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Natalie Edwards,  
Ben McCann  
and Peter Poiana



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## Framing French Culture

edited by Natalie Edwards, Ben McCann and Peter Poiana

The essays in this collection examine how both colonial and British Writers, painters, photographers, illustrators, directors and designers search for the perfect frame to capture, isolate, subvert or aestheticise an image, and may deploy a range of framing devices to tell their stories: the layered photograph, the jumbled timeframe, the flashback, the voice-over, the unreliable narrator, the hybrid assemblage.

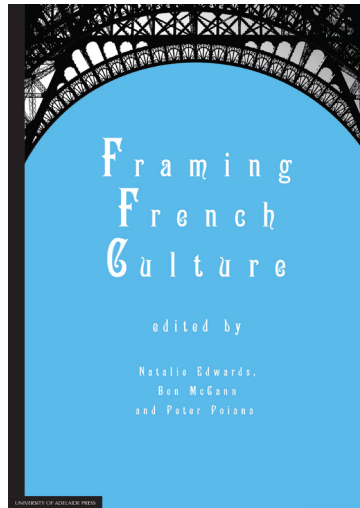
Throughout this book, the concept of framing is used to look at art, photography, scientific drawings and cinema as visually constituted, spatially bounded productions. The way these genres relate to that which exists beyond the frame, by means of plastic, chemically transposed, pencil-sketched or moving images allows us to decipher the particular language of the visual and at the same time circumscribe the dialectic between presence and absence that is proper to all visual media.

Yet, these kinds of re-framing owe their existence to the ruptures and upheavals that marked the demise of certain discursive systems in the past, announcing the emergence of others that were in turn overturned.





Framing  
French  
Culture



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# Framing French Culture

edited by

Natalie Edwards, Ben McCann  
and Peter Poiana

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# Introduction



# 1

## The doubling of the frame — Visual art and discourse

*Natalie Edwards, Ben McCann and Peter Poiana,  
The University of Adelaide*

The notion of framing is one that has emerged as a key factor in current investigations into representations of culture. In the disciplinary area of French Studies, framing is understood as collective and individual rules of identity construction that are based upon a combination of modes of visual production, past and present narratives, and discourses of knowledge and power. The present volume will pursue the question of framing in all three areas.

The first sustained discussion of framing, understood in the modern sense, is attributed to anthropologist and linguist Gregory Bateson. In 1954, in 'A theory of play and fantasy', Bateson argued that no form of communication can be understood without reference to its metacommunicative frame; monkeys are able to distinguish the same gestures as aggression or as play, depending upon their framing, according to one of his examples.<sup>1</sup> Sociologist Erving Goffman took up the concept in *Frame analysis* (1974), positing that individuals interpret experiences and situations through

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1 G. Bateson, 'A theory of play and fantasy', in *Steps to an ecology of mind* (New York, Ballantine, 1954), pp. 177-93.

a series of frames.<sup>2</sup> These frames are cognitive structures that guide perception; if one saw a person being chased down the street by a police officer, one could surmise that s/he had committed a theft, for example. The notion was soon adopted in the field of Literary Studies, which during the 1970s was busily adopting models from other disciplinary areas as ways of changing the scope and pattern of traditional literary interpretation. The rise of structuralism in particular gave prominence to the idea of 'narrative' and to the 'science' of narratology, and Gerald Prince notes how this new theoretical application led to the positioning of 'narrative as a thematic frame'.<sup>3</sup>

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, framing as a theoretical device has since been employed across an array of disciplines to open new modes of interpretation, and between disciplines as a way of crossing disciplinary borders. Studies of the use of frames exist in, for example, Sociolinguistics, Cultural Studies, Psychology and Psychotherapy, Anthropology, Sociology, Museum Studies, Film Studies, Architecture, Cognition Theory, Discourse Theory, Artificial Intelligence, Postcolonial Studies, Intermediality Studies, Communications and Policy Studies. Framing has become commonplace and we readily accept that we interpret the world through the medium of frames. We understand reading, in its broadest sense, as a framing activity and use framing as a way of approaching the heterogeneous quality of texts. As Werner Wolf summarises, '[O]ver the past few decades it has become a received notion that there is no human signifying act, no meaningful perception, cognition and communication without "frames" and ... frames are practically everywhere'.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, the terms 'frames' and 'framing' are often employed with imprecise theoretical underpinnings. Wolf, for example, interrogates the variety of definitions of 'framing', noting the slippage that occurs in the word's meaning as it moves across disciplines. He points out that a 'frame' may be synonymous with a 'script', a 'schema' or a set of 'discursive exchanges' in certain disciplines, for example, and that, depending upon its usage, the term 'framing' can refer either to metacommunicative acts or to a set of metaconcepts. Comparing the use of framing across the visual arts, film, music and literature, Wolf designates frames thus: 'culturally formed

2 E. Goffman, *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience* (London, Harper and Row, 1974).

3 G. Prince, *Narrative as theme: Studies in French fiction* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 19.

4 W. Wolf, 'Introduction: Frames, framing and framing borders', in W. Wolf (ed.), *Framing borders in literature and other media* (Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2006), p. 1.

metaconcepts, most of which possess a certain stability even if modified ... [that] enable us to interpret both reality and artefacts and hence other concepts that can be applied in perception, experience and communication'.<sup>5</sup>

It is this notion of framing as a metaconcept that provides the impetus for this volume. The chapters use frames as interpretative devices to produce new readings of textual and visual material, and as culturally derived concepts whose functioning in contemporary discourse needs to be further understood. Our approach allows for examination and comparison of cultural materials from different perspectives, calling attention both to the framing of their content and composition, and to the framing of their broader significance within culture and discourse. In this introduction, we explain how the twelve chapters that comprise the volume approach the concept of framing in its visual, narrative and discursive dimensions. The four sections of the book study examples of framing in different mediums: scientific illustrations, cultural artefacts, film, photography and art. Individually, the sections explore how framing may be used to interpret materials within a particular medium. Taken together, they demonstrate how the visual functions as a mode of cultural representation, and how acts of framing are constructions through which we may interpret cultural artefacts from the past and the present.

## Historical framings

The first of the framing mechanisms examined in this volume is the grand Enlightenment project of constructing a complete picture of the universe and what it contains. The artefacts that were collected and the accounts and drawings that were produced during the sea voyages of exploration in the Antipodes offer a rich setting for the examination of the functioning of frames as interchangeable grids of understanding in which personal, historical, aesthetic and ideological considerations variously impose themselves. The way in which we view the accounts of the explorers, their drawings and collections is brought into particular focus by the multitude of critical and theoretical discourses that have arisen in the works of historians, human scientists and philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A blueprint for the study of competing discourses and their historical variations is to be found in Michel Foucault's opening lecture at the Collège de France, in December 1970,

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<sup>5</sup> Wolf, p. 5.



published under the title *L'Ordre du discours*.<sup>6</sup> Foucault proposes to carry out firstly a 'critical' examination of discourses as they emerge and rise to prominence at a given historical period by way of the processes of exclusion, limitation and appropriation, and the ways in which they are modified and displaced by their confrontation with other discourses. He then conceives a second stage that he calls 'genealogical', which is concerned with the process of formation of new discourses according to the conditions of appearance, growth and variation that prevail at a given time.<sup>7</sup>

In his *Les Mots et les choses*<sup>8</sup>, Foucault develops a series of empirical studies based on these 'critical' and 'genealogical' principles. He identifies certain points in history in which the categories of ordering and understanding the world were overturned. One of these was the demise of the classical model of thought at the end of the eighteenth century and the rise of a modern episteme that reflected the empirical and critical concerns advanced respectively by Hume in England and Kant in Prussia. The breach that appeared within classical thought systems concerned chiefly the way in which language aligned itself with, or detached itself from, the reality it supposedly accounted for. Foucault identifies several such changes of episteme in the history of Western thought, each bringing with it a breakdown of the processes of representation. Each brought about a change in the way in which the elements of experience were integrated into accepted forms or *lieux communs* of thinking, viewing and speaking, or alternatively excluded from these spaces. Foucault describes, for example, the widespread change that took place in the medical sciences when new clinical procedures were introduced, as a result of which the manner of 'seeing' the body shifted from a form of observation that scrutinised each detail 'on the surface' of the patient's body to a more penetrating vision that allowed the examination of each of the internal organs. The change in the manner of seeing the body was not just the result of a technological innovation, but corresponded more profoundly to the creation of new norms in the manner of creating knowledge and dealing practically with issues such as health and illness.

Like the changes that occurred in nineteenth-century medical science, the manner in which explorers conducted their activities in the South Pacific was also dependent upon a shift in the value attributed to visual perception, and beyond

6 M. Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours*, (Paris, Gallimard, 1971).

7 Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours*, pp. 62-3.

8 M. Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris, Gallimard, 1966).

this, to the relationship between the functions of vision and language.<sup>9</sup> In this respect, Foucault's approach is suggestive of the notion of framing as the process in which discourses variously determine and modify their objects, and this in a way that crosses disciplines and genres. The import of visual productions such as scientific drawings and maps during the voyages of discovery, their relation to the dominant discourses of the time, and their reinterpretation by a new generation of readers and viewers over a century later, are the three main questions raised in the first section of the volume.

The first chapter in the section, Nicole Starbuck's 'Colonial vision: French voyager-artists, Aboriginal subjects and the British Colony at Port Jackson', analyses the visual records and verbal accounts of the French expedition's sojourn in Port Jackson. Starbuck's examination of French and English depictions of the land and its people rests upon different sets of ideological discourses that the French and the British had brought with them to the Colony. The French artists tended to depict their Aboriginal subjects in their purported natural setting, away from the colonial context, unlike their British counterparts who were more concerned, for reasons of propaganda, to highlight the signs of civilisation that were 'visible' in the local Aboriginal people's dress and demeanour. The differences Starbuck identifies at the level of visual representation are related to the different political discourses that inform them; but there is also the question of the ethical and aesthetical standards that appear to guide the choice to either omit certain unsavoury details of Aboriginal life, as the French artists tended to do, or to distort or falsify them, as was the case with the British artists. Starbuck's analysis suggests that the paintings were governed precisely by what the artists wished to exclude from their pictorial space, as if the very unpalatability of the Aborigines' lifestyle dictated the style of the paintings, defining them paradoxically against their very claims to scientific accuracy.

John West-Sooby's 'An artist in the making: The early drawings of Charles-Alexandre Lesueur during the Baudin expedition to Australia' focuses specifically on the relationship between on the one hand the obvious scientific purposes of the drawings — that is, the need to reproduce accurately the real characteristics of the flora, fauna, humans and geographical formations encountered on the large

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9 Michel Foucault, in the preface of *Naissance de la clinique* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), mentions explicitly the mechanisms altering 'la structure commune qui découpe et articule ce qui se *voit* et ce qui se *dit*' (p. xv, emphasis in the original).

antipodean continent — and on the other the adherence of the artist to an aesthetic project that subtly manifests itself in Lesueur's drawings. Considered both in his concern with composition and in the sense of empathy he projects in his paintings, the underlying aesthetic preoccupations of Lesueur, observes West-Sooby, are as consistent as they are understated. Indeed, they colour the scientific purpose of the drawings in a manner that gives the entire expedition a distinctive sense of humanity.

The dynamics that structure competing discourses are also evident in the maps produced by the cartographers working on the expedition. In the following chapter, 'Framing New Holland or framing a narrative? A representation of Sydney according to Charles-Alexandre Lesueur', Jean Fornasiero focuses on one single detail in Lesueur's map of the east coast of Australia. The vignette that Lesueur added to the map features part of the landscape of a very distant region of the continent, a 'sacred grove' that had fascinated Lesueur's mentor, François Péron, when they had earlier visited the western side of the continent. Fornasiero shows how the small inset, physically separated from the main drawing and picturesque enough to trick the viewer into considering it as merely decorative, expresses in a way that words could not match Lesueur's strong feelings about the spiritual life of the Aboriginal people. The noble sense of a common humanity expressing itself via a compositional feature of the map of New Holland is both a limiting feature of the scientific nature of the map, and the key to unlocking the profound sense of discovery that occurred during the expedition.

Jane Southwood's chapter, 'The artwork of the Baudin expedition to Australia (1800-1804): Nicolas-Martin Petit's 1802 portrait of an Aboriginal woman and child from Van Diemen's Land', situates the portrait in question at the centre of three competing discourses, these being the formal artistic conventions that governed portrait painting in the early nineteenth century, the requirement of scientific accuracy to which each of the expedition's artists were beholden, and finally the advice provided to explorers by the Société des Observateurs de l'Homme, reminding them that people from other lands should be treated humanely and sympathetically. If it is unquestionable that these 'established' discourses combine to give the painting its final shape, Southwood points to a radical shift in its conceptual framework — one that alters its order of priorities — when she examines the written account of the chance encounter that brought together a party of astonished explorers and a bemused crowd of Aboriginal women on the beach. Southwood juxtaposes the conventional

features of the portrait with the narrative of the chance encounter to show how its unpredictability, and indeed its absurdity, invests the painting with an emotional undercurrent that overtakes its stated intentions of scientific accuracy, human contact and aesthetic unity, providing it with an entirely new imaginative dimension.

Taken together, the four accounts of scientific illustrations belonging to early nineteenth-century exploration demonstrate the way in which our understanding of the scientific and political discourses that seemingly informed their composition is confronted with a different series of relations, producing an unexpected configuration of meaning in the very space occupied by the official account. Each of the chapters shows how the interplay between competing discourses, particularly of art, science and politics, provides a framing mechanism that admits a measure of displacement and variation of meaning. As self-enclosed normative systems, they offer themselves up to different contexts of reception and different degrees of appropriation.

The historically framed account of nineteenth-century scientific illustrations must itself be re-framed in terms that recognise the distance from which we view them some 220 years after they were produced. Yet this repositioning of historical discourse must also take into account the way in which history and historiography have been viewed over time. To the extent that it developed a regime of explication, invented the concept of 'character' as an agent of change, put forward models of measurable and immeasurable time, and, finally, gave precedence to the medium of writing, history became one of the great framing devices of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>10</sup> Historians claimed to explain crises by situating them in a logical and chronological framework that connected an incipient moment to an inescapable destiny while providing a set of concepts (evolution, industrialisation, justice) which mapped out the stages of an aspiration towards a higher Good (the nation-state, scientific truth, social wellbeing).

However, history as the great bridge between the beginning of humanity and its accomplishment has since undergone a change of episteme that casts doubt over all of its presuppositions. Of note is Paul Ricœur's 'soupçon', which led him to state that the models of historical truth which served the needs of universal understanding owed their prestige to the rules of composition and presentation characteristic of narrative as Aristotle defined it in his unsurpassed study of the genre, the *Poetics*.<sup>11</sup>

10 P. Ricœur, *Temps et récit I* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1991), p. 269.

11 Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. M. Heath (London and New York, Penguin Books, 1996).

By declaring that history is fundamentally 'story', Ricœur highlights history's vulnerability to the imaginative excesses and the fictional distortions that it attempts to conceal. At the same time, he reveals how history itself has, over the course of time, redistributed its priorities, such that it has moved away from witness accounts and explanatory models, and towards the narrative reworkings that are now inseparable from its epistemological framework. The scriptural medium of history, its narrative deployment and indeed the entire *mise en scène* it entails mark the introduction of a new framework that allows us to re-evaluate past historians' attempts to make sense of the changing trajectory of humanity.

### Cultural icons and cinematic framings

The move of history towards scriptural media must be matched with the corresponding emergence of the visual as a key ingredient of historical understanding. One can expect that the rise to dominance of visual productions such as photography and film would trigger further changes in the conceptual framework by which we make sense of the past. Such is the hypothesis that informs Jacques Rancière's study of the historical film in his *Figures de l'histoire*. Rancière argues firstly that cinema is not anti-historical. The screen does not flatten the story or the forms of intelligibility associated with it, but rather enhances narratives by the way it accommodates the different layers of time which are the hallmark of storytelling. However, the way that cinema combines past and present is very different from the techniques proper to verbal narratives. Whereas the latter are infinitely hospitable towards multiple voices and seem to achieve without effort the synthesis of different viewpoints, cinema seems to exacerbate the divisions between them. This is evident in the way in which the cold, hard lens of the camera carves out the space of each scene, each bounded by its frame, just as the camera isolates each frame within a sequence of shots. The multiple frames produced by the work of the camera are an essential part of the manufactured illusion of cinema, in that they establish and maintain in place the perceptual and conceptual frame that separates the visual content of the film from considerations of its historical context. For Rancière, historical cinema does not tell us why things were as they were; it simply shows what was there. It simply says: 'Cela a été'.<sup>12</sup>

As such, cinema marks a transformation of the function of visual production in its relation to history. In the nineteenth century, Rancière notes, visual production,

12 J. Rancière, *Figures de l'histoire* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), p. 12.

or images, served to educate. They were a means by which princes, emperors and bishops led the people to adopt their particular worldview. The image was a lesson that taught individuals their place in society. In the twentieth century, too, the image played to some extent a role in forming mentalities, such as what occurred in the USSR, where the image was honed as a powerful instrument for propagating belief in the Socialist model of society. Yet by and large, the twentieth century witnessed a change of episteme which caused the image to cut itself off from its instructive function. A 'democratisation' of the image ensued, in which the latter freed itself from social hierarchies and allowed itself to present different worldviews. Thus, Rancière observes, 'ceux qui n'ont pas le droit d'occuper la même place peuvent occuper la même image'.<sup>13</sup> The frame became a measure of inclusiveness enabling the different classes, genres and groupings captured by the camera to share equally in the light in which they bathed.

Rancière recalls a scene from Chris Marker's *Le Tombeau d'Alexandre* in which the Tsar of Russia walks past the crowd while an officer exhorts the common people to pay their respects to their leader. For Rancière, the scene presents a situation whose visual richness distracts viewers from what they know of the decline of the Russian monarchy, just as it ignores the period of Soviet rule that emerged following this point in time. The lens is 'sans mémoire et sans calcul. Sans ressentiment donc. Il enregistre ce qu'on lui a dit d'enregistrer: le passage de la famille impériale au début de ce siècle ...'<sup>14</sup> The values of authoritarian, tsarist Russia which an industrious, egalitarian regime abolished are of no concern to a rolling camera that says, without explanation and without judgement, 'Cela a été'. The lens organises the depicted universe, dividing the story into separate scenes; at the same time, its visual immediacy keeps at bay familiar explanatory models and other forms of ideological approximation. The frame as a mechanism for separating one scene from another repeats, or doubles, the rule of separation that cuts the scenes off from their ideological compass points. It ensures that the viewer ignores, provisionally, all but what appears to be there.

Concerning the status of visual productions as markers of historical understanding, one might take a step further in its elucidation by taking into account the realm of manufactured objects that serve as reminders or souvenirs of a particular city, culture or people. Sonya Stephens, in her chapter 'Framing the Eiffel Tower:

13 Rancière, *Figures de l'histoire*, p. 19.

14 Rancière, *Figures de l'histoire*, p. 13.

From postcards to Postmodernism', takes the most iconic and enduring urban icon — the Eiffel Tower — as her starting point. Stephens considers the status of the Eiffel Tower as an 'urban icon', by firstly examining the set of 'myths' (in the Barthesian sense) attached to it, and secondly by analysing the Tower as it appears in a range of associated visual media and objects (films, documentaries, postcards) which viewers propagate and consume as they circulate through and experience the city. The Eiffel Tower becomes, in Stephens's analysis, a vital element in the construction of urban experience and identity.

Following Roland Barthes's analysis of the Eiffel Tower as a semiotic system, Stephens brings to the fore two ways in which the iconic monument partakes of the logic of framing. Firstly, by its very ubiquitousness, the image of the Tower cuts itself off from the hierarchy of values that it previously served, just as it no longer indelibly marks its place in a particular space and time. The endless representations to which it gives rise progressively reduce and simplify it, transforming it into a useless, gratuitous cipher that sits alongside, metonymically, the multifaceted whole of the city of Paris. Secondly, as an increasingly redundant motif, the iconic object shifts to a different value system. Over a period of more than 120 years, it has moved from the grandness of a unique national symbol to the broad-based production of the image by way of the number of smaller reproductions of the Tower in Texas, Las Vegas and in China's World Parks. Framing, in this context, does not isolate and draw attention to what is there, but signifies ultimately the act of (non-) seeing as conditioned by the discourses of the liberal economy and the practices of cultural consumption it encourages.

What if the stories that constitute history were transposed onto a screen? To use Hayden White's delightful expression, we find ourselves increasingly in an age of historiophoty, which sees the 'representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse'.<sup>15</sup> Having started out as a vehicle for historical narratives, cinema now distinguishes itself by its visual capacity to alternatively interrupt, rewrite, trivialise, falsify or embellish, while at the same time bringing history 'back to life' for spectators unfamiliar with specific events or personalities. French cinema's ongoing dialogue with the Occupation is a case in point, whereby filmic representations of past events (from *Au revoir les enfants* in 1987 to *Lacombe*,

15 H. White, 'Historiography and historiophoty', *The American Historical Review*, 93: 5 (1988), p. 1193.

*Lucien* in 1974, and from *La Rafle* in 2010 to *L'Armée des ombres* in 1969) offer alternative, competing discourses on the period within a visual framework that fastidiously recreates temporal and spatial markers.

Technically, the sequential nature of the film as storytelling is counteracted by the existence of the frame that operates as an instrument of separation of images. As was the case with scientific drawings, and as we shall see in our discussion of photography and plastic arts, cinema consists of the fertile interaction between two logical imperatives: the visual and the discursive. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson remind us that the film frame 'actively defines the images for us': framing choices require us to 'read' the image — close-ups concentrate on facial gestures and allow us to interpret emotional responses, while long shots place characters within their wider environment, often putting them at the mercy of external forces.<sup>16</sup> While the limited dimensions of the film frame — rectangular or oblong — differ from other visual 'frames' (like the oval and circular borders for paintings and photographs), the deployment of different aspect ratios can allow the film frame to introduce compositional ingenuity and pictorial nuance. Widescreen cinema in particular allows for the creation of striking horizontal compositions that accentuate side-to-side movement and tracking shots across wide, open environments (often deserts, landscapes and city streets) and draw our eyes to specific areas of space. One need only think of the films of Jean Renoir (*Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* in 1935, *Une Partie de campagne* in 1936 and *La Règle du jeu* in 1939) to observe the importance of windows, doorways and other frame-within-a-frame compositions to determine mood, and link successive planes of action without the intrusiveness of editing.

In the opening chapters of *Cinéma 1: L'Image-Mouvement*, Gilles Deleuze defines 'framing' as 'la détermination d'un système clos, relativement clos, qui comprend tout ce qui est présent dans l'image, décors, personnages, accessoires'.<sup>17</sup> He identifies five aspects of the framed image:

- i. The frame provides information — the more information, the more it is 'saturated', the less information, the more it is 'rarefied'.
- ii. The frame is a limiting border that functions either 'geometrically' or 'dynamically'; it provides a fixed set of horizontal, vertical, parallel and

16 D. Bordwell and K. Thompson, *Film art: An introduction*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1997), p. 226.

17 G. Deleuze, *Cinéma I: L'Image-mouvement* (Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983), p. 23.



diagonal co-ordinates or a series of more dynamic visual methods to introduce information.

- iii. The frame both separates and brings together the distinct elements of the composition, and can include such 'frame-within-frame' devices as doors, windows and mirrors.
- iv. The frame and the framed shot are filmed from a particular position in space to emphasise certain aspects and to control our understanding of the narrative.
- v. The frame is never entirely closed; there exists an 'out-of-field' (*hors-champ*) beyond the framed image. This final emphasis on the out-of-field accentuates the creative potential of the framed image. For Deleuze, even a seemingly closed frame works alongside something beyond its demarcations. Because the frame can be placed in relation to what is outside its borders, the framed image becomes more dynamic.

This concept of the *hors-champ* recalls Noël Burch's observation<sup>18</sup> that there are six zones of off-screen space — the ones beyond each of the frame's four edges, the zone behind the camera and the zone behind the back of the set — and that film-makers may choose to take advantage of one or more of these zones to generate tension, surprise or mystery. Even while the frame fixes and demarcates the image, its potential to break out of the frame, to bleed into one of these zones, suggests that the frame, far from being a stable mechanism for presenting the world to us, may generate additional narrative space and increase the potential for other spaces and actions. Deleuze concludes that the framing is 'l'art de choisir les parties de toutes sortes qui entrent dans un ensemble. Cet ensemble est un système clos, relativement et artificiellement clos'.<sup>19</sup>

The framing that constitutes cinema as an art form is nowhere more evident than in the art of set design, in which the task is to produce literally the physical spaces for the action of the film. Production designers are integral components of each film, for not only do they create the visual and physical realm of the film and conceptualise sets consistent with the film's mood, but they are also closely involved in the creative process from pre-production to documentation to model-

18 N. Burch, 'Nana, or the two kinds of space', in *Theory of film practice*, trans. H. Lane (New York, Praeger, 1973), pp. 17-31.

19 Deleuze, p. 31.

making to final construction. In the words of V.F. Perkins, directors are always searching for that 'moment of choice' — selecting costume and props, and choosing the right framing, cutting or performance style. Directors seek to bind their films together 'in a design that offers a more personal and detailed conception of the story's significance, embodying an experience of the world and a viewpoint both considered and felt'.<sup>20</sup> Thus both Deleuze and Perkins stress the process of 'deciding' when it comes to framing the story. And decor is perhaps the most important choice of all. Where a film takes place, how actors interact within that space, and how lighting and camera movement work together to bring attention to the set are all part of this complex decision-making procedure — they provide a 'frame' for the entire narrative.

In his chapter, 'The return of Trauner: Late style in 1970s and 1980s French film design', Ben McCann refers to Alexandre Trauner's use of 'action spaces' in the late part of the set designer's career, in which he infused aspects of the French tradition of studio-based sets in the 1930s and the American film scene of the 1950s. McCann examines three of Trauner's late-French-style films — *Monsieur Klein* (1976), *Subway* (1985) and *'Round midnight* (1986) — noting in particular how Trauner's creative methodology altered the conception of the set design and its relation to the film director's role. Designers like Trauner not only created beautifully designed visual spaces, but also contributed to the dramatic composition of a film. They frequently rejected primary realism; theirs was no simple cut-and-paste job, extracting life 'as it is' and rebranding it for the screen. They may have identified pre-existing spaces, but they then would misrepresent them by altering their perspective, recalibrating their dimensions or overemphasising their visual fabric to create new, dynamic designs. The collusion between skilful director and set designer masked the division between real and imaginary, between what existed already and what had been totally fabricated from scratch, to create a sensation of the real filtered through the screen of make-believe. In the case of Trauner's historical reconstructions for *Monsieur Klein* and *'Round midnight*, the visual, the cinematic and the discursive are bound together in ways that complicate history's relationship to an objective retelling, framing very specific historical moments in such a way as to invite a symbolic reading.

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20 V.F. Perkins, 'Moments of choice', originally published in *The Movie*, ch. 58, pp. 1141-5. See the most up-to-date version published online by *Rouge*, 9 (2006) at <http://www.rouge.com.au>.

## Photographic framings

The section devoted to the frame in photography presents a similar argument, but raises also a different set of questions. These involve the relationship between the fixed image and the reality to which it points, mostly allusively — particularly in regard to its manner of articulating the identity of the individual or the community it portrays.

The study of photography cannot avoid the question of its pure visual immediacy. Roland Barthes's work on photography, *La Chambre claire*, adopts his familiar semiological approach in that it seeks, first and foremost, to distinguish the formal relations between the visual content and the discursive context in which it is embedded. Recall that the entire critical project of Barthes's *Mythologies*<sup>21</sup> focused on discursive structures. This included the way in which the visual (television, publicity, magazines and so on) became part of the discursive manipulations that enabled economic and political powers to control the market economy. In *La Chambre claire*<sup>22</sup>, however, his approach to the visual arts has less to do with social critique than with the exploration of his personal fascination with the genre of photography and other genres that are marked by the primacy of visual experience. In his assessment of Barthes's work, Jacques Rancière ironically refers to an act of contrition by the semiologist, who finally turns his back on the system he had constructed around the image. Rancière takes issue with the way in which Barthes naïvely opposes the raw visual presence of the photographic image to discursive structures, the *punctum* to the *studium*, for he believes that there is no collapse into silence, no marvellous passage into a world without discourse. Rather, for Rancière, the two sides of the image are two ways of making sense, and therefore two ways of functioning in the mode of discourse. They are both essentially systems of virtualities that Rancière calls 'puissances de l'image'.<sup>23</sup>

Be that as it may, it is instructive to view the way in which Barthes argues his position. On the one hand, he presents semiological analysis as a means of uncovering the cultural codes (*studium*) which a photograph conceals in the objects that populate

21 R. Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, 1942-1965, ed. E. Marty (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1993).

22 R. Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, 1974-1980, ed. E. Marty (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1995).

23 J. Rancière, *Le Destin des images* (Paris, La Fabrique éditions, 2003), p. 19.

its space, or in the postures, the clothing and the expressions of its characters, or in the streetscape lying in the background. Having acknowledged the presence of these ideological values, he confesses that he is drawn forcefully to the minute detail or vague shadow (*punctum*) which, although hardly visible, affects him with such force that it suspends logical thought. He becomes aware of a series of affective responses, perhaps a feeling of tenderness that arises from this photo, or distaste at another, or else the feeling of being drawn into a universe of fantasies: '[P]ar la marque de *quelque chose*, la photo n'est plus *quelconque*. Ce quelque chose a fait *tilt*, il a provoqué en moi un petit ébranlement, un *satori*, le passage d'un vide'.<sup>24</sup>

Barthes's assessment of photography appears to revolve around two key points. The first is that the characteristic which distinguishes it from other genres is the privilege it accords the referent.<sup>25</sup> No other form of art, he states, is as wedded to the reality it represents. Before we can relate a photo to any idea or proposition, we focus exclusively on the thing or person in the frame. This is obviously not the case in painting and sculpture because of the artistic licence that artists enjoy in matters of subject, form and colour. Barthes's second point is that the preponderant role of the referent does not mean that we should reduce photography to simple imitation or reproduction. We do not just perceive the past reality captured in the photo in a singular occurrence that we can easily situate in time and place, but rather as a 'once was' that implies a mode of apprehending the world as a lost world. Photography's attachment to the here and now of its referent as it stands before the open shutter rests in fact upon the idea of the necessary absence of its here and now in the finished photographic image. In other words, the referent of a particular photograph is one that foreshadows the principle of disappearance that applies to all existing things, including, Barthes adds ominously, the viewers themselves.

The chapters in the third section, 'Photographic framings', focus on the relation of framing to self-narratives. Hence the derived term *photo-graphy* to designate the areas in which the practices of photography and autobiography intersect. The three chapters all confront photographic works with the vicissitudes of existence of the singular or plural subjects they portray. In her chapter 'Annie Ernaux's phototextual archives: *Écrire la vie*', Natalie Edwards focuses on the manner in which Ernaux chooses to frame her 2011 anthology of her best-known works, *Écrire la vie*. Edwards

<sup>24</sup> Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, p. 1142, emphases in the original.

<sup>25</sup> Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, p. 1163.

argues that the collection of photographs strikes a conventional note to a story of selfhood — Ernaux presents the photographs chronologically and introduces familiar faces and scenes, much in the style of a traditional family album. Juxtaposed with the photographs, Ernaux places text extracts from her personal diaries, which she orders apparently by chance, upsetting the chronological order of the photographs. For Edwards, the effect of the collision between two modes of self-representation is at once revealing and concealing insofar as it demonstrates how framing can alter our interpretation of previously published texts.

Chris Hogarth's 'The image of self-effacement: The revindications of the autonomous author in Marie Ndiaye's *Autoportrait en vert*' also addresses the question of the use of visual supports to accompany an autobiographical text. This time, the focus is on the generic separation between autobiography as a constructed self-narrative on the one hand and self-portrait as a fleeting self-image on the other. Hogarth charts the textual manipulations that sustain the self-narrative/self-portrait dynamic in Ndiaye's work, through which the 'I' is refracted in a fashion analogous to the shifting colours, vision and perception in a moving kaleidoscope.

In the final chapter of this section, Amy Hubbell examines the use of visual archives in the particular context of a displaced people's collective memory. The diverse collection of material she analyses in 'Accumulating Algeria: Recurrent images in Pied-Noir visual works' is related to an overwhelming sense of attachment which the Pied-Noir population felt to its lost homeland. Hubbell is concerned to pit a series of visual representations against the historico-political discourses that inform and limit them. More particularly, she shows how the over-determined affective and memorial value of such visual representations, which include photographs, photodocumentaries, films and paintings, divests these representations of their avowed purpose, causing rather an estrangement from a past that now presents itself as a lost world.

In the three abovementioned chapters, the authors underline the centrality of the 'I' or the 'We' through the use of the frame as a means of establishing a dialectic of presence and absence. For Barthes, the paradoxical situation of the absent referent is crucial for the fact that it connects with the anxieties associated with existence. It is no coincidence that the word 'métaphysique' occurs often in *La Chambre claire*, for Barthes ultimately places the spotlight on the affective dimension of

photography, its unsettling effects and finally its affinity with fantasy and reverie.<sup>26</sup> It is useful to recall the two contrasting approaches we outlined earlier. The first follows Rancière's proposition that the image is not a suspension of discourse but a means of constructing a different kind of discourse, one that maps differently the space between 'le dicible et le visible'.<sup>27</sup> The other path is one that is haunted by the principle of disappearance, which signals an experience as ungraspable because it lies outside of discourse. Barthes's preoccupation with death indicates that it is clearly to this second category that he belongs. We note also that his *La Chambre claire* proceeds from the premise that photography's essence is tied up with the emotions it elicits. All stages of photographic production, diffusion and reception must eventually return to this fundamental emotion, as if returning to their source. Considered in light of the Rancière-Barthes debate, we can situate the three chapters in this section between the two definitions of framing they imply. All three address the tension between the discursive logic inherent in the image and the rule of separation that causes it to break away from language.

Barthes's position recalls the esoteric quality which Georges Bataille describes as an ecstatic moment 'où l'existence défaille dans un cri'<sup>28</sup>, and which Walter Benjamin, in his critique of photography, calls the *aura*.<sup>29</sup> Curiously, Benjamin denies photography access to the *aura*, citing its dependency upon industrial means of reproducibility as a factor that destroys the hidden connection tying it to the time and place of its initial appearance. Painting and the other plastic arts, in contrast, enjoy a privileged relationship with the *aura* by means of which they attain their depth and significance as creative events. Certainly, one hundred years of experimentation in photography have put an end to Benjamin's hierarchy of the visual arts in which he unjustly relegates photography to a secondary position. However, in essence, the question Benjamin poses is suggestive enough for us to return to it. How does the principle of exclusion and inclusion function in other plastic arts such as painting and sculpture, and how does it participate in the notion of framing by which visual artworks stage the crossover of the visual and discursive domains?

26 Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, p. 1167.

27 Rancière, *Le Destin des images*, p. 21.

28 G. Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1954), p. 138.

29 W. Benjamin, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, trans. J.A. Underwood (London, Penguin Books, 2008).

## Artistic framings

The fourth and final section discusses the realm of painting and its manner of articulating the divide between that which is given visually and the set of discourses which both justify and deny it: 'Il y a du cadre mais le cadre n'existe pas', writes Jacques Derrida in *La Vérité en peinture*.<sup>30</sup> Framing is an act, he suggests, and one in which the onlooker is frequently oblivious to its process and product. Derrida insists upon the inevitability of the act of framing; the frame is at once present and absent, explicit and yet invisible, but inescapable. There is something inside the frame and something beyond it, and the frame itself, the distinction between interior and exterior, vanishes in the process. Frames and the act of framing emphasise containment and contribute to categorisation, yet also allow for transgression and subversion.

At stake is the cultural paradigm in which art emerges as a particular set of relations connecting it to discourses that confirm the qualities of uniqueness, magnitude and universality to which the 'work of art' aspires. Following Derrida's quote above, and Foucault's position, which we outlined earlier, the set of conditions in which art detaches itself from the noise created by such ambient discourses is never stable. These conditions appear rather as a series of fault lines by which common discursive patterns periodically unhinge themselves, overturning the representations that accompany them. At stake is the *subject*, understood as the person, reality or idea that gives the work its authenticating principle.

Two points can be made here in respect to the framing that connects and disconnects the work in relation to its subject. The first concerns the proposition that the 'a été' of the absent referent is actually inflected with a particular affective orientation, for it presents 'what is there' also in terms of a desired but unattainable presence. Thus its visual and emotional acuity is paradoxically linked to the fact that the frame necessarily loses, conceals or casts off the depicted object, person or scene. The second point is that the detachment that orders the work of art by way of its frame doubles the interplay of discourses and the system of mutual exclusions, restrictions and variations which constitute them as historically marked modes of appropriating the world. Through its frame, visual art repeats a separation that has already been consummated in the passage of one episteme to another. Its subject is a fallen subject. This is akin to saying that we must first and foremost consider the painting in terms

30 J. Derrida, *La Vérité en peinture* (Paris, Flammarion, 1978), p. 83.

of the 'trait' or brushstroke whose function, essentially, is both to make present and conceal. Thus Derrida writes: 'Un trait n'apparaît jamais, jamais lui-même, jamais une première fois. Il commence par se retirer'.<sup>31</sup> This is not to suggest that the work lacks creative energy, but that following the latest collapse of the modern episteme, it imposes itself only through the re-enactment of the demise of the subject. Such is the problematic of framing which the three chapters in the section 'Artistic framings' attempt to outline in their analyses of the paintings of Édouard Manet, Surrealist art, and finally cave drawings.

In her 'Georges Bataille's *Manet* and the "Strange impression of an absence"', Caroline Sheaffer-Jones examines the subject in terms of the alteration of perceptions and expectations that occurred at the time of the appearance of Edouard Manet's startling works. She approaches the question not through a simple survey of Manet scholarship but through the double prism of Manet's art and Georges Bataille's commentary, which he wrote almost a century later. She thus conceives *Manet* as a particular discursive structure through which representation itself is questioned. Sheaffer-Jones establishes the framework for re-viewing *Manet* through a consideration of Bataille's position regarding art, which he defines in terms of the excesses and the impoverishment it enacts. *Manet*, she suggests, constructs its subject in terms of a collapse, a flight towards insignificance, a singular embrace of the nothingness from which art emerges and to which it necessarily returns. The subject of art, declares Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, a philosopher who openly declares his affinity with Bataille, is indistinguishable from the notion of crisis. What happens, he asks, when art can no longer rest upon the prestige accorded to it by religion and social class? He answers, provocatively, by suggesting that what occurs at this juncture is the 'désastre du sujet'<sup>32</sup>, by which he means not the obliteration of the subject but a radical change in the way it constructs itself, such that it experiences itself as crisis, as a manner of reinventing itself in and through its displacement and relocation outside the frame.

The other two chapters in this section develop similar ideas, firstly by means of an examination of the frame in its compositional function — in other words, in the manner by which visual motifs and textures enter into a formal relationship with the frame which completes and limits them — and secondly metaphysically, in

31 Derrida, p. 16.

32 P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Écrits sur l'art* (Genève, Les Presses du Réel, 2009), p. 180.



terms of the mode of questioning that the artwork instigates regarding its own status as art. Klem James's 'Entropy and osmosis in conceptualisations of the Surrealist frame' considers the practices by which the Surrealists enacted the redistribution of energies on either side of the frame, causing confusion in the categories of the inside and the outside. James uses the analogy of the scientific description of the process of entropy to show that the artworks, far from evaporating into an infinitely extensible homogeneous space, occupy a region of uneasiness in which the frame works to accentuate the work's monstrous hybridity.

To complete the picture of the collapse of the subject, Peter Poiana's 'Art and origin: Bataille and Blanchot's return to Lascaux' traces the subject's demise to its very origins in the first cave drawings at Lascaux. After posing the question of origins in historical terms, the focus shifts to the ontological self-questioning of art. Here, the discussion proceeds in line with Blanchot's proposition that art commences precisely when it finds itself exposed to an absence of foundation. For Bataille, in contrast, art originates from that which makes the idea of art intolerable, namely the erotic and violent impulses which pull apart its pictorial splendour, disengaging it from social concerns and transgressing norms including those of genre. Ultimately, the frame that establishes what Blanchot calls the 'solitude' of art, and Bataille its 'sovereignty', is the salutary mode of questioning by which its status as a privileged object of contemplation is overturned. Art is henceforth that which, devoid of foundation, constructs itself upon its ruin. This is the consequence of two earlier collapses of art, the first being the crisis in which art lost the authority of the gods, and then of God; and the second, the crisis that saw art lose the authenticating seal of the human as principal reference point. The frame lies precisely where the self-questioning of art encounters its limit in the figure of the fallen subject, whereupon it embarks upon a different path to accomplishment.

### Framing French culture

Writers, painters, photographers, illustrators, directors and designers search for the perfect frame to capture, isolate, subvert or aestheticise an image, and may deploy a range of framing devices to tell their stories: the layered photograph, the jumbled time frame, the flashback, the voice-over, the unreliable narrator, the hybrid assemblage. Throughout this book, the concept of framing allows us to think together art, photography, scientific drawings and cinema as visually constituted, spatially

bounded productions. The way these genres relate to that which exists beyond the frame, by means of plastic, chemically transposed, pencil-sketched or moving images, allows us to decipher the particular language of the visual and at the same time to circumscribe the dialectic between presence and absence which is proper to all visual media. Yet these kinds of reframing owe their existence to the ruptures and upheavals which marked the demise of certain discursive systems in the past, announcing the emergence of others that were in turn overturned.

The modern episteme has led to the foregrounding of the rule of separation which appears by way of the frame. The frame of the camera shot, the painting or the photograph separate the *now* of the visual experience from the *then* of its production, just as it disassociates the *here* of its material presence from the *there* of its assumed surroundings. Jean Baudrillard admits that what he admires most about photography is the separation of time and place. For Baudrillard, photography provides a more intense experience of the lost presence than the other visual arts. This is because it comes closest to the total abolition of the values associated with cultural heritage. In the illusory world that it creates, photography 'met toujours fin à quelque chose, il y a arrêt sur image, arrêt du monde sur image, et en même temps cette chose définitive a déjà près fin'.<sup>33</sup> The fact that photography never alerts viewers in advance to the appearance of the photographic subject, thus exposing them to surprise and sometimes shock, and the fact that each photo seems indifferent to the mechanics of photographic reproduction, shows the extent to which photography operates in a very different fashion to the meaning-bearing and value-laden structures of discourse. For Baudrillard, however, the visual immediacy of photography does not imply the possession of an innate purity. Nor does it simply rely on the evacuation *hors champ* of the noise associated with conventional discourses and familiar viewpoints.

Following Paul Virilio who, in his provocative piece 'Expect the unexpected'<sup>34</sup>, underlines the panic that drives contemporary visual culture, Baudrillard sees photography in terms of an acceleration of illusion, a multiplication of its strategies of attraction and fascination. In a fashion that rehabilitates photography, by restoring the *aura* that Benjamin saw fit to take away from it, Baudrillard seeks to make us aware,

33 J. Baudrillard, *D'un fragment l'autre: Entretiens avec François L'Yvonnet* (Paris, Éditions Albin Michel, 2001), p. 128.

34 P. Virilio, *L'Art à perte de vue* (Paris, Éditions Galilée, 2005).

in photography, of 'une rupture plus étrange ... un point de fuite plus radical'.<sup>35</sup> Here, the formulation 'Cela a été' that sums up the functioning of visual productions is inflected towards the motif of catastrophe: cela *a été*, understood in the 'satanic' sense of *nous ne serons plus les mêmes*.

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# Part 1

## Historical framings



# 2

## Colonial vision: French voyager-artists, Aboriginal subjects and the British Colony at Port Jackson

*Nicole Starbuck, The University of Adelaide*

Charles-Alexandre Lesueur and Nicolas-Martin Petit arrived at Sydney Town in mid-winter 1802, the first French artists to visit Britain's colony at Port Jackson.<sup>1</sup> Two seasons lay ahead of them, providing respite after a gruelling exploration of Australia's south coast, and, more importantly, providing the young men with an invaluable opportunity. Lesueur and Petit were members of the Baudin expedition, which — prepared by the Institut National and sponsored by the First Consul at the close of the French Revolution — was the first scientific expedition to carry official anthropological instructions. It was thus with the varied advice of philosophers, humanists and comparative anatomists that Baudin's artists entered upon their most prolonged cross-cultural encounter of the voyage and, still more importantly, upon their only opportunity to observe Aboriginal Australians experiencing colonisation. The outcomes of this encounter were significant: Lesueur and Petit produced a rich body of portraits, ethnographic landscapes and settlement scenes depicting the Aboriginal people of Port Jackson. A number of these

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<sup>1</sup> Chapters in this volume by Jean Fornasiero, John West-Sooby and Jane Southwood also explore artworks that Petit and Lesueur produced during the Baudin expedition.



illustrations were published in the *Voyage de découvertes, Atlas Historique*, in 1807, and more again in the second edition of the volume in 1824.<sup>2</sup> Intended to feed studies of human nature in France, these visual records also represent how Petit and Lesueur viewed the humanity of Port Jackson's Aborigines and intimate how they felt about the matter of colonisation.

It has long been clear that the way these artists looked at Aboriginal people in the Colony led to depictions that are exceptional in the context of early colonial art. Most earlier paintings and drawings of local Aboriginal people had been produced by ex-convict Thomas Watling and the 'Port Jackson Painter'. They convey little about Aboriginal life and any hint of the artists' empathy for their subjects is less evident than the sense of the Aborigines' alterity. The French depictions reflect a more open and penetrating view. Bernard Smith highlights Lesueur's 'typical' rather than picturesque or neoclassical form of landscape art as well as the great degree of detail his scenes provide about Aboriginal life; Rhys Jones declares that Petit's is one of the best series of portraits produced of Aboriginal people; and Ian MacLean describes the drawings overall as 'sympathetic studies ... which showed a proud, dignified and stoic people'.<sup>3</sup> The dissimilarities between the roles and circumstances of the voyager-artists and ex-convicts explain these differences to a degree<sup>4</sup>; however, it would be naïve to assume that the Frenchmen's scientific gaze was completely open, or that their emotional detachment from the colonial project was absolute. Through their drawings, Lesueur and Petit chose to provide a very particular view of Aboriginal life at Port Jackson — that is, of a life unaffected by European contact.

2 C.-A. Lesueur and N.-M. Petit, *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes: Exécuté par ordre de sa Majesté L'Empereur et Roi, sur les corvettes le Géographe, le Naturaliste; et la goëlette le Casuarina, pendant les années 1800, 1801, 1802, et 1804: Atlas historique* (Paris, Imprimerie Impériale, 1807) and 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824).

3 B. Smith, *European vision and the South Pacific, 1768-1850* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 147-8, and R. Jones, 'Images of Natural Man', in J. Bonnemains, E. Forsyth and B. Smith (eds), *Baudin in Australian waters* (Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 63; I. MacLean, 'Under Saturn: Melancholy and the colonial imagination', in N. Thomas and D. Losche (eds), *Double vision: Art histories and colonial histories in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 144.

4 G. Dutton, *White on black: The Australian Aborigine portrayed in art* (South Melbourne, Macmillan, 1974), pp. 18-19.

This selectivity demands further consideration. It may fall within the broader 'great Australian silence' concerning the country's Indigenous history.<sup>5</sup> Yet it is notable that this 'silence' is more complete in the 1802 drawings of Lesueur and Petit than it had been in those of Juan Ravanet<sup>6</sup>, who visited Port Jackson with the Malaspina expedition in 1793, and especially of colonial artists from the 1810s and French voyager-artists of the 1820s.<sup>7</sup> On the point of timing, Geoffrey Dutton argues that the effects of colonisation on Port Jackson's Aborigines had become so clear by the 1820s that artists came to draw them more or less as they saw them.<sup>8</sup> Yet the effects of colonisation were already quite clear in 1802. Conflict over the dispossession had come to a head that year when rebel leader Pemulwuy was executed, alcohol and tobacco had entered Aboriginal life, and some Aboriginal women had become involved in prostitution.<sup>9</sup> Nicolas Baudin himself observed that the Eora had already learned to fear European weapons.<sup>10</sup> More persuasive is Ron Radford and Jane Hylton's argument that at this time Aborigines were deemed a threat to the success of the Colony.<sup>11</sup>

5 Dutton, p. 13.

6 J. Ravenet, Preliminary sketch of a Botany Bay scene and 'Reception of the Officers at Botany Bay', in R.J. King (ed.), *The secret history of the convict colony: Alexandro Malaspina's report on the British settlement of New South Wales* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1990), pp. 71, 142.

7 See, for example, A. Earle, *Natives of N.S. Wales as seen in the streets of Sydney*, 1830, reproduced in R. Radford and J. Hylton, *Australian colonial art: 1800-1900* (Adelaide, Art Gallery Board of South Australia, 1995), p. 37; and A. Earle, *View from the Sydney Hotel, c. 1825*, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an6065557> (accessed 13 June 2013). See also M. Rosenthal, 'The penitentiary as paradise', in *Double vision: Art histories and colonial histories in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 106; and A. Pellion, 'N<sup>lle</sup> Hollande: Port-Jackson. Sauvages des Montagnes-Bleues', plate 66; 'N<sup>lle</sup> Hollande: Port-Jackson. Sauvages des environs de la Rivière Nepean', plate 100; 'N<sup>lle</sup> Hollande: Port-Jackson. Sauvages des Montagnes-Bleues', plate 101; and J. Arago, 'N<sup>lle</sup> Hollande: Port-Jackson. Sauvages des environs de Sydney', plate 105, in J. Arago and A. Pellion, *Voyage autour du monde: Atlas historique* (Paris, Pillet Aîné, 1825).

8 Dutton, p. 25.

9 G. Karskens, *The Colony: A history of early Sydney* (Crows Nest, NSW, Allen and Unwin, 2009), pp. 386-447.

10 N. Baudin to P.G. King, Elephant Bay, King Island, 3 nivose an XI [24 December 1802], in F.M. Bladen (ed.), *Historical records of New South Wales*, vol. 5 (Sydney, Government Printer, 1896) [hereafter *HRNSW*], p. 826, and N. Baudin to A.-L. de Jussieu, Port Jackson, 20 brumaire an X [11 November 1802], Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle [hereafter *MNHN*], ms2082, pièce no. 5.

11 Radford and Hylton, p. 32.

Still, the British themselves surely felt more direct sense of threat than the French visitors. Perhaps attention should be paid not merely to the timing of this encounter or to the artists' circumstances in the Colony, but also to the artists' nationality. Though the 'silence' is also in the work of English voyager-artist, William Westall, whose stay in Sydney with the Flinders expedition coincided with Petit's and Lesueur's, it seems more deliberate in the work of the latter: the Frenchmen produced a larger and more varied corpus of ethnographic drawings than Westall and the separation of European and Indigenous worlds is consistent throughout.

Evidently, something about this turn-of-the-century moment — not simply in the history of the Colony, but also for Petit and Lesueur as Frenchmen — influenced this body of work. Lesueur's and Petit's drawings must be viewed against the backdrop of political and ideological change in turn-of-the-century France. When the Baudin expedition set sail from Le Havre in October 1800, France was emerging from revolution: Liberty, equality and fraternity had in theory been granted to the French people, slavery in the colonies had been abolished and the new Republic had been proclaimed *une et indivisible*. Both the government and the Institut National had set to work consolidating the revolution's reforms and one crucial element of this task was investigating how well the Republic's democratic principles were actually suited to the 'laws of nature'.<sup>12</sup> Out of this spirit of inquiry emerged the Société des Observateurs de l'Homme. Its aim was eventually to establish a Muséum de l'Homme, but more broadly to gather comprehensive observations of humanity by drawing on the disciplines of anatomy, physiology, medicine and hygiene.<sup>13</sup> It was the Société that provided two strikingly different papers to guide the voyagers' work in this field: a treatise composed by Joseph-Marie Degérando, which posed research questions about 'savage' culture, and a set of directions for the collection and drawing of anatomical specimens from comparative anatomist Georges Cuvier.<sup>14</sup> In both Degérando's

12 See M. Staum, *Minerva's message: Stabilizing the French Revolution* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996); C. Blanckaert, '1800 — Le moment "naturaliste" des sciences de l'homme', *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, 3 (2000), pp. 117-60; and N. Starbuck, *Baudin, Napoleon and the exploration of Australia* (London, Pickering and Chatto, 2013), pp. 17, 83-4.

13 L.F. Jauffret, 'Introduction aux mémoires de la société des Observateurs de l'Homme, 1800', in J. Copans and J. Jamin (eds), *Aux Origines de l'anthropologie française: Les Mémoires de la Société des Observateurs de l'Homme en l'an VIII* (Le Sycamore, Paris, 1978), pp. 71-85.

14 J.M. Degérando, 'Consirations sur les diverses méthodes à suivre dans l'observation des peuples sauvages, 1800', and G. Cuvier, 'Note instructive sur les recherches à faire relativement

treatise and the foundational writings of the Société des Observateurs a desire to renew faith in the 'greatness of Man' is evident.<sup>15</sup> Recent violence and upheaval had affected morale, and revolutionary principles had emotionally and politically tied the concept of human equality to the French national identity.<sup>16</sup> As Carol E. Harrison points out, naturalists looked for equality<sup>17</sup>, even as the establishment of democratic government accelerated the transition from the concept of encyclopaedic knowledge to disciplinary specialisation and, along with it, the move toward a 'science of Man'.<sup>18</sup>

The colonial scene at Port Jackson profoundly challenged such investment in civilisation and such tension between humanistic and scientific observation of humanity. The expedition's written accounts all reflect disappointment not merely that the Aborigines had failed to satisfy the ideal of 'natural man', but, above all, that they had failed to 'progress'.<sup>19</sup> Correspondingly, the descriptions and evaluations they provide are relatively derogatory. The illustrations imply that the artists felt the same

aux différences anatomiques des diverses races d'hommes, 1800', in Copans and Jamin, pp. 127-69, 171-85.

15 Jauffret, pp. 76-7, 85.

16 M.-N. Bourguet, 'Race et folklore: L'Image officielle de la France en 1800', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 31: 4 (July-August 1976), p. 812.

17 C.E. Harrison, 'Replotting the ethnographic romance: Revolutionary Frenchmen in the Pacific, 1769-1804', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 21:1 (January 2012), p. 40. See also: Bourguet, pp. 811-12, 815, 817; Staum, p. 160; Blanckaert, p. 135.

18 See Bourguet, pp. 802-23; D. Outram, 'New spaces in natural history', in N. Jardine, J.A. Secord and E.C. Spary, *Cultures of natural history* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 249-65; Blanckaert, pp. 117-60; J.-L. Chappey, *La Société des Observateurs de l'Homme: Des Anthropologues au temps de Bonaparte* (Paris, Société des Études Robspierristes, 2002), pp. 225-380; C.E. Harrison, 'Projections of the revolutionary nation: French expeditions in the Pacific, 1791-1803', *Osiris*, 24 (2009), pp. 33-52.

19 For a discussion of this perspective, see N. Starbuck, 'Neither savage nor civilized: The Aborigines of colonial Port Jackson, through French eyes, 1802', in A. Cook, N. Curthoys and S. Konishi (eds), *Representing humanity in the age of Enlightenment* (London, Pickering and Chatto, 2013). On this type of challenge to European notions of society, considered in a broader context of Pacific exploration, see H. Guest, *Empire, barbarism and civilisation: Captain Cook, William Hodges and the return to the Pacific* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 6. For examples of the Frenchmen's point of view, see T. Leschenault, 'Account of the vegetation of New Holland and Van Diemen's Land', in F. Péron [L. Freycinet], *Voyage of discovery to the Southern Lands*, vol. 3, *Dissertations on various subjects*, trans. C. Cornell (Adelaide, The Friends of the State Library of South Australia, 2007), p. 107; Baudin to King, in *HRNSW*, vol. 4, p. 826, and P.B. Milius, *Récit du voyage aux Terres australes*, ed. J. Bonnemains and P. Hauguel (Le Havre, Société havraise d'études diverses, Muséum d'histoire naturelle du Havre, 1987), p. 48.

sense of disappointment, but also promise a more nuanced reflection of contemporary French views of humanity. As Bronwen Douglas explains, images typically comprise more information than textual descriptions; in particular, they capture emotional responses that words fail to express accurately.<sup>20</sup> Lesueur's and Petit's illustrations can therefore be expected to have fleshed out and deepened the expedition's portrayal of humanity in the face of colonisation.

### Lesueur's settlement views

The artists, along with the other scientific staff and Baudin himself, lodged in Sydney for the duration of their sojourn, so they no doubt encountered Aboriginal people not only on occasional inland excursions but on a daily basis in town. As explained, neither Lesueur nor Petit chose to draw this scene directly. However, Lesueur, who specialised in landscape drawing, did represent the encounter in his two 'Views' of Sydney, published in the *Voyage de découvertes, Atlas historique*, 1807.

The first one is described in its caption as a 'vue d'une partie de la ville de Sydney ... et de l'entrée du Port Jackson' (Figure 2.1). The dominant feature of the scene is not Sydney Town, but the harbour: calm water stretches across the foreground and enticingly away into the distance toward Sydney Heads. Upon the water are a number of vessels: canoes and dinghies to the foreground, sailing ships behind. One ship, pointing away toward Bennelong Point and the French tents erected there, provides the focal point; presumably, it belongs to the expedition. Before it, however, forming an extension of that focus, is a group of smaller vessels: sailors fishing in a canoe dragging a line of buoys, a dinghy piled with firewood and carrying three men — more sailors — and, in the centre and most to the foreground of the scene, two Aborigines in a fishing canoe, identifiable by the fire burning at its centre. Colonial buildings and gardens cling to the edge of Sydney Cove and occupy only a small part of the scene, as though secondary to this maritime setting. On the northern point of the cove, behind a stone fort at the water's edge, are three Aboriginal men: they look out at the harbour with their backs to the settlement. The final feature of this scene is the sky. It presents a distinctly delineated set of cumulous clouds that sit low and

<sup>20</sup> B. Douglas, 'Art as ethno-historical text: Science, representation and Indigenous presence in eighteenth and nineteenth-century oceanic voyage literature', in Thomas and Losche, p. 66. See also Smith, p. 139, and Dutton, p. 13.

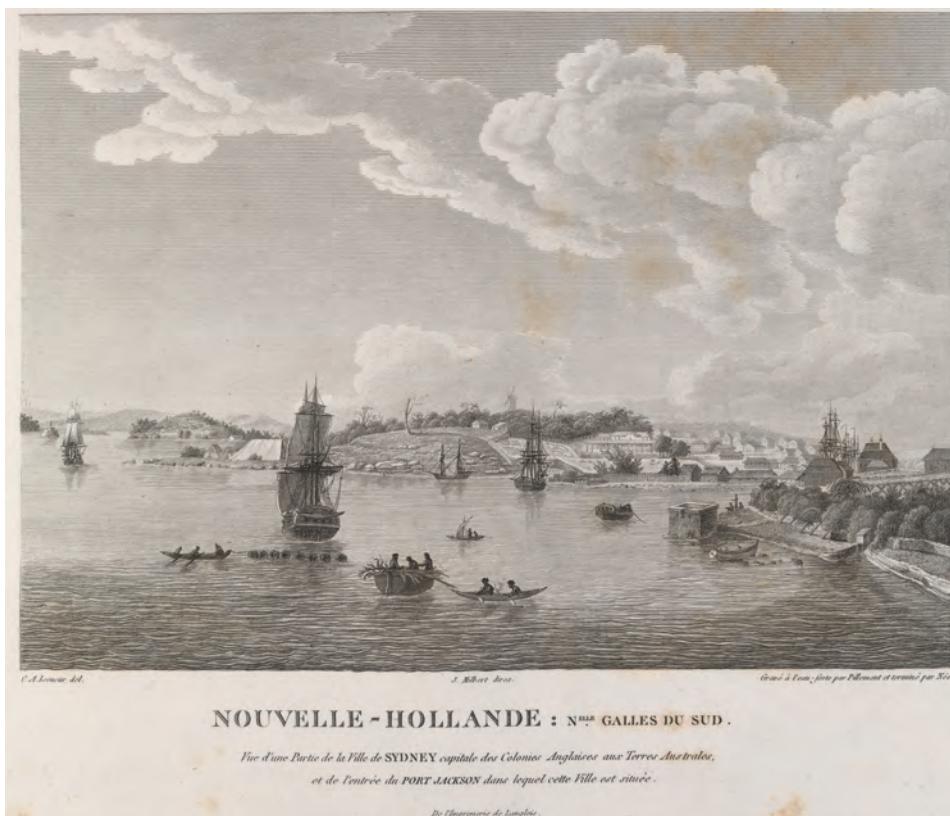


Figure 2.1: V. Pillement (after C.-A. Lesueur), 'Nouvelle-Holland, Nouvelle-Galles du Sud, vue d'une partie de la ville de Sydney, capitale des colonies anglaises aux terres australes, et de l'entrée du Port Jackson dans lequel cette ville est située'. Engraving in C.-A. Lesueur and N.-M. Petit, *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes, Atlas historique* (Paris, Imprimerie de l'Anglois, 1807), National Library of Australia, an7568617, Plate 37.

deep over Sydney Town and rise higher, allowing more light, as they extend across the harbour and away toward the ocean.

If, in its composition, Lesueur's 'View' from the harbour seems to associate the expedition more intimately with the sea and the Aboriginal inhabitants of Port Jackson than with the colonists or the Colony itself, then his subsequent 'View' does so yet more distinctly (Figure 2.2). This panoramic view takes in Sydney Cove, with Bennelong Point laid out across the foreground, Sydney Town sweeping around the water's edge to the northern point of the Cove opposite, and the still water, scattered with sailing ships and canoes, opening out on the right-hand side. The curve of the





Figure 2.2: V. Pillement (after C.-A. Lesueur), 'Nouvelle-Hollande, Nouvelle-Galles du Sud, vue de la partie meridionale de la ville de Sydney, capitale des colonies anglaises aux terres australes et l'embouchure de la riviere Parramatta 1803'. Engraving in C.-A. Lesueur and N.-M. Petit, *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes, Atlas historique* (Paris, Imprimerie de l'Anglois, 1807), National Library of Australia, an7568621, Plate 18.

cove combined with dark lines and shades draw attention to an ethnographic scene in the left foreground corner. Here are three Aboriginal men beneath a large tree: one, on hands and knees, blows on a small fire, another crouches alongside, while the other walks towards them with a spear in his hand, looking backward over his shoulder. All three are depicted naked, muscular, with tight curly hair, and separated from the rest of the image by a border of large rocks and hillocks. The expedition's tents, surrounded by voyagers tending to their tasks, are located just beyond this border and in the centre of the drawing. However, visitors and Aboriginal inhabitants are not entirely apart, for just across from the tents, by the water, there is another trio of Aboriginal men. A solid fence separates them all from Sydney and, immediately behind it, a row of trees so thick and tall it obscures the southernmost section of the town. Altogether, this 'View' — which features a clear sky as well as a balance between that sky, the sea and the land, and also between the spaces inhabited by colonists, visitors and Aborigines — suggests a more sanguine attitude about the Colony than that represented in the previous scene; and yet the dividing line between the colonial space and the shared space of the visitors and Aboriginal people is given greater emphasis.

This demarcation distinguishes the visual representations of the encounter from the written accounts. In their journals, letters and ethnographies, the Frenchmen describe Port Jackson's Aboriginal people with scarce mention of the circumstances in which they made their observations. They also show less interest in the Aborigines, on the whole, than in the settlers and colonial officials.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, Lesueur's 'Views' distance the voyagers from the Colony's newcomers and place them near the Aboriginal inhabitants: both groups are marginal to the colonial space.

This angle also bears an interesting comparison to similar scenes by contemporary British artists. It is widely accepted that these artists composed peaceful settlement scenes to promote the successful transplantation of British society to New South Wales.<sup>22</sup> They omit any signs of cross-cultural conflict, like Lesueur, but they also pay closer attention to the details of the colonial settlement: for instance, the buildings and bridges, gardens and farms, fences and roads.<sup>23</sup> During his own sojourn in 1802, William Westall concentrated on natural scenes, but he did produce one drawing that is comparable to Lesueur's 'Views': in its foreground is an Aboriginal man in a canoe, alongside a European-style vessel; yet the focal point is Government House (Figure 2.3).

**Figure 2.3: William Westall, 'Sydney, Government House', 1802. National Library of Australia, an4549391. To view this image, see <http://nla.gov.au/nla-pic-an4549391>.**

John Eyre's 'Settlement Views', completed in 1806 and 1808, are more similar in their composition to Lesueur's, particularly the 'View' from Bennelong Point.<sup>24</sup> Aboriginal subjects, presented in the foreground, focus on a campfire or the task of fishing, while others look away from Sydney Town; their spears are held at ease. Yet Eyre's 1806 subjects are otherwise very different from Lesueur's: oddly black-coloured and dwarf-like, they are caricatures, contemplating the scene of European order and industry

21 Starbuck, *Baudin, Napoleon and the exploration of Australia*, pp. 81-99.

22 See, for example, Rosenthal, p. 117.

23 See, for example, J. Eyre, 'View of Sydney from the west side of the Cove', c. 1806, plate 10, and 'East View of Sydney', c. 1808, plate 11, in J. Gleeson, *Colonial painters, 1788-1880* (Melbourne, Lansdowne Press, 1971).

24 See, for example, J. Eyre, 'View of Sydney from the west side of the Cove', c. 1806, plate 10, and 'East View of Sydney', c. 1808, plate 11, in J. Gleeson, *Colonial painters, 1788-1880* (Melbourne, Lansdowne Press, 1971).



before them.<sup>25</sup> In this painting, Eyre clearly privileged the constructions and industry of the settlers. In 1808, he painted the settlement further into the background and depicted his Aboriginal subjects more delicately, if imprecisely; yet, once more, he gave an impression of incongruity: huddled round a campfire on a neat lawn, by the busy harbour's edge, the Aborigines appear distinctly out of place.<sup>26</sup>

By comparison to these British works, Lesueur's 'Views', with their focus on the sea and their foregrounding of a voyager-Aboriginal space, are more like depictions of encounter than traditional colonial scenes. Rather than starkly contrasting his Aboriginal subjects against the European settlement, Lesueur allows the Aboriginal people to blend into the composition of the harbour view, while in the Bennelong Point 'View' he presents them in a 'state of nature', and with meticulous detail grants them a sense of nobility. This comforting portrayal represents a notable continuity in Lesueur's ethnographic gaze from the Tasmanian encounters, which produced detailed and accurate sketches of Aboriginal groups, huts and burial sites, to this rather different colonial contact (Figures 2.4 and 2.5). While British artists added Aboriginal subjects to their studies of the colonial settlement, Lesueur drew the Aborigines and his expedition against a colonial backdrop.

**Figure 2.4:** C.-L. Fortier (after C.-A. Lesueur), 'Terre de Diemen, navigation, vue de la côte orientale de l'Île Schouten'. Engraving in the *Atlas of the Voyage de découvertes aux terres australes* (Paris, Imprimerie de l'Anglois, 1807), National Library of Australia, an7573651. To view this image, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an7573651>.

**Figure 2.5:** V. Pillement (after C.-A. Lesueur), 'Terre de Diemen, Île Maria, tombeaux des naturels'. Engraving in the *Atlas of the Voyage de découvertes aux terres australes* (Paris, Imprimerie de l'Anglois, 1807), National Library of Australia, an7573653. To view this image, see <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an7573653>.

### Lesueur's typical landscapes

Aside from the sketches of purportedly public sexual intercourse, which lack any visual context and were not published, Lesueur's ethnographic scenes from Port Jackson fit

25 Eyre, 'View of Sydney from the West Side of the Cove', c. 1806, plate 10, in Gleeson, *Colonial painters, 1788-1880*.

26 Eyre, 'East View of Sydney', c. 1808, plate 11, in Gleeson, *Colonial painters, 1788-1880*.



Figure 2.6: A. Delvaux (after C.-A. Lesueur), 'Grottes, chasse et pêche des sauvages du port Jackson, à la Nouvelle-Holland'. Engraving in the *Atlas of the Voyage de découvertes aux terres australes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), National Library of Australia, an7569797, Plate 31.

the genre of 'typical landscapes' as defined by Smith: they are clearly intended to present the Aboriginal people of Port Jackson in their 'appropriate environmental situation'.<sup>27</sup> Two engravings, 'Grottes, chasse et pêche des sauvages du Port-Jackson' and 'Navigation', provide apt examples.

With 'Navigation', Lesueur addresses a particular theme: the construction and use of Aboriginal canoes (Figure 2.6). 'Grottes, chasse et peches' is a broader ethnographic study: it shows men, women and children in canoes on the water as well as on the shores fishing, tending campfires, hunting and gathering food (Figure 2.7). The figures are drawn in the same style as in the 'Views' of Sydney: where they are close enough to the foreground, we can see their muscular forms and facial profiles. Both drawings also show trees and birdlife in great detail; indeed, their function within the nascent discipline of anthropology and the fields of natural history is obvious. However, their romantic influence is clear as well, in their representation of the natural world as a

<sup>27</sup> Smith, pp. 147-8.



Figure 2.7: C.-L. Forestier (after C.-A. Lesueur), 'Navigation'. Engraving in the *Atlas of the Voyage de découvertes aux terres australes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), National Library of Australia, an7573675, Plate 34.

place of fertility, abundance and harmony: flocks of birds feature in 'Navigation', a mother carries an infant upon her shoulders in 'Grottes, chasse et pêche', and, overall, this latter drawing is focused on the gathering and preparation of fresh food.

These images contrast with the word-pictures sketched by many of Lesueur's fellow-voyagers. Baudin, Leschenault, Milius and Péron all suggest that the Aborigines led a rather bleak existence.<sup>28</sup> Leschenault and Péron, in particular, blamed the 'lack

28 Baudin to King, *HRNSW*, vol. 5, p. 826; Baudin to de Jussieu, MNHN, ms2082, pièce no. 5; Leschenault, pp. 97-109; Milius, p. 48; F. Péron, 'Conférence adressée à "Messieurs les Professeurs" décrivant les aborigènes et leur moeurs près de Port Jackson', n.d., Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Le Havre, Collection Lesueur [hereafter MHN, CL], dossier 09 032; F. Péron [L. Freycinet], *Voyage of discovery to the Southern Lands*, vol. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, trans. C. Cornell (Adelaide, Friends of the State Library of South Australia, 2006), pp. 301, 302, 311, 313 and

of food, its poor quality, and the labour needed to obtain it', for the Aborigines' apparently 'miserable' and 'vegetating' state.<sup>29</sup> Yet, the Frenchmen generally praised Port Jackson's environment for its fertile soil, variety of flora and healthy climate. Clearly, then, the key differentiating factor between these written accounts and Lesueur's landscapes was not the way each observer evaluated the environment but the lens through which they viewed the Aboriginal people. Most of the writings engage with the Aborigines' perceived lack of 'improvement' despite ongoing contact with British society<sup>30</sup>, and the sense of distaste they reveal is marked — even more so than that which had emerged in the voyagers' accounts by the end of the Tasmanian encounters.<sup>31</sup> This is interesting because at that time the Frenchmen's notion of the 'noble savage' had been unsettled by signs of hostility and perceived ingratitude while, by all accounts, the subsequent Port Jackson stay was entirely free of French-Aboriginal discord. Evidently, it was more the apparent failure to embrace colonisation than the nature of the encounter itself that influenced the view of most of the voyagers.

Lesueur, by contrast, depicted the Aborigines of Port Jackson much as he had the Tasmanians and, moreover, he avoided the issue of 'progress' in his writing as well. In an unpublished manuscript, he carefully describes the fishing practices of Port Jackson's Aboriginal people: where by the water's edge or in their canoes the Aborigines typically position themselves for fishing, the spears, lines and shells they use, and how they use them.<sup>32</sup> His point of view is not entirely objective because it is selective, but, having chosen his subject, he certainly describes it in an impartial way. This disciplined outlook would seem to have been his starting point as he turned to the representation of Aboriginal life through landscape.

Moreover, he determinedly maintained this outlook as he shifted his gaze from inland settings to the shoreline and waters of Sydney Cove. Lesueur's 'Views' take in

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Chapter XX, 'Experiments on the physical strength of the native peoples of Van Diemen's Land and New Holland the inhabitants of Timor', pp. 351-85.

29 Péron, *Voyage of discovery*, vol. 1, pp. 366-7, and Leschenault, pp. 107.

30 Starbuck, *Baudin, Napoleon and the exploration of Australia*, pp. 81-99.

31 See, for example N. Baudin, 'Des naturels que nous trouvions et de leur conduite envers nous', in Copans and Jamin, pp. 205-17; and Péron, *Voyage of discovery*, vol. 1, pp. 353-4, 359, 364-9.

32 C.-A. Lesueur, 'Pêche des aborigènes du Port Jackson', trans. J. Bonnemains, MHN, CL, dossier 09 031.

the township of Sydney without engaging with its associated issues of dispossession or civilisation: he depicts the Aborigines on its fringe as untouched by European society, whilst at the same time neither contrasting them against it nor portraying them as if they are in awe of it. Indeed, they appear just like the subjects of the 'typical landscapes'. Ultimately, Lesueur framed the Aborigines of Port Jackson within the paradigm of encounter rather than colonialism. This frame considerably facilitated his task, for it enabled him to respect the requirements of natural history illustration, to avoid problematising contemporary belief in civilisation and to uphold faith in the 'noble savage' and the 'greatness of man'.

### Petit's portraits

Nicolas-Martin Petit took as much care as Lesueur to dissociate his Aboriginal subjects from the colonial setting; nonetheless, there are significant points of comparison between the portraits he produced at Port Jackson and the scenes they would accompany in the *Voyage de découvertes*. Lesueur achieved a degree of empathy by carefully recalling the details of Aboriginal bodies and manners — details he had observed during the long course of the sojourn and assimilated with the memory of previous observations as well as pre-existing beliefs about humanity. His subjects are not individuals but particular representations of Port Jackson's Aboriginal people. Given the nature of portraiture, we can assume that Petit, for his own part, sketched what was immediately before him, one individual at a time. The portraiture process would have involved direct, one-on-one exchange, extended over a period of time. It must have been an intimate exchange, which naturally produced a degree of familiarity. For Petit, however, this would not have been a familiarity gained solely during the portraiture sessions, but a deepened understanding of individuals he had undoubtedly come to know through casual contact and through his British hosts during these five months in port.<sup>33</sup> Petit's subjects were individuals who lived in and around Sydney; they are identified by name in the portraits' captions and some of them were also participants in the comparative strength experiments carried out by the expedition's self-styled 'observer of man', François Péron.<sup>34</sup> Their portraits

33 Margaret Sankey highlights that the British colonists mediated the French voyagers' view of the Aborigines of Port Jackson. See 'The Aborigines of Port Jackson, as seen by the Baudin expedition', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 41: 2 (2004), p. 125.

34 M. Sankey, 'The Baudin expedition in Port Jackson, 1802: Cultural encounters and enlightenment politics', *Explorations*, 31 (December 2001), p. 20 and 'The Aborigines of Port



therefore reflect less sentimentality on the part of the artist and a more profound, more direct, empathy than do the scenes Lesueur sketched.<sup>35</sup>

They are also remarkably realistic, which was no doubt due not only to Petit's familiarity with his subjects, and to his openness to a common humanity, but also to his 'scientific' purpose. As for their predecessors of the late eighteenth century, Petit's and Lesueur's role was to provide accurate illustrations that would complement their companions' natural history reports; however, unlike earlier missions, the Baudin expedition had been issued with an official 'note instructive' that included particular directions for portraiture. Georges Cuvier desired portraits that would contribute to his research into 'racial' characteristics and, more precisely, 'les rapports entre la perfection de l'esprit et la beauté de la figure'.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, he instructed Baudin's artists to work with 'précision géométrique', always to ensure that 'le profil pur soit joint au portrait de visage', and to depict subjects of diverse ages, genders and 'conditions'. He needed to see 'le véritable caractère de la physionomie' of each people and therefore also explained that the portraits should exclude 'les costumes, les marques' and 'tous les ornements étrangers, les bagues, les pendants, le tatouage', and should show 'la même arrangement des cheveux, le plus simple possible'.<sup>37</sup>

At Port Jackson, Petit's approach to portraiture conformed to the most essential of Cuvier's wishes: the utmost attention to facial features. However, his concentration on accuracy was so great that the body of work he ultimately produced represents a range of individuals at least as strongly as it does a 'racial' type. Overall, the subjects' noses and lips are similarly formed, but the prominence of their cheekbones, chins and brows is distinctly varied and there are natural differences in muscularity and expression as well. Moreover, Petit deepened the representations by adding to each a sense of cultural context and individual character.<sup>38</sup> Contrary to Cuvier's instruction,

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Jackson', p. 124.

35 J. Fornasiero, P. Monteath and J. West-Sooby point out, too, that Petit's portraits neither engage in sentimentality nor idealise body shapes and proportions. Moreover, they add that they reveal a degree of the subjects' 'inner life'. See *Encountering Terra Australis: The Australian voyages of Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders* (Kent Town, Wakefield Press, 2004), p. 324.

36 Cuvier, p. 173.

37 Cuvier, pp. 174-5.

38 See also S. Konishi, 'Depicting sexuality: A case study of the Baudin expedition's Aboriginal ethnography', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 41: 2 (2004), p. 110.

he included ornaments, body-paint and scarification, as well as various hairstyles; for example, Bedgi-bedgi wears a string of red beads, wound loosely several times round his neck (Figure 2.8); Y-erran-gou-la-ga wears a prominent nasal ornament and has streaks of red paint on his forehead, chin and cheeks as well as scarification and a distinct design in white paint across his chest and shoulders (Figure 2.9), while Nourou-gal-derri, depicted in full, wears a red headband and string belt, and carries a spear and shield (Figure 2.10).

**Figure 2.8:** R. Bartholomey (after N.-M. Petit), 'Nouvelle-Hollande, Bedgi-Bedgi, jeune homme de la tribu des Gwea-gal'. Engraving in the *Atlas of the Voyage de découvertes aux terres australes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), National Library of Australia, an7569774, Plate 22. To view this image, see <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an7569774>.

**Figure 2.9:** R. Bartholomey (after N.-M. Petit), 'Nouvelle-Holland, Y-erran-gou-la-ga'. Engraving in the *Atlas of the Voyage de découvertes aux terres australes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), National Library of Australia, an7573663, Plate 24. To view this image, see <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an7573663>.

Like Lesueur's Port Jackson views and ethnographic landscapes, Petit's portraits are incongruent with the voyagers' many written statements about these people's character and human condition. The individuals appear strong and healthy and, in their relaxed posture and alert yet open expressions, they do not appear to be hostile, 'vegetating' or unintelligent. They by no means represent the 'fierce', 'cruel' or 'treacherous' faces that Péron describes.<sup>39</sup> In fact, while the written accounts reflect a more critical attitude toward Port Jackson's Aborigines than they had toward the Tasmanians, and Lesueur's scenes show a continuity of vision from one encounter to the next, these portraits, as scholars have remarked, indicate that Petit took still greater care and identified yet more closely with the 'natives' of the Colony than with those he had met in Tasmania.<sup>40</sup> Given the comparative circumstances of the encounters, this is not entirely surprising; as Margaret Sankey suggests, Petit no doubt achieved a much greater degree of intimacy with the Port Jackson subjects.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps, too, as

39 Péron, *Voyage of discovery*, vol. 1, p. 375.

40 Fornasiero, Monteath and West-Sooby, *Encountering Terra Australis*, pp. 323-4.

41 Sankey, 'The Aborigines of Port Jackson', p. 124.



Figure 2.10: R. Bartholomey (after N.-M. Petit), 'Nouvelle-Holland, Nouvelle-Galles du Sude, Nourou-gal-derri s'avancant pour combattre'. Engraving in the *Atlas of the Voyage de découvertes aux terres australes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), National Library of Australia, an7569780, Plate 25.

Jean Fornasiero and John West-Sooby propose, it is possible that he viewed these people as somewhat 'tamed' by the influences of the Colony and thus more familiar.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> J. Fornasiero and J. West-Sooby, 'Taming the unknown: The representation of Terra Australis by the Baudin expedition 1801-1803', in A. Chittleborough, G. Dooley, B. Glover and R. Hosking (eds), *Alas for the pelicans: Flinders, Baudin and beyond* (Kent Town, SA, Wakefield Press, 2002) p. 78; and Fornasiero, Monteath and West-Sooby, *Encountering Terra Australis*, p. 368.



On occasion, Petit did turn away from individuals in order to sketch certain ethnographic scenes. In 'Nouvelle Hollande, Port Jackson: Cérémonie préliminaire d'un mariage chez les sauvages', he depicted two groups of men performing a tug-of-war over a woman. They pull at her arms and hair, some brandishing spears, while, pushed down on one knee and apparently crying in anguish, the woman seems helpless and tormented.<sup>43</sup> However, this violent scene does not correspond to any of the Frenchmen's written accounts; in fact, it is as likely to have been based on British anecdotes or images as on a personal observation. It represents a long-standing stereotype of 'savage' sexuality, as Shino Konishi points out<sup>44</sup>, and bears little relation to the French-Aboriginal encounter of 1802. The three scenes 'showing Aborigines copulating', one sketched by Petit and one (of which there are two variants) by Lesueur, further demonstrate the ethnographic interest in sexuality.<sup>45</sup> As Konishi observes, they are depictions of an act rather than of individuals; for example, the couple's facial features are drawn quite differently than those in Petit's portraits.

However, in two of these scenes, the couples' affection is represented quite clearly: in one the subjects embrace and in the other they look into each other's eyes. The third image, Konishi suggests, was modified to show more explicit detail and to give a more voyeuristic effect, for the purposes of profit should the image be published.<sup>46</sup> Like most of Petit's and Lesueur's works discussed here, these scenes are not visibly associated with the colonial context. Yet neither are they detailed drawings imbued with a sense of the artists' connection with their subjects. Instead, they reflect the lingering influence of 'savage' tropes, the increasingly invasive methodology of the 'natural history of Man' and a tentative attitude: they are only roughly sketched and, in the end, were not published in the *Atlas historique*.

To return to the published portraits, it is notable that, as more empathetic renderings of humanity than those Petit produced of uncolonised Aborigines, and

43 S. Leroy, 'Nouvelle Hollande, Port Jackson: Cérémonie préliminaire d'un mariage chez les sauvages', engraving after N.-M. Petit, plate 104, in Arago and Pellion, *Voyage autour du monde: Atlas historique* (1825).

44 Konishi, 'Depicting sexuality', p. 101.

45 The three sketches are all entitled 'Scene showing Aborigines copulating'; they are held at the MNH Le Havre, Collection Lesueur, and catalogued 16055, 16056.1 and 16056.2. Both 16055 and 16056.1 are reproduced in Bonnemaïn, Forsyth and Smith, *Baudin in Australian Waters*, pp. 98-9.

46 Konishi, 'Depicting sexuality', pp. 110-12.

as representations so silent about the colonial context, these portraits differ distinctly from those produced by French voyager-artists in Port Jackson subsequently, when the scientific approach to studying human diversity was more developed. During his visit with the Freycinet expedition in 1820, for example, Alphonse Pellion drew two Aboriginal men in jackets — torn, dirty and worn askew — with their genitalia exposed, and a look of profound weariness on their faces and in their posture (Figure 2.11).

**Figure 2.11: A. Pellion, 'Sauvages de la Nouvelle Galles du Sud (d'apres nature dans leur Camp pres de Sidney, 20 dec. 1819)', 1819. State Library of New South Wales [SLNSW], SV/118. To view this image, see <http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/item/itemLarge.aspx?itemID=446493>.**

Even Pellion's more experienced companion, artist Jacques Arago, in his more realistic and sensitively sketched portraits, did not flinch from the effects of colonisation on Aboriginal people. Almost all his subjects wore shirts, and some also wore a jacket or a hat. Moreover, while Pellion did also publish a sketch of Port Jackson Aborigines in a 'state of nature', it is a grotesque caricature (Figure 2.12). The subjects' features are exaggerated, even in comparison to the accompanying written ethnography<sup>47</sup>, and they contrast sharply with the portraits of various uncolonised individuals of the Pacific Islands, which were all rendered with a relative sense of attention to accuracy and of empathy.

**Figure 2.12: E. Forget (after A. Pellion), 'N<sup>lle</sup> Hollande: Port-Jackson. Sauvages des Montagnes-Bleues'. Engraving in J. Arago and A. Pellion, *Voyage autour du monde: Atlas historique* (Paris, Pillet Aîné, 1825). National Library of Australia, an9032044, Plate 101. To view this image, see <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an9032044>.**

It is also notable that it was in Arago's and Pellion's *Atlas* that Petit's 'Cérémonie préliminaire d'un mariage' was finally published. Clearly, as Marc-Serge Rivière demonstrates, the naturalists and artists of the Freycinet (1817-20), Bougainville (1824-26) and d'Urville (1826-29) expeditions engaged closely and

<sup>47</sup> See also J. Arago, 'Five portraits of Aborigines from around Sydney', 1819, SLNSW, <http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/album/albumView.aspx?acmsID=52166&itemID=823406> (accessed 13 June 2013); and L. Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde: Atlas historique*, tome II, livre III (Paris, Chez Pillet Aine, 1826), pp. 703-908.

more dispassionately than their Revolutionary predecessors with the social problems of the colonial project at Port Jackson.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, much occurred to influence French colonialism in the years between these voyages: French colonists and soldiers lost their battle against the former slaves of Saint-Domingue, and the independent Republic of Haiti was declared; slavery in the remaining French colonies was re-introduced; and the Napoleonic Empire rapidly expanded and, just as swiftly, drew to a close. The principle of equality became firmly embedded in French society but, by the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, few imagined it might be applied beyond the nation's borders. This was a time when 'observations of Man' were less motivated by philosophical and political questions than by scientific aims to explain differences and classify peoples: a time when debate about establishing a penal policy in Oceania was vigorous. Indeed, it was inevitable that the voyagers' view of the Eora, in the Restoration period, would be more critical and more conspicuously framed by colonial concerns than that of their predecessors.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

The turn of the century, when Baudin's ships set sail for the *Terres australes*, was a time of optimistic colonial visions in France. While the study of humanity was certainly becoming more systematic, French observers were still strongly invested in the concept of universalism. This historical moment combined with the circumstances of the expedition and of the Aboriginal people at Port Jackson to produce a particular mix of sentiment and science in Lesueur's and Petit's ethnographic art. While the romance of the noble savage concept is in evidence, especially in Lesueur's scenes, the realistic lines and shades of Petit's portraits indicate that the myth was in fact penetrated. Through the intimacy of both the contact zone and the portraiture process, and through the demands of natural history illustration, the Aborigines' fundamental human nature was exposed to Petit and Lesueur. It was, however, only partly set down on paper. The artists from the Revolution era were open to signs of a shared humanity because it was what they expected and wanted to find, and they concentrated on the comforting sense of universality. Yet their absolute determination to exclude the

48 M.S. Rivière, 'Distant echoes of the enlightenment: Private and public observations of convict life by Baudin's disgraced Officer, Hyacinthe de Bougainville (1825)', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 41: 2 (2004), pp. 170-85.

49 J. Dunmore, *French explorers in the Pacific*, vol. 2: *The nineteenth century* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 386.

colonial context from their images suggests that they could not otherwise maintain this insight. Neither were they prepared, as later French voyager-artists would be, to venture an explanation of Aboriginal humanity as it stood on the middle ground.

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# 3

## An artist in the making: The early drawings of Charles-Alexandre Lesueur during the Baudin expedition to Australia

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The link between scientific discovery and empire building was never more evident than in the latter decades of the eighteenth century. During that time, as Mary Louise Pratt has noted, the 'international scientific expedition' became 'one of Europe's proudest and most conspicuous instruments of expansion'.<sup>1</sup> For Pratt, this period coincided with the emergence of a new version of Europe's 'planetary consciousness' — one which was characterised by 'the construction of global-scale meaning through the descriptive apparatuses of natural history'.<sup>2</sup>

Empirical observations of the natural world were indeed indispensable to the European Enlightenment ambition of obtaining a complete and taxonomic knowledge of the globe — and thereby gaining mastery over it. At this time, too, there was a growing realisation that the visual could play just as valuable a part in that process as the verbal. Accordingly, by the end of the eighteenth century, it had become common

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1 M.L. Pratt, *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London and New York, Routledge, 2008), p. 23.

2 Pratt, p. 15.



practice for professional artists to be included on scientific expeditions. Their role was to keep a pictorial record of the places visited, the peoples encountered and the specimens of flora and fauna that were collected or otherwise examined. The natural history drawings, ethnographic portraits, coastal profiles and landscapes that they produced, together with the various maps and hydrographic charts that the officers and geographers compiled, formed a rich store of iconographic material that became just as important to the imperial project as the discursive observations to be found in the logbooks and journals that their fellow travellers kept.<sup>3</sup>

This development had profound implications, for both the sciences and the arts. As Bernard Smith has argued, progress in the arts not only paralleled scientific progress but also assisted it by providing scientists with ever more accurate and reliable visual material for analysis. Conversely, the increase in scientific knowledge of the world constituted an 'enduring challenge to the supremacy of neo-classical values in art and thought'.<sup>4</sup> The artist was henceforth required to depict nature accurately, not enhance or idealise it as the Renaissance had programmatically set out to do. The visual imagery that scientific travellers compiled had to conform to a new ideal

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3 Confirmation of this is provided by the report on Nicolas Baudin's Australian voyage (1800-04) presented to the French government by the Institut Impérial, an extract of which was published in François Péron's official account of the expedition, the *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes*, vol. 1 (Paris, Imprimerie Impériale, 1807), pp. i-xv. In it, the authors, Pierre-Simon Laplace, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, Charles Pierre Claret de Fleurieu, Bernard Germain de Lacépède and Georges Cuvier, note that 'une description, quelque complète qu'elle puisse être, ne sauroit jamais donner une assez juste idée de ces formes singulières, qui n'ont pas de terme précis de comparaison dans des objets antérieurement connus. Des figures correctes peuvent suppléer seules à l'imperfection du discours' (p. v).

4 B. Smith, *European vision and the South Pacific*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Sydney, Harper & Row, 1985), p. 1. The year 1768 is the starting point for Smith: in that year, the Royal Academy was established in London and the Royal Society simultaneously undertook the promotion of James Cook's first voyage to the South Seas. Smith observes that 'it was the empirical approach of the Society and not the neo-classical approach of the Academy which flourished under the impact of the new knowledge won from the Pacific' (p. 1). Smith's thesis has been immensely influential, though it is worth noting that the various connections he established have been challenged in more recent times. According to William Eisler, for example, 'Bernard Smith's integration of the histories of scientific and ethnographic illustration, evolutionary thought, and Australian art in one vast progress appears somewhat forced. I prefer to see these strands as running parallel to each other, intersecting at various points'. See W. Eisler, *The furthest shore: Images of Terra Australis from the Middle Ages to Captain Cook* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 4-5. Eisler further argues in his study that the 'association of art, science, exploration, and the "typical" landscape' was a product of the Renaissance, not of the Enlightenment, as Smith had maintained (p. 5).

of objectivity, as illusory as we now understand that ambition to have been.<sup>5</sup> The pursuit of scientific knowledge thus influenced the development of artistic practices as much as art served and impacted upon science. And, in keeping with Pratt's thesis, in neither case were the consequences — or the motivations — entirely altruistic or innocent. Indeed, as Sarah Thomas has observed, the intrinsic link that had developed between 'the historically determined conventions of art and science ... formed a key role in the colonial enterprise'.<sup>6</sup> Reliable and precise verbal and visual information was essential to a Europe 'obsessed with the idea that the natural world could be classified under the one global system of nomenclature' — an obsession underpinned by ideological assumptions and heavily motivated by political aspirations.<sup>7</sup>

Natural history drawings were thus both a symptom and an instrument of this greater project. In order to contribute to it, they had to be as accurate as possible and include details that would be useful for the purposes of analysis and classification. Ethnographic portraits likewise had to convey information relating both to the morphology of the subjects and to their social and cultural practices. And if the artists were called upon to draw coastal profiles of the shores surveyed, these had to be sufficiently detailed to serve the very practical purpose of assisting future navigators in identifying their exact location. The need for precision and verisimilitude did

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5 In *Imagining the Pacific: In the wake of the Cook voyages* (Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 1992), Bernard Smith rightly points out that 'it would be profoundly misleading to assume that this increased use of art for the conveyance of relevant scientific information operated as a direct, unilinear process by which error and illusion were cast off and the *truth* progressively revealed — though that certainly was the way the scientific optimists of the day chose to regard it. Naturalism, like idealism, is a conceptualising enterprise. In moving from the ideal theories of the academies towards the empirical standpoint of science, artists did not thereby achieve an unvarnished truthfulness of the eye; they exchanged one conceptual master for another' (p. 39, emphasis in the original).

6 S. Thomas, "'Beautiful to the eye or interesting to science": The conundrum of natural-history art', in S. Thomas (ed.), *The encounter, 1802: Art of the Flinders and Baudin voyages* (Adelaide, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2002), p. 36.

7 Thomas, p. 18. Simon Ryan's study on the nineteenth-century land explorers of Australia and the ideological conception of space which they helped construct, and which led to their mythologisation, makes the same claims regarding the ultimate motives of the business of discovery. In *The cartographic eye: How explorers saw Australia* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), he asserts: 'The imperial endeavour encourages the construction of space as a universal, measurable and divisible entity, for this is a self-legitimising view of the world. If it were admitted that different cultures produced different spaces, then negotiating these would be difficult, if not impossible. Constructing a monolithic space, on the other hand, allows imperialism to hierarchise the use of space to its own advantage' (p. 4).

not, however, preclude artistry or subjectivity, and the best illustrators achieved the kind of fusion of art and science that led Bernard Smith to describe one of the most celebrated among them — the artist on board Matthew Flinders's *Investigator* expedition, Ferdinand Bauer — as 'the Leonardo of natural history illustration'.<sup>8</sup> As Smith explains, although Bauer 'laboured with infinite care upon detail he never lost sight of a plant as a unified whole, so that he avoided both the dryness of science and the sweetness of sentiment'.<sup>9</sup> The best natural history drawing thus combines craftsmanship and scientific accuracy with a deep aesthetic sense.

While he was certainly not of the calibre of a Bauer when he left his home town of Le Havre in October 1800 on an ambitious state-sponsored voyage of discovery to the 'Terres Australes', Charles-Alexandre Lesueur was clearly talented enough to have attracted the eye of the expedition's commander, Nicolas Baudin. The French government had appointed three established artists to the expedition, but Baudin also required illustrators for the personal journal of the voyage that he was planning to compile, presumably with a view to publication. He therefore engaged Lesueur and another inexperienced but equally promising artist, Nicolas-Martin Petit, for this purpose. They were appointed officially as 'assistant gunners', but everyone on board understood that their role was in reality to work in a quasi-private capacity for the commander.<sup>10</sup> Lesueur and Petit must have had a taste for adventure to sign up for such a long and potentially perilous voyage to a little-known destination. According to Jacqueline Bonnemains, there was even an element of risk regarding the role they would play in this mission: 'To enlist as an assistant gunner, simply accepting the commandant's word that they would be exempted from seamen's duties and employed as illustrators to be paid from his private account, may well appear to be an act of pure madness'.<sup>11</sup>

8 B. Smith, 'The intellectual and artistic framework of Pacific exploration in the eighteenth century', in W. Eisler and B. Smith (eds), *Terra Australis: The furthest shore* (Sydney, International Cultural Corporation of Australia, 1988), p. 126. See also Smith, *Imagining the Pacific*, p. 48.

9 Smith, *European vision and the South Pacific*, p. 190.

10 Lesueur makes this clear in a letter addressed to his father aimed at reassuring him about his role: 'N'ayez nulle inquiétude sur mon sort. Jusqu'à présent je suis bien avec le Capitaine Baudin qui doit m'employer moi et d'autres de mes camarades utilement et sans être obligé à la manœuvre du bâtiment. Notre partie sera plutôt le dessin'. See C.-A. Lesueur, Letter to his father, Jean-Baptiste, dated 2 Fructidor Year VIII [20 August 1800], (Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Le Havre, Collection Lesueur, n° 63004).

11 J. Bonnemains, 'The artists of the Baudin expedition: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur and Nicolas-Martin Petit', in S. Thomas (ed.), *The encounter, 1802: Art of the Flinders and Baudin voyages* (Adelaide, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2002), p. 128.

Baudin, too, was taking a calculated gamble in employing two such young and untried artists to illustrate his personal journal, despite the obvious talent they each had. In the event, however, his decision would prove to be an inspired one, as both Lesueur and Petit would go on to produce an impressive number of accomplished drawings, many of which have now become emblematic of the expedition. Lesueur in particular would benefit from this formative experience, eventually carving out a successful career as both an artist and a naturalist.<sup>12</sup>

Commentary on Lesueur's life and work has understandably focused on his collaboration with the zoologist François Péron and on the more accomplished illustrations he produced as a result of that partnership, both during his visit to Australia and after his return to France. His rise to prominence once the Baudin expedition left Mauritius, for example, has been well documented. During the stopover in Port Louis on the journey out, the three official artists who had been appointed by the government to accompany Baudin — the landscape painter Jacques Milbert, the draughtsman Louis Lebrun and the genre artist Michel Garnier — decided to abandon the expedition, ostensibly for reasons of ill health, though this appears to have been merely a pretext.<sup>13</sup> Their departure, in any event, created a void that allowed Lesueur and Petit to be promoted to the status of official artists for the expedition as it set out from Port Louis bound for New Holland.<sup>14</sup> For Lesueur, who

12 Petit's career was tragically cut short when, on 21 October 1804, he succumbed to a gangrenous wound sustained in a fall in a Paris street just seven months after the expedition's return to France.

13 That was certainly the way their decision was interpreted in France, as the irony-laden report in the *Magasin encyclopédique* indicates: 'Quelques-uns des dessinateurs partis avec l'expédition du capitaine Baudin, ont trouvé si agréable le séjour de l'Île-de-France, où l'expédition a relâché, qu'ils y ont borné le voyage autour du Monde qu'ils avoient d'abord entrepris. L'état florissant de la Colonie, les richesses dont jouissent en général les habitants, ont mis ces artistes dans le cas d'y exercer avec fruits leurs talents, et avec d'autant plus d'avantages, que l'éloignement de l'Europe, privant cette île de la présence des hommes qui cultivent les arts, ils n'ont point eu de concurrence à craindre. Il paroît que ces diverses considérations se sont réunies pour leur faire gagner beaucoup d'argent en peu de temps. L'un d'eux a déjà, du fruit de son travail, acquis une maison, des terres, des nègres, etc'. *Magasin encyclopédique*, VII<sup>e</sup> année, VI (1801), p. 77.

14 Their promotion is recorded in Baudin's *Journal de mer* in an entry dated 7 Floréal Year IX [27 April 1801], the day after the expedition's departure from Mauritius: 'je fis remplacer sur le Géographe par les citoyens Petit et Lesueur les places qu'y occupaient inutilement M<sup>rs</sup> Milbert et Garnier. On jugera d'après les travaux de ces deux jeunes gens si le choix que j'en ai fait était bon ou mauvais'. N. Baudin, *Journal de mer*, vol. 2 (Archives Nationales de France, série Marine 5JJ37), p. 76.

had begun to show some talent for natural history drawing, this meant working more closely with the scientists after the stopover in Mauritius, and in particular with the zoologist François Péron, whose own status had improved radically following the desertion of several of his more senior colleagues during their stay on the island. As Lesueur's biographers have rightly observed, Péron would have a decisive influence on Lesueur's evolution as a natural history illustrator. Jacqueline Bonnemains, in pointing to the 'rôle immense de François Péron dans la carrière de Charles-Alexandre Lesueur', explains: 'C'est lui, en effet, qui le forma à l'étude zoologique lui permettant ainsi d'y faire valoir tout son talent artistique'.<sup>15</sup> This collaboration with Péron was not only instrumental in making Lesueur a better natural history artist; it also developed in him an enduring taste for natural history itself. As Bonnemains notes:

Leur collaboration est des plus efficaces, l'un dessinant avec précision et talent ce que l'autre décrit et détermine. Mais, très vite, Lesueur devient plus qu'un artiste. Les rangs des naturalistes s'éclaircissent: le scorbut, la dysenterie, les fièvres s'installent, soit en mer, soit au cours des escales et sont fatals à beaucoup. C'est alors que Lesueur, avec son ami Péron, récolte, observe, prépare et naturalise les animaux marins ou terrestres de ces lointaines régions.<sup>16</sup>

Lesueur's scientific activities and the drawings he produced later in his career, both during the twenty-two years he spent in the United States (1815-37), where he mixed and worked with such luminaries as the philanthropic geologist William Maclure and the utopian socialist Robert Owen, and in the last decade of his life back in Le Havre (1837-46), where he was eventually appointed the founding director of the newly created Museum of Natural History in 1846, have likewise been well documented.<sup>17</sup>

15 J. Bonnemains, *Les Artistes du 'Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes' (1800-1804): Charles-Alexandre Lesueur et Nicolas-Martin Petit* (Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle du Havre, 1989), p. 15. (Extrait du Bulletin trimestriel de la Société géologique de Normandie et des Amis du Muséum du Havre, 76: 1 [1989].)

16 Bonnemains, *Les Artistes du 'Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes'*, p. 20.

17 This period of his life was indeed an early subject of interest for commentators. See, for example, Ernest-Théodore Hamy's 1904 study, *Les Voyages du naturaliste Ch. Alex. Lesueur dans l'Amérique du Nord (1815-1837)*, numéro spécial du *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris*, 5: 1 (1904) (translated into English and published in 1968 by Kent State University Press). See also A. Loir, *Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, Artiste et savant français en Amérique de 1816 à 1839* [sic] (Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, 1920); R. Rinsma, *Alexandre Lesueur*, vol. 1, *Un explorateur et artiste français au pays de Thomas Jefferson* (Le Havre, Éditions du Havre de Grâce, 2007); and the illustrated study produced by J.M. Elliott and J. Thompson Johansen, *Charles-Alexandre Lesueur: Premier naturalist and artist* (New

Commentators have paid less attention, however, to the drawings Lesueur made during the early part of the Baudin expedition, and in particular during the long journey out from Le Havre to Mauritius (the last port of call before heading for 'New Holland').<sup>18</sup> For Lesueur, these months spent at sea provided a perfect opportunity to practise his craft, and the drawings he produced in this time — before he developed his close collaboration with François Péron — provide us with valuable insights into the style and personality of the more accomplished natural history artist who was later to emerge. More specifically, a study of these early drawings will serve to highlight some of the characteristics of Lesueur's style and of the particular aesthetic he was developing at the very beginning of what we might describe as his 'professional' career. Comparisons with his later work — the more orthodox scientific illustrations he would go on to complete, as well as the sketches of people and places he would continue to draw throughout his life — will further allow us to determine the extent to which the stylistic and aesthetic features exhibited in his early drawings might be seen as enduring and defining characteristics of his œuvre. Finally, a consideration of these early drawings will also provide us with a better understanding of the place that drawing occupied for him, both during the expedition and in his life more generally.

One of the unfortunate consequences of neglecting these early sketches and drawings and focusing instead on the artwork that Lesueur produced during his time in Australia and beyond is that the importance of his early training and development as an artist is often overlooked. It is almost to imply that, until he began to work in close collaboration with the scientists on the expedition, he had not begun to develop his own aesthetic, his own way of seeing the world. There is admittedly little documentary evidence to help us identify what his early influences might have been. We do know, thanks to the efforts of his biographers, most notably Jacqueline Bonnemaïn, that his early training was most likely in the field of hydrography and

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Harmony, s.n., 1999). On his life and work in Le Havre, see Ph. Manneville and S. Barot, 'Charles-Alexandre Lesueur et Le Havre', in A. Dommergues and M. Nedeljkovic (eds), *Les Français et l'Australie: Voyages de découvertes et missions scientifiques de 1756 à nos jours* (Paris, Université Paris X Nanterre, 1989), pp. 99-105.

18 One notable exception is Jean Fornasiero's account of the circumstances in which Lesueur and Petit produced their work on board the ship during the early part of the voyage: 'Charles-Alexandre Lesueur: An art of the littoral', in J. Fornasiero and V. Thwaites (eds), *Littoral* (Adelaide, s.n., 2010), pp. 12-19.

naval draughtsmanship.<sup>19</sup> Born in 1778 into a lower-middle-class family from Le Havre, where his father worked at the Admiralty, as his grandfather had also done, the young Charles-Alexandre attended the local College and then in all likelihood went, with his cousins, to the School of Hydrography. This is where midshipmen were trained in the basic skills of that art, but the School also offered free classes in draughtsmanship and applied graphic techniques. Lesueur's early training was thus of a technical nature and would have developed in him a sense of precision and a keen eye for detail. We can assume, from the fact that Baudin hired him, that Lesueur had already demonstrated some talent for this kind of drawing, and perhaps also for artistic drawing more generally. The young twenty-two-year-old artist therefore had at least one of the qualities required to become an accomplished natural history artist: a meticulous attention to detail.

But technical ability alone does not make a great artist. Precision and accuracy will produce perfectly acceptable maps and charts, but they are not in and of themselves sufficient when it comes to drawing animate objects. Contemplation of another living object — a plant, an animal or, particularly, another human being — always induces in us a mix of responses which are a sign that we are interacting with that object: that we are investing it with meaning, engaging with it on our own personal terms. The paradox of good natural history art is that, at the same time as it purports to provide an objectively accurate depiction of the object under study which satisfies our intellectual requirements, it also expresses the artist's subjective vision and produces in the viewer a subtle but sure emotional response.

Some might argue that, even in his later drawings, Lesueur sometimes struggled to find that delicate balance between the intellectual and the emotional: that he did not always avoid the excesses of both. We can see from his early drawings, in any case, that his gaze already had a strongly personal dimension that competed with his primarily technical training. There is a whimsy, for example, in his choice of subjects. One particularly compelling set of images is the series of cloud drawings that Lesueur made, most notably when he crossed the Equator.<sup>20</sup>

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19 For more detail on Lesueur's early life and training, see Bonnemains, *Les Artistes du Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes*, pp. 17-18. The brief outline presented here is based on that biographical study.

20 For obvious practical reasons, only a selection of Lesueur's drawings can be reproduced here. The most complete catalogue of his work is to be found in the illustrated biography produced by G. Baglione and C. Crémère, *Charles-Alexandre Lesueur: Peintre voyageur, un trésor oublié* (Paris, Éditions de Conti, 2009).



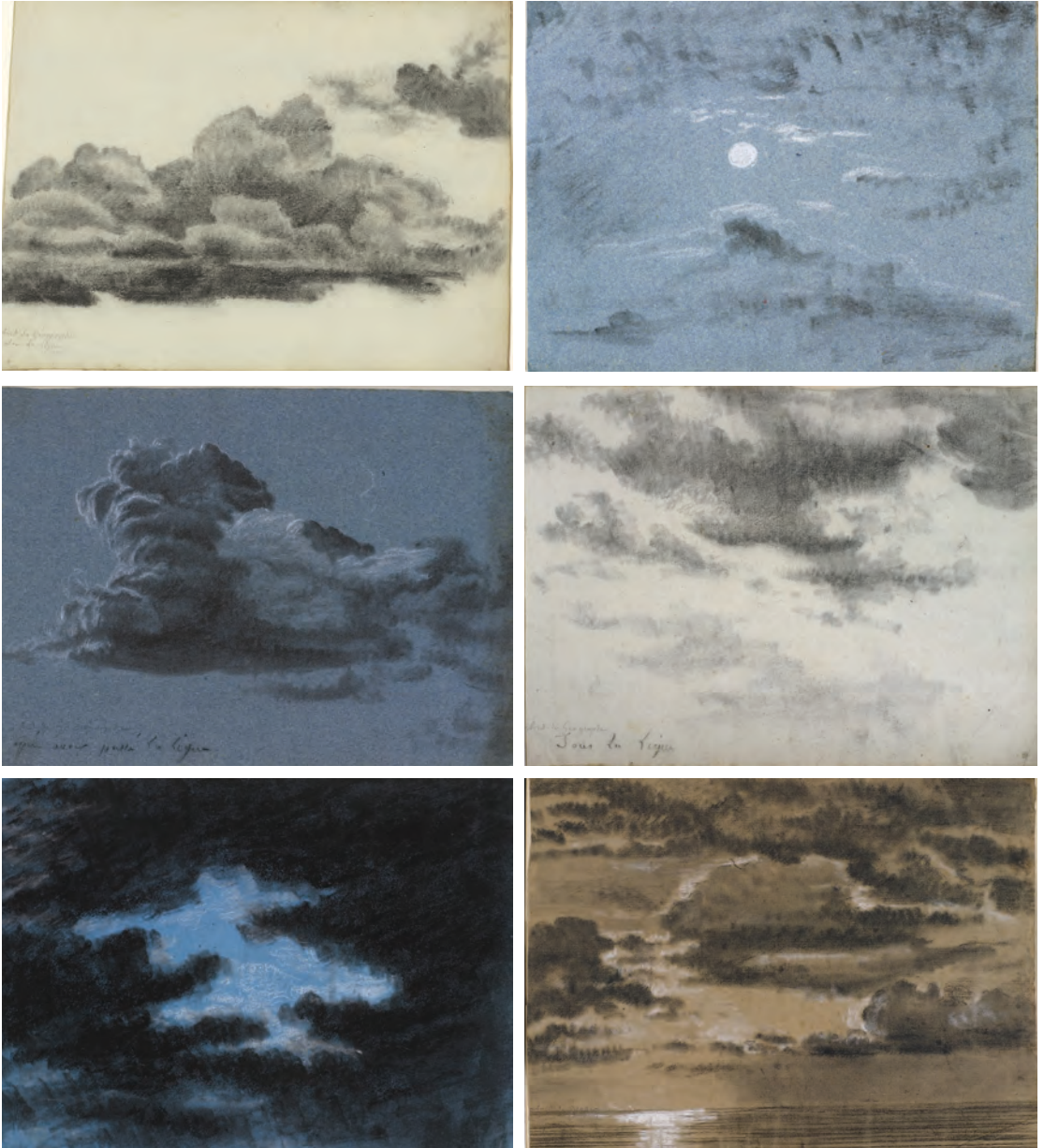


Figure 3.1: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, Sketches of clouds made on board the *Géographe* at or near the Equator. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 13002-13007.



These drawings, which Lesueur did not intend for public display, demonstrate a keen eye and a sound level of technical skill. The fact that they correspond to different moments of the day, and that he drew most of them at or near the symbolic latitude of the Equator, might suggest an emerging scientific curiosity about natural phenomena. It is nevertheless hard to imagine that these drawings would have served any particular scientific purpose, beyond the anecdotal recording of the state of the sky at that latitude and at the given time of day and year. What dominates in these drawings is the fascination of the artist with light, shape and form, especially when we view them as a set. This keen interest in shape and form would remain a feature of Lesueur's work, as demonstrated by his later illustrations of jellyfish and starfish, for example, or by his depictions of the cliffs around Le Havre. We can therefore see it as constituting one of the enduring and defining aspects of his aesthetic.

The cloud drawings also point to Lesueur's willingness —and ability — to take on technical challenges. Clouds are a particularly difficult subject for any artist, not just because of their mobile nature but also because they test the artist's skill in depicting volume, perspective and nuances of shade and light. As no less an artist than John Constable observed in 1821, at a time when his own obsession with skies had led him to focus almost exclusively on sky and cloud studies, the 'difficulty [of skies] in painting is very great, both as to composition and execution'.<sup>21</sup> These technical challenges — the elusive and changing shape of the subject, the difficulty of depicting nuances of colour and of portraying specific details in accurate perspective and proportion — are not limited to clouds. They are in fact very similar to the challenges Lesueur confronted when he came to draw the jellyfish caught by Péron and the other scientists during the Baudin expedition. It is true that his execution of such illustrations improved over time, but the technical ability and the methodical patience exhibited in Lesueur's later, more accomplished, zoological illustrations are already in evidence in his early cloud drawings.

Finally, the cloud sketches point to yet another constant in Lesueur's work, and that is his emotional engagement with his subject, which complements the intellectual demands of objective observation. Constable, who understood the vital role clouds play in expressing the mood of a scene, considered the sky to be the 'key note' of

21 Letter from Constable to his friend John Fisher dated 23 October 1821, reproduced in J.E. Thornes, *John Constable's skies: A fusion of art and science* (Edgbaston, University of Birmingham Press, 1999), p. 57.

any landscape and 'the chief "Organ of sentiment"'.<sup>22</sup> Lesueur's cloud drawings may not have the evocative power of a Constable sky, but they nevertheless convey a strong sense of emotion — the aesthetic emotion of the artist, no doubt, but also the emotional response created in him by the particular circumstances in which he found himself: on a ship in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean in unfamiliar latitudes and in atmospheric conditions that he was experiencing for the first time. There is a sense of moment here, most notably in the cloud drawings from the Equator. Crossing the line was a significant event for any maritime traveller, let alone a young man engaged in his first sea voyage. It is therefore entirely plausible that Lesueur was using these drawings as a means both to record his personal milestone and to express something of his emotional response to that moment.

The numerous sketches Lesueur made during the passage from Le Havre to Mauritius of sailors and others going about their business on board the ship represent another important group of early drawings. Perhaps in one sense Lesueur was simply rehearsing his art, as a musician practises scales, or as his Normandy compatriot Eugène Boudin would later hone his skills through endlessly painting cows. The comparison is not entirely factitious if we consider the unfinished quality of many of Boudin's cow paintings: at a certain point, the artist must have felt that he had sufficiently 'warmed up' to move on to new and more challenging subjects. In Lesueur's case, however, these sketches also constitute a kind of diary of his voyage.

These sketches have an intimate and whimsical quality that is reminiscent of his cloud drawings. Lesueur spent several months in close and confined contact with the men he depicts here, and sketching them was perhaps a way of expressing his personal connection with the routine work they had to undertake around him and with some of the more idiosyncratic forms of behaviour they displayed.<sup>23</sup> The inclusion of the odd accessory, in sketches that are generally short on such detail, also gives us the sense of a strongly personalised perception of his travelling companions and of ship-board life: the cannon, the cup and carafe, the duck in its cage, the sailor's bell, for example (Figures 3.6 and 3.7). The character that may be lacking in their facial expressions is nevertheless suggested in other ways — by their pose, for example, or by the lived-in quality of the clothes they are wearing. In aesthetic terms, these rapidly drawn sketches that are 'pris sur le vif' have the unfinished quality characteristic of

22 See Thornes, p. 57.

23 For other examples, see Baglione and Crémère, pp. 37 and 39.

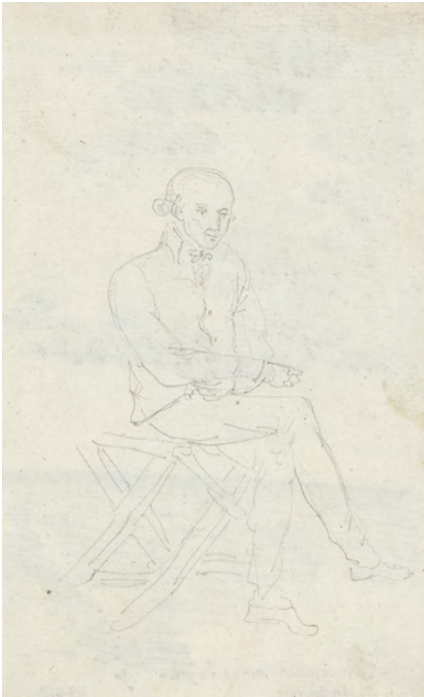


Figure 3.2: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, Portrait possibly of Nicolas Baudin. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 13019.



Figure 3.3: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, *Voilier sur le Géographe*. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 13025.

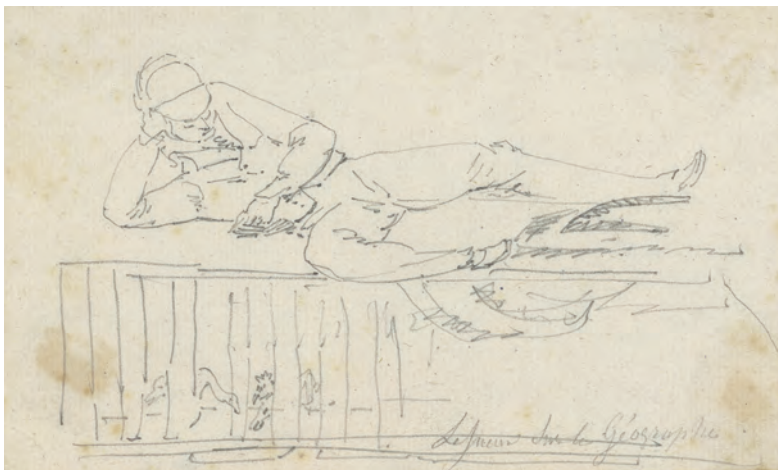


Figure 3.4: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, *Lesueur sur le Géographe*. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 13032.



Figure 3.5: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, *Leschenot sur le Géographe*. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 13033. Théodore Leschenault was one of the botanists on the expedition.



Figure 3.6: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, *Sur le Géographe*. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 13012.



Figure 3.7: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, *Sur le pont du Géographe*. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 13016 verso.

this kind of drawing, yet they are highly evocative and capture a certain essence of the person or activity depicted.

This would remain a feature of many of Lesueur's later pencil sketches — during his boat trips down the Ohio and the Mississippi, for example, when he sketched people likewise going about their work.<sup>24</sup> There is even a kinship in this respect with some of the pencil and watercolour sketches depicting the places he visited, whether it be Sydney Town, Philadelphia, New Harmony, New Orleans or Le Havre.<sup>25</sup> In most cases, Lesueur did not intend to use such sketches as a basis for final, more finished, pieces of work, and they were therefore not a means of working out ideas. He was simply recording what he saw and compiling a kind of visual diary of the people he met and the places he visited.

The drawings we have examined thus far are of a very personal nature — that is to say, they are of subjects that Lesueur chose and that reflect his own particular interests and experiences. He was, however, hired to illustrate the commander's personal journal, and that involved drawing subjects of natural history at Baudin's request. Lesueur completed many such drawings during the outward journey, primarily of fish and other marine animals — a choice no doubt dictated by the circumstances, though it should be noted that marine life, particularly the smaller and more unusual animals, held a particular fascination for the commander. The specimens Lesueur and Petit drew were pulled up from the sea during the voyage using a net that the zoologists René Maugé and Stanislas Levillain had specially designed for this purpose, and it was Baudin who decided which specimen he wanted drawn for his journal. It is possible that Maugé and Levillain also had some input into the illustrations; Levillain's notebooks, for example, contain zoological descriptions that, as Jean Fornasiero has pointed out, 'are clearly linked to Lesueur's paintings of some of these very animals'.<sup>26</sup> However, the relative lack of scientific detail they provide suggests either that the input of Levillain and Maugé was not as detailed or as technical as Péron's would later prove to be, or else that the visual and textual records were compiled more or less separately or perhaps sequentially

24 See Baglione and Crémère, pp. 296-9.

25 In addition to the images reproduced here, see Baglione and Crémère, pp. 56-7 (Île de France), 79 and 93 (Kupang), 123 (Port Jackson), 156 (Cape Town), 194-215 and 220-2 (various locations in France), 230-3, 248-9 and 331-7 (Le Havre), 270-5 (northeast United States), 279-84 (Philadelphia), 286-9 (New Harmony), and 345-9 (the Cap de la Hève near Le Havre).

26 Fornasiero, p. 16.





Figure 3.8: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, Sketch drawn during the sojourn in Port Jackson. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 16076.



Figure 3.9: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, *New Harmony*, Indiana. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 41151.



Figure 3.10: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'The French market at New Orleans', Louisiana. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 44090.



Figure 3.11: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'Le Havre and its beach'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 36001.

— that is to say that the artists were not necessarily always working under the direct supervision of the zoologists when they made them.

Despite their scientific shortcomings, however, these drawings made quite an impression on anyone who cared to go and look at them (Baudin was perfectly happy to have his illustrated log put on display for all to see). The zoologist Bory de Saint-Vincent, who travelled on Baudin's consort ship, the *Naturaliste*, was most taken by these illustrations when he had the chance to look at them during the stopover in Mauritius:

En attendant qu'il nous fût permis d'aller à terre, je parcourus avec admiration le journal du commandant: c'était un immense volume cartonné, étalé sur une table dans son appartement, et auquel il paraissait qu'on pouvait toucher sans indiscrétion, car Riedlay [Riedlé] et Maugé le feuilletaient sans façon, et en faisaient les honneurs aux étrangers. Ce journal renfermait une multitude de figures de mollusques, de poissons, ou d'autres objets d'histoire naturelle, peints avec une perfection et une vérité dont rien n'approche. Je regrettai que ces dessins n'eussent pas été dirigés par un naturaliste; ils auraient pu par-là devenir complets; mais il n'y avait nuls détails anatomiques; le peintre n'avait pas toujours représenté l'animal par le côté qui offrait ses caractères; et comme aucune description linnéenne si l'on peut s'exprimer ainsi, n'accompagnait ces figures, elles n'auront pas, si elles sont jamais gravées, le mérite qu'elles eussent dû avoir, sur-tout pour les zoologistes des contrées éloignées de la mer, qui ne prendront pas toujours par elles une idée exacte de ce qu'elles représentent. Pour moi qui venais de voir les objets représentés, et qui avais eu en même tems la prétention de les peindre avec vérité, je fus surpris et confus en parcourant ces chefs-d'œuvre, et je me hâtai de m'informer quel était l'auteur d'un si bel ouvrage, afin de lui témoigner la satisfaction que j'en éprouvais; on me présenta un jeune homme d'un air très-modeste, et qui, par un noble zèle, s'était embarqué comme novice-timonier, quoique digne d'entrer dans une expédition scientifique d'une manière bien plus utile aux progrès des arts; on avait découvert son talent à bord, et le commandant l'avait employé. On m'a dit depuis que la justice qu'on lui devait, lui ayant été rendue, ses appointemens avaient été assimilés à ceux des chefs dans chaque partie, et il méritait bien un pareil encouragement. Je suis bien fâché d'avoir oublié le nom de cet habile jeune homme, duquel l'expédition doit tirer une de ses plus grandes ressources.<sup>27</sup>

27 J.-B.G.M. Bory de Saint-Vincent, *Voyage dans les quatre principales îles des mers d'Afrique, fait par ordre du gouvernement, pendant les années neuf et dix de la République (1801 et 1802), avec l'histoire de la traversée du capitaine Baudin jusqu'au Port-Louis de l'île Maurice*, vol. 1 (Paris, Buisson, 1804), pp. 161-2.



The skilful young man with the modest demeanour whose work Bory admired is most likely to have been Lesueur, rather than his more worldly Parisian colleague, Petit, who had trained under Jacques-Louis David and who appears to have had a 'caractère plein d'entrain', as Jacqueline Bonnemains has noted.<sup>28</sup>

Establishing the authorship of the illustrations in Baudin's personal journal is nevertheless a difficult matter to resolve, given that they were unsigned and there is little evidence to help us determine their attribution with absolute certainty. We know from the commander's comments that Petit was responsible for at least some of these drawings<sup>29</sup>, but Bory's remarks indicate that whoever responded to his inquiry considered they were primarily the work of one man. It is important to note that, as Bory himself makes clear, he had to rely on others for information regarding this artistic work. He had travelled in Baudin's consort ship, the *Naturaliste*, and had therefore only become aware of it on the expedition's arrival in Mauritius. A further degree of circumspection is warranted given the two factual errors Bory makes in his account of this episode. As already noted, Lesueur, like Petit, was engaged as an 'aide-canonni er', not as a 'timonier', and his talent was not discovered during the course of the voyage but had already been identified by Baudin before the departure from Le Havre, which is when the commander hired both of the young artists.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, Fran ois P eron, in a draft letter to the Professors at the Museum praising their work, states that one (Petit) devoted himself to coastal views and ethnographic drawings whereas the other (Lesueur) focused on natural history. This, however, is something of a simplification and provides only a guide as to the division of labour between them. As Jacqueline Bonnemains reminds us, while P eron is largely justified in his description of their respective duties,

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28 Bonnemains, *Les Artistes du 'Voyage de d couvertes aux Terres australes'*, p. 44. Her characterisation is based on Fran ois P eron's anecdote regarding Petit's interactions with the Tasmanian Aborigines.

29 Baudin writes: 'Les dessins colori s qui se trouvent dans mon journal, ex cut s par les citoyens Martin Petit et Lesueur ne laissent rien   d sirer pour la r gularit  et l'exactitude'. See J. Bonnemains (ed.), *Mon voyage aux Terres Australes: Journal personnel du commandant Baudin illustr  par Lesueur et Petit* (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 2000), p. 137.

30 It is also possible that Bory was deliberately misrepresenting the situation in order to deprive Baudin of his due credit for hiring these two artists. On Bory's key role in the campaign to undermine Baudin's reputation, see J. Fornasiero and J. West-Sooby, 'Doing it by the book: Breaking the reputation of Nicolas Baudin', in J. Fornasiero and C. Mrowa-Hopkins (eds), *Explorations and encounters in French* (Adelaide, University of Adelaide Press, 2010), pp. 142-6.

in practice their work was not as clearly separated ... There will therefore always remain some doubt about the attribution of the unsigned drawings to one or other of these two artists, although their different styles allow certain conclusions to be drawn.<sup>31</sup>

A thorough stylistic analysis would indeed be useful in attempting to identify the authorship of the various illustrations that figured in Baudin's personal journal. While that kind of detailed analysis is beyond the scope of our discussion here, it is nevertheless instructive to consider a sample of these early natural history drawings, as they display certain characteristics that can be seen to have a kinship with Lesueur's later zoological work — even if it remains a moot point for the time being whether this kinship constitutes evidence of Lesueur's authorship or, alternatively, is the sign of an aesthetic that he and Petit jointly explored and developed.<sup>32</sup>

The natural history drawings that made the commander's journal such an object of admiration were certainly, as Bory laments, deficient in terms of scientific detail. They are nevertheless remarkable for their expressivity and the emotional response they suggest on the part of the artist. These are not the drawings of a cold and indifferent observer. Some of the fish paintings, for example, give us a keen sense of the artist's engagement with his subject.<sup>33</sup> The fish have something of a startled look, perhaps reflecting the response of the artist to such unusual specimens of marine life. This would remain a feature of many of his later fish illustrations — his drawings of the Moorish idol (*Zanclus canescens*), for example, or of the red lionfish (*Pterois volitans*).<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, one of the defining traits of Lesueur's later drawings of Australian mammals would likewise be their anthropomorphic

31 J. Bonnemains, 'The artists of the Baudin expedition', in J. Bonnemains, E. Forsyth and B. Smith (eds), *Baudin in Australian waters: The artwork of the French voyage of discovery to the southern lands 1800-1804* (Melbourne, Oxford University Press in association with the Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1988), p. 17.

32 In a new book by the current custodians of the Lesueur Collection and their collaborators the authors state that, when Lesueur was named official artist for the expedition after the sojourn in Mauritius, Petit was his 'assistant'. This suggests that Baudin saw Lesueur as having the more senior status of the two and perhaps adds some weight to the argument that he was primarily responsible for the drawings in the commander's journal — and for the aesthetic features they exhibit. See G. Baglione, C. Crémière, J. Goy and S. Schmitt, *Lesueur: Méduses* (Paris, Éditions de Conti, 2014), p. 10.

33 For other examples, see Baglione and Crémière, pp. 184-7.

34 See Bonnemains, Forsyth and Smith (eds), pp. 257 and 254-5, respectively.



Figure 3.12: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'Long-spine porcupine fish. *Diodon holocanthus* (Linnaeus, 1758)'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 76712.



Figure 3.13: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'Ocean sunfish larva'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 76415.

qualities.<sup>35</sup> As Susan Hunt has observed, drawings such as these derive much of their visual potency from 'their status as exploration art, since something of the sheer excitement of discovery seems to permeate Lesueur's pictures'.<sup>36</sup>

The drawings of the more unusual marine animals, such as the medusae, the starfish and the zoophytes, likewise communicate the surprise and excitement of the artist, as well as the fascination and wonderment they produced in him.

The fact that Lesueur could execute such drawings at all is something of an exploit. As Baudin notes in commenting on the 'lézard de mer' (Figure 3.15): 'Le dessin que j'en donne n'a pas été facile à faire parce que ce petit animal change si subitement



Figure 3.14: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, "'Lézard de mer". *Glaucus atlanticus* (Forster, 1800)'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 65750 (ventral view).

35 See, for example, his depiction of the elephant seals on King Island (published in the 1807 *Atlas* for volume 1 of Péron's *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes*), or his portrait of a 'family' of wombats (also published in the 1807 *Atlas*).

36 S. Hunt, 'Paris Le Havre Sydney', in S. Hunt and P. Carter (eds), *Terre Napoléon: Australia through French eyes 1800-1804* (Sydney, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales in association with Hordern House, 1999), p. 9.

de forme qu'il est presque impossible d'en saisir une'.<sup>37</sup> Baudin is confident in the quality of the drawing — 'on a apporté la plus grande attention à faire connaître les caractères qui lui sont particuliers' — but decides nevertheless to preserve the actual specimen of this and other similarly unusual animals in anticipation of the incredulity of the scientists and others back in France: 'comme on aura peine à croire qu'il puisse exister dans les mers des animaux vivants d'une forme aussi bizarre et extraordinaire que ceux que nous y avons rencontrés, j'ai conservé dans l'esprit-de-vin la part des originaux qui nous ont servi de modèles'.<sup>38</sup>

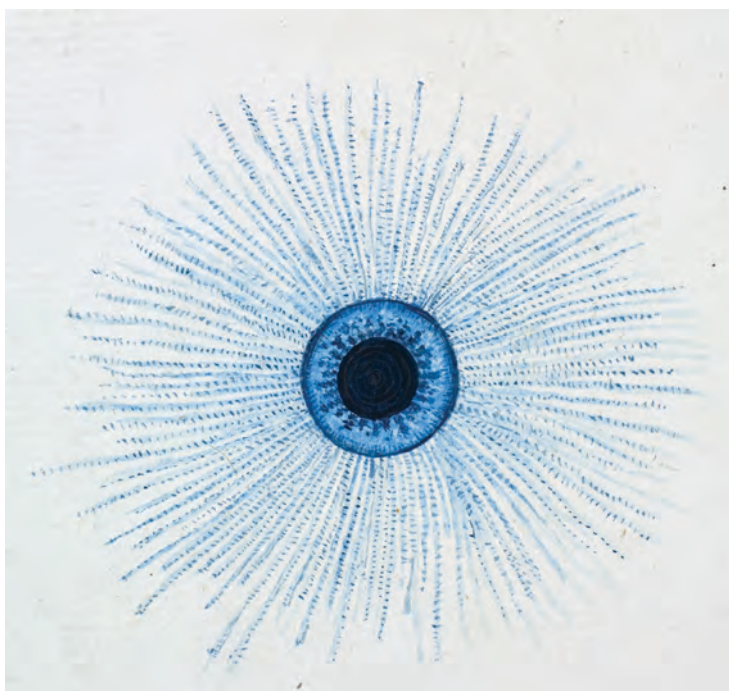


Figure 3.15: 'Blue button jellyfish. *Porpita porpita* (Linnaeus, 1758)'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 14028.<sup>39</sup>

37 Bonnemains (ed.), p. 136.

38 Bonnemains (ed.), pp. 136 and 137.

39 Commenting on these early illustrations of jellyfish, Jacqueline Bonnemains notes: 'Ces dessins assez malhabiles furent les premiers réalisés pendant l'expédition pour ce groupe si fragile des méduses. Rien à voir avec la finesse des observations notées sur les vélins que Lesueur peignit par la suite'. Bonnemains (ed.), plate VII.

There is indeed an unfamiliar and alien quality to these animals that has both drawn the artist in and forced him to take his distance from them. And this counter-response of detachment may be one reason why, in aesthetic terms, these illustrations take on an almost abstract quality. The artist, having been drawn in by the alluring features of these animals, has then found himself compelled by questions of form. This fascination with form, above and beyond any scientific considerations, was a feature of Lesueur's drawings of clouds and would remain a key element of his later work — his drawings of starfish (Figure 3.16) or sea squirts (Figure 3.17), for example, or the various composite drawings in which he carefully grouped specimens of the same animal in order to create a more general collective shape (Figure 3.18).<sup>40</sup> In these composite illustrations in particular, but also in the series of drawings he devoted to starfish and jellyfish, the emphasis on form and composition is such that it distracts the viewer from seeing the specimens depicted as animals. They begin to lose their status as living creatures and instead become abstractions that fascinate us more for their shape and the way the artist has arranged them than for their zoological properties. This is as true of the early drawings (Figure 3.15, for example) as for Lesueur's later work, and is thus a key element of his aesthetic.

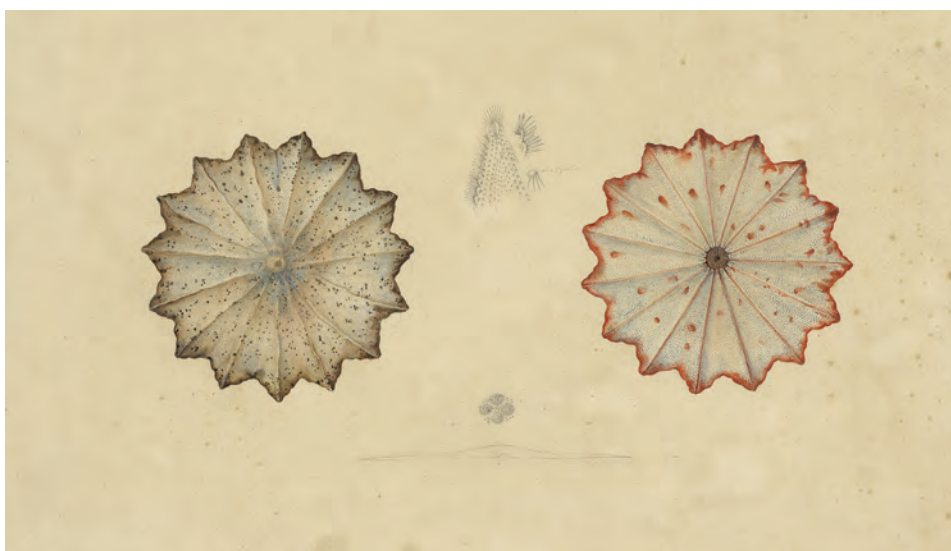


Figure 3.16: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, '*Anseropoda rosacea* (Lamarck, 1816)'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 74035.

<sup>40</sup> See Baglione and Crémère for similar composite images of frogs (p. 356), butterflies (p. 366), praying mantises (p. 367), starfish (p. 370), salps (p. 374) and lizards (p. 382).





Figure 3.17: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'Sea squirts. *Polycarpa* sp., *Pyura* sp. and *Polycarpa aurata clavata* (Hartmeyer, 1919)'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 75020.

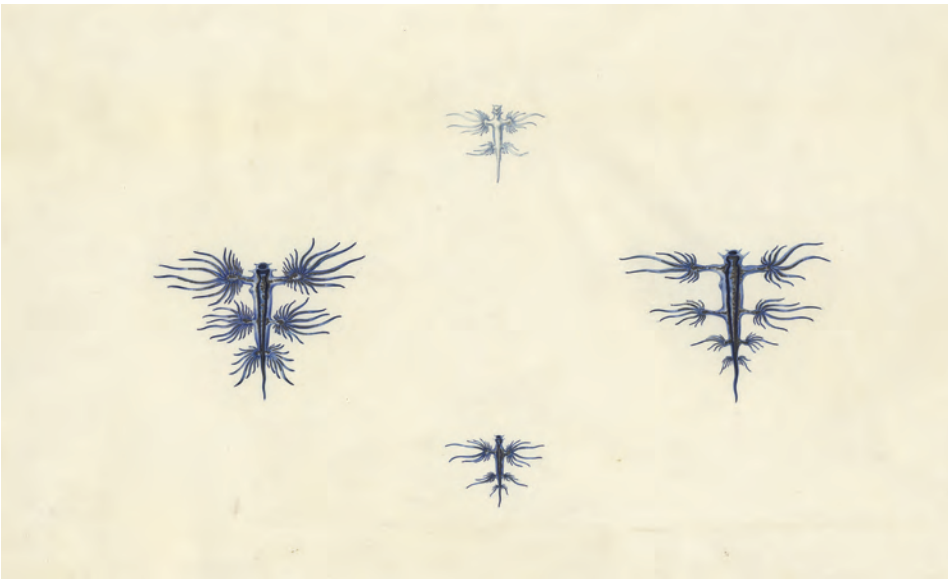


Figure 3.18: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'Four views of *Glaucus atlanticus* (Forster, 1800)'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, n° 72019.

We have already noted that, as the journey progressed, and especially once the expedition reached Australian waters, Lesueur came to work more and more closely with the scientists, and in particular with the zoologist François Péron. This close association with Péron, which soon evolved into an enduring friendship, led Lesueur to take a different path from that followed by his fellow artist, Petit, both in terms of the subject matter in which each would specialise and with respect to the particular aesthetic each would develop. Lesueur's zoological drawings naturally became more 'professional', in the sense that he learned how best to depict his subjects for scientific analysis.<sup>41</sup> Through his art, he would therefore contribute in no small way to the scientific success of an expedition which, in Martin Terry's colourful expression, was 'the zenith of France's sense of *omnium gatherum*'.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, Lesueur's subsequent drawings retained many of the features we have identified in his early sketches as well as in many of the unattributed illustrations included in Baudin's personal journal: the warm and intimate rapport with the subject, a kind of whimsical gaze, the expression of emotion and subjectivity, a tendency towards anthropomorphism, and a fascination with shape and form that gives many of the drawings a certain abstract quality. In contrast to the posed and almost serene sophistication of Ferdinand Bauer's natural history drawings, Lesueur's finished illustrations have a 'dynamic vivacity' which for Martin Terry 'owes much to the even earlier traditions of Dürer and Hoffmann' — traditions which, ironically, Lesueur may have become more aware of thanks to his meetings with the Austrian Bauer in Sydney in 1802.<sup>43</sup> That spontaneous and dynamic style is, as we have seen, also evident in Lesueur's early and less finished pieces, and is likewise a feature of the various zoological illustrations in Baudin's journal, many of which he painted.

41 See, for example, his later paintings of jellyfish depicting different views, including cross-sections (Baglione and Crémière, pp. 99 and 124), or his drawing of a platypus skeleton (p. 116).

42 M. Terry, 'Terre Napoléon', in W. Eisler and B. Smith (eds), *Terra Australis: The furthest shore* (Sydney, International Cultural Corporation of Australia, 1988), p. 156. As Terry adds: 'An almost obsessive quality is present in the rigour of its [France's] confiscatory and classificatory impulses'.

43 Terry, p. 155. Susan Hunt goes so far as to suggest that Lesueur's drawings of Australia's exotic animals and birds, for all the 'extraordinary precision and painstaking skill' they display, are nevertheless quite distinct from the work of other natural history artists because of their 'bizarre violence' (p. 12).



What this suggests is that, in reality, Lesueur's way of seeing never changed: his skill as an artist undoubtedly improved, but his aesthetic remained constant. When he was not simply sketching in order to keep a kind of personal diary of the places he visited and the scenes he witnessed, Lesueur learned to discipline his art for scientific purposes; but he remained, throughout, true to his personal style. Indeed, as some of his later sketches demonstrate, he was not afraid to return to a more spontaneous and raw expression of it when the mood struck.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps, then, this enduring attachment to his own particular aesthetic, as expressed in the various stages of his evolution, was his way of telling us that, despite the respect he had for science, and despite all the learning he himself had acquired, he was first and foremost an artist.

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44 See, for example, Baglione and Crémère, pp. 348-9.

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# 4

## Framing New Holland or framing a narrative? A representation of Sydney according to Charles-Alexandre Lesueur

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The artists on the Baudin expedition, Charles-Alexandre Lesueur and Nicolas-Martin Petit, left us a substantial legacy in terms of the drawings of antipodean peoples, landscapes and coastal profiles which they executed during and after their voyage of scientific discovery to Australia between 1800 and 1804.<sup>1</sup> Many of these works are now well known, thanks to the publication of the various *Atlases* of the official account of the expedition, the *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes*, and their modern facsimile editions.<sup>2</sup> Other images, which have remained

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1 For a detailed catalogue of the works of Petit and Lesueur and a commentary on their background, see the following studies: G. Baglione and C. Crémère, *Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, peintre voyageur: Un trésor oublié* (Paris, Éditions de Conti, 2009); and J. Bonnemains, E. Forsyth and B. Smith, *Baudin in Australian waters: The artwork of the French voyage of discovery to the southern lands, 1800-1804* (Melbourne/New York, Oxford University Press in association with the Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1988).

2 François Péron and Louis Freycinet published the official voyage account in two volumes: *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes: exécuté par ordre de sa Majesté L'Empereur et Roi, sur les corvettes le Géographe, le Naturaliste; et la goëlette le Casuarina, pendant les années 1800, 1801, 1802, et 1804, Historique*, t. 1 (Paris, Imprimerie impériale, 1807); *Historique*, t. 2



Figure 4.1: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'Nouvelle Hollande'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, 16074-2.

unpublished, demand to be better known, given the energy that emanates from them, their sense of engagement with their subjects, and, not least, the information encoded within them of the new worlds and people they encountered. Although there are some exquisite watercolours of antipodean marine life to be found in the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, by far the most important repository of the unpublished drawings and sketches of Lesueur and Petit is the Lesueur Collection in the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle of Le Havre.<sup>3</sup> Within

(Paris, Imprimerie royale, 1816). The details of the atlases accompanying the official account are as follows: C.-A. Lesueur and N.-M. Petit, *Historique, Atlas*, 1<sup>re</sup> partie (Paris, Imprimerie Impériale, 1807); C.-A. Lesueur, N.-M. Petit and L. Freycinet, *Historique, Atlas*, 2<sup>ème</sup> partie (Paris, Imprimerie Impériale, 1811). A second edition of the official account or, in French, *Historique*, combining the two parts of the *Atlas* in a single volume, appeared in 1824; it was published in English translation in 2008. See C.-A. Lesueur and N.-M. Petit, *Atlas, an historical record*, ed. and trans. P.S. Hambly (Adelaide, The Friends of the State Library).

<sup>3</sup> Some significant works of Charles-Alexandre Lesueur are to be found in the Bibliothèque centrale, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, in the collection entitled 'Manuscrits de Charles-Alexandre Lesueur (1778-1846), en partie publiés', Ms 1715-1749. A catalogue of the manuscripts can be found online at <http://www.calames.abes.fr/pub/#details?id=FileId-1348>. For a sample of the holdings of the Lesueur collection at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle at Le Havre, see <http://www.museum-lehavre.fr/fr/>

the Australian subjects of the collection, one vividly coloured map stands out, as much for its attractiveness as for its picturesque detail: this is the watercolour entitled 'Nouvelle Hollande', executed by Charles-Alexandre Lesueur (Figure 4.1).<sup>4</sup> Although the form and presentation of its title, 'Nouvelle Hollande', indicate that Lesueur originally intended this work for the *Atlas* of the official account of the *Voyage*, it ultimately remained unpublished. Given the formal beauty of the image, we are quite naturally led to regret its exclusion from the *Atlas*, especially since the engraved map of Sydney that does feature in it singularly lacks the aesthetic appeal of the watercolour (Figure 4.2).

However, this substitution is only too easily explained. Unlike the engraving, which Lesueur drew to scale, based on a survey by the expedition's hydrographer, Charles Boullanger, the watercolour bears no such endorsement as to its accuracy. As Robert Irving has pointed out: 'Lesueur's map is exquisite, but he was no surveyor. The map is wrong in a number of respects, including the waterline'.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, is it even a map? Paul Carter describes Lesueur's work more generally as 'poised between rival visions, between the first impressions appropriate to a logbook and the scientific figures fit to adorn a scientific treatise'. Lesueur's dual vision thus provides the explanation for Carter as to why, in the watercolour of Sydney, 'a town plan bends over at its northern edge to become the distant view of land, the panoptic survey beloved of the scientific geographer regressing to the record of a traveller's optic turned towards strange coasts'.<sup>6</sup> In any case, as a hybrid representation, the strangely framed town plan, bearing no indication of scale, could have no place in the scientific record of the expedition and hence in its *Atlas*.

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collections/ca-lesueur/lesueur-peintre-voyageur.

4 I would like to express my grateful thanks to the Curator of the Lesueur Collection, Gabrielle Baglione, for supplying the images of *New Holland* (16074-2) and *Terre de Diemen: Tombeaux des Naturels de l'Île Maria* (18020), which inspired these reflections. I would also like to thank the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle of Le Havre for granting permission to print these images.

5 R. Irving, 'Sydney Town as seen by the Baudin expedition', in A.-M. Nisbet and M. Blackman (eds), *The French-Australian cultural connection* (Kensington, School of French at the University of New South Wales, 1984), p. 164.

6 P. Carter, 'Looking for Baudin', in S. Hunt and P. Carter (eds), *Terre Napoléon: Australia through French eyes 1800-1804* (Sydney, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 1999), p. 29.



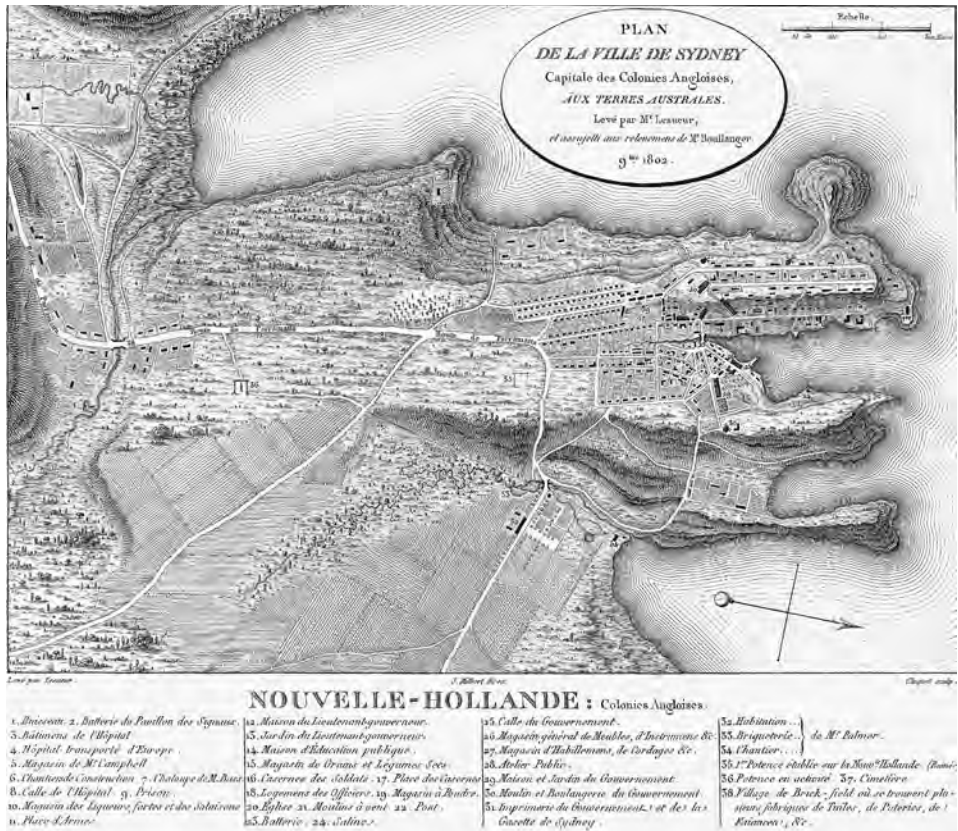


Figure 4.2: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'Nouvelle Hollande: Colonies anglaises'. In C.-A. Lesueur and N.-M. Petit, *Historique, Atlas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), Plate 17.

What, then, was Lesueur's intention in composing his work as he did? There are a number of idiosyncracies present in the painting that may hold a clue. One feature that is particularly unusual is that Lesueur's watercolour incorporates into the framework of his map of Sydney and its position on the east coast of the Australian continent an insert that has no obvious connection to it — that is, a detail from Geographe Bay, which is situated on the western Australian coast (Figure 4.3). Furthermore, Lesueur did not personally sight the 'sacred grove' he depicted in the inset; he reconstructed it from François Péron's report. The existence of this disparate detail within the main frame of the image is surely another reason why the watercolour was never intended to be a map *per se*, but a series of impressions grouped together to form a narrative about the expedition as a whole.

There is some evidence to support this view, namely that the detail from Geographe Bay which Lesueur inserted into his 'Nouvelle Hollande' watercolour is different from the representation of the same feature in the map of Geographe Bay which appears in the *Atlas* of the *Voyage* (Figure 4.4). The watercolour version demonstrates a higher level of attention to the hieroglyphic signs that Péron described as traced in the sand. It takes us away from mere geographical considerations and into the musings of Péron about the significance of the 'sacred grove' that he was the only voyager to see and that Lesueur could only imagine. In contrast, the *Atlas* version confers on the 'sacred grove' a fixed geographical location within a known locality. At the same time, the use of a question mark in the title is querying rather than affirming its religious significance. All things considered, the *Atlas* version has all of the qualities of a map, albeit one in which some detail is unverified and hence uncertain; but in the unpublished watercolour the artist is directing us towards something else altogether.

What, then, are we looking at and why did Lesueur lavish such care and minute attention to detail on his map of Sydney and its detail of Geographe Bay, if these disparate elements meant that the map would not meet the standards of geographical representation required for its inclusion in the *Atlas*?

Does this mean that Lesueur intended for it to serve other purposes? Since he left little in the way of correspondence or commentary on his work, we must seek the answers to these questions principally within the detail of the maps in question, but also in the context of the artist's own personal style and vision.

Lesueur was an adept practitioner of landscape and possessed a fineness of touch that enabled him to work to a level of detail bordering on the microscopic, since it is only with a zoom feature



Figure 4.3: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'Plan d'un bosquet à la baie du Géographe'. Detail from 'Nouvelle Hollande'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, 16074-2.



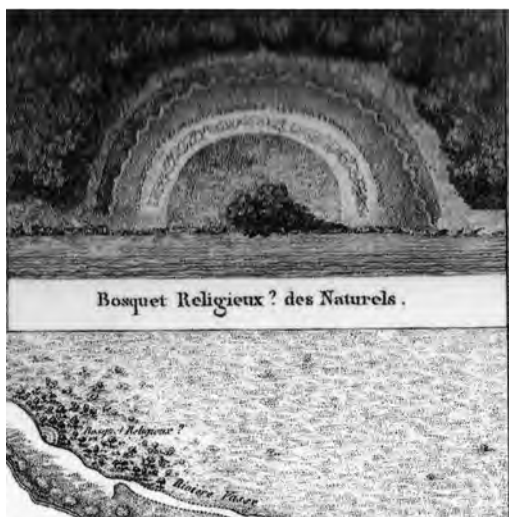


Figure 4.4: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'Bosquet religieux? des Naturels'. Detail from 'Plan de la baie du Géographe'. In C.-A. Lesueur and N.-M. Petit, *Historique, Atlas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), Plate 15.

(or magnifying glass) that we can clearly perceive the intricacy of his brushwork. This is evident both in the coastal profiles on which he collaborated with Petit, but also in his zoological subjects, where he was able to capture minute features of tiny marine animals that he often had only a few precious moments to observe in all of their movement and colour.<sup>7</sup> Even so, he found ways of representing his subjects which reflected his own artistic tastes. For example, Lesueur decided to group the scientific illustrations of molluscs and zoophytes that were approved for the *Atlas* in a highly decorative

configuration that expressed his sensitivity to their beauty (Figure 4.5). Indeed, in many of his works that were ostensibly drawn for the purposes of providing support for scientific observations, he found a means of self-expression that could be ironic, disarming and often charming — as we can see from his 'family portrait' of the wombat (Figure 4.6).<sup>8</sup> However, he did not just restrict this tendency to his zoological drawings. His depictions of artefacts in a landscape can also reveal an idiosyncratic view of his subject or a reflection on his choice of how to represent it.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed study of Lesueur's representations of marine life, see J. Goy, *Les Méduses de Péron et Lesueur, un autre regard sur l'expédition Baudin* (Paris, Éditions du C.T.H.S., 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Lesueur represented a group of wombats as a 'caring family', attributing to them a set of behaviours that he could hardly have experienced through scientific observation. Though he accurately represented the wombats themselves, he imagined their habits and expressions. Wombats are solitary animals and they only produce one baby annually; see M.L. and R. Bauchot, 'Dessins de poisson et de mammifères de la collection Lesueur du Muséum d'Histoire naturelle du Havre', *Bulletin trimestriel de la Société géologique de Normandie et des Amis du Muséum du Havre*, 88: 2-4 (2011), pp. 82-3. Lesueur's drawings of animals often possess an anthropomorphic character — for example, the plates in the *Atlas* that depict emus or elephant seals. See Lesueur and Petit, *Historique, Atlas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), plates 62 and 66).



Figure 4.5: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'Mollusques et zoophytes'. In C.-A. Lesueur and N.-M. Petit, *Historique, Atlas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), Plate 59.



Figure 4.6: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'Nouvelle-Hollande: Île King; Le Wombat'. In C.-A. Lesueur and N.-M. Petit, *Historique, Atlas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), Plate 58.

To examine but one such example, let us consider the depiction that the artist made of his friend, François Péron, as he went about his work on Maria Island in Tasmania (Figure 4.7).

The exploration of Maria Island had indeed been an important moment for the expedition; with the discovery of two native tombs, Péron was now able to make the kind of detailed ethnographic report his commander had requested of him.<sup>9</sup> Making this find vindicated Péron, who felt slighted by Nicolas Baudin's

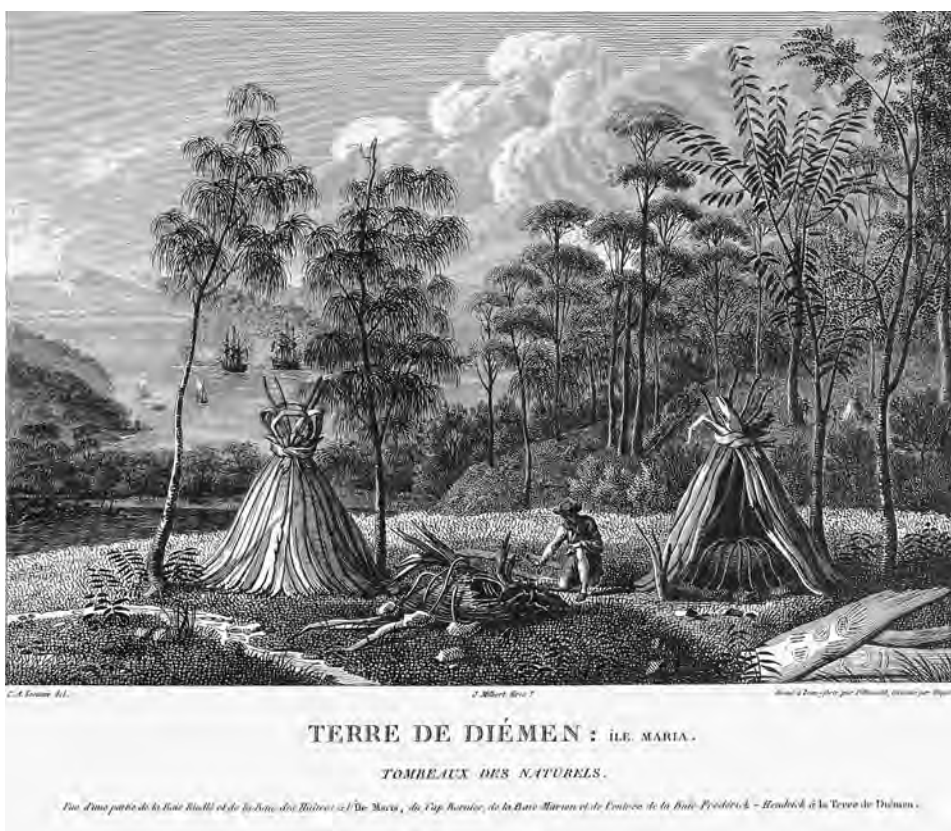


Figure 4.7: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'Terre de Diemen: Île Maria. Tombeaux des naturels'. In C.-A. Lesueur and N.-M. Petit, *Historique, Atlas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), Plate 12.

<sup>9</sup> This report, whose catalogue number is 18040, forms part of dossier 18 in the Lesueur Collection at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle of Le Havre. It has been transcribed and translated into English as Chapter 6 in Brian Plomley's *The Baudin expedition and the Tasmanian Aborigines, 1802* (Hobart, Blubber Head Press, 1983), pp. 80-95.

insinuation, in requesting a report, that he had hitherto neglected this task.<sup>10</sup> In Lesueur's representation of the event, Péron appears centrestage, actively making a crucial discovery and acting as lead player in the expedition. With ships and other expeditioners depicted at the margins or in the background, Lesueur is clearly affirming his friend's status and authority and his own strong belief in Péron's right to hold them. The care he takes to present the bark engravings in the foreground (and the bone in Péron's hand) underlines the fact that Péron's authority is scientific and that the ethnographic dimension to the entire presentation is what lends it its credibility (Figures 4.8 and 4.9).

The fact, too, that Péron is the only expeditioner to be presented as a central figure in the *Atlas* of the voyage is even stronger testimony to the seriousness of Lesueur's intent and his homage.

However, is the panegyric the only genre of narrative to be explored within the engraving? If we look this time at the background to the image, in the vicinity of the second Aboriginal tomb, another story begins to emerge (Figure 4.10).

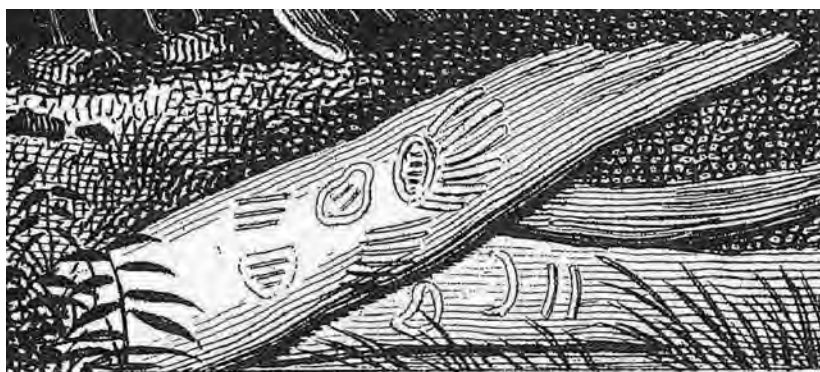


Figure 4.8: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, Detail from 'Terre de Diemen: Île Maria. Tombeaux des naturels'. In C.-A. Lesueur and N.-M. Petit, *Historique, Atlas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), Plate 12.

10 Péron confirms in his introduction that Baudin had 'imposed on [him] the obligation to occupy [himself]' with the report and, by way of expressing his personal discomfort that such a request should be made, offers a series of excuses for having neglected this work up until that time (Plomley, pp. 83-4).





Figure 4.9: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, Detail from 'Terre de Diemen: Île Maria. Tombeaux des naturels'. In C.-A. Lesueur and N.-M. Petit, *Historique, Atlas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), Plate 12.



Figure 4.10: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, Detail from 'Terre de Diemen: Île Maria. Tombeaux des naturels'. In C.-A. Lesueur and N.-M. Petit, *Historique, Atlas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), Plate 12.

We see that Péron is not completely alone in his explorations, but that there are other Europeans present. The botanist Théodore Leschenault, as the discoverer of the second tomb, is perhaps the figure in this section of the engraving who is portrayed as closest to the tomb.<sup>11</sup> Was Lesueur also being playful by including two other figures in the frame? Perhaps, since their occupation is not clear — indeed, they appear to be lurking behind a tree. Yet nothing in this playful background detail erases the significance of the foreground; it simply adds a human dimension, and demonstrates that, in Lesueur's eyes, Péron is at the heart of a team enterprise, as well as leading it. Even though the presence of the tombs adds a note of solemnity to the scene, the emphasis is not on death itself, but on the activities of the living — in this case, experiencing the joy of discovery. In this sense, the scene can be described as an idyll: under sunny skies, in a park-like setting, the expeditioners display a harmony of purpose which is perfectly in keeping with the natural harmony of the landscape.

We could dwell at length on an image that participates in a complex set of historical narratives that speak of more than the voyage itself. Indeed, we could add

<sup>11</sup> Leschenault left a description of his discovery in his journal, which is held in the Archives Nationales de France, Paris, série Marine, 5JJ56. The extract containing his description of the native tomb is to be found in Plomley, pp. 138-9.

a contemporary judgement on the bone or the destruction of the tomb, on the link between exploration and colonisation and the fate of a decimated people, and much more; but if our intent is to decode Lesueur's own intentions, it is his mode of representation that is most revealing. Lesueur could have represented the tomb or tombs alone if he were simply attempting to illustrate the importance of a scientific find. The fact that he did execute just such a series of drawings, and that these are set out according to the conventions of the *Atlas*, confirms that he had seriously contemplated this form of scientific representation (Figure 4.11).



**Figure 4.11: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'Terre de Diemen: Tombeaux des Naturels de l'Île Maria'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, 18020.**

In the version finally chosen for the *Atlas*, Lesueur's attention was clearly not focused on the tombs alone, nor was his work guided by purely scientific instructions. If he included three expeditioners as well as Péron in the depiction of the glorious find, it was to these three — who must have been recognisable to their fellow travellers — that Lesueur was also transmitting a message of solidarity and recognition. The hymn of praise that is the work as a whole is therefore personal on more than one level.

If we turn our attention back to 'Nouvelle Hollande', we can see the same processes operating (Figure 4.1). Firstly, Lesueur clearly did not produce the image in response to the requirements of a single genre — that is, as a map — as we have seen from its geographically disparate and unscientific elements. Secondly, its name, in cartographical terms, is problematic: *New Holland* is intended to be the all-inclusive title, as it is for all of the images of mainland Australia in the *Atlas*, but does the fact that the name is incomplete in the unpublished watercolour have any particular significance? Thirdly, the relationship between the vignette and the flow of water at the top of the map is awkward and does not completely bind all of the sections of the map together. Finally, as we have previously seen, there are no measurements to indicate the accuracy of the survey upon which Lesueur designed the map — a sure sign that we are in the presence less of a map than of a work based on personal

reflections, beliefs or feelings. Given that the subject that the artist foregrounds is a British colony, it may be appropriate, too, to extend our analysis to matters ideological or even philosophical.

Let us start by examining the separate sections of the work one by one before attempting to determine what may be the general theme and preoccupations to emerge. To the left, the section that is the continuation of the map of Sydney is unfinished (Figure 4.12).



Figure 4.12: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, Detail from 'Nouvelle Hollande'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, 16074-2.



It is unframed and does not therefore counterbalance the right-hand section, which leads us to ask whether it is an afterthought or a last-minute extension that would give a better idea of the expansion of the Colony of Port Jackson to the west. Since this section does find its way into the map Lesueur eventually published in the *Atlas*, the push to the west must have been deemed an important development for the Colony. The Blue Mountains, in 1802, still constituted a formidable barrier to unlocking the secrets of the unknown country which lay to the west of Sydney.<sup>12</sup> In the unfinished version of the layout of Sydney that we have before us here, we can only speculate as to why there was some hesitation in Lesueur's use of his framing device. But it does seem evident that he intends to feature Sydney's size and its expansion, an intention which echoes the point Péron made in the official account — that is, that Sydney had achieved a remarkable degree of growth and development in the short years of its existence.<sup>13</sup> Sydney, according to Lesueur, is thus even challenging the frames and boundaries of his map as he constructs it.

In contrast, if we then look at the section to the right, the control of the frame

<sup>12</sup> See Figure 4.2.

<sup>13</sup> Péron's enthusiastic description of Sydney's prosperity is to be found in volume 1, chapter XIX of the 1824 edition of the *Voyage*, translated as *Voyage to the southern lands* by Christine Cornell (Adelaide, The Friends of the State Library of South Australia, 2006), pp. 293-349.



Figure 4.13: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, Detail from 'Nouvelle Hollande'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, 16074-2.



is assured and the viewer's perspective of the Colony is oriented to the east, as the title of the section indicates (Figure 4.13).

Here Lesueur is highlighting the situation of the Colony in relation to its complex system of waterways and to its natural eastern barrier, the Pacific Ocean. This inset has none of the accuracy of the map of the same area that featured in the *Atlas*, but its function does not appear to be to provide a map *per se* — rather, its function is to depict the unique natural setting of Sydney and give some indication of its terrain. By adopting a bird's-eye view here, Lesueur also makes its protected situation much clearer than in the conventional map. Sydney, with its narrow entrance and its myriad inlets, has natural defences. All of the expedition journals, as well as Péron's plan to invade Sydney<sup>14</sup>, discuss the difficulty of negotiating access to the harbour, and Lesueur's emphasis is little different.

If we move to the top and centre of the image, the impression that Lesueur is providing information on his subject is unequivocally reinforced (Figure 4.14). Within the vignette, however, he supplies two sets of information. The first is a set of scientific information — the expedition excelled in its collection and description of native flora and fauna, many examples of which adorn the central section of the vignette itself. This kind of heraldry forms part of the techniques deployed in the *Atlas* maps, where the use of vignettes magnifies the scientific achievements of the expedition.<sup>15</sup> The range of live animals on display surpasses those which were collected at Port Jackson, which means that part of the message that the vignette transmits relates to the entire expedition and its contribution to the natural sciences — and

14 The manuscript of the Memoir in which Péron develops a plan to take over the Colony of Port Jackson is to be found in dossier 12 of the Lesueur Collection at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle of Le Havre. It was first published in French by Roger Martin as 'Mémoire sur les établissements anglais à la Nouvelle Hollande, à la terre de Diémen et dans les archipels du grand océan Pacifique', in R. Martin (ed.), 'Le Rêve australien de Napoléon: Description et projet secret de conquête française', *Revue de l'Institut Napoléon*, 176: 1 (1998), pp. 4-187. It has been published in English translation by Jean Fornasiero and John West-Sooby as *French designs on colonial New South Wales: François Péron's memoir on the English settlements in New Holland, Van Diemen's Land and the Archipelagos of the Great Pacific Ocean, with an introduction, notes and appendices* (Adelaide, The Friends of the State Library of South Australia, 2014).

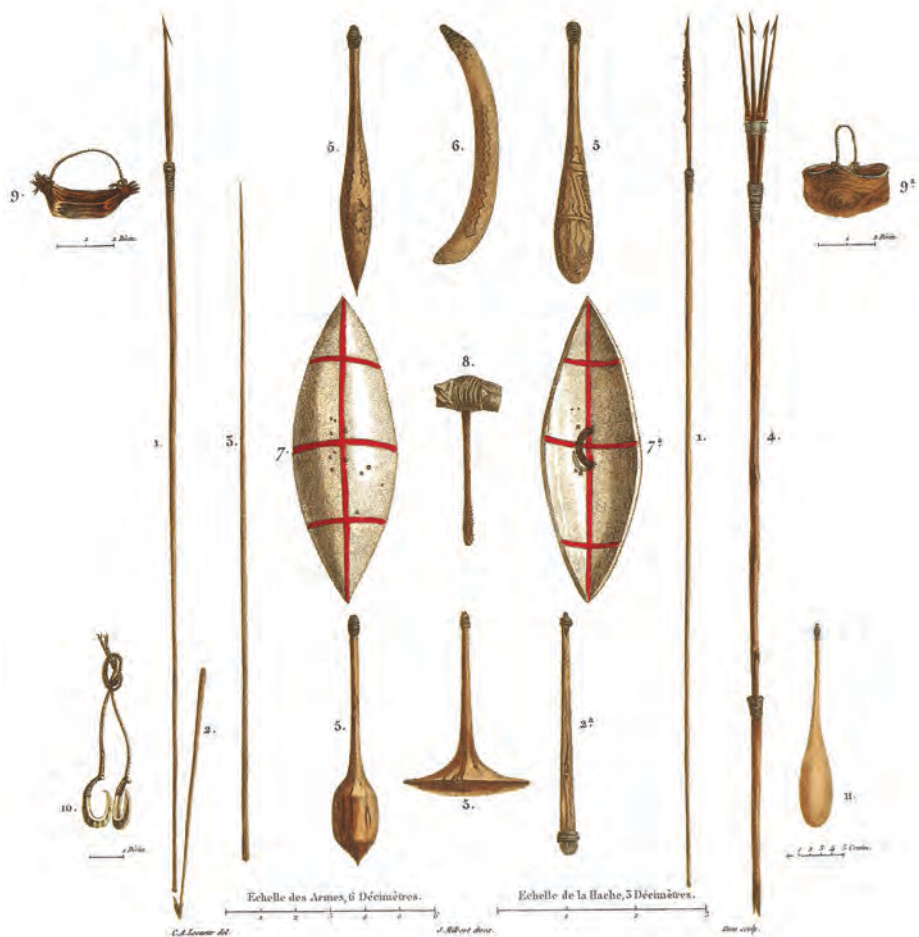
15 On the use of vignettes, see J. Fornasiero and J. West-Sooby, 'Cartography as narrative: The maps of the Baudin expedition', in R. Gerritsen, R. King and A. Eliason (eds), *The Freycinet map of 1811: 200th anniversary of the publication of the first map of Australia* (Canberra, Australia on the Map Division of the Australasian Hydrographic Society, 2012), pp. 20-32.



Figure 4.14: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, Detail from 'Nouvelle Hollande'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, 16074-2.

even more specifically to the achievements of François Péron. The ethnographic objects that also feature in the vignette leave us in no doubt that the praise the artist intends is for Péron, whose presence in Lesueur's life and work is inescapable. The objects themselves were collected in New Holland, as we know from the depiction of these same artefacts in the *Atlas* (Figure 4.15). This gives an affirmation of the importance of the anthropological work during this part of the expedition and a sense of continuity to Péron's endeavours.

If we return to the question of location, Sydney, from the perspective of scientific collecting, is not being viewed in isolation; the animals are characteristic of Australia as a whole and ethnography is a key part of the expedition's mission. In this way the vignette shows Sydney as central to the entire enterprise that was the Baudin voyage to Australia, even though the Colony was not originally designated as one of the expedition's stopovers. Sydney, in this representation, also appears as an integral part of the land known as New Holland, a fact which the expedition also helped to clarify through its cartographic work. By charting the unknown south coast of Australia and by confirming, along with Matthew Flinders, that the west coast of New Holland did indeed join the east coast of New South Wales, Baudin and his men acquired the certainty that New Holland was part of a continent, of which Sydney was the hub in terms of economic development. The vignette metaphorically contributes to our understanding of the title, 'New Holland', which appears, incomplete, hesitant, immediately above. In contrast to the barely articulated title, Lesueur's painting as a whole affirms confidently that New South Wales and New Holland are part of the same landmass.



NOUVELLE-HOLLANDE.

VASES, ARMES, PÊCHE.

- |   |                                      |  |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Saiguie de trait.  | 5. Saiguie de main.                  | 6. Sabre à rivochel.                                   |
| 2. Instrumēt à lancer la saiguie ou de profil. 2 <sup>o</sup> le même ou de face. | 4. Saiguie de pêche, opposée brisée. | 7. & 7 <sup>o</sup> . Boutelet ou our-our deux fibres. |
| 3. Tige décorée. 3 <sup>o</sup> Tige de bois.                                     | 5. Cases-Téles de différente forme.  | 8. Rache de pierre.                                    |
|   | 10. Hamacans de Coquilloges.         | 11. Rame.  |

Figure 4.15: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, 'Nouvelle-Hollande: Vases, armes, pêche'. In C.-A. Lesueur and N.-M. Petit, *Historique, Atlas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1824), Plate 30.

However, this is by no means all that the vignette has to say. If we turn to the list contained within it, we can see that Lesueur is supplying, through the list of buildings in the Colony, a second set of information that we could consider strategic. It is not, after all, akin to a tourist map, for the buildings' names speak of resources, industries

and economic development, but they also tell of defences and means of communication. In short, the buildings are the sites associated with authority and the protection of the Colony, its organisation and its social fabric. As a group of buildings they are strategically significant. One might well argue that the few buildings Lesueur designated were all that existed, but this is belied by the completed map, with its greatly expanded list of sites (Figure 4.2).<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 4.16:** Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, Detail from 'Nouvelle Hollande'. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, 16074-2.

The final version is a bona fide map, as we have seen. Its function is to be as informative as possible to the reader of the voyage account — a reader who would also be seeking to follow the adventures of the *Voyage's* narrator as he travels through an unfamiliar location. The extreme degree of the details reinforces this impression — the body attached to the gibbet being a salutary reminder that the adventurer in question is in a land of moral challenges and marked social contrasts (Figure 4.16).

In the case of Lesueur's vignette, however, the details are less numerous, the buildings more significant in their set of strategic functions. Interestingly, they are also set within an image that reflects Lesueur's desire to show the countryside as partly in relief and partly reflecting the garden-type verdure that so greatly impressed Baudin and his men. This is a desirable location, its defences exposed to the gaze of the covetous viewer. This is again a representation that reinforces Péron's conviction that the Colony is a prize that needs to be captured.

Thus far, the message that we can derive from this group of images is clear and unambiguous. Lesueur's representation of Sydney parallels the message that Péron expressed in covert terms in the *Voyage* and openly in the *Memoir*, in which he proposed the conquest of Sydney, now seen to be the key to access and colonial success in New Holland and in the Pacific region onto which it abuts. Lesueur's acquiescence to Péron's views and his continued admiration for his friend's scientific

<sup>16</sup> The number of buildings and sites listed in the plan of Sydney that features in the *Atlas* is thirty-eight, in contrast with the twelve locations that feature in the watercolour.

and ethnographic accomplishments also underpin this set of images, as they do his more homogeneous depiction of the Maria Island tombs. Before we draw our final conclusions on the artistic form of support which Lesueur offers to Péron's narrative — a form of support and dependency that is, so far, quite conventional in terms of the production of a travel account and its illustrations — let us consider one last important element, one that is both distinctly less susceptible to the same kind of explanation and offers the same kind of personal intervention that is akin to the image of the men lurking behind the tree on Maria Island. I refer to the third inset, to the left of the vignette (Figure 4.3).

How do we explain the presence of an inset here of a map of a grove in Geographe Bay? It is true that we have now established that, for the expeditioners, New South Wales and New Holland were part of the same continent. This means that a location on the west coast of Australia fits well enough under the general title of 'New Holland', which is ascribed to the image as a whole. But why does Lesueur depict it here and how does it relate exactly to the map of Sydney, with all of its strategic implications and scientific importance? Firstly, it is unlike the other sections of the drawing, in that the map of the grove represents no known and surveyed locality. The only knowledge of its existence stems from the description of it given by Péron, who reported that he stumbled upon a clearing that had every appearance of being a meeting place for Aboriginal peoples of the area — and a site of religious significance at that, in the light of the carefully designed space and what Péron took to be a series of symbols marked out by reed segments and traced in the sand. No other expeditioners sighted it and Péron saw no Aboriginal people frequenting it. Yet Péron was so struck by the sight that he speculated at length about its significance in the report on Geographe Bay that he made to his commander.<sup>17</sup>

In the *Voyage*, he insisted that an image of the grove, as he himself had sketched it, must appear as an inset to the map of Geographe Bay.<sup>18</sup> For him, the reason was two-fold. The grove was a sacred site which provided him with the evidence that the Aborigines had an active spiritual life and were capable of abstract thinking, as evidenced by the forms of symbolic writing that were inscribed into their site and that

17 Péron's description of the 'sacred grove' is to be found in volume 1, chapter V of *Voyage to the southern lands*, pp. 65-7.

18 See Figure 4.3. Péron mentions in the same chapter of the *Voyage* that he specifically instructed Lesueur to include the 'sacred grove' in the chart of Geographe Bay (p. 67).

he likened to both Runic figures and hieroglyphs. He believed himself to be in the presence of a high civilisation like that of the ancient Egyptians. Péron had not met any Aborigines in this part of Australia and his opinion stood in stark contrast to those of his companions who had experienced disappointing and aggressive encounters and were not unaware of Dampier's view that here were to be found the 'miserablest people in the world'.<sup>19</sup> Péron was himself to be disappointed some months later by the encounters he finally experienced with the Indigenous inhabitants of D'Entrecasteaux Channel.<sup>20</sup> His conclusions concerning the future prospects of Aboriginal culture were formulated as a result — namely that the only way for the native peoples of Australia to thrive was for them to be integrated into European civilisation.<sup>21</sup> This being so, what are we to make of Péron's belief that persisted well beyond his time in Australia, and well after he had expressed his thoughts on the native population of Australia, that the 'sacred grove' of Geographe Bay was a major find in anthropological terms and must be recorded in the *Voyage* and in its illustrations? How was this find compatible with all that Péron had observed and concluded?

The only possible explanation is that Péron needed to retain his major anthropological moment on the Australian continent.<sup>22</sup> The rest of his research had not produced the conclusions he had originally hoped for, nor had it brought

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19 W. Dampier, *A new voyage round the world* (London, The Argonaut Press, 1927), p. 312. Dampier's work, originally published in 1697, was included in the library of both the *Géographe* and the *Naturaliste*, and Baudin referred to it frequently in his journal. See N. Baudin, *The journal of Post-Captain Nicolas Baudin, Commander-in-Chief of the Corvettes Géographe and Naturaliste assigned by order of the Government to a voyage of discovery*, trans. C. Cornell (Adelaide, Libraries Board of South Australia, 1974), pp. 592-3, 600. Even Péron concluded, upon seeing some native huts in Geographe Bay, that 'we were a very long way from having observed on these shores the extreme limit of ignorance and misery ...' (*Voyage to the southern lands*, vol. 1, p. 71).

20 See the full account of the evolution in Péron's thinking in R. Jones, 'Images of natural man', in Bonnemains, Forsyth and Smith, pp. 35-64.

21 See, for example, Péron's musings about bringing the Aboriginal populations of Sydney to a 'civilised' state, *Voyage to the southern lands*, vol. 1, p. 367.

22 Susan Hunt and Paul Carter also attach to the inset of the 'sacred grove' of Geographe Bay a desire on the artist's part to reflect on the anthropological record of the expedition. For them, this detail in the watercolour of Sydney 'seems incongruous but is perhaps intended as a reference to the spiritual life of a culture, certainly only imperfectly glimpsed, but that in Sydney had only too clearly been fractured'. (See Hunt and Carter, Notes, p. 60.) I disagree with the second term of the contrast they make, in that there is nothing in the watercolour itself to suggest the degradation of Aboriginal life. The overall message that emanates from the work is positive and harmonious.



release from his commander's critical gaze. Psychologically, at least, he required a space in which he observed, collected and analysed material on his own — no longer the trainee, but already the chief scientist. He had a narrative that no-one could contradict; it was uplifting and gave him a role which he was only too content to play, that of interpreter of higher truths, the mediator between higher forms of culture and language. If other members of the expedition were not entirely convinced by Péron's experience of Aboriginal culture, in that it in no way mirrored their actual experience of contact, Lesueur as always demonstrated his fidelity to, if not admiration for, the man who had helped him to enter a new and more highly intellectual world. By taking the young artist under his wing and teaching him how to make his art co-habit with scientific precision, Péron had done much more than find an exemplary partner; he had helped to form an artist who would serve the cause of Péron himself as much as the cause of scientific accuracy. The inclusion of the 'sacred grove' from Geographe Bay reflects Lesueur's view that Australia is a single continent and that Péron has left his indelible mark upon it. This territory extended from Geographe Bay, where Péron obtained insights of which no other was capable, to Sydney, which he intended to conquer and possess.

This is the subtext to the inset of the grove, which no doubt provides the principal thread of the narrative which Lesueur has inscribed within his representation of Sydney. If the 'sacred grove' is the key to decoding a message in Lesueur's 'New Holland', then it is a message that is truly personal, for there is no overwhelmingly practical reason why this element would feature in a map of Sydney. This inset thus adds a level of commentary that the other sections do not convey and it makes sense of the stuttered title of the work as a whole. Indeed, it makes sense of the stutter and, finally, gives us an even stronger sense of why Lesueur was unable to complete his work than simply the inaccuracy of his map.

Inaccuracies can be fixed; an overly idiosyncratic and lyrical view of place cannot be so readily transformed. The discreet man that was Lesueur had perhaps gone further than he had intended in his lyrical assessment of a colony, a voyage and a friend, and he may even have realised himself that his view of Sydney was inappropriate for an illustration that was meant to highlight the geographical. Indeed, his work had spoken words that he was incapable of expressing in conventional ways. If he had managed to include a similar narrative in his *Atlas* illustration of the Tasmanian tombs, it was precisely because he had remained within the limits of convention,



except for the microscopic detail. In his 'Nouvelle Hollande', his framing devices had breached the borders of his ostensible subject. However, while he did not ever publish his lyrical tableau, he did not suppress its message. He preserved it amongst his papers, as a tribute to Péron, and as a narrative that can now be deciphered by a far greater audience than the readership of the *Voyage* for which it was once hesitantly intended.

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# 5

## The Artwork of the Baudin expedition to Australia (1800-1804): Nicolas-Martin Petit's 1802 portrait of an Aboriginal woman and child from Van Diemen's Land

*Jane Southwood, University of New England*

*Dans ma façon de penser, je n'ai jamais pu m'imaginer qu'il y eut de justice et même de loyauté de la part des Européens à s'emparer au nom de son gouvernement d'une terre vue pour la première fois quand elle est habitée par des hommes qui n'ont pas toujours mérité les titres de sauvages ou de antropages qui leur ont été prodigués; tandis qu'ils n'étoient encore que les enfants de la nature et tout aussi peu civilisés que le sont actuellement vos montagnards d'Ecosse ou nos paisants de la Basse Bretagne, etc, qui s'ils ne mangent pas leurs semblables, ne leurs sont pas moins nuisibles. D'après cela, il me paroît qu'il seroit infiniment plus glorieux pour votre nation comme pour la mienne, de former pour la société les habitants de son propre pays sur lesquels on a des droits plutôt que de vouloir s'occuper de l'éducation de ceux qui en sont très éloignés en commençant par s'emparer du sol qui*

*leur appartient et qui les a vu naître. Ce discours n'est pas sans doute d'un politique, mais au moins il est raisonnable par le fait; et si ce principe eut été généralement adopté, vous n'auriez pas été obligé de former une colonie par le moyen d'hommes flétris par les lois et devenus coupables par la faute d'un gouvernement qui les a négligé et abandonné à eux-mêmes. Il s'en suit donc que non seulement vous avez à vous reprocher une injustice, en vous étant emparés de leur terrain, mais encore d'avoir transporté sur un sol où les crimes et les maladies des Européens n'étoient pas connus, tout ce qui pouvoit retarder les progrès de civilisation, qui ont servis de prétexte à votre gouvernement etc.*

— Letter of Nicolas Baudin to Governor King, 23 December 1802.<sup>1</sup>

*Tout portrait est 'sacré' (autant dire d'ailleurs 'secret').*

— Jean-Luc Nancy<sup>2</sup>

The 1802 portrait by French artist Nicolas-Martin Petit (1777-1804) of a young woman from Bruny Island (Figure 5.1), Tasmania — or Van Diemen's land, as it was known at the time — is the subject of the following discussion. Petit's portrait<sup>3</sup> of Arra-Maïda, as she was called, which he painted during the 1800-04 French expedition to Australia (*Terra Australis* or *Les Terres australes*) under the command of Post-Captain Nicolas Baudin<sup>4</sup>, gives fascinating insights into these first encounters of expedition members with Indigenous Tasmanians before colonisation and the subsequent decimation of the group.

1 Baudin's letter can be found in F.M. Bladen (ed.), *Historical records of New South Wales*, vol. 5, King, Appendix B (Sydney, Government Printer, 1897), pp. 826-7. The grammatical errors in the letter — the lack of agreement of the past participle with the preceding direct object and the use of an infinitive instead of a past participle — are all Baudin's, not those of the author or editors of this chapter.

2 J.-L. Nancy, *Le Regard du portrait* (Paris, Galilée, 2000), p. 57.

3 The portrait, 30.0 x 17.5 cm, is in watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper.

4 For an account of the Baudin expedition see F. Horner, *The French reconnaissance: Baudin in Australia 1801-1803* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1987); A. Brown, *Ill-Starred captains: Flinders and Baudin*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Fremantle, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2008); J. Fornasiero, J. West Sooby and P. Monteath, *Encountering Terra Australis: The Australian voyages of Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders 1800-1803*, revised edn (Kent Town, Wakefield Press, 2010); N. Starbuck, *Baudin, Napoleon and the exploration of Australia* (London, Pickering and Chatto, 2013). See also J. Bonnemains, E.C. Forsyth and B. Smith (eds), *Baudin in Australian waters: The artwork of the French voyage of discovery to the southern lands 1800-1804* (Melbourne, Oxford University Press in association with the Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1988).



Figure 5.1: Nicolas-Martin Petit (1777-1804), *Portrait d'Arra-Maïda, femme de Tasmanie*. Le Havre, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Collection Lesueur, 20022-3.

The portrait allows us to recontextualise material such as the written accounts of the voyage and to weigh up the traditions on which Petit seems to have drawn for his portrayal of Arra-Maïda. In this way the portrait invites an assessment of the interaction between Europeans and Indigenous Australians in the light of French and

English imperial discourses, of postcolonial theories and of the contrast between the metropole and the colonised territory in order to ascertain the extent to which what Bronwen Douglas calls '[t]he interplay of metropolitan ideas, regional experience and Indigenous agency'<sup>5</sup> is present in the description and representation of Arra-Maïda.

Baudin's enlightened views, revealed in the extract of his letter to Governor King quoted above, shaped these encounters. Baudin is far ahead of his times in decrying the seizing by colonial powers of lands rightfully belonging to the colonised, and the failure of the colonisers to provide a society in which its denizens are not forced to turn to a life of crime, but instead are brought to the colonised territory, thus inflicting their diseases and crimes on innocent people. These views derive from, or were reinforced by, the Commander's adherence to a nascent anthropological movement founded by Jauffret in 1799, the *Société des Observateurs de l'homme*, to which the second-in-command, Hamelin, the gardener, Riedlé, and the zoologist, Maugé, also belonged. Instructions that Joseph-Marie Degérando of this Society drew up, entitled *Considérations sur les diverses méthodes à suivre dans l'observation des peuples sauvages*, informed by French Enlightenment ideals, outline to expedition members how they should interact with Indigenous peoples and what to note when in their company. The instructions stress the importance of studying different peoples in their natural environment, noting their language, their habitations, their art and their behaviour in groups or as individuals.<sup>6</sup>

Other traditions from Europe colour these interactions and in turn influence the way Petit portrays the subject of this portrait. This chapter offers one way of viewing the portrait and suggests how the image interacts with the written account of the expedition and with European traditions, ideas, art and culture. These traditions act as a filter for Europeans viewing Indigenous Australians and, in Bernard Smith's words, illustrate the exchange between 'European vision' and 'Antipodean experience'.<sup>7</sup>

Petit made the portrait following a succession of encounters with Indigenous Bruny Islanders in February 1802, which François Péron described in the first

5 B. Douglas, Website biography, <https://researchers.anu.edu.au/researchers/douglas-bp> (accessed 10 March 2014).

6 For a comprehensive discussion of Degérando's instructions and his earlier work, see J. Copans and J. Jamin, *Aux origines de l'anthropologie française, les mémoires de la Société des Observateurs de l'homme en l'an viii*, revised edn (Paris, Jean-Michel Place, 1994).

7 B. Smith, *European vision and the South Pacific*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Sydney, Harper & Rowe, 1985).

volume of the official account of the journey (1775-1810).<sup>8</sup> As is the case with most of the artwork of Petit and of his fellow artist during the Baudin expedition, Charles-Alexandre Lesueur (1778-1846), who, under the tutelage of Péron, became a competent draughtsman of natural history, this portrait forms part of the Lesueur Collection in the Muséum d'histoire naturelle, Le Havre. Jacqueline Bonnemains, formerly Curator of this collection, gives details of the extent and whereabouts of all Petit's work: 'Une centaine de dessins et de peintures de N.-M. Petit se trouvent dans les collections du Muséum du Havre, et quelques autres sont éparses dans les collections publiques (Muséum national d'histoire naturelle et Archives nationales, Paris) et privées'.<sup>9</sup> Bonnemains points out that though Petit did not complete this work, it is 'un témoignage extraordinaire et unique de la vie des aborigènes de la Terre de Diémen (Tasmanie) et des côtes de la Nouvelle Hollande (Australie) avant les déformations dues à la colonisation'.<sup>10</sup>

8 F. Péron, *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes*, vol. 1, 1807, ed. M. François and J. Goy (Paris, Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, 2011), pp. 250-7. Péron had been taken on as élève-zoologiste in the expedition subsequent to his last-minute impassioned plea to the professors of the École de Médecine de Paris by means of a pamphlet with the beguilingly explicit (and self-interested) title *Observations sur l'anthropologie, ou l'histoire naturelle de l'homme, la nécessité de s'occuper de l'avancement de cette science, et l'importance de l'admission sur la flotte du Capitaine Baudin d'un ou de plusieurs naturalistes, spécialement chargés des recherches à faire sur ce sujet*. With the death of Baudin at Mauritius in September 1803, and after an audience with Admiral Decrès, Minister of the Marine at the end of 1804, and a subsequent audience with Champagny at the Ministry of the Interior, Péron was given the task of writing the official account. He completed the first volume and most of the second volume — chapters XXII-XXIX as well as an unfinished version of chapter XXX. Chapters XXX-XXXIV of this volume were completed by Louis Freycinet using Péron's notes. Louis Freycinet also compiled the third volume: F. Péron and L. Freycinet, *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes exécuté ... sur les corvettes le Géographe, le Naturaliste, et la goëlette le Casuarina pendant les années 1800, 1801, 1802, 1803 et 1804*, vols 1-3 (Paris, Imprimerie impériale [later royale], 1807-16). For a comprehensive biography of Péron's life and his inclusion in the expedition, see E. Duyker, *François Péron, an impetuous life: Naturalist and voyager* (Melbourne, Miegunyah, 2006). See also M. Jangoux, 'François Péron: L'émergence d'un naturaliste', *Actes Colloque de Cérilly: Une petite ville, trois grands hommes* 15-16 May 1999 (Moulins, Pottier, 2000), pp. 137-52; and F. Debard, *François Péron (1775-1810): Zoologiste du Voyage de découverte aux Terres australes, remarques et observations sur les Pinnipèdes*, thesis (Faculty of Medicine, University of Nantes, 1999).

9 J. Bonnemains, *Œuvres de Nicolas-Martin Petit, artiste du voyage aux Terres Australes* (Le Havre, Bora, 1997), p. 4.

10 Bonnemains, *Œuvres de Nicolas-Martin Petit*, p. 4.



These two young men, Petit and Lesueur, executed the sketches, drawings and watercolours which comprise this collection when the official artists, Milbert, Lebrun and Garnier, left the expedition at Mauritius. As Bernard Smith states<sup>11</sup>, Petit was the one portrait and figure painter remaining after the defection of these more senior artists. It is clear that though Baudin engaged both Petit and Lesueur in the position of 'assistant gunner, 4th class' (aide-canonnière de 4e classe<sup>12</sup>), the captain almost certainly knew of their artistic skills, as he entrusted to them the illustration of his personal journal.<sup>13</sup> The edition of this work published in Paris in 2000<sup>14</sup> includes on the cover the Petit portrait under consideration in this chapter.

The traditions Europeans brought to bear when depicting native peoples have been the subject of much rigorous analysis. Classics scholar Matthew Dillon has drawn attention to the long tradition of scholarship in Australian art history<sup>15</sup> wherein the classical overlay of works depicting Indigenous Australians is extensively examined and discussed. As Dillon points out, the pioneering spirit in this process was art historian Bernard Smith, who, in his monumental work *European vision and the South Pacific* analyses the iconography of the peoples of the Pacific and what he sees as the 'double vision' of the artist — that is, the European (often classical) overlay on the Indigenous subject. As Smith shows, this classical overlay is apparent in the portraits appearing in Britain from the 1770s to the 1790s: in Sydney Parkinson's 1773 *Voyage to the South Seas*; in the 1789 official record of Captain Arthur Phillip's establishment

11 Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, p. 199.

12 A list of the personnel of both vessels, their place of origin and their titles is included in the personal journal of the Commander. See N. Baudin, *Mon voyage aux Terres Australes: Journal personnel du commandant Baudin*, ed. J. Bonnemains, J.-M. Argentin and M. Marin (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 2000), pp. 113-20.

13 Bonnemains, *Œuvres de Nicolas-Martin Petit*, p. 4.

14 Baudin, *Mon voyage aux Terres Australes*.

15 I am referring here to a presentation Matthew Dillon made to the United Kingdom Classical Association, University of Exeter on 12 April 2012, entitled 'Polykleitos and the *bon sauvage*: Greek sculpture and *terra australis incognita*'. I am extremely grateful to Matthew Dillon for making his slides available to me, for drawing my attention to the artwork from Cook's voyages and its extensive treatment by Bernard Smith and to his own discussion of the classical models for much European depiction of Indigenous Australians, as well as for the fruitful general discussions we have had on the classical overlay to be found in these portraits. I also wish to express my gratitude to Grace Moore and Tom Bristow, both of whom kindly read a draft of this chapter on the artwork of the Baudin expedition in its original form and suggested amendments to it.

of the white colony at Port Jackson; and in John Hunter's 1793 *Historical journal of the transactions at Port Jackson*.

In his overview Smith draws attention to the classicising tendencies present in the very first depiction of Australian Aborigines by a European — the engraving 'Two of the natives of New Holland, Advancing to combat' (Figure 5.2), by the British engraver Thomas Chambers (1724-89), believed to be from a drawing by Sydney Parkinson (1740-71), the draughtsman who accompanied Cook on the first voyage of 1768-71.

The engraving appeared in a work entitled *A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas in his Majesty's Ship the Endeavour. Faithfully Transcribed from the papers of the late Sydney Parkinson, Draughtsman to Joseph Banks Esq. on his Late Expedition, with Dr Solander. Round the World; Embellished with Views and Designs, Delineated by the Author; and Engraved by Capital Artists*. It was first published in London in 1773 and republished with an expanded title in London in 1784. Smith points out that in this engraving the Aborigines are depicted as classical heroes, with the foremost figure drawn as the so-called *Borghese gladiator* (Figure 5.3), which he feels gives 'powerful



Figure 5.2: Thomas Chambers, 'Two of the natives of New Holland, advancing to combat'. Engraving (plate mark 11.5 x 17.6 cm), publisher's details unknown (London? Sn 178-?), National Library of Australia, Rex Nan Kivell Collection, PIC Drawer 7432 4 U3041 NK.

support to the view embraced by both Cook and Kames which saw the aborigines as exemplars of a harsh but virtuous primitive life'.<sup>16</sup> Dillon sees not only the foremost figure, but also the background warrior, as inspired by the *Borghese gladiator* (Figure 5.3), or rather — to give the sculpture the more correct title used by historians of Greek art, as, according to Dillon, there were no gladiators at the time the sculpture was executed — the *Borghese warrior*. Originally sculpted in about 100 BC by Agias from Ephesos in Asia Minor, the sculpture survives, Dillon tells us, in a Roman marble copy, now held in the Louvre.

The view of Cook and Kames can be seen, Smith maintains, as a variant of the theme of the *bon sauvage*.<sup>17</sup> However, the harshness of the Australian environment was a far cry from the idyllic Eden, one more easily located, Smith states, in the islands of the Pacific in which the Noble Savage was believed to live. The classical overlay evident in this and other illustrations from the period (Figure 5.4) — largely the work of the engravers who worked on the original sketches — supports the dream of the Noble Savage, consonant with Cook and Kames's opinion of the inhabitants of Australia.

The work of British artists has close affinities with that of their French counterparts and derives from the same set of beliefs. In accordance with the theory of the Noble Savage, artists from *both* these nations imbue their Indigenous subjects with features drawn from classical sources to reinforce the inherent nobility of the individuals depicted. Art historians, however, differ in the weight they attribute to the classical overlay and to its value in portraits such as Petit's of Arra-Maïda. Brian Plomley, for one, reminds us of the classical elements in portraits of Indigenous Tasmanians by artists prior to Baudin's voyage of exploration and the links to the Noble Savage which arise from these elements:

[A]rtistic tradition linked these people with the Noble Savage of the philosopher. As a result, the artist tended to draw the Tasmanians as he thought they should be rather than as the people they were. Their portraits therefore

16 Smith, *European vision and the South Pacific*, p. 170.

17 For links between the Noble Savage and Australian Aborigines, see the following works indicated by Matthew Dillon: B. Smith, *Place, taste and tradition: A study of Australian art since 1788*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, revised (Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 28-9; Smith, *European vision and the South Pacific*, pp. 171-3; B. Smith, *Australian painting 1788-2000*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 2-3; G. Serle, *From deserts the prophets come: The creative spirit in Australia* (Melbourne, Heinemann, 1973), p. 6.



Figure 5.3: *Borghese Gladiator/Warrior*. Source: Wikimedia Commons.





Figure 5.4: R.Clevely, delt, T.Medlock, sculpt, 'Natives of Botany Bay'. Plate from *The voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay* by Arthur Phillip (20 x 25 cm), National Library of Australia, Rex Nan Kivell Collection, Bib ID 285291.

tend to be pictures of an imagined ancient Greek in savage guise, and this is especially to be found in the work of Piron, the artist of the D'Entrecasteaux Expedition; and where individuals are grouped into scenes, there is the same classical arrangement of the figures, the same poses and the same strongly muscled bodies and limbs. The portraits and scenes which John Webber made during Cook's third voyage (1777) are also classical portrayals, though showing less of the style than those of Piron.<sup>18</sup>

Plomley goes on to minimise the classicism of Petit's depiction of Arra-Maïda, which he sees as a landmark in portraiture of the time because of its departure from classical models. For Plomley, the classical overlay present in earlier portraits, which he believes distorts the representation of the subject, is minimal in Petit's portraits: 'Petit seems to have been able to set aside most of *the taint of classicism*, his portraits of the Tasmanians seeming to be fairly true representations of his subjects'.<sup>19</sup>

18 N.J.B. Plomley, *The Baudin expedition and the Tasmanian Aborigines*, 1802 (Hobart, Blubber, 1983), p. 162.

19 Plomley, p. 162, emphasis added.

Susan Hunt and Paul Carter have a different view; they see Petit's portrait as drawing closely on classical models: for them, Petit's portrait derives from both Jean Piron (Figure 5.5) and John Webber:

As striking as Petit's portrait appears, it references two earlier representations, John Webber's 'Woman of Van Diemen's Land' which appeared in the account of James Cook's third expedition, *Voyage to the South Pacific* (1784) and Piron's *Femme du Cap du Diémen* in the *Atlas du Voyage à la recherche de la Pérouse* (1800).<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 5.5: Jean Piron (1767-96), 'Femme du Cap de Diémen'. Paper engraving in black ink from one copperplate (44.0 x 30.2 cm). In J.J.H. de Labillardiere, *Atlas pour servir à la relation du voyage à la recherché de La Pérouse* (Paris, Jansen, 1800), National Gallery of Australia, Collection Jacques Julien Houton de Labillardiere, IRN 128044. To view this image, see <http://artsearch.nga.gov.au/Detail.cfm?IRN=128044&PICTAUS=TRUE>".**

Philip Jones shares Hunt and Carter's conviction that Petit's portrait evokes classical models: 'Petit painted [Arra Maïda] in a stance evoking classical sculpture, suggesting arrested motion and a certain tentativeness, which recurs often in early depictions of Aboriginal and other indigenous peoples'.<sup>21</sup>

I therefore wish to ask just how classical Petit's portrait might be, and if indeed classical elements are present as Hunt, Carter and Jones suggest, what models he drew upon and whether or not they mitigate against the 'authenticity' or 'realism' of the portrait. Are the models classical sculpture as Jones suggests? Or are other models present?

Classical aspects in portraiture would certainly have been very familiar to Petit, who, prior to embarking on the Baudin expedition, trained with a man who was one of the pre-eminent artists of the day and leader of the French neo-classical school, Napoléon's portraitist, Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825); the appellation *élève de David*, given to Petit, appears in a letter of 10 August 1800 from Lesueur and again in Petit's death notice on 29 October 1804.<sup>22</sup> Born into a family of

20 S. Hunt and P. Carter, *Terre Napoléon: Australia through French eyes, 1800-1804* (Sydney, Historic Houses Trust, 2008), p. 72.

21 P. Jones, 'In the mirror of contact: Art of the French encounters', in S. Thomas (ed.), *The encounter, 1802: Art of the Flinders and Baudin voyages* (Adelaide, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2002), p. 181.

22 The biographical sketch of Nicolas-Martin Petit that follows draws on two works by

fan-makers, a guild which suffered in the Revolution from laws abolishing the privileges of master craftsmen, at a time when luxury crafts such as fan-making were on the wane, Petit may well have undertaken studies at the national school of graphic arts, in the rue des Cordeliers, prior to entering David's school in 1795.<sup>23</sup> This apprenticeship would have given him the necessary preparation to enable him to benefit from the subsequent training David offered him from 1795 in his studio in the Louvre, when the great artist emerged from the Revolutionary prisons in which he had been incarcerated. Jacqueline Bonnemains speculates that Petit was one of the 'rapins' in David's studio, 'pupils already advanced in the practice of their art but who were still at the copying stage and had not produced any personal work'.<sup>24</sup> David was beneficial to Petit in several ways over and above the excellent neo-classical artistic training he gave his young pupil. Firstly, his studio offered shelter from conscription or from the often-savage legal pursuits attendant on failing to enlist, in the case of Petit, at the age of eighteen, in 1795. As Bonnemains points out, in this way David was a protector to young men such as Petit. She also believes that it was through David, whom Napoléon held in high esteem, that Petit probably heard of the Baudin expedition organised by the Institute, under the auspices of the great leader.<sup>25</sup>

The neo-classical elements singled out by Hunt, Carter and Jones in Petit's portrait derive, in all likelihood, from his training with David. These elements are accompanied by other elements in the portrait, which the *written descriptions* of the meetings with the Bruny Islanders stress. These descriptions are an invaluable adjunct to the portrait.

The fullest account of the meetings with Arra-Maïda and her companions comes from the first volume of a work that I have already cited, namely François Péron's official account of the journey, first published in 1807.<sup>26</sup> Péron's account mentions the date of the first landing on Bruny Island<sup>27</sup> and describes the first

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Jacqueline Bonnemains: 'Biography of Nicolas-Martin Petit', in Bonnemains, Forsyth and Smith pp. 27-30; and *Œuvres de Nicolas-Martin Petit*.

23 David's school opened its doors in 1793-94 to 1500 students, to whom it gave free tuition.

24 Bonnemains: 'Biography of Nicolas-Martin Petit', p. 28.

25 Bonnemains: 'Biography of Nicolas-Martin Petit', p. 28.

26 Péron, *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes*.

27 'Le 31 janvier, de bonne heure, je descendis sur l'île Bruny' (Péron, p. 250). Further



encounter with the inhabitants of the island: 'une vingtaine de sauvages qui venoient à ma rencontre sur la grève' (p. 250). As he describes it, he originally retreats from the group. However, meeting up with Heirisson, an officer, and Bellefin, the surgeon from the *Naturaliste* — who are both armed, as they have been hunting — the three men, mindful of Degérando's brief, return 'pour chercher à lier quelques communications avec eux' (p. 251). On seeing the three men approach, the group melts back into the forest. Knowing that they would not be capable of keeping up with the agile Aborigines, the French party content themselves with attracting their attention by waving their handkerchiefs and showing them various articles.<sup>28</sup> While the act of holding up objects with the aim of attracting the attention of the Aboriginal group can be read as the traditional and rather patronising gesture of the European towards the Indigenous inhabitants ('beads for the natives'), other acts of the Frenchmen in this meeting with the Tasmanians redeem their behaviour and temper our understanding of the encounter.

The act of showing these objects certainly has the desired effect. 'Ces démonstrations d'amitié', as Péron calls their actions (p. 251), halts the Aboriginal group in their tracks, which allows the three men to catch up with them. It is then, to the great astonishment of the Frenchmen, that they discover the gender of the Aboriginal group: 'Ce fut alors que nous reconnûmes que nous avions affaire à des femmes; il n'y avait pas un individu mâle avec elles' (p. 251).

This preliminary meeting constitutes a very positive and nuanced interaction between the two groups, thanks largely to the qualities of Arra-Maïda, which so impress the Frenchmen — as the rest of Péron's account stresses. It thus leads to her portrait by Petit during a subsequent encounter. Distinguishing herself right from the outset as a fearless leader, Arra-Maïda approaches the three Frenchmen, urging them by her gestures to put down their arms and to sit with the women.<sup>29</sup> The women then

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references to Péron's journal will, where appropriate, be given in the text.

28 '... et sans chercher à poursuivre les naturels, ce que l'agilité particulière à ces peuples auroit rendu trop inutile, nous nous contentâmes de les appeler, en leur présentant divers objets, et sur-tout en agitant nos mouchoirs', *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes* (Péron, p. 251).

29 '[U]ne des plus âgées d'entre elles, se détachant de ses compagnes, nous fait signe de nous arrêter et de nous asseoir, en nous criant avec force, *médi, médi* [asseyez-vous, asseyez-vous]; elle sembloit nous prier aussi de déposer nos armes, dont la vue les épouvantoit' (Péron, p. 251). Later, she chides the other women for fleeing when they catch sight of the longboat party and by her strength of character and boldness convinces them to rejoin her in approaching

relax and enjoy themselves in the company of the Frenchmen, laughing at them and seeming to criticise them, in a playful vein (p. 251).<sup>30</sup> When Bellefin, the surgeon, sings them the Marseillaise, the women are attentive and appreciative:

M. BELLEFIN se mit à chanter, en de gestes très-vifs et très-animés; les femmes firent aussitôt silence, observant avec autant d'attention les gestes de M. BELLEFIN, qu'elles paroisoient en prêter à ses chants ... (p. 251)

A mesure qu'un couplet étoit fini, les unes applaudissoient par de grands cris, d'autres rioient aux éclats, tandis que les jeunes filles, plus timides sans doute, gardoient le silence, témoignant néanmoins, par leurs gestes et par l'expression de leur physionomie, leur surprise et leur satisfaction. (pp. 251-2)

Arra-Maïda, though, once again singled out by Péron, who describes her as having 'conservé une grande assurance, avec beaucoup d'enjouement et de jovialité' (p. 253), goes even further, much to the delight of her companions and of the Frenchmen:

Après que M. BELLEFIN eut terminé sa chanson, elle se mit à contrefaire ses gestes et son ton de voix d'une manière fort originale et très-plaisante, ce qui divertit beaucoup ses camarades. Puis elle commença elle-même à chanter ... (p. 253)

The Frenchmen respond enthusiastically to her mimicry, as to her singing. This reaction elicits a further response from 'notre joviale Diéménoise', as Péron calls her, a response which in turn conditions Petit's portrait:

Excitée, pour ainsi dire par ses propres chants, auxquels nous n'avions pas manqué d'applaudir avec chaleur, et voulant sans doute mériter nos suffrages

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the party along the shore: '... déjà la troupe s'enfonçait dans la forêt, lorsque la même femme qui, presque seule, avait fait tous les frais de notre entrevue, sembla se raviser. A sa voix, il y eut un mouvement d'hésitation: elle parla quelques instants aux autres; mais ne pouvant, à ce qu'il nous parut, les décider à la suivre, elle s'élança seule du haut des dunes; et marchant sur le rivage à quelque distance en avant de nous avec beaucoup d'assurance et même avec une sorte de fierté, elle sembloit insulter à la timidité de ses compagnes. Ces dernières, à leur tour, parurent honteuses de leur foiblesse; peu-à-peu elles s'enhardirent, et se décidèrent à revenir au rivage. Ce fut donc avec cette nombreuse et singulière escorte que nous arrivâmes à nos embarcations ... ' (p. 255).

30 'Ces conditions préliminaires ayant été remplies, les femmes s'accroupirent sur leurs talons et dès ce moment elles parurent s'abandonner sans réserve à la vivacité de leur caractère, parlant toutes ensemble, nous interrogeant toutes à-la-fois, ayant l'air souvent de nous critiquer et de rire à nos dépens, faisant, en un mot, mille gestes, mille contorsions aussi singulières que varies.'

sous d'autres rapports, notre joviale Diémenoise se mit à exécuter divers mouvemens de danse. (p. 253)

What Homi Bhabha sees as the ambivalence of mimicry<sup>31</sup> is at play here and a complicated interchange/reversal of the viewed and the viewer. There is the gaze of the Frenchmen looking at the woman who has been watching them closely in order to imitate them. The reversals continue: the resulting portrait grows out of the European gaze directed towards the Indigenous woman who is simulating the Europeans.

Arra-Maïda's dancing for the men is, as I shall show, the clue to one aspect of Petit's portrayal of her. Some of her dance movements are very suggestive and highly erotic — 'excessively indecent', Péron calls them — or they could be seen as such by Europeans:

Divers mouvemens de danse dont quelques-uns pourroient être regardés comme excessivement indécent, si dans cet état des sociétés l'homme n'étoit encore absolument étranger à toute cette délicatesse de sentimens et d'actions qui n'est pour nous qu'un produit heureux du perfectionnement de l'ordre social. (p. 253)

As Péron observes her closely, she takes note, and when she has finished her dance, she draws some charcoal out of her rush bag and proceeds to apply charcoal to his face and to Heirisson's.<sup>32</sup> Their changed appearance greatly pleases the women:

Nous parûmes être alors un grand sujet d'admiration pour ces femmes; elles sembloient nous regarder avec une douce satisfaction, et nous féliciter des nouveaux agrémens que nous venions d'acquérir. (p. 254)

This is the first of a series of enchanting interludes, beautifully portrayed in Péron's written account and subsequently recorded by Petit in the portrait, which encapsulates

31 H.K. Bhabha, 'Of memory and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse', *The location of culture* (London and New York, Routledge, 1994), pp. 85-92.

32 It is noteworthy that during the visit to Tasmania by members of the D'Entrecasteaux expedition, a visit which took place from January 1793, the artist Jean Piron requested that the exposed parts of his body be painted with charcoal, which one of the Indigenous Tasmanians then did. For a description of this event see E. Duyker, *Citizen Labillardière: A naturalist's life in revolution and exploration, 1755-1834* (Melbourne, Miegunyah, 2003), pp. 149-50. Péron's reflections on skin colour, once he and Heirisson have had charcoal applied to them, are revelatory: 'Ainsi donc cette blancheur Européenne dont notre espèce est si fière, n'est plus qu'un défaut réel, une sorte de difformité qui doit le céder, dans des climats lointains, à la couleur noire du charbon, au rouge sombre de l'ocre ou de la terre glaise' (p. 254).

much of the tenor of the interactions. Not long afterwards, Péron meets up with this woman who had so impressed him and his companions; the meeting proves to be of the utmost importance not only for the individuals involved, but also for posterity:

Peu de jours après, j'eus le plaisir de rencontrer la même femme dont il vient d'être tant de fois question: j'appris alors qu'elle se nommoit ARRA-MAÏDA. M. PETIT voulut bien, à ma prière, en faire le portrait, qui se trouve dans l'atlas, et qui, sous tous les rapports, est d'une ressemblance parfaite. On y retrouve bien, si je ne me trompe, ce caractère d'assurance et de fierté qui distinguoit éminemment cette femme, de toutes ses compagnes. Lorsque je la rencontrai la dernière fois, elle portoit un petit enfant derrière le dos. (p. 256)

This woman — self-assured, proud, bold, jovial, engaging, amusing and a born mimic — has come down to us from Péron's vivid account and Petit's lively portrait. A leader amongst the group of Aboriginal women, Arra-Maïda is also maternal. Her maternal tenderness appeals enormously to Péron and would also have appealed, we could surmise, to Degérando of the Société des Observateurs de l'homme. Author of the manual directing the members of the Baudin expedition how to behave and what to note when in the presence of Indigenous peoples, Degérando had also written an important tract on motherhood.<sup>33</sup>

What are the important features of Arra-Maïda — features which distinguish her, as she is depicted by Petit, from others of her race? A woman of her people she is, but she also seems to have features derived from a tradition with which, I believe, Petit would have been very familiar. In other words, there is a sort of overlay which seeks to render Arra-Maïda palatable to a European viewer and to suggest the charm she exuded, to which, as Péron's account reveals, the Frenchmen were not impervious. This woman who danced and sang for the unknown white men, and who so charmed them by her self-assurance and pride, is portrayed in a pose not dissimilar from this one of the bare-footed Taglioni (Figure 5.6).

**Figure 5.6: 'Marie Taglioni as La Sylphide'. To view this image, see <http://world4.eu/ballerina-costume-marie-tagioni>.**

In other words, Petit gives Arra-Maïda certain characteristics which he takes from the tradition of French dance. Her position — the way her body is inclined and

<sup>33</sup> As noted earlier, the most comprehensive reference work on Degérando can be found in Copans and Jamin.

the tilt of her head — is very much that of a dancer. Her feet, too, placed in a way reminiscent of dance positions, are rather dainty for a woman who would not wear shoes. Her body-shape recalls a typical European woman of the time. The similarity of pose, with the raised foot at the back and the position of the head, suggests the ideal femininity of the period while alluding to the performer, the dancer who charms men and embodies, even if only momentarily, 'cette délicatesse de sentimens et d'actions qui n'est pour nous qu'un produit heureux du perfectionnement de l'ordre social' of which Péron speaks in his account of the voyage (p. 253). Is this an attempt by Petit, one might ask, to bring Arra-Maïda into the European fold just as she had sought to bring the Frenchmen into the Aboriginal fold?<sup>34</sup>

There seem to be other models for Arra-Maïda, too, and this brings me back to the classical precedents. Hunt and Carter, for example, describe her as 'an ambiguous *huntress*, arousing but also maternal'.<sup>35</sup> For the huntress there were models aplenty with which Petit would have been familiar, by virtue of his apprenticeship with David in the Louvre: Jean-Antoine Houdon's sculpture, *Diane Chasseresse* (Figure 5.7)<sup>36</sup>; the famous depiction of Diane de Poitiers, the mistress of Henri II, as Diane Chasseresse by an anonymous painter from the Ecole de Fontainebleau; and the prototype from antiquity from which all of these were derived (Figure 5.8).

The portrait of Arra-Maïda ties in, then, with a whole French tradition in which portraiture is important. Though the classical and the dance traditions inform Petit's portrait of Arra-Maïda, the inner life of the subject is perhaps even more important. Viviane Fayaud points out that from the eighteenth century onwards the goal of the portraitist was to 'rendre la psychologie du modèle'.<sup>37</sup> She considers that Petit's portraits of the Indigenous population from Van Diemen's Land 'subissent et traduisent cette influence', with a happy outcome: 'Dépeindre leur vie intérieure

34 I am grateful to my colleagues Jennifer McDonell and Sascha Morrell for enriching the content of this chapter through discussions of its earlier incarnation. Jennifer generously gave of her time to discuss postcolonial theory and particularly Homi Bhabha's work. Sascha drew my attention to the similarities between Arra-Maïda 'painting' the Frenchmen in her own image, and the Frenchman, Petit, painting her in his.

35 Hunt and Carter, p. 72, emphasis added.

36 I am indebted to Professor Fae Brauer for suggesting Houdon's sculpture as a possible model for Petit.

37 V. Fayaud, 'Le temps du rêve français: L'Australie dans l'iconographie au xixe siècle', *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 2: 129 (2009), pp. 1-13; <http://www.cairn.info/revue-journal-de-la-societe-des-oceanistes>.



Figure 5.7: Jean-Antoine Houdon, *Diane Chasseresse*. Source: Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 5.8: 'Diane Chasseresse', also known as 'Diane de Versailles', prototype from antiquity. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

devient alors une exigence, qui rend si attachants les portraits de Nicolas-Martin Petit, ce qui leur a valu d'être remarqués dès le dix-neuvième siècle'.<sup>38</sup> For Fayaud, Petit's portraits, including the one of Arra-Maïda, 'témoignent d'un respect peut-être jamais égalé envers les indigènes, une approche qui surgit d'un compte rendu de l'expédition de Joseph d'Entrecasteaux'.<sup>39</sup> Fayaud quotes Etienne Taillemite, a quote reminiscent of Baudin's letter to Governor King cited at the beginning of this chapter, in which the Commander deplors the practice of taking away lands from the Indigenous population to whom they belonged: 'Il ne fut question ni de conquérir ni de convertir les insulaires; les liens d'hospitalité furent les seuls qu'on chercha à former'.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Fayaud, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Fayaud, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> E. Taillemite, *Marins français à la découverte du monde, de Jacques Cartier à Durmont d'Urville* (Paris, Fayard, 1999), p. 436, quoted in Fayaud, p. 6.



This concept of hospitality, of an exchange between equals, is evident in Petit's portrait of Arra-Maïda, a proud and confident woman who is in no way subjugated to the tyranny or the control of the visiting Frenchmen, but who rather shapes and controls the successive encounters with them, as Péron's account testifies. Drawing on his classical training and on his knowledge of French dance and of sculpture and paintings in the Louvre, as well as on the nature of the successive encounters with Arra-Maïda, Petit has added stylistic features into his frame to make his portrait 'readable' for a European viewer and to convey the tenor of the meetings by French expedition members with a woman the French considered a leader amongst her people and an important intermediary between the two groups.

How authentic, then, is the portrait? Georges Cuvier had expressed concern that 'les dessins qui se trouvent dans les voyages modernes quoique faits sur les lieux, se ressentent plus ou moins des règles et des proportions que le dessinateur avait apprises dans les écoles d'Europe et il n'en est presque aucun sur lequel le naturaliste puisse compter pour en faire la base de recherches ultérieures'<sup>41</sup>, a problem he sought to rectify by drawing up a set of guidelines. The 'physical anthropology guidelines [Cuvier] prepared seem to have influenced the style of portraiture' adopted by Petit.<sup>42</sup>

In the case of Petit, his training and inclusion of elements deriving from his apprenticeship do not seem to have made the portrait less authentic: Péron stresses that the portrait of Arra-Maïda 'sous tous les rapports, est d'une ressemblance parfaite' (p. 256). In a letter to the Professeurs du Muséum, Péron describes Petit's work as 'une suite précieuse et complète de toutes les vues des côtes de la Nouvelle Hollande avec un très grand nombre de dessins de costumes de naturels *parfaitement exacts*'.<sup>43</sup> While capturing the essential characteristics of Arra-Maïda, Petit was, Philip Jones states, 'also striving to fulfill Cuvier's brief to identify the woman scientifically as a specimen of her race'.<sup>44</sup> In this way, Nicolas-Martin Petit contributed to what Jacqueline Bonnemains has called 'l'essor de l'anthropologie'.<sup>45</sup> The instructions to the engraver inscribed by Péron on the grid of the portrait stress this aspect of Arra-

41 Copans and Jamin, p. 69, quoted in Fayaud, p. 8.

42 P. Jones, p. 164.

43 Coll. Lesueur, n. 22 052, Bonnemains, *Œuvres de Nicolas-Martin Petit*, p. 9, emphasis added.

44 P. Jones, p. 170.

45 Bonnemains, *Œuvres de Nicolas-Martin Petit*, p. 4.

Maïda as a type: 'au trait simple / conserver soigneusement / les formes generales, mais /retoucher les défauts essentiels; / les formes grêles des / members étant un caractère / de cette race, il faudra les / observer avec grand soin'.

Jones believes that the 'ethnographic and physiognomic detail contained in Arra-Maïda's portrait does not prevent us from regarding her as an individual. It was Petit's outstanding achievement to provide this combination of sensibility and acute observation'.<sup>46</sup> Petit's portrait, then, while providing the scientists with an accurate depiction of a Tasmanian Aboriginal woman, in line with Cuvier's brief, also allows a clear vision of the personality and force of character of this outstanding woman and of her behaviour when in the company of the Europeans.

Moreover, it is thanks to this artist that we have a portrait such as this one depicting the proud Arra-Maïda, belonging to a people soon to disappear, owing to the very tyrannies that Nicolas Baudin deplores in his letter to Governor King.

## Conclusion

Nicolas-Martin Petit's 1802 portrait of Bruny Islander Arra-Maïda affords an illuminating glimpse into the interactions of nineteenth-century Europeans and Indigenous Australians. Written documents which complement the portrait are an invaluable resource for 'reading' it. These resources include the instructions that Degérando of the Société des Observateurs de l'homme drew up, which outlined to expedition members how they should interact with Indigenous peoples — a document informed by French Enlightenment ideals of 'common humanity, rather than racial difference'.<sup>47</sup> While results may have fallen short of what Degérando was proposing,

the French demonstrated a preparedness to engage with Aboriginal society on its own terms, regarding Aboriginal people unequivocally as members of the same human family. That level of engagement stands in stark contrast to the British investigations proceeding almost simultaneously under Flinders.<sup>48</sup>

The official record compiled by François Péron is also a precious resource for understanding the nature of the relations of the French with the Tasmanians, and the portrait which resulted from these relations.

<sup>46</sup> P. Jones, p. 170.

<sup>47</sup> P. Jones, p. 164.

<sup>48</sup> P. Jones, p. 164.

Details that Péron gives in his account invite a reassessment along postcolonial lines of the encounters and of the context in which they took place and of the resulting portrait. In some ways we can see the act described by Péron of Arra-Maïda covering the men with charcoal, and in this way including them in her own group, as equivalent to Petit including Arra-Maïda in his group by representing her as a dancer. The portrait suggests, then, a nuanced relationship of reciprocity rather than a simple one-way transaction. In other words, the interactions with Indigenous people changed the imperial expectations, tempered by the advice of Degérando, with which the expedition members set out, and resulted in the reformulation of the encounter as an exchange.

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FRAMING FRENCH CULTURE

Thomas, S. (ed.), *The encounter, 1802: Art of the Flinders and Baudin voyages*  
(Adelaide, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2002).



## Part 2

Cultural icons and  
cinematic framings



# 6

## Framing the Eiffel Tower: From postcards to Postmodernism

*Sonya Stephens, Mount Holyoke College*

*... la Tour attire le sens comme un paratonnerre la foudre; pour tous les amateurs de signification, elle joue un rôle prestigieux, celui d'un signifiant pur, c'est-à-dire d'une forme en laquelle les hommes ne cessent de mettre du sens (qu'ils prélèvent à volonté dans leur savoir, leurs rêves, leur histoire) ... Regard, objet, symbole, tel est l'infini circuit des fonctions qui lui permet d'être toujours bien autre chose et bien plus que la Tour Eiffel.*

— Roland Barthes.<sup>1</sup>

The visual impact, and iconic status, of the Eiffel Tower have long been established. Indeed, it was conceived as both a monumental sight and as a place for viewing, and so its place in visual culture, it might be argued, was a very part of the Tower's conception in 1884, long before a committee had even been formed to select a centerpiece for the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*. Recent innovations in a range of fields, including cultural geography and visual culture, have led scholars to reflect on what constitutes an urban icon, to question that which is precisely the 'visual' in urban culture, and to propose that 'the Eiffel Tower is actually the original and defining urban icon'.<sup>2</sup> This

1 R. Barthes, *La Tour Eiffel* (Paris, Centre Nationale de la Photographie, 1989), p. 8.

2 See P.J. Ethington and V.R. Schwartz, 'Introduction: An atlas of the urban icons project', *Urban History*, 33: 1 (April 2006), pp. 5-19.

recent work in visual culture, and on the urban icon, constitutes the latest inquiry in a long lineage of critical reflections on seeing, the panoramic, the spectacular and the semiotics of the image, many of which have profoundly affected our field.

As we might expect, and as we know from other studies, such as those by Jonathan Crary and Maurice Samuels<sup>3</sup>, this line of critical inquiry takes root in the moment of viewing, and in a culture of spectatorship. Indeed, Vanessa Schwartz and Jeannene Przyblyski contend that 'the very notion of "visual culture" was made possible by many of the changes in image production in the nineteenth century' — the kind of 'imageries', to borrow Philippe Hamon's term, that, they go on to argue, 'forever altered our connection to such fundamentals as materiality, experience, and truth'.<sup>4</sup> To explore the notion of 'framing', then, here I examine some connections between the discourse on the Eiffel Tower at the time of its construction, as well as the ways in which representation of it has developed, alongside the way that the theorising impulses of a number of disciplines in the human sciences, profoundly affected by semiotics, have engendered the discipline of visual culture. This brings the attendant challenge of demonstrating, to borrow Phillip Ethington and Vanessa Schwartz's distillation of the concern, how 'amorphous concepts such as viewing and visuality are anchored to the material world'.<sup>5</sup>

Schwartz and Przyblyski have outlined the way in which the visual is at the center of sensory experience and sense-making activity and, more specifically, the way that 'our contemporary understanding of it has a particular connection to modernity and the nineteenth century'.<sup>6</sup> Visual culture, then, includes 'the study of image/objects and also reaches beyond them to include the history of vision, visual experience, and its historical construction'.<sup>7</sup> Such is the array of representations of the

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3 For example, see J. Crary, *Techniques of the observer: On vision and modernity in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, MIT, 1990); J. Crary, *Suspensions of perception: Attention, spectacle and modern culture* (Cambridge, MIT, 2000); and M. Samuels, *The spectacular past: Popular History and the novel in nineteenth-century France* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2004).

4 V.R. Schwartz and J.M. Przyblyski, 'Visual culture's history: Twenty-first century interdisciplinarity and its nineteenth-century objects', in V.R. Schwartz and J. M. Przyblyski, *The nineteenth-century visual culture reader* (London and New York, Routledge, 2004), p. 3. See also P. Hamon, *Imageries* (Paris, Corti, 2001), especially pp. 31-2.

5 Ethington and Schwartz, p. 6.

6 Schwartz and Przyblyski, p. 3.

7 Schwartz and Przyblyski, p. 7.

Eiffel Tower that collecting and ordering them represents its own challenge. This will not be, then, a pictorial history, but rather an attempt to trace one particular narrative of the iconisation of the Tower within visual culture.

The Eiffel Tower is of particular significance because its status as a visual attraction, centered on viewing and observation, existed from its inception, and because it has continued to exert a fascination for viewers, circulating from the outset as an image that represented much more than itself. The Eiffel Tower thus represents the historical moment of 1889 and the context of its construction (the *Exposition Universelle*). These together lend to the Tower its enduring symbolism of economic progress and science: values shaped in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the Eiffel Tower, in conception, design and original purpose, as well as in the context of the *Exposition Universelle*, assumes a particular power and effectively creates connections in economic and social behaviors. A complex understanding of this is in evidence in the contracts established by Eiffel for both the construction and the subsequent exploitation of the Tower.

Focused on French rehabilitation after the humiliations of the 1870s, the *Exposition Universelle*, and its centerpiece, were designed to show the world that France was still a power to be reckoned with, a force for good and for progress which, in many of the metaphors used to describe the fair, associated national pride with prowess, perfectability with progress, and height with vision and success. Georges Berger, the manager of the *Exposition* of 1889, expressed this as a desire to show the sons of France what their fathers had accomplished 'par le savoir, l'amour du travail et le respect de la liberté', offering them a view from 'la pente abrupte qui a été escaladée depuis les ténèbres du passé'. He continued the metaphor, suggesting that, should future generations ever again descend to some valley of error and misery, they remember these accomplishments, and remind their children of them, too, so that future generations would be more determined than ever to climb still higher: 'Car la loi du progrès est aussi immortelle que le progrès est infini'.<sup>8</sup> Sully Prudhomme

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8 Quoted in G. Masson, *La Nature: Revue des sciences et de leurs applications aux arts et à l'industrie*, vol. 17 (1889), p. 334. Sully Prudhomme's remark is cited in a review of Eiffel's Conférence, 'Scientia'. He continues: 'Voilà le point de vue qui a réconcilié mon regard avec ce monstre, conquérant du ciel. Et quand même, en face de sa grandeur impérieuse, je ne me sentirais pas converti, assurément je me sentirais consolé par la joie fière qui nous est commune à tous, d'y voir le drapeau français flotter plus haut que tous les autres drapeaux du monde, sinon comme un insigne belliqueux, du moins comme un emblème des aspirations invincibles de la patrie'.

described the Tower as 'un témoin de fer dressé par l'homme vers l'azur pour attester son immuable résolution d'y atteindre et de s'y établir'.<sup>9</sup> The discourse here is clearly about ascension and vision, as well as about access to not only a view but a structured approach to viewing. As Barthes would much later argue, the Tower enables the viewer to go beyond 'la sensation' to see things 'dans leur structure'. He continues, 'c'est donc l'avènement d'une perception nouvelle, de mode intellectualiste'. Connected with the panorama, then, this view embraces history and ideology as well, Barthes says, as myth.<sup>10</sup>

At the opening ceremony of the Eiffel Tower, the description of which reads like a scene from a Flaubert novel, the iconic status of the new monument was clearly articulated. Eiffel's patriotic speech, beneath a massive *tricolor*, emblazoned with the letters RF, which had been raised at the Tower's summit, spoke of France as holding still an important place in the world, as still able to succeed where others had failed, and all to the great honor of the nation and the Republic. The toast was provided by the president of the Conseil Municipal, Emile Chautemps: 'Gloire à M. Eiffel et à ses collaborateurs! Vive la France! Vive Paris! Et vive la République!'<sup>11</sup> It was at this moment that Eiffel was presented with the *médaille de la Légion d'honneur*.

The Tower was planned on the Champs de Mars in order to create, for the *Exposition*, 'une entrée triomphale par ses grands arceaux'.<sup>12</sup> Both *tricolor* lighting and the large flag were powerful symbols of the nation's pride in this achievement. In fact, just a few days after the flag had been hoisted, *Figaro* ran a story about some English tourists who had torn strips from the flag 'comme souvenir de leur ascension'.<sup>13</sup>

9 G. Berger, in *L'Exposition de Paris 1889*, prospectus (Paris, La librairie illustrée, 1889), p. 11.

10 Barthes, p. 11.

11 G. Eiffel, *La Tour de 300 mètres* (Paris, Lemerier, 1890), Septième partie: 'La Tour pendant l'exposition de 1889', Pose du drapeau au sommet, 211-13. See also the speech by Emile Chautemps: 'Votre œuvre, Messieurs, est donc aujourd'hui à peu près terminée, et les visiteurs de tous les pays se presseront bientôt ici en foule pour l'admirer, tous, de quelque continent qu'ils viennent, et quelque langue qu'ils parlent, se sentiront envahis et dominés par un sentiment commun, celui d'un profond respect pour un pays resté digne de sa glorieuse histoire, et plus que jamais attaché à la République', in X. Paoletti, X. (ed.), *Discours de M. Emile Chautemps, président du conseil municipal de Paris, de février à novembre 1889* (Paris, A. Hennuyer, 1890), pp. 14-20.

12 S. Krakow, *Guide bleu du Figaro et du Petit Journal* (Paris, Imprimerie Chaix, 1899), p. 73.

13 Krakow, p. 70.



At the heart of this national pride was both an international race to build the tallest tower and, for Eiffel and Janssen, as well as many others, the advancement of science. The Tower was, as Gaston Tissandier, editor of *La Nature*, saw it, 'une des victoires scientifiques de notre siècle'. He continues: 'Monsieur Eiffel aura élevé à la science un monument grandiose, qui est la gloire de l'art de l'ingénieur, et qui fait honneur à notre génie national'.<sup>14</sup> An Englishman, Richard Trevithick, had wanted, in 1833, to construct such a tower in cast iron. And in 1874, there was some talk in the newspapers about Clarke Reeves and Company building a cylindrical tower for the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 — a project that had set the world talking about the ambition of the project. Eiffel was convinced he could do it, his colleagues in the research department — Maurice Koechlin, Emile Nougier and Stéphan Sauvestre — already had plans drawn up to do it, and the very competition announced in 1887 for the *Exposition's* main attraction was redolent of Eiffel's existing plan for a 'tour de 300 mètres'.

Despite the feat of engineering this represented and the overt celebration of the advances in science, as well of the new possibilities this created, critics were persistent in their call for an explanation of the usefulness of the Eiffel Tower, dubbed 'inutile et monstrueuse', 'une superbe quincaillerie', 'ce lampadaire véritablement tragique', and 'ce mât de fer aux durs agrès, inachevé, confus, difforme'. The 1889 *Guide bleu du Figaro* clearly makes the case:

La Tour Eiffel est avant tout la réalisation d'un gigantesque travail industriel dans l'ordre des constructions des ponts, des viaducs ou des phares. Un phare sauveur, un pont utile seront certainement la conséquence de ces travaux d'exécution hardie devant lesquels la science humaine reculait jusqu'à présent. Elle est donc, à ce point de vue spécial, pleine d'enseignement pour l'avenir.

Mais là ne se borne pas son rôle: il y a peu de savants qui ne pensent depuis l'achèvement à réaliser à l'aide de la Tour une expérience quelconque se rattachant plus directement à l'objet de leurs études; ce sera donc pour tous un *observatoire* et un laboratoire tel qu'il n'en aura jamais été mis à la disposition des intelligences humaines.<sup>15</sup>

The uses cited by Gaston Tissandier (and others, including Eiffel himself)<sup>16</sup> correspond to the laboratories established at the Tower's summit. Eiffel had his own

14 G. Tissandier, *La Tour Eiffel de 300 mètres* (Paris, G. Masson, 1889), p. xii.

15 Krakow, p. 81.

16 G. Eiffel, *Travaux scientifiques exécutés à la tour de 300 mètres de 1899 à 1900* (Paris, L.

personal laboratory on the second platform, in which he conducted experiments long after his retirement. These, then, are the scientific uses identified:

1. observations stratégiques
2. communications par télégraphie optique
3. observations météorologiques
4. observations astronomiques.

Others uses are mentioned, too. Eiffel was especially interested in the observation of objects dropped from the Tower. J. Janssen also mentions 'observations électriques'. A. Hénocque would oversee a lab dedicated to 'la biologie et les études micrographiques de l'air'. And Louis Cailletet would measure atmospheric pressure with the installation of a 'manomètre'.<sup>17</sup> The scientific value of such a tower had some international currency, too. The *British Medical Journal* announced, for London, 'a second, revised and enlarged, edition of Eiffel's Tower', that would, apart from making money, 'undoubtedly afford valuable means of scientific observation' of the kinds already noted above, as well as advancing medical research.<sup>18</sup>

Of particular significance, too, was the electric lighting that illuminated Paris, but which was also installed to help the workers on the construction of the Tower. More than two pages of scientific text is devoted to the 'phare', which, Tissandier declares, could be seen from Chartres 75 km away, and even from Orléans, 115 km away.<sup>19</sup> This was also a major contributing factor to the notion of the Tower as spectacle — a tradition that has continued. Finally, the usefulness of the Tower as a transmission point should not be overlooked, nor its part in radio, largely at Eiffel's instigation.

In short, the Tower became a symbol which, through its circulation in popular and scientific culture — from picture postcards to construction pictures, and from the *Guide bleu* to the *British Medical Journal* — was then iconised to 'diffuse its meaning and to structure a collective representation of place'.<sup>20</sup> And not just Paris,

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Maretheux, 1900).

17 See G. Eiffel, *Travaux scientifiques*, p. 182 ff. (for Janssen), p. 195 ff. (for Hénocque) and p. 172 (for Cailletet, p. 172).

18 'The scientific uses of very high towers', *British Medical Journal*, 2: 1506 (9 November 1899), pp. 1048-9.

19 Tissandier, pp. 75-7.

20 J. Monnet, 'The geopolitics of visibility: Urban icons in contemporary Mexico City', in P.J. Ethington and V.R. Schwartz (eds), *Atlas of urban icons: Studies in urban visual history, Multimedia companion to special issue of Urban History*, 33: 1 (May 2006). <http://journals>.

but the place of Paris in the world. Victor Hugo explained the role of the Eiffel Tower as a part of a broad social and cultural framework from the outset — invested with symbolic transformative powers:

[Il] résumait la grandeur et la puissance industrielle du temps présent. Sa flèche immense, en s'enfonçant dans les nuages, avait quelque chose de symbolique; elle paraissait l'image du progrès tel que nous le concevons aujourd'hui: spirale, démesurée où l'humanité gravite dans cette ascension éternelle.<sup>21</sup>

As Henri Loyrette points out in *Lieux de mémoire*, for many the Tower represented a simple equation: 'tour Eiffel=République=triomphe du progrès'.<sup>22</sup> Edouard Lockroy, Minister of Commerce and then of Public Education and Fine Arts in the 1880s, was well positioned to speak to this equation. In his preface to Monod's official report, he writes of the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889 that:

... pour remplir le but, il fallait que cette Exposition réussît d'une manière éclatante, qu'elle attirât l'attention du monde entier, qu'elle ne ressemblât en rien ni à ce qu'on avait vu dans le passé, ni à ce qu'on venait de voir dans les pays voisins, soit en Belgique, soit en Angleterre; qu'elle se distinguât non seulement par un aspect particulier, mais encore par une organisation administrative et financière nouvelle; qu'elle laissât une trace, et, s'il était possible, qu'il en sortît une grande œuvre, une sorte de monument intellectuel, pareil à la Grande Encyclopédie du XIXe siècle, pour en éterniser le souvenir.<sup>23</sup>

The 'organisation administrative et financière' is significant, since it draws attention to the Tower as a conscious and programmatic expression of contemporary Republicanism, echoed in the contracts for its construction and exploitation, and in the symbolism of a multitude of parts working together in an integrated and harmonious way, for the benefit of the whole, for progress, and for the future of France.<sup>24</sup> This, too, is evident in the discourse around the *Exposition Universelle* more generally, since the congregation of experts, the dispersal of knowledge around the

[cambridge.org/fulltext\\_content/supplementary/urban\\_icons\\_companion/atlas/content/07\\_monnet.htm](http://cambridge.org/fulltext_content/supplementary/urban_icons_companion/atlas/content/07_monnet.htm).

21 Victor Hugo's position is here described by Edouard Lockroy. See E. Lockroy, 'Preface', in E. Monod, *L'Exposition Universelle de 1889*, vol. 1 (Paris, Dentu, 1890), p. xxv.

22 H. Loyrette, 'La Tour Eiffel', in P. Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, vol. 3 (Paris, Gallimard Quarto, 1997), p. 4280.

23 Lockroy, p. xvii.

24 See M.R. Levin, 'The Eiffel Tower revisited', *The French Review*, 62: 6 (May 1989), p. 1058.

world and throughout France, and the celebration of labour are all similarly evoked. Lockroy concludes his preface by saying that

[u]ne Exposition universelle est une totalisation: l'esprit humain arrête une minute son labeur et considère le chemin parcouru, comme un voyageur retourne la tête pour regarder la pente déjà gravie. C'est un moment de détente où les pensées se condensent, où les forces se renouvellent. Les hommes admirent leurs conquêtes et se donnent la main. Un grand souffle de fraternité passe sur leurs fronts.<sup>25</sup>

Posters promoting the *Exposition* made use of these aspirations to frame the locus of the event, with flags suggesting France and the world, and the monumentalisation of 'le travail'. Visual representations of the Eiffel Tower under construction similarly emphasise this phenomenon. Take, for example, figure 14 of Gaston Tissandier's *La Tour de 300 mètres*, Poyet's 'vue d'ensemble d'une des grues de montage'.<sup>26</sup> This image emphasises the order and harmonious integration of activities in a futuristic framing of new angles and materials. The intersection of straight lines and curves frames labour and transport, as well as privileging ideas of vision, direction and ascension. Tools are raised in effort, people are looking or pointing upwards, and cranes, pulleys and cables are hoisting the Tower's components.

Much like other construction projects of nineteenth-century Paris, the representation of process figured in the project's staged incompletions, engineering prowess and manual labour was a subject of choice for photographers and illustrators alike, reinforcing the ideological message of progress and liberal democracy. In many of these images of the Eiffel Tower, precariousness is preferred to grounded perspectives, emphasising simultaneously the heady risks of innovation and human ascent — images that will be echoed in 1930, with representations of construction crews working on the Empire State Building, precariously but fraternally perched on beams above the Manhattan skyline.

This 'totalisation' is, in sociological terms, a way of framing France in 1889. Framing is a social construction of a social phenomenon, usually developed by political or social movements, actors or organisations, and in concert with mass media. The *Exposition Universelle* was a condensed opportunity to engage in such construction, facilitating selective influence over the individual's perception of meaning, and creating

25 Lockroy, p. xxv.

26 Tissandier, p. 29, fig. 14.

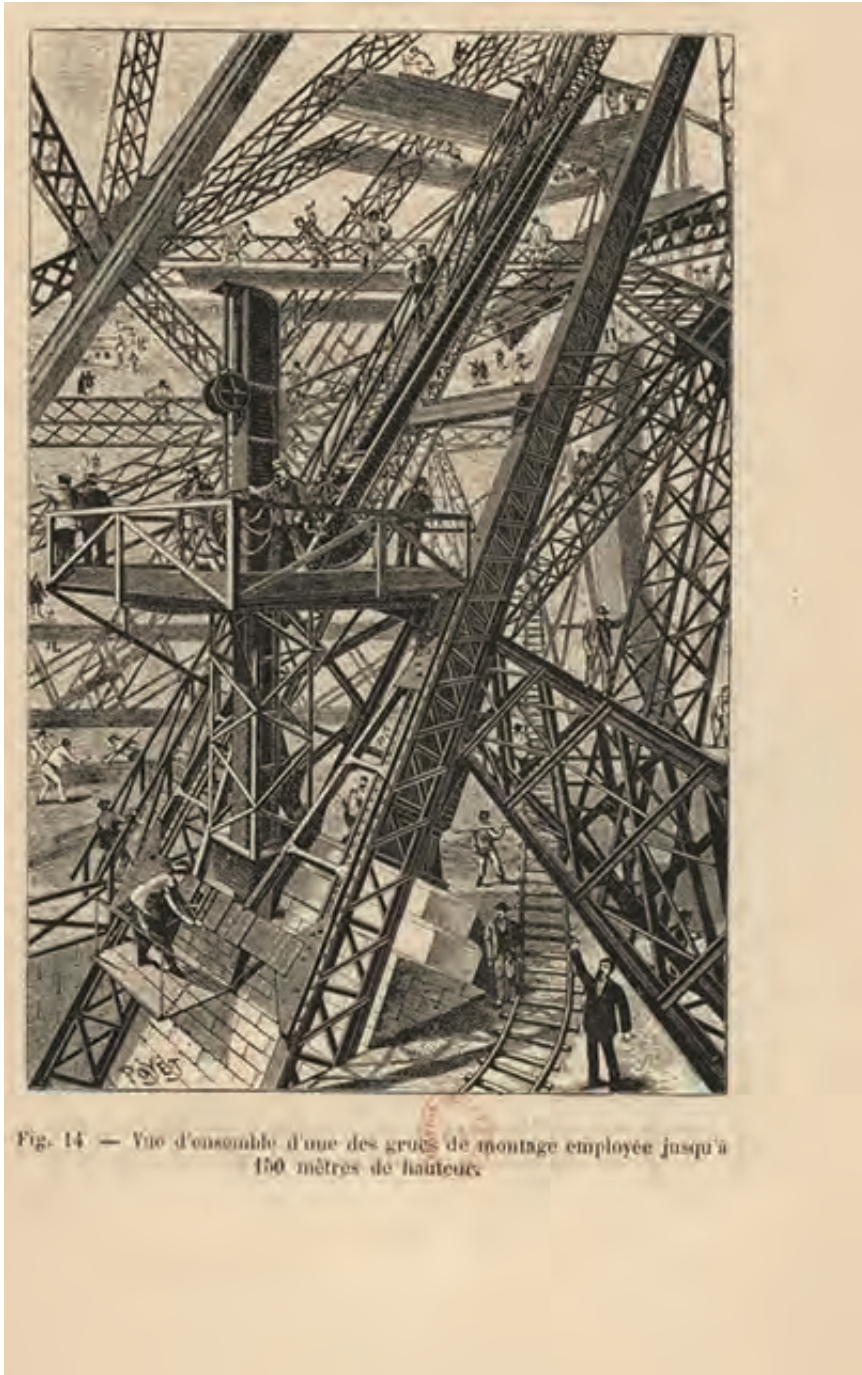


Figure 6.1: Émile Poyet, *Vue d'ensemble d'une des grues de montage employée jusqu'à 150 mètres d'hauteur*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Gallica. Public domain.

both frames in thought — mental representations, interpretations and simplifications of reality — and frames in communication — conduits for those frames to be communicated between actors.<sup>27</sup> In both the rhetoric of the 1889 *Exposition*, and in its scientific manifestation of progress and the celebration of labour, the framing is consistent, reinforcing particular interpretations. In other words, it offers a schema of interpretation, using icons, stereotypes, anecdotes and other social performances through which individuals understood and responded to events, and thus invested meaning in those events and their symbols.

Whilst the official reports and the *Guide bleu* might constitute a version of official discourse relating to the Tower and its position in the *Exposition*, another text, published in 1895, gives us some insight into how the Tower developed in the popular imagination: Georges d'Auzouville's brief play entitled *La Comédie sur la Tour Eiffel, fantaisie*. The play has a cast of sixteen: a drunken Englishman, William Plumpudding, who has determined to end his life on the first platform with a revolver; M. Prudhomme and his son, aged eight or nine; a couple who argue, she from below, he from above, and then divorce (the *loi Naquet* was passed in 1884); two pickpockets; a family from the Auvergne, les Chabrouillas; M. Leblanc and M. Lenoir, who enter and leave arguing vigorously about the merits of the Tower; a professor of astronomy and his two students; and finally a security guard, who works on the first platform. The play offers eighteen scenes and ends with a musical number. Each scene frames a type of visitor, comically organising received ideas about the Tower, stereotypes from the world and the 'provinces', spectatorship and spectacle, and science.

So it is that William Plumpudding swigs whisky between bursts of *français* (a stock character in French representations of the Eiffel Tower), as he tries to build up courage to shoot himself. Before he ends it all, though, he wants to take one final look at Paris from the Tower and, captivated by the sublime beauty of the sights, determines that he must continue to live, exiting to go and eat dinner at the Palais-Royal, as Prudhomme and *filz* enter. Prudhomme insists that his son, Clodomir, remove his hat out of respect for country and progress:

Vous n'avez pas compris, mon fils? Je vous répète de vous découvrir. Quand le génie humain habite quelque part, j'entends que le fils de M. Prudhomme sache lui rendre hommage. (Il lui enlève son képi). Très bien. Maintenant,

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27 J.N. Druckman, 'The implications of framing effects for citizen competence', *Political Behavior* 23: 3 (2001), pp. 225-56.



regardez et admirez. Seulement. N'oubliez pas que du haut de cette tour vous avez comme une vision de la grandeur de la patrie.

Clodomir (*regardant par dessus la balustrade sans faire attention à ce que lui dit son père*): Oh!

'Psitte! Psitte! Pas d'enthousiasme aussi bruyant. Le silence, voyez-vous mon fils, est la meilleure forme de l'admiration. Ici nous sommes dans un temple; on examine et on se tait.'

Clodomir: 'Oh! Oh! Oh!'<sup>28</sup>

Then, when Clodomir remarks on the 'tuyaux de cheminées and the becs de gaz', his father responds: 'Ce n'est pas bien. En face d'un spectacle aussi imposant que celui-ci, l'heure n'est pas à des mesquines préoccupations comme les vôtres', and he exhorts him to 'ouvrir son esprit à de grandes pensées et de nobles émotions', 'en contemplant cette tour incomparable, unique'.<sup>29</sup>

The dispute between the couple arises because of the question of whether 'ça valait la peine, l'ascension de la Tour Eiffel'. He contends the view is 'magnifique'; she replies 'je m'en moque'. The separation caused by his ascension is symbolic of two different ways of seeing, and while he contemplates his own view, she leaves to file for divorce. Similarly, after the episodes concerning the two pickpockets who steal from each of the visitors in turn and then from each other, Lenoir and Leblanc enter. Leblanc argues that Eiffel represents 'un génie sublime'; Lenoir retorts that he is 'un homme bien ordinaire'. They exchange views along these lines, and the dialogue alternates between a series of opposites — *incomparable/horrible; splendide/affreuse; je l'aime/je la hais; je la chéris/je la déteste; je l'adore/je l'exècre* — culminating in opposing descriptions of the Tower as 'le type de la grâce et de la hardiesse unies à la majesté/un clou planté la tête en bas; un mât de cocagne/de la négation absolue de toute poésie au profit de l'insipide mécanique'.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, two students, Léveillé and Malineau, sent by a professor of Astronomy, set up their telescope to observe 'l'autre monde'. So convinced is M. Copernic that there is life on another planet that he patiently awaits a sighting, sure that the honour of discovery will be his. The students play a trick on him, placing a maggot on the lens of the telescope. The maggot's movement is noted second by second,

28 G. d'Auzouville, *La Comédie sur la Tour Eiffel, fantaisie* (Paris, Vic et Amat, 1895), p. 8.

29 d'Auzouville, p. 10.

30 d'Auzouville, scène IX, pp. 41-5.



and its sighting recorded as a 'gigantesque reptile', playing on the interest around the size and scale of objects when viewed from the Tower. The play ends with the *gardien* counting the ways in which he is fortunate as a result of his employment at the Tower:

Que nonobstant la place de bibi est superlativement et itérativement chouette tout d'même! Et ... au jour d'aujourd'hui gardien chef de la Tour Eiffel, il est le particulier le plus veinard de tous les veinards de France et de Bretagne!

Car enfin 10 écus de solde par mois, un bel habit tout galonné avec une casquette idem, toute la journée des visites et, par conséquent, des pourboires, enfin par-dessus le marché, la position la plus élevée de la capitale, qui qu'à ça, je vous le demande, qui qu'à ça?

Aussi, vois-tu, ma p'tite tour, je t'aime. Je te chéris, je t'adore.<sup>31</sup>

D'Auzouville's play enacts different ways of seeing the Tower, making use of many of the dominant discourses we have seen in the literature about Eiffel's Tower; and it does so with both delight in caricature and comic energy. It also highlights the degree to which the discourses around the Eiffel Tower have become entrenched and the Tower's iconic status established. It further highlights the relationship between intellection as a way of viewing the city, as well as the sense of seeing as cliché.<sup>32</sup>

In this framing, metonymies acquire special significance. To return to the origin of icons for a moment, these were originally defined as memorial images of the deceased, made by early Christians and embraced as cult images and authentic copies of the original. Icons connected vision to touch, so that looking upon such an object resulted in the return of the visual ray in such a way that the worshipper's heart and mind were touched by the object of vision. In the case of the Eiffel Tower, ordinary and elite *citadins* and tourists participated in the creation of the 'myths' of the Tower by consuming and propagating print and visual media, and by circulating through and perceiving the city, both visually and, to use Giuliana Bruno's term, 'haptically'.<sup>33</sup> The Eiffel Tower becomes, in this circulation, a critical visual element in the construction of urban experience and identity, as well as in the construction of other, extra-urban developments (nation, economy, empire, transnational influence,

31 d'Auzouville, pp. 62-3.

32 See Monnet.

33 G. Bruno, *Atlas of emotion: Journeys in art, architecture, and film* (London, Verso, 2002). For Bruno, the haptic facilitates the shift between an exclusive emphasis on vision and other senses in their relations to space. See especially p. 65 and p. 178.

cultural and scientific supremacy, the spectacular, and so on). The notion of icon is of central importance since, in a way similar to framing, the icon condenses and reduces, transforming the experience of the city into knowledge and meaning through representation.

Phillip Ethington and Vanessa Schwartz's 'Urban icons project' has made a significant contribution to thinking in both urban history and visual culture. In a summary of the work done by scholars across a range of fields, Ethington and Schwartz propose a working definition of the icon, and particularly of urban icons, which is central to these arguments and so worth sharing in full. They contend that all icons

1. are graphic simplifications and condensations of meaning, distilling a range of ideas into a single representation and acting metonymically as a substitute for a multifaceted whole
2. circulate across semiotic forms and across media
3. are both singular and repeated
4. function as visual clichés, despite variation.

They further contend that urban icons

1. approximate the status of an ultimate or summary representation of a particular city
2. embed the materiality of experience but also de-territorialise it through the mobility and circulation of images
3. are 'visually noisy' attention-grabbers, addressed to a distracted viewer
4. carry the stamp of place and time, usually that of the icon's origin but often of its recasting in later historical moments
5. depend in part on size and location because these features contribute centrally to the quality of legibility.<sup>34</sup>

So it is, they argue, that 'the concept of an urban icon helps to forge links between the concrete spatiality of the city and the metaphoric spatiality of "imaginary landscapes"; between the material and the ideal; between the shapes on the ground and the shapes in the mind'.<sup>35</sup>

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34 Ethington and Schwartz, p. 13.

35 Ethington and Schwartz, pp. 9-10.

The organisation of the *Exposition Universelle*, and the monument that was designed to 'en éterniser le souvenir', as well as to iconise science, progress and nation, worked in concert with tourism, spectacle and its evolving mode of communication, the picture postcard. The first picture postcards in France (known as *Cartes Libonis*, after the illustrators and lithographer responsible for the image) were sold and sent from the Eiffel Tower in 1889.<sup>36</sup> Though the postcard evolved from the first Austrian government missive in 1869 to this *Libonis*, there is agreement that no single event contributed more to the development of this form of illustrated correspondence than the series of World Fairs and Expositions. In fact, the *Figaro* records that the 'innocent manie' of postcard-sending from the Eiffel Tower in 1889 resulted in special writing desks and post offices being established on the Tower in August of that year, and in over 56 000 postcards being sent in just three weeks that month. Once the *Libonis* featuring an illustration of the Tower were released, between 5000 and 6000 of these were sent each day, to locations around the world.<sup>37</sup> The first American picture postcards were similarly sent from the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, in 1893, where, 'in units of two at a time, the public could purchase ten different aspects of the *Exposition* from conveniently placed vending machines for the price of five cents a time'.<sup>38</sup>

While this implies the commercialisation of visual culture, not only in the form of the postcard, but also that of the souvenir, there are two dimensions that should retain our attention. The first is that writing *from* the Tower was secondary to writing *upon* the Tower — a phenomenon that remains.<sup>39</sup> The same *Figaro* columnist mentioned earlier (signing himself simply as 'Un Flâneur') reports early graffiti:

Promenez-vous sur la deuxième et troisième plate-forme de la Tour, et examinez les boiseries des constructions diverses qui y sont aménagées; il n'y en a pas une qui ne soit criblée d'inscriptions, —et si serrées que par endroits la couleur des murs ou des palissades a disparu sous le noirâtre tissu d'arabesques dont les couvrent les milliers et les milliers de signatures qui s'y juxtaposent et superposent depuis trois mois! ...

36 N. Schor, 'Cartes postales: Representing Paris 1900', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (Winter 1992), pp. 188-245.

37 'Les cartes postales de la Tour', *Le Figaro*, 103 (25 août 1889).

38 W. Dûval and V. Monahan, *Collecting postcards in colour: 1894-1914* (Poole, Blandford Press, 1978), p. 17.

39 Signs on the platforms read: 'La Tour Eiffel est un monument unique. Respectez-la. Pas de graffitis s'il vous plait'. See also G.N. Simpson, *Thresholds: Photo 101*, <http://www.thresholds.net/photo101>.

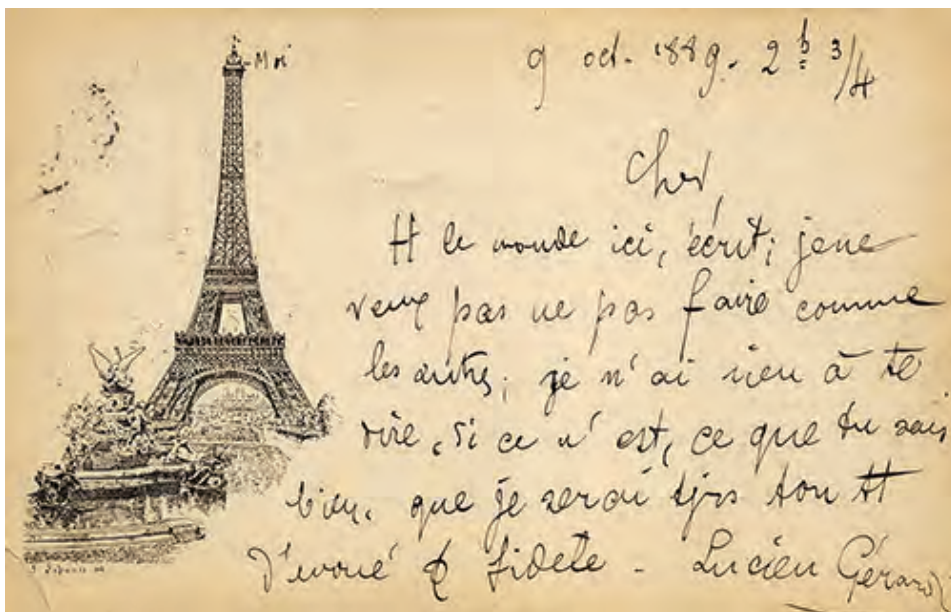


Figure 6.2: Neurdein, Carte Libonis, sent from the Eiffel Tower on October 9, 1889. Noël Courtaigne, leonc.free.fr. Public domain.

Mais il ne suffit pas que la postérité soit édifiée: il faut aussi que les contemporains soient avertis, et c'est pourquoi, après avoir 'gravé,' on veut 'écrire.'<sup>40</sup>

The writer links this phenomenon to a desire both to 'se déplacer dans le sens de la hauteur', and, once ascended, to leave a trace of one's passage upon the landscape — an action similar to carving one's name in a tree trunk at the top of a mountain. This double impulse is, in fact, framed by the picture postcard as object, experience and text. The act of leaving one's mark on the Tower (literally) is reproduced in the act of writing upon and signing an image of the Tower, which then circulates as a text of the experience. One sender of a *Libonis* draws attention to this in a paradoxical act of negation. First, signalling his presence at the top of the Tower with the word 'Moi', he then writes: 'Cher, Et le monde ici écrit; je ne veux pas ne pas faire comme eux; je n'ai rien à te dire si ce n'est ce que tu sais bien, que je serai tjrs ton tt dévoué et fidèle Lucien Gérard'.<sup>41</sup>

Note that, in this example and with all first postcards, one side was reserved for the message and image, the other for the address, so with the *Libonis* and other

<sup>40</sup> Simpson, *Thresholds: Photo 101*, <http://www.thresholds.net/photo101>.

<sup>41</sup> See this, and other Neurdein *Libonis*, at: <http://leonc.free.fr/histoire/neurdein/neurdein.htm>.

nineteenth-century picture postcards, the message was superimposed upon, limited by, and in competition with the image. It was not until 1903 that the postcard was reconceived. Naomi Schor draws attention to the significance of the division of the blank part of the card in two — one part for the address, one part for the message. This transformed the relationship between text and image, inverting the hierarchy, so that eventually the text is relegated to the side defined as verso, while the image occupied the recto surface.<sup>42</sup>

The signing and 'postcarding of Paris' is, then, both an act of individual affirmation and identification (with the object pictured), and an assertion (or promotion) of French national identity and civilisation. Furthermore, the taxonomic urge that the imaging of the capital represents (in terms of the production of picture postcards) is already present in a city 'pre-articulated by power' — the *quartiers* or *arrondissements*, the streets aligned, and the monuments landmarked.<sup>43</sup> As the postcard develops, it pictures Paris according to the established norms of bourgeois society and according to an image of modern Parisian monumental façades and interiors. This is a Paris which reproduces in photographic form the views and pursuits already immortalised by the Impressionists, and which captures, as Naomi Schor has argued, 'the dominant discourse on Paris produced by Paris ... a discourse clearly inflected by the politics of class, civic and national privilege'.<sup>44</sup> The framing of Paris for postcards is thus highly selective, and centered on (a predetermined notion of) leisure and spectacle.

Now, in the Postmodern cultural studies framework, visual tourist destination images and icons are a form of 'text' representing the world. These texts are arranged into discourses that embrace particular combinations of narratives, concepts and ideologies, and that form connects circles of representation, or cultural circuits. Edmund Carpenter identified the impulse in 1972:

An American tourist ... does more than see the Eiffel Tower. He photographs it exactly as he knows it from posters. Better still, he has someone photograph him in front of it. Back home, that photograph reaffirms his identity within that scene.<sup>45</sup>

42 Schor, p. 212. See also C. Bourgeois and M. Melot, *Les Cartes postales: Nouveau guide du collectionneur* (Paris, Editions Atlas, 1983), p. 28.

43 These words from Philippe Hamon are here quoted and translated by Schor, p. 215.

44 Schor, p. 219.

45 E. Carpenter, *Oh, what a blow that phantom gave me!* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and

As David Crouch and Nina Lübbren have shown, 'the visual cultures of tourism contextualise representations, prioritise destinations, direct or suggest ways of seeing, and provide points of departure'.<sup>46</sup> With the Eiffel Tower, as with some other monuments (the Musée d'Orsay or the Louvre, say), the site may also constitute 'sight'. Once we problematise 'sightseeing', as the Eiffel Tower did from the outset, then, the borders between forms of visual culture and spectacle become ambiguous. Desire is engaged by visual attraction. What we consume are sights/signs that are prescribed to structure our experience of space, culture and spectacle. Think of this as a complex interplay of commercial posters, scientific discourse, literary and artistic representations, and photographic records, combined with an assimilation of these into everyday life and individual experience in ways mediated by tourism, popular culture and more individualised circuits of communication (like the postcard).

Indeed, there is a conflation of the public and the private that occurs in this process, too. McCannell has suggested, for example, that visual culture is constructed to deliver to the tourist what is understood to be 'authentic', even though this may be 'a staged authenticity'. These sites/sights then become markers in what he terms 'constructed recognition'.<sup>47</sup> In this way, the individual experiences the site/sight as an authentication of self in relation to some preconceived notion or feelings about what the icon represents for her/him personally. This results in a hermeneutic circle, in which tourists track down and recapture images, and then display them at home to represent their authenticated version of images seen prior to departure.

This leads to a proliferation of representations, though, as Crouch and Lübbren point out, visual representations chosen by a tourist often reproduce the perspective of images already seen, so that 'the "kodakisation" of tourism includes the clearly marked site from which to see, the direction of the view, even the framing in a circuit of visual culture'.<sup>48</sup> Tourists pose in positions that capture the views that may have prompted their desire to visit, and record that experience as 'real'. And because representations of the Eiffel Tower run the gamut from mass-produced kitsch trinket to original painting, ownership of the icon is both accessible and yet still

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Winston, 1972), pp. 6-7.

46 D. Crouch and N. Lübbre (eds), *Visual culture and tourism* (Oxford and New York, Berg, 2003), p. 7.

47 D. MacCannell, *The tourist: A new theory of the leisure class* (Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1999), pp. 123-4, quoted in Crouch and Lübbren, p. 9.

48 Crouch and Lübbren, p. 9.

uniquely inscribed as high art — and successive representations generate ever more desire to be inventive (and referential). Indeed, the representation of the Eiffel Tower in modern art further validates it as an icon, and gives it a privileged position on the tourist circuit. John Urry has argued compellingly that culture is appropriated into such sites/sights, and that, as a result, the power of visual culture is significantly increased and becomes associated with a sense of viewing as 'mastery'.<sup>49</sup> As Crouch and Lübbren suggest, then, 'photographs become a scopically constructed form of visual culture whose power is to convey and reproduce the hegemony of the visual'.<sup>50</sup>

In *Funny Face*, the 1957 Stanley Donen film starring Fred Astaire, Audrey Hepburn and Kay Thompson, the musical number 'Bonjour Paris', presents an archetypal American tourist experience, acting as a picture postcard from the city, framing celebrated sights with the refrain 'Is it real? Am I here?'<sup>51</sup> Splitting the frame into three individuated but predetermined itineraries and alternative perspectives, the film offers a different cultural and urban panorama (from window shopping to Jean-Paul Sartre), and each leads inexorably ('there's something missing') to the Champ de Mars, and to a common ascent of the Tower. The scene from *Funny Face* illustrates perfectly the way in which a hermeneutic circle operates with respect to representations of the Eiffel Tower — a circle in which images are produced, projected, perceived, propagated and perpetuated. In such a model, each successive representation reinforces others that have come before, often adding another layer of symbolic meaning to the image, and anchoring these to a central visual stereotype or icon. This becomes, then, a circuitous process of cultural production and reproduction, with viewers actively participating in the process as promoters of the icon and its ideologies.

Barthes, too, refers to the Eiffel Tower as a 'symbole *universel* de Paris' as 'présente au monde entire'.<sup>52</sup> Although Barthes evokes the role of science and Eiffel's statement about the Tower's utility, he goes on to say that 'les raisons utilitaires, si ennoblies qu'elles soient par le mythe de la Science, ne sont rien en comparaison de la grande fonction imaginaire qui, elle, sert aux hommes à être proprement humains'. Indeed, he argues that the Tower should not be rationalised under the rubric of use,

49 J. Urry, *The tourist gaze: Leisure and travel in contemporary societies* (London, Sage, 1990).

50 Crouch and Lübbren, p. 10.

51 *Funny Face*, directed by S. Donen (United States, Paramount, 1957). To view the clip of 'Bonjour, Paris!' see [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrIjB\\_dyP0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrIjB_dyP0).

52 Barthes, p. 7, emphasis added.



and rather that it must escape reason. In this construction of the icon, the object of science and sight is returned 'sous la forme d'un grand rêve baroque qui touche naturellement aux bords de l'irrationnel'.<sup>53</sup> As Barthes continues his argument, the panoramic topography of Paris becomes a layering of history and culture, a literary landscape which enables him to engage in what Ian Fletcher calls, in a quite different context, 'aesthetic time-travelling'<sup>54</sup>, and to make the shift from the visual (a bird's eye view) to intellection: from the description of the experience of the Eiffel Tower to what he calls 'concrete abstraction' and 'decipherment'. Barthes's emphasis is on the readability of the visual and of the experience, upon detachment as an aesthetic condition affording privileged insight.

We know this to be a common motif in nineteenth-century French literature and art — the 'high view', as Prendergast refers to it, trumping almost every other perspective.<sup>55</sup> Felicia Miller has also identified this as a common nineteenth-century urban motif, beginning with the paralytic cousin in a late Hoffmann story (published in 1822), *The cousin's corner window*. Here, the central character, the cousin, is a physically immobile, aerial *flâneur*, described by Walter Benjamin as holding an attitude of superiority which is in direct relation to his aerial view, who 'would like, as he admits, to initiate his visitor into the "principles of the art of seeing"'.<sup>56</sup> In the end, in literature as in science, distance becomes an overall stance — one of detachment for the purposes of observation, most obviously characterised by Baudelaire in the figure of the *flâneur* amidst the crowd, in which there is heightened capacity for aesthetic perceptions of specifically urban experiences.

The Eiffel Tower is positioned, as Barthes rightly underscores, to facilitate perception, understanding and a certain enjoyment of the city, which goes beyond sensation and reveals the *structure* of the experience. The Tower is, for Barthes, both a symbol and facilitator of this apprehension of structure — 'un corps de formes intelligentes'.<sup>57</sup> The status of the Tower as icon is connected to its size and place — to the wholeness of its representation (and the vision it offers) in the first instance. So

53 Barthes, p. 8.

54 I. Fletcher, *Romantic mythologies*, (New York, Barnes & Noble, 1967), p. 180.

55 C. Prendergast, *Paris and the nineteenth century* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA, Blackwell Publishers, 1992), pp. 46-73.

56 W. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, Schocken Books, 1969), p. 173.

57 Barthes, p. 11.

it is that those millions of interconnected pieces, symbolically harmonised in 1889 into an iconic form, become, like the Tower's complex meanings, simplified by line and framing. The repetition of the form means that, over time, it can be ever more simplified, or fragmented, and yet remain recognisably itself.

This phenomenon is perhaps best exemplified by Robert Delaunay's choice of the Eiffel Tower as a focus for formal experimentation in his painting between 1910 and 1912. Virginia Spate has shown that this series of paintings was executed in the country, and so from memory, thus freeing the artist to concentrate on formal considerations.<sup>58</sup> In an interesting echo of the Hoffmann story, Cendrars recounts that the view from the window of the hotel where he was bedridden as a result of an accident was particularly arresting for the painter: 'Delaunay venait presque tous les jours me tenir compagnie. Il était toujours hanté par la Tour et la vue que l'on avait de ma fenêtre l'attirait beaucoup. Souvent il faisait des croquis ou apportait sa boîte de couleurs'.<sup>59</sup>

Eric Robertson has pointed out that, 'though the series begins with representations from a single perspective, from 1910 the Tower becomes the starting point of experiments in fragmentation and dynamics, with colour schematised into simplified contrasting patterns'.<sup>60</sup> Increasingly, Delaunay focuses upon the framing, using the window motif, to explore in graphic ways the function of the frame, or *parergon*, discussed by Derrida in *La Vérité en peinture*.<sup>61</sup> As Robertson has shown, in the case of Delaunay's *La Tour aux rideaux*, the curtains and the window draw attention to the very act of framing, and so to the self-referential nature of the work — linking 'the most distant background with the immediate foreground', and creating 'ambiguity between the representational depth of the image and the actual flatness of the canvas'.<sup>62</sup> The frame of the window emphasises the vertical lines of the curtains,

58 V. Spate, *Orphism: The evolution of non-figurative painting in Paris, 1920-1914* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 172, quoted in E. Robertson, 'Painting windows: Robert Delaunay, Blaise Cendrars, and the search for simultaneity', *Modern Language Review*, 90: 4 (October 1995), p. 884.

59 B. Cendrars, 'La Tour Eiffel, in 'Peintres', *Aujourd'hui, Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7 (Paris, Denoël, 1960-80), p. 196, quoted in Robertson, p. 887.

60 Robertson, p. 884.

61 J. Derrida, *La Vérité en peinture* (Paris, Flammarion, 1978).

62 Robertson, pp. 885-6.

which, in their turn, frame the soaring lines of the Tower itself, and all within the framed compositional space that is the canvas.

If the window and the Eiffel Tower offer 'an auto-referential metaphor of Delaunay's own progression towards abstraction' — a mediation of Chevreul's nineteenth-century scientific theories of colour, or what Delaunay describes as the 'premier germe de la Couleur pour la couleur'<sup>63</sup> — the postcard, and the photographed situation, frame a self-referential representation which, similarly, are neither fully integrated into the visual text nor entirely independent of it. Delaunay's is, nevertheless, a privileged view, an expert eye that makes seeing a science or an art, directed at a play of meanings and interpretation. Retracing the aesthete's position, which rejects the useful or representative in favour of the purely aesthetic, Barthes, too, insists on the way in which the Tower's function was inverted, slipping from rational to irrational, from the pragmatic to the useless and purely gratuitous, recreating, as Felicia Miller argues with respect to Delaunay, the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* for a modern audience.<sup>64</sup>

Although Barthes's Tower is accessible — friendly, even — it remains the locus of privileged exchange if the seeing of it is understood as being of a particular kind. Barthes identifies 'friends' as being connected: not just any city dwellers, but friends who see the Tower. This can be understood as a way of mapping the city and connecting the pieces of the panorama, but it is also a shared experience of the visual, and one revealing of the circuits of visual (and other) culture born along with the Tower. While Barthes accepts the universal appeal of the Tower, he nevertheless sees it as an intellectually transformational experience: 'transformer le rite touristique en aventure du regard et de l'intelligence'.<sup>65</sup> There is no question that, in its nineteenth-century form, this is how the *Guide bleu* presents the *Exposition Universelle*, but the Tower's real iconic power is not in this intellection, nor in the privileged scientific understanding of its uses and merits, nor in its aesthetic possibilities. These are, rather, the ongoing representational manifestations of the 'signe pur — vide, presque — [qui] veut tout dire'.<sup>66</sup>

63 See Robertson, pp. 886-7.

64 F. Miller, 'A view from the tower: Barthes and the aesthetic tradition', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 20: 1/2 (November 1985), p. 85.

65 Barthes, p. 8.

66 Barthes, p. 7, emphasis in the original.

The fact that the Tower has an enduring significance for ordinary urbanites and global tourism alike, for the way in which people experience Paris, and express their experience in unmediated forms, perceiving and circulating ideas (and clichés) about the city as they live it, is what sustains its iconic fascination. In its graphic simplification, the Eiffel Tower can distill ideas into a single representation and act metonymically as a substitute for the multifaceted whole, circulating across semiotic forms and media, and functioning both as singularly insightful and as repeated cliché. 'Rien de plus beau que le lieu commun', as Baudelaire said.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, in the way it is cut loose from its Parisian/French context, with replicas in Disney's Epcot Center, in Paris, Texas, Las Vegas, and in China's World Parks, for example, the Postmodern predominance of this urban icon is confirmed. Replication and representation problematise and reinforce the Tower's iconic status. In *Simulacra and simulation*, Baudrillard suggests that, in the hyper-reality of pure simulacra, there is no more imitation, duplication, parody: we lose sight of 'the real' and our confidence in referents declines.<sup>68</sup> The replica Eiffel Towers offer an experience of visiting 'real' places as a substitute for actually visiting them. However, these simulations are icons of otherness whose original ideological messages are reinvested in places — Texas, Las Vegas, Beijing, Dubai — where global capitalism and Postmodern culture have found new representations that take to new heights (in the case of the projected Eiffel Tower in Dubaiworld, quite literally) the replication of the visual and the haptic. They deterritorialise monuments and their meanings for the purposes of consumption — thus creating an 'image-commodity'.<sup>69</sup>

For Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism is the fragmentation of society by capitalism. This is a fragmentation that leads to the disorientation of the individual:

[T]he latest mutation in space — postmodern hyperspace — has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate

67 C. Baudelaire, 'Hygiène', in C. Pichois (ed.), *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris, Gallimard, 1975), p. 670.

68 J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1981).

69 The term is David Harvey's. See *The condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1989), p. 302. The 2004 film *The World* illustrates this perfectly. Young workers in costume move through the park's replicas, and in and out of a Postmodern reality, which embraces the simulated sites and animated cyberspace. Even the trailer for the film frames these co-existent spaces and, in its final image, juxtaposes the simulacrum of the Eiffel Tower with a different (but resonant) kind of labour and reality, one beyond the confines of the park.

itself, to organise its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. This alarming disjunction ... can itself stand as symbol — of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individuals.<sup>70</sup>

Such fragmentation means that we are no longer able to perceive our social situation in all its complexity. While the dislocations of the Eiffel Tower fragment the intended hegemonic experience of the *Exposition Universelle*, the performances of the World Parks in China — whether in the costumes, or the Bollywood-style cultural spectacles, or the replica monuments — are actually strikingly similar to the notion of the World Fair. These parks enable Chinese citizens to experience global tourism through simulation — by foot, electric car or simulated air travel. As Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright have pointed out,

the world as created through simulation is, of course, always the product of someone's labour. In the film [*The World*] the low-paid workers who come from poor rural areas, or who are brought in from other countries, such as indentured labourers from Russia, keep the simulation afloat. *The World* [the park] coexists with a world of industrial pollution, poverty, and human relationships that makes up the lives of these workers and the people who visit. In reflecting on the postmodern aspects of contemporary societies and our ease with interacting in and experiencing things within simulated environments, we are also tapping into issues of space, global culture, fantasy, and communication technologies.<sup>71</sup>

There is in this framing a new 'totalisation' that the 1899 *Exposition Universelle* prefigures in so many ways, and which the Tower continues to iconise, both in Paris and in Beijing. From the construction of the Tower to the scientific experiments conducted there, from d'Auzouville's comedy of caricature and the aesthetic and representational importance of the *tour de 300 mètres*, from self-referential abstraction to World Parks, the power of this sign is that it embeds the material nature of existence, but also de-territorialises it through the almost excessive mobility and circulation of images.

70 F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The cultural logic of late capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991), p. 229.

71 M. Sturken and L. Cartwright, *Practices of looking: An introduction to visual culture* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 310.

What visual culture, as a discipline, now enables us to envisage is a way of connecting these disparate but related projects in seeing. As Henri Loyrette puts it, 'C'est tout cela que nous célébrons dans la Tour, l'omniprésence et les constantes métamorphoses, la faculté d'attraper la mémoire d'un siècle, les petites choses comme les grandes, une chanson, un poème, un motif pour les peintres, un bibelot de mauvais gout, les fêtes et les guerres, trois fois rien'.<sup>72</sup> To be, as d'Auzouville's play comically points out, all things to all people. Barthes seems to identify the power of this experience when he writes that the Eiffel Tower 'matérialise une imagination', and that 'la Tour n'est pas trace, souvenir, bref culture, mais plutôt consommation immédiate d'une humanité rendue naturelle, celle de l'espace humain'.<sup>73</sup> Although the discipline of visual culture has made these elements more tangible, the texts and images across more than 120 years bear out the presence and prevalence of a hermeneutic circle centered on complex framings of a national icon, and on circuits of representation and communication that connect human experience at an 1889 World Fair in Paris to that of a World Park in Beijing.

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<sup>72</sup> Loyrette, p. 4290.

<sup>73</sup> Barthes, p. 8.

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# 7

## The return of Trauner: Late style in 1970s and 1980s French film design

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It is a truth universally acknowledged that set designers create the space in which films take place. But, as Alessio Cavallaro reminds us, set designers 'never simply replicate reality: they always involve the artificial creation of a world ... carefully selected to generate a particular aesthetic or mood that draws the audience into the story'.<sup>1</sup>

Hungarian-born production designer Alexandre Trauner (1906-93) fits neatly into this definition. Time and again, in his groundbreaking and highly evocative designs for a series of 1930s French Poetic Realist films — most notably *Le Quai des brumes* (1938), *Hôtel du nord* (1938) and *Le Jour se lève* (1939) — and his monumental, almost mythical sets for *Les Enfants du paradis* (1945) and *Les Portes de la nuit* (1946), Trauner created the visual and physical realm of the film and conceptualised sets consistent with the film's mood. Beyond the Hexagon, Trauner's abiding collaborations in Hollywood with directors like Howard Hawks, Orson Welles and, in particular, Billy Wilder (*The apartment* in 1960, *One, two, three* in 1961 and *Kiss me, stupid* in 1964) won him an Academy Award and the status as one of the post-war film industry's most influential and innovative production designers.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Cavallaro, *Setting the scene: Film design from Metropolis to Australia* (Melbourne, Australian Centre for the Moving Image, 2008), p. 4.

Trauner's designs in both these French and American contexts intertwined familiar iconography with stylistic and decorative markers of excess, and covered numerous genres and historical periods, be it biblical epic, Shakespeare adaptation or medieval allegory. Famously, in both France and the US, he distilled an image of Paris even more Parisian than Paris itself — his exemplary iconic representations of the city in *Les Enfants du paradis* (1945) and *Irma la douce* (1963) were uniquely his, and today remain a time capsule of the capital's architectural and fashion trends. Throughout his career, Trauner reiterated that the role of the production designer was critical in establishing a visual mood 'so that the spectator has an immediate grasp of the character's psychology'.<sup>2</sup> Somewhat self-effacingly, he also suggested that the best designer should simply 'suggérer des choses'.<sup>3</sup> Both these pronouncements — design-as-mirror and design-as-suggestion — consistently inflected his style. By distilling a visual concept from the thematic and psychological concerns of the screenplay, Trauner's skill was to appropriate realism and then simplify, stylise or accentuate it into an expressive, often highly memorable set of designs.

Yet there is also another story that needs to be told — Trauner's late career, in which he returned to France from the US in the mid-1970s to begin a third series of fruitful partnerships, this time with directors such as Joseph Losey, Luc Besson and Bertrand Tavernier. This chapter will concentrate on three of Trauner's Late French style films: *Monsieur Klein* (Losey, 1976), *Subway* (Besson, 1985), and *'Round midnight* (Tavernier, 1986). It will chart a continuity between Trauner's earlier work and these newer designs, and highlight how his creative methodology was incorporated into a new set of industrial and aesthetic contexts. Each of these films is set in Paris, and two of them are period films. All of them combine studio and location work, whether recreating the Vélodrome d'Hiver, the cavernous bowels of a metro station or a 1950s jazz club. Trauner's hyper-real production designs are reworked into a modern aesthetic of the spectacular, and underline the lasting importance of his decor in establishing mood and paraphrasing the narrative. For Trauner, the ideology of film design was clear: design was rarely neutral, unmediated or impersonal, for there was

2 'Alexandre Trauner interviewed by Carole Weisweiler & Annette Insdorf', *Film Comment*, 18: 1 (1982), p. 34. Many of Trauner's interviews, especially towards the end of his career, were conducted in English.

3 Quoted in P. Carcassonne and F. Cuel, 'Alexandre Trauner', *Cinématographe*, 76, 1982, p. 13.

always a willed compliance between the designer and the final aesthetic or functional demands of the narrative.

This late style Trauner has formal consistencies with his earlier work, and highlights a remarkable professional dependability. Perhaps most noticeably, his work reinscribes the importance of decor in the production process which had been gradually supplanted by the French New Wave film-makers of the 1960s. Trauner's work, and the combination of studio and exterior decor, continues to have a lasting impact on the amount of 'design' needed to tell a story.

### Late style

I'm borrowing the term 'late style' from Edward Said, who, in a series of posthumously published lectures, developed the idea of late style to define a range of different artistic endeavours produced late in an artist's career that are characterised, not by serenity or harmony, but by intransigence and contradiction. At the heart of late style, Said noted, is 'an insistence ... not on mere ageing, but on an increasing sense of apartness and exile and anachronism'.<sup>4</sup> Some artists, he argued, like Shakespeare, Rembrandt or Bach, find a 'new spirit of reconciliation and serenity' in last or late works — works that 'crown a lifetime of aesthetic endeavour'<sup>5</sup>; while other late artistic works are on the contrary unresolved and difficult. Ultimately, late style is the quality possessed by a work of art created late in an artist's career, after decades of creative output, which suggests not closure and resolution but rather the 'nonharmonious, nonserene tension'<sup>6</sup> of an artist renewed with youthful energy in the face of imminent mortality.

The applicability of Said's term to Trauner's career is a potentially productive one. When we speak of the 'late phase' of a set designer like Trauner, we might perhaps imagine that this period was one imbued with a dynamic sense of artistic rejuvenation and creativity, in which long-cherished projects, ideas and design approaches were finally commissioned and incorporated into his work. Conversely, Trauner's late period might conceivably allow him to merge darker, grittier elements into his visual palette, choosing assignments that infer a less accessible and more distant designed world. This late style might also be attributed to encroaching illness

4 E. Said, *On late style* (London, Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 17.

5 Said, pp. 6-7.

6 Said, p. 7.

or the debilitating effects of old age.<sup>7</sup> Yet it seems unlikely that any changes in attitude towards film design by Trauner later in his life (he died in 1993, aged eighty-seven) can be attributed to sickness. Trauner certainly never made any mention of illness, retirement or impending death in any of his interviews, but since he worked well into his seventies (he turned eighty during post-production on *'Round midnight*), it is tempting to read his later designs as a definitive attempt to both secure his reputation as an 'artist' and corroborate his own relevance within a film industry that had spent almost three decades moving away from building entire film sets in studios to shooting on location in the streets and cafés of Paris. In this sense, Trauner's late style is in fact a recycling of an earlier style, redeployed later in life: a circular trajectory that links all the parts of his career.

Billy Wilder once noted that Trauner would always read the script before beginning the design stage 'not simply to see what sets will be needed, but to understand what the film is about: characters, plot, atmosphere, even what music is appropriate'.<sup>8</sup> This is both the epitome and the end point of Trauner's late style: collaborative, highly trained, receptive to the exigencies of the narrative and other elements of the *mise en scène*, and forever willing to manipulate the visually orthodox to create something at once uncompromisingly true to life and oddly Surrealist.

## On decor

Before we look more closely at Trauner's late style, a brief overview of the 'Trauner touch' and the context in which it developed is necessary. Broadly speaking, the French film design tradition that preceded the *plein air* spontaneity of the Nouvelle Vague was a form of 'concentrated design'. Rather than having the camera drift arbitrarily across sets, entering and withdrawing from individual rooms or urban spaces purely to showcase the sturdiness of the set, designers tended to confine a film's action to one or two specific sets in which all the constituent elements of the decor 'talked'.

7 As Susan Tomes reminds us, 'lateness' is a problematic concept 'that in most cases can only be known retrospectively. It's easy to look back at what turned out to be someone's final works and label them "late", but to the individual artist they may have been just the next thing they happened to write, with plans for lots more. The artists would not have known which period of their lives they were in, unless they were both old and ill'. See S. Tomes, '*On late style* by Edward W. Said', *The Independent*, 19 May 2006, [www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews](http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews) (accessed 1 January 2014).

8 A. Trauner, *Alexandre Trauner: Cinquante ans de cinéma* (Paris, Cinémathèque Française and Flammarion, 1986), n.p.



It was this narrativising tendency of decor that Trauner excelled at, in the sense that his set designs represent a discourse of their own, producing a fascinating dialogue with other elements of the *mise en scène*, such as framing, lighting, costume and editing. Take the factory scene in *Le Jour se lève*. Director Marcel Carné's camera tracks alongside four anonymous workers, each protected from the deafening noise and the swirling sand and dust by rubber suits and helmets, and comes to rest on the film's hero, François (Jean Gabin). Carné avoids any editing: the tracking shot lasts for nearly half a minute, and the medium-shot of François at work almost as long. Here, costume, sound, (non-) editing and cinematography all work in close harmony with Trauner's built set to create 'meaning': this is a dehumanising workplace; as well as the noise and the protective suits, workers drink milk to keep their lungs lubricated against the deadly effect of the sand in their lungs.

Trauner's own design methodology fits consistently within this narrativising, paraphrasing tradition. In their influential study of film design, Charles and Mirella Jona Affron categorise set designs according to various degrees of 'design intensities'. Their design taxonomy contains five categories — 'denotation', 'punctuation', 'embellishment', 'artifice' and 'narrative' — with film sets conforming to one or more of these qualities. The Affrons place Trauner at the embellishment level, defining this type of decor as '[v]erisimilitudinous yet unfamiliar and intentionally arresting; embellishing sets insist on values that are highly determining; they oblige the spectator to read design as a specific necessity of the narrative'.<sup>9</sup> Trauner's sets move away from the essentially denotative — that is, sets that serve as descriptive indicators of place, temporality and genre — towards a more stylised, narrativised design. Many of these Trauner-designed films contained scenes in which the sets paraphrase the narrative. Thus the apartment block in *Le Jour se lève*, the bridge in *Hôtel du nord*, the Boulevard du Crime in *Les Enfants du paradis*, the castle in *Les Visiteurs du soir* and the metro station in *Les Portes de la nuit* are all impressive examples of this prominent, interventionist set design.

It is worth recalling that Marcel Carné directed all of these films. The relationship between director and set designer was a fruitful one, for Carné would frequently ask Trauner and the film's design team to sit in on script development meetings and encouraged them to make suggestions, adjustments or amendments to

<sup>9</sup> C. and M.J. Affron, *Sets in motion: Art direction and film narrative* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1995), pp. 82-3.

the film's overall visual strategy.<sup>10</sup> Trauner's authority within the French industry in the 1930s and 1940s stemmed from the fact that he was frequently the first person to visualise the 'look' of a production, and was called upon at a very early stage to help realise Carné's initial vision. This stable director-designer nucleus worked doubly: the director could have the designer close at hand during the pre-production and filming process, and the designer was encouraged to comment on blocking and camera movement as the director developed the script. Trauner did not have complete autonomy; rather, he worked closely and collaboratively with the director to design the optimum narrative space. This became a set of working practices that Trauner adopted across his whole career, in various national and industrial circumstances.

Another key element of the Trauner style was simplicity: designs would be stripped down to their essential elements in order to highlight the symbolic properties of that which remained. Trauner always felt that any designer's best work should resemble 'le travail d'un sculpteur qui consiste à éliminer ... Il faut montrer juste les éléments qui sont nécessaires pour la compréhension et qui peuvent être variés, apporter de l'inattendu, mais un inattendu que les gens doivent accepter comme vrai'.<sup>11</sup> This insistence upon minimalism and visual sobriety implies that those objects that we do see in a Trauner-designed film are automatically flagged as crucial to the narrative. Instead of an excessive incorporation of props, objects or other decor fragments that might 'easily jam the clean development of the narrative with semantic static'<sup>12</sup>, the flow of the narrative is unimpeded, and the film's design scheme becomes eminently 'readable'.

Trauner's best work in France in the 1930s and 1940s, the US in the 1950s and 1960s, and back in France for his late-style period in the 1970s and 1980s was characterised by a predominance of what we might call liminal sets. These are often extremely large sets that enclose and demarcate the fictional world and also stand as the narrative's organising image, the 'figure' standing for the narrative itself. To the aforementioned metaphoric spaces of Trauner's French Poetic Realist films (the bridge, the metro station, the apartment block), we can add the office building in *The apartment*, the hilltop palace in *The man who would be king* and the Great Pyramid in

10 Trauner collaborated with Carné nine times between 1936 and 1951.

11 M. Ciment and I. Jordan, 'Entretien avec Alexandre Trauner (1)', *Positif*, 223, October 1979, p. 8.

12 C.S. Tashiro, "'Reading" Design in *The go-between*', *Cinema Journal*, 33:1 (1993), p. 18.

*Land of the pharaohs* as examples of designs that construct a teeming, vibrant spatial arena and anchor protagonists to a particular place, time and genre. These liminal sets that bookend Trauner-designed films frame the narrative, even 'become' the narrative. It is as if they are almost too large for the narrative to contain, waiting to burst beyond the parameters of the frame and take on a life of their own. By virtue, then, of their simplicity and stripped-back, readable style, Trauner's sets move paradoxically towards a series of hefty, monumental designs.

### Trauner in France ... again

Trauner's late style marks the end point of extensive criss-crossing between different film-making environments, from the autonomous and partnership-driven industry in 1930s France to the hierarchical and commercially driven 1950s Hollywood system, and then back again to a post-New Wave France inclined towards the *cinéma du look*. Any study of Trauner's French work in the 1970s and 1980s is therefore a useful test case to examine whether European cinematic sensibilities can be recalibrated or harmonised within the confines of an American tradition, and how that American tradition might then feed back into the French context. Trauner's participation in two different domestic film industries helped to provide diverse, unfamiliar and exotic cinematic images of both French-ness and American-ness. As with his earlier renditions of Paris from the 1930s, he was able to look at the locations he was required to reproduce with a considerable degree of unfamiliarity because he had not grown up in those environments. This lack of an ingrained, culturally specific understanding of Paris more often than not led to heightened, exaggerated versions of generic locations like cafés and courtyards, as foreign-born artists like himself often offered fresher, less timeworn depictions of these familiar Parisian spaces.

Trauner's design praxis was flexible enough to continually adapt to different sets of professional and commercial imperatives. It also continued to revolve around three key aspects: the deployment of architectural symbolism, the interplay between the monumental and the intimate, and the decor paraphrasing the narrative. Firstly, in all three films, Trauner alternates between pre-existing Parisian locations and studio or location reconstructions. Trauner's art increasingly tended towards this delicate balancing act: the incorporation of a constructed set that was imagined, drawn, modelled and then built, either on a studio set or within the confines of a pre-existing real location. He became an expert at deploying *découvertes*, whereby

a particular exterior space — usually a street, courtyard or town square — would be photographed, enlarged and then rephotographed until the required dimensions were achieved. These final photographs (often twenty metres high) would then be attached to, or hung from, the back wall of the set. When seen through the doors and windows of the built set, the *découverte* would maintain the illusion of location realism stretching towards a vanishing point.

By providing this *raccord* between the exterior and the interior, Trauner created a seamless link between inside and out, between real and constructed. For Trauner, 'les décors d'un film constituent un ensemble dont il faut respecter l'homogénéité. Un décor d'intérieur doit se poursuivre par le décor de la rue que nous apercevons par la fenêtre'.<sup>13</sup> Throughout these late-style films, Trauner is also working at the interface of what we might call 'set dressing' and 'narrative design', or micro- and macro-design. Set dressing involves the careful selection of small objects and accessories that provide contextual clues to a character's emotional state, social status or relationship to the rest of their community, whereas narrative design represents the visually integrated, holistic film environment, in which all elements of the *mise en scène* interact to lend coherence and cohesiveness to the film's overall visual shape. Let us now look at the films in more detail.

### *Monsieur Klein* (1976)

Set in Nazi-occupied France in 1942, Joseph Losey's *Monsieur Klein* is an acutely psychological examination of French unresponsiveness to the persecution of its Jewish inhabitants. Robert Klein (Alain Delon) is a wealthy Parisian art dealer who makes a living by exploiting his Jewish clients by purchasing their art at prices far below their actual worth. When he receives a Jewish newspaper addressed to him, he realises that there is another Robert Klein in Paris, a Jew disguising himself as a collaborationist Frenchman, and he becomes obsessed with finding the other man, his mirror image alter ego. The film's design reflects the decline into Kafkaesque territory: not only is the bureaucratic nature of the German occupation captured by Trauner's austere *mise en scène* and dark interiors, but Klein's own descent into a world of guilt, mistaken identity and constant suspicion is metaphorically cast in Trauner's rigid and severe set of spatial configurations. As Klein becomes increasingly pulled into his nightmarish world, both Losey's framing and editing and Trauner's compositional sense offer up

13 A. Trauner, 'Naissance d'un décor', *L'Ecran Français*, 63 (September 1946), p. 9.

an increasingly deterministic narrative environment that pins Klein down, locking him tightly within the frame in much the same way as Trauner and Carné had done with Gabin in *Le Jour se lève*.

Trauner is also attuned to the two distinct worlds in which the film's characters collide — on the one hand, there is the affluent Parisian middle-class universe of glass, mirrors and opulent furnishings; on the other, there is a dank hinterland where the dispossessed and marginalised hide. Throughout the film, Trauner's sets become increasingly claustrophobic, full of confined spaces that not only serve to emphasise the gradual erosion of personal space under such conditions of fear and paranoia, but are also a wider correlative for a very particular set of political and historical circumstances. Trauner's colour palette is particularly well deployed to accentuate these feelings of oppressiveness: the richer tones of yellow, brown and dark red become significantly muted and shift to blue and black as Paris is progressively drained of colour. As Klein's character, personality and awareness of events around him change, so, too, does the decor — from open to closed, accessible to claustrophobic — so that by the end of the film, Klein is swept along by the crowds in the Vélodrome, lost in a mass of people stampeding towards the cattle-trucks destined for the concentration camps.

Trauner would later state, in a series of extensive interviews in the film journal *Positif*, that his work could be characterised as an ongoing search for a stylisation: 'Mais il est très important, quand on fait un travail, même si c'est un travail sans grande prétention ... de trouver quelque chose qui devienne intéressant à un moment donné, de faire une sorte de prouesse. Je ne peux pas travailler autrement'.<sup>14</sup> The 'quelque chose' he continually sought was an important element not just of French studio design, but also of the Trauner 'style', whether early, middle or late. The composition of the decor should, according to Trauner, be 'frappant', and remain lodged in the audience's memory long after the film is over.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of the assignment, Trauner constantly sought ways to punctuate an essentially verisimilitudinous decor with instances of noticeable visual intervention, arrest the spectator's attention, and find a dominant visual idea that served to buttress the narrative.

An example of this 'something' in *Monsieur Klein* is the design and set dressing of Klein's Parisian apartment. David Thomson has noted how Losey's best films use 'interior setting as an extension of character' and find a 'unique suggestibility in

14 Quoted in Ciment and Jordan, p. 19.

15 Ciment and Jordan, p. 18.

the shapes and spaces within a house'.<sup>16</sup> Much like the designs for the overcrowded London apartment in Losey's *The servant* (1963, designed by Richard Macdonald), Klein's apartment is crammed full of items that seem out of place, unconnected and randomly assembled — sculptures, mirrors, chairs and paintings. Perhaps the most striking 'something' is the large tapestry depicting a vulture pierced through the heart by an arrow. As Foster Hirsch observes, Trauner visually implies through this image Klein's dual identity as a predator and a victim: '[Klein] is a vulture, feeding off the misery of others as he buys paintings from fleeing Jews; but he too is pierced by the Nazi menace, vulnerable to its predatory attacks'.<sup>17</sup>

Here, then, Trauner's set dressing proposes a distinctive and deeply unsettling *ambiance* that perfectly suits its Kafkaesque subject. The muted colour palette, sombre lighting and claustrophobic interiors work together to sustain a mood of alienation, oppression and paranoia. Trauner's design underscores the film's treatment of its protagonist: Klein's own alternatives are progressively narrowed, and this is reflected in a visual scheme that suggests a man gradually being drawn into a moral and political impasse. Such an assertive, interventionist decor, which determines the 'look' of the film and provides a visual foil to the narrative, is a hallmark of Trauner's late style. In *Monsieur Klein*, he distilled visual concepts from the thematic and psychological concerns of Losey's script to create set dressings that became characters in their own right.

### *Subway* (1985)

*Subway*, perhaps more than any other of his films, is the one with which Trauner seems to have the least affinity, at least on the surface. Luc Besson's 1985 work is a genre hybrid: blackly comic, infused with a punk chic, and inflected with musical, *noir* and fantasy properties. Besson was the standard-bearer of the *cinéma du look*, a key aesthetic mode in 1980s France. Will Higbee has defined the *cinéma du look* as

a spectacular visual style which manifests itself through a highly stylised *mise en scène* (elaborate framing, a preoccupation with decor and colour), a cinéophile

16 D. Thomson, *The biographical dictionary of film*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (London, Little, Brown, 2003), p. 534.

17 F. Hirsch, *Joseph Losey* (Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1980), pp. 186-7.

tendency to reference or recycle from other films, and a focus on youthful protagonists who are often marginal or romantic figures.<sup>18</sup>

In *Subway*, this highly stylised *mise en scène* is most apparent in the Trauner-designed underground service tunnels beneath the Paris Metro system into which the film's protagonist flees after stealing a set of valuable documents at the start of the film.

Trauner designed the set for the metro station in *Subway* in the Paris Billancourt studio. The realism of his studio sets stems in part from their clever integration with real locations in the Paris Metro. In *Subway*, Besson and Trauner admitted that they did not wish to replicate specific or identifiable metro stations, but instead sought to construct a kind of 'space-station', in which the psychedelic colour schemes and fantastical interiors imbue the space with an artificiality rather than offering up a direct facsimile of the 'real'. As always with Trauner, there is an authenticity and a truthfulness to this construction: our familiarity with the Paris Metro — its mythic status, so to speak — is returned to us as a defiantly dreamlike, spatially unorthodox space — a 'clinical and timeless world'<sup>19</sup> in which a subculture of misfits and the marginalised thrive. Via Trauner, the Metro, that most iconic of Parisian spaces, becomes a subterranean maze that beguiles the spectator by dint of the unfamiliarity of its familiarity.

*Subway*'s rather flimsy narrative forms the pretext for a series of elaborate visual compositions by Trauner. His compositional framework 'respects clear geometric principles', with 'expressly modernist' interior spaces and 'clear-cut lines that exaggerate ... horizontal and vertical axes'.<sup>20</sup> *Subway*'s diverse genres and visual styles are brought into some kind of harmony by Trauner's imaginative production design — described by one critic as 'fashion magazine chic ... fused with pop-art surrealism'<sup>21</sup> — which fashions a contemporary Parisian world that is simultaneously 'poetic' and 'realist'. Besson said his intention was to create 'un monde aseptisé, un peu

18 W. Higbee, 'Diva', in P. Powrie (ed.), *The cinema of France* (London and New York, Wallflower, 2006), p. 154.

19 D. Berry, 'Underground cinema: French visions of the Metro', in M. Konstantarakos (ed.), *Spaces in European cinema* (Exeter, Intellect, 2000), p. 14.

20 S. Harris, 'The cinéma du look', in E. Ezra (ed.), *European cinema* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 227.

21 A. Gargett, 'Subway', *Kamera*, <http://www.kamera.co.uk/features/subway.php> (accessed 1 January 2014).



intemporel'<sup>22</sup> — and this wish to embed the narrative within a striking set of designs, and to place the realism of the metro setting alongside a deliberately exaggerated version, is ultimately clinched by Trauner's seductive, imaginative recreations.

Indeed, much of the pleasure in *Subway* derives not just from the way Trauner reimagines the metro space and from how he and Besson establish a nostalgically French generic framework (via references to the Metro, the *polar* genre, the accordion player and Cocteau's *Orphée*) but also from how a number of Trauner's designs consciously rework some of the key design choices of his career: location shooting versus studio reconstruction, the 'above ground' versus the 'below ground' of the Metro, and the *cinéma du look* aesthetic versus the sheen and texture of his 1930s films. All of these choices suggest Trauner's appreciation of the ludic and intertextual properties of film design.

Sets for Trauner were not just containers of action or stylistic resonators of narrative concerns, but also super-architectures designed to distract the spectator's attention. Indeed, according to Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris and Sarah Street, Trauner's design practice demonstrates how the set could often be 'increasingly placed as a narrative and performative priority that exists as a counterpart to character and story, yet sometimes threatens to exceed both'.<sup>23</sup> The decor's sheer monumentality could override its purpose as container of action or denotative narrative backdrop, leading to such banal excesses as Trauner's sets for the Barbès-Rochecouart metro station in *Les Portes de la Nuit*.<sup>24</sup>

In *Subway*, Trauner negotiates this precarious terrain by combining authenticity, the use of expansive space and an amplified, abstracted symbolic rendition of familiar architecture. It is a key example of what Susan Hayward has termed Trauner's 'hyper-reality' — those sets that 'become more significant than the original to which they refer and because of their excess obtain more signification than the narrative which

22 Quoted in S. Hayward, *Luc Besson* (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 35.

23 T. Bergfelder, S. Harris and S. Street, *Film architecture and the transnational imagination: Set design in 1930s European cinema* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2007), p. 79.

24 By the mid-1940s, new cinematic trends were emerging that challenged pre-war studio practices. Thus, neo-realism of the kind seen in films like Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, open city* (1945) and René Clément's *La Bataille du rail* (1946) celebrated the authenticity of urban locations. Such films provided an ironic counterpoint to the studio-bound excesses of the Carné-Trauner collaboration, which, in this new climate, looked decidedly old-fashioned and unrealistic.

they are intended to illustrate'.<sup>25</sup> The excessive nature of Trauner's liminal sets in *Subway* and *'Round midnight* thus maintains the aesthetic congruities with his earlier work, and demonstrates the productive cross-fertilisation that took place once Trauner returned from the US and began working in a French context once more.

Trauner's late style in *Subway* represents a fascinating end point to a career that espouses the kind of production design priorities, ideologies and methods of control which he helped instigate during the classical period of the 1930s and 1940s in France. The Billancourt studios provided both director and designer with the thoroughly controlled synthetic environment they required, which could be modulated, coloured, framed and lit in a variety of ways to obtain the atmospheric realism to which the *cinéma du look* aspired. For Harris, 'the imaginative, often absurd stylisation of an environment is intrinsic to the form [and] the result of a highly professional, highly skilled attention to the very smallest details of cinematic composition'.<sup>26</sup> Trauner, late in his career, was clearly at ease with the familiar elements of control that the studio offered. His return to France in the 1970s suggests a domestic industry that was still receptive to older, more established modes of production design. Indeed, the pre-war studio aesthetic that Trauner did much to instigate and export would remain largely dormant in French film-making practice until the emergence of the *cinéma du look* and his collaboration with Besson. In *Subway*, by referencing his own earlier work *Les Portes de la nuit* — which also largely took place at a Paris metro station — Trauner was effectively revalorising 1930s-style set design in a modern aesthetic of the spectacular.

### *'Round midnight* (1986)

Bertrand Tavernier's *'Round midnight* (1986), set against the backdrop of the 1950s Paris jazz scene, represented Trauner's last major contribution to a film project before his death. If the film is successful in marrying a typically French sensibility about mood, tone and atmosphere with an American grasp of jazz music, then it is Trauner's striking pictorial and compositional sense that is fundamental in linking the two. Writing about Trauner, Jill Forbes noted how the 'charm of Trauner's sets is the charm of recognition, the pleasure deriving from the fact that the physical environment is exactly as the viewer somehow always expected it to be, a second-

25 S. Hayward, 'Luc Besson', in Y. Tasker (ed.), *Fifty contemporary filmmakers* (London and New York, Routledge, 2002), p. 57.

26 Harris, p. 228.

level recreation'.<sup>27</sup> His sets combined meticulously rendered foreground realism with abstract background realism, and through the skillful deployment of *découvertes*, trompe l'oeil and forced perspective, Trauner manipulated and exaggerated space.

Throughout *'Round midnight*, the sets are a nostalgic, wistful recreation of 'recent-past' spaces. Many of Trauner's designs, regardless of the country in which they were set, were a cluster of tightly packed signs and symbols that audiences immediately recognised, anchoring them to the here and now. He was aware that sets should be recognisable and authentic, as well as rich in local detail. Long-disappeared or half-remembered places were reconstituted on the screen, creating sites of nostalgia for both on-screen protagonist and spectator. The rendering of these urban environments frequently hinged on the delicate detachment of a prior visual artefact from its original context and its employment as pictorial shorthand in the present. This explains the perpetuation of such spatial markers in *'Round midnight* as cobbled streets, angular rooftops and jazz club façades — such quotations allow the film to balance its realism with its more poetic spatial renditions.

As with *Monsieur Klein* and *Subway*, there is an ongoing interaction between real and built. This time Trauner recreated four locations — the Paris Blue Note jazz club, its adjacent side street, New York's Birdland jazz club (both club sets, notes Jonathan Rosenbaum, are 'made to glow like pirates' lairs'<sup>28</sup>) and a Paris Left Bank hotel. There is also a sustained use of one of Trauner's trademark devices — 'action spaces'. These are usually brisk, fluid spaces, brought to life by the forceful movement of an actor. Because design can visually externalise feelings and moods, 'action spaces' are like a series of stages, where characters can 'play out' their emotional moments both to their on-screen counterparts and to the audience. Trauner's earlier 'big sets', for *Subway* or *The apartment*, could accurately reflect time and place and delineate the borders of their particular worlds. Sometimes, however, a more intimate 'action space' was required to burrow into character motivation and state of mind. This is base-level design: the sets wrap themselves around characters and tether them to the story. Hence the appearance of so many cramped, smoky, somewhat down-at-heel bars, clubs and cafés in *'Round midnight*: the restraint Trauner shows in depicting these particular urban spaces (no neon, no teeming pavements, no panoramic camera

27 J. Forbes, *Les Enfants du paradis* (London, BFI, 1997), p. 21.

28 J. Rosenbaum, 'An American in Paris: *'Round midnight*', <http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net> (accessed 1 January 2014).

movements) mirrors the dreamlike, poetic nature of the film's visual gloss — and recalls Trauner's nineteenth-century Paris in *Les Enfants du paradis*, made forty years earlier.

Tavernier's striking widescreen frame establishes the rainy, smoke-filled world of the jazz film and allows him to capture his marginalised characters moving through coded and impermeable social spaces. His bold compositions also foreground Trauner's emphasis on each character's isolation and lonely status. Recall the shot that first binds together Francis and Dale: Dale plays a blues song at the Blue Note as the camera tracks through the long, low-ceilinged club and into the street. This long, languorous retreat showcases not just the ongoing technical expertise of Trauner and Tavernier's skill in linking together, via camera movement, the destinies of the two men, but also reiterates the importance of holistic, integrated, total design that Trauner first deployed fifty years earlier for Marcel Carné. As Trauner once noted, the best film decor is 'un décor qui dit le drame'.<sup>29</sup>

\* \* \*

This late part of Trauner's career has important industrial implications. It shows that seasoned professionals like Trauner could still adapt and recycle their own particular style to individual circumstances by deploying notions of adaptability, professionalism and authenticity where appropriate. His sets pushed at the boundaries of rigidly defined national cinema styles and incorporated the denotative, the symbolic and the artificial, so that designs became integral carriers of meaning. If his success in 1950s America saw him transcend infrastructural barriers and impose a distinctly French style on the US film industry, then his return to France, and his work on these aforementioned and other films in the 1970s and 1980s, illustrate how designers with a predilection for the monumental could still be stimulated by an industry eager to reappropriate the aesthetics of bold, spectacular decor interventions.

From assignment to assignment, the 'embellishing' capacity of Trauner's designs consistently emerged. His ability to work comfortably across a range of genres and locales — Occupation Paris or post-war Paris or Postmodern Paris — evinced a professional confidence and a willingness to experiment in different industrial circumstances. Trauner sought out design fragments that would affirm or annotate

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in J. Douchet and G. Nadeau, *Paris cinéma: Une ville vue par le cinéma de 1895 à nos jours* (Paris, Editions du Mars, 1987), p. 127.

underlying narrative themes and bolster the particular mood that each director required. Embellishment for Trauner was not an arbitrary incorporation of 'things', but clear, unambiguous choices that helped to decipher the story.

As critic Edward Rothstein, writing in *The New York Times*, wrote about Said:

What artist does not yearn, some day, to possess a 'late style'? A late style would reflect a life of learning, the wisdom that comes from experience, the sadness that comes from wisdom and a mastery of craft that has nothing left to prove. It might recapitulate a life's themes, reflect on questions answered and allude to others beyond understanding.<sup>30</sup>

Thus the final act of Trauner's career — which began in the silent era, took in the Occupation, the Nouvelle Vague and the *cinéma du look*, via Hollywood, colour film and CinemaScope — is the culmination of a profession spent developing, honing and passing on a very specific visual style. Late style, Said ultimately suggests, expresses a sense of being out of place and time. True, Trauner's own professional trajectory was very much characterised by migration and adapting to different industrial practices, locations and personnel. But his late style remains as vibrant, innovative and experimental as his earlier, more celebrated work, and demands to be read not so much as mere 'Set Dressing', but as part of a 'Total Design'.

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<sup>30</sup> E. Rothstein, 'Twilight of his idols', *New York Times*, 6 July 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com> (accessed 1 January 2014).

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# Part 3

## Photographic framings



# 8

## Annie Ernaux's phototextual archives: *Ecrire la vie*

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Why would a writer publish a text that seemingly undoes the literary innovation of her life's work? Annie Ernaux has achieved fame by writing short, pithy narratives that recount isolated autobiographical moments. Rather than recounting events and extrapolating their meaning to her life within an autobiographical text, such as Michel de Montaigne falling off a horse, Jean-Jacques Rousseau stealing a ribbon, or André Gide travelling to North Africa, Ernaux chooses a specific incident — a love relationship, an abortion, a scene of domestic violence, for example — and describes this in sparse, unlyrical prose with no discussion of its consequences upon her developing selfhood.<sup>1</sup> These moments instead hang as though suspended in mid-air, forming disjointed snapshots of episodes which invite identification or disidentification from the reader. Likewise, rather than linking these autobiographical moments into a coherent, cogent and complete self that hints at the Lejeunian notion of autobiography as the history of development of personality, Ernaux's texts defy

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1 Examples of this style of writing include *Passion simple*, *L'Événement*, *La Honte* and *La Place*. For discussion of Ernaux's unpoetic style, see Warren Motte's work on what he calls her 'minimalist writing': *Small worlds: Minimalism in contemporary French literature* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

linkage; some narrators are identified by different names or not at all, she rejects a chronological approach to life writing, and she plays with temporality.<sup>2</sup>

So why now publish an anthology of previously published texts in one volume, placing her texts chronologically within her life and seemingly joining the dots between her autobiographical moments? Why invite a reading of 'her' as one, unitary identity that is a process and a product of the moments that she had previously rendered in such an isolated manner? *Ecrire la vie*, published in 2011, presents ten of Ernaux's texts in one volume, organised, according to the author's preface, by her.<sup>3</sup> She claims that 'c'est la succession des âges qui organise les textes' (p. 8), since they are not presented according to their order of publication but instead to the time of her life that they depict. Furthermore, she does not comment upon or justify the choice of the ten. Since Ernaux is the author of nearly twenty texts, part of her corpus is absent, which gives rise to questions over concealment, repression and, as Derrida has written with respect to archives, how a narrative of identity may be based on what is discarded rather than on what is included.<sup>4</sup> Some of her most famous, prize-winning texts, such as *Une Femme* and *La Place*, form part of the anthology. But her writing on writing, and her co-written texts such as *L'Usage de la photo*, are conspicuously absent from this work that she describes in the preface, in contrast to the individual texts, as 'un autre texte, troué, sans clôture, porteur d'une identité différente' (p. 9).

What I want to suggest in this chapter, however, is that the 'new' part of this anthology, the only part that Ernaux has never before shown to the public, is not only innovative by itself, but adds a very different layer to our interpretation of her work thus far. This 'new' part is photographic: printed on the opening pages of the anthology, before the previously published ten texts, are 100 pages of photographs and diary entries which Ernaux selected herself from her personal collection. This author has previously written about photographs in her autobiographical work, and has published photographs within her most recent texts. In *L'Autre Fille*, for example,

2 Philippe Lejeune famously defined autobiography in 1975 as 'un récit rétrospectif en prose que quelqu'un fait sur sa propre existence quand il met l'accent principal sur une vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité'. See *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris, Seuil, 1975), p. 14.

3 A. Ernaux, *Ecrire la vie* (Paris, Gallimard, 2011). All further references to this work will be given in the text.

4 J. Derrida, *Mal d'archive: Une impression freudienne* (Paris, Galilée, 1995).

she uses a photograph of her family home and the sister who died before she was born, and in *L'usage de la photo* she uses photographs as a meditation on her own mortality as she suffers from breast cancer. Both of these texts are primarily concerned with time: imagining a past before her and a future after her.

In *Ecrire la vie*, time is also the central preoccupation. The photographs that Ernaux includes in this text span 1913 to 2011, and figure on the pages next to extracts from the author's diary. Significantly, these diary entries are from a different time frame to the photographs. The diaries are previously unpublished, so on one level Ernaux juxtaposes ten published 'autobiographies' with a series of unpublished diaries, thereby immediately casting doubt over the narrative of self with which her readers are familiar.<sup>5</sup> What is particularly interesting in this section of text is that the photographs, rather than the words of the diaries, provide the narrative. The images move forward chronologically and the diary entries that surround them, from different time frames, are chosen because they mention, often very obliquely, something shown in the photograph.

W.J.T. Mitchell, in his work on illustration, cautions against what he calls the 'suturing' of visual and verbal elements of a text, and highlights instead the need to interpret 'resistance' between them.<sup>6</sup> It is my contention that the images and words in Ernaux's frame stage such a resistance: the photographs move time forward but the diary entries arrest it. What happens when text is added to photography and not the other way round? When photographs come first and text second, what sort of hierarchy does this produce and how does that impact upon autobiographical text in particular? Furthermore, when several different texts from several different time frames are added to photographs, how do they interact and represent a self? In this chapter, I look first at the way in which Ernaux constructs this photojournal as a seemingly conventional family album but juxtaposes photographs and diaries within

5 Ernaux has been an avid diary writer since the age of sixteen. Moreover, she has previously published several of these diaries. Ernaux criticism tends to separate these published diaries into two groups: the *journaux intimes* that she writes daily and which are rarely published, and the *journaux extimes* that are closer to collective records of daily life and that are intended for publication. See, for example, S. Wilson, 'Life, disrupted: Annie Ernaux's *Journal du dehors* and *Je ne suis pas sortie de ma nuit*', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 49: 3 (2012), pp. 250-66; and M. Sheringham, *Everyday life: Theories and practices from Surrealism to the present* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006). *Ecrire la vie* is the first of Ernaux's published diaries that incorporates photographs.

6 W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture theory* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 289.

it in order to displace the self that it purports to represent. I then examine the specific elements of the photojournal in which Ernaux subverts the chronology to which the rest of the photojournal adheres, pointing to the concealment that the use of photography and autobiography together stages.

### Time and the family album

Time has long been a preoccupation of theorists of photography. Although a photograph presents a static moment, a fixed image that is a record of immutability, the logic of the photograph pushes the observer to different time frames. In *La Chambre claire*, Barthes's notion that the photograph is evidence of an existence — 'ça a été' — also marks the temporal shift in photography as it represents something captured from the past.<sup>7</sup> Yet Barthes also points out photography's propensity to look towards the future. He builds his reflection around the example of a photograph by Alexander Gardner, taken in 1865, of convicted criminal Lewis Payne sitting in his prison cell, awaiting his execution. Barthes argues that the *punctum*, the element of a photograph that hits the viewer and almost wounds her/him, is the dual movement inherent in this image: not just that he has existed — 'cela a été' — but also that his execution is imminent and thus 'il va mourir'. The photograph thus points to both a past disappearance and a future absence, a movement that the viewer will automatically link to her/his own death:

C'est parce qu'il y a toujours en elle ce signe impérieux de ma mort future, que chaque photo, fût-elle apparemment la mieux accrochée au monde excitée des vivants, vient interpeller chacun de nous, un par un, hors de toute généralité.<sup>8</sup>

Barthes encapsulates this propensity of the image thus: '[J]e lis en même temps: cela sera et cela a été; j'observe avec horreur un futur antérieur dont la mort est l'enjeu'.<sup>9</sup>

The photograph, then, refers to what has been, to what will be and to what will have been. Barthes's *La Chambre claire* interwove photography and personal account as it theorised the workings and functions of photography, and thus became the seminal text for the study of the intersections between autobiography and images. In Barthes's previous autobiographical work, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, he had taken care to distance himself in his preface from the identity depicted in the book,

7 R. Barthes, *La Chambre claire* (Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma Gallimard Seuil, 1980).

8 Barthes, *La Chambre claire*, p. 1176.

9 Barthes, *La Chambre claire*, p. 866.

stating that 'tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman'.<sup>10</sup> In this later work, published shortly before his death, photography is the device that brings him closer to an admission of a narrative of self. For example, Barthes writes of a photograph of his mother in the winter garden, which he chooses not to print in the book. Gazing upon this image, he imagines her past and how it links with his past, but also imagines her death, and links the disappearance of his mother to the eventual disappearance of the photograph itself. Thus Barthes links his theorisation of the image to its effects upon self-narrative; he demonstrates that the propensity of photography to exist beyond time yet also to move the onlooker into several different time frames simultaneously has important implications for autobiography. Celia Lury summarises how the logic of photography has

a distinctive temporality; more specifically, the freezing of time creates a dimension in which the future perfect of the photographic image — this will have been — may be suspended, manipulated and reworked to become the past perfected'.<sup>11</sup>

Many theorists have taken up Barthes's notion of death in photography. Susan Sontag compared the photograph to a death mask, for example, and Camille Laurens writes of how photographing a face is photographing absence rather than presence: 'Toute photo fait une ovation à la mort, et même elle la provoque, elle la donne: on vise, on appuie, ça tue'.<sup>12</sup> Yet the equation of photography with death is somewhat simplistic in that it does not take into account the temporal movement inherent in the images. The photograph moves backwards and forwards; it pauses at instances; it creates other time frames; it invents memories and it stages events; and it is this movement that alters the framing of Ernaux's autobiographies.

Ernaux's 'photojournal' is set up as a conventional family album, beginning with her ancestors. On the first page of the photodiary, two photographs, one of her father on military service and the other of her parents on their wedding day, are superimposed onto a background of a photo of her father's family. This placement provides a conventional opening in the sense that it heralds a chronological story of selfhood. Simultaneously, as is the case in any family album, it points to both the

10 R. Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris, Seuil, 1975), p. 5.

11 C. Lury, *Prosthetic culture: Photography, memory and identity* (London, Routledge, 1998), p. 3.

12 S. Sontag, *On photography* (London, Penguin, 1979), p. 154; C. Laurens, *Cet absent-là: Figures de Rémi Vinet* (Paris, Éditions Léo Scheer, 2004), p. 35.



past and the future, since the page's autobiographical function is the ending of one person's life and the beginning of another's; the ancestors are part of a line from which Ernaux will issue, as the marriage photo and the anthology hint. Marianne Hirsch, in her work on family albums, suggests that family photographs insist upon identification since all family albums resemble each other.<sup>13</sup> Ernaux is on familiar terrain here, since she relies heavily upon relationality in her life-writing, writing herself often in relation to other people she happens to observe. As Nancy K. Miller states, '[T]he autobiographer's ego is incomplete without the anonymous individuals who, unbeknownst to them, fill her in, flesh her out'.<sup>14</sup> The album is something that we all recognise, since it is formulaic: as an artefact that most families possess (at least until digital media displaces it), it instils group identity, standardisation, family and civic authority, hierarchy and even the law. The school photos that often figure in these collections further enforce socialisation and the frameworks in which family life develops within culture and society.

Yet Ernaux disrupts this conventional family album and particularly she disrupts it through playing with its representation of time. A layer of complication is added to this opening page by the text that appears in the top left-hand corner. Two separate entries from the author's personal diaries appear: the first entry from 1963, and the second from 1999. Both contain only very oblique references to the content of the photographs; the second, written on 31 December 1999, mentions that her father was two-and-a-half months old a century ago, and refers to her grandparents, whereas the first highlights the bourgeoisie, presumably as a contrast to the poverty of the ancestors in the images. Thus this 'beginning' page contains five different time frames: the three photographs and the two diary entries.

This juxtaposition of words and images from clearly different time frames points to what is absent, from both photography and from autobiography: the experience between what is recounted and what is photographed. The movement in time between these snippets of information points to what the writer does not know about her ancestors and to what we as readers do not know about her. The page hints at the unknown in any life history: who are the other, unnamed people,

13 M. Hirsch, *Family frames: Photography, narrative, and postmemory* (Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 1997).

14 N.K. Miller, *But enough about me: Why we read other people's lives* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 114.

both relatives and acquaintances of her father's? Did she even know them, and what impact may they have had on her family history? What exists beyond the frame of the photograph exists beyond the frame of the autobiography, and thus photography and autobiography together highlight the interplay of presence and absence in self-narrative. This juxtaposition of autobiographical text and image thus creates a distance between the narrative of self that each one stages. It shows how many different temporalities come into play in autobiography and points to the concealment that is at work in both photography and autobiography, as well as the revelation that both stage.

As the family album continues, with the photographs providing the chronological narrative and the diary entries problematising this, several pages stand out as significant to this project of playing with time. A page of several photographs depicts Ernaux as a child with her mother, with her father, and standing in front of her childhood home. Another image of her as a child sits atop of a diary entry. The photographs are from 1944 to 1945, which fits with the chronological framework of those that come before and after it, and the diary entry is from 1998. No background photo is used here. What is intriguing about this collection is the content of the diary entry, in which Ernaux describes a moment in which she claims to have seen herself as a child looking at herself as an adult. She describes this as 'des instants brefs où, ainsi, j'ai fait le chemin inverse de la mémoire, non de l'adulte vers l'enfant mais de l'enfant vers l'adulte. Cette vision, plus que jamais, me fait sentir le gouffre entre ce qu'était ma mère et ce que je suis' (p. 20).

The author thus reflects upon an earlier version of herself looking at a 'present' version of herself. Not only does she highlight the difference between the narrated 'I' and the narrating 'I' of autobiography, but she also imagines the narrating 'I' beyond the confines of a text, from the perspective of an earlier self. What would her 'I as child' think of her 'I as adult'? she ponders, underscoring the instability of any 'I' in narrative. The different tenses evident in this journal entry — the perfect, the past conditional, the imperfect and the present — broaden the text to include times that are always beyond the frame of the narrative, drawing the reader's attention to the before and after of this text, and of this life. Moreover, this reflection in turn pushes Ernaux to compare herself to her own mother, as she imagines the little girl that she *was* looking at herself as she is *now* and looking at her mother. Staring back at us as readers, as we read this page, are both of these people — the mother and the girl —

together in the bottom right photo. This is a direct invitation for us to ask what their perspectives were, these ghosts whose Ernaux's text proclaims as dead. Their point of view looks at us as we look at them, and the images around them situate them in relation to other people and places that contributed to their formation.

And this creates an absence: that of the author. Ernaux moves at this point from the centre of the autobiography to its margins, and this movement addresses the reader directly. The reader enters the text explicitly here and highlights the agency of the onlooker in any photograph and in any autobiography. Just as the photographer cannot decide upon how the photograph will be interpreted, the autobiographer cannot decide upon how the self-narrative will be read. These photographs prove that their subjects have existed — in Barthes's formulation that '*ça a été*' — but that there will also be a future and a future anterior: that they will have been. But the photographs also prove that we as readers of an autobiography, and particularly one that contains photographs, are creators of the narrative: that we assure a 'there will be', since the words and image that we read and the interpretation that we create last beyond the author.

### Time and tense

As this chronological, seemingly conventional family album progresses, a small number of photographs break the chronological frame of the narrative. Among the photographs of the author as a child are suddenly, with no explanation, a photo of four of her diaries: exercise books with the years that they represent on the front cover, superimposed on handwritten pages, which are presumably excerpts from them. The earliest begins in 1963 and the latest in 1984. The photographs from her adolescence reappear on the following page. Why include these diaries, and why here? Part of the reason must be, as Ernaux states in the accompanying diary entry, which is from 1988, that she began writing a diary in 1957 and that her mother burnt the first six years, which she terms '*les années clés*' (p. 35). This immediately points to the absence — what is not there and what is not retrievable — and reminds us that a photograph or a book can easily be forced to disappear. The text above the photographs is this:

Ce journal que j'écris depuis 1957 ... me donne l'impression d'une faible durée, au fond je pourrais placer — j'imagine à tort? — un passage de 78 dans

67, un de 63 dans 88, y aurait-il une grande différence, une distorsion? Rien ne rend autant la permanence du moi que le journal, il ne fait pas histoire. (p. 35)

Thus Ernaux claims that the 'I' of the diary is immutable, unchanging, permanent; and that hints that what *has been* is what *is*, to her. So what about her autobiographical writing, little of which corresponds to the genre of the diary? Are we to believe that the 'I' of the rest of the anthology is temporary and mutable? This section not only points to another way of writing time, but also questions the autobiographical enterprise that has formed her career and that forms the rest of this anthology. Ernaux in these stand-out pages may be read as cautioning us: much of 'me' is out there, she hints, but not all of it, and not the most permanent parts. In this way, as soon as the reader/viewer thinks that s/he 'knows' something of Ernaux and understands her autobiography, the author underscores that s/he really does not. Instead, this photojournal constructs the autobiography with a certain direction, a certain chronology, which builds on things that are known about her — and then reverses that gesture.

In addition to the interruption staged by this photograph of the diaries, several photographs stand out as breaking the chronological narrative. One of the most significant of these is a full-page photograph of the author's mother in 1956. The photographs have moved steadily throughout Ernaux's life until 1971, but then this photograph from fifteen years previously suddenly appears (p. 75). Ernaux leaves this interruption unexplained, as the caption simply reads '[M]a mère, 1956'. The previous pages show her mother in the late 1960s and early 1970s as an older lady with white hair, spectacles and a slight stoop as she looks at her young grandchildren. The text of the diary entries positioned next to the photographs on these pages discusses Ernaux's writing and career. Specifically, one lengthy quotation from the diary entry of October 1998 discusses how the author is discarding her notes as she is approaching retirement; the notes and lessons that she has kept from her student days through her teaching career 'ne me serviront plus ... ne m'auront guère servi' (p. 73). Her awareness of her ageing and her preparation for later life are underscored by her memory of discarding papers when she was eighteen, since she was 'tendue vers l'avenir' (p. 73), and her contrasting emotion of discarding now 'ce qui a été l'emballage, le cocon de ma vie' (p. 73).

Set in the context of her awareness of her own ageing, the photograph of the mother from a different time frame takes on a different meaning. The early photograph

not only arrests the passage of time but pushes it back, as we view the mother as an old lady with her grandchildren, and then as a strikingly younger woman on the following page. Ernaux's play with temporality thus emphasises the past life of the older woman and the fact that, since ageing is common to all of us, Ernaux herself is now having to recognise the process that she observed in her mother. The diary entries that accompany the photograph add a further nuance to this time play. Spanning 1970 to 1996, the four entries all present the author's feelings towards her mother in different instances. On one hand, Ernaux quotes her less charitable moments, remembering her 'agacement insurmontable', but on the other hand she juxtaposes this with comments such as her acknowledgement that this 'modèle maternel' was one of the women who formed her, that she understands her mother better through having mothered herself, through her recollections of her mother's funeral and her realisation that 'l'écriture me vient d'elle, qui n'a jamais écrit' (p. 74).

Clearly, Ernaux is testifying to her changing feelings towards her mother over time and to the way in which her own ageing has produced a mellowing and a greater understanding of the old lady that the mother was and that she herself is becoming. There is a clear mirroring of the process of coming to terms with one's mortality, as is evidenced by the fact that this text is a survival story — that of the battle with cancer that Ernaux overcame — as well as a look backwards to her writing career so far. Significantly, a full-page photograph of Ernaux appears on the following page in a very similar pose: seated in a dark cardigan and looking in the same direction, although the backgrounds are different (the mother is sitting in front of a blurred field and the daughter in a blurred library). The chronology of the photographs is restored by this, from 1974, and continues to move forward as before.

In addition to playing with the time of memory and ageing, Ernaux introduces another important technique into this framing section: that of repetition. In two instances, she juxtaposes on the same page photographs of herself from the same/similar places, alongside text that alludes to these from yet another time frame. The most striking example of this is the author's depiction of herself in Venice, a city that she has frequently visited and which figures regularly in her work. Displayed one above the other are two photographs of the writer smiling at a camera on a bridge with water behind her; one is from 1982 and the other is from 2004. The same pose in almost the same place in almost the same clothing in the same composition is striking and clearly invites comparison; the reader/viewer will naturally notice the

ageing that is the main element distinguishing the two images, a process that Ernaux depicts consciously and candidly.

Moreover, the act of revisiting is inherent to both photography and autobiography. The subject of the two photographs is the same but different, and photography and self-narrative operate in the same way. Between the two photographs, time has moved forward and created change in the photographed subject, in the same way as time has moved between lived experience and a writer's written record of this. The juxtaposition of photography and autobiography thus points up the multiple reference points involved in both, as the visual image aids the process of memory but highlights the changes brought about on the autobiographer by time. The two juxtaposed photographs remind the reader/viewer of the changing author and invite us to think that we recognise her image, her identity and her autobiography. Yet, as this chapter contends, the movement is quite the opposite.

Further to the comparison that Ernaux invites by showing herself in the same position in different time frames, and by her linkage between photography and autobiography, the diary entries add another level of interpretation to this juxtaposition. The first entry, from 1986, is an excerpt from her record of being in this area, walking around and viewing the surroundings. It also mentions how she thought back to having been there twenty-three years earlier, thus introducing a reference to yet another time frame: 'Je marche aujourd'hui et rien n'est perdu. Je n'ai pas eu moins que ce que je désirais et je suis toujours *moi*' (p. 92, emphasis in the original). The photographs go forward yet the text goes backwards, imagining a previous time further back in the past when she was in this city. Nevertheless, the text insists on the constant nature of her self — 'je suis toujours moi' — although the photographs suggest the exact opposite. The images insist upon change, while the text insists upon sameness, and the resistance that these two opposing movements produce is the crux of my reading of this photojournal. By using photographs to supplement her diary and indeed her anthology, Ernaux subtly undercuts any interpretation of a stable, coherent self that unites her self-narrative. Her photojournal thus becomes a push and pull between knowing and not knowing this author, as she simultaneously displays herself in images, yet through the diary entries casts doubt upon the veracity of the identity that the images stage.

The photographs continue chronologically until 2011, when Ernaux simply stares out at us, opposite a picture of her holding a grandchild, an image of the

future. Michèle Bacholle-Bošković views this image as symbolic of Barthes's notion of 'le temps écrasé', and comments that 'sa dernière photo est porteuse de la mort que l'écrivaine septuagénaire voit poindre'.<sup>15</sup> This is certainly true, yet Ernaux's self-narrative is complicated by the diary entry that appears above the photograph: '[L]es choses qui m'arrivent, au moment où je les vis, s'écrivent toujours déjà à l'imparfait' (p. 101). 'What has been', says the text; and 'What will be?' and 'What will have been?' ask the images. And Ernaux, looking directly at the reader, again explicitly invites us into the text, recognising the creative agency of the reader in determining 'what will be'. The play with verb tenses in this final entry is a technique with which Ernaux has previously experimented. Most notable in this regard is her polemical 1991 work *Passion simple*, which is included in the anthology and to which several diary entries refer; Ernaux also published a different version of this text as *Se perdre* in 2001 and, crucially, in the format of a diary that was supposedly closer to the 'real' events.<sup>16</sup> The events in question were related to an affair with a married man for whom the narrator lived a passion that she willed to be permanent but that was predictably curtailed. The word play of the title is indicative of the text's literary innovation; nowhere does the author employ the *passé simple* tense, as she renders the tale in the imperfect and future tenses. More than a subversion of French literary norms, this narrative technique enables the author to subvert the finality of a tense that insists upon completed actions and thus to envisage the episode as an ongoing action, via the imperfect tense, or as a continuing probability, via the future tense.

In this photojournal, the final diary entry performs a similar movement. Ernaux at once points to how her lived reality immediately becomes narration, as 'les choses qui m'arrivent' transform themselves into written material. Furthermore, her assertion that they become written material in the imperfect tense adds an ironic twist to this ending. The imperfect insists upon fluidity and ongoing, descriptive or habitual actions as opposed to the *passé simple* or *passé composé*, which imply finality and an ensuing change of state. Ernaux's final comment thus resists ending and instead presages an ongoing self-narrative. The image is also at odds with this, again staging a resistance as the photography refers to the future while the text refers to the past. As

15 M. Bacholle-Bošković, 'Ph-auto\*bio\*graphie: Ecrire la vie par des photos', *Women in French Studies*, 21 (2013), pp. 79-93.

16 A. Ernaux, *Se perdre* (Paris, Gallimard, 2001).



we have seen from Barthes's theorisation, the crucial tense at work in photography is also the future anterior, which, as Jérôme Thélot identifies, 'donne le photographiable comme en train de disparaître, qui donne le moment de photographier comme décisif, et le photographié comme disparu'.<sup>17</sup> Ernaux's mortality is all the more in evidence, as the inclusion of a photograph is testament to the fact that the image itself, the book, and the author will all one day disappear. Far from a simple frame for the anthology to follow, therefore, this photojournal insists upon the dual movement, backwards and forwards, and upon the instability of the evolving identity that is its subject — or subjects.

Overall, then, this anthology may appear to be a step backwards, an undoing of Ernaux's work thus far, but the way in which she frames it, with these unpublished diary entries and photographs, shows a renewed commitment to the questioning of the genre of autobiography. By moving the reader into different time frames, she reminds us of how little we know about her, and of the fact that the anthology is far from a complete rendition of a life. The autobiographical enterprise in which she has been engaged, playing on concealment and revelation alongside identification and disidentification, is alive and well, and is furthered by the use of photography. The photo/diary entries set up a different approach to time that then pushes us to read the texts from within a different temporality.

Ernaux is thus not using photography in a banal, unoriginal way. French autobiography took a significantly visual turn in the 1990s, with writers such as Raymond Depardon, Leila Sebbar and Marie NDiaye publishing life narrative with photographs or other visual support.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, as I have shown in this chapter, Ernaux uses photography as an innovative device to frame her self-narrative across different time periods and, since this is the frame of an anthology, to take her previously published work in a new direction. By allowing photography to form the narrative and positioning words as secondary, she explores another approach that points up absence and displacement in self-narrative. By playing with time, specifically by constantly altering the time frame of the narration, she displaces her 'self' and places herself constantly beyond the reader's understanding. The photographs are evidence

17 J. Thélot, *Critique de la raison photographique* (Paris, Belles Lettres, 2009), p. 11.

18 See, for example, R. Depardon, *Errance* (Paris, Seuil, 2000); M. NDiaye, *Autoportrait en vert* (Paris, Mercure de France, 2005); and L. Sebbar, *Mes Algéries en France* (Saint Pourçain-sur-Sioule, Bleu Autour, 2004).

of her existence but her way of undercutting their status shows the reader that we cannot possibly 'know' her. Ironically, the album of evidence continually prevents any coherent and cogent reading of self-narrative. So the anthology invites linkage, but the frame with the photographs hanging as though suspended in mid-air warns us against believing her story. Ernaux wrote in *L'Occupation* in 2002 that 'écrire, c'est d'abord ne pas être vu'.<sup>19</sup> In this reading, she uses photography and text together to perform the questioning of the genre of autobiography and ultimately to make sure that she is not seen.

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# 9

## The image of self-effacement: The revendication of the autonomous author in Marie NDiaye's *Autoportrait en vert*

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Michel Beaujour states his dissatisfaction with the term 'autoportrait' to encapsulate adequately literary endeavours at self-representation.<sup>1</sup> The connection between self-portraiture and painting is evident, and the slippage of the term across mediums leads, in Beaujour's opinion, to deny the specificity of literary works. Yet, referring to works such as Michel de Montaigne's *Essais*, Michel Leiris's *L'âge d'homme* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Rêveries*, Beaujour highlights its usefulness as a tool that distinguishes it from autobiographical texts for two fundamental reasons. First, self-portraiture insists upon an absence of continuity, thus defying any clearly arranged order of events that contribute to a personality created in narrative. Furthermore, the self-portraitist responds to time differently from the autobiographer, since s/he does not necessarily write a retrospective narrative; whereas the autobiographer is generally concerned with how s/he has become what s/he has — the scope of the self-portraitist is who s/he is now, in the present time of writing. Herein lies one of the main reasons for the derision of the self-portrait: it may be viewed as mere 'scribbling', an attempt to

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1 M. Beaujour, *Miroirs d'encre: Rhétorique de l'autoportrait* (Paris, Seuil, 1980), p. 14.

encapsulate the present self in words with no clear purpose or direction. As Beaujour resumes, the self-portrait 'ne s'adresse à un éventuel lecteur qu'en tant que celui-ci est placé en position de tiers exclu. L'autoportrait s'adresse à lui-même'.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to autobiography, the self-portrait is relatively undertheorised, but Beaujour offers a partial definition, declining how the self-portrait

tente de constituer sa cohérence grâce à un système de rappels, de reprises, de superpositions ou de correspondances entre des éléments homologues et substituables, de telle sorte que sa principale apparence est celle du discontinu, de la juxtaposition anachronique, du montage, qui s'oppose à la syntagmatique d'une narration, fût-elle très brouillée, puisque le brouillage du récit invite toujours à en 'construire' la chronologie.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the correlation between textual and visual elements — between a painter's self-portrait and a writer's — adds a further layer to a narrative self-portrait. Beaujour points to Leiris's and Montaigne's metaphors for painting in their work, showing their preoccupation with the visual genre and its impact upon their narrative. Yet, Beaujour argues, the writer's work departs from that of the painter since when s/he begins to write, s/he cannot render her/himself as though looking at a mirror, but is instead affected by the culture and the language in which s/he is immersed. From this comes Beaujour's famous definition of the self-portrait as a 'miroir d'encre': not a speculum but a mirror that is blurred by the ink of language and culture.

Even amidst the current explosion of autobiographical writing and the ensuing critical reflection devoted to it, the subgenre of the literary self-portrait still garners little theoretical attention. Whereas confession, testimony, autofiction and the photojournal, for example, have become increasingly popular vehicles for critiquing previously held theoretical positions on self-narrative, the self-portrait has not been resurrected. This may be, as Beaujour states in relation to his corpus, because the format of the self-portrait has changed little over centuries or has been obscured under a different moniker, such as 'the essay' or 'the confession'. Set amidst this background, the decision by a well-known experimental writer, whose entire oeuvre creates an elusive approach to female subjectivity and self-representation, to approach the genre of self-portraiture is tantalising.

2 Beaujour, p. 14.

3 Beaujour, p. 9.

Marie NDiaye is a renowned contemporary playwright and novelist who burst onto the literary scene at the age of seventeen with the publication of her novel *Quant au riche avenir* in 1985.<sup>4</sup> While NDiaye is generally regarded as French, she is sometimes described as a French-African writer since her father, who left her home when she was a child and whom she barely knows, is Senegalese. NDiaye has refuted this idea, claiming she identifies as French only. Indeed, her background is markedly different from that of the many Franco-African writers who abound in France today. Many writers, such as Léonora Miano, who was raised in Africa but moved to France and settled there as a teenager, now identify as belonging in an interstitial space between Europe and Africa, as 'Afropéens' (the title of an oft-quoted Miano story). Odile Cazenave recently coined the term 'Afrique sur Seine' to describe the Franco-African literary activity particularly centred around Paris (although it should be noted that some of these writers, such as Fatou Diome, work from other French cities).<sup>5</sup>

NDiaye's background as a child of a French schoolteacher-mother raised entirely in France without any contact with Africa or her African father makes her refusal to associate herself with Africa quite understandable. Nonetheless, NDiaye's ambiguous, strained relationship with her father and Africa has long haunted her works. Most notably, this author won the prestigious Prix Goncourt in 2009 for her novel *Trois femmes puissantes*<sup>6</sup>, which describes the experiences of three Senegalese women in Europe and Africa, marking a sudden shift in this writer's focus to the experiences of African females. Ndiaye's brother, Pap, author of the meditation on black experience in France *La France noire*, experienced his awakening towards blackness while studying in the United States, and has assumed his status as a spokesperson for black people with this well-regarded work.<sup>7</sup> Marie NDiaye has never spoken of any such awakening, but the spectre of her paternal ancestry resonates in her work. As Fernanda Eberstadt wrote in a review of the English translation of *Trois femmes puissantes*:

NDiaye describes herself as a purely French product, with no claim to biculturalism but her surname and the colour of her skin. Nonetheless, the

4 M. NDiaye, *Quant au riche avenir* (Paris, Minuit, 1985).

5 L. Miano, *Afropean soul et autres nouvelles* (Paris, Flammarion, 2008); O. Cazenave, *Afrique sur Seine: Une nouvelle génération de romanciers africains à Paris* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 2003).

6 M. NDiaye, *Trois femmes puissantes* (Paris, Gallimard, 2009).

7 P. NDiaye, *La Condition noire: Essai sur une minorité française* (Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 2008).



absent father — charismatic, casually cruel, voraciously selfish — haunts NDiaye's fiction and drama, as does the shadow of a dreamlike Africa.<sup>8</sup>

From her 2003 play *Papa doit manger* (only the second play by a woman to be taken into the repertoire of the Comédie Française) to her difficult but inviting 2005 combination of text and photos *Autoportrait en vert*, NDiaye provides glimpses of this charismatic but cruel, multifaceted African father, tempting the reader to draw parallels with this fictional figure and her own African father.<sup>9</sup>

*Autoportrait en vert* sits uncomfortably at the interstice between several genres, including fiction, autobiography, self-portrait, phototext, diary and the fantastic. Written in the first person, it is narrated by a woman named Marie who is a writer and who shares several similarities with the author; her mother is French and her father African, for example, and the first name of the narrator's husband tallies with that of the writer's. Yet the text continually undercuts any simple connection between narrator and writer, and does not provide any portrait of a single, identifiable self. Instead, the reader learns that the narrator lives near the Garonne River and follows her through a series of encounters and conversations with local women and visits to her mother before she travels to Africa to attend a conference and spend time with her father.

In this chapter, I first analyse the ambiguous nature of the self of this self-portrait, as it is presented in both text and in image. I then examine the temporal aspects of this work, comparing Beaujour's theorisation of the time of the self-portrait with the narrator's presentation of her past and present. I finally analyse the imagery of colour throughout this work, since this black-and-white, atemporal self-portrait is predicated upon a reading of colour, as the green of the title hints. In this regard, *Autoportrait en vert* presents NDiaye's most sustained effort to use self-portrait to challenge autofiction, considering the proximity of her work to the evasive, intangible, fictionalised self on which this subgenre is based.

### Self-portraiture in text and image

The most striking element of this self-portrait is the absence of the self. The text opens in a manner akin to a pastoral novel, as the narrator describes the countryside around

8 F. Eberstadt, "'Three Strong Women' by Marie NDiaye", *The New York Times*, 10 August 2012.

9 M. NDiaye, *Papa doit manger* (Paris, Minuit, 2003); *Autoportrait en vert* (Paris, Mercure de France, 2005). All subsequent references to this latter text will be given in parentheses.

the Garonne River and the constant threat of flooding of which the inhabitants are acutely aware. She alludes to the village in which she lives and to the countryside that surrounds them in the present tense: 'la longue et lente colonne de camions, voitures, tracteurs, camping-cars, moissonneuses-batteuses, défilant dans la nuit, allant rejoindre l'autre côté du canal, où la Garonne ne viendra pas' (p. 10). Such an opening description appears to set the scene for a novelistic plot, and the reader expects to learn whether the Garonne floods and how the self-narrative plays out against this potential natural disaster. Instead, the narrative switches abruptly to another topic and another temporality: a description of a woman whom the narrator believes she sees repeatedly from her car, introduced simply by '2002 — Comme je la voyais chaque jour devant sa maison, il m'a été longtemps impossible de distinguer entre cette présence verte et son environnement' (p. 11). The narrator does not explain this interruption in any way, and the reader never discovers whether the Garonne flooded on the evening in question, since the narrative meanders to another seemingly unconnected memory several pages later.

Crucially for this discussion, the identity at the centre of this supposed self-portrait is never explained. As is evident in the citations above, the text is narrated in the first person, switching from the first-person plural of the description of the Garonne to the first-person singular of the memory of the woman standing in her garden, yet this first-person narrator never identifies herself. Throughout the text she is unnamed and the snippets of information that the reader receives about her — that she has four children, that her father lives in Africa, for example — are facts rather than psychological or emotional depictions of memories or of personality.

The two sections of text that follow the opening description of the Garonne exemplify NDiaye's approach to textual self-portraiture in this work. The abrupt switch to the description of a woman whom the narrator thinks that she sees repeatedly in a garden is narrated in the first person and largely in the present tense, yet continually defies the reader's expectations. The narrator explains that she drives her children to school every morning, returns home, drives back to the school at the end of the day and drives back home, thus passing a particular house four times. Each time she is drawn to a figure whom she spies in the garden next to a banana tree and who is always present whenever she passes: a woman dressed in green. She describes the experience thus: 'je la regardais et je ne la voyais pas, et cependant une obscure insatisfaction m'obligeait à tourner la tête de ce côté, pourtant je ne remarquais rien,

jamais, qu'un beau bananier insolite ... J'avais, quatre fois par jour, le cœur étreint par quelque chose d'innommable quoique pas absolument mauvais' (p. 11).

This woman — or rather this phantom woman — becomes not just a curiosity for the narrator but something of an obsession, as the omnipresent but invisible woman is always beyond her grasp; she wonders whether the woman may be waiting for her, whether she wants the narrator to discover her, and whether she is there even when the narrator is not. On one occasion, she even stops the car and asks the children whether they see somebody in the garden, to which they respond negatively. No information is given about her identity or those of her children; all five are unnamed, undescribed characters who appear to be just as phantom-like as the mysterious woman — or non-woman — in the garden. In this way, NDiaye not only conceals the self of this self-portraiture but also casts doubt over the narrator's vision, perception and reliability, to the extent that the reader may question the truth of any claim subsequently made as to the narrator's identity.

This technique is furthered by the encounter that the narrator describes in the following section. Walking in the unnamed town centre one morning, she unexpectedly meets a friend of hers, who happens to be wearing green shorts patterned with green flowers. As opposed to 'la femme en vert' of the garden, this woman becomes 'la femme au short vert' and her identity is similarly indistinct. The narrator at first believes this woman to be a friend named Cristina, only to realise quickly that she could be one of her acquaintances, Marie-Gabrielle or Alison. The woman recounts a disturbing tale of her children and parents, at the conclusion of which the narrator's 'real' friend, Cristina, appears. The first woman is then described as 'Cristina (?)', then as 'l'inconnue que j'ai prise pour Cristina' (pp. 28-9) and finally as 'la fausse Cristina' (p. 29). The narrator thus never identifies her, and furthermore describes her in terms of whom she is not rather than whom she is, an absence rather than a presence: she is not Marie-Gabrielle or Alison, but simply not Cristina.

This image resonates with the absence of self-portraiture at work in this text, especially since the narrator gives no more information on, or insight into, the identity or character of the narrator throughout this episode; throughout, this self is more of an absence than a presence, defined by what she is not more than by what she is. Marie-Claire Barnet writes succinctly that this text 'donne le vertige, comparable à l'effet d'illusion optique de voir surgir une surabondance de portraits incontrôlables, en enfilade sans fin, tout comme pouvaient les provoquer les anciennes armoires à

pharmacie', since a series of women move through this text, all of whom are presented in incomplete, thumbnail sketches and who further distance the 'self' for whom the reader searches.<sup>10</sup> In the first few pages of this text, therefore, NDiaye challenges the expectations of the reader, the identity of the narrator, the reliability of sight and the truth of memory. Vision, visibility, perception and memory are all shown to be fallible, and characters, including the narrator, are phantoms rather than personalities. Indeed, phantoms are given more precedence in this tale than the self whose portrait the title claims to depict, as the writer appears intent on portraying the unreliability of people and of the senses, rather than creating any self-portrait in words.

Yet another major aspect of *Autoportrait en vert* is that, as Beaujour highlighted in his discussion of Leiris's and Montaigne's self-portraits, this text also contains visual elements. In this work, seventeen photographs are interspersed among the text. Predictably, perhaps, in light of the almost anti-self-portrait that this work stages in its textual narrative, this visual narrative does little to further a representation of a self. Shirley Jordan argues that the photographs 'serve persistently to dis-locate the autobiographical self, transferring our attention away from NDiaye as a private individual and back to her writing', since NDiaye's photographs serve to complicate rather than elucidate the self of this purported self-narrative.<sup>11</sup> The work opens with a photograph that sits across the page from the description of the Garonne. One may expect such a photograph to depict the countryside that the text is describing, to contextualise the tale or to introduce photographs of the self of this self-portrait. Instead, the photograph is of a woman looking down to the side at an invisible target with an arm raised in front of what appears to be a hill. The black-and-white photograph is so blurred that the woman's clothing and facial features are indistinct, yet the tone of her skin shows that she is white. In fact, the image is so blurred that it could possibly be a shaded pencil drawing rather than a photographic image. At once the reader recognises that this is not the writer, therefore, but since there is no label or description, and since nobody

10 M.-C. Barnet, 'Déroute d'un autoportrait en vert (mère): Vers l'errance de Marie NDiaye', in A. Asibong and S. Jordan (eds), *Marie NDiaye: L'étrangeté à l'œuvre* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2009), p. 157.

11 S. Jordan, 'Chronicles of intimacy: Photography in autobiographical projects', in N. Edwards, A. Hubbell and A. Miller (eds), *Textual and visual selves: Photography, film, and comic art in French autobiography* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2011), p. 62.

is mentioned in the accompanying description of the Garonne, the identity of the woman pictured is impossible to guess.

One may imagine that the photographs included in a work that purports to be self-referential may relate directly to the self by depicting the self or its others, or at least emanating from personal photographs. Nevertheless, the credits for the images show that many do not even belong to NDiaye; nine come from her personal collection but eight are reproductions of photographs taken by the artist Julie Ganzin. These photographs depict either women or countryside settings and no caption or explanation is ever appended to them. Some even appear to be period pieces — portraits of women from previous centuries in clothing and in settings of those times — and one may imagine that these may be the author's ancestors, but nothing appears to link the image and what one knows about her. It is thus impossible to discern whether the women or the settings relate to the tale told by the text; instead, they are inserted seemingly randomly among the words on the page with no direct connection between text and image. As Catherine Poisson identifies, 'la photo est une invitation à l'interprétation et non pas trahison, sentiment qui colore dans un premier temps le rapport du lecteur à cette photo qui semble refuser d'adhérer au texte et qui nous fait en sentir exclus'.<sup>12</sup> The photographs thus further conceal or displace the self of this supposed self-portrait and lead the reader to pose more questions of this selfless self-narrative than they answer.

In addition to the fact that the self is absent from these photographs, they challenge the reader's expectations of photography, and particularly of photography in self-narrative, on several levels. One such example is the usage of repeated shots of people who are apparently unrelated to the writer and whose photographs are slightly altered in each reproduction. Amid a description in the text of the narrator's mother, two photographs by Ganzin are displayed side by side. Unlabelled, the photographs' human subjects are indistinct; in both, a white woman is seated on a chair on which a white child is standing, in front of what appears to be a hedge. The style of dress is from a previous time, possibly the nineteenth century; thus both the time frame and the skin colour of the child convey that these people cannot be the writer and her mother. Instead, the reader is invited to ponder who these people may be and what history they may occupy in the writer's family (none, it

12 C. Poisson, 'Frictions: Mot et image chez Marie NDiaye et Camille Laurens', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 10 (2007), p. 490.

transpires, since the photographs were taken by Ganzin, so can have nothing to do with the author). Moreover, the two photographs are slightly different; although almost identical, one is brighter than the other, and the child is looking in a different direction in each one.

To complicate this further, the photograph is again reproduced ten pages later and again in a slightly different way; this is a full-length shot that takes up an entire page, showing the whole image of the woman and child and the trees and sky above them, and in this version the child looks directly at the camera. This recurring image and its recurring ghost-like inhabitants arrest the reading process; although there is a continuity in the three almost identical photographs, they appear on two different pages and bear no apparent connection to the text. They thus disrupt the flow of the narrative and oblige a pause to ponder and to compare these images. Unknowable, ghost-like and beyond one's grasp, they hint at the evasive, uncapturable self who is perpetually situated beyond the text and images of this self-portrait. The fact that the child is dressed in white and the woman is dressed in black provides an evident contrast in colour, which I will discuss further below.

A further twist in the use of photography in self-narrative is a photograph of a woman set against trees and bushes, most of which are again blurred (p. 31). The woman stands leaning to the side with her top half visible and her arms raised, and she is pictured from behind as she looks towards the countryside. Oddly, however, this image is displayed upside down. No explanation of the photograph, its content or its non-standard display is given in the text, which discusses another of the narrator's attempts to find 'la femme en vert' in her garden. Instead, the reader is obliged to turn the page upside down to view the photograph, thereby engaging in non-standard reading/viewing practices in the search for understanding of this supposed self-portrait. It may be that NDiaye's intention is to turn self-portraiture on its head, very literally, or to further highlight the invisibility or inaccessibility of the self that this work conceals.

Moreover, this photograph is reproduced several pages later, again with no caption or explanation of its relevance to the text (p. 44). There are two notable differences in this second image, however; first, the photograph is no longer upside down but is displayed in a standard way with the grass and trees clearly visible. Second, the woman is absent; where she was, her arms raised and looking at the countryside, is simply the rest of the tree that her body obscured. This may be a

pictorial representation of the disappearing 'femme en vert' for whom the narrator is searching, or a reference to the mostly invisible, indiscernible self of this self-narrative. It is striking also that these two photographs play with the idea of being 'à l'envers', upside down, which is a homonym of 'en vert'; maybe this contains a clue that this work is both an 'autoportrait en vert' and an 'autoportrait à l'envers', an upside-down or reverse self-portrait.

### Self-portraiture and time

Beaujour proposed that a major trait of self-portraiture, and its main point of dissimilarity from autobiography, is the pattern of representation that insists upon an absence of continuity and a rendering of the self in the present. We have seen that NDiaye creates a lack of continuity by constantly displacing the self, by confusing characters in both text and image, and by casting doubt over the veracity of the narrator's own memories and vision in the present. Moreover, the reader does not have access to the backstory; the narrator does not inform the reader of the history of her relationship with her family members, of her personal or professional history, or of any details related to her past. Nevertheless, NDiaye plays with the reader's expectation of the relationship between past and present in autobiographical narrative in several ways.

First, NDiaye plays with time very literally through her inclusion of dates throughout this work. The opening page featuring the description of the Garonne begins with a date, December 2003; and this, together with the present-tense narration of an event that is incomplete and awaiting resolution (whether or not the Garonne will flood that evening) gives the impression of a standard diary format. Yet the following section in which the narrator searches for the woman behind the banana tree is simply dated '2002', before returning to December 2003 in the following vignette. Several vignettes are dated and some are not, and several have a very precise date, such as 10 April 2001. This supposed diary even begins and finishes at the same date, suggesting that its subject has come full circle.

Such lack of continuity and precision regarding the dates of events recounted and the movement backward and forward of time without explanation undercuts the reader's expectation of a diary, yet conforms to Beaujour's notion of the portrayal of the self in present time rather than the reconstruction of a complete personality; the self-portrait is predicated upon the immediate with little regard to its subject's



past, which is the pattern of NDiaye's cyclical, non-chronological diary. Yet the absence of the self at the heart of the text and the images, due to the author's constant displacement of the narrator's identity, complicates this version of self-portraiture. The vignettes with different dates cannot represent a diary according to established standards of this genre since they do not present a self; thus the establishment of a self in a present time that self-portraiture aims to achieve is averted. This supposed diary format and the continual subversion of narrative continuity throughout this work thus serves to further remove the self from this self-portrait.

Yet the fact that the self-portrait concentrates on the present rather than the past enables the writer/painter to obscure her/his past, which is of particular interest in NDiaye's text. This writer claims to barely know her African father and members of his family, and the history of her identity is therefore beyond her own grasp. Whereas an autobiographer may refer to incidents of her/his past and an autofiction writer may fictionalise parts of her/his story, the self-portraitist has the artistic license to overlook that past to the extent that s/he wishes. NDiaye's narrator makes references in this text to ways in which her past has influenced her, particularly to how she does not know or even recognise people to whom she is related and how this creates tension and conflict in certain situations, but the details of her past are largely invisible.

The self-portrait is thus the perfect genre for the writer who aims to remove her/his history as far as possible from the narrative. NDiaye remarked in an interview: 'Je me livre, voilà ma vie et mon être. Non, voilà une vérité. Après, les détails ne sont pas vraiment importants ... Oui, c'est autobiographique. Les rapports entre le texte et ma vraie vie, ça ne regarde que moi'.<sup>13</sup> She thus claims that the text represents her, but, just as she does in the text, she refuses to explain how. Indeed, the indicators are so indistinct that the reader certainly cannot have a clear portrait of her — of the author or of the narrator — by the text's close. Instead, what one reads is a portrait of a search for an identity: a search for 'la femme en vert', rather than a portrait of a self. It is as though a painter were preparing a series of preliminary sketches for a self-portrait, but these are of people or places to whom s/he is not directly related — or at least her/his relationship to them is not conveyed to the onlooker.

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13 P. Casanova, 'Entretien avec Marie NDiaye', *Les Mardis littéraires, France Culture* (Radio, 15 January 2005).

Nora Cottille-Foley argues that 'plus que d'un autoportrait, il s'agit ici du récit d'un regard, celui d'un auteur — ou encore de son double fictive — sur le monde qui l'environne. Le regard, ou plutôt les regards, croisés ou solitaires, concentrés ou affolés, extralucides ou aveugles, sillonnent le récit'.<sup>14</sup> Whether this self-portrait is based upon how the author looks at other people or places, or whether it paints a picture of the author's real-life relationships, which she intends to keep a secret from the reader, the result is that neither the images nor the text create a self-narrative. Ironically, this conforms to Beaujour's theory, since the reader is unknowing and uncomprehending, in the position of the overhearing third person, the 'tiers exclu'. Yet NDiaye pushes this logic to its limit by concealing her self and the process of self-representation to the extent that it is — to the onlooker at least — invisible.

### Self-portraiture and colour

A key element of the invisibility at work in this text is the author's play with colour, to which her title alludes. The notion of a self-portrait in green is evidently an artistic metaphor, alluding to painting oneself in the colour green. NDiaye thus brings her text closer to the medium of painting, in which the self-portrait originates. The choice of the colour green is a further enigma, since this is never explained in the text. The reader may immediately think of the countryside of the Garonne in which much of the text is contextualised. The choice of the colour green for the 'femmes en vert', the ghost-like characters who people the text, is never justified, yet each woman, including the narrator's mother and the narrator herself, is awarded this label.

When outlining her relationship with the colour green early in the narrative, the narrator refers to her memories of primary school, evoking a stern, frightening school mistress:

Me revient alors l'inquiétant souvenir d'une femme en vert, au temps de l'école maternelle. Cette grande femme brutale et carrée nous promet à tous la prison si nous mangeons trop lentement, si nous salissons nos vêtements, si nous ne levons pas les yeux vers les siens. Elle a les yeux verts, elle leur assortit ses longues jupes à carreaux à col roulé. Elle faisait planer dans l'école une atmosphère d'épouvante. (pp. 18-19)

14 N. Cottille-Foley, 'Optique fantastique, traitement de la photographie et transgression des limites du visible chez Marie Ndiaye', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 13: 5 (2009), p. 550.

This memory provokes the narrator to associate green with nastiness, and she provocatively asks the reader if such an association can be denied: 'qui peut nier que la méchanceté aime tout particulièrement s'orner de toutes sortes de verts?' (p. 19) The colour green may be more immediately associated with nature or, particularly in the French tradition, with hope, yet NDiaye appears to take a more negative view; the menacing Garonne itself is described as a 'femme en vert'; her unpleasant stepmother has an emerald eye that makes the narrator uneasy; and the mysterious, untrustworthy women whom she encounters often wear green. The author thus morphs standard connotations of the colour green into something unfamiliar and uncomfortable, a metaphor perhaps for her approach to the self-portrait itself.

However, this self-portrait is certainly not in green; it is in black and white. The photographs are mostly of natural, countryside settings, yet all appear in black and white in the text. Some of the photographs of women from previous time frames may have been printed in black and white, but all of the photographs are rendered in this way in the text. Given that the title states that this writer is portraying herself in a colour that would normally be very evident in photographs of the countryside, the reduction to black and white is curious. One may wonder at a link with the writer's multiracial background, especially since she has attempted to deny the impact of colour and her multicultural background on her identity or writing.

Yet one may also question the title, given that *vert* is a homonym of several other words. This could alternatively be considered as an 'autoportrait en vers', since NDiaye's highly lyrical prose emphasises poetry through its imagery and word-play. We have seen that the photographs — and, by extension, this text — may be interpreted as an 'autoportrait à l'envers'. Alternatively, the *vert* of the title could be read as referring to the state of immaturity or inexperience, as in the colloquialism 'to be green', and may hint at the unfinished, experimental nature of this text. Another interpretation may be found in the homonym *vert/verre*: green and glass. Given that the self-portrait that NDiaye has created is colourless, a self-portrait in glass may be an appropriate approximation. Glass is transparent, yet obscures and obstructs. Rather than a speculum or a mirror, glass is a material through which perception passes; glass is colourless but is able to reflect and to refract other colours, as in a prism. Furthermore, the fragile, brittle nature of glass may mirror the vulnerability of the self-writing project and emphasise the way in which a story of a self may be shattered. Read in this way, the self-portrait may not be colourless, and may not

feature a displaced or invisible identity, but may function rather as a prism through which identity metamorphoses, through which colours, vision and perception alter, and which is closer to a moving kaleidoscope than a fixed, static picture of a captured identity.

### Concluding thoughts

*Autoportrait en vert* thus challenges the reader's expectation of a self-portrait on several levels. NDiaye conforms to several key aspects of this genre, concentrating on the present time and writing vignettes rather than an explanation of the developing personality over time. As Beaujour suggested, the self-portrait traditionally rests upon a narrative pattern that defies continuity, that conveys an array of isolated moments rather than a string of ordered memories that contribute to a narrative of self-development. NDiaye's collection of vignettes that portray isolated events mirrors such a notion of self-portraiture. Yet she simultaneously plays with this by casting doubt over the identity and perception of the narrator, by writing a supposed diary that conveys a search for a self rather than any explanation of a self, and by flattening several aspects that are important to this particular self-representation: history and colour.

As opposed to autofiction or autobiography or the journal, the self-portrait therefore is a perfect choice for NDiaye's literary and visual experimentation; she elects to include little of the past in order to concentrate on the present, she experiments with vignettes that defy any notion of ordered self-development and she challenges the representation of colour in a multiracial context. Furthermore, she extends the experimentation with visual image which she began in *En famille*.<sup>15</sup> In *Autoportrait en vert*, the photographs, the inclusion of which is becoming steadily more popular in autobiographical narrative, serve to further distance the self from this self-portrait. NDiaye thus uses the genre of the self-portrait to extend her questioning of the conditions and limits of self-narrative and her nuanced representation of subjectivity. By using the self-portrait and by manipulating several key aspects of this genre, she fosters the reader's expectations, only to undercut these in a crafted play of revelation and concealment which ultimately obscures the self.

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15 M. Ndiaye, *En famille* (Paris, Minuit, 1991).

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# 10

## Accumulating Algeria: Recurrent images in Pied-Noir visual works

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Upon losing their homeland at the end of the Algerian War of Independence in 1962, the community of Pieds-Noirs, or former French citizens of Algeria, set out to protect their fragile memories through literature, photography and film. Every year the communities gather together in France to commemorate their exodus, and each reunion is guided by images of colonial Algeria. As the ageing Pieds-Noirs assemble, so do fragments of their past: school photos endlessly emerge from Pieds-Noirs seeking to identify lost or forgotten classmates, and iconic Algerian monuments reappear in slide presentations, films, photodocumentaries, paintings and websites. The Pieds-Noirs are eager to collect each remnant from their homeland, and the visual pieces are among the most evocative. As these accumulated images represent an entire community's long absent home, and as many members contribute to the composite image of colonial Algeria, a process of layering and overlapping occurs. The representations of places become densely piled, heavy with consolidated meaning and multiple memories of places to such an extent that the image becomes larger than life.

Through an analysis of recurrent images of Algeria produced by its former French citizens, from photodocumentary to mixed-media artwork, I hope to make apparent that the visual layering of a colonial past progressively narrows what is



remembered from the colony while solidifying specific landmarks. I will then attempt to demonstrate that rather than jogging, confronting or preserving memory, the accumulated images of Algeria distance the viewer from the reality of the past by compressing personal experience under communal memory.

In the *Souvenirs de là-bas* series of Algerian photodocumentary books, author Elisabeth Fechner expresses that, in spite of distortions, the photograph is the reality that endures through time: 'La photo alors, la belle affaire. Floue? Surexposée? Mal cadrée? Vue du ciel? De trop loin? De trop près? Ce rêve d'un soir, allez savoir comment, restait à jamais fixé sur la pellicule'.<sup>1</sup> Fechner's goal is to let the Pieds-Noirs compare and contrast their memories with the assembled images in her works dedicated to Algiers, Oran and Constantine. Each text begins with the same introductory call: come and see how your memories match up to these pictures. After all, this is all we have left. Fechner similarly collects images in broader works such as *Le Pays d'où je viens: Souvenirs d'Algérie 1910-1962* (1999) and *La Gloire de l'Algérie: Écrivains et photographes 1830-1960* (2000).<sup>2</sup> Across the texts, Fechner builds a stable image of Algeria the way it appeared before independence — a version that will resonate with Algeria's former inhabitants more than with those who live there today. Colonial Algeria is conveyed as if the present were entirely negligible.

As individual photos gradually join together into collective volumes and websites, the community's memory progressively erases personal experience in Algeria. Landmarks especially bear the weight of this process. Iconic locations stand out in individual memories, and as the experiences at these locations join together, the images of them become repetitious. Eventually the backdrop fades and from whatever vantage point the photo is taken, the landmark remains clearly visible and recognisable. The needs of the community prioritise collective memory over individual experience in Algeria, and lesser known places begin to be forgotten.

This nostalgic overlapping of images that absorbs individual experience into communal memory is especially apparent in the representation of Oran's Notre-Dame

1 E. Fechner, *Alger et l'Algérois* (Paris, Calmann-Levy, 2002), p. 9.

2 E. Fechner, *Le Pays d'où je viens* (Paris, Calmann-Levy, 1999); E. Fechner, *Le Pays d'où je viens* (Paris, Calmann-Levy, 1999); see my chapter 'Viewing the past through a "nostalgeric" lens: Pied-Noir photo-documentaries', in N. Edwards, A.L. Hubbell and A. Miller (eds), *Textual and visual selves: Photography, film and comic art in French autobiography* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2011) for a detailed discussion of sustained nostalgia in photodocumentary texts.

de Santa-Cruz basilica, an iconic monument typically photographed from the Fort Santa-Cruz just above it. The church has come to symbolise colonial survival, faith and community: in September 1849 Oran was at the centre of a devastating cholera epidemic.<sup>3</sup> When more than 1100 people died in the last two weeks of October 1849, the community began making processions up the mountain.<sup>4</sup> As the legend goes, when the procession up the mountain with the Virgin Mary began on 4 November, throngs of people threw themselves at the statue asking her to take pity. Rain fell that night, breaking the heatwave that had spurred the epidemic. To commemorate the miracle, in the following year the Spanish community built the Chapelle de Santa Cruz at the top of the mountain and it was dedicated on Ascension. The church was rebuilt in 1851 after one of the vaults collapsed; a bell tower was added in 1873. After numerous other modifications, in 1951 the old chapel was demolished and the church was rebuilt into its present state.

For the Pieds-Noirs, the church represents a communal memory rooted in Catholicism; thus when the Pieds-Noirs arrived in France in the 1960s, they built a similarly styled church in honour of the Virgin in Nîmes-Courbessac. The new Notre-Dame de Santa-Cruz church hosts a large communal gathering and a procession every year on Ascension in which the community carries the same statue of the Virgin up from the town to the new church. In spite of the architectural and geographic shifts in the representation of the church, Notre-Dame de Santa-Cruz is solidified as a communal icon. The church now represents Pieds-Noirs from all regions of Algeria. Individual attachment to the icon is effaced in favour of communal representation.

In the same way that the physical building reappears, images of the church are reproduced almost *ad nauseam*. Oran's Notre-Dame de Santa-Cruz is ubiquitous on Pied-Noir websites and in photodocumentary books. For example, the iconic location appears on the cover and inside Fechner's *Oran et l'Oranie* as well as the cover of René Bail's *Souvenirs d'Oranie* (2003).<sup>5</sup> It is pictured in Marie Cardinal's

3 This epidemic is ostensibly the inspiration for Albert Camus's *La Peste* (Paris, Gallimard, 1947), although Camus's story takes place in the 1940s.

4 According to the legend recounted on Villedoran.com, Général Pélissier asked the Curé to intercede but the Curé declared himself incapable of stopping the epidemic. So Pélissier recommended the processions saying, 'Foutez donc une vierge là-haut et elle se chargera de jeter le choléra à la mer'.

5 E. Fechner, *Oran et l'Oranie* (Paris, Calmann-Levy, 2002); R. Bail (ed.), *Souvenirs d'Oranie* (Paris, Trésor du Patrimoine, 2003).

*Les Pieds-Noirs* (1988), Gérard Guicheteau and Marc Combier's *L'Algérie oubliée: Images d'Algérie (1910-1954)* (2004), and in a variety of other photographic works dedicated to the former *Français d'Algérie*. In *Souvenirs d'Oranie*, the last French mayor of Mostaganem, Lucien Laugier, recounts his departure from Algeria as he looks down at the church:

11 juin 1961. A La Sénia, je prends l'avion pour Marseille. L'appareil survole Oran; sous mes yeux, la montagne de Santa Cruz et le sanctuaire de Notre-Dame. Près de là, 130 ans auparavant, lors de l'épidémie de peste qui dévasta la ville, Bugeaud avait ordonné: "Foutez-moi une Vierge sur la montagne, peut-être nous en débarrassera-t-elle." Depuis lors partout, des Français avaient transformé, vivifié ce pays. C'était maintenant fini, et mon regard en recueillait les derniers souvenirs. Là-bas, dans le bled, au petit cimetière ombragé de cyprès, auquel on accédait par une belle allée plantée d'eucalyptus, je laissais, témoins de ce passage:

Claude Laugier, père de Victor

Victor Laugier, père de Louis,

Louis Laugier, père d'Ulysse,

Ulysse Laugier, mon père.<sup>6</sup>

Laugier's last glimpses of Algeria zoom in on the site, attaching his family history to the colonial history of Oran. After this brief preface, Bail presents gathered photographs with multiple views of Notre-Dame de Santa-Cruz, explaining in a caption:

Le vieux fort espagnol de Santa-Cruz, élevé à partir de 1509, fut restauré en 1955. En contrebas, la basilique, lieu d'un pèlerinage particulièrement fréquenté le jeudi de l'Ascension. La statue de la Vierge a été "rapatriée" au sanctuaire de Mas-de-Mingue à Nîmes-Courbessac.<sup>7</sup>

The church is reiterated throughout the book — because it stands above the city on the mountain, it is a constant backdrop for various other monuments in Oran such as 'Le port de pêche et le Quai Charlemagne', 'La Casbah et la cité des planteurs', 'Le statue du Calo', and 'Le vieux fort espagnol de Mers el-Kébir'.<sup>8</sup> The penultimate

6 L. Laugier, 'Preface' to R. Bail (ed.), *Souvenirs d'Oranie* (Paris, Trésor du Patrimoine, 2003), p. 16.

7 Bail, p. 23.

8 Bail, pp. 26, 34, 52, 80 respectively. The Basilica also appears in the background on photos of other religious buildings. For example in M. Cardinal, *Les Pieds-Noirs*, a photo of the 'Minaret de la mosque Sidi Mohamed el Haouari à Oran' has the Santa Cruz fort and

photo in *Souvenirs d'Oranie* is a hazy black-and-white aerial shot of Oran spanning two pages with the caption:

Ceux qui partent par avion garderont dans la mémoire un dernier cliché de la terre que des générations de leurs aïeux avaient contribué à mettre en valeur et dans laquelle beaucoup d'entre eux pensaient s'être enracinés, une vision plus large, plus lointaine aussi, et qui s'estompera plus vite.<sup>9</sup>

In this and other photographic works that attempt to fix a specific visual memory to the page, the reader can heavily sense the Pieds-Noirs' fear of losing sight of these cherished Algerian icons.

Although the Notre-Dame de Santa-Cruz church is not always foregrounded visually, the paratext in these volumes draws the eye towards it. In *L'Algérie oubliée: Images d'Algérie (1910-1954)*, the church almost imperceptibly appears in a panoramic shot from above that focuses on the bay. The caption reads:

Vue aérienne de la rade de Mers-el-Kébir, à l'ouest d'Oran, avec, au premier plan le rocher de Santa Cruz, la chapelle et le fort espagnol qui tint la ville et la mer sous ses canons durant deux siècles. C'est à la chapelle de Santa Cruz que les Oranais venaient en pèlerinage.<sup>10</sup>

What is not visually obvious becomes highlighted as the text repositions it within the colonial setting. Similarly, in a photo in Marie Cardinal's large-format photobook, *Les Pieds-Noirs* (1988), Notre-Dame de Santa-Cruz is barely visible but a caption printed on the image itself allows the viewer to recognise the site: 'Oran, la Banque de l'Algérie et le fort de Santa-Cruz'.<sup>11</sup> The reader is invited to zoom in on these tiny representations of a church that is progressively enlarged through memory.

Each town in colonial Algeria has its own symbols that accumulate over time. Landmarks such as *La Grande Poste* in Algiers, the ruins of Tipasa, Timgad and Guelma, and the bridges of Constantine are photographically reproduced and subsequently iconised, becoming emblematic of both their specific region in Algeria and the colonial presence therein. The central post office of Algiers is figured in church centred in the top portion of the photo, while the minaret is foregrounded but on the extreme left (Paris, Belfond, 1988), p. 246.

9 Bail, p. 123.

10 G. Guicheteau and M. Combier, *L'Algérie oubliée: Images d'Algérie (1910-1954)* (Paris, Acropole, 2004), p. 35.

11 Cardinal, p. 125.

Cardinal's *Les Pieds-Noirs*, taken as both a street view and an aerial view<sup>12</sup>, in Fechner's *Alger et les Algérois*<sup>13</sup>, and in Guicheteau and Combier's *L'Algérie oubliée*, which describes the site's specificity: 'Alger: la Grande Poste en pur style néo-mauresque, le square Laferrière et les lignes des tramways Satramo (une innovation) qui roulèrent de 1935 à 1959'.<sup>14</sup> The Roman ruins in Algeria are pictured in these same works and across a variety of others. For example, in *Alger et l'Algérois* Fechner provides a black-and-white close-up of a European tourist examining the Roman ruins in Tipasa.<sup>15</sup> Constantine, built on the Rummel gorge, remains a stunning example of French colonial engineering. The many bridges that span the gorge symbolise the community and are pictured in the same photodocumentary works. In *Les Pieds-Noirs*, the Pont Sidi Rached and the Pont Suspendu appear.<sup>16</sup> Fechner pictures le Pont d'El Kantara in *Constantine et le Constantinois*.<sup>17</sup> In the section of *L'Algérie oubliée* entitled 'La Modernité vint avec le colonialisme', we see an 'autre vue du ravin du Rhummel qui entoure Constantine — le pont Sidi Rached qui le franchit'.<sup>18</sup> The text also underscores the amazing engineering feat accomplished by the colonials in a site that endures timelessly in the photos: 'Constantine: les gorges du Rhummel et le pont Sidi Rached. Cinquante siècles contemplant cette ville, ses défenses naturelles et ses ravins tragiques'<sup>19</sup>, and: 'La passerelle suspendue de Constantine a été construite selon la technique mise au point naguère par Marc Seguin. Après la conquête, elle fut l'un des premiers ponts jetés sur les gorges du Rhummel quand fut abandonné le "pont Romain" d'El-Kantara'.<sup>20</sup>

12 Cardinal, pp. 139, 142.

13 Fechner, *Alger et les Algérois*, p. 25.

14 Guicheteau and Combier, p. 140.

15 Fechner, *Alger et l'Algérois*, p. 69; see my article '(Re)turning to ruins: Pied-Noir visual returns to Algeria' in J. McGonagle and E. Welch (eds), 'France and Algeria in contemporary visual culture', Special issue, in *Modern and Contemporary France* 19.2 (May 2011), pp. 147-61 for a more complete study of the ruin's function within nostalgic memory.

16 Cardinal, pp. 114, 110.

17 E. Fechner, *Constantine et le Constantinois* (Paris, Calmann-Levy, 2002).

18 Guicheteau and Combier, pp. 120-1.

19 Guicheteau and Combier, p. 64.

20 Guicheteau and Combier, p. 34. The spelling of the Rummel gorge and its bridges varies across these texts.

As similar images reappear across volumes, a specific memory of Algeria emerges that erases what is not seen.<sup>21</sup> The repetition reinforces a fixed image of the country, specifically during the colonial period, while giving the impression that Algeria's diversity is accurately represented through photographs. While its intent is to fulfil nostalgic longing, repetition instead renders these places as unmovable, solidified monuments that represent the past but that do not allow other angles and other views of less stunning colonial achievements to intercede. The wall-like monument instead encases the memory within, impeding contamination of the past by divergent memories of the shared homeland. Algeria is pictured at its best. The few images of indigenous peoples and the real poverty some endured in colonial Algeria become romanticised through black-and-white pages of smiling peasant workers or Algerian dignitaries in grand robes who are exoticised against the predominantly European architecture that fills the volumes.<sup>22</sup>

While many photodocumentary works attempt to sustain a nostalgic vision of Algeria, some question the reality of the oft-reproduced images. In *L'Algérie oubliée*, for example, Guicheteau and Combier seek to display how the postcard images of the past found in the Fonds Combier are unrepresentative of reality precisely because those pictured sites are heavily transformed by the suffering exiles in the Pied-Noir community. Benjamin Stora, an exiled Algerian Jew and the foremost scholar on all things Algerian, writes in the preface to *L'Algérie oubliée*: 'Les photographes standardisent, et distinguent, tous les modèles en allant quelquefois dans le simulacre, l'icône, l'illusion'.<sup>23</sup> Recognising the photograph's tendency to erase difference, Stora emphasises the book's title — what is forgotten, based on these collected images — and he explains:

L'accumulation de photos signale la chronique fébrile, derrière une apparente quiétude, d'un pays dont les brusques mutations économiques et sociales sont grosses de contradictions, et de tragédies lorsque l'on connaît la fin de cette histoire ... Les photographes ont transformé les paysages ... en motifs, en formes malléables, en taches d'une couleur noire et blanche. Toutes ces

21 Hélène Cixous in *Si près* looks at her footage of return voyage to Algeria and states, 'La caméra regarde, je ne regarde pas ce qu'elle regarde ... La caméra ne voit pas les abîmes. Je tombe'. (Paris, Galilée, 2007, p. 137).

22 See especially Cardinal's *Les Pieds-Noirs*, which simultaneously romanticises and exoticises Algerian people throughout both the images and the texts.

23 Stora, 'Preface', p. 8.

images construisent l'Algérie comme un décor pour un tourisme qui n'a jamais vraiment existé ... où l'analogie du visible avec la réalité s'éloigne lentement, sans toutefois prendre trop de distances.<sup>24</sup>

The anxiety induced by separation and the fear of forgetting inspire the accumulation of these images, but the standardised prints also contribute to forgetting. All that is left now of this Algeria is tied to the page, and the image painted therein is nothing more than a vivid tourist brochure. Collected images can do little more than solidify the most representative aspects of Algeria for the largest number of its former inhabitants. In this process the outliers are erased: personalised and intimate portrayals are less likely to be preserved.

Despite his recognition of how feverish collection condenses memory, Stora has a long history of participating in textual and visual representations of Algeria. His own experience is visually represented in his 1998 book *Algérie, formation d'une nation* and its postscript '*Impressions de voyage*, in which he gives a brief history of Algeria's independence followed by a nostalgically photographed trip back to his homeland for a conference. Stora visits and photographs iconic locations in Constantine including his childhood home, and he also provides two versions of the same photo of the Pont Sidi M'Cid.<sup>25</sup> Stora, like many of his compatriots, has gathered images and commentary across volumes of densely piled memorabilia.

In 2011, Stora wrote the texts for Yann Arthus-Bertrand's *Algérie, vue du ciel* in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of Algeria's independence. Overtly calling attention to both ruins and nostalgia, the opening pages are filled with impressive double-page spreads. One of these is the Ruins of Timgad, immediately followed by a sweeping view of the Casbah in Algiers. Although the Casbah is obviously not in ruins, the second picture runs in stark parallel to its predecessor. The criss-cross of the streets lines up similarly, giving the impression that Timgad has been overlain with Algiers. Stora opens the volume by calling attention to this differing view: 'Je n'avais jamais vu la ville où je suis né, Constantine, de cette manière. Une ville tout entière tassée au sommet d'un bloc, et les ponts, *vus du ciel*, au-dessus ...'<sup>26</sup> Stora claims that his own image of Constantine had long been stored in his mind's eye: 'après avoir suivi mes

24 Stora, 'Preface', p. 9.

25 B. Stora, *Algérie, formation d'une nation* (Paris, Atlantica, 1998), pp. 55, 64.

26 Y. Arthus-Bertrand and B. Stora, *Algérie vue du ciel* (Paris, La Martinière, 2011), p. 29, emphasis in original.



parents dans l'exil, j'ai longtemps eu peur de l'effacement des premières images de mon enfance'.<sup>27</sup> In spite of his fears, however, Stora understood that even though he was in exile, that past (as evidenced by these images) did not disappear. He remained highly attached to Algeria and pursued a 'chassé-croisé permanent entre l'actualité et les événements passés' so as to avoid enclosing himself in the past, but to reveal a 'mémoire vraie, apaisée' that allows new visions of that past.<sup>28</sup>

The images in *Algérie, vue du ciel* strive to provide that new vision — they attempt to reinvigorate the static images that have been seen, re-seen, stacked and overlapped. Stora says that Arthus-Bertrand gives 'une nouvelle "peau" à un pays que certains, que tous croient connaître depuis longtemps'.<sup>29</sup> This colourful book is destined first for young Algerians, then the painfully nostalgic Pieds-Noirs 'arrachés de leur terre natale qui songent encore à un pays perdu, et qui gardent en eux la nostalgie de paysages'.<sup>30</sup> Stora subsequently identifies the market as Algerian immigrants, French soldiers and more recent Algerian exiles who moved to France in the 1990s.<sup>31</sup> Rather than evacuating personal attachment, these images are meant to give them substance. The result is a massive Algeria, not reduced only to icons, but expanded so that it more resembles the paradise it is often labelled by its exiles. Inch by inch, Algeria appears to have been rendered on paper. Alongside the familiar, the camera captures the oil fields, Saharan dunes, wildlife and uninhabited terrains. It would seem every nook and cranny of Algeria has been laid bare below us, and the people captured look up to the photographer's lens, startled but sometimes also welcoming the gaze.

*Algérie, vue du ciel* offers a new perspective, a sight not yet seen but familiar, recognisable, abstracted, more breathtaking than ever. Yet in spite of the new angle and vivid colour, the book also remains familiar. The volume includes aforementioned images of Notre-Dame de Santa-Cruz and the bridges of Constantine. So even as images immediately appear to be fresh, they resonate with their predecessors, remaining recognisable, and contribute to the composite accumulated image of Algeria. As Stora puts it, 'Etrange apparition de paysages répétés, semblables et différents, en

27 Arthus-Bertrand and Stora, p. 29. Stora continues, 'J'ai longtemps gardé dans ma tête cette vision d'une cité, d'un pays à la fois lointain, insaisissable à l'étranger, et en même temps hospitalier, accueillant'.

28 Arthus-Bertrand and Stora, p. 29.

29 Arthus-Bertrand and Stora, p. 30.

30 Arthus-Bertrand and Stora, p. 30.

31 Arthus-Bertrand and Stora, pp. 30-1.

suspens, véhiculant l'idée de dématérialisation des formes et, par là, échappant au décorative, à l'exotisme'.<sup>32</sup> What Stora ignores, however, is that shooting from this high vantage point erases the detailed degradation of sites one might otherwise notice from the ground: the aerial view further distances the spectator while allowing an unapproachable position. The viewer cannot engage with the photographed reality, nor can the photographed reality touch the viewer, yet she/he has the impression of seeing everything from these god-like heights. This photographed Algeria is sanitised yet contradictorily seems more real and complete than ever.

In her seminal work *Regarding the pain of others*, Susan Sontag explains how memory functions in relation to the image:

... [W]hen it comes to remembering, the photograph has the deeper bite. Memory freeze-frames; its basic unit is the single image. In an era of information overload, the photograph provides a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form for memorizing it. The photograph is like a quotation, or a maxim or proverb. Each of us mentally stocks hundreds of photographs, subject to instant recall.<sup>33</sup>

While individuals may be able to instantly recall these catalogued images from their memories, communal memory is not so simple. The sheer volume of repeated images takes up space, crowding out the individual versions in favour of the familiar and resonating one. Personal memories, both good and bad, are squeezed out in favour of the more popular.

While the communal outweighs the personal in these photographic volumes, some of Algeria's former French citizens attempt to use the autobiographic to represent the community. This is the intention of Leïla Sebbar's recent photo-autobiographic trilogy *Mes Algéries en France*, *Journal de mes Algéries en France* and *Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre*, published between 2004 and 2008. Sebbar was born in 1941 in Aflou, Algeria, to an Algerian father and a French mother. Not identifying herself with any group, much less the Pieds-Noirs, Sebbar seeks to express her specific belongings and exclusions throughout her œuvre. In this series, however, Sebbar depicts fragments of her lost home by joining her own collections to the contributions of others. She gathers a disturbing number of pieces of colonial

32 Arthus-Bertrand and Stora, p. 30.

33 S. Sontag, *Regarding the pain of others* (New York, Picador, 2003), p. 20.

memorabilia, especially images of her lost homeland, to create a condensed web of personal and national memories that renders her own memory nearly inaccessible.<sup>34</sup>

In the preface to the first volume, *Mes Algéries en France* (2004), Michelle Perrot establishes the link to photography and memory:

La perte, qu'elle soit celle de la séparation, de l'exil ou de la mort, rend d'autant plus précieuses les photographies. Condensé de temps, instant suspendu, énigmatiques, voire indéchiffrables sans le regard familial encore capable de les lire, elles tiennent dans ce mémorial une place de choix non pas seulement illustrations mais pièces de puzzle, éléments du paysage, fragments du corps à recomposer.<sup>35</sup>

Like the image itself, Sebbar also wants to stabilise what she has experienced before it evaporates:

Au hasard de mes pérégrinations, j'ai fixé sur papier glacé, avant disparition, tout ce qui pouvait se lire encore, que le temps ou les élus n'avaient pas effacé, et je classe ces photographies dérisoires dans une petite boîte ... soucieuse d'une société qui bientôt ne sera plus, l'émotion est la même, sûrement, devant la trace lisible qui peut durer à l'image.<sup>36</sup>

To this end Sebbar almost frenetically collects objects, images and texts that represent her past. She calls herself a 'collectionneur fou, tendu vers ce qui s'exhibe et se dérobe, je tente par les mots, la voix, l'image, obstinément, d'abolir ce qui sépare'.<sup>37</sup> By collecting numerous remnants of her past in Algeria, photographing, sorting and assembling them in books, she 'fixes' a sort of history that compiles and compresses her past. Resonating with Stora's claim that '[l]'accumulation de photos signale la chronique febrile'<sup>38</sup>, Sebbar's activity is not satisfying. She openly declares that after each text she only wants to take up the project again: 'Après *Mes Algéries en France*,

34 Sebbar relies heavily on the contributions of others in these works so as to deflect her own participation in a return. In *Mes Algéries en France* she tells the story of her parents and joins them to a broader context of Algeria. In *Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre* Sebbar collects letters from numerous authors who know and do not know Algeria. Each person's sentiment about the country is as valid as the next. The collection is non-discriminant and progressively allows Sebbar to hide her own story underneath the layers of the collective.

35 L. Sebbar, *Mes Algéries en France* (Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule, Bleu autour, 2004), pp. 12-13.

36 Sebbar, *Mes Algéries en France*, p. 42.

37 L. Sebbar, *Journal de mes Algéries en France* (Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule, Bleu autour, 2005), p. 11.

38 Guicheteau and Combier, p. 9.

je poursuis et je poursuivrai encore l'Algérie en France. Prise par un besoin fébrile de mêler l'Algérie à la France, depuis la naissance, presque ...<sup>39</sup> And she does indeed continue this project on her blog published by Swarthmore College, with her most recent entry complete with images arriving in September 2014. Constructed of others' fragments, Sebbar's story becomes enmeshed within the texts. She is the master of the collage she presents, but what she gives of herself is obscured.

Sebbar's work can have no tidy outcome. She strives to maintain her identity as 'separated'<sup>40</sup> all while trying to 'abolir ce qui sépare'<sup>41</sup> through her texts. As Floriane Place-Verghnes suggests in 'The Photobiographical today: Signs of an identity crisis?', while Sebbar attempts to join communities together through her work, her collage process instead creates what she calls an 'unraveling identity'.<sup>42</sup> In *Mes Algéries en France* Sebbar tells tales of others. She recounts exile, forgetting, and even curiously absent photographs ('Je n'ai pas vu la photo, je ne la verrai pas').<sup>43</sup> Within Sebbar's work, representations through both image and word become densely intermeshed creating a tangled narrative that keeps the spectator-reader at a safe distance while giving the semblance of intimate detail.

Sebbar may demonstrate her personal wound through other autobiographical texts, but in this trilogy she avoids a visual representation of trauma.<sup>44</sup> The majority

39 Sebbar, *Journal de mes Algéries en France*, p. 11.

40 See L. Sebbar and N. Huston, *Lettres parisiennes: Histoires d'exil*, in which Sebbar defines herself as 'la croisée' (Paris, J'ai lu/Bernard Barrault, 1986), p. 147.

41 Sebbar, *Journal de mes Algéries en France*, p. 11.

42 Place-Verghnes explains that Sebbar uses herself to link together two cultures and 'tries to reconstruct her own identity through the narrative of a collective history: an identity that is a collage made up of multiple encounters', in N. Edwards, A.L. Hubbell and A. Miller (eds), *Textual and visual selves: Photography, film and comic art in French autobiography* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2011), p. 101.

43 Sebbar, *Mes Algéries en France*, p. 63. As Place-Verghnes analyses the intermingling of text and photo in these works, she explains, 'We thereby witness a quadruple cross-fertilization of the document: not only of the text and the image but also of the images among themselves (photographs as well as various other kinds of documents and objects — which can even enter into relationships of *mise en abyme*), of the texts among themselves (with ever-ambiguous generic categories) and, within the texts, different narrative instances'. See 'The Photobiographical Today: Signs of an identity crisis?' in Edwards, Hubbell and Miller, *Textual and visual selves*, p. 108, parentheses in original.

44 It is noteworthy that in *Mes Algéries en France*, Sebbar relates a second-hand graphic account from Nora Aceval about Islamic fundamentalists who forced a mother to eat her son's liver during the Algerian Civil War (pp. 52-6).

of her images are beautiful representations, often unexpected ones such as collected orange wrappers in brilliant colours, which remind her nostalgically of Algeria. The closest she comes to depicting discomfort is through the oft-repeated ID photos of Algerian women taken by Marc Garanger in 1960<sup>45</sup>, which have been interwoven into Sebbar's fiction and autobiography for the past forty years. Sebbar usually frames these photographs by describing the women as resistant and defiant to the European voyeuristic gaze rather than showing how they might also represent the wound of colonialism.<sup>46</sup>

While Sebbar does not attempt to go straight to the wound, other artists, very physically marked by their pain, do. Nicole Guiraud, who at the age of ten was mutilated in the Milk Bar explosion at the outset of the Battle of Algiers and who survived with an amputated arm, is now a mixed-media artist who depicts that wound and her multiple levels of exile in her artwork. Guiraud approaches trauma by reworking journalistic photos of the war and the subsequent exodus of the Pieds-Noirs. For example, Guiraud reuses an iconic photo which is believed originally to have been published in *Paris Match* 1962 and then reproduced in the 2006 film *Pieds-Noirs histoires d'une blessure*, and which appeared more recently in François Cardinali's collected testimonials, *Je me souviens ... L'exode des Pieds-Noirs (1962-2012)*.<sup>47</sup> The black-and-white photograph entitled 'L'Exode' represents grief and

45 See also the cover of *Mes Algéries en France* for one of these images of resistance.

46 The story of these photos is recounted in 'La Photo d'identité' in Sebbar's *La Jeune fille au balcon* (Paris, Seuil, 1996), pp. 59-83. See Andy Stafford's 'Fabulation in fragments: Leïla Sebbar's Algeria through the photography of Marc Garanger', in *Photo-texts* for a complete analysis of Sebbar and Garanger's intermingled work (pp. 122-39). Stafford cites Garanger as also appearing in the fictional short stories 'La Photographie' and 'Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts'. According to Stafford, when *Femmes des Hauts-Plateaux, Algérie 1960* (Brussels, La Boite à Documents, Université libre de Bruxelles, 1990) was republished from a 1982 work, *Femmes algériennes 1960* (Paris, Atlantica, 2002), Garanger was not consulted and this resulted in a falling-out between the collaborators: 'Garanger cannot, try as he might, control the ends to which his photographic images (whether "identity" or ethnographic photography in Algeria) have been (and, crucially, are still to be) mobilized. It would seem, anecdotally at least, that this staunch desire to control his photographic work stemmed from the experience of working with Sebbar in 1989' (Stafford, p. 123). Garanger indicated to Stafford a third edition was in progress and that he had significant difficulty getting his work published when he returned to France after two years of military service. It was not until his collaboration with Sebbar in 1982 that he succeeded.

47 F. Cardinali (ed.), *Je me souviens ... L'exode des Pieds-Noirs (1962-2012)* (Paris, Michel de Maule, 2012). In *J'étais enfant en Algérie. Juin 1962*, Sebbar's narrator also describes this scene

exhaustion as an elderly man hides his face in a handkerchief and two young girls sit on the curb beside him, while a French soldier crouching behind them looks blankly at the camera.<sup>48</sup> Guiraud recreates the familiar departure scene for her exhibit *Survivre*, commissioned by the city of Perpignan for the dedication of the *Centre de documentation des Français d'Algérie* in 2012. She overlays her words, 'Cesser le feu, c'est fini', upon the reproduction and inscribes a verse by poet Edmond Jabès: 'Tant d'adieux dans chaque adieu. Tant de cendres pour recouvrir un peu de cendre'.<sup>49</sup> Although Guiraud personalises the familiar departure scene, the reproduced image is immediately recognisable to her public, allowing the autobiographical to be overshadowed by the community's memory.

In *Survivre* Guiraud brings together pieces from several previous exhibits such as *La Valise à la mer* (1991), *Le Monde en bocal* (1998), along with painted reproductions of family photographs and newsprint demonstrating her life before her amputation and the multiple layers of suffering she endured afterwards. Her canvases and installations contain intensely personal and painful images that she has carefully layered and transformed from photo into painting or physical objects. Guiraud incorporates even gruesome images of herself post-bombing and photos of

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as though she is observing it (Paris, Sorbier, 1997), p. 17.

48 'L'Exode', *Paris Match* (2 Juin 1962?), unknown original publication details; image available online at [http://www.tenes.info/galerie/EXODE/3\\_G](http://www.tenes.info/galerie/EXODE/3_G) (accessed 26 April 2012); although the photo represents the grief of exile, it is entirely possible to read this photo in different ways. Perhaps it was a hot day and the man is wiping sweat rather than tears when the camera catches its object. As Sontag explains, time changes the reading of violence and pain. Sontag proposes, 'Memory has altered the image, according to memory's needs' (p. 26). Interpretation always depends on the present political context, not on the intent or objective of the photograph itself. Joseph McGonagle and Edward Welch describe this image in their discussion of an 'iconography of exodus' in *Contesting views: The visual economy of France and Algeria* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 45. For further analysis of Guiraud's and Sebbar's use of layering images, including this one, see my article 'Accumulated testimony: Layering French girls' diaries on the Algerian exodus' in *Studies in Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Literatures* (2014).

49 N. Guiraud, *Survivre*, Catalogue (Perpignan, Mairie de Perpignan and Cercle Algérieniste, 2012), p. 29. For an in-depth study of Guiraud's expression of trauma as well as that of Charly Cassan and Jean-Pierre Lledo, see my chapter, 'Unspoken Algeria: Transmitting traumatic memories of the Algerian War', in N. El Nossery and A.L. Hubbell (eds), *The unspeakable: Representations of trauma in francophone literature and art* (Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 305-24. I wish to thank Nicole Guiraud for the many texts, catalogues and images and films she has sent to me over the years, which have greatly elucidated this study.

a childhood friend whose throat was slit during the war. In her installation *La Valise à la mer*, the artist uses her accumulated pieces of Algeria and the very suitcase that accompanied her from Algeria to France during her exodus to visually represent her experience. In the exhibit, her opened suitcase rests in the centre of the floor and is filled with catalogued objects in sealed plastic bags. Much like in Arthus-Bertrand's aerial views of Algeria or Sebbar's photographed collections, Guiraud's emotional baggage is laid bare for the spectator, yet it remains inaccessible. We cannot dig through her past; we can only see what she lays out for us, however intimate that may seem.<sup>50</sup> On the top of her suitcase, plainly visible, is the iconic photograph of the exodus from *Paris Match*.

Guiraud's artwork shocks, but it also resonates with a current trend in the Pied-Noir community. Since the mid-2000s, the most violent memories of the Algerian War have begun to be exposed. This is apparent through a proliferation of photographed corpses circulated on Pied-Noir listservs such as the *Jeune Pied-Noir* newsletter, in documentary films by French and Algerian artists (Jean-Pierre Lledo, Charly Cassan and Marie Havenel) and in magazines such as the *Nouvelle Revue d'Histoire*.<sup>51</sup> The images are shocking in their horror — they reveal unmasked torture that leaves the viewer to wonder and indeed hope that the evisceration took place posthumously. Shamefully, however, the astute viewer begins to recognise those photographed corpses as reproductions: while some new images periodically surface, others are proliferated until the viewer (I am referring to myself in this case) can state in an unaffected tone, 'Oh, I've seen that one before'. I stand condemned already in my recognition. Sontag, restating Virginia Woolf, writes: 'Not to be pained by these

50 Guiraud uses the same method in *Le Monde en bocal*, in which she seals intensely personal representations of her suffering into jars and stacks them on shelves where they cannot be opened or touched, only displayed. See the Hermann Galerie website for images: <http://www.galerie-herrmann.com/arts/guiraud/index.htm>. The spectator believes him/herself to be seeing the most intimate suffering of the artist, while the accumulated debris keeps the artist herself out of reach.

51 The *Jeune Pied-Noir* newsletter repeated the same images of civilian victims of the Algerian War in issues released on 24 October 2007, 22 November 2007, 30 November 2007 and 26 June 2008. Then the images were reworked and made into a wall dedicated to those 'mort pour la France'. The *Nouvelle Revue d'Histoire* repeated the same graphic image of a slaughtered European man from 28 May 1962 in at least two of its issues with a first appearance in an issue dedicated to 'Crimes d'état', no. 59 (Mars-avril 2012), p. 14, and a second in a volume dedicated the 'L'Algérie: Histoire d'une terre tragique', 4H (Printemps-Eté 2012), p. 34.



pictures, not to recoil from them, not to strive to abolish what causes this havoc, this carnage ... would be the reactions of a moral monster'.<sup>52</sup> Helpless as I am fifty years after the events, I force myself to look, to recognise the victim as the same one previously depicted, reused with varied political messages each time he appears.

Sontag proposes: 'And photographs of the victims of war are themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus'.<sup>53</sup> Meaning, even of the most shocking events, is essentially condensed, solidified and obscured through photography because

[a]wareness of the suffering that accumulates in a select number of wars happening elsewhere is something constructed. Principally in the form that is registered by cameras, it flares up, is shared by many people, and fades from view. In contrast to a written account — which, depending on its complexity of thought, reference, and vocabulary, is pitched at a larger or smaller readership — a photograph has only one language and is destined potentially for all.<sup>54</sup>

In Guiraud's case, her body becomes a site of this accumulation. Not only are her childhood portraits as a young amputee reiterated in media and even on book covers, today she is trotted out, exhaustingly, to ceremonies for Pied-Noir memory where she represents the pain that never healed. Images of her wound accumulate as she fights to be recognised as a surviving victim. Underneath the many versions of this pain, though, the wound is simultaneously fixed and sanitised through its constant repetition.

From the highly personal and violent images transmitted by Guiraud, to the new visions of Algeria through Arthus-Bertrand's panoramic aerial shots, and all the way back to the broadly representative photographs of Algerian landmarks, accumulated memory has become enmeshed in the repeated image. Because colonial Algeria no longer exists, those who want to remember cannot discard its remains. Consequently, memorabilia continues to accumulate, rendering the underlying meanings inaccessible and obscuring the once vibrant details. Whether created as a communal depiction or an autobiographic representation, the resulting Algeria is solidified and unmoving. Even the violent and shocking images at some point stop having an impact, because as Sontag puts it: ' ... a catastrophe that is experienced

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52 Sontag, p. 8.

53 Sontag, p. 8.

54 Sontag, p. 18.

will often seem eerily like its representation'.<sup>55</sup> No matter how nostalgic or horrific, the images become a part of the debris from the past, never properly put away, constantly visible and unapproachable. Images continue to linger and accumulate in the community's memory, gradually building a wall around the afflicted individual and shutting off the memory and pain they depict.

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55 Sontag, p. 19.

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# Part 4

## Artistic framings





# 11

## Georges Bataille's *Manet* and the 'strange impression of an absence'

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*A propos de Manet, Mallarmé disait déjà: il n'importe qu'une œuvre ne soit pas tout à fait achevée, 'alors qu'il y a entre tous ses éléments un accord par quoi elle se tient et possède un charme facile à rompre par une touche ajoutée'. (Georges Bataille)<sup>1</sup>*

*Il faut acquiescer à ce principe de ruine au cœur du nouveau le plus nouveau. Il ne saurait être éludé ni dénié.*

*Et pourtant. Au cœur de cet acquiescement, alors qu'on saurait dire oui au principe de ruine, au-delà du savoir et de la vérité, justement, une place vide serait laissée — par Nietzsche tel que nous voudrions peut-être le lire: un lieu ouvert pour ce qui peut, par chance, peut-être, arriver encore. (Jacques Derrida)<sup>2</sup>*

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1 G. Bataille, *Manet, Œuvres complètes*, vol. 9 (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1979), p. 157. The references to quotations from this text are given in brackets within this article. In quoting passages from Bataille's *Œuvres complètes*, I have omitted numbers in superscript, generally referring to textual variants at the end of the volume.

2 J. Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié, suivi de L'oreille de Heidegger* (Paris, Éditions Gallilée, 1994), pp. 84-5, emphasis in the original.

## A break with the times

In *Manet*<sup>3</sup>, Georges Bataille focuses on the life and work of Édouard Manet, undoubtedly one of the greatest painters in the Western world and considered by some to be the founder of modern art.<sup>4</sup> Bataille's text, which opens with a chronology of detailed biographical and historical information, was originally published with some black-and-white reproductions in 1955 by Albert Skira Editions and now appears in volume 9 of his *Ceuvres complètes* after *Lascaux ou la naissance de l'art*. The juxtaposition of *Manet* with this piece on the birth of art is not without significance, as Bataille examines the artist's extraordinary status at the dawn of a new era. The richness and variety of Manet's canvases have been studied in depth in a multitude of publications over the years, including by eminent authors such as Zola, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry, Malraux, T.J. Clark and recently Vitoux, to name only a few of his critics.<sup>5</sup> Identifying as one of the great discontinuities in the episteme of Western

3 On Bataille's text, see notably J. Pfeiffer, 'Entre Goya et Manet', *L'Arc*, 44: 'Bataille' (1971), pp. 64-70; E. Bosch, 'Bataille sur Manet, le jeu de l'indifférence', in *Georges Bataille: Actes du colloque international d'Amsterdam (21 et 22 juin 1985)*, textes réunis et présentés par J. Versteeg (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1987), pp. 19-34; M. Warehime, 'Georges Bataille on Édouard Manet: The ideology of form', *Yearbook of Interdisciplinary Studies in Fine Arts*, vol. 1 (1989), pp. 1-14; F. Cachin, 'Introduction', in G. Bataille, *Manet* (Geneva, Éditions d'Art Albert Skira, 1983), pp. 5-13; Y. Ishaghpour, *Aux Origines de l'art moderne: Le Manet de Bataille* (Paris, Éditions de la Différence, 2002); and A. Benjamin, 'The matter of a materialist philosophy of art: Bataille's Manet', *Style and Time: Essays on the politics of appearance* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2006), pp. 124-38.

4 On this issue, see in particular T.J. Clark, *The painting of modern life: Paris in the art of Manet and his followers* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1985); M. Fried, *Manet's Modernism or, The face of painting in the 1860s* (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1996) — a text which also contains appendices with early commentaries by Antonin Proust, Edmond Duranty, Carle Desnoyers and Zacharie Astruc; C. Armstrong, *Manet Manette* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2002); and S. Guégan (ed.), *Manet, inventeur du moderne* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay/Éditions Gallimard, 2011).

5 See notably É. Zola and J.-P. Leduc-Adine, *Écrits sur l'art* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1991); C. Baudelaire, 'Critique d'art', *Ceuvres complètes*, vol. 2, texte établi, présenté et annoté par C. Pichois (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1976), pp. 1250-451; S. Mallarmé, 'Le Jury de peinture pour 1874 et M. Manet', *Ceuvres complètes*, texte établi et annoté par H. Mondor et G. Jean-Aubry (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1945), pp. 695-700; P. Valéry, 'Triomphe de Manet', *Ceuvres*, vol. 2, édition établie et annotée par J. Hytier (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1960), pp. 1326-33; A. Malraux, *Les Voix du silence* (Paris, La Galerie de la Pléiade, 1951); P. Courthion, *Édouard Manet* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1962); F. Cachin, C.S. Moffett and M. Melot, *Manet 1832-1883* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983); A. Krell, *Manet and the painters of contemporary life* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1996);

culture the one which marks the threshold of modernity at the beginning of the nineteenth century<sup>6</sup>, Foucault reminds us also that Manet is credited with changing modes of representation and techniques in art; that this painter of the nineteenth century brought about a major break, for example through the use of colour and light, making possible not just Impressionism but also no doubt movements well beyond it.<sup>7</sup> Indeed while Manet's paintings, watercolours, pastels and sketches show a wide variety of figures of the times, still lifes ('natures mortes'), objects and landscapes, his masterpieces, by the use of a chosen perspective, background, brushstroke or colour, for example, clearly also address the more general subject of what constitutes a work of art and the way in which it might relate to the tradition.

Jean-François Lyotard aptly stated that art freed from ritual in the bourgeois world was about showing visible 'reality' and appropriating nature and man, in contradistinction to the Postmodern: 'Sous couvert de description, la peinture des temps modernes célébrait un nouveau souverain à venir, l'Homme raisonnable'.<sup>8</sup> However, if Manet has been thought to initiate the modern, the celebration of man as sovereign subject is not what Bataille recognises in the works of art, but rather much more secretive, mysterious and less clear-cut subjects, separated from the bourgeois world. Undoubtedly, the complexity of Manet's modern art, on the cusp of different tendencies, cannot be underestimated.<sup>9</sup> In this article, I focus firstly on Bataille's philosophical appreciation of several major works and his remarks on the subject of art in *Manet*, in order to emphasise the way in which the subject of the

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F. Vitoux, *Voir Manet* (Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2013).

6 See the 'Préface' in M. Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses: Une Archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1966), p. 13. Foucault writes: 'De l'expérience-limite de l'Autre aux formes constitutives du savoir médical, et de celles-ci à l'ordre des choses et à la pensée du Même, ce qui s'offre à l'analyse archéologique, c'est tout le savoir classique, ou plutôt ce seuil qui nous sépare de la pensée classique et constitue notre modernité', pp. 15-16.

7 M. Foucault, *La Peinture de Manet, suivi de Michel Foucault, un regard*, ed. M. Saison (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2004), pp. 21-2.

8 J.-F. Lyotard, 'Peinture initiale', *Rue Descartes*, 10: 'Modernités esthétiques' (juin 1994), p. 51.

9 As Paul Valéry has written: 'Une époque, peut-être, se sent "moderne", quand elle trouve en soi, également admises, coexistantes et agissantes dans les mêmes individus, quantité de doctrines, de tendances, de "vérités" fort différentes, sinon tout à fait contradictoires'. See Valéry, p. 1327. In Bataille's study, Manet's position with regard to the tradition is not straightforward, exhibiting some 'contradictory' trends, and the very conception of seeing 'reality' through art is already radically brought into question.

paintings inevitably exceeds the frames. It is as if what is depicted in the art were the manifestation of a conflict, which prevents closure. Importantly, if for Hegel art was a thing of the past<sup>10</sup>, Bataille radically rethinks such a position in his writings, reinscribing Hegel's realisation of meaning and truth into a different economy, beyond a metaphysics of presence<sup>11</sup>, and points above all not to absolute truth but to a loss of meaning and to the unknown. In considering the 'destruction of the subject' in *Manet*, I then briefly indicate some resonances between Bataille's position and Jacques Derrida's *Mémoires d'aveugle: L'autoportrait et autres ruines*. In order to come to terms with Bataille's approach, it is imperative to perform a close deconstructive reading of his intricately woven text, in which words such as 'glissement', 'déception', 'monde', 'élégance', 'scandale', 'rire' and 'jeu' are repeated in different contexts and displaced.<sup>12</sup>

Bataille ascribes to Manet a major role in the transformation of painting and a break with previously dominant conceptions of art. In effect, it is as if the tradition which had been built up over the years had crumbled, losing meaning and displaying its superficiality. Like the crowd, Manet turned away from it, innovating and opening 'un nouveau monde' (p. 127). If Manet models his works at times on those of artists such as Titian, Rembrandt or Goya, and if some subjects resemble other representations — namely figures of artists, models, spectators or crowds — how might his works renew painting? It is certainly evident that the artist, who is engaged in bringing to light a new conception of art, is also a spectator of the history of painting. In short, the boundaries of the work are not clearly defined, and Manet's paintings signal another space, as is apparent, for example, in the play of mirrors in *Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère*. Bataille points towards such an impression of absence in the frames of the paintings.

At the heart of Bataille's *Manet* is the way in which a work of art tests the so-called boundaries between life and art, reality and representation, life and death. The gazes of painted figures and the mirrors in Manet's paintings perhaps designate the

10 G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's aesthetics: Lectures on fine art*, vol. 1, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 11.

11 See notably 'De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale: Un hegelianisme sans réserve', in J. Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1967), pp. 369-407.

12 As Bataille states in his early writings, that is in *Articles* under the title 'Informe': 'Un dictionnaire commencerait à partir du moment où il ne donnerait plus le sens mais les besoins des mots.' See G. Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, présentation de Michel Foucault (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1970), p. 217. See also J.-M. Rey, 'Le Signe aveugle', *L'Arc*, 44: 'Bataille' (1971), pp. 54-63.

place of imagined encounters with the scrutiny of the artist or spectator.<sup>13</sup> What is brought into view in the canvas is a space where the separation between outside and inside cannot clearly be determined. In play are the limits of the work and thus also, importantly, the subject that might be captured. As Derrida has emphasised in *La Vérité en peinture*, among other texts, the frame is not an ancillary matter but pertains to the very question of what constitutes the work and indeed a notion of truth in painting. With reference to Kant's *Critique of judgement* in particular, Derrida has problematised the distinction between work and ornament, *ergon* and *parergon* — for example, the frame — and asked where the frame begins or ends. Derrida writes: 'selon la logique du supplément, le parergon se divise en deux. A la limite entre l'œuvre et l'absence d'œuvre, il se divise en deux'.<sup>14</sup> In short, to bring into question the notion of frame is fundamentally to rethink the work and the 'absence of the work'<sup>15</sup> — that is to say, its fragility. Such issues are of paramount importance in Bataille's *Manet*.

If the framing of the subject is to a certain extent problematic in Bataille's text, it is noteworthy that in writing on Manet, Foucault also draws attention to a profound lack of visibility in the paintings. This is in some respects like the 'vide essentiel' or interruption in representation, which he outlined in his meticulous analysis of Velasquez's painting *Las Meniñas*.<sup>16</sup> In Manet's *Le Balcon*, Foucault notes that the

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13 On the spectator, see in particular C. Talon-Hugon, 'Manet ou le désarroi du spectateur', in Foucault and Saison, pp. 65-79; and D. Marie, 'Recto/Verso ou le spectateur en mouvement', in Foucault and Saison, pp. 81-93.

14 J. Derrida, *La Vérité en peinture* (Paris, Flammarion, 1978), p. 74. On the logic of the supplement, see notably Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967). See also Irene E. Harvey, 'Derrida, Kant and the performance of parergonality', in *Derrida and deconstruction*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (New York and London, Routledge, 1989), pp. 59-76; and J. Adnen (ed.), *Derrida et la question de l'art: Déconstructions de l'esthétique* (Nantes, Éditions Cécile Defaut, 2011).

15 The notion of 'l'absence d'œuvre' has been elaborated from different perspectives. See M. Foucault, 'La Folie, l'absence d'œuvre', in *Dits et écrits*, vol. 1, 1954-1975 (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 2001), pp. 440-8; and 'L'Absence de livre', in M. Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1969), pp. 620-36. See also C. di Marco, *Georges Bataille: Etica dell'incompiutezza* (Milano, Mimesis, 2005).

16 See 'Les Suivantes', in M. Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, p. 31. Also see in particular G. Shapiro, 'Visual regimes and visual resistance: From Panopticon to Manet's *Bar*', in *Archaeologies of vision: Foucault and Nietzsche on seeing and saying* (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 285-323; C. Perret, 'Le Modernisme de Foucault', in Foucault and Saison, pp. 113-26; J.J. Tanke, 'The specter of Manet: A contribution to the



Figure 11.1: Édouard Manet, *Le Balcon*. Source: Wikimedia commons.

figures are suspended and writes, with reference to Magritte's variation of the painting, *Le Balcon de Manet*, in which the characters are replaced by coffins: 'C'est bien cette limite de la vie et de la mort, de la lumière et de l'obscurité, qui est là, manifestée par ces trois personnages'.<sup>17</sup> It is indeed such a limit which is at stake in Manet's art; there is an 'invisibility' to which Bataille points and which is fundamentally linked to the 'game of life and death'. Importantly, in a wider context, Bataille associates art with the game, as opposed to the utility of work, and the manifestation of art is tied to transgression and the necessity of the sacred world.<sup>18</sup> Bataille underscores, in Manet's

archaeology of painting', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 66: 4 (2008), pp. 381-92.

17 Foucault and Saison, p. 43.

18 See G. Bataille, *Lascaux ou la naissance de l'art*, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 9, pp. 28-42,



paintings and in the art of Lascaux, a movement of transgression in which the figures also point beyond, to life bursting out, to the play between death and birth. There is an excess or emptiness, as if the subjects of the scenes also designated that which is not simply of the order of the visible: the source and destruction of life.

The first chapter of *Manet* begins with a consideration of Manet's separation from past painting and the unfathomable breach which he opened. Manet's name is synonymous with a major rupture, also inescapably affirmed in the title of Bataille's text. Bataille points to the gaping rift between public taste and changing beauty, which art renews through time, and to the scandal generated by Manet in the world around him. A fundamental change, associated with Manet, is described in the chapter entitled 'Une subversion impersonnelle'. 'Qu'est donc Manet, sinon l'instrument de hasard d'une sorte de métamorphose? Manet participa au changement d'un monde



Figure 11.2: Édouard Manet, *Olympia*. Source: Wikimedia commons.

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and 'Le Sacré', *Articles, Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 559-63. See also Foucault, 'Préface à la transgression', in *Dits et écrits*, pp. 261-78; and in particular the chapter 'Sociologie sacrée' in M. Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'œuvre* (Paris, Gallimard, 2012), pp. 302-13. See also D. Hollier, 'The dualist materialism of Georges Bataille', in F. Botting and S. Wilson (eds), *Bataille: A critical reader* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1998), p. 65 (a 'shortened and revised version' of an article published in *Tel Quel*, 25 in 1966).



dont les assises achevaient lentement de glisser' (p. 120).<sup>19</sup> The metamorphosis would be so extreme that it would be as if the world's foundations were slipping away. Subsequently, Bataille discusses a 'glissement', a sliding or a shift, not only in relation to Manet but also the figures in his paintings.

More in tune with our world, Manet's art, according to Bataille, responded to a change and also stood out from other works, as the critic Duranty noted. If, previously, Delacroix, Courbet and Ingres had provoked laughter, nothing compared with the enormity of the laughter from the crowd and directed towards Manet's *Olympia*.<sup>20</sup> Exhibited in the Salon of 1865, the painting, which bears a relationship with Titian's *The Venus of Urbino*, circa 1538, and Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus*, circa 1510, received a most hostile reception. This was no less so for *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, presented at the Salon des Refusés of 1863 and inspired, among others, by Titian's *Pastoral Concert*, previously thought to be by Giorgione, and Raphael's *Judgement of Paris*.<sup>21</sup> While *Olympia* and *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* were based on the works of great artists, like the subject matter of some of Manet's other paintings, both were considered scandalous, in particular as brazen female nudity, even though clearly evident in some classical paintings, had been transposed from a mythological setting to the context of the contemporary real world. If a classical training of faithfully copying the Old Masters in the Louvre had helped Manet to develop fine and indispensable skills, obviously his consummate art far surpassed techniques of imitation.

In *Manet*, Bataille ponders on the artist's crucial transgression of conventions. Perhaps with a thought for Nietzsche's *Untimely meditations*, Bataille also pays attention to exactly what Manet chose to reaffirm in other works of art, noting that Manet negated Couture but not Titian or Rembrandt (p. 135).<sup>22</sup> In a sense, therefore, by elegantly privileging some artists and discarding others in the history of art, by choosing to revive and capture aspects of some works in a modern scene,

19 In another context, see 'Métamorphose', *Articles*, in Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 208-9. See also 'L'impressionnisme', in G. Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 12 (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1988), pp. 370-80.

20 See Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 9, pp. 115-7.

21 See also P.H. Tucker (ed.), *Manet's 'Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe'* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998); and H. Damisch, *Le Jugement de Paris* (Paris, Flammarion, 2011).

22 See also 'On the uses and disadvantages of history for life', in F. Nietzsche, *Untimely meditations*, ed. D. Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 57-123.



Figure 11.3: Édouard Manet, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. Source: Wikimedia commons.



Figure 11.4: Édouard Manet, *L'Exécution de Maximilien*. Source: Wikimedia commons.

Manet is already engaged in forging a different path, which affirms discontinuity and transformation.

### The 'pretext of painting'

In the chapter entitled 'La Destruction du sujet', Bataille emphasises Manet's liberation and his opposition to the tradition of the past, which became profoundly dislocated. Bataille uses an architectural metaphor, describing past painting as an edifice. Previously, painting had merely been 'une partie d'un édifice majestueux, proposant à la foule une totalité intelligible' (p. 127).<sup>23</sup>

However, the monument became meaningless and the crowd turned away from a pretentiously eloquent language. Manet, without fully mastering the directions in which he was heading, is associated with a break and the discovery of new forms. Importantly, Bataille writes about the moment, in a way embodied by Manet, in which the authoritative monument, 'ce monument didactique', which had been endlessly reconstructed in the past, lost meaning. Bataille states: 'le moment vient où il perdit le sens qui le fondait; il se disloqua: son langage devint à la fin l'éloquence prétentieuse, dont la foule, autrefois soumise, se détourna' (p. 127). The 'destruction of the subject' is apparent in Manet's turning away from this monument, namely in the move which lays bare a lack of foundation.

Bataille maintains that Manet's art created a new world, a moment which pointed, in form and colour, to the silence of painting. While such truth necessarily escapes us in part, it shows a move beyond the history of art, which has simply often been 'l'histoire des *belles œuvres*, des *beaux-arts*' (p. 127, emphasis in the original) and an obfuscation of other works. If, following Malraux, Bataille concedes that there are no doubt artists who have abandoned painting as narration or as a real or imaginary spectacle, in order to show it in its nudity, as blotches, colour and movement, he attributes above all to Manet the birth of painting with no other signification than 'l'art de peindre qu'est la "peinture moderne"' (p. 131). Bataille turns his attention to Manet's *L'Exécution de Maximilien*, which was based on Goya's *The third of May, 1808*. However, while Goya's work showed 'la passion métaphysique' (p. 130), as emphasised by Malraux, Manet's painting portrayed a more sober, denuded subject. Bataille quotes Malraux: "'C'est *Le Trois Mai* de Goya,

23 On 'L'édifice hégélien' and 'La métaphore architecturale', see D. Hollier, *La Prise de la Concorde: Essais sur Georges Bataille* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1974), pp. 9-106.

moins ce que ce tableau signifie"', and further: 'C'est de Manet que date le refus de "toute valeur étrangère à la peinture", l'indifférence à la signification du sujet' (p. 131). A subject is retained in the picture, yet its signification is suppressed, so that it is merely about painting itself.<sup>24</sup>

For Bataille, Manet's art in *L'Exécution de Maximilien* is that he appears to have painted death as insensitive, despite the fact that such a subject would not generally be associated with indifference. In Manet's work, Bataille points to an extraordinary depiction, to some extent achieved negatively, as if from a numbed, senseless position of apathy; in short, the designation of an absence or 'definitive silence'. If Goya's *The third of May, 1808* showed the apparition of death itself, which escapes us and whose intense instantaneous light destroys vision, Manet's work brought out indifference — that is, a negation of eloquence and painting expressing a feeling. Bataille writes: 'Tout facteur d'éloquence, vraie ou fausse, est éliminé. Restent les taches de différentes couleurs et l'impression égarante qu'un sentiment aurait dû naître du sujet: c'est l'étrange impression d'une absence' (p. 133). It is such an 'impression' of absence which Bataille brings to the fore in his discussion of Manet's work. With reference to Malraux, Bataille writes about the subject, its lack of meaning and its destruction in Manet's *L'Exécution de Maximilien*:

Malraux l'admet: Manet supprima la signification du sujet. Supprimer le sujet, le détruire, est bien le fait de la peinture moderne, mais il ne s'agit pas exactement d'une absence: plus ou moins, chaque tableau garde un sujet, un titre, mais ce sujet, ce titre sont insignifiants, se réduisent au *prétexte* de la peinture. *A priori*, la mort, donnée méthodiquement, froidement, par des soldats, est défavorable à l'indifférence: c'est un sujet chargé de sens, d'où se dégage un sentiment violent, mais Manet paraît l'avoir peint comme insensible; le spectateur le suit dans cette apathie profonde. (pp. 132-3, emphasis in the original)

In Bataille's analysis, it is as if Manet's work exposed the ends of man at the completion of history, as in Alexandre Kojève's reading of Hegel<sup>25</sup>, yet rather than the

24 See Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 9, p. 133; and also A. Malraux, *Saturne, le destin, l'art et Goya* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1978).

25 Alexandre Kojève states: 'La fin de l'Histoire est la *mort* de l'Homme proprement dit', and further: 'Le Livre une fois paru, il se détache de moi. Il cesse d'être moi, tout comme mon corps cesse d'être moi après ma mort. La mort est tout aussi impersonnelle et éternelle, c'est-à-dire inhumaine, qu'est impersonnel, éternel et inhumain l'Esprit pleinement réalisé dans et par le Livre'. See A. Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel: Leçons sur la Phénoménologie de l'Esprit, professées de 1933 à 1939 à l'École des Hautes Études, réunies et publiées par Raymond*

revelation of meaning, it would show a profound absence and the lack of signification of the subject. What is apparent from the 'apathie profonde' described by Bataille is that the 'destruction of the subject' painted in *L'Exécution de Maximilien* also draws Manet and the spectator into this 'spectacle' of indifference and death. Indeed, it is perhaps as if the work had been conceived paradoxically, from a position of absence at the end of history; as if it were an impossible representation from the point of view of death itself and had come into existence miraculously without even the hand of an artist, 'fait, étant'.<sup>26</sup> In his insistence on the 'destruction of the subject', Bataille indicates not knowledge or truth but a radical 'invisibility', which extends beyond the frames of the paintings.

If ultimately Manet's paintings might show apathy, Bataille also attributes to Manet's work 'cette passion de réduire au silence — en une sorte d'*opération* — ce dont le mouvement naturel est de parler; et à la nudité, ce que revêt la convention' (p. 150, emphasis in the original). Manet's secret art, apparent in *L'Exécution de Maximilien* and in the scandalous transgression of past forms, was in the magic 'operation' of removing objects and images from the conventional, utilitarian, bourgeois world of the present. In *Olympia*, Manet attains the height of elegance in showing a silence which negates the conventional world. Bataille writes:

André Malraux l'affirma le premier: la peinture moderne dans nos musées est la seule cathédrale édifée par le temps présent. Mais en son essence cette cathédrale est secrète. Ce qui est aujourd'hui sacré ne peut être proclamé, ce qui est sacré est désormais muet. Ce monde-ci ne connaît qu'une transfiguration intérieure, silencieuse, en quelque sorte négative: il m'est possible d'en parler, mais c'est parler d'un silence définitif. (p. 135)<sup>27</sup>

While noting the silence identified by Malraux, Bataille insists further on a denuding act in *Olympia*, on its 'valeur d'*opération*': 'ce silence qui l'isole et qui le

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*Queneau* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1947), p. 388, note 1, emphasis in the original.

26 Stéphane Mallarmé's description of the Book is often quoted: 'Impersonnifié, le volume, autant qu'on s'en sépare comme auteur, ne réclame approche de lecteur. Tel, saché, entre les accessoires humains, il a lieu tout seul: fait, étant. Le sens enseveli se meut et dispose, en chœur, des feuillets'. See S. Mallarmé, 'Quant au livre', *Œuvres complètes*, p. 372. See also M. Blanchot, *Le Livre à venir* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1959), pp. 326-58.

27 Malraux also makes the following remark: 'Ce n'est pas l'historien qui assure la vie, c'est la prise de l'artiste sur les rêves des hommes'. See Malraux, *Les Voix du silence*, p. 618. Further in the same text, he writes: 'l'étendue de notre musée imaginaire suffit à rendre superficielles les connaissances historiques qu'il appelle' (p. 621).





Figure 11.5: Édouard Manet, *Intérieur à Arcachon*. Source: Wikimedia commons.

grandit, qui permet seul à Valéry d'en parler gravement, de parler d'une "horreur sacrée" (p. 151, emphasis in the original).<sup>28</sup> In citing Valéry, Bataille explicitly associates Manet's 'opération' with the sacred, whose nature he describes as 'peut-être ce qui se produit de plus insaisissable entre les hommes, le sacré n'étant qu'un moment privilégié d'une unité communielle, moment de communication convulsive de ce qui ordinairement est étouffé'.<sup>29</sup> For Bataille, Manet's work disturbs, for it exposes

28 Valéry writes about the triumph of *Olympia* and the secrets surrounding this figure: '*Olympia* choque, dégage une horreur sacrée, s'impose et triomphe. Elle est scandale, idole; puissance et présence publique d'un misérable arcane de la Société. Sa tête est vide: un fil de velours noir l'isole de l'essentiel de son être. La pureté d'un trait parfait enferme l'Impure par excellence, celle de qui la fonction exige l'ignorance paisible et candide de toute pudeur. Vestiale bestiale vouée au nu absolu, elle donne à rêver à tout ce qui se cache et se conserve de barbarie primitive et d'animalité rituelle dans les coutumes et les travaux de la prostitution des grandes villes'. See Valéry, 'Triomphe de Manet', p. 1329. See also M. Leiris, *Le Ruban au cou d'Olympia* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1981).

29 Bataille, 'Le Sacré', *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 562. In *Le Regard du portrait* (Paris, Éditions Galilée, 2000), Jean-Luc Nancy discusses the divine and the sacred as a kind of absent presence in portraits and remarks: 'Ce "divin" ou ce "sacré" n'est autre chose que l'éloignement et le creusement à travers lequel se fait le contact avec l'intime: à travers lequel se déclare la passion de son in/extériorité infinie — passion de souffrance et passion de désir. C'est l'écartement nécessaire à la communication de soi. En ce sens tout portrait est "sacré"'



Figure 11.6: Édouard Manet, *Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère*. Source: Wikimedia commons.

transparency, where meaning slips away beyond the finished canvas of the particular subject and shows a game being played out: 'Les conventions étaient privées de sens, puisque le *sujet* dont le sens était annulé n'était plus que le prétexte du jeu et du violent désir de le jouer' (p. 150).<sup>30</sup>

### The fragility of the work

A veiled flight or a certain 'glissement' is paramount in Bataille's conception of Manet and points to the way in which the subject, while captured in the frame, nevertheless also exceeds it, defying knowledge and appropriation. Bataille describes in Manet's work, notably in *Olympia*, a strange 'operation' or a kind of shift in which there is an 'attente déçue' (p. 151); expectations are disappointed and boundaries are crossed. For example, Bataille considers the line of demarcation between the interior and the sea outside in *Intérieur à Arcachon* and states: 'la mer vue par la fenêtre ouverte envahit la chambre qui en est l'impuissante limite, le détail infime qu'annule d'avance une invasion infinie' (p. 152). Such a 'glissement' is also evident for Bataille in the

(autant dire d'ailleurs "secret"), p. 57. See also J.-L. Nancy, *Au fond des images* (Paris, Éditions Galilée, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> See Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 9, pp. 156-7, emphasis in the original.



immensity of the figures, as opposed to the insignificance of the sea, in Manet's *Sur la plage*, where 'cette énormité est dans le glissement où d'abord elle est détruite' (p. 152). In Bataille's approach, it is as if the effect of what is presented were closely tied to the expected presentation of something else; as if Manet had also captured, in the harmonious proportions of his paintings, unimagined substitutions which might destabilise the frames of the work. What Bataille emphasises is the 'déséquilibre des parties de l'univers représenté, placées au moment d'un glissement' (p. 153), thereby bringing into focus the tensions, the fragility and the limits of the work, where its disappearance is at stake.<sup>31</sup>

The suggestion of flight is perhaps evident in many ways in Manet's work, for example in the mysterious *Berthe Morisot à l'éventail*, or in the unfathomable blackness of the exquisite lady reading unknowable lines of a newspaper in *Le Journal illustré*, or in the infinite play of reflections in *Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère*. Here Bataille underlines 'l'absence du vide', as well as the disappointment of expectations; while the vast play of mirrors and light casts a brightness on the waitress, she is also somehow extinguished with her hazy, fatigued look. Moreover, in the magic play of light in the mirrors, the crowd, which is really in front of the waitress, 'n'est pourtant qu'un reflet dans la féerie lumineuse de la glace' (p. 154).<sup>32</sup> It is a kind of duplicity of presence and absence which Bataille underscores in his study of Manet's work, as if the figures were at once there yet had taken flight, already nothing but a spectral shadow merged into the background. Perhaps one might also consider, among many examples, the way in which the lady with the fanned-out dress, in *La Dame aux éventails: Portrait de Nina de Callias*, blends in with the surrounding fans. Again, in *Le Balcon*, particularly due to the divergent gazes, it is as if the subject were not simply contained within the frame. Bataille notes that we are drawn to the 'regard excessif' (p. 153) of the wide-eyed Berthe Morisot and that the subject of this dreamlike painting is somewhat elusive.

31 Bataille writes: 'Celui qui crée, qui figure ou qui écrit ne peut plus admettre aucune limite à la figuration ou à l'écriture: il dispose tout à coup seul de toutes les convulsions humaines qui sont possibles et il ne peut pas se dérober devant cet héritage de la puissance divine — qui lui appartient. Il ne peut pas non plus chercher à savoir si cet héritage consumera et détruira celui qu'il consacre. Mais il refuse maintenant de laisser "ce qui le possède" sous le coup des jugements de commis auxquels l'art se pliait'. See 'Le Sacré', *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 563.

32 On this painting, see in particular B.R. Collins (ed.), *12 Views of Manet's 'Bar'* (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1996).

Importantly, it would appear that it is not just the subject framed in *Le Balcon* which lacks a firm worldly foundation, but that equally those 'outside' are caught up in a hallucination. For 'we' also experience a 'glissement' and, if the shady figures on Manet's canvases are perhaps not so much the subjects depicted but rather 'l'image d'un glissement' (p. 153), no doubt 'we' are also engulfed in this movement. Bataille writes:

*Le Balcon* présente un écartèlement sournois, fondé sur une telle divergence des regards que nous en éprouvons un malaise. Nous n'en pouvons voir en une fois que la fuite dans l'insignifiance et ce n'est qu'après un temps que nous nous éveillons et que l'attention se concentre sur le regard excessif, sur les grands yeux de Berthe Morisot. Si bien que de cette peinture hallucinée, nous pouvons dire que le sujet nous est, dans le même temps, donné et retiré. (p. 153)

In this 'malaise', in this 'fuite dans l'insignifiance', we are attentive to an excess in the wide eyes of Berthe Morisot, perhaps as if she were gazing at us for a moment and not the reverse; as if we were the ones who had fled into meaninglessness and awoken to her gaze. For Bataille, Manet's subjects do not sit squarely within the frames but rather manifest something unfathomable. It is as if they were at once there and yet had disappeared. Thus, in a sense through Manet's art, 'we' have a certain awareness of our mortality. Of death, Bataille insisted in 'Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice' that there is no immediate knowledge and that it relies on the necessity of representation. Bringing into question the foundation of absolute knowledge, Bataille outlines a different kind of sovereignty in which the unknown is inscribed.<sup>33</sup> Indeed as Bataille notes in 'Ce monde où nous mourons': '*Seule la mort se dérobe à l'effort d'un esprit qui s'est proposé de tout embrasser*'.<sup>34</sup> It is apparent that in his approach to Manet, whose work at an early stage he describes as a 'travail aveugle' (p. 160), Bataille has radically displaced any conception of man in complete control of his destiny to evoke a subject which exhibits something inconceivable.

For Bataille, Manet challenges the notion of representation — that is to say, 'la possibilité de représenter que la toile lui donne' (p. 156). The 'absence de signification' is apparent in the *Bal masqué à l'Opéra*. Bataille ascribes to the subjects, reduced to pretexts of painting, 'cette active "indifférence"' which he considers characteristic of Manet, and also paradoxically underscores profoundness in the festive 'frivolité' of this

33 See 'Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice', in Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 12, pp. 326-45.

34 See 'Ce monde où nous mourons', in Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 12, p. 457, emphasis in the original.



Figure 11.7: Édouard Manet, *Bal masqué à l'opéra*.

Source: Wikimedia commons.

work (p. 154). In these opposing tensions, the subject of the work, perhaps poised at a 'point' of equilibrium, risks disintegrating into amorphousness. Bataille states:

*Le Bal masqué à l'Opéra* est selon Mallarmé 'capital dans l'œuvre du peintre ... y marquant comme un point culminant d'où l'on résume mainte tentative ancienne'. C'est une réussite étourdissante obtenue par une sorte de naufrage du sujet — qui n'est plus que la foule informe. Il est probable que la fête est en son essence une suppression de l'état distinct de ceux qui la vivent: Manet eut peut-être la facilité de la représenter mieux que personne d'autre, puisqu'il était à la recherche de ce qui substituerait à l'élément précis qui distingue le sujet ce qui se perdait et se dérobait. (pp. 153-4)<sup>35</sup>

In such a 'shipwreck of the subject', as Bataille emphasises in relation to *Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère*, even the formless crowd can be simply a reflection.

Bataille maintains, however, that the overcoming of the subject, as in a sacrifice, does not involve simply neglecting it. He states: 'Après tout, le sujet des toiles de

<sup>35</sup> In this context, see also J. Derrida, 'La Double séance', in *La Dissémination* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1972), pp. 199-318.

Manet est moins détruit que dépassé; il est moins annulé au profit de la peinture nue qu'il n'est *transfiguré* dans la nudité de cette peinture. Manet inscrit un monde de recherches tendues dans la singularité des sujets' (p. 157, emphasis in the original). In the *Portrait de Mallarmé*, Bataille considers that Manet attains the supreme value of art.<sup>36</sup> What Bataille brings to the fore in Manet's work is a fleeting, suspended subject, slipping beyond signification; a subject which manifests itself also in the play of fans or the excessive fugitive gazes in *Le Balcon* or in the brazen nudity of *Olympia*. In Manet's enigmatic paintings is a subject which is captured in its singularity but which is also ungraspable. In Bataille's description of this art of poetry, the borders between the work of Manet as artist and Mallarmé as poet are transgressed. In a sense, there is something necessarily unfinished about the work, as if the ends of the work concerned the fact that it always called for another. Thus in describing the effects, which Manet privileged over the completion of the work, Bataille aptly quotes an expression by Lionello Venturi — that is, 'une sorte de "fini du non fini"' (pp. 156-7).

In so far as Bataille emphasises the enigmatic and elusive subject affirmed in Manet's paintings, a subject without signification, his approach might be considered in terms of the notion of 'ruine' outlined by Derrida in *Mémoires d'aveugle: L'autoportrait et autres ruines*. What is evident in different ways in these texts is that the subject in play exceeds the frame; the completed work harbours remnants of that which fundamentally defies representation. In brief, Derrida writes about the many masterpieces, in the history of art, which address blindness, revelation and conversion to insist, in a different manner from Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Le Visible et l'invisible*<sup>37</sup> or indeed Foucault, on an absolute invisibility or blindness which pervades the visible, haunting it like the spectre of its own impossibility.<sup>38</sup> Ineluctably,

36 Bataille writes: 'Nous devons dire plutôt que rien en lui ne heurte le sentiment que nous donnent les chefs-d'œuvre du peintre — qui nous réduisent à l'honnêteté du dépouillement. Ce qui se passe ne dément pas, ce qui se passe *expose* cette valeur suprême, qui est la fin de la peinture. Cette valeur est l'art lui-même, en quelque sorte dépouillé, qui succède à ces ombres pathétiques, que le passé voulut mettre en puissance du monde. L'*artiste*, s'il est Mallarmé, est la présence de l'art, l'absence de lourdeur, rien de plus. Lorsque Manet peint le *Portrait de Mallarmé*, pouvait-il détruire la signification du sujet qu'il avait choisi? Mais le sujet lui-même était la poésie, dont la pureté est la fuite éperdue des ombres, et qui laisse transparaître l'irréel' (pp. 161-2, emphasis in the original).

37 M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1964).

38 J. Derrida, *Mémoires d'aveugle: L'autoportrait et autres ruines* (Paris, Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1990), p. 56. In relation to Derrida's text, see also M. Fried, 'Between realisms: From Derrida to Manet', *Critical Inquiry*, 21: 1 (1994), pp. 1-36.

it is always already beyond the scene of the canvas and unable to be shown as the realisation of meaning and truth within a metaphysics of presence. It is as if this invisibility were in effect of the order of memory, one which is nevertheless affected by amnesia<sup>39</sup> and a lack of retrieval.

In describing ruin, be it in portraits or pictures of fragmented monuments, Derrida insists on a subject, which is unable to masquerade as full consciousness and whose vision of itself is marked by considerable blindness. Derrida states that ruin is primordial:

La ruine ne survient pas comme un accident à un monument hier intact. Au commencement il y a la ruine. Ruine est ce qui arrive ici à l'image dès le premier regard. Ruine est l'autoportrait, ce visage dévisagé comme mémoire de soi, ce qui *reste* ou *revient* comme un spectre dès qu'au premier regard sur soi une figuration s'éclipse. La figure alors voit sa visibilité entamée, elle perd son intégrité sans se désintégrer.<sup>40</sup>

For Derrida, 'ruin' is not of the order of an event, but is always already in the gaze, preceding it and returning like a spectre. Inherent in the first gaze, ruin points to an 'eclipse' of representation, which cannot escape this fundamental invisibility. The subject, not simply contained within defined parameters, is in play between the 'outside' and the 'inside' of the frames, as Derrida has discussed in *La Vérité en peinture*.<sup>41</sup>

Derrida's notion of ruin, in the subject of writing and the portrait, is perhaps most evident in his description of Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*. Derrida states: 'C'est aussi le récit d'une représentation qui porte la mort: un portrait mortifère réfléchit d'abord les progrès de la ruine sur le visage de son modèle qui est aussi son spectateur, le sujet ainsi regardé, puis condamné par son image', and then, quoting Wilde: "'It was his beauty that had ruined him. (...)'".<sup>42</sup> Ruin, already evident not

39 On anamnesis and amnesia, see Derrida, *Mémoires d'aveugle*, p. 56.

40 Derrida, *Mémoires d'aveugle*, p. 72, emphasis in the original.

41 It is noteworthy that, from a different perspective, Jean-Luc Nancy writes in *Le Regard du portrait*: 'La lumière du fond — de cet improbable fond ouvert sans fond dans le fond de la toile — est l'éclat d'une présence en deçà et au-delà d'elle-même, qui la fait elle-même. Ce qui est portrait, c'est naissance et mort du sujet, lequel n'est rien d'autre que cela, naissance à la mort et mort à la naissance, ou encore infini rappel à soi' (p. 65, emphasis in the original).

42 Derrida, *Mémoires d'aveugle*, p. 41; see O. Wilde, 'The picture of Dorian Gray', in G.F. Maine (ed.), *The works of Oscar Wilde* (London and Glasgow, Collins, 1957), p. 165; see also 'Force et signification', in *L'Écriture et la différence*, pp. 9-49.

just in the representation but also in both the model and the spectator, persists in the world of beauty, for appearances simply hide a 'truth', like the mask of the Dionysian by the Apollinian 'imposter'.<sup>43</sup> Such a mask represents for Nietzsche, in *The birth of tragedy*, the 'necessary effects of a glance into the inside and terrors of nature; as it were, luminous spots to cure eyes damaged by gruesome night'.<sup>44</sup> In a sense, death, metamorphosis are at work, inevitably pervading the subjects and defying representation. It is indeed the game of life and death which fascinates Bataille in both *Lascaux ou la naissance de l'art* and *Manet*.<sup>45</sup>

If it has been said that Manet's figures have an 'existential strangeness' which 'made them modern, but modern in dialogic and differential relation both to their own time and to the past that went before them'<sup>46</sup>, in *Manet*, Bataille insists more radically on a subject, which is always at once 'donné et retiré' (p. 153), and also in a sense caught between the sacred and the profane. In 'The dualist materialism of Georges Bataille', Denis Hollier describes 'two worlds': 'the profane in which we live, and the sacred in which we die, the world of the presence of I, and the world of the absence of I, of my absence, the world where I am not, where there are no I's'. Hollier also refers to Bataille's statement: '*Le monde où nous mourons* n'est pas le "monde où nous vivons". Le monde où nous mourons s'oppose au monde où nous vivons comme l'inaccessible à l'accessible'.<sup>47</sup> It is in this context of the sacred, the world in which the 'I' is absent, that Bataille's notion of the 'destruction' of the subject

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43 See 'L'Imposture de la beauté: L'Inquiétante étrangeté du *Portrait de Dorian Gray*, d'Oscar Wilde', in S. Kofman, *L'Imposture de la beauté* (Paris, Éditions Galilée, 1995), pp. 9-48. Kofman states: 'Dorian Gray n'est pas cet Œdipe nietzschéen, dionysiaque, qui ose regarder, ne serait-ce qu'un moment, la "vérité" sans voile ni masque' (p. 48).

44 F. Nietzsche, *The birth of tragedy and the case of Wagner*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York, Random House, 1967), p. 67. On the Apollinian world of beauty and of appearances and the Dionysian in *The transfiguration* by Raphael, see Nietzsche, *The birth of tragedy and the case of Wagner*, pp. 44-7; and notably Shapiro, pp. 87-106.

45 From a different perspective, in remarks in *Portrait de l'artiste en général*, on a series of photographed portraits by Urs Lüthi, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe also underscores not just death, but birth. He writes about a subject whose exposition or deposition is in the unending recitation of its death and its origin: 'représentation de l'art(tiste) en général. S'y constitue et s'y défait, s'y (dé)constitue, *interminablement*, entre père et mère, *le sujet de l'art*. Sans fixation possible'. See P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Portrait de l'artiste en général* (Paris, Christian Bourgeois Éditeur, 1979), p. 91, emphasis in the original; see also pp. 60-1.

46 Armstrong, p. 317.

47 Hollier, 'The dualist materialism of Georges Bataille', p. 66; Bataille, 'Ce monde où nous mourons', *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 12, p. 458, emphases in the original.

in *Manet* can be considered. Indeed, in Manet's art, the limits of representation are exposed and what Bataille brings to the fore is a fugitive subject, one captured in flight. In the play of light, colour and movement — whether it be in the poses of figures in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, *Olympia* or *Le Balcon* or in the myriad of reflections in *Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère* or in the unfathomable cold indifference of *L'Exécution de Maximilien* — the works do not simply divulge their secrets. Thus, while Bataille discusses in *Manet* the 'destruction of the subject', it is necessary to reflect on it, on its ruin, not simply as annihilation, but rather as a kind of radical transformation. Indeed, Maurice Blanchot writes paradoxically about man as 'l'indestructible qui peut être détruit'.<sup>48</sup>

In Bataille's remarks in *Manet*, it is evident that the subject, portrayed harmoniously in each *chef d'œuvre*, also defies representation. Impossible to capture once and for all, it is both informed by a long history and reinvented in works as yet undreamed. If Derrida insists on a notion of 'ruin' which has always already taken place, Bataille draws attention to an inexorable passage beyond limits, such as in Manet's *Intérieur à Arcachon*, where the infinite sea has always already moved across the contours of the room and invaded it. It is therefore an excess, inscribed in and beyond the frames of each painting, the affirmation of a certain 'attente déçue' (p. 151), which Bataille brings to the fore in his analysis of Manet. Bataille stresses Manet's scandalous break with the times and the opening which his extraordinary art made apparent. Above all, for Bataille, it is as if Manet's paintings were always poised at a 'point' of equilibrium, necessarily showing a certain 'glissement' and the flight towards insignificance. It is as if, in the way in which the figures are balanced, they also always show another pose and work unfinished. In *Manet*, Bataille reminds us that this great artist's work is not consigned to an unproductive past, but rather participates in an unfathomable transformation, generating new creations. Manet's innovative name represents a renewal and yet, to some extent, the subject of an imponderable metamorphosis. Bataille points above all, in *Manet*, to the capture of a secret and fleeting presence, which already announces 'la naissance de ce monde féerique' (p. 164) before us in modern painting.

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48 See 'L'Espèce humaine', the second section of 'L'indestructible', in Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, p. 200.



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# 12

## Entropy and osmosis in conceptualisations of the Surrealist frame

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Since its inception, Surrealism has been associated with conservative art forms aspiring to a higher synthetic unity, unlike those modern art movements such as Pop Art or installation art, which have eschewed aesthetic and transcendental values in favour of the purely material and commercial. In *Displaying the marvellous*, Lewis Kachur writes that Breton was 'holding fast to Surrealism as "high" art'.<sup>1</sup> According to Hal Foster, 'reconciliation is the *raison d'être* of Bretonian Surrealism'<sup>2</sup>, whereby the binding or 'synthetic principle'<sup>3</sup> underlying Surrealist works is Eros and 'the uncanny is recoded as the marvellous and arrested animation is sublimated as convulsive beauty'.<sup>4</sup> Although Foster's book uncovers many of the tenebrous themes which have come to define Surrealism's visual lexicon, he argues that Surrealism's general thrust was to synthesise and sublimate, attempting to create a harmonious unity cleansed of psychic tensions. Rosalind Krauss characterises Surrealist visuality as the dissolving of

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1 L. Kachur, *Displaying the marvellous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist exhibition installations* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2001), p. 98.

2 H. Foster, *Compulsive beauty* (London, MIT Press, 1993), p. 16.

3 Foster, p. 47.

4 Foster, p. 30.

writing and vision, vision and presentation into 'the higher synthesis of Surreality'.<sup>5</sup> For José Pierre, Surrealist collage expresses an underlying aesthetic of association: '[Le poète] tentera, de la réunion des éléments discordants, de faire surgir une unité lyrique inattendue'.<sup>6</sup>

One noteworthy challenge to this prevailing view of Surrealist art has been formulated by Elza Adamowicz in her work on Surrealist collage. For her, Surrealist works are chaotic, sprawling and fragmentary entities. They are

monstrous proliferating shapes both material and metaphoric, never achieving closure. The organic unity of classical statuary is replaced in these works by an aesthetics of the hypertropic detail, its euphoric complete forms giving way to the disturbing hybridity of the *informe*.<sup>7</sup>

The observation that Surrealist works are fundamentally ill-defined, unending and '*informe*' (or formless) — a term one naturally associates with the philosopher Georges Bataille<sup>8</sup> — seems astute, since it accurately describes those aspects of the Surrealist aesthetic (based on disharmony and disunity) which have all too often been overlooked. One type of formlessness, which, I believe, also encapsulates these qualities, providing a useful theoretical model to explain how Surrealist art is realised, is entropy.

Entropy is the phenomenon of irreversible and disorderly energy exchange between two closed systems. An example of such closed systems are ice cubes melting in a warm drink, whereby the ice absorbs the heat energy of the drink, and progressively loses its molecular 'order' to the hotter liquid into which it dissolves. Ice and drink thus begin to blend chaotically and irrevocably into one. Whereas the term was originally used to define the second law of thermodynamics, it is now used

5 R.E. Krauss, 'The photographic conditions of Surrealism', *October*, 19 (Winter, 1981), p. 10.

6 J. Pierre, 'Le Lyrisme exalté ou refusé: Breton et les dadaïstes zurichois', *Champs des Activités Surréalistes*, 16 (June, 1982), p. 53.

7 E. Adamowicz, *Surrealist collage in text and image: Dissecting the exquisite corpse* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 171.

8 Georges Bataille famously provided the following definition of '*informe*' in the journal *Documents*: 'Un dictionnaire commencerait à partir du moment où il ne donnerait plus le sens mais les besognes des mots. Ainsi *informe* n'est pas seulement un adjectif ayant tel sens mais un terme servant à déclasser .... Ce qu'il désigne n'a ses droits dans aucun sens et se fait écraser partout comme une araignée ou un ver de terre'. See G. Bataille, 'Dictionnaire — *Informe*', in *Documents*, 1: 7, first published 1929 (Paris, Jean-Michel Place, 1991), p. 382.



within a variety of subdisciplines within science (including cosmology), as well as having extended applications within sociology and the arts.

I do not want to suggest that the incorporation of entropy by Surrealists into their artworks was in any way programmatic or even intentional. Indeed, I in no way seek to reappraise authorial intentionality, which in the case of the Surrealists would be ill-advised, given the fine line they often trod between conscious and unconscious methods of art-making. I want rather to consider how the Surrealists, in their works, came to operate the notion of entropy despite themselves.

In his article entitled 'Le Puits et la pyramide', Jacques Derrida states:

Malgré l'idéalité de la lumière et du regard, les objets perçus par l'œil, par exemple les œuvres d'art plastique, persistent au-delà de la perception dans leur existence sensible, extérieure, têtue; ils résistent à l'*Aufhebung*, ne se laissent pas, en tant que tels, absolument relever par l'intériorité temporelle. Ils freinent le travail de la dialectique.<sup>9</sup>

I believe that Surrealist works exemplify Derrida's comment concerning the resistance of art to dialectical sublation on account of their hybridity. In bringing together arbitrary elements within their iconography, the Surrealists created a monstrous *entre-deux*. In their material finality, Surrealist works did not, in my view, express the élan towards a higher unity, but rather the pain and rupture of subjects being displaced from their usual surroundings and merged into an unnatural agglomeration (Lautréamont's image of the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table — oft-cited by the Surrealists — springs to mind). The creation of Surrealist works was contingent upon irreversible amalgamations between entirely disparate elements, amalgamations which gave the works their unique identity. Before corroborating this point with some visual examples, I will now show how (implicit or explicit) references to entropy already existed both in Surrealist writings (particular those of André Breton and Roger Caillois) and in critical analyses of the movement.

One of the seminal works of Surrealist theory is Breton's *Les Vases communicants*, in which he discusses the interpermeability of the inner life and external reality. According to his biographer, Breton named *Les Vases communicants* after a scientific experiment in which gases and liquids pass back and forth between two joined

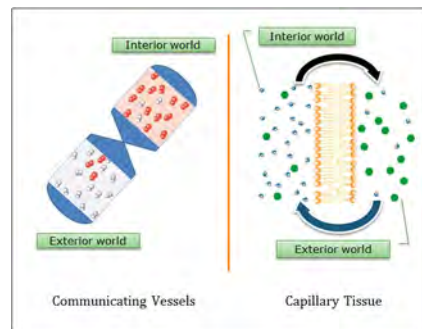
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9 J. Derrida, 'Le Puits et la pyramide', in J. d'Hondt and J. Hyppolite, *Hegel et la pensée moderne: Séminaire sur Hegel dirigé par Jean Hyppolite au Collège de France (1967-68)* (Paris, PUF, 1970), p. 59.

recipients 'until they reach equilibrium'.<sup>10</sup> When Breton himself talks about the reciprocal flow of information from the human psyche to nature, he discusses the process in comparable terms, identifying a capillary tissue which regulates the osmosis between the two:

Il m'a paru et il me paraît encore ... qu'en examinant de près le contenu de l'activité la plus irréfléchie de l'esprit, si l'on passe outre à l'extraordinaire et peu rassurant bouillonnement qui se produit à la surface, il est possible de mettre à jour un *tissu capillaire* dans l'ignorance duquel on s'ingénierait en vain à vouloir se figurer la circulation mentale. Le rôle de ce tissu est, on l'a vu, d'assurer l'échange constant entre qui doit se produire dans la pensée entre le monde extérieur et le monde intérieur, échange qui nécessite l'interpénétration continue de l'activité de veille et de l'activité de sommeil. Toute mon ambition a été de donner ici un aperçu de sa structure.<sup>11</sup>

While the reference to 'capillary tissue' is more metaphorical than scientific, it aptly conceptualises Surrealism's working practices, which captured the interplay of interior and exterior worlds, combining the phantasmagoria of the imagination with the bric-à-brac of mundane reality.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that osmosis is frequently characterised as an 'entropy of mixing'<sup>13</sup> or an 'entropy-generating process'<sup>14</sup>, since it



**Figure 12.1: Two key concepts in Bretonian Surrealism — 'communicating vessels' and the 'capillary tissue'. Source: Author.**

10 M. Polizzotti, *Revolution of the mind* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), p. 367.

11 A. Breton, *Les Vases communicants* (Paris, Gallimard, 1955), pp. 188-9, emphasis in the original.

12 'Tout porte à croire qu'il existe un certain point de l'esprit d'où la vie et la mort, le réel et l'imaginaire, le passé et le futur, le communicable et l'incommunicable, le haut et le bas cessent d'être perçus contradictoirement. Or, c'est en vain qu'on chercherait à l'activité surréaliste un autre mobile que l'espoir de détermination de ce point.' A. Breton, *Manifestes du Surréalisme* (Paris, Gallimard, 1979), pp. 72-3.

13 I. Müller, *Entropy and energy: A universal competition* (Berlin and New York, Springer, 2005), p. 81.

14 V. Raicu and A. Popescu, *Integrated molecular and cellular biophysics* (Dordrecht, Springer, 2008), p. 110.

allows a liquid with a high concentration to mix with a liquid of low concentration via a permeable membrane. I will presume the reader's awareness of the kinship between both concepts ('entropy' and 'osmosis') throughout the remainder of this chapter.

The journal *Tel Quel* recognised the centrality of osmosis in Breton's thought and works. One of its contributors, Pierre Rottenberg, characterised the quality of his literary writings as 'porous', in particular the novel *Arcane 17*, which opens inside a dream with depictions of Canada's Percé Rock shrouded in mist. Rottenberg characterised this opening as "'ouvert", dilaté, poreux'.<sup>15</sup> Not only is the atmosphere in Breton's work presented as vaporous and hazy (Rottenberg would refer to it as 'cette porosité traversée par l'air, la neige, l'écume ...'<sup>16</sup>), but the image of (wo)man him/herself is conceived as permeable: 'tout dépend de sa trajectoire, de son ampleur et je dirai, ici, de sa "porosité"'.<sup>17</sup> Here he underlines the fact that human life is, according to Breton, a crucible of forces from inside and outside of him/herself. He does, however, refuse to acknowledge that the notion of the 'porous' (wo)man can betoken anything other than an idealist viewpoint: the individual in his or her permeability represents merely a derivation of Spirit rather than a manifestation of matter. He concludes that such a belief in Spirit must be underpinned by a faith in human evolution as an urge towards dialectical resolution on the ideal plane.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, art to which the porous (wo)man has contributed or in which (s)he is depicted is likewise considered a product of this questionable ideality. No consideration is given to the counterargument, that the *porosité* of Surrealism frequently results in monstrous hybridisations which, when captured by means of art and literature, resist any kind of sublation or harmonisation.

Perhaps the most radical aspect of porosity is the Surrealist work's capacity to disrupt the sacred boundary between the artwork and its exterior so that its content and environment are no longer clearly differentiated. Like the Surrealist artist, the Surrealist work is Janus-faced, looking inward and outward simultaneously and dismantling the notion of the crisply defined cadre. The most astute depiction of this phenomenon came from an individual who operated on the margins of Surrealism, and corresponded with Breton about his ideas. In an essay first published in 1935

15 P. Rottenberg, 'Esquisse cartographique du mouvement: Surréalisme', *Tel Quel* 46 (Summer, 1971), p. 45.

16 Rottenberg, p. 45.

17 Rottenberg, p. 46, emphasis in the original.

18 Rottenberg, p. 43.

entitled 'Crise de la littérature', Roger Caillois set out the ways in which one could interrogate the imagination so as to better understand it. One of these methods was:

[L']Interprétation réciproque des phénomènes du monde intérieur et du monde extérieur de manière à placer dans une nouvelle lumière le problème des rapports de la subjectivité et de l'objectivité en rendant manifeste l'homogénéité profonde de l'*Umwelt* [l'environnement] et de l'*Innenwelt* [le monde intérieur].<sup>19</sup>

He believed this could also occur by means of a certain type of art, which gave free reign to subjective perception in representing external phenomena, a concept he termed 'impure art'.<sup>20</sup> Conceptually, this form of art was very similar to Surrealist art since, like Breton, Caillois viewed the boundary between the artist or the individual and the outside world as porous.

Caillois further explored these fluid boundaries in a famous article published in 1935 entitled 'Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire'. In it he considered the tendency of certain organisms (including human beings) to mimic characteristics of their environment. In his discussion of human behaviour, he likened artists and writers to schizophrenics in their propensity to succumb to 'la dépersonnalisation par assimilation à l'espace'.<sup>21</sup>

L'espace semble à ces esprits dépossédés une volonté dévoratrice. L'espace les poursuit, les cerne, les digère dans une phagocytose géante. A la fin il les remplace. Le corps alors se désolidarise d'avec la pensée, l'individu franchit la frontière de sa peau et habite de l'autre côté de ses sens. ... Il est semblable, non pas semblable à quelque chose, mais simplement *semblable*.<sup>22</sup>

Caillois cited the early Gustave Flaubert as a major exponent of such an experience: at the end of his prose poem *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, Flaubert has the saint hallucinate about myriad natural phenomena (plants, animals, minerals) all mimicking each other, with Saint Anthony's consciousness also aspiring to become one with its environment and succumbing to 'la généralisation de l'espace aux dépens de l'individu'.<sup>23</sup> Caillois cited Salvador Dalí as an artist who in the 1930s similarly

19 R. Caillois, *Procès intellectuel de l'art*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Marseille, Les Cahiers du Sud, 1936), p. 43.

20 Caillois, *Procès intellectuel de l'art*, p. 30.

21 R. Caillois, 'Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire', in *Minotaure*, 7 (1935), p. 9.

22 Caillois, 'Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire', pp. 8-9, emphasis in the original.

23 Caillois, 'Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire', p. 9.

depicted 'assimilations mimétiques de l'animé à l'inanimé'<sup>24</sup>, as exemplified in the illustrations of his book *La Femme visible*, in which delineations between organic matter and human form are barely discernible.

It is significant that in her article on entropy in the work *Formless*, Krauss refers to Caillois as one of two individuals she associates with the notion. She states that from the writings of Caillois and Robert Smithson one might assume that 'entropy's import is particularly acute for visual analysis and most especially for that which concerns modernist painting'.<sup>25</sup> She speculates on whether

sloughing off the inevitable separations of space as we normally experience it, in which objects stand apart from one another and space is discontinuous with them, this new optical continuum would be the result of what one school would call *sublation* — as figure and ground achieve a new and higher synthesis.<sup>26</sup>

It is the previous assertion with which I take issue, for I believe that Modernism's processes can be better understood with reference to Derrida's 'Le Puits et la pyramide' rather than to Krauss's account of artistic entropy. In other words, while recognising the ideality of vision (which may be suggestive of a 'higher synthesis'), I believe Derrida's point about the materiality of art resisting sublation to be more plausible in relation to Surrealist artworks. The latter owe too much to the incongruity of the components from which they are created to be subsumed into a higher, more rarefied state of ideality.

An example of a Surrealist work which is defined by its materiality is Max Ernst's *Two children are threatened by a nightingale* (1924). The work is the product of a fevered hallucination recalled by Ernst in which the wood grain of a panel near his bed took on 'successively the aspect of an eye, a nose, a bird's head, a menacing nightingale, a spinning top, and so on'.<sup>27</sup> A small wooden gate and a spinning top encroach upon the work's wooden frame; both are oriented towards the painting's

24 Caillois, 'Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire', p. 9.

25 R.E. Krauss, 'Entropy', in R.E. Krauss and Y.-A. Bois, *Formless: A user's guide* (New York, Zone, 1997), p. 75.

26 Krauss, 'Entropy', pp. 75-6, emphasis in the original. Krauss concludes, however, that entropy in art is only possible when it is 'anti-visual', disrupting or effacing the field of vision by which the artwork enters the beholder's consciousness: 'the entropic, simulacral move, however, is to float the field of seeing in the absence of the subject' (p. 78).

27 M. Ernst, *Beyond painting and other writing*, trans. D. Tanning (Wittenborn, New York, 1948), p. 28.

exterior. This makes it at once uncertain as to where the artistic work is delimited, for the frame now becomes the background of the work as well as demarcating its borders. The open gate especially hints at the possibility of the work's content (which is very much a product of the artist's imagination) escaping into external reality. The uncanny qualities of the work mediate a hauntedness and tension without closure or resolution, the realia of the work serving only to underline the work's resistance to sublation.

Ernst's problematisation of 'the frame' is echoed in some measure by Derrida in his reinterpretation of the 'parergon'. In *La Vérité en peinture*, he writes of a fluid boundary that straddles the work itself and its external environment. The term 'parergon', originally employed in the domain of painting, refers to 'something subordinate or accessory to the main subject', an 'ornamental accessory or addition, grace, embellishment'.<sup>28</sup> Derrida redefines the concept as 'ni œuvre (*ergon*), ni hors d'œuvre, ni dedans ni dehors, ni dessus ni dessous, il déconcerte toute opposition mais ... donne lieu à l'œuvre'.<sup>29</sup> It might be said that this conceptualisation of the parergon permits an entropic exchange, since he dispenses entirely with those constructs which ordinarily give meaning and structure to a work (such as border and content, interior and exterior). As in Ernst's work, the elements of the artistic artefact have the capacity to become a part of reality itself by means of a porous frame.

Art historians have been quick to apply the term 'parergon', as Derrida understands it, to Surrealist art. Patricia Allmer has used the term to interpret Magritte's œuvre. With reference to his painting *Le Soir qui tombe*, she writes: "The frame here is no more a discrete entity but has become a "betweenness", erasing clear distinctions



Figure 12.2: Max Ernst, *Two children are threatened by a nightingale*, 1924. © Max Ernst/ADAGP. Licensed by Viscopy, 2014.

28 'parergon, n.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/137856?redirectedFrom=parergon>, accessed 2 December 2013.

29 J. Derrida, *La Vérité en peinture* (Paris, Flammarion, 1978), p. 14.



Figure 12.3: Salvador Dalí, *The endless enigma*, 1938. © Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí/VEGAP. Licensed by Viscopy, 2014.

between inside and outside'.<sup>30</sup> The author of *Dalí and Postmodernism: This is not an essence*, Marc J. LaFountain, makes a similar assertion about Dalí's work, claiming that 'through the 1930s Dalí eroded the coherence of the *ergon/parergon* couplet'.<sup>31</sup>

It is worth examining Dalí's works in greater depth in order to establish how precisely this erosion occurred. In his painting *The endless enigma*, he adroitly depicts several subjects, all of which are interlaced and, at the same time, framed by one another. Most appear as optical illusions, each of whose presence becomes discernible as one alters one's perception of the other subjects painted. These subjects are in succession: a reclining philosopher; a greyhound lying down; a mythological beast; the face of the great Cyclopean; a mandolin; a compotier of fruits and figs on a table; and finally a woman seen from the back mending a sail. In the right-hand corner, one can perceive the upper part of the face of Dalí's wife (Gala) with a turban on her head, and, at the bottom left, balanced on a stick, the skeletal remains of a grilled sardine.

With closer scrutiny of the painting, it becomes difficult to establish where one subject begins and another ends. As LaFountain comments, '*Endless enigma* is a site of effacement where frames, interiors, and exteriors wither and are erased, surpassed by an endless exteriority'<sup>32</sup>, and further, 'medium is more than a *trompe l'oeil*, it is also a clever trump of the I that deeply alters both the I (subjective) and the world (objective)'.<sup>33</sup> Dalí's paranoiac critical method, which reveals the resemblances of two

30 P. Allmer, 'Framing the real: Frames and processes of framing in René Magritte's œuvre', in W. Wolf and W. Bernhart (eds), *Framing borders in literature and other media* (Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2006), p. 121 (pp. 113-38). I will discuss the significance of Magritte's use of framing in greater depth later in this chapter.

31 M.J. LaFountain, *Dalí and Postmodernism: This is not an essence* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 90, emphasis in the original.

32 LaFountain, p. 91.

33 LaFountain, p. 104.



entirely unrelated yet formally similar subjects, contributes to the dismantling not only of the barriers between the artistic subject and its natural border (given that the myriad subjects all constitute and frame each other) but also of the boundaries between the individual and his/her environment (given the undifferentiated representation of oneiric visions and exterior landscapes).

Dalí's montage entitled *Mae West's face which may be used as a Surrealist apartment* (1934-35) also overturns the idea of the 'natural border' by using a door-frame as the outline of a celebrity's face. Beyond the door-frame are items of furniture which constitute both the contents of a Surrealist apartment and the facial features of Mae West. He repeated this concept some forty years later, when he created an actual version of the apartment. The installation was filled with kitsch furniture, such as Dalí's infamous red-lip sofa, and two paintings of what appeared to be shadowy landscapes at close quarters, but which came to resemble eyes from a distance. The work problematised not only the delineations between interior and exterior but also the relationship between the beholder and the artwork: as an individual entered the



Figure 12.4: Salvador Dalí, *Mae West's face which may be used as a Surrealist apartment*, 1934-35. © Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí/VEGAP. Licensed by Viscopy, 2014.



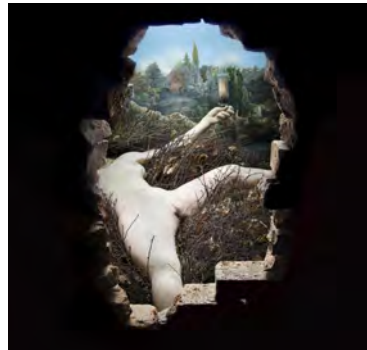
Figure 12.5: Salvador Dalí, *Mae West Room* (early 1970s). © Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí/VEGAP. Licensed by Viscopy, 2014.

Surrealist apartment via its front door, (s)he in fact passed through the frame of the artwork into the *ergon* itself (and into the face of Mae West). In doing so, however, the beholder invariably changed his/her perception of the work, which came to look less like a face and ever more like an apartment.

Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés*<sup>34</sup>, like Dalí's Mae West Room, is an installation which makes the spectator of the work a participant in the scene depicted. In Duchamp's work (his last and possibly most esoteric one, which he constructed between 1946 to 1966), the frame as such is totally absent. From the exterior, the onlooker sees only a closed wooden door. The visual aspect of the work is witnessed via a peephole within it, yet unbeknown to the spectator, this eyelet will reveal a female nude in the immediate foreground. Duchamp thus inculcates the spectator by unwittingly making him/her a voyeur, an action which is made more ignoble by the manner in which the nude is presented: headless and with limbs raised on one side, her pose straddles Eros and Thanatos. Duchamp has reduced the part of the installation which most resembles a work of conventional art (the waterfall) to a background detail at the rear of the diorama. The viewer is, however, cut off from this section of the work not only by its distance but by the locked door and the spectacle of grim reality represented by the corpse-like woman in the foreground.



(Exterior)



(Interior — through the peephole)

Figure 12.6: Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés: 1 La Chute d'eau/2 Le Gaz d'éclairage* (Given: 1 The waterfall/2 The illuminating gas), 1946-66. © Succession Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP. Licensed by Viscopy, 2014.

<sup>34</sup> The full title of which is: *Étant donnés: 1 La Chute d'eau/2 Le Gaz d'éclairage* (Given: 1 The waterfall/2 The illuminating gas).

There is no consensus amongst critics as to the meaning of this opaque work, though evidently the spectator has a pivotal role to play both in creating the work and interpreting it: on the one hand (s)he helps create the work by interacting with the installation and peering through the door's peephole like a voyeur; on the other hand, (s)he is a witness to a scene which is presented like the aftermath of an accident and is therefore in need of interpretation. Concerning this interrelationship between artwork and spectator, Duchamp confirmed that 'the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and thus adds his contribution to the creative act'.<sup>35</sup> This results in 'a transference from the artist to the spectator in the form of an aesthetic osmosis'<sup>36</sup>, a transference which further establishes the meaning and impact of a work. His use of the concept of 'osmosis' is significant here, ultimately suggesting that the inner reality of the artist is co-interpreted by an external spectatorship via the intermediary of the artwork. Thus he again overturns



Figure 12.7: René Magritte, *La Condition humaine I*, 1933.  
© Rene Magritte/ADAGP.  
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Figure 12.8: René Magritte, *La Condition humaine II*, 1933.  
© Rene Magritte/ADAGP.  
Licensed by Viscopy, 2014.

35 M. Duchamp, 'The creative act', in M. Sanouillet and E. Peterson (eds), *The writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York, Da Capo Press, 1973), p. 140.

36 Duchamp, p. 139.

the notion of contained artistry, which is given its meaning and integrity by a fixed frame.

Another Surrealist artist to challenge traditional modes of representation and confuse the relationship between the work and its subject was René Magritte. In two of his paintings from 1933, *La Condition humaine I* and *II*, our ordinary perception of reality is undermined as the border between painting and referent is obscured. Each work is a painting of a painting, which appears at first glance to merge with its background (a conventional landscape). In each work, however, the painting is only distinguishable from its background by the inclusion of an easel which supports it and a barely perceptible line around its perimeter. According to Allmer,

... this line seems to draw out a contour, a frame, a sketch or a plan for what is behind the canvas. The line interrogates the question of what has been framed — is it the painting within the painting, is it the outline of the canvas, or is it the boundary, the frame, the limit of the landscape and its representability?<sup>37</sup>

Thus Magritte's conception of the frame is also a diffuse one. Rather ingeniously, he introduces an osmotic fluidity between the subject represented and its referent by locating (flimsy, tenuous) artistic frames within the paintings themselves.



**Figure 12.9:** René Magritte, *La Lunette d'approche*, 1963. © Rene Magritte/ADAGP. Licensed by Viscopy, 2014.

In René Magritte's *La Lunette d'approche* (1963), he attempts to discredit the structures of representation and reality by revealing the illusory nature of a vista which we can discern through a window. From viewing the windowpanes alone, we would assume that we were overlooking a blue sea which meets a cloudy sky at the horizon. With the right-hand window open, however, we are able to behold what lies beyond the window, which is only darkness. What was intended to show reality for what it is (i.e. the window) serves only to frame a semblance of it: the view of the sea is merely a trompe l'œil painted onto both windowpanes.

37 Allmer, pp. 119-20.

By means of an osmotic exchange (between internal and external elements), an unsettling psychic void usurps the exterior landscape and reality itself (as anticipated beyond the window), reducing it to an interior decoration. The painting's lack of resolution and disconcerting eeriness again seem to resist sublation to a harmonious unity.

In *Les Deux mystères* (1966), Magritte depicts a painting of a pipe (with the caption 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe'), an artistic miniature of an enormous pipe which floats mysteriously

in the background. He confounds the relationship between the interiority of the painting and its environment by highlighting the simulacral nature of the painted pipe: it is neither an original painting, the artist having presented it to the public as an independent work entitled *La Trahison des images* in 1929, nor a real pipe, being merely an artistic representation of the original (which is in itself a painted simulacrum). The frame, which Magritte has mounted upon the easel and has so conspicuously rendered within the work, thus becomes an ironic addition, since the image within neither exists as a work in its own right nor portrays adequately something external to it.

In commenting on Magritte's œuvre (in particular *La Trahison des images*), Michel Foucault states:

Magritte nomme ses tableaux (un peu comme la main anonyme qui a désigné la pipe par l'énoncé 'Ceci n'est pas un pipe') pour tenir en respect la dénomination. Et pourtant, dans cet espace brisé et en dérive, d'étranges rapports se nouent, des intrusions se produisent, de brusques invasions destructrices, des chutes d'images au milieu des mots, des éclairs verbaux qui sillonnent les dessins et les font voler en éclats.<sup>38</sup>

Foucault seems to imply that a chaotic deterioration, or an entropic loss, occurs in the attempt the artist makes to capture a real object in a painting — and then name it. Meaning is lost in the process; though, conversely, new layers of meaning (implicit or explicit) may be added. A work's title helps constitute its frame — though it likewise



**Figure 12.10:** René Magritte, *Les Deux mystères*, 1966.  
© Rene Magritte/ADAGP.  
Licensed by Viscopy, 2014.

38 M. Foucault, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (Montpellier, Fata Morgana, 1973), p. 48.

contributes to the reworking or misrepresentation of the subject to the extent that it is conceived from the artist's subjective perceptions.

This form of exchange between the inner life and the environment is one of several forms of osmosis which we have observed in relation to the Surrealist works discussed. These osmotic processes always perturb the interiority of the artwork itself, and may involve the following: the artwork and its object (the referent), as in Magritte's *Les Deux mystères*; the artwork and its immediate environment (which includes the exhibition space, frame and title), as in Dalí's Mae West room; the artwork and the inner life of the artist, as in Ernst's *Two children are threatened by a nightingale*; the artwork and spectator, as in Duchamp's *Étant donnés*; and the artistic subject (in the work) in relation to another, as in Dalí's *The endless enigma*.

Collectively, we might consider these processes as part of the greater osmosis of art and life, which is often cited in critical appraisals of the movement as having been one of Surrealism's central aims.<sup>39</sup> This fusion of art and life ran counter to any tendency to elitist academicism in art, which might have aspired to such qualities as harmony and 'higher' synthesis. Rather, it allowed art to take on a multitude of new, experimental forms, which expressed the individual's subjective reactions to the vicissitudes of material life, and often confused inner and outer realities. When asked for his view of Breton's role in achieving this osmosis, Michel Foucault commented:

Nous sommes aujourd'hui à un âge où l'expérience — et la pensée qui ne fait qu'une chose avec elle — se développe avec une richesse inouïe à la fois dans une unité et une dispersion qui effacent les frontières des provinces autrefois établies ... Il est très probable que c'est à la personne et à l'œuvre d'André Breton qu'on doit ce nouvel égaillement et cette nouvelle unité de notre culture.<sup>40</sup>

Foucault underscores the importance of Breton's legacy as that of wiping out the 'boundaries' (of discrete areas of art, culture and knowledge), once considered well-established and impervious, as well as blending and unifying heterogeneous (and

39 See S. Harris, *Surrealist art and thought in the 1930s: Art, politics and the psyche* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004); H. Marcuse, *Art and liberation: Collected papers of Herbert Marcuse*, vol. 4, ed. D. Kellner (Hoboken, Routledge, 2007); J. Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', *New German Critique*, 22 (Winter 1981), p. 10.

40 M. Foucault, 'C'était un nageur entre deux mots', in *Dits et écrits*, vol. 1, 1954-1988 (Paris, Gallimard, 1994), pp. 556-7.



'scattered') elements from these domains in a quasi-entropic fashion. There is no doubt that the artistic practices of Surrealism as Breton and his associates conceived them contributed greatly to this phenomenon.

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# 13

## Art and origin: Bataille and Blanchot's return to Lascaux

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Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot's mutual interest in the Lascaux cave paintings signals their common concern to construct a discourse of origin in relation to art. Both writers consider origin in terms of the anxiety-filled questioning surrounding the ontological and historical aporias that have plagued Western thought, including those that appear under the banner of the Modern and the Postmodern. Both ask: what kind of discourse presides over the disconcerting doubling of reality performed by the first artists? For Bataille, origin is bound up with the ritual significance of eroticism and death as these underpin all forms of artistic endeavour; Blanchot, for his part, focuses on the existential void that takes up residence at the centre of all poetry and art.

In attempting to break with tradition, modern art and literature heralded a period of anxious questioning in relation to origin. James Joyce, in *Ulysses*, illustrates the modern preoccupation with origin by making his young characters recall impertinently their forebears:

— Pooh! Buck Mulligan said. We have grown out of Wilde and paradoxes. It's quite simple. He proves by algebra that Hamlet's grandson is Shakespeare's grandfather and that he himself is the ghost of his own father.

— What? Haines said, beginning to point at Stephen. He himself?<sup>1</sup>

The youthful disdain of their illustrious forefathers brings the young men all the more surely to the question of origin: who are we to claim absolute knowledge, given that we have done no more than appear in the shadow of our fathers?

Joyce's insights find their theoretical underpinnings in the work of Michel Foucault, particularly in his historico-philosophical account of the Modern reconfiguration of the concept of origin. In *Les Mots et les choses*, Foucault points to the radical change that occurred around the middle of the nineteenth century in the manner of thinking about origin. From this moment, it was no longer possible to define origin solely in terms of the presence or absence of an external authenticating instance (such as God, Nature, Man). Instead, origin came to signify an enigmatic relation to being.<sup>2</sup> What one 'is', essentially, is a condition of the invisible founding principle from which one emanates.

This is a theme that permeated twentieth century thought via the human sciences in particular, inasmuch as the latter aimed essentially to redefine the workings of language, society and art in terms of a hidden principle that underlies all of their actual forms. Among the writers that came to the fore during this period, George Bataille and Maurice Blanchot are worthy of attention for the fact that, throughout this period, they continued to remind us that the search for the invisible logic that structured human experience is not a mere scientific pursuit, but is imbued with a persistent existential anxiety. In other words, behind the methodological innovations and empirical inflation, the pursuit of knowledge, when it became knowledge of the human realm, gave rise to the suspicion that the human is an encumbrance. 'Human, all too human', as Nietzsche entitles his anti-humanist essay<sup>3</sup>, as if the 'too much human' tended quite naturally to direct our attention to the nothingness from which it derives and to which it must return. For Bataille, then, the return to the origin, to the foundation of the 'all too human', requires that we renew our union with the erotic and destructive energies that civilised societies had quashed; for Blanchot,

1 J. Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. D. Rose (London, Picador, 1997), p. 19.

2 M. Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris, Gallimard, 1966). See the discussion 'Le recul et le retour de l'origine', pp. 339-45.

3 F. Nietzsche, *Human, all too human*, trans. M. Faber and S. Lehmann (London, Penguin, 1984).

it marked a desire to attain, via an austere redeployment of language, an essential solitude.

The concern of this study is to gauge how Bataille and Blanchot approach the question of the origin of art. To begin with, and to ward off the temptation of naturalistic empiricism, it is necessary to say what origin is not. It is not, firstly, to be confused with ascription. Ascription occurs when one imputes a work of art to a painter, a school, a movement, a period. As such, ascription does not identify an origin but merely attributes a value by association that ensures the work's place in the museum, and, ultimately, in posterity. Nor should one confuse origin with the reduction of the work to one of a number of universal concepts, such as Truth, Goodness or Desire. Here again, one is not addressing the question of origin, but merely engaging in ascription — that is, signalling the relation of the work to a general idea through which its particular forms and textures seem to become intelligible. Thus origin neither pertains to the external realities that inform us of the context of a work's production, nor does it take the form of a fundamental idea of which the work is deemed to be a spectacular illustration.

The origin of art must rather be understood by way of an examination of the ontological foundations of art — that is, the particular manner in which it appears as art. In his essay 'The origin of the work of art', Martin Heidegger opens with a definition: 'Origin ... means that from which and by which something is what it is and as it is'.<sup>4</sup> Heidegger's sparse formulation suggests that origin is not merely a matter of establishing criteria by which one identifies a typical artwork in opposition to the familiar world of objects, such as one finds in Nelson Goodman's *The languages of art*.<sup>5</sup> At the other end of the scale, Heidegger warns also against making art subservient to the higher-order values promoted by Idealist philosophies.<sup>6</sup> Avoiding these diametrically opposed models of ascription, Heidegger focuses on the manner in which art 'is' as a mode of 'setting itself forth', and refers to the 'self-opening' by which the work brings into the 'clearing' that which was previously held 'in reserve'. This does not amount to saying that the artwork appears magically

4 M. Heidegger, *Poetry, language, thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York, Harper & Row, 1971), p. 17.

5 N. Goodman, *The languages of art: An approach to the theory of symbols* (Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 1976).

6 Examples are Schelling's notion of art as an absolute, and Hegel's famous description of art as a concrete manifestation of the Spirit.

against a backdrop of nothingness, but rather that the 'being' implies a 'being there', and that this manner of occupying a position is disquieting because of the shadow it casts over its 'ground'. Art 'is', then, to the extent that in its relation to the visible it is beholden to the obscuring that conditions its appearance.

The question of origin has as much to do with the darkness against which the work appears as with the exalted instant in which it brings itself into view. However, one must not be content with simple binary oppositions. To understand origin in its complexity, one must apprehend the darkness in a particular light, and consider rather a changing, or more precisely a receding, darkness, one displaying a double movement of concealing and concealing concealment. The example of a heroic statue serves to illustrate the notion of double concealment. On the one hand, the statue makes visible the texture and colour of the stone, as it offers these properties to aesthetic contemplation. In this respect, the stone statue contrasts with a stone building or bridge in which the concern with functionality obscures most of the stone's natural qualities. However, the pendulum swings immediately the other way, as the stone statue also makes visible the idea, the actions or the story of the legendary character it portrays, precisely by making us forget the physical properties of the stone in which they are carved.

For Heidegger, art, more than any other area of experience, elicits the fundamental question of metaphysics: 'From what ground do beings come?'<sup>7</sup> We have seen that art, as 'self-erection', as the constitution of an anxiety-prone modality of 'being', poses the question of origin via a scenario that articulates a two-sided, active relationship with darkness. This relationship is dramatised in two ways: firstly, as a retrieval (from a loss or disappearance), and secondly as a restoration (from a situation of rupture). Yet, as retrieval, origin remains attached to what, in the process of retrieval, remains 'in reserve'; and as restoration, it is still bound to the ruins that provide its justification. In both cases, a situation of double concealment is played out in such a way that the un-concealment is ultimately another form of concealment. It is in this way, I contend, that art maps out its particular itinerary in terms of its relation to origin.

In retrieval and restoration, one detects a double movement to and from darkness, which not only offers a model of the creative process but suggests also that creation occurs through crisis. It is at this point that we can gauge Foucault's contribution to

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7 M. Heidegger, *Introduction to metaphysics*, trans. G. Fried and R. Polt (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2000), p. 3.

this view of art, particularly in relation to modern art. In outlining his 'archeological' method, Foucault invites us not to conceive origin as a single inceptive moment. It is not, for example, the first light of dawn in which a humanly created object of contemplation first appeared. Nor does it refer to the formless magma from which the object emerged and to which it is destined to return. Such views of origin, Michel Foucault explains in *Les Mots et les choses*, belong to Classical Thought, inasmuch as they suppose a series of representations that draws together, in a single uninterrupted line and in a perfect chronology, a reality that is in fact multifaceted. Modern thought departed from such a linear view of origin by way of the immense paradigm shift that saw areas of art and culture, among others, acquire their own founding principles. Art and culture were no longer grounded in a single external unifying concept such as God or Man. Because Modern thought no longer presented God or Man as absolutes, they were relegated to the level of objects of representation *among others*. Conversely, art and culture marked out a territory in which they were able to generate *within themselves* the principles that presided over the history of their emergence and decline.

Foucault's concern in *Les Mots et les choses* is to locate the epistemological break that gave rise to the radical new conditions for knowledge at the start of the Modern period. Here, knowledge no longer derived from a creator who dictated the rules of enquiry from above. Rather, the authenticating instance was now lodged within the objects and methods that defined an area of inquiry. This is particularly the case in the many human sciences that emerged in the early years of the twentieth century. Their aim was to examine human activity as a particular set of behaviours, proper to a social setting, in which there emerged a set of principles that could be classified as distinctly human. Significantly, this change of outlook enabled humans to pursue the source of knowledge within themselves, just as they could derive a particular ethical system purely on the basis of their own sense of self and other: 'la [pensée] moderne ... ne formule aucune morale dans la mesure où tout impératif est logé à l'intérieur de la pensée et de son mouvement pour ressaisir l'impensé'.<sup>8</sup> A new question arises at this juncture: how can the human play both the role of the seeker of knowledge and that of its object? Does this situation not in fact give rise to an aporetic situation in which the seeker and the object of knowledge impede one another, casting a shadow (the inhuman?) over the entire enterprise? Such is the quandary that was brought to a head

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8 Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, pp. 338-9.



when Western thought overturned past thought systems and produced an overhaul of conventional forms of art and literature.

Foucault's exposition of the problem of origin enables us to conceive of a self-generating system that is located at the level of the artworks themselves. Just as the source of thought for Foucault is the 'impensé' that subsists within its object of enquiry, so, too, does the origin of the work of art lie in that part of representation that escapes the play of graphic or pictorial substitutions. This paradigm informs Foucault's famous study of Velasquez's painting 'Las Meninas'.<sup>9</sup> Foucault analyses the different components of the painting as the product of a gaze that appears to emanate from different positions, these being attached to the position of the king, the characters or the artist. Considered in their multiplicity, the different perspectives do not simply complement each other but seem curiously to point to an anomalous gaze that is unattributable. This, he writes, is the 'vide essentiel' or the blind spot from which the entire complex arrangement of mirrors and windows, people and objects, seems to emerge.<sup>10</sup> The source of the gaze is not, then, a transcendent being such as God that orders its universe as it sees fit, nor the commissioning duke or duchess satisfying their vanity in such a display of wealth; nor is it the artist who arranges the entire scene according to the demands of his art. The source of this gaze is rather a faceless entity that escapes all three figures of authority. In this anonymous trace, which is barely discernible to the viewer, Foucault discovers the work's structuring principle, one that is 'intimement étranger' to its pictorial splendour.<sup>11</sup>

Foucault adopts a similar approach in his essay 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?' This text defends a position that had become synonymous with the structuralist movement, namely that discourse can only secondarily be reduced to the will, the intention, the personality or the repressed desires of the author. Essentially, discourse is to be defined in terms of the signifying mechanisms proper to language. Interestingly, Foucault regards the impersonal discursive logic that supplants the author not as a predetermined set of rules but as the scene of a crisis that takes the form of an authorial fade-out: 'il est question de l'ouverture d'un espace où le sujet écrivain ne cesse de disparaître'.<sup>12</sup> By portraying the author as the 'oubli non accidentel' that

9 Foucault's study, entitled 'Les Suivantes', is the opening chapter of *Les Mots et les choses*.

10 Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, pp. 30-1.

11 Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, p. 30.

12 M. Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, vol. 1, 1954-1975, ed. D. Defort and F. Ewald (Paris, Gallimard, 2001), p. 821.

imprints itself negatively in the text<sup>13</sup>, Foucault, like Heidegger, subscribes to the notion of the double concealment inherent in being. Like Heidegger, he conceives of the text's inceptive moment as a concealing concealment, for in his view it is precisely that which removes itself from view, as it falls into a state of dereliction, that effectively organises the literary work and determines its ontological status.

The origin of the painting, for Foucault, is precisely the invisible centre around which the multiple perspectives organise themselves; and that of the written text is the place where the operation of the blanking-out of the author is most fully realised. It is notable that for Foucault, the origin — that is, the invisible principle that governs the form and significance of a work — partakes of both an outside and an inside. It represents the outside to the extent that it possesses a different temporal structure to that of the work. In this light, origin retreats into a time that is essentially prior to the forms, contents, materials and messages that appeal to the eye and the ear. Origin is external also to the extent that it corresponds to that which the realm of appearances must cast aside in order to become visible, committing it to a zone of alterity. However, the origin belongs also to the inside, in the sense that the principle from which the work emerges permeates the work's entire graphic, textural or pictorial space. This is certainly the case in Velasquez's painting, which encloses the fleeting shadow moving between the areas of light and shade, but also in texts such as autobiographies, in which the term 'I' serves both to announce the subject and to highlight, if not its absence, at least its dispersion within a network of symbolic substitutions.

Foucault's position is well known. My purpose in presenting it here is to show that we can apply it usefully to the way in which we think about the origin of art. If scholarship has not to this point manifested a great deal of interest in pursuing this question, it is because of the erroneous idea that origins must be singular, absolute and historically legible. This limitation, however, stems from the Classical construction of origin. It ignores the manner in which Modern thought transformed the notion of origin. It is, then, from Foucault's 'modern' determination of origin that I shall examine two different accounts of the origin of art: firstly, Georges Bataille's theory of the beginnings of art in relation to the paintings of the Lascaux caves, and secondly, Maurice Blanchot's treatment of poetry and art, in which he places the poetry of René Char against the Lascaux cave painting that inspired it. I shall finally draw together the two accounts of origin by considering the work of Philippe Lacoue-

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13 Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, vol. 1, p. 836.

Labarthe, whose posthumous *Écrits sur l'art* seeks to gauge how contemporary and indeed future art conceive their relation to origin.

Bataille's study, 'Lascaux ou la naissance de l'art' (written in 1955), is in some ways a precursor of Foucauldian 'archaeology'.<sup>14</sup> Bataille outlines a theory of origin that, by drawing on different clues provided by historical and archaeological research, offers a model of continuity and discontinuity. Firstly, how would it be possible, Bataille wonders, for present-day viewers of the cave paintings to feel wonder and astonishment if there did not exist, in the *homo sapiens* artists, an intense exuberance and joy at the moment they created them? In other words, there must exist in art an emotional resonance that enables it to speak to humans over a 30 000-year time span. Secondly, how could this joy express itself in this *homo sapiens* community and in this particular form, if there did not exist at that time a system of rules to which it was necessary to oppose a form of resistance? Art appears, therefore, essentially as an act of transgression. It is from these two suppositions that Bataille derives his account of the origin of art as a moment of religious fervour that entails a radical upheaval. This he explains by noting that forms of social control and the demands of productive work which were introduced into human communities in that era gave rise to a need to release excess energy through activities that were regressive, non-directed, pleasure-driven, playful and creative. Art functioned similarly to the pagan festival inasmuch as it served as an opportunity to deny, subvert and overturn the social order for short periods set aside for this purpose. 'La fête levait le couvercle de la marmite', writes Bataille.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, art would not have been born without lifting the lid of social disciplines.

This being the case, why did the artists choose to depict horses, cows, men, women, tools and weapons? If anthropologists tend to explain these pictures as forms of preservation that replicate the function of mortuary rituals, Bataille is more likely to link them to the context of sacrificial rites, thus making artistic activity an extension of the religious significance of objects. In this light, one can understand Bataille's interest in the astonishing hybrid figures that bring together different animal and human features. One such figure, known as the Sorcerer, has the body of a bison, the face of a bearded man, inflated genitals and feet that appear, Bataille

14 In *L'Archéologie du savoir* (Paris, Gallimard, 1969), Foucault claims that he bases his historical research not on a preconceived discursive unity proper to each historical period, but on the discontinuities of the discourses it produced. He proceeds not with the aim of identifying a historical period's single centre, but of mapping out 'l'espace d'une dispersion'. See p. 20.

15 G. Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 9 (Paris, Gallimard, 1979), p. 40.

notes, to be dancing the cakewalk.<sup>16</sup> For Bataille, the hybrid figure is a distortion of perception that results from the proto-artist's excess of creative energies and spiritual intoxication. Beyond the idea of unlimited exuberance, Bataille's insights raise the question of the origin of artistic representation in the sense that the figure presents an image of the human that makes visible its lost animalness. By honouring, in its pictorial space, the animal energy, the unchannelled sexuality and the destructive rage against which human society had to barricade itself in order to create its civilised forms, the hybrid figure shows what humanity had to conceal in order to become itself. In doing so, it brings into particular focus humanity's ambiguous relation to the animal. For hybridity combines not just forms, but the affective traits of fear and fascination, and the notions of proximity and distance, and it does so within a ritual space in which dangerous inclinations are formally cordoned off from society. In other words, art, through its first experiments with hybridity, connects its viewers to the undeclared and unthought truth behind their humanness.

Far from offering a clumsy first attempt at representational art, such paintings articulate, forcefully and eloquently, the anxiety surrounding the question of origin. What the figure shows, in the strange combination of horns, tail and genitals alongside recognisable human traits, is the persistence of a thought that society can no longer countenance, namely that the human originates from the inhuman that it is at pains to deny. Bataille seemingly takes pleasure in constructing on this basis an account of Christianity and Christian art in which, as he states in 'Les Larmes d'Eros', truly diabolical forces are at work. Indeed, he intimates, without being fazed by the anachronism, that the Lascaux cave paintings are the first expression of original sin. 'Retrouvant, ou au moins disant que je retrouve, au plus profond de la caverne de Lascaux, le thème du péché originel, le thème de la légende biblique! la mort liée au péché, liée à l'exaltation sexuelle, à l'érotisme!'<sup>17</sup> For Bataille, art makes accessible the erotic and destructive impulses that negatively structure our social habits and moral systems. Art's origin, then, lies in the revelation, via a double concealment or at least the (partial) concealment of a concealment, of an obscure thought that is as intolerable as it is inescapable.

Bataille's account of the origin of art proceeds by sketching out the history of human socialisation and marking its limits. However, following Foucault's model of

16 Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 9, pp. 68-70.

17 G. Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 10 (Paris, Gallimard, 1987), p. 586.

a split origin, should we not also consider the origin of art on the other side of its relationship with the human, where it deploys its abyssal logic in a time and place that is totally removed from our experience? Such is the position from which Maurice Blanchot departs when he claims that art is art, essentially, when it retreats from all the voices that seek to speak through it, when it takes its leave from those that have a message to deliver, a lesson to teach, an idea to promote. It is enlightening, in this respect, to examine his piece *La Bête de Lascaux*, written in 1958, in which he discusses the Lascaux painting known as the Pregnant Cow in tandem with the poem, 'La Bête innommable', that René Char wrote in homage to it.<sup>18</sup> Blanchot approaches pictorial art through the mediation of poetic language in order to determine the way in which painting and poetry commonly articulate the notion of the inceptive moment. His argument begins by declaring that poetry is essentially impersonal. In this, it resembles the ancient oracles who seemed to make their pronouncements from a distant, un-locatable past and address a future that was equally non-determined:

Quand l'inconnu nous interpelle, quand la parole emprunte à l'oracle sa voix  
où ne parle rien d'actuel, mais qui force celui qui l'écoute à s'arracher à son  
présent pour en venir à lui-même comme à ce qui n'est pas encore, cette parole  
est souvent intolérante, d'une violence hautaine qui, dans sa rigueur et par sa  
sentence indiscutable, nous enlève à nous-mêmes en nous ignorant.<sup>19</sup>

The haunting, severe and indifferent tone of the oracular voice has the effect of tearing its listeners away from their familiar world. So, too, does poetry, and in particular the poetry of René Char, which Blanchot describes as a language 'qui ne dicte rien, qui n'oblige en rien, qui ne parle même pas, mais fait de ce silence le doigt impérieusement fixé vers l'inconnu'.<sup>20</sup> Such is the peculiar configuration of commandment and affect that Blanchot also associates with art. Here, art actualises a time that exists outside of time. It is a representation that carves out an 'inactual space',

18 *La Bête innommable* ferme la marche du gracieux troupeau, comme un cyclope bouffe.  
Huit quolibets font sa parure, divisent sa folie.

*La Bête* rote dévotement dans l'air rustique.

Ses flancs bourrés et tombants sont douloureux, vont se vider de leur grosseur.

De son sabot à ses vaines défenses, elle est enveloppée de fétidité.

Ainsi m'apparaît dans la frise de Lascaux, mère fantastiquement déguisée,

La Sagesse pleine de larmes.

— R. Char, 'La Parole en archipel', *La Paroi et la prairie* (Paris, Editions GLM, 1952).

19 M. Blanchot, *Une Voix venue d'ailleurs* (Paris, Gallimard, 2002), p. 62.

20 Blanchot, *Une Voix venue d'ailleurs*, p. 62.

where the disturbing alterity of the pictured characters hammers into insignificance the preoccupations of the familiar world.

Blanchot's attempt to think together poetry and art as a particular relation to origin is based upon a metaphysics of violence. The hieratic quality of poetic language and visual representation implies a connection to origin that is not at all stable or assured, but is, as Blanchot stresses, in fact traumatic. In this respect, Blanchot shares René Char's admiration for the pre-Socratics, particularly Heraclites, insofar as they claim that poetic language belongs to the state of flux, chaos and conflict which originally comprised the universe. This is the original *logos* that Platonic philosophy, through its invention of a translucid language, had abandoned.<sup>21</sup> But poetry, thanks to its eviction from Plato's *Republic* on the grounds of its emotional instability<sup>22</sup>, actually preserves its connection to violence. This is where it connects with art:

Il est un moment, dans l'expérience de l'art et dans la genèse de l'œuvre, un moment où celle-ci n'est encore qu'une violence indistincte tendant à s'ouvrir et tendant à se fermer, tendant à s'exalter dans un espace qui s'ouvre et tendant à se retirer dans la profondeur de la dissimulation.<sup>23</sup>

By virtue of their reliance on appearances, poetry and art lead us back to the 'violence indistincte' that orders the operation of double concealment. Blanchot's discussion of Char's poetic treatment of the painted beast highlights a fatal attraction that is equally apparent in its verbal or graphic forms. The poem presents the beast's nature as unruly, unknowable and unbearable, and above all, as the title indicates, unnameable (*innommable*). The beast occupies a space that is uninhabitable to humans because it denies the order of logic and the clarity of vision. In a text devoted to Blanchot's early novels, Foucault sets out some of the characteristics of this space:

Cette pensée qui se tient hors de toute subjectivité pour en faire surgir comme de l'extérieur les limites, en énoncer la fin, en faire scintiller la dispersion et n'en recueillir que l'invincible absence, et qui en même temps se tient au seuil de toute positivité, non pas tant pour en saisir le fondement ou la justification, mais pour retrouver l'espace où elle se déploie, le vide qui lui sert de lieu ... [C]ette pensée, par rapport à l'intériorité de notre réflexion philosophique et par

21 Blanchot, *Une Voix venue d'ailleurs*, pp. 64-5.

22 Plato, *The Republic*, book 10, trans. D. Lee (London, Penguin, 1955).

23 Blanchot, *Une Voix venue d'ailleurs*, p. 65.

rapport à la positivité de notre savoir, constitue ce qu'on pourrait appeler d'un mot 'la pensée du dehors'.<sup>24</sup>

This space is inhuman in a manner that differs from Bataille's anthropological account of primitive terror because here it plunges the human subject into a void, trapping it between two impossible demands. For here the subject can gain no foothold. It can neither appeal to the world of intuition and imagination by which the subject becomes present to itself, nor claim knowledge and eventually mastery of the empirical universe that it seeks to turn into a projection of its will. As such, 'la pensée du dehors', according to Foucault's formulation, is an alienating and alienated discourse that one might well describe as the modern equivalent of the oracular pronouncements to which Blanchot alluded in *Une Voix venue d'ailleurs*. Like the oracles, it marks a space that deploys an aura of contemptuous indifference, before which the subject is sentenced to an anxious and uncertain future. It is interesting to note the manner in which Blanchot radicalises his position in his later texts. As his writing matures, he is no longer content to present discourse as an obscure space inassimilable by the subject, but sees it as a vector of the principle of destruction that corrupts the subject from within. It is not so much the outside (*le dehors*) rejecting interiority as it is the outside eating away the inside. As he writes in *L'Écriture du désastre*, literature and art carry the possibility of a ruinous moment that comes into effect the moment the subject asserts itself as a self-standing, self-sufficient agent of creation: 'Nous n'avons pas accès au dehors, mais le dehors nous a toujours déjà touchés à la tête, étant ce qui se précipite'.<sup>25</sup>

The above outline of the metaphysics of violence that informs art serves as a prelude to Char's poetic treatment of the cave painting. Char dwells initially on the animal's inordinate suffering. Likened to a 'cyclope bouffe', the cow that trails behind the more nimble elements of the herd is seemingly weighed down by its surplus flesh. The poem foregrounds the stagnant organic mass that envelops the animal in a deathly torpor, emphasising its slowness, its defencelessness and its fetid stench. The overdetermination of the idea of physical imprisonment (in contrast to spiritual liberation) is brought to a head in the closing line of the poem, 'La Sagesse pleine de larmes'. At the same time, the sheer immovable weight of the animal tips over into its opposite, namely the ethereal reign of semblances that constitute art. The represented

24 Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, vol. 1, p. 549.

25 M. Blanchot, *L'Écriture du désastre* (Paris, Gallimard, 1980), p. 16.



cow becomes a 'mère fantastiquement déguisée', an object not of ridicule but of fascination. Art, through its brilliance, does not simply overshadow the suffering, but rather subjects it to a double concealment, a concealment of concealment such that the artifice, in obscuring the formless ugliness of the beast, actually preserves in its visual space the raw expression of suffering. It keeps painful memories alive through a small detail — the cow's expressive eyes. In the line 'Sagesse aux yeux pleins de larmes', the tear-filled eyes shining through the picture transcend, by their artistic quality, the platitude of the pregnant animal. But, by this very process, the poem locates the thread that connects art to its traumatic origin. By retaining the monstrosity of the 'cyclope bouffe' and making it resonate in 'La Sagesse aux yeux pleins de larmes', 'La Bête innommable' delimits a tragic space in which the spiritual elevation implied in the term 'Sagesse' both masks and reveals the hidden principle that lies in the impurity of the cow's rampant flesh.

Origin, one might recall, is the hidden structuring principle that defines art ontologically. The above discussion endeavoured to show how Bataille and Blanchot approach the question of origin through the study of art. In Bataille, the hybrid figure with an animal's body and tail and a human face and feet highlights the capacity of art to bring into view the energies that human society had repressed. This is not in the Freudian sense of wishing to redress an imbalance, but in the more extreme and provocative sense of harnessing the creative and destructive forces to which children, primitives and poets appear to hold the key. Blanchot's treatment of René Char's poetic interpretation of the Pregnant Cow rests upon a conception of origin as a shift of scale, whereby the familiar world recedes into an anonymous grey, and time collapses into a void. Though the anxiety produced by the expulsion towards the 'outside' of thought and speech may well be mitigated by the harmonious forms produced by art, it remains none the less true that the pleasurable illusion cannot put a halt to the forces of disaggregation. For the promised 'erection' of the work is possible only because it contains within it the seed of its imminent collapse. Within this conceptual framework, it is easy to see the point of difference between the two approaches. Bataille considers art as an area in which it is possible to liberate destructive energies and experience the joy that accompanies all transgressive behaviours; Blanchot, in contrast, highlights the rigorous demands of art as it makes us aware of what, metaphysically, is at stake behind the double concealment.

As I suggested earlier, the question of origin invites us to reconsider the way in which it is possible to account for the historical evolution of art. Following Foucault's archaeological method, history is a series of unstable tectonic plates that produce pressure points and eventually chasms. Such a model implies that the gains in knowledge of a particular historical period are defined paradoxically by the ideas that it finds impossible to formulate. For example, classical discourses on madness became inoperative amid scientific claims that there existed a connection between behaviour and the human brain, just as the procedures of law enforcement were overturned following the circulation of new discourses on human freedom.

In relation to art, it is possible to identify similar crises and disjunctions. It is universally accepted that art originates in religion. To demonstrate this, one need only consider the number of times objects of cult around the world are reclassified as art. The gods, or God, ceased to be an authenticating factor when the science of aesthetics was born in the eighteenth century, for at this moment rational discourse provided a complete set of criteria, such as sense, intelligence and imagination, for defining art. We know, however, that this appeal to the faculties and their interactions corresponded to humanistic ideals. Thus, through aesthetics, art confirmed its origins in the human. However, when the human ideal was discredited via the nihilisms of the nineteenth and the twentieth century, this collapse gave rise to new forms of art. Art rose from the ashes of the fallen human and presented itself as an independent value. Bataille's *souveraineté* and Blanchot's *solitude* are just two examples of the way in which art outlived the human ideal. But here a new crisis presented itself. When art became everything (as the Surrealists claimed), it necessarily became nothing since there remained nothing against which it could assert its difference. Once again, the pedestal art created for itself bore the conditions of its ruin.

In his essay 'La Littérature et l'expérience originelle', Blanchot retraces the history of art, or rather its anti-history, by focusing on the aporetic moments that punctuate it. Each of these moments corresponds to a loss. Art lost or forgot the gods, then it lost man, and finally it lost itself, but more importantly, at each stage, it also forgot the forgetting, such that it was obliged at each stage to reconstruct itself in terms of its essential solitude: 'Il était le langage des dieux et, les dieux ayant disparu, il est devenu le langage où s'est exprimée leur disparition, puis celui où cette disparition elle-même a cessé d'apparaître. Cet oubli est maintenant ce qui

parle seul'.<sup>26</sup> Art, then, defines itself with respect to a series of crises in which it loses sight of its grounding principle. Paradoxically, it is most itself when it endures this loss. Blanchot doubtlessly agrees with Heidegger's ontological determination of art, which states that art finds its essence when it divests itself of all contingent factors, all extraneous concepts, and having found the pure ether of nothingness, springs forth into itself. However, Blanchot is not content to say in such definitive terms that art immediately and fully extracts itself from the dark in order to reveal itself in the pure light of its being. Rather, he suggests that art's mode of existence is crisis. It lost the gods, then man, then art itself, and at each moment it is pushed up against the abyss of self-obliteration. It is here that it formulates with greatest urgency the question of origin. This question is: what remains, precisely, when art loses its ground? The answer, which all the proponents of the modern imagination from Manet to Debussy to Beckett relayed, is clear: art murmurs its distress, desists while it persists, and exists, finally, in the mode of survival.

Following Blanchot, the origin of art resides in the plight that is hidden behind its pictorial splendour. Such is the position that this study has tried to argue from the vantage point of a Foucauldian-style archaeology. One must keep in mind, however, that the quest for origin does not end triumphantly with the revelation of an eternal truth bound up in a work, but gives rise rather to more questioning. For as this study has tried to show, the origin is a split origin, divided between an outside source of legitimacy which art contests, and the internal principle of organisation which art conceals. As such, origin reveals itself via a double refusal. It opens its space only to the extent that it closes off another. Such is the impossible logic of a work's relation to origin: 'c'est l'impossible qui est sa tâche, et elle-même ne se réalise alors que par une recherche infinie, car c'est le propre de l'origine d'être toujours voilée par ce dont elle est l'origine'.<sup>27</sup>

To complete the historico-ontological account, one might consider art's predicament in the wake of the turbulences of the Modern and Postmodern eras. What are the precise terms in which one must now formulate the question of origin? Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe grapples with this question in his posthumous *Écrits sur l'art*. At a time when art is more than ever the alibi of commercial interests, technological innovations and political agendas, and at a time when art is more than ever obliged to confront the desert of irrelevance to which it is consigned, the quest

26 M. Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire* (Paris, Gallimard, 1955), p. 330.

27 Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire*, p. 314.

for origin can no longer take the form of the old metaphysical question 'What is art?', nor can it any longer be satisfied with the question 'What is a work of art?', with its productivist overtones. In the wake of what Lacoue-Labarthe, following Foucault and Blanchot, calls the disaster of the subject, the question must be formulated as 'L'art peut-il s'identifier?' ('Can art identify itself?')<sup>28</sup> The reflexive form of the question suggests that art now participates in the construction of the exploratory discourses which it previously left to philosophy and the human sciences. In this respect, the words 'peut-il' ('Can') that begin the question introduce a doubt about the outcome, or even a pathos of failure (to be true to art, this pathos may well be contrived).

Certainly, the form of the question indicates the event of an inward turn that confirms, by making more explicit, the retreat that had diversely characterised art throughout its history. Now, however, the retreat that was once contingent upon the revelation of the work's external, authenticating moment, is apparent at the level of the work's verbal and pictorial forms. As Lacoue-Labarthe points out, the retreat of art corresponds to a posture that is akin to autobiography in the sense that it directs the gaze to the catastrophe within, where the 'itself' loses itself precisely in the strategies it adopts in order to make itself visible. By way of the question 'Can art identify itself?', Lacoue-Labarthe exposes the paradoxical logic that constitutes art: the more it asserts itself in its visible forms, the more it loses itself. Such is the destiny of art when it announces itself as an anxious quest for origin.

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<sup>28</sup> P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Écrits sur l'art* (Geneva, Les Presses du réel, 2009), p. 31.

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