Rational Enchantment:

On the Travel Writings of Cendrars, Leiris and Michaux

by

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DEDICATION

To L. Moses,
This one's for you.
ז״ל

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ABSTRACT

In the 19th century, writers like Chateaubriand, Nerval, and Flaubert traveled in search of sublime, exotic experiences of transformation that they believed could still be found outside of France. However, this tradition changed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With the advent of a modernity defined by calculated rationalism and progress, many writers began to lament the death of travel as a sublime literary experience. To paraphrase Sartre's Roquentin, they mourned the death or dearth of adventure and enchantment in the world.

This dissertation explores the travel memoirs of three authors who look for ways of overcoming this *disenchantment of the world*: the futurist and vagabond Blaise Cendrars, the surrealist ethnographer Michel Leiris, and the heteroclite traveler-poet Henri Michaux. It examines how each of these authors develops a particular method of travel that mixes poetic desire with the technological, social, and political realities of the modern world. Cendrars does this through a fascination with speed and vehicles, Leiris through ethnography, and Michaux through an obsession with ethical practices of self-control. Each author's method leads him to form what the critic Michel Deguy calls a *poéthique* — an approach to writing that finds enchantment through reason and engagement with the real world. The title of this dissertation, *Rational Enchantment,* refers to the way this *poéthique* brings together these two seemingly contradictory elements. It is this approach, developed through travel, that, I argue, enables Cendrars, Leiris, and Michaux to cultivate representations of enchantment that, in turn, contribute to the re-enchantment of the world.

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INTRODUCTION:

FROM VOYAGE TO *ÉCRITURE*

Preamble: Toward a Personal *Poéthique*

In his 1972 essay *Le voyage et l'écriture,* the French writer Michel Butor struggles to come up with a term to describe what it is that drives him to travel. Finding the right word proves a difficult task because voyages are multifaceted — with their promise, their encounters, and their cycles of arrival and departure, they contribute to our growth as individuals on many different levels. Each voyage enriches our self-awareness and paints for us a clearer picture of our place in the world. Unable to find *le mot juste,* Butor settles on a description, calling what drives him to travel *the inverse of nostalgia*. In other words, travel is not an absence one mourns, but rather a presence one anticipates.

Butor discovers this sensation of *inverse nostalgia* in the downtime between his travels. He finds, in fact, that he cannot prepare for a new trip until he has processed the previous one through a practice of reflection and writing that he calls *digestion*:

> j'ai besoin de digérer d'anciens voyages, je n'en suis pas encore tout à fait revenue, je n'en reviendrai jamais complètement, il s'agit pour moi de trouver un *modus vivendi* avec eux par le moyen de l'écriture, avant de pouvoir repartir vraiment; c'est donc pour voyager que je voyage moins.[1]

[1] Michel Butor, "Le voyage et l'écriture," *Romantisme,* vol. 2, no. 4, (1972) pp. 4-19 : 4.

What draws me to this passage is its acknowledgment that the growth and enchantment one experiences when traveling demand a great deal of work. In Butor's estimation, the traveler is tasked with coming to an intimate understanding of how the people and places he encounters (with their own reality and autonomy) change his perception of the world and himself. In digesting the voyage, he must reevaluate his sense of self. Only after he has completed this *work* can he begin preparing for the next voyage.

What I find particularly striking here is Butor's notion that a writer should attempt, little by little, to build a literary *œuvre* by reflecting on his travels. This precept is close to what the poet and literary sage Michel Deguy has called a *poéthique*, an ethic of using lived experience to create a personal aesthetic of moving through the world and interacting with others.[2] Indeed, the experience Butor describes echoes a familiar problem in twentieth-century travel writing: how can the voyage surpass its utter self-centeredness and become a meaningful exercise that develops and fosters literary communication? It is exactly this problem and its treatment in the travel memoirs of Blaise Cendrars, Michel Leiris, and Henri Michaux that I will be exploring in this dissertation. We will see how these authors *digest* their travels in order to create an innovative, personal *poéthique* that communicates a sense of wonder and connectedness (which I will call *enchantment*) in a world that has become increasingly fragmented. In other words, we will discover the literary and esthetic forms and figures that develop out of a sense of *inverse nostalgia*. Hence the title of this dissertation, *Rational Enchantment* — the process of using one's rational mind to digest and reveal the enchantment hidden in the world. To be sure, there are

[2] Michel Deguy, *Grand Cahier Michel Deguy* (Paris: Le Bleu du ciel, 2007) 287.

many more complex angles to this discovery; these will be discussed throughout this introduction.

Digesting Divergent Desires

Marrying the realms of the rational and the poetic can make for onerous work. This is a lesson Michel Leiris learned well (and much to his chagrin) during his first ethnographic voyage with the Mission Dakar-Djibouti (1931-33). Appropriately, his journal documenting the trip, *L'Afrique fantôme* (1934), reveals this tension. Though the journal and the voyage begin as an attempt to forgo poetry in favor of a career in ethnography, the text Leiris ends up producing (and editing and publishing) is more poetic in its figures, meditations, and descriptions than it is a scientific *feuille de route* (field notebook). One scene in particular, which takes place during the Mission's very long trek through the Sudan, captures a telling moment in which Leiris's poetic tendencies win out over his desire to become a rational scientist.[3] After developing photos taken in present-day Benin (where the company has traveled a few weeks prior), Leiris comes to the realization that a career based on observation may very well bar him from the visceral experiences he seeks:

> Il faut que je regarde les photos qui viennent d'être développées pour m'imaginer que je suis dans quelque chose qui ressemble à l'Afrique. Ces gens nus qu'on

[3] As we shall see, this is not particularly surprising, as Leiris had previously been an apprentice to Max Jacob and an art critic for Georges Bataille's avant-garde magazine *Documents*.

> aperçoit sur les plaques de verre, nous avons été au milieu d'eux. Drôle de mirage.[4]

These phantasmal images, barely clinging to glass photographic plates, depict a ghostly hint of Leiris's own presence in a moment where he thought he was an absent observer. Interestingly enough, it is through photographic *representation* that he is able to digest the idea of himself as being present in a world of enchanted vitality that he believed had eluded him. In other words, reality does not suffice for Leiris. In order to live the experience he desires, Leiris must read it in mimetic representations (here, the photographs). The irony of this situation is not lost on the author himself. Looking at the photos, he becomes frustrated, for they reveal to him the unpleasant truth that assuming the posture of an anthropological observer may very well prevent him from experiencing the vibrant presence of the places he visits; the representations mock him like a *drôle de mirage* might mock a parched desert traveler.

But what exactly was Leiris searching for when he signed on to become an ethnographer? What is this *drôle de mirage* that he so longs to enter? I would venture to say that this mirage is not a fantasy but rather an enchanted way of looking at (and living in) the rational world. Leiris's desire, then, is to live an experience of what I will call *enchantment* in real-time. In other words, direct experience bores Leiris, and it is only in digesting, photographing or writing about an experience that he can connect with the sensation of *enchantment* he is looking for. This realization, in essence, is Leiris's particular predicament of travel; it is a double bind which requires him to engage in a non-poetic role in order to find the poetic sensation he seeks.

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[4] Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981) 213.

Leiris's struggle to find *enchantment* mirrors a common trope in twentieth-century travel writing. The trope shows a modern hero's desire to recapture what many considered to be the unfortunate loss of spirituality (in other words, *enchantment*) that humanity has suffered due to modern progress — the rapid triumph of technology and science over religion and superstition. In short, the aim of this hero is to restore poetry and song to the world and to teach others how to listen for the hymn of *enchantment* (in French, the word *enchantement* signifies a "sensation of song") that still exists in the world. Traveler-poets like Leiris (whether intentionally or unintentionally) search for what the novelist Jean Giono would later call *le chant du monde*, a song of the world that binds communities and works toward erasing strictures of scientific rationalism. For Giono, *le chant du monde* represented a new form of writing "dans lequel on entendrait chanter le monde." This form of writing was to come about when a modern writer learned through political or social engagement to displace the tendency to make his own ego "le centre de tout […]" in his writing.[5] Along these lines, this dissertation examines how a variety of experiences that form part of modern travel (including anthropological observation, the speed of machines and vehicles, and a sense of respect for ethical and political mores) allows writers in the twentieth century to forge deeply intimate, innovative and enchanted poetic discourses that help others hear, once again, *le chant du monde*. The writers and works that we will focus on in examining this phenomenon will be Michel Leiris's *L'Afrique fantôme*, Blaise Cendrars's *Le Lotissement du ciel,* and Henri Michaux's *Un barbare en Asie* and *Ecuador*. We will see that each one of these authors explores a different approach to finding figures of enchantment still

[5] See Philippe le Guillou, *Déambulations* (Paris: Pygmalion Editions, 2008) 192.

existing in the rational world. Admittedly, however, the term *enchantment* is rather vague. As we shall see, however, it is both a concept pervading the contemporary zeitgeist of the early 20th century and a trope consistently evoked in the texts I study in this work.

Disenchantment

Enchantment, in the sense of the word used in this dissertation, is best described by making reference to its antonym, *disenchantment,* a 20th-century notion that has its roots in early German Romanticism. According to this notion, the rise of rationalism and the decline of a belief in religion and magic has stripped the natural world of its spiritual luster, the primordial force that must have inspired poets in ancient times. More recently, the use of the *enchantment/disenchantment* dichotomy to describe this loss is generally traced back to Schiller's allegorical poem *Die Götter Griechenlandes.* In this ode to the twilight of the Greek Gods in the face of modernity, Schiller laments the disappeared enchantment of this ancient world:

> *Schöne Welt, wo bist du? – Kehre wieder,*
>
> *Holdes Blütenalter der Natur!*
>
> *Ach! nur in dem Feenland der Lieder*
>
> *Lebt noch deine goldene Spur.* [6]

---

[6] Edgar A. Bowling, translator. *The Poems of Schiller* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1875) 74: "Beauteous world, where art thou gone? O, thou,/Nature's blooming youth, return once more!/Ah, but in Song's fairy region now,/Lives thy fabled trace so dear of yore !"

The romantic longing expressed in Schiller's verse transforms, in the 20th century, into a sociological notion most associated with the sociologist Max Weber. Weber, in a 1918 lecture entitled "Wissenschaft als Beruf" [Science as a Vocation], theorizes *disenchantment* as the modern struggle to overcome or compensate what he calls *die Entzauberung der Welt* (after the line in Schiller's poem, "*Schöne Welt, wo bist du*"), the purging of magic through systems of thought like Comtean positivism.[7] This struggle leads to the desacralization of the world, meaning that the ability to think mystically (or spiritually) becomes more and more difficult for a rational, modern individual (a scientist, engineer, or any other fervent adherent of modernity and progress). As a result, Weber argues, one tends to think of *enchantment* as something that is no longer possible for the rational individual to attain. Instead, enchantment appears reserved for those ready to return to the compassionate arms of the old myths and churches, an act of return and *Weltflucht* that would require a "sacrifice of the intellect."[8]

Though his lecture is often read as a lament for the loss of enchantment in the world, Weber points out that we need a new way of thinking about this problem of *the rational* versus *the enchanted*. Indeed, both approaches to the world are problematic and dogmatic. As he notes, a purely rational and intellectual belief in *disenchantment* is itself a myth, an "academic prophecy, which does not clearly realize that in the lecture-rooms of the university no other virtue holds but plain intellectual integrity."[9] Adhering to a rigid dogmatic belief that rationality precludes all magic could be just as damaging as subscribing blindly to the redemptive, escapist

[7] The French philosopher Auguste Comte, was known for his doctrine of positivism, according to which knowledge can only be gathered through adherence to the laws of nature.
[8] Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2004) 31.
[9] Weber, same page.

logic of a return to pre-modern religious thought; neither approach is a viable solution to finding enchantment in our world. As Weber writes in *Essays on Sociology*, "[w]hen religious virtuosos have combined into an active asceticist sect, two aims are completely attained: the disenchantment of the world and the blockage of the path to salvation by a flight from the world."[10] What I read Weber as saying here is that, if we are to find enchantment, we must seek out a way of experiencing the enchantment of the world (and eschewing asceticism), while also finding a means of living *within* the world (not flying away from it).

While Weber's view is a hopeful one, he does not shy away from showing the systemic dangers of modernity's id left to run rampant; while science and industry might drive growth, focusing solely on calculations and bottom lines erases a human quality and level of spiritual (i.e. enchanted) intimacy. Weber's solution is radical and, as such, the stuff of much debate and interpretation. Almost counter-intuitively, he suggests that the way forward is to face disenchantment without falling prey to its logic. In other words, an individual is capable of making their own decisions of how their work and use of rationalism affects their connection to the spiritual forces at play in the world. Essentially, we can refuse to see the system of *disenchantment* as a force of heteronomy that supersedes our moral actions.

This same process of embracing the enchantment that underlies modern economics, industry and politics also crops up in France around the same time. A similar discomfort with the finite nature of the world serves as the basis of Dada and Surrealism. Through collages and exquisite corpses, both movements sought to re-enchant the calculated world by perverting the

[10] Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Routledge, 2009) 290.

use of modern objects and modes of perception.[11] In France, at this time, the loss of enchantment is often expressed as a desire for voyage or adventure in order to see a world of infinite enchantment. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre describes the feeling of inertia that disenchantment begets with the title of his novel *La Nausée,* in which the main character, a former traveler named Roquentin, laments that there is no point in leaving the ever more suffocating, disenchanted life of Saint-Germain-des-Prés because "il n'y a plus d'aventure" in the world. Roquentin, in fact, laments that in all his voyages he never found what some might call the transcendent and enchanting experience of *adventure*, going so far as to compare the absence of enchantment in the world to a belief in the absence of love, noting: "Il n'y a pas d'aventures… il n'y a pas de moments parfaits... nous avons perdu les mêmes illusions, nous avons suivi les mêmes chemins. Je devine le reste […]"[12]

Other writers intellectualized the increasingly calculated world of positivist modernity as a malaise, highlighting the slight differences in the French approach to the problem compared to the German. Unlike German thought about this issue, the French approach is rooted in anthropology and dynamism. A lament on this subject can be found in an essay by Paul Valéry from 1931, in which, seeing the dire economic and political situation in Europe, its nation states and their colonies, he announces that "le temps du monde fini commence." That is, we know all

[11] We see a rather harsh reaction to this strain of thought in the early 1920s expressed by Jacques Rivière, editor of the *NRF,* who argued that the nascent avant-garde movements were far too focused on attaining transcendence by hook or by crook.
[12] Jean Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard "folio," 1974[1938]) 210.

there is to discover in the world, there are no events left unknown, no hidden solutions or messiahs.[13]

Despite this gloomy prognosis, the authors analyzed in my study represent a more or less positive shift in thinking about modernity and enchantment, a shift more or less in line with the more positive aspects of Weber's conclusion. In France, we find clear evidence of this shift in the works of French sociologists, anthropologists and philosophers. For example, we have Marcel Mauss's notion of *le sacré*. His 1902 essay "Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie" argues that enchantment underlies every echelon of human society. Mauss argues that the *magic* forces governing social interactions in (what at the time were referred to as) *primitive* cultures are in fact the basis of modern organizational science and technology. Mauss tells us that magic, like science, is more than an *art pratique*: it is also "un trésor d'idées." Following this same line of thought, he goes on to write that modern scientific practices and the social structure of modern society are also based upon a sacred notion of enchantment:

> Si éloignés que nous pensions être de la magie, nous en sommes encore mal dégagés. Par exemple, les idées de chance et de malchance, de quintessence, qui nous sont encore familières, sont bien proches de l'idée de la magie elle-même. Ni les techniques, ni les sciences, ni même les principes directeurs de notre raison ne sont encore lavés de leur tache originelle. Il n'est pas téméraire de penser que, pour une bonne part, tout ce que les notions de force, de cause, de fin, de substance ont encore de non positif, de mystique et de poétique, tient aux vieilles

[13] Paul Valéry, *Regards sur le monde actuel* (Paris: N.R.F., 1931) 35.

> habitudes d'esprit dont est née la magie et dont l'esprit humain est lent à se défaire.[14]

For Mauss, then, enchantment is something that lives among us and influences us. Indeed, it is the basis of the rational, calculated world of modernity. If we learn to look closely at our world, we can begin to see a sacred force (the *tache originelle*) that underlies our interactions and connects us.

We see another approach to modern enchantment from a philosophical perspective in Henri Bergson's later works. Whereas early in his career Bergson lamented the rise of calculated rationalism that leaves no room for finding the *élan vital* available to our senses, he undergoes a perspectival shift later in life. In *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion* (1932), he moves toward the opinion that the modern individual is still capable of finding what he calls *joie* — an *élan vital*, or a mystic sense of *jouissance.* He writes that this "[j]oie serait en effet la simplicité de vie que propagerait dans le monde une intuition mystique diffuse, joie encore celle

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[14] Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, "Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie," in L'*Année sociologique*, 7 (1902-1903), Mémoires originaux, 1904, p. 146. This is also not too far removed from Levy-Bruhl's notion of *la mentalité primitive* which, though problematic in for todays sensibilities, was nevertheless a crucial critical step in thinking about the *other*. *See* Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *La mentalité primtive* (Paris : Librairie Félix Alcan, 1922) 14:

> Abandonnons ce postulat, et attachons-nous sans idée préconçue à l'étude objective de la mentalité primitive, telle qu'elle se manifeste dans les institutions des sociétés inférieures ou dans les représentations collectives d'où ces institutions dérivent. Dès lors, l'activité mentale des primitifs ne sera plus interprétée d'avance comme une forme rudimentaire de la nôtre, comme infantile et presque pathologique. Elle apparaîtra au contraire comme normale dans les conditions où elle s'exerce, comme complexe et développée à sa façon. En cessant de la rapporter à un type qui n'est pas le sien, en cherchant à en déterminer le mécanisme uniquement d'après ses manifestations mêmes, nous pouvons espérer ne pas la dénaturer dans notre description et notre analyse.

qui suivrait automatiquement une vision d'au-delà dans une expérience scientifique élargie."[15] The mystic secret is for the individual to learn how to expand his soul so that it might fill the void of a body extended and outsized by the advance of rational calculation and technology. Imagine, for example, a steam-shovel driver letting his soul seep into the metallic inhumanity of the behemoth he operates.[16]

If we are to believe Bergson, it is possible to bear witness to the birth of a new sense of mystical intuition even within the limits and simplifications put in place by rationalism. However, this intuition must be jumpstarted through physical endeavors and unexpected encounters. In order to understand the role of physicality in creating modern experience and a language of enchantment, in this dissertation I focus on what I believe to be the *locus* of this experience: the voyage. To be sure, the voyage is not a place, but a trajectory — it is a verb made noun and vice versa: an act of learning how to perceive objects, and an object that alters perception.

The writers I study in this work might not all be travel writers, but they are all writers for whom travel played a crucial role in the development of their unique idioms. Blaise Cendrars, Michel Leiris, and Henri Michaux each tasked themselves with undertaking voyages as a means of finding and communicating a feeling of enchantment in the world. Their struggle is one of finding the presence of the mimetic magic of poetry in a physical event. Each describes this

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[15] Henri Bergson, "Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion," *Œuvres* (Paris: P.U.F., 1970) 1245.

[16] This sort of thinking is also the basis for Gilbert Simondon's theory of how the handle of a tool or a computer terminal allows a tool or machine to be filled, momentarily, with the humanity of its operator. The famous example given in Simondon's writings is of the human as a conductor and machines as the symphony of musicians. Through them, he expresses something of great beauty.

sense of enchantment differently. Blaise Cendrars, for example, paints himself as an optimist who sees enchantment as a feeling of ecstasy one has while experiencing free movement through the world, whereby someone speeding in a car or plane becomes "un brahmane à rebours qui se contemple dans l'agitation."[17] On a more active level, Blaise Cendrars clearly sees the task of creating enchantment in the world as one falling to the modern writer. As an active agent in the world, the true writer is a traveler-poet whose experiences, affected by the vehicular and communicative technologies of the 20th century, allow him access to the magic of the world, which he can channel through written language.

Michel Leiris does something similar when he speaks of travel as practice of re-centering oneself and casting off anxieties attached to one's identity:

> [d]ans le voyage il semblerait que, se livrant à l'espace et s'y jetant à corps perdu, on échappe par là même à la marche du temps, qu'on la remonte en quelque sorte à mesure qu'elle progresse, et qu'on parvient ainsi à annuler tous ses ravages, si terribles quand on reste immobiles et voués à leurs mâchoires, ainsi qu'un minéral friable rongé par l'érosion.[18]

The "échappe […] à la marche du temps" Leiris describes in this passage reflects his desire to experience the world in all of its immediacy — that is, without critical thought or judgment. What he desires, then, is a method of traveling (and existing in the world) without his Westerner's ego usurping the experience and analyzing it. Ideally, in Leiris's mind, travel

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[17] Blaise Cendrars, *Blaise Cendrars: Oeuvres autobiographiques complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard "Pléiade," 2013) 100.
[18] Michel Leiris, *Journal* (Paris : Gallimard N.R.F., 1990) 210.

confers to the individual a secondary existence, a space in which we can “s’aliéner […] de se projeter ailleurs et de se dépasser pour s’engager dans de multiples voies.”[19]

Similarly, the notion that escaping the self is the goal of travel and writing also shows up in Michaux’s method of relating travel and enchantment. In his early works, Michaux searches for a way of relating his closed self to a multitude of other places and peoples; he attempts to find a compromise between his inward and outward selves — his *moi-boule* and his *moi-foule*.[20] Indeed, all three of these authors illustrate ways in which physical action and engagement bring an individual toward an experience of ecstasy — an experience of enchantment that allows one to experience the multitude, to be a part of the other, to explore facets of one’s own identity reflected in other places and peoples.

It is also worth noting that, while the texts I study deal with similar quests (pertaining to travel as a means to discover enchanted aspects of the modern world and of the self), they do not, at first glance, appear to be unified in terms of genre. For example, one could roughly consider Michaux’s *Ecuador* and *Un barbare en Asie* to be edited poetic travelogues, whereas later works like *Voyage en Grand Garabagne* could be classified as invented, imaginary or faux travelogues. Leiris’s *L’Afrique fantôme*, is his *carnet de route* from his first ethnographic trip, though, structurally, it reads as a novel. Lastly, I read Blaise Cendrars’s autobiographical reflections on a life of travel —what the critic Claude Leroy has called Cendrars’s “Mémoires *qui sont des*

[19] Leiris, Michel, Preface, *La Musique et la transe*, by Gilbert Rouget (Paris: Gallimard, “Tel,” 1990) 17.

[20] See Laurent Jenny, “Styles d’être et individuation chez Henri Michaux,” *Fabula-LhT*, issue no. 9, “Après le bovarysme,” 26 March 2012, http://www.fabula.org/lht/9/jenny.html. Accessed, 9 March 2017.

Mémoires sans être des *Mémoires"—as a genre and practice that exists somewhere between embellishment and genuine spiritual revelation*.[21]

Each of these texts, however, exhibits an autobiographical tendency common among modern travelers: they each reflect upon their voyages and the act of the voyage in and of itself as a means of communing with a personal sense of *joie* that they are unable to experience while staying put in one place. Another common thread is that travel, for these writers, is an act that spurs writing; in the physical act of travel, one finds a particular style, or figure, of rhetorical creation (i.e. writing). For this reason, the texts I examine could all be said to be permutations of the autobiographical genre. After all, this sort of internalization of the outside world into the inner microcosm is a feature of the genre of autobiography, close to what the critic Michel Beaujour describes as *autoportraiture* — that is, texts which act as mirrors, revealing to the writer their own actions and perceptions of the world. As Beaujour shows, this mirror is not simply the author's reflection of himself, but also, in the sense of the medieval *speculum* (an encyclopedia-like genre), a reflection of the author's hopes and dreams for enchantment, which are equally determined by his culture and surroundings:

> […] en tant que *speculum* encyclopédique, l'autoportrait est une mémoire qui médiatise entre l'individu et sa culture. Cette mémoire *s'attache* particulièrement aux lieux où les rapports entre la monade microcosmique [sic] et le macrocosme linguistique et culturel se problématisent en s'affrontant.[22]

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[21] Claude Leroy, *La Main de Cendrars* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Septentrion, 1996) 319.
[22] Michel Beaujour, *Miroirs d'encore* (Paris: Seuil, 1981) 40.

Beaujour contrasts this encyclopedic *autoportraiture* with traditional autobiography, which is told along narrative lines. *Autoportraiture*, he argues, lends itself more readily to representing experiences of enchantment. In this literary form, the macrocosm of the world and the forces at play within it are condensed and digested into the microcosmic life of the writer, enabling him to explain the magic forces at play in the world in a smaller, more relatable human manner.

A Moral Dilemma

Although these authors succeed in their endeavor to express of the macrocosm in the microcosm, this process is made complex by the vagaries of modern morals. In other words, the enchantment they seek is complicated by moral concerns that an engaged writer and artist is pressed upon to consider in the 20th century — problems of orientalist, racist occidental bias so ingrained that the individual might not even notice how it guides their thinking. As these writers digest their travels, they must also ask how it is possible to experience and represent experiences of modern enchantment while remaining respectful of the people and places which reveal this special force to them. As we shall see, the unique character of each author's mimetic figure of enchantment is mediated in part by how they negotiate their desire for enchantment with respect for the other. Though this act of negotiation is something in the general *zeitgeist* of a time of *le monde fini,* this sort of mediation has its roots in the brand of existentialism embraced by Simone de Beauvoir, who, in one of her earliest philosophical essays, "Pyrrhus et Cinéas" (1944), questions a moral dilemma similar to the one our traveler-poets face.

The essay opens with a tale borrowed from Plutarch, that of King Pyrrhus of Epirus (after whom the *pyrrhic victory*—a victory in which the cost of life and resources negates glory—is named) speaking with his advisor Cineas. In Beauvoir's retelling, Cineas asks the king what he plans to do after conquering Macedonia. Pyrrhus answers that he will keep on conquering. He announces with requisite braggadocio that, after Macedonia, he'll take Asia Minor. Feeling his question has been dodged, Cineas presses on, "And after Asia Minor, then what?" The game repeats itself until Pyrrhus finally answers. Once he has conquered all that he desires, the king proclaims, "I will rest," which leads Cineas, like a pre-modern psychoanalyst, to point out to his king the absurdity of his pattern of behavior: "Why don't you just rest *now*?" Essentially, Beauvoir raises the question of how political and physical barriers define an individual's quest to satisfy a desire for a greater and sacred meaning in life. In other words, Beauvoir tries her hand at defining the individual's relationship to a post-war world in which hope is banished and borders have become enclosures. Moreover, this choice of tale conveys with urgency (she wrote the essay during a period in her life when she, too, was immobile and forced to *remain*, sequestered in Paris during the Second World War) the tension between physical, measurable fulfillment and the less visible benefits of *la vita contemplativa*. Pyrrhus needs action to feed his desire for glory — the Hellenic equivalent of Romantic sublime enchantment; travel and conquest, after all, are figures that define glory and transcendence for him. However, there is a caveat. Greedily searching for glory can morally and physically bankrupt an individual, leading such a quest to become a *pyrrhic victory*. As such, this tale underscores a fundamental dilemma for the modern traveler: what is the collateral cost (to one's self and others) of pursuing glory? This train of thought leads Beauvoir, in the guise of Cineas, to pose a critical 20th-century

question: "Quel est donc la mesure d'un homme?" she asks. "Quels buts peut-il se proposer, et quels espoirs lui sont permis?"[23]

For Beauvoir, the notion of glory on the battlefield is transposed here into a modern desire for vitality and enchantment, which she names *espoirs,* hopes. Finding these *espoirs* requires tempering personal desires so as not to abuse others, given the interconnectedness of the modern world. We must ask ourselves what *hopes* we are allowed. For, as Beauvoir shows, the measure of a modern individual can be judged by how they pursue their *hopes* (for enchantment) in the face of the physical and philosophical (i.e. legal, moral, rational) constraints that modernity places on them. In this light, Plutarch's tale is something of a parabolic plea that is directly applicable to the modern individual's attempt to balance forces of rationality in a bid to find whatever enchantment may remain in the world, and the search for modern enchantment might be viewed as a search for *hope* and enchantment through *self-control* — the modern individual must ask himself "quels buts lui sont *permis*" (emphasis added) in his search for enchantment.

To further clarify her reading of Plutarch, Beauvoir makes reference to Candide's famous dictum: "cultivate your own garden." While Candide's advice is superfluous, it is nevertheless prescient. As Beauvoir points out, "c'est toujours *mon* jardin que je cultiverai, m'y voilà enfermé jusqu'à la mort puisque ce jardin devient mien du moment que je le cultive." In other words, it is not enough to merely conquer or announce oneself as a traveler, or as a seeker of the enchantments that the world has to offer; one must also understand that the wider one's garden, the more responsibilities one has. This notion is of capital importance for the traveler seeking

[23] See Simone de Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1944) 204.

enchantment in modernity because, as Beauvoir is quick to point out, the traveler becomes an unexamined tourist if they fail to take notice of the specificity of *their garden*, for taking a nice walk awhile adhering to one's own "discours, en prenant des photographies, ce nest pas participer à une guerre, à une expedition." One must engage with the world a bit more to understand its magic. To be sure, if a traveler fails to learn this modern application of Voltaire and Plutarch, their travels risk being reduced to solipsistic "conduites qui contredisent les fins qu'elles prétendent viser."[24]

Beauvoir's contention is that in any enterprise in which we attempt to appropriate *hope* and *enchantment,* we are bound to an unspoken morality; we must acknowledge that our desires are just as valid as those of others. To take part in what Valéry lamented was *le temps du monde fini*, we must take into account how our behavior (*conduite*) impacts upon the *hopes* of others. In other words, our experience of enchantment must be checked and mediated. This, however, does not spell an end to *espoir.* On the contrary: awareness of this interconnectedness, Beauvoir suggests, may indeed be a means through which we might construct new, viable and perhaps even moral experiences of enchantment. By "moral," I refer to the common existentialist notion that there is a code of respecting the other that one must take into consideration in determining one's essence. As Beauvoir is quick to point out, it is in our nature to strive toward this goal, for "tout homme a besoin de la liberté des autres hommes et, en un sens, il la veut toujours, fût-il tyran; il lui manque seulement d'assumer avec bonne foi les consequences d'une telle volonté."[25]

[24] Beauvoir 312-14.
[25] Beauvoir 90.

From a literary standpoint, the notion of *espoir* that Beauvoir focuses on in *Pyhrrus et Cinéas* is a useful way of thinking about the desire for enchantment and its connection to travel in the 20th century. Indeed, Beauvoir shows us that hope for enchantment requires that we remain present in the world and work within our own world, rather than try to escape it, for “il n’y a pour l’homme aucun moyen de s’évader de ce monde … c’est en ce monde qu’il lui faut […] se realiser moralement.”[26] In other words, the more one expands one’s horizons in pursuit of the desire to appropriate the world, the more responsibilities one takes on. As a rule, then, the search for enchantment in modernity implies work on the part of the individual. I argue that coming to terms with and defining this work as a personal style and figure is, the vocation of the writers analyzed in this dissertation — Cendrars, Michaux and Leiris. After all, when they travel, they realize that they cannot escape the interconnectedness of the world. They are part of a community of individuals, bound more by a similar *journey* than by any stylistic similarities, that works toward the goal of finding *espoir* through the process of mediating personal desire with rational reality. In other words, these authors do important existential work and bring us closer to understanding that enchantment in the 20th century is a way of thinking that transcends the individual. Truth be told, Beauvoir’s idea of finding *hope* through mediating one’s desires with the other is almost par-for-the-course existentialism. However, she introduces a notion that paves the way for the specific voyages of these authors.

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[26] Beauvoir 88.

To both conclude with this notion of an ethos of enchantment and usher it into a more contemporary paradigm, I would like to bring to the fore another work to which my thinking is indebted. The idea that limitations can be a source of enchantment is at the core of what Brown University political and critical theorist Jane Bennett, who coined the notion of "vibrant matter,"[27] sees as modernity's enduring power to enchant us. In her book *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (2001) Bennett disagrees with the notion that there is no enchantment left in the world and, like Beauvoir, stipulates that moral conduct is not a deterrent to enchantment. Indeed, she seeks to rid us of this "image of ethics as a code to which one is obligated, a set of criteria to which one assents or subscribes," which demands that we see the world as a cold, calculated and completely rational place.[28] Similar to Beauvoir's point about the pleasure of our garden's limits, Bennett makes the argument that enchantment itself is a beautiful and ethical experience, insisting that ethical codes and restrictions should not be seen as barriers but rather as beguiling limitations that must be suffused with a "spirit of generosity" if they are to be useful.

There is, however, a more complex angle to Bennett's line of thinking; her notion of ethics is anchored in a tradition going back to Kant. In chapter seven of her book (a chapter to which we will return in the conclusion to this dissertation), Bennett affirms that ethical action is defined by "both a moral code (which condenses moral ideals and metaphysical assumptions into principles and rules) and an embodied sensibility (which organizes affects into a style and

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[27] See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

[28] Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 3.

generates the impetus to enact the code)."[29] Traditionally, she tells us, an estheticized affect or style is seen as an affront to an ethical order. That is, a person risks being self-serving by developing their affect. They risk acting non-collectively, or to use existentialist terms, as a *pour-soi*. However, she argues, these are merely fears and, "as long as affect remains an indispensable part of human life, it makes more sense to discipline it into a magnanimous sensibility than to try and ban it from ethical life."[30] In a series of moves that takes us from Kant's assertion that "nonsomatic feelings (perplexity, sublimity, exaltation) have the power to awaken nonsomatic (moral) sentiments,"[31] to Schiller's notion of "aesthetic play" (whereby, in developing one's style, one simultaneously develops one's outwardly-focused moral character),[32] to Foucault's notion that self-care techniques are an expression of one's desire to please and relate to others, Bennett argues that the cultivation of an esthetic style through action can serve as the basis for both an art and an ethic of enchantment.

This is why she defines enchantment as

> something that we encounter, that hits us, but it is also a comportment that can be fostered through deliberate strategies. One of those strategies might be to give

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[29] Bennett 131.
[30] Bennett 132.
[31] Bennett 136.
[32] Bennett notes Schiller's distinction between "fantasy-play" and "esthetic play." The first is defined by "uncultivated taste [which] seiz[es]… upon what is new and startling—on the colourful, fantastic, and bizarre…shunning nothing so much as tranquil simplicity. It fashions grotesque shapes, loves swift transitions, exuberant forms, glaring contrasts, garish lights." On the other hand, esthetic play "engages an 'autonomous shaping power within' which 'subjects the arbitrary activity of the imagination to its own immutable and eternal unity, introduces its own autonomy into the transient, its own infinity' into the life of sense."(Bennett, 142) The main idea here is that an intimate esthetic sensation will eventually bind itself to a communitarian, moral and transcendent virtue, like Beauty or Truth.

greater expression to the sense of play, another to hone sensory receptivity to the marvelous specificity of things. Yet another way to enhance the enchantment effect is to resist the story of the disenchantment of modernity.[33]

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Through action and affect similar to the processes Bennett theorizes, the writers I analyze in this dissertation use travel as a means of cultivating an affect that soon transforms into a personal, communicative style that both transmits and translates each author's idiolectic sense of enchantment into a code of language that can be shared on a communal level. Framed by Beauvoir and Bennett, then, my project eschews the more common tropes of travel literature such as exoticism, discovery, adventure, etc. These terms can be assumed to already be problematic for the authors in question. My concern is not how a particular poet problematizes these terms, but rather how these writers acknowledge themselves as desiring what these terms represent and how they go about reconciling these desires. Indeed, this is what the poet and literary theorist Michel Deguy refers to as an ethic of poetic language, a *poéthique.*

The Field of Travel Literature and the Need for a Notion of enchantment

I am not alone in my interest in shifting the discourse on travel writing in this direction. Indeed, this mode of thinking is part of a growing discourse that pays less attention to the

[33] Cf. Bennett 4.

objective of the voyage, and, instead, favors seeing travel both as an experience and a process of self-discovery, balanced with an attempt to respect the other. One rather methodical study is Kimberley J. Healey's *The Modernist Traveler: French Detours 1900-1930.* Healey's book gives us an interesting and broad corpus of texts to consider (with some similarities to my choices: Segalen, Morand, Cendrars, Michaux, et al.).

Healey provides little by way of a framework that might allow one to discern a *poéthique*. Her book is more a survey of these writers. The word "detours" in the title, for example, which one might expect to refer to a way of finding enchantment in unexpected places, is not clearly defined or explained. But she nevertheless documents quite well the phenomenon of French modernity's self-reflexive turn, or, as she puts it, "the shift from exoticism to ethnography."[34] This shift is an important part of the discourse that has its roots in James Clifford's studies on the ethics of anthropology in *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) and Clifford Geertz's *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (1988), which posits anthropology as being a discipline that is "poised, mule-like," between literary and scientific discourse. More recently, Vincent Debaene's *L'Adieu au voyage* (2010), which will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter on Leiris, concerns itself with understanding the history of how this discourse developed over time. However, Healey is less interested in understanding how this hybrid discourse (of modern science, method and a desire for the exotic) might have developed and caused this shift. She focuses instead on an argument of "tradition" versus innovation. As such, her work is more a catalogue of how early twentieth-century French travel writers wrote both "in and against a

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[34] Kimberley J. Healey, *The Modernist Traveler: French Detours 1900-1930* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press) 13.

French tradition of travel literature," rather than noting the specifics of their discourse or attempting a diagnosis of these writers' processes.[35]

More focused on the specifics of how a writer's poetics are influenced by their internalization of a voyage is a work such as the semiotician David H. T. Scott's *Semiologies of Travel: From Gautier to Baudrillard* (1994), which examines how modern authors are faced with the difficult task of filling in the empty signifier of the destination of travel: *the ailleurs*. Along the same lines, Brown University critic Thangam Ravindranathan's *Là où je ne suis pas* (2010) looks at Michaux, Freud, Derrida and others' attempts to define modern travel as an attempt to enter physically into the liminal space of poetics. However, this dissertation perhaps allies more closely with the line of argument that John Culbert's takes in his book *Paralyses* (2011), a book that views modern travel as an attempt to overcome both physical and psychical (imaginative) *paralysis*.

Culbert's main argument is that we should not see travel as an impasse that must be dealt with, but rather as an opportunity for innovation and adaptation. He is decidedly against the historical view of travel as a *travail* or difficulty which one must overcome in order to fulfill a metaphysical requirement. Modern travel should not be inscribed in a "redemptive logic of useful toil, salutary travail, and mortal trespass."[36] Instead, it should be an experience more in line with *paralysis,* a notion he borrows from Derrida and defines as a space of potential action or inaction, in between death and life, between the *right here* and *over there*. The problem of modern travel is therefore not one of overcoming negativity, but rather learning to create new

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[35] Healey 10.
[36] John Culbert, *Paralyses: Literature, Travel and Ethnography in French Modernity* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011) 10.

discursive spaces within the limits to which we are beholden. To make this point, Culbert invokes Ross Chambers's *Loiterature*, a fascinating study on aimless travel and digression, in order to explain and justify his use of the term *paralysis* to describe the modern voyage. Chambers uses the term *loiterature* to define a personal bubble wherein narrative and thought regarding one's day-to-day activity is seen as "'coming loose' or 'coming unstrung,'" a notion that would seem to allude "to a *desired inertia*[37] [signifying] the impossibility of its attainment [...]" For Chambers, Culbert notes, "[...] paralysis is a state of suspension that derives from digression's oxymoronic pull toward a state of stasis, on the one hand, and a need to move or even a desire to progress, that is, to move on, on the other."[38] In other words, the space is a bubble of reflection — a space of movement without movement. This is a space quite close to the one Michaux invents in *Un certain plume* as part of an ethic of seeing the world. In other words, it is that of individuality being incubated in a *moi-boule* that opens up into a *moi-foule*, the outer edge of the bubble serving as a straddling point between self and other, narrative and digression.[39]

It is in this vein that my dissertation attempts to ally the magic of this *desired inertia* with the ideas espoused by Beauvoir and Bennett. In fact, we can read in Chambers's description of 'limited travel' a notion similar to that of King Pyrrhus in the Plutarch tale cited by Beauvoir. What we might take from this comparison is that Culbert's notion of *paralysis* does not so much describe a struggle, but essentially a practice of contemplative rest. The limited space, the limited body gives way to a meditation in motion, a space where literature may take place, but it is also a

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[37] The italics are mine.
[38] Cf. Culbert 17.
[39] Cf. Laurent Jenny.

space (and perhaps the two are inextricably linked) where a mystical experience might occur within the sphere of the real and the rational. How one fashions the act of travel within this digressive space is a means of crafting both a rational critique and a personal experience of enchantment. Where Culbert leaves off, we begin. It is my hope that my work moves us a bit past Colbert's mapping of movement, mobility and impetus, and more into an exploration of the space that the modern traveler creates for themselves within the paradigm of the major 20th-century (and now 21st-century) problem of re-enchantment.

Idioms of Enchantment

Taking cues from Culbert, Beauvoir and Bennett, the chapters that follow examine three different authorial approaches to combining travel (action) and poetic representation as a means of creating new communal spaces of enchantment. These three approaches are represented by the authors making up our corpus, hence the division of this dissertation into three monograph chapters: the first on Blaise Cendrars's *Le Lotissement du ciel,* the second on Michel Leiris's *L'Afrique fantôme* and *Fourbis*, and the third chapter on Henri Michaux's attempt to find a means of relating to what he sees as individualized spheres of personal enchantment in *Un barbare en Asie* and *Ecuador.*

Each author's struggles represent a successive step in an attempt to better understand the mechanics of enchantment in modernity; each author finds in the act of travel—in their experiences, in the motion of travel itself, in the mediation of their desires for *espoir* with the autonomy of those they encounter, and in their meditation and digestion of these experiences —a

newfound and very personal figure of literary enchantment.[40] Together, these works tell a story of ingenuity — a solution to a crisis of spirit and experience that will become more common in the latter half of the 20th century, with the experiential and mediatized *poéthique* of writers like Nicolas Bouvier (*L'Usage du monde,* 1963), Michel Butor (*Où,* 1971), Roland Barthes (*L'Empire des signes,* 1970), and Julia Kristeva (*Des Chinoises,* 1974). Each of these texts mixes observation and experience with a political or social outlook that begets, to varying degrees of self-awareness and success, a particular personal idiom or idiolect. However, it is in this double act of engagement with the world and mediation of personal desire that these writers approach what Paul Valéry called turning one's work (one's representation of the world) into an "édifice enchanté."[41] With this double act in mind, I look to Cendrars, Leiris, and Michaux for evidence of a methodology of building this *edifice enchanté* in a way that is responsible and individually meaningful — as acts of a Schillerian notion of esthetic play. I am looking for various instances of what the anthropologist and writer Marc Augé has termed "supermodernity" (*surmodernité*): the attempt to place excessive value on the individual to the detriment of a communal spirit. Be it through contact or an experience of decentering one's individuality through outside stimuli, travel is an important litmus test for understanding how a new sense of communal meaning might arise.[42] I hope to show that such a desire is part of a conscious quest to turn poetry into a common language; a search for a way of speaking directly that might bind communities, or, as Weber defined it, a search for the "prophetisches Pneuma [the prophetic breath or spirit]" that "in

[40] Cf. Bennett 95.
[41] *Tel Quel*, no. 1 (1960).

[42] See Marc Augé, *Non-lieux* (Paris: Seuil, 2015).

stürmischem Feuer durch die großen Gemeinden ging und sie zusammenschweißte [once ran through and bound great communities together]."[43]

The first chapter in this project is entitled "Lessons of a Backwards Brahman: Cendrars and the Democratization of Enchantment." Here, I focus on Blaise Cendrars's impression that the enchantment of travel is localized not in the encounters one has during the voyage or the destination of that voyage, but rather in the act of travel itself. Indeed, he believes that a mystical sensation of *the sublime* can be found in the paradoxically calm space one finds oneself in when zooming along in airplanes and Alpha Romeos. Cendrars calls this experience the transcendent jubilance of a modern *brahmane à rebours*.

In this vein, my chapter on Cendrars focuses on reading him as a theorist working on how one might achieve *ekstasis* (the ecstasy of the Catholic saints) through the act of travel. This view of Cendrars as a theorist runs counter to much of the critical discourse on him; he is usually known for his embellishments, his outrageously impossible adventures and neo-romantic flourishes. However, if one looks past the transparent pathological lies and the many fantastic postures Cendrars affects (and they are numerous), it is, we shall see, possible to read in his works a surprisingly subtle theory of what it takes to encounter enchantment in the 20th century.

To make my case, I will focus on the last volume of Cendrars's pseudo-memoirs, *Le Lotissement du ciel,* a collection of remembrances of past travels in which I contend the author

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[43] Max Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992) 110. I cite this text in the original German to draw attention to the strength of the Greek loan word *Pneuma* he uses, as well as the notion of binding communities through representation, which doubles as the breath of a blacksmith who *welds* the community together through his rational practice, or vocation.

establishes a theory of enchantment through action. Appropriately, the title of this volume refers to a practice of enchanting new and empty *spaces* through a combination of imaginary representative practice and physical action. This title, *Le Lotissement du ciel* (or the "parceling of the sky") is an allusion to the divinatory practices of Roman augurs. According to Livy and Cicero, an augur would look through a loop affixed to the top of his staff in order to cordon off a section of the sky, creating a *templum* into which the gods would send enchanted messages encoded in the movement of the birds and the heavenly bodies.[44] This title, then, is a metaphorical (and, at times, almost literal) guide to how one might combine a physical experience of the world with one that enchants the world through the imaginary — through a willingness to take ownership of one's own space (one's garden, as Beauvoir put it), one might have hope yet for translating affect into a communicable, enchanted poetics. Cendrars, whose life was built on transforming modernity into affect, does this extraordinarily well. In *Le Lotissement du ciel,* we see that his selfishness melts. Through an analysis of two vignettes, "Le Nouveau Patron de l'aviation" (a reflection on saintly levitation and air travel) and "La Tour Eiffel sidérale" (a reflection on stargazing and road-tripping in the Brazilian coffee plains), I hope to show that, beneath the surface of the supposedly fanciful work of a seemingly unrepentant literary hedonist, Cendrars finally attempts to reveal his affective prowess as a gift for "les jeunes gens" who wish to travel and find enchantment in the world. This, we shall see, effectively makes *Le Lotissement du ciel* a *guide bleu* for the traveler wishing to experience what hidden magic remains in the world.

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[44] See Cicero, *De divinatione* 1.30 and Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 1.6, in which the auguries on the basis of which Romulus founded the city of Rome are described.

The second chapter, "The Ethnographer's Eye, The Poet's Touch, The Pessimism of the Poet," examines Michel Leiris's attempt to balance his desire for the enchantment he presumes exists in exotic locales with his desire to be a productive, rational individual. As a result, we move from Cendrars's optimistic take on romantic idealism to Leiris's bid to find enchantment despite his own negative and pessimistic attitude vis-à-vis the rehabilitation of magic in the world. I begin this chapter with a reading of one of Leiris's earliest essays, which focuses on the connection between anthropology and travel: "*L'Œil de l'ethnographe*," written for George Bataille's magazine *Documents*. Here, Leiris develops a notion of anthropological travel as providing an acute eye, what I call the *ethnographic gaze*, an anamorphic look at the self that both reveals the rational structure of the world and how the traveler is able to suspend this rationality to find a sense of enchantment. From this early article, we follow Leiris through a few moments in his long, diverse career as an ethnographer and poet as he struggles to marry these two poles of his existence; as he tries to lose his rational ego so as to better experience the enchantment present in the world.

To begin, *L'Afrique fantôme*, his record of his first ethnographic trip with the Dakar-Djibouti mission, is the first time that Leiris is able to articulate his struggle concisely. In ethnography he seeks an answer to the double bind of travel. He asks if it is possible to find a means of experiencing the sublime sensation of losing one's self in communion with the other and the elsewhere that is at once respectful and personally fulfilling. It is through this profession that he hopes to find himself on trips "dans des contrées alors plus ou moins retirées," where, "à

travers l'observation scientifique, un contact vrai avec leurs habitants feraient de lui un autre homme, plus ouvert et guéri de ses obsessions." [45]

Leiris fights against these obsessions throughout his life; he keeps searching because each successive trip is a failure. For example, Leiris is disappointed with his trip to Africa because his own egoistic concerns led him to lose sight of the "plénitude d'existence à cette Afrique en laquelle j'avais trouvé beaucoup mais non la déliverance."[46] In essence, his deliverance will only come when he finds a balance between concern for the *self* and the plenitude of existence present in the *other* and the *elsewhere.* Thus, throughout the remainder of his literary work, Leiris continues to rethink this voyage and others. He does this most successfully, as we shall see, when he reflects on these trips and, to some extent, relives them as therapeutic dreamwork in "Fibrilles," the third volume of *La Règle du jeu*. My argument, then, is that by revisiting and critiquing the problems of past voyages, Leiris is able to define enchantment not as some romantic ideal, but as a rational practice of psychodynamic role-play (a literal version of the Schillerian notion of aesthetic play).

The third and final monograph chapter, "The Enchantment of Self-Control," examines Henri Michaux's attempt to turn the more selfish esthetic play of travel into a form of ascetic play which might allow him to become a conduit for expressing the spiritual experiences of the *others* and *elsewheres* he encounters. I argue that Michaux's work combines Leiris's contention that enchantment is the way we use our interaction with the world as a means of settling inner turmoil with Cendrars's belief that our use of mimetic language has the capacity to create an

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[45] Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme,* 7.
[46] See Michel Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique* (Paris: Gallimard "Quarto," 1996) 87.

enchanted, communicable sense of wonder. To this, he adds a quest of selflessness; that is, he seeks to surpass concern with the self in order to better channel, as a poet, different *forms of being* (or, to use the Deleuzian term, *devenirs*), allowing him to communicate a morale of individual identity and care that evinces a signs of existential enchantment.

The bulk of this chapter will focus on Michaux's travel journals *Ecuador* and *Un barbare en Asie.* I am interested in how Michaux, through an ideal of travel, forges a language in these texts that transcends the idiolect of the one and becomes a song of enchantment for the many. Moreover, I suggest that we can find this Michaldian notion of enchantment in the practice of what he calls *self-control*, a term that first appears (and is used heavily) in his travel memoir *Un barbare en Asie* (1931). In the section of *Un barbare en Asie* that takes place in India, he learns the value of self-control from the people he encounters:

> Il vous regardent avec un contrôle d'eux-mêmes, un blocage mystérieux et, sans que ce soit clair, vous donnent l'impression d'intervenir quelque part en soi, comme vous ne le pourriez pas.[47]

People in India, he surmises, possess an inner language which serves as a source of enchantment to them. It is as if there is a secret communal hum buzzing in the people he observes, at once communal and personal. This, I argue, is what Michaux calls "self-control," a balance between a rational existence with others (the *foule,* the multitude) and an enchanted, invisible inner self with its own rules. Thus, the Indians, and other people and animals Michaux encounters throughout Asia and South America, give him both a sense that some enchanted mystery still

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[47] Henri Michaux *Un barbare en Asie*, *Œuvres completes,* vol. 1 [3] (Paris: Gallimard "Pléiade," 1998-2004) 285.

exists in the world and a hope that, through poetics and observation, a Westerner like himself might find a means of relating inner self with outer multitude.

Animating this search for enchantment from Cendrars to Leiris to Michaux, the trajectory I follow in this dissertation is a bid to understand how travel allows those living in a *disenchanted* modernity to find idyllic spaces between the limits of enchantment and rationality. It is an attempt to conceive of the different shapes this pause or bubble-like space might take, and the figures and forms it creates. However, it is important to remember that these structures are anchored in a specific mid-20th-century moment. They are reactions to the growing pervasiveness of this frightening myth of modernity that has become real — reactions based on the notion that communities founded on enchantment (or other ideals) can appear in forms that are both esthetically unique and ethically constructive. By studying the travel reflections of these authors, I hope to come to a better definition of what constitutes this language that is personal, communal, ethical and magical. I hope to find methodologies and approaches to language that were desperately needed in the political climate of the *entre-deux-guerres* and in which, in the state of today's world, we might want to place more *espoir* — to use Beauvoir's word. After all, *espoir* is itself an expression of *inverse nostalgia.*

CHAPTER 1:

LESSONS OF A BACKWARDS BRAHMAN

In movement, travel, motors (and motor skills), magic, and poetics combine. As the body speeds along, the mind reacts to the stimuli of flexing muscles, rolling wheels, turning turbines, foreign gestures, the steps of the latest dance craze. This sense of *motricité*—a term I use to denote a principle of action and movement based on personal ability and motor skills—is the domain of the Swiss-born Freddy Sauser, who lived his life as a series of avatars grouped under the fantastical pseudonym Blaise Cendrars. This chapter considers how, by developing an aesthetic and personal identification with *motricité,* Blaise Cendrars reveals that the motion alone that is involved in modern travel has the capacity to reveal a sense of enchantment still present in the world.

Cendrars spent a great deal of his career creating the persona or image (or, more negatively, a *posture,* as in *imposture*) of a gutsy, hardened traveler-poet whose great gift was to sing the song of modernity's vehicles and machines in pulsating prose and verse poetry, fantastical novels, and a unique form of prose that lies somewhere between memoir, travelogue, romantic exegesis, and yellow journalism. He did this from his earliest days as a post-Futurist with *La Prose du Transsibérien*, and later in more rhapsodic works such as *Moravagine* and *Dan Yack*. His strong suit, in his early works, was his ability to use images of vehicles and machinery. In *La Prose du Transsibérien,* he uses images like "roues vertigineuses" to inspire a feeling of youthful and erotic vitality. It is a way of depicting the modern world that recasts the *heteronomic* threat of a calculated world run by machines not as a sentence of doom, but as an

opportunity. By "heteronomy," I am referring to a particular 20th-century iteration of the problem that Kant theorized as man's rediscovery of his moral will due to the rise of rationalism. In its 20th-century iteration, the term *heteronomy* has been used by critics like Carrie J. Noland to describe how modern machines and technology encroach upon the free will of man, prompting certain modern mystics (like Rimbaud and, later, Cendrars) to forge their own autonomous poetic morals. In his essay "The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes," Jacques Rancière gives an example of this (seemingly influenced by Maurice Blanchot), writing that "[t]he 'autonomy' of the avant-garde work of art becomes the tension between two heteronomies, between the bonds that tie Ulysses to his mast and the song of the sirens against which he stops his ears."[48]

Early on, one method that Cendrars explores for man to assert control over machinery is by becoming machine-like himself. This is the strategy we see at play in *Profond aujourd'hui* (1917), a short prose work created for a small press Cendrars worked closely with at the time, À la Belle Édition. *Profond aujourd'hui*, with its manic verbosity, amounts to an attempt to counteract the effects of modernity on human consciousness and expression:

> Les yeux. La main. L'immense fourrure des chiffres sur laquelle je couche la banque. La fureur sexuelle des usines. La roue qui tourne. L'aile qui plane. La voix qui s'en va au long d'un fil. Ton sens d'orientation. Ton rythme. Tu fonds le monde dans le moule de ton crâne. Ton cerveau se creuse. Profondeur

[48] Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy," *The New Left Review*, no. 14 (Mar-Apr 2002) 147-8. For an example more centered on Cendrars, see Carrie Noland, *Poetry at Stake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

> insoupçonnée dans laquelle tu cueilles la fleur puissante des explosifs. Comme une religion, une pilule mystérieuse active ta digestion. Tu te perds dans le labyrinthe des magasins où tu renonces à toi pour *devenir tout le monde.*[49]

Factory whistles and locomotives, with their percussive rhythms, allow the author to forge a means of communication through ecstatic alchemical and kinetic reactions. The human body melds with the mechanical, synthesizing into a single, unique unit, guiding the reader into a world where anatomical signifiers mix openly and interchangeably with mechanical ones. This machine world is virile; within the "la fureur sexuelle des usines" an anthropomorphic admixture of biochemistry, electric circuits and gears creates a new sense of joy and enchantment. And, like a prose poem, even the form of the piece suggests a hybridity of genres, which, when combined ever so carefully, make it possible for a heretofore-inexpressible human urge to find its voice in the rhythm of mechanical apparatuses.[50] We also see the first stirrings of what, we shall see, is the philosophy guiding Cendrars's life: his deformation of Schopenhauer's maxim (and the title of one of his works) *Le monde est ma représentation.* What is key, however, is how this process turns the popular view of modernity as a nightmare of an overly rational world into a world of spiritual possibility. This way of thinking, this new opening and new moral order, gives us a first inkling of the thought at the heart of Cendrars's notions of modern travel and *motricité*; it helps us begin to see an underlying motive that becomes clear in the four books that have been called

[49] Blaise Cendrars, *Profond aujourd'hui*, *Tout autour d'aujourd'hui,* vol. 11 (Paris: Denoël, 2012) 473-74. (Referred to in notes as *TADA*).
[50] I am reminded of Barbara Johnson's landmark *Défigurations* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), in which she insists upon the figure of the thyrse in Baudelaire's famous prose poem as being the image of the melding of the organic and the mechanical, of meter and visceral, narrative description.

Cendrars's pseudo-memoirs, his series of embellished and romanticized reminiscences (*L'Homme foudroyé* [1945], *La Main coupée* [1946], *Bourlinguer* [1948], and *Le Lotissement du ciel* [1949]). In these books, we begin to see that Cendrars was not a blustering *mythomane* and a relic of romanticism who survived on too late into the 20th century, but rather a vital theoretician who, as a sort of spiritual travel guide, shows how the development of a personal esthetic of travel and movement (*motricité*) can lead to an experience that can be translated and transmitted to a large readership.

It should be noted that Cendrars did not pioneer this method of cultivating modern enchantment by fusing with modernity's inventions. In fact, this mode of thinking certainly owes something to Cendrars's association with Apollinaire's *orphisme* and Robert and Sonia Delaunay's *simultanéisme.*[51] Both were artistic movements that tried to capture, in language, light and color, aspects of the mechanical modern world. However, Cendrars's search for hybridity is more intimate than the endeavors of these artists. He is truly searching for some sense of what it would be like—to use Deleuzian terms—to become a train, a factory, or a car (*devenir*-train, *devenir*-usine, *devenir*-voiture). In other words, Cendrars shows an interest in fusing with machines so that he can explore *physically*, through travel, what remained confined to the realm of the metaphysical in the works of thinkers like Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and

[51] The formation of these movements and monikers is part of the long history of the avant-garde. We can, however, provide a working definition without delving into the various factions and their fights thanks to Jean-Noël von der Weid's *Le Flux et le Fixe: Peinture et Musique* (Paris: Fayard, 2012). Weid tells us that "Apollinaire coined the term *orphisme,* which refers to an "'art pur et inobjectif […]" that originally came from "Matisse et du mouvement des 'fauves', en particulier de leurs tendances lumineuses et antiacadémiques." *Simultanéisme*, on the other hand, was a particular artistic expression of anti-academic imagery founded upon an notion of painting "qui, techniquement, se fonderait sur les contrastes de la couleur, mais qui se déroulerait aussi dans le temps et pourait être perçue d'un seul coup d'œil […] les contrastes simultanées."

Bergson.

Moreover, it is Cendrars's dedication to these hybrid 'becomings' that earned him notoriety in his earliest days as a part of the avant-garde scene. Jean Cocteau, with whom Cendrars later had a falling-out (possibly due to the latter's regrettable homophobia), saw the evocation of vehicles and factory machinery in Cendrars's writing as an attempt to resolve the same question that plagued Rimbaud and Baudelaire: how does one express the inexpressible ecstasy of experiencing the world? In a 1919 newspaper column, Cocteau writes that Blaise Cendrars's poetry does something rare — it shows how the "leçon de rythme et de dépouillement"[52] sung by all of modernity's mechanical denizens finds its way into the voice of human communication. For Cocteau, it seems, Cendrars's poetry captures the "rythmes instinctifs" of the machine of language (the many moving phonemes, lexemes and syntagma that make up sound and meaning) better than Rimbaud did in his famous poem, "Alchimie du verbe." Perhaps Cendrars's efforts are made more visceral by the physical risks he takes and the sacrifices he makes to learn this "leçon de dépouillement" — from his train trips across Europe to his escapes to New York, the amputation of his arm during his service as a legionnaire in the First World War, etc. Along these lines, Cocteau surmises that Cendrars's experiences have afforded him an uncanny ability to evoke the world of movement, machines, and the battlefields, as if he had become a hybrid of his various experiences. As Cocteau writes: "il semble que la guerre l'a émondé de ce bras par où les mots descendent pour que les poèmes fleurissent avec

[52] Jean Cocteau, *Le Rappel à l'ordre,* (Paris: Stock, 1948) 137.

des couleurs plus éclatantes […] "[53] It's as if losing his arm to modern machinery and movement has allowed him, using his remaining arm, to sing the song of shells and colors and wheels with even more affect and accuracy.

To be sure, Cendrars, with his "mélange de moteurs et de fétiches noirs," uses these machines and their rhythms, their *motricité*, to move past simply following a "mode," or the prevailing trend. Instead, he uses them to create a hybrid form of meditative and spiritual poetics halfway between machine, motion, and man. Indeed, it is my aim in this chapter to better understand how these experiences of movement, motion and *motricité* lead Cendrars to become something of a guide or sage. His writings serve as a travel brochure with a twist, showing readers how they can begin to transform the calculated world of modern machinery into an enchanted pathway, leading to a spiritual and vital connection with one's surroundings and a means of becoming a visionary capable of unlocking the hidden mysteries of the world and expressing them to others. To support this argument, I will turn to Cendrars's pseudo-memoirs and other short autobiographical texts, for it is in these texts that Cendrars presents his own notion of an ecstasy (or *ex-stasis*) based in modern experience in clear terms so that his readers may benefit from it. This effort makes these autobiographical texts testaments to a shockingly savior-like conception of enchantment in the age of modernity.

[53] Ibid., 137-38.

The Enchantments of a Backwards Brahman

A common theme emerges throughout Cendrars's writings: at the heart of his visceral and kinetic poetics one finds poetic prowess and a sort-of agitated contemplation that leads to new revelations. This narrative of agitated contemplation leading to ecstasy is present in all of the events of Cendrars's life (as he tells it). Just after his birth as Freddy Sauser in La Chaux-de-Fonds, he was whisked away to Egypt, to Italy, and then back to Switzerland as his father's successive business ventures failed. Unfortunately, his father had decided to import beer before modern technology had managed to find a decent way to keep beer from going flat as it traveled long distances to hot climes. Cendrars never stopped moving: running away from home to Russia, crisscrossing the globe on trains and ships, and so on, the facts mixing with fiction and self-mythologized narrative. For all these movements and motors, however, one constant remained: this need for motion in order to tap into a sensation of transcendence. It is no coincidence that after these wanderings, Cendrars wound up in avant-garde Paris, a city itself undergoing turbulent change, poetic and pensive, home to an array of visionary artistic movements. Both he and the city seem to adhere to the motto "fluctuat nec mergitur;" being tossed about allows his poetic faculty to get to work. Indeed, in the journal he kept of his 1913 journey to New York, he had already formed this idea, which would become the basis for much of his poetic ethos:

> Le mal de mer reste une accentuation de la subjectivité. Tous ces haut-le-cul, peu habitués d'être soi, se voient, tout à coup, face à face avec eux-mêmes et se vomissent, ridicules. Nous autres, artistes, nous somme distillateurs: nous prenons

plaisir aux verdoyantes couleurs des vomitures, aux jaunes idéalistes des fiels. (II, 808)[54]

The sentiment expressed here is similar to the one echoed in the following year's *La Prose du Transsibérien* where, as a railway passenger, he finds "dans le bruit monotone des roues" something that reminds him of the soft yet heavy ("*lourde*") prose of Maeterlinck. Through the internal calm of rapid motion, Cendrars can both decipher a language "confus des roues" and forge for himself a life-rhythm built from "les éléments épars d'une violente beauté/ Que je possède/ Et qui me force."[55] Once again we encounter the strong meditative juxtaposition of kinetic violence and calm beauty that are, for Cendrars, the mark and force of a modern poet.

Almost two decades later, this same idea is codified and given a name in Cendrars's earliest attempt at an autobiographical memoir, *Une nuit dans la forêt* (1930). In this short text, Cendrars develops the meditative, immaterial use of travel in its greatest detail. A rare book, little read at the time of its publication (and during the author's lifetime), *Une nuit dans la forêt* is an attempt to explain how Cendrars's combination of "action," "motion," and "travel" coalesces to form a sense of forceful calm. In this novella, these elements are combined with reminiscences of racing along rough-hewn freeways in France, Italy and Brazil. For our purposes, the most important passage in this text is the one where Cendrars describes himself undergoing a strange transformation while driving on the open road. He comes to the realization that despite his affinity for action and kinetic motion, he travels for another reason: "J'ai toujours

[54] Roman numerals followed by a comma and page number refer to the two-volume *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* set: Blaise Cendrars, *Blaise Cendrars: Œuvres autobiographiques complètes,* 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," 2013).

[55] Blaise Cendrars, *Du monde entier au cœur du monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006) 61.

pratiqué la vie contemplative," he notes. This expression hold more than a first glance might imply. The author is in fact referring to the early obsession (his "intellectual awakening") that resulted from his discovering the Catholic mystic tradition through the work of Migne, Eckhardt, and the fin-de-siècle mystic revival spearheaded by Huysmans. Most influential of all, however, was *Le Latin mystique* by his *maître,* Remy de Gourmont. As Claude Leroy recounts:

> Cendrars n'avait pas la foi. Il le répète et on ne peut que lui en donner acte. Reste que le domaine religieux, surtout catholique, occupe une place-clef dans son œuvre. Cet intérêt est précoce : les lectures de Freddy témoignent de son engouement pour *Le Latin mystique* de Gourmont. Il recopie alors des pages entières de citations latines. Et cette admiration ne se porte pas seulement vers son « maître », elle est nourrie par la littérature chrétienne latine dont Gourmont fut l'intercesseur.[56]

Cendrars, then, though he was not religiously inclined, saw secular value in these works. And as a result of reading these texts, mysticism became the prism through which he viewed modernity. Indeed, if he was drawn to Futurism and Simultaneism, the reason was that he saw a similar mystique at play in wheels, engines, turbines, and steam pipes. This is why I argue that for Cendrars, modern machines and speed become the locus of an experience of contemplative bliss. We see this clearly later in *Une nuit dans la forêt,* when he describes himself as an:

> espèce de brahmane à rebours, qui se contemple dans l'agitation […] Quelle virtuosité, quelle science, quel équilibre, quel calme dans l'accélération. Après, il faudra savoir encaisser les coups avec la même tranquillité. Moi, je sais encaisser

[56] Claude Leroy, *La Main de Cendrars* (Lille: Septentrion "l'objet," 1996) 232.

et c'est avec sérénité que je me féconde et que je me détruis, bref, que j'agis dans le monde […] (I, 100-101)

Linking physical travel and writing, action and contemplation, Cendrars proposes a secondary image of hybridization. He generates and regenerates to the rhythm of a combustion engine — part of an odd symbiosis between technology, speed and biological chemistry. His predilection for images like the *brahmane à rebours*, which mix modes of modern travel and signifiers of exoticist or romantic *ecstatic* sensations of spiritual transcendence, makes the convergence of travel and modern technological advancement the basis for a poetic mode of expressing the experience of sublime ecstasy. Furthermore, it is worth noting that this image of calm renewal of the self within what should be a horrible nightmare is integral to Cendrars's style, poetics, and persona; it is the basis of a notion of self-rebirth ("je me féconde") that builds on the image of the phoenix, an image to which Cendrars returns again and again in his writings.

The phoenix and its ashes, indeed, are the very emblem of Cendrars's myriad transformations, tales, and enchantments. They are also the origin of his pseudonym—a stand-in for *braise* and *cinders,* the ashes from which he rises—as he explains later on in *Une nuit dans la forêt*: "[e]n Cendres se transmuent/ Ce que j'aime et possède /Tout ce que j'aime et que j'étreins / Se transmuent aussitôt en / Cendres." (I, 90)

Cendrars thus defines himself as a poet capable of using the objects (machinery and vehicles mostly), people, and places he encounters to burn his way across the world, fashioning new identities and subjectivities, each one then discarded in the form of ash-like written traces. Of course, the figure of the *brahmane à rebours* is yet another avatar of the phoenix burning and rising from its ashes.

Modern travel—speed, vehicles, and machines, et al.—is what makes this ultra-modern experience of the sublime possible. As Cocteau noted, this process is not easy; it is not something attained without pain or sacrifice. As Cendrars writes, he had to learn to "encaisser les coups" in order to live an experience of enchantment. The experience is, to employ the phrase used by Jean-François Lyotard (who describes a similar reaction to modernity and its machines in his essays on the sublime) "un plaisir de peine,"[57] an ecstatic non-pleasure that arises from the tension and suffering of trying to express an inexpressible, unfathomable experience.

As Cendrars's writing matures, he learns to put this inexpressible experience into words with greater clarity. The clearest treatise on finding poetic expression through physical sensation appears in his final memoir, *Le Lotissement du ciel*. Here, the key example he gives is the poet-traveler's supposed resemblance to a number of Catholic saints, such as Saint Joseph of Cupertino, John of the Cross and Theresa of Ávila, who were supposed to have experienced levitation as a result of sublime transcendence. Cendrars outlines this notion in the middle chapter of *Le Lotissement du ciel*, an essay entitled "Le Nouveau Patron de l'aviation." However, before going on to discuss "Le Nouveau Patron de l'aviation" directly, I should explain why *Le Lotissement du ciel* is a wholly different book from Cendrars's earlier works-—a text both novelistic and autobiographical.

Changing Skies

[57] See Jean-François Lyotard, *L'Inhumain: Causeries sur le temps* (Paris: Galilée, 1988) 138.

Unlike Cendrars's earlier poems and novels, which focus on more fantastical and clearly fabricated tales, *Le Lotissement du ciel* is a meditation on the mechanism underlying how a poet experiences sublime enchantment through travel and action. If, as Cendrars writes in an earlier book, his personal motto is "primum vivere deinde philosophari" (first live, then philosophize), then *Le Lotissement du ciel* decidedly comes after the *vivere* part of his life. As such, *Lotissement* is a text that wants to be considered as something other than a mere prurient reportage of adventures lived. Rather, it is an attempt to clarify that the physical action spurring Cendrars's works is about something more than what Aragon had reduced it to in the late 1920s, when he dismissed it as a desire to fabricate a sort of "littérature faite avec le verbe 'partir'."[58]

Thus the departure which *Le Lotissement du ciel* represents was effectively Cendrars's bid to recast himself in a more serious light and draw a line, once and for all, under the stigma of being a self-serving reporter rather than a socially-minded esthete. At the very least, this choice came as a huge shock to the author's public. The public disaffection for *Lotissement* stems from it being starkly different from Cendrars's previous work, and moreover from *Bourlinguer,* which he had published the year before and which had been a commercial and critical success. *Bourlinguer* is an autobiography told in 18 vignettes, each representing a port of the Mediterranean and North seas where the author lived some adventure which he embellished for publication. In opposition to the action that characterizes *Bourlinguer* (though *Bourlinguer* does feature a pensive turn at its core), *Lotissement* reveals the metaphysical underpinnings of

[58] Louis Aragon used this phrase to deride Cendrars, Morand and Soupault in his *Traité du style* (Paris: Gallimard "L'imaginaire," 2004 [1928]), 80.

Cendrars's need for adventure, speed and action. We see this in the *prière d'insérer* to the original edition of *Le Lotissement du ciel,* in which he announces that "[a]près *Bourlinguer* le voyage continue mais sur les voies du monde intérieur. C'était urgent." (II, 747) The urgency ushered in by the death of his son Rémy in post-war aviation exercises is perhaps what spurs this departure from his previous approach in favor of straightforward clarity and intimacy, a move that was rare for a persona and personage who so often played with casting shadows on his origins and mixing fact and fiction. Here, Cendrars endeavors to show the inner digestion of his *motricité*.

In essence, Cendrars wants to show himself as something more than a *littérateur* or reporter. This intention becomes apparent as the preface continues:

> Je voudrais indiquer aux jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui qu'on les trompe, que la vie n'est pas un dilemme et qu'entre les deux idéologies contraires entre lesquelles on les somme d'opter [Communism and Capitalism], il y a la vie; la vie, avec ses contradictions bouleversantes et miraculeuses, la vie et ses possibilité illimitées, ses absurdités, beaucoup plus réjouissantes que les idioties et les platitudes de la politique, et que c'est pour la vie qu'ils doivent opter, malgré l'attirance du suicide, individuel ou collectif, et de sa foudroyante logique scientifique. […] Il n'y a pas d'autre choix possible. Vivre … (II, 747-48)

Aside from the rather violent, manifesto-like tone of this promotional insert, Cendrars expresses a desire to banish problems of politics and scientific rationality from his works. He instead entreats the "jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui" to listen to Uncle Blaise, so that they may learn that

being apolitical and not listening to the talking heads of the writer-philosophers then in vogue (like Sartre and cie.)[59] is the only real way to live (*vivre*).

Part of this manifesto is rooted in his desire to take some sort of political position after the Second World War (the collaborationist Denoël had been his former publisher, and now he wanted to stave off any aspersions on his own character). But his politics are more a refusal of politics: he dismisses all political pretext as snobbism; he often repeats the line that writers who subscribe to political utopias and philosophies are only doing so "car le bifteck prime." Instead, Cendrars prefers a vision of the world in which we each cling to our own (Schopenhauerian) *representation* or hallucination of that world. Therefore, Cendrars's way of approaching the problem of finding enchantment and the sublime in modernity comes through what he calls *life* and *action*. Within this space of imagination, everyone has a representative vision of their life, whether it be based in action and writing, or in the passive consumption of books, films, or any other sort of media:

> [T]ous, nous sommes dans l'imaginaire et quelle drôle de cortège qui défile clopin-clopant et parade, des esprits très divers, […] sous les huées, sous les

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[59] Cendrars sees no reason for a politically-conscious existentialist philosophy (or any form of phenomenology for that matter) because cognitive structures seem to have little use in his thinking). On the meaning of "being," the verb or the act, he writes that no answers can be found in existentialism, "ce pas de clerc qui ne veut être le pas de l'oie, malgré Heidegger, malgré Husserl." He finds these modern philosophers to be misleading. Instead, he prefers Schopenhauer, who he sees as a mystic sage : "déjà Schopenhauer, le dernier philosophe classique, enseignait : « Méfiez-vous des professeurs de philosophie. Ils n'ont pas d'originalité, manquent de talent et leur école est une école de platitude… »."(II, 183)

In another breath, he dismisses all existentialists as "jeunes littérateurs littératurants qui se trémoussent dans les caves de Saint-Germain-des-Prés, qui se situent à la pointe de l'extrême avant-garde de l'exégèse poétique et qui plongent à rebours et font carrière dans le conformisme, qui ne peuvent vivre qu'en groupe, qu'en bande, à la queue d'un chef d'école car le bifteck prime…" (II, 678)

risées, mais fier chacun de son infirmité particulière et chacun gardant son quant-à-soi, […] chacun à son image de la Vie. Un livre, un miroir déformant, une projection idéale. (II, 363)

For Cendrars, action and movement constitute his projection or representation of the world. However, the larger question this passage brings up is whether one needs movement and travel to experience the sublime in the twentieth century, or whether we could also just stay put. The answer he finds to this question in writing *Le Lotissement du ciel* is that the twentieth century has blurred the lines between the *motricité* of the traveler and the meditative *calme dans l'agitation* of the *brahmane à rebours.* The means of locomotion that blurs these lines is the most modern one available: flight. And, fittingly, *Le Lotissement du ciel,* at its core, is a reflection on the sensation, movements and poetics of flight, and the connections between flight and enchantment.

Secrets of Flight

We can say with confidence that *Le Lotissement du ciel* strengthens the notion that a visceral experience of sublime enchantment through machines and vehicles is a modern means of attaining the spiritual *extasis* experienced by mystics and romantics. As he announces in the *prière d'insérer* included in the first edition of *Lotissement,* the book is a collection of texts "plein d'oiseaux, d'ailes, d'anges, de saints, d'enfants, de fleurs, de lumière, de rêve éveillé, mais il contient aussi toute la faune et toute la flore redoutables de la nuit et des ailes de chauve-

souris…" (II, 747) The aim of the text, then, is to create a flight into both the paradisal and nocturnal regions of the mind.

But flight has so many deeper resonances: it concerns both travel and spirituality, the two topoi that Cendrars dwells upon in his autobiographical writings. Flight ("le vol") represents a difficulty for Cendrars. At first, he is hesitant to embrace flight as capable of bringing mystical realizations on a par with the way the automobile can turn one into a *brahmane à rebours*. He expresses this hesitation in several conflicting opinions written between 1929 and 1945. While the airplane is a machine capable of allowing man to "franchir l'espace en luttant contre la montre […] une machine apte à explorer le temps, voire à remonter le cours des ages,"[60] it nevertheless threatens to reduce our 'horizon of perception' by ruining our ability to see magic and poetry in the world. Cendrars presents this position in a short text written in the late 1930s entitled *Le Brésil: Des hommes sont venus*, in which he debates whether or not an airplane can give one the same ecstatic sensation as an automobile. He writes:

> si j'avais pris l'avion, jamais je n'aurais été amené à faire de la photographie verbale et à en adresser les images à mes amis sous forme de poèmes dépouillés, car vue du haut des airs cette terre ardente du Brésil est comme frappée de lèpre, et l'immense forêt vierge que j'ai comparée à une absurde cathédrale végétale vivante perd son relief, ne fait plus image et ressemble, maintenant qu'on la

[60] See Blaise Cendrars, *Œuvres completès*, vol. 3 (Paris: Denoël, 1987 [1960]) 451.

> découvre du haut du ciel, à l'envers effiloché d'une tapisserie mangée aux mites s'étendant à l'infini, à une sombre moisissure qui ronge l'intérieur du pays […][61]

His argument here is similar to that of the later 20th-century (and 21st-century) critic of modern speed and technology Paul Virilio. In the late 1980s, Virilio wrote in his book *Negative Horizon* (1984) that when we travel too quickly or too far above the surfaces to which we are accustomed, the more exciting symbolic forms of the world escape our perception. Virilio calls these lost spaces *intervals*:

> […] our perception of intervals, of the interstices between things, between people, is far less acute. These configurations, cut out by bodies, stamped out by forms, escape us … in every case, these passing figures barely leave any sensible traces in our vision of the world, their fleeting character, tied to the instantaneity of a relation, never seems particularly important.[62]

Here, Virilio argues that since *agitation* in air travel is also rendered invisible, the airplane reduces our horizon of perception. He compares air travel to 1920s movie palaces — the airport lounge is like a movie-house lobby, each person waiting politely in the same utopian space for the wool to be pulled over their eyes. This view is rather close to Cendrars's argument from the late 1930s.

However, despite Cendrars's early doubts as to whether airplanes and flight might serve as a poetic means of locomotion, he later comes to espouse the experience as one of modernity's greatest opportunities. Flight, he argues later, allows one to experience the hidden enchantment

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[61] *TADA,* vol. 11, 214-215.
[62] Paul Virilio, *Negative Horizon* (London: Continuum, 2008 [1984]) 28.

of the world, its spirit and its vitality (in both the Bergsonian sense of an *élan vital* and the Nietzschean sense of the vital, proactive morality of power and force). In fact, Cendrars, to use a mathematical metaphor, comes to see the meditative qualities of modern air travel as an opportunity to integrate that *interval* which he once thought flight erased. It is in *Le Lotissement du ciel* that Cendrars presents his argument that flight allows one to integrate the experience of the interval.

We first encounter this espousal of flight in the first of *Lotissement*'s three chapters, a short text entitled "Le Jugement dernier." Here, Cendrars recounts a voyage back from Brazil on the ocean liner Volturno. During the trip, he tries desperately to keep a flock of exotic birds alive so that he can offer at least one as a gift to "la petite fille de Batignolles" (we must assume this to be his muse, the actress Raymone Dûchateau). Beyond the sentimental aspect of this fool's errand (all the birds die, save one, which expires hours after his return), Cendrars's eventual misfortune is cause for reflection on birds, flight and spirituality—whereby the sublime quality of the sea suddenly becomes for him the sublimity of the sky and birds. He notes:

> ce qui me frappe le plus chez les oiseaux ce sont leurs yeux avec leur regard d'outre-monde ou d'outre-tombe, car où est le cimetière des oiseaux? N'avez-vous jamais été frappé de ce regard impersonnel, voire d'éternité que l'Oiseau ne fait pas peser sur vous mais avec lequel il vous transperce comme si vous n'étiez pas opaque et qu'il visât derrière vous votre âme, votre ombre et qu'il s'entretînt, prêt aux épousailles, prêt à s'envoler dans l'immortalité, avec votre double ou, à crever pour les manger les yeux de votre ange gardien ? Il n'y a pas plus étranger à ce monde que l'oiseau, car où est le cimetière, l'ossuaire des oiseaux ? (II, 393)

He finds in flight a kinetic expression of true enchantment. Birds, he notices, inhabit and have always inhabited the realm of the invisible. They can physically live out what humans can only dream or attempt to approximate through rational and calculated inventions, à la Icarus. Poetically speaking, birds serve as the natural symbol of man's Icarian quest to attain the sublime existence of the gods (or of God). Indeed, birds do not fail and fall as man does with his flying machines; their bones, cartilage, and feathers do not come unglued in the heat of the sun, for they are incarnations of the immaterial and spiritual realm — pure movement and meditation. Even when they die, they are not buried.

This sentiment is part and parcel of a Romantic tradition that we find in the early English Romantics, for instance Shelley's ode "To a Skylark," or in the French tradition in Lamartine's "Les Oiseaux," in which he asks where birds go in winter ("Ont-ils cessé d'aimer ? Ont-ils cessé de vivre ?/ Nul ne sait le secret de leurs lointains exils") and Baudelaire's "Élevation," in which the poet uses flight as a means of attaining sublime perfection ("Envole-toi bien loin de ces miasmes morbides;/Va te purifier dans l'air supérieur").[63] With these meditations on birds and flight, Cendrars finds yet another way to revive a Romantic sense of ecstasy through action, modernity and machinery.

This sudden embrace of flight as a poetic action is not Cendrars's idea alone. He appears to have been inspired by (or to have borrowed heavily from) a book published only a few years before *Le Lotissement du ciel:* Gaston Bachelard's *L'Air et les Songes* (1943). In this book, Bachelard writes about the prevalence of poetics of flight and aerial *motricité* (inspired by birds, clouds, air, lightness, etc.) that might fulfill a particular elemental need of the human psyche for

[63] Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968) 46.

the ethereal sublime. Bachelard notes in the conclusion to *L'Air et les Songes* that flight is so powerful a sensation because it is physical and visceral, the "mobile qui synthétise en soi le devenir et l'être;" it internalizes experience as one's own "impression directe d'allégement." If flight leads to a communion with the sublime through movement, then it is due to an active choice made by an individual — a choice to integrate one's mind and body with a particular form of *motricité* and matter. Bachelard describes this in the following Bergsonian (or proto-Deleuzian) terms:

> nous pouvons couler en nous-mêmes soit du plomb, soit de l'air léger ; nous pouvons nous constituer comme le mobile d'une chute ou le mobile d'un élan. Nous donnons ainsi une substance à notre durée dans les deux grandes nuances de la durée qui s'attriste et de la durée qui s'exalte. Impossible en particulier de vivre l'intuition d'un élan sans ce travail d'allégement de notre être intime. Penser force sans penser matière, c'est être victime des idoles de l'analyse. L'action d'une force en nous est nécessairement conscience en nous d'une transformation intime.[64]

This final line, where Bachelard proposes that force and action manifest an intimate transformation through which we can communicate ecstasy, is key to Cendrars's line of thought, and also arises organically from the latter's own work.

Thus, in *Le Lotissement du ciel* Cendrars moves from the cemetery of birds (whether influenced by Bachelard or not) toward an acceptance of mechanical flight as a pathway to experiencing the sublime in modernity. And if there is any doubt as to whether this is what Cendrars is doing in this work, one need only turn to "Le Nouveau Patron de l'aviation," the

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[64] Gaston Bachelard, *L'Air et les Songes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998 [1943]) 295.

second chapter of *Le Lotissement du ciel*. Here, Cendrars attempts to show that an equivalence exists between avian flight, mechanical flight (in airplanes) and mystic levitations, the locus of a universal experience of the *brahmane à rebours*.

Aviation and Ecstasy

In "Le Nouveau Patron de l'aviation," Cendrars gives an even clearer explanation of how he came around to accepting flight as the perfect means of mixing enchantment and *motricité.* However, in order to delve into this text, first it is important to understand its context. "Le Nouveau Patron de l'aviation" was conceived of as the fulfillment of a promise Cendrars made to his son Rémy, an airforce pilot who survived capture during *drôle de guerre* only to die in post-war military exercises over the Moroccan Sahara in 1946.[65] In letters written during the war, Cendrars promised Rémy that he would lobby for the reclassification of Saint Joseph of Cupertino from patron saint of exams to patron saint of aviators. Cupertino, a "petit oblat […] qui savait à peine lire et écrire" (II, 429) is, Cendrars argues, a terrible intercessor for students. But there are mystical reasons, we learn, that make him a particularly good patron for wartime pilots. It is well-documented, Cendrars notes, that Cupertino is said to have levitated spontaneously on no less than 72 occasions, more than any other individual ever. In Cendrars's eyes, this makes Saint Joseph "un précurseur, un champion et un as de l'aviation." (II, 419)

[65] Rémy was named after Cendrars's hero and sage, Remy de Gourmont. Gourmont wrote *Le Latin mystique* presented a study that showed how Latin poetry flourished as a mystic genre after the days of the canonical Latin poets like Virgil. His interest was mixing spirituality and blasphemy, erudition and vulgarisation.

Thus, with Saint Joseph leading the way, "Le Nouveau Patron de l'aviation" becomes Cendrars's attempt to console himself (due to the loss of his son) by finding a poetic expression that translates the language of mystics into the language of modernity (and its machines and modes of conveyance). The endgame of this manoeuver is to use the notion of travel as a spiritual transport strong enough to bring him back into contact with his son. In essence, he begins an act of *reverse nostalgia,* attempting to prepare a next, impossible, voyage through poetics. In other words, if Cendrars jumps around from Cupertino to other evocations of flight and levitation, it is to show (whether he intends to or not) a concept of flight is crucial to an esthetic of *motricité,* the figure of enchantment that defines Cendrars's writings.

Oneiric Flight

In pursuit of a theory of flight as a spiritual and mechanical means of transport, Cendrars begins "Le Nouveau Patron de l'aviation" by defining the connection between aviation and mystical experience. He does this by citing one of his favorite literary passages, an excerpt from Roland Garros's journal in which the famous aviator explains how, like all boys (even long before the invention of the airplane), he has long dreamt of flying in much the same way that boys dream of a first sexual encounter:

> Roland raconte qu'il se jetait avec volupté par la fenêtre pour aller butiner aux fenêtres, surtout les lucarnes et les œils-de-bœuf donnant dans les mansardes de bonnes, en ne s'éloignant pas trop du rebord des toits dans la rue de ses parents—c'était à Nice—mais parfois il se risquait tout de même à voleter au-dessus de la

> ville, mais alors saisi d'une telle terreur qu'il se hâtait de rentrer, et il se réveillait en sursaut. (II, 428)

Jolting awake, the child is not yet equipped to communicate this ecstatic experience, verging on the sexual; for Cendrars, it is something without a name to which he must seek transport. Cendrars, too, had childhood dreams of flight, particularly a recurring dream preceding his escape from Neufchatel:

> je planais, et je virevoltais, et je me livrais à des évolutions très agréables et un peu vertigineuses, plongeant au ras de l'eau ou m'élevant très haut en l'air, jusqu'à la hauteur des peupliers qui bordent le quai gauche du bassin devant la façade ouest du musée de Pury, et cette façade sans fenêtres, toute en lourde maçonnerie, m'attirait au point que j'allais étourdiment y donner de la tête, ce qui me réveillait, et je restais un bon moment sans pouvoir me retourner dans mon lit, tout émerveillé. (II, 427)

The feeling of flight, then, opens up several new possibilities for Garros and Cendrars alike. For instance, we see similar notions and terms at play in a short autobiographical sketch entitled *Vol à voile* (1932, published in 1952). Here, Cendrars codifies the myth of his origins as a poet, detailing how he first came to know the sublime through travel and the sensation of flight. The story goes like this: young Freddy Sauser escapes from his father's house in Neufchatel after his father reprimands him for attempting to deflower English boarding-school girls. In the ensuing battle against the "no" of his Protestant father, he pulls a knife and flees out the window, hopping on the next train to Germany. He associates this *fugue* with the *vol* of his childhood dream, in which he flies out of Switzerland on wings and under sail. This *vol,* however, is also a lived

metaphor of an escape from the restricted signifiers of a world stripped of its enchantment by the strictures of a modern bourgeois existence — a world in which the physical manifestations of these desires (sex, speed, travel, and transport) are not allowed to find their fullest expression. From this boredom, young Sauser soars into the dizzying, sublime ecstasy of newfound people, places and objects. He soars toward an ideal of flight. And, although airplanes are not yet in the picture, he experiences the overload of new sensations that he presumes he will find once again in flight:

> J'avais un peu le vertige […] C'était la première fois que je venais d'obéir à ce besoin d'évasion qui si souvent s'est emparé de moi, m'a fait faire des excentricités, prendre des résolutions extrêmes, aussi soudaines qu'irréfléchies, risquer gros, même la mort, pour me réveiller éreinté, mais ravi, dans l'absurde, au fond d'une impasse ou en pleine *fugue,* toujours extraordinairement content et fier de ce que je viens de sacrifier, tout en me moquant gentiment de moi-même et quoique soulevé par l'enivrante sensation d'être perdu, ou d'aborder un nouveau monde, ou d'avoir fait peau neuve, me méprisant chaque fois un peu plus d'avoir marché et de croire encore à la vie. (I, 68)

Giddiness, surprise, ravishing delight, exhaustion (*vertige, étonnement, ravissement, éreintement*), the qualifiers Cendrars uses to describe his first flight (to use the word figuratively, as this is not a literal 'flight in the air'), conjure up a maelstrom of conflicting sensations. However, the confusion he feels generates a sensation of enchantment. It is the requisite emotion felt by heroes in romantic *Künstlerromane*, the sensory inundation that serves as a metaphor for a budding poet's newfound autonomy. In these narratives, a young man, turned restless by a

newfound sensation—the *fugue*—finds himself cowering before the overabundant, yet seemingly still inadequate ability of language to express the unnamable sensations he is experiencing. This idea also seems to come up in Rimbaud's "Voyelles," in which the lyric voice is learning to read a world overloaded with signs, so much that the system of language is cracked open.[66]

Despite this trope having its roots in romanticism, there is a modern component to these experiences. The movements and sensations that are only supposed to exist in the second life, the realm of dreams, become a reality. These dreams, by extension, can be seen as the impetus for a specific *telos*: the invention of the airplane. In other words, the subconscious image-desire of flight continues to gestate until it becomes an obsession, a burning passion for speed and travel—the *mystic* experience that is misplaced, displaced, bereft of a religious signifier—with the invention of the airplane being part of a communitarian desire to make this desire visible in concrete form. From a theoretical point of view, Cendrars appears to borrow this notion from his *maître* Remy de Gourmont, who similarly proposed a principle of *constance intellectuelle*. According to this principle, man does not progress intellectually; he merely learns to translate his more ephemeral ideas into physical semiotic expressions. Hence, the dream of flight is concretized into the aerostat, the airplane, etc.

[66] One might also say that the experience is similar to what Thomas Weiskel, using the language of semiotics then in vogue, called the metaphorical sublime: "the feeling…of being lost [in which] the signifiers cannot be grasped or understood; they overwhelm the possibility of meaning." Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976) 26-7.

Mystical and Mechanical

It is not until "Le Nouveau Patron de l'aviation" that Cendrars is able to identify the true nature of this experience of perplexing enchantment. This text relates how Cendrars finds a precedent to this sensation of enchantment in his research on Saint Joseph of Cupertino and other allegedly levitating saints whom he reads about in the Bollandist monks' *Acta Santorum*. Here, the vocabulary used by the Bollandists to describe levitation mimics the physical coupling of travel and poetic ecstasy Cendrars had found himself in his own flights and *fugues*. From his readings in the *Acta Santorum,* Cendrars is able to pinpoint and describe levitation as a kinetic and physical phenomenon through which "le corps humain serait capable, chez certains individus, à de certains moments, de se soulever dans l'air et parfois de s'y mouvoir sans appui visible, sans action contrôlable d'aucune force physique."(II, 465) He explains that, just as he had to create neologisms like *brahmane à rebours* to describe his own sensations brought about by speeding along in trains, automobiles, etc., the etymologically-recent word "levitation" was invented to describe a similar sensation:

> […] si ce terme est récent et de fabrication spirite, la chose ne l'est pas. C'est le rapt, l'oraison, l'extase—*raptus, oratio, extasus*[67]—des Bollandistes, et leurs successeurs, les théologiens et hagiographes parlent des acrobaties aériennes des saints et les caractérisent en les dénommant *élévation, suspension, élan, vol extatique, extase ascensionnelle, extase d'élévation, ravissement corporel,*

[67] The word *extasus* does not exist. It should be *extasis*. It is not clear, however, whether this is an error on Cendrars's part or on the part of his editors. In any case, it appears in all editions of *Le Lotissment du ciel* that I have consulted in the course of my research.

> *incendie d'amour divin* selon leur degré de virtuosité et de perfection. (II, 465-66)

It is the movement of the ardent body, twirling yet in suspension, that captures the perfect physical-poetry of levitation. Here, we begin to understand that Cendrars's works may not simply be the self-gratifying work of a curious demiurge. Rather, we see that there is a specific and ancient form of *ecstatic sublimity* that he is attempting to revive for a modern mass audience.

Citations abound throughout "Le Nouveau Patron de l'aviation." Most are taken from the Bollandist *Acta Sanctorum,* and many are left in the original Latin. Of course, copying texts and manuscripts is a practice Cendrars cultivated throughout his life, most notably (as I've already mentioned) the passages of Latin poetry found in Remy de Gourmont's *Le Latin mystique*. This practice mirrors Cendrars's desire to appropriate other identities — through citation, he can translate and channel the experiences from the past. However, among all the examples Cendrars cites, there are many cases similar to that of Saint Joseph of Cupertino. These accounts, however, only serve as entertaining lures: they are aimed at piquing the reader's interest in supposed levitators who wrote their intimate experience of the sublime in verse — Saint Theresa of Ávila and Saint John of the Cross. It is Theresa of Ávila who interests Cendrars most of all, due to her sensual description of levitation (which he cites twice):

> dans ces ravissements, l'âme semble ne plus aimer le corps. Ici il n'y a aucun moyen de résister à l'attrait divin. Dans l'union, nous trouvant encore comme dans notre pays, nous pouvons presque toujours le faire quoique avec peine et un violent effort; mais il n'en est pas de même dans le ravissement et on ne peut presque jamais y résister…vous sentez cette nuée vous saisir, et cet aigle puissant vous emporter sur ces ailes. (II, 43)

As in *Profond aujourd'hui* or *Vol à voile*, the feeling of *ravissement* connotes a sexual (or chemical-mechanical) sensation which the material body is capable of experiencing. Theresa of Ávila describes herself as unable to resist this temptation and puts into words this sublime paradox — a struggle between spirit and flesh, between the material and the immaterial:

> Lorsque je voulais résister, je croyais sentir sous mes pieds des forces étonnantes qui m'enlevaient; je ne saurais à quoi les comparer. Nulle autre des opérations de l'esprit dont j'ai parlé n'approche d'une telle impétuosité. J'en demeurais brisée. C'est un combat terrible et qui sert de peu. (II, 545)

This sensation approaches something close to the *dépouillement* Cocteau recognized in Cendrars's early works, or the image of the *brahmane à rebours,* and implies a loss of one's ability to define oneself. In essence, Saint Theresa (perhaps in spite of herself) produces a language capable of directly expressing her mystic, or enchanted, experience. This sort of sensorial hallucination transmitted to writing is similar to the notion of poetry that Cendrars borrows from Schopenhauer — according to whom one is able to create the world as one's own representation. Specifically, it echoes section 51 of the first volume of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea,* where poetry's ability to create a representation of the will is described as the odd moment in which

> [...] desire (the personal interest of the ends), and pure perception of the surrounding presented, are wonderfully mingled with each other; connections between them are sought for and imagined; the subjective disposition, the

> affection of the will, imparts its own hue to the perceived surrounding, and conversely, the surroundings communicate the reflex of their colour to the will.[68]

That is to say, desire for the divine combines with physical sensation to create an affect that reads as (and most probably is) enchantment. Strangely, this Truth comes partly from what the individual wills to be true according to their esthetic preferences. In this act of *willing the world,* I see something close to the Schillerian version of moral enchantment Jane Bennett describes; that is, the notion that a desire to cultivate affect (in order to construct our own representation of the world) leads to a representation of truth.

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Lastly, there is a divine sense of love and spirituality that one can experience in flight, a notion Cendrars illustrates toward the end of his reverie on levitation in "Le Nouveau Patron de l'aviation." He closes his reflection on an emblematic image: two saints, Saint Theresa and Saint John of the Cross, undergoing what Cendrars calls a *double-lévitation*:

> Les voyez-vous, ces deux-là, dans leur petit parloir séparés par une grille, faisant aller leur langue, voletant sur place comme un couple de colibiris face à face ou comme ces oiseaux qu'a chantés le poète:
>
> … *qui n'ont qu'une seule aile et qui volent par couples* ... (II, 548)

That these saints resemble hummingbirds (*colibris,* or *beija-flores,* as he will later call them in

[68] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea,* vol. 1 (London : Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1997[1896]), 323.

Portuguese) is no coincidence. The hummingbird is one of Cendrars's favorite animals because of its ability to hover in place, in perpetual motion, a living symbol of the meditative motion that so captivates him. The bird can also flit away, as if transported to another plane of existence. It is, for all intents and purposes, a "*brahmane à rebours qui se contemple dans l'agitations*" of its rapidly beating wings. Similarly, Theresa of Ávila and Saint John of the Cross are not merely passively meditating on their relationship to the divine, but becoming something else themselves:

> en extase, morts au monde; les voyez-vous comme les *beija-flores,* les *baise-fleurs* en extase devant un Rideau de jasmin, qui font du supplice, les ailes battant si vite qu'elles leur font une auréole d'étincelles, ces deux—là, nos deux colibris en tête à tête, chacun en extase devant la bouche de l'autre comme devant une corolle entrouverte—et, entre eux, dans le rideau tremblant du jasmin chaque fleurette blanche s'exhale comme une étoile lilliputienne en transparence, s'éblouissant l'un l'autre, chacun devenant incandescent et fondant sous l'action de la grâce de la contemplation, de la jubilation, de l'impulsion, de la possession, de la joie et de l'amour pur qui se donne impétueusement et est absorbé : *incendie d'amour divin* ? (II, 548)

These two souls in flight burn with divine love, leaving only ashes of ecstasy behind. They reach a state of *extasis* (existence outside of themselves), which in itself is an immobile mode of travel that is the ideal goal of the modern traveler-poet (who finds sublime calm in agitation). The image is also a biographical one. These two saints nearly kissing like *beijaflores* in ecstasy represents Cendrar's unconsummated marriage to his muse Raymone — the "petite fille des Batignolles"—to whom he tried to bring a bird, a *sept-couleurs*, in the first part of *Le*

Lotissement du ciel.

What comes of this strange mix of Catholic mythology and aviation? What we notice here, above all, is a sense of thematic continuity between Theresa of Ávila's experience of flight and the experience accorded us by modernity's inventions. It is this saintly experience that Cendrars claims one can attain through modern vehicles. In this spirit, a chapter that begins as an attempt to elevate the mute and illiterate patron saint of exams to the role of patron of aviator becomes a poetic treatise on flight as a sacred and eroticized emblem and means of spiritual transport. Indeed, it becomes a treatise on an experience that might, in the 20th century, be attainable through mechanical as well as spiritual means.

The ending of "Le Nouveau Patron de l'aviation" raises several questions regarding the exact implications of Cendrars's theory of flight as a means of attaining *extasis* in modernity: Is this ecstasy attainable and expressible by any modern individual who flies in an airplane? Or is it only attainable by a poet or poet-saint in flight?

The answer is ambiguously *both*. It cannot be denied that this experience of saintliness has many similarities to the experience Cendrars seeks to attain, in his early works, through speed and modern machinery. However, there are quite a few ways in which Cendrars differs from his saintly influences. These differences become clear in the conclusion of "Le Nouveau Patron," where he discusses the difference between the ecstasy of saints and the *transes* of mediums. Unlike Saint John of the Cross and Theresa of Ávila, who as mystics communicate indirectly, "mort au monde," a divine and hermetic message by forgoing their ego, the medium is an individual who retains or projects an ego or persona through the practice of self-hypnosis. The medium "se met lui-même en transe à heure fixée d'avance et par des procédés spéciaux, souvent

sexuels […]" (II, 538). Instead of being dead to the world, the medium "s'exhibe," exposing his persona for personal pleasure. Instead of speaking about his experience indirectly as saints are wont to do, he speaks *to* the world and risks speaking as the world's will. However, the medium is able to communicate his experience to others. While his mysticism may not be as pure as that of a saint, it is no less potent. Cendrars, then, is this medium — and travel is the trance into which he puts himself, allowing the medium to become his own message.

This counterfeit mysticism, founded in the evangelism of machinery and movement, is part of a larger attempt to show his readers that they too can experience an enchanted world as he does. And he demonstrates that this experience can be reached through meditative actions; or, as one might put it, the medium of travel (exhibited by Cendrars, its *medium*) is the message he seeks to impart. A clearer example of this is expressed in Cendrars's preface to a 1946 republication of his novel *Dan Yack*:

> Le monde est ma représentation. J'ai voulu dans *Dan Yack* intérioriser cette vue de l'esprit, ce qui est une conception pessimiste ; puis l'extérioriser, ce qui est une action optimiste. D'où la division en deux parties de mon roman : la première, du dehors au dedans, sujet du *Plan de l'Aiguille* ; du dedans au dehors, objet des *Confessions de Dan Yack*, la deuxième. Systole, diastole : les deux pôles de l'existence ; outside-in, inside-out : les deux temps du mouvement mécanique ; contraction, dilatation : la respiration de l'univers, le principe de la vie : l'Homme.[69]

Turning Schopenhauer's pessimistic maxim into something active and positive, Cendrars shows

[69] Blaise Cendrars, *Dan Yack, TADA*, vol. 4 (Paris: Denoël, 2002) 293.

that modernity has given the individual the necessary tools to muscle their way into exteriorizing their inexpressible, incomparable innermost desires. In turn, these desires are amplified, allowing them to roar with the hum of air, the rumble of an engine, the rocking of a train, the beat of the heart, *systolic* and *diastolic* presence revealing the magic and majesty of the individual.

This exuberance, however, brings us to a final, difficult question regarding Cendrars's work and his insistence that modern enchantment can be experienced through travel and mechanical speed. Cendrars, of course, is known as a famous *mythomane* (or pathological liar). Thus, we are forced to ask whether, in these examples, he is writing as a braggart who secretly assumes that he alone possesses the capacity to experience and communicate a sensation of enchantment gleaned from modernity, or whether he is altruistically donating to his readers a recipe for enchantment. Or, to rephrase the question in the terms that Cendrars uses above: is he alone able to become "l'Homme" from whose "contraction and dilatation" an enchanted poetic vision of the world will appear? Does he alone have the dynamic capacity to turn an *élan vital* of flight into an outward *devenir tout*?[70] Or is he truly serving as a medium or guide, leading his readers into a messianic age of communitarian enchantment, like the community that Weber (in our introduction) hoped might come about through *re-enchantment*?

It is this challenging question that I will seek to resolve, to the extent that such a

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[70] Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Le Bergsonisme* (Paris: PUF, 2004) 111-112:

> "On dirait que l'homme est capable de retrouver tous les niveaux, tous les degrés de détente et de contraction qui coexistent dans le Tout virtuel. Comme s'il était capable de toutes les frénésies, et faisait se succéder en lui tout ce qui, ailleurs, ne peut être incarné que dans des espèces diverses. Jusque dans ses rêves, il retrouve ou prépare la matière. Et les durées qui lui sont inférieures ou supérieures sont encore intérieures à lui. L'homme crée donc une différenciation qui vaut pour le Tout, et, seul, trace une direction capable d'exprimer un tout lui-même ouverte."

resolution is possible, in the remainder of this chapter. More precisely, to attempt to find this answer, I will turn to the final section of *Le Lotissement du ciel,* entitled "La Tour Eiffel sidérale." My aim is to understand what it means to essentially democratize an experience of the sublime through machinery and popular writing and to gauge if, indeed, Cendrars's taste for affect and avatar translates into a guide for experiencing the poetic enchantment of the world. I am particularly interested in understanding what constitutes a Cendrarsian ethic of enchantment. I ask: What is the place of the author's pleasure in revealing his particular hallucination of enchantment in the world? Is it an invitation to the other to create their own vision, or does Cendrars seek to be the alpha and the omega of this enchanted modernity?

Modernizing Extasis

Thinking about Cendrars's experience of ecstasy and his vision of the world, we must finally face his reputation as a famous and pathological liar. Though his mendacious character is part of his charm and journalistic style, it nevertheless presents one of the most challenging facets of his work. On the one hand, his lies contain a hint of verisimilitude (an *effet du réel*, in Barthesian parlance). On the other, his claims and tales are far too outlandish for even the most naïve of readers to take at face value. The question we must ask, then, is: What and whom do his lies serve? Are they in the interest of an author trying to cement his persona for posterity, or are they the mark of a medium? Do they serve as a guide for the reader, to whom he wants to impart a notion of modern enchantment? And who is supposed to benefit from the revelation of a path to the sublime through modern machines: all readers or only himself, the poet?

These are difficult questions to answer. Despite all appearances of apparent madness and egotism, Cendrars's deformations of the truth do seem to follow a particular method and message, one that appears to have altruistic overtones —in that it seems he is seeking to transmit a craft to his reader. I propose that this approach is rooted in a notion and neologism Cendrars invented early in his career: *prochronie.* This term, which Cendrars never clearly defines, appears as both an autobiographical practice (it is how he describes his first attempts at writing autobiographical texts) and a means of incorporating action and speed in writing, but it also results in the deformation of a faithful report of experience. As a form, I find that it refers to a specific practice of autobiographical writing: *prochronie*, at its most basic, is a practice of rearranging the ordering, the events, and the dates of a past experience. In more nuanced terms, it is an act of prolepsis — bring the future into the present —, thereby flattening time.

If we subscribe to this point of view, we can define *prochronie* as a means of embellishing the chronological events of one's life in order to give them thematic resonance and metaphysical gravitas. This is a slight departure from the angle that the Cendrarsian critic Claude Leroy takes vis-à-vis *prochronisme*. Leroy defines it as "une poétique du fantasme de l'éternel retour," by which he means that it is a way of linking the events of a life. For example, Cendrars's loss of his hand in the First World War is linked to his escape from Neufchatel, which, in turn, is linked to sensations of flying and escaping (or flying) away from a sedentary life. All of these events are thus rewritten so as to prefigure later ones.[71] On a larger scale, the

[71] If we connect this to some of Cendrars early readings of medieval text, we see that this mimics one of the functions of allegory listed in Dante's famous letter to Cangrande, in which he gives the example of Christ's resurrection repeating across many different and diverse tales.

levitating medieval saints we saw in “Le Nouveau Patron de l’aviation” become proleptic avatars of Cendrars’s son, Rémy.

Though this pattern is undeniably present in Cendrars’s works, it also seems that this theory of thematic resonances is used as a justification for Cendrars’s fabulations — his spinning of personal fables. The principle of *prochronie* suggests that the events that occur in his travels, the dates on which they occur, and the specifics of the events themselves simply do not matter; as long as the sentiments expressed touch on a certain truth, all fibs shall be forgiven. As such, *prochronie* or *prochronisme* is a tool for self-mythologizing — it allows one to be seen as part of a continuum. This is very handy indeed for someone like Cendrars, because it allows for enchantment from past literary iterations to graft itself onto future signifiers, like the airplane, the locomotive, the “systole” and “diastole” of modern life, and so on and so forth.

Le Lotissement du ciel is, to some extent, Cendrars’s *prochronie par excellence.* It is an attempt to prove that his lies are not completely self-serving and that travel might accord a sense of poetry to all — that modernity might be what he calls a *utopialand* (or perfect poetic paradise) in which all citizens are poets. Each text in *Lotissement,* in other words, amounts to more of an exploration of the images and ideas that make up a poetics of travel than an accurate chronicle of events. In *Lotissement*, it is more important that the author manages to bring all of the themes of his life and writing into what the critic Claude Leroy calls the all-encompassing *point d’orgue* of Cendrars’s memoirs. (II, 1002) Indeed, the symphonic metaphor he uses is not out of place: *prochronie* does not require an accurate chronology, but it does ask that the events of a life follow symphonic *leitmotifs*. For Cendrars, it could be said that these two motifs are flight (or travel) and return (mimicking the eternal return of *flight* and *groundedness* that Leroy sees); the

first motif is related to air, speed and the ethereal, whereas the other is the absence of poetic drive. To avoid the dull music of this second motif, Cendrars must, like the ever-moving hummingbird, remain in a continual state of poetic arousal, in incredible motion, like a saint levitating.

Within the framework of *prochronie*, when one lies, one is simply bending the truth so that it becomes an efficient and affective transmission of a crucial experience. It is this mode of *prochronical* thinking that leads to the formulation of a famous line found in *Bourlinguer*, the tome preceding *Lotissment.* Here, Cendrars writes, "l'écriture n'est ni un songe ni un mensonge, mais de la poésie. Donc, création. Donc, action […] l'action seule libère." (II, 318)

But is there no limit to *mensonge* and fabulation (the telling of tales, the spinning of *fabulae*)? Is there no limit to which one must adhere in order to be credible and write words that are transmissible? Thinking about *prochronisme* in its crudest form brings us around to the crucial question guiding this dissertation as a whole: How do we know that this experience of travel as ecstasy isn't just a convenient myth? And how do we know that the action that leads to *extasis* does not encroach on another's freedom to experience the same?

An answer to this question might be found if we take an unconventional reading of another famous line from *Bourlinguer*. Cendrars writes here that:

> [l]a vie n'est pas un dilemme […] C'est un acte gratuit. Et l'action libère. C'est pourquoi Dieu est le Créateur. Son soufflé donne vie. C'est l'évasion. / Vivez, ah ! Vivez donc, et qu'importe la suite ! N'ayez pas de remords, vous n'êtes pas juge. (II, 192)

In lines like these, at first glance, only Cendrars's poetic prowess seems to matter. Even his close

friend Henry Miller saw in his writing the presence of "a vital force, a blind and pitiless urge, closer to nature than to man […] tender and ruthless at the same time […] antinomian."[72] If Cendrars lives up to this qualifier "antinomian," then one can assume he rejects codified religious dogma, turning his actions into pure will and rendering himself the demiurge whom Miller admires. However, are we truly faced with someone who flouts moral order? Perhaps the public's disappointment with *Le Lotissement du ciel* was related to its destruction of this image of Cendrars as a "chrétien sauvage." Indeed, *Lotissement* reveals a Cendrars who is, in fact, fine with moral order, so long as he gets to name it and create it vitally in his own image. Indeed, Cendrars is only against morality insofar as it pertains to agreeing with judgements put in place by arbitrary structures of power. We must remember that Cendrars (and not Freddy Sauser) went from mother's milk to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Indeed, if as Cendrars's often points out "la vie n'est pas un dilemme," then its truth can only be put in place through action and poetics. It is no accident that this point of view mirrors Nietzsche's early essay "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense:"

> What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms — in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after a long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their

[72] See Henry Miller, *The Wisdom of the Heart* (New Directions: New York, 1941) 151.

pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.[73]

The morale that underpins Cendrars's lies, his *prochronisme*, is his urge to guide his readers past the veil of illusions and into the essence of a truth that they themselves are able to willfully create and represent through new, meaningful metaphors. In essence, he breathes life back into language through a modern lexicon of speed, vehicles, locales, exotic places and peoples. He creates, in a Schopenhauerian sense, his own representation of the world and, through his own literary prowess and choice of register (and medium — *reportage*, autobiography, and journalism), forges a truth that envelops his readers and entices them to zoom around abroad and discover the world for themselves.

To conclude this section, I would like to posit that Cendrars, taking his cue from Schopenhauer, does not see his work as lies, but rather as a perfected metaphorical representation of the world and will as true enchantment. It's almost as if Cendrars's life were a fortuitous (and perhaps against-the-grain) reading of §51 of *The World as Will and Idea*, which discusses the literary arts. For it is here that Schopenhauer notes that, insofar as the "significance of the phenomenal" (the way in which one can 'will representation') is concerned, "it is quite the same [in a literary autobiography] whether the objects with which the action is concerned, are, relatively considered, trifling or important […] for all these things in themselves are without significance, and obtain it only in so far as the will is moved by them."[74] To this extent, Cendrars could be seen as considering his lies to be affective avatars of a sublime truth. I say this because

[73] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin, 1982) 46-47. Cendrars must have also seen himself in the example Nietzsche gives of the painter who has lost his arms, and yet is still able to transmit his representation (his "lie" against the "truth" of the world that is, in fact, his own "truth") with greater sensuous effect than most.
[74] Schopenhauer, 319.

it lines up with a possible reading of Schopenhauer's contention that it is difficult to lie in an autobiography because

> the man who writes his own life surveys it as a whole, the particular becomes small, the near becomes distant, the distant becomes near again, the motives that influenced him shrink; he seats himself at the confessional, and has done so of his own free will; the spirit of lying does not so easily take hold of him here, for there is also in every man an inclination to truth which has first to be overcome whenever he lies, and which here has taken up a specially strong position.[75]

There is nothing saying that this truth cannot be colored by a poetic representation of an inner will. This, then, is what could be seen as an ethic of truth through affect.

Cendrarsian Morality

To better understand what I see as Cendrars's sense of morality through *mensonge,* let us turn to the final chapter or episode of *Le Lotissement du ciel,* a long text entitled "La Tour Eiffel sidérale." This final text recounts a trip to Brazil, which Cendrars saw as the place in which he could find a reality in which machines naturally coexisted with the spiritual. He called Brazil *utopialand*, the embodiment of his vision of a poetic future. "La Tour Eiffel sidérale" might not deal directly with the immateriality of flight as the other texts in *Lotissement* do, but it remains focused on the sidereal, man's relationship to the sky and the stars, and the promise of *extasis* that these realms hold. With this departure from flight, Cendrars moves closer to guiding the

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[75] Schopenhauer, 320.

reader toward their own sense of enchantment.

The framing device Cendrars uses to present this moral to the reader is a motoring tour he took through Brazilian coffee country, over the rugged hills that were once home to a vast and forbidding rainforest. The purpose of the trip is to call on the dull, depressing Morro Azul, a foreboding *fazenda* (plantation) owned by a lethargic self-proclaimed poet, Docteur Oswaldo Padroso. This Doctor Padroso is something of a homage and insult to several acquaintances from Cendrars' actual trips to Brazil —the *mécène* Paulo Prado and the modernist poet Oswaldo de Andrade among them.[76] The fictional Padroso whom Cendrars visits, however, is not as illustrious as his namesakes. He is the sort of *littérateur* who Cendrars prides himself on having not become: a lovelorn "vieux schnock," a leftover from the 19th century whom one should avoid at all costs so as not to have to listen "jusqu'à n'en plus pouvoir de mortel ennui les plaintes et les doléances […]" (II, 574) Padroso claims to be a poet; he rejects the Brazilian modernism or *gigantisme mental* that had attracted Cendrars to Brazil in the first place. Worse still, Padroso lives and thinks according to mythologies of a long-gone French 19th century and lives in a palace built for the Emperor Don Pedro according to the specifications of Gobineau, the famous 19th-century French consul and racialist. Padroso's backwards mentality renders the Morro Azul the exact opposite of what Cendrars seeks in his travels. It is a place where one is forced to be

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[76] Cendrars's view of Padroso isn't straightforwardly negative — the real people the character is based on were dear to Cendrars, who entered Rio and Sao Paulo as something of a celebrity in 1924. He had even made plans to create cinema with his newfound fellow utopists. However, the adoration Brazilian modernist poets like Oswaldo de Andrade felt for him was short-lived. They came to see him as a reactionary. Andrade, who had dedicated the first edition of *Pau Brésil* (1925), his epic on the formation of a particularly-Brazilian poetics, to Cendrars, erased this dedication from the book's 20th-anniversary edition. For more on this, see Yvette Bozon-Scalzitti, *Blaise Cendrars ou la passion de l'écriture* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'homme, 1977).

content mired in the rhetoric of 19th-century mannerisms, all based on French "style." To borrow Pascale Casanova's title and term, the *fazenda* is a crumbling relic of a dying *république mondiale des lettres*.[77] For Cendrars, Padroso comes to represent a sort of poetic violence worse (i.e. less ethical) than Cendrars's zealous *brahmane à rebours*. It is, therefore, in explaining what separates Padroso from himself that Blaise Cendrars reveals the ethic underlying his own use of travel. Indeed, Cendrars uses Padroso and his *fazenda do Morro Azul* as a morally-decrepit foil to what he sees as an ethical means of experiencing the world for the sake of poetry.[78] In essence, Padroso is a *passéiste* as much as Cendrars is a *futuriste*; he sits alone in his stately European mansion in the middle of what was once rainforest, only able to write decrepit self-serving verse that does not engage in any way with the spirit of the world.

Cendrars contrasts Padroso and his estate with his own practice of poetic action and speed. He does this by giving a lengthy and fantastical account of his drive to the *fazenda*, which contrasts Cendrars's focus on action and speed with Padroso's clinging to a past long gone, wallowing in stagnation and decay. By drawing attention to the superiority of his focus on action and speed, Cendrars reveals a more crucial point about travel's use in creating literary enchantment: he shows that it is not the destination (which may be a refuge for decrepitude and stagnation) of travel that maters, but rather the act of traveling, the trajectory. This difference is what separates Cendrars from other poets and travelers. Thus, in this final text, Cendrars continues to stress the importance of his role as a poet of travel's trajectory.

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[77] See Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des Lettres* (Paris: Seuil, "Points," 2008).

[78] In her very lengthy study on Cendrars, the critic Yvette Bozon-Scalzitti takes things a step further and sees Cendrars as feeling threatened by Padroso, who represents a negative (in the sense of a photographic negative and also of a quality that is not positive) version of himself; what the poet might have been had he taken the wrong path, or had he eschewed travel.

For example, he recounts his adventures zipping along dirt roads from São Paulo to a coffee plantation in the hills of Rio Parana, in an Alpha Romeo rigged up like a portable movie house — "un projecteur mobile," complete with "phares aux rayons alternativement blancs ou oranges" and a "radio musicale," which somehow picks up the eight o'clock music countdown from Paris. Here, with tremendous speed and ingenuity, Cendrars establishes his role as a moral guide for his reader. Driving through the Brazilian countryside at night, Cendrars pulls his Alpha Romeo into a clearing on the side of the road and reclines his seat for a night of stargazing. There, smoking cigarette after cigarette, he notices something strange, writing that "la braise de mon mégot solitaire" (and in "braise," we must hear *Blaise*) becomes indistinguishable from the "étoiles fixes qui me fixaient" shining in the night sky. (II, 584)

Caught in the double regard of the stars, the poet-traveler is fascinated by how these traveling furnaces of self-destruction which "se consumant dans les ténèbres" mirror the double structure of his personal trajectory. Each of these stars is an active sojourner carving out its pathway as it makes its way across the universe; each is an avatar of the phoenix, consuming itself and disintegrating into ephemeral ashes that will serve as the raw material necessary to kindle another celestial body's voyage. Cendrars, traveling in his vehicle, becomes a celestial lamp, burning fuel into exhaust and ashes. The ashes he leaves behind fall in the form of written traces (*écriture*), contemplative cinders for posterity which, like elemental stardust, "ensemencent le cerveau de l'homme y port[ant] un germe de destruction […] un indice de désintégration." (II, 584)

Staring at the stars, Cendrars reveals a very distinct notion of moral responsibility: as the poet who has discovered the lessons of modern speed, Cendrars sees it as his duty to

communicate and transmit this lesson to his reader. Indeed, we see the broad strokes of this lesson in the passage I've just cited. We also see this in Cendrars's interest in using in modern technology—vehicles, cinema, sound recording, electricity, radio-waves—to attain an experience of transcendence or ecstasy which is then transformed into a contemplative, celestial romantic poetry. Thus, through the author's *motricité*, an imprint of his sublime experience can be *read* and experienced by his reader — this work (or literary œuvre) is a *travel guide* of sorts *and,* essentially, Cendrars's phantom limb that he uses to transmit a modern, sublime experience to his readers. If we keep in mind that Cendrars also wants his writing to "[ensemence] le cerveau de l'homme y portant un germe de destruction," we come to understand that the poet's movement and *motricité* is also meant to inspire others to take up a similar combination of action, contemplation, and destruction, from which the re-enchantment of a new age will rise. Indeed, this *germe* of combustion is, in fact, a germ of inspiration that works on the reader much the same way speed works on Cendrars. It is this ability to inspire and to teach as a guru, a *brahmane à rebours,* that separates a Cendrars from a Padroso. The modern poet incinerates himself into ashes and cinders—with their connotation of change, light and lightness—whereas the poet still clinging to the Romantic past cannot shake off entrenched power structures, and is preoccupied with rotting in his empire while he is still king. It is here that he makes his final case to the "jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui" that one must move in order to experience the sublime nature of the world. Approaching the end of his life, he adamantly insisted in his radio interviews with Michel Manoll that his mission was to spread a gospel of travel as a means of attaining a perfect *fainéantise* that leads to a spiritual plenitude. As he says in one of his *entretiens* with Manoll in reference to the young poets who write to him, looking for a sage:

> C'est la vie. Des jeunes gens qui ont du talent, des jeunes qui n'ont pas de talent, des gens qui ont du génie, des gens qui n'ont pas de génie. Cela me touché beaucoup et je leur réponds toujours. Mais s'ils s'adressent à moi avec l'intention de choisir à leur tour un maître, ils se trompent d'adresse. Je ne suis pas chef d'école. Je ne suis pas vieux, vieux, vieux à ce point… C'est du gâtisme…[79]

His advice to these young poets is that they go and *brûle un chemin* (blaze, or *blaise*, their own trail); for, as he remarks in another interview a few years later, in 1956:

> Des jeunes gens, poètes ou romanciers tentés par l'aventure, viennent me voir et me posent assez souvent cette question : « Comment fait-on pour voyager ? » Ma réponse est invariable : « Non mais, ma parole, vous me prenez pour un agent de compagnie maritime qui délivre des billet ? Faites donc comme moi partez demain et n'en parlez plus ! » (II, 953)

His rejection of their flattery seems somewhat disingenuous. He may be reluctant to take up the mantle of staff of the guru, the saint preaching the gospel of modern enchantment. However, is this not the role he has been preparing for himself since his earliest works? Indeed, a spiritual guide or guru (or *brahmane à rebours*) is the character he reveals himself to be in *Le Lotissement du ciel* — not only in passages like those cited above, but also in the title of the work itself.

This title is a reference to a specific divinatory practice from ancient times. In this practice, an augur, looking through a curved staff called a *lituus* (the same staff that would later be used by Catholic bishops), would section off a parcel of sky (a *lotissement du ciel*), a celestial mailbox into which the gods were to send messages in the form of birds, weather, stars, etc. In

[79] Blaise Cendrars, *Blaise Cendrars vous parle* (Paris: Denoël, 1952) 53.

choosing this title, Cendrars identifies himself as a modern *augur* or *eubage,* a mystic priest who, like the priests of the Romans, the Gauls and the Celts, practices the act of parceling out the sky. The Latin name for this circular parcel of sky is *templum*. "To read the *templum*" had its own verb in Latin: *cum-templare*. Contemplation, in other words: to converge with the *templum*, to think outside of the self and *with* the *cosmos*, the sky. Through this image, contemplation becomes an act that gives one access to new *auguries*.

The Posterity of the **Brahmane à Rebours**

Can this assumption of the role of priest or guide to modern poets be considered an honest pursuit? It is tempting to embrace Cendrars's position here as altruistic. However, he leaves just enough ambiguity to create discomfort. Is Cendrars subsuming and compromising the autonomy of his readers by sowing his germ of destruction, or is he guiding them and empowering them?

There are arguments for both positions. Viewed negatively, we could say that Cendrars remains the poet and seeks to subjugate his reader. The critic Jay Bochner calls this subjugation *autogéographie*. It is a process of subsuming all other people, places and objects encountered along the road into the self, into a *cosmos* with the author at its center. Reading *Lotissement,* he calls this topological enterprise a "un renouveau du travail du sujet et de lieu de l'Autre qui fait de ce livre la culmination d'un long voyage de Cendrars dans ses textes."[80] Bochner feels that all

[80] Jay Bochner, "Lotir," *Cendrars et le Lotissement du ciel* (Paris: Université de Paris X, 1992) 157.

of the places and people that Cendrars encounters are treated as aspects of the author himself; they are elements of his personal story and geography. One might say that this is a literal version of *l'enchantement du monde*, wherein the world itself becomes a support in telling Cendrars's story and edifying his persona. However, Bochner stops short of further problematizing this way of viewing the world and the act of travel.

We see this attempt to subsume all outside influences in one of the scenes at the end of "La Tour Eiffel sidérale." It is the scene in which the title of the chapter is revealed. Here, Cendrars arrives at Padroso's Morro Azul and is asked a favor by his host. Padroso wants Cendrars to register on his behalf, upon his return to Paris, two constellations he claims to have located in the skies of the Southern Hemisphere: *La Tour Eiffel* and *la divine Sarah Bernhardt*. This constellation of the Eiffel Tower is the literal referent of the chapter's title. For Cendrars, the Eiffel Tower, the one-time muse of his one-time friend Robert Delaunay, is a bygone, useless symbol of bourgeois decrepitude which he rails against humorously — defaming it metaphorically as a false symbol of the modern sublime.

In contrast to the false, jingoistic representation of the world requested by Padroso (who celebrates the Eiffel Tower as a symbol of the worst possible colonialist nationalism) Cendrars attempts to recast the Eiffel Tower as a symbol of action and enchantment, an image already present in a crucial poem written around 1917, "Au cœur du monde:"

> Un nénuphar sur la Seine, c'est la lune au fil de l'eau
>
> La Voie Lactée dans le ciel se pâme sur Paris et l'étreint
>
> Folle et nue et renversée, sa bouche suce Notre-Dame.

> La Grande Ourse et la Petite Ourse grognent autour de Saint-Merry. Ma main coupée brille au ciel dans la constellation d'Orion.[81]

The Eiffel Tower, then, is transformed, no longer the broken sign of Oswaldo Padroso's bourgeois dream of a constellation representing an idle desire for a world of *pacotille* and authoritarian might. For Cendrars, it becomes the hybridization of the bony skeleton of his absent *main coupée,* flying, levitating, with radio waves flying through the air. He is, essentially, an all-pervasive antinomian demiurge; his *représentation du monde* subsumes the entirety of the world, creating it anew in his image, through his prowess as the poet of modernity, of machines, of enchantment through *motricité*.

To Conclude

While it is possible to stop at this interpretation of Cendrars's endeavor as more nefariously self-serving, I would like to propose ending these reflections by taking a more positive view, suggested by a passage in "La Tour Eiffel sidérale," which does not erase the ambiguity of Cendrars's position but leaves room for thought.

On the way to Padroso's villa, speeding and meditating in his Alpha Romeo, Cendrars waxes lyrical about a possibly altruistic reasoning behind his desire to be a *brahmane, guru* or *eubage.* In teaching the world to recognize the beautiful *rythme de dépouillement* that he has discovered, perhaps he is trying to spread a new spiritual message to a modern world that has

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[81] *TADA,* vol. 1, 196.

become a mess of rationality and cold calculations, a "faux ÂGE D'OR […]" as he calls it; a world in which technological advancement leads only to war—the cutting of hands, the splaying and gassing of bodies—not to poetry or the sublime. He preaches that the evil of this world resides in simplified notions of progress based solely on creating, not for the sake of creation itself, but for profit, a world in which nothing matters but cash, for:

…c'est du fric qu'il s'agit, et de rien d'autre, du fric pour financer LA GUERRE, et rien d'autre, et l'alimenter, et le genre humain peut toujours crever, faute de pain, esclave des machines et sous la coupe des politiciens et des fonctionnaires, qui ne brandissent plus le fouet comme les maîtres de naguère pour faire se courber les échines, mais ont fait avancer les robots qui broient entre leurs mâchoires automatiques les réfractaires et les individus et dont l'anus également automatique, ne pisse pas du sang, ne rend pas des excréments mais éjecte des rondelles d'or en série, nettes, astiquées, brillantes, hypnotiques, exactement calibrées et du même poids : l'Unité […]

Hostie métallique de l'économie politique !

L'OR. (II, 568)

This point of view could perhaps be seen as an opening to a communitarian ethic of poetic thought through a notion of *motricité*. Perhaps it is in this passage that Cendrars communicates a message of flight, of the sublime, of the *eubage*, through his own personal representation. The message, then, is the following: In order to escape from the ugly cycle of greed, war and politics, we must learn to turn the machines we have created and their effects into vehicles of spiritual awakening. If we are to experience this awakening, we must undermine the negative structures of modernity, by beating our mechanical swords into enchanted ploughshares. Perhaps this is the

guidance, the lesson (the travel recommendations, if I'm not being too bold) of the *brahmane à rebours*…

Whereas Cendrars experiences and prescribes 'esthetic play' through robust motion and physicality—*motricité*—Leiris, as we shall see in the next chapter, seeks the path of least resistance; he tries to find the minimum of physical risk needed to experience enchantment. In the pages that follow, I will offer a reading of Leiris's mode of travel as an attempt to attain enchantment by balancing his desire to indulge personal fantasy with a tragically moral sense of duty, which prompts him to play along with a set of pre-defined ethical rules.

CHAPTER 2:

THE ETHNOGRAPHER'S EYE, THE POET'S TOUCH

Alternating between two vocations, Michel Leiris's life could be seen as a constant voyage: between mundane paperwork at the Musée de l'homme and the sacred world of magic and poetics to which he retires when he writes. This pattern of constant shuttling back and forth is something we find throughout Leiris's works, from his earliest journal entries to his four-tome autobiographical project, *La Règle du jeu*. In essence, his need to alternate between vocations is symptomatic of his struggle to balance his desire to live out poetic fantasies with what he felt was his duty to be a rational, engaged and progressive European social scientist and writer. There is a passage in *Frêle Bruit* (1976), the final volume of *La Règle du jeu,* where he explains this need for movement with the frank lucidity that characterizes his later works:

> Si j'apprécie l'alternance travail chez moi et travail au Musée de l'Homme, peut-être est-ce, pour une part, comme quelqu'un qui espère rattraper en jouant la rouge ce qu'il a perdu sur la noire mais, pour une part aussi, à cause de l'ironie constant qu'implique ce va-et-vient : prendre en chaque cas mes distances, soit avec l'ethnologie quand je pratique la littérature, soit avec celle-ci quand je me tourne vers celle-là, et (selon ce schéma trop théorique pour mériter, après examen plus serré de mes emplois du temps, un *oui* monolithique) changer de cap suivant l'horaire mais diriger toujours une pointe contre l'une ou l'autre de ces activités dont même celle qui m'appela plusieurs fois à m'en aller ailleurs n'est

plus maintenant pour moi que froide exploitation de documents ou de fragile savoir ?" (*Fr,* 271)[1]

The image of the roulette wheel that opens this passage evokes the sense of futility Leiris feels in attempting to find a balance between these two poles, but it also shows why he thrives on and appreciates this constant movement. For Leiris, distance is crucial to his sense of enchantment: it is the *out-of-body* (or out-of-ego) experience of this back-and-forth that fulfills what the author will call his "besoin que j'ai de me soustraire" — to erase the pain of existence in one world by escaping to another, where one lives in an enchanted state of non-identity, where one is free to be *another* and see one's self as another. Becoming an anthropologist and joining ethnographic voyages seems to fulfill this promise for a short while. However, as this vocation degenerates into sedentary clerical labor—a "froide exploitation de documents"—Leiris must find a new figure of travel. In order to address this issue, he finds a substitute for the movement of the ethnographic voyage in the *va-et-vient* between his home office and his office at the Musée de l'homme — in effect, between two identities. Ultimately, this means that he takes refuge in a liminal space, halfway between rational duty and the heightened reality of poetics.

Leiris reflects on this form of displacement in some of the notes he included in his *fichier,* his filing cabinet of notes written as part of his ongoing project: an *ethnologie de soi* that would become *La Règle du jeu.* In one note, written in the mid-1950s, he states that traveling fulfills his "[b]esoin [de] prendre mes distances," because, as he writes, "je n'existe qu'à distance […]." In other words, he travels not to see the world as himself but to see the world as though he

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[1] Michel Leiris, *Frêle Bruit* (Paris: Gallimard "L'imaginaire," 1976). Further references to this volume are cited in the text as *Fr.*

were not himself; as he writes in the same note, he seeks to "voyager, non pour voir, mais pour être vu voyageant."[2] What he means by this is that, in the act of travel, he can stand outside of himself and become the observer of his own life. His desire, then, is to travel so as to experience an *out-of-body enchantment,* wherein he can view himself as another. In his own words, it is his "inclination perverse à ne me plaire que dans l'ambiguïté ou dans le paradoxe et tantôt m'apparaît sanctifié par l'idée que le mariage des contraires est le plus haut sommet jusqu'auquel on puisse métaphysiquement s'élever." (*Fr*, 272)

At first glance, this passage from *Frêle bruit* and the note from Leiris's *fichier* may seem like innocuous scraps. However, as is often the case with these types of simple descriptions, they point to Leiris's larger aim: his desire to find a way of bringing the enchantment he believes only exists in adventure—in being *outside* of himself—into his daily life. It is my aim in this chapter to show how Leiris dissects the experiences he has while traveling in order to find a way of transposing what travel offers into the realm of the mundane. To do this, I will look mainly at Leiris's first ethnographic voyage, his journey across the African continent, which he recorded in *L'Afrique fantôme*. Despite his disappointment with this voyage, it forced him to undergo a series of physical and psychological changes that led him to understand how travel might allow for an experience of *enchantment*. By reading passages from *L'Afrique fantôme* in conjunction with parts of *La Règle du jeu* and several of Leiris's essays, my goal is to show how travel is the necessary catalyst for Leiris's ability to find enchantment in his daily life. Moreover, I will focus on some important questions that seem to be at the center of Leiris's search for enchantment through physical endeavor: What is the minimum physical engagement necessary to both fulfill a

[2] See Michel Leiris, *La Règle du jeu*, Denis Hollier (ed.) (Paris: Gallimard "Pléiade," 2003).

civic duty and feed literary inspiration? In essence, how can the real, the documented, become the spark of poetry while retaining its veracity and objectivism? These questions lie at the heart of the attempt to negotiate between the literary and the scientific that defines Leiris's life.

Perspective Shift: The Eye of the Ethnographer

This negotiation has its roots in an about-face Leiris's life made in 1928. In 1928, he left the Surrealist group and went to work on George Bataille's magazine, *Documents.* Leiris hoped that working with Bataille on this anthropological and philosophical project would allow him to combine his mystical and poetic side with a conscious and active commitment to art criticism, the social sciences and social progress. It is here that he begins to forge a theory of how travel and an ethnographic perspective lead one to experience a modern sensation of enchantment by sharing in the palpable notion of the sacred held by one's ethnographic subjects. This theory first appears in an article written for *Documents,* "L'Œil de l'ethnographe."[3]

The article is something of a personal manifesto. In it, Leiris announces his departure from the magazine and his decision to accept an invitation to leave the literary scene and join Marcel Griaule's Mission Dakar-Djibouti, beginning his apprenticeship as an ethnographer. The article, then, is Leiris's attempt to both rationalize and theorize what his new career as an ethnographer might reveal to him. As we shall see, he hopes that becoming an ethnographer will lead him to see the world and himself anew, through "the *eye* of the ethnographer."

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[3] *Documents* (1929-1930), reprint, 2 vols., preface by Denis Hollier (Paris: Éditions Jean-Michel Place, 1991). A review of "archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés," *Documents* was started by George Bataille in direct opposition to *La Révolution Surréaliste.* Leiris, Bataille and a few others in their entourage had been excommunicated from the Surrealist movement.

In "L'Œil de l'ethnographe," Leiris writes that his vision of what he hopes ethnography will provide is informed by a play he saw as a child — an adaption of his father's friend Raymond Roussel's novel *Impressions d'Afrique*. The play and the novel both feature the same conceit. In the first act, a troupe of white actors performs numbers depicting an absurd caricature of European society at the turn of the 20th century. In the second act, it is revealed that the vaudevillians are, in fact, Europeans marooned off the coast of Africa, who have been taken prisoner by a local emperor.[4] The terms of their release are that they must put on a show for the emperor's coronation. For Leiris, the power of Roussel's play lays in the structural reversal it employs. Through this simple conceit, the play offers an anarchic, chiasmic inversion of traditional modes of relating the subject and the other. In Leiris's eyes, Roussel presents both a vision of Africa "telle que nous pouvions la concevoir dans notre imagination d'enfants blancs," and a vision of a Europe "de phénomènes et d'inventions abracadabrantes telle que peut-être elle se trouve figurée dans l'esprit de ceux que nous nommons avec dédain des « primitifs »." For Leiris, *Impressions d'Afrique* offers a vision of the world comparable to that of ethnography as Leiris sees it: one which seeks to understand "la totalité des hommes […] dans leurs rapports entre eux et non d'une manière arbitrairement individuelle."[5] In other words, the optic of ethnography sees both the other and the self as equal halves of a total, fluid system. Ethnography, then, forms a system based not upon a traditional dialectic of power (master/servant, colonizer/colonized, etc.), but rather on a dialectic of difference, a community of

[4] Two factors may explain the play's effect on Leiris. First, Roussel was a close friend of Leiris's father; second, Leiris saw the play, which caused a major scandal when it debuted, at the impressionable age of 11.
[5] Michel Leiris, "L'Œil de l'ethnographe," *Documents 7* (1930) 407.

reversals, wherein each party involved learns about the perspective of the other. Additionally, this ethnographic reversal allows one to step outside of one's ego, if but for a second, and escape one's inhibitions and prejudices.

In addition to Roussel's play, there are other factors that contributed to Leiris's looking to ethnography as a means of stepping outside of his ego and experiencing the enchantment of the world. His decision to join the Mission Dakar-Djibouti was also part of a therapeutic exercise: it was Leiris's psychoanalyst, Adrien Borel, who saw the trip, which Marcel Griaule had invited Leiris to join, as a perfect physical treatment for his feelings of sexual and intellectual inferiority. Leiris's problem of being torn between personal desire and professional practice is studied in depth in both Séan Hand's *Michel Leiris: Writing the Self*, and, more recently, by Vincent Debaene in his book *L'Adieu au voyage*. Debaene's book claims that the conjuncture of literature and the social sciences renews one's imaginative capacities and tethers literary traditions back to the real world. We can better understand the trip's curative role by reading Leiris's preparatory notes for "L'Œil de l'ethnographe," which appear in his private journal. In these notes, Leiris hopes that an ethnographic voyage will prove to be "[l]e seul moyen de ne pas voyager comme un touriste, c'est-à-dire comme un aveugle […]" (*JI*, 208) By this, he means that it will both prevent him from considering only surface appearances and force him to understand the underlying relations between an individual and their community, between one community and another, and between ethnographer and ethnographic subject. For example, he imagines he will experience in the landscapes he encounters:

> d'innombrables couches intérieures, d'une valeur de plus en plus profonde et générale, en même temps que plus humaine, car c'est bien, encore un fois ! à ce

> fameux mot : *humain* qu'il faut en venir, dès lors qu'il s'agit de qualifier une chose plus particulièrement concrète et grave, dont la simple évocation nous bouleverse autant que s'il s'agissait de l'apparition d'un fantôme, mais d'un fantôme plus vrai que les créatures douées de la vulgaire existence charnelle … (*JI,* 208)[6]

Through this ethnographic eye, then, he will see the hidden realities and deep secrets ("d'innombrables couches intérieures") of the countries and peoples he visits. It will train him to pierce ever more deeply into the layers of the real; to see the subjects and societies he observes as layered and complex, complete with *humain* and *fantôme* elements. And by training this eye, Leiris believes he will both better understand his own humanity and experience a sense of sacred spirituality. This view of travel is undeniably indebted to Freud, whom Leiris happened to be reading at the time he recorded these observations.[7] Leiris's position, that an objective and analytic view of the self can foster a better understanding of one's identity and relation to the world, calls to mind Freud's contention, in his 1916 introductory essay on the unconscious, that searching only for oneself (and not for understanding or communion with the forces that bind communities) is a sign of non-analytic thinking. In contrast, Freud claims that the psychoanalyst's eye is capable of restoring humanity because it peers into the cause of desire rather than the object, a position that it appears Leiris seeks to affirm through ethnographic travel. Moreover, the humanity that Leiris hopes the ethnographer's eye will reveal also recalls Freud by virtue of the language Leiris uses. He describes this approach as having the power to

[6] Michel Leiris, *Journal* 1922-1989, Jean Jamin (ed.) (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). Cited in the text as *JI*.
[7] Op. cit. 208.

reveal *fantasmatic* or *spectral* entities, the ghosts more real than "créatures douées de la vulgaire existence charnelle" that govern our lives and communities.[8]

Freud himself saw phantoms as a manifestation of the uncanny — a formless, yet visceral aberration from one's primordial past that finds itself projected onto the present of the unconscious. Not unlike the specters of the past that the analysand reveals to the analyst, in Leiris's thinking the ethnographic eye reveals the specters of human relationships (or the return of repressed memories and relationship-structures as phantasmal aberrations). Thus, subscribing to this Freudian manner of thinking, Leiris comes to the conclusion that action, and specifically the act of travel, reveals to him these hidden forces. As he writes, "[la] fraîcheur des spectacles qui se trouvent perpétuellement renouvelés, par suite plus agissant," are "plus aptes à susciter notre désir, donc à nous maintenir dans cette attitude profondément active, où la force dont nous disposons a trouvé son point d'appui." (*JI*, 209) The spectacles or rituals he imagines he will observe in the field are envisioned as having a stronger psychic effect (and will allow him to develop more of an individual *affect*) than one can find in the *train-train quotidien* of a comfortable European bourgeois life.

Through this journal entry and its pseudo-Freudian language, a clearer idea emerges of what the ethnographic is and how it functions. The forward-thinking attitude and posture of the ethnographer—his *eye* that gazes at objects and people with a profound and intimate desire—becomes the *point d'appui* capable of clearly receiving and deciphering the phantasmal and primordial intensities that exist in the individuals and communities it beholds. In turn, the eye of the ethnographer also becomes a tool for regarding one's *self* with this same profound and

[8] See Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989) 35-36.

piercing gaze. It is a practical realization of a line Leiris's wrote in his surrealist glossary *Glossaire, j'y serre mes gloses* some years before. Defining a shift in perspective, he wrote: "l'œil perce, lumière active." The more intently one observes, the more visible the hidden secrets of the world become.

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Though these interpretations of Leiris's journal writing may seem to be reaching a little, the idea that an ethnographic perspective entails a piercing and reflexive gaze is expressed more clearly in the article "L'Œil de l'ethnographe." Here he explicitly shows ethnographic travel as a physical endeavor that ought to lead to an outside perspective of the self, a shedding of ego, and an experience of enchantment. He renders this notion concrete through a parable from the Songhai people of West Africa:

> Un homme dont le nom était Abarnakat, voyageait avec ses compagnons. Un cordon rouge était attaché à son cou et il avait une couverture rouge et un âne. Il attachait son âne à son pied et étendait sa couverture pour dormir.
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> Un jour qu'il dormait, l'un de ses camarades se leva, détacha le cordon de son cou, l'attacha à son propre cou, souleva doucement Abarnakat pour retirer la couverture rouge, détacha l'âne, alla sous un arbre, étendit la couverture et attacha l'âne à son pied.
>
> Lorsque Abarnakat s'éveilla et qu'il vit cet homme, un cordon rouge attaché à son cou, l'âne attaché à son pied et lui-même couché sur la couverture

rouge, il dit : « Cette personne est Abarnakat ; et moi, qui suis-je ? » Et il se leva en pleurant."[9]

Because of a practical joke, identity confusion ensues. Abarnakat is forced to see himself as another. Mistaking himself for his doppelgänger, he finds himself in the position of an observer who, due to the painful sensation of losing his ego, begins to think critically about his subjectivity.

If Leiris sees Abarnakat's tale as "infiniment touchant," it is because he finds in it an inkling of what he believes is missing in the West. The story communicates a philosophical and scientific conception based on simple, theatrical optics, which bring us face-to-face with different aspects of our identity as they are perceived from outside of the immediate understanding of our ego. To be sure, Abarnakat's experience gives us a more tangible and concrete figure of the rather spectral illusion that seems to be taking place in the aqueous humors of the ethnographic eye. In this figure, the eye of the observer *decodes* a situation by forcing the viewer to approach it from a perspective which he was previously unable to access; it involves the same theatrics of an out-of-body experience, but without the risk of death. This notion, of course, is very close to the thinking of Freud's pupil, Otto Rank, who used ethnographic examples of what were then called "primitives" to explain psychoanalytic phenomena. In his essay "Narcissism and the Double," Rank explains this notion in a way that eerily prefigures Leiris's tale and, as we shall see, Leiris's experience in Africa. Rank writes that:

> [p]rimitive narcissism feels itself primarily threatened by the ineluctable destruction of the self. Very clear evidence of the truth of this observation is

[9] Michel Leiris, "L'Œil de l'ethnographe," op. cit., 416.

> shown by the choice, as the most primitive concept of the soul, of an image as closely similar as possible to the physical self, hence a true double. The idea of death, therefore, is denied by a duplication of the self incorporated in the shadow or in the reflected image.[10]

There is a term used to describe perspectival distortion in art which refers to an image or object within a painting that can only be detected when viewed askance. This is called an anamorphic object. *Anamorphosis*, more broadly, refers to a perspective that is present but cannot be perceived unless the viewer knows how to look. The notion of the double or doppelgänger is, as we shall continue to see, integral to Leiris's desire to travel and become *other*. However, another, more nuanced psychoanalytic reading can be made of the Abarnakat tale. This second reading is more focused on vocation and the mechanism of doubling that the voyage makes possible. At the center of this second reading is the figure of *anamorphosis,* or visual distortion.

Leiris's conception of the ethnographic voyage as an experience that allows us to step outside of our own subjectivity and see all the forces governing our own behavior and that of others (his notion of, effectively, 'selfless enchantment') follows an *anamorphic* logic. Specifically, I am thinking of the type of anamorphosis in which an entire distorted image is drawn so as to form a flat ring on a sheet of paper. In order to decode the image, a cylindrical mirror is placed in the center of the image. The hidden image appears in the cylinder. The symbolic logic of this figure is described by Jacques Lacan in his seventh seminar (1960-61) on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* to describe the complexity of our fantasies and illusions and the

[10] Otto Rank, "Narcissism and the Double," *Essential Papers on Literature and Psychoanalysis,* Emanuel Berman (ed.) (New York : New York University Press, 1993) 130.

way we cannot understand them until we step outside of ourselves. He uses the example of a Rubens painting reconfigured in the manner described below:

> Dans le domaine de l'illusion, le tableau de Rubens qui surgit à la place de l'image, dans ce miroir du cylindre de l'anamorphose, vous donne bien l'exemple de ce dont il s'agit. Il s'agit d'une façon analogique, anamorphique de retrouver, de réindiquer que ce que nous cherchons dans l'illusion est quelque chose où l'illusion elle-même en quelque sorte se transcende, se détruit en montrant qu'elle n'est là qu'en tant que signifiante. C'est ce qui rend et ce qui redonne éminemment la primauté au domaine, comme tel, du langage, où là nous n'avons affaire en tous les cas, et bel et bien, qu'au signifiant. C'est ce qui rend sa primauté—dans l'ordre des arts, pour tout dire—à la poésie.[11]

The anamorphic apparatus thus combines different strands of scientific rationality in order to allow an image of the sublime to appear. The image itself is very real, but it is, in effect, empty if we cannot understand that it is the result of many different apparatuses of culture, language and technology. Similarly, the ethnographic voyage allows for these two worlds—the rational and the enchanted—to collide.

We see this at play in the tale of Abarnakat, where, upon seeing himself from another angle, the young man begins to question how his self is constructed by his surroundings, and what it means to be an *other*. Thus, the cylinder, the eye of Abarnakat, of Rank, of the

[11] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VII: L'Éthique de la psychanalyse 1959-1960* (Paris: Seuil, 1986) 161-162.

ethnographer — they are all versions of what Leiris hopes an ethnographic perspective will accord him.

However, theory and practice are two different things. And Leiris's attempt to implement this anamorphic "Œil de l'ethnographe" during the Mission Dakar-Djibouti often leads to results that are more depressing than affirming. But if the quest, taken as a whole, is flawed, there must be elements of it that are not. How can we ascertain what can be salvaged from this experience? In small glimpses, Leiris's *journal de route* of the Mission, *L'Afrique fantôme* (published in 1934), gives inklings of what may be salvaged and lays the groundwork for a life thatseems to straddle the Kantian dialectic between duty and inclination that will come to characterize Leiris's unique style.

Pickwick's Reversal

"La Lecture ne doit pas être une communion mystique non plus qu'une masturbation, mais un compagnage."
— J.-P. Sartre, *Situations II* (1948)

Leiris's difficulty in *L'Afrique fantôme* is that his desire for the sacred and his desire to be an ethical scientist are at odds — and it is the *anamorphic* ethnographer's eye (as he himself conceived of it) that reveals this to him. Interestingly, however, it is first and foremost the act of reading that functions as Leiris's anamorphic mirror. That is to say, he reads himself in the books

he has brought along with him and in journal entries of his own that he rereads. Indeed, there seems to be something about reading on the road that makes this newfound awareness possible.

Reflections related to the books one brings along while traveling is a relatively common trope in travel journals, although it is one that Leiris criticizes at the outset of *L'Afrique fantôme*. He takes issue with the long essayistic passages in Gide's *Voyage au Congo* devoted to essayistic reflections on the works of Milton, Bossuet and Goethe that Gide brought along on the trip, arguing that they distracted the reader from Gide's powers of observation. However, as Leiris's journey proceeds, he comes to accept the practice as critically important, acknowledging that reading provides a structure within which one can think more critically and objectively about one's role as a traveler. The books one takes along on a trip act as a reflective, esthetic lens through which one can better understand them.[12] In other words, they function as reflexive and anamorphic eyes. In them, literature and ethnography come together.

For Leiris, the convergence of books and travel occurs a little more than a year into the Mission Dakar-Djibouti, when he and his travel companions find themselves in limbo as they wait for permission to enter Abyssinia (Ethiopia) from then Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Each member of the mission attempts to cope with his or her boredom in various ways.[13] Leiris copes through the good graces of onanism, and also through the company of an eclectic collection of

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[12] Leiris is forced to admit that the transformation he was seeking is slower than previously thought: "le voyage ne nous change que par moments. La plupart du temps vous restez tristement pareil à ce que vous aviez toujours été. Je m'en rends comptes en constatant que très souvent Schæffner et moi avons des conversations sur des sujets littéraires ou esthétiques." (*AF,* 225) In other words, it seems the role of literature and esthetics is that they counteract disappointment about the failure of the revelation to appear.

[13] I say "his or her" because there was one woman on the Mission. Deborah Lipschitz, who would later die in Auschwitz, joined the Mission in Ethiopia.

books delivered to the customhouse in the border town of Gedaref. He mentions two volumes in particular: his 'Bible, an early English anthropology manual entitled *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*,[14] and another book that catches his eye, Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers*. While *Notes and Queries* has a practical part to play, *Pickwick* strikes a more intimate chord with Leiris, and serves as both an ethnographic and a literary manual — a loyal travel companion. When he finally finishes the last volume of *Pickwick*, he begins to note its relevance to his present trip, characterizing Dickens's novel as having formed a "[c]urieuse coupure" in his journey and in his "état d'esprit au cours de ce voyage"(*AF*, 302) and explaining that reading Pickwick has the effect of doubling

> l'espèce d'entr'acte constitué, sur le plan matériel, par le séjour au Soudan anglo-égyptien. Cela correspond peut-être aussi à un retour de ma part à cette très ancienne et banale opinion, que les aventures au milieu desquelles on se démène

[14] See Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991 [1934]) 309.
This book provides Leiris with more fodder for literary thought than one might think. Its evocations of dreams and terrain lead him to think thematically about the sacred associations of the four elements and their impact on the formation of his own ego. In order to understand the role of this interpretative form of travel, Leiris, still on the Ethiopian border, begins to consider how his own travels measure up to the "grand theme légendaire du voyage et à ce qui s'y rattache." (*AF*, 389) He comes up with a list: chief for him among these tales is that of "Œdipe tuant son père au cours d'un voyage lointain," which has avatars in each "révélation que l'initié reçoit toujours au loin (dans l'antiquité : Moïse, Pythagore, Apollonius de Tyane, Jésus-Christ, etc…chez les primitifs : découvertes techniques ou mystiques, qui toujours se font en brousse) […]" (*AF*, 389)

Once again, the ability to interpret one's own actions is made possible by the distance travel creates. Indeed, Leiris mentions that his favorite tale is that of "l'homme qui s'en va de chez lui et, quand il revient, ne reconnaît personne, ayant plus de 100 ans." (*AF*, 390) For old Rip Van Winkle, the act of travel preserves the traveler's life in a past bubble, fixing it as though it were an old tale or text ready for interpretation.

avec les bras et les jambes ne sont pas forcément plus excitantes que celles qui se déroulent dans la tête. (*AF,* 302)

This *coupure,* or *entracte,* or *caesura* in Leiris's trip is intriguing because it suggests that esthetics are capable of revealing a hidden structure that remains invisible in everyday life — just like the eye of the ethnographer he had theorized a year before. The question remains, though, as to why *Pickwick* serves as the source of this *coupure*. The answer to this question is fairly complex. To begin, *Pickwick's* relevance is due, in large part, to its basic plot, which recounts the misadventures of its eponymous picaresque antihero, an industrialist who comically abuses those on the lower rungs of mid-19th century London society. Dickens's narrative tone also provides the key to understanding the book's importance. In *Pickwick,* Dickens introduces a critical distance between the reader and the acts perpetrated by his protagonist, arguably guiding the reader toward a critical view of industrial society and its more well-off denizens.

Leiris's encounter with *Pickwick* in Gedaref, then, is the beginning of the book's functioning as an anamorphic apparatus; the plot of Pickwick resonates with Leiris, leading him to glance once more at earlier moments of the Mission recorded in his journal. His eye is particularly drawn to his and Marcel Griaule's picaresque abuses of colonial subjects in Mali and Dahomey, where they 'collected" tribal artifacts for the future Musée de l'homme. More often than not, these *collectes* consist of procuring sacred objects from ethnographic subjects through a calculated series of elaborate thefts, not unlike the ruses described in *Pickwick*. The most 'pickwickian' of these involve Leiris and Griaule stealing *konos*—masks used in blood rites—from villages in Mali. The thefts succeed one another in an almost burlesque fashion: an *ur-kono theft* in one village is followed, the next day, by a repeat heist only a few kilometers down the

road. With Griaule going in for the hat-trick, the following day brings another theft, and the next day another, and another, and so on. As he continues in this trajectory, Leiris begins to read himself as Pickwick, seeing the architecture underpinning his experience. He sees himself as an *other* abusing *others* and begins to change his stance on ethnography's relationship to more nefarious practices of colonialism, partly in light of his position as an individual seeking the sublime. In Leiris's analysis of the *kono* heist, we see an ugly conflict between Leiris's desire for sublime knowledge and his desire to be a moral and rational individual. There is excitement in unwrapping the mask he and Griaule have absconded with when they reveal that the day's haul is, in fact, a sacred object "entièrement recouvert d'une croûte de sang coagulé qui lui confère la majesté que le sang confère à toutes choses." (*AF,* 104) However, whereas he first sees the mask as a magical object retaining a vital and uncanny value of potential sacredness, the object's ethereal aura soon fades: the next day, upon rereading his journal he finds himself shocked at "l'énormité de ce que nous [members of the Mission] commettons." (*AF,* 105)

This disconnect between experience in the moment and retrospective reflection is an aspect of the "coupure curieuse" mentioned earlier. The observer is taken out of a situation of sacred role play and made to see that his desire for the sacred mirrors that of Leiris himself, which, in turn, shows him, much like Abarnakat, a vision of himself he was not expecting to encounter. In the *anamorphosis* of the ethnographic eye, the viewer always catches a glimpse of himself, and he may not always like what he sees. Leiris realizes here that the ethnographer's true eye is rooted in a problematic, *scopic desire* — while his drive to travel might be dressed up as a noble, ethnographic pursuit, it is rooted in a desire to see and appropriate the other for his own self-gratification and edification. This realization, in turn, sours his experience of the sacred;

as a result, he begins to look for another sort of voyage in which he might commune with the sacred, rather than pillage it.

*   *   *

The role of *Pickwick* in *L'Afrique fantôme* should not be underestimated, for it is a continuation of this fascination with doubles and doppelgängers. However, little has been made of the significance of Leiris's reading *Pickwick* in Africa. Most critics mention *Pickwick* as a footnote, along with the other texts Leiris reads on the trip, like *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (which resonates with him because of his sexual problems), *Queries on Anthropology*, etc. However, *Pickwick* enacts a practice of anamorphic bibliomancy that reveals more about the voyage that one might think. Indeed, throughout *L'Afrique fantôme*, we find other evocations of this anamorphic vision that mimic *Pickwick*. In looking at these other 'mirror events,' the problems of using ethnography as a means of communing with the sublime become more acute. Leiris begins to realize that the position of the ethnographer carries with it another cruel paradox: while ethnography allows one to become aware of the hidden enchantment of the world, it places a methodological barrier in the path of anyone wishing to commune with it. For example, the introduction to this study already mentioned the episode in which Leiris, traveling through Dahomey, is shocked when he sees photographs taken a few weeks before, a *drôle de mirage*.

Leiris continues to document this separation and doubling throughout *L'Afrique fantôme.* For example, in one instance, while still in Dahomey, he begins writing a "projet de Préface" for the eventual publication of his field notes. As he drafts the preface, he reiterates what he had first

set out in "L'Œil de l'ethnographe," but prefaces this opinion with a caveat. According to the new thesis he drafts, it is by exploring one's own "subjectivité (portée à son paroxysme) qu'on touche à l'objectivité. Plus simplement: écrivant subjectivement j'augmente la valeur de mon témoignage, en montrant qu'à chaque instant je sais à quoi m'en tenir sur ma valeur comme témoin." (*AF*, 263) The subject enunciating this "témoignage" is no longer the "I" of the traveler, but rather a projection, an anamorphic doppelgänger. Ironically, this makes an objective enterprise into a subjective one, in which ethnographic observers try to "toucher de plus en plus près à l'objectivité," all the while remaining "toujours des observateurs, c'est-à-dire situés en pleine *subjectivité*." (*AF*, 210) It is important here to try and untangle this complex reversal of terms: what Leiris is saying, essentially, is that the *objective* stance required of the ethnographer actually requires one to remain trapped in one's own subjectivity. This is not desirable because Leiris seeks to look at things objectively so as to erase his subjectivity — to touch (*toucher)* or become an object not his own (*l'objectivité*).

The inability to partake in what this new perspective reveals bears down on Leiris, ultimately culminating in an angry refrain: "[a]mertume. Ressentiment contre l'ethnographie, qui fait prendre cette position si inhumaine d'observateur, dans des circonstances où il faudrait s'abandonner." (*AF,* 433) Ethnography frustrates Leiris because its methodology is fundamentally incompatible with a desire to participate and find a means of overcoming his inability to directly express, and thus sublimate, problems of sexual and intellectual impotence. More specifically, it is ethnography's insistence on physical distance and its injunction against intimacy that clash with Leiris's desire to *touch* and commune with his subjects, and thus to take leave of his ego (*s'abandonner*). We might begin to understand the power of this contradiction

by returning to the observations of Séan Hand, who suggests that Adrien Borel, Leiris's psychoanalyst, "was perhaps well-suited to bridge the gap between Leiris's surrealist and ethnographic interests in ecstatic self-loss, on the one hand, and his contradictory need to recover and retain the basis for self-identity and expression on the other, the latter rendered pathological by the Surrealist goal of unmediated unity."[15] Hand's argument brilliantly provides a contextual basis for understanding Leiris's frustration as he concedes, in *L'Afrique fantôme,* that social sciences are merely a fool's errand, an attempt "de toucher de plus en plus près à *l'objectivité*."

There is, here, a tragedy in the making.[16] It is true that the voyage as a method of self-reflection allows Leiris to travel outside of himself and develop what James Clifford correctly identified as a natural "enunciative position" from which one can critique oneself. According to Clifford, Leiris's enunciative position is characterized by two tendencies. First, Leiris is "preoccupied with the kind of narrative [he] is collecting[;]" both that of his subject and of himself. Secondly, Clifford suggests that in *L'Afrique fantôme* we see Leiris asking himself "[w]hich of all the possible enunciative positions should the reluctant historian adopt and which avoid? How not write the travelogue, the adventure story, the *grand reportage*, the utopia, the pilgrimage, the ecstatic (or ironic) access to wisdom, the ethnographic fable of rapport, the humanist rite of passage, the scientific myth of discovery."[17] While I believe that there is less intention in Leiris's process than Clifford appears to believe, he does effectively show, in these lines, that the Mission Dakar-Djibouti becomes the particular travel text that Leiris needs; it

[15] Séan Hand, op. cit., 53.
[16] And this is not a bad thing, as Leiris, throughout his life, is obsessed with tragic opera. Often, he imagines himself and the women in his life as famous tragic villains, heros, and heroines like Carmen, Holopherne, Judith, etc.
[17] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) 170.

allows him to transform his own experiences into literary representations that he can later read and interpret, in the hope of finding that a sublime revelation has occurred.

As he attempts to pen the preface to his travels, Leiris again begins to ask himself the question of what it is he is seeking in travel and ethnography. The revelation is that the process is not merely about coming to a better understanding of himself and his desires, but rather a desire to experience the enchantment (or, in the examples we have seen, *the sacred*) that he believes is dead in his little life as a Parisian. The questions that he begins to pose in the previous examples are the seeds of what will become the moral preoccupation of Leiris's writing: How can the traveler touch or attain what he desires, yet remain within ethical limits? How can travel allow one to bridge this gap, this distance, to touch yet at the same time remain rational and respectful? How does one negotiate desire for the other and for enchantment with an equally strong desire to respect the autonomy of the other? Moreover, and more importantly, to what extent does Leiris's method of approaching and touching the other and the sacred (in travel) become, for him, an enchanted pathway into writing?

Frôlements: Negotiating Touch

"Nous prêtons à l'existence, avec une étourderie puérile, la possibilité (le caractère possible), que tout à la fin contredit : c'est le résultat, c'est le postulat du travail. Quand je ris ou quand je jouis l'impossible est devant moi. Je suis heureux mais chaque chose est impossible."
—Georges Bataille[18]

To better understand this problem of touch, it is best to return to the metaphor of the mirror. The anamorphic mirror, as we've seen, is the symbol of what Leiris both desires and comes to deplore in ethnography. He is allowed to see the enchantment of both an *other* world and of himself as an *other* who is part of this world. However, he remains removed from the sacrality of this experience. How can one bridge the barrier of the mirror so that the *pays de merveilles* of the enchanted world can be experienced, not as an afterthought but at the moment in which it occurs? What, in other words, is the liminal touch of the mirror's reflective surface that allows both insight and experience of the enchanted world?

A clearer theorization of this mirror problem appears in Leiris's writing a few years later in his 1938 text on bullfighting, *Miroir de la Tauromachie*. This text, a dissection of the symbology and psychology of the Spanish *corrida de toros*, or bullfight, addresses many of the

[18] Georges Bataille, *Méthode de méditation, George Bataille, Œuvres complètes*, vol. 5 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970) 209.

questions posed above. The connection between this text and the problems raised by *L'Afrique fantôme* becomes apparent upon a simple glance at the work. To begin with the title, we should take note that the word *miroir* means to place this book within the genre of the medieval *speculum* (Latin for mirror). The *speculum* was a compendium written on a single subject. Leiris is a great fan of this style of writing, something Michel Beaujour points out in his book *Miroirs d'encre*, going to great lengths to show the connection between Leiris's autobiographical texts (his 'autoportraits' like *L'Âge d'homme* and *La Règle du jeu*) and the medieval *speculum*. Beaujour describes this mirror as an oblique perspective, from which the writer sees his "identité à lui-même du sujet écrivant."[19] Similar to his theory of the *eye of the ethnographer,* in these mirrored texts, Leiris creates a microcosm of himself in the mirror of his own writing. It allows him to see and know himself in a number of settings. However, there is the risk that this type of experience is not lived viscerally enough — that it remains an experience without contact, or touch. This is the problem Leiris begins to tackle when he turns his attention to bullfighting.

In *Miroir de la Tauromachie,* Leiris offers us a meditation on risk and touch — the bull is merely brushed by the cape in the closing faenas; the animal cannot be touched until it is killed, until it loses its vital sacrality. The animal must lose its stature as an image and become a banal, dead body. Leiris considers this transformation to be an enchanted experience — as he explains:

> Cette beauté tout idéale, intemporelle, comparable seulement à l'harmonie des astres, est en relation de contact, de *frôlement*, de menace constants avec la catastrophe du taureau, sorte de monstre ou de corps étranger, qui tend à se

[19] Michel Beaujour, *Miroirs d'encre* (Paris: Seuil, 1988).

> précipiter au mépris de toutes règles, comme un chien renversant les quilles d'un jeu bien aligné telles les idées platoniciennes.[20]

Here, Leiris reiterates his contention that touch (or semi-touch), or physical communion with the other, is what leads to a sensation and an experience of enchantment. However, he begins to modify his position slightly by recasting the idea of touch as *frôlement* — a proxy of touch that, it would seem, is spectral and liminal enough to bridge the dialectics Leiris so despises and connect the parallax views seen by the ethnographer's eye. As the passage from *Miroir de la Tauromachie* continues, Leiris begins to develop a concept *frôlement* as a means of *brushing up against* the sacred or the enchanted. He sees this practice of *light touch* as being present in the bullfight, somewhere between past and present, convergence and avoidance, tangency and penetration:

> Il n'y aurait encore là que contraste, opposition, si la passe ne se présentait elle aussi comme une espèce de tangence, ou convergence immédiatement suivie d'une divergence (approche du *torero* par le taureau, puis séparation de l'homme et de la bête, à laquelle l'étoffe indique la « sorte »), à cela près que le contact, à l'instant même où il va se produire, est évité de justesse, au moyen d'une déviation imposée à la trajectoire du taureau ou d'une esquive : léger écart de l'homme, simple torsion de son corps, sorte de gauchissement qu'il fait subir à sa beauté froidement géométrique, comme s'il n'avait d'autre moyen d'éviter le maléfice du taureau que de se l'incorporer en partie, par l'acte d'imprimer à sa

[20] *Miroir de la Tauromachie*, *L'Âge d'homme précédé de l'Afrique fantôme* (Paris: Gallimard, "La bibliothèque de la Pléiade," 2014) 966. The italics are mine.

personne quelque chose de légèrement sinistre, -- jouant sur le mot : par l'acte littéral de *se gauchir*.[21]

Here, *frôlement* transforms into *l'acte littéral de se gauchir,* which might amount to a notion of a touch that is not quite touch, but rather a constant desire to bridge a distance; a desire to keep approaching what one desires, *à la* Zeno's paradox, even though we know it cannot be grasped. The very act implies that such liminal touch is awkward or clumsy; the individual who seeks this sort of action is relegated to being *gauchi* — walking on the wrong, sinister path, almost in a ritualized manner. Why would one risk this awkward and dark turn, this *gauchissement*? What we see here is partly an effort on Leiris's part to retrospectively make up for his the disappointment he experienced during his travels in Africa. The notion of *frôlement,* barely developed here, is the beginning of Leiris's long attempt, in his writing, to understand how, through literary thought and physical action, he might find an awkward gait (*gauchissement*) that will give him a physical inkling (*frôlement*) of the sublime. Indeed, this is what Leiris attempted to discover with the Mission Dakar-Djibouti. His failure and disappointment lead, in his later writings and travels, to this stylized attempt to rethink and redeem his earlier trip.

To better understand this strategy of negotiation, we should dig deeper into this notion of risk and *frôlement*. We can proceed in this endeavor by taking a look at another text Leiris wrote on bullfighting, "De la littérature considérée comme une tauromachie." This text, a comparison between the writer and the matador in a *corrida de toros*, appeared as Leiris's preface to the 1946 republication of *L'Âge d'homme*. The title, "De la littérature considérée comme une tauromachie," is a reference to Thomas De Quincey's *De l'assassinat considéré comme un des*

[21] Ibid., same page.

beaux-arts, a satirical novella in the guise of an essay with a speaker who, as the title suggests, dissects infamous murders and shows their esthetic value. Leiris's text is similarly slightly satirical in its take on how physical risk and engagement might be achieved through the aesthetics of literary prose; however, he does make a very serious point. He is aware that, though the writer may risk social or political ostracization or mental torment for his writings, he never risks his life in the same way a combatant does; the writer doesn't approach death, the sublime unknown, in the same way.[22] But though he may not come close to risking his life, he still has *brushes* with danger. These brushes are necessary because they give him a *frisson* of pleasure—a racing heartbeat, a flushing of the cheeks—that turns into poetic flights. As he writes in "De la littérature considerée comme une tauromachie," he only seeks danger as it appears in literature, as "l'ombre de la corne du taureau." In other words, to touch the shadow of risk with the tip of one's fingers is to risk the physical minimum. "L'ombre de la corne," a brush with the bull's horn (or "le bout de l'oreille," as Leiris calls it in *Fibrilles*), represents the bare minimum of contact with the sublime that is necessary to stimulate a sensation of enchantment.

More plainly put, the risks Leiris seeks in travel and ethnography (and other risk-related travels, like his military service and political trips to China) are conceived of as brushes with the bull's horns from the stands above the *toril*. These are the awkward *brushes*, the *frôlement* of enchantment that gives Leiris an inkling of danger. They are the bare minimum amount of physical risk needed to experience enchantment. Perhaps what this line of thought intimates is that, with regards to physical touch, a writer or traveler can only brush against the sublime. Only

[22] See "Entretiens avec Michel Leiris (1967)," *Michel Leiris ou de l'autobiographie considérée comme un art*, Philippe Lejeune, Claude Leroy and Catherine Maubon (eds.), (Paris: Presses Univ. de Paris X, 2004) 219-220.

a minimally physical, erotic *frôlement* with the sublime is necessary for an active, imaginary leap from the ego to take place.[23]

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Thus, I would argue the figure of *frôlement* is the key to Leiris's negotiation between a desire for sublime enchantment through physical contact and a desire to remain rational and at a distance. To better understand the word and how it functions, we need to look at how it develops in the course of Leiris's work and his reflections on travel in *La Règle du jeu* and (to a lesser extent) in *L'Afrique fantôme*.

For example, in *L'Afrique fantôme,* there is a scene in which an inability to touch leads to severe depression. The trigger is his colleague, Éric Lutten (with whom he often quarreled), who remarks that he fancies—"et il l'a dit comme s'il l'a déjà fait!" —sleeping with Emawayish, the daughter of the *zar* priestess Malkam Ayyahou, whom Leiris, despite vehement denials in his journal, has come to fetishize. Lutten's comments destroy Leiris's moral universe and renascent sense of virility. Instead, they lead to an acute return to poetic and aesthetic invention, born out

[23] This approach also mimics an approach to the experience of death, the ultimate enchantment or "vertige de rester suspendu en plein milieu d'une crise dont ma disparition m'empêchera, au grand jamais, de connaître le dénouement." (*AH,* 85) Here, death and risk enter more plainly as experiences attainable through literary practice. Indeed, the experience of approaching death, Leiris writes in *L'Âge d'homme*, can only be brushed up against in acts that approximate it poorly. As examples of approximations, he cites writing, traveling and lovemaking — which he concludes may very well be "le seul moyen dont nous disposons d'en faire un tant soit peu l'expérience [de la mort], car […] nous savons au moins ce qui se passé *après* et pouvons être le témoin—d'ailleurs amer—du désastre consécutif." (*AH,* 87)

of a feeling of insecurity, and the revelation that action and science have not resulted in sufficient contact:

> [J]e ne suis pas amoureux de cette fille, je ne la désire pas non plus. Pourtant les paroles de Lutten me déchirent, car elles me font toucher ma plaie, toujours bien là, malgré que j'ai cru durant plusieurs mois que le voyage, la vie active, l'avaient effacée : impossibilité de me contenter comme les autres, de traiter les choses de l'amour nonchalamment, impossibilité même de jouir, faculté seulement de m'inventer de prestigieux tourments. (*AF,* 443-44)

Leiris wants to experience a sense of erotic enchantment, to break through barriers of contact that seemed impenetrable in Europe. However, he cannot find a means of ethical contact with the other that would allow him to experience the enchantment he seeks to explore. His anger with Lutten, then, stems from the perceived ease with which Lutten can give himself over to a casual sexual tryst and therefore experience the enchantment Leiris is seeking.

Leiris's inaction at this moment becomes a source of disappointment, leading him to the conclusion that: "Si j'avais couché avec Emawayish, sait-on jamais? Je l'aurais peut-être fait jouir…" (*AF*, 587) We might translate this remark into a crucial question Leiris seems to ask himself: Had I slept with Emawayish, would I have found the experience of enchantment I am seeking? Immediately, he is ashamed for even entertaining this past conditional. Indeed, his implied answer appears to be that had he slept with her and had he brought her to climax, he probably still would not have found the sublimation he was seeking. He would still have been missing something. However, Emawayish becomes, for Leiris, a possibility, an emblem of the

possibility of touch. He retains this memory in a sacred erotic symbol used in his journals: Ǝ, for Emawayish, a sign of touch and intimate sublimation of self.

Oddly, a parallel episode arises a few years later, while Leiris is in North Africa, and concerns his liaison with a prostitute named Khadidja during his military service. He recounts this in the third chapter of Fourbis (the second tome of *La Règle du jeu*), "Vois! Déjà l'ange..." Here, Leiris addresses this notion that sexual intercourse, when complete, doesn't necessarily constitute a complete revelation. Khadidja quickly becomes an ideal, sublime presence with whom he desires to live "sans restriction, ce qui pourrait être vécu[,]" — a sense of intense longing and *living* that means giving one's entire being to a situation. (*Fo,* 150)[24] But he soon returns home and the event is lived as though it were a masturbatory hallucination: at once "grandiose" and "raté." (*AF*, 303) While the event brings him closer to the sublime, the object of desire fades away, leaving doubt as to whether the revelation served any function at all. What these scenes illustrate is the power of *frôlement.* This bare minimum, this touching with the "bout des doigts," contains an intimation of the sublimation promised by death. Through these physical acts of touch (no matter how light or tangential), the possibility of imagining sublimation reenters language, the mirror through which Leiris represents doubles of himself.

More directly, the word *frôlement* also appears later in Leiris's writing. We find a reference, for example, in "Les Tablettes sportives," the second chapter of *Fourbis.* "Les Tablettes sportives" is a chapter rooted in Leiris's obsession with the elusiveness of masculinity. It is a hodge-podge of reminiscences related to sports and his time in the army. The first half of

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[24] Michel Leiris, *Fourbis* (Paris: Gallimard "L'imaginaire," 1954). Cited in the text as *Fo*.

the essay deals with his childhood shortcomings in gymnastics lessons and other sports, whereas the second part deals with Leiris's experiences as a would-be-warrior in the *drôle de guerre*, where, instead of fighting on the front lines, he found himself testing chemical artillery on sheep in the Sahara. Looking back on these experiences, he trains a sharp critical eye on the way fear renders him unable to experience the enchanted rush of endorphins that many find in sport and combat. Indeed, he ridicules his wartime experience, saying that he doesn't even have the right to say that he went to war, as "il m'est tout juste permis d'en dire que j'ai connu certain de ses aspects les plus anodins." (*Fo*, 153) This negativity leads to a more revealing self-indictment for having avoided combat, only risking (and barely, at that) to "*frôler*, occasionnellement, le danger […]" (*Fo*, 153) Here, in this *anodyne* brush with danger, we begin to understand how this brushing-up-against functions. The use of the infinitive *frôler* evokes a desire for a slight sensation that one can detect with "les bouts de doigts." This small palpation, this brush, is powerful because it mitigates disappointment, if only momentarily. It intimates the possibility of becoming something *other* than oneself, gaining qualities one lacks and sharing in an experience that is alien to the self. The notion is so powerful that Leiris repeats it further down the page, calling this brushing "[c]e péril jamais que frôlé," which, despite being somewhat shameful, suffices. (*Fo,* 153)

We begin to see here that some real physical act, some form of movement or travel, is necessary for literary thought to take flight. This is a key prerequisite for Leiris to experience a sense of enchantment. One must forge a tactile memory of having come into contact with a possibility of otherness, as a way of communing with an experience of the sacred. *Frôlement,* then, signifies both a process of writing, and a desire to touch and penetrate that which is either

forbidden or impossible, which is very close to what Freud called a *délire à toucher* — an obsessive "attitude towards a single object, or rather towards one act in connection with that object."[25] A *frôlement* is a simple act, a physical sacrifice that is necessary so that one might partake of and experience this enchantment which delights the mind and allows it to take flight in poetic representation. Indeed, throughout Leiris's work, even the slightest touch enables a simple *délire* to blossom into a full-blown sacred experience, which he can then write about.

* * *

What we begin to realize is that *frôlement* is a stand-in for the inability to fulfill an endeavor. It is, as we've mentioned, the proxy of penetration, the minimum amount of contact needed so that the imagination can do the rest. It is a negotiation, a clever solution to Leiris's perceived inability to *go all the way* in a physical or intellectual endeavor, both out of fear and respect for the other. This perceived inability haunts him throughout his life and is what served as his initial impetus to travel. Indeed, the phrase "tu n'oses pas aller jusqu'au bout" appears over and over again in Leiris's works. It is related to his feelings of being inadequate, unadventurous,

[25] Cf. Sigmund Freud 38: Freud, in *Totem and Taboo,* opines that the desire to touch and the taboo of touching arise due to the admonishment of the child who desires to touch their own genitals. For Freud, this conflicted desire is the basis of the *délire de toucher*, "the subject's *ambivalent* attitude towards a single object, or rather towards one act in connection with that object." The relation to this fetishized thing or person, or part of a person, spurs the individual to think constantly about touching. They suffer for constantly wanting to touch what is supposed to be untouchable (one's genitals, the other, etc.) "but […] detest[…] it as well," leading to a confusion of desires wherein "[t]he conflict between these two currents cannot be promptly settled because—there is no other way of putting it—they are localized in the subject's mind in such a manner that they cannot come up against each other. The prohibition is noisily conscious, while the persistent desire to touch is unconscious and the subject knows nothing of it. If it were not for this psychological factor, an ambivalence like this could neither last so long nor lead to such consequences."

and emasculated. The phrase has its origins in an insult Leiris carried with him his entire life. He describes the incident in *Fourbis,* writing "Il y avait des années que je ressaisis cette phrase *Tu n'oses pas aller jusqu'au bout de tes désirs* que m'avait dite autrefois un homme auquel me liait une amitié passionnée […]" (*Fo,* 203) In fact, the insult was leveled by Marcel Jouhandeau, after Leiris refused to go beyond their one-time homosexual experience.[26] Both Leiris and Jouhandeau were acolytes of Max Jacob, who encouraged their friendship. Because of this association, the notion of not being able to *go all the way* in committing to a sexual identity (be it a hetero-masculinity, a form of queerness, or something other) also becomes an aspersion cast on Leiris's intellect and poetic ability.

The idea that travel could serve as a bare minimum of physical risk or a stand-in allowing Leiris to experience the ecstasy of *going all the way* is not mere conjecture. In fact, it is well documented in many texts, not the least a scene at the end of *L'Afrique fantôme*. The day after Christmas in 1932, Leiris writes about suffering from a "cafard effroyable" while contemplating his imminent return to both conjugal life and a politically turbulent Europe. Mired in this depressive state, he takes stock of all the "ratages" of his life—"actes manqués, aventures manquées, coïts manqués"—and complains that his trip didn't help him overcome any of his problems involving physical contact, communication and virility.

To lift his spirits, he sketches out an idea for a short story featuring a character along the lines of Joseph Conrad's anti-hero Axel Heyst from the 1915 novel *Victory*. Heyst, in *Victory,* is a sexually virile and violent man living in colonial Jakarta who is accused of a murder he didn't commit (the deceased expired from cholera). As this wrongful accusation weighs on him, Heyst

[26] See *Journal :* 1922-1989, Jean Jamin (ed.) (Paris: Gallimard, 1992) 35.

falls into despair and ends up committing suicide. Leiris dreams up an alternate version of *Victory* with an avatar of himself as its anti-hero. Instead of a virile and dangerous anti-hero, Leiris's Heyst is riddled with sexual anxieties and insecurities, and, in a chiasmatic reversal of Conrad's plot, Leiris's Heyst doesn't commit suicide, but rather is the first to die when cholera erupts in the colony. However, the would-be ethnographer's hypothetical *Victory* parody does not end here. His Heyst, it turns out, left behind a *journal intime* in which Heyst's doctor learns of the anti-hero's inner-life and neuroses — all of which mirror Leiris's own. Chief among these is Heyst's lament "de n'être jamais arrivé à considérer le coït autrement que comme « une chose tragique »" which leads to the protagonist's diary echoing Leiris's biggest fear, "de ne pas avoir toujours eu le courage *d'aller jusqu'au bout de ses désirs*."[27] [28] (*AF*, 620)

In this second anamorphic mirror that Leiris creates of himself, his thoughts on these notions of incompleteness allow him to posit a new way of thinking about success. According to this line of thought, failed attempts to "go all the way" might be viewed as intimations (*frôlements*) of a sublime *eros*. Leiris essentially introduces the notion that what is *incomplete* may already be sufficient. It's interesting to note that this premise is quite similar to the one Bataille describes in the book he dedicated to Leiris, *L'Érotisme*. Speculating on the rite and right of sacred touch in ancient societies, Bataille surmises that there may have existed castes of individuals who had

> de quelque manière un caractère souverain, qui les fît échapper à l'interdit frappant généralement l'espèce humain. Le sacerdoce désignait en principe ceux qui devaient

[27] The italics are mine.
[28] See *L'Afrique fantôme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981) 298. Leiris says that his fear of complete coitus is due to his accute *malthusianisme.*

> posséder la première fois la fiancée […] L'activité sexuelle, s'il s'agissait du moins d'établir un premier contact, était évidemment tenue pour interdite, et dangereuse, s'il n'était la force possédée par le souverain, par le prêtre, de toucher sans trop de risques aux choses sacrées.[29]

Likewise, Leiris can be seen as striving to attain the sovereignty necessary for touch beyond the realm of possibility. However, if Leiris's *coïts* remain incomplete, and if he never has the revelations he seeks, we might surmise this is part of his desire to preserve the sacred. As a result, he never can truly go *jusqu'au bout*.

"Le Toucher" and the Theatre of Touch

To conclude this discussion of *frôlement* as a means of escaping embarrassment and experiencing a sacred sense of transport through a proxy of minimal touch, I would like to add that Leiris offers a way of thinking here that prefigures that of many post-modern thinkers. Namely, his idea that the slightest inkling of physicality heightens poetic exploration appears in the 1980s in the works of thinkers like Jean-Luc Nancy. Nancy's work questions the necessity of gesture, touch, and physicality in communicating across interpersonal boundaries and in reaching toward ideal objects of desire. In particular, he gives an apt definition of how writing and touch are related to distance in his book *Corpus*:

> «Écriture» veut dire : non la monstration, ni la démonstration d'une signification, mais un geste pour *toucher* au *sens*. Un toucher, un tact qui est comme une

[29] Georges Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, *Œuvres Complètes,* vol. 10 (Paris: Gallimard, 1987) 111.

> adresse : celui qui écrit ne touche pas sur le mode de la saisie, de la prise en main […], mais il touche sur le mode de s'adresser, de s'envoyer *à* la touché d'un dehors, d'un dérobé, d'un écarté, d'un espacé. Sa touche même et qui est bien *sa* touche, lui est dans le principe retirée, espacée, écartée. Elle *est* : qu'advienne le contact étranger, l'étranger restant étranger dans le contact (restant *dans* le contact)… [30]

What we call *frôlement* is quite similar to Nancy's *toucher.* They are both synonyms for the act of writing (*écriture*), or, more precisely, an act of pre-writing that ignites all é*criture*. Nancy's *touchér*, then, is a gesture which reaches toward the most intimate point of communion and communication possible between two parties. Ironically, though, the contact between the toucher and 'touch-ee' is never more than an asymptotic brush. It is a touch that continues to touch the sacredness of the other, but nevertheless remains at the infinite limit of contact, while Zeno and his paradox mock it from the shadows. However, such a concept of touch as liminal communication allows an individual to straddle the divide of subject and object, and, in parallax, inspire an imagination of the self as an-*other* by means of a simple desire to be on the other side.[31]

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[30] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Éditions Métailie, 2000) 19.

[31] Likewise, Leiris, in *La Règle du jeu,* describes his writing process in terms similar to Nancy's notion of writing as *"restant dans le contact."* Leiris notices that a minimum of touch allows for poetic exploration and the emergence of a corporality in his writing. Stylistically, even his sentences mimic this ability to explore a risky experience fully through writing; they meander down and across pages as though his thoughts were going back on themselves, questioning their capacity to successfully communicate. But in spite of this knotted style, Leiris rarely loses sight of the goal of his phrases. The hesitations, which form the myriad dependent clauses, never detract from the thought or desire expressed. Each sentence, as if by a miracle, comes to a conclusion and finishes with either a period or another finalizing mark of punctuation. He hits his

Nancy, in the passage cited above, also evokes the theatrical aspect of these minimal gestures one exerts to *"toucher au sens."* Later in his life, Leiris will also come to the realization that the cathartic and healing nature of gesture is rooted in a theatrical form of therapeutic meditation. Surprisingly, Leiris has his first experiences with this form of theatrical *toucher* during the Mission Dakar-Djibouti; at the time, however, he is not able to express it. The scene I have in mind occurs when the author attempts to experience enchantment by interacting with the Ethiopian *zar* cult and its priestess, Malkam Ayyahou. In the cult, Malkam Ayyahou's sacred theater, members go into trances in order to become invisible *djinn* or *zars* (they participate in theatrics which might offer laypeople a vision of the negotiations that constantly occur between the myriad forces of the unseen world).

It is, in fact, light physical *touch* that allows the *zar* practitioner to enter into this healing trance. Malkam Ayyahou's touch allows an individual to be overtaken by a *zar*. She is like a theater director, telling each individual which role they are to play. Leiris's involvement with Malkam's *toucher* takes him past Nancy's asymptotic touch—albeit in an illusory fashion—and invites him (and other members of the Mission) to participate as "membres de la secte […] des affidés." Malkam, for example, heals the Mission's guide, Abba Jérôme, "en lui tirant sur tous les doigts successivement jusqu'à ce que'ils craquent, lui massant la gorge, lui embrassant la

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marks and goes on to the bitter end. And though he sometimes rebukes his writing—criticizing it as "[t]outes mes bravoures, hésitations, trébuchements de parole, toutes les ratures ou surcharges qui s'accumulent dans chacune de mes phrases et que si volontiers j'attribue à la maladresse d'expression traduisent, en fait, indécisions dans ma pensée et défauts dans mon caractère […]" *(Bi, 289-90)* He rarely succumbs to these bifurcations in his line of thought. He finishes his sentences, no matter how winding the way — he unifies in writing what cannot be unified physically. This might be seen, then, as virtual means of overcoming one of his greatest fears: the inability to *go all the way* (*oser d'aller jusqu'au bout*) in examining himself.

nuque, puis lui tournant la tête à droite et à gauche en faisant craquer les vertèbres du cou." (*AF*, 481) For a nightmare of Leiris's "au cour duquel un chacal me mordait le petit doigt de la main gauche et un chien le poignet droit," Leiris writes, "elle m'a fait subir un traitement analogue." And though, on a literal level, these movements go beyond brushes, the true touch they represent—the grazing of two sentient realms—remains a mere *frôlement*. However, these manipulations of the body invite the individual to see himself from the double perspective of a mirror realm. For the *zar*, this second realm, manifests in ours through a sacred theatrics.

Through this touching of realms, the *zar* cult brings Leiris closer to the revelation he had desired to find. In the *gourri*—or trances—of the *zar* cult members, one sees oneself outside of oneself, performing different subjectivities, each sanctioned and stimulated by Malkam Ayyahou. Her influence and touch create a consecrated space in which one is free to—to quote the opening lines of one of Leiris's late analyses of his experience with the *zar*—"ne pas se contenter d'être ce que l'on est." This quote is from an article which appears as the foreword to *La Musique et La Transe* (1981), a book written by Leiris's former student Gilbert Rouget, which considers the purpose of situations where the individual is allowed to become something or someone *other*. Touching, *frôlement*, by this account, would be a kind of role-playing allowing one to approach a societally-sanctioned, subconscious proxy of the sublime. The trance, Rouget argues, is not induced by music or by an outside force transporting the individual; it is the individual, hearing the music brush against them, who begins to act in the manner sanctioned by the trance. Leiris, drawing conclusions from Rouget, writes that humankind is a "[b]ête capable plus que toute autre (c'est le moins qu'on puisse dire) de se déguiser, de s'aliéner, de se projeter ailleurs et de se dépasser pour s'engager dans de multiples voies." In other words, man's

ability to imagine is so strong that it allows him—through imitation, trance, etc.—to become (if only for a moment) a subject other than himself. More often than not, these *becomings* are performative by nature and are predicated on a desire to participate or be part of a system. Addressing this observation in his foreward to Rouget's book, Leiris asks:

> [n'est-ce pas que] l'homme, à quelque époque et quelque latitude qu'il appartienne, [n'est pas] par vocation un suppôt de l'imaginaire, dans la mesure en tout cas où, qu'il se trouve ou non être le jouet de quelque bovarysme institutionnel ou privé, il est conditionné, au niveau collectif comme au niveau individuel, par le monde de pure convention que la masse de symboles et de signes qui foisonnent dans son cerveau lui crée?[32]

In other words, through touch and participation, Leiris realizes that this theatrical impulse is a means of using gesture to *oser d'aller jusqu'au bout.* The most effective way of working through our problems is through trance — through societal *exutoires,* which allow us to exorcise our demons. For Leiris, travel fulfils this role. In travel all elements of the unconscious are at play. Through travel, Leiris finds his *bovarysme*: the space where he can momentarily lose himself in—to quote Jules de Gaultier, who coined the term (after Emma Bovary's self-transformation through reading)—a desire "de se concevoir autre."[33] And ultimately, in reality, what is this *bovarysme*, this theater, if not a performance allowing one to arrange troubling symbols "qui foisonne dans son cerveau" into a meaningful order? Indeed, travel, for Leiris, is

[32] Michel Leiris, Preface, *La Musique et la Transe* by Gilbert Rouget, (Paris: Gallimard, "Tel," 1990) 17.
[33] See Jules de Gaultier, *Le Bovarysme*, *suivi d'une étude de Per Buvik, Le Principe bovaryque,* (Paris : Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2006).

useful because it is a physical and theatrical act of dreamwork, to use Freud's term for the process of understanding how the various elements of one's ego are constructed independently of the content they produce. Through travel, he brushes against something that will allow him to re-organize the content of his psyche. *Frôlement*, then, is Leiris's *physical* attempt to realize his *aesthetic* ability to *go all the way* — a ceremony that spurs writing.

Thus, Leiris's mode of travel is a sort of trance: a *gourri* halfway between the real and the oneiric, a liminal space halfway between a desire to be something other than the self and a desire to repair one's own ego. Reflection on this perspectival shift and dreamwork shows up as a hallmark of Leiris's autobiographical style. He represents past experiences in which he felt alienated from a daily experience of enchantment (*le sacré du quotidien*[34]) and deforms them, reliving these moments in writing until he can experience a proxy of *going all the way*. He describes this process in *Biffures,* the first volume of *La Règle du jeu*, as a process of resuscitating dreams:

> ressusciter le rêve […] lui injecter, comme un soufflé de nouvelle vie, la très vague atmosphère qui, de ce qui lui avait été essentiel, était tout ce qu'il me restait; triturer les bribes de décor, de personnages et d'événement que ma mémoire, avec beaucoup d'effort, parvenait à faire apparaître un instant. (*Bi,* 22-23)[35]

But this recasting of the enchantment into the everyday is no easy task. Enthusiasm for this practice is tempered by a melancholy sense of guilt. He writes that tailoring his dreams to attain

[34] Michel Leiris, "Le sacré dans la vie quotidienne," *Le Collège de sociologie*, Denis Hollier (ed.) (Paris: Gallimard, 1995) 94-119.
[35] Michel Leiris, *Biffures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948). Cited in the text as *Bi*.

what he cannot achieve in reality only makes him feel his inferiority more acutely: "[…] remâcher tout cela sans avoir le courage de le recracher avant que ma certitude de n'aboutir à rien se fût manifestée par une impression presque physique de nausée." It's as if he were choking on his tongue out of guilt for even daring to *frôle* his desire. Nathalie Barberger, commenting on this passage in her book on mourning as Leiris's scriptural mode, argues that he takes this approach to writing so as to deal with not guilt, but more a disquieting sense of mourning for people, places and things he cannot keep with him: Emawayish, Khadidja, etc.

It is important to note that this mode of mourning is also one of possibility, of approaching the impossible through a dual process of action and writing.[36] Whether it is mourning or *mise en scène,* Leiris is attracted to travel and dreams because they promise to bring about a reversal of the lens. They allow for a healing act of revisionism, which, through acts of "triturations" and "remâchements," is an attempt to bring relief from maladies of the ego and regain a sense of sublime strength — an attempt which, to refer back to a key theme of Leiris's work and life, time and again is tragically unsuccessful.

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[36] See Nathalie Barberger, *L'Écriture du deuil* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Septentrion, 1998) 102: Leiris's desire to "[t]riturer le corps du rêve, le toucher et le désarticuler" is already an example of what Barberger calls "une activité transgressive," involving "la rupture d'un tabou, comme si, consignant ses rêves et les trahissant, l'auteur se rendait coupable de la perte, la désirait, reniait ses origins." Indeed, Leiris loses nothing he does not want to lose; instead, he gains from the outside and lives an experience vicariously, on his own terms.

Coda: Sublimating the Tension

But how does one leave the trance and learn to live a life that is enchanted on its own merits? What does it take for this *bovarysme* to become part of one's daily existence? As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, Leiris eventually finds this balance by displacing the motion of the voyage and the trance into an act of constant distanciation, constant travel between two subjectivities — that of the ethnographer and that of the writer. Traveling between these two functions, he gains continuous insight into himself as another; he continuously *brushes* with the real and then can turn that brush into an experience by recasting it as though it were a dream, a text.

In my reading of Leiris's works, a final breakthrough occurs during his 1955 trip to China. It is in explaining how the events of this trip impact upon worldview, and his relationship with travel and poetic enchantment, that I would like to conclude. Before his trip to China, he feels an old tension surface between rational duty and literary desire. He notes this in his journal, his *miettes de chine,* which were gathered and published by Jean Jamin as *Journal de Chine* in 1994, a few years after Leiris's passing. As Jamin points out in his excellent introduction to the volume, these notes are haunted by Leiris's desire to once again ban dreaming and poetry and mystical hermeneutics in deference to scientific observation and analysis. He issues an injunction against turning the experience into something fantastic: "Il faudra maintenant s'employer à ce que tout cela n'ait pas été purement et simplement rêvé." (*JC*, 9) In light of this note, we can perhaps read the one with which we began as a counter-injunction, one which reminds Leiris that

the mere act of attempting to go *jusqu'au bout* and only brushing awkwardly against one's desire might be enough.

It is clear that this inability to go all the way still tormented Leiris during his 1955 trip to China. In the journal of the journey, Leiris mostly sticks to his injunction and ignore the counter-injunction. He only records a few sparse lines of poetry, a few choice adjectives describing the topographical forms one sees while flying overhead: "rivières serpentantes," "[m]ontagnes abruptes, dont les escarpements et la striure noire et blanche font penser à la peinture chinoise", "[r]ideau de nuages."[37] There are surprisingly few metaphorical descriptions that attest to Leiris's reflecting on these experiences in a figurative or sacred manner. Things do not get much better when he gets to China, where the red tape of Maoist bureaucracy further stifles any chance for contact. However, there is at least one moment where distance and bureaucracy give way, once more, to touch, to dreams. In this instance, he records a dream: "Rêverie de réveil: la Chine Comme 'pays de Monelle' — à morale communiste (et non morale anarchiste) prêché par les femmes-enfants." (*JC*, 121)[38] The dream follows the Association's visit to a "patronage laic," something along the lines of a Maoist kindergarten*,* in Nanjing. There, greeted by red-scarved little girls, he is soon dragged into participating in a symbolic ceremony which includes a gift-giving session where small children offer ethereal "dons de petits oiseaux en plumes, de colombes [en peluche], de farces et attrapes aussi: fruits qui nous fondent littéralement dans la main quand on les presse car leur peau seule est consistante." (*JC,* 119) Similar to Cendrars, each

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[37] This phrase, which appears in the part of *Fourbis* entitled "Mors," is one of Leiris' fetishized expressions.

[38] Michel Leiris, *Journal de Chine,* Jean Jamin (ed.) (Paris: Gallimard, 1994). Cited in the text as *JC*.

of these elements takes us back to a concept of air, flight, the ethereal, perfectly suited to the raw content of dreams, where substance turns to air before it can be touched.

Leiris unwittingly becomes a participant in a trance, a theater, a cult (political rather than religious on this occasion). As a result, he has brushes (*frôlements*) with the realm of the impossible. What triggers this unintended experience of the sublime is the platonic touch of a small child, a little girl who takes Leiris by the hand as he enters the *patronage*. In the dream he records after the experience, he describes the child as a Marxist *Monelle*. This reference is not to be taken lightly. Monelle, after all, refers to the famous pixie-ish muse in Marcel Schwob's symbolist narrative *Le Livre de Monelle*. In Schwob's tales, Monelle is a prophetic tubercular waif who is at once the narrator's lover and a Diotima-like sage, instructing him in the philosophy and poetics of anarchist symbolism. Among Monelle's preachings is a brand of turn-of-the-century anarchic iconoclasm, according to which one must be willing to destroy preconceptions of how one ought to represent new figures: "Détruis, détruis, détruis. Détruis en toi-même, détruis autour de toi. Fais de la place pour ton âme et pour les autres âmes…Et pour imaginer un nouvel art, il faut briser l'art ancien. Et ainsi l'art nouveau semble une sorte d'iconoclastie."[39]

This line from Schwob's book shows the extent to which Leiris might be considered a closet symbolist. Indeed, his goal in traveling is to destroy his ego so as to better see, from another vantage point, new and sublime possibilities. It might be said that, in China, Leiris's desire for the poetic is stronger than his self-imposed injunction: he cannot help but see these children as forebears of a Maoist aesthetic of the sublime that he might be able to subsume for

[39] Marcel Schwob, *Œuvres* (Paris: Phébus "Libretto," 2002) 400.

his purposes. This is similar to the way Schwob's *Monelle* represented (at the end of the 19th century) an attempt to link a modern experience with the destruction of a stifling artistic *règle*. For Leiris, political engagement and anthropology are similar to one another: they both bring the individual into contact with a new sense of sacred communion. He outlines this parallel in *Fibrilles,* noting that:

> Ce que pour les intellectuels français de l'époque symboliste furent l'anarchie et le nihilisme (dont Marcel Schwob s'est fait un des prophètes avec *Le Livre de Monelle*), le communisme en aura été un peu l'équivalent pour ceux de ma génération : de quelque manière que nous jugions la *conjoncture*[40] présente et quand bien même nous tiendrions ce grand mouvement pour aujourd'hui fourvoyé, il nous est impossible, quant à nous, de ne pas regarder la révolution d'octobre 1917 comme l'événement majeur de notre époque, celui qui pour les plus lucides aura marqué le commencement d'un âge nouveau ou, du moins, aura représenté l'ultime espoir de voir l'humanité s'atteler à une tâche, certes, grosse de périls et de difficultés mais défendable dans ses vestiges. [41] (*Fi*, 37)

The major event of the Russian revolution represents a change in how one thinks about the sublime; the sacred becomes tied to events in the real world.

However, to better understand the evocation of Monelle, we should delve further into the poeticized version of this experience in *Fibrilles* (1965)*,* the third volume of *La Règle du jeu.* Thinking back to the experience at the "patronage laïc," Leiris casts the child as a Nervalian *fille*

[40] The italics are mine.
[41] Michel Leiris, *Fibrilles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965).

du feu: "La fillette de sucre candi, aux nattes de réglisse, prend notre main pour nous conduire au club des papillon, Monelle marxiste-léniniste." (*Fi*, 37) And it becomes clearly apparent that it is through touch that Leiris begins to dream again:

> Pendant toute la durée de la visite, j'eus pour compagne une très petite fille qui, dès mon arrivée, m'avait offert un oiseau peluche et s'était emparée de ma main gauche que, parfois, elle serrait fortement en levant les yeux vers moi et me souriant de tout son visage. D'elle à moi, il n'y avait, bien entendu, aucune possibilité de conversation mais les pressions de doigts y suppléaient. (*Fi,* 39)

A language of touch replaces a language of tongues. Touch, communion (and communism!), is a fantastic possibility — it allows for an impossible language to be spoken across an unbridgeable divide. Though this touch is part of a bureaucratic theater, it is nevertheless as effective as the *gourri* of the *zar*. In other words, Leiris finds himself once more in the mold of the European sailors in *Impressions d'Afrique*: he sees himself in an oneiric, sublime parallax.

What is striking about this scene is how it ties up many loose ends concerning Leiris's desire to travel and his desire to experience the sublime. Leiris, who was resolute in his desire not to have children and his fear of paternity, behaves in a jarringly fatherly manner at the kindergarten. Thus, ironic though it may be, it is the proxy of a paternal touch that leads us back to Leiris's other experiences of traveling and touching. At the kindergarten, Leiris finds a form of *frôlement* that is not based on *eros*, but on a purer notion of sublimation: the ability to communicate one's innermost self through slight physicality. The squeezing of hands, denuded of sexuality, puts problems of impotence to rest. Masculinity, in this case, is not a show of virility, but rather the proffering of a platonic, fatherly touch. And while this perfect moment of

contact functions as a substitute for the lack of a common language, one mutually-understood symbol does emerge when the little girl points to a propaganda poster: "'Lénine', avait dit la fillette qui me conduisait à travers les diverses parties de son club enfantin." (*Fi*, 41-42) The word "Lenin" is a sign of poetry and a sign of perfect communion, contact, compassion and community:

> De même que le latin fut pour la chrétienté une sorte d'espéranto et que le symbole du poisson servit de signe de reconnaissance aux tenants de la foi nouvelle, un nom tel que celui de Lénine et des symboles comme la faucille et le marteau ou la colombe inspirée de la gravure de Picasso peuvent aujourd'hui constituer un vivant trait d'union entre des êtres que séparent la race, la langue, voire l'âge par surcroît. Ce qui, à mon sens, est la vertu inappréciable du communisme c'est qu'il relie effectivement par quelque chose de *commun* ces individus qui, sans cela, resteraient tout à fait étrangers les uns aux autres, disperses comme ils le sont aux quatre coins de la terre. (*Fi*, 40)

Here, Communism (with Leiris never really to fuse his writing wholeheartedly in the manner of an Aimé Césaire) has one ultimate value: promise. Communism is a slight touch—the hand of a child, the kiss of peace—promising compassion, community, and communication.

Moreover, in China, it is travel that reveals to Leiris how one might forge a sense of enchantment in everyday life. His travels (be they to Africa, China or elsewhere) bring him into contact with great communities, and reveal to him a sense of community. Perhaps what Leiris's work suggests is that we must travel to find these small moments in which sublime communion and community still exist. In other words, Leiris's move toward ethnography and politics to find

a sublime poetics makes sense. For is he not living out the prophecy penned by Max Weber in 1920, according to which:

> [i]t is not accidental that our greatest art is intimate and not monumental, nor is it accidental that today only within the smallest and intimate circles, in personal human situations, in *pianissimo,* that something is pulsating that corresponds to the prophetic *pneuma,* which in former times swept through the great communities like a firebrand, welding them together[?]"[42]

[42] Max Weber, *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, (London: Routledge, 2009) 155.

CHAPTER 3:
SELF-CONTROL: FROM ASCESIS TO ESTHETICS

A Change of Pace

Originally, the focus of this final chapter was going to be André Malraux. I planned to discuss the travels he recounts in his sprawling *Antimémoires* (1967). The reason for including Malraux was to give the notion of travel and enchantment a more political dimension. Roughly, the plan was to draw upon Malraux's travels as Minister of Cultural Affairs in the second de Gaulle government, and his years of work as a curator and collector of ethnographic artifacts[1] in order to explore how the rather banal act of international diplomacy could also be a means of finding enchantment in the world. Although Malraux would make a fine addition to this study, my sense was that *Antimémoires* is ultimately too large in its ambitions and too focused on history and historical figures. The book is a single volume in a long series of autobiographical texts, *Le Miroir des limbes*; in order to understand the way in which travel breeds enchantment, and get an idea of the role this enchantment played in Malraux's life, one would have to take a much broader historical perspective and consider the full arc of *Le Miroir des limbes*. Additionally, *Antimémoires* focuses more on reconstituted dialogues with consuls, dictators and

[1] We should not forget that André Malraux rose to prominence after the tribunal of Phnom-Penh sentenced him to three years in prison for stealing bas-reliefs from the Temple of Banteay Srei in present-day Cambodia. Journalists covering the affair were enchanted by his eloquence and romanticist disposition, leading to a petition for his release. For more on this, see Jean-François Lyotard, *Signé Malraux* (Paris: Grasset, 1996).

monks than it is a clear record of an internal and poetic transformation.[2] It is also difficult to identify a specific practice central to Malraux's writing. For these reasons, among others, I decided to replace Malraux with Henri Michaux, a poet whose work more clearly reflects a search for a way of traveling that would enable him to internalize a poetics of otherness.

Michaux's story arc—his tale of finding enchantment—occurs on a scale comparable to that of the other authors we have looked at in the previous chapters. He approaches enchantment by attempting to adopt a practice of *ascesis* (an ascetic practice) that will allow him to better control his own desires and open himself up to the enchantments of the world. Through an affect and practice we will call *exteriorization,* Michaux, unlike Cendrars, searches for a way of making himself the mouthpiece through which the world is represented. He seeks an ethic in the traditional sense of respecting the will of those he encounters. My aim, then, is to show how Michaux employs travel as a means of finding esthetic models and *forms of living* that will inspire in him a poetics centered on enchantment and community. By "esthetic models," I refer to the notion I addressed in the introduction to this thesis, making reference to the ideas of Jane Bennett: the notion that an esthetic experience can serve as the basis for the formation of a new ethical code. The aim of this chapter, then, is to ask whether a post-Romantic search for magic or

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[2] Cf. André Malraux, *Antimémoires,* (Paris: Gallimard, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade,"1976) 284. Here, Malraux recounts a discussion with a French consul in China. They discuss the idea of exoticism: "Nous ne manquons pas d'aventuriers en Europe, dit le consul. Mais le grand romanesque de l'aventure, le décor exotique, n'existait pas autrefois. Marco Polo est surpris par la Chine comme un Européen peut l'être par les États-Unis : pas plus. L'Asie ne devient fantastique qu'à l'époque où nous en devenons maîtres.
— Et où nos moyens de la conquérir nous séparent d'elle, dis-je : les armes à feu et les machines. Deux cents ans plus tôt, la guerre de l'opium n'eût pas été concevable. Il est très vrai que les Espagnols appelaient Maures les Mexicains, lorsqu'ils ont découvert le Mexique."

enchantment can be viewed as something other than self-serving. In other words: can an esthetic search be ascetic?

To try and answer this question, I will begin with a prelude in which I discuss how Michaux's approach to travel as a practice of revealing enchantment can be seen as both a combination of the practices Leiris and Cendrars demonstrated in their memoirs, and a break with them — the key difference being that Michaux moves toward an approach more focused on absorbing and transmitting (almost like a camera) the essence of what he experiences abroad. Next, I will move on to an analysis of how Michaux develops his practice of travel as a means of *exteriorizing* his worldview in his early poetry and travel memoirs — namely, *Ecuador* (1928) and *Un barbare en Asie* (1933).

Relation to the Approaches Taken by Cendrars and Leiris

Like Cendrars and Leiris, Henri Michaux sees travel as a means of experiencing sublime enchantment in a world made drab by modernity. It is no surprise, then, that his writing shares key aspects with both authors. In fact, Michaux took inspiration from Blaise Cendrars in his earliest works, going so far as to borrow Cendrars's neo-Futurist interest in movement and *motricité* as a means of attaining new poetic heights.

One of Michaux's earliest texts, a Cubist-inspired manifesto entitled *Chronique de l'aiguilleur* (1922), shares many similarities with the Cendrarsian notions of the *profond aujourd'hui* and the *brahmane à rebours* discussed in Chapter 1, which encompass the way machines and speed enhance the human capacity to experience the hidden sublime in the world.

Michaux's text adapts Cendrars's idea of how to attain spiritual enchantment or sacredness, calling it an experience of *emotive speed* (*vitesse émotive*). For Michaux, speed enhances an artist's ability to feel, understand, and represent the world around him; it also makes for innovative stylistic effects, as the artist tries to represent the images and sensations that rush by him as if the world itself were a cinema. To explain this term, he gives a Cendrarsian example, explaining how the rapid succession of images seen from a train window allows the passenger to *become* (*devenir)* every cow, beggar, blade of grass, and plow he sees in rapid succession. However, this example already reveals a way of thinking less tied to the ego and the individual than what we find in Cendrars. Through mathematical formulas, Michaux shows that the author is merely the conduit of a phenomenon that surpasses his individuality:

$$V = \frac{E}{T} = Vitesse\ \text{émotive}\ = \frac{\textit{Espace parcouru – Champs d'émotions}}{\textit{Temps employé à le parcourir}}$$

To clarify: this formula argues that since *velocity* can be expressed as the relation of *space* over *time,* it follows that modern vehicles should also have a proportional influence on how one experiences, interprets and represents the world artistically. To clarify what he means to represent with this formula, Michaux offers a more concrete illustration:

> En express, en auto, à 100 kilomètres à l'heure : chaque seconde apporte ses objets et les retire. Chaque seconde a son spectacle, son lot, un étang, ou un poteau, un taillis […] Et ces successions de spectacles soudains qui se jettent tout d'un coup à votre figure et s'annulent tout aussitôt comme un figurant de retour aux coulisses, n'engendreraient pas un tic-tac plus rapide de représentation et d'émotions dans les arts, n'y contribueraient pas ?

Pourquoi pas ? (I, 15)[3]

Like Cendrars, he expresses an ethic of representation through machines. According to this belief, an artist must learn to tap into an experience of "L'ABRÉVIATION DES ÉMOTIONS ET DES REPRÉSENTATIONS," which Michaux sees as the driving force behind the works of "B. Cendrars, J. Cocteau, E. Satie, Honegger, etc." Indeed, the works of these artists not only adhere to a common principle of combining speed, observation and ingenuity, they also illustrate the notion that through speed a modern individual can learn to forge a mystic, yet rational perception of the world that is transmissible to others. Of course, this notion of mechanics and transmission is the idea of animating Cendrars's *La Prose du Transsibérien* (1913)*,* Cocteau's collaborations with Diaghilev, Satie's "musique répétitive," and Honegger's *Pacifique 231*, which uses train whistles and engine sounds to create a cacophonic symphony.[4] *Chronique de l'aiguilleur,* then, is Michaux's take on this tradition; it is a manifesto that lays out the precepts according to which Michaux will live his life as a poet, centered on the notion that esthetic innovation (in literature, music, the visual arts, etc.) comes from abdicating the self in favor of exterior experience.

In addition to Cendrars's influence, Michaux's works also share certain aspects with Michel Leiris. Though the two writers did not frequent the same circles (their early careers had

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[3] Henri Michaux, *Œuvres complètes*, Raymond Bellour (ed.), 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," 1975–76) All in-text references refer to a specific volume in this Pléiade collection.

[4] See Jacques Carion, "Henri Michaux et les commencements," *Textyles*, no. 29 (2006) 9-14. In addition to the similarities I have noted here, Carrion show that Michaux, in writing *Chronique de l'aiguilleur,* also borrows from the cinema theorist Jean Epstein. Epstein used the term "fatigue" to refer to the limit to one's ability to take in a succession of images and impressions while riding in modern vehicles. In other words, *vitesse émotive* is exhausting; only the artist who is able to physically withstand this training will be able to translate it into poetry.

little overlap), a similar strain of thinking is evident in their early works. Poetically, they both look to travel in order to experience what might be called, in Deleuzian parlance, new *devenirs*, or what has been referred to in recent literary studies as new *formes de vie*.[5] As we have seen, Michel Leiris does this in the guise of anthropological (or pseudo-anthropological) travel, which he undertakes to escape from feelings of inadequacy that he sees as being tied to his weak ego. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 2, Leiris achieves this transformation by means of a theatrical ceremony that doubles as a sort of physical-psychotherapy which allows him to experience other forms of life by *brushing up against* the other.

During his trips to South America and Asia (which are, incidentally, the focus of the analyses undertaken in this chapter), Michaux attempts to find a similar experience of otherness. However, there is one key difference between Leiris's and Michaux's respective approaches. Whereas Leiris travels in order to purify his ego by appropriating the *forms of being* of the subjects he observes, Michaux travels to *complement* the self by allowing other forms of being to *coexist* within his ego.

By the same token, Michaux's focus on a notion of completeness might also be seen as an aspect of his work that separates him from Blaise Cendrars. While Cendrars may live his life under a pseudonym embodying a cast of loosely-related characters, ultimately he always remains true to his *être-pour-soi* — he is the one in the driver's seat, deciding what shape the next

[5] The notion of *formes de vie* has a long history in literary studies, having most recently been explored by Lauren Jenny and Marielle Macé. Underlying this concept is the essential distinction that has been made by Giorgio Agamben between two Ancient Greek words for life, *zoê* and *bios*. *Zoê* indicates that something has the quality of being alive, whereas *bios* refers to the inimitable form that a life takes. As such, *bios* is only used in reference to humans or anthropomorphic descriptions of animals. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, "Meridian," 1998) 1-3.

incarnation of his essence will take.[6] Michaux, on the other hand, is not afraid of relinquishing his ego. Indeed, as we shall see, Michaux develops an ascetic practice of poetics in his travels which allows him to work toward this pluriform perspective in which the self is part of a totality of voices. Chief among these ascetic practices is that of *self-control*, a process in which relief from the pressures of the ego comes about through openness to exterior forms of life and individuality — literally, the ability to *control* the desires of one's ego (*self*).

Self-Control

Before moving onto deeper readings of Michaux's texts, it is important to have a clearer idea of what *self-control* means and how it enters into Michaux's lexicon. The term figures most prominently (in English and French) in *Un barbare en Asie*, the poetic travel journal he kept during his time spent traveling from India to Japan in the early 1930s. The first instance of the term we find was recorded during his stay in Calcutta. He writes:

> Jamais, jamais, l'Indien ne se doutera à quel point il exaspère l'Européen.
>
> […]
>
> Cette contrainte, de toutes la plus agaçante, celle de la respiration et de l'âme.

[6] See Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'être et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard "Tel," 1943) 177-8. He notes that the *pour-soi* seeks to unify several concepts of self into one all-encompassing whole. Indeed, it is through this act of control that the *être-pour-soi* finds a sort of solipsistic ecstasy: "Présent, passé, futur à la fois, dispersant son être dans trois dimensions, le pour-soi, du seul fait qu'il se néantise, est temporal."

> Ils vous regardent avec un contrôle d'eux-mêmes, un blocage mystérieux et, sans que ce soit clair, vous donnent l'impression d'intervenir quelque part en soi, comme vous ne le pourriez pas. (I, 285)

Here, *self-control* is a quality observed in India that Michaux feels he himself lacks. The root of this frustration is a feeling that the average Indian on the street experiences a hidden enchantment which he can only dream of having access to. He describes this invisible sensation of the *other* as a "blocage mystérieux" — an ability to commune with one's surroundings, to be intensely present and yet completely absent (*figé, bloqué*) to Westerners who come to India with the orientalist goal of appropriating the "wisdom" of a more spiritual Indian other. If Michaux cannot (or should not) appropriate this spirituality, he can at least learn from its key feature: *contrôle de soi.* Indeed, from this point of view, the "blocage mystérieux" of the other becomes less of a mysterious force and more something along the lines of what Michel Foucault called *techniques de soi* — meditative and reflective practices that reveal to an individual how his ego is constructed by the world in which he lives.[7] For it is through better reflective practice and control of the self that one can begin to take into account the full depth of one's surroundings.

In India, Michaux writes that this practice of *self-control* is localized in *pranayama,* or yogic breathing, "l'exercice national indien [of] la respiration et de l'âme" (I, 287). Indeed, this practice is almost elemental in its illustration of the concept of *control,* as it is rooted in the notion that to be in control of the breath is to be in control of the self. Rather than appropriating culture or essence, Michaux attempts to capture the practices of those he encounters. He sees

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[7] See Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, F. Durant-Bogaert (translator) and P.H. Hutton, H. Gutman, and L.H. Martin (eds.) (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988) 16-49.

how these practices form the basis of a new point of view that might, respectfully, be borrowed and used to convey the nature of their difference in his writing. We see this notion put into words a few pages later. Michaux writes that: “[l]'hindou est *religieux*, il se sent relié à tout,” whereas the Westerner, “l’homme blanc” possesses the quality of “irrespect,” a sense that his ego is of all-encompassing importance. In a sense, Michaux travels to shed his *irrespect* for the other and show less concern for his own desires.

The practice of *self-control* that Michaux is after is his personal version of finding enchantment in a modern world through thoughtful, ethical means. In addition, there are political undertones to Michaux’s process of finding a respectful way to experience enchantment that are not as evident in the works we have explored in previous chapters. In fact, what Michaux calls *self-control* in the passage cited above could, ironically, also be read as a reaction on the part of the colonized Indian subject; part cultural habit, part mechanism developed for coping with English subjugation. The “blocage mystérieux” may in fact be a means of self-protection, whereby the colonized subject retains his inner self while performing a series of social and political *devenirs* for the colonizer. If the “respiration de l’âme” frustrates the Westerner, it is because it represents an enchanted, spiritual quality that seems to know the Westerner better than the Western knows himself. The Indian, through breath, has access to what Max Weber (as was noted in the introduction to this dissertation) called the *pneuma*, or respiration, of enchantment that connects an individual to a new promise of renewal and community. This *pneuma,* or breath, is also the source of a sense of enchantment in one’s view of the world.

To be sure, the exercise of *self-control* is by no means something that one simply intuits — Michaux realizes that his understanding of the other, and his ability to tap into this practice of

self-control, will be an ongoing process. In the pages that follow, it is my intention to document how Michaux, through traveling, forges a process that enables him to arrive at an understanding of existences exterior to his own. We will see, in other words, how he taps into the practices and perspectives of the *other,* diminishing his own ego in the process so as to both express their intimate idiolect and experience a sense of *alterity*. More precisely put, we will see how Michaux's travels both inspire and frustrate this search for a better understanding of enchantment, the self, and the *other.*

Exteriorization: Michaux's Practice of* Self-Control *Before His Travels

Michaux's development of a practice of *self-control* begins before he sets off on his voyages. We see this in a series of early texts written a few years after *Chronique de l'aiguilleur*. I will refer to this early practice of *self-control* as *exteriorization,* or the ability to give up focusing on the ego in order to be more open to the essence of the *other.*

Early examples of this occur in two of Michaux's early texts, *Qui je fus* (1928) and *Lointain intérieur* (1930). Both texts are collections of verse and prose fragments that explore a common poetic problem: how can an individual control the desires of the self so as to better understand, sympathize with and represent the intimate desires of *others*? It is clear that elements of Michaux's upbringing influenced this desire to experience life differently. As a young bourgeois gentleman, Michaux felt trapped within the confines of his education and social background. From his earliest writings, he is searching for a way of leaving behind a personal experience that seemed too Eurocentric, banal and quotidian, so as to better feel the sensations

that his rational education and upbringing fail to account for. The titles of his early *receuils* reflect this obsession: the phrases *Qui je fus* ("who I was") and *Lointain antérieur* (loosely translated: "faraway past" are expressions of a desire to reduce the role of one's overarching identity in favor of new experiences. In essence, they sow the seeds for Michaux's future travels and his interest in exteriorizing himself.

The first of these texts, *Qui je fus,* introduces a practice of exteriorization through the use of poetic parable. This parabolic play occurs in the collection's eponymous first short text. The basic premise is that the poet is at war with his soul. This internal argument is part of a late-Romantic trope that we find, most famously, in Baudelaire's prose poem "Anywhere out of the world," in which the narrator argues with his soul, saying that he needs to travel to warmer climes. The poet's soul agrees, albeit with the morbid caveat that their destination must be "anywhere out of this world."[8]

To be sure, the argument in *Qui je fus* is somewhat different from the one we find in Baudelaire. For example, Michaux's narrator does not argue with his soul, but rather with a former iteration of himself, his *qui-je-fus*. In the course of this argument, the present narrator tells his *qui-je-fus* that he has an urgent need to write a novel instead of pseudo-philosophy or poetry. His *qui-je-fus,* however, criticizes this ambition, arguing that the speaker will find himself incapable of writing a novel because he has become too philosophical. The text ends with the narrator winning the argument by pointing out that the *qui-je-fus*'s position is invalid; his former self is merely afraid of the present narrator evolving and forgetting who he once was.

[8] See Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968) 182.

In other words, the *qui-je-fus* is afraid of dying. The narrator points out that this fear is illogical, for the individual is always an amalgamation of several selves, each fighting to be heard:

> Ah ! par exemple, y en a-t-il de pauvres fous en moi ! Vous avez vécu un an, deux ans dans notre commune peau et vous me faites la loi, à moi qui suis.
>
> «Je ne veux pas mourir», dit ce *Qui-je-fus*.
>
> «Je ne veux pas mourir», et pourtant, il est sceptique ! Voilà comment on se leurre. Et voilà comment on manque tant de choses. On a le désir d'écrire un roman, et l'on écrit de la philosophie. On n'est pas seul dans sa peau. (I, 79)

What we can take away from this example is the following: if we think of the evolution of the ego as death, we are falling into an unhelpful trap ("on se leurre"), for all iterations of one's past self remain in the present. Nothing ever dies; rather, it is subsumed into a totality of the self.

In this first text, we can begin to see that Michaux's poetic process is focused on finding a way to *exteriorize,* or escape a monolithic image of the self by imagining it as a multiplicity of forces, each vying to represent the world in their own way.

Indeed, as *Qui je fus* continues, Michaux's narrator begins to think of ways in which one might control the myriad voices and experiences that one encounters in life, travel, reading… In order to allow other voices to express themselves through oneself, on must (in the narrator's theory) undertake a practice that he tells us originates in Eastern philosophy. According to this practice, one must learn to "accroître les sensations, les équiformations [of the other] en combre et en vitesse." I read this difficult phrase as saying that one must learn to collect other forms of being and expression as one comes into contact with others. Note that *accroître* (to gather mass, like a snowball rolling down a hill) does not mean to appropriate what one encounters; there is

something eminently respectful about this verb. It is also worth noting that the word "équiformation," which appears in the passage cited above, is a Michauldian invention — *équi-* is a prefix that seemingly indicates an *equality* or *equilibrium,* and *formation* presumably refers to the various forms of being that surround the individual. *Équiformation,* then, speaks to a notion of inner transformation; it refers to the work of an individual who must alter their inner composition in order to make room for the various forms and "surfaces des choses" they encounter.

For Michaux, the fullest expression of this *équiformation* is a particularly in-tune observer and poet, who is able to serve as a conduit or transmitter of the myriad experiences found in the world. In other words, the individual realizes that they can transmit the feelings of an experience to others. Michaux describes this individual as a *fakir*:

> Les Orientaux accroissent le équiformations en dimension, en profondeur, en fixité. Un fakir, ayant pendant deux mois arrêté la pensée de son âme sur une statue, la forme mentalement avec une telle perfection, qu'un passant ne peut circuler dans un rayon de trente mètres sans que la statue ne s'impose à lui. (I, 75-76)

At first glance, the *fakir* appears as a dangerous svengali, imposing his mental power on others. However, if we take an unconventional reading of this passage (with the notion of *self-control* or *exteriorization* in mind), we might say that the *fakir* controls his own ego effectively and uses his contemplative capacities to communicate the beauty of an object or subject outside of himself to others. If we follow this train of thought (although it is, admittedly, problematic in its orientalism) this passage describes the ideal poetic goal that underpins Michaux's worldview.

The *fakir* not only steps out of his own ego, he also *exteriorizes* what he replaces his ego with in a way that benefits and enchants others.

By virtue of the labyrinthine twists and turns of thought it introduces, *Qui je fus* lays the groundwork for Michaux's desire to forge an ethos of exteriorization. He thus crafts a practice through which he can both experience and transmit (poetically) "[l]es sensations et les pensées" of the myriad subjectivities and forces at play, be they hidden or visible, animate or inanimate, subject or object. He goes so far, to give another example, as to describe a scenario in which one might enter into the subjectivity of a pine tree: "Vous voyez un sapin, vous pensez un sapin […] une partie de votre âme au moins s'est faite sapin" (I, 75). Thus, through great concentration and control of his ego, he learns that he can alter the composition of his self. It is through practicing this act of concentration that one is rewarded with an intimate experience and an understanding of something outside of the self. This is the practice of exteriorization that I believe serves as the driving force behind Michaux's earlier works and his travels.

Michaux further develops this notion of *exteriorization* and *équiformation* in *Lointain intérieur* (1938).[9] In this collection of related meditations, Michaux begins with a piece called "Magie," in which the narrator (Michaux or an alter ego of his) imagines entering into a series of different objects, most notably an apple; it's as if he were raising Magritte's *Son of Man* painting (his famous self-portrait with an apple obscuring the face) to the level of a philosophical and poetic quandary. He seems to be asking "Can man experience life as an apple? As another

[9] The earliest texts in *Lointain intérieur* date from 1930. The definitive volume was published in 1938.

subject? Another object?" Musing on these sorts of questions, he performs an act of transmigration, or even *équiformation,* himself:

> Je mets une pomme sur ma table. Puis je me mets dans cette pomme. […] Je viens à la pomme. Là encore, il y eut des tâtonnement, des expériences ; c'est toute une histoire. Partir est peu commode et de même l'expliquer. Mais en un mot, je puis vous le dire. *Soufir* est le mot. Quand j'arrivais dans la pomme, j'étais glacé. (I, 559-60)

In Michaux's journey to the center of the apple, *suffering* serves as the cornerstone of his experience of enchantment. It is the litmus test he uses to know that he has entered another subjectivity and felt the deepest experience of this intimacy. However, it is important to note that Michaux is interested in suffering specifically as a means of experiencing an alternate existence. As the literary critic and Michaux scholar Raymond Bellour points out, Michaux is not interested in fulfilling a personal need for altruistic compassion, as such pursuits are rooted in an egoistic desire to *perform* compassion.[10] Rather, Michaux's experience of an*other*'s suffering amounts to a poetic practice of controlling his own desires so that he may experience and transmit the suffering of others in a pure way. By embodying several *devenirs*, the poet enjoys the experience of several different *êtres* and objects in a whirlwind of emotive *vitesse*. It is here, then, that

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[10] This is reminiscent of Nietzsche's critique of altruism. Nietzsche argues that one should show compassion for those less fortunate, but also emphasizes that we must be wary of convincing ourselves that any altruistic act is inherently good; otherwise, we can convince ourselves that acts of caring for the other that have evil, ulterior motives behind them are not evil. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, R.J. Hollingdale (translator) and M. Clark & B. Leiter (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 93-4.

Michaux develops a practice that responds to what Bellour terms Michaux's obsession with "le caractère insaisissable de toute identité."[11] He is never comfortable except when he is able to "accroître les sensations, les équiformations."

Understanding Exteriority

There are parallels between Michaux's early notion of *exteriorization* and certain ideas about how one can share and communicate experiences of the other that were developed by philosophers later on. Namely, it recalls the notion of *exteriority* described by Emmanuel Levinas in his book *Totalité et infini : essai sur l'extériorité*. For Levinas, *exteriority* refers to a process of first coming to *know oneself* and, second, learning how to respect the autonomy and *alterity* of the other. In Levinas's thinking, *exteriority* describes the process of escaping the myopic outlook that occurs when one confuses the imminent being (*l'être*) with the multiple and transient ego (*le moi*). Levinas suggests something close to what I described in the introductory chapter to this dissertation as an "ethical approach to enchantment" — by respecting the other, one is able to experience a sense of enchantment. To explain this principle, Levinas notes that experiencing the *alterity* of the other does not detract from one's own subjectivity, but rather enriches it:

> [d]éjà le moi existe en un sens éminent : on ne peut en effet se l'imaginer comme existant d'abord et comme, de plus, doué de bonheur, ce Bonheur s'ajoutant à cette existence à titre d'attribut. Le moi existe comme séparé par sa jouissance,

[11] Raymond Bellour, *Lire Michaux* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011) 119.

c'est-à-dire comme heureux, et il peut au Bonheur sacrifier son être pur et simple. Il *existe* dans un sens éminent, il existe au-dessus de l'être.[12]

Thus, Levinas argues that when an individual accepts that the emotional state of his being (*l'être*) is separate from his transcendent, immanent existence (*le moi*), he attains a new perspective or stage in thinking about himself and his relation to others. The example Levinas gives is that of an individual feeling, or embodying, *happiness* at a specific moment in time. *Happiness* is an ideal experience that may, from time to time, adjoin itself to a human subject in much the same way that a modifier does vis-à-vis a grammatical subject or object. However, the modifier does not define the subject to which it is attached. Instead, it refers to its existence at a point in time; or, to put it differently, one's existential *être* is something that is ancillary to the immanent *ego*. The endgame of this situation occurs when an individual learns to conceptualize this difference. Once this has happened, the individual in question should be able to express attributes of other *ego-être* structures, thus exteriorizing the expression of the self into a richer, interpersonal expression. I will return to Levinas in a moment; however, in order to better conceptualize this way of thinking, it is helpful to have some examples from Michaux's early works that show this process in motion.

In *Qui je fus* and *Lointain intérieur,* the notion of *exteriorization* allows Michaux to (in Levinassian terms) "défaire la forme adéquate au Même pour se présenter comme Autre;" that is, he is able to loosen the binds that tie his identity to a single, transient attribute of the *ego*. We see this in the example of Michaux entering into the *devenir* of the pine tree or the apple. What is

[12] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalié et infini : essai sur l'extériorité* (Paris: Le livre de poche, 1990 [1971]) 57.

important about these examples is that Michaux is able to present the *alterity* of another existence by allowing it to be expressed through him, without adulterating it with his own egoistic desire. The other, in this case, merely becomes a momentary attribute for Michaux. Thus, Michaux lives the experience of presenting himself as a signifier that can signify (and speak as, or as a mouthpiece for) the *other*; or, to return to Levinas one last time, in order to speak other experiences he must

> [s]e présenter en signifiant […] Cette présence affirmée dans la présence de l'image comme le point du regard qui vous fixe est dite. La signification ou l'expression tranche ainsi sur toute donnée intuitive, précisément parce que signifier n'est pas donné. La signification n'est pas une essence idéale ou une relation offerte à l'intuition intellectuelle, encore analogue en cela à la sensation offerte à l'œil. Elle est, par excellence, la présence de l'extériorité. Le discours n'est pas simplement une modification de l'intuition (ou de la pensée), mais une relation originelle avec l'être extérieur […][13]

In simpler terms, Levinas shows that if one is able to give up the notion that one's ego is an all-encompassing totality, one can enter into a transcendent discourse of otherness. Through this practice, one learns what it means to *be,* or *to exist,* as an *other*. The end result of this process is that the individual transcends the self and finds enchantment in a non-totalizing exteriority. In the process, one learns to accept the incompleteness of the ego.

There is something spiritually and artistically fulfilling about the pattern that Levinas puts forth. He echoes the young Michaux's sensibilities and desire to produce plurivocal dialogues

[13] Ibid. 61.

with uncanny ease. What we are beginning to see is that Michaux's early texts form the basis of a concerted effort to find a physical form or figure of *exteriorization* that might imbue his literary efforts with the *emotive* content that is enchantment. But how might one anchor this theory in practice? How does one translate this concept into a way of living in the world? Reading these early texts, one is struck by Michaux's curious failure that despite his theoretical outlook, he remains stuck firmly within himself.

Toward Travel

It is here that travel enters the picture. Michaux turns to travel as a means of fulfilling his desire to exteriorize. As the critic Laurent Jenny writes in an essay on Michaux: "Voyager […] c'est non seulement « aller trouver la terre à domicile » mais s'exposer aux provocations singulières de l'extériorité."[14] Travel, in other words, exposes one to provocations, interlocutors, desires, etc. This in turn leads one to see the possibility of playing host to a choir of *paroles singulières,* or, as Jenny puts it, "l'occassion d'un risque et d'une espérance absolues."[15] We will see how this plays out as we delve deeper into Michaux's travels.

Travel, as Laurent Jenny puts it, is an "occasion for risk" that allows one to experience *exteriority*. Michaux's first voyage that is expressly organized as an opportunity for *exteriorization* occurs in 1928, when he travels to Ecuador. This trip will become the basis of the

[14] Laurent Jenny, *La Parole singulière* (Paris: Belin, 1988) 7.
[15] Ibid. 106. Here, Jenny cites Paul Valéry's *Mélanges* to illustrate this point: "Tout le monde en toute occasion pense de même. J'ai *failli* tomber, mourir, faire fortune. L'histoire est pleine de ces raisonnement./ Ces proximités sont imaginaire./ Il n'y a de degrés que dans le SI…"

travel memoir *Ecuador*, a hybrid text that toes the line between novel and journal. Similar to Leiris's first voyage with the Mission Dakar-Djibouti, Michaux is faced with constant disappointment with his inability to leave behind egoistic concerns. Unlike Leiris's trip with the Mission Dakar-Djibouti, however, Michaux's first voyage was aimed at expatriating himself from Europe and distancing himself from his family. His goal, as Raymond Bellour writes in a biographical essay on Michaux, was to diminish in himself "tout ce qui tient à une trop proche et précise identité" (I, 1083).

What can we make of this remark? In the context of Bellour's essay, Michaux's desire for distance could be taken to mean that the poet is attempting to shake off his European identity. But this more appropriately describes the approach we saw Michel Leiris take. What differentiates Michaux from Leiris, as we have already seen in excerpts from *Qui je fus* and *Lointain intérieur*, is that his desire for a practice of *exteriorization* is not one of subtraction, but rather of way of inviting and adding to his own being a multitude of other *identities*. In other words, Michaux travels to dilute his European identity in a kaleidoscope of other existences; he travels to throw off the shackles of his Eurocentric, solipsistic self — an aspect of his personality closely centered on his own world and his own needs.[16]

[16] In her excellent study on Michaux, the scholar Nina Parish notes about this that Michaux shows, continually, his "desire to transcend any restrictions imposed on him by belonging to any one country and thus to a single set of defined rituals and traditions." See Nina Parish, *Henri Michaux: Experimentation with Signs* (New York: Rodopi, 2007) 110.

But why would he choose Ecuador as the country in which to debut this approach? In the 1920s, Ecuador seems an obscure choice.[17] Looking into the choice of location brings the fortuitous nature of this first trip into clear focus. Michaux's reasons for choosing *Ecuador* were circumstantial. His friend, the wealthy Ecuadorian poet Alfredo Gangotena, paid for his passage across the Atlantic. However, even if the trip came about by sheer circumstance, both Gangotena and his homeland have a certain poetic allure. For example, on an onomastic level, the name Ecuador refers to a *non-lieu,* the invisible line and borderland of the "Equateur." It is a space that we know exists but which we cannot see; by virtue of its name, it is a place where contradictions abound and merge.[18] Of similar importance is the fact that Gangotena, a wealthy, Eurocentric Ecuadorian, is a living emblem of the various contradictions of the *non-lieu*, or borderland. In Gangotena, Michaux sees an example of an individual who effortlessly embodies a multiplicity of *formes de vie*. He is a contradictory mélange of identities and *devenirs* bundled in the trappings of a new-world aristocrat — the ideal model for a modern traveler.

True to the borderland in which his journey takes place, the journal Michaux keeps while traveling to South America is a mix of literary styles, shifting between observations, poems, and sketches of day-to-day goings-on as Michaux sails to Quito, visits Gangotena's estates, travels the Andes on horseback and ultimately treks through the Amazon. In these shifts of genre and

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[17] Ecuador seems to have been a country that was not on many people's radars at the time. How little thought was given to it is apparent when we consider that its GDP was slashed in half following the crash of 1929.

[18] See Michel Butor, *Improvisations sur Henri Michaux* (Paris Éditions de la Différence, 1999) 34. Butor plays with the notion of a frontier and invisible line conjured up by the word "equateur/Ecuador," making the country's name a catachretic figure.

place, we are able to read the process through which Michaux realizes that what he desires is the ability to control his own ego.

Ecuador's Failure

In *Ecuador*, we see a Michaux who is still unsure of his commitment to gathering the *équiformations* of the other; he is not willing to temper his own desires and, as a result, is too attached to his ego. In the travel journal he writes, this manifests itself in a negative tone that is evident from the very start of *Ecuador*, when Michaux is still sailing the Atlantic aboard the ship *Boskoop*. As the ship passes through the southern Caribbean, Michaux becomes impatient. After a few weeks at sea, he has not experienced the sublime *exteriorization* of his ego that he believed he would. He voices his frustration in continual pleas—"[e]t ce voyage, mais où est-il ce voyage ?" (I, 144)—that mirror Leiris's realization that trips in which one moves along with "les bras et les jambes ne sont pas forcément plus excitantes que celles qui se déroulent dans la tête."[19]

Michaux's problem is twofold: on the one hand, he remains closed and unable to *exteriorize*; on the other, he is inert: he expects the voyage to change him without any effort or personal responsibility on his part. Michaux's inability to take responsibility for his own *exteriorization* leads to, among other things, a vicious cycle of elation and depression. For example, after mixing with passengers on the *Boskoop*, he notices an effect on his sense of

[19] Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* (*Paris: Gallimard*, 1991 [1934]) 302.

enchantment and community, marveling at how it gives him a sense of lightness and enchantment: “comme ça dilate.” In other words, he is excited by coming into to contact with many different *devenirs*; the experience makes him feel more complete. Ironically, however, it is his attempt to represent this enchantment in writing that kills the ecstatic experience. Thus, the very medium meant to transmit these experiences kills their vitality and risks reducing the sublime enchantment he experiences to a pile of paper: “des pages, c’est tout” (I, 142). He believes that he is doomed to the “pétrification qui est tout l’écrivain,” and complains that “l’écriture tue le voyage” (I, 144). The problem is that Michaux is too focused on preserving his experience of enchantment for himself. He is too egoistic in his approach, and must learn to find a more impersonal (non-egoistic) way of experiencing and expressing enchantment.

Michaux’s problem here is a somewhat unexpected one. We previously saw in *Qui je fus* that he is interested in expressing a multitude of voices, not merely his own. *Ecuador*, then, presents him with the opportunity to learn to put this tenet into practice. However, this is no easy task: as his voyage continues, the cycle of “dilation” and “depression” of the soul repeats itself over and over. Soon, the anticipation of disappointment creeps into his experience of enchantment, lending a negative tone to many of Michaux’s observations. Upon arriving in Quito, he attempts to describe the enchantment of a specific place and the myriad *devenirs* of its people. However, his descriptions, many of which are recorded in verse, are often tempered with hesitation. He struggles to free himself from concerns of the ego, leaving him unable to explore the myriad *devenirs* he encounters. This is evidenced in a small drama of internal conflict that plays out in a verse poem: “Je te salue quand même pays maudit d’Équateur./ Mais tu es bien sauvage” (I, 153). As this journal entry continues, Michaux tries to give the country the benefit

of the doubt, sketching the *formes de vie* of Ecuadorians as "sévères, étranges […] Trapus, brachycéphales, à petits pas,/ Lourdement chargés […] dans cette ville, collé dans un cratère de nouage […]" (I, 153). While the wording could be more flattering, it still represents a poetic attempt at *exteriorization*. Indeed, to temper his more reactionary instincts, he convinces himself that any malaise or negativity he feels is due to the ego's discomfort with the physical sensations of being high in the Andes: "Nous fumons tous ici l'opium de la grande altitude, voix basse, petits pas, petit souffle […];" and, later: "Ne soyons pas tellement anxieux/ C'est le mal de montagne que nous sentons/L'affaire de quelques jours […]" (I, 154). However, the "opium" of Ecuador turns out to give Michaux a bad trip, and he is unable to shake off his disappointment that the elation and "dilation" he should feel while smoking the "opium" of high elevations results more in anxiety and disappointment than in a sublime transport into multiplicity.

For these reasons, perhaps, *Ecuador* is somewhat lackluster in tone. There is a banality in Michaux's observations; they never quite capture the place or the *devenirs* he encounters. He tries too hard to write and thus fulfills his prophecy that "l'écriture tue le voyage," leaving his observations so dispassionate and so similar to one another that they are barely worth citing; his words grasp, yet never latch onto what he had hoped to find. But does this emptiness come from Michaux or from the place he visits? This is the question he asks himself in a verse poem entitled "Je suis né troué:"

Il souffle un vent terrible.

Ce n'est qu'un petit trou dans ma poitrine,

Mais il y souffle un vent terrible.

Petit village de Quito, tu n'es pas pour moi.

J'ai besoin de haine, et d'envie, c'est ma santé.

Une grande ville, qu'il me faut.

Une grande consommation d'envie […] (I, 191)

At first, he blames Ecuador and Quito, complaining that they offer him nothing but a sense of emptiness. He is unable to tap into any experience of life, any sense of emotion, hate, love, etc.; the winds of the mountain carry no revelations in their gusts. However, he also asks if it is not something related to his ego that stops him from being able to find the sense of transport that he is searching for in Ecuador:

Mon vide est un grand mangeur, grand broyeur, grand annihileur.

Mon vide est ouate et silence.

Silence qui arrête tout.

Un silence d'étoiles.

Quoique ce trou soit profond, il n'a aucune forme.

Les mots ne le trouvent pas,

Barbotent autour. (I, 190)

What we see here is a poet-traveler on the cusp of realizing that he himself is to blame for the lack of revelations that he experiences. However, he stops short of taking responsibility and, instead of coming out of his *vide,* turns so far inward that he ends up, in spite of himself, recreating the same inner struggle seen in *Qui je fus*. As he becomes frustrated, he contemplates the *ailleurs* of death as perhaps being able to bring him closer to the writerly revelation he was seeking when he set out for Ecuador:

Oh ! Mon âme,

Tu pars ou tu restes,

Il faut te décider […]

Seigneurs de la Mort

Je ne vous ai ni blasphémés ni applaudis.

Ayez pitié de moi, voyageur déjà de tant de voyages sans valise […]

Ayez pitié de cet homme affolé qui avant de franchir la barrière vous crie déjà son nom […] (I, 190-191)

This morbid, inward turn suggests that Michaux is more interested in his own gratification as a poet than in becoming a mouthpiece for the myriad voices of the place through which he travels. Indeed, the severity of this inward turn is further underscored by the unfortunate colonialist (or racially-charged) language that appears on the next page. "Non," he writes, "il me faut faire le voyageur intelligent, l'amateur d'exotisme. J'ai là une mine ! […] je déteste les Indiens, dis-je." (I, 191) His disgust comes from an inability to appreciate the value of understanding a difference that will not benefit him; he still thinks of himself, his ego, as superior and therefore feels he must find something spiritually superior in the other. He writes that the Andean Indian of Ecuador is

> [u]n homme comme tous les autres, prudent, sans départs, qui n'arrive à rien, qui ne cherche pas, l'homme « comme ça ». (Quant à dire que je m'y habituerai …) Ces gens n'ont pas de saints, et puis la manière que je m'entende avec des brachycéphales ? (I, 191)

The untoward nature of these characterizations is not simply reserved for the particular individuals he speaks of, but rather stems from a general conviction that these are "les hommes qui n'aident pas à mon perfectionnement : zéro." (I, 191)

The sort of negativity that Michaux expresses in *Ecuador* can be considered as falling into two categories: *orientalism* and *messianism*. *Orientalism* is self-explanatory: it is the presupposition that the non-Western other should offer some secret wisdom to the Westerner.[20] As for *messianism,* Michaux hopes that the enchantment he seeks, the opening-up of his self to other *devenirs*, will present itself to him without too much effort on his part. While his orientalism comes about merely as a reaction to the frustration he experiences, messianism can actually serve as a pathway out of the laziness that inspires it. To better explain what is meant by messianism, consider the prose poem "La Crise de la dimension," in which Michaux describes the gaps between what he hoped the voyage would bring and the reality he faces:

> Non, je l'ai déjà dit ailleurs. Cette terre est rincée de son exotisme.
>
> Si dans cent ans, nous n'avons pas obtenu d'être en relation avec une autre planète (mais nous y arriverons) l'humanité est perdue. (Ou alors l'intérieur de la terre ?) Il n'y a plus moyen de vivre, nous éclatons, nous faisons la guerre, nous faisons tout mal, nous n'en pouvons plus de rester sur cette écorce. Nous

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[20] In the introduction to his landmark book *Orientalism,* Edward Said tells us that he is concerned with the extent to which an orientalist text (a text that professes to know the *oriental* other more than that subject knows itself) is "exterior" to what it describes: "I do not think that this idea can be overemphasized. Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West." This notion of *exteriority* is, of course, the opposite of the one we have defined in the context of Levinas's ideas. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York Knopf/Doubleday, 2014) 20.

souffrons mortellement ; de la dimension, de l'avenir de la dimension dont nous sommes privés, maintenant que nous avons fait à satiété le tour de la terre.

(Ces réflexions, je le sais, suffiront à me faire mépriser comme un esprit de quatrième ordre.) (I, 155)

The notion that "cette terre est rincée de son exotisme" links directly to Weberian notion of *Entzauberung*. Michaux introduces the notion that enchantment comes about through the erasure of our own tiny perspectival dimension so that we might make room for other perspectives. He writes that we suffer because "l'avenir de la dimension dont nous sommes privés, maintenant que nous avons fait à satiété le tour de la terre," meaning that we are too close to the Earth and cannot see the rainforests for the trees. To save ourselves, we must learn to see the world as another might. It does not do for us to remain stuck in our tired, tiny dimensional perspective. Perhaps the different perspective that we need must come from beyond, from our scientific ability to reach others beyond the confines of our perceived reality.

Though Michaux's plea for extraterrestrial contact may seem outlandish, the way he words it sums up exactly what Michaux sought to achieve on a broader level: it is a poetic plea for a means of erasing the self and learning to view the world from a vastly different perspective.[21] And although, to some extent, Michaux's messianism represents a negative aspect

[21] In a way, this is reminiscent of the notion of the *Crise de vers* that Mallarmé spoke of in a prose poem of that name. Mallarmé's speaker argues that, in order for a new form of poetry (or art) to flourish, the poet must erase all traces of ego from his writing, so that a non-human, purely esthetic evocation of magic can remain. See Stéphane Mallarmé, "Crise de vers," *Igitus, Divagation, Un coup de dés* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003) 256:

> "L'œuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poëte, qui cède l'initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés; ils s'allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle trainée de feux sur des pierreries, replaçant la

of his thinking (especially if we interpret this plea for extraterrestrial contact as indicative of his remaining inert and hoping enchantment will be brought to him), there is perhaps more here than meets the eye. Indeed, the desire expressed in the passage above echoes what we saw Weber criticize in his essay on the *disenchantment of the world* — in particular, his contention that a return to pre-modern religious thinking is a foolish, or even impossible means of rekindling the magic of enchantment in modernity. And there is more to Michaux's turning to messianism than a simple desire to will oneself into ignorant bliss. Rather, Michaux's messianic plea for an extraterrestrial visit could very well be seen as the start of a practice of controlling the self and thinking outside of the present. What Michaux desires and what he sees as a crisis is, in truth, an opportunity to learn to see diversity in the world.

Thus, Michaux's messianic thinking in the fragment from "La Crise de la dimension" might not be evidence of a desire to relinquish the *work* of finding enchantment. Rather, it points toward a way of broadening his perspective; it is Michaux learning, albeit slowly, to cultivate the patience necessary for a more exteriorized engagement with the world.

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To conclude these thoughts on *Ecuador,* I would now like to turn to one final passage that appears near the end of the journal, before Michaux begins the Amazonian leg of his trip.

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respiration perceptible en l'ancien soufflé lyrique ou la direction personnelle enthousiaste de la phrase."

Passing back through Quito before heading to the jungle, he offers an almost religious plea to the place he has visited:

> Équateur, Équateur, j'ai pensé bien du mal de toi. […]
>
> Équateur, tu es tout de même un sacré pays, et puis qu'est-ce que je deviendrai, moi ? (I, 203)

The question he poses concerns how he might develop an outlook and practice that will serve as the avenue to an experience of lasting enchantment in his life and work. In other words, he asks in a most dramatic way how he might prevent a future journey from falling into the poetic mire of this one. However, he essentially gives away the answer when he asks the question: he admits that he needs to let go of his worries about "what will become of him," and merely allow the "sacré" of another place and its people to flow through him. To do this, he must show a courage he has thus far lacked:

> Il se pourrait bien que jusqu'à présent ma vie ait pas mal manqué de courage.
>
> Manqué, et peut-être le courage m'était condition d'existence, et peut-être par ce fait, je gardais toujours cette sensation d'inemploi, qu'on appelle encore disponibilité […] (I, 203)

In other words, what Ecuador teaches him is that he must show more courage in order to find his vocation, his *emploi* as a poet who allows the enchantment of the world to speak through him.

Of course, this is but one instant in a text that weaves constantly between "courage" and "manque de courage;" while Michaux might have various small epiphanies throughout the journal, he never integrates them into a clearly-defined, fully-formed practice or process. Discussing this failure on his part, Laurent Jenny identifies *Ecuador* as being an existential and

poetic playground in which Michaux begins to collect “toutes sortes de genres et de manières verbales,” without being able to find their “emploi face à une terre noire, nue, et avare, qui laisse sur sa faim” (I, 203). He even comes to see a hint of what he is searching for in “la profusion des styles formels y apparaît comme la compensation d’une pauvreté de styles existentiels.”[22] But the experience of these *styles* of life or *devenirs* is not yet solid enough for a true poetic of enchantment to emerge. Thus, this first trip is simply an instance of a traveler-poet testing the waters; Michaux merely begins to recognize how much courage it will take him to, as he writes to Jean Paulhan while still in Ecuador, brutalize (*brutaliser*) his body, thus performing an ascetic act that will allow him to control the desires and expression of his ego.[23]

Un barbare en Asie: *Toward a Policy of Exteriorization*

Though many of the same frustrations appear in *Un barbare en Asie,* Michaux’s second voyage is more of a success. As a record (or memoir) of Michaux’s voyage to the Indian subcontinent, China, Malaysia, and Japan, *Un barbare en Asie* introduces us to a Michaux who is trying to rectify the shortcomings of *Ecuador*. Michaux finds the courage necessary to renounce control of his ego, immersing himself in the countries he visits in a respectful way. In this vein, *Un barbare en Asie* represents the development of a new, more indirect approach to travel: the Michaux of *Barbare* is able to shift his focus away from the self and toward connections made

[22] Laurent Jenny, “Styles d’être et individuation chez Henri Michaux,” *Fabula-LhT*, issue no. 9, “Après le bovarysme,” 26 March 2012, http://www.fabula.org/lht/9/jenny.html. Accessed 5 March 2017.
[23] Bellour, op. cit. 133.

with that which is exterior to him. Michaux's trip through Asia helps him to find a style that will allow him to create what Maurice Blanchot, in his essays on Michaux, refers to as "des œuvres d'où presque toute poétique directe est exclue, mais que déchire un humour désespéré, une bouffonnerie dont le sens ne peut être découvert."[24] This is not to say, however, that *Barbare* is by any means perfectly innocent. Indeed, it too raises a number of problems. Namely, michaux's attempt to cultivate an ethos of respectful *self-control* and *exteriorization* in India and China are, at times, undermined by an unfortunate (and often unexamined) racial essentialism and orientalist bent. However, this too is less problematic than the examples we find in Ecuador.

Moreoever, Michaux addresses the problems of *Barbare* head-on in a 1967 re-edition of the text. In the preface to this re-edition, musing on the legacy of his trip, he notes "qu'il manque beaucoup à ce voyage pour être reel" (I, 280). By this he means that his attempts to depict and transmit the worries and hopes of the other (and the other's political situation) are lacking and even irresponsible. The problem he notices in *Un barbare en Asie* is that the trip is, essentially, a selfish act of wish fulfillment. Reflecting on this, he notes: "Quand je vis l'Inde, et quand je vis la Chine, pour la première fois, des peuples, sur cette terre, me parurent mériter d'être réels. / Joyeux, je fonçai dans ce réel, persuadé que j'en rapportais beaucoup" (I, 280).

Michaux's disappointment in himself in 1967 represents a continuation of his attempt, begun in Ecuador, to shift his perspective and grow. In his self-critique, he comes to the conclusion that the enchantment he experienced in Asia was most probably the result of a "[v]oyage réel entre deux imaginaires." He continues: "peut-être au fond de moi les observais-je

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[24] Maurice Blanchot, *Henri Michaux ou le refus de l'enfermement* (Paris: Farrago, 1999) 22.

comme des voyages imaginaires qui se seraient realisés sans moi, œuvre d'«autres». Pays qu'un autre aurait inventé. J'en avais la surprise, l'émotion, l'agacement" (I, 280).

Despite these shortcomings, *Barbare* holds up remarkably well. To be sure, a measure of inescapable racism always clouds his outlook. But Michaux did not allow himself to sanitize this text retrospectively — as he puts it: "ici, barbare on fut, barbare on doit rester" (I, 281). Thus, by looking at the text and his subsequent reflections on it, one is able to see the process of *self-control* at play.

Toward Ascesis

A major life event that occurred in the years between his trips to Ecuador and Asia may have helped Michaux gain the courage and sense of *emploi* he was lacking. Soon after his return from Ecuador, he lost both of his parents within a period of six months. This tragedy may have allowed Michaux to more easily separate himself from his roots and moorings, inspiring him to begin what he will call his "voyages contre:" travels that are not simply against his upbringing or social class, but also against his own desires. The term "voyage contre" comes from a short chronology of his life that Michaux calls *Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence*. Here, he speaks of himself in the third person: "[…] Il voyage contre. Pour expulser de lui sa patrie, ses attaches de toutes sortes et ce qui s'est en lui et malgré lui attaché de culture grecque ou romaine ou germanique ou d'habitudes belges" (I, CXXIX-CXXXV).

The text reinforces this notion of a break from family and, as Nina Parish has pointed out, from ownership of his own perspective.[25] Viewed as a *voyage contre,* Michaux's time in Asia can also be described as an ascetic journey — a journey with the intention of shedding attachments. To better understand this ascetic endeavor, we return to the notion of *self-control*, which, as we saw in the beginning of this chapter, enters Michaux's lexicon following his interactions with Indian colonial subjects in Calcutta.

The form of self-control that Michaux discovers (and opens himself up to) is the ascetic *forme de vie* that he notes (in a somewhat essentializing manner) is a common practice in India, which he calls the Indian "propension à se dépouiller qui lui est aussi naturelle que de s'asseoir" (I, 322). This practice is a sort of mania that overtakes individuals in India at certain times in their life, and allows them to undergo a rapid shift in their perspective. Indeed, "[t]out le monde," he notes "à de certains moments décisifs, se reveille pour lutter ou conquérir." However:

> L'Hindou se réveille pour lâcher tout. Le temps de dire « ouf » : le roi quitte son trône, le riche se dépouille de ses habits, abandonne son palais, le fondé de pouvoir de la *Chartered Bank of India,* sa position. Et non pas au profit de quelqu'un […] c'est comme si son vêtement ou l'appareil de sa richesse lui faisait mal à la peau, et le plus nu et le plus abandonné qu'il sera, errant et sans famille, mieux ça vaudra. (I, 322)

Although his making generalizations about an entire religion is, of course, problematic, in describing this practice he is suggesting a different form of being — a society in which letting go of one's ego in order to explore and revel in the *devenirs* that surround us is an accepted way of

[25] Parish, op. cit. 110.

life. The devout Hindu's asceticism ("dépouillement") is seen as a means of cultivating enchantment. As we saw previously, the term *dépouillement,* or ascetic dispossession, is also a key means of finding enchantment for Blaise Cendrars. As mentioned in the first chapter, Jean Cocteau called Cendrars's early interest in travel and machinery part of a practice of self-dispossession ("dépouillement de soi"), which leads to a discovery of enchantment in modernity. What is crucial about this concept is that it combines a desire to practice *self-control* and travel as a means of experiencing sublime enchantment. As such, it remains a motif throughout the first part of *Un barbare en Asie,* as Michaux increasingly begins to translate the form of being of the ascetic into his own experience of *dépouillement* and *exteriorization*.

We see this effort to undertake an ascetic practice, for example, when Michaux travels along the Ganges and prays to the river, in an attempt to leave his personal desires behind in order to flow with its current:

> "Oh ! Gange, grand être, qui nous baigne et nous bénit.
>
> Gange, je ne te désire pas, je ne te dessine pas, je m'incline devant toi, et je me
> fais humble sous tes ondes
>
> Fortifie en moi l'abandon et le silence. Permet que je te prie. (I, 314)

His prayer, here, is powerful and imbued with purpose because, in India, he has seen how "[l]a faculté poétique et la faculté religieuse se ressemblent plus qu'on ne pense" (I, 327). Michaux is thus able to imbue his writing with a religious spirituality and fluidity — the same energy and sacred power that undulates in the waters of the Ganges and that constitutes the secret inner life of the traveler-poet who is able to open himself up to the plurality and enchantment of the world around him.

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Through the observations he makes during his travels, Michaux is able to forge his own practice of *dépouillement de soi*. He is able to see how his own ego and point of view have been constructed. He notes, almost incredulously, that only through his travels to India has he been able to experience this loss of the burden of ego: “ayant vécu en un pays d’Europe plus de trente ans, il ne me soit jamais arrivé d’en parler. J’arrive aux Indes, j’ouvre les yeux, et j’écris un livre.” Once he is open to it, travel introduces Michaux to experiences that show him “l’abondance des choses nouvelles et dans la joie de revivre.” He is thus able to renew his emotive engagement with the world. The result of this is that he will be able return to Europe with an eye trained to see the enchantment that lies beneath “l’ennui, à la contradiction, aux soucis étroits, aux défaites, au train-train quotidien, et sur lequel on ne sait plus rien” (I, 332).

Beneath the *ennui,* the defeats and the slog of day-to-day life, there lies a world of enchanted forms and figures one might have lost sight of. Furthermore, he discovers that travel, when approached with enough presence of mind and self-control, can serve as an invaluable tool for unlocking the enchantment and interconnectedness of modern life. In other words, he shows us that one must look past one’s immediate needs; he shows that the animalistic ego of desire does not define who one is. This, in fact, brings Michaux to a clearer definition of *self-control*:

> L’Indien n’est pas séduit par la grâce des animaux. Oh ! non, il les regarde plutôt de travers.
>
> Il n’aime pas les chiens. Pas de concentration, les chiens. Des êtres de premier mouvement, honteusement dépourvus de *self-control.* (I, 286)

The example of dogs (which are presumably ubiquitous in the Indian cities Michaux visits) unable to control their appetites situates Michaux's fascination with *self-control* within both an Eastern and Western tradition. In the Eastern tradition depicted here, we have a specific cultural observation pertaining to the Indian who seeks asceticism in order to dispossess himself of his appetite (so as to better understand his connection to a totality of others). In the Western tradition, we have a similar notion of appetite being counter to good governance, or mastery, of the self. I'm thinking, in particular, of section 430 of Plato's *Republic*, in which Socrates gives his famous description of the tripartite soul as a metaphor of the well-governed *polis* (city). He tells us that, in order for the rational part of the soul to win out, the soul of volition (which is concerned with carefully measured choices) must be given preference over the appetitive, or animal soul. The difference in Michaux's case is that Socrates's rationality is replaced by a search for spiritual truth.[26]

Though Michaux comes to see attachment to the *ego* as animalistic, this is not to say that animals themselves do not reveal something. On the contrary, like any individual or natural phenomenon he observes, animals provide evidence of other possible forms of being that Michaux can add to his poetic of understanding of himself so as to express a more complete notion of the interconnected magic of the world.

[26] There is both a spiritual and political analogy bubbling under the surface of Michaux's observations in India. As Socrates jokingly remarks in the *Republic,* "there is something ridiculous in the expression 'master of himself;' for the master is also the servant and the servant the master; and in all these modes of speaking the same person is denoted." Of course, as I have mentioned, the India Michaux finds at the time of his visit is a colonized British subject. The notion that this Indian subject had a hidden mastery of self, while still being a servant, is both a political statement of solidarity with a movement for independence, and, ironically, a fetishized colonialist desire on Michaux's part.

In the space of self-control Michaux carves out for himself, he is able to understand the different interactions and behaviors of others (even animals) as *devenirs* that he can incorporate and emulate. Thus, he does not take animals as models, but as idioms of the divine expression that goes to make up each of us. For example, he considers various species of fish in the aquarium at Madras, which he describes as having personalities that are evidence of darker human vices. He sees the sloth-like behavior of *autennarius hipsidue,* with its "gross tête bonus, tête gigantesque de philosophe." The fish sits in place, "accroupie pendant des heures sans bouger," with "un air abruti qui ne ment pas. Car si une proie ne passe pas devant sa bouche, il ne se déplacera pas. mais si elle passe juste devant, alors, oui, les mâchoires s'ouvrent, happent, se referment et font « clac »" (I, 331). There is also the violence of *Tétrodon ollongus,* who, upon finding one of their own who is either sick or fatigued,

> assemblent, l'attrapent, les uns par la queue, les autres par les nageoires de devant, le tiennent solidement, pendant que le reste lui arrache des morceaux de chair du ventre tant qu'ils peuvent. C'est leur grande distraction. (I, 331)

These violent, graceless brutes are, nevertheless, representations of *devenirs* of man. Indeed, Michaux's accounts of being captured by the language of animals almost double as moral tales to explain the different aspects of human behavior and how people might interact with one another. Other animals, in fact, receive more moral judgment from Michaux than fish *devenirs.* When writing about birds, he describes *perruches* as exhibiting a pure élan of self-interested movement, and the pigeon as *un obsédé sexuel* in the way it gobbles up food.

The fact that these examples often show a negative aspect of these animals appears to be related to their inability to exteriorize their point of view. Indeed, the act of self-control Michaux

learns and attempts to cultivate in his travels comes from an ability to view how one interacts with other *devenirs*. The vital significance he associates with this ability becomes evident in a particular passage of animal observation that takes place, once more, in India, when he observes the common interaction between horses and monkeys in stables. This interaction, he notes, takes place in two stages. The first involves differences in cognition, wherein each animal manages, if not to exercise *self-control*, then to gain an inkling of exteriority, with the horse realizing that the monkey "est tout un autre être" (and vice versa). Furthermore, the monkey (who is much faster on the uptake) sees that the horse is not as agile or social as he and his companions are. He realizes that he cannot interact with the horse in the same way as with members of his own species. In the second stage, the animals learn to accept this exterior *being* with "un certain plaisir." They effectively undergo a primitive version of understanding exteriority. To clarify this notion, I will reproduce Michaux's narrative from *Un barbare en Asie*:

> Aux Indes, dans les écuries, il y a presque toujours un singe. Il ne rend aucun service apparent au cheval, ni le cheval au singe. Cependant les chevaux qui ont un tel compagnon travaillent mieux, sont plus dispo [sic] que les autres. On suppose que par ses grimaces, ses gambades, son rythme différent, le singe délasse le cheval. Quant au singe, il aurait du plaisir à passer tranquillement la nuit. (Un singe qui dort, parmi les siens, est toujours sur le qui-vive.)
>
> Un cheval donc peut se sentir vivre beaucoup plus avec un singe qu'avec une dizaine de chevaux. (I, 332-3)

The key word Michaux reveals here is "délasse." It's as if knowing another *être*'s rhythms relieves the burden of having to live up to one's own supposed *ego*. Indeed, *délasser* also means

allay (*delayer i*n French), thus representing a notion of being able to bring respite to the ego by diluting its importance.

In essence, this is an action of *contrôle de soi*: keeping the ego, the self, in check. However, there is a caveat. While their interaction has an effect on their ego, the two parties are not consciously aware of this. The traveler has access to this greater awareness — his or her eyes, moving like a camera, can glimpse the behavioral interplay taking place:

> La connaissance ne progresse pas avec le temps. On passe sur les différences. On s'en arrange. On s'entend. Mais on ne situe plus. Cette loi fatale fait que les vieux résidents en Asie et les personnes les plus mêlées aux Asiatiques ne sont pas les plus à même d'en garder une vision centrée et qu'un passant aux yeux naïfs peut parfois mettre le doigt sur le centre. (I, 133)

Being a *passant*, or traveler, allows one a requisite distance from one's moorings, leading to greater awareness of the exteriority by which one is surrounded. As he travels, an effect of *vitesse émotive* arises and allows Michaux to visualize, and serve as a conduit for the expression of, a multiplicity of *devenirs*. This, in fact, is the experience Michaux was seeking in the early texts of his that we discussed at the beginning of this chapter. It is what Laurent Jenny, writing about Michaux, has called an ability to observe and transmit a multitude of "styles d'individuation," be they represented in monkeys, pigeons, mongooses, railway agents, babas, or beggars. The lesson he learns through travel (and from the religious thinking he encountered in India) is that through movement and the ability to capture *styles d'individuation,* one can open oneself up to the enchantment that exists in the world. The only requirement is that he let go of his ego, trusting that he will be able to express, as he puts it, the constant flow of being that

underpins his relationship to the world. It's fitting to end on an effective illustration of this revelation from *Barbare.* It occurs in a short meditation on the prevalence of beggars in Nepal. There, Michaux notices that there is not one beggar, but rather a fraternity of *mendicité*: another individual, for example, will play the role of the beggar tomorrow, and so on and so forth. This is the law of fluidity and *vitesse émotive*. It teaches its practitioner *self-control* and humility (I, 339).[27]

[27] What we see here are styles of living and experiencing the world that can be understood interchangeably. It is a way of allowing individuals their own signification; a way of looking the world through the lens of prophetic enchantment. It implies that, if we can understand the diversity of the world, we can see into a messianic future. The idioms Michaux creates here chime with other prophetic-poetic observers of the mid-twentieth century. I'm thinking, in particular, of Kojève's famous assessment of post-war futures at the end of history in a long footnote to his book *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, "Bibliothèque des idées," 1947) 436n.

In this footnote, he describes what he calls *le retour de l'homme à l'animalité*. The return to animality means a return to activity aligned with a specific *devenir*; this is something that coincides with the end of man's historical evolution. In this scenario, there is no need for a struggle against one's ego or the *other*. Earlier in his life, Kojève tells us, he had thought that this *end* had not yet occurred. However, a trip to Japan in 1959 changes his mind: he notes what he considers to be a phenomenon of post-history, with *snobbism* taking over and giving rise to extreme cultural invention and ritualized suicide as a means of creating existential conflict where there is none. Kojève thinks the United States will probably head in the same direction once it has become homogenized and unified.

Today, we know that this is something of a false impression. However, the post-historical conflicts we see playing out on a smaller scale in the habits and *devenirs* of animals, are examples of a sense of enchantment and multiplicity without conflict.

Toward a New Symbology

In this travelogue, then, Michaux shows how the *styles d'individuation* he encounters lead him to new means of poetic expression. The remainder of *Un barbare en Asie* is not as experientially rewarding as the passages we have looked at previously (Michaux was right to downplay the significance of the parts on China and Japan). Nevertheless, his position as a traveler in these countries still gives him room to further hone an ethic centered on observation and the creation of signs describing how we might find enchantment by reading all of the people and objects that surround us with a piercing eye. It allows him to think about how he will encode and transmit what he has learned.

While his trip to China may not have involved any significant interpersonal encounters, he finds inspiration in modes of representation – what he calls "le génie du signe" of pictographic writing. This is the quality that was already evident in "[l]'ancienne écriture chinoise, celle des sceaux," that contains "ni volupté dans la présentation ni dans la trace." (I, 379) That is to say, it is a symbology that does not represent the object it signifies but rather transmits something on the level of thought and experience. His argument is that we can learn from this way of reading objects. Michaux also sees this quality in Chinese theater, where representation is scaled down to include only symbolic objects to represent "la plaine, les arbres, l'échelle, à mesure qu'on en a besoin." In this form of representation, the scene is itself a *devenir* — a thought that changes "toutes les trois minutes." Indeed, as he remarks, "Son théatre est extrêment rapide, du cinéma" (I, 379). This takes us back to the sentiment expressed in the early

text *Chronique de l'aiguilleur,* where cinema-like rapidity gives one a rapid experience of multiplicity: in other words, the sensation of *vitesse émotive*.

In light of these descriptions, it becomes apparent that the travels recounted in *Un barbare en Asie*, like his first voyage to Ecuador, remain far from the messianic transformation into a traveler-poet capable of encompassing great dimensions and multiplicity that Michaux was looking for. However, he does fortify a practice of examining the present with an open imagination, free from his own desires. Indeed, he learns to control desire, which allows him to see enchantment in the present. While this may not be the perfect form of *exteriorization* he once sought, it is nevertheless an opening. The experiences described in *Un barbare en Asie* allow a figure of representation to emerge; it is this figure that will serve as the basis for Michaux's later writings. For example, this understanding of symbology emerges as a poetic ethos in Michaux's imagined travelogues to fantastic places like Grand Garabagne, "[le] pays de la Magie." These invented countries, complete with their own peoples, customs, creatures and *devenirs*, adhere to their own hermetic logic. In *Grand Garabagne,* there are the short-tempered, brutal Émanglons who shame and kill disturbers of the peace for sneezing, or forcing an interlocutor to speak too loudly. (II, 24) And there are the shy Omobuls and the philosophical orbs, who, in many ways, mimic the practice of self-control Michaux codifies in *Un barbare en Asie,* with their sage teaching them to "[r]amasser en soi […] quelque chose de si petit que, même mort, on le tient encore" (II, 32).

Looking at all of the ways that the practice of self-control crops up in Michaux's later work would require another chapter altogether. (Indeed, we shall return to some of them in the conclusion.) To conclude this chapter, however, suffice it to say that through the brutality,

anxiety, and risk of the encounter, Michaux becomes able to create works that are not mere speculative exercises like *Qui je fus* and *Lointain intérieur,* but rather symbolic idioms that speak to a real visceral experience that is possible in the world. Travel is necessary for this poetic voice to find its expression.

What Michaux teaches us, then, is that travel is the enactment of a vicious cycle between the magical and the critical. We do not have to abandon rationality in order to have visceral experiences, just as we do not have to abandon the self to experience the variety of *devenirs* there are. It is undeniable that the lessons found in Michaux's works are much less vital than those of Leiris or Cendrars; indeed, for Michaux there is no resolution, no single form that fulfills the journey he begins. This could very well be the reason that there are so many contradictory positions and emotions in Michaux's explorations. Maurice Blanchot was quick to see and appreciate this in Michaux's works, noting that the literary signs he observes and invents "nous paraissent si proches et intéressent notre sort, même lorsque rien de nous n'y semble impliqué," which is because they touch upon a journey of self-realization that is integral to the

> condition générale de notre destin qui ne peut trouver un sens que dans un effort pour échapper à ce sens et même à tout sens possible — de sorte que la gratuité de ses fables et parfois de son langage est ce qui nous importe le plus. Mais, en même temps, cette gratuité, cette objectivité sans résonance, cette placidité sourde et aveugle fait partie d'un mouvement qui à son autre extrémité est puissance de colère et de tempête, anxiété et désespoir, émotion infinie. Il n'y a pas d'œuvre contemporaine où l'angoisse et l'échec humains aient trouvé une

> expression à la fois plus réservé et plus violente, une voix plus fière et plus tragique.[28]

The anger and anxiety that permeate this discovery of wonder are central to the voyage that Michaux undertakes. He has the daring to once more imbue the world with enchantment, yet is dogged by his critical conscience at every step of the way. This tension is perhaps the clearest representation of modern travel that we have seen thus far; Michaux embodies these contradictions and turns them into an ethic of writing; a way of living one's life that does not resort to self-aggrandizement or self-loathing, but that dares to face the experience head-on, relaying it as it occurs.

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[28] Blanchot, op. cit. 62.

CONCLUSION:

TRAVEL AND THE ESSAY AS A FORM FOR CONVEYING ENCHANTMENT

In each iteration of "rational enchantment" introduced in the three chapters making up this dissertation, what we have seen are rational processes of thought that lead to a communicable experience of enchantment. Each author finds in travel a rational process or practice through which he can write and express nuances of magic that he extrapolates from his experiences moving through the world. Moreover, we have seen that, more than the content of the voyage itself, it is each author's approach to the voyage that results in a specific personal figure of enchantment that persists and develops across their literary œuvre. For Cendrars, this is the figure of flight, for Leiris, the figure of *frôlement,* for Michaux, the figure of ascetic *self-control* and *exteriorization* that he finds in Indian religiosity. One final question remains, then: is there a single figure under which we might regroup these three authors, a figure that both unites them and points toward a new way that their thoughts might be applied?

I can think of one figure that is appropriate for a conclusion: that of the *uraboros*, the snake eating its own tail, the perfect symbol of a continual voyage. In this spirit, to begin these concluding remarks, I would like to offer a line from a Michel Foucault's famous introduction to the second volume of his *History of Sexuality*, which served as a sort of unwritten mantra for me as I penned these pages. This introduction is something akin to a conclusion in the way the author reflects on the genesis of his project and what it brought him to understand about how the "arts of existence," or "technologies of the self" (here, this especially refers to sexual practices)

change over time and constitute different notions of identity for the practitioner. To explain how his project revealed to him his own hidden mantra (or the fundamental problem he is grappling with) he offers a piece of wisdom that reads like a proverb:

"Le voyage rajeunit les choses mais il vieillit le rapport à soi."[1]

I read this phrase as meaning that the more discoveries one makes, the more clearly a specific problematic, which has plagued the individual from his earliest days, comes into focus, revealing itself to be integral to their work and being. Applied to the authors we have examined, this could be taken to mean that the voyage does not so much reveal to them new aspects of enchantment as it does manifest desires that were already in place earlier in their lives and works.

In the spirit of Foucault's proverb, I would like to look at a few different forms and figures that are common to the works we have examined. The two points of commonality I would like to address are those of a similar *struggle* and a similar *outcome* in terms of the literary forms these writers produce.

In each chapter, we saw the creation of a dialectic between the individual and the world (comprised of *others* and *elsewhere*), which resulted in an inner tension that inspired each writer to travel. This tension is, to a certain extent, a modern version of the Kantian opposition of *Pflicht* and *Neigung*, duty and inclination — the *duty* to carry out action in deference to moral law, versus doing something out of intimate desire or *inclination*, perhaps for a premeditated gain.[2] The space between these two poles of the will forms the paradigm in which the authors I

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[1] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité II : L'usage des plaisirs* (Paris: Gallimard, collection "Tel," 1997[1984]) 19.

[2] See Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 108 : "[For Kant,] every action is motivated by either inclination or the thought of duty,

have studied travel and write: Leiris was caught between poetic desire and ethnographic duty, Michaux between the desire for multiplicity and the duty to keep his appropriation of the other in check, and Cendrars between a desire to fabulate and a desire to create a range of esthetics that would allow him to bob and weave through the machines and spheres of modernity. In essence, each of these authors finds their esthetic desire to be in conflict with a law of communication and action.

Out of this this common struggle, however, comes another important point, this time related to form and genre. The examples examined in this study show us that for these authors, travel first and foremost serves as the catalyst for a more intimate transformation. For this reason, it is perhaps inappropriate to call these texts travel *journals* or even *memoirs*. Rather, they are something more akin to travel essays. Indeed, considering these texts as essays seems a natural choice, if we are to understand the term "essay" to mean a literary form in which the writer examines the contradiction at the heart of their character in order to arrive at a more nuanced portrait of the self.

This notion of exploring a dialectic in order to bring about mystic revelations of selfhood is deeply ingrained in the French tradition of essay writing. This method goes back to Michel de Montaigne's *Essais,* which were predicated, among other things, on the notion that one's senses must always be challenged; the idea is that, in order to know the self, one must become aware of the dialectical way in which the world enters their perception. This is what leads to enchanted

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that is, every action is either aus Niegung or aus Plficth (Gr 4: 398, 401n; 66, 69). Presumably, inclinations constitute the "subjective limitations and obstacles" to which a potentially good will is exposed. Presumably also, it is by bringing out the contrast between action aus Neigung and action aus Pflicht that the essential goodness of the latter is made to "shine forth more brightly."

observation and spiritual writing. Montaigne conceives of the individual as having multiple inclinations: “il ne se peut establir rien de certain de l’un à l’autre, et le jugeant et le jugé estans en continuelle mutation et branle.”[3] That is, the individual must constantly challenge what he feels, as though he were in continual *branle* (movement). It should be pointed out that the use of *branle* here is not without significance. This passage comes from the third book of Montaigne’s *Essais*, the meanderings of which often return to the *branle* Montaigne experienced on his travels through Italy, Switzerland and Germany. Ultimately, Montaigne is something of an early-modern traveler-poet and, as such, can be considered a spiritual precursor to the authors we have examined.[4]

Beyond their similarity to Montaigne’s logic, the texts we have examined also fulfill several of the criteria that the literary critic Marielle Macé considers to be the hallmarks of the 20th-century revival of the essay. Indeed, she sees the essay as a record of an individual practice of reconciling a personal *forme de vie* or style with an outside notion of duty to certain ideals. She writes:

> La possibilité de l’essai suppose en effet une certaine représentation de la littérature, la conviction que la pratique de la littérature a à voir avec une vie de la pensée, avec le fait d’avoir des idées. C’est cette confusion désirable,

[3] Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, Pierre Villey (ed.) (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 1999) 601.

[4] Pierre Villey, “Editor’s Note,” *Les Essais*, Michel de Montaigne (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 1999) 944 .

> précisément, entre la littérature et l'exercice de la pensée qui a sous-tendu l'institution de l'essai comme genre au XXe siècle.[5]

Thus, the modern essay is defined by an individual's relationship with the vagaries and vicissitudes of the world in which they live and the communities (political, social, etc.) to which they belong; as such, it is a reflection on the particular historical moment, or *situation*, in which they live, as Macé mentions as well:[6]

> A un moment de son histoire, l'essai a constitué un foyer autour duquel a pu graviter la représentation de la *situation* culturelle de la littérature, de sa modernité et de ses pouvoirs, en particulier de sa mise en concurrence avec les discours savants.[7]

As we have seen, this very principle allows Cendrars, Leiris, and Michaux to coexist, comment on, share and communicate with a great many other aesthetic influences: Gourmont, Mauss, Bataille, Epstein, and others. However, one of the things that sets these three apart from other writers is their decision to exercise their bodies (and not simply their *pensées*) in the world. It is this level of physical engagement that makes for this particular genre and creates a sense of enchantment.

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[5] Marielle Macé, "L'essai littéraire, devant le temps," *Cahiers de Narratologie*, issue no. 14, 2008, online since 27 February 2008 www.narratologie.revues.org/499. Accessed 28 March 2017.

[6] Here Macé is alluding to Sartre's series of essays that appeared throughout the second half of his life under the title *Situations*. With this title, Sartre referred to a concept he fashioned in *L'Être et le Néant* (Paris: Gallimard "Tel," 1943) 544: "Nous appellerons *situation* la contingence de la liberté dans le *plenum* d'être du monde en tant que ce *datum,* qui n'est là que *pour ne pas contraindre* la liberté, ne se révèle à cette liberé que comme *déjà éclairé* par la fin qu'elle choisit."

[7] Ibid.

For Leiris and Michaux, the connection to the essay is nothing new. Indeed, Leiris has often been considered the modern Montaigne,[8] and Michaux has been analyzed as an essayist by several critics, including Jerôme Roger's great chapter on how Michaux separates the vocations of "essayiste" and "poète."[9]

Cendrars is not usually seen as part of this same genre and *situation*. However, as I hope I have been able to show, Cendrars does fit into this model in a rather original way. He creates his own unique essayistic mechanism in the *prochronie*, which, to quote the critic Claude Leroy, is:

> une *pratique palingénésique de l'autobiographie*. Conjoignant la rétrospection à la régénération, la commémoration à l'instauration, elle substitue, à la conception d'un temps linéaire, successif, irréversible, objectif, un temps cyclique, mythique, élastique, « signe », qui est celui des renaissances, des correspondances, des coïncidences magiques entre soi et soi, soi et les autres, soi et le monde.[10]

The cyclical and mythical time of non-linear contradictions that Cendrars projects onto the voyage deepens, solidifies, and crystallizes his concept of himself. As he travels, Cendrars encounters new places, peoples and sensations (experienced through modes of transport). The enchanted desires he observes in the outside world he finds reflected within himself. Thus travel brings into focus the desires that lie at the heart of his own identity and needs. Using concepts of time and experiences of modernity, Cendrars synthesizes these experiences into his own

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[8] See Michel Beaujour, op cit.

[9] Jérôme Roger, *Henri Michaux : Poésie pour savoir* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2000).

[10] Claude Leroy, *La Main de Cendrars* (Lille: Septentrion, "Objet," 1996) 314.

combination of the rational and the fantastic, establishing an esthetic practice rooted in an ethic of knowing the self.

Cendrars acknowledges the essayistic nature of his *prochronisme* directly in a passage from *Bourlinguer* in which he views writing on a typewriter as tantamount to Xeroxing his travel and experience onto the page:

> […] depuis des années que je ne sors plus, que je ne bouge plus, que je ne voyage plus, que je ne vois plus personne, glissant ma vie comme une feuille de papier carbone entre deux feuilles de papier blanc sous le chariot de ma machine à écrire et que je tape, je tape […] intercalant dans la vision directe celle, réfléchie, qui ne peut se déchiffrer qu'à l'envers comme dans un miroir, maître de ma vie, dominant le temps, ayant réussi par la désarticuler, la disloquer et à glisser la relativité comme un substratum dans mes phrases pour en faire le ressort même de mon écriture ce que l'on a pris pour désordre, confusion, facilité, manque de composition […][11]

Cendrars sees the ability to represent the enchantment of his life and travels as an act of innovation and a physical activity in and of itself. The result, he tells us, is something of a mix between literary and scientific exploration (or enchantment) as he has, in his estimation, learned to apply "les procédés, les analyses et les inductions mathématiques d'un Einstein sur l'essence, la constitution, la propagation de la lumière à la technique du roman !"[12]

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[11] Blaise Cendrars, *Blaise Cendrars: Œuvres autobiographiques complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," 2013) 163-164.
[12] Ibid.

Few other authors are as brash about their process of translating their experiences of enchantment in the world into writing as Cendrars proves to be. He states that his essayistic approach is directly tied to the enchanted scientism "of an Einstein."[13] Most importantly, however, the broad strokes with which Cendrars paints his representation of the world and its enchantments demonstrate with great clarity what is meant both by the act of digestion mentioned by Butor in my introduction and the notion of esthetic play coined by Jane Bennett. We see how his experience, once digested, can become his impression, his art 'of the self' in the age of mechanical reproduction.

Travel as a (Literary) Practice of Diversity

Indeed, it is by reflecting on this notion of essayist practice that I would like to slowly close the reflections of the past several chapters. To pursue this notion (and to borrow some terminology), I turn once again to Michel Foucault. I refer to his essay "L'écriture de soi," in which he focuses on a variant of essayistic self-writing from antiquity called *hupomnêmata* — journals in which the writer practices taking stock of their existence. Foucault, in his explanation of the term, shows that *hupomnêmata* represent ways of digesting outside stimuli, desires, and moral structures (and strictures), in order to better understand one's relation to oneself and one's place within the world. In Foucault's words, the objective of *hupomnêmata* is to "faire de la récollection du logos fragmentaire et transmis par l'enseignement, l'écoute ou la lecture un

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[13] Cendrars could be considered to be referring to a very rudimentary notion of the dilation and contraction of time.

moyen pour l'établissement d'un rapport de soi à soi aussi adéquat et achevé que possible."[14] Thus, this genre of writing is itself a synthesis of the raw material that our reason transforms into a coherent vision of self and the self's role in the world.

With this definition, Foucault reveals a paradox that is particularly important insofar as the travelers I have studied in this dissertation are concerned. "Il y a […] pour nous," he writes, "quelque chose de paradoxal : comment être mis en présence de soi-même par le secours de discours sans âge et reçus d'un peu partout ?"[15] In the case of the traveler, this dispersion of heterogenous elements made up of the *logos* (or self-representation) of what one encounters is once again made whole in writing. To this effect, Foucault continues: "si la rédaction des *hupomnêmata* peut contribuer à la formation de soi à travers ces logos dispersés, c'est pour trois raisons principales : les effets de limitation dus au couplage de l'écriture avec la lecture, la pratique réglée du disparate qui détermine les choix, l'appropriation qu'elle effectue."[16]It is crucial to address each of the points Foucault makes here. First, there is the *lecture* in the larger sense that we saw in the chapter concerning Michel Leiris, who records his picaresque adventures under the *hupomnênatic* sign of his readings. For Michaux, there is a moment in *Ecuador* where, bored with Quito, he writes "Je suis plus à Quito, je suis dans la lecture."[17] We also see this focus on reading in Michaux's obsession with interpreting, creating and decoding signs in China and in his later works. And finally, we see it in the works of Cendrars, who

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[14] Michel Foucault, "L'écriture de soi," *Dits et écrits,* Daniel Defert (ed.) (Paris: Gallimard, 1994) 420.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Henri Michaux, *Œuvres complètes,* vol. I (Paris: Gallimard, "Pléiade," 2003) 159.

continually forms and reforms himself with what he calls—with his inimitable vulgar verve—the "foin de livres" that he consumes. At one point, while traveling, he undertakes the mythic act of having books mimic his mythic identification with the phoenix burning, and then rising from its ashes. Thus he turns books, like travel, into fuel for self-invention; and he does this with such intent that he forgoes recording actual experiences of travel, opting instead to show scenes in which he force-feeds himself books and magazines in "l'hôtel des Wagons-Lits à Pékin," or feeding "la chaudière avec le Mercure de France à bord de l'Almanzora [a ship], " or, finding on his crossing to America that the ship's library "ne comportait que les Œuvres complètes de Goethe, en allemand, et durant l'année que j'ai passée à bord du sinistre cargo d'émigrants, je n'ai lu que du Goethe," and how aboard another ship "j'ai lu tout Kipling, en anglais," and "à bord d'un autre encore Dostoïevski, en russe, ou saint Jean de la Croix, en espagnol […]"[18]

Books serve as the basis for Cendrars's concept of self; they are both real encounters (literary encounters as part of real life) and metaphors for encounters — the worlds on the page being on the same level as discussions with fellow travelers, lovers, remembrances of landscapes and spectacles, etc. Each character, story or philosophical proposition is another aspect of a desire to remain oneself yet be involved in a sense of community.

The second and third elements of *hupomnêmatic* practice that Foucault mentions—the experience of different ways of being (or *formes de vie*), and the desire to appropriate these— are part of the desire to draw on a variety of resources in forming the self in order to offer an enchanted esthetic vision of totality to oneself and one's readers. To return to the idea evoked in

[18] Cendrars, op. cit. 354.

my chapter on Michaux, one must have the *self-control* required to master these different experiences and integrate them into a coherent individual vision. This approach to assimilating outside influences, then, is the ethic that arises from each author's esthetic play of travel.

* * *

Having defined these works, taken together, as formal variations of the essay, we find ourselves having to address a new predicament: How can this genre of essay or *hupomnêmata*, which is effectively focused on the self, lead to a description of enchantment rooted in community? How does digesting experience lead to a representation of enchantment outside of the self, and how can the writer avoid having this practice turn into problematic appropriation? I believe Jane Bennett's readings of enchantment can help us understand the extent to which esthetic play, and appropriated (and largely internalized) experience, can lead to a responsible expression of enchantment.

In the final chapter of *The Enchantment of Modern Life,* Bennett argues that the esthetic play and communication of enchantment is brought about through "condensing and exaggerating [enchantment's] presence and force" into a personal style. She further notes that this process is "indirect."[19] Thus, through a practice of absorbing disparate elements in a subtle manner, one opens oneself to the richness of other sorts of existence.

To better explain her position, Bennett turns to a notion made popular by the theorist Stephen K. White, a theory of *weak ontology*, which is White's term for an emerging genre of

[19] Bennett, op cit. 160.

social theory that develops its political analyses in conjunction with a set of contentions about the fundamental character of human beings and the world. The practitioner of weak ontology believes that

> such conceptualizations of self, other and world are necessary or unavoidable for an adequately reflective ethical and political life. What distinguishes a weak ontologist from a traditional metaphysician is that the former emphasizes the necessarily speculative and contestable character of her onto-story and thus does not try to demonstrate its truth in any strong sense.[20]

Similarly, the truth represented by the authors we have studied in their "onto-story" (their story of what connects their being to the enchantment of the modern world) is "weak" insofar as it exists solely within the realm of a personal conflict. However, I would argue their processes are nevertheless instructive insofar as they cultivate a personal form of meditation (a personal struggle, expressed in their own idiolect) that, despite the risk of this degenerating into navel-gazing, they manage to express outwardly. The fact that travel is the basis of this weak ontology is crucial as well — after all, there is always a built-in audience or second eye (like Leiris's *ethnographer's eye*) built into the voyage, which means the onto-story they create is always judged, always read. As a result, their revelations leave just enough room for doubt as to their truthfulness to give the reader an opening to enter into. In this way, the texts we have read are both instructive in terms of setting out a specific practice and in terms of serving as an *invitation au voyage* — an experience through which the reader, if so inclined, might find their own weak onto-story and communicable enchantment.

[20] Ibid.

The dual notions of “invitation” and “instruction” lead us to my final reflection on the problem of travel as a form of “rational enchantment.” I would like to end with a look at the notion of “rational enchantment” in terms of how it ties into meditative, solitary practice, and how this is compatible with the communitarian impulse (i.e. the impulse to share) that informs writing. The writers this dissertation focuses on take a monastic or hermit-like (and, at times, *hermetic*) approach to travel, informed by a notion of *ascesis* and *askedia*. The author who leaves his established community behind, who travels and experiences this internal transformation, comes back to share that experience and give us figures that might alleviate our sense of fear and loneliness in the drudgery of the disenchanted day-to-day. Thus, by renouncing the world, they in fact end up making a positive contribution to community.

The Figure of the Hermit-Traveler as Part of the Community

In an attempt to understand the modern voyager as a monastic figure, we end on a final note and a further set of core principles that tie these authors together — though, as is *de rigueur* in conclusions, I would hope this is the beginning of a new line of inquiry. While studying the authors discussed in this text, I found myself thinking time and again of Roland Barthes’s winter-spring course at the Collège de France in 1976-1977. The title of that year’s course, *Comment vivre ensemble*, might sound at first like a humorous guide for newlyweds. The focus of Barthes’s inquiry, however, is how an individual searching for their own truth, their own onto-story, can still communicate with, and be a part of, a community.

At the conclusion of his course, Barthes appears to resolve the problem that concerns us in this conclusion, or at least points us in a helpful direction. To conclude his thoughts on how to live together without compromising one's *forme de vie*, he reminds his audience of a distinction he made at the outset of the course, the Nietzchean distinction between *method* and *paedeia* (culture). Method, for Barthes, represents "une bonne volonté de penseur" and a "decision préméditée." [21] That is, it represents a sort of fetishization of *telos*; an obsession with reaching goals that are in our heads from the outset of an endeavor. In the case of this dissertation, each author's *telos* was their desire to awaken in themselves a sense of enchantment that they could then transmit through their writing.

The term to which Barthes opposes *method* is culture (he uses the Greek term *paedeia*), which is an important term in 20th-century French thinking. *"Culture" he*re is Barthes's term for what the French thinker Pierre Hadot, called a practice (*pratique*).[22] Barthes defines *paedeia* as a "tracé excentrique de possibilités," or an act of drunkenly stumbling (*titubant)* "entre des blocs de savoir."[23] *Method* and *culture,* then, are Barthesian avatars of the struggle between rationality and desire. To use Barthes's exact words: on the one hand, our travelers hold themselves to the rational task of fulfilling a *method* characterized by "psychisme phallique d'attaque et de protection (« volonté », « décision », « préméditation », « aller droit », etc.)[;]" but, on the other hand, they also feel the pull of desire to set themselves free through an enchanted anti-method, characterized by *culture* or *practice*, which Barthes describes as being in line with a "psychisme

[21] Roland Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble* (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2002) 180.
[22] Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995) 31-2.
[23] Barthes, op. cit. 180.

du voyage, de la mutation extrême (papillonage, butinage)."[24] With these words, he describes perfectly Cendrars's obsession with flight, *vagabondage* and vehicles, Leiris's discontent "d'être ce que l'on [ce qu'il] est," and Michaux's goal of learning to transmit the *équitations* of the world around him.

Barthes, furthermore, seems to describe the literary and communicative results of these voyages when he notes that the endeavor of research is akin to a voyage and *practice* — a "protocole d'exposition (du butin)," a journey that leaves a trace and allows for one's poetic and spiritual haul (*butin*) to serve as inspiration for others to take up their own journey. The traveler and the Barthesian *maître de cours* are thus adept at inspiring without inculcating, allowing the writer and their community, their audience, to *vivre ensemble*. [25]

This takes Barthes to the same question that also plagued our traveler-poets. He asks how we might follow our own *paedeia* and still communicate as part of a community — or, how can our experiences of enchantment, realized within this *paedeia*, reach out to the other in a way that makes ethical and communicative sense? The answer he presents is a *fantasme* or obsessive esthetic fantasy (to return to Schillerian terms) that he believes can function as a solid figure of esthetic play. Barthes dubs the *fantasme* guiding his thoughts the *fantasme d'idiorrythmie* — communities in which each individual creates their own rhythm or *mode de vie*, enabling them to communicate as part of the community. [26] Much like Cendrars's obsession with the Schopenhauerian notion of presenting the world as his representation of the sublime. Leiris's

[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid. 38-39.

desire to participate in the magic of the *zar* cult while respecting his own *mode de vie,* and Michaux retaining *contrôle* of himself while sharing in and appropriating (for better or worse) the spiritual practices of the other, the key element of *idiorrythmie* is that no one is proselytized or indoctrinated. Within an idiorrythmic community, each personal *fantasme*, or *paedeia,* or truth, is communicated for the benefit of the others, without encroaching on their ability to seek their own enchantment. Indeed, where we previously arrived at the conclusion (drawing on Jane Bennett's ideas) that the heteroclite act of modern travel—caught as it is between inclination and duty, between method and practice—is essentially an indirect pathway to a personal expression of poetic magic, Barthes shows that this notion of *vagabondage* in search of a lost poetic magic can be considered "une Éthique"[27] of discourse and living with others. It is a space of negotiation, voyage, digression — all roads lead to the essay, an attempt to revive wonder, hope, for the self and the other. In turn, the "Éthiques" that are established through these experiences entice others (like a lover's discourse) to pursue, digest, and attempt (*essay*) to express their own experience of rational enchantment. In other words, the texts we have read are not "travel literature" in the traditional sense, but rather "*invitations au voyage*."

[27] Ibid.184.

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