MICHEL LEIRIS, FRENCH ANTHROPOLOGY, AND A SIDE TRIP TO THE ANTILLES[1]

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Susan Sontag seems to have been on to something when she placed her word portraits of Michel Leiris and Claude Lévi-Strauss back to back.[2] An elaboration of her comparison (which was more implied than explicit) may help situate anthropological practice in France—and Leiris' special role in it—within the larger context of trends elsewhere in the world.

I begin in a personal vein, following the lead of Leiris, who broke with standard anthropological practice in France (and elsewhere in the world during the 1930s) when he bucked current notions of "objective science" and introduced his own subjectivity into ethnographic narrative. Such an opening seems especially appropriate given that, in commenting on his *Contacts de Civilisation en Martinique et en Guadeloupe*,[3] I am commenting on both a man and a book that were very much present in my own contacts with Martinique and its *civilisation*.

My original introduction to Martinique—and to the work of Michel Leiris—dates to 1962 when a Harvard student I was dating at the time showed me a copy of *Contacts de Civilisations* that he had bought for FF 7.50 at the Librairie Alexandre in Fort-de-France in the course of a summer field study. A year later that same student brought me back to Martinique, first for our honeymoon and then for further ethnographic work in a fishing village on the southern coast.[4]

The second time that Leiris and Martinique crossed paths in my personal history came 24 years later, while I was conducting research on the reception of non-Western art among collectors in Paris—research for which Leiris provided generous help in the form of informal conversations, bibliographic suggestions, and phone calls to art collectors who, without the recommendation of their good friend Leiris, would hardly have been inclined to grant interviews

to an American woman poking around in their affairs.[5] Leiris always received me in his Spartan underground office in the entrails of the Musée de l'homme, where we talked about art, museums, anthropology, and ethnocentrism.

And then one morning the conversation turned to the Antilles. I told him the story of an illiterate Martiniquan named Médard Aribot and showed him an article that my husband had written about him.[6] I also mentioned that we had just made a decision to buy a small house on the island and to divide our time each year between the Martiniquan countryside and more conventional academic settings. Leiris was fascinated by the story of Médard, a man who lived in caves and used a pocket knife to craft exquisite wooden sculptures of colonial subjects—ocean liners, elegantly dressed dancers, bemedaled military officers, and even his vision of the Dahomean king Béhanzin who was exiled to Martinique after his defeat by the French. Médard also liberated merchandise from the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique and passed it on to rural Martiniquans in need of this or that, spent 30 years as a prisoner in the penal colony of French Guiana, and returned, after World War II, to live in a minuscule gingerbread house that he built overlooking the Caribbean Sea—a house that, after his death, became one of the most frequently post-carded tourist attractions in Martinique, even supplying the cover illustration for the 1994-2004 editions of the *Guide Gallimard* to the island. Leiris's reaction to this story was to pick up the phone excitedly and dial the number of his friend Aimé Césaire. I was alarmed that the Martiniquan time zone would have had Césaire sound asleep when it was 10:00 am in France, but either he was an early riser or he was in Paris that day, because I heard Leiris summarize the Médard story into the phone and ask Césaire to be sure to welcome us as his friends when we arrived in our new island home.

In any case, I continued to see Leiris as my research on art collecting developed. And then, during a visit to London, I was asked by the editor of the international journal *Current Anthropology* if I would be interested in doing an interview with Leiris for its pages. He suggested that it could be illustrated in color, given that Leiris's world was made up of artists at least as much as anthropologists. After returning to Paris I spoke to several people about the interview proposition, and the opinion was unanimous: Leiris detested formal interviews and would never agree to accord me one ... except perhaps, they said, if I could interest his close friend and colleague at the Musée de l'homme, Jean Jamin, into doing it with me. Jamin kindly accepted the idea, and then Leiris did too.

Our three-way tape-recorded conversations took place between October 1986 and March 1987 in Leiris's apartment on the Quai des Grands Augustins, generously lubricated with Scotch for the men and an excellent white wine for the lady. Jamin then took on the transcription, I produced the English translation, and we both contributed explanatory notes.[7] After Leiris read the text and made a few minor changes, we raised the question of illustrations, suggesting those we especially liked, including a collage by Lou-Laurin Lam, the

widow of Wifredo Lam. Leiris eyed it with evident tenderness and explained to me, "You see? It's a portrait of me in the form of a monkey who's masturbating."[8] And indeed it was. But then he vetoed it for the publication, declaring that he wished to be represented by his friends, not by their wives. That meant we could use any of the portraits by Picasso, Giacometti, Francis Bacon, and André Masson, though he wanted to be clear that the Masson works were not portraits of him but rather art works for which he had served as model. (We all agreed not to use the one by Miró, which was hardly flattering.)[9]

As I prepared for the interviews, I had in the back of my mind an image of Leiris built up during my two-year stay in Paris. First, there were quite a few colleagues who had told me that their admiration for Leiris's writing (especially *L'Afrique fantôme*) was what originally inspired them to become anthropologists. At the same time, a recent experience in the library of the Musée de l'homme leaned in another direction: After I'd filled out a request for his often-mentioned 1948 book, *La Langue Secrète des Dogons*,[10] the volume that was brought to me was in virginal condition, requiring that I cut the folded edges of the pages before gaining access to the text. How was I to reconcile the esteem of my anthropological colleagues for Leiris with the fact that one of his central contributions to the discipline had lain in the stacks of France's main anthropology library for 40 years without ever being read? I decided to pay a visit to Lévi-Strauss, a friend since 1963-64, when Richard Price had been his student at the École Pratique des Hautes Études.

If Leiris's office was a dark underground burrow, Lévi-Strauss's was more of an arboreal perch. Like an ornithologist's observation post, it occupied an open balcony, affording a commanding view of the supremely scientific research institution he had founded, the Laboratory of Social Anthropology. Frail of body, with hands unsteadied by Parkinson's disease, Lévi-Strauss had ceded nothing of the intellectual sharpness responsible for his stature as a towering pillar of anthropology, a public intellectual of a kind produced only in France. The contrast with Leiris seemed perfect: the rigorous scientist and champion of Cartesian objectivity versus the poetic surrealist who bathed in reflexive subjectivity. I looked forward to hearing what the one would have to say about the other.

The foundation of what he told me was solid respect. He spoke in detail, and with strong admiration, of Leiris's entire *œuvre*, spontaneously citing work after work with authority and precision.[11] "*L'Afrique fantôme*," he emphasized, "represents the very first time in France—and, I believe, in the entire world—that the person of the anthropologist appears in the literature." It wasn't until a half century later, he noted, that it became generally accepted in the discipline for anthropologists to make themselves visible to readers of their work. And Leiris had been equally ahead of his time, he went on, in building meaningful communication between anthropology and the art world.

At the same time, there were obvious divergences in the two scholars' orientations, not the least in terms of their take on surrealism. Leiris had talked

to me about surrealism as a rebellion against rationality, and about Lévi-Strauss as a "super-rationalist."[12] He had claimed that it was this anti-rationalist position that led him to an interest in *mentalité primitive* à la Lévy-Bruhl—quite a different thing from the concept of *pensée sauvage* that Lévi-Strauss had long championed. Lévi-Strauss smiled and said he saw no contradiction between rationalism and surrealism; nothing prevented a "super-rationalist" from being fascinated by surrealism—as a subject of study. It struck me that he was casting Leiris in the role of a believer and himself in that of a theologian, one practicing a surrealist religion and the other putting it under a microscope. Both motivated by a fascination for the phenomenon, but from two totally different vantage points.

Etched on the flip side of that same coin, of course, were their respective relationships to formal scientific rigor—Lévi-Strauss had it running through his veins, while for Leiris, as Sontag points out, "everything that is impersonal and cold" stood as an object of intense fascination.[13] Finally, their views of Western civilization went in very different directions. Lévi-Strauss had reaped the gold medals of Euro-American culture, from membership in the Académie Française and a chair at the Collège de France (the first for a social anthropologist) to countless honorary degrees and other tokens of high-level recognition throughout the world, and he was a militant defender of the classic educational system in France, including its crowning ordeal, the *baccalauréat*. Had he been born on the other side of the Channel, there is no doubt that he would have been knighted, becoming "Sir Claude" in a rite of passage at least as symbol-laden and culturally charged as those of the Amazonian Indians he studied. And then there was Leiris: the reluctant survivor of several attempted suicides, a diminutive man who took refuge in his underground cell of the Palais de Chaillot and whose attitude toward Western civilization was summed up in *L'Afrique fantôme*:

> I curse my entire childhood and every aspect of the education I received, the imbecilic conventions I was raised with, the morality that people … felt called upon to inflict on me, and all the principles that did nothing but tie me down and make me the mawkish pariah that I am, incapable of leading a wholesome life or copulating in a wholesome way. … If I torture those who love me, may the fault not rest on me, or even on those who raised me (since the only way they ever wronged me was to put me into this world), but rather on this rotted-out society, desperately clinging to its outworn values.[14]

Sontag picked up on this self-image and ran with it. For her, Leiris was a man "unredeemed by the slightest tinge of self-respect," a man whose troubled sexuality was marked by "wormy failures and deficiencies more often than lurid acts," a writer obsessed by an awareness of his "incipient baldness, of a chronic inflammation of the eyelids, of his meager sexual capacities, of his tendency to hunch his shoulders when sitting and to scratch his anal region when he is alone, of a … traumatic infection in his penis … of his hypochon-

dria, of his cowardice in all situations of the slightest danger, of his inability to speak any foreign language fluently, of his pitiful incompetence in physical sports." The author of his famous autobiography is, she says, "corroded," a man "curiously fingering his own wounds" and "perpetually in training to extinguish himself."[15]

Turning the final page of her essay on Leiris, we enter a very different world, focused on the "eminence," "brilliance," and "greatness" of the author of a stunning "masterpiece," *Tristes Tropiques*. We're being shown a portrait of the noble anthropologist in the company of the noble savage. If, for Sontag, Leiris was a man fingering his own wounds, Lévi-Strauss is a magisterial figure perfecting "a technique of political disengagement [and] a profound detachment." If Leiris's stature depended in large part on his self-mutilating autobiographical works, Lévi-Strauss's rested on the premise that "anthropology must be a science, rather than a humanistic study," and on his role as the towering founder of a brand of anthropology "which obliterates all traces of his personal experience and truly effaces the human features of his subject, a given primitive society."[16]

How do the contrastive personal and intellectual styles of Leiris and Lévi-Strauss help us to understand their respective assessments of colonialism as a subject of anthropological interest? How (in the context of the Martiniquan colloquium that inspired this essay) can they be related to other French anthropologists' understandings about the potential of cultures in the Antillean archipelago for shedding light on issues of anthropological relevance? And, more generally, how might they be seen to have contributed to the towering dominance of Lévi-Strauss in French anthropology over the second half of the twentieth century?

For Lévi-Strauss, there has always existed an absolute qualitative difference between, on the one hand, the civilization in which he has conducted his career as a scientist and, on the other, the civilizations, equally sophisticated, that have fueled his research—the famous "here" and "there" of the anthropological fieldworker. [17] One society is hot, the other cold. One is historicized, the other driven by myth. For Lévi-Strauss, "anthropology is necrology," observes Sontag, and the challenge is to get to those dying cultures before they expire.[18] If the anthropologist has an activist mission, it consists of an effort to protect the *pensée sauvage*, to preserve the mythological mindset, to build barriers against the destructive contamination of modernization. And in terms of his role in setting out the paradigms that dominated twentieth-century French anthropology more generally, his adoption of the role of a "scientist" (founding and directing a "laboratory") served the longevity of his program well by permitting, as my French colleagues have pointed out, a line of succession (common in the hard sciences, rare in the humanities) played out through the virtual inheritance of his position at the Collège de France by anthropologists following directly in his footsteps: first Françoise Héritier and then Philippe Descola.

For Leiris, the world did not divide into two camps. Or if there was a division, it was not a matter of hot versus cold, but rather (as he puts it in the preface to *L'Afrique fantôme*) a political reality separating oppressors and oppressed. What interested him, anthropologically, were not pristine worlds on the wane, but rather a phenomenon he called *clash*, the dynamic of potentially messy contact zones, the process of worlds grappling with intercultural relationships in which history and differential power were determining factors. (The other notable exception to French anthropological disinterest in colonialism as a central concern was the Africanist Georges Balandier. Two decades younger than Leiris, Balandier worked under Leiris's direction in the 1940s at the Musée de l'homme and followed his lead in terms of acknowledging his own subjectivity: "If [as Pascal wrote] '*le moi est haïssable*,' we need to grant an exception to the anthropologist. He should contextualize his observations which even more than reflecting a technical expertise, emerge from multiple, complex interactions between the observed and the observer.... It is therefore necessary that he 'discover' himself in the course of studying the results of his research."[19] His writings on colonialism postdate by more than two decades Leiris's *L'Afrique fantôme*, which remains, even today, the strongest French anthropological critique of colonialism in Africa.)

It is no accident, then, that while Lévi-Strauss was turning his attention to societies of a stunning remoteness from western influence, Leiris was exploring colonized settings, including the Antilles. A little background on Leiris's articles of faith may help us understand the relevance of his perspective for Antillean studies and, more broadly, the truth behind Lévi-Strauss's comment that his anthropological vision was ahead of its time.

First, there was his vehement opposition to the tendency, prevalent among anthropologists of his generation, to privilege the study of "exotic" and strongly non-Westernized societies. He wrote, "We need to combat the tendency, too frequent in anthropology (at least in France), that consists of favoring those peoples who can be considered relatively intact, either because of a taste for 'primitivism' or because such peoples present the attraction of greater exoticism."[20]

Similarly, Leiris argued against the widespread notion that the cultural authenticity of a given society is most thoroughly embodied in those individual members who have experienced the least acculturation. He decried, for example, "those colonial administrators (such as those we hear from in sub-Saharan Africa) who sing the praises of the 'brave chap in the bush' and contrast him with the 'evolved' man in the city," and concluded:

> It is quite legitimate to assert that the most interesting people in human terms, for example in Africa, are the "acculturated" ones, people whose eyes are being opened to new experiences, and to see in these people (too often viewed abusively as simple imitators ...) the *greatest* authenticity, to understand that they have the fullest consciousness of their human condition as colonized men of color, that they are the ones accepting less and less easily the capitalist oppression imposed by Euro-

> peans, and that it is they who have become the promotional agents of emancipation, both for themselves and for others who are their brothers less for reasons of race than for reasons of their shared condition.[21]

Leiris also declared that it would be a grave error to treat societies, even the most remote, as if they existed in isolation from the rest of the world. Regarding societies like those in the Caribbean, he wrote:

> We cannot, without falsifying the picture, neglect the fact that these societies have been subjected to a colonial regime. ... If we wish to be objective, we need to view such societies in their actual state—that is to say, as societies experiencing to a variable degree the economic, political, and cultural hold of Europe—rather than thinking in terms of some kind of integrity, for it is patently clear that the societies which fall within our purview have never known such a supposed integrity, even before being colonized, given the total unlikelihood that any society ever lived in complete isolation.[22]

Continuing in the same vein, he asserted that no society exists "out of time," frozen in a state governed by stable traditions and free of disruptions, whether from the inside or the outside. This position carries practical consequences that go well beyond the job of anthropological observation, to reach into the realm of moral responsibility. Leiris wrote:

> A culture is inseparable from history. ... It's not something fixed, but rather something moving. ... As for the preservation of cultures, ... it would be futile to preserve them as they are because, even if that could be done, it would mean subjecting them to a process of petrification.[23]

In terms of ethnographic writing, Leiris was adamant that anthropologists who erase themselves from scientific reports are guilty of introducing gross distortions in their portraits of the societies under study. In a striking passage that is 30 years ahead of its time, he wrote:

> The impossibility of completely separating an observation from the influence of the observer is even more necessary to recognize in anthropology than in the other sciences, because that influence goes much further. Even if we think we should content ourselves with conducting studies free of personal interference, we can't do anything about the fact that the very presence of the ethnographer in the midst of the society where he works constitutes an intervention. ... Pure science is a myth. ...
>
> We must not confuse the idea of saving cultures with the idea of preserving them, as innumerable ethnographers do from a wish to see the cultures to which they have devoted so much effort be transformed as little as possible, a position that we might, in many cases, be tempted to interpret in terms of a desire not to lose the opportunity for continuing study, and enjoyment, of them.[24]

And finally, he advocated greater participation by members of the society under study in the research process. This recommendation was made in spite

of full recognition of the difficulties in realizing it: "I am not unaware of the fact that researchers will be working according to methods that we [that is, members of the dominant society] will have taught them and that the end result will still be strongly stamped with our signature."[25] Yet for all its imperfection, the effort to integrate the conclusions of local ethnographers concerning their own societies could not help, he argued, but enrich cultural understandings fashioned by western investigators.

Taken together, these position statements make up a program for the study of cultures that goes in a very different direction from the Lévi-Straussian vision that so dominated twentieth-century anthropology in France ("...the hegemonic position of Lévi-Straussian models to privilege the exotic, the remote, and the non-historical kind of primitivism," as an anonymous reader of this article put it). It is also a program that is strangely reminiscent (or rather, precursive) of the major trends in anthropological thinking of the 1980s and 90s, especially outside of France. The invention of Cultural Studies is also founded on ways of viewing difference reflexively and within the context of power relations, global interactions, evolving authenticities, and hybridized identities that, if not identical to Leiris's vision, are at least highly compatible with it. And the plea to let subalterns speak for themselves has passed from a revolutionary proposition to a basic article of faith. One has only to read recent book reviews, grant proposals, or course syllabi to grasp the parallels between, on the one hand, Leiris's writing from the 1930s to the 1960s and, on the other, the understandings concerning anthropological research (and, not incidentally, ethics) that have come to dominate both the academy and museums in most parts of the world today.

Summing up this position, we might cite: an affirmation that recently decolonized societies offer as much relevance for a comparative ethnology as do indigenous societies living in relative isolation from global influences; a shift in attention away from the search for "tradition-based authenticities" and toward an interest in processes of exchange and hybridization; a stronger focus on the ways in which new circumstances are integrated into cultural patterns and the ways that people deal with shifts in their options and constraints due to events both local and global (which means an interest in the way power works); abandonment of the "profound detachment" that Sontag picked up on in the structuralist program of Lévi-Strauss; and valorization of the analyses of native researchers studying their own social and cultural surroundings.

How does such a vision play out in the context of France and the Antilles? Not as pervasively or uniformly as it does in much of the world. French universities continue to privilege "properly exotic" cultures (sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania, the indigenous Northwest Coast, and so on) over those of the rapidly modernizing overseas departments (Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane) in terms of anthropological course offerings, and the same can be said of the distribution of grants and research positions.[26] Meanwhile, the overseas departments themselves are still dominated—in terms of museum exhibits, cultural

events, novels, and social-science literature—by fascination for an almost Disneyesque portrait of "the good old days" (*antan lontan*), located just prior to France's massive program of cultural assimilation (*francisation*) that took off in the mid-1960s. In Martinique, for example, the manifestations run from the folkloric *éco-musée* on the southern coast and the nostalgic programs of annual *fêtes* held by each *commune* to the narratives of Creolist novelists such as Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant. "Culture" in these settings takes on the bright colors of a madras head scarf, the gently danceable rhythms of a mazouk, the smooth, creamy texture of a breadfruit *migan*, the intoxicating aromas of canefields and rum, the gravelly voice of a barefoot *conteur*, and the lilting cadences of a market woman's Creole. And France's use of French Guiana for its infamous penal colony, where the scum of Paris's underbelly were sent to rot in the tropics, is depicted in museums through the convicts' colorfully painted ceramics and canvases rather than a history of the now-defunct penal system or an examination of the approach to social control that undergirded it.[27]

Part of the problem relates to Leiris's caution about the unavoidable influence of Western training on those members of a non-Western society depicting the fabric of their own culture. In order to be taken seriously as analysts of their society, Antilleans are required to learn the ropes for satisfying an audience brought up in a cultural system directed by a particularly centralized authority structure, where "norms and forms" are more rigidly policed than in many other parts of the world. If they wish to conduct research on their home society, they must first negotiate the system of courses, diplomas, and job candidacies run out of the Hexagon and master the techniques for success in a system strongly marked by categories and hierarchies of value conceived and monitored in metropolitan France. And novelists are largely dependant on French publishers, readers, review outlets, and prize committees for the dissemination and recognition of their work.

The central contribution of the French language to national pride is not irrelevant to the whole picture, and it is fair to say that the politics of *Francophonie* valorizes and unifies the French-speaking world (from New Caledonia to Québec) partly at the expense of insights that might be culled from the work of its regional Anglophone, Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch neighbors, to name but the most relevant for the Caribbean. Part of the problem is that the ambiguity of the term "Antilles" (at once designating "Caribbean" and "*French* Caribbean") encourages general claims for the region to be made on the sole basis of studies in Overseas France (Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guyane), which represents only about two percent of the region's population; even if we add in Haiti, where most people do not speak French, it is no more than about twenty percent. French assessments of Leiris, citing his study of Martinique and Guadeloupe (which was based on trips to the region in 1948 and 1952 and published in 1955), have sometimes portrayed him as pioneering the sociology and anthropology of the Antillean region.[28] Yet such a depiction, in addition to

skimming over other early (and more in-depth) work on the region in French (that of Jean Price-Mars in the 1920s and Alfred Métraux in the 1940s, for example), means turning a blind eye to the wide-ranging contributions of researchers in other languages.[29] The frequent absence of such works from French anthropological writing on the Caribbean creates a literature that traces its roots largely to French Americanists such as the Brazilianist Roger Bastide, even in those few French studies focusing on non-francophone Caribbean societies. It is as if French anthropologists working in the Caribbean have forgotten the advice of their seventeenth-century ancestor Père Labat, which infuses writing by other students of the region, from Antonio Benítez-Rojo in Cuba, George Lamming in Barbados, and Sidney W. Mintz in the United States to Harry Hoetink in the Netherlands, Paul Gilroy in England, and Gordon K. Lewis in Puerto Rico:

> I have traveled everywhere in your sea of the Caribbean … from Haiti to Barbados, to Martinique and Guadeloupe, and I know what I am speaking about …. You are all together, in the same boat, sailing on the same uncertain sea … citizenship and race unimportant, feeble little labels compared to the message that my spirit brings to me: that of the position and predicament which History has imposed upon you … I hear, *de mon oreille morte*, the echo of calypsoes from Trinidad, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Antigua, Dominica and the legendary Guiana.[30]

Returning to the issue of more general anthropological approaches, Leiris himself provides an important insight. Lévi-Strauss, he remarks, "considered his own self not as a *je*, but rather as a temporary aggregate of living cells which is itself only as an element of the almost-as-precarious *nous* that makes up the humanity in which this pseudo-*je* is integrated."[31] In contrast, Leiris's program for anthropological study was very much of a personal enterprise, highly reflexive and played out rather quietly through his own writings rather than being passed on to students and colleagues through the channels open to a highly visible *maître à penser* like Lévi-Strauss. On grounds of personality alone, he was neither a dynasty builder nor even a very willing public figure. But in the sense that his concerns can be seen as both harmonizing with today's vision of (multi-)cultural research (granting primary attention to contact zones and hybrid cultures) and constituting a plea for an in-depth and very "modern" attention to the Antilles in all their economic, cultural, and political complexity, they might be considered today as having been strangely "ahead of their time."

Leiris's self image, diametrically opposed to what he saw in Lévi-Strauss as the "*nous* that makes up humanity," may certainly have played a part in his deep skepticism toward the notion of anthropology as an objective science. And it seems possible that disenchantment with the idea of a universalizable "*nous*" on a more global scale—a growing recognition and appreciation of the hybridity and displacement at the heart of today's multicultural world—has, independently, been pushing the discipline of anthropology in a similar direction (French foot-dragging notwithstanding), giving new prominence to "con-

tact zones" such as those so important in both the formative years and the present moment of Caribbean societies.

I grant the last word to Leiris:

> Anthropology couldn't help but disappoint me: a social science is still a science, and detached observation could never, in itself, lead to contact; it may even be that, by definition, it implies quite the opposite, since the attitude of the observer is supposed to be an impartiality that rejects all empathy. It took a trip to the Antilles for me to discover that if the idea of contact between men born under very different climes is more than a myth, it's only to the degree that it can be achieved by working together against those who, in our twentieth-century capitalist society, are the equivalent of the slave-era oppressors.[32]

Notes

1. This essay began as a talk for a colloquium, "Au cœur du XXe siècle: La culture antillaise au miroir de Michel Leiris," organized by the Archives Départementales, Fort-de-France, Martinique, January 31-February 1, 2002. I am grateful to Dominique Taffin, director of the Archives départementales, for inviting me to speak, and to several colleagues for helpful comments on a draft of the written text: Denis Hollier, Patrick Menget, Leah Price, Richard Price, and anonymous reviewers of the manuscript.
2. Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), pp. 61-81. For another juxtaposition of Leiris and Lévi-Strauss, this time as writers of travel narrative, see Fernanda Peixoto Massi, "O Nativo e o Narrativo: Os Trópicos de Lévi-Strauss e a África de Michel Leiris," Novos Estudos CEBRAP 33 (1992):187-98.
3. Michel Leiris, *Contacts de civilisation en Martinique et en Guadeloupe* (Paris: Gallimard/UNESCO, 1955).
4. Richard Price's anthropological writing on Martinique was originally focused on the history of fishing and fishing magic. See, for example, "Magie et pêche à la Martinique," *L'Homme: Revue française d'anthropologie* 4 (1964): 84-113. Over the years he has published on broader aspects of Martiniquan culture—see, for example, Richard Price, *The Convict and the Colonel* (Boston: Beacon, 1998).
5. See Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
6. Richard Price, "An Absence of Ruins? Seeking Caribbean Historical Consciousness," *Caribbean Review* 14 (1985), pp. 24-29, 45.
7. I edited the English version and wrote a brief introduction aimed at readers of *Current Anthropology:* Sally Price and Jean Jamin, "A Conversation with Michel Leiris" (with portraits by Pablo Picasso, Alberto Giacometti, André Masson, and Francis Bacon), *Current Anthropology* 29, 1 (1988):157-74. Jamin edited it differently and published it, minus some of the notes, in French: Sally Price et Jean Jamin, "Entretien avec Michel Leiris," *Gradhiva* 4 (1988): 26-56. Several years later, browsing in

the book shop of the Musée de l'homme, I discovered that it had also been published as a book: Michel Leiris, *C'est-à-dire: entretien avec Jean Jamin et Sally Price* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1992). Parts of the transcript also appeared in *La Quinzaine Littéraire* and *Libération*.

8. See the cover illustration of Gallimard's new edition (1988) of *L'Afrique fantôme*.
9. For portraits of Leiris, see the *Current Anthropology* interview and a special issue of *Sulfur: A Literary Tri-Quarterly of the Whole Art* 15 (1986) devoted to Leiris.
10. Michel Leiris, *La Langue secrète des Dogons de Sanga (Soudan français)* (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1948).
11. Anthropological colleagues in France have pointed out to me that even after Lévi-Strauss curtailed most public appearances due to advanced age, he still dined frequently at the home of his friend and colleague Leiris.
12. For Leiris's appreciation of the merger of personal involvement and "rigorous objectivity" in *Tristes Tropiques*, see "À Travers 'Tristes Tropiques'," in *Cinq Études d'Ethnologie* (Paris: Gonthier-Denoël, 1969), pp. 113-27.
13. Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, p. 67.
14. Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), p. 503.
15. Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, pp. 62-63.
16. Ibid., pp. 74, 77.
17. Ibid., p. 74; see also Clifford Geertz, "Being Here," in *Works and Lives* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 129-49.
18. Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, p. 73.
19. Georges Balandier, *L'Afrique ambiguë* (Paris: Plon, 1957), p. 19. See also his *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire* (Paris: PUF, 1955). The relevance of colonialism was only one of the issues that sharply divided Balandier's anthropology from that of Lévi-Strauss.
20. Michel Leiris, "L'ethnographe devant le colonialisme," *Les Temps Modernes* 58 (1950), reprinted in *Cinq études d'ethnologie* (Paris: Gonthier-Denoël, 1969), pp. 83-112.
21. Leiris, "L'ethnographe devant le colonialisme," pp. 102-03.
22. Ibid., pp. 87-88.
23. Ibid., pp. 91, 99.
24. Ibid., pp. 85-90.
25. Ibid., p. 107.
26. Those few anthropologists in France who have focused on the Antilles cannot be said to enjoy any significant prominence within the profession. In contrast, French anthropology has, over the past few decades, embraced and valorized a turn toward analyses of cultural tradition in the Hexagon itself—studies such as Jeanne Favret-Saada's exploration of sorcery in the Bocage (*Les Mots, la mort, les sorts* [Paris: Gallimard, 1977]), some of Marc Augé's more reflexive essays (for example, *La Traversée du Luxembourg*: *Un Ethnologue dans le métro* [Paris: Hachette, 1985 and 1986]), or the ambitious French kinship project of Françoise Héritier. The Antilles—neither fully French nor properly exotic—essentially fall between two stools.
27. See Richard Price and Sally Price, *Equatoria* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and "Shadowboxing in the Mangrove," *Cultural Anthropology* 12 (1997): 3-36; Sally Price and Richard Price, "Ethnicity in a Museum Case: France's Show-Window in the Americas", *Museum Anthropology* 18, 21 (994): 3-15.
28. The letter of invitation to the Martinique colloquium, for example, asserted that "Le passage de Leiris aux Antilles reste la première tentative globale de prendre en compte, de façon à la fois sociologique et ethnologique, la culture antillaise."
29. To cite but a few of the key players: Melville and Frances Herskovits published *Rebel Destiny* in 1934, *Suriname Folk-lore* in 1936, *Life in a Haitian Valley* in 1937, and *Trinidad Village* in 1947. Harold Courlander published *Haiti Singing* in 1939. Fer-

nando Ortiz's *Contrapunto Cubano* was published in 1940, and James Leyburn's *The Haitian People* in 1941. Fernando Henriques's *Family and Color in Jamaica* came out in 1953 and *The People of Puerto Rico*, based on 1940s fieldwork by the distinguished team of Sidney Mintz, Eric Wolf, Robert Manners, and others in 1956. Mintz's *Worker in the Cane* (1960) is based on fieldwork conducted in the 1940s and early 1950s. R.T. Smith's influential study of family structure (*The Negro Family in British Guiana*, 1956), Edith Clarke's work in Jamaica (*My Mother Who Fathered Me*, 1957), and M.G. Smith's research both on Carriacou and Grenada (*Kinship and Community in Carriacou*, 1962; *Stratification in Grenada*, 1965) and on the British West Indies comparatively (*West Indian Family Structure*, 1962; *The Plural Society in the British West Indies*, 1965) all took place in the early 1950s.

30. P. Labat, *Nouveau voyage aux îles de l'Amérique* (Paris: C. Cavalier, 1722), cited in translation by Gordon K. Lewis, who remarks: "The prophetic vision of that passage has never been far from the conscious surface of the Caribbean imagination." (*Main Currents in Caribbean Thought* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983], p. 93.)
31. Leiris, "A travers '*Tristes Tropiques*'," p. 116.
32. Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme*, p. 8.

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