ago, in the late 1970s, that travel writing became worthy of interest in the researchers’ eyes, without necessarily acquiring respectability, however. Regardless of newly acclaimed and talented travel writers (such as Nicolas Bouvier or Bruce Chatwin) who emerge in the late twentieth-century, confirming the publishing boom, and regardless of specific editions literary journals like the Granta would devote to the genre hoping to promote its relevance and prestige, travel texts remain to a certain

---

5 Modern travel narratives offer more realistic descriptions, but they are to a certain extent as much imaginaries as medieval ones, to follow Edward Saïd’s point (detailed further below).
extent in poor relation to literature, while being lowly perceived in other neighboring fields of study as well.\textsuperscript{6}

\textit{Literary and Cultural Discard}

As for the literary perspective, Michael Kowaleski notices for instance a “venerable tradition of condescending to travel books as a second-rate literary form.”\textsuperscript{7} This view had the pernicious effect of producing a persisting disdain among travel writers themselves. Bruce Chatwin, for instance, does not envision himself as writing “travel literature.” Others, like Jonathan Raban, even reject the travel book as a legitimate form. This rejection originates from the “fact versus fiction” debate Raban finds futile, and which goes back to a generic consideration I will touch on later. Conversely, travel books generally cease to be regarded as such once they enter the sacred circle of literature. While confirming Kowaleski’s observation –“literary studies have taken (…) little interest in travel writing until fairly recently”–, Korte concedes: “unless it related to ‘recognized’ works of literature.”\textsuperscript{8} As an example, Crusoe or Gulliver stories by William Defoe and Jonathan Swift in the old days, and, similarly, Louis Ferdinand Céline’s \textit{Voyage au bout de la nuit} in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, have rarely been labeled as travel texts. They are novels indeed… which raises another generic concern to be addressed, that of the documentary value versus the aesthetic quality.

Besides this empowerment of the literary critics likely to refuse the travel text its artistic potential, or to deny the literary text its travelogue label, the repudiation of travel writing

\textsuperscript{6}“What is not in question is the popularity of the genre as a whole: recent decades have undoubtedly witnessed a travel writing ‘boom’, and this boom shows no sign of abating in the near future.” Carl Thompson, \textit{Travel Writing}, 2011, p.2.
\textsuperscript{8}Barbara Korte, \textit{English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations}, 2000, p.2.
also stems from a rather ideologically engaged body of studies. Whereas the disavowal on the literary side sounds rather conservative and antiquarian, this other scholarly rejection is inherent to the rise of travel studies within academia. Therefore, the negligence previously mentioned needs to be nuanced, as it is only a relative and apparent one. Relative, because not all scholars remained indifferent to modern travel writing (geographers mapping the territory, botanists and zoologists attempting to reconstruct the chain of the living, all relied on some precious first hand data to achieve their goals); and apparent, given the need for such an alleged sub-literature to exist in order to formulate an intellectual critique against it (namely, that it legitimizes colonial expansion). As a result, the political implications and general cultural bias of travel texts fostered the constitution of a seemingly homogenous corpus. Despite being “morally” reproved, the establishment of travel writing as a worthy body of primary sources is concomitant with the rise of ethnic, feminist, and postcolonial studies. Ironically enough, travel writing drew scholarly attention thanks to an unethical identification. Hence Dinah Roma Santuiri’s question earlier, and the fundamental issue of ethics when dealing with travel representation.\(^9\) Nonetheless, this key question unfortunately overshadowed other features of travel writing, as Tim Youngs assesses: “the scrutiny of the genre is more the responsibility of cultural than literary studies, believing its interest to be primarily sociological and its aesthetic value less than that of novel, poetry and drama.”\(^{10}\)

My approach argues against this dichotomous and unbalanced consideration of travel representation, and my attempt is to elaborate a way to conjoin these cultural and literary aspects. This approach is even more needed since scholars, while noticing the duality

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\(^{10}\) Tim Youngs, *op.cit.*, p.8.
under question, often perpetrate it. They do so more particularly by looking at this mutual influence without yet properly assessing or even reflecting on the connection of the two different levels their inquiries address.\footnote{This tendency already surfaces in numerous book titles that bring poetics and politics together: \textit{Writing Travel. The Poetics and Politics of the Modern Journey} (2008) by J. Zicolsky; \textit{Travel Writing, form, and Empire. The Poetics and Politics of Mobility} (2008) by J. Kuehn and P. Smethurst, to quote a couple examples.}

\textit{Twofold Academic Reception}

Consequently, there is a twofold reception of travel writing, opposing the popular reader to the scholar, but there is also a twofold appreciation of it within academia. However, the latter does not reflect this antagonism between literary critics (an amateurish literature) and cultural considerations (an ethnocentric gaze), but rather remains within the cultural domain, being consistent with the relative dismissal of literary matters. After all, hasn’t the literary versus cultural split long lost its relevance following the rise of cultural studies as an anti-discipline that erases academic boundaries?

Be that as it may, the travel genre has its detractors and defenders. Among the former group, wonderfully blending cultural and formal levels again, Debbie Lisle writes for instance that “colonial relations are constitutive of both the historical development of the genre and its general poetics,” which is probably why she states in her preface there is “something wrong with travel writing in general.”\footnote{Debbie Lisle, \textit{The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing}, 2006, p.58.} According to her, the genre typically encourages a conservative perspective. It is undeniable that the impetus for travel studies comes from connections between travel and imperialist ideologies. Far from being neutral and objective, and despite deluding itself for a while, travel writing is more or less directly complicit with exploitative forces. It can be rightly regarded as conservative and
pro-colonial, racist and ethnocentric, patriarchal and sexist. No wonder it is somehow a distasteful and morally dubious non-literary form. Also, the emergence of academic interest was everything but an endorsement. And yet, it raised very interesting debates in the literary field (in the generic concerns quickly mentioned previously) and turned out to be a perfect fit for the research agendas of the body of studies listed above, and that falls nowadays under the umbrella term of “cultural studies.”

Nonetheless, Tim Youngs nuances Lisle’s words in reminding us of the existence of domestic travel, on the one hand, and of texts challenging colonial and capitalist expansions on the other. Carl Thompson names a few other defenders of travel writing. Extending the adage that travel broadens the mind, he quotes Mark Cocker for whom travel opens “the greatest doors to human freedom,” even if this sounds a little “vague and grandiloquent,” as Thompson assesses. What kind of freedom is he talking about? Does he bear in mind a rupture from cultural determinations? And might this freedom not be reached at the expense of others? For Jim Phillip, travel writing fosters “an internationalist vision and a cosmopolitan attitude,” and thus encourages “tolerance, understanding and sense of global community,” that is a “new kind of international society” according to White’s words.13 This orientation also resonates with Colin Thubron’s article titled “Travel writing today: its rise and its dilemma” in which he identifies the most influential feature of contemporary travel writing as “an awakened social consciousness.”14

Finally, there is no right and wrong or good and bad in such a matter. It seems the wiser and righteous position would be to have none, or rather, to consider both of these stances.

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13 Cocker, Phillip, and White are quoted in Carl Thompson’s Travel Writing, op. cit., p.6.
This is the case of Holland and Huggan for instance. While they target the popular enthusiasm when perceiving the genre as “a refuge for complacent, even nostalgically retrograde, middle-class values,” they also emphasize its “defamiliarizing capacities.”

Likewise Tim Youngs observes that “travel writing provides an alibi for the perpetuation and reinstallment of ethnocentrically superior attitudes to ‘other’ cultures, people, and places.” Yet, he clarifies at the same time that this thesis is complicated through travel writing’s attempts “to adjust it sights to new perceptions.” Obviously, travelogues vary greatly when it comes to their complicity with imperialism, and twenty years ago already, Dennis Porter was opting for the relativist voice as well:

At best, that heterogeneous corpus of works I am calling European travel writing has been an effort to overcome cultural distance through a protracted act of understanding. At worst it has been the vehicle for the expression of Eurocentric conceit or racist intolerance. Yet, in either case, (...) they have traditionally been the vehicle by which our knowledge of things foreign has been mediated. As such they merit a more sustained, less belletristic attention than has frequently been accorded them.

Depending on what is meant by “cultural distance,” there is nothing more uncertain as whether or not this overcoming is achievable, or even desirable. What is for sure however, is how crucial it is to better understand what lies below the various academic positionings briefly exposed here, which is the object of what follows.

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18 See section 1.3 below on globalization and the need for cultural differences as a meaning-making process.
1.2 Situated Knowledges

Epistemic Consideration

Having exposed and now displacing this too simplistic alternative between enforcement of prejudice and open-mindedness, imposed identities and unsettled ones, perpetuation of power and subversive questioning, a few remarks need to be made regarding this main aspect of the scholarly debate on travel writing. Beyond the dialectic of praise and disdain, this discussion reflects the advent of a possibly new épistémè to quote Foucault’s terminology, on the one hand, while on the other, it resembles the logical practice of a cultural subfield to evoke Bourdieu’s theory. The “French theory” label, which refers to a composite group of French thinkers, makes it normal to quote Foucault and Bourdieu next to each other. However, the reason for that is a little more profound, as it stems from the fact that both theorists were preoccupied with the irruption of the self within the field of human sciences. While Bourdieu in the first part of Le sens pratique achieves the elaboration of an objective subjectivity, Michel Foucault in Les mots et les choses addresses the same epistemological problem of a scientific discourse in which the human being is at once subject and object of investigation. Social and human sciences could only exist indeed, once the human subject was envisioned as an object of knowledge. Now, this does not go without a fundamental dilemma: “la culture occidentale a constitué, sous

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19 The objectivation of subjectivity addresses the reflexive sociology Bourdieu has always been advocating for (An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology, 1992, with Loïc Wacquant), and that he has always put into practice as well (the title of his book Homo Academicus, 1984, speaks for itself). Nevertheless, this epistemological move has to be understood as resulting from the twofold aspect of social reality, being at once what it is and how it is perceived, hence the need for social science to take both into account. Cf. Le Sens pratique, 1980, pp.233-234.
Concerned with the discursive elaboration of human sciences, Foucault characterizes the modern épistémè by the emergence of the human figure as a knowable domain. This notion of épistémè – that had a short life in the scholar’s discourse, yet an immediate and on-going success\(^2\) simply designates the unity or coherence that exists, over a certain period of time, between the various fields of knowledge (including natural sciences). Thus it reflects the possibilities and conditions of discourse at a given moment. Without further details, what I am suggesting here is the basic idea that the rise of travel studies in academia and the ideological comments made on travel texts partake of an épistémè that also governs the birth of a whole range of academic trends inherited from the “cultural turn” in the 1970s. It is likely that a new épistémè, which has its origins in an earlier “linguistic turn,” arises then. It shifts the focus in suggesting the following paradigm: the world, in short, is a textual construction, approachable as such with literary and formal methodologies, and we are furthermore the authors of that world-text. There is no doubt that this 1968-1978 decade is a time of replenishment for academia, opening a way to a whole range of prefixes to be later added to modernity: hyper-, sur-, non-, and the first and more common one that prevails over the others, post-.\(^2\)


\(^{21}\) And a surprising and controversial success as well… This notion, which does not reflect the complexity of the text, was forged in 1965 and abandoned by its author about ten years later. In an interview from 1977, he considers it as a potential impasse for who is concerned with other than discursive practices (through which, precisely, he investigated the conditions of knowledge in *Les Mots et les Choses*). See Yves Viltard, “L’étrange carrière du concept foucaldien d’épistémè en science politique”, *Raisons politiques* 3/ 2006 (n°23), pp.193-202.

\(^{22}\) Hypermodernity characterizes the excess in all spheres of society; surmodernity, forged by the French anthropologist Marc Augé, also refers to spatial and factual excess in a way; Bruno Latour asserts “we have never been moderns” since the “modern” project of independent knowledge was never achieved but always contaminated with social, economic and political constraints; as for the “postmodern” adjective, it was first
Whether or not this turn constitutes one of these “enigmatic discontinuities” Foucault talks about to identify archeological layers of knowledge is not quite the concern here.

The point is rather to underline that similar to the idea that texts must be read in regards to their contexts—the central aspect of a discussion to follow—, the understanding of those same texts is also dependent on the interpreter’s épistémè. Being the mere products of our own time we can only think what this specific cultural frame allows us to think, like a temporal window delineating the space to which our gaze has access. In a section titled “omissions and caveats” in his *Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, Tim Youngs goes beyond the usual delimitation of the operating field of one’s primary sources.\(^{23}\) He acknowledges this other kind of epistemic limitation: on the one hand, he warns, “modern day theorists [who] run the risk of appearing self-congratulatory in their critiques of colonial texts and of critics of less enlightened than themselves, as though they have themselves attained a peak of critical acuity and cultural sensitivity;”\(^{24}\) and, on the other, he addresses future generations of researchers who may look at his own perspective as being “flawed and outdated,” or perhaps somehow loose and shaky. I feel concerned about this issue as I examine contemporary travel writing studies that seem to lack a clear epistemology and consequently may present weaknesses in the way they approach their object.

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\(^{23}\) This aspect, by the way, completes the introductory pattern mentioned in the opening. Dinah Santuiri could have added this delimitation as a recurrent motif of scholarly introductions. These liminary parts systematically end with precautions on what the main corpus is and the subsequent range of accuracy of the text to follow. Hence the limits and apologies for “exclusion of oral narratives,” or “omission of unwritten stories,” and the opposite hopes for bridging works over traditional boundaries (national, regional, oral, non-European, peripheric travel accounts, etc.).

\(^{24}\) Tim Youngs, *op. cit.*, p.11.
**Reflexive Subjectivity**

Caren Kaplan, who pays attention to theoretical aspects in *Questions of Travel*, is quite interesting in that regard: her work simply echoes Tim Youngs’ warning as she reviews academic discourses. Investigating metaphors of travel and their use within modern and postmodern texts, she observes that despite the fact postmodern aesthetics is often described as a rupture, it did not actually erase but rather reshaped modernist themes. The alleged rupture must be questioned for “the ‘travel’ of theories and theorists [has not] been fully considered as part of the legacy of imperialism [or] as part of the politics of cultural production in transnational modernities and postmodernities.”

Her contribution is also interesting in two other ways: first, the analyses she provides offer a salutary reflexive perspective to theorists producing knowledge on travel; second, working at the crossroads of gender and postcolonial studies, she unveils insidious ideologies (as the reshaping of modernist themes precisely) and therefore puts forth a political discourse. In the end, Kaplan’s contribution encompasses a reflexive move regarding critical studies, and her situated knowledge, that is, literally the place she occupies within academia and from which she perceives and thinks things, is also readable in terms of the dynamics of a cultural field, which is, from a Bourdieusian perspective, outlined below (and no longer in Foucauldian terms).

Quoting a passage from Nietzsche’s *On Moral of Genealogies* that resonates with Bourdieu and Foucault’s preoccupation with subjectivity, Timothy Lenoir more explicitly

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evokes these two aspects of reflexive and situated knowledge. He interprets the text as follows:

First, it rejects a single, all-empowering gaze, a non-perspectival seeing, in favor of radical, critically positioned seeing—the theme of situated knowledges. Second, the passage enjoins us not to abandon vision and objectivity, but to reclaim embodied vision, perspectival seeing, even technologically mediated vision as a route to the construction of located, and therefore, responsible knowledges.

One could draw this causal relation: overtly assuming a subjective position, or “situated knowledge,” should lead to some kind of responsibility, provided that a reflexive move formerly took place. This expression, “situated knowledge,” first coined by Dona Harraway, makes perfect sense when placed under a Bourdieusian perspective. In order to explain the logics at stake within a given field, whether it is the literary field in Les Règles de l’art (1992) or precisely the academic field in the case of Homo Academicus (1984), the French theorist considers the particular positioning of individuals who compose and animate that field. They struggle and undertake both conscious and unconscious strategies to play the field’s game in their quest for symbolic capital consisting in various kinds of recognition (mostly intellectual and artistic in the broader cultural field). The usual trajectory of this quest takes an individual or a subgroup from the position of outsider (yet, still within the field) to the one of leading figure. This is

26 “Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject" [which] demand[s] that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking... There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective "knowing"; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity," be.” Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, 1887.


exactly what happened for a large array of (sub-)disciplines when Edward Said first published *Orientalism* in 1978. This brief overview of Bourdieu’s approach – which eludes the illusio however, that remains a particularly strong notion within the cultural fields – highlights the academic treatment of travel literature on a different scale than Foucault’s *épistémè*.

**Postcolonial Turn (1970s)**

Echoing the recent fall of ancient imperialisms and the rise of social contestations, scholars from the 1970s, at the conjunction of the linguistic and cultural turns, were able to throw a different gaze on travel writing. Said’s *Orientalism* is the discursive materialization of that gaze, undoubtedly more overtly situated in comparison to the previous and mainstream views it confronts and denounces. In the same way new literary trends emerge in opposition to preceding canons they reject, postcolonial studies are forged on a radical questioning of dominant views. They examine modern imperialism, decipher ideological implications, point at geopolitical consequences and, while demonstrating travel writing’s complicity in injustices inflicted by modern – and contemporary – imperialisms, they question the impact it had – and still has – on social relations and aesthetic projects. No wonder, then, if “new scholarship on travel writing comes from the context of postcolonial studies which has been rewriting the history of Western imperial and colonial contact with other cultures.”

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29 In short, the illusio has to do with the belief of one’s own selflessness. It is a prevalent notion within the broad array of the cultural fields (education, research, spirituality, arts, etc.) as most of its agents often consider “fighting the good fight,” so to speak.

Along with postcolonial scholars, other groups of researchers responded to the Nietzschean call for situated knowledge: ethnic and feminist studies as mentioned already; cultural and eco-critical studies as well. And yet, because they intentionally are—and have to be—“situated,” they always run the risk of aiming at something else than textual, and even cultural, representations. Or, differently phrased, precisely because they have an ideological agenda, they use the text as a tool for their argument and present a tendency for neglecting it as an object of study per se. Gender and feminist studies are interested in patriarchy and conservatism; postcolonial studies inquire about imperialism, geopolitics, and euro-centrism as stated; cultural studies originally dismiss the low-versus high-culture split, while eco-criticism rejects this other division between nature and culture.31

In my case, because travel writing is subject to a whole range of academic approaches, including these “political” forms of criticism, it seems in the end that it has become a fragmented object of study that is missing a strong, convincing, and edifying treatment. Aiming at giving back travel representation a relative integrity, I offer in what follows an overview of the academic and cultural trends since Said’s input. A lay out of the academic constellation within which my object of study travels, should clear the view and allow a better grasp of the axiology that it falls under.

31 Eco-critics condemn anthropocentrism and the nature-culture dichotomy it encompasses. They are concerned with the relationship between literature and physical environment. However, in giving nature the leading role, most of them adopt an opposite stance—a naturo-centrist one—and consequently, they might fail working at the unity they long for. Besides, a major problem remains: how to escape Cartesian duality when taking the nature as an object of study and producing an intellectual discourse on it?
1.3 Towards “Anthropo-Semiotics”

*Anthropological Turn (1980s)*

Travel representation deals with the way we view the world, others, and ourselves in relation to both of them. This vision is always a representation, both cultural and textual, hence the confusion mentioned above... and my proposition for an anthropo-semiotics of travel representation. This approach will be thoroughly developed in the first part of the dissertation ending with a methodological proposition, before offering an analysis of primary sources in the second part of the project. Even at first sight, it makes perfect sense to combine anthropology and semiotics. On the one hand, semiotics, which emerged from linguistics, clearly invested the former (Claude Lévi-Strauss and Clifford Geertz, as well as Dean MacCannell and Jean-Didier Urbain who are closer to my subject, all exemplify it); on the other hand, postcolonial studies and its allied fields are very often produced as an anthropological reading of literature in the broad sense.

If Said’s work serves as a landmark for postcolonial studies, it also resonates with other major —and earlier— contributions within the humanities (post-structuralist thinkers like Jacques Derrida) and the social sciences (Clifford Geertz, again). All of them, while highlighting particular aspects of travel writing, illustrate the basic social trajectory described earlier: when one particularly situated knowledge moves from the margins to the mainstream, the challenge being to maintain its symbolic capital once there. As I have showed, the initial step of the composite *avant-garde* in academia (by that I refer to ethnic, feminist, postcolonial, cultural, environmental criticisms) was to denounce during

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32 This primary sources, as well as the structure of the dissertation, are detailed in the last section of this introductory chapter.
the 1970s an established perspective and consequently to cast doubt on authenticity, authority, and aesthetics. But the analogy I made earlier with the literary field stops here. Counter-positioning indeed is often coupled with new propositions, usually in the form of a manifesto. In that case, it seems that the initial outsiders of the academic field came to an end with the ancient order without offering anything substantial for the future, except overall deconstruction. In the end, things appear as if the humanities and the social sciences were durably shattered because of the realization of the epistemological issue that Foucault observed.

Along with denunciations of a too neat, unjustified, and inequitable delineation of things, the leading trend of the academic field was to observe and advocate for a global melting in which there was no distinction but only indeterminacy. The unsettling of clear-cut ideas made the whole human architecture unstable. As a result, the 1980s are symptomatically blurry times. There was nothing such as low and high-culture but only political discourse; nothing like cultural anthropology but only fantasized and textually produced others; nothing like referential literature based on facts but only a linguistic realm, etc. The cultural turn reaching its peak, methodologies became interchangeable from one field to another and disciplinary boundaries declined.

In this context, anthropologists looked at their discipline in a renewed and reflexive way:

> With its ‘real-world’ object of study\(^{33}\) (‘culture’, exotic others) now having vanished or been declared to have been inappropriately objectified in the first place, anthropology can only ‘cannibalise’ itself, taking its own history, methods and epistemology as its principal matter.\(^{34}\)

\(^{33}\) This idea of the ‘world as an object of study’ has already been mentioned through the notion of the ‘world as a text’. I would just add here that this ‘world-object’ is also, to a certain extent, an object anthropology shares with eco-criticism.

\(^{34}\) Peter Hulme and Russel McDougall, *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*, 1999, p.3.
Cultural anthropology was then forced to re-draw its boundaries and to shift its theoretical orientation. The collection of essays Clifford and Marcus published in 1986, *Writing Culture*, is a milestone for the discipline. Beyond the explicit title, the authors insist on the point that ethnography and travel writing are not that different. Indeed, from a historical perspective, it seems anthropology voluntarily under-historicized its relationship to travel writing. And from a postcolonial perspective, it appears the discipline shares responsibilities with travel writing in the construction of colonial and neo-colonial societies.

Travel writing and anthropology are alike in their openness to the *textual problematic of identity*, with its constant displacements, disjunctures, and continuities: as Clifford Geertz noted, it is possible for anthropologists to think of their indigenous subjects as in fact writing the life of the anthropologist.\(^\text{35}\)

This expression I underlined echoes the doubtful question of authenticity and authority, and while reasserting the importance of postcolonial studies for reaching this questioning, it also reminds us that the object of investigation is substantially, and essentially, textual.

**Semiotic Turn (1990s)**

Following the postcolonial observation that travel writing played a role in European expansion during the modern period, contemporary travel writing should similarly “yield significant insights into ideologies and practices that sustain the current world.”\(^\text{36}\)

Probably more than any other writings, travel texts do reflect their period, especially

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\(^{35}\) Hulme and McDougall, *Travel Writing and Empire...*, p.7, referring to Geertz’ *Works and Lives*, “The Anthropologist as an Author”

\(^{36}\) Carl Thompson, *op. cit.*, p.3.
during these times of doubts. The turn of the century is marked by the newly dominant and assertive voice of a worrisome postmodernity that is expressed for instance through the disappearance of (academic) contours and the advent of globalization. The established uncertainties and related indeterminacies trigger a need for authenticity and uniqueness. Consequently, a search for meaningfulness arises, which might be conveyed through travel writing.

The *Granta* magazine salutes powerful insights that these mobile texts offer the globalized world: traveling the world is a way to reassess differences and to provide a reassuring message. But at the same time, other commentators regard the form as “typically seeking not to reflect or explore contemporary realities, but rather to escape them.”37 Moreover, the writer Robyn Davidson rightly states that travel texts “create the illusion that there is still an uncontaminated Elsewhere.”38 In the globalized times of blurriness, when the world gains homogeneity and localized cultures seem to lose it, there is a need for clear-cut distinctions between home and abroad, us and them. Distinction is made difficult and travel writing can play a role in reinstating a sense of cultural difference. Nonetheless, this assessment appears both problematic and salutary: is travel writing really sustaining a minimal and vital gap between cultures? Or is it artificially maintaining, if not continuously inventing it, and thus perpetrating the same old conservative prejudices?

Once the postmodern fog started dissipating a little, scholars from the 1990s were able to come with new theories echoing this twofold question. On the one hand, some anthropologists got interested in the blending of cultural difference and the global fading

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37 Carl Thompson, *ibid.*, p.5.
of identities, like Marc Augé who developed the notion of surmodernity through his multiple analyses of non-places (1992), or Arjun Appadurai who examined diasporas in *Modernity at Large* and suggested “the world is growing smaller” (1996). On the other hand, others theorists looked at the irrevocable aspect of differences: Homi Bhabha in the *The Location of Culture* (1994) observed that we are “almost the same, but not quite,” which can be interpreted in both negative and positive ways, and Edouard Glissant celebrated relation and diversity in his *Traité du tout-monde* (1997).

These postcolonial speakers from various origins all made highly insightful observations; however, I propose to emphasize for now the latter assertion of an irreducible and critical difference. Indeed, this notion of “difference” – and the correlating one of “relation” without which it would not be conceivable – constitutes a fundamental paradigm of Saussurean linguistics: it appears to be the very condition of any meaning-making process, no matter the domain under consideration.

**Contre-Sciences**

“Difference” and “relation” are notions that are fundamental to both anthropology and semiotics. Actually, as meaning is acquired through a distinctive relationship, they are eminently pervasive notions to any domain of knowledge. Therefore, whether it is the object under study or the perspectives it is approached from, one has to observe what it lies against, not in an oppositional way (anti-), but in a proximal one (next to). I have just exposed how travel writing and ethnographies relate to each other from a cultural point of
view.\(^{39}\) Now, in an attempt at academic positioning, I should briefly consider the question of multidisciplinarity.

In this kind of academic connections, differences remain essential. When theorizing the “pictorial turn” in the 1990s, W.J.T. Mitchell advocates for a shift of paradigm and thus promotes a new perspective.\(^{40}\) On a pragmatic level, this turn implies the end of transferable methods and consequently discards textual readings when applied to images. This project also parallels, to a certain extent, the work the “Mu Group” achieved in their *Traité du signe visuel* (1992), in which they grant particular importance to visual plasticity. On an epistemological level, this move can be seen as an indirect means to reinstate differences within academic fields, as a warning against the tendency to loosely combine approaches within cultural studies, and as a call for appropriate methods of investigation according to the specific object that is studied. While I do agree with Mitchell, given the hybrid and complex nature of travel representation, I will rather follow Foucault’s trail in a way, reflecting on the mutual contribution of two of the three *contre-sciences* he identified.

Foucault’s perspective when writing *Les mots et les choses* was that of an overtaking of human sciences announced by a new triad of sciences, he called *contre-sciences*, namely psychoanalysis, ethnology and linguistics. To give a brief outline, whereas human sciences necessarily remain within the representational realm, psychoanalysis and ethnology reach the edges of the human ability to represent and do not directly question

\(^{39}\) As Hulme and McDougall explain it, travel writing lies at the margins of anthropology; and as showed in *Writing Culture*, ethnographies can be read as literary works.

\(^{40}\) “Whatever the pictorial turn, then, it should be clear that it is not a return to naïve mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial “presence”: it is rather a “post-linguistic, post-semantic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies and figuration.” W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, U. Chicago Press, 1994, p.16.
Rather, they are sciences of the “unconscious” – respectively the particular and collective ones –, and thus can escape the epistemological problem initially mentioned, that of the human individual studying the self. As for linguistics – for which I would consensually substitute the term semiotics nowadays –, it plays the role of a “pilot-science” and delves into the very structures of signification. And while it provided psychoanalysis and ethnology with suitable operating models, it does not exactly consist in a cross- or a trans-discipline, but rather plays as a modeling source, for semiotics is essentially an inter-discipline. Instead of combining or going across various fields, semiotics evolves between social, human, or even natural sciences. Its primary goal being to examine the emergence of meaning, it does not belong to philosophy, linguistics, anthropology or literature per se. However, while it relies on them, it also provides them with heuristic thinking, so that, in the end, it adapts and enlightens the object under study.

To conclude this section, while I do acknowledge how enlightening postcolonial studies have been regarding the underlying issues of travel writing, and although my approach is situated by nature, I am not conveying an ideological claim denouncing, for instance, a nostalgic feeling or an oppressive power. However, I am advocating an approach that would appropriately balance the cultural and textual aspects of travel representation, within an epistemologically grounded framework. Through a close examination of how travel writing has been conceived so far, the following section will support even more this need for a strong methodology.

Psychoanalysis is the domain where the relationship between representation and finitude happens. As for ethnology, whose main issue is the relationship of culture with nature, it “looks at how systems that are organized on or around linguistic structures are made.” (my translation) Jozef Van de Wiele, “L’histoire chez Michel Foucault. Le sens de l’archéologie,” in Revue Philosophique de Louvain. Tome 81, n°52, 1983, p.608. Talking about their relatedness, he adds: “Leur privilège, la raison de leur profonde parenté et de leur symétrie ne résident pas dans un certain souci qu’elles auraient l’une et l’autre de percer la profonde énigme de la nature humaine. Ce qu’elles s’efforcent d’atteindre, c’est avant tout l’a priori historique de toutes les sciences de l’homme.”
2. What Is Travel Writing?

2.1 The Issue of Genre

Defining a Genre

Regarding definitions of travel writing, propositions are at first often vague. For example, Tim Youngs’ opening remark: “Travel writing one may argue, is the most socially important of all the literary genres. It records our temporal and spatial progress. It throws light on how we define ourselves and how we identify others.”

Nevertheless, these lines point at two very important aspects: the spatio-temporal underpinning of the text, and the intercultural relationship. Concerning the “most socially important” feature of the genre, this phrasing might refer to interculturality as well as to the fact that travel writing welcomes a very wide array of textual subtypes. In Qu’est-ce qu’un genre littéraire ? (1989), Jean-Marie Schaeffer shows the importance of context when defining a genre.

This social aspect however is mistaken: not only does it fall back on the cultural bias many scholars underlined when following Said, but it also prevents us from looking at the text for itself. Casey Blanton more wisely combines the two levels of travel representation, since she clearly introduces the cultural dimension as a staging, stating in her preface “that travel books are vehicles whose main purpose is to introduce us to other, and that typically they dramatize an engagement between self and world.”

And yet, the

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textual and cultural levels of inquiry are more often juxtaposed or carelessly joined than embraced.

Schaeffer explains that there cannot be an overall theory of genre because generic identities are always the result of multiple logics. Texts do not solely obey normative rules defining them from the outside, nor are they pure essences of a particular genre arising from the inside. Rather, they are inscribed in a complex economy of relations. John Frow agrees with him on the fact that genre is not merely a descriptive act, independent and exterior to the object. According to him, instead of being shaped by genres, texts are “uses of genres.” He even talks of “generically shaped knowledge” and understands genre as a form of symbolic action: the generic organization of language, images, gestures, and sounds makes things happen by actively shaping the way we understand the world. (…) Far from being merely ‘stylistic’ devices, genres create effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility, which are central to the different ways the world is understood in the writing of history or of philosophy or of science, or in painting, or in everyday talk.44

Besides the anthropological dimension that surfaces, two remarks appear to be necessary. First, it is interesting to observe the structuralism underlying Frow’s proposition. The idea that genres play a role in “the social structuring of meaning” or, as Youngs rephrases it, that genres are “a way of making sense of structures by which we describe our surroundings and perceive meaning of them,”45 is not only reminiscent of Schaeffer’s inquiry.46 More importantly, from a semiotic point of view, it echoes A. J. Greimas’

44 John Frow, Genre, 2005, p.2.
45 Tim Youngs, op. cit., p.2.
46 Underlining the limitations of the normative –defining form the outside– and the essentialist –defining from the inside– approaches, Jean-Marie Schaeffer opts for a third attitude, that of structuralism, which
theory of the parcours génératif that offers a (partial) modeling for the emergence of meaning.\textsuperscript{47} Second, as it is twice suggested in Frow’s quote, a genre is not reducible to the traditional text. Beyond the distinction made by Mikhail Bakhtin between primary and secondary genres, one must think of the genre as an intertextual phenomenon in the broad sense, involving a whole range of social and cultural practices, including photographing and filming.\textsuperscript{48} This widened acceptation of “text” and “intertextuality” contributes to the performativity, dynamics, and evolution of the generic notion, and it makes it even more challenging identifying what travel writing is.

**Travel Writing’s Hybridity**

The exact same challenge is perceivable through the varying terminologies arising in studies of travel books: “travel writing” might be the most widespread, next to “travel account,” “travel report,” “travelogue,” “travel literature,” “travel narrative,” etc.\textsuperscript{49} However, this indistinction is relatively superficial, since some of these terms might simply refer to different strategies of communication (which is one of the generic logics Schaeffer identified). The French language would rather use the term “récit de voyage” in contrast for instance with “carnet de voyage” that designates a notebook of watercolors. Despite the intertextuality that could gather under the same genre (yet within different sub-genres) watercolors and written texts, my lexical preference would go to the term

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\textsuperscript{47} Post-saussurean semiotics and Greimas contributions are developed in the next chapter of the dissertation.

\textsuperscript{48} This broad sense corresponds to Julia Kristeva’s definition in opposition to the narrower one of Gérard Genette. Her concept is derived from her reading of Bakhtin and “denotes any relationship, implicit or explicit, between two or more texts or ‘signifying systems’, including relationships constitutted by genre.” David Duff, *Modern Genre Theory*, 2000, p.xiv.

“récit” and its translation “narrative,” because of the practical experience it evokes. (The term “tale”, however, could also be an interesting option regarding fiction.)

In regards to the definitory attempts of travel writing, and the problems its various forms pose to academia, Youngs recalls through scholars expressions how reluctant the genre is to classification.\(^{50}\) Travel genre’s hybridity goes hand in hand with this refractory aspect. Travel writing is everything but hermetically sealed, and this very heterogeneity is what makes it so special and attractive to writers and critics. Underlining the open, malleable, and welcoming features of the form, Jonathan Raban develops a famous and often quoted metaphor around hospitality.\(^{51}\) Further in the text, the writer mentions that travel genre accommodates “the private diary, the essay, the prose poem, the rough note,” and similarly, it could consist in a travel log, an autobiography, a guide book, or a scientific report, just as it might comprise as well epistolary segments, journalistic reportages, and ethnographies of course. No boundaries were ever set, and formal variations are a persistent feature of travel writing that makes it the “most hybrid and unassimilable of literary genres,”\(^{52}\) according to Holland and Huggan.

**“Travel Representation”**

Fluctuations, fluidity, flexibility... There is a consensus among scholars and writers on the protean characteristic of travel writing. However, making this acknowledgement does

\(^{50}\) Holland and Huggan consider it as “refractory to definition;” Thompson talks about a “bewildering diversity;” Kowaleski suggests a “dauntingly heterogeneous character;” Fordsick underlines “the generic indeterminacy of travelogue;” and Korte finally writes about “a genre not easily demarcated.” Quoted by Tim Youngs, *Cambridge introduction...*, p.6.

\(^{51}\) “As a literary form, travel writing is a notoriously raffish open house where very different genres are likely to end up in the same bed. [He further talks about an] indiscriminate hospitality, [then writes]: Because of this genial confusion, the travel book has always been a favourite haunt of writers, just as critics, with some justification, have usually regarded it as a resort of easy virtue.” Jonathan Raban, *For Love and Money: Writing, Reading, Travelling, 1968-1987*, 1984, pp.254-255.

not allow going as far as Youngs’ statement: “it is a genre whose intergeneric features constitute its identity.”53 Indeed, if some might say this lack of homogeneity constitutes the very identity of the genre, conversely travel writing is such a “stubbornly indefinable form that some critics [might] argue [it] does not constitute a genre at all.”54 I would rather agree with this second opinion. Defining the travel text through its hybrid character is not satisfactory at all. How could one be contented with indeterminacy as a generic criterion? But suffice it to say travel writing is a non-genre, even an anti-genre that resists any classificatory attempt? As seen earlier, Schaeffer argues that a genre’s definition is always plural, and Frow’s perspective corroborates this idea in a certain way.

As a result, not only would I support Guillaume Thouroude “dissenting voice” —“it is misleading to consider travel writing as a quintessentially hybrid genre as opposed to other presumably ‘pure’ genres—,” but I would even extend his argument in saying that this hybridity is precisely what has encouraged critics to look at the cultural object instead of the textual one when investigating travel writing.55 Ian Borm, for instance, defends the idea that travel writing is “not a genre, but a collective term for a variety of texts predominantly fictional and non-fictional whose main theme is travel.”56 As a result, when aiming at defining their object for scientific investigation, facing this unsettling shift of forms, scholars usually move towards what would apparently remain constant in travel writing: not the writing but the travel.

53 Tim Youngs, op. cit., p.6.
I elaborate on this misleading idea in the next section, and to conclude this one, in terms of terminology, I ultimately selected the expression “travel representation.” Besides catching both the cultural and textual aspects, this term constitutes the best fit for my dissertation for practical and theoretical reasons. On the one hand, avoiding the formal dead-end of labyrinthine sub-genre distinctions, “representation” conveniently and at once conveys the three media in which I am interested for this research. In that sense, it makes it easier to sustain a very important assumption: that of a common meaning-making process regardless of final and formal manifestations. On the other hand, travel writing deals with the object of the world and, consequently, carries along the inherent matter of signifying systems in attempts to reflect the world and overcome the irreducible gap that separates it from the textual realm. Hence, the term “representation” recalls the enigmatic passage from world to text. In short, “representation” does not fall back on a unique type of language and addresses, what appears to be the very essence of travel studies: the relationship between the text and the world.

2.2 The Travel Object

*An Actual Journey*

The term “narrative,” although it does not convey the same questioning, is a probing one as well. It suggests an unfolding towards a specific telos and as such is quite suitable to the journey. Roland Barthes, in a famous article from 1966, remarkably evokes how the term “récit” is a slippery signifier. Yet, he does so to underline the universality of

57 “Innombrables sont les récits du monde. C’est d’abord une variété prodigieuse de genres, eux-mêmes distribués entre des substances différentes, comme si toute matière était bonne à l’homme pour lui confier
narratives, and facing this particularly heterogeneous nature and infinite variety, he finally states the following dilemma: “ou bien le récit est un simple radotage d’événements, auquel cas on ne peut en parler qu’en se remettant à l’art, au talent ou au génie du conteur (l’auteur) –toutes formes mythiques du hasard–, ou bien il possède en commun avec d’autres récits une structure accessible à l’analyse, quelque patience qu’il faille mettre à l’énoncer.”

While I believe the authors I have chosen respond to the first option, the undertaking of the second option stresses the fact that substantial variety should not be an obstacle for analyzing my primary sources. Moreover, despite the travel texts’ formal indeterminacy, a minimal structure is already identifiable, whether it regards the mere spatio-temporal unfolding of the narrative, or the scheme of the quest inherited from Greimassian narrative models and their update by Jacques Fontanille. Although these models provide good insights for travel representation, they do not, however, constitute distinctive criteria in comparison to other genres. And even if the journey’s pattern is one
of the “most persistent forms of all narratives,” as Blanton underlines, one probably needs to look deeper, at the narrative infrastructure within the travel framework.\footnote{See Jean-Didier Urbain’s statement introduced and commented below regarding “le secret du voyage.”} Finally, the lack of homogeneity in travel writing might explain the reason why it did not find a place among literary canons. More importantly, the same lack also highlights the way critics ended up focusing mostly on the journey itself and moved from the text as an object to the object of the text. The problem is that putting emphasis on the traveling experience –which paradoxically appears as the stable element within aleatory narrations– instead of the text, they came to the definition of travel writing as being the writing of an actual journey. Supposedly, this definition would allow for discriminating between factual and fictional travel texts. On a practical level, as previously stated, in order to make sense of an object of study, one has to differentiate it from others lying at its margins.\footnote{This is what has just been done in the previous section to situate travel writing studies within various academic fields and to briefly justify an anthropo-semiotic approach. This approach will make even more sense towards the end of this section that aims at a personal definition of travel representation.} In that particular case, most scholars decided to exclude fiction and to set the actuality of the trip as an absolute and definitory criterion of travel writing. This position is Peter Hulme’s and Tim Youngs’, which Barbara Korte and the tenants of “new travel writing” contradict. Consequently, one can draw a line between two opposite groups of critics: those who look at travel writing by stressing the contextual, the external reference to voyage itself, and those who focus on the writing, aesthetics and poetics of the text.
Textual Failures of Actuality

Among the first group, Hulme advocates an exclusive definition of travel writing: authors must have traveled to the place they describe. This convenient narrowing of the travel writing corpus as a whole, conflicts however with the broad understanding of the generic notion. But still, it remains a potentially useful characteristic that takes away any fictional creation (even if relying on real people, just as Robinson Crusoe has been inspired in his creation by Alexander Selkirk for instance). From another angle, this definition has two troublesome consequences I will now develop: first, it merely ignores how delicate it is, even impossible, to textually distinguish between fact and fiction, and thus, it does not resolve the intrinsic matter of formal indeterminacy; second it relies on the author’s claim for truth, and as such, it resorts to extra-linguistic features while seemingly ignoring the epistemological implications that this entails.

Tim Youngs indirectly establishes a hierarchy when saying that works of fiction employ travel writing methods. However, it seems futile to debate which has prevalence over which regarding the devices they develop to authenticate their discourse, as Youngs himself, although adopting Hulme’s position, also acknowledges how difficult it is “to overlook the mutual influence of factional and fictional accounts of travel.” The straightforward distinction between real and imaginary travel writing is complicated by the numerous overlaps between these two aspects. The point is that fiction borrows from “factual” travel text (episodic, journalistic, chronologic features) and in return, this travel

63 Even though he implicitly assumes here that a travel account might be fictional, he still second Hulme’s perspective and informs the reader that his book “will follow Hulme’s premise that travel writing must relate a journey that has been made by its author (…) the emphasis is on the texts that narrate real rather than imagined journeys, although there is some consideration of how travel writing and other types of literature (factual and fictional) are interlinked, sharing motifs, themes, settings, and techniques.” Tim Youngs, op. cit., pp.4-5.
text resorts to fictional artifacts, as underlined by Kowaleski for instance.\(^{64}\) As a result, the text will always challenge attempts at factual discrimination to some extent, which returns to another kind of indeterminacy in the end. The actuality of the journey as a relevant delineation of travel writing is then risky and dubious since there is no way to distinguish between fictional and factual texts. Korte is right when she states that “as far as the text and its narrative techniques are concerned, there appears to be no essential distinction between the travel account proper or purely fictional forms of travel literature.”\(^{65}\)

Realism possesses a good deal of artifices to make the reader believe the telling, as the concrete detail contributing to the “effet de réel” Barthes has theorized.\(^{66}\) In the case of travel writing, verisimilitude will also be achieved through the claim that traveling actually took place. But it is one thing or the other: either the claim is made explicit and, as such, it still belongs to the discursive level, or it relies on the reader’s belief, in which case, it transcends the text. In the end, it is only by relying on external features of the text that one might assess and trust its veracity. For the holders of truth who second Hulme’s position, travel writing, despite its “almost all-embracing freedom (…) should only be enjoyed within a very exacting discipline. And that is to tell the truth. Why? Simply because that (…) is what your readers expect you to be doing when they read your account.”\(^{67}\) Several critics similarly point at this reader’s expectation of the author’s honesty, and some will compare the trust placed in the author to that given to the

\(^{64}\) “Travel writers utilize fictional devices such as episodic structure, picaresque motifs, and (most significantly) foregrounding of the narrator.” Michael Kowaleski, *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel*, 1992, p.13.


\(^{66}\) Barthes, « L’effet de réel », *Communication* n° 8, 1968.

journalist. Shifting finally to the auctorial and readership contexts, a more or less tacit contract is passed between the two instances of discourse, which might be textually materialized through the claim, hence reminiscent of Philippe Lejeune’s *pacte autobiographique*.68

**The Issue of Referentiality**

On an opposite stance, while some might finally foreground a delusive verisimilitude – which is never a guarantee for veracity–, others do not have difficulty admitting the manipulation of details. Those advocates of “new travel writing” are more comfortable with embroidering, as they recently declared: “travel writing has made a new departure. A generation of writers who push the limits of the genre has emerged from the old adventure school. (…) Travel writers have become more literary and less literal. This fusion of biography, memoir and fiction –let’s call it New Travel Writing– is among the richest literature around.”69

Distinguishing between literary and literal travel writing, it seems that this new wave of critics displaces the debate from the factual aspect to the literary value of the text. For now, I will simply stress the idea that a factual text might be literary at the same time, although this is not its primary focus, of course. As Roman Jakobson developed through his model of linguistic functions, the matter has to do with narrative strategies and what specific pole of the communication the emphasis is put on: that of the author (expressive function), the addressee (conative function), the text itself (poetic function), or the

context (referential function), to name four out of the six functions identified.\(^{70}\) Now, when considering travel writing is first and foremost a written account of a journey that did actually take place, and consequently insisting on the veracity of described elements and narrated actions, this attitude makes the travel text mostly referential. A referential text however does not imply things did actually happen…

Emphasizing the truth that a travel text is expected to convey, amounts to insisting on referentiality without acknowledging the fact that a text is always a reconstruction. In response to the holders of actuality, Barbara Korte writes that “even the actual experience of a journey is reconstructed, and therefore fictionalized, in the moment of being told (…) reports of travel necessarily re-create the experience of the journey.”\(^ {71}\) Hulme apparently does not object to this representational essence: “all travel writing –because it is writing– is made in the sense of being reconstructed.” And yet, he adds: “but travel writing cannot be made up without losing its designation.”\(^ {72}\) I underline this last expression because it precisely shows the prevalence given to the referent. However, from my perspective, it does so in the wrong way, that is, it defines the text by its context. Again, “defining travel writing by its authenticity (…) depends on an assumption that can only be tested beyond the text itself.”\(^ {73}\)

While the referential matter is at the very heart of my research and constitutes its liminary development, I disagree with the advocates of an actual journey as defining travel writing. Indeed, this misleading idea postulates a relative transparency of language (facilitating the collusion between the text and its object, in this case, the trip) and makes

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\(^{72}\) Peter Hulme to Tim Youngs, *Talking about Travel Writing. A Conversation between Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs*, 2007.

\(^{73}\) Barbara Korte, *op. cit.*, my emphasis.
us believe that the travel experience, whether real or not, might be reached directly. There is no such thing as transparent literature. Besides the temporal gap that characterizes the nexus between a travel experience and the recounting of it, there is this other irreducible chasm between the world and its representation. No confusion should be allowed. This is finally the most serious and prejudicial mistake that travel scholars might commit when reflecting on travel writing.\textsuperscript{74} Beyond the “Hulme versus Korte” discussion, lies a deeper epistemological problem, too often overlooked: that of the immanence of the text and how to approach its relation to context. In confusing the text with its object, scholars sideline what is really at stake in the representational process. Another way must be proposed. My investigation on travel writing focuses on the representational process, and while raising the structuralist immanence of the textual object, I will also be looking at a way to escape what could appear as an intellectual impasse. But I will do so without losing from sight how the only object that can be investigated remains a text, a text that still encapsulates a practice.

2.3 Cultural Circularity

Paradox of Real Inventions

The confusion of the text with its object reveals the following paradox: while on the textual level no authenticity can really be achieved, the travel text has a profound and concrete influence on the cultural level. As a result, while my inquiry should remain “textual,” the postcolonial critic highlights a circular influence between text and context.

\textsuperscript{74} This confusion is sometimes perceptible in some of Youngs’ phrasing, when he gives an insight into the generic indeterminacy for instance (“given that our subject is mobility, genres are not fixed but dynamics”) or writes that “travel and movement (actual and metaphorical) are so fundamental to literary writing.”
and encourages a move beyond the text. However, this circle is twofold and one must distinguish between the reciprocal influence existing between individual and culture belonging on the one side—an influence that remains within the social field and that I call “cultural circularity”—, and between the mutual and more intimate relation connecting the travel experience with its writing on the other side—which truly involves the text and the experience it narrates, hence a “con-textual circularity,” developed in the next section.

To make sense of the paradox just mentioned, if no authenticity seems achievable on the one hand, it is not merely because of the impossibility of textually discriminating between fact and fiction, but also because of the a priori insurmountable gap existing between the text and the travel experience. There is no such thing as direct mediation, which is why otherness remains ultimately a textual construction made out of imaginary projections. Hence, a dual degree of invention, or double “translation” in accordance with the two circles of influence identified: from the real object to its subjective interpretation (intercultural translation), and from this interpretation to the text (textual translation of a perceived context). Meanings are always reconstructed—and potentially distorted—through cultural interferences and linguistic transformations. Yet, the idea of an “intermediate ground” created by the “liminal figure” of a traveler-translator is questionable. If the translating process remains a convenient and perhaps heuristic metaphor for travel writing inquiries, it has to be addressed from an anthropological perspective as it clearly puts accuracy at stake while pointing at the authoritative voice.

Tim Youngs underlines these “cultural and linguistic translation[s]” as well, but he reduces them to an identical and unique phenomenon. Of course, translating a particular term from a culture to another is both a cultural and linguistic action (in the opposite way, maintaining the original word might sound like a rhetorical strategy for authenticity and exotic effect), but I would isolate and differentiate the two processes.
On the other hand, despite the dual filter (cultural and linguistic) and an authenticity that can only be staged, there is a recurrent tendency to go directly through the text without carrying out prior epistemology or justification. Consequently, defining travel writing as the recounting of an actual journey might promote the facts as direct emanations of a real experience, when there are first and foremost speech products. Of course, critics are not naive and this is precisely where the postcolonial discourse intervenes: in denouncing a lack of objectivity and self-reflection that results in fake authenticity, and yet carries real prejudices. But conversely, if there is a more or less conscious failure in representing different people and other places, this biased representation is too often taken for granted and passed on. In fact, it is always a figment of reality the interpreter, both a traveler and a reader, is trying to reach: “the biggest fiction (...) is travel writing’s own claim to being an objective genre. What does anyone really know about a foreign place that isn’t partly his or her own creation? We’re always choosing what we see, what we don’t see, and whom we meet; we’re always inventing our destinations.”\footnote{Raphael Kadushin, \textit{Wonderlands: Good Gay Travel Writing}, 2004, p.5.} Interestingly enough, these invented destinations, germane to the invented Orient Edward Said pointed at in 1978, constitute the exact thesis Dean MacCannell developed in \textit{The Tourist} in 1976.\footnote{Dean MacCannell, \textit{The Tourist A New Theory of the Leisure Class}, 1976.} In the eloquent investigation he makes on the leisure class, the sociologist suggests that people travel to places they invent and progressively transform into symbolic landmarks.

\textit{Postcolonial Consideration}

Aligning with the postcolonial critic who unveils traveling in total contradiction with the complacent idea of the usual mind-opening experience, Elizabeth Bohls doubts this
awakening can ever happen. On the contrary, she argues “most travelers carry with them an apparatus for assimilating their new experiences to comfortable systems of belief.”

As a result, if the Orient was invented in the first place—and a long time ago—it appears subsequent travel texts did little not to corroborate and perpetuate dominant preconceptions of the West. Hence, most of these texts continuously accommodated, during modern and postmodern times, the too well known ideology of progress, civilization and white men’s burden; the hidden purpose behind this alleged supremacy of Westerners being a desire for power. So too the postcolonial denunciation Said officially initiated, since then followed by a wave of studies connecting travel, empire, and representation. Among the countless works this vein generated, one can think of Mary Louise Pratt’s recent Imperial Eyes, and her notion of “othering,” that resonates with Said’s and MacCannell’s works.

Without further elaboration needed, postcolonial studies have shown that even if others and landscapes are textual productions and constructed imaginaries, they are very real and bear “consequences far beyond literary narrative. Representations of the travel experience affect subsequent travelers,” as Tim Youngs writes. This is precisely the reason why travel writing studies were led to move beyond the texts: because these texts themselves have cultural impacts and shape ideas that are usually reintegrated into future documents, engendering stereotypes. This circular aspect implies a back and forth from the author to the readership, and conversely. For instance, evoking the readers’

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79 Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, 2007.
80 Youngs, op. cit., p.13. Regarding invented places and others, Youngs rightly refers to cultural circularity when observing that “perhaps Said’s major contribution in this context has been to show that travel writing does not consist simply of individual or disinterested factual accounts. Rather, travelers have already been influenced, before they travel, by previous cultural representations that they have encountered. Thus, they never look on places anew or completely independently but perceive them instead through accretion of others’ accounts,” p.9.
expectations, George Moorehouse overtly states the all-embracing form of the travel text may include “almost anything under the sun that you think your readers will tolerate as having some relevance to your journey or your inquisition on a particular place.”\textsuperscript{81} The \textit{pacte de lecture} mentioned earlier would then not only include the author’s claim for authenticity, but would also imply the satisfaction of the readership’s \textit{horizon d’attente}, putting the emphasis on the receiving pole. Hence the question of “what comes first” in this particular economy: are the traveler’s views originally shaping the reader’s gaze or is it the other way around, with a writer conveying preconceived images to supply readers’ expectations?

This question echoes Bourdieu’s sociology of practice, according to which individuals literally incorporate the culture of the field they belong to. In taking part in the game that animates the field, they acknowledge and establish the rules at the same time. The influence between each agent and the “collective mind” is then reciprocal. The postcolonial perspective, on the contrary, while acknowledging this influence, highlights the prevalence culture has over individual agency. This established hierarchy between particular and collective spheres is problematic to a certain extent. It implies that cultural incorporation does not merely influence perceptions but, more seriously, carries along ingrained preconceptions of otherness. I believe that one must be cautious about being too assertive and avoid the tendency of diminishing writers’ intentions when prioritizing ideological readings. In this regard, I would align with Tim Youngs’ project not to perpetuate, within the postcolonial frame, a “downplaying of the agency.”\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{81} Youngs, \textit{ibid.}, p.8.
\textsuperscript{82} Youngs, \textit{ibid.}, p.13.
Travel as Cultural Disruption

From this perspective that tends to revalorize the individual view, Jonathan Raban’s definition of traveling is helpful. As “the experience of living among strangers, away from home,” the journey can work in the exact opposite way to what it is accused of—a catalyst for stereotypes—and can then provide an exit from the circular process.83 Through the expression “away from home” the writer indirectly suggests that the very first step of a voyage consists in an initial rupture, an uprooting from comfortable habits and from what is known—or what apparently displays itself as being known (there is always a way indeed to unveil an unknown part within the known). The notion of home is a symmetric antonym to the visitor status underlined by Kowaleski: “no matter how much ‘inside’ description a traveler employs in evoking another culture and its people, a crucial element of all travel writings remains the author’s ‘visitor’ status.”85 The traveler must then be and remain a “cultural outsider.”86 Although the notion of home could serve as a negative definition of traveling, I will not insist too much on it for two reasons. First, the idea of home does not present itself as a clear-cut feature, but rather sets a scale between two poles of the known and the foreign, just as gradients moving from non-fiction to fiction or from a document to a literary work. Second, this dichotomy of status (“at home” versus “visiting”) could be easily bypassed when thinking of a “snail-traveler” with the ability to make the journey their home, that is, to find home wherever

84 I am not venturing on the psychoanalytic domain here, rather, this remark goes back to the recent notion of domestic ethnography, of which Baudelaire can be seen as one of the first illustrators. See note 86.
86 This point, developed further in the dissertation, raises interesting issues regarding literary work and academic anthropology: first, to what extent do I remain an outsider when consistently and over a long period practicing participant observation? And what if I ultimately become the other? Second, is domestic anthropology possible? May I become a stranger at home? This last question refers to the very first move of traveling: disruption and the breaking apart from cultural belonging.
they are, to feel at home everywhere they stay. This traveler’s profile, by the way, has been too often associated it seems with the spoiled figure of the nomad.

Leaving aside the “home” versus “away” binary, disruption, as the primordial act of traveling, appears more relevant. Besides the cultural exteriority qualifying a journey and that can only be achieved on an individual and internal level, this notion refers to a sort of cultural extraction, made of intellectual deterritorialization and social decolonization. Travel requires a disruption and, as such, it should contain a particular disposition of the mind, a decentering of the gaze encompassing if not preceding the displacement of the body. Consequently, not only may a journey happen at home, but even more so, were it only imaginary, it would still trigger a voyage. The Hulmian position again can be dismissed since traveling starts first and foremost with an idea of travel, “an anthropological structure of imagination,” as Jean-Didier Urbain phrases it. A trip might take someone across space, and yet as factual and concrete as it is, it does not necessarily entail the happening of a journey. Differently framed, with this initial disruption in mind and the idea that a journey exits, or at least shakes, the cultural frame, if travel were to mean the continuous imputation to others of pre-constructed identities, consciously or not, there would be no journey at all but a mere and insipid displacement.

87 Interestingly enough, the term “host” in French is an énantiosème that means both status at once (another by. It partly inspired Dufournantelle and Derrida’s dialogue in De l’hospitalité (1997).

88 This depiction of a “snail-traveler” has nothing to do with the notion of nomadism, which has been way too often spoiled over the past decades. While some travelers, reporters, artists, like to call themselves as such, nomadism relates to a special situation. Jean-Didier Urbain develops this abusive use of the term in criticizing Kenneth White’s Esprit nomade. Other uses of the term can be found in Franck Michel’s Traité de nomadologie and Eloge de l’autonomadie. Contrarily to nomadism that refers to a back-and-forth process in a known environment, the drifting aspect of travel is a better fit and we should rather adopt the terms of “roving,” “roaming,” or “wandering.”

within the already known, for “travel starts where our certainties end,” as Franck Michel eloquently writes.  

2.4 Con-Textual Circularity

*The Journey and the Text*

Providing a definition of travel is an obvious and necessary prerequisite when dealing with its representation. Without rejecting the classic and physical meaning of traveling, nor totally sinking in a postmodern assumption limiting it to a state of mind, travel encompasses a fundamental attitude which connects through the body outer and inner worlds, namely space and consciousness. As showed, it starts with an individual distancing from one’s culture. But where does it end? Common sense would have us assuming it ends with the traveler’s return. However, taking into account that my object of research is a text on the one hand, and given the cultural circularity previously highlighted on the other (that would imply the reintroduction of the traveling experience within the community of belonging), it is more appropriate to advocate that it is the recounting of the travel that brings it to an end.

Could this be really considered an end however? Indeed, the travel book only triggers a new journey. It is a recollection of memories that stabilizes a posteriori an experience of space, time, and otherness. It establishes and acknowledges at the same time the narrative trace of an accomplished itinerary. But conversely, this travelogue, just like a tourist guide, also suggests a programmatic wandering, an a priori trip to be carried out as an experience of mobility and discovery. From this perspective, by the sole virtue of the

effect it has on the readership, travel writing does not merely encapsulate an experience but it also precedes another, forthcoming, and to be written down.\textsuperscript{91} Hence, this second circularity introduced earlier, evolving from the textual imprint to the spatial context, then back to the text again, and so on. While the former cultural circularity remained within a mental realm, both particular and collective, this other one brings into play the two concrete domains of the world and the text. This second circle that connects the writing practice to the traveling experience, renders the medium a certain opacity and thickness, in which I will be looking for travelers escaping postcolonial determinisms, and authors whose expression does not necessarily sustain cultural stereotypes.

Of course, one is always traveling with preconceived images inherited from previous readings. As stated, there are very good chances that a previous book invites its reader to leave the world for good and to become a writer. After all “Le bateau ivre” by Arthur Rimbaud, or “L’invitation au voyage,” Charles Baudelaire dedicated to Maxime Du Camp, are already and not yet an arrival and a departure. Likewise, isn’t \textit{La recherche du temps perdu} ending with the narrator’s readiness to write a novel, precisely referring to the master piece that was just read? In short, focusing on this second circularity allows a noteworthy remark: travel representation is at once an experience and its enactment, for any travel writing can be read as an \textit{art poétique} that makes any journey unique.

\textsuperscript{91} “The narrative of the travel is both retrospective and delocutive on the one hand, and prospective and perlocutive on the other hand,” writes Jean-Didier Urbain, in “Le dire et le voir.”
Travel and Fiction

Urbain’s extensive research on travel and tourism allowed him to excavate a structural “secret” lying at the heart of this social practice. Drawing on René Girard’s mimetic desire, he identifies four archetypal and literary figures infusing travel and its representation. But most importantly, he ultimately reveals in a section meaningfully titled “viator est fabula” the intimate relation connecting travel and fiction.

Du voyage comme fiction à la fiction du voyage comme modèle d’organisation du discours, de la pensée et aussi de l’action. Il faut s’interroger sur la rémanence de l’image : la fonction de la fiction ou la valeur de son usage. Peut-être que tout est là, je veux dire le centre du voyage, sa vérité, et donc son secret quand elle est voilée – dans le récit sous-jacent qui l’irrigue, le structure, le suscite et finalement lui donne sens.

The importance of fiction within the voyage is not to be underestimated. Far from being a mere literary artifact, even less so a fallacious perspective on travel writing, a “semiological collapse of travel [would happen] with the absence of fabula,” adds Urbain. This could be a reason why French ethnographers from the first half of the 20th century, from Marcel Griaule to Claude Lévi-Strauss, almost systematically published a literary book about their field experience along their scientific articles. This remark

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92 Le Secret du voyage (2003) constitutes the third volume of extensive research on travel Jean-Didier Urbain did. In this volume, he considers three types of secret: the hidden parts of traveling that people voluntarily ignore; the attempt to make one’s journey particular in a too well traveled world; and finally, what is the secret the journey is keeping to itself, which travelers are most of the time ignorant of, but already revealed in the previous section, namely “travel is an anthropological structure of imagination.”

93 René Girard, on the mimetic desire. Girard calls médiateur du désir the third party through which imitation structures the longing, the desire of the desire of another. There is always a mediator triggering the desire for traveling and Urbain detects four intertextual figures embodying various strategies of concealment: from Fogg to Crusoe (around and outside), and Lindenbrock to Nemo (into and under).

94 This play on the phrase “acta est fabula” Ancient Greeks used to notify the end of a theatrical representation does not imply the travel is over, nor that the traveler is done traveling. Neither does it echo the famous and preliminary “Adieu au voyage” Lévi-Strauss wrote as a foreword to Tristes tropiques.


illustrates a need for retelling and reenacting the travel experience. It also reminds us that traveling starts in the mind and, although implying a disruption, no travel author is immune to prior influences. Perhaps these French ethnographers had to re-establish a certain truth when recounting their experiences abroad. When one leaves for good, the initial and imaginary intrigue does not always resist the roughness of reality, for “travel is a fragile story.”

In the end, the travel book is way more than just a by-product of travel, always coming afterwards. Conversely, some writings certainly influence subsequent travels. However, when it comes to the consideration of a private journey, this chain of causality –a traveler is someone telling a tale that proceeds from, and leads to another traveler’s telling– can be slightly revisited. Indeed, the relation existing between a text and the contextual experience it represents –or differently phrased, the connection of a worldly experience with its textualization–, is neither linear nor exactly circular, but simultaneous. Two spheres are put into contact and the concern becomes more about the concomitant practices of writing and traveling; hence the dismissal of the question of which came first. The book is not separated from the trip, nor are they confounded, rather, they belong to two parallel dimensions that constantly interact. One discovers the world while representing it, and vice-versa. “Perception, relation, action. Regard, récit, mouvement. Vision, fiction, comportement. Ce sont des réalités qui apparaissent indissolublement liées, au sein d’une culture de la mobilité où le monde de l’expérience et le monde du récit sont en interaction permanente, inscrits dans un rapport de secondarité relative ou réversible.”

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97 Urbain, op. cit., p.312.
98 Urbain, ibid., p.291.
“A Journey Through Reality”

The considered traveler being a lucid storyteller, he confronts the world and continually needs to adapt his scenario to concrete constraints. Indeed, there is no travel without obstacles. If the traveler faces a resisting structure when entering a foreign universe, the writer within deals with an even more solid and distant sphere when it comes to textualization. What I am suggesting here is the existence of two kinds of disruption, that of traveling as defined previously, and that of representation as a way to step out of the phenomenological world. Jean-Dider Urbain agrees on the initial rupture defining a voyage: “avec ou sans mouvement, le voyage commence à cet instant, par cette triple opération de distanciation, de résistance et d’abandon d’une réalité source.”99 And he further confirms that travel puts the world at a distance while pulling oneself out of it: “il fait exister le monde face à soi et le soi hors du monde.”100 The “journey though reality” corresponds both to the penetration of the world to grasp its thickness (cultural move), and to the ability to transcribe it in a meaningful and accurate way (semiotic process). Accordingly, the term “representation” refers to both the immaterial dimension of interculturality, and to the production of a signifying object (artistic or not). Travel authors as understood in this research, while being immersed in an alternate reality, seize fragments of it and manage somehow to re-inscribe them within their texts. Here lies the central concern of my research: how do the considered authors successfully move from their worldly experience to the representational dimension? How do they manage to reintroduce in their texts the very feeling of this reality, the tangibility of its parts?

99 Urbain, ibid., p.329.
100 Urbain, ibid., p.339.
Differently phrased: in what ways do the two spheres of text and context interact, and how can one trace within the text the dual practice of the travel author? Precisely because I investigate the relation between the world and the word, and despite acknowledging the obvious intertextuality of travel writing, my approach refutes any assumption of self-referentiality.

Consequently, travel writing is most likely the genre par excellence for reflecting on the enigmatic passage between the natural world and the textual domain. While we do not apprehend the issue in the exact same terms, nor do we confer to it an equal significance, Tim Youngs is also concerned with the process, and, in quoting Casey Blanton, he further suggests an interesting lead: “One of the questions running through this book, then, is: what happens between the experience of travel and the perception, representation and the reception of it? Key to this is the ‘foregrounding of the narrator,’ which Blanton regards as ‘central to an understanding of the travel book.’”101 Regarding the connection between travel experience and travel writing, my research is framed a little differently: I consider perception as being inherent to the worldly experience on the one hand, and on the other hand, I tend to leave the receptive dimension aside as much as possible, in order to focus on the enunciation of a traveling body.102

Travel writing is the result of a subject who goes within, through, across, beyond the inescapable reality, and of a text apparently hermetic and yet paradoxically encapsulating this spatio-temporal dimension that surfaces here and there. This postulate, however, is only conceivable through a traveling author lying at the core of the process under study.

101 Youngs, op. cit., p.10.
102 In using the expression “as much as possible,” I acknowledge what the postcolonial perspective underlines in the previous section: reception of travel writing within society plays a decisive role in its production. It would be delicate and illusory to isolate the subject from its cultural environment and determinations, which justifies the socio-cultural input of an anthro-po-semiotic approach.
The absolute distance between textual and natural worlds is incarnated within the structural body the author, the narrator, and the protagonist share from an enunciative perspective. In other words, this body constitutes the interface between both worlds and plays a central role in understanding the construction of travel texts. As a result, a well established epistemology and an appropriate method for analyzing this body will help to characterize the journey, while conveying the passage from the inside to the outside of the text and thus reconstructing the reverse representational move. Focusing on the enunciative process results in moving towards the edges of the text, and potentially provides an insight into its outside. It is only through the traveler’s attitude that one may reach the contextual environment of the text and consider the travel writing practice. Consequently, the degree of openness displayed by the travel author will help to determine the nature, the value, and the meaning of the journey.

3. Times, Themes, and Texts

3.1 Travel Historiographies

From the Object to the Subject

In my considerations on travel writing, I argue against the downplaying of both the text’s opacity and the traveler’s singularity. On the one hand, because they result from a double “translation” (cultural and textual), travel representations never provide direct access to otherness; on the other, travel narratives are not always culturally pre-written. With
respect to what they call “new travel writing,” Dea Birkett and Sara Wheeler respond to this downplaying to a certain extent, as they insist on the expressive function of the text. As seen previously, they disqualify the “fact versus fiction” dilemma to stress literary features instead of literal aspects, echoing Tim Youngs: “Once we attend to that [the foregrounding of the narrator], we will be able to move towards greater appreciation of literariness as distinct from—or even as opposed to—the documentary function of travel writing.”

It seems only an emphasis on the travel author-narrator can foster this inner “literary turn” of travel writing. Discarding the matter of authenticity allows a better focus on the subject of travel. According to Birkett and Wheeler, what matters is “not what we see, but how we see,” which promotes the writer’s gaze instead of the traveled space. If the use of the pronoun “we” rightly connects the individual and the group and as such refers to cultural circularity, the phrasing nonetheless lacks a consideration: can the gaze really be isolated from the surroundings and separated from the objects on which it focuses? From a phenomenological perspective, looking always means looking at something. I would then suggest a slight modification to the “new travel writing” slogan and state that what matters in travel representation is both “what we see” –which implies a choice and thus an intrinsic subjectivity– and “how we tell” –which allows including the representational process in the saying. Casey Blanton, who precisely takes both dimensions into account, would certainly agree with this revised expression (“what we see and how we tell”).

Drawing on her, one might question the novelty of “new travel writing.” If Birkett and Wheeler advocate a shift from the object to the subject of travel (that is from the journey

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103 Tim Youngs, *Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, p.10.
to the traveler), this move better applies to the scholarly perspective than travel writing itself. According to Blanton, indeed, the shift happened a few centuries ago rather than a couple decades ago, that is, when genuine travel literature could be opposed to “pre-travel.” Looking at “the various ways the observing self and the foreign world reverberate within each work,” Blanton remarks that “at the one end of the spectrum lies the object-bound journey (factual, disinterested, thoughts hidden…) at the other end lie the more explicitly autobiographic travel books (social and psycho more important than facts and events).” Although these two ends juxtapose two narrative strategies (an impersonal journey with a linear structure versus a more consciously crafted work of literature), they historically and systematically impinge upon each other with the emergence of a personal narrative voice at the turn of the 17th century. This interplay guides Blanton’s inquiry.

**Historical Threads in Travel Writing**

Most works on travel writing typically present a historical thread based on a specific thesis they seek to demonstrate. This diachronic perspective ranges from political motivation in Mary-Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eye* to psychoanalytic consideration in Denis Porter’s *Haunted Journeys*.\(^\text{105}\) It also includes linguistic and nostalgic pursuits as well as feminist or autobiographical concerns.\(^\text{106}\) Despite their diversity, all these works always

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105 Mary-Louise Pratt extends and deepens Said’s *Orientalism* in convincingly criticizing the ideology of the imperial self. However, if travelers’ voice truly resonates like that of a “monarch-of-all-I-survey” as Pratt qualifies it (1992, p.216), Blanton observes that *Imperial Eyes* “is a valuable but frankly ideological look at the genre,” p.131.

As for Denis Porter, observing the profusion of personal elements, he uses the theme of desire and transgression as “travel writers put their fantasies on display often in spite of themselves … always writing about lives they want or do not want to live, the lost object of their desire or the phobia that threaten to disable them” in *Haunted Journeys. Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing*, 1991, p.13.

106 David Scott’s *Semiologies of Travel* complements both Denis Porter’s *Haunted Journeys* (1991) and William Franklin’s *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers* (1979). Franklin explores the problematic relationship between the word and the world and the lack of appropriate language for new experience. Scott follows the
put the traveler’s experience forth, which is an experience that they only access through the narrator. This tendency is also the case regarding Jas Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiès’ *Voyages and Visions*: although their inquiry concerns the cultural history of travel, they access it through the prism of the narrating self. Similar to Blanton, they do not envision the history of travel representation as a straightforward move from one pole to another, but, rather, suggest a dialectic between these two:

We should not be talking of linear development. Rather, the cultural history of travel is best seen as a dialectic of dominant paradigms between two poles, which we might define as the transcendental vision of pilgrimage and the open-ended process which typically characterizes modernity. By transcendental vision we mean the sense of spiritual fulfillment with which the traveler achieves a kind of completion at the goal of his journey (…). By contrast, we define as open-ended travel that process the fulfillment of which is always deferred because its achievements are relativized by the very act of traveling.”

One of the two paradigms described, that of the modern on-going process, clearly resonates with the circularity of travel representation detailed earlier. This dialectic Elsner and Rubiès identify and the one underlined by Blanton both relevantly contribute to travel writing inquiries. They respectively do so in paying attention to the traveler’s mind on the one hand, and to the textual content on the other. However, while they have in common an interesting sidelining of temporal linearity, one must also bear in mind that modern subjectivities are defined by and against ancient, medieval, and modern pasts from a diachronic perspective, and that co-existing cultures also play a major role in

thread of the search and the longing for a pre-existing and ideally motivated language, a sort of lost authenticity that goes back to nostalgia.


defining the traveling-self from a synchronic perspective. A crossing of the two perspectives seems then to be required, yet one must be cautious at the way of doing it, especially if by synchronic intrinsic characteristics are meant.108

**Internal and External Determinations**

Comprehensive travel writing studies often display a historical section and a thematic one separately. Tim Youngs argues the first and second parts of his *Cambridge Introduction* will allow a comparison between “what we might call external factors (social and historical context) with internal ones (enduring elements that seem intrinsic to the genre).”109 In doing so he reconciles, but afterwards and artificially, the cultural and textual levels of his inquiry. By contrast, my dissertation aims at combining these two approaches of travel representation (external and internal) in a more mutually inclusive way, by placing the enunciative body of the travel author at the core of my research.

When crossing social sciences with formal readings, one must be very cautious not to concede immediately to a contextualizing temptation. As Jacques Fontanille remarks in *Pratiques sémiotiques*, by supplementing the textual analysis with contextual elements, additional findings might arise but not match the semiotic heuristic. Yet, internal and external determinations of the text can be thought of within the “enunciative praxis.”110

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108 The term “synchronic” here is not to be confounded with that of “intrinsic.” Indeed, a synchronic perspective might refer to both intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics. When suggesting that a given culture is defined in relation to the co-existing others, external elements are called up. When saying a culture can be defined from within, through essentialist elements, then one draws on internal features. The same goes with travel writing.


110 “En informant l’analyse à partir du contexte [ce à quoi peut-être mènerait l’approche socio-anthropologique, en restituant les objets de l’analyse dans leur contexte de production et leur processus communicationnel], on se procure en effet, à bon compte, un ‘supplément’ d’explication, mais qui n’est justement pas celui de l’heuristique sémiotique [mais peut-être celui des cultural studies]. En immanence,
Pierre Bourdieu also suggests that such a combination of social and literary approaches is possible, and even desirable. According to him, it would still be possible to preserve “les acquis et toutes les exigences des approches internalistes [d’inspiration néo-kantienne ou structuraliste par exemple] et externalistes [entre autres d’orientation marxiste], formalistes et sociologistes, en mettant en relation l’espace des œuvres (...) et l’espace des écoles ou des auteurs”.\textsuperscript{111}

If travel starts by ending certainties, this ending generates a decentering of the gaze, a cultural upset that should be noticeable in the textual production. Not being a sociologist collecting data, nor an anthropologist back from fieldwork, I have no other choice as a literary scholar but to start with the material representation that brings an end to a personal journey. As a result, unlike Hulme who appears to primarily define the travel text by its exteriority, I consider the text for itself. It is only from an internal exploration of this object and via an epistemological premise that I intend to approach its exteriority. Responding to the historical move previously outlined (from the world to the self), I am paradoxically reversing the hierarchy, leaving from the body within the text to reach the world, from the “how it is told” to the “what has been seen,” thus conferring travel experience its full expression. What comes first would then be the aesthetic of the text and the poetics it relies on to reflect an ethics of travel. Satisfying this demand calls for a close selection of the sources. They could not be the work of any writer or any traveler.

\textsuperscript{111} P. Bourdieu, \textit{Raisons pratiques. Sur la théorie de l’action}, Paris, Seuil, 1994, p.69. The theorist further observes that “l’analyse des œuvres culturelles a pour objet la correspondance entre deux structures homologues, la structure des œuvres (c’est-à-dire des genres, mais aussi des formes, des styles et des thèmes, etc.) et la structure du champ littéraire (ou artistique, scientifique, juridique), champ de forces qui est inséparablement un champ de luttes.” \textit{Ibid.}, pp.70-71.
but should rather correspond to the craft of an artistic, pervasive, and self-conscious soul, able to challenge both postcolonial clichés and literary debates.

3.2 Selecting and Comparing

_The Author’s Voice_

Regarding the evolution of travel writing, Casey Blanton argues “the change comes at the nexus of the narrator’s sense of him or herself as creator of a text and the involvement with the other (as person, places, and moral and aesthetic universes) about whom the text is written.”\(^{112}\) Beyond this foregrounding of the narrator, Blanton emphasizes in this quote the twofold practice of the travel author, as she is concerned with both the aesthetics of the text and the ethics informing the travel. I contend that these two aspects could be traced back in a way through the common etymology of an authorial and authoritative voice.

On the creative side (authorial), my aim is to consider artists with the ability to renew their gaze and escape the norms. Bourdieu in _Les règles de l’art_ (1992) identifies Baudelaire, for instance, as the archetype of a heteronomous writer. This requirement also implies that the studied travelers should, to a certain extent, distance themselves from the colonial framework, just as Victor Segalen does through his particular understanding of exoticism.\(^{113}\) The useful approach, surprising for the time, that he offers of exoticism is of crucial importance because he defines it as the ability to conceive diversity. This celebration of difference holds in itself the disruptive departure defining

\(^{112}\) Casey Blanton, _Travel Writing_, p.xii.  
\(^{113}\) Segalen, _Essai sur l’exotisme. Une esthétique du divers_, 1978 (posthume)
the journey, a genuine appreciation of otherness, and, by extension, a potential for unveiling the unknown within the realm of the known.

On the imperious side (authoritative), the approached travelers should be aware of their status and the impact of their voice. Authority, that literally means the “power to enforce obedience,” comes from an older and broader understanding of author designating someone “who is at the origin of something.” Consequently, the one who creates, instigates, writes or advises, inherently bears responsibility. This point is particularly critical when it comes to ethnological travels or similar initiatives.\textsuperscript{114} The problem is that biased representations are often, if not always, the results of a power relationship that diverts and distorts the encounter. Not only should the ethics of travel raise anthropological-like questions—“who am I to talk about the others?” or “can I really talk about them?”—, but it should also place the encounter at the heart of the practice.\textsuperscript{115}

\textit{Strong Subjectivities}

One of the main issues in selecting travel authors does not lie in the distinction between a traveler and an artist—writer, photographer or filmmaker— but rather in their approach to the respective practices of responsible journey and genuine creation. To draw on the nuance Barthes made between the \textit{écritain} and the \textit{écrivant}, I do not aim to study a writer traveling, nor a traveler writing. Although these profiles do exist, both practices are equally important in my view. Barthes went to Japan at the end of the 1960s and he published the \textit{Empire of Sign} (1970) after his journey. In this interesting text, he argues

\textsuperscript{114} Flaherty’s direction of \textit{Nanook of the North} might pose a problem in this regard, as it is both a fiction and an ethnography in which the director staged every single aspects of the Inuit’s everyday life.

\textsuperscript{115} As Blanton stressed it in her previous quote, this encounter does not only take place with the people, but with landscapes and places, possibly raising eco-critical concerns, and with moral and aesthetic universes as well, where interculturality truly happens.
that no deep knowledge about Japan was possible for him and no meaning could really be achieved. Barthes simply wandered as a novice soul in the empire of the unknown, displaying the degree zero of the traveler—an ultimate decentering in a way. In the midst of readable objects, he has the feeling that no meaning can really be stabilized or completed. This is the kind of positioning required for initiating the travel—and an interesting exercise for a semiotician. However, this stance cannot be maintained for too long, as it would precipitate the traveler in a postmodern spiral of slippery significations. Barthes’ initial remarks indeed put him face to face with reality as a slippery surface—or signifier—on which he can never have a hold, thus recalling Lacan’s phrase about the real being “that against which one bumps.” My authors, on the contrary, are able to enter this reality and seize it from within. They do so without betraying their environment, but traverse spaces and encounter otherness with an astonishing accuracy. The primary criterion for identifying them was to look for strong subjectivities able to capture “reality” and mold it in such a way that it would became a work of art.

With respect to these artistic works, a second aspect is worth mentioning that does not constitute a selective criterion, yet might inform the analysis. It pertains to the authors’ attitudes towards their works: are they claiming authenticity for their accounts (while they might stage it)? Or, on the contrary, is that issue of veracity irrelevant to their work? While I discarded the question of authenticity earlier, I am not bringing it back as a feature of travel representation. Rather, I am pointing at the authors’ intentions and beliefs when recording reality, and questioning the artificial border that opposes document to fiction: travel narratives, indeed, always oscillate between informative and aesthetic expressions. There is no such thing as an actual literature, and, if one speaks of
non-fiction, it paradoxically ultimately remains fictive in my view because it still belongs to the realm of representation. Non-fiction is not simply factual. It requires real facts, or at least credible facts, but the indeterminacy remains on the textual level, as I argued above. Whether or not the events are taking place on the contextual level does not really matter. Rather, it is worth underlining that since my approach goes from the text to the corporeal experience of travel, a certain reality is still at stake. This remark would parallel, for instance, the paradox of inventing other people and other places (the exotic) and, while these inventions primarily concern the imaginary (Westerners’ minds), they still convey a concrete impact: these constructions exist and do not exist at once. Similarly, when Urbain talks of travel figures mediating the journey, those are fictive characters that nonetheless inspire and have been internalized by a traveler made of flesh.

**Comparative Media**

Broadly speaking, travel representation is a hybrid, multimodal, changing and extensive domain. Not only does it gather a whole range of writings but it also borrows various modes of expression. Different types of language (textual, oral, visual, musical), supported by different media, are involved. My primary sources bring together literature, photography, and film, and intentionally reflect the diversity of resources available for narrating a journey.

My essential concern being the aesthetics of the representation of reality, I could examine a whole range of media, including graphic or audio transmissions. However, I have narrowed my approach to an objective and mechanical recording process, or an apparently transparent reproduction of reality on the one hand, and to a more evidently
subjective method relying on a conventional and arbitrary system, on the other hand. Yet, this dichotomy, opposing the automatic image (photographs and films) to traditional writing, is misleading in a certain way: the written text might promote a referential illusion of transparency as much as photographic and cinematic images do, and, conversely, these images are as much subjective and arbitrary as literature is to some extent. The semiotic orientation of my approach partly originates from this variety of materials, and one of the difficulties and values of the research lie in this multi-modality of expressions. Of course, each one of these media possesses its own syntax and specificities, necessarily taken into account when analyzing them. But the primary objective of the dissertation being the representation of reality, this comparison between different forms of representation must be made possible on a solid and fundamental basis that is at the origin of all forms of message: that of an enunciative body.

Most, if not all, of the approaches involving various media—which seems to be characteristic of cultural studies—usually do so on the basis of the common content these media convey. Whether it is a given topic (the journey in my case), a historical period (late modernity), a geographic region (Paris), or rather, all at once (since the topic is generally examined from a historical or/and a geographic perspective, enlightened by a hypothetical thesis), the content-based research often considers the fact that it brings together several media needless to justify, or at least self-justificatory. Consequently, it rarely reflects on this fact. In my approach to travel representation, by contrast, it is almost anecdotal that the different types of text I examine deal with an urban context. My focus on traveling, however, defined as a mindset disruption triggered by the very act of its representation, is crucial. This representation being at once my subject and my object
of study, the comparison I make between writing, photography and film, is first and foremost justified by an epistemological concern (the how and why of comparative media). As a result, the comparative approach is an underlying problematic of my research.

In this regard, the issue of referentiality offers horizontal insight through various semiotic systems and allows their connection. Additionally, it opens a way to re-think vertically the relation that exists between text and context, two dimensions that might not be as absolutely and hermetically separate as it first seemed, provided that they are approached from the perspective of an enunciative and referential body through which they are put in relation. This body, shared at once by the travel author and the narrator, enables a reflection on the dual practice of traveling and representation.

The journey consisting primarily in the existential relation the author has with the world, the Parisian setting is only secondary to my research. Whereas it could appear quite paradoxical to inquire about travel in the very city where the authors live, it does not matter since traveling, as seen, is a particular mindset that may happen anywhere. Or, on the contrary, because traveling is defined as such, inquiring about it in the author’s own cultural context, helps to reflect on this very first move of traveling. The Parisian context becomes a way to access the root of traveling, just as my comparison of different media attempts to reach the founding of representation before it takes a specific form. From this perspective, it does not matter to distinguish between travel account or poetry, scientific or artistic photography, fiction movie or documentary film. Each of these genres ultimately relies on the exact same signifying system: writing, photography, cinema.
3.3 The Travel Authors

Preliminary Remarks

The three chapters that follow examine written, photographic and cinematic productions over a century that runs from Charles Baudelaire’s poetry and the popular praise of photography in the midst of the second industrial revolution, up to the “sociological inquiry” of Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch, at the dawn of a new épistémè and the preludes of postmodern, globalized, and hyper-real times. In spite of the intemporal, concrete and mythical grounding of voyage, this modern period appears to be the heyday of travel writing. It is more precisely delimited by Baudelaire’s preface to Le Spleen de Paris that he writes in 1861 (a letter to Arsène Houssaye) on the one side, and the release of Chronique d’un été in 1961 co-directed by Morin and Rouch, on the other. Between these two temporal marks, I consider the photographic production of Atget at the turn of the 20th century, who operates with obsolete techniques at the time cinematography appears.

While the three media could seem arbitrarily juxtaposed over this historical thread, there is a very good reason for studying poetry in the midst of the 19th century, photography at the beginning of the 20th century, and film in the midst of the last century. What the next chapters reveal is how, each one of these authors I have chosen, manages to rethink and refine the very essence of their media in relation to reality. The historical outline and the choice of a particular media for each period make sense as in fact it encompasses in the three cases a similar evolution typical of late modernism, but happening on different occasions regarding the particular systems of representation. In other words, and roughly said, what Rouch reveals of cinema corresponds with Atget’s photographic practice as
well as with Baudelaire’s literary exploration, which is an intimate understanding of their respective arts in relation to reality.

Because they do not take part in colonial ideology and they either ignore or invert the exotic clichés, they also perceive the particularity of modern travel. Miles away from tourism and leisure industry, each one, in his own way, foregrounds the uncanny encounter serving their art. They are central figures at the avant-garde of modernity, precursors who, in their specific time, feature as counter-models when placed in relation to their contemporaries: Baudelaire and the realists, Atget and the pictorialists, Rouch and the *Nouvelle Vagu-ists* (from an authorial perspective).

Generic features are always open to modifications, and travel representation is necessarily affected by temporal evolution. These are two aspects that I attempt to neutralize when focusing exclusively on the relation the author has with reality, aside from historical contingency. In this regard, I focus my analysis of three structural invariants: the self (reflection), space (displacement) and others (encounter), but I do not specifically look at the evolution of their content. Finally, these are aspects that are rarely isolated and that often interact together: when sketching the other or reproducing a dialogue, when describing a stunning landscape or narrating a movement, travel authors always tell something about themselves.

**Chapters Content**

Within the century, specific decades carry a historical momentum and innovations, which had profound influences on travel and its representations. The French Second Empire promotes railroad developments, Haussmannian urbanizations, and the premise of
colonial imperialism. Baudelaire writes his poetry during this period. As a great poet and a lucid art critic, he manages better than anyone else to transcribe a certain essence of “reality” so that it permeates his works. In spite of the symbolist label, he has a very modern, even postmodern, approach to reality, more especially regarding the “Tableaux parisiens” and Le Spleen de Paris (1869). Close attention will be paid to these works in particular, but also to other poems taken from Les Fleurs du mal (1857), in which the artist evokes the voyage, as a counter-effect to the spleen. Facing a spatio-temporal oppression, prisoner of demonic time and narrow space, Baudelaire represents travel as a release from this imprisonment. The evocation of wide landscapes allows a temporal suspension during which comforting sensations unfold. However, where many others seemed to be satisfied with their foreign discoveries, Baudelaire is not fooled by this illusory euphoria: if travel appeared to be a recovering resource for spiritual illusions, erotic evocations and poetic effects, it also bears a disillusionment that provokes the poet’s return in the end. Roaming in Paris, he is now able to face and confront the spleen and does not need to flee anymore: “Si tu peux rester, reste.”116 The unknown he is calling for at the end of Le Voyage (“Au fond de l’inconnu pour trouver du nouveau”) might then be understood as a new way of approaching reality… and poetry.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Atget travels the Parisian streets. He builds an immense and valuable photographic archive that will be later acclaimed by the surrealist group, while inspiring Walter Benjamin’s thoughts as well. The press industry replaces engravings with photographs at the same time magazines and photographers’ agencies arise, but Atget stands aside. Concurrently, the Lumière brothers’ invention has well spread and broadcast industries begin shooting in studios (news reenact the events they

document). The photographic voyage has its ancestors from the period when photography acquired enough mobility to explore the world (Du Camp in the Middle East, Gsell in ex-Indochina, Désiré-Charnay in Central America, Beato in Japan around the 1860s). They will give rise to photojournalism, just as the reporters sent all over the world by the Lumières brothers (Paul Veyne in particular) will give rise to documentary film to some extent. Atget, who exclusively and stubbornly practices a Parisian photography, is nonetheless at the crossroad of these movements, between exploration and reportage. The impressive collection he realizes using obsolete techniques at the turn of the 20th century is comprised of portraits, landscapes, scenes and fragments, and while some may read it as a romantic undertaking (the disappearing Paris), according to him, it remains essentially documental, as he stresses. His streets are desperately empty of people, hence an uncanny absence in a busy town, praised by surrealists. Berenice Abbot or Walker Evans, however, both acknowledge in this work the very essence of photographic art, in total contradiction with pictorialism.

The period following World War II is full of different and new experiments: transportation belongs to a new era and the decolonizing world shakes up the ancient order. Photojournalism is on the edge of artistic recognition, or at least is finally conceived as proceeding from a genuinely authorial approach (as suggested by the creation of the cooperative Magnum photography in 1947). Regarding the motion pictures, the appearance of television invites the media to question itself, just as the emergence of photography did with painting. Cinema had already been understood as a true language to be manipulated with art (Eisenstein’s montage), while ingenious others believed in the recording of traditional costumes before modernity fosters their
disappearance (Flaherty’s *Nanook*). Now, the founders of *Les Cahiers du cinéma* identify a Nouvelle vague, whereas a straight recording of reality emerge with direct cinema in America or cinéma-vérité in France, whose official birth corresponds with the release of *Chronique d’un été* (1961) by Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch. Direct cinema and cinéma-vérité proceed from two divergent approaches. While the former paradoxically emphasizes the camera’s disappearance in order to foster an illusion of direct mediation, the latter, on the contrary, acknowledges the camera’s presence and makes the director part of the movie, especially through Morin’s appearance in front of the camera. Rouch’s cinema epitomizes the blurring – yet already suggested by photographer’s awareness or unconsciously manifested in Flaherty’s *Nanook* –, between document and art, fact and fiction, the referential and expressive functions of language. The ethnofictions Rouch directs conjointly with his friends and characters, confusingly oscillates between reality and fiction. Deleuze’s definition of Rouchian storytelling makes perfect sense: “the constant connection of the documentary character with a higher fiction than him”.

There is always a part of fiction in any aspect of life, even when strictly documented, as narration occurs as soon as one starts representing something.

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CHAPTER II – BAUDELAIRE: EXPLORING THE TRAVELER’S MIND

In 1857, the deputy prosecutor from the imperial court, Ernest Pinard, stands out as a keeper of good manners and respectable behavior in accusing Charles Baudelaire for literally telling everything: “son principe, sa théorie, c’est de tout peindre, de tout mettre à nu. Il fouillera la nature humaine dans ses replis les plus intimes; il aura, pour la rendre, des tons vigoureux et saisissants, il l’exagérera surtout dans ses côtés les plus hideux ; il la grossira outre mesure afin de créer l’impression, la sensation”.

In a rather ironic way, the man of law, while implicitly defining the bourgeois moral of the Second Empire, transforms into a literary critic and stresses the “réalisme grossier” of a work to be condemned, for it necessarily leads to the “excitation des sens” and as such

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118 Quoted by Antoine Compagnon, Baudelaire devant l’innombrable, PUPS, Paris, 2003, p.10. The following expressions are those from the official verdict published the day after the trial in La Gazette des tribunaux n° 9483, August 21, 1857, in André Guyaux, Baudelaire. Un demi-siècle de lectures des Fleurs du mal (1855-1905), PUPS, Paris, 2007, pp.247-249.
constitutes an indecent assault. Beyond the six particular poems targeted and subsequently prohibited, Ernest Pinard points in simple terms, more or less ingenuously, at Baudelaire’s existential hypotyposes and their shocking effects; an incomparable ability to drain out of things their literal essence, as put in the epigraph above. The quote is taken from one of the two projected epilogs Baudelaire wrote to conclude Les Fleurs du Mal’s second original edition of 1861. Both texts, addressed to the “capitale infâme” the poet loves and hates, also introduces Le Spleen de Paris, posthumously published in 1869.

Back to the trial, the anecdote goes on that Champfleury, a prominent figure of the realist movement and acquaintance of Baudelaire, would have upset the poet right before the hearing, in telling him he would most probably be accused of realism. Indeed, what could have been more insulting to an artist whose ultimate goal is, somehow, through passionate work and thorough commitment, to precisely untie himself from crude reality? Hence an apparently ambivalent and paradoxical realism, both Platonic and artistic, that this chapter attempts to resolve. As a matter of fact, and as a poet, Baudelaire simply transcends literary realism as much as he transcends 19th-century literature. From romanticism to naturalism, via the realist and symbolist trends, his poetry – and his art criticism too – makes him the archetype of modernity par excellence; a modernity that he fights and overcomes as well, for he is, if not a precursor of postmodernity, at least a “modern antimodern”. However, my aim is not to measure Baudelaire’s artistic legacy

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120 Antoine Compagnon’s seminar on Baudelaire at the Collège de France in 2011-2012 was titled “Baudelaire moderne et antimoderne”. Among other references, it relates to an earlier book of Compagnon, Les Antimodernes : De Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes (Gallimard, Paris, 2005) in which Compagnon develops the thesis that “modernity is unthinkable without taking into account forms of resistance and
or the impact he had on his contemporary and subsequent readerships (although the excitation of senses he communicates could serve as an interesting leading thread). In this chapter, I focus rather on a presumed “transcendence of reality” and I will show that, if such sublimation does happen – in the literal sense –, when articulated in the travel experience as previously defined in the introductory chapter, it takes place “within reality” and, as such, should be conceived as an immanent process.

In order to fully apprehend such a process, one must first consider how artists treat reality during the second half of the 19th century. The first section of the chapter provides not only an overview into realism but also a glimpse at its relation with the newly born photographic medium. When considering Baudelaire’s subjective realism more deeply, the notion of Spleen becomes a guiding principle for analyzing the spatio-temporal universe he depicts and struggles with. From there emerges the role and meaning of an artificial and immaterial voyage, analogous to exotic literature and exploratory photographs. Yet, this overcoming of reality already presents its own limitations. It corresponds to the allegorical process with which so many critics of Baudelaire collided.121 In the end, this chapter shows how the poet breaks through the impasse of imaginative escape and re-enters the physical world, namely the city of Paris, shattering aesthetic and cultural fetters; a performance that in itself constitutes the true meaning of voyage.

opposition to it”. In his foreword to his most recent publication, Compagnon remarks that Baudelaire was present throughout this whole work, although no chapter was dedicated to him. Then he adds: “L’antimodernité représentait à mes yeux la modernité authentique, celle qui résistait à la vie moderne, au monde moderne, tout en y étant irrémédiablement attaché.” in Baudelaire l’irréductible, Flammarion, Paris, 2014, p.8.

121 Relevantly enough, these conclusions are often the result of an inquiry that only looked at Les Fleurs du mal without reflecting on the twin opus of this collection: Le Spleen de Paris.
1. A Misconstrued Realism

1.1 Baudelaire as a Vulgar Realist

**Pluralist Realism**

Encompassing both those who officially adopt the label, as well as those who either ignore or simply reject it (respectively Balzac and Flaubert), realism does not just refer to a particular art school of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century but more broadly reflects a conception of the world. Consequently, artistic realism stems out of an evolving ethics and presents an indefinite aesthetics, for there are almost as many realisms as there are “realist” authors, from Herodotus to contemporary writers (no matter if they refute or, on the contrary, reinstate, the status of referentiality), including Baudelaire. However, despite the existence of subjective realities, this remark should not lead to solipsism or nominalism which, in granting preeminence to the subject, denies the objects their very existence (unless they have been specifically addressed).\(^{122}\)

Without falling into the trap of absolute relativism, nor asserting, on the opposite side, an ontological existence of reality regardless of the observer, I merely suggest that there is no work of art that is not, somehow, anchored in reality. After all, Baudelaire himself, referring to what could seem the least realist of all literary genres, curiously observes that “\textit{tout bon poète fut toujours réaliste}”. This expression epitomizes Baudelaire’s fundamental ambivalence (sometimes spiced with some duplicity): while this reply to Champfleury obviously holds a hint of

\(^{122}\) Amusingly, as noticed by Bertrand Russel, in denying the things their universal existence unless being named, nominalism primarily refers to these things, whereas realism, which claims the independent existence of the world, mainly consists on a play on words... Besides, given this opposition between these two philosophical doctrines, and talking of subjective reality, it would make no sense to grant reality to either the conscious subject or the world.
irony, it also remains a true and honest claim when bearing in mind Plato’s conception of reality. Indeed, the poet further explains: “la Poésie est ce qu’il y a de plus réel, c’est ce qui n’est complètement vrai que dans un autre monde.” Despite Plato’s reference however, a superficial and a priori definition of Baudelaire’s realism would be doomed to fail. For the poet’s universes (that of poetry and that of reality, that of imagination and that of the senses) are unique and immense, regardless of concrete finitudes: only two poetic collections on the one hand, and Paris on the other, where the poet spent most of his life. How should Baudelaire’s striking penetration of things and beings, his surprisingly accurate and edifying relation to the world be called? Sur-reality, hyper-reality, infra-reality… Defeating any attempt of classification because of his evasiveness and multiplicity—suffice it to quote Antoine Compagnon’s book title: Baudelaire. L’Irréductible—, Baudelaire’s poetry can be read successively as satanist or catholic, symbolist or naturalist, reactionary or modern, revolutionary and even postmodern, yet consistently realist. I take here the opportunity to clarify that death and metaphysics, moral and ethics, religiosity and sarcasm, beauty and spirituality… all of the highest importance in Baudelaire’s work, will barely be alluded to in what follows, precisely because this clearance leaves me with just the nude reality; a reality with which Baudelaire interacts in both abuse and indulgence.

123 “Puisque réalisme il y a”, quoted in André Guyaux, op. cit., p.38. Baudelaire writes this article in 1855 in response to Courbet and Champfleury. Although incomplete, he could have used it as an alibi when put on trial two years later: a poet who repudiates material realism can hardly be taken for a realist, at least intentionally.
124 See section 3.2 below for details on Baudelaire’s travel out and mostly in Paris.
125 For instance, although they are concrete elements of reality and recurring textual elements, I will not consider the two important topics of women and wine. But in order to access Baudelaire’s relation to reality and the impact it has on him, I will look at their effects on the body of the poet, sensuality and (a certain form of) intoxication.
The right-minded spirits regard Baudelaire as a disparaging realist because of shocking immorality (which recalls Flaubert conviction the same year of 1857).\textsuperscript{126} The poems perceived as offensive in the \textit{Fleurs du Mal} are the ones tinged with obvious eroticism and underpinned with sadism or lesbianism. As Henri Peyre remarks in an article examining Baudelaire’s legacy, the poet is less “\textit{l’initiateur d’un ordre poétique nouveau}” –probably because of his inimitable singularity– than “\textit{l’héritier et le purificateur du romantisme}”.\textsuperscript{127} Although complacently describing a nature that is very rarely in tune with the poet’s aspirations, in clear contradiction with the locus amoenus topos, never beneficial or beautiful anymore, but rather corrupted and subversive, unpleasant and often repellent, Baudelaire does not necessarily oppose romanticism (and conversely, Victor Hugo, while being the godfather of romanticism, presents realistic facets through his consideration of the city and human distress). Socialism and feelings of brotherhood are also what bring Baudelaire closer to Champfleury, Courbet, and the realist group. As stated by the poet himself, a “\textit{socialisme mitigé}” underlies some of his texts, in total contrast with the image of the dandy later explored in this chapter. Finally, Compagnon sums it up: “\textit{Baudelaire réaliste, c’est ainsi non seulement Baudelaire romantique ou baroque, suivant les conclusions du tribunal et du collège, mais encore Baudelaire socialiste animé de soucis humanitaires et d’un optimisme fraternitaire.}”\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{126} Although Gustave Flaubert states in a letter to Mme B. that he wrote \textit{Madame Bovary} “\textit{en haine du réalisme}”, Ernest Pinard, again, had him convicted for depicting the characters and their thoughts “with a vulgar and often shocking realism” (quoted from the verdict of Flaubert’s trial a few months earlier Baudelaire’s one).


\textsuperscript{128} Antoine Compagnon, \textit{Baudelaire devant l’innombrable, op. cit.}, p.12.
“Une Charogne” and Two Readings

Baudelaire’s most noteworthy “realism” is first publicly observed in the poem “Une Charogne”, after which Nadar forges the in-famous “Prince des Charognes” (and sketches a caricature of the poet as well, “Baudelaire à la charogne”) to refer to his friend. However, this designation rather displeases the poet as it somehow reinforces the reputation of a vulgar (realist) and uncouth author. Such a connotation indeed, would not pay tribute to Baudelaire’s methodic and detailed dissection of reality (hence the naturalist and sadistic angles) and to the meticulous attention with which he works his poems as if they were jewels. “Une Charogne”, that continues the theme of the memento mori, is the first text on which admirers and detractors of the artist crystallize: on the one side, those who are repulsed by crude poetry; on the other, those who praise his “baroque of banality” to use Walter Benjamin’s expression. Here is where resides Baudelaire’s talent: to reveal poetry anywhere it lies, no matter the subject (as it happens, a putrefied corpse), and to tastily extract beauty from even the most distasteful matters. Isn’t it after all the very first meaning of the oxymoronic title, Les Fleurs du mal? Those flowers are purely textual and yet greatly efficient: no matter how beautifully written the poem is, the context to which it refers might sometimes inspire true disgust. Considering

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129 Nadar, alias Felix Tournachon, is the photographer of the “tout-paris” who has realized several portraits of Baudelaire. Their friendship is ambivalent to say the least, as shown, on the one side, by this nickname about which Baudelaire complains (“il m’est pénible de passer pour une charogne, tu n’as pas du tout une foule de choses de moi, qui ne sont que musc et que roses”, from a letter to Nadar, May 14, 1859); and on the other side, through Baudelaire’s attitude regarding photography (he also addresses a poem to Nadar, “Le Rêve d’une curieux”, that he knows the materialist photographer will probably not understand).

130 This metaphor refers to Baudelaire’s self-conscious and very precise “word-craft”. More particularly, it insists on the fact Baudelaire virtually never stops reworking his texts. In that sense, and certainly in Baudelaire’s mind, it opposes the profoundly refined work of poetry to the raw and superficial photographic process. It is taken from the following quote: “c’est un mineur de fond qui suit la veine où il découvre des joyaux, qu’il ne cesse de tailler et retailler, de polir et de sertir. Si l’on ajoutait les unes aux autres les versions successives des poèmes – parfois une dizaine –, on constituerait plusieurs volumes”, in Claude Pichois and Jean-Paul Avice, Baudelaire. Paris sans fin, Paris bibliothèques éditions, Paris, 2004, p.123.
the hypotyposis at stake in “Une Charogne” (as well as in “Un Voyage à Cythère” whose hanged body undoubtedly recalls of François Villon’s memorable Ballade), Edmond Schérer, one of Baudelaire’s contemporary critics, writes in a note: “Le lecteur se bouche le nez, la page pue”. Transcending the textual limits with a sensitive and perlocutory effect on the reader, this remark resonates with the exclamative “Pouah!” ending the article of Jean Habans (another critic of that time). According to Champfleury, these expressions rather please Baudelaire this time, as they are obvious signs of some expected effects.

“Une Charogne” rapidly becomes the canonical text opposing the realistic and idealistic appreciation of Les Fleurs du mal. Another contemporary critic of Baudelaire, Georges Noël, confirms and orders these two sides of his poetic work: “quelques-uns ont voulu voir en Baudelaire un réaliste forcené qui, pour pousser à bout son système, se complet à présenter à l’imagination les plus horribles réalités (...) Il a donc toutes les qualités du réaliste, mais il en a de plus élevées qui les dominent et les mettent en œuvre. En lui le réaliste est comme asservi à un idéaliste des plus raffinés, et c’est celui-là qui est le vrai Baudelaire”. In placing realist features below idealist aspirations, this remark draws on Platonic philosophy again. As André Guyaux reminds us in his preface to a substantial collection of Baudelaire’s early critics, there are four main meanings of realism. The first and oldest one is philosophical and refers to Plato’s theory, according to which ideas are realities from the intelligible world (in contrast with a world of the senses accessible through perception). The most recent and popular definition of realism is pragmatic and

concerns a specific attitude that consists in taking into account concrete elements of the world of the senses. Third, the artistic and literary conception aims at avoiding any idealization of reality. And finally, the last definition is synonymous with caricature as it consists in a tendency for accentuating certain aspects of reality. As we have seen, except for the most recent realism, Baudelaire is somehow related to the three other meanings: he is sued because of exaggeration; sometimes associated with realist artists; and he willingly situates his poetry under the patronage of Plato, to reach out an absolute beauty. Yet, none of these approaches appropriately reflects Baudelaire’s singular aesthetics of reality. Not only the accusation of immoral exaggerations and the Platonic perspective should be sidelined for a while – I honestly doubt that idealist realism prevails over the more common one I am concerned with –, but even the tendency to connect the poet with realist artists and writers must be taken with precaution.

1.2 The Photographic Paradigm

Tensions about Realist Neutrality

As a sequel to his essay “Puisque réalisme il y a”, written in 1855, Baudelaire publishes an art critique regarding the Salon de 1859, that also marks the distance he is taking from the realist group. He tells about the deceptive works of this exhibition that constitutes, from another angle, the official recognition of the new trend, and even the first step towards that of photographic art as well (for which Nadar has been striving so far).

133 A. Guyaux, ibid., p. 39.

134 During the “Universal Exhibition” of 1855 that takes place in Paris, photography figures with the industrial products. Unlike Maxime Du Camp, who seems to agree with this setting, Nadar aims at dragging photography out of these utilitarian and reducing applications – another bone of contention.
While Baudelaire more likely uses the adjective “modern” to qualify an aesthetics that differs from the classical and romanticist trends, the term “realist” still needs further explanations, for it covers much more complex attitudes than the superficial one it denotes at first. Realism cannot be reduced to the features resulting from the avoidance of idealization that reside in a predilection for contemporary subjects and a claim for authenticity (and thus, untouched mediation). The various artists who are, deliberately or unintendedly, linked to the realist current, are all well aware that the term should in no way be interpreted literally. If so, it would simply result in an undermining of their past achievements and future projects. In an article he writes about Courbet in 1856, the art critic, Théophile Silvestre, elaborates on the non-sense the term conveys:

_Si le mot réalisme avait un sens (Et Courbet reconnaît lui-même qu’il n’en a pas), il voudrait dire de deux choses l’une: négation de l’imagination; alors l’homme dépouillé de la plus haute de ses facultés, devient un animal inférieur, et la nature n’est plus qu’un théâtre inanimé; ou bien prééminence de la vérité visible et palpable sur la fiction poétique. Dans ce second cas, l’artiste, réduit à l’état de scribe, n’a plus qu’à dresser le procès-verbal de tout ce qu’il voit et de tout ce qu’il touche._

A deeper dialectic underlies these two aporetic options, which brings subjectivity and objectivity face-to-face. As implicitly suggested by the quote, beyond the alternative between two poles—a fake one since neither can be an option—, lies the interaction between subject and object as a system of communicating vessels: making the subject neutral—which is targeted in both the cases mentioned—renders the object preeminent and, vice-versa, decreasing this domination of the object confers the subject a leading

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role. But, as stated earlier, the problem is not that of nominalism on the one side, which posits consciousness as the one and only medium able to “animate nature” (first case), opposing realism on the other, which admits independent existence of things (second case). Rather, the main issue regards their relation and thus implies the author’s confrontation with, and existence within the world. The assumption that objectivity is correlated to the self-effacement of the human mind would end up denying the very existence of this mind for accessing what is external to it. As a result, my concern is not an absence of mediation but the very possibility of an “objective mediation”, implying the non-intervention of the human mind, often ascribed to the photographic process. Here lies the idea against which the realists fight throughout the second half of the 19th century, and upon which is built the whole debate on photography as whether being an art or not (a long and on-going process that only finds a resolution with Atget in the next chapter). Therefore realism doubly sounds like an insult –“Aujourd’hui l’injure est à la mode”, remarks Champfleury: not only because, from a social perspective, it refers to some kind of degraded and degrading art (as first the press and legal institution dealt with Baudelaire’s poetry, Flaubert’s novel or Courbet’s painting), but more profoundly because, on a personal plan, it denies the artists their agency. “Qu’un écrivain étudie sérieusement la nature et s’engage à faire entrer le plus de Vrai possible dans sa création, on le compare à un daguerréotype”, adds the leading figure of the realist trend.\(^{136}\)

\(^{136}\) Champfleury, in Revue de Pans, May 1854. The quote continues as follows, insisting on the impossibility of neutral imitation: “La reproduction de la nature par l’homme ne sera jamais une reproduction, ni une imitation, ce sera toujours une interprétation. (…) L’homme n’étant pas une machine ne peut rendre les objets machinalement; Subissant la loi de son moi, il ne peut que les interpréter.”
**Photographic Infringement on the Arts**

In the middle of the 19th century, the daguerreotype offers an ideal paradigm for those who want to reduce photography to a mechanical process and to deny it any potential for artistic achievement. Baudelaire’s opus, “*Le public moderne et la photographie*”, totally supports this opinion against the young and already popular industrial art. The text is written twenty years after Daguerre’s invention and figures as the second section of the poet’s introduction to his *Salon de 1859*. As is customary, the poet isolates himself in going against the progressive flow of that time.  

More curiously, however, he resorts to overused arguments that have already been parodied for a few years, especially in Nadar’s *Le Journal amusant*. Compagnon summarizes the polemical essay as such: “*Toute la démonstration de Baudelaire est fondée sur le jeu de l’action et de la réaction, entre la demande du public et l’offre d’artistes plus ou moins manqués, aboutissant à la destruction de l’art par l’industrie, le commerce et la démocratie*”.  

This mechanism brings the author and the public together and connects at the same time, within the cultural sphere, contextual and textual dimensions (what is viewed is what is shown). As examined in the introductory chapter regarding the production and recycling of exotic stereotypes, an identical vicious circle appears from Baudelaire’s perspective: in responding to the crowd’s expectations, and then influencing it in his turn, the photographer contributes to, and accelerates, the flattening and fatal effect of realism over the art (similarly to the press in fact, which is another industrial and modern development.

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137 Delacroix, Champfleury and even Gautier, to whom *Les Fleurs du mal* is dedicated, are all three members of the *Société héliographique* created in 1851 (which becomes the *Société française de la photographie* in 1854).

the poet reproves, and yet uses). On the reception side, there is this obvious appetite of the public for the products of the photographic industry, which, although it is not an art per se, contributes to the commodification of it, as photographs immediately exert on people a mystifying attraction: the belief in a magical drawing from the sun.\(^{139}\) On the production side, lies this “failed artist”, interacting with the crowd and abusing the arts, for the photographer is much more a “rapin du soleil” than a solar tamer. This expression, coined by Charles Bauquier, is quite well chosen, as it designates both a painter’s apprentice and a cheap robber.\(^{140}\) It rightly epitomizes the unsolvable tension opposing the arts and the industry, and that is suggested by Baudelaire’s fight against progress and more specifically, against photography. In his mind, the photographer and his viewers together establish a new and dangerous “credo”, phrased as follows by the poet:

> “Je crois que l’art est et ne peut être que la reproduction exacte de la nature (...). Ainsi l’industrie qui nous donnerait un résultat identique à la nature serait l’art absolu.” Un Dieu vengeur a exaucé les vœux de cette multitude. Daguerre fut son Messie. Et alors elle se dit : “Puisque la photographie nous donne toutes les garanties désirables d’exactitude (ils croient cela, les insensés !), l’art, c’est la photographie.” A partir de ce moment, la société immonde se rua, comme un seul Narcisse, pour contempler sa triviale image sur le métal.\(^{141}\)

\(^{139}\) Baudelaire certainly does not buy this popular belief; however, he is not bothered by a contradiction either: there are about a dozen photographic portraits left of him (by Nadar and Carjat mostly). Additionally, he does not really avoid the enthusiasm he disapproves, as he also succumbs to the popular success of Disdéri photographic cards during the 1850s.

\(^{140}\) Charles Bauquier is a journalist working for the *Figaro*. In this article from January 16, 1859, he writes that “les photographes sont les rapins du soleil”, then concludes: “Laissons-les donc crier à tue-tête, sauf à faire chorus avec eux ; le soleil seul est Dieu et Tournadar son prophète !” (which is a play on Nadar’s real name), quoted in Compagnon, *op. cit.*, p.121.

\(^{141}\) Baudelaire, “*La photographie et le public moderne*”, in *Écrits sur l’art*, Le Livre de Poche, Paris, p.363.
**Curbing the Attack on Photography**

Although none of Baudelaire’s argument is quite new, his attack on photography slightly differs with the acknowledgement of a theological shift, from the “*culte des images*” to an idolatrous paganism that gives preeminence to reality over imagination, thus preventing any artistic elevation.\(^{142}\) As I will show further in this chapter, it is a more subtle and comprehensive poet who authors the playlets of *Le Spleen de Paris*, who seems to reinstate external reality in an anecdotal genre, and who finally combines the two universes of art and reality. For now, he condemns the contamination of the arts by reality and severely blames this exclusive taste for truth that has infiltrated aesthetic productions. Consequently, photography is both responsible for, and a result of, the art crisis Baudelaire identifies. Photographers are failed painters seeking revenge and submitting pictorial arts, when it should actually be the other way around. As Baudelaire also notices, from another angle, the ability and usefulness photography presents as a document: “*la servante des sciences et des arts, mais la très humble servante*”. But he recuses it as a model and denounces its hubris.\(^{143}\) Finally, below his diatribe boils the poet’s fury against industrial subjugation and the blind belief in progress and materialist religion. It is as if society were sinking into the domination of matter—which is

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\(^{142}\) “*De nos jours, l’art diminue le respect de lui-même, se prosterne devant réalité extérieure et le peintre devient de plus en plus enclin à peindre, non pas ce qu’il rêve, mais ce qu’il voit*,” adds Baudelaire, “*Le public moderne et la photographie*”. About the “*culte des images*” (mentioned in *Mon Coeur mis à nu*, f68), Gisèle Séginger explains that Baudelaire in using this expression wants to save figurativity at the expenses of reality and thus valorizes the Platonic orientation that takes away from “*la simplicité de la vie*”, in *Les Fleurs du mal*, in the proceedings of the eponym colloquium held at La Sorbonne in 2003.

\(^{143}\) This remark indicates that Baudelaire does not attack photography in itself since he grants it a documental function. His true target rather concerns the status photography has reached because of popular success and ignorant photographers. As seen, he is terribly upset with this inversion that confers photography a role model for the arts.
paradoxically what Baudelaire does, yet with an ability to extract himself from it, as I will show.

Of course, things are not as Manichean as Baudelaire envisions them. First, against the reproach for insipid objectivity, some connoisseurs and photographic practitioners stress the recognizable existence of personal hallmarks within the images produced: Louis Figuier, who is in charge of the Salon de 1859, compares the camera lens to the artist’s pencil and claims that one can identify photographers’ styles; Nadar supports the exact same idea when writing that “chaque photographe met si évidemment son caractère individuel dans ses œuvres, qu’un œil habitué reconnaît au premier coup leur auteur”.

Second, realist painters and writers also assert their subjectivity despite an ethics that sticks to reality. For instance, Gustave Courbet writes his intention “to be in a position to translate the customs, the ideas, the appearance of (his) time, according to (his) own estimation; to be not only a painter, but a man as well; in short, to create living art”.

And Georges Sand defends “la manière réaliste” as well. In a letter addressed to Champfleury, she adopts a more qualified stance vis-à-vis photography. While strongly stating her personal view and striving for her own “idéal”, she resorts to the photographic comparison for its compelling effect and mediated directness. She emphasizes its persuasive force that straightforwardly moves the senses over a convincing discourse whose logic only speaks to reason (similarly to the Charogne’s effect mentioned earlier).

This way, she re-appropriates the objective vehicle of the photographic comparison with-

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144 Quoted in Compagnon, op. cit., p.109-110.
145 Taken from the catalogue introducing the independent exhibition that Courbet did in his personal gallery, “Le Pavillon du Réalisme”, as a protest against the official rejection he receives for showing his paintings during the Universal Exhibition of 1855.
out compromising her demiurgic power as a realist author, as shown in her conclusion: “je fais de la nature aussi belle que la nature, et il n’y a encore que le daguerréotype qui l’ait faite ainsi”.

1.3 Subjective Illuminations

On Two Naturalists Authors

Moving a little forward in time, and leaving the idealist poets aside (Parnassians, symbolists and other decadentists claiming Baudelaire’s legacy), I propose to consider now two important naturalists authors who specify the argument of an improbable realism. Emile Zola first, through his theory of screens, refines the photographic comparison in some way, in focusing on one specific element of the apparatus: the optical device of the camera. He draws his metaphor on translucent screens inserted into a window-frame, that he also compares to glasses and lenses: “De même, des verres de différentes couleurs donnent aux objets des couleurs différentes, de même des lentilles, concaves ou convexes déforment les objets chacune dans un sens. La réalité exacte est donc impossible dans une œuvre d’art”. Although the literary naturalism Zola advocates pretends to bear some kind of scientific value (in that sense, the author is a

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146 “Mais si on vous pose ainsi l’attaque : « Vous mettez l’idéal à la porte. Vous faites trop vrai, vous rejetez l’analyse du romanesque, vous n’analysez que le fait, vous ne cherchez pas le beau et le rare, vous ne croyez pas à l’exceptionnel, vous n’admettez aucune fiction, enfin vous ne drapez ni vos modèles ni votre style, vous appelez un chat un chat, et vous faites de l’art un Daguerréotype. » Alors, répondez-leur: « Je ne me passe pas d’idéal, mais je me sers que du mien. Je n’analyse pas, je montre, je ne démontre pas, je prouve. C’est là le profit qu’on trouve à ne vouloir traiter que ce que l’on a éprouvé vrai. Je ne sens pas l’exceptionnel où vous le sentez, dans la fiction. Je n’ai pas besoin d’orner. Quand je parle d’un chat, je ferai aussi bien pleurer qu’avec un drame, et l’histoire d’un chat bien comprise et bien dite, vaut mieux que celle d’une étoile mal interprétée. Enfin je fais de la nature aussi belle que la nature, et il n’y a encore que le daguerréotype qui l’ait faite ainsi.” Letter from Georges Sand to Champfleury, June 30, 1854.

147 Emile Zola, Lettre à Valabrègue, 1864.
pure product of the century’s positivism and determinism), the particular device he depicts renders some sort of imperfect transparency, corresponding to the creator’s intention (his “tempérament”). This view acknowledges the mediating and irreducible subjectivity of the artist; it suggests as well that, no matter the artistic trend, art is always and unquestionably in a certain relationship to reality. In contrast to *Le Roman expérimental* (1881), Zola’s letter to Valabrègue identifies specific screens for each one of the schools that precedes him, and then concludes on a screen of his own, close to the realist one, for sure, yet with some modifications: “je préfère l’Ecran qui, serrant de plus près la réalité, se contente de mentir juste assez pour me faire sentir un homme dans une image de la création.”

Zola’s particular screen results in a partial rendering of reality, in both senses of the adjective, that is, oriented and incomplete. Oriented, because it necessarily holds some lies without which the work of art could not exist according to the writer; and incomplete, because the author has only access to a “coin de la création”, precisely this restricted and subjective space which overlooks the window where is set the screen.

This biased incompleteness also resonates with Guy de Maupassant’s famous preface of *Pierre et Jean* (1888). This second writer, Flaubert’s protégé, clearly addresses the

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148 “L’Ecran classique est une belle feuille de talc très pure et d’un grain fin et solide, d’une blancheur laiteuse (...). La création, dans ce cristal froid et peu translucide, perd toutes ses brusqueries (...). L’Ecran romantique est une glace sans tain, claire, bien qu’un peu trouble en certains endroits (...) un prisme, à la réfraction puissante qui brise tout rayon lumineux et le décompose en un spectre solaire éblouissant (...). L’Ecran réaliste est un simple verre à vitre, très mince, très clair (...) une reproduction exacte, franche et naïve. L’Ecran réaliste nie sa propre existence. Vraiment, c’est là un trop grand orgueil. Quoi qu’il dise, il existe (...). Toutes mes sympathies, s’il faut le dire, sont pour l’Ecran réaliste (...) je ne peux l’accepter tel qu’il se présente à moi...” taken from Emile Zola’s letter to Valabrègue, 1864.

149 “Une œuvre d’art est un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament”, writes Zola in “M.H. Taine, artiste”, *Mes haines*, 1866. While addressing Zola’s theory, I would like to rapidly stress its interesting contrast with Baudelaire’s prose poem, “Les Fenêtres”: suggesting a richer look when directed from the outside towards the inside, the first sentence of the poem merely reverses Zola’s perspective: “Celui qui regarde au dehors à travers une fenêtre ouverte, ne voit jamais autant de chose que celui qui regarde une fenêtre fermée”. Baudelaire puts the emphasis on a rather opaque screen that forces imagination. However, in both cases, natural and human perspective is at stake, which identifies with internal focalization.
operation of a creative mind as well, who selects among elements taken from reality and skillfully arranges them. In his turn, he rejects the idea of a mere reproduction of nature, as well as the naïve belief in truth telling, and, as a result, he advocates both the useful and artistic distortion of reality. In regards to selection, Maupassant observes that “raconter tout serait impossible”: this attempt would need at least a volume of notes per day to enumerate the countless and insignificant elements our lives are made of. “Un choix s’impose donc, he writes – ce qui est une première atteinte à la théorie de la réalité”. As for the arrangement of the selected facts, the writer identifies it with clever operations of transitioning, concealment, highlighting that result in an artistic composition. Then, he concludes:

Faire vrai consiste donc à donner l’illusion complète du vrai, suivant la logique ordinaire des faits, et non les transcrire servilement dans le pêle-mêle de leur succession. J’en conclus que les Réalistes de talents devraient s’appeler plutôt des Illusionistes. Quel enfantillage, d’ailleurs, que de croire à la réalité puisque nous portons chacun la nôtre dans notre pensée et dans nos organes. Nos yeux, nos oreilles, notre odorat, notre gout différent créent autant de vérités qu’il y a d’hommes sur la terre.150

Two important remarks stands out of this quote: first, the paradoxical, yet more accurate, notion of illusion when dealing with realism; second, the singularity of the sensitive body of the author.

“Illusion Vraie” and “Faux Authentique”

Regarding the illusion, it is worth looking back at Baudelaire’s writing thirty years earlier and bring Maupassant’s quote closer to the following one, taken from a section the poet dedicates to pictorial landscapes in the Salon de 1859:

150 Maupassant, preface of Pierre et Jean, 1888.
Je désire être ramené vers les dioramas dont la magie brutale et énorme sait m'imposer une utile illusion. Je préfère contempler quelques décors de théâtre, où je trouve artistement exprimés et tragiquement concentrés mes rêves les plus chers. Ces choses, parce qu’elles sont fausses, sont infiniment plus près du vrai; tandis que la plupart de nos paysagistes sont des menteurs, justement parce qu’ils ont négligé de mentir.151

Like Maupassant, Baudelaire operates an interesting inversion. However, the last sentence of the quote demands some clarifications for a full understanding of its potential meaning. As seen previously, realism is associated with truth-telling throughout the century, thus promoting a confusion of truth with reality, when it actually consists in communicating an impression of verisimilitude (the “faire Vrai” of Maupassant against the “faire rentrer le plus de Vrai possible” of Champfleury). Greimas’ semiotic square of veridiction, based on the contrariety between being and seeming (être et paraître), sheds light on this matter. Truth-telling amounts to mediating things as they are and as they appear to be, whereas literary and artistic realism has more to do with lying, as it tells something that seems true but does not exist.152 As a result, the painter of landscape (“paysagiste”) who claims truth is mistaken and does not produce any artwork. On the contrary, the artist who shows a genuine interest in reality—and again, Baudelaire is among them—does not aim at truthful representation per se (being and seeming) since it would result in a mere documental production. Rather he achieves art either as an

152 See an English version of Greimas semiotic square of veridiction in Louise Schneider, Cultural semiotics, Spenser and the Captive Woman, p.74. One should note that this square replaces falseness (association of not-being and not-seeing on the lower part of the square) with fiction, which is problematic in the case of literature, as Maupassant’s illusionist authors do write fiction for instance. What is under consideration with this square of veridiction is the object of the text in relation to reality (what is represented—content that is or is not—and how it is narrated—form that seems or does not). As a result, the texts might be true (being and seeming) as are the informational, factual or scientific writings; they might seem true (not being and seeming) such as the realist fictions; they might also be true without seeming to be, as Baudelaire’s poetic fiction; or, finally, they are neither true nor seem to be as utopias and science-fiction literature.
illusionist (not being and seeming) or as a poet and ciphering artist (being and not seeming). Indeed, an artistic performance is never true or false but either tends towards lie or secrecy. Consequently, when Baudelaire writes about “truth” and “lie”, he confusingly refers to both the aesthetic achievement towards an ideal Beauty (truth), and to the acknowledgment of aesthetic manipulation (lie). Therefore, some productions might be “true” (that is “real” from Plato’s perspective) although they seem unfaithful; and conversely, others are failures although they seem true. Besides, Baudelaire’s sibylline sentence also refers to the useless and artless struggle there would be in attempting to hide the representational process, which is the founding principle of art. To claim representation implies honesty and refusal of imitation. In return, one is necessarily wrong (“lying” in Baudelaire’s term) when vainly attempting to bypass representation through realist assertion. Reality can never be reproduced because of the simple fact that no transparency is achievable –a debate that will later animate the fields of social sciences–, which is what paradoxically makes an artist truer or more authentic than someone who persists in imitation and obviously tries to hide the mediation process.\footnote{Here lies a fundamental and paradoxical problem of photographic and filmic documents: while their intrinsic nature displays them as true imitations of reality (being and seeming), they foreground their mechanical process as neutral and thus hide their subjective and mediated dimension. This observation appears clearly when looking at the move from pictorialism to straight photography or that of romantic to direct cinema (see the two next chapters).}

As a result, it all depends on the intention of the author, oscillating between self-effacement for a better imitation, or self-affirmation of a creative mind and its imagination. While imitation, if not acknowledged, ultimately leads to Umberto Eco’s “faux authentique” and Baudrillard’s hyper-reality, imagination rather promotes what I would call an “illusion vraie”. The “faux authentique” applies to a sign emptied of its intrinsic meaning, cut from any external reference, and whose only remaining value relies
on a dominant and blind convention. Therefore, it always tends to become an absolute simulacrum with no grounding and no other aim than itself, and yet reoccupies and invades the world. Baudelaire clearly bases his photographic critique upon these ideas, to which he opposes the “illusion vraie” as the unique process for artistic achievement. Neither a reproduction “plus vraie que nature” as the proverbial expression paralleling the “faux authentique”, nor in keeping with the symbolists’ motto of “art for art’s sake”, the “illusion vraie” is a middle ground that avoids absolute transcendence of reality as well as self-referentiality, and aligns with a phenomenal orientation that postulates a subjective consciousness within its surroundings.

Sensitively Situated Subjectivity

Beyond the artistic dead-end announced by Baudelaire regarding the imitation process, lies the deeper philosophical problem of a denial of the (meaning of the) self and of the world. To refute the work of imagination is to refute both as it annihilates the subjectivity by which one relates to, and mediates, reality (a critic, mentioned above, spoke of “inanimate nature”). From Plato’s perspective, senses have to be transcended from in order to avoid maintaining consciousness imprisoned within the physical world (there lies the pitfall of sensationalism). However, subjective reality is still constructed upon them, as they provide the very first contact with this physical world, a relation that is irreducible, undeniable, and the sine qua non condition to any action (including the work

154 See Umberto Eco, Travels in Hyperreality (1995) and Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and simulation (1994). Both these theories can be traced back to Walter Benjamin notion of phantasmagoria (later developed in this chapter). More particularly, the concept of simulacrum comes from Plato who distinguishes it from the copy (an imitation of the intelligible world within the sensible world). The copy acknowledges the imitation process (hence fostering the elevation towards a higher reality), the simulacrum attempts to break off from all references and is displayed as an original, thus only referring to itself.
of art). Consciousness cannot sustain the stance of absolute abstraction, as it is always equipped with a body of senses, thus forcing interaction with the surroundings. Therefore, not only is reality inescapable—a situation that is at the heart of Baudelaire’s poetic tension—but moreover, reality is always traceable in any representation. Besides, this body is always situated in a particular place within the world (Sartre’s être-dans-le-monde Sartre or Heidegger’s dasein), which implies that the poet is as much informed by the world as he informs it. The way things appear to a subjective consciousness parallels the way this consciousness projects itself towards worldly objects. The artwork is then a secondary mediation that corresponds to the way this subjectivity interacting in the natural world takes form within the textual domain. These ideas are well put in Baudelaire’s quote taken from his critique of Delacroix’s paintings exhibited at the Salon de 1859:

L’immense classe des artistes, c’est-à-dire des hommes qui se sont voués à l’expression de l’art, peut se diviser en deux camps bien distincts : celui-ci, qui s’appelle lui-même réaliste, mot à double entente et dont le sens n’est pas bien déterminé, et que nous appellerons, pour mieux caractériser son erreur, un positiviste, dit : « je veux représenter les choses telles qu’elles sont, ou telles qu’elles seraient, en supposant que je n’existe pas. » L’univers sans l’homme. Et celui-là, l’imaginatif, dit : « Je veux illuminer les choses avec mon esprit et en projeter le reflet sur les autres esprits.»

First stressing the ambiguity of the term “realist” because of its connotations (either referring to Plato’s ideal or to the artistic movement), Baudelaire pejoratively replaces it with the term “positivist” and puts the emphasis on a pseudo-artist fooled by progress and

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155 Baudelaire, *Salon de 1859*, “Le Gouvernement de l’imagination” in *Ecrits sur l’art*, op. cit., p.375-376. This section of the Salon follows the one celebrating imagination as “La Reine des facultés”. And both are sequels to the attack against the photographic viewers (and believers) to whom Baudelaire reproach their inability to feel the power of dream, and who, on the contrary, remain stuck in photographic sensationalism as they replaced beauty with truth.
stuck within an impossible aporia (contradiction of willing – “je veux” – while not existing – “je n’existe pas”). Second, having discredited the realist ambition, the poet may valorize the power of the imagination. The true artist is the imaginative one who has an intention for intellectual endeavors and spiritual enlightenment of things (primary mediation happening within a real context), and who shares these lights through representation (secondary mediation made through the textual production). Far from denying reality, this attitude makes the poet a dual intercessor, between worldly things and his own kind as suggested in the quote, and between the contextual and textual universes, at stake in this study.

2. The Imaginary Journey

2.1 A Splenetic World

_Sensing the Limits_

Emmenuel Adatte, in an insightful inquiry on Baudelaire’s ability to overcome reality, acknowledges the superior power of imagination, as stressed by the poet himself. He considers it as the means by which the opposition between “nature” and “surnature” is resolved.156 Thanks to the poet’s “reine des facultés”, it becomes possible to bring closer two domains, so that it becomes possible to rise, from the lower field of “nature”, to the superior realm of “surnature”, where beauty lies. Underlining the same connection, yet

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using an alternate vocabulary, Gisèle Séginger observes that Adatte’s endeavor is an
attempt to show a “conciliation entre le réel et l’irréel plutôt qu’une tension”. The poet’s
aptitude for imagining – and for writing down what he foresees – works together with
reality in order to produce sur-reality: “la recherche de l’harmonie, les synesthésies,
métaphores et allégories permettent (de fixer le transitoire) mais il faut remarquer
qu’elles métamorphosent ainsi les petites choses de la vie en une sur-réalité: les parfums
et les sons se confondent pour vaporiser le réel”. 157

I will show a little later how essential this vaporization of reality is for an imaginary
tavel to take place. However, although this process allows some sort of gaseous
ovation, it does not quite transform reality. It rather corresponds to a super-imposition,
as suggested by the two critics. The prefix sur- (“over”), that is used very often, implies
that something is appended on reality by imagination, in compliance with a vertical,
classic and transcendental conception. Rather than being entered, penetrated or crossed –
as the general hypothesis of this research contends –, reality would be something to
overpass, as Adatte’s book title suggests. 158 This idea is accurate… only to a certain
extent though. Therefore, it needs to be clarified before being discussed. The benefit of
this consideration is that it provides us with the opportunity to follow Baudelaire in the
poetic voyage that takes him from an abhorred reality to a sensational trip.

One must then start with Baudelaire’s particular understanding of reality to figure out the
reason why he attempts escaping from it. After having defined objective reality as an

157 Gisèle Séginger, “Ethique et poétique” from Les Fleurs du mal, proceedings of the colloquium, op. cit.,
p. 242.
158 This super-imposition of a higher realm over a lower one, resulting in a “dépassement du réel”, is
exposed not only because it is a right and common interpretation, but mostly because it serves as a
revealing counter-example of what is a journey through reality (developed in the last section of this
chapter). Besides, and more directly, since it deals with the travel and with reality, it makes sense to
consider this approach of Baudelaire.
external and independent space-time structuring “l’ensemble des lois immuables du monde”, Adatte presents a first lead describing the constraining aspect (obstacle) of that reality when experienced by Baudelairian subjectivity:

Le réel a donc un caractère de permanence qui confine au déterminisme, et représente pour Baudelaire l’obstacle qui est là de manière permanente (…) Baudelaire (en) éprouve et (en) connaît principalement la finitude, ne serait-ce que par le temps qui le rapproche immanquablement de la mort. (…) Notre idée initiale va donc être de formuler que ce que Baudelaire connaît de la réalité du réel qu’il subit – connaissance qui est forcément limitée dans le temps et l’espace – constitue sa vérité subjective, son être-dans-le-monde pour reprendre une expression sartrienne.159

This subjective truth that the poet is rendering through poetic expression results from his experience of the world, as already observed. Baudelaire must have interiorized a notion of reality that originates from his particular relation to a well determined spatio-temporality, and this internalization is already in itself a mental transformation of a primary cognitive experience. As a result the description of Baudelaire’s subjective reality does not have to be an imitation of this experience, but it can simply be inspired by it, which does not mean the representation is fake: while it might seem unreal as the splenetic world described below, it is still linked with true feelings and sensations.

\textit{Evil and the Spleen}

\textit{Les Fleurs du mal} oscillates between suffering and hope, which reflects the dual tendency of every single human being, as Baudelaire puts it.160 Although several of his poems strive toward beauty or good, those virtues remain abstract, perfect, and unreachable

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnotesize 159 E. Adatte, \textit{op. cit.}, p.12.
  \item \footnotesize 160 “Il y a dans tout homme, à toute heure, deux postulations simultanées, l’une vers Dieu, l’autre vers Satan. L’invocation à Dieu, ou spiritualité, est un désir de monter en grade ; celle de Satan, ou animalité, est une joie de descendre.” in \textit{Mon Cœur mis à nu}.
\end{itemize}
ideals, making such an endeavor doomed to fail right from the beginning. Consequently, the main feeling Baudelaire holds and recounts from his concrete experience carries all the marks of evil. And most likely, this is a very lucid and existential choice that can be conceived in several ways. First, it may result from a socio-pragmatic decision: in choosing to dedicate himself to a topic barely explored, the poet might find an untouched ground for establishing a literary ascendancy. The poetic depiction of evil is as much an attracting provocation as it is a conscious search for novelty—and Baudelaire’s trial also plays a role for distinguishing among several exceptionally good poetic collections being published around this time. Second, in opting for moral badness, the poet might well be a Satanist blasphemer, yet he still evolves within a biblical frame: terrestrial reality made of lust and desire is nothing but the result of God’s punishment, hence the endless penitence of roaming souls assuming their penitence—and in a meaningful way, during the trial, prosecutors were less fooled by theological matter than they were focused on puritanism, as noticed by Matthieu Vernet. Which leads me to a third reason for electing evil as a guiding principle: that of a vision of nature in total contradiction with classical projections of a benevolent and exemplary nature; just as Baudelaire reacts against the realist project of a pale imitation of nature, he is overtly hostile to nature itself, as it embodies to his mind the exact opposite of the arts, hence the depiction of a corrupting and perverted nature. Finally, these pragmatic, ethical and aesthetic readings are all


162 “Je suis incapable de m’attendrir sur les végétaux, Baudelaire writes, mon âme est rebelle à cette singulièrere religion nouvelle qui aura toujours, ce me semble, pour tout être spirituel je ne sais quoi de shocking. Je ne croirai jamais que l’âme des Dieux habite dans les plantes, et quand même elle y habiterait, je m’en soucierais médiocrement, et considérerais la mienne comme d’un bien plus haut prix
very relevant and would demand further comments, yet they cloud the poet’s primary perception of reality. Below his sociological, theological and cultural motivations, Baudelaire’s choice for evil first and foremost comes from his vision of the world as a gigantic mire in which he struggles.¹⁶³

Baudelaire experiences reality as a coercive force that denies him any possibility; a burdening gravity that spares him absolutely no margin for action. This helplessness is well narrated in the poem “L’Albatros”: the giant seabird that embodies the poet, is captured and mocked by sailors; being put in an awkward position, the bird appears clumsy and disabled, as he belongs to the sky and the stars, not to the ground and vulgar humankind. There is one particular Baudelairian word that encapsulates this feeling regarding reality: Spleen. It underlies the whole architecture of Les Fleurs du mal, from the very beginning and this remarkably compelling address “Au Lecteur”, where it is designated by l’Ennui, to the very end of the collection and the poem “Le Voyage” that closes the book after a long and deceiving travel.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ And to follow up on this famous metaphor of Stendhal I am referring to, the evil simply originates from the fact that Baudelaire’s subjective mirror more often reflects mire than azure sky. “Eh, monsieur, un roman est un miroir qui se promène sur une grand-route. Tantôt il reflète à vos yeux l’azur des cieux, tantôt la fange des bourbiers de la route. Et l’homme qui porte le miroir dans sa hotte sera par vous accusé d’être immoral ! Son miroir montre la fange, et vous accusez le miroir ! Accusé bien plutôt le grand chemin où est le bourbier, et plus encore l’inspecteur des routes qui laisse l’eau croupir et le bourbier se former.” Stendhal, Le Rouge et le Noir, second part, chapter xix.

¹⁶⁴ Vocabulary clarifications seem necessary regarding the more or less synonymous terms of “ennui” and “spleen”. First, “ennui” should not be read in the sense of boredom (its most common French connotation), but it should rather be understood as an association of languor, depression and worry in order to equal the “spleen”. Second, the French understanding of “spleen” differs from the English one: in French, it clearly suggests melancholia (or nostalgia, secondarily), while in English, its meaning rather corresponds to bad temper and irritability, which, by the way, is also perfectly right when characterizing Baudelaire (his fits of anger –whether poetic or autobiographic– are common indeed). However, the French acceptation of “spleen” has to be privileged as it better expresses the desperate feeling in which reality confines the poet.
The Dislocating Prison

The spleen clearly connotes an overwhelming reality that is characterized by a feeling of spatio-temporal oppression. On the one hand, the monstrous time carries along “son démoniaque cortège de Souvenirs, de Regrets, de Spasmes, de Peurs, d’Angoisses, de colères et de Névroses”. The human being has simply no hold on it and is condemned to physically endure this “Temps qui brise vos épaules et vous penche vers la terre”. Its infinite flow is counted like a running clock – “son infinie postérité les Jours, les Heures, les Minutes, les Secondes”–, which only reminds us, and increases, its killing (and self-empowering) effect, as in this stanza:

— Ô douleur! ô douleur! Le Temps mange la vie,
Et l’obscur Ennemi qui nous ronge le cœur
Du sang que nous perdons croît et se fortifie!165

On the other hand, space is as much terrible as time is, if not worse, for it is this dimension that literally confines the poet to powerlessness. Overall, the splenetic spatiality is dense, opaque, narrow, and logically ends up immobilizing the poet who suffocates: “Que le Réel étouffe entre ses quatre murs!”166 This last verse taken from the sonnet “Sur le Tasse en prison d’Eugène Delacroix” resonates with “L’Albatros” as it explicitly depicts the poet enduring not only his present (and counted) time and the pressure the matter applies on him, but also the lack of understanding from his own kind.167 Baudelaire’s reality is a prison from which he cannot escape. Supporting the idea of a splenetic universe immuring the poet, the last poem of the Spleen series depicts a

166 “Sur le tasse en prison d’Eugène Delacroix”, in Les Fleurs du mal.
167 In Mon cœur mis à nu, an autobiographic gathering of Baudelaire’s angers, the poet writes: “je veux faire sentir sans cesse que je me sens comme étranger au monde et à ses cultes”. Quoted in Baudelaire. Paris sans fin, op. cit., p.141.
rainy atmosphere where natural and vast elements shrink into a cell: the weighty sky becomes a lid (“Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle”), the ground is now a moist oubliette (“Quand la terre est change en un cachot humide”), and rainy stripes are compared to prison bars (“Quand la pluie étalant ses immenses trainées / D’une vaste prison imite les barreaux”).

No wonder the spleen finally takes possession of the poet’s mind (“l’Angoisse, atroce, despotique, / Sur mon crâne incliné plante son drapeau noir”). Under influence, the poet might be compared to an already old and vulgar object (“un vieux boudoir”, “un flacon au fond d’une armoire”...), but at least, he still has a container, because eventually, by dint of unbearable pressure, the corporal envelope collapses and only a dying matter remains: “– Désormais tu n’es plus, ô matière vivante ! / Qu’un granit entouré d’une vague d’épouvante”. The formless gravestone may now perfectly reflect the kingdom of evil and its ineluctable spleen. Following the disintegration of the body-envelope—a sensitive screen that was shaping the poet and allowing his subjective relation to reality—, Adatte rightly concludes: A cause de l’extraordinaire dénuement auquel est condamnée la pensée de Baudelaire (le spleen interdit en effet toute tentative d’esthétiser le monde extérieur), il existe dès lors une entière transparence et une totale équivalence entre l’espace extérieur et un espace intérieur inhérent à la spiritualité baudelairienne.

Even the poet’s death is not a relief since his entity now disperses in, and becomes confounded with, the splenetic universe. One last aspect is worth stressing: an endless expansion, the exact opposite of the compression process previously described. This experience of the abyss is expressed in the on-going descent figured in the poem

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168 Spleen IV, Les Fleurs du mal.
169 E. Adatte, op. cit., p.45.
“L’Irrémédiable”, or through the constant roaming suggested by “Les Sept Vieillars”: “Sans mâts, sur une mer monstrueuse et sans bords”. And yet, this continuous drift is paralyzing –“Un navire pris dans le pole / Comme en un piège de cristal”– yet the immobile roving goes on.\textsuperscript{170} Caught between suffocating contraction and scary expansion, Baudelaire manages to communicate the paradoxical idea of infinite limits and restricting infinites. Adatte further explains: “Le spleen renvoie au poète l’image du monde microscopique et négative (...) et la terreur d’un infini sans limite (qui) terrorise et fascine (...) Le spleen est un savant dosage de ces deux pôles, où d’une part l’essence enferme Baudelaire au cachot, et où, d’autre part, il dérobe le cachot à Baudelaire pour plonger ce dernier au sein du gouffre”.\textsuperscript{171}

2.2 The Sensational Trip

**Centralization and Synesthesia**

Thanks to the transformations it operates, the Baudelairian trip counters the effect of the spatio-temporal prison. Splenetic temporality, as overwhelming and terrifying as it might be, actually never unfolds within a specific length. And more specifically, when it comes to the poems evoking a voyage, temporality is purely and solely adjourned. The landscapes emerge from an instant sensation originating either from the poet’s imagination or personal recollection. Resorting to a Chinese proverb in the prose poem “L’Horloge”, Baudelaire reads time in cats’ eyes. This very brief exotic evocation suffices to reconcile him with the former tyrant, as reassuring time unfolds, light and non-

\textsuperscript{170} Quoted respectively from “Les Sept vieillards” and “L’Irrémédiable” in Les Fleurs du mal.

\textsuperscript{171} E. Adatte, op. cit., pp.51-52.
segmented, lasting and transient, infinite and instantaneous: “toujours l’heure distinctement, une heure vaste, solennelle, grande comme l’espace, sans division de minutes ni de secondes, - une heure immobile qui n’est pas marquée sur les horloges, et cependant légère comme un soupir, rapide comme un coup d’œil”.\(^{172}\) In regards to the spatial dimension, while the spleen was opacifying the poet’s world and resulting in suffocating densification, new horizons allow the deployment of “des rivages heureux” and comforting landscapes, as these “ciels brouillés” and their “soleil mouillé” from the Netherlands, that confer soft brightness and release a soothing light, as does this boat quietly sailing. These unreal universes fulfill the poet and, if lately the dry desert of “De Profundis Clamavi” was harassing, picturesque or exotic sceneries projected by the poet’s imagination respond with a delightful softness. Overpassing the limits of his cell, Baudelaire moves away from the spleen and complacently rides the horizon instead of the troubling abyss.

Two rhetorical figures prevail in these poems of otherworldliness: synesthesia and analogy. Whereas the first one satisfies a need for unification of the self, the second illustrates the fleeing of the poet, and both together perfectly illustrate what appears to be a Baudelairian axiom par excellence: “De la vaporisation et de la centralisation du Moi. Tout est là”.\(^ {173}\) The vaporization process resembles the vampiric dispossession noticed earlier, yet it has an opposite effect. During a timeless moment, the body transforms into an all-encompassing entity, fully occupying the imaginary universe, everywhere at once in an ecstatic fulfillment. This a-temporal and utopic existence “materializes” into the dream as Baudelaire notices regarding Delacroix and Ingres: “leur existence étrange est

\(^{172}\)“L’Horloge” in *Le Spleen de Paris.*

\(^{173}\) Baudelaire, in *Mon cœur mis à nu.*
le réel du rêve”. Concurrently, for this oneiric world to hold some reality, centralization becomes necessary: the recreation of the fragmented subject and corporeal reintegration of the self is essential in the struggle against the spleen. The fusional effect of synesthesia responds to the cracking assault of the spleen. By reassembling the senses it reconstructs a profound unity between all the concrete sensations of the world, previously and usually kept apart. As a result this essential poetic trope goes beyond the mere textual universe as the senses are in direct relation with the phenomenological world, hence the possibility for a “réel du rêve”. Synesthesia resolves the internal deflagration and allows recovering corporeal consistency and sensational unity, as suggested in the poem “Tout Entière” (whose title in itself is already quite revealing): “O metamorphose mystique / De tous mes sens fondus en un”175 Synesthesia is not to be reduced to the mere correspondence of the senses between one another, it also refers to a profound and original unity. As a result, Baudelaire distances himself from Plato’s philosophy, since, in a realm as real as the spleen, he does not consider the senses being illusory and limited to the imitation of the higher world, but on the contrary, he relies on them to access this superior realm within which he might evolve. Numerous poems from Les Fleurs du Mal, especially those referring to pleasant travel, proceed from the synesthetic trope, where the world of senses is connected to the ideal one. As the poem unfolds, sensational travel gradually produces exotic landscape, which is a performative aspect characteristic of Baudelaire’s poetry as well. In “Parfum exotique” for instance, the poet creates the liberating space that he needs while recovering the integrity of his entire body.

175 in Les Fleurs du mal.
Quand, les deux yeux fermés, en un soir chaud d’automne
Je respire l’odeur de ton sein chaleureux
Je vois se dérouler des rivages heureux
Qu’éblouissent les feux d’un soleil monotone

In this stanza, smell generates sight and touch is vaguely implied, while, simultaneously, the season, the fire, the praised body suggest a warm ambiance wrapping the poet whose moves are connoted by the breath and the traveling landscapes. The evocation goes on combining concrete and lively elements with imaginary deployment. In the last tercet of the sonnet, the hearing of a chant embraces the earth and the air (and again, smell and sight) to fulfill the poet’s soul and to facilitate his spiritual rise thanks to an inflated body-envelope. Alliterations (-m, -r) and assonances (-an, -è) merged with the continuous regularity of the alexandrines to evoke a safe environment and soporific quietness allowing the dream to unfold.

Pendant que le parfum des verts tamariniers
Qui circule dans l’air et m’enflé la narine
Se mêle dans mon âme au chant des mariniers

Vaporization and Analogy
As we can see in this poem, reality is never suppressed from Baudelaire’s poetry, but just put on hold during the time vaporization happens. Reality cannot be suppressed precisely because it is the very condition for imagination to take place, the ground from which it takes off. Baudelaire’s traveling is always triggered by an “objective correlative” as T.S.

176 “Parfum exotique” in Les Fleurs du mal.
Elliott phrases it.\textsuperscript{177} This referential element, a “
\textit{sein chaleureux}” for instance, constitutes the means by which a remote and absent world landscape can be evoked, that might become in its turn the element for another departure, just as in the process of infinite semiosis. Baudelaire will perceive continents in some hair, canals in wet eyes, a vessel in a body, allowing movement to take place in stretchable extents. This is precisely the analogical process Emmanuel Adatte defines as follows: “\textit{retenir dans un donné initial les éléments qui permettent le mieux l’exploration et le “voyage” spirituel}”.\textsuperscript{178} In a sort of inverted mise en abyme, splenetic implosion is replaced by a delicate eruption, through which the inner self, now unified, expands towards the outer world. The point is then for Baudelaire to never hold too long on these things and beings he envisions, so that he can avoid feeling their finitude. Baudelairian analogy consists in bouncing upon elements so that they remain voluptuous and fluffy enough for the mind to pursue sensational travel. It is when duration sets that reality’s beams start piercing the poet again.

\textit{La loi universelle de l’analogie peut donc s’interpréter comme une sorte de perpétuelle invitation au voyage : elle propose à l’imagination de suivre, à travers le réseau sensible des correspondances, le trajet d’une signification unique qui circulerait et s’approfondirait d’objet en objet pour revenir enfin, toute gonflée d’une richesse accumulée, se perdre en sa source première}\textsuperscript{179}

In a significant way, all these analogical texts, based either on the female body or on the arts, deal with a voyage. Whether one thinks of “\textit{Le Serpent qui danse}”, “\textit{Le Beau Navire}”, “\textit{La Musique}”, the human body is compared to a vessel on the move: “\textit{Tu fais

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\textsuperscript{177} ”The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an “objective correlative”; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion”. T.S. Eliot, “Hamlet and His Problems”, \textit{The Sacred Wood}, 1921.

\textsuperscript{178} E. Adatte, \textit{op. cit.}, p.124.

l’effet d’un beau vaisseau qui prend le large” or “La musique souvent me prend comme une mer !”. Similarly, in “La Chevelure” and “L’Invitation au voyage”, and their twin pieces from Le Spleen de Paris, an initial and minimal element allows the rise of images of immensity where the being floats from one to another, before heading back towards the primary source, as noticed by Jean-Pierre Richard, and illustrated by the return of the human-ship to the body-port, under Dutch skys, full of Sumatra’s richness:

*Ces trésors, ces meubles, ce luxe, cet ordre, ces parfums, ces fleurs miraculeuses, c’est toi. C’est encore toi ces grands fleuves et ces canaux tranquilles. Ces énormes navires qu’ils charrient, tout chargés de richesses, et d’où montent les chants monotones de la manœuvre, ce sont mes pensées qui dorment ou qui roulent sur ton sein. Tu les conduis doucement vers la mer qui est l’Infini, tout en réfléchissant les profondeurs du ciel dans la limpidité de ta belle âme ; et quand, fatigués par la houle et gorgés des produits de l’Orient, ils rentrent au port natal, ce sont encore mes pensées enrichies qui reviennent de l’Infini vers toi.*

Combination of senses, thanks to synesthesia, and association of images, via the analogies, contribute together to an intended fusion of landscapes with language, in compliance with the programmatic poem “Correspondances”, thus connecting the two dimensions of referential context and textual expansion. As shown, synesthesia gives back coherence not to the world but to the body of the poet, who becomes a perceiving and matrix surface, and whose mental and analogical projections sublime reality out of minimal stimulation, towards infinite possibilities. Consequently, an alternative to the spleen opens through a progressive liberation that is conquered at the same time it is created. The sensitive body may navigate below the harrowing character of the world and beyond the usual limitations of human perception. Finally, there is no overcoming of

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180 Le Spleen de Paris.
reality but rather an integration of the infinite within a body. As suggested by the end of
the quote, the final return to the “objective correlative” paves the way for revising
Adatte’s notion of “dépassement”.

2.3 Back to Reality

The Illusory Trip

The overpassing of reality is not quite satisfying for who really attempts comprehending
the realist aesthetic of Baudelaire. What I consider to be a slight and partial mistake from
Adatte is actually stated in his initial postulate: “Pour dépasser le réel, il faut que la
conscience s’éprouve comme intégrée au monde qu’elle va dénier”.

The experience of
the splenetic world, despite appearances, is not an authentic integration to external
reality, for it is a subjective projection just as the imaginary travel is. Of course, when
both the spleen and the travel are articulated, they do figure an integration followed by a
denial, yet this only happens on a textual ground (even if synesthesia truly speaks to the
senses). The transcendence of reality is not an end in itself, but rather a self-withdrawal.
This phase, however, is an essential step for a second move to happen, that of the
reintegration of the real world, a walk towards real things and beings; no dépassement du
réel then, but a traversée indeed. It is the opposite process than the one described by
Adatte that I am suggesting: in order to truly enter the world, the poet must first have
conceived his ability to deny it. While this concrete (urban) journey is explored in more
details in the last section of this chapter, I propose to observe, in what follows, how the
poet returns.

182 E. Adatte, op. cit., p.16.
It could seem obvious, as Adatte notices, that the overcoming of reality only operates on the very basis of this reality, yet it corresponds less to a victory of the self over the world, than a mere escape from terrestrial surroundings. The Baudelairian travel just observed, actually reveals that reality was never truly experienced, but only took place in an imaginary realm. As a result, fleeing the real struggle is an illusion that is doomed to be reabsorbed in the concrete world. Adatte himself acknowledges it: no matter the literary power of the synesthetic and analogic combinations, it remains a “projection fantasmatique du moi qui peut procurer à Baudelaire l’illusion d’avoir créé pour quelques instants une patrie aux dimensions de l’âme”. Yet still an illusion, similar in that sense to the realist attempt, the photographic ambition and the exotic imaginary. Reinforcing the illusion and even contradicting the hypothesis of an “objective correlative”, some texts deal with distant horizon without even needing a preliminary referential basis for the imagination to unfold. Those are generally the abstract poems characterizing the ideal (as opposed to the spleen), whose intrinsic perfection is by definition immaterial. How to know, for instance, from where the poet speaks in “La vie antérieure”? The arcades that are evoked (“vastes portiques”) cannot be identified. The description certainly suggests a comforting den, but is that a mysterious cave near the sea, a fabulous vault, or the uterine cavity? All three at once, probably, but indeterminacy remains.

There was actually no other journey than the one imagined; the poet never hid that truth. All is finally made up of illusions, starting with that of motion. As Baudelaire acknowledges in the conclusion of the prose poem “Les Projets”, after having described

183 E. Adatte, op. cit., p.136.
184 Les Fleurs du mal.
splendid and exotic sceneries, the immobility of the perceiving body is not antinomic to
the generous move offered by the imagination:

\begin{quote}
J’ai eu aujourd’hui, en rêve, trois domiciles où j’ai trouvé un égal plaisir ;
Pourquoi contraindre mon corps à changer de place, puisque mon âme
voyage si lestement ? Et à quoi bon exécuter des projets, puisque le projet
est en lui-même une jouissance suffisante?\footnote{Le Spleen de Paris.}
\end{quote}

Not only is it in vain to believe in actual displacement, but it is even hazardous, as it
endangers the newly recovered integrity of the body. Why run the risk of getting
dispersed again? One should rather listen to the wise advice given by “Les Hiboux”:

\begin{quote}
Leur attitude au sage enseigne
Qu’il faut en ce monde qu’il craigne
Le tumulte et le mouvement,\footnote{Les Fleurs du mal, p.117.}
\end{quote}

And avoid this endless race with no purpose, described in “Le Voyage”:

\begin{quote}
Singulière fortune où le but se déplace
Et, n’étant nulle part, peut être n’importe où !
Où l’Homme, dont jamais l’espérance n’est lasse,
Pour trouver le repos court toujours comme un fou\footnote{Les Fleurs du mal, p.187.}
\end{quote}

\textbf{Disillusionment}

As important as the biased harvest of the actual travel might be –Baudelaire’s journey to
the Mascarene islands as a young adult probably provided him with an important
inspirational reserve, and so did his lifelong relationship with Jeanne Duval, a mixed race
demi-mondaine, muse and mistress, he met after he returned– it is useless to shake the
poetic and moral quietness acquired through spiritual travels. One might then suggest a safer reversal of things: if movement is in the end only an unsafe madness, why wouldn’t the world rather slide on the perceptive surface of the body instead of the body traveling the world? Interesting indeed, but not quite convincing: this alternative does not exist; people traverse the world as much as the world moves over them. Yet, in the end, and in a paradoxical way, without having even left, Baudelaire’s illusions dissipate: first, that of the departure – out of an insufferable world –, then, that of the sensational trip – imaginative escape based on the senses. Consequently, if change of scenes is nothing but a transitory illusion under the now discrete yet constant threat of the spleen, it constitutes at the same time a way toward disillusionment:

\[
\textit{Amer savoir, celui qu’on tire du voyage} \\
\textit{Le monde, monotone et petit, aujourd’hui} \\
\textit{Hier, demain, toujours, nous fait voir notre image :} \\
\textit{Une oasis d’horreur dans un désert d’ennui}^{188}
\]

In the end, “Le Voyage” teaches an edifying lesson, that of a deceiving attempt to escape, since the projected self is ultimately thrown back on to the existential self. No matter the place, no matter the time, existence is only the transient traveling of a carcass of man-landscape, roaming in timeless and indefinite limitation. Consequently, the poet must confront the spleen again, but with the acquired knowledge of his poetic power at least, a unifying force invigorating the self and able to provide shelter thanks to an illusory, yet salutary imagination. Hence the crucial question and immediate answer rising towards the end of “Le Voyage”: “Faut-il partir ? rester ? Si tu peux rester, reste ; / Pars, s’il le faut”.\(^{189}\) The departure is that of the travel-refuge found in the arts, on the sea or the

\(^{188}\) \textit{Les Fleurs du mal}, p.190.  
\(^{189}\) \textit{Les Fleurs du mal}, p.190.
female body. Provided that he is not hiding (as suggested in the poem), the one who stays and confronts the spleen is a hero (as much as the explorer is). Baudelaire is now ready for getting into the world and the concrete reality of the Parisian city, all the more because, besides imagination, he carries along this idea of “*infini diminutif*” he forged once in a fragment from *Mon Coeur mis à nu*, as he was wondering about oceanic fascination:

*Pourquoi le spectacle de la mer est-il si infiniment et si éternellement agréable?*
*Parce que la mer offre à la fois l’idée de l’immensité et du mouvement. Six ou sept lieues représentent pour l’homme le rayon de l’infini. Voilà un *infini diminutif*. Qu’importe s’il suffit à suggérer l’idée de l’infini total? Douze ou quatorze lieues (sur le diamètre), douze ou quatorze lieues de liquide en mouvement suffisent pour donner la plus haute idée de beauté qui soit offerte à l’homme sur son habitacle transitoire.*

While this last expression of “*habitacle transitoire*” clearly refers to the transient being of a traveling body, the notion of “*infini diminutif*” offers a way for warding off the anxiety of a compressive and indomitable infinite first; then, for resolving the subsequent fissuring dispersion of the self through the parallel process of centralization and vaporization; and third, for creating beauty from one’s own human perspective. This idea of limited infinite also refers to the power of imagination when it investigates a painting by Delacroix (“*c’est l’infini dans le fini*”) or the chiaroscuro of an interior perceived from the street (“*Les Fenêtres*”). It corresponds to the conclusion of “*L’Invitation au voyage*” as well, quoted earlier, which connotes the necessary return to the loved one: “*de

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190 *Mon Cœur mis à nu.*

191 Respectively in *Salon de 1859* and *Le Spleen de Paris*. Besides, this idea of a framed infinite is also expressed in this quote from Baudelaire regarding the sonnet: “*Parce que la forme est contraignante, l’idée jaillit plus intense*”, Letter to Armand Fraisse, February 1860, in Compagnon, *op. cit.*, p.83.
And it finally suggests the Parisian existence of the poet, announcing the *Petits poèmes en prose* collected in *Le Spleen de Paris*.

**“Au Fond de l’Inconnu”**

What could better express this “infini diminutif” than the city containing countless souls in its urban limits? This place is where reality is crossed and truly experienced, through a process that does not attempt to overcome it anymore—for this is way too easy— but rather to work with-in it. As a result, if transcendence happens (extracting beauty from, or inscribing it on, urban souls), it actually takes place in a modern and horizontal plane of immanence. Baudelaire seeks the infinite within the restricted reality of which he contests the limitations, and he does so through a dilating process; Adatte was right in many of his observations. But this work of the mind is not a suppression as already said, nor a suspension as seen so far, neither is it a dissipation or an overpassing of reality. Rather, the poet expands the world from within, thus creating more space to be entered while softening the oppression at the same time.

All these suggestions rise from “*Le Voyage*” and the famous last verse of this poem closing *Les Fleurs du mal*: “*Au fond de l’Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!*” This “unknown” might well refer to death, for it belongs to the eponymous section ending the collection. Indeed, as there is nothing new to bring back from the traveling, and since the world is nothing else but a universe filled with ennui and monotony, constantly deceiving, the ultimate and untouched novelty will always lie in the world beyond.

Baudelaire writes *Le Voyage* at Honfleur, in 1859, and he dedicates the poem to Maxime

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Du Camp, one of the very first photographer-explorers.\textsuperscript{193} This signature suggests a more specific reading of the text then, as it actually responds to Du Camp naïve verses of the progressive and positivist \textit{Chants modernes} published in 1855. Those celebrate railways, gas lighting, and photography of course, all of which are nothing but illusions from Baudelaire’s perspective, hence this ironic note he addresses Du Camp with “\textit{Le Voyage}”: “\textit{si, par exemple, vous étiez choqué de mes plaisanteries contre le progrès, ou bien de ce que le Voyageur avoue n’avoir rien vu que de la banalité, ou enfin de n’importe quoi, dites-le moi sans vous gêner}”.\textsuperscript{194} The deceiving and splenetic world acquires then an alternate tone that corresponds to the industrial and material progress of a so-called modernity. Once again, the voyage is nothing but an overall illusion that needs to be denounced. In that sense, it may be compared to photography that is as much solar and luminous (Nicephore Niepce first coined it “heliography”), as it is a nocturnal and deadly practice. In a relevant way, the rejection of progress is conveyed by the “photographic” sonnet preceding “\textit{Le Voyage}”. In this poem, the narrator is experiencing the deceptive spectacle of a death he was expecting –“\textit{Eh quoi ! N’est-ce donc que cela ?}”–, but “\textit{Le rêve d’un curieux}” actually recounts the hope and the disappointment produced by a photographic session.\textsuperscript{195} As noticed by Compagnon, the two poems are not only contiguously close, they also both support the idea that nothing has changed: the same dull horizon under an empty sky, and nothing to reflect. “\textit{Au fond de l’Inconnu pour

\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Egypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie : Dessins photographiques}, 1852. A collection he realized out of the pictures he took during a journey with Flaubert during the years 1848-1851. Flaubert, however, depicts the man as a young and ambitious man he will later mock when honored by the Second Empire.

\textsuperscript{194} Baudelaire’s letter to Du Camp.

\textsuperscript{195} This sonnet, “\textit{Le Rêve d’un curieux}” is dedicated, in an ironic way as Baudelaire’s usual, to the initials F.N. for Felix Nadar. The interpretation of a portrait session is that of Philippe Ortel (\textit{Littérature et photographie}, p.99). However, Compagnon mentions this other interpretation by Claude Pichois who sees the poem as a reference to a lithography by Daumier.
trouver du nouveau ?”… and yet, neither death or the voyage can provide this crucial novelty, for this salutary Inconnu is not beyond or elsewhere, but it lies just here, right in the city.

3. Traveling the City

3.1 A Poetic Adventure

Modernity and Antithesis

While Baudelaire continuously conceives arts and industrial progress as highly incompatible as suggested in “Le Public moderne et la photographie”, the poetic experience he attempts with the Spleen de Paris brings his writing closer to the photographic process, for many echoes rise between these “deux ambitions qui se haïssent d’une haine instinctive”; and Antoine Compagnon recalls it as well.196 First, photographic portrait, just as the prose poems, can be compared to a “caricature sérieuse”. Baudelaire uses the expression for describing a lithography by Daumier, and Marcelin employs it to ironically mock photography. But this wording, along with the term “anecdote” as well, appropriately fits the sketches of the prose poems. Second, this compact writing is based on surprise effects, not only in a formal way (as the sonnet’s volta for instance), but foremost because of the experience of the city, out of which

196 “Pour saisir la complexité et l’ambiguïté des anathèmes lancés par Baudelaire contre la photographie, il faut garder à l’esprit l’alliance déjà bien installée dans les esprits entre la nouvelle technique photographique et le genre original auquel il s’essaie”. Antoine Compagnon, Baudelaire. L’Irréductible, op. cit., p.95.
results a certain sensationalism for which Baudelaire was precisely reproaching photography. Photography seeks truth rather than beauty and as such works against idealism, which leads us to a third parallel between this medium and the prose poem: that of desacralization of the arts; as a result, as Baudelaire initiates a move towards reality, he brings poetry back to earth. Those are the three points I develop in this last section: a new aesthetic based on antithesis, an experience made of shocks, and an erroneous suspicion of a degraded aura.

Incapable of abstraction, lacking spirituality, it is as if photography could not exist with poetry, and yet, they present the same transitory and eternal characteristics by which Baudelaire defines beauty and modernity as well. It is common knowledge that the poet, beyond the aesthetic divide between realists and symbolists, is a prominent figure of the modernist avant-garde (one could even label him as a very early precursor of postmodernism). As a modern, the poet wants to seize beauty in its own context, as it unexpectedly emerges in the present world: “Le beau est fait d’un élément éternel, invariable (...) et d’un élément relatif, circonstanciel”, writes Baudelaire. The poet must then be available for the accidental occurrence of poetic elements, jutting out from his own spatio-temporal frame. Additionally, he defines modernity as follows, insisting again on the role played by unstable situations: “c’est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la

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197 Several threads support this idea of Baudelaire as a post-modern. First, he does not believe in technological or human progress and he is detached from the linear reading linking teachings of tradition (early modern) and hopes in the future (modern). As a result, he strongly feels the vacuum and the anxiety of his immediate existence. This remark identifies with a second aspect of postmodernity: that of individual fragmentation (as seen already) and the associated fragilization of identity because of a multiplying effect. Finally, despite his brief socialist impetus of the 1848 barricades, Baudelaire does not believe anymore in social action. After all, if self-identification is at risk, it is also because of a collective meaning that is under the process of being taken over by impersonal and mechanical regulations. The relationship of photography with the arts epitomizes this larger context. However, one might also notice that photography is both singular and multiple, over-informed and meaningless, a grasp and a loss of a continuing instant... which all lead as well to the major figure of antithesis.
moitié de l’art, dont l’autre moitié est l’éternel et l’immuable”. As a result, whether it regards beauty or modernity, they are obviously the one and same thing in the poet’s mind, both comprised of two complementary and antithetic aspects: movement and stability. (This conception could make Baudelaire’s attitude towards photography even more curious, as although it immortalizes, the photographic image is always that of a transitory instant.) As a matter of fact, antithesis –defined as the exact opposite of analogy– constitutes another fundamental basis of Baudelaire’s aesthetics. But at the same time, it also reflects a more rational conception of the world. If the oxymoronic “Fleurs du mal” was already suggesting such a paradox, it actually does not translate it as well as the urban landscapes: while beauty may contrast with evil because of cultural and external determination, it does not oppose it (and nor does ugliness oppose goodness) as strictly as city does reject nature. Baudelaire masters the arts of paradoxical evocation, and thus he disconcertingly overcomes dichotomies, including his own. Isn’t it after all an intrinsic condition of human beings to struggle between nature and culture? As examples, some poems resort to analogical process while lying in fact on an antithetic structure: “Le Rêve parisien” unfolds dreamlike sceneries before a harsh urban waking up; “La Chambre double” contrasts an ideal palace replete with allegories to the deceiving and miserable reality of the dwelling.

199 Antithesis contradicts analogy since it consists in a process that opposes images instead of having them triggering and attracting each other. “L'antithèse est une opposition verbale entre deux mots, deux expressions, deux phrases, deux idées, deux hémistiches, deux vers, deux parties d'un développement. Mais cette façon de parler peut être plus qu'un procédé esthétique, elle peut exprimer une conception du monde. D'une façon plus générale, il s'agit alors d'une vision de la réalité sous la forme de deux éléments opposés qu'elle unit : sublime et grotesque, spleen et idéal” –but these two united elements may well correspond with an intrinsically dual object, as that of the human being. Léon Cellier, Parcours initiatiques, Neuchâtel, 1977, p. 191. (quoted in Adatte, p. 137).
Open Structure

On all levels, the *Spleen de Paris*, to which the latter poem belongs, certainly manifests an audacious, hazardous and global antithesis. The “Rêve parisien”, however, is part of this new section Baudelaire added to *Les Fleurs du mal* for a second publication in 1861. When revising the first edition (partially because of the removal of six poems, demanded by court ruling), the poet enriches the collection with thirty-five pieces and slightly reworks the whole composition. The new section added gives a first insight into this urban experience in a time when addressing the city as a literary topic is highly unusual. Baudelaire makes it explicit in a note he sends to Jean Morel, the director of *La Revue française*, along with one of the new poems from the “Tableaux parisiens” section. In May 1859, he writes: “c’est le premier numéro d’une nouvelle série que je veux tenter, et je crains bien d’avoir simplement réussi à dépasser les limites assignées à la Poésie”. Similarly, on a formal level, using prose for poetic attempts is in itself an antithesis that clearly crosses traditional limits — but there are a few precedents acknowledged by Baudelaire in the preamble to the *Spleen de Paris*. The experience of a poetic prose that confers the text a free flow with a progressive and undetermined phraseology, is reflected in the very structure of Baudelaire’s second collection published in 1869, posthumously – Baudelaire dies in 1867— yet long matured, just as *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) was.

200 To my knowledge, only Victor Hugo did so, yet he reduced the attempt to the novelistic format with *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831) and *Les Misérables* (1862). As for Balzac, he sure sets *Le Père Goriot* (1835) and other of his novels in a well-discerned Paris, but the experience he recounts is more a social one (and more especially, bourgeois), than the urban confrontation to the anonymous. 

201 Letter to Jean Morel, May 1859.

202 A honest gesture, but ironical for sure, which is precisely the reason why Edgar Allan Poe does not figure in this preamble (Baudelaire must have had too much respect for the dark romanticism of his *Extraordinary stories* he translated, and for “L’homme des foules” more particularly, that will certainly inspire him). One of the two authors explicitly mentioned is Aloysius Bertrand, whose *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1842) more or less relates to Poe’s aesthetics. The second one is Arsène Houssaye, to whom is addressed the 1862 letter that serves as the preamble precisely. The irony directed towards Houssaye is particularly obvious because of the apparent praise of his “Chanson du vitrier” to which responds Baudelaire’s acerbic “Le mauvais vitrier”.


was. As a manifest desire of the poet for novel experimentation, the way both collections are conceived differs radically, which does not prevent Baudelaire from insisting on the fact the Spleen de Paris is written “pour faire pendant aux Fleurs du Mal” (that is, to match the first collection). If the second edition of “Les Fleurs du Mal” needs to be reworked, it is for the main reason that, contrarily to most poetic works published then, this one book is very consciously underpinned; an argument that serves, by the way, to Baudelaire’s defense when put on trial: “Le livre doit être jugé dans son ensemble, et alors il en ressort une terrible moralité”. Consequently, while the poet strongly asserts that Les Fleurs du mal presents “un commencement et une fin” on the one side, on the opposite one, the second collection presents a free structure rejecting usual linearity, as stated in its preamble: “Mon cher ami, Baudelaire writes to Houssaye, je vous envoie un petit ouvrage dont on ne pourrait pas dire, sans injustice, qu’il n’a ni queue ni tête, puisque tout, au contraire, y est à la fois tête et queue, alternativement et réciproquement”; and Baudelaire continues this metaphor of a snake, whose every vertebra might exist and live independently.

203 Long after the distress letter sent in 1845 to announce his attempted suicide, Baudelaire clarifies, in a second testament letter addressed to Narcisse Ancelle (the family legal practitioner administrating Baudelaire’s funds) in 1866, some details regarding the publishing of his complete works. This precision reflects the fact that Baudelaire was never quite satisfied with the title of this second collection (similarly to the hesitations that finally led to Les Fleurs du Mal, coined by a journalist form La Revue des deux mondes in 1855. The first collection was first announced as Les Lesbiennes in 1846, then Les Limbes a little later). In the case of Le Spleen de Paris. Petits poèmes en prose. Pour faire pendant aux Fleurs du mal, the titling hesitation is revealing of a term that is worth substituting to the over-used “flâneur” (as I shall develop in the conclusion).

204 Taken from Baudelaire’s “Notes et documents pour mon avocat, en vue du procès”, 1857. His friend, Barbey d’Aurevilly, also stresses the “secrete architecture” of the collection (“une œuvre poétique de la plus forte unité”), and in a letter to Alfred de Vigny, Baudelaire shares his concern for Les Fleurs du mal to be acknowledged not as a “pure album” but as a artwork presenting “un commencement et une fin”.

205 “Considérez, je vous prie, quelles admirables commodités cette combinaison nous offre à tous, à vous, à moi et au lecteur. Nous pouvons couper où nous voulons, moi ma rêverie, vous le manuscrit, le lecteur sa lecture ; car je ne suspends pas la volonté rétive de celui-ci au fil interminable d'une intrigue superfllue. Enlevez une vertèbre, et les deux morceaux de cette tortueuse fantaisie se rejoindront sans peine. Hachez-la en nombreux fragments, et vous verrez que chacun peut exister à part. Dans l'espérance que quelques-
Experimental Prose

This announcement points at the potential and lively resonance of experimental writing. But the apparent triviality of the prose contrasts with majestic alexandrines and other Baudelairian verses that are characterized by a rhythmic syncope, qualified by “ces brisures sonores, ces staccatos prononcés et expressifs, ces pauses calculées, loin de s’opposer au déroulement majestueux de la phrase poétique, (et qui) ne font, comme en musique, qu’en souligner l’ampleur et en renforcer l’unité mélodique”. The Baudelairian sentence does keep some of these features, increased with an even more surprising and liberated music, as if jazz would have replaced classical music, for it possesses almost all the appearances of natural expression. As a result, a rather surprising realist tone figures the fluidity of the living; anecdotes, dialogues, personal reflections, emerge under all the appearance of normality. Baudelaire appreciates the variety offered by this type of writing. He writes about Poe’s prose that it has “à sa disposition une multitude de tons, de nuances de langage, le ton raisonneur, le sarcastique, l’humoristique”. However, the poet is also aware that such an endeavor contradicts the poetic rhythm and might not achieve the highest ideal of beauty. For, like photography again, the prose genre aims at truth and becomes more accessible under the apparent recess of the form. Baudelaire pursues his introduction to Poe’s tales: “ce développement minutieux de pensée et d’expressions qui a pour objet la vérité (…), qui n’est pas situé à une aussi grande élévation que la poésie pure, peut fournir des produits

uns de ces tronçons seront assez vivants pour vous plaire et vous amuser, j’ose vous dédier le serpent tout entier.” Letter to Arsène Houssaye (1862), preamble to the Spleen de Paris, 1869.


plus variés et plus facilement appréciables pour le commun des lecteurs”.

Consequently, lacking the essential rhythm of the verse, dissonances may rise and pure beauty may well be offended, but it is not this abstract beauty that the poet aims at anymore, but a living one, like this medusing passer-by from “A une passante”. No matter what, when working on his poetic prose, Baudelaire soliloquizes in Mon Coeur mis à nu, “sois toujours poète, même en prose”, and here is how he suggests doing so:

\[
\text{Quel est celui de nous qui n’a pas, en ses jours d’ambition, rêvé le miracle d’une prose poétique, musicale, sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s’adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l’âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience ?}
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\[
\text{C’est surtout dans la fréquentation des villes énormes, c’est du croisement de leurs innombrables rapports que naît cet idéal obsédant.}
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This question is to be considered as an “art poétique” in which Baudelaire distinguishes the “mouvements lyriques” and the “ondulations de la rêverie” from the “soubresauts de la conscience”, as if imagination and reality were now working together. There is enough flexibility for the imagination to poetically deploy in a lawless form that welcomes at the same time the trivial interventions of a conscious mind. In short, the Spleen de Paris performs a global antithesis characterized by its structure and its poetic phrase, as well as its urban topic and Baudelaire’s ambition. The novelty traditional verses (and deceiving travels) were lacking lies in the openness, the multiplicity, the liveliness of the poetic prose, which perfectly reflects this world of concrete possibilities offered by “la fréquentation des villes énormes”.

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208 Ibid.
209 Baudelaire, Letter to Arsène Houssaye (1862), preamble to the Spleen de Paris, 1869.
3.2 The Social Dandy

The Poet of Urban Modernity

The substitution of the prose to the verse might shift the attention of the reader from the form to the content, paralleling in that sense the effect of photography and the ambition of literary realism to render the illusion as transparent as possible (hence the impression of an easier access). However, Baudelaire’s intention is not to recount his Parisian life at all, but rather to communicate a sensitive—and collective—urban experience. Prior to examining his artistic approach to Paris (which should keep in mind his infra-realistic and immanent aesthetic), it is important to get an insight into Baudelaire’s biographical relationship to Paris.

Aside from the years he spends in Lyon as a young teenager (1832-1836), the aborted voyage to Calcutta (1841-1842), and the stay in Brussels (1864-1866) where a massive stroke, that leaves him partially paralyzed and aphasic, forces him to get back to Paris (he dies a year later), Baudelaire spends his whole life in the French capital where he lived in over forty different places. This impressive number suggests in itself how he travels the city from every conceivable angle. At the most extremes, he moves six times over one month (March 1859), and lives five years in the same apartment (Hôtel de Dieppe, from 1859 to 1864). The rest of these stays expand in average between six month and a year and a half. The auspicious and sumptuous life of a rich heir turned dandy did not last indeed. Baudelaire experiences it during two years, after he comes back from his oriental trip and accesses the legal age (1842) to claim his father’s money (the latter passed away when he was a young boy). But he spends so much so quickly that two years later he
agrees with the familial decision to be placed under financial supervision. From now on starts a Bohemian life; he has to walk the city avoiding his creditors, asking for financial help, struggling with publishers and journalists; he is tossed from one place to another. Exhausted, he writes around the mid-1850s: “je suis absolument las de la vie de gargotte et d’hôtel garni ; cela me tue et m’empoisonne”. This urban aspect of Baudelaire’s biography helps us to understand how and why he is a cursed lover of Paris, with an ambiguous attitude towards it: he loves Paris and he hates it. He can only pretend that he aspires to leaving, for he is nailed to its dirty ground, (dis-)possessed by the horrible town. Both the epilogues drafted for Les Fleurs du Mal address the feminine city in an ambivalent way: “Je t’aime, ô ma très belle” and “Je t’aime, ô capital infâme”. He loves it as a whore (“énorme catin”) with which he has a very personal relationship (as shown by the anaphor of the possessive pronoun “tes”). The town has so much to offer, and yet, only gives him its mud. Although he is able to turn it into gold, he feels mistreated; Paris is forever indebted towards him: “je soutiens que Paris n’a jamais été juste envers moi, - que jamais on ne m’a payé, en estime, non plus qu’en argent, ce qui m’est dû.”

Despite a very personal experience in a particular city, Baudelaire suffers from a Parisian existence that could correspond in fact to almost any urban life. Haussmann, préfet de la Seine from 1853 to 1870, is often seen as the great architect of modern Paris. Although he is the one who plans and directs the realization of large axes lightening the capital, the massive cleaning up starts a generation earlier, with his predecessor, Rambuteau. The Paris Baudelaire lives in progressively becomes this city of light made of streets, parks, and bourgeois buildings equipped with gas-lighting. Over the decades, Baudelaire frequents several Parises, from the one of the Bourbon Restoration to the one of the

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210 Baudelaire, Letter to his mother, December 1865.
Second Empire, via that of Louis-Philippe and the 1848 barricades (during which he never seemed more enthusiastic). Consequently, he sees the city changing, yet he virtually does not address these transformations, except for one particular poem, “Le Cygne”, dedicated to Victor Hugo: “Le vieux Paris n’est plus (la forme d’une ville / Change plus vite, hélas ? que le cœur d’un mortel)”.211

The city may be personified at times, but the Paris Baudelaire writes about has nothing picturesque to offer, nothing particular that would hold the attention, no specific details that would make it recognizable (contrarily to an classic realism then). Without the title of the prose collection or that of the Fleurs du mal specific section, and except for a few rare elements of identification (all of them mentioned in the section “Tableaux parisiens”), the poet addresses a topic pertaining to any modern metropolis, which is why he is often considered as the great poet of urban modernity.

Into the Unknown Ones

The reason for that absence of particular markers is that Baudelaire appreciates the big city, not as much for his architecture, places, and monuments as for the numerous souls it brings together: the “innombrables rapports” mentioned in the letter to Houssaye, or the “puissante agglomération d’hommes” evoked in the Salon de 1859. Similar to the absence of particular places, these persons are not stereotyped ones that immediately trigger a set of ready-made characteristics (the general, the bourgeois, the worker, the artist, the demi-mondaine, etc.) but there are the truly unknown ones crossed by chance in the streets of an enormous town. Those people compose the Inconnu hoped for in the end

211 “Le Cygne” in Les Fleurs du mal. Baudelaire offers this poem to Victor Hugo while he is exiled. Overtly denouncing Louis Napoléon Bonaparte’s coup of December 1851, and mocking the new emperor in Les Châtiments (1852), he is an influential political opponent to the regime.
of the *Voyage*; and because they carry along indeterminacy, they allow a renewed imagination: “*En somme, c’est l’inconnu qui vaudra pour cette poésie qui se cherche, non le connu. Ce qui l’appellera et l’incitera, ce seront les figures sans attributs décidés, et dont la nature en cela ouverte pourra aider le poète à transgresser les stéréotypes*.”

The experience of the city is first and foremost an interpersonal one. After having visited the unexplored recesses of his tormented mind, the new and authentic adventure resides for the poet in the prose associated with this urban experience. Hence the move, both literal and literary, the poet makes towards others.

The human condition is already placed under Baudelaire’s scrutiny in *Les Fleurs du mal*, for his experience of the spleen is that of an alter ego –another, yet different, self–, as he claims in the inaugural address “*Au lecteur*: “*Hypocrite lecteur ! Mon semblable, mon frère*”

This existential sharing might not have had the expected effect as the poet, and his verses as well, remained too distant to some extent. In the *Spleen de Paris*, Baudelaire reasserts this communion again (hence the “*pour faire pendant aux Fleurs du mal*”), but he reenacts it in a more efficient way, by disclosing his intimate contact with others, and by facilitating its access through the prose. It is as if the dandy had fallen, revealing some imperfections in becoming –almost– like anyone else. Indeed, the archetype of the dandy commands in him a haughty and indifferent attitude on the one hand, by which he must distinguish itself from the vulgar mass, on the other. Baudelaire speaks for himself when he writes about Constantin Guys, in the “*peintre de la modernité*”: “*Le dandy aspire à l’insensibilité, et c’est là que M.G., qui est dominé, lui, par une passion insatiable, celle*”

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213 This verse echoes Victor Hugo’s exclamation in the preface of *Les Contemplations*: “*Ah ! insensé, qui crois que je ne suis pas toi!*”, and will be later rephrased by Arthur Rimbaud as “*Je est un autre*”.

Fortunately enough, like the defeated beauty or the imperfect photograph, Baudelaire is a failed dandy according to Benjamin, allowing a particular dynamics to take place between the poet and the masses. This failure permits a breaking off with insensitive distance and thus provides us with powerful insight into the unknown ones. Of course, this particular experience of the crowd consists in an interactional process with his fellow beings through which, similar to his photographic poses, the poet has to give a lot of himself. A sustained attention meets the aesthetic feeling the photographer must have when operating and informing reality, as stressed by Nadar and Figuier. Therefore, pursuing this photographic comparison, one could say Baudelaire is the artist and the subject, alternatively—or simultaneously—one and the other. From the backstreets of poetry, looking from the outside, he perceives everyone, since he is everyone, most particularly this “mauvais vitrier” harassed by the narrator and the beggar he assaults in “Assommons les pauvres”. Reminding us of the “Héautontimorouménos”, Baudelaire is the attacker as much as he is the victim. The fact the glazier lacks colored materials may refer to the poet’s choice of prose (that he happens to regret sometimes), while the moral of the anecdote from “Assommons les pauvres” resembles a revisited socialism where the beggar and the poet become equals (also reminding us of Baudelaire’s financial situation). However, the equivalences established from an external point of view are not enough. To truly make

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215 About the failed attempt of Baudelaire as a dandy, Walter Benjamin writes: “Son amour pour le dandysme ne fut pas heureux. Il n’avait pas le don de plaire qui est un élément si important dans cet art de ne pas plaire propre au dandy. Transfigurant en maniérisme ce qui devait chez lui paraître naturellement étrange, il plongea dans le délaissement le plus profond, à mesure que son isolement croissant le rendait plus inaccessible encore.” W. Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire, Payot, Paris, 2002, p.141.
216 This is most particularly salient in the penultimate stanza of the poem: “Je suis la plaie et le couteau! / Je suis le soufflet et la joue! Je suis les membres et la roue, / Et la victime et le bourreau!” in “L’Héautontimorouménos”, Les Fleurs du mal.
others alter egos, the poet must feel them from within. Here is where the reversal of the
dandy, as an aesthetic amateur, plays an important role. In working towards an individual
understanding of his fellow beings, in genuinely wondering who are these people he uses
for his fantasy, the poet gets closer to them, and even gets along with them, because he
has learned to respect and love them. “Les Petites vieilles” illustrates Baudelaire’s sincere
compassion as he realizes that the elder women he describes, these “cerveaux
congénères”, dream just as he does, and, tenderly looking at them, he enters their souls
and finally confesses: “je vis vos jours perdus”. He has then ceased perceiving them from
the outside, as a curious and indifferent man, to start worrying about their intimate being
in a surge of solidarity.

**Multitude and Individual Shocks**

Paris is changing, and below its cleanliness, its lighting, its richness and everything that
asserts an unreachable beauty, Baudelaire feels closer to those who Paris rejects, for he is
one of them.217 This is the reason why, despite the “bain de multitude” the masses offer
him, he also experiences solitude in the midst of the vast human desert, just as the “vieux
saltimbanque” left aside or the forsaken widow in “Les Veuves”. But overall, “Les
Foules” constitutes the pivotal text for understanding the Spleen de Paris:

*Il n'est pas donné à chacun de prendre un bain de multitude: jouir de la
foule est un art; et celui-là seul peut faire, aux dépens du genre humain,
une ribote de vitalité, à qui une fée a insufflé dans son berceau le goût du
travestissement et du masque, la haine du domicile et la passion du
voyage.*

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217 As an example, Baudelaire is more fascinated by the elder women and the gaze of underpriviledged
people than he is by the ostentatious and impudent display of wealthy progress and material modernity:
“C'est toujours chose intéressante que ce reflet de la joie du riche au fond de l'œil du pauvre” in “Les
Veuves”, Le spleen de Paris.
Multitude, “solitude: termes égaux et convertibles pour le poète actif et fécond. Qui ne sait pas peupler sa solitude, ne sait pas non plus être seul dans une foule affairée.
Le poète jouit de cet incomparable privilège, qu’il peut à sa guise être lui-même et autrui. Comme ces âmes errantes qui cherchent un corps, il entre, quand il veut, dans le personnage de chacun."

This last paragraph corroborates the process earlier described and stressed in the quote as the “art of masses’ enjoyment”. Besides, the first paragraph also reminds us of the dandy’s taste for ornamental clothing and secrecy (analogous to the formal verse), while ending with a well-balanced antithesis that implicitly opposes Baudelaire’s numerous dwellings to the particular traveling Parisian streets offer him: that of entering people’s souls and moving from one to another. In doing so, the poet puts the encounter at the center of the travel experience. Finally, the dialectic of solitude and multitude, evoked in the second paragraph, goes back to the paradox of a populated and well-spread loneliness where lies the potential risk conveyed by this human journey. Mingling with the crowd is double-edged indeed, for, if the urban masses offer Baudelaire an inexhaustible reserve for inspiration, it also precipitates him towards two pitfalls. On the one hand, the unknown person might be available, but it remains a furtive appearance made of unsure forms that, similarly to the dreamed travel, exerts no constraint on the poet’s subjectivity (as shown in “Les projets” or “Les fenêtres”). As a result, he constantly runs the risk of withdrawing into a narcissistic solitude if the crowd only reflects his own image back to him. On the other hand, Baudelaire cannot get too deeply into this crowd (of which he

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219 In a more explicit way, Baudelaire ends the poem in drawing closer his intoxicating experience of the crowd with that of “Les fondateurs de colonies, les pasteurs de peuples, les prêtres missionnaires exilés au bout du monde, (qui) connaissent sans doute quelque chose de ces mystérieuses ivresses” in “Les foules”, ibid.
220 As stated by Jean-Paul Sartre in an essay on the poet that actually serves more his philosophy than it illuminates the poetic writing: “Baudelaire est l’homme qui ne s’oublie jamais, il se regarde voir ; il
actually never ceases perceiving the inhuman character), simply because, similarly to the vaporization noticed in the previous section, in becoming one with all of them, he runs the opposite risk of dis-identification.

The paradoxical profile of a social dandy allows then the aesthetic and existential process of going back and forth between solitude and multitude. Reminding us of the analogical process, Baudelaire bounces upon anonymous persons, not in an attempt to escape the spleen this time, but mostly for self-preservation. “A peine s’est-il fait son complice qu’il se sépare d’elle”, remarks Walter Benjamin. As a solitary hero, he lives aside from the Parisian people; and when endangered by his own narcissism, he indulges himself to a “besoin de s’oublier dans autrui et de se consumer dans le vaste monde”, as noticed by Adatte. He may then dissolve within the crowd since his duality will allow immediate reconstruction of the self. Yet, it is not as if he were abandoning his body to enter others’, as his own personal senses are crucially needed for the process at stake. Rather, the art of the urban poet consists in an exceptional ability to control the sensitivity of his envelope from extreme perceptiveness to hermetic isolation. In the end, while in the process of writing, Baudelaire actually reproduces sensational shocks he previously gathered here and there when traveling the city. Walter Benjamin identifies a “corrélation interne, chez Baudelaire, de l’image du choc et le contact avec les masses qui habitent les grandes villes”. Whether here or there, in this poem or in that text, the crowd is present throughout the whole Spleen de Paris; it totally fills, if not exceeds, the book, which retroactively sheds some light on the snake metaphor (life is everywhere, irreducible, in

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regarde pour se voir regarder”; the role of the crowd would then ultimately be “de renvoyer la conscience à soi” in Baudelaire, Gallimard, Paris, 1975, p.23.  
222 E. Adatte, op. cit., p.68.  
223 Walter Benjamin, op. cit., p.163.
any single text of the collection). Out of his intimate and sensational contact with the crowd, out of this “sainte prostitution de l’âme qui se donne toute entière, poésie et charité, à l’imprévu qui se montre, à l’inconnu qui passe”, the poet only has to let surface the shocks he has incorporated from accidental collision and unexpected encounter. The poem “A une passante” – about which Benjamin notes that “aucune formule, aucun mot ne fait mention explicite de la foule. Et c’est pourtant elle qui meut tout le poème, comme le vent pousse le voilier” – compellingly narrates this brutal and instantaneous experience. The female passer-by, who epitomizes an uncanny beauty driven by the crowd, leaves an indelible print of the poet, while reminiscent of a lasting snapshot from the encounter of Orpheus with Medusa. The experience of this unexpected shock is essential to understand the power of Baudelaire’s expression, as it corresponds to the evasive half beauty and modernity are made of.

3.3 Against Allegoric Intoxication

Illusion and Awareness

Going across the city and its narrow streets, as an anonymous wanderer, the poet is drunk with the profusion of objects and beings. In order to fulfill his desire for intoxication, he looks for unknown souls to penetrate and unexpected situations to happen, staring at a gaze, attracted by another. Walter Benjamin reminds us that Baudelaire says of himself in

224 Walter Benjamin, ibid., p.169.

225 I take here the opportunity to mention that I am purposely leaving aside in this chapter the consideration of Baudelaire as a flâneur. There are two main and connected reasons for doing so: first, because it could also pertain to Atget’s photographic practice and Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin’s Chronique de Paris; second, because although being an interesting notion, I do not think it applies quite appropriately to the poet and the photographer. As a result, the figure of the flâneur will be touched on in the concluding section of this research.
rather crude terms that he is “un peu catin, un peu prostitué”. He lets the crowd act upon him, just as it takes pleasure incorporating its shapeless mass. The philosopher, who calls this phenomenon “intropathie”, associates it with an almost inevitable and addictive attraction exerted by merchandise: “l’ivresse à laquelle le flâneur s’abandonne, c’est celle de la marchandise qui vient battre le flot des clients”. Moreover, after quoting an excerpt from “Les foules”, Benjamin remarks: “ce qui parle là, c’est la marchandise”. Then, drawing a parallel between the modern poet and the bourgeois class he belongs to, and resituating them in the historicity of the industrial age, he further explains:

Si elle voulait pousser jusqu’à la virtuosité cette façon de prendre du plaisir, elle ne pouvait dédaigner l’identification avec la marchandise. Elle devait savourer cette identification avec le plaisir et l’angoisse que lui donnait le pressentiment de voir là préfiguré sa destinée en tant que classe sociale. Elle devait finalement apporter à cette identification une sensibilité qui sait percevoir le charme des choses meurtries et pourrissantes. Baudelaire (...) possédait cette sensibilité-là.

According to Benjamin, Baudelaire is the one who accomplishes this aestheticization of merchandise during “le commencement du déclin”, which seems nothing less than surprising when knowing Baudelaire’s position vis-à-vis material progress. Of course, Baudelaire gets pleasure out of his intoxication, but it seems only partially correct to associate him with commodification, or even the antithetic embellishment of its deadly products (a lethal effect not yet perceived according to Benjamin). Furthermore, confusing Baudelaire with merchandise amounts to denying his peculiar subjectivity, an objectification that misses the point that Baudelaire is as much consumed by the crowd as he very consciously consumes it. He might well be drunk of unknown others, but, unlike

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226 Quoted from W. Benjamin, op. cit., p.54.
227 Walter Benjamin, ibid., p.85.
228 Walter Benjamin, ibid., p.90.
most of his contemporaries, he is not fooled by the city lights, the influence of photography, the industrial productions and all the external marks of a progress he precisely denounces. While confronting the crowd he is well aware of the danger of self-oblivion. Therefore, as noted already, he regularly pulls himself out of it to assert his difference through, for instance, the feeling of ultimate solitude. Benjamin acknowledges this ability for distancing himself from the masses –“la fascination extrêmement profonde qu’elle exerçait sur lui tenait à ce qu’elle ne l’aveuglait pas sur la terrible réalité sociale, malgré l’ivresse dans laquelle elle le plongeait”– yet, he reads it as a linear process: “plus il prend conscience du fait que son mode d’existence lui est imposé d’en haut par l’organisation de la production (...) moins il aura envie de s’identifier par intropathie.”

I believe this move, from a pleasing sensation to the realization of its limits, has less to do with a causal link than it relates to a dialectic alternating between illusion and disillusion. For the “sainte prostitution”, the “bain de foule” or the “universelle communion”, whatever one calls it, has its dark side: the city also implies muddled noise and crazy speed, violence of anonymity, loss of landmarks and meaning, all of which Baudelaire is quite aware and that is expressed by one word: alienation. The poet is not fooled by modern Paris, and neither is he a masochist victim of its crowd. But he uses it for poetic purposes until a calculated extent to which he separates from it. This second move translates into his search for originality, manifested through his dandy attitude and his use of poetic prose (and an earlier choice for evil as well). As Benjamin says it, Baudelaire feels the social pressure too well to remain indifferent to it or lured into the masses. For instance, on the one hand, the poem “A une heure du matin” –which starts with the words “Enfin ! Seul !”– maliciously reasserts the poet’s singularity in

\[229\] Walter Benjamin, *ibid.*, pp.89 and 90.
expressing the contempt he has for others; and, on the other, the sudden and violent apparition of a spectre in “La Chambre double” –which makes the dream swing to reality–, is no one else than a torturing bailiff.

**Phantasmagoria and the Aura**

Benjamin’s reading of Baudelaire is quite relevant in many points, but it remains sometimes over determined by his critique of a commodifying modernity. Therefore, I suggest clearing out this external orientation and getting back to Baudelaire’s aesthetic of reality. It is possible to do so through the examination of two fundamental notions of the philosopher: phantasmagoria and aura. There is a tension existing between these two that could lead to their confusion, especially when it comes to their dissipation: “l’absence d’illusions et le déclin de l’aura sont des phénomènes identiques”, writes Benjamin.²³⁰ I contend this idea by arguing that Baudelaire’s experience of Paris has more to do with aura than phantasmagoria. Phantasmagoria originally refers to an optical spectacle projected by a magic lantern. When conceptualized by Benjamin (and Marx before him), it consists in this distracting illusion that turns away the gaze from reality, like a veil covering it or like intoxication precisely. “Pour Benjamin est fantasmagorique tout produit culturel qui hésite encore un peu avant de devenir pure et simple marchandise”.²³¹ Consequently, if the aura and phantasmagoria are the same phenomenon for Benjamin, it is because the latter could correspond to a temporary phase

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²³¹ The quote, by Jean Lacoste, a commentator of Benjamin’s considerations on Baudelaire, continues as follows: “Chaque innovation technique qui rivalise avec un art ancien prend pendant quelques temps la forme sans transparence et sans avenir de la fantasmagorie: les méthodes de construction nouvelles donnent naissance à la fantasmagorie des passages, la photographie fait naître la fantasmagorie des panoramas, le feuilleton s’accompagne de physiologies, l’urbanisme à la Haussmann, dans sa brutalité, s’oppose à la flânerie fantasmagorique.” Jean Lacoste, in Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, op. cit., p.260.
by which the former transits during the process of its deconstruction, before accessing a final stage of basic merchandise. From Baudelaire’s and Benjamin’s perspective, the industrial age – and especially photography – is responsible for this deconstruction. However, they interpret it in different ways: according to Benjamin, the decline of the aura is a positive process since it bears within a possibility for reappropriation of what was formerly posited as sacred; in Baudelaire’s view, this loss of aura would imply the end of genuinely aesthetic endeavors, as artists would not aim at the essence of things but at superficial realism.  

In Benjamin’s mind, the loss (or deconstruction) of the aura and the end of phantasmagoria are one and the same phenomenon because they allow merchandise to exist for what it is: an object deprived of any other value than the utility it is designed for. Prior to this degradation, the aura and phantasmagoria are similar in appearance since they both attract the gaze in virtue of a supplemental feature. But when looking at what engenders this particular feature, aura and phantasmagoria differ in quality, just as the “illusion vraie” presents a value superior to that of the “faux authentique”. The aura captivates whereas phantasmagoria deludes; this is where their subtle yet crucial difference lies. If both govern the attention, the aura has a preeminent virtue that originates from the human mark the thing carries along (just as the human presence in the emptied streets of Atget’s photographs). As a result, “les mots eux-même peuvent avoir

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232 It appears Benjamin is mistaking when stating that photography abolishes the aura, History has shown that it is actually the opposite: photography is way more likely to reinforce it. The philosopher could even get a glimpse at this counter-effect: as he was valorizing the loss of the aura for working towards emancipation of the masses, in his second version of the well-known essay, “The Work of Art in Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, he measures the impact of filmic propaganda.

leur aura”, writes Benjamin, making the aura a source for poetry.\textsuperscript{234} In an even more relevant quote, opposing the (realist) journalist to the (poetic) teller, he explains how a text may carry human marks and significantly compares them with the potter’s prints on a clay vase: “\textit{A la différence de l’information, le récit ne se soucie pas de transmettre le pur en-soi de l’événement, il l’incorpore dans la vie même de celui qui raconte, pour le communiquer, comme sa propre expérience, à celui qui écoute. Ainsi le narrateur y laisse sa trace, comme la main du potier sur le vase d’argile.}”\textsuperscript{235}

This is the reason why I would suggest that phantasmagoria is not a phase in the aura’s decline, but rather an artificial reconstruction originating from the social circulation of industrial goods. Benjamin’s Marxist orientation corroborates this idea, but it deprives the object of the aura at the same time, because of the confusion at stake, and more precisely, because of the opposition between industrial production and handicraft.\textsuperscript{236}

Although being assigned by external work, the aura becomes immanent to the object, like an indefinable human value it has incorporated, while phantasmagoria is only something assigned from the outside. In short, phantasmagoria is virtual, like a cultural preconception, while the aura exudes from the concrete, cultural as well, yet bearing some real evidence. In seeing across phenomena, Baudelaire is not contributing to the decline of the aura at all, but, on the contrary, he expresses the danger of a phantasmagoria likely to substitute and dispel the aura, or at least make it secondary.

\textsuperscript{234} Walter Benjamin, \textit{ibid.}, p.200.
\textsuperscript{235} Walter Benjamin, \textit{ibid.}, p.154.
\textsuperscript{236} What originally gives the objects their aura is the fact that they have been humanly conceived (by opposition to mechanical production). Adorno, in a letter to Benjamin, sustains this idea of the aura as the trace of human work left in the thing, to which Benjamin responds that there must be “\textit{dans les choses une part humaine qui n’est pas fondée par le travail}”. He implicitly grants the aura with something else than human work, but this thread was never explored. For my part, I propose that this additional value to the thing, is also the result of human manipulations and temporal traces it keeps from being used, the patina in some way.
Baudelaire shows how important it is not to associate them; a distinction that even surfaces in his photographic consideration: far from reproaching photography for the aura it conveys –his portraits are highly “auristic”– he rather attacks the viewers’ misperception, for it is they who contribute to phantasmagoria.237 Not only the decline of the aura should not be associated with an absence of illusion (and conversely), but, actually, aura and disillusion complement each other, as shown throughout the Spleen de Paris: the poet manages to erase phantasmagoria while expressing the aura of things and beings. And yet, in place of the aura, Benjamin celebrates the allegory for dissipating the illusion.238

The Fallen Allegory

The poem “Perte d’auréole” should not be misread. It makes more sense interpreting this loss as the collapse of the allegory rather than that of the aura: “Mon cher, vous connaissez ma terreur des chevaux et des voitures. Tout à l’heure, comme je traversais le boulevard, en grande hâte, et que je sautillais dans la boue, à travers ce chaos mouvant où la mort arrive au galop de tous les côtés à la fois, mon auréole, dans un mouvement brusque, a glissé de ma tête dans la fange du macadam.”239 This anecdote is that of a return to the reality of a busy town and to the potential death of a pressing present, a world of the senses finally made possible and livable thanks to the loss of holiness,

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237 In this very particular case of photography, phantasmagoria can way too easily be confused with the aura because of this other confusion photography conveys between its object (the photograph) and its subject (what is represented). Phantasmagoria concerns the value attributed to the object, whereas the aura comes from the conjunction of the subject with the analogic process of photography.

238 According to Jean Lacoste, “l’aura semble designer un rapport avec la nature qui est aux yeux de Benjamin définitivement perdu. Toute apparence d’aura (autour d’une invention technique) est une illusion, une fantasmasagoria, qui se dissipe sous le regard mélancolique, dans l’allégorie”. J. Lacoste, in Benjamin, Baudelaire, op. cit., p.277.

239 “Perte d’auréole”, Le Spleen de Paris.
innocence and ideal. As a result, contrary to what Benjamin asserts about Baudelaire’s writing, it is not “le déclin de l’aura (qui) s’est inscrit dans son œuvre lyrique”, but that of the allegory, which has more in common with the “faux authentique” than phantasmagoria does.240

According to Benjamin, allegory dissipates the illusion, most likely because, in breaking off with reality, it separates from the phantasmagoria appended to it while accessing the pure realm of idea: “Majesté de l’intention allégorique: destruction de l’organique et du vivant – dissipation de l’illusion”241 Consequently, in distancing itself from the material and world of the senses, the allegory would also work against the aura and, moreover, against the living towards which Baudelaire precisely heads in the Spleen de Paris. Therefore, and conversely, the prose poems constitute a move away from allegory, and Benjamin would finally agree on that. In his critique of modernity, he observes that allegory has been caught up with merchandizing and he envisions the move of “art for art’s sake” as a vain reaction to the situation he describes as follows: “la dépréciation du monde des choses dans l’allégorie est dépassée par la marchandise dans le monde des choses lui-même”.242 Baudelaire acts in contrast to the symbolists, that is, in compliance with the zeitgeist, yet without falling into the realistic trap. It is as if reality were overcoming language and thus leaving it with the subsequent alternative: either asserting its detachment from any reference and thus illusorily evolving in a pure world of words, either playing the card of transparency and then opting for the upholding of illusion within reality. Obviously, Baudelaire choses none of these options that amount to the identical impasse of self-referentiality. His experience clearly aims at expressing worldly

240 Walter Benjamin, op. cit., p.201.
241 Walter Benjamin, ibid., p.226.
242 Walter Benjamin, ibid., p.215.
constraints in response to the symbolists, and he values words too much to take them for granted, in response to the realists.

In his book, *Baudelaire devant l’innombrable*, Antoine Compagnon dedicates a chapter to the matter of the allegory as a global trope that has too often driven the Baudelairian critique. Consequently, “il s’agira de redescendre de l’allégorie comme trope global, épuisant l’œuvre, figure de toute une vision du monde ou plutôt du langage, permettant de lire chez Baudelaire notre conception de la modernité, de la littérature et de l’univers, à une allégorie comme figure localisée, plus contraignante, moins pertinente”.243 This appropriate reassessment of allegory allows the words to modestly reinvest the world, as shown in “*La Chambre double*”. Structured upon the opposition of imagination with reality, the text mentions, in an often unnoticed and yet fundamental way, a dreamed “Idole” that is deprived from its capital letter when quoted again in the awakened phase of the poem.244 Given the fact that this graphic mark of allegorization is very widely used in Baudelaire’s poetry, this loss of capital cannot be an anodyne one. It simply symbolizes the reversal of the allegorical process that consists in a passage from the phenomenal to the rhetorical or the conceptual, depending on which of the two understandings of allegory is favored.245 As an attempt at absolute abstraction, the allegory does not give the words their chance as referential containers. It only uses them to reach conceptual ideas behind their sensible forms or the signified behind the signifier, without ever paying attention to their common reference that belongs to the phenomenal.

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244 “*La Chambre double*, *Le Spleen de Paris*.
The critique of Hans Robert Jauss provides means as well for undermining the allegorical process. In revising Benjamin’s interpretation of Baudelairian allegory as an anticipation of Proust’s involuntary memory, he stresses the disuse of the theory of correspondences in favor of a “médiation d’une nouvelle expérience esthétique anti-romantique pour laquelle toute trace d’une harmonie préétablie entre l’homme et la nature, ou d’une analogie cachée entre l’expérience sensible et la signification suprasensible a disparu”.246 This suggested short circuit of romantic and platonic conceptions, based on the mediation between the two realms of the senses and the ideal, fosters the fall of the allegory. Those two dimensions are not distant from one another anymore, nor are they confused however. In fact, they are put in close contact through the intermediary of the poet’s experience, for whom ideas or sensations were never a goal in itself, but the simple means towards artistic achievement. Baudelaire’s work proceeds from a reaction against “l’excès de l’esprit sur le langage” and an acknowledgment of “le surcroît de réalité sur les signes” to rephrase Yves Bonnefoy’s expressions, who rightly observes how Baudelaire succeeds “à briser le cercle de l’écriture”, bringing poetry back to a reality.247

In the end Baudelaire refuses the allegory, destroys phantasmagoria and restores the aura. The recounting of his experience hold both the literal and the literary trace of his humanity, as the failed dandy in the modern city infuses all his being into his writing,

_Trébuchant sur les mots comme sur les pavés_
_Heurtant parfois des vers depuis longtemps rêvés._248

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246 H. R. Jauss, quoted by Compagnon, _ibid._, p.152.
247 Yves Bonnefoy, preface, _Baudelaire. Paris sans fin, op. cit._, pp.21 and 22.
248 “Le Soleil”, _Les Fleurs du mal_.

Les Fenêtres is a modern ode to artistic imagination in radical contrast with Baudelaire’s conception of photography as mechanical reproduction. However, strangely enough, this opening of the poem sounds like a metaphorical description of the photographer aiming at reality behind the camera obscura. As seen in the previous chapter, Baudelaire is in many ways a visionary artist, yet he seems to miss a point regarding photography, although his diatribe addresses photographic reception rather than the object itself (as suggested by its title, “Le public moderne et la photographie”, 1859). Twenty years after Arago’s announcement of the daguerreotype process in front of both the Académie des Sciences and the Académie des Beaux-Arts, photography is popular, well spread and on the verge of entering the second phase of its existence according to Walter Benjamin,
namely that of narcissism and kitsch. In the treatise he wrote on the medium, “A Small History of Photography”, the philosopher places some hope in the third phase he observes at the turn of the century, especially through the figure of Eugène Atget (1857-1927). This essay of Benjamin is infused with his interest in elaborating a counter-history of modernity. Who, better than Atget, could have illustrated it? Indeed, despite an apparently classic production, the photographer navigates against the flow, using an anachronic camera in times of fierce progress, patiently unfolding his device in the midst of the surrounding velocity, drudging as a commercial photographer, miles away from the Pictorialists, and documenting bygone subjects in strikingly modern ways. Atget embodies an indispensable corner stone of modern photography, and as such, is to be considered as the “Proust de la photographie”. During the climactic period of modernity known as the Belle Epoque, both Atget and Proust sublimate nostalgic recollection into an esthesic process, and produce an artistic saga that mixes past and current flows. But how is nostalgia to be understood?

The world being known and explored in its entirety, the only room left for astounding achievements are those of physical and extreme exploits. Colonization is virtually achieved and modern empires are established. Despite the fading horizons and the end of adventurous explorations, the fantasized “elsewhere” must go on. Tourism develops in and out of France, recycling already old folkloric and exotic stereotypes, reenacting heroism and discovery, in an old-fashioned and insipid way. Clichés provide the context upon which colonial ideology is elaborated, in relation with general positivism and a faith in progress. Just as the French colonial empire enters a phase of self-celebration, Paris asserts itself as the “city of light”, world capital of the arts. While some (like Blaise
Cendrars or Jacques-Henri Lartigue) embrace modernity, enveloped in the characteristic insouciance of the *Belle Epoque*, others express their doubt about the culture of progress. In a dissonant gesture, they depict the new world as oppressive and cold, industrial and harsh, mercantile and cynic (Louis-Ferdinand Céline does it explicitly, whereas Eugène Atget portrays it *en creux*, deciding not to represent it). Therefore, the second group of artists turns to a form of nostalgia, both geographic and historic, there and then. Gauguin, for instance, flees as far as possible, yet only to eventually find a condemned world, already corrupted by westernization. Hence the acid colors and overall melancholic atmosphere of his Tahitian paintings, reminding us of Baudelaire’s avant-gardist teaching from the previous chapter: the “**I**déal” is a state of mind that does not exist in the material world, no matter how far one goes in space or in time. Here is where Robert Flaherty and Victor Segalen intervene, both concerned with the preservation of diversity: historic romanticism infuses the films of the former, and the latter genuinely celebrates cultural differences. Baudelaire’s voyage extends itself: facing an overwhelming modernity, the comforting feeling and artistic power of what differs from it, can be found just here and now, at the corner of the street, precisely where Atget goes photographing what still resists.

Nevertheless, looking closely at my primary sources, it seems the underlying structure of this intense period is not to be found in the superficial dialectic of modernity and nostalgia (subsuming the “now and then” of progress and the “here and there” of an omnipresent West), but, rather, in that of objectivity and subjectivity. Relating to the
classic oppositions between document and art or fact and fiction, this deeper structure calls for a transcending perspective, which does exist in travel literature, not yet or not quite in cinema, and is under process in photography. With regard to written texts, fewer travelogues are published after the 1890s, and the press serial (periodic narratives encompassed with amazing engravings) has decreased too. In fact, there is an obvious split between scientific literature on the one side, because of the progressive specialization of knowledge (especially anthropology), and pleasant reading on the other, that includes adventure stories, leisure reportages, and Pierre Loti’s popular novels, highly incriminated by Segalen. Along with Proust in his own way, Segalen is among those who are capable of the mentioned transcendence combining real and imaginary worlds. Cinema is not there yet: it seems the medium is still too young to fuel a reflection upon itself. Therefore, the newsreel is regularly staged, as are the first ethnographic films consisting in fictions, which looks pretty normal in these times of experimentation. As a result, neither Nanook of the North (1922), nor Edward Curtis’s In the Land of the Head Hunters (1914), can be conceived as documentary films for the mere reason that the term is not even coined yet. The same goes with documentary photography, even though the situation is similar to that of travel writing. Perceived as an objective recording of reality on the one side, photography serves all kinds of scientific and social endeavors; on another side, there have been quite a few aesthetic explorations, but they prove to be misleading to a certain extent, as they consist in a doomed, and thus tragic, attempt to escape the very essence of photography. While belonging to the first category, Atget is posthumously celebrated by a whole range of artists and art experts up to today. This
legacy suggests he overpassed the dichotomy at stake. The question is how he did so when intentionally just making “documents”?

The following offers some answers regarding this general ambiguity epitomized by Atget. First, I look at the photographer himself, consider his dual image and his technical savoir-faire, and examine three self-portraits. Second, I retrace his photographic work, in order to get a better grasp at the substance of his work. Third, I narrow the investigation to specific series that reveal the man at work, as an editor and an urban explorer.

1. The Photographer

1.1 Atget at First Sight

“L’Œuvre et l’Homme”

Eugene Atget, as a photographic artist, has a quite surprising and ambiguous status. While he died being a barely recognized photographer, known only, like most of his commercial fellows, from his particular clientele, he is still perceived by his photographic followers and by art historians, as a fundamental figure and essential benchmark in the great history of photography. As a matter of fact, he literally embodies the history of photography, as suggested in this quote introducing Atget’s collection from the Modern Museum of Art:

Atget’s best work is a poetic transformation of the ordinary by a subtle and knowing eye well served by photography’s reportorial fidelity. His transcendent, haunting works transposed photography’s function from the
arena of 19th-century commercial documentation into the realm of art. This legacy, posthumously heralded as paralleling the rejection by ‘art’ photographers of Pictorialism and the return to the straight, unmanipulated approach, passed into the tradition of modern photographic history.\footnote{Maria Morris Hamburg, about the Atget’s collection of the Modern Museum of Art, text taken from the catalog of the 2007 exhibition. (http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=229)}

No critic will disagree on the fact Atget is a precursor of modern photography, or, better phrased, the discrete narrator of photographic modernity. However, it is more delicate to sustain the other widespread idea that very little is known about him –unless this assumption applies to his early life.\footnote{Eugène Atget starts photographing when he is already a middle-aged man in his early forties. Although details are clearly missing regarding his early life, we still know that, born in Libourne in 1857, he is an early orphan raised by his grandparents next to Bordeaux. At the age of 18, it is said that he joins the merchant navy and sails on regular lines towards Africa. He then turns from the sea to the stage and moves to Paris where he takes acting classes at the Conservatoire d’Art dramatique of Paris in the “Chant et déclamation” section. However, his military service obligation prevents him from completing his studies. Nevertheless, he later embarks on an itinerant career as an actor that will prove to be short-lived. While his passion for theater endures (he will lecture about the genre and offer readings at “universités populaires” until 1913), he quits the profession around 1887, tries his hand at painting as he also takes his first photographs (1888) and finally turns to commercial photography. After two years spent in Northern France (Amiens), Atget settles in Paris in 1890 and opens a studio.} Indeed, when it comes to the work for which he is famous, he left behind such a colossal and impressive –if not intimidating for the analyst approaching it– collection of photographs that some parts of him, as a professional photographer, prove to be quite clear, yet still need to be revealed. If the great visual catalogue he compiles in and near Paris during the first quarter of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century has inspired seminal works regarding modern photography (Walker Evans among many others) as well as critical thought (Walter Benjamin), it seems a lot can be told of the man himself and about his working process through a conscientious reading of this vast ensemble. This last remark calls for a particular note: Atget’s body of work surely provides an insight on his particular experience of the surrounding space, but I insist that it does not work the other way around. My intention is by no means to yield, in the style of a Sainte-Beuve, to the temptation of psychological guessing and uncertain
determinations that would miraculously enlighten his photographs. Therefore, I should not be misread when gathering below some vague impressions of the photographer, although they are real evidence, and despite insightful ideas that can still stem from looking at the reflection of Atget’s personality on his photographic production. The images must speak for themselves, providing that one is ready to let them speak for what they are and is able to listen to them. This precaution banishes over-interpretation and warns against relying blindly on contextual and cultural facts. As I will show towards the end of this chapter, these kinds of analysis and rendition often identify with romanticist or surrealist characterization of Atget’s work. On another note, it also matters, in order to eradicate potential misinterpretations, not to reduce the collection to the very widespread circulation of a few iconic photographs, nor to the mere attempt at an exhaustive inventory of Parisian streets, both at the origins of Atget’s fame.

This being said, despite ultimately unsure authorial intentions, and yet without too much anticipation, some pretty certain inferences can be made about Atget’s collection, namely that the photographer was quite “aware of having produced a body of work worth preserving”. In the opposite direction, an abusive interpretation would consist in reducing this vast tapestry of Old Paris to an impetus only driven by a nostalgic pulsion,

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251 Sainte-Beuve is an acclaimed literary critic from the 19th century whose method is based on the central thesis that an art work is first and foremost the reflection of the author’s life and thus should be interpreted through it. Marcel Proust, in an essay titled *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, is the first one to overly contest—and reverse—this arbitrary reading informed with external determinism.

252 Some instances of these kinds of assumptions would foster the reading, in Atget’s photographs, of his discrete and self-effacing character, never looking for praise or success. Similarly, it would apply to them stubborn and withdrawn features, as if they were holding and revealing at once some kind of secret. It could also rely on Mac Orlan’s comment that this “one-time man of the theater was impenetrable.” *Atget. Photographe de Paris*, 1930, preface.

253 It is a great thing that Atget could be acknowledged and celebrated for his work throughout the 20th century and even recently (the MoMA exhibition of 2007, for instance). It is not so great that one can only think of Atget as the photographer of emptied Parisian streets, since he did actually compile quite a diversified inventory (see the collection’s description in the second section).

in tune with the preservationist milieu. Furthermore, the fact that Atget seems very conscious of his achievement—as suggested in this reported quote of his: “I have done little justice to the Great City of Paris”—does not imply that he envisions himself as an artist, although he has been an actor for about a decade, and has tried his hand at painting prior to becoming a professional photographer around 1890. It is more likely he pictures himself as a commercial photographer who provides “documents pour artistes”, as stated by the sign hung on his Parisian building. Shortly after settling down in the neighborhood of Montparnasse, rue Campagne-Première, Atget dedicates himself to a systematic and methodical documentation of a multifaceted Old Paris. He becomes an urban explorer animated by a consistent and relentlessness routine as implied by the several thousands prints his collection comprises.255

**Contradictory Features**

As they work in the same street where Atget lives, Man Ray and his young assistant, Berenice Abbott, visit him a few times around the mid-1920s, towards the end of his life. Aside from speculations made after the broad photographic compilation, an idea of the man’s temperament and intentions can be deduced from their recounted anecdotes. Man Ray buys from him fifty images, out of which four are published in the seventh edition of *La Révolution Surréaliste* (June, 15 1926).256 In an interview from 1975, the experimental photographer recalls “a very simple man” letting him know about his refusal to getting

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255 These thousands of images are roughly split in two, between the collection the MoMA purchased from Berenice Abbott in 1968 (numbers vary from a source to another, but it approximately regroups about 1400 plates, 7000 prints—corresponding to about 5000 negatives—, 100 albums) and the various French institutions who bought Atget’s images during and shortly after his life (mainly the Musée Carnavalet and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France holding about 4600 plates).

256 One of these photographs, “L’Eclipse”, shot in 1912, was used as the cover feature. It is displayed though with a purposely distorted titled, “Les Dernières Conversions”, that regards the return of clericalism.
credit for these publications: “Don’t put my name on it (...) these are simple documents I make”.\textsuperscript{257} Contrasted with Man Ray’s sense of himself as an artist, and contrasted with the Surrealists’ praise of Atget as a precursor of their revolutionary stance (as was Lautréamont on the literary side), the photographer is often depicted as a modest and humble man, a craftsman unwilling to be considered as an artist, moreover naïve and possibly suggestible. These attributes do not quite correspond to the character however. On the one hand, Atget was not that humble as the self-valorization of his work shows – actually, it is a possibility he did not take credit for the published pictures precisely to avoid being associated with the surrealist group, thus asserting his independence--; on the other hand, the “naïve” adjective –probably inherited from a filiation first made by Robert Desnos, then phrased by Waldemar George calling Atget “le Rousseau de la photographie”--\textsuperscript{258}, wrongly suggests some kind of “unintentional genius” in contrast with Atget’s perfect command of his tool. Of course, he does not experiment much and he theorizes even less about photography, but again, he is very aware of the value of his work, even though he could never have imagined such a legacy.\textsuperscript{259} As for the suggestibility, for instance, it is true the vitrine series made on les grands boulevards in 1925-1926, which bears a highly surrealist quality, could have been done following a conversation Atget had with Man Ray; on the opposite side, however, Abbott portrays the


\textsuperscript{258} To clear out any potential confusion, I must specify the expression does not refer to the French writer but to the painter “Le Douanier Rousseau”. He is an important figure of primitivism or “art naïf”, first celebrated by Apollinaire.

\textsuperscript{259} One might wonders if this valorization only rises from a historical perspective. This chapter, especially the last section, will provide the reader with some clues.
photographer as an unself-conscious professional, “a man of violent temper and of absolute ideas.”

Curiously, these antagonistic views on Atget, contrasting uncertainty with self-confidence, also stand out from the portraits Abbott takes of him not long before he dies. These rare photographs of the man (there is only one more picture existing of Atget, as he must have been in his forties) leave the viewer with two opposite impressions: whereas the side profile picture shows an old stooped man seemingly tired and fragile, the facing view, through its strong, astute and bright gaze, evokes on the contrary a willful person. Finally, if Man Ray introduces Atget’s work to other artists (as De Chirico for instance, another neighbor from rue Campagne-Première), Berenice Abbott is the one who contributes the most to his international and unanimous recognition. About a year after his death at the age of seventy (August 1927), she buys a good deal of Atget’s production with the support of Julien Lévy. A couple years later, in 1930, she contributes to the edition of the first monograph on the photographer’s work, printing the hundred images it features herself.

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260 To be precise and balance the assertion, the quote goes on as follows: “…who had all the patience of a saint with his photographing”, Berenice Abbot, “Eugène Atget”, in *Creative Art Magazine*, September 1929, p.652.

261 *Atget. Photographe de Paris*, New York: Weyhe publisher, 1930. 3000 copies of this first monograph were published in New York, Paris (both with Mac Orlan’s preface), and Leibniz (with a preface by Camille Recht). In regards to this very first book of Atget’s photographs, “It has been said that the editing and sequencing of the book contributed to a narrowly modern artistic reading of his work…” This reading was also fostered by the withdrawal of captions (only listed at the end of the book) and the absence of dates, freeing the photographs in a sense, and making them much more open. Besides, the 96 images, representing a little more than 1% of Atget’s production, are not quite representative, as the book shows “fewer straight architectural details, fewer of the uncompromisingly utilitarian record images, more urban views, more of the evocative and atmospheric shots, in general more documents that could be read more openly and more easily in the relation to the art of the time.” David Campany then suggests: “Perhaps any book of Atget’s work would be a transformation of it.” in *Atget. Photographe de Paris*, “Books on books”, postface, not paginated.
Photographic Process

Atget’s turn to photography corresponds with a general move, taking place at the turn of the 1890s. Around that time, following the popular reception of Disderi’s photo-cards, and while the first illustrated postcards are being printed, the medium has less and less to do with a mere consuming habit. Because they are quite acquainted already with the process, people have no problem adopting photography, except that, from now on, they do so as means to produce their own images. Hence, in appropriating photography, they take a step further toward a form of disalienation: “the true method of making things present is to represent them in our space (not to represent ourselves in their space) (...)” Thus represented, the thing allows no mediating construction from out of “large contexts” (...) We don’t displace our being into theirs; they step into our life.”

A photograph is not just something to look at anymore, but also a document almost anyone can produce. Shifting from social fact to social practice (as standardization of formats and the ease of techniques prove it), the photographic move enters a new phase that makes it more and more accessible. As a result, Atget starts working as a professional and documentary photographer while amateur practice develops. In an increasingly competitive market, he manages to distinguish himself through relentless work.

On a technical level, one must keep in mind that throughout his entire career, and from the time he starts photographing, Atget operates with what is already an obsolete technique. Overall, glass-plates are used until the end of the 19th century, but Atget goes on working with these negatives for over two more decades. Although he works with dry

plates (that have taken over the constraining collodion process during the 1880s), in 1888, when he takes his first photograph in Northern France, the Eastman Kodak n°1 makes its appearance. This is a light and manageable device loaded with a celluloid film but no matter what, even declining Man Ray’s offer to use a Rolleiflex he would lend him, Atget goes on shooting with his bulky bellow-camera until his death. “At a time when small hand-held cameras were beginning to replace bulky large-format plate cameras, Atget preferred the descriptive quality of the 18x24 cm format”.263 Despite a cumbersome, heavy and fragile material, demanding relatively long exposures and delicate manipulation, the detailed quality and the finish of the proofs are obvious advantages for using an optical chamber. Atget is perfectly informed of these benefits, therefore, he goes on using it. Once his daily harvest of exterior images is done, he goes back to his studio with the exposed plates and, with the help of his wife, Valentine Compagnon, they make contact-prints through sunlight exposition on ordinary albumen-silver paper. Photographs are often marked with darkened curves at their upper edges. This recurrent effect, called vignetting, is produced when raising the camera front panel in order to reduce immediate foreground. The standard wooden box camera, mounted on a folding tripod, is equipped with a rapid rectilinear lens. According to Berenice Abbot, Atget has a “trousse-objectif” that offers him the option to choose between normal or wide angle, depending on the subject photographed or the way he wants to frame it. She adds that “Atget made a practice of closing down to a very small aperture, he told me, and giving long exposure”, hence the smooth texture, overall sharpness, and depth of field being characteristic features of Atget’s photographs.264

To photograph with a large-format-view camera on a tripod in Paris was not only a physically arduous activity, but a slow and exacting process, one in which each view had to be carefully selected and considered, and each exposure methodically made. As a descriptive and interpretative process, it required an intimate understanding of how a particular format of camera and lens would render the overall space and articulate the relationship within it. Practical decisions on where to stand, how to frame, when to make the exposure were influenced as much by the specific architecture/subject and lighting conditions, as by Atget’s awareness of the distinctive needs of the various markets he served, and by his cumulative experience and vision as a photographer accrued over many years of professional practice.265

Abbott is also impressed how well, when entering a scene, the photographer knows exactly where to set up his equipment. Not only that, he also has the ability to estimate, without any device, the necessary time of exposure according to the lighting conditions and to the light reflected by the objects. In short, Atget literally incorporated the photographic practice, virtually making the camera a natural extension of his body. Looking at self-portraits, the following section offers further insight into the camera-man.

1.2 Atget by Atget: Three Self-Portraits

Facing Atget’s almost absolute muteness about his work, knowledge arises entirely from the analysis and interpretation of his photographs. For that reason, what has just been stated regarding his practice –and what I will have the opportunity to specify occasionally throughout the rest of this chapter– is of utmost importance. I now offer a closer look at the way Atget represents himself in three of his own photographs, either through a metonymic presence via his camera or a full exposure of himself.

As an “objective photographer” doing nothing more than documentation, Atget constantly takes care to exclude his own reflection from the images he composes. This situation appears occasionally unavoidable, unless he willingly exposes himself, or just his recording device, as in this photograph of the Hôtel Matignon that displays the camera in the midst of an opulently decorated salon.\footnote{57 rue de Varenne, (ancienne) Ambassade d’Autriche, Hôtel Matignon, 1905. Image studied on the website of the Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art (INHA).}

This interesting “portrait” of an absent operator triggers an interesting allegory on photography. At first sight, one sees a sumptuous salon. Wall panels are richly ornamented with gilded woodwork. Two armchairs flank the precious marble of the mantelpiece, topped off with a massive bronze clock and two not less imposing candelabra. The mirror set above it redoubles the luxury, reflecting a chandelier and the back wall covered with the same ornamental motifs. Lightness however comes from the other mirror, set below into the fireplace. It reflects the extent of the room and a welcoming circular couch on a thick carpet. The slight angle of the shot and the horizontal composition guides the gaze from left to right, but also towards the center of the salon, as it bounces upon the lower mirror and delves into the soft and homogeneous light that comes from the right side. As a result, this mirror that obviously sets a frame within the frame, renders some depth to photographic flatness. The perspective it offers provides a background to what would have been otherwise a trivial image of a richly decorated wall. This background is literally in the back of the operator (back angle) who is curiously absent. A visual metonymy at least suggests his invisible presence through
the viewing of his devices: a coat lying on the couch and a camera shrouded by its dark cloth. This one looks like a curious three-legged creature, a Cyclops probably as its only eye fixes us.

The interpretation of this photograph is twofold. First, there is a clear confusion here between the subject and the object of the photograph. What does the photographer intend to show (subject) and through what concrete elements (object): is the salon of the Austrian embassy the object of the image, or is it the camera, the photographic process, and by extension the operator? To provide an answer, one needs to consider a preliminary question: could the author have recorded this shot without tracking his presence? Probably, but this would have given a different result and Atget being quite well informed of his doings, there are good chances the photograph was intentionally framed this way to incorporate the camera. Consequently, he finally stages the impossibility he faces of escaping his image, but he also pictures a desire for self-effacement. On the one side, he does not personally appear in the frame; on the other, the mirror and the path of the light offer a way out and do not force a direct look at the self. Be that as it may, this self is still captured by the photograph and remains as a preserved presence, ultimately contained within the language that it produces and that produces it (echoing the subject-object confusion).

Le langage est en nous et nous sommes dans le langage. Nous faisons le langage qui nous fait. Nous sommes, dans et par le langage, ouverts par les mots, enfermés dans les mots, ouverts sur autrui (communication).

267 The terms subject and object are problematic when it comes to my photographic descriptions. Although they could basically signify the photographer and his device—and indeed, there is a confusion of both in this photograph—most commonly, “subject” refers to the topic that is represented by the photograph. But what about the “object” then? And what if the “subject” is in fact an individual? In the following analyses, “subject” will designate external reality or abstractions, as the photographer for instance, or the category of things represented, and “object” will designate the iconic elements visible in the picture, as the camera on its tripod in this case, or the salon.
In short, the photographer always belongs to the photographic image. Although trying, he cannot escape it. The second interpretation fostered by this self-portrait regards the camera: it appears as a tool that is able to unravel mystery, thanks to the thinness of the grain and despite the muddle of decorative details in the upper mirror. Or rather, these details have to be disentangled. In revealing all of them, even minimal ones such as the time it is or the electric cables of each candelabrum, the allegory could finally go like this: technology can freeze time in order to investigate the mind and to paradoxically extract oneself from the constant flow of modernity. Delving into the richness of the room is like entering the immense space of the imagination, thanks to an eye (the literal lens) that at once encloses and reveals the mysteries of consciousness. It is 2:45 pm, the lavish room is steeped in an atmosphere of tranquility, and the photograph can only remind us of famous verses from Baudelaire: “Là, tout n’est qu’ordre et beauté / Luxe, calme et volupté”. Although localizable (the Netherlands in the poem, Austria in the photograph), we remain uncertain about the place designated by the metaphoric “là” and this evocative salon.

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“Au Tambour” (1908)

Sometimes the photographer appears next to his equipment, dimly captured along with identifiable figures in the shimmering glass of a bistro, as in this picture, “Au Tambour”, shot in 1908. The light comes from behind, slightly on the left, accompanying the viewer towards this recessed entrance of the restaurant. Actually, it seems there is no choice but to go there as the over-exposed slate, hung from the bars on the left and on which the menu is written, constitutes a visual obstacle. A few other elements sustain this idea: focus is made at the level of the door handle which seems even closer and thus reachable; the frontal view and perfectly centered and steady framing suggest not only a will to go in, but the sense that the person is already engaged in this move; the short perspective and limited depth of field finally provide no other place to go to but the threshold of this bistro. After all, the place looks welcoming to a certain extent. Behind the glass door, there is life, two plants on the left side, a couple bottles on the right, in front of a percolator, and two faces in the center. They look familiar, like father and son, with serene expressions. The gaze even rises up above them and reads on the sign “H. Cousin”. Even better, this is a reassuring name that confirms they are relatives; these men are of my own kind.

But then, in this ascending move of the gaze, the viewer is confronted with the rise of the metal bars, framed between two horizontal strips, the lower one and its recess where the imagination stands now, and the upper one where the iconic sign that gives its name to the place: a “tambour” is fixed. This drum is made of a half trunk covered with ironwork. Finally here comes the inversion of feelings: the military instrument evokes war, brutality, confrontation. And the camera responds to it, as another kind of military device,

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aiming like a canon at this liminal space, about one meter deep, in which the utopic viewer finally gets caught, right between the photographer and the two spectral faces. As a result, the image oscillates between hospitality and unreachability, as expressed by its smooth surface and the thinness of the grain: both encapsulate the very nature of photography, rendering distant elements palpable (wood, metal, marble, handle) and reinforcing the tactile feeling of their presence. Is this photograph an invitation to come in or a trap suppressing any mobility? As the gaze bounces back upon the surface of the world embodied by a French door, it encounters the reverse angle that should normally offer a way out, but which is in fact obstructed by the photographer and his bulky camera. Here either there is no space to go, only the black surface of the operator’s coat, intertwined with that of his camera.

As a result, the viewer remains stuck in a liminal and oppressive universe, a space circumscribed by two frontiers (the glass-window and the metal bars), in-between, neither inside nor outside, somewhere between the front and the back. And, those who stand there, the photographer behind and the restaurateur in front, are from the same side. Although facing them, the former appears on the same surface as the latter. After all, the reverse angle is a trompe-l’œil, literally confounding Atget with the older man. Therefore the perspective is undermined, and Atget appears as nothing else but a beheaded body with an anonymous face. Beyond the perspectival imperfection from another world (incongruity of the face-body dimensions), one can imagine the author is claiming impersonality, self-effacing himself in front of just as anonymous individuals. Not only Atget literally illustrates Rimbaud’s “Je est un autre” with this self-portrait, but a unified and hybrid voice also rises to tell the viewer: “I am the one who contemplates
you, now, from this outer-world beyond the grave, the unknown space that scares you so much.” One can now sense the metaphysical anxiety the photograph produces: an existential trap and a profound doubt as to get away from it, because of what such an escape would imply. The trap is figurred by the photograph, yet it does not refer to a spatial dimension in the end (as the two angles are finally superposed) but rather to temporality (the very specificity of the medium is to join and oppose at once past and present times). The doubt regarding the escape is also expressed in the photograph (for instance, is the viewer moving towards, or on the contrary leaving the only reassuring element of the image that are the branches reflected in the glass?), but it actually regards the containment of the self as an on-going “now”, which equals death the moment it ends.

“Antiquités” (1902)

In the third self-portrait I selected, Atget finally uncovers himself, instead of hiding behind his device or behind others. This photograph where Atget is revealed is that of an antiquarian boutique in the 8th arrondissement.²⁷¹

Atget is clearly visible, reflected in the central vertical glass pane. Neatly dressed in a jacket and tie, with a hat to shade his eyes from fierce midday sun, and with his bag of photographic materials at his feet, he stands patiently in profile with his camera on its tripod at the edge of the sidewalk; his left hand rests on the back of the camera, perhaps to steady it, while he holds the lens cover with.

More than any other single photograph, this image epitomizes the photographic process, catching the photographer in the midst of his daily work as the exposure is being made.²⁷²

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²⁷¹ *Magasin d’antiquités, 21 rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré, 8th*, 1902.
²⁷² David Harris, *Unknown Paris, op.cit.*, p.3-4.
The description concentrates on the photographer, which is my goal too; however the analysis calls for additional remarks to really grasp what is at stake in this photograph. The image simultaneously permits us to observe Atget’s reflection (to which I will return) and the early 19th shop window, typical of the Empire style. Since the foreground is quite empty with no details at all, the eyes are primarily captured by the vitrine and more specifically by its upper ornament. The window as a whole is similar to a Romanesque arch. The very structure of the image conveys this idea: a set of vertical strips, approximately occupying the middle third of the photograph’s height, is bridged over by three concentric and regular curves. The verticals figure four wooden columns with chiseled capitals, two large ones on the sides and two thin ones in the middle; they support two semi-circles discretely carved with motifs as well. The first semi-circle is mounted with a spiked and radiant crown, whose beams consist in a set of multidirectional arrows pointing at the second semi-circle. This representation over the glass is made of iron, hence suggesting an alliance of fragility with sturdiness. Additionally, above the two larger columns on each side, hovers a couple of bas-reliefs figuring winged nymphs. They are holding out branches towards the written sign, “Antiquités”, whose font solely suffices to arouse some historic and artistic interest. Overall, there is a sense of unity and harmony in this image. Despite the bright light falling onto the ground, soft texture lightens values and smooths out every single element of the front window, now seeming in perfect adequacy with one another: the inscriptions with the sculptures, the delicate vitrine with the carved details, the external surface with the perceptible collectibles inside the shop. Likewise, although a gradually stronger
contrast invades the image from up to down, a feeling of osmosis still encompasses the whole, bringing together the opposites.

The cast shadows indicate a zenithal daylight. This one deeply illuminates the sidewalk in the foreground, against which it bounces before softly caressing the vitrine. This vertical orientation has rich signifying effects: not only does it suggest the indirect effect of the artificial sun described earlier, but it also stresses the photographer’s presence and godly gesture. First, this subject (the photographer) is both, literally and symbolically, reflected by its object (the photograph). Second, he seems to be the one directing the (spot)-light towards the vitrine, the holder of light in some way, when actually it is rather the other way around. Furthermore, the imagined rebound in the light’s trajectory is reinforced with three converging plastic effects: that of a slightly low-angle shot enhancing the vitrine; that of the subtle decentering of the composition towards the upper right (which results from the angle); and that of the framing, cutting the awning peak and including three dark edges. All together, these effects contribute to the dynamics of the image and produce the impression of a vitrine popping out towards the photographer. There he comes finally, the man described earlier. Is that an intentional appearance? Given the directional lighting, could he have properly shot the shop window while avoiding himself? Perhaps, but clearly the store was not the only thing he was aiming to show.

After all, why operate a choice between the self and the vitrine when both the subject and the object can harmoniously melt together without impairing the document? On the

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273 This recalls of Lucifer, the light-bringer, or Prometheus, who provided humans with fire. When talking about the photographer, one cannot really sustain the comparison –unless considering the photographer points at and reveals certain things– because his witchcraft, no matter how powerful, does not make him a master of light but a humble servant. The outer photographer does not really control light but rather receives it.

274 “That Atget has so prominently positioned himself, when he could have partially or entirely hidden his presence behind one of the window mullions, further supports the interpretation that this was conceived in part as a self-portrait” D. Harris, Unknown Paris, op. cit., p.191.
contrary, it does supplement it with some aesthetic and meaningful value. Besides, as the allegory seen in the first self-portrait stated it, ultimately, the operator is always trapped in his own language. The image always shows its operator, if not explicitly, at least by metonymy, since it corresponds to the content of his eyes.²⁷⁵

Contrary to the upper part of the vitrine, made of some sort of ground glass blurring the reflection, the lower part presents a superior quality, a dual one that combines translucent and reflective effects. Taking the photographer’s position in the street as the point of reference, one first sees an overexposed sidewalk with almost absolutely no details (except an otherworldly and improbable mouth). This foreground confers an ambivalent stability to the image on which everything is built, yet so fragile, so immaterial, so empty. Focusing then on the lower part of the window, two projected spaces are harmoniously superposed. The first one compensates for the vacuum just stressed. It figures the back angle and a busier sidewalk continuing the empty one (one sees a lamppost, a façade with an echoing arch, a flap and a small cart below – would that be something Atget uses to carry his photographic material?). The second space, thanks to detailed shadows and depth of field, allows the gaze to cross physical limits and see inside the store.²⁷⁶ Behind the vitrine are displayed some collectibles (clocks, fans, vases, sculpture, textiles, and bigger furniture), hence producing two sorts of mises en abyme: a spatial one that consists of the frame within the frame, and a temporal one inscribing antiques within

²⁷⁵ Many quotes by several writers (Flaubert, Mallarmé, Zola) draw on the metaphor and ideal objective of rendering the world just as one sees it. Some even push on the comparison with the photographic process, talking about imprints on the retina.
²⁷⁶ There are details in the shadows which qualifies a little the strong contrast. And when regarding closer at the depth, it seems the focus is not quite made on the door but rather on the interior lights, just above the operator when fusing spaces, hence a second metaphoric light source.
Paralleling the previous iconic association of fragility and solidity observed in the upper window, this second mise en abyme matches transientness (of the photographic instant, but also because of humans’ use of objects surviving them) with durability. Finally, this arrangement of the three spaces triggers a revised version of Plato’s allegory of the cave, as photography appears to be a subtle means to see behind/across things. The photographer’s voice, symbolically reflected in the strange mouth noticed earlier, tells the viewer the need to reach not only behind the too bright and blinding surface of things (foreground), but also literally behind the glass (background) and behind himself as an operator (reverse angle). Metaphorically, looking across the window could be the task the photographer assigns to himself; looking at what stands behind him, his surroundings and his operating process, is that of the interpreter.

277 These mise en abymes work from both the photographer’s and the interpreter’s perspectives. While there is no doubt about the spatial one, as the operator’s choice is an obvious one, the second, temporal, mise en abyme, can also be conceived by the photographer as well, provided that he takes into account the particular relationship photography has with temporality, and, for multiple reasons, Atget certainly does.

278 Plato’s allegory figures his dualist understanding of a world divided between the realm of the senses and the intelligible realm. This view could also suggest language binary structure made of a signifier and a signified. Based on my final interpretation of the photograph just studied, I propose revisiting Plato’s allegory. It is made of four steps that go as follows: 1- Where light stands strong is blindness (reminding us of this chapter’s epigraph), implying a need to look beyond, at what (photographic) representation can figure. Since nothing in the foreground is identifiable, one should search for details in the shadows to grasp real contours of objects. 2- Beyond saturated light objects becomes perceptible, but they consist of flattened projections and thus remain inconsistent and distrustable. This is where photography –like any other signifying system– actually stands, as a third degree imitation in Plato’s theory. At this stage, I literally do see things that are not true objects, hence the need to reach over appearances. 3- Logically, this move is only made possible by turning towards the source of the projected objects: the photographer. After all, it is indirectly his thoughts that are projected under the appearance of materiality. Yet, this does not mean the immediate environment of the photographer is more real; at this intermediary level that has us switch from text to context, the material world has gained consistency but remains illusory and deceptive. 4- Leaving second-degree imitation and moving one step upstream again, the aim is to reach the source of the source. The photographer is not a prisoner, neither is he the philosopher, but simply one of these men in the cave carrying the material objects in front of the fire pit that allows their projection. The photographer might not the philosopher, yet he knows, for he is aware of the sunlight. The ultimate source is there, behind, in front, around, above the photographer… and just down at his feet: the bright, inscrutable, illuminating, ultimately external light, that is beyond language’s ability to represent, and that is just too obvious to be considered. Thus the circle is complete. In short, the chain goes from the light as an ontological condition of photography, to the operator who confers it its essence (photography is not an unmediated recording), then to the final representation.
In conclusion, this elaborate portrait of a performing self has important meanings: starting first with the duality constantly conveyed by the medium, clearly stated in this image, that displays the photographic act as both an external recording and an inclusion of the self; moving then to the notion of transparency and the related power of photography as a magic tool and yet, an imperfect medium. On the one hand, the camera provides the photographer with the ability to cross physical limits (both spatial and temporal). On the other, the photographic image is still the result of a human mind and a physical process (as symbolically signified by the inspiring muses showing two profiles, and the visible hands operating the camera). Moving now from the single and isolated portrait to the vast architecture of Atget’s production, it seems these intentional and operating aspects are also reflected in the series he elaborates.

2. The Collector

2.1 A Lifetime Production

Major Series

As stated earlier, Atget’s work should not be reduced to old facades and their ornamental close-ups, nor to unpeopled street views, as it also includes hawkers, small trades, barrows, passages, fortifications, Parisian outskirts and their rag-pickers (“la Cité Doré” photographed in 1913), Parisian interiors, both elegant and from the middle class, parks
and gardens, villages around Paris and urban wastelands. This variety is coherently organized, presenting a thematic, chronologic and professional logic as I detail below.

Atget settles as a commercial photographer in the early 1890s. One can presume this decade is a time of apprenticeship and training for him, although he already supplies artists with documents.\(^{279}\) He starts then with floral and landscape studies (trees, flowers, ponds, gardens and parks) and decorative motifs as well, often passed unnoticed (wood carvings, door knobs, staircases ironworks and mascarons), thus producing a photographic equivalent of 17\(^{\text{th}}\) century etchings that have become quite expensive (those of Jean Bérain, Jean Lepautre and Sébastien Leclerc, for instance). As a result, the photographic documents Atget sells are classic materials directly conceived to serve painters, cartoonists, sculptors, illustrators, designers; all artistic trades to whom Atget markets at first. In a commercial from 1892 he publishes in the *Revue des Beaux-Arts*, he advertises his work as follows: “*Paysages, animaux, fleurs, monuments, documents, premiers plans pour artistes, reproduction de tableaux, déplacements. Collection n’étant pas dans le commerce.*” Obviously, this precise task and straightforward recording keep Atget aside from the prevailing taste for soft-focus and painterly photography. As a matter of fact, he is an objective photographer, although facing the impossibility of escaping his own subjectivity (as stressed in the previous analyses).

Barbara Michaels, in an article titled “Introduction to dating and organization of Atget’s photographs”, shows how methodical and coherent Atget is when it comes to numbering his photographs. She underlines the logical and continuing plan he follows, that is perceptible through his division of images into major series. Atget begins two series in

1898. Most likely, this organizing process is due to the fact that he had been photographing for about eight years, and consequently, he must have compiled an already important sum of images, which obliges him to classify them. He concurrently conducts two series: the first one he calls *Botanique* is numbered from 1 to 1290 and regroups trees, plants, flowers, parks, natural landscapes mentioned earlier, from Paris, its environs and north and south of France as well; the second series is titled *Le Vieux Paris* and is numbered from the 3000s to 6731. Even though it is not reflected in the numbering, this major series is actually divided into two main topics. There are the artistic subjects on the one hand; they consist of noticeable architecture (but no monuments with the exception of churches), ironwork structures, door carvings and their knockers, as well as other discrete decorative elements, all being pre-revolutionary and thus implicitly linking artistic value to historic feature. The picturesque views, on the other hand, comprise quaint scenes, urban landscapes, popular amusements and other ephemeral subjects opposing an enduring art. Among the stalls, fairs, and picturesque areas of Old Paris, figures the noteworthy series of *les cris de Paris*, a classic and long-lasting category of illustrations. Beyond their folkloric appearances, one might assume these photographs of Parisian street-hawkers, famous for their particular call, could be sold to couturiers or costume designers, and as post-cards too.

When starting in 1901 a third series that concerns the Parisian suburbs, *Environs*, Atget makes another jump of 3000 in his numbering system (negatives are numbered from 6000 to 7157), but then, in 1906, initiating the *Topographie du Vieux Paris* series, he returns to low numbers (approximately from the 10s to 1700). Although Atget had already started producing photographs for the new Commission municipale du Vieux
Paris recently created in 1898, the *Topographie* series clearly indicates his work is also intended towards official institutions and their curators, historians and town-planners. “As a fiercely independent small-businessman working mostly on speculation”, Atget does not cater directly for the *Commission*. It is friend and playwright Victorien Sardou, who, as a prominent member of this society, provides him with information about vulnerable and threatened buildings. The *Topographie* series on the contrary, originates from one of the very rare commissions Atget takes on, that of Marcel Poëte, chief librarian of the Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris. In diversifying his clientele, Atget also enriches his collection, adding to frontal views of lavish town houses (hôtels particuliers) and close-ups of their decorations, a more suggestive exploration of Paris as I detail further in this chapter. Indeed, when shooting sequences of urban fragments, Atget is not influenced by preexisting categories anymore, unlike his artistic clientele of private clients. Instead of shooting classic topographical views, systematically trying to embrace the stage from a high-angle perspective, he pictures the city at man’s height.

With the exception of this last series he achieves in 1915, Atget continues supplying the three others until his death. However, one must also notice that these series are not hermetic to one another (for instance, transfers and duplicates of hundreds of pictures are visible from *Environs* or *Topographie* to the larger series of *Le Vieux Paris*). Furthermore, these series are subdivided in smaller sets, as suggested by the descriptions of Old Paris series. Out of these specific sections, Atget personally composes seven albums between 1909 and 1915, which have been extensively studied by Molly Nesbit.\(^{280}\)

These albums introduce us in some Parisian interiors for instance (“*Intérieurs parisiens*”, 1910, closely examined below), depict the horse-powered vehicles (“*La voiture à Paris*”,

1910), document numerous stalls blurring the limits between shop interiors and public space ("Métiers, boutiques et étalages de Paris", 1912), or inquire about rag-pickers and their dwellings in the outskirts of Paris ("Zoniens", 1913). Interestingly enough, they portray Atget not only as photographer anymore, but also as an author-editor.

**Post-War Period**

The First World War constitutes an important break in Atget’s production. He hardly photographs between 1913 and 1915 and spends the three next years (1916-1918) without taking any pictures at all. Assumptions are that he works on the organization of his production during these years (possibly making paperbound reference albums for each of his subseries to ease the clients’ overview at the collection). In 1920, Atget approaches Paul Léon who is responsible for the art collection of the national Commission des monuments historiques. Sensing a lessened interest in Old Paris views and thus their related diminishing commercial value, he sends him three letters to negotiate the selling of about a third of his negatives. These letters are significant as they are the clearest and the most substantial statements from Atget himself. In one of them, he describes his comprehensive work as follows:

For more than twenty years by my own work and personal initiative, I have gathered from all the old streets of Vieux Paris photographic plate, 18 x 24 format, artistic documents of the beautiful civil architecture of the 16th to the 19th century: the old hôtels, historic or curious houses, beautiful facades, beautiful doors, beautiful woodwork, door knockers, old fountains, stairways de style (wood and wrought iron); the interiors of all the churches of Paris (comprehensive views and artistic details: Notre-Dame, Saint-Gervais-et-Protay, Saint-Séverin, Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre,
Saint-Etienne-du-Mont, Saint-Roch, Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, etc. etc.). This vast artistic and documentary collection is today complete. I could say that I possess all of *Vieux Paris*.²⁸¹

This quote deserves further comments. On a commercial level, it confirms Atget is an independent photographer working on his own “initiative”, detached from any liability, and yet, having to look for financial self-sufficiency. Regarding this matter, it seems the final transaction of a little more of 2,600 plates for a total of 10,000 francs will comfort him.²⁸² (One must also realize Atget is in his early sixties when approaching Léon, he needs to provide for some sort of retirement plan). On a professional level, Atget explicitly qualifies his work as “artistic and documentary”. However, one should not be mistaken here: the use of the “artistic” adjective in Atget’s phrasing most definitively refers to works of arts he has documented with his camera, not to his own images. Atget certainly values a craft he mindfully conducts, but as a documentary photographer, he probably confers more interest to the subjects he aims at in the natural world than to their photographic representation. He photographs such and such subject because of the artistic, picturesque or historic worth he grants it. On a personal level, the quote denotes a rather proud and confident person. The descriptive gradation he builds up ends on this climactic formulation, “I possess all of *Vieux Paris*”. The comprehensive work figured by the extensive list, draws the comparison with the *Comédie humaine*, as Abbot reminds us when calling Atget the “*Balzac de la photographie*”.²⁸³ One could even expand the

²⁸¹ Excerpt from a letter addressed to Paul Léon, November 12, 1920 (translation by David Harris), quoted in *Unknown Paris*, p.13-14.
²⁸² Considering the rate of the 1920 Francs, this transaction would equal today to a price of about 3.8 dollars per plate.
²⁸³ Abbot is not only a preserver and one of the best editors of Atget’s collection, she is also a helpful commentator, as this interesting quote shows: “The final total is similar to the vast range of Balzac’s human comedy, where hundreds of characters move in and out of complicated relations and the specific action or event described is richer because the reader remembers actions and events in which these men and women
metaphor: Atget is not just the author of this immense photographic saga, he is also one of his own characters. In fact, he could be seen as a bicephalous hero reuniting Goriot and Rastignac: Goriot for the frugality and obstinacy of the old man; Rastignac for his ambitious determination. After all, how could one not see in this “I possess all of Vieux Paris”, a final victory and a response that resonates with Rastignac’s initial challenge thrown at the city of light: “A nous deux, Paris!” Atget walking across the town, carrying his bulky and obsolete camera, dressing poorly for convenience and by conviction, becomes himself a Parisian character, as his lifelong friend, André Calmettes, remembers: “Paris will no longer see that strange silhouette, the face with its expression of energy, this Balzacian personage, always enveloped in the immense worn overcoat, an old round hat on his head, hands eaten by the acids necessary to his profession”.284

Finally, despite the past tense used in the quote that denotes a feeling of achievement, Atget goes on shooting in the 1920s. However, he does not work the exact same way. Leaving the serviceable documents he had produced until then, he provides images whose “usefulness” is questionable (including this interior nudes and the prostitutes series ordered by the painter André Dignimont). His photographs are now suffused with melancholy, as if he has different intentions and is more in tune with the post-war atmosphere. Perhaps only his gaze changed since he continues with similar subjects and concerns it seems, as these parks to which he returns regularly (Versailles, Saint-Cloud, Sceaux). In conclusion, this photographic biography portrays Atget as a commercial

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284 Taken from a brief memoir André Calmettes wrote about his friend, shortly after his death, when asked by Berenice Abbott. Quoted by David Harris in Unknown Paris, p.8.
photographer, a collector of documentary views and an album-editor. But an authorial ambiguity finally arises, which retrospectively casts important doubts on what is labeled as straightforward images. In looking at a staged album, the following section deepens the photographer’s complexity a little more.

2.2 A Serial Shooter

Smaller Series

Although Atget’s numbering system does not reflect his itineraries exactly (in fact, as we have seen, he was conducting various series concurrently), according to Barbara Michaels, it is still possible to retrace a path thanks to the chronological order of some groups of pictures. Closely looking at the *Environs* collection, that concerns the neighboring villages around Paris, she writes:

Noticing few obvious number changes in the group, and assuming Atget numbered the photographs more or less in the order he made them, I hoped the numerical list would provide a logical itinerary of Atget’s trips outside Paris, showing that his procedure was not random. So it does: the resulted list provides workable routes, indicating that Atget explored the area in a methodical fashion, first south of Paris, then north. His first series of *Environs* photographs was made in 1901, of places in close proximity to Paris (…). In later years, Atget traveled to more and more distant towns…

The collection from the Bibliothèque National de France provides similar information about the *Topographie* collection, yet still vague and loose. According to the institution, Atget’s exploration of Paris (from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> arrondissements) starts with the area of

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Palais-Royal, then he crosses over the Seine to document rue Mouffetard, place Maubert, and Jardin des Plantes, as well as la Montagne Sainte-Geneviève. Later on, from 1910 to 1912 he photographs the Faubourg Saint-Germain, Saint-Sulpice area, place de l’Odéon, the Marais, and Saint-André-des-Arts. More particularly, he continuously illustrates the demolition and renovation of the surroundings of the Eglise Saint-Séverin, and also extends his field of investigation towards the near east of the Quartier latin (entrepôts de Bercy, 1913) and the near west (Couvent des Carmes, 1914).

These two overviews on different collections, as precise as they can be, still show how uncertain and complicated it is to attempt an exact tracking of Atget’s photographic routes across and around Paris. Perhaps is it not quite relevant too. Nevertheless, as the organization of his collection shows it, we must hold in mind that the photographer proceeds by series. When going on a “photographic hunt”, he certainly conceives each one of the images he takes as part of a specific series (architectural detail, picturesque scene, topographic document, etc.). This assumption indicates two things: first, photography is a “cumulative art”, as underlined by Abott, which is a relevant notion carrying additional meaning when reading a specific image; second, there is an underlying logic that informs Atget’s physical and photographic exploration of space (urban, suburban, peri-urban, and parks). Not only does he know where to go since he proceeds by neighborhoods, but he probably also anticipates where the photograph he is taking will fit in his series and subseries. As a result, he certainly photographs with an intention in mind that, in some ways, transcends the photographic composition. The smaller series studied below provide us with a refined sense of Atget’s work as well as his experience of space. It suggests that a photograph may be resituated in its immediate
context (that is the environment in which it is placed and displayed, not the physical space to which it refers) to better assess the photographer’s intentions and the decision he makes, and to complement the particular choices identifiable within a single shot (framing, light, depth, etc., and their related effects). In order to enhance my insight into Atget’s coherent process, I propose to narrow the look to smaller series of images for which I identified three underlying logics: serial, temporal, sequential. While the first one rather concerns the author as an album-editor, out of the explored space, the second and third groups correspond respectively to temporal and spatial photographic enactments (analyzed in the third section of this chapter).

Aside from the pragmatic photo books Atget makes himself for his clientele to get a glance at his production, he also works on more specific albums he sells to institutions. “As methodically composed works, the albums are a conscious yet self-effacing form of authoring, infused with an awareness of the gradual disappearance of many of his subjects”.

This statement needs to be nuanced in two ways. First, I have already insisted on the illusion of self-effacement pertaining to both the viewer and the photographer –the illusion I mean, not the effacement, which only regards the latter and the human subjects he photographs. Since there is no such thing as an absent author, this one might not be present in the picture, but is still always contained within its own language. Therefore, self-effacement is not to be read as an absence; and neither

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286 The intermediary and various levels of signification in relation to the intertext may be approached through mereological considerations.
288 This point, already commented on through Atget’s self-portraits, is precisely the thesis sustained throughout the whole dissertation, which looks at authorial traces within the texts. Regarding Andrea Loselle’s statement on self-effacement, she nuances it further in the article, when acknowledging a “more complex set of thoughts behind [Atget’s] defection from the stage”; this defection referring potentially to
should it be thought of as a transparent objectivity – and this remark works both for the photographing practice and the album composition. Second, to talk about “disappearance” of subjects, whether human beings or urban fragments, demands further precisions as well: on the one hand, one must qualify the nostalgic concerns in Atget’s work; on the other, an important distinction must be made between disappearance and exclusion. The former term can apply to the famous spectral silhouettes of Atget’s urban photographs, while the latter refers to the author’s effort at clearing out the streets from its population in order to produce an adequate document for the archive. This intentional side-lining also concerns the specific series titled “Intérieurs parisiens” analyzed below, because clearly, despite his old camera, Atget could have included in the apartments he pictures their respective dwellers.

“Intérieurs Parisiens” (1910)

Formally speaking, except for a few frontal views that present their own perspectival interest, oblique angles are predominantly used to picture the interiors. “Atget’s photographs also come much closer to the furniture and objects, centering upon them as one would a figure in a portrait”. Katie Hartsough Brion also remarks that this aesthetics renders a “claustrophobic, one might even say imprisoning and oppressive atmosphere”.289 I do not really support this interpretation, since I believe that, on the contrary, such a representation allows the gaze to wander over the numerous details

within the frames (which is precisely the point of her article). However, at the same time, she raises an important observation drawn from Molly Nesbit’s work, namely that these interiors might be conceived as portraits. Indeed, the accumulation of people’s belongings, despite their visual absence, suggests their very presence in those rooms. Books and papers scattered, chair pulled out and drawers ajar, shoes and clothes, bottles and fruits on a table... impregnate the space with a certain vivacity.

The interior is not just the universe of the private individual; it is also his étui, writes Walter Benjamin. Ever since the time of Louis-Philippe, the bourgeoisie has shown a tendency to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city. He tries to do this within the four walls of his apartment (...) In the style characteristic of the Second Empire, the apartment becomes a sort of cockpit. The traces of its inhabitant are molded into the interior.

By imprinting their marks within a private space, residents transform their interiors into malleable receptacles that express in return their very own subjectivity – a process that precisely parallels the photographer’s relation to the natural world. Concretely, these indexical traces of life portraying the occupant consist in objective elements (location, size, floor, windows of the apartment), and more particularly in the furniture, ornaments and objects one can observe in the room.

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290 Reflecting on the accumulation of objects as a characteristic of the Fin de Siècle interior, Brion, like many other critics, leans towards the surrealist reading of Atget’s images – liveliness of the inanimate, – yet without considering it curiously. Observing the uncanny animation of the objects themselves, which she contrasts with the usual freezing of photographed people, she finally states that the interiors do not quite represent the persons but rather their death, which is actually the doing of any portrait, and not just photographed interiors.

291 “Normally, portraits like these, of unpeopled rooms, were seen in private places, in family albums alongside other views of the home and family life, each of which had special significance” Molly Nesbit, Atget’s Seven Albums, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, p.124.

Molly Nesbit’s extensive study of Atget’s albums, informs us that this particular one, “Intérieurs parisiens”, undermines assumptions about the missing occupants. Not only did some of these residents not live on the mentioned streets but, most importantly, the album comprises a curious and interesting play on identities, especially that of Atget’s.\textsuperscript{293} To start with photographic facts, it is known that the three first views opening the album, as well the couple preceding the actress’s opulent abode at the end of the book, are images of the photographer’s own apartment. Yet, they are labeled as a dramatic actor’s interior, which is not entirely false though, considering the fact that Atget used to be an actor, and that he even registered himself as such on the electoral list until 1912.\textsuperscript{294} The montage becomes fairly obvious when comparing the three versions of the album Atget sells to institutions in 1910-1911: in the Musée Carnavalet’s edition, the two last photographs mentioned are titled as a collector’s interior. Moreover, some additional mistakes come out when looking meticulously at the images. Regarding the actor’s apartment, the second view of the album allows a glimpse, through the doors of an intermediate space, in the far back where originates a bright natural light, of a room with a washstand. Further in the album, as several details indicate, this exact same room happens to be used for illustrating a worker’s interior. Similarly, it appears that the collector and the decorator share the same apartment, making them the one and the same person: in the back right side of the latter’s dining room lie furniture and objects identical to those found in a view of the former’s interior. As a result, not only Atget’s apartment

\textsuperscript{293} Molly Nesbit, \textit{Atget’s Seven Albums}, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, pp.120-123. Nesbit’s comment and reading of Atget’s work is heavily weighted politically speaking.

\textsuperscript{294} Although he no longer held this occupation, being listed as a dramatic artist, would allow him avoiding paying taxes on his current profession. Unlike acting, photography was not considered as an intellectual labor, and therefore was not exempted from taxes.
plays other roles than that of the dramatic actor, but captions are also found to be misleading.

“Intérieurs parisiens” contains sixty images officially representing twelve apartments, which corresponds to an average of five views per visited room. Representing “artistiques, pittoresques, et bourgeois” interiors, the series could be seen as an attempt to reflect an overarching view of society, with the exclusion of the poorest households though. (Far from a contemptuous attitude yet, Atget will later dedicate a full album to the rag-pickers living in the outskirts of Paris). The captions indicate the profession of the resident, which implies that the interiors are characterized by class. Looking at the social markers of the apartments, one could distinguish among three to four life standings, ranging from the worker to the rich trader or the industrial entrepreneur, including in between the middle class and the petite bourgeoisie. However, this overview presents some defects: artistic trades are particularly well represented, thus creating a noticeable imbalance. It suggests that Atget must have entered intimate spaces thanks to his clientele (as showed by the decorator’s, collector’s, milliner’s interiors) and related acquaintances (Atget might have met the famous actress, Cécile Sorel, through former colleagues from the stage, like his close friend, actor and director, André Calmettes). Except for this last person, whose fame would make it useless, names are kept anonymous and exact addresses are not given. Only professions, last initials, and unnumbered streets are indicated in the captions. Knowing which is Atget’s apartment on the one hand, and bearing in mind that objects are indexical markers of personality on the other, it would be interesting to conduct close analyses of the author’s interior. However,

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295 Some social balance is then re-established, although Atget’s album, “Zoniers” (1913), does only display exterior views of the shantytowns surrounding Paris.
my point here is rather to reflect on the album’s underlying structure and meanings rather than photographic details. I will just stress two important facts however: first, the contrasting aspect of Atget’s self-introduction as a worker (the washstand room) and a cultivated man (shelves replete with books); second, the self-assessment of his middle class standing, at the level of a Musée du Louvre’s employee, between the worker and the “petite rentière”. Nesbit goes further in her interpretation of Atget’s social display. She reads the album as an intended commentary on class disparity. More especially, considering the correct version of the album is the one where the actor’s interior resurfaces before the actress’s, she stresses the contrast of his modest home against the sumptuous dwelling of the performer from the Comédie française. Without denying this reading, Andrea Loselle concentrates on another one and suggests conceiving the masquerade as a comedy set by the photographer himself.296

**Masquerade**

“Mistaken identities, the playing of roles within roles, misconstrued statements, and misperceptions are central plot devices” of a comic playwright.297 But once the masquerade is neutralized, it becomes possible to make sense out of it. Atget has already been introduced as an editor conceiving himself as a worker. Additionally, “if the photographer can play an actor, and the decorator can simultaneously be a collector (two mutually opposing roles that are in this case complementary), it should be also possible for the actor to play, if not be, a collector”, as shown through the comparison of the

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296 Eugène Atget, in his early stage career, because of his physiognomy, was repeatedly cast in a few stereotypical roles as vilain or traitor (“third roles”). After all, isn’t he continuing this act when twisting the truth? The tone remains that of the joke, and one can also notice that Miss Sorel, the rich and famous actress, is around this time mostly known for her interpretation of Célimène in Molière’s Misanthrope.

different versions of the album. In the chain of equivalence, it also makes the photographer a collector, which is actually the activity that best parallels the photographer’s pursuit of series. The figure of the collector triggers an important allegory for Walter Benjamin, as he embodies the process of re-appropriation of things, and thus he is envisioned as a source of both phantasmagoria and awakening. Now, if the photographer is a collector who himself has something in common with the decorator, by association, the photographer also turns out to be a decorator. Even better, it is actually the photographer that allows the paradoxical merging of the decorator and the collector. Through the intermediary of the photographer, the decorator and the collector finally complement each other: while the former select, isolate, builds a scenery that has all the appearance of nature, the latter brings together (thanks to the dual activity of photographing and editing) according to the guiding and coherent principle of a designated topic, period or space. Finally, the photographer, as a collector and a decorator, is able to artificially reproduce the natural arrangements of things, like in this album for instance, but also within the very composition of a single image.

To conclude, there are in this album three types of contiguity at the origin of the global confusion I tried to untangle. The first one is syntagmatic in the sense that the sequence of images produced by the album impairs their uniqueness. Reflecting the *Fin de Siècle*

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298 Andrea Loselle, *ibid.*, p.89.
299 In reference to the collector section of the *Arcades Project*, Katie H. Brion writes that “Walter Benjamin believed that the collector, with his penchant for accumulation and arrangement, created dialectical, allegorical images, images that, even as they were a source of phantasmagoria, were also a source of awakening.” Brion, *op. cit.*, p.71. Benjamin also notices the haptic and private relationship the collector has with objects, which, to him, makes “the collector proves to be the true resident of the interior. He makes his concern the idealization of objects”, preserving them from the commodification of the world, more likely to “perform the higher task of expressing the self”. (Brion, *ibid.*, p.56). Moreover, unless the collector happens to be an antiquarian (and thus, reminding us of Atget’s third self-portrait), collector is not a profession properly speaking, and as such it looks incongruous in the album.
300 “Decorators are usually deeply disapproving of collectors, since the latter disarticulate the inherently syntactical, social arrangements of furnitures and objects. Not so here, because the decorator is a collector in whom Atget sees the counterpart to his own space”. Loselle, *ibid.*, p.92.
culture that consists in an eclectic accumulation of objects, they make most of the interiors look similar, thus facilitating repetition and confusion. Placed next to each other, the actor, the decorator, the collector are one and the same person. Yet, this combination also allows the comparative contrast between the actor’s and the actress’s interiors. The second and related contiguity is that of a paradigmatic organization, allowing the substitution of identities. “The captions are therefore eminently allegorical: the seeming certainty and transparency of the identity given therein is shown to be an illusion, revealing the instability of all types of identification with one’s interior.” 301 Finally, the object’s false ability for expressing the self stresses the disjunction existing between the interiors and their inhabitant, which leads me to a third type of contiguity, one that transcends representational limits as it concerns the image and the natural context to which it refers. It calls indeed for a move beyond the interior-identity relationship, whether it was theorized by Walter Benjamin as seen earlier, analyzed through a metaphoric reading based on Aristotle’s Poetics, or put straightforwardly by Andrea Loselle as follows: “the interior poses as a likeness to the actress; it is type-cast as a mere appearance thanks to the metaroles that launch and close the serie.” 302 These meta-figures are those of Sorel and Atget, who belong in their own ways to two universes, that of the stage or the photograph, and that of real life. As a result, they are more likely than others to cross social space (Atget’s intrusions in various homes), to pose and to pretend (Atget’s multiple figures), and to compile a lively album of roles, making the whole look

301 K. Brion, op. cit., p.62.
302 Loselle, p. 89. The metaphorical reading refers to Lesley Brill, “Notes Towards an Analytic Criticism of Photography: Seven Photos of Eugene Atget”, in Metaphor and Symbolic Activity, 7(2), 1999, pp.77-91. The author, depicting a bedroom from the Interiors series, notices two frames above the empty bed, one of which is inscrutable. “As the “empty” picture frame parallels the empty bed, she writes, so the occupied frame implies an occupied bed”, relying on Aristotle principle of equivalence characterizing the following pattern: A/B=C/D, p.89.
like a human comedy. Without disqualifying it, this human comedy makes the indictment of social inequality less relevant. The social critique remains though, but not exactly in the way Nesbit sees it. It does not pertain only to the class struggle, but rather corresponds to a more profound and global perspective, namely that we all wear make-up to feature a role in our life. As Benjamin puts it: “Atget was an actor who, disgusted with the profession, wiped off the mask and then set about removing the make-up from reality”. This reality is both social and staged, real and fake, just like the intrinsic contradiction of Atget being a worker and a cultivated man, a collector and a decorator, an actor and a photographer. In leaving the stage, he actually moves from one side of the spotlight to the other. He goes across the mirror, yet without ever being able to totally erase his own reflection.

3. The Explorer

3.1 Temporal Sequences

*Before and After*

Commercially speaking, Atget would have no interest in returning to take further views of a place he already documented. Yet, occasionally, he does renew the image of a given urban fragment. There must be several reasons for doing this: first, the location has changed over the years and as a conscientious documentary photographer, Atget has to update his collection and replace what has become an outdated view (the Saint-Séverin

area for instance); second, having sold photographs along with their negatives, there is a gap in a given series and thus a need for replenishing the stock (hence some irregularities in his numbering, as missing, duplicated or reused numbers). It seems the particular case of the rue Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, shot on three different occasions, responds to both these motivations. The reason for re-photographing the street in 1912 is obvious: there was a major change in the landscape compared to the original image of 1899. The demolition of the annex of the Hôtel Dieu justifies it, even more so that it now provides this orientation of the street with a direct view on Notre-Dame-de-Paris. The reason for making a third view in 1923 is more intriguing, and even more so is the fact that it presents a horizontal format. But David Harris, on the one hand, reminds us that Atget had sold a good deal of his production in 1920; and on the other, he emphasizes the advantage of the stabilizing effect of a larger angle over the former spatial recession of the street:

the vertical format had sympathetically echoed the tall, narrow constraints of the street itself (...) In the 1923 view, Atget (...) now employed the wide angle lens to create an image in which the pronounced spatial recession of the walls and buildings bordering the street was neutralized by the more symmetrical presentation and the stabilizing effect of the horizontal format.304

This observation may sustain the idea discussed at the end of this section, according to which Atget has refined his photographic practice over the years.

Finally, there is a third reason for going back and re-photographing a location. Contrary to the two previous pragmatic motivations, the photographer may not have any particular or evident reason for doing so. Consequently, one can just assume that he remains dissatisfied with the previous prints and he is thus driven by both a professional concern

and an artistic impetus. As a demanding worker, Atget might estimate that he has not produced the right view yet, and this discontent turns out to be, if not an aesthetic preoccupation, at least that of a meticulous craftsman. As an example of photographic subject that resists the photographer’s attempts and regularly invites him to reshoot for an enhanced image, I suggest turning to this particular corner of the 6th district of Paris, where the rue de l’Echaudé converges with the rue de Seine. Atget photographs this intersection on three occasions, producing a total of five views, one from 1905, and two pairs from 1911 and 1924. Of course and unavoidably, as they were shot decades apart, this set of images presents some obvious changes throughout the years: from pavement to asphalt cover, from naturally powered cart to motorized truck, the temporary constructions of 1911 as well, or the overt evolution of the central façade: white at first, then covered with advertisements that finally shred apart. Yet, these temporal marks are not my central preoccupation—and besides, one could point at the permanence of things as well: this street corner (up to today), the store below the building, the lamppost on the left side of the rue de Seine. We should rather observe how the photographer apprehends the same architectural ensemble over time.

*Rue de Seine et de l’Echaudé (1905/1911/1924)*

The first 1905 approach consists in a single view that frontally embraces the triangular building and the two adjacent streets, as if Atget attempts to grasp all the complexity of the area at once. On the contrary, the consecutive views from 1910 encompass two

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305 According to David Harris, “the reasons for his returning may lie with a lingering dissatisfaction with his earlier treatment of this complex urban form, and the sense that he had not yet found the ideal balance between scale and mass, between the space of the streets, and the triangular wedge of the buildings.” in *Unknown Paris*, *ibd.* , p.30.
complementary shots, appropriately responding to the dividing of the street. Moving from the left side of the street to its right side, Atget repeats the exact same strategy in 1924. Consequently, while the uncommon block remains the central object of the photographic compositions, these changes of the camera position logically result in different perspectives. Taking the lamppost as a point of reference, more or less facing the angular curve of the opposite sidewalk, it becomes possible to locate the camera and retrace the operator’s move. Regarding the three photographs taken from the left side of the streets (1905, 1911, 1924), Atget progressively moves towards the building, but unlike the perspective would make us believe, this is a minimal progress of just about a few meters. Similarly, when shooting the two views from the right side of the street, Atget is just a couple meters further, approximately at the level of the lamppost (but on the opposite side). How does it come to be then that the resulting perspectives are so different?

There are two answers to that question. First, on the couple images from 1924, Atget reproduces the move from left to right as already stated, except that he stands respectively a little further left and a little further right (actually, in both images the camera is placed on the sidewalk). In doing so, he subtly shifts the angle and thus the perspective, especially on the first photograph (left side standing) emphasizing the eastern façade of the building, instead of insisting on showing the extension of both streets, as he does in all the other views. (Additionally, one can notice that the 1924 right view presents a slightly raised angle, including in the frame the entire height of the building). Second, when looking at the whole series, on the one hand, and knowing that only a few meters separate each shooting point on the other, my guess is that he has used different lenses when realizing these views. Overall, Atget photographs with a wide-
angle lens that has the particularity of exaggerating spatial distance in pushing the background further and bringing the foreground closer. This feature is evident in the 1911 left side view, whose “right twin” seems then to have been operated with a different lens. Furthermore, when comparing the same view with that of 1905, another lens must have been used as well, as it is clear, when looking at the building width, that the background is flattened in a way, although Atget operates from a further distance. While the foreground is deeper, the building comes closer, creating a vertigo impression, instead of the stretching effect.

On an iconic level, the five compositions are made of identical foregrounds (roadway before the streets fork) and backgrounds (lengthening of the streets and the sky above), however, from a plastic consideration, the various framings offer quite different results. Despite the “white sky fork” common to all of the images, their respective lighting and the values stemming from it produce a variety of structures in terms of lines and forms, masses and vacuity, and relatively soft light and dark. These resulting structures depend on different times and climatic conditions as, ultimately, one cannot control natural light. When combined with the previous remarks on perspective, the structures clearly offer different ways into the photographs. On the 1905 image, a natural morning light coming from the east illuminates the diamond-shape of the central block, whereas the 1911 photographs were taken in the afternoon, with bright sunlight originating from the west. As for the 1924 views, most likely shot earlier in the morning, since no silhouettes at all are perceptible, a slightly cloudy sky produces a softened and homogenous

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306 Regarding the contrast values of a photograph, parameters of shooting as plate sensitivity, length of exposure, and aperture size, can only modify the contrast locally.
 chiaroscuro (by contrast with the rather tenebrist effect of the other pictures). These lighting considerations actually influence the gaze of the viewer—not that of the operator who necessarily stands in a shady area, but from where he also takes into account the brightened parts of his calculated composition. As a result, in the first photograph, the gaze delves straight towards the building, and from there, molding its shapes, it splits and runs along the two facades. The second set of 1911, the gaze’s trajectory after bouncing off the left side of the image and glancing at the elongation of the rue de Seine follows a diagonal from the bottom left to the upper right sinking into the rue de l’Echaudé. Finally, the 1924 pair suggests just the exact opposite trajectory, bouncing off the lower right, then going towards the upper left, into the rue de Seine.

It appears in the end that significant changes happen with a few and very little shifts of the camera position. But it is not just about two meters further or two meters on the side, the lens caliber, variations of framing, lighting conditions, all converge to produce different effects. These considerations create different insights into the urban space, and suggest their infinite and always changing character, relating in the end to the spatio-temporal situation of the author, his dasein in a way. Finally, comparing similar views of the same urban piece allows us to note Atget’s apprehension about his surroundings, the specific connection he has with the context that depends on the present moment, and that conditions various attitudes. This remark could go against the tempting conclusion stressing how much he has gained in mastery of his craft over the years. Since the result

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307 Although pictorial terms are not necessarily relevant to photography, the notion of chiaroscuro seems unavoidable when speaking of black and white photographs. “Tenebrism” and its opposite, “sfumato”, are particular types of chiaroscuro. The former, also called “dramatic illumination”, refers to a strong contrast of light and dark in the chiaroscuro. As it is true the 1905 and 1911 photographs present a stronger contrast than the views from 1924, they still present soft values overall, as noticed earlier: details in the shadows remain quite perceptible.
ultimately derives from a given situation at a precise moment, can we really say so? Of course, years of photographic experience informed his approach, sharpened his vision and refined his technique. The 1924 left-side view is certainly a beautiful photograph, with this enveloping early-morning light, a lower contrast, subtle values, soft texture, and a great depth of field. Atget seems to have finally found “a delicate equilibrium between volume of the buildings and receding perspectives of the two streets”. And yet, this statement does not really apply to the right-side view from the same year, which I would rather substitute with the 1905 photograph (although slightly blurry but with a more interesting play on light) as a frontal image of the intersection and its intricate building. Given this assumption of a practice refined over the years, another temporal set of two images calls out the critic’s attention. When looking at the pictures of the house where Balzac lived between 1840 and 1847, that Atget photographed on two occasions (1913 and 1922), it seems he did virtually stand at the exact same place despite a nine years gap. Harris explains that “the similarities between the two images spring from Atget’s characteristic and habitual response to photographing in this type of environment”. All these years of added experience (despite those of war) would not have changed Atget’s perception. Or, differently interpreted, he must have then combined natural and calculated approaches of a subject, which from Bourdieu’s theory of practice, amounts to the fact that Atget must have incorporated a technical savoir-faire that finally acquired all the appearances of nature.

309 D. Harris, *Unknown Paris*, ibid., p.26
3.2 Sequential Shots

*Topographie du Vieux Paris*

If it is true that the photographer, when producing temporal sequences, does not set here or there bearing in mind the photograph he took years before from the same location, he does not pick a place just by chance either. The paradox is that, even if the photographer is subject to circumstantial conditions, his changes of position, when operating, are all but random. First, Atget’s photographic practice consists in a rational interaction between a professional operator and the subject. Second, one must also consider the pragmatic constraint of cumbersome equipment, whose bulkiness does not ease any movement. These remarks take on their full meaning when examining spatial sequences because their central interest lies precisely in the various positions they reveal.

Atget might have initiated this type of photographic sequences as he starts working on the topographic series of Paris around 1905-1906. Before then, he only documented streets, façades, hôtels particuliers, ornaments, etc., with a single shot or maybe a couple views at most (like in the previous examples examined). In order to develop this topographic series, Atget consistently produces sequences of six to eight images on average (this number is limited to the amount of glass-plates he can reasonably carry) that are systematically performed within a temporal continuum linking the spatial evolution of the author. The other particularity of this collection is that, compared to others, it does not constitute a more substantial photographic exploration of Paris, as much as it increases the literal coherence of Atget’s reconstruction of the city. Indeed, as shown in the analysis below the series documenting the *Passage des Singes* in 1911, Atget does not
only stand out there in the streets, along the buildings, but he also enters a courtyard, revolves around a church or crosses a passage as it happens.

The numbering of the seven negatives this particular sequence comprises does not correspond to the logical succession in which the photographs must have been taken. Rather than supporting a random operating system again, this observation suggests that Atget does not number the plates in the order he exposes them, but following the order of their development. Another apparent incoherence that could surface, concerns the way this sequential set is divided afterwards. Indeed, while the seven images result from a single and unique photographic session, they belong to three different classifications: five images (including that of the well) are part of the Topographie du vieux Paris; the larger view of the vegetable stand figures in L’art dans le vieux Paris; and the more detailed one is in Paris pittoresque. This distribution corroborates the fact that Atget works on several collections concurrently. However, what remains impossible to determine is, whether or not, while shooting such or such view, he anticipates exactly where it will fit in the bigger series (the different location of the two images of the stand for instance, shows how porous the bigger collections can be).

“Assuming that Atget worked in a logical way, two recurring patterns can be proposed: first, that he began with the distant and overall view before proceeding to the more detailed one; and, second, that he moved progressively forward through spaces”.

Differently phrased, David Harris observes two ways Atget may proceed, either from general to particular view, or in compliance with the displacement of the body. Yet both seem quite compatible in the example of the Passage des Singes, where the operator

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310 D. Harris, Unknown Paris, ibid., p.19.
moves from the street to the interior of a small courtyard, flanked by two streets, and then, get closer to a vegetable stand in there, before zooming onto a well head.

“Passage des Singes” (1911)

The first photograph is an oblique view taken from the rue des Guillemites, towards the entrance of the passage located at the number 6. It clearly targets the entrance of the passage, although slightly off-centered, as the relatively strong angle does not provide any other perspective than that of the three successive buildings. The further one is blurred, cut by the frame, and insignificant since it occupies a minimal portion of the image’s surface. The first one in the middle ground, on the contrary, may hold the attention for a short while because of the advertising it displays whose repetition vaguely echoes the recurring motif of the first ground’s pavement. Indeed, the gaze slides along the façade from a first set of posters, to a second one more discrete, and then to a third advertisement even smaller, hanging above a passer-by standing in the entrance of the passage. Because of the wide angle of the image increasing the countless cobblestones, both the man and the entrance seem a little far away, but this is where the photographer is heading, the unique outlet in a closed street that only offers a constrained perspective. Now facing the 6, rue des Guillemites, Atget avoids a strictly axial view in positioning his camera slightly to one side. This smart choice enhances the sensation of looking through a succession of dark and bright spaces. These black and white surfaces are delimited by the pattern of an arch, which is repeated four times and thus gives the perspective a mise en abyme aspect. No matter how enigmatic this alternation of contrasted frames might seem, their succession still ends on a luminous, mysterious, yet
extremely shrinked “beyond” in the most remote background of the picture. It still suggests an opening though: the perspective gives a clear idea of the passage as a transitional space. The middle ground, also quite reduced in proportion to the image’s surface, is perhaps the area where transformation happens (the standing man has been replaced by a sitting dog). But it is for sure the next site where Atget will be taking pictures, and he certainly has it in mind already: there would be no point in simply going across, to the distant and symmetric other side of the passage, without precisely documenting the crossing.

As a result, the photographer moves along the line of his sight, towards the interlocked areas, reinforcing the sense of the linking function of the passage. He continues his spatial progress, passes the dark porch and enters the courtyard, where he stops for a few more images. For now, he is still facing the same side, towards the east, but the impression left by the photograph is quite different. In this open and confined space a feeling of vertical oppression rises. It is suggested by the surrounding of three facades: the left one is too dark and does not really allow us to grasp anything (aside from the ending letters of a sign indicating a printing factory); the right side seems annoyingly too close and is congested with the cart in the foreground; the front wall is composed of a column of French doors on the right part, while a slightly wider column on the left forces the gaze towards the only possible exit, that of the opposing street extending the passage. The slightly off-centered position of Atget comes fully into play: his goal is to align with this narrow vanishing perspective towards which the lying dog stares, beyond this intermediate space where the operator stands. At least there, there seems to be some kind
of life and activity (a man walking, a cart in a street, perhaps a shop and a café), in contrast with the quietness of the courtyard.

Continuing his journey, the next logical shot of Atget should be that of this bustling rue des Rosiers on to which the passage des Singes opens, flanked by rue Vieille du Temple on this eastern side and rue des Guillemites on the other side. However, the photographer turns round and pictures the reverse angle of the former photography (whose angles are inverted then). This 180 degrees rotation allows for getting a full sense of the courtyard, yet a little abruptly, because of the gesture itself and because of what could have been naturally expected (exiting towards the rue des Rosiers). However, the eluded sweep simply obeys the architectural configuration of the space: lateral (and thus intermediate) views of this small, stretched out, rectangular courtyard, would have been simply impossible given the narrowness of the space and Atget’s wide angle lens, or at least, feasible but meaningless. Purposely, or by constraint, the photographer inserts in his images anodyne elements that actually may serve as marks that facilitate the combination of an image with the one that precedes or that follows. This could be for instance the dog in the two previous views, or the cart in the mirrored pictures of the courtyard. While the cart still appears in the foreground of this reversed view, Atget manages to slightly put it at a distance, which also implies that he does not just turn back on himself, but actually walks a few steps forward before doing so. This is not to say that the courtyard seems less stifling; on the contrary: as the windows do not reflect the western light for

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311 I am likely to only partially agree with David Harris on this matter. According to him, Atget frequently uses “a prominent element in the immediate foreground, such as a cart or vegetable stand, to establish a sense of scale, and to begin guiding the viewer through the fictive space of the photograph” (Unknown Paris, op. cit., p.22) While the second half of his assertion makes total sense, I do not believe Atget uses elements to set a scale, even less so, given the fact that he proceeds with a wide-angle lens that precisely distorts the distances and bends the feeling of it, which I usually take it into account in my analyses. For instance, the entrance of the passage in the first photograph must not be further than a dozen meters, and yet, the standing man appears quite small, as if he would be on the opposite side of a field.
instance, there are more darkened space in this view. Moreover, the mirrored way out through the porch (through which Atget formerly entered) is not only half closed, but is even obstructed with some additional dark matter (there is no street to flee into anymore). In the three following views, the photographer remains in the courtyard, first approaching a vegetable stand he pictures twice, then detailing a well head in a corner. As suggested by the 180 degrees switch, and even when the space represented allows it, Atget never performs panoramic views (however, he does realize on a few occasions a progressive sweeping that makes the juncture between two streets). On the contrary, he makes what I would called inverted panoramas, that is, instead of covering the urban landscape with a translating gaze, he turns around the photographed subject. This practice is quite interesting as, in changing the focus from the observer to the observed, it indirectly reflects the move of the operating body, giving priority to the kinetic aspect over the viewing ability. This exploration process of the body renders in a more efficient way the materiality and the three-dimensional characteristic of space. Making two views from closely related camera positions is actually symptomatic of Atget’s method, as seen previously in the paired photographs from the temporal sequence (junction of the rue de l’Echaudé with the rue de Seine), or, as it happens here, with the twined pictures of the vegetable stand photographed from two slightly different angles. While the first view still situates the shop within the courtyard (part of the court is visible, as well as the gloomy porch), the second one, taken from closer and with more angle, exclusively focuses on it. The two photographs, however, display the same stand made of wooden boxes piled up and wicker baskets, all of which seem a little depleted (aside from several cauliflowers).

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312 This is the case of the pictures linking the rue de Sévigné and the rue de Jarente for instance (1911) or of the ones connecting the place du Louvre with the rue des Prêtres around the church of Saint-Germain-l’Auxerrois (1902).
Finally, the baskets constitute the recurring elements that link to the next image. Four of them, within easy reach, are hung at a well head in the opposite corner of the courtyard. This close-up presents some similar characteristics to still life: the inanimate objects first, on which the emphasis is placed; second, the rendering of the shape and the thin grains suggesting the texture of the wicker baskets and that of the humid stones of the wall behind as well. But the photograph also differs from still life genre because the space suggested is not a close-up per se on the one hand; and, on the other, because the soft contrast contradicts the usual dramatic light that should be stressing a focal point. At the level of the sequence though, this lighting aspect has an important function: it plays a part in connecting all the single shots together. One notices here, maybe expressed with even more intensity than in the other pictures, the same diffused and weak light from a grey afternoon. As a result, this last view epitomizes the overall ambiance of the space just explored.

**Atget’s Reconstruction of Paris**

To sum it up, “once assembled, the entire sequence provides a clear architectural description of the passage, its relationship to the two streets and, in his photographs of the vegetable stand and the well head, how it functioned as a communal space for those living and working in the immediate vicinity.”313 Despite the fact the courtyard looks a little desolate, this set of images, from another perspective, reveals the methodical precision and the detailing approach of Atget’s documentary work.314 Along with this

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313 D. Harris, *op. cit.*, p.22.
314 I take here the opportunity to specify, as I did with Baudelaire, and despite Benjamin and numerous subsequent interpretations, that in my view, Atget does not identify with the flâneur stereotype for one particular reason that will be detailed in the concluding section of the dissertation.
mental visualization of a three-dimensional space it makes possible, this kind of
sequences also helps to resituate the location in its immediate context, as a fragment of a
whole, to both of which Atget grants an equal importance, and whose scales may vary
considerably: the well head in the courtyard and the courtyard between two streets, as it is
the case of the examined sequence; and then come bigger layers when resituating these
small sequences within the larger series: this passage into the neighborhood, the
neighborhood into the district, the district into Paris. In 1920, as he writes it, Atget has
achieved his documentation of the *vieux Paris*. He has done the opposite of a superficial
observation, in terms of quantity, of quality, and in the literal sense of the term: the
stereoscopic vision may have existed for a while then, but it is Atget’s spatial sequences
that truly render a sense of depth. This type of production amounts to an attempt at
photography for overcoming its ineluctable planarity, which ultimately constitutes a
move towards reality.

But Atget moves throughout reality. His photographic itinerary is an accomplishment
within the field that gives back Paris its thickness, but also marks the photographer’s
implicit path, linking a street to another, crossing a square, entering a courtyard, then a
café, etc. What is really interesting in such a colossal undertaking – and that differs from
its global reiteration by Google street – is the way this photographic envisioning allows
the reconstruction of Atget’s own progress, his human and subjective experience of the
city. The spatial sequence just examined is a compelling example of the operator’s
movement within the urban landscape he represents, first towards and then into the
courtyard. As seen, each image holds and reveals at once the next position of the camera,
suggesting the physical approach of Atget, walking along the street, looking into a
passage, entering and exploring it. At this secondary level of meaning, that is, when the images are put together—which was very likely the intention of the topographic series—, Atget performs as if he had held a cinematic subjective camera, making his move highly perceptible. Consequently, he presents the area in an intimate and sensitive way, contrary to other topographic methods that aim at embracing the space as a whole, documenting it from an ideal viewpoint (yet in doing so they generalize and idealize the territory, as a map would). Atget opts for a description that parallels how the targeted space would “normally (be) encountered by pedestrians and perceived from street level”.

David Harris further concludes:

Atget interpreted the purpose of architectural and urban photography as creating a progressively unfolding description. A single vantage point could never adequately encompass a site; rather, several viewpoints and a sequence of related images were necessary to elucidate fully the particularities of the spatial configuration. Moreover, Atget’s photographs were directly related to the urban forms they described, and he modified his method to accommodate the particularities of a passage, a staircase, or an intersection of two streets.

Actually, by looking at several of these sequences, one can observe in each particular case how Atget adjusts to the space he documents. However, he does not modify his method substantially, as all of these mini-series present a pattern identical to the one noticed earlier (moving forward into the space, going from general views to particular

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315 D. Harris, *op. cit.*, p.19. A good example for this ideal way of operating topographic views is that of Nadar, who was the first one in Paris to use a hot-air balloon in order to make aerial views of the city. But this way of proceeding naturally maintains the distance and omits the details.

details, adding slight changes of angle from time to time), even in the case of interior documentation that just parallels the outdoor one.\textsuperscript{317}

Finally, regarding the first sentence of Harris’ quote, and to conclude on these sequences, it is worth remarking that in fact they exceed the idea of a “progressively unfolding description”. Most importantly, when bearing in mind the photographic practice, and not just its result, this extensive description transforms into a silent narration. As one delves into the creative process of the dual author (re-writing a context and assembling it into a photographic text), an underlying narrative surfaces and tells us the subjective story of a Parisian explorer.

\textsuperscript{317} In the case of the stairwell of the Hôtel Dodun for instance (1904-1905), Atget moves naturally through the interior space, from where he originally stands to a further location within the frame. And while climbing the stairs, he inserts a couple closer details (the ornate ironwork, a statue between second and third floors) within his wider look.
Ce qu’il faut interroger précisément, c’est ce phénomène étonnant où l’illusion de réalité est inséparable de la conscience qu’elle est réellement une illusion, sans pour autant que cette conscience tue le sentiment de réalité.

Edgar Morin, *Le Cinéma ou l’homme imaginaire*

**CHAPTER IV – MORIN AND ROUCH: THE CINEMATIC TRUTH OF A PARISIAN TRIP**

Despite being conscious of having collected an impressive amount of historical data, Atget could not expect his posthumous success and even less his profound influence on modern photography. Not only is he a precursor of what the f64 group and Edward Weston name “straight photography”, but he also offers the surrealist group a significant sample on which they can draw to formulate their aesthetics. The same ambivalence goes with Jean Rouch, whose work opens a new way to both documentary film and fiction movies. However, although these two visual artists exhibit an acute understanding of their respective media, they more directly connect through the link surrealism establishes between them: on the one hand, the photographer inspires a new relation to reality that the filmmaker inherits on the other hand. The ground on which they meet is

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318 Ansel Adams and Edward Weston creates the f64 group in 1932 in San Francisco. Their members works towards an authorial and pure photography, which gets rid of the artificial embellishments of pictorialism.
that of a reality sprinkled with irruptions of “hasards objectif”, creating particular oddities on the regular thread of the everyday life.

Baudelaire is not less an amateur of these unexpected shocks he thought photography could not capture and deliver. For, the transitory, moving, dynamic, and thus unpredictable aspect of life, qualifies an essential “half” of modernity, according to him. Consequently, appreciating photography for what it is—a still image—he may acknowledge its documental function, but can only devalue its artistic pretention. Although being instant-like, the irregularities searched for may only happen over certain duration of time, so that a medium that can only freeze temporality is right away disqualified. Movement, which is so important to Baudelaire, when deployed into space necessarily implies a temporal dimension that photography persists in negating. Contrary to the paradoxical effect of still images on temporality, freezing a (living) instant for a (mortal) eternity, the cinematic medium, although derived from photographic techniques, presents the ability to record movement and dynamics of life, which is why, according to Antoine Compagnon, Baudelaire would have certainly endorsed cinema over photography.319 It is because of this emphasis he puts on movement that Baudelaire particularly admires Constantin Guys, this cartoonist he considers as “le peintre de la vie moderne”.

In the same manner, since they attempt to grasp reality as closely as possible and as they sketch moments of life as it is, Baudelaire would certainly have appraised Edgar Morin’s and Jean Rouch’s Chronique d’un été (1961). This movie is an experimental project and

319 Antoine Compagnon concludes a chapter with the following sentence: “Baudelaire aurait sans doute aimé le cinéma ; il lui aurait trouvé le charme qui manquait à la photographie”. in Baudelaire l’irréductible, op. cit., p. 167. Additionally, Antoine Compagnon reminds us how fond the poet was of the cinematic ancestors anticipating the Lumière brothers’ invention in 1898, from the diorama to the kaleidoscope, via kinetoscopy for instance.
a “free-style” method, considered by the critics as a landmark in the history of cinema – just as Atget’s photographs and Baudelaire’s poetry were in their respective domain– for technical, aesthetic, conceptual and socio-cultural reasons, all interacting together. The use of a hand-held camera along with synchronized sound provides the co-directors with an unprecedented impression of real-life. It confers some new consistency to the sequence as the directors may now capture two primordial features by which a subject naturally interacts with the world: kinesthesia and speech. Since they offer new possibilities, these technical innovations have an impact on the ways of filming and representing reality. Therefore, a specific aesthetics emerges, which is also at the founding of both the Nouvelle Vague and cinéma-vérité.

Facing the intriguing appearance of real life and the potential truth a film may reveal, the bicephalous director of Chronique d’un été is forced back to rethink the relationship cinema has with reality. In doing so, Morin and Rouch reinvent the documentary film, to some extent, while having a profound influence on cinematic fiction at the same time. Besides, one of the particularities of their movie resides in the fact that, while raising the matter of reality and its representation, they also come with a solution, or at least an experimental answer to it: hence, the performative and self-reflexive characteristics of the film. Finally, as expressed in one of the very first statements of the film, Morin and Rouch are ignorant of the outcomes of their undertaking, which is a very condition for, and definition of, an experiment. Like Atget’s and Baudelaire’s previous contacts with reality, the aesthetic exploration recounted by Chronique d’un été is rather a paradoxical one since it looks for novelty within the realm of the known and what is usually neglected. Extending the limitations conferred to an ordinary, mundane, and perhaps
vulgar reality (since it involves privacy), the film content is based on a running question about the everyday life.

Nous-même, très précisément, on ne sait pas ce qu’on veut faire avec Rouch. C’est un film sur l’idée suivante: comment vis-tu? Comment vis-tu? On commence par toi, mais après on va s’adresser à d’autres. Comment vis-tu? ça veut dire comment est-ce que tu te débrouilles avec la vie? Et alors, on commence par toi, parce que tu vas participer, d’une façon très intime à notre entreprise, à notre film.\textsuperscript{320}

This experience of cinéma-vérité is not just about a new way of making documentary film. It is a moment in the history of cinema, but also a moment in the life of all the protagonists of Chronique d’un été: the persons appearing on screen, which includes the directors, but also the camera, mostly held by Jean Rouch and Michel Brault. As I will show in this chapter, cinéma-vérité revisits the notion of authoring and the related one of acting. This is the reason why it becomes possible in the end to assess the ethnographic value of a particular style of visual anthropology: ciné-transe. First considering the notion of chronicle and examining the film’s opening, I track throughout this chapter what exactly is the truth cinéma-vérité reveals.

\textsuperscript{320} Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch, Chronique d’un été, 1961, minute 2’10.

1.1 A Glance at the Chronicle

**The Chronological Orientation**

From Marceline, the first person being addressed the question “*comment vis-tu ?*”, closely followed by a “*est-ce que vous êtes heureuse ?*”, to Angelo, Marilou, Jean-Pierre and the unknown Parisians; from the public exposure of the streets to private apartments, via a short detour on the French Riviera; from intimate thoughts regarding personal lives and working conditions, to political reflections in relation with decolonization; Morin, the sociologist, and Rouch, the anthropologist, achieve together a work of art and of domestic ethnography, undeniably relying on the method of participant observation. Entering the field –both the Parisian ground and the cinematic frame–, they document the everyday life through a series of encounters during which they inquire about happiness, generally impeded by work. Towards the middle of the film, an inflexion arises because of the rise of political and international topics by larger groups, but then a relative lightness is brought back –but was there actually any lightness before?– thanks to a brief excursion in Southern France. From the sociological survey in Parisian streets to the bucolic picnic in the garrigue, *Chronique d’un été* is an immersive journey into the Summer of 1960.

This documentary film presents itself as a chronicle, which constitutes perhaps a too explicit assertion for not being dubious and drawing right away our attention, just as *Le Rouge et le Noir*’s subtitle –*Chronique de 1830*– regularly alerts Stendhal’s critics. In substance, *a chronicle is a factual and detailed account of important or historical events*
in the order they occurred. Acknowledging the evident manipulation cinema intrinsically carries—and especially through the editing process—, each of these terms defining a particular form of narration, must be cautiously weighed, although there is no doubt that the term chronicle sets the authorial intention toward authenticity. To get a first glimpse at this claim for authenticity, while going on describing Chronique d’un été, I first consider the chronological unfolding of events whose significance will then need to be assessed.

Except for the subtitle appearing in the opening credits and stating “Paris 1960”, no precise dates are ever mentioned throughout the film. Yet, the shooting of a few scenes at a ball—referred to shortly after during a discussion between Morin and Marilou—, may play as a temporal marker.\textsuperscript{321} It most likely corresponds to the 14\textsuperscript{th} of July during which balls are organizing all across France to celebrate the National Day. Interestingly enough, the movie hinges approximately on this deictic indication that separates a first geographical setting, that of Paris—recognizable from the very first minute of the film—, from a second one, that of famous Saint-Tropez. A short sequence showing Parisians packing up introduces the departure of the August holiday-makers, implicitly suggesting that of the film crew. As recounted in an interview, it is Jean Rouch who expresses the wish to pursue the shooting in this particular setting of Southern France (where French cinema stars usually get together), so that it would lighten the movie’s atmosphere for the time remaining (about the last third of the film length).

\textsuperscript{321} Other evident temporal markers are those of the violent events taking place in Africa (Franco-Algerian war and Belgian Congo’s decolonization). The protagonists evoke them, yet it is impossible to identify the temporality of the film (the Algerian war last eight years from 1954 until 1962 and Congo’s decolonization is a six month process ending in June 30, 1960), aside from paying close attention to a rapid succession of journal covers relating to these events. But this is an extra-diegetic manipulation inserted during the editing.
From another perspective, the characters’ reappearance and the content of their speech also indicate the natural progression of time. For instance, Angelo informs Morin and Rouch that, because of the shooting they did at the Renault factory he works at, his supervisors are now giving him some trouble and he is under the risk of losing his job. In her second interview, Marilou recalls with Morin what happened since they first met about a month before and how her feelings have evolved since then. Last but not least, the first and penultimate scenes that echo each other, also suggest that *Chronique d’un été* has a beginning – what the directors intend on doing – and an end – the reflection carried by the mise en abime showing the protagonists screening a compiled footage of the film they took part in.

Looking closer at the segments composing the film, several sequences do respect a temporal linearity as well, either documenting a typical work day for Angelo, from dawn to dusk, or following Marilou, who gets back home after work too, or walks out from her maid’s room into the streets with her new lover. From a chronological perspective, *Chronique d’un été* does not diverge from the logical sequencing of a given action. In that regard, cinematic conventions are respected, as William Rothman stresses on various occasions in a chapter on Jean Rouch’s cinema. From a continental perspective, this observation suggests that Morin’s and Rouch’s film presents all the appearance of the *image-mouvement* conceptualized by Gilles Deleuze. This notion is based on sensorimotricity of a body and the kinesic competence of motion pictures. Simply put, it

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322 In chapter IV “Chronicle of a Summer” taken from *Documentary Film Classics* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), William Rothman reads on a few occasions the meaning of a particular shot in terms of conventions of “classic” editing: an affair suggested between Marilou and Jean-Pierre during the post-screening discussion (p. 71); the classical shot/reverse shot dialogue or “180 degree” rule (p. 74); or an extreme close-up which in Hollywood cinema nominates “a woman with whom we are to fall in love” (p. 73).
corresponds to the causal relationship linking two shots –the latter being a reaction to a previous action–, which implies then a chronological development.\textsuperscript{323}

Despite conveying a sense of natural unfolding of time, \textit{Chronique d’un été} also presents a relative freedom. The overall impression while remaining chronological, necessarily results from an authorial manipulation, yet a functional one, since it serves the continuity of the narration. Maxine Scheinfeigel points at an artificial compression of time in a chapter he dedicates to Rouch’s editing. He observes that there is nothing odd in such a manipulation, which is well known and admitted in the case of fiction movie, a little less, however, in regards to documentary films, especially for \textit{Chronique d’un été} that apparently aims at sticking to the reality it represents.

\textit{Les vingt-cinq heures de rushes n’ont pas été simplement réduites à l’échelle ordinaire d’un long-métrage, elles sont devenues une pâte d’espace-temps malléable qu’une opération à la fois intellectuelle et artistique a transmuée en un récit dont l’apparence chronologique est une illusion purement cinématographique. Cela ne serait que banal si Chronique d’un été n’était pas un film d’observation documentaire, attaché, semble-t-il, à suivre au plus près et au plus juste, les situations provoquées par l’enquête à laquelle sont soumis les protagonistes dans la réalité.}\textsuperscript{324}

\textsuperscript{323} The \textit{image-mouvement} consists in an action and reaction uniting two shots, based on causality and sensori-motricity. The action commands the length of the shot. For instance, in the case of a classic dialogue sequence the alternating shots would screen the person who talks.

The Collage of Events

Although Jean Rouch pleads for, and usually makes, a minimalist use of montage, the twenty-five hours of rush he collects with Edgar Morin during the Summer 1960 ends up as a full-length feature film of eighty-five minutes, which suggests, on the one hand, how important the editing work must have been, and explains, on the other, the unavoidable hiatus and ellipses punctuating the movie. As a result, *Chronique d’un été* consists overall in a series of juxtapositions that paradoxically lacks some of the explicit connections we could observe previously, and that a classic story would normally establish from a sequence to another. Running the risk of breaking the impression of narrative homogeneity, of fracturing its continuity, this aspect is all the more confusing that the film’s coherence relies on the chronological thread. Yet, it is true at the same time that, traditionally, a chronicle is a particular form of narration that does not bother with transitioning and rather presents the aspect of a raw list of successive events, possibly linked to each other, but without logical connectors. In a way, ellipses could be compared to a period and the start of a new paragraph, like the film does when shifting abruptly from a sequence in a street to a private interview, or jumping from a character to another. The effects of these gaps are similar to those of the Deleuzian time-image to the extent that they share an absence of explicit causality and foreground a discontinuous time, breaking away from a particular action, and thus leaving a sort of “blank space” into the narration (instead of the “empty time” or “temps creux” I would say, expressed by Deleuze as “un morceau de temps à l’état pur”).

Besides, contrary to the sequence-

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325 The *image-temps* is an absence of evident causality or meaning of a sequence. It is similar to an ellipse in the sense that it paradoxically consists in a suspension of time, creating the temporal equivalent of a blank space. Time prevails over movement and does not depend on the action. Thus, it constitutes an intriguing break within the usual unfolding of things. Deleuze, who identifies this type of image with post-
shot, ellipses evidently indicate that a documentary film is not just a visual display relying on a mimetic effect, but that it actually creates its own diegetic universe where narration prevails over illustration.

Considered from the enunciative perspective, ellipses create an event as they manifest the evident subjectivity of the narration, while at the same time creating a juncture between two events belonging to the diegetic perspective. Along with a list of other cinematic strategies (shot/reverse-shot, close-up, editing…), Jean-Paul Desgouttes identifies ellipses as a process that intertwines these two perspectives and manifests “l’imbrication de l’instance diégétique et de l’instance énonciative, non pas que le narrateur fasse effraction dans la diégèse, mais, à l’inverse, parce que l’événement est tout entier circonscrit dans l’espace de l’énonciation”. In the case of Chronique d’un été, not only is this space of enunciation common to that of the diegetic universe (this is a necessary feature of photographic or filmic representation), but the official enunciators also enter the representational space (we see and hear the co-directors). This intertwining involving the realm of the text (diegetic) and its relation with the context via the enunciative voice, creates an analogy between real life and its cinematic transposition. The protagonists are juxtaposed in the film just as they live next to one from another in reality, with very little chance to ever cross each other. And yet, Chronique d’un été is ambivalent regarding this isolation of individuals. Indeed, the unity of the filmic text brings these people together, just as the directors arrange their mutual encounters in the real world. Therefore, given the central place they occupy in the narration, these encounters are to be envisioned as the

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war cinema (Italian Neo-realism and the French Nouvelle Vague) also qualifies it as an “expérience optique et sonore pure” as well. While the image-mouvement presupposes a chronological timing, the image-temps breaks away from temporal ruling.

326 Jean-Paul Desgouttes, “Le documentaire de création” (online seminar).
main events of the film (the successive and repeated actions through which the film acquires its homogeneity). They essentially happen by means of speech then, which is why individual voices are emphasized in the interviews, but they may happen through the moving body as well, although less frequently, when sensori-motricity constitutes the structure of a segment that serves as a pause within the overall narration of a talkative movie. The two might also happen together, either in a unified way, like Marceline’s famous sequence when she walks across the Place de la Concorde and then Les Halles, or in a disassembled manner, like the sequence of Sophie, the cover girl from Saint-Tropez, as she walks from the beach to a pier while her off-screen voice comments on the touristic place.

As we can see, the film, being interested in the collection and the conjunction of particular lives, it takes the form of a collage of events that may have impacted these lives, and whose significance or historical value depends on the frame through which the film is regarded because there are individual events and collective ones. In the first case, *Chronique d’un été* pictures personal experiences: Marilou, who works as a typist at the *Cahiers du cinéma* has met someone (a famous director from the *Nouvelle Vague*, Jacques Rivette); Angelo, who is harassed at work, leaves for vacation—unless he is fired, the film does not say—with a colleague and friend, Jacques, and his family; Marceline breaks up, or rather, she is on the verge of breaking up with Jean-Pierre (the directors decided to cut out this episode during editing). On a contextual level, yet still individual, *Chronique d’un été* is in itself an important event in almost all of the protagonists’ lives,

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327 At first sight, a conversation does not really look like an action in the common understanding of the term, but, when conceived as an encounter, it takes its full meaning.
as it is often recalled during discussions following the screening.\textsuperscript{328} From a cultural perspective as well, the film is an event in the history of cinema, as I first noticed in the introduction to this chapter. However, from a social and political perspective—which historically gave birth to the chronicle genre, under the form of medieval hagiographies, historical annals or exemplary biographies—, Morin’s and Rouch’s film seems to fail to portray the state of the world as it is during this Summer 1960, even though Marceline considers it “une des petites rivières qui mènent à Mai 68”.\textsuperscript{329} Its involvement with the national situation and international events is rather anecdotal (both in terms of length and content), and yet of certain significance. Finally, what is chronicled in this film are the anodyne and normal lives of ordinary people, giving an insight into personal stories of a Parisian village, through which bigger events are only alluded to, according to the co-directors explicit initiatives.

\textbf{The Details and the Facts}

Besides the temporal succession of events, the third element characterizing the chronicle regards the details it provides. I already had the occasion in the previous chapters to notice the necessary selection of specific elements when it comes to the construction of a narrative, especially one aiming at representing reality, since it would be impossible and irrelevant to pick up all the details happening in a single day. \textit{Chronique d’un été}, in

\textsuperscript{328} I do not insist on that point as it would take us out from the representational practice of the filmic text. But I can still mention a few examples of how the movie has impacted some of the lives it shows, which is an aspect often acknowledged by the directors and actors following the screening of the movie. Thanks to \textit{Chronique d’un été}, Marceline meets Joris Ivens, a famous documentary maker; Angelo becomes a unionist; Michel Brault deepened an experience he will put at work to direct with Pierre Perrault \textit{Pour la suite du monde} (1964), introducing direct cinema on the American continent; all of which finally allows Jean Rouch to observe that “all the people in the film were directly influenced by it”.

\textsuperscript{329} Marceline Loridan, in an interview with Laura Laufer (online). Indeed, the workers, employees and students appearing in the film rather express a reserved feeling in regards to the initial question of the film, although we are still eight years from the events of May 1968 and at the climax of the “\textit{Trente Glorieuses}”.\textsuperscript{1}
compliance with an aesthetics reliance on the “effet de réel”, displays visual and spoken details that contribute to the impression of authenticity and that confer to the characters an undeniable consistency. Obviously, those details are not all relevant to the narration and most of them belong to the general aesthetics of the film and the description of the characters. The typical detail of a visual representation is the close-up, which, beyond its descriptive quality, suggests a specific feeling and gives a sense of proximity while focusing the viewer’s attention (as during Marilou’s first appearance or Marceline and Jean-Pierre’s interview, for instance). However, close-ups are also an essential feature of cinematic syntax that allows us to make sense of a dialogic situation, for instance, such as the conventional “180 degree” rule Rothman evokes when closely examining the first sequence of Morin’s interaction with Marilou.\footnote{330 Referring to a scene from Chronique d’un été (minutes 33’ to 38’), Rothman exemplifies the 180 degree rule: “The shots of Morin, which locate Marilou off-screen to the left, are alternated with shots of Marilou in which we understand Morin to be located off-screen to the right. Screen direction is preserved: Marilou is always screen left, Morin is always screen right. We always know the direction she needs to look in order to look at him, and vice versa.” In Documentary Film Classics, op. cit., p. 74. This setting overtly establishes the fact that a discussion is taking place.} Although descriptive, they still carry important significance: when the camera holds for a moment on Marilou’s nervous hands, it conveys the uncertainty and anxiety that animate her as she enters her new relationship (second interview with Morin); when a close-up reveals Marceline’s tattooed number, it prepares Rouch’s intervention in the next conversation, which is then followed by the sequence of her noteworthy walk in Paris, a reminiscent moment of her experience of deportation, and among the first cinematic testimony of the Holocaust.\footnote{331 Nuit et Brouillard by Alain Resnais (1955), despite a poetic narration written by the death camp survivor Jean Cayrol, is actually the very first cinematic testimony of the Holocaust. The three excerpts mentioned correspond respectively to moments during the second interview with Marilou (minute 57’), and the one with Jean-Pierre in presence of Marceline (minute 43’), as well as to Marceline’s sequence (minutes 52’ to 57’) that inspired Michael Rothberg’s article, “The Work of Testimony in the Age of Decolonization: Chronicle of a Summer, Cinéma Vérité, and the Emergence of the Holocaust Survivor”, Publication of the Modern Language Association, vol. 2119, n° 5, October 2004.}
Other details may carry their own narration as those of the unique extra-diegetic sequence of the movie, for instance. It consists in a display, over a machinegun soundtrack, of a series of newspapers headlines regarding the Algerian and the Congolese situations during the Summer 1960. Not only do they present a narration of their own (the succession of titles relates the arrival and departure of an Algerian delegation in Paris), but they also serve as a transition between two group discussions on those topics voluntarily initiated by the directors (the Algerian titles are followed by Congolese one, just like the topics they connect).

As for what is conveyed by the protagonists’ utterance, despite Jacques’ contemptuous comment during the post-screening conversation, people do not only say “des généralités”. On the contrary, the intimate thoughts and confessions shared in *Chronique d’un été* confirm the idea that “*dans la vie on ne dit pas que des généralités*”.332 Landry’s observations regarding African unity, Angelo’s description of an alienating work, Marceline’s remembrance of the Nazi camps, are all but generalities. Those are personal details conveying various gazes on decolonizing struggles, social conditions and historical violence, thus articulating particular views that are more than commonplaces, with collective and remote events, with regard to which the protagonists, however, demonstrate a relative indifference (an attitude that surprises and saddens Rouch).

The fourth and last feature of the chronicle consists in the recounting of facts, which are things that exist and are generally believed to be true when recounted, in opposition to being known. As said earlier, *Chronique d’un été* is made up of a juxtaposition of portraits and encounters, a gallery of individual exposures made through the interactions between the directors and their protagonists primarily, but also of meetings arranged

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332 *Chronique d’un été*, minute 78’.
either between a couple of them (usually involving Landry, the Black student from Ivory Coast, and someone else), between several of them (as the two roundtables set up to address politic and international matters), and between them all on the final occasion of the screening. Although these evident interventions of Morin and Rouch may resemble to that of a filmmaker shooting a fiction movie and directing scripted interactions between the actors, it should not cast doubt on the fact that what takes place on the screen and in front of the camera are real facts. Even a fiction movie and its staged scenes still consist in a sample taken from the physical world, and, as such, unless special effects are added, it remains factual in the literal sense of the term (not one concerned with non-fiction). Reality is always at stake when it comes to photographic and cinematographic images. While animated movies, paintings or writings, may detach themselves from the materiality of the world, the very essence of photographic and cinematic pictures, forces the medium to transplant an image from reality, selecting in the context what literally illuminates and “writes” the visual text (since it is rendered with particles of light, a photographic process is a representation with no matter and yet constrained by its reflection).

Whether staged or not, the filmic representation remains a concern, for, what distinguishes a fiction movie from a documentary film in the end, regards the veracity of the facts, not the facts themselves. Far from escaping the problem of asserting the authenticity of the facts –and not whether they are true or not–, this remark forces us, on the contrary, to closely examine an aesthetics aiming at representing reality, while discarding the opposition between factual (or non-fictive) and fictional writing. In other words, it is not because a chronicle attempts to narrate some facts that one must take the
representation for a fact, as it is ultimately a recounted fact, not to be confused with reality itself. As a result, even if none of the scenes we see in *Chronique d’un été* is formally staged or strictly prepared, including that of Marceline walking across *la Concorde* then *Les Halles*, it does not really matter: Marceline is still walking and talking, that is a fact, and she is being filmed and recorded, that is another fact.

Finally, *Chronique d’un été* presents overall most of the features of a chronicle, and the film is edited towards this aim. It lets time unfold to a certain extent, it records things as they happen, capturing the regular events of everyday life, arbitrarily arranging in the end an order that is compatible with a chronological impression. This is not reality of course, but a representation of it. In accordance with the chronicle’s principle, the movie seems to follow the natural unfolding of a summer, reporting information about ordinary people. Morin and Rouch’s chronicle is a slice of time containing the possible truths of real individuals, but it is also a recounting that is, like any other, constrained by the impassable distance between a context and the pieces of text extracted from it, before being edited together. Consequently, such a representation always carries both truth and lie within. Reminding us of Baudelaire’s antithesis, Rouch expresses this problematic ambivalence at the heart of the reflection on *cinéma-vérité*.

There is a whole series of intermediaries and these are lying intermediaries. We contract time, we extend it, we chose an angle for the shot, we deform the people we are shooting, we speed things up and follow one movement to the detriment of another movement. So there is a whole work of lie. But, for me and Edgar Morin at the time we made that film, this [lie] was more real than the truth.\(^{333}\)

\(^{333}\) Jean Rouch in an interview, quoted by W. Rothman, *op. cit.*, p.70.
1.2 Incipit of a Parisian Summer

50 Seconds Description – Paris, 1960

*Chronique d’un été* opens with views of Paris at dawn. There is a tracking along the Seine with factory chimneys in the background across the river, framed in the foreground by the shapes of tree branches on the upper part, and famous *bouquinistes’* wooden boxes on the lower one. The camera slows down at a crossroad, holding for a little moment a wide-angle shot of the lights and the emblematic Eiffel Tower further in the back. A strident siren resounds during these two shots, and continues a little, making an audio juncture with the next one. The siren then fades away and is replaced by street noises that discretely rise, along with people hastily getting out of a subway entrance. Darkness has now dispersed and the camera, whose high-angle shot almost perfectly aligns with the stairs’ inclination, may now capture Parisians going to work in the daylight. This angled perspective on a broad sidewalk, only occupied on the right side by the “Metro” pillar and the stairs, contrasts with the longitudinal dimension of the first tracking and the depth of field of the second shot. Literally crossing two geometrical plans (that of the sidewalk with that of the camera angle extended by the stairs entrance), this third shot contributes more directly to the three-dimensional sense of space, precisely entered and crossed by people in a rush. Written information is displayed on the upper left of this dynamic frame, left “empty”: first the name of the producer (“*Anatole Dauman présente*”), then the title of the movie (“*CHRONIQUE D’UN ETE (Paris 1960)*”), and finally the directors’ names (“*Un film de Jean Rouch et Edgar Morin*”).
Two American (or three quarter) shots follow, situating the camera virtually within the crowd first, then slightly on the side. Although the camera is static, it seems to go against the flow since people walk towards it then pass it, as if they were crossing an invisible frontier, moving from the dimension of the visual text to that, off-camera, of the physical world from the past. In return, as if it was coming from this outer world, a voice starts speaking over the images. It is Jean Rouch’s opening, straightforward and fundamental statement: “Ce film n’a pas été joué par des acteurs, mais vécu par des hommes et des femmes, qui ont donné des moments de leur existence à une expérience nouvelle de cinéma-vérité”. Finally, instead of confronting the flow, the camera adopts an off-stream position, in and out a café, from which it still observes and follows the Parisians’ movement. In doing so, the camera turns backwards, as if it was intending to capture the outer world just mentioned that will still, inescapably, slips away. The two additional shots closing the opening sequence, pans from right to left at the corner of the street where the café is set and onto which the subway entrance gives. The first panoramic view, recorded outside the café, runs from the sidewalk into the café, whose glass-doors allow us to see through, providing a glimpse towards the other side of the street. The second panoramic shot echoes the first one, except that it presents a larger angle and that it is set inside the café, where it plays on the effects of the mirrored images of the bystanders, showing them splitting in opposite directions, and also revealing at once interior and external facets of the city.

This cinematic incipit lasts less than a minute, yet it is quite meaningful on several accounts, and not only because of Jean Rouch’s founding statement of cinéma-vérité examined further below. First, the bracketed subtitle plays as a deictic marker that

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334 *Chronique d’un été*, minutes 0’34s.
indicates the spatio-temporal anchoring of the movie. The loud siren, in relation to the Parisian subway, reminds us of the Second World War and Paris under bombing, except that people, instead of reaching for shelter, may now come out of the underground. It is sixteen years since the Liberation of Paris, and the move from darkness to light could suggest it is only bad memory—a memory that is, however, very present in the film and embodied by Marceline. The city is now reborn and rejoiced, as conveyed by the demographic boom and the economic revival. 1960 is the exact midpoint of a three-decades period of growth and insouciance that follows the war in France, a period called the “Trente Glorieuses”. Bearing that historical context in mind, the recurring question “êtes-vous heureux?” acquires a particular dimension, taking the risk of either sounding redundant, or contradicting the apparent lightness of those years. As a matter of fact, the film contrasts images and expressions of boredom, solitude and anxiety, with that of happiness when moving towards the South of France (water skiing and bathing in the Mediterranean sea, the corrida show, the familial get together), but it also brilliantly combines the burdening hopelessness with an apparently volatile editing. The seeming lightness that envelops Chronique d’un été, either aesthetic, recreational or technical, provides an awkward contrast vis-à-vis the moving and intense testimonies of the film.

On an individual level, the coming out of the shadows into the bright daylight, and from the underground onto the sidewalk, connotes another meaning: that of the exposure of intimacy conveyed by the directors. The question of happiness is quite a private one indeed, although depending on the people’s intention to give a honest answer. Such a

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335 The mention of technical lightness refers to the hand-held camera. Besides, regarding the cinematic industry, one may also recall that André Malraux, the French minister of culture at that time, facilitates the access to film making. Along with technical innovations (detailed further), this situation is one of the reasons for the emergence of the Nouvelle Vague.
disclosure is less likely to happen in the street, as shown by the early sequence of street interviews led by Marceline and Nadine, than in private apartments where people more voluntarily give themselves to the camera, just as they literally accept its presence in their interiors.\footnote{In the early part of the film, after the initial conversation between the co-directors and Marceline, they delegate her and Nadine in the street to ask people if they are happy (minutes 3’ to 8’). Then, right after this street sequence (that holds a little longer on a mechanic, his wife and a colleague), the two women meet a young couple of artists in their dwelling (this sequence ends with the playing of, and a close-up on, a music box, the only melody of the film that will also serve its final closing). Regarding the street interviews, Marceline recalls in an interview that the all crew was not quite comfortable filming in the street, as this was kind of new and thus surprising to people, and potentially suspicious to French authorities in a time of “civil” war.} This dialectic between the inside and the outside, the private and the public, is actually allegorized by the last shot depicted previously: when the camera is within the café and reveals what happens inside and outside at once. Besides, from the moment a person chooses to speak his or her private thoughts and feelings out in front of a camera, this information becomes public.

\textit{The Camera’s Ambivalent Moves}

From a shooting perspective, the position of the camera and its moves are also quite revealing in this opening sequence. In filming the Parisian crowd from above at first, the camera displays itself as an omniscient tool with the ability to view the action of life from above, an empowered “\textit{kino-glaz}” to quote Vertov’s expression, even a god’s eye reminding us of the demiurgic power of the directors: a creative ability they may perhaps –at least this would be Vertov or Morin’s hope– not exert directly upon reality, but on its representation for sure. Although Morin and Rouch have the possibility of choosing what they film and how they shoot, they can only fully perform their authoring power afterwards, when editing the film. From this dominant, unnatural and external perspective (also freed, to some extent, from the problem of the reverse angle as there would be a
priori nothing to look at behind the operator), the camera shortly reaches the ground and positions itself among the crowd, filming the Parisians at a human scale. This following visual statement is that of a humanist perspective, which makes the other its equal, someone to interact with, not to oversee or to direct. While being confused with the crowd, the camera also asserts itself as an observer when stepping slightly aside, which constitutes a third statement acknowledging a particular status, that of an alter ego physically present, and yet in retreat from reality at the same time, for, to document everyday life as *Chronique d’un été* attempts to, one needs to withdraw oneself from it: this apparent paradox is at the heart of participant observation, perfectly illustrated by the succession of the two shots just described. The camera, because it is already projecting itself into another universe, that of the text, belongs to the context but not quite. It is an intermediary tool that works both towards referentiality because of its indexical process, and against it in a way, as an anti-referent since, when performing the shooting, the camera primarily refers to a text, not to reality. The film often plays on this formal and ontological ambivalence between presence and absence. When filming group discussions, for instance, the camera plays as an additional character, like an arriving guest taking an overview of the group (from a human-ist perspective) and then sitting at the table as a silent person staring at others who talk.337

These three positions of the camera, above, within and aside, respectively epitomize the directors as authors, their interactions with others and their apparent refusal to intervene in the action taking place. This last observational stance holds a particular power, evoked

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337 On this matter, see also the last sections of the chapter regarding the effects of a participant and organic camera. However, we can already observe that the camera never talks in *Chronique d’un été*. It only shows, which still is a visual enunciation. For a talking camera (and not just a sound-recording one as in the movie), I would refer here to Stéphane Breton’s documentary films set in New-Guinea. He is the perfect exemplification of a fully embodied camera that even pushes forward Rouch’s approach.
by the two panoramic shots as well. It suggests an ability to see through things: first, against the living flow to reach a certain truth (the camera is traversed by the crowd and the pans run from right to left); second, from the outside across the inside (of the café), as a way to extend the understanding of people’s moves; and third, in grasping two opposite streams at once, as if the camera had eyes in the back, thanks to the mirrored effects. In the end, this vantage point of the camera acknowledges a possibility to go against the obvious by revealing things and revealing more, which reminds us of Walter Benjamin’s statement regarding the particular ability of the cameraman. In opposition to the painter operating from a distance, “the cameraman penetrates deeply into the web of reality”, as the surgeon into a subject’s tissue.\(^{338}\) Consequently, the camera has the ability to enrich and widen reality, thus renewing its exploration of reality, revisiting common knowledge and reconsidering the habits of the everyday life: “By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring common place milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action”.\(^{339}\) Not only does the camera does increase the field of reality, giving birth to a space for creative exploration, it also

\(^{338}\) See Walter Benjamin’s essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 1936, paragraph 11. “The surgeon represents the polar opposite of the magician. The magician heals a sick person by the laying on of hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient’s body. The magician maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself; though he reduces it very slightly by the laying on of hands, he greatly increases it by virtue of his authority. The surgeon does exactly the reverse; he greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient’s body, and increases it but little by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs. In short, in contrast to the magician—who is still hidden in the medical practitioner—the surgeon at the decisive moment abstains from facing the patient man to man; rather, it is through the operation that he penetrates into him. Magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web”. The philosopher goes on opposing the final results of the two images: one is a global overview, whereas the other consists in fragments and offers, “precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality, which is free of all equipment”.

fosters a self-reflecting process since behind the camera—and in front of the screen—, stand human beings similar to those being filmed. The whole point of Benjamin’s essay on “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” is precisely to stress the potentiality and the wake of masses’ self-awareness. Heading towards others and meeting people is always a way for looking at the self, which is, on the one hand, literally the case in the penultimate sequence of *Chronique d’un été*, and on the other, a defining characteristic of *cinéma-vérité*, especially in its acknowledgment of the camera’s presence, as developed further in this chapter.

**Rouch’s Statement on Cinéma-Vérité**

Rouch’s spoken introduction is a genuine statement for authenticity. His short sentence making the French expression of *cinéma-vérité* official can be considered as a pact he makes with the audience to assert the veracity of the documentary film they are about to see. The initial antithesis contrasts on the one side a film “*joué par des acteurs*” with an experience “*vécu par des hommes et des femmes*” on the other. As already suggested, this opposition, aiming at discriminating between fiction and document, is highly questionable (especially coming from Jean Rouch who conceptualized ethno-fiction). In the concluding sequence of the film, once the experience is over and after the protagonists have expressed their opinions regarding the level of reality the movie has achieved and whether or not it reflects the truth, Morin and Rouch themselves are led to reassess the “acting versus being” dichotomy. Morin, with relative bitterness, observes that the viewers’ reactions could be summed up by these two opposite views: some stress

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340 “The adjustment of the reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception”, *ibid.*, paragraph 3.
the duplicity of certain characters who seem to be acting rather than just being themselves; others claim that they are indecently exposing themselves to the camera. “En somme, tout ce qui a été dit peut se résumer en deux choses: ou bien on reproche à nos personnages de ne pas être assez vrais (...), ou bien on leur reproche d’être trop vrai (...) les gens, dès qu’ils sont un peu plus sincères que dans la vie, on leur dit ou bien vous êtes des cabotins, des comédiens, ou bien vous êtes des exhibitionnistes.”

But what difference does it make, in the end, whether they are faking or over-confessing? When it comes to cinema as a representational process, it does not matter whether the people on screen are acting or not. These two judgments over one same phenomenon, that of real people appearing on screen, finally does not matter, because they are real, all made of flesh and blood, and because of the mistake it would be to oppose from this perspective fact and fiction, between which it is ultimately not possible to discriminate with certainty (in that sense, it makes more sense to oppose a classic film to an animated cartoon).

Rothman’s stance appears then wiser: “Chronicle is not simply a documentary, because the people in the film are provoked to manifest fictional parts of themselves. And it is not simply a fiction film, because the fictions it reveals are real. Yet a fiction is also a lie” he adds, and so is a documentary, as Rouch said earlier, but a real one though.

Taking note of this ambiguity, and of the dual interpretation of a same phenomenon, Rouch laconically suggests to Morin that the protagonists themselves ignore that they may actually be acting, whether in the literal sense of the word (“comédiens”), or by exaggerating their own reality (“exhibitionnistes”). Then, referring to Marceline’s remembering sequence, he implicates his acolyte and asserts: “elle dit qu’elle jouait, on

341 Chronique d’un été, minute 81’.
342 W. Rothman, op. cit., p.70.
est témoins, elle ne jouait pas !”; to which Morin relevantly answers: “ou si elle jouait, on peut dire que c’était la partie la plus authentique d’elle-même”. The ambiguity rises again, leading Rothman to formulate a tricky question: “is her ‘most authentic side’ the role she was playing, or is it the actress capable of making that role her own?” Actually, Morin’s reply could suggest an easier rephrasing of the problem under the form of the paradox that consists in “playing for real one’s own role”. The contradiction is less aporetic than it seems when considering these two evident observations: first, on the representational level, the transposition a film operates on an individual necessarily makes her or him an image of what she or he really is, and conversely, by virtue of the performance, the person may only project an impression of what she or he is; second, on the contextual level, “all the world’s a stage” as stressed by William Shakespeare four centuries ago. Because social life may be perceived as a play, we all act the role society has assigned us (a statement that also resonates with Atget’s manipulation in the *Interiors* album). For instance, one of the person Morin interviews with his wife, an old friend of Morin’s from the period they were enrolled together in the communist party, expresses that he is not really himself while at work. There, he has to adapt, whereas he can truly be who he is when at home. The second part of Rouch’s introductory statement regards the fact that the individuals who took part in the film gave “des moments de leur existence” to a new cinematic

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343 *Chronique d’un été*, minute 81’. Rothman says the exact same thing, and so does Rouch in an interview a few years later when observing that film has the power “to reveal, with doubts, a fictional part of all of us” and he significantly adds that, according to him, this “is the most real part of an individual”. These observations are further explored and commented on in the section on “ciné-transe”.

344 W. Rothman, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

345 “All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages.” William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene vii, Jacques’ monologue (1599).

346 *Chronique d’un été*, minutes 27’ to 33’.
experience. This remark does more than merely refer to their willingness to be filmed and to share with the directors intimate thoughts and feelings about their daily lives. It connects their personal histories with the filmic representation, implying that the latter should not be considered as “just” a movie, but rather as an actual performance in which individuals were existentially involved. It is not as if the camera would have stolen something from them, or as if they had willingly abandoned a part of themselves, for they exist within the representational realm and within reality, just like the camera. This is possible because an experience, acknowledged and recollected on the filmic level, occurred in real life, thus being a trace of contact between the two dimensions I am concerned with; a particular event through which representation (aside all the manipulations it implies) meets reality. In other words, Rouch’s remark refers to the text this movie shares with the con-text it was once in con-tact with. This encounter, made through the filmic performance, is the one and only undeniable vérité of cinéma-vérité.

2. A Bicephalous Direction

2.1 The Viewer and the Observer

*Morin, an Introduction to Film Theory*

Morin is an atypical scholar, known nowadays as a leading intellectual figure, but at the time of *Chronique d’un été*, he had not yet pictured the global approach he will later detail in his substantial *Method* (six volumes published between 1977 and 2004); nor has
he formulated the complex that is at the heart of his genuinely transdisciplinary thinking (to be understood in the etymological sense of the word, that is, as a web interweaving together various domains of thoughts). Throughout his career as a scholar, Morin has no particular agenda related to a specific discipline; he is rather driven by a personal path which keeps him on the fringes of academia, especially in a time when human and social sciences are still pretty much infused with objectivity and positivism. His first publications deal with his experience of destruction in L’An zéro de l’Allemagne (1946), of death in L’homme et la mort (1951) and of communism in Autocritique (1959). But most importantly, Morin, being a passionate if not an obsessive moviegoer, has also written two important books on cinema prior to taking part in the adventure of Chronique d’un été. Although quoted by Jacques Aumont, Christian Metz or Siegfried Kracauer, Morin’s theoretical works on the cinematic image stands on the margins of French film theory. It also has little echo in Anglophone scholarship despite their English re-edition in 2005. In his review of these new editions of The cinema, or the Imaginary Man (1956) and The Stars (1957), Karl Shoomover comments on the introduction by the translator, Lorraine Mortimer:

Mortimer believes that an overly rational approach to analysis dominates the academic study of film, an approach that risks flattening the experience of cinema. In her view, a monolith of film theory threatens to disembowel the very qualities that grant the medium its power, through a series of analyses or clinical dissections that are especially insensitive to cinema’s subjective lures. Morin’s perspective, by contrast, demands that we recognize how essential affect, participation, and chance are to the

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347 Appointed in Germany after the Liberation, Morin can only observe the breadth of the ruins in the homeland of great thinkers and artists. A few years later, in 1949, he starts distancing himself from the communist party he joined in 1941. In 1951, the rejection is official and reciprocal: Morin is expelled from the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) for questioning and denouncing the Stalinist purges.
institution of cinema. He seizes on the magic of cinema, regarding it as a structured form of enchantment which, to be understood, must be appreciated for its anti-rationalizing reason.\(^{348}\)

In order to pay tribute to Morin’s reflection on cinema, Mortimer first revisits the values assigned by Richard Allen and Murray Smith to the twofold orientation they observed within the “academic film community”. In their preface to the important collection of articles gathered in *Film Theory and Philosophy* (1997), they react against continental philosophy, which they find ambiguous, speculative, obscure and politically engaged, on the one hand, and give credits, on the other hand, to the analytic perspective of the Anglophone world, long seen as narrow and technical, but reassessed as being in fact clear, precise, and rigorous. Dominique Chateau, who finds some weaknesses in this clear-cut distinction, summarizes it as follows: “*le retour brutal du réalisme de l’image cinématographique contre la sémiotique de l’illusion*”.\(^{349}\) In my view, this sentence reflects two perspectives on cinema that are in fact more complementary than opposed: the analytic orientation aims at getting rid of external determinations (a pragmatic realism), while the continental tradition appears mostly interested in the cinematic effect on, and participation of, the viewer (the illusory effect). But in fact, these two stances only reflect the dual nature of cinema, which Morin encompasses in his work through the distinction he makes between the cinematograph and cinema for instance, or in the following quote: “*le cinéma unit indissolublement la réalité objective du monde, telle que*”

\(^{348}\) Karl Shoomover, review of *The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man*, and *Stars*, in *Senses of cinema*, may 2006, issue 39.

\(^{349}\) According to Chateau, this reading first opposes thinkers specialized in cinema against general philosophers; second, it superficially superposes methodology and geography; third, it presents at times caricatural interpretations; and fourth it is mistaken when considering ideology from empiricist perspective (something that is bad when looking at USSR) and not from its ethical point of view. See Dominique Chateau, *Philosophies du cinéma*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2010, introduction. On this last matter of ideology, one should also notice that Morin’s writings on cinema stands aside the dominant view of French thinkers envisioning cinema as a mere bourgeois distraction to the detriment of the masses.
la photographie la reflète, et la vision subjective de ce monde, telle que la peinture dite archaïque ou naïve la représente."\(^{350}\) This simple remark points at what makes Morin’s anthropological perspective on cinema original. He considers it a subjective projection (whether coming from the author or the viewer) as much as a social phenomenon (reflecting on the collective irrational of cinema, similar to a possession ritual to some extent).\(^{351}\) His concluding section of *The Imaginary Man*, entitled “la réalité semi-imaginaire de l’homme”, does not discard the ambiguous status of the cinematic image, always real and illusory (as suggested by the epigraph of this chapter), regardless of the analytic or continental perspective adopted. Consequently, one of the most fertile ideas of Morin on cinema relies in his conception of its aesthetics as being strongly bound to magic. Indeed, resituating aesthetics in a historical process, and reminding us of Benjamin’s perspective on the decline of the aura, Morin writes:

> Aussi avons-nous envisagé l’essence esthétique du cinéma, non pas comme une évidence transcendantale, mais relative à la magie ; réciproquement l’essence magique du cinéma nous est apparue relative à l’esthétique. Cela veut dire que ce n’est pas la magie première qui ressuscite dans le cinéma, mais une magie réduite, atrophiée, immergée dans le syncrétisme affectif et rationnel supérieur qu’est l’esthétique ; que l’esthétique n’est pas une donnée humaine première (…) mais le produit évolutif de la déchéance de la magie et de la religion.\(^{352}\)

Morin’s complexity lies in his global approach to the cinematic phenomenon. His originality is also underlined by Shoonover when situating him between “the ontological realism of Bazin and the semiotics of Metz” for instance, or by the alternative his

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\(^{351}\) Morin’s second book on cinema, *Stars*, is quite original for the perspective it adopts of popular culture and the religious component he identifies regarding the myths surrounding celebrities and their adoration.

\(^{352}\) E. Morin, *op. cit.*, concluding chapter.
reflection may offer to a debate opposing Baudry (and his Marxist-Lacanian perspective on cinema) to Kendall Walton (known for asserting the transparency of photographic images). This nominalization of the “continental versus analytic” opposition seems in the end always focused on mental representations (for asserting transparency of the image is a mental perspective), not to be confused with the practice of representation on which I try to focus exclusively (although being conscious of my position as an analyst). This is the reason why it makes perfect sense to identify the primary truth of cinéma-vérité as referring to the fact that a film has been shot, thus echoing Barthes’ Ça a été in a way.

*Rouch, an Initiation to Film Practice*

In comparison with Edgar Morin, Jean Rouch is rather a man of practice. At the time they meet, Rouch is already known for the many films he had directed in West Africa (about twenty). His work in the field of visual anthropology had already taken a dual direction perceptible, for instance, through two particular films he directs in 1954: *Les Maîtres fous* and *Jaguar* (only finalized in 1967 though). Interestingly they both reflect fundamental early works of ethnographic cinema. *Les Maîtres fous*, on the one hand, strikingly documents the Hauka movement and their violent reenactment of the British colonial administration. Jean Rouch films with an astonishing proximity an episode of a trance, which he later comments off-screen for the viewer to make sense of what is shown. This arrangement, evidently meant to be informative, emulates another famous film on trance—a very cinegenic phenomenon indeed—shot a couple decades earlier (yet only released in 1952) by Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead in Bali.\(^{353}\) On the other hand, *Jaguar* is a road movie that narrates the story of three friends traveling to the Gold Coast (Ghana)

\(^{353}\) Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, *Trance and Dance in Bali*, 22 minutes, 1952.
where they plan on making a fortune for a triumphal return to their village. Crossing the boundaries between documentary film and fiction movie, *Jaguar* is a confusing work of ethno-fiction that echoes the well-known *Nanook of the North* Robert Flaherty directed in the early 1920s.\(^\text{354}\) In directing these two films, Jean Rouch becomes aware of certain characteristics and filming strategies he will progressively develop, and that are already noticeable in *Chronique d’un été*.

First, *Les Maîtres fous* reproduces Bateson’s and Mead’s documentary setting only to a certain extent: while shooting the Hauka’s possession ritual, Jean Rouch seems to be at the heart of the scene; he measures the impact his presence may produce on the protagonists. Actually, as he recalls in an interview, the Hauka priests had invited him “to come and film their ceremony which they planned to use as part of their ceremonies”.

Rouch further observes:

> It was probably their intention to go beyond what had been done before. You see, when they first decided to eat a dog it was really breaking a very strong taboo. They were doing something very bad, and maybe if they had used the film there would have been a fantastic emergence of all the Hauka power at the same time. Well, they were ready to try a kind of experiment because they felt they could command any aspect of European-based technology, including cameras and films.\(^\text{355}\)

Rouch may not be participating in the Hauka ceremony, but it becomes clear to him that his very presence and the mere fact that he is filming, suffice to make him part of the

\(^{354}\) Robert J. Flaherty, *Nanook of the North*, 79 minutes, 1922. Flaherty’s film is among the first ethnographic and documentary films in the history of cinema. One should mention as well the documentary movie directed by Edward S. Curtis eight years earlier (and just restored last year), *In The Land of the Head Hunters* (1914). Both films of course are romanticized, however, while the latter reenacts a tribal myth, the former –often criticized for being staged, reducing others and asserting white man’s power– documents the very day life of the Inuit people.

event on the one side, and, as a result, to alter reality on the other.\footnote{This situation is made explicit by Jean Rouch when talking about the film Turu et Bitti he directed in 1971. As developed further in the section “The Virtue of Trance”, he feels himself entranced and does not doubt that his very presence among the Songhay group, triggered the episode of trance.} Besides this essential realization of the part the camera takes in the reality it films, Rouch tunes the length of the ceremony with that of the movie: “il filme les événements en les situant dans le temps (...). Il respecte le déroulement du rituel (...). Les nombreuses indications temporelles données dans le film et l’explicitation des différentes étapes du rite suivies chronologiquement montrent comment le temps s’inscrit dans le film, montrent comment le déploiement liturgique est à l’origine du temps du court.”\footnote{Florence de Courville “Jean Rouch : des Maîtres fous à Moro Naba. De l’éthique à l’esthétique” in Le Court-métrage français de 1945 à 1968 (Vol. 2). Documentaire, fiction : allers-retours, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008, p.364.} In short, even though he may distort it, Rouch submits himself to the event and he tries, later on, during the editing phase, to resituate its temporality as closely as possible. In a way, this cinematographic practice comes really close to “one take/one sequence” method Rouch will later develop, which is based on the sequence-shot.

Second, Jaguar, which Rouch directs together with his friends Lam, Illo and Damouré (who is the one asking him for a “real” fiction movie), can be read as a paradigmatic experience of shared anthropology, just as Moi, un noir (1958) and other ethno-fictions.\footnote{Rouch directs this other ethno-fiction a few years after Jaguar, which is still a part of his anthropological research on transnational migrations in West Africa. Moi, un noir retraces the everyday life of young men from a neighborhood of Abidjan, Treichville, in which Jean Rouch is introduced by Oumara Ganda (the narrator). Contrary to Jaguar, in which Damouré and Lam (not Illo) were playing a different character than their own, the protagonists of Moi, un noir enact their own roles. Additionally, two films directed in the early 1970s can be seen as sequels to Jaguar, since we see the same friends coming together in Petit à petit (1971), a contemporary version of Les Lettres persannes, and Cocorico Monsieur Poulet (1974), another improvised road movie with humoristic incidents. One may also think of Rouch’s late film Madame l’eau (1992) as another sequel on a certain level.} Knowing that cinematic objectivity is illusory and that a camera’s presence is most likely bound to influence interactions between people, Rouch sees nothing contradictory in employing narrative techniques in ethnographic films. In an interview he
recalls a discussion with his wife, Jane, about this matter, during the shooting of Jaguar:

“She said “The Truth is more important: why aren't you making a documentary instead of asking these people to play roles which are not their own?” And I explained to her how very difficult it is to show all the things I wanted to show about these migrations in a documentary”, thus suggesting the alternative ethno-fiction offers in certain situations. Rouch further concludes:

So we were using the camera as a kind of passport to fantasy or to truth, I don't know which exactly.
We shot the film like that in one year. The narration was done later on, and the film was not edited on a bench but was actually filmed in the camera in the final order you see on the screen. I brought the film back two years later and projected it to the boys in Accra. We improvised the commentary in one day and it was first-class. 359

Similar to Chronique d’un été, Jaguar is a daily adventure, both in its content and in its making. The friends meet in the morning, decide on what they want to perform, shoot during the day, and later improvise the voice over commentary. This last aspect is the only one that significantly diverges from Chronique d’un été (which still resorts to voice-over from time to time). In the absence of synch-sound, the protagonists add a different value to the film when recording their own voice over the images. In Moi, un noir, for instance, not only do they reenact their own dialogues, but they also comment and anticipate sometimes on what happens next, making jokes as well, which gives the film a particular note and allows at the same time to access their personal thoughts. The way the director and the people shown in the film interact together is an example of shared anthropology, whose epistemology relies on the fact the protagonists are aware of the

359 Rouch interview, 1977n About His Films to John Marshall and John W. Adams (September 14th and 15th, 1977)
representation at stake, so that what is displayed in the end, amounts to the result of a true encounter between the observer and real persons, counterbalancing the objectifying effect of the camera and of the anthropologist, allowing people to become informers instead of just being observed. “This type of participatory research, says Rouch, as idealistic as it may seem, appears to me to be the only morally and scientifically feasible anthropological attitude today”.\(^{360}\)

In the end, although Rouch’s film presents a fiction part resulting in the loosely narrative the director elaborates with the actors (just like Flaherty did with Nanook, yet conducted in a more conscious way by Rouch), he does not bother with the boundaries between fiction and documentary.\(^{361}\) He even considers it desirable and more authentic in the sense that ethno-fiction, and its correlate of shared anthropology, are means to explore further and to represent better reality. Instead of recruiting actors and having them play a given role, Rouch asks ordinary people to reenact their own life. In doing so, he emulates Flaherty’s participant approach (although the camera has not yet become participant). In that sense, Flaherty is the one who invents with Nanook the reality-show –of course, cleared of all its current and foolish excesses. The point is not to shoot people while they replay reality, but rather to record the narrative of their everyday life as they perform it more or less consciously.

\(^{360}\) Jean Rouch, Steven Feld (trad.), Cine-Ethnography, University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p.44.
\(^{361}\) From Rouch’s perspective, it is in fact inevitable –and probably desirable– that a film contains some drama in it: “For me, as an ethnographer and filmmaker, there is almost no boundary between documentary film and films of fiction” in Cine-Ethnography, op. cit., p.185.
2.2 *Chronique d’un Été* as a Crossroad

*Before and After The Film*

*Chronique d’un été* is an innovative experience regarding the aesthetic representation of reality. Therefore, it rapidly becomes a model in terms of cinematography, not only for subsequent documentary films but also regarding its influence on, and relation with, the works of the *Nouvelle Vague*. This modern cinema corresponds to a new spirit infusing the way movies are conceived, directed and edited. Beyond the technical innovations that play a crucial role in these films’ aesthetics as well, it is the whole syntax of classic cinema that is revisited. Yet, one must also look back at the inspiring sources of Morin’s and Rouch’s cinematic experiment. Rouch, for instance, often acknowledges the impact two great directors, Dziga Vertov and Robert Flaherty, had on him. Talking of the possibilities offered by the new equipment, Rouch speaks of the camera as “a third character: a combination of Flaherty’s participant camera and Vertov’s theory”, he says.⁶⁶²

All these influences finally amount to the essential matter of the expression of an author and the reshaping of a hero. Addressing the oscillation between a discrete and an overt directing, a present and an absent camera, a real and a fake performance, *Chronique d’un été* epitomizes the historical shift that helps cinema to reach its full potential as a medium, or, differently phrased, this documentary film helps a medium that is modern by nature to reveal its particularity, just as Atget contributed to the advent of straight photography. Because it is impossible for art to reconcile with nature (or for

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⁶⁶² Jean Rouch, interview with Dan Yakir, *op. cit.*. This condensed remark, combining two antithetic approaches, is clarified in the section “Participant and Organic Camera”.
representation to espouse reality), and because of the self-reflection the movie displays, the film talks about itself, in compliance with Arthur Danto’s remark about modernism: “With modernism, the condition of representation themselves become central, so that art in a way becomes its own subject” \(^{363}\)

Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch are about forty years old at the time they direct *Chronique d’un été* during the Summer 1960. Although Rouch is four years older, they belong to the same generation and they both engaged in the Resistance as young adults during the Second World War. Rouch is then a young engineer from the prestigious school *Les Ponts et Chaussées*. Affected in Niger, he builds roads in the French colonial empire on the decline, before joining the *Forces Françaises Libres* in Sénégal and taking part in the Liberation of France. Morin, who was already an activist during the Spanish Civil War, is involved in a pacifist and antifascist organization. He is involved in the Resistance with the left-wing parties. A few years after the war, they both join the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS). Morin enters the institution on the advice of his mentor, Georges Friedman, in 1950; and Rouch, who will later defend his dissertation under Marcel Griaule’s direction, starts working for the *Comité du film ethnographique* in 1953. They first meet on the occasion of a colloquium held in Switzerland in 1959. Shortly after, Morin invites Rouch to turn his camera on Paris for a few months in order to have a finger on the pulse of French society. Rouch answers positively and acknowledges, in the very next scene following the introduction analyzed previously, Morin’s brilliant idea: “*Tu vois Morin, l'idée de réunir des gens autour d'une table est une excellente idée. Seulement, je ne sais pas si nous arriverons à enregistrer une conversation aussi normale*” \(^{363}\)

qu’elle le serait s’il n’y avait pas de caméra". In saying so, Rouch exposes the exact problem the directors will be facing throughout their film, and wonders about the particular reality they will be recording, explicitly pointing, right from the beginning, at its distortion by the very presence of the camera. Although they ignore what the result will be, Rouch may already conceive this filmic exploration as an interesting –and different, since he had only been directing in Africa so far– experience of shared anthropology, while Morin may additionally perceive it as a concrete plunge into the making of a universe in which he could only immersed himself so far as a reflecting viewer. For Rouch, accomplished filmmaker and anthropologist, and Morin, engaged intellectual and sociologist, Chronique d’un été constitutes the perfect ground for sharing and confronting their respective approaches, mostly practical on the one hand, and theoretical on the other. As shown by the way the two researchers will later reincorporate their common filmic experience in their subsequent works, one can observe that Chronique d’un été is not only a landmark in the history of cinema, but also constitutes a pivotal work in regards to Rouch’s and Morin’s approaches (not forgetting the impact it had on the lives of the other protagonists).

First, the new lightweight equipment and synchronous sound Rouch experiments with under Michel Brault’s guidance, encourages him, from now on, to resort as much as he can to sequence-shots (or the “one take/one sequence” concept), out of which he will forge the notion of ciné-transe. As noticed by William Rothman, there is a pre- and a post-Chronique d’un été in Rouch’s way of filming:

As he incorporated the use of portable synch-sound equipment into his films among the Songhay and Dogon, and no doubt partly as a response to

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364 Chronique, 0’50s
his experience making *Chronicle*, he developed a new method of filming (it is also a new method of editing, or, rather, of avoiding editing). What he calls the “one take/one sequence” method enabled him increasingly to forgo the classical conventions that made *Chronicle* a “work of lies”.365

Second, there also is a before and an after when looking at Morin’s later definition of his sociological methodology, which resonates quite appropriately with the work conducted in *Chronique d’un été*: “Our method seeks to envelop the phenomenon (observation), to recognize the forces within it (praxis), to provoke it at strategic points (intervention), to penetrate it by individual contact (interview), to question action, speech, and things. Each of these methods poses the fundamental methodological problem: the relationship between the research worker and the subject.”366 Alfonso Montuori remarks in an introduction to Morin’s impressive body of work (it probably comprises as much books and articles as the numbers of movies directed by Rouch, that is, over a hundred), that *Chronique d’un été* deepens considerably his participative approach. In that sense, the film is precursory of “Morin’s lifelong concern for intersubjectivity and self-reflection that was later to be articulated extensively in his works of sociology [of the everyday life] and Complex Thought”367.

365 W. Rothman, op. cit., p.89.
367 Alfonso Montuori, p. 6. Who further writes: “From his work on popular culture to *cinema vérité* to his participatory research approach, we find Morin challenging assumptions about high and low culture, about the objectivity and distance of the researcher and the camera, and a critique of expertism that instead favors immersion and participation in the everyday, and draws on the knowledge of non-specialized participants. This is part of Morin’s larger thrust to bring the dis-course of social science in much closer relationship to the lived realities of human experience, the contingencies, the seeming trivialities, the emotions, subjectivities, and uniqueness of life in all its manifestations while at the same time uncovering the epistemological dimension, addressing how we make sense of the world, how we construct our knowledge.” Alfonso Montuori, *ibid.*, p. 6-7.
Finally, Morin’s and Rouch’s perspectives meet on this practice of a participatory approach that allow them understanding from within a specific vision of the world; this “within” consisting, in the particular case of Chronique d’un été, rather in the vision of the film than that of the characters (not to be confused once again). Their whole intellectual edifice relies on encounters and the common construction of knowledge, the shared anthropology that characterizes Chronique d’un été in the end, appears secondary. This being said, one might notice, however, a slight difference between the ways the co-directors approach this filmic representation or cinematic encounter: Morin appears to be more obsessed with the authenticity the film will achieve in the viewer’s mind, while Rouch seems to be rather interested in what the camera will reveal of the actors.

Rouch Directing Morin

The co-directors intervene on the film in two ways: first, in refining its narrative through the editing of its final form; second, in appearing in front of and behind the camera during the shooting. While their different personalities, experiences and roles are quite perceptible in the film, it is difficult, if not impossible, to really discriminate between the role each one played during the montage of Chronique d’un été. The “pure” narration – impossible since it would demand the absence of a narrator, and thus the absence of the camera– would consist in a mere recording of the events as they unfold. This idea matches Rouch’s nascent concept of “one take/one sequence”, but it obviously conflicts with the important editing the two directors have to operate over the twenty-five hours of rush and the numerous ellipses resulting. Max Scheinfeigel provides us with some information regarding their delicate collaboration in regards to editing:
Morin souhaitait un système d’oppositions réglées entre le général et le particulier, élaborant ainsi une « structure » pour les différents thèmes abordés. Rouch, lui, plaidait pour « un montage chronologique en fonction du tournage plutôt qu’en fonction du sujet ». Après intervention de la production, Jean Rouch finit par tirer cette conclusion intéressante : « Le co-auteurisme (...) est un jeu violent où le désaccord est la seule règle, et la solution dans la solution de ce désaccord. Encore faut-il que l’arbitre (ou le producteur) ait l’esprit assez libre pour suivre la partie en sanctionnant les seules fautes. Hélas, un producteur de film, coincé entre le mécénat d’artistes insupportables et les impératifs financiers, ne peut pas être impartial.»

This quote briefly reveals the opposite perspectives of the co-directors regarding the narrative structure they want to give to the montage of *Chronique d’un été*. Scheinfeigel points at the disagreement between Morin, who wants the film to articulate private elements with bigger social issues, and Rouch, who would prefer the narration to follow a chronological frame. Despite Rouch’s comment, it is unclear which of the two versions is finally favored, as the global structure of the movie loosely combines both views.

Regarding the respective positions of Rouch and Morin during the shooting of the film, the former naturally stands mostly behind the camera, while the latter is the one who interacts directly on screen with the other protagonists. This arrangement makes perfect sense given Rouch’s previous experience as a cameraman and the fact that most of the people interviewed are Morin’s acquaintances. However, it is a trompe-l’oeil at the same time that gives Morin an apparent leading role when in fact, Rouch seems to be the one directing the movie, although he finds it a bit hypocritical when reflecting on his position: “I was often behind the camera. Maybe it was also a bit hypocritical of my part: all the people in the film were Morin’s friends, so I was a sort of an observer, having an

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observer’s impunity. It’s not a very nice role.” Rouch is not quite comfortable with this position of a viewer who is present and visible in the context of the shooting, absent and concealed from the filmic text, yet, in both cases, never evidently taking part in the movie.

Aside from this unusual situation that prevents Rouch from fully enacting a moment of shared anthropology, this short quote reveals three other important aspects. First, it acknowledges the fact that Rouch is rather in the position of the outsider, or at least the visitor. He barely appears on screen, and when he does so, it is significant only on three occasions: the initial and final sequences, and a middle one, consisting in a group discussion during which he provokes Marceline’s memory of the death camp. After all, he is the one who has been offered by Morin to come to Paris and shoot a film. As such, Morin is the host – and he might well be literally so, for several of the interviews are set in the same apartment one may recognize because of the congested bookshelves and a patterned curtain. It is in this relatively discrete but recurrent setting, supposedly around Morin’s table, that takes place the first conversation with Angelo and two of his co-workers, the interview with Marilou, maybe the one of Marceline and Jean-Pierre too, the dinner with an old friend from the communist party and his wife, and finally the group conversation regarding the war in Algeria.

Second, Rouch’s remark reveals that there were actually two groups taking part in the film, which are often acknowledged in interviews as la bande à Morin (Morin’s mob) and la bande à Rouch. The former is comprised of leftist students, workers or employees,

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369 Jean Rouch, interview with Dan Yakir, op. cit..
370 This does not mean that it is the only setting of the movie, as these interviews are interspersed with streets views, other interiors, factory shots, a stairwell discussion… However, it may have motivated Rouch’s suggestion to leave “for vacation” in Saint-Tropez.
rather politically involved, defeatist sometimes, more serious than the second, lighter and rather cheerful, with Landry, the student from Ivory Coast, and Nadine, with whom Rouch had just directed *La Pyramide humaine*\(^{371}\). This dual attitude complies with the personalities of the co-directors in the film and with their positions regarding the question of happiness, as Morin himself acknowledges in Saint-Tropez. Indeed, when asking his teenage daughters what they think about life, he introduces the question as follows: “"tu sais que Rouch et moi on fait un film... Alors on est pas d’accord parce que Rouch il trouve que la vie est marrante et moi je trouve que la vie n’est pas tellement marrante".”\(^{372}\) More generally, this ambivalence is characteristic of the film as a whole, since it oscillates not only between lightness and weariness, but also between the city and the sea, work and vacation, personal and political matters. Morin is then the focused one, taking the film seriously, asking an anodyne yet profound question to people: are you happy? When on screen, Rouch is the smiley and distracted one, adopting a rather nonchalant behavior (he sits on the floor, puts his foot on the chair, etc.).

Third, and most importantly, Rouch confirms the fact that he “was often behind the camera”. Morin is in front of it, in presence of people he knows better, and as such he belongs to the film as a visible character asking questions, while Rouch directs the shooting, and thus directs Morin directing the interviews. A typical example of this situation that confers Rouch a relative ascendancy over Morin can be found in the scripted version of the first discussion with Marilou. The excerpt has been edited out, but it indicates that Rouch intervened towards the end of the scene, repeatedly urging Morin

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\(^{371}\) Jean Rouch, *La Pyramide humaine*, 1961, 90 minutes. This film is another of Rouch’s ethno-fiction that approaches the problem of racism among high school students from Abidjan.

\(^{372}\) *Chronique d’un été*, minute 70’. 
to ask another question but without moving, so that Rouch could maintain a meaningful framing, described as follows by Rothman:

It is crucial to the expressive effect that he is not in profile, that he is looking into the frame, much as the camera is; he is an object to the camera but is also viewing what it is viewing. This setup links Morin with the camera (with Rouch, with us) even as it emphasizes their separateness (Morin is visible, the camera is not). He is turned away enough so we cannot see whatever reaction he may be expressing, so our impression is that he is impassively taking everything in. In this frame, we might say, Morin becomes the camera’s stand-in. Or its scapegoat.\(^{373}\)

Rouch is clearly in the position of a director asking his actors to perform, but additionally, this particular framing establishes a hierarchy in which Morin serves as an intermediary to the camera as noticed by Rothman. In other words, Morin embodies a materialization of the camera within the film, that is the textual inscription of an external subjectivity. One can observe a similar strategy, conducted with a little less virtuosity perhaps, yet during an avant-gardist moment of self-reflexivity, that is, when a compiled footage of the film is screened to its own protagonists for them to discuss the level of authenticity they believe the film has reached. The off-screen voice of Rouch, who is still behind the camera set in a corner of the screening room, begins: “Vous venez de vous voir sur l’écran, Edgar et moi nous voudrions connaître votre avis”.\(^{374}\) Morin, who was seated comfortably in the first row facing the screen like the other protagonists, turns towards the group (and turns the back to the camera), personifying Rouch’s double again, and reinforcing the self-reflexive effect of the mise en abime, not from the perspective of the

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\(^{373}\) W. Rothman, *op. cit.*, p.76-77.

\(^{374}\) *Chronique d’un été*, minute 77*.
viewer however (a film within a film), but from that of the author (a director seen by a
director).375

Finally, when Rouch faces the camera again for the last minutes of the movie, the
interaction he has with Morin illustrates a subtle shift of roles. This final sequence shows
the two directors walking along a corridor in the *Musée de l’homme*. They discussed the
reactions of the protagonists to the screening that just happened. In fact, Rouch seems to
be taking Morin’s stance throughout the film. On the one hand, he is the one hosting now,
since this new setting is where the *Comité du film ethnographique* is located; and on the
other hand, Rouch barely makes any remark: he is the one asking the questions to which
Morin answers. In the very last shot, the co-directors shake hands and Rouch stays off-
screen, while the camera follows Morin on the sidewalk, before he disappears among the
crowd, a Parisian among others.

3. Men and The Camera

3.1 *Cinéma-Vérité*, a Theory from the Practice

*Technical and Spatial Proximity*

It is on the occasion of *Chronique d’un été* that the term “cinéma-vérité” is coined for the
first time, on the suggestion of a publicist searching for a slogan to broadcast the film.376

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375 The very next shot even extends of an additional degree this meta-representation, as Rouch appears from
behind in the foreground, then Morin in the middle ground. Consequently, this setting stresses the camera
the leading role as a director.

376 As recounted by Michel Brault in an interview with Laura Laufer.
Of course, Jean Rouch, to whom Dziga Vertov’s “Kino-Pravda” is quite influential, is already familiar with the expression. Yet, the group has some doubts at first in using such a loaded term. They do estimate that they are not cheating and genuinely attempting to produce an authentic film and to establish a possible truth – not the truth – in total contrast with realist writers who are making it all up. But they are not too sure about what this truth they are showing really is. And indeed, it is only afterwards that they may refine the idea of cinéma-vérité.

If Chronique d’un été reinvents the documentary film to a certain extent and fosters a renewed reflection about its relationship to the contextual milieu out of which it is taken, it is primarily because of audiovisual innovations. Towards the end of the 1950s, technical progress allows now a small crew to achieve a cinematic work in synch-sound. The external contributors (the persons we do not see on-screen) being reduced at the minimum, a closer relationship becomes possible between them and the imaged protagonists. Cinéma-vérité owes a lot to this proximity made technically possible. Most of Chronique d’un été is shot with a light and mobile camera engineered by the Éclair firm. As a matter of fact, the cinematic experiment literally starts at this technical level, since the Coutant-Mathot KMT 16 mm camera is in itself an invention in the making. Jean Rouch and Michel Brault film with a prototype, and the anecdote goes that each day after shooting, they would bring back the camera to its two engineers (André Coutant and Jacques Mathot), giving them feedbacks for additional improvements. Besides, the hand-held and easily maniable Caméflex (“Camerette” in the United States) is mounted with a wide-angle lens of short focal length, which allows “extreme closeness”, as Rouch says. As a result, he praises Brault for having introduced him to this “caméra qui marche”,

which he also calls “caméra de contact”. But this camera not only walks, its “mechanical eye” is doubled with an “electronic ear” to go on quoting Rouch’s expressions.\textsuperscript{377} Thanks to the Pilottone system, which connects the camera to a magnetic tape recorder (the Nagra developed by Stefan Kudelski), the filming crew may record the sound in synchronicity with the images. Just like the camera Éclair, the Nagra plays a crucial role in the advent of cinéma-vérité, and more especially in regards to Chronique d’un été, for the movie confers oral speech a fundamental place and the dialogues being at the center of each encounter.

Finally the new equipment the film crew is operating with constitutes the technical facet of two fundamental characteristics of cinéma-vérité: that of proximity, and that of authenticity. Regarding proximity, the audiovisual material is at the source of an ambivalent position of the camera: it plays as an intrusive yet distant guest, as noted earlier. The combination of this physical intimacy, with a paradoxical and relative distancing, is perfectly addressed in a short filmic demonstration of cinéma-vérité by Edgar Morin in 1966.\textsuperscript{378} This six minutes excerpt opens with a street situation filmed with a hidden camera. Repeatedly, a smiling actor (either a man or a woman) walks towards a passerby with open arms, evidently intending to greet him. However, just as she (or he) approaches the unknown person, the actor slightly shifts direction to actually address an accomplice arriving just behind the victim, left dazed and confused. The passerby always seems surprised at first but ready to shake hands or even kiss, which eventually illustrates Morin’s point that there are two momenta in cinéma-vérité: one triggered by a certain irony vis-à-vis the man in the street, that translates by a

\textsuperscript{377} Rouch’s interview with Dan Yakir, originally published in Film Quarterly, Vol. xxi, n.3, Spring 1978.
“distancing”; and one consisting in a natural empathy towards others, which Morin calls “fraternization”. Cinema may adopt one stance or the other says Morin, but, according to him, films that are the most powerful are those that actually combine both moves of detachment and curiosity, films through which we can “nous éloigner de nous-même tout en nous rapprochant d’autrui”.\textsuperscript{379} This situation does not only pertain to cinéma-vérité, as a matter of fact, it also corresponds to the virtue generally attributed to a journey: moving away from one’s culture opens a space and creates an opportunity for discovering others’. Although one may notice that the distancing Morin intends to illustrate with the visual excerpt refers to a viewer laughing at a fellow human being that is filmed, it is only for the need of the demonstration it seems, as this situation is actually encompassed within Chronique d’un été itself, when the protagonists are engaged in this reflexive move by the screening of their filmed behavior.\textsuperscript{380} Finally, Morin adds that films are means for communication and questioning, which perfectly suits Chronique d’un été, since its underlying narrative inquires about the practice of representation and the problem it entails when dealing with reality. In short, the reflexive move is precisely what creates a certain distance independently of apparent proximity, thus enabling and even provoking the thinking. But conversely, this thinking is also triggered by an impression of authenticity that brings closer reality and its representation.

\textsuperscript{379} Morin, \textit{ibid.}, minute 2’26.

\textsuperscript{380} This remark is essential as, if Morin often refers to cinema as a social practice and more particularly considers the film from a receptive standpoint (see section “Morin, an Introduction to Film Theory”), I am primarily, and as much as possible, exclusively, interested in the representational practice, that is the direct interaction of an author with reality, and not his indirect communication with the viewership.
The Authentic Truth of Cinéma-Vérité

The second feature of cinéma-vérité, that of authenticity, is induced by the physical positioning of the camera as well, for, its proximity is rather confusing. The close recording reveals the protagonist as an embodied and speaking subject. The combination of visual images documenting people’s movements and expressions with their oral recording reinforces the impression of reality. The subject is not a passive one anymore, easily captured by the camera which almost naturally puts it at a distance and objectifies it. Even if it offers itself to the lens and to the public’s interpretation, speech allows the subject to have a better control over its representation. As a result, while consciously exposing themselves, the protagonists can also assert their agency more fully and more efficiently. As observed by Michel Marie in his article “Direct”, both cinéma-vérité and direct cinema (its American version) display “une esthétique fondée sur le retour à la fonction primordiale du langage parlé”.\(^{381}\) In giving voice back to a formerly mute subject, the oral recording doubles the effect of the visual document. Were he speaking, what would Nanook had said for instance? How a shift from an omniscient narration (made of inter-titles) to a focalized one, would have influenced Flaherty’s film? This aspect is all the more important that, in retrieving this essential linguistic skill defining human beings, the subject distinguishes itself from the mute camera that, although invisible, should be considered as a character, especially in the case of cinéma-vérité as I will show. To sum it up, synchronized sound and extreme close-ups work together towards the construction of an embodied subject, perceived as a subject of truth, and thus conveying authenticity. The reality of the individuals is reinforced as they can almost

fully express themselves in the screen as they do in the context of the shooting, yet this is a mere impression of authenticity, that is, the referential illusion at its fullest.

When viewing recorded testimonies, despite their claimed authenticity—in the sense that they are honest and sincere, although it remains unverifiable— one must be very cautious not to get as far as Lawrence Langer, for instance, who, speaking of accounts about the Holocaust, asserts that such testimonies bypass “the mediation of a text” to reach the viewer with “an untouched frankness” thanks to “the immediacy and intimacy of the interviews”. 382 This observation, nuanced by Michael Rothberg of course, precisely points at the kind of pitfalls one wants to avoid. Langer’s misleading comment is that of an interpreter who only expresses the impression left on him by such recordings. Through a metaphor of directness he tries to rephrase the impact they had on him, but he cannot reasonably ignore that those testimonies are purely mediated, for, if something may look as unmediated, it is certainly not, and it will never be, a film. Indeed, the closest thing that could be perceived as an example of cinematic directness, is not even the sequence-shot Rouch will come to praise, but merely the interaction that happened during the shooting performance, which, as stated earlier, refers to this very moment when text and context were in virtual contact. 383

According to Morin, cinéma-vérité must be centered on authenticity; the truth that is exposed is that of the subjects interacting with him. In that sense, as Rothberg remarks, Morin’s vision differs from Rouch’s understanding of cinéma-vérité, which rather associates it with what has just been observed.

383 And even in that case, or in the case of a conversation between two persons for instance, the notion of directness might be questioned. For, from a certain perspective, anything that relates to the exteriority of a conscious body is a kind of transcending mediation.
Rouch et Morin eux-mêmes ne partagent pas une seule et même vision de ce qu’est le cinéma-vérité ou de ce en quoi il consiste. Alors que d’après Morin, son but est de rendre compte de “l’authenticité de la vie telle qu’elle est vécue” à un moment donné et en un lieu donné (c’est-à-dire Paris, pendant l’été 1960), Rouch a ce que l’on pourrait appeler une définition performative du genre. Le cinéma-vérité constate-t-il, “ne signifie pas le cinéma de la vérité mais la vérité du cinéma”.

This nuance between the two directors, and this final quote from Rouch, oblige a revisit to the notion of authenticity and the truth of cinéma-vérité: what is authentic is not what is shown on the screen, nor is it what is shown in the film, despite the fact that it presents all the appearances of reality, but the mere existence of the film and the fact that there is a shooting under process, which basically refers to the experience of representation. This, in the end, is the journey I am looking at, the adventure of an experimental performance. As a result, it is not the authenticity of the images that is aimed at, but that of the cinematic construction, which is what is unquestionably genuine and true, although the final product may result in a lie.

Referential Illusion and Illusion Vraie

As it pushes reality and its representation to an extreme closeness, attempting to fuse what was once in contact, a major risk run by cinéma-vérité, is to end up confusing the context with the text, as it often happens when it comes to documentary and referential information. This powerful effect happens not only because of the organic essence of the medium—which of course plays a great role in this regard—but also because it all started there after all, when the camera, the directors and their actors, were all immersed together

in the same milieu, sharing a common piece of reality—which reminds us of Rouch’s opening remark in *Chronique d’un été*, stating that people gave moments of their existence to a cinematic experiment. However, at the same time, this referential illusion is what really allows us asking the question of representation and of an aesthetic of reality. Hence the inversion of the earlier remark on reflexivity and its necessary distance: while distance was needed for a reflexive questioning of the authors upon their work, the closeness noticed between the two realms of reality and representation is also what triggers the questioning at stake, explicitly manifested during the post-screening discussion. It is because it takes the form of reality that one must, and is led to, question the representation. The right stance in the end is the one that arranges a distance for reflection, and at the same time remains close enough for representativeness. Putting things at a distance when they are brought at the closest—yet without giving way to an idea of absence of mediation later addressed—is typical of a chronicle documenting in “real-time” the human actions of the everyday life.\(^{385}\)

In terms of the contrast between the *faux authentique* and the *illusion vraie*, first noticed with Baudelaire, the risk of *cinéma-vérité* would lie in the reaching of such a degree of closeness with the reality it represents, that it would finally and paradoxically lose sight and detach itself from it (hence identifying with Baudrillard’s simulacrum). One must not forget that the film originates from a particular context, but neither should this context prevail over the representation (which is the problem initially noticed regarding travel literature). To identify with the *illusion vraie*, that is to remain in the realm of artistic

\(^{385}\) As Rouch states, “the discovery of sync-cinema is the discovery of real-time in film”, interview with Dan Yakir, *op. cit.* This assertion of real-time is not to be confused with the chronological impression of *Chronique d’un été*, but rather regards the fact that the sound is recorded as the actions happen thus enabling the shooting of a thicker or more unified piece of reality.
truth, illusion must assert itself as such, no matter how similar it looks or how honest was the shooting. It implies a more or less explicit admission of manipulation, transformation, mediation, representation, etc. –as expressed by Rouch earlier– and it leads to self-reflexivity, not only that of the actors but also that of the directors, of their montage and of the camera itself. This formal recognition (detailed in the third section of this chapter) is precisely at the very heart of the ethics of Chronique d’un été.

In cinéma-vérité, it is not what is documented that is true, but rather the artifice of documentation, that is, the existence of the document itself; the fact that there is a support mediating –and thus transforming– reality. Consequently, it is in acknowledging the artifice, and not in playing on its effect, that an illusion vraie is achieved. This distinction corresponds to two different attitudes: either the emphasis is put on actuality and relies on the referential quality of the medium, which corresponds to a journalistic orientation that tries to minimize and to conceal subjectivity; or the verisimilitude of the film is considered accidental or anecdotal, which means the medium is not use as means for authentication. While the first position is an attempt for objectivizing subjectivity, the second establishes a subjective objectivity: the subjectivity is not denied, on the contrary, it is precisely because it is acknowledged that a certain objectivity is achieved, it is by stressing the lie that truth rises.386

The alternative between these two attitudes is made possible thanks to the photographic process. The combination of mechanical, physical and chemical operations is at the basis of a raw objectivity that confers the document an ontological yet superficial value of truth: it is and it seems true. However, when it comes to the shooting practice, this

386 This remark closely relates to the epistemology Bourdieu substantially develops in the first half of Le Sens pratique, Paris, Minuit, 1980. The book he later publishes with Loïc Wacquant, An invitation to reflexive sociology, goes back in a lighter way over this philosophical grounding of sociological inquiry.
objectivity is always informed by subjectivity. Despite the fact that their medium combines both the appearance and the existence of truth, Rouch and Morin do not try to seem true, for, they emphasize being over seeming. They do not reinforce an effect that already speaks for itself, nor do they hide the fact that the cinematic medium, as it receives the imprint of reality, detaches itself from it at the same time: the screen and the frame, the elliptic editing and the punctual voice over, the chronological impression and the authentic play of real persons… all evidently manifest the skillful construction of an illusion. And as if it was not enough, the incursion of the directors on the set, the encounters they arrange and the topics they put forward, contribute to bring to the surface the very structure of the film, just as Marcel Duchamp’s sculptures or the Centre Pompidou’s architecture. These are the manifestation of the authorial intention.

3.2 A Threefold Authoring

The Participant and Organic Camera

When Rouch talks about the camera as a third character, he refers to it as a perfect combination between Vertov’s theory and Flaherty’s participation. This connection seems quite paradoxical at first sight, for the two “cinematic ancestors” of Rouch seem rather radically opposed with regard to their approaches to filming reality. It takes a “cinematic griot” to transcend this dichotomy and to make a synthesis of a concept of non-intervention with that of participation. This combination might be eased however, by the fact that the two approaches do not happen on the exact same level (nor in the same phase of the film production), according to Paul Stoller:
Whereas Flaherty’s creative influence on Rouch is fundamentally methodological, Dziga Vertov’s cinematic contributions lead to the heart of Rouch’s cinematic art, to Rouch’s practice of cinéma-vérité, in which one edits film as one shoots it – in which the camera becomes an extension of the filmmaker’s body… Vertov’s aim was to plunge the cinema into the stimulating depth of real life, a construction of the real prompted by the camera.  

If Flaherty’s participation is methodological, and not aesthetic or cinematic, it should a priori not conflict with Vertov’s idea of a camera being plunged into real life. In other words, the kind of participation Flaherty initiates, is not that of the camera but rather concerns the interaction of the observer with the informer, in a perspective of shared anthropology. Vertov may still strongly oppose Flaherty’s approach however, even if it mainly takes place prior and after the shooting, as suggested by Rothman. Indeed, Vertov supporting the illusion that his immersed camera is neutral and records things as they are, he can only discard the fact that Flaherty stages scenes that he pre-arranges with Nanook. From Flaherty’s perspective, participation is an intervention on reality precisely made for the needs of the ethnographic film. In total contradiction with Vertov’s view of Kino-Pravda, according to which this artificial construction amounts to betraying the reality cinema is supposed to genuinely represent. Be that as it may, it must be noted that Rouch’s participation slightly differs from that of Flaherty, and, contrarily to what Stoller writes, it is not a merely methodological one. Rouch integrates the notion of participation and transforms it in two ways: first, he pushes it further through the concept of ethno-

388 “Inspired by Flaherty’s practice, Rouch regularly screens his footage to his subjects, asks them questions about events he has filmed whose meaning he does not already fully understand, receives answers that help him to film in ways that will enable him to ask further questions, to receive further answers.” W. Rothman, op. cit., p.94.
fiction; second, reflecting on the camera’s role and its evident presence, he comes to envision participation as a way of shooting, which does not contradict reality but actually reinforces it, as he acknowledges the unavoidable effect of its presence. In short, Rouch extends the notion of participation in reflecting on, and in assuming, his position as a cameraman.

Vertov advocates the non-intervention of the cameraman while shooting. But he totally counterbalances this conception when it comes to the editing phase, which curiously, he does not envision as another kind of manipulation of reality. According to him, if the cameraman should not be involved in any of the scenes he records, the director has ample opportunity to arrange the rush images in any manner he wishes during the editing stage. In Vertov’s theory, there is then an illusion of discrete recording of reality, a dream of non-intervention similar to that which direct cinema seems to emulate (see next section). As a result, like he does with Flaherty’s method, Rouch revisits and overpasses Vertov’s conception. He rejects montage, as the only intervention that should be, that can only be, and even that must be, is that of the cameraman entering the ethnic field he visually documents.

Observing the importance and freedom Vertov grants to the editing phase, one may question Stoller’s emphasis on the similarities between him and Rouch regarding cinematic art. As much as possible, Rouch attempts to “edit in the camera”, an objective that translates in the aesthetic of sequence-shot, or what Rouch calls the “one take/one sequence” method. Consequently, Rouch inverts Vertov’s theory: on the one hand, he acknowledges and even theorizes the inevitable impact of the camera on reality during the shooting –shooting, in itself, is intervening–; and on the other, he transfers the
concept of non-intervention from the shooting to the editing phase, which is finally the only stage where the director might refrain its intervention on represented reality. Rothman stresses this evident gap between Rouch and Vertov in regards to montage, but he also subtly points at an essential difference between the two of them in regards to the shooting and the man-camera:

For Vertov, montage is almost everything, and the function of montage is not to enable the camera to become an extension of the filmmaker’s body [as noticed by Stoller] (the way it increasingly does for Rouch, who comes to forgo montage all but completely); rather, the filmmaker’s body becomes an extension of the camera/machine, which liberates the body, allows it to assume more than human powers.389

If Stoller could bring together Vertov and Rouch, it is precisely on the basis of the human metaphor linking the man with the camera. The concept of the Kino-Glaz forged by Vertov makes the camera an extension of the human body, conferring it super powers: the man-camera sees closer, sees better, sees more, sees everywhere, as suggesting by an oft-quoted passage of Vertov, that enters in perfect resonance with Benjamin’s analogy between the cameraman and the surgeon.390 These supra-senses with which the operator may enter in an unprecedented reality are the results of a mechanical enhancement. But for Rouch, as suggested by Rothman, it is the other way around: the body is an extension

389 W. Rothman, op. cit. p.93.
390 D. Vertov’s human metaphor is reminiscent of Benjamin’s analogy between the cameraman and the surgeon. Rouch quotes Vertov’s enthusiast and positivist revolution of the Kino-Glaz, which clearly aims at the merging of the machine with the man through an accumulation of actions performed by an anaphoric I: “I am the ciné-eye, I am the mechanical eye, I am the machine that shows you the world as only a machine can see it. From now on, I will be liberated from immobility. I am in perpetual movement. I draw near to things, I move myself away from them, I enter into them, I travel toward the snout of a racing horse. I move through crowds at top speed, I precede soldiers on attack, I take off with airplanes, I flip over on my back, I fall down and stand back up as bodies fall down and stand back up.” Quoted in Ciné-Ethnography, op. cit., p.32.
of the camera, a quite interesting reversal again, that actually gives prevalence to the organic aspect metaphor over the mechanic one. Three decades after Vertov’s transcendental and teleological perspective for the achievement of a modern and revolutionary society, Rouch appears much more pragmatic even if, like Morin, he believes in a certain magic of cinema. Although being genuinely enthusiastic, Rouch is not fooled by technology. He has literally incorporated the techniques (even more so that the camera now is accompanied with a kino-ear), and he envisions them as a means to reveal an immanent yet unconscious part of things and beings. In that sense, the “mechanic versus organic” opposition makes even more sense: the mechanic artefact adds to reality whereas the organic elicits an existing potential, which works both for the cameraman and the reality he documents.

**The Camera’s Presence**

When Rouch exposes his doubts to Morin in the opening scene with Marceline, he already has in mind that the conversations taking place in front of the camera will not be as natural as if the camera were not present. Morin seems not quite convinced, even a little skeptical. He answers Rouch’s warning that he wants to try (“on peut essayer”), which implicitly carries his belief that it is possible to document reality as it is. However, the reactions of people after the screening lead Morin to reconsider his position, and to evoke even a certain failure of the film because of the gap he notices between what one sees and what he knows: “si les gens pensent que ce sont des comédiens ou des exhibitionnistes, notre film est raté. Mais en même temps, moi par exemple je peux dire

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391 Rouch’s vision of magic, however, is embedded in reality and differs from Morin’s one, for whom magic rather happens when the viewer sits in the screening cave.
que je sais, que je sens, que ce ne sont ni des comédiens ni des exhibitionnistes”. As a matter of fact, *Chronique d’un été* tells the story of a recurring character (a social scientist) who progressively discovers intersubjectivity and consequently mourns the pure objectivity he wanted to achieve in the first place, through a paradoxical and illusory self-effacement. Rouch later confirms this deception in an interview: “Edgar Morin was very frustrated because he thought he could reach objectivity, without personalizing things.”

In the short sequence Morin directed five years after *Chronique d’un été*, and that offers a didactic approach to cinéma-vérité, the sociologist deals with the notion of authoriality. His perspective on that matter illustrates a certain distancing from the Nouvelle Vague’s directors (although inspired by *Chronique d’un été*) and from François Truffaut more particularly, whose manifesto for “la politique des auteurs” gives birth to auteur-theory. Morin, in advocating a minimized author, suggests a new balancing of the situation of communication. According to him, the viewer would have become major while the author is now anecdotal, if not neutralized. This observation could seem of little importance to this research as I have voluntarily left out the receptive pole from my inquiry. However, Morin’s perspective is quite relevant when re-centered on another type of relationship, which does not put in distant and indirect connection a viewer and an author via the medium of the screen, but rather concerns the direct contact established between the two co-directors and the protagonists of the film via the medium of the camera. From this perspective, in compliance with the primary truth of cinéma-vérité...
acknowledged earlier, the new balancing suggested by Morin makes full sense: it gives back the protagonists their agency, confers them with a greater part in the authoring of the movie, and also fosters a situation of shared anthropology between an observer and an informer.\footnote{Like the protagonists in \textit{Chronique d’un été}, this informer is both an object of study and a participant of this study, as underlined by Morin regarding his methodology: “It is not merely a subject-object relationship. The “object” of the inquiry is both object and subject, and one cannot escape the intersubjective character of relations between men. We believe the optimal relationship requires, on the one hand, detachment and objectivity in relation to the object as object, and on the other, participation and sympathy in relation to the object as subject. As this object and subject are one, our approach must be a dual one.” Edgar Morin, quoted in A. Monturori, \textit{op. cit.}, p.7. This “dual one” perspective, indirectly reminiscent of a co-directed movie, is in fact at the very heart of any intersubjective situation: an individual consciousness always perceives the other as being both an object and a subject. This phenomenological assumption is a “dual one” too: it makes perfect sense from both the anthropologist (as seen in Morin’s method) and the camera’s positions. For instance, Rothman observes in his close reading of Marilou’s first interview that “by not looking at the camera she acknowledges that she is the object of its gaze. She is presenting herself to the camera as an object to be gazed upon. Paradoxically, in thus presenting herself, she is revealed by the camera, reveals herself to the camera, as an active subject after all.” In W. Rothman, \textit{op. cit.}, p.74.}

The authoring is a key question when dealing with documentary films that usually claim authenticity and consequently face the dilemma of unavoidable subjectivities: that of the author(s), of the protagonists, and of the camera. The particularity of \textit{cinéma-vérité} as conceived by Rouch and Morin, consists in acknowledging all of them, and more especially the last one. Consequently, if the film seems true in the end, it is by excess of the camera’s subjectivity, because the “‘I’ of the camera” is made explicit.\footnote{The expression refers to William Rothman’s title for his collection of essays, \textit{The “I” of the Camera. Essays in Film Criticism, History and Aesthetics}, Cambridge University Press, 1988.} Here lies the essential difference between \textit{cinéma-vérité} and direct cinema. While directors deceptively attempt to efface themselves and their mechanic extension in the case of direct cinema –and as Morin ingenuously envisions at first–, \textit{cinéma-vérité} does not foreground the absence of mediation (directness) involving the threefold subjectivity. In making believe that only the visible characters are present, and that they interact naturally, direct cinema relies on the relative transparency of the inescapable medium.
Cinéma-vérité, on the contrary, acknowledges the presence of every subject, more especially that of the camera. Its distinctive characteristic consists in the fact that the collective author does not act as if its mediating component did not exist.

Of course, it is impossible to ignore the presence of the camera and everyone (the viewer as much as the analyst) is well aware of that. The film can only exist and is always given through the camera’s eye. Ignoring its presence, acting as if it was not there, is then the biggest and consciously agreed illusion of cinema. Every single movie relies on this mental construction of transparency, including those of cinéma-vérité, even though Jean Rouch is the only and first one to paradoxically grant the camera its ontological presence among the other protagonists of the film (like them, the camera is just a point of view among infinite possibilities). If the viewer is quite willing to forget and ignore the camera, the analyst’s work originates from the recognition that there is no such thing as an absence or a transparency of mediation. While an absence would result in no representation at all, a film analysis that would only and directly look through at the content would miss a crucial point. Conversely, if I have not considered the denotative aspects of Chronique d’un été in more depth, it is precisely to insist on fundamental elements of representation.398 Besides, this fake transparency of what is shown in the movie is also the reason why Rouch usually pursues the experience of shared anthropology with the Western audience of his movies, after their screening, just like the

398 Michael Rothberg considers testimony, and in his article, “Un cinéma en travail ?”, Marc-Henri Piault addresses the working dimension of the film. Those are essential since Rothberg articulates memory with the political events taking place and the social condition of work is often what the answers given to “êtes-vous heureux ?” address. One could also look at the topic of migration in considering Marilou’s or Landry’s presence in Paris. Of course, those are totally different experiences since Marilou is Italian and Landry comes from Ivory Coast, however, one may presume they both have wealthy families (which is made explicit in the case of Marilou). Regarding Landry, and more particularly Rouch’s comment introducing the move to Saint-Tropez –“et c’est comme ça que Landry est devenu l’explorateur noir de la France en vacance” (65’)--, his position prefigures Petit à petit (1971), another ethnofiction in which Rouch’s friend, Damouré, leads an anthropological inquiry on Paris and its “maisons à étages”.
one we see in *Chronique d’un été*. This is an interesting process reflecting the dual status of the man-camera, as a living element of a shooting to be later shown on screen. During this second phase, the observer becomes an informer that supplements the interpretation of the viewer and thus eases or reveals what Morin’s finally remarks about intersubjectivity: “la difficulté de communiquer quelque chose”.

This difficulty is also very real when representing reality. Since the cinematic image carries within this illusion of transparency, as an inescapable and intrinsic characteristic, *cinéma-vérité*, when acknowledging the presence of the camera as a means for truthfulness and objective subjectivity, finally reinforces its effect. Through its self-reflecting aspect, *cinéma-vérité* fosters the belief in reality by stressing the fact that it is an illusion. In its attempt at making believe; cinema is always a lie, as Rouch acknowledges himself. Whereas direct cinema promotes an illusion of authenticity, *cinéma-vérité* asserts this illusion, and yet, both still rely on it (acknowledging the recording of reality is ultimately another way for making believe in what is shown). Consequently, these are just two different ways of making believe, respectively corresponding to the distinction between the *faux authentique* (direct cinema) and the *illusion vraie* (*cinéma-vérité*).

This being said, while this distinction is ethically meaningful and formally results in two different aesthetics, it does not question the very truth of *cinéma-vérité*, namely that a film is being or has been shot via the presence of the camera. From this perspective, again, there is no fundamental difference between *cinéma-vérité* and direct cinema, as suggested by Rothman who qualifies an often too clear-cut opposition:

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399 *Chronique d’un été*, minutes 76’-81’.
400 *Chronique d’un été*, minute 83’.
The distinction between “cinéma-vérité” – a cinematic practice in which the camera engages in provocation – and “direct cinema” – a cinematic practice in which the camera refrains from being provocative – is rendered moot by the fact that it is the very presence of the camera, when it is doing its mysterious work, that constitutes the kind of “provocation” that most interests Rouch.\textsuperscript{401}

\textit{The Virtue of Ciné-Transe}

Whether one hides an already “invisible” camera, or, on the contrary, reveals its presence, there is still a representation at stake. The making of this representation is the primary truth displayed by cinéma-vérité as already seen. But it leads to another one, as much meaningful and important, since it concerns the truth these subjectivities unconsciously reveal about themselves, and that is triggered by the performance of the representation itself, as I explain below. As Rothman just put it, this second and related truth consists in the particular reality that happens because of the camera’s presence.

Despite the fact it is explicitly mentioned, visually, the camera is most of the time forgotten, just as in any other movie. For instance, during the post-screening discussion, Angelo answers Jacques’ remark about the unnatural aspect of his discussion with Landry, that he had totally forgotten the camera at this point.\textsuperscript{402} On other occasions, the camera is only discretely acknowledged, whether it concerns the protagonists’ glances at the camera, never insistent though, or the savoir-faire with which Rouch guides Morin

\textsuperscript{401} W. Rothman, \textit{op. cit.}, p.87.
\textsuperscript{402} Jacques says about the interaction between Landry and Angelo in the film: “Tout ça, c’est pas naturel, c’est pas naturel et c’est archi-faux”; to which Angelo responds: “Moi j’suis pas d’accord (...). Quand j’ai discuté avec [Landry], les caméras j’les voyais plus. Je voyais plus les caméras, c’était uniquement le problème qui m’intéressait”. \textit{Chronique d’un été}, minute 79'.
when changing direction in their final discussion at the *Musée de l’homme*. The directors of *cinéma-vérité* do not intend to conceal the camera, but the only way for them to acknowledge it is by talking about it, and about the representation it produces. The simple fact that Morin and Rouch mentions its potentially problematic presence regarding their attempt to document reality (self-reflexivity), and then ask the protagonists about the reality it ends up showing (self-reflexivity supplemented with shared anthropology), finally makes the camera a subject of enunciation, and not only the visual support of the narration. The camera speaks for itself, and *cinéma-vérite* answers to it, welcoming it as a participant protagonist, even a participant provocator.

In *cinéma-vérité*, the traditional authoring undergoes an implosion in its move towards reality, which however resolves into the recomposed unity of the filmic text. *Chronique d’un été* results from a threefold subjectivity, involving the directors, the protagonists and the camera. Through their participative and collaborative elaboration, they achieve a valid proposition of both a documentary movie and the travelling practice. For the truth of *cinéma-vérité* is not only that of a film in the making, but also that of subjective encounters, ultimately orchestrated by reality itself. Involving self-reflection and intersubjectivity, the truth remains twofold, but its problematic has shifted from the authenticity of the film, to the specifics of the subjectivities disclosed. Whether one focuses on the directors, the protagonists or the camera, each one in its own way performs a journey in the sense that each one experiences some kind of self-decentering, (which is at the very heart of the journey as defined in the introductory chapter). They

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403 Although he has to get off screen at some point, Rouch does so with a certain mastery, in compliance with the smart move of the camera, so that Morin remains on his left because of the microphone’s position on his chest. As for the discrete glances, those are the ones of Marceline at the beginning of the film, of the mechanic’s wife during the street interviews, or of Marilou’s during her first interaction with Morin.
reach a certain state of consciousness they could not even conceive prior to the shooting. The cinematic magic that pleases Rouch and Morin in their own way, lies in what remains beyond their control as directors, in what will always ultimately escape them as they are making a film, that is, differently phrased, in the intersubjective unconscious the camera provokes and reveals, and that leads the threefold subjectivities to some sort of trance. This entrancement is however different whether one looks at the protagonists appearing in front of the camera, or at the man-camera itself.

In the first case, the trance presents a character similar to what James Clifford calls “surrealist ethnography”. Distancing itself from traditional anthropology that aims at rendering the others comprehensible and even at familiarizing them, “an ethnographic surrealist practice, by contrast, attacks the familiar, provoking the irruption of otherness— the unexpected.”[^404] “The two attitudes presuppose each other”, he adds, highlighting the fact that it is the confrontation between the known and the unknown, or rather, their juxtaposition, that fosters this “surrealist moment in ethnography (...) in which the possibility of comparison exists in unmediated tension with sheer incongruity”.[^405]

Although Rouch and Morin might themselves provoke this incongruity (when Morin introduces Landry to Angelo for instance, or when Rouch asks Landry about Marceline’s tattoo), from a shooting perspective, this surrealist moment is conveyed by the camera, since it embodies the irruption of an unpredictable representation within a known reality. The very first sequence Michel Brault shot when joining the crew in Paris is an emblematic example of this surrealist happening, when things are out of control but the result is just brilliant. On the one hand, Rouch recalls the shooting as a “gamble”: “We


[^405]: James Clifford, *op. cit.*, p.146.
didn’t know what was going to happen (…) Brault said we should put the camera on the back seat of the Citroën 2cv (…) We didn’t know what image we were getting. It was surrealistic because we did it unconsciously." On the other hand, Marceline had no idea about what she was going to say exactly. She started improvising a dialogue with her belated father who did not come back from the death camps, and then, she reenacted scenes of departure and return triggered by the setting of Les Halles, which resembles a train station. This sequence in which Marceline becomes the actress of her true existence resonates with other elements in Morin’s concluding remarks. The sociologist observes that despite the fact one may reproach the protagonists for being either not enough, or too sincere, they have reached another state of truth than the one of everyday life: “Nous arrivons à une sorte de degré où nous interrogeons une vérité qui n’est pas la vérité des rapports quotidiens. Nous sommes allés un peu plus avant.” In other words, the very act of filming ordinary people reveals an extraordinary part of themselves as they become, in front of the camera, the very “auteurs de leur propre existence”, as Morin states in his short sequence on cinéma-vérité. The recorded and provoked truth characterizing this cinematic experience finally foregrounds “une esthétique de l’improvisation, de la maladresse, de la vie brute, et du miroir”, that is, in other words, a surrealist aesthetic based on the unexpected and of the incident, life as it happens, but also reality as triggered by the camera’s presence.

In the second case, that is, when considering the disjunctive effect the camera has on the operator itself and no longer on the others, the transcending aspect makes even more

406 Rouch, interview with Dan Yakir, op. cit.
407 Chronique d’un été, minutes 53’-57’.
408 Chronique d’un été, minute 81’.
409 Vidéo INA, op. cit.
sense. Out of his cinematic experience, and more particular that of *Tourou et Bitti* he directs in 1971, Jean Rouch forges the expression of *ciné-transe* that he defines as such:

For me then, the only way to film is to walk with the camera, taking it where it is most effective and improvising another type of ballet with it (...) the cameraman-director can really get into the subject. Leading or following a dancer, priest, or craftsman, he is no longer himself, but a mechanical eye accompanied by an electronic ear. It is this strange state of transformation that takes place in the filmmaker that I have called, analogously to possession phenomena, ‘ciné-trance’.  

As a result, while the protagonists of the film break the social role to appear as they truly are and thus enter a state of de-possession (it is even the case with Morin who leaves the envelop of the sociologist to express his own feelings at the end), the man-camera becomes truly possessed by the representation he is conducting. Among the surrealist techniques that influence Rouch, and aside from the fortuitous juxtapositions that trigger unexpected reactions, automatic writing is a method that enables access to different states of consciousness. The “one take/one sequence” that Rouch puts in practice is a filmic transposition of automatic writing. The operator physically interacts with the reality he belongs to, but at the same time, being one with the camera he projects himself in the realm of representation, an imaginary world in which he is absorbed. As a result, he travels back and forth between the two universes of the referential context he documents on the one hand, and the representation being enunciated on the other, two worlds in which he exists simultaneously as they share the same determining subjectivity (in contrast to the other protagonists).

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411 This parallel, briefly suggested by Rothman in his chapter on *Chronique d’un été* (op. cit., p.93), also reminds of Alexandre’s Astruc notion of *caméra-stylo* (camera-pen).
J'ai toujours tenu pour suspects ou illusoires des récits de ce genre : récits d'aventures, feuilles de route, racontars — joufflus de mots sincères — d'actes qu'on affirmait avoir commis dans des lieux bien précisés, au long de jours catalogués.

Victor Segalen, *Voyage au pays du réel*

**CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN ANTHOPO-SEMIOTICS**

The “Journey Through Reality” has finally taken us back to late modernity on the trail of a poet, a merchant and a dual socio-anthropologist. Each one reached an absolute mastery in their respective domains of writing (literature, photography, cinema), at the threshold between reality and representation, demonstrating an ability to perform travel that not only concerns their acute exploration of reality, but that also consists precisely in the passage from the physical world to which we all belong to the imaginary dimension of their representation where only they could take us.

**The Travel of Representation**

The experience of voyage, as defined in this research, involves a ternary composition made of a decentering effect that goes hand in hand with the ending of certainties, both of which result in particular encounters.

First, a journey is a cultural disjunction that puts the self at a distance from its environment, be it familiar or foreign. Giving the aesthetics of their works, the three authors unsettle traditional boundaries: Baudelaire takes poetry beyond versification with
his prose poems; Atget looks like a living element from the past when photographing emptied streets with an obsolete and cumbersome equipment; Rouch brings fiction within the ethnographic work of documentation. They all are at odds in their way of representing things and in the things they represent as well, for one can easily bridge form and content here: the prose poem is a move towards normality echoing the indistinct characteristic of the crowd; Atget photographs the stability of things in times of dramatic changes; Morin and Rouch value personal narratives within the collective. Considering the content of these cultural disjunctions from a little closer, it appears that Baudelaire is the first to witness the anonymous aspect characterizing the modern city. His intimate experience of the unknown crowd facilitates the separation from the self. Foregrounding the coexistence of an old Paris with the advent of a new world, Atget pursues the discovery of modernity in a reverse way. He documents the petits métiers and the persisting architecture of the capital, humanly informed, bringing back to the surface the metonymic reflection of thousands of souls that inhabited this town over the centuries and will continue to do so. As a result, his self-distancing is a diachronic one. Rouch and Morin, through their sociological inquiry, give back their individualities to a few of these souls. In a time of rural exodus and urban explosion, of statistics and quantitative studies, it is not the Parisians as a whole that they document, but Marilou, Angelo, Marceline, Jean-Pierre… Morin’s initial postulate, that is, minimizing the role of the directors to let others speak for themselves and appear fully human, is a way of putting the self at a distance. However, this ambition is ultimately self-deceptive, which brings us to the second and related feature of the journey: the end of certainties. Facing the illusion they could escape their subjectivities –either in stepping into other’s shoes and discovering them from
within, in hiding behind a massive camera foregrounding its documenting quality, or in letting the self be possessed by a lighter one—, the authors are sent back to themselves. Baudelaire no longer believes in the power of allegory and the possibility of fleeing the world; Atget is well aware of the social masquerade and the illusion his images may promote in this regard; Rouch comes to an early realization of fake objectivity as being an intrinsic characteristic of the camera. From now on, they have to deal with their inescapable subjectivities and envision reality in a renewed way, making their own Marceline’s expression: “l’aventure est toujours au coin de la rue”.\(^\text{412}\) The ending of certainties inclines the travel authors to question the habits and beliefs of a given culture and a given medium, and thus to operate a distancing again. Hence the initiation of a movement that will from now on continuously take the explorers back and forth between the self and the other, the known and the unknown, the here and the elsewhere, yet not a geographical one. Indeed, this constant and dynamic move resembles an alternating state of trance, which accurately corresponds to the dual practice of the travel author, oscillating between an experience of reality and a practice of representation.

The third fundamental aspect of traveling consists in the encounters it provokes between two cultures, two historical moments, two subjectivities, but also within the traveler himself, via the back and forth just mentioned that brings together reality and representation despite their impassable distance. The initial encounter of the recounted journey concerns the relationship travel authors have with their surroundings, of course, but in the case of this research, it more particularly addresses the secondary, and yet simultaneous encounter that happens between these surroundings and their

\(^{412}\) *Chronique d’un été*, minute 3’35.
representations. In the end, this structural encounter of travel narratives lies at the heart of the travel authors, for the back and forth in question happens through their own persons. One may now articulate these three essential features of the journey I have been exploring. The initial decentering, both cultural and personal, is maintained by an operation of representation whose results project something from the physical world into an outer dimension, that of the textual universe. However, this transposition might not necessarily foster the essential disjunction at stake: in the case of a faux authentique, for instance, the mimesis seems so perfect that it triggers no surprise… unless this mimesis reveals its very nature and thus its ultimate failure, becoming an illusion vraie, because the gap existing between the real and the imaginary realms is made explicit. This particular gap, as said, is in each one of us, since the source of its production is that of an enunciative body making the connection between concrete reality and imaginary representation. As a result there is no need to answer the initial question of Victor Segalen in his imaginary *Voyage au pays du réel* –“L’imaginaire déchoit-il ou se renforce quand il se confronte au réel ?”– for, from the travel author’s perspective, there is no confrontation between the Real and the Imaginary, but only permeation.\footnote{V. Segalen, *Equipée. Voyage au pays du réel*, 1929, p.1.}

*Semiotics of Print*

The works of Baudelaire, Atget, Rouch and Morin represent three moments in the history of modern representations. However, they echo each other in what they manage to achieve through the mastery of their respective medium, as middle-aged men questioning middle-aged representations: of course, poetry is multi-secular as Baudelaire writes, but in the narrowed time of late modernity, the poet distances itself from the romantic
movement on the decline; Atget starts his photographic undertaking as the first daguerreotype is exactly fifty years old; Rouch explores new cinematic possibilities as the Lumière brothers’ invention is also about half a century old. What Baudelaire finally does with the prose poem and the urban setting corresponds to what Atget and Rouch respectively achieve regarding photography and cinema: they question the very nature of their medium and thus the essence of representation, finally stressing this combination of fact and fiction, reality with representation. Whether it is Baudelaire who renders the imaginary very real, Atget who reveals the uncanny aspect of reality, or Rouch and Morin who join the two realms by directly questioning the process of representation, all of them bring their work closer to reality without denying what representation is: an illusion vraie. Their works are self-performing “arts poétiques” addressing the matter of representation, and each one, in its particular way, expresses the inextricable link and yet impassable distance between reality and imaginary. In doing so, they rightly reveal “the secret of travelling” Jean-Didier Urbain is interested in, that is, the mental impetus at its origin. However, as a matter of fact, this discovery happens precisely because they address “the secret of representation”, what it does not tell and what it tries to hide: that photographic (and cinematic) images is only a referential illusion, that written language has less opacity that one would think, and that both, in the end, are indexically linked to reality via the initial medium of a semiotic body. That is the secret this research aimed at deciphering, and whose key, again, can be found in the traces left in the texts by an enunciative body.

It finally becomes possible to confirm Jacques Fontanille’s hypothesis: “Si un corps est susceptible de conserver, au titre de la mémoire figurative, les traces et empreintes de ses
interactions sensorielles avec d'autres corps, alors on peut faire l'hypothèse qu'un sujet d'énonciation qui serait aussi un corps est susceptible de témoigner de ses expériences”.

As a matrix bringing together reality and its representation, the enunciative body is also a referential one that allows the passage from one universe to the other. Consequently, considering the texts as repositories of an enunciation (from the context to the text), one may reach the reality from which the authors are speaking (from the text to the context). In other words, it is not a deconstruction of representation that I am interested in, but rather a reversal of its process, allowing the reconstruction of the worldly experience of the authors. The corporal marks of enunciation that they leave into their representations are means by which reality becomes accessible.

Out of the four iconic figures of the body that Fontanille identifies, and in regards to the dynamics to which it is subject, the semiotician elaborates a typology of prints and of their modes of signification. To sketch it briefly (and leaving aside the many details of the model), Fontanille first postulates a body made of form and substance. These complementary aspects of container and content figure a body-envelop and a body-flesh; the substance of the body-flesh is subject to forces that confers it a form, and, conversely, the body-envelop exists because it contains a substance. Drawing then a semiotic square, two opposite figures of the body appear: the body-spot contradicting the envelop, and the body-hollow contradicting the substance.

These four figures are not just static ones, and semiosis is always a dynamic process. From a phenomenological perspective, a body is the primary vehicle of intentionality, the place and the means by which our presentness to the world acquires signification. As a

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result, the intentional body expresses its existence via two dynamic modes of synesthesia: *coenesthésie*, that confers the body its coherence and allows it playing as an interface between external perceptions and internal sensations; and *kinesthésie*, that refers to a moving body exploring and experiencing the physical obstacles of reality. Besides, the category container/content refers to a metonymic trope, which implies an indexical and contiguous process (rather than an iconic or analogical mode of signification). Consequently, the body is converted into a surface of inscription and the semiotics of print suggested by Fontanille gives an insight into the semiotization of the world by the body. In compliance with the four soma-semiotic figures observed, he draws up a typology of print. In introducing this typology below, my point is to stress the idea that the enunciative body is also a referential one that serves as an intermediary term in an indexical relation between the context and the text. The marks left by the world on the body are the same ones informing the text with the body’s presence. This observation finally allows identifying the specificities of each of the travel authors considered.

First, the prints featured by the body-hollow are diegetic ones. The internal and empty space characterizing this body is where the representation takes place, where the transmutation of the world into a text happens. The diegesis is common to the three authors; it consists in an imaginary realm not yet informed by more specific types of prints: *empreintes de surface* on the body-envelop, *empreintes déictiques* on the body-spot, and *empreintes motrices* on the body-flesh, corresponding respectively to Baudelaire’s, Atget’s and Rouch’s aesthetics. Baudelaire’s characteristic is that of an extreme acuteness of the senses. He brings them together through a synesthetic process and, in doing so, he unifies the body and renders it its coherence, as if he were weaving a
fabric – a *tissu*, in French, in which the word “text” has its etymological origin. The body of the poet is a shaping envelope receiving signifying elements from its direct surroundings. Atget’s photographic medium primarily relies on sight. But in looking at something, the photographer also indicates his position, the precise location from which he operates. Hence the deictic characteristic that is typical of a body-spot, and which allows reconstituting a specific itinerary in making the link between his successive positions. Rouch’s camera acts as a continuously moving body. It follows someone, stops, switches focus, goes away, gets closer… As a body-flesh, its impetus comes from within, making sensori-motricity its main quality, and allowing it more specifically to foster contact with others.

*The Anthropologist and the Prowler*

In the same way each of the travel authors illustrates a dominant type of print, each one embodies a particular aspect of cultural anthropology. Baudelaire, immersing himself in the undetermined crowd, reveals a participant move; Atget, photographing empty streets indirectly refers to his very presence and thus identifies with a self-reflecting tendency; Rouch and Morin, who stress their presence in interacting with others as individuals, initiate a shared anthropology. However, these three aspects are tied together, and, like the semiotic prints all converging towards diegesis, the travel authors meet on the ground of their Parisian investigation. They all realize some sort of domestic ethnography – a paradoxical expression at first sight –, through the particular method of participant observation – not less antithetic –, which they conduct with a similar attitude towards reality.
Originally, geographic remoteness and cultural distinction are inherent to the ethnographic project. In the case of the travel authors, none of these conditions are met: they explore and document their own environment within a culture to which they belong. Nonetheless, isn’t that the ideal situation initially pictured by Malinowski when advocating participant observation? “The final goal, of which an ethnographer should never lose sight is, briefly, to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world.”\textsuperscript{415} Yet, there is also an inherent paradox to participant observation, as it encompasses a contradictory tension between the position of the insider and that of the outsider. In the first case, the less the foreign scenes and habits are mediated (an ideal situation of direct observation), the better the access to information; in the second case, staring at actions from the outside also provides a better grasp of data. From an epistemological perspective, this intrinsic tension can be read in terms of the fundamental distinction initially opposing continental semiotics to American one: participant observation brings together immanence, which places the observer within the scene, and thirdness, which puts the scene at a distance.\textsuperscript{416} Because the travel authors examined here are at home, within their own cultural field, they would need to reinstate a sense of thirdness to perform participant observation, so that the fundamental decentering mentioned earlier takes place, allowing them to see beyond the similar, familiar, immediate others and to resist the dangerous blindness of proximity.

\textsuperscript{415} B. Malinowski, \textit{Argonauts of the Western Pacific}, 1922, p.25.
\textsuperscript{416} Immanence is a fundamental principle of structuralism when studying an object: it implies the analysis must be conducted from its internal determinations, suggesting the meaning is intrinsic to the object. Thirdness is one of the three fundamental categories defined by Charles S. Peirce: “The First is that whose being is simply in itself, not referring to anything nor lying behind anything. The Second is that which is what it is by force of something to which it is second. The Third is that which is what it is owing to things between which it mediates and which it brings into relation to each other.” (Peirce, \textit{Collected Papers}, 1887, 1.356). A First, a Second and a Third roughly refers to quality, reaction and mediation, the latter “bringing a second and a third into relation to each other.”
Based on a close reading of the anthropological films Stéphane Breton directed in Papua-New Guinea in the early 2000s, there are two ways this distancing may be achieved. The experience of the French ethnographer, who paradoxically ends up doing domestic ethnography in this remote location, teaches us that when distance has became null and people too familiar, the only way to recreate some sense of strangeness, either lies in the incongruous reactivation of memories, or in the renewal of the way we look at things. The first case strongly resembles the Proustian episode of the madeleine, the involuntary memory is triggered by an anodyne perception, like Les Halles reminding Marceline of a train station. But when such memories do not exist, the second case demands a sustained attention to these little things and unnoticed details, like when Rouch’s camera almost accidentally ends up showing Marceline’s tattooed number. This specific attitude and increased focus that achieves recreating and magnifying distance within a too well known universe, is characteristic of the three travel authors. They can finally make their own Breton’s conclusion: “the closer I move towards it, the vaster I find the world to be”. In representing reality, the authors are forced to move closer to it. Yet, in reducing the distance between their two worlds, they only intensify the dynamic oscillation and creative gap between them.

Having identified this particular attention with which the travel authors explore and represent the world, it is important to question and even discard the recurring image of the flâneur that has been improperly given to Baudelaire, and which is also at use from time to time to describe Atget’s or Rouch’s approaches. Baudelaire comes to encounter

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418 M. Proust, Du côté de chez Swann, 1913.
419 S. Breton, Le Ciel dans un jardin, minute 60.”
the flâneur on two particular occasions: when interpreting Edgar Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd”, and in the essay he writes about Constantin Guys, “Le peintre de la vie moderne”. However, Baudelaire, as well as Atget or Rouch, are all but flâneurs. The poet may have thought as the substantive “promeneur” (stroller), in reference to Rousseau, when searching a title for his collection of prose poems, but he also suggested that of “rôdeur” (prowler), which finally corresponds quite well with the attitude under consideration. Rôdeur in French does not only refer to a suspicious person but also implies someone on the alert, looking out for something, even though not knowing what. This person is suspicious vis-à-vis reality, this is a man on the hunt searching for a prey. One should be aware of him: Baudelaire fights the poor and abuses the glazier; Atget pictures streets and courtyards as if they were crime scenes; Rouch looks at Marilou who seems desperate but still wants the scene to go on. The flâneur may identify with the man of the crowd as described and experienced by Baudelaire, or he may carry this surrealist expectation that some kind of uncanny situation will rise at some point when facing reality. By contrast, the rôdeur is not just a wanderer open to the unexpected, but rather an active individual looking for an occasion, an incident that he won’t let just happen, for he will search for it and try to provoke it. Walter Benjamin is not misled when writing about this Baudelairian topic of the flâneur. First, he rejects this figure as being a self-portrait: “on découvre que le flâneur de Baudelaire n’est pas, autant qu’on pourrait le croire, un autoportrait du poète”.

Second, he refuses to assimilate –like Baudelaire does– the man of the crowd to the flâneur type: “l’homme des foules n’est pas un flâneur (...) Il correspond plutôt à ce que devait devenir le flâneur pour peu qu’on le

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coupât de son univers familier”. In this last sentence, Benjamin draws a nuance that accurately resonates with domestic ethnography: he finally suggests that the rôdeur I have depicted is in fact a flâneur when cut from familiar setting. In the end, the final experience to which anthropo-semiotic reading of the travel authors leads us is that of the primary move of the journey.

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421 W. Benjamin, ibid., p.175.
APPENDIX

1. MAPPING BAUDELAIRE’S LIFE-LONG TRAVELING

Figure 7. Baudelaire’s Parisian dwellings (in Baudelaire. Paris sans fin).
2. ATGET BY ATGET: THREE SELF-PORTRAITS
Paris, early 20th-century

Figure 8. Atget, Eugène. “Ambassade d’Autriche, 57 rue de Varenne,” 1905. Albumen print, 22.2 x 17.8 cm.
Figure 10. Atget, Eugène. “Au Tambour, 63 quai de la Tournelle,” 1908. Gelatin silver print, 17.6 x 22.2 cm.
Figure 9. Atget, Eugène. “Magasin d’antiquités, 21 rue du Fbg Saint-Honoré,” 1902. Albumen print, 17.9 x 21.7 cm.
3. ATGET’S ALBUM: INTÉRIEURS PARISIENS
“Artistiques, pittoresques et bourgeois,” 1910-11 (albumen prints, c. 22 x 17 cm)

Figure 11. “Petit intérieur de M. R, artiste dramatique, rue Vavin,” n°1.

Figure 12. “Petit intérieur de M. R, artiste dramatique, rue Vavin,” n°50.

Figure 13. “Petit intérieur de M. R., artiste dramatique, rue Vavin,” n°2.

Figure 14. “Intérieur d’un ouvrier, rue de Romainville,” n°25.
Figure 15. “Intérieur de M. C., décorateur, rue du Montparnasse,” n°44.

Figure 16. “Intérieur de M. B., collectionneur, rue de Vaugirard,” n°46.

Figure 17. “Intérieur de M. C., décorateur, rue du Montparnasse,” n°43.

Figure 18. “Intérieur de M. B., collectionneur, rue de Vaugirard,” n°48.

The numbers reflect the order the photographs appear in Atget’s album. As explained, images on page 272 are Atget’s interior; figures 17 and 18 are taken in the same room.
4. ATGET AT WORK: A TEMPORAL SEQUENCE
Angle de la rue de Seine et de la rue de l’Echaudé, Paris, VIème arr.

Figure 19. “Angle de la rue de Seine et de la rue de l’Echaudé,” 1905.
Figure 20. “Angle de la rue de Seine et de la rue de l’Echaudé,” 1911-a.

Figure 21. “Angle de la rue de Seine et de la rue de l’Echaudé,” 1911-b.

Figure 22. “Angle de la rue de Seine et de la rue de l’Echaudé,” 1924-a.

Figure 23. “Angle de la rue de Seine et de la rue de l’Echaudé,” 1924-b.
5. ATGET AT WORK: A SPATIAL SEQUENCE

“Passage des singes, 6 rue des Guillemites,” IVème arr., 1911.

Figure 24. 6, rue des Guillemites, 1911-a.

Figure 25. Entrée, 1911-b.
Figure 26. Cours, 1911-c.

Figure 27. Cours, 1911-d.
Figure 28. Etale de légumes, 1911-e

Figure 29. Etale, 1911-f.
Figure 30. Puits et paniers, 1911-g.
6. SEMIOTIC SQUARE OF VERIDICTIO

Figure 31. Greimas’ veridictory square, in *Semiotics and Language*, 1982.

7. FAUX AUTHENTIQUE AND ILLUSION VRAIE

Figure 32. Zoning and polarities of *faux authentique* and *illusion vraie*. 
8. SEMIOTIC SQUARE OF PRINTS

Cryptages et décryptages

Empreintes de surface
(réseaux des inscriptions)

Empreintes motrices
(faisceaux sensori-moteurs)

Empreintes diégétiques
(scènes intérieures)

Empreintes déictiques
(itinéraires déictiques)

Figure 33. Types of prints and respective modes of signification, in Fontanille, “L’analyse du cours d’action : des pratiques et des corps,” 2011.

9. BODY, PRINTS AND TRAVEL AUTHORS

Body-Envelope
Prints by inscription
Baudelaire

Body-Flesh
Kinetic prints
Rouch

Diegetic prints

Body-Hollow

Atget
Deictic prints
Body-Spot

Figure 34. Types of bodies and printing modes of Baudelaire, Atget and Morin/Rouch.


Bateson, Gregory and Margaret Mead, Trance and Dance in Bali, 22 minutes, 1952.

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---. Le Spleen de Paris. Petits poèmes en prose, 1869.


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---,. *Les Contemplations*, 1856.

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Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, 1922.


Morin, Edgar. and Jean Rouch, Chronique d’un été, 85 minutes, 1961.


Nietzsche, Friedrich. On the Genealogy of Morals, 1887.


---. Contre Sainte-Beuve, 1900.


---. *Moi, un noir*, 73 minutes, 1958.

---. *La Pyramide humaine*, 90 minutes, 1961.

---. *Petit à petit*, 96 minutes, 1971.

---. *Cocorico Monsieur Poulet*, 93 minutes, 1974.


Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*, 1599.


---. “Ecritures du voyage et explorations: le dire et le voir,” online version.


