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Erika Thomas

**Jeanne Durieux
(1942-2018)**

**Tricks and Turns
of the Imagination**

**Translated by
Francine Migneault**

Alternatives Artistiques



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Jeanne Durieux (1942-2018)
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Foreword



Illustration 1 - Newspaper archives – B-9 Chris Marker Collection

In March 2021, while I was researching the Chris Marker Collection, in one of the many boxes I consulted, I found an insert presenting an upcoming conference on Monday September 13th, 1993 at the Société de Géographie – 184 Saint-Germain Boulevard – entitled “*Capturer la beauté du monde*”. A little further along in the article, the name of the lecturer – Jeanne Durieux – was circled in red, and in the margin an indecipherable note was followed by a phone number. That very night, I dialed the number. It was a landline, and it was still in service:

“Hello. I would like to speak to Madame Durieux. I found her name in a box belonging to Chris Marker...¹ ... ». « Come see me tomorrow at 11am. 30 Leon Frot Street. My wife died on the 9th of October, 2018».

I went, of course.

Why is it that certain things, which take us away from our main research, echo inside us so intensely? Some sort of strong desire ... Is it because of our own state at the moment we encounter these things? The fact is, I never could have imagined at the time, that the path I was heading down, week after week, would lead me into strange lands, bringing me face-to-face with people who, in one way or another, had encountered Jeanne Durieux, known as Jeanne Labroche. This woman – daughter of a Hungarian father and Spanish mother, haunted by political oppression, a self-taught ethnologist, a travel photographer, selling her photos and articles to armchair journalists who signed them in her stead – had all the makings of a book dedicated just to her. Bringing together the necessary elements, that had been dispersed over time, was not an easy feat. But one encounter always leads to another; and that’s how narratives and stories are made.

I’d like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have made possible this incursion into the life of a bright yet fragile woman. First off, I’d like to thank her husband Henri Durieux and her son Philippe Durieux; then I’d like to thank all those who knew her or those who crossed her path – during childhood, adolescence, or as adults: the memories that they shared with me allowed me to take in all the different faces of Jeanne Durieux. Finally, I’d like to thank the psychiatric department at Saint-Anne’s Hospital and the caregivers who were able to shed light on the nature of the disorders that affected Jeanne towards the end of her life.

¹ At the time, I was co-directing a film about this filmmaker with Laura Farrenq (*On vous parle de Chris Marker*, 95 min, 2023).

Introduction

I'd like to introduce this research with a specific memory. A voice, a face, a situation. We're in a beautiful apartment, not far from the Cirque d'Hiver, eating macaroons.

“She would have liked to have known that after her death someone was looking to understand that which she was not able to fully grasp: the meaning of her life. That which agitated her deeply. That which she was always looking for.” Henri Durieux wasn't really speaking to us – Bernard and I – he seemed to be speaking to himself as he served us coffee in the finest Haviland porcelain. *“It's Le Brésil, by Zuber Manufacture. Have you seen it before? Mid-19th Century. Jeanne loved this set!”* Indeed, the set was beautiful and very refined.

This is how our first meeting with Henri started, on March 15th, 2022. We were happy, and even surprised, to be welcomed into his home; but at the same time, we were ill at ease, not knowing exactly what we were looking for with all of this. But there were many more meetings at Henri's, often they were joyful or musical because *“Jeanne loved music”*; she listened to all sorts of music, and she danced a lot. At one point during this first meeting of ours, Henri pointed to a CD rack and told me, *“pick one! It's a gift. I know that Jeanne would have liked this process.”* I let chance guide my hand, and it landed on *Janis Joplin, Little Girl Blue*. Every time I listen to this heartrending music, I think about this woman whom I never knew, and I smile to myself and think that life has funny ways of surprising us. In this book, I present a synthesis of my research and analysis of Jeanne Durieux, based on the documents I consulted and the people I met.

Shunning the classic chronology that would have me begin Jeanne Durieux's story with her childhood, I'd rather start at the end. In fact, it was the last years of her internment –years psychic misguidance – that particularly affected me. By looking at what was going on at the time, I hope to be able to shed some light on the life of this woman who seemed so viscerally anchored in life and joy. The last five years of Jeanne's life at Saint-Anne's Hospital left me with the following question: *how can a person who is apparently psychologically well-adjusted falter and collapse from a trivial event, such as the loss of a brooch?*

Of course, this rhetorical question allows me to address a specific problem. Although this event “the loss of a brooch” must be considered from a number of different angles in this book, no event – no matter how insignificant it may seem – should be considered trivial if it affects an individual. On the basis of the various interviews and documents analyzed, and using a multidisciplinary approach – including discourse analysis, psychoanalysis, art semiology and sociology – I will consider *life through its end* (the delirium and its possible meanings) in relation to *the beginning of life and adulthood* (including both the loss of her father and a taste for travel), and the many encounters that tell us so much about Jeanne.

Part One

A Life Through Its End

Chapter 1: Wavering and Confinement (2010-2018)

Where does the end begin? When the inanimate has embraced its substance, or when the first signs of the great silence appear in successive waves of increasing urgency? Jeanne Durieux died of a heart attack on October 9th, 2018 in the psychiatric ward of Saint-Anne’s Hospital, in Paris. In the years leading up to her death, an inexorable process seemed to be underway.

On September 17th, 2010, in celebration of her 68th birthday, Jeanne organised an artistic and literary dinner party for four of her closest friends. Each guest was supposed to bring something artistic with them, something that would feed the discussion at dinner: a book, a poem, an excerpt from a play, a DVD of a favourite film, a vinyl record or a CD, a photograph, a description of an exhibition. The “object” could take any form. What was important, was to spend an evening discussing the themes that affected them, and through these objects, to talk about themselves. That night, Henri remembers, Jeanne – usually so enthusiastic about these dinners – was sullen before her friends arrived. She had been looking for a brooch that could not be found.

“ I had just come back from the wine cellar; I had bought some very fine wine. Jeanne seemed preoccupied when I told her that we were going to have a wonderful evening with our old friends. I remember finding it odd when she replied that she didn’t care about her friends. That wasn’t like her. Why would she say that? The only thing she cared about that day was finding a brooch that she had wanted to wear to the party (...)”²

² Interview with Henri Durieux, May 2022.

Despite her fruitless search, her mood shifted quickly. She drank a glass of wine, put on some Cuban music, and looked at Henri: *“Yes, you're right, we're going to have a lovely evening with our friends. I'll find my brooch tomorrow.”*³

The evening was splendid. And yet, a document written by her friend Jacqueline Castillo gives a glimpse into the dark nightmare of the days that followed for Jeanne. The harbinger of an end. A clap of thunder in a sky striving to appear calm⁴. This document, found at the Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine (BDIC) in Nanterre, appears to be the beginning of a manuscript – likely the draft of a book that Jacqueline Castillo, former professor of Spanish literature at the University of Amiens⁵ had hoped to write about her friend.

Document #1:⁶ - Extract from an unpublished text written by Jacqueline Castillo. The text, typed and incomplete is three pages long. It's part of one of the five boxes of "Jacqueline Castillo Matthieu" archives at the BDIC de Nanterre. The text is undated. It is preceded by a dedication.

“This work is dedicated to my long-time friend, Jeanne Durieux. I am going to try to reassemble her unique itinerary here.

When I met Jeanne, she was not this old lady, ever-repeating incomprehensible phrases and fighting with force the nurses who come to give her a shower. Who would ever believe, seeing her today, that Jeanne was, for me, and many people who knew her, one of the most inspiring women. It was around the age of 12 or 13 that we first met each other in a library, a long time ago.

³ Idem.

⁴ Reference here to Michel Leiris's definition in *l'âge d'homme*, Folio, 1939 p. 111

⁵ Jacqueline Castillo passed away on July 29, 2019.

⁶ I've assigned numbers to the various documents, so as to bring them together more easily in a table of documents at the end of the book.

The important thing today is to know that she was a woman who loved to host her friends, who loved to laugh, sing, and dance. A woman who loved life.

*The last memory that I have from that era, when she was still that woman, was her birthday party in 2010. She and Henri had invited four guests whose names I've since forgotten. I arrived early, I brought a bottle of wine and the catalog of the exhibition *C'est la vie. Vanités : De Caravage à Damien Hirst*. We had visited the exposition, Jeanne and I, at Musée Mayol, and Jeanne regretted not having bought the catalog herself. I should have known that day that something was off. We sometimes overlook the details that carry a truth too brutal to face. When we left that exhibition, Jeanne wore an unusually somber expression. Her gaze, usually so deep, had lost its light. While walking home, she grabbed my arm, stopped me in my tracks, and with a distressed look on her face, as if it were a matter of life or death, asked: "Jacqueline can we go back to the museum? I must buy the exhibition catalog." We had done a lot of walking already, but we turned around and walked back to the museum. When we got there, it was already closed. Jeanne murmured that it didn't matter, that she had only wanted to verify that a certain artist's name appeared. She didn't tell me anymore, but her mood was unstable for the rest of the day; she could go from tears in her eyes to bursting out laughing within just a couple of minutes. On the evening of her dinner party, I brought her the exhibition catalog. She opened the door. Cuban music was playing. Jeanne smiled and thanked me for the gift, which she instantly put down, hardly even noticing it, and invited me to take a seat on the sofa. Henri poured a glass of wine for me and started talking about their recent trip to New York. Jeanne laughed as she adjusted her hair. She shone brightly that evening. As if the fire within was burning one last time, with all its force, before fading away forever.*

The other friends of the couple, three men who had known Henri for a long time, arrived just after me. At one point, Jeanne declared that she had brought us together for a "philosophical evening". That was one of her specialities: I can still see her bent over the coffee table, pushing hors d'oeuvres with one hand, and writing on little pieces of paper and folding them over with the other, listing all the different questions that crossed her mind. She then put them in a hat. "The honour is all yours, Jacqueline! Draw the theme of the evening for us!" I put down my glass of wine before sticking my hand into the hat: "What is the purpose of literature?"

Jeanne had raised a finger in the air, saying that we needed to think out loud together about the novels we'd read. It had been a delightful evening. The conversation was lively, the food refined.

The next day I sent a thank-you note to Jeanne and Henri.

A month had passed since that evening, and I saw Henri one day at the supermarket; he told me that Jeanne had had a psychotic breakdown a few days after our last meeting. Psychotic breakdown. I didn't know what that meant. He explained that she had hidden in the cellar for three days while he was away in Lyon. She was victim of hallucinations and had wanted, according to her, to protect herself from the dead who were calling out to her. That same day, I called Jeanne, but I didn't manage to reach her. She didn't reply. I went to her house, but she didn't open the door. One day Henri called me to say that she was doing worse. Between her birthday party and her internment two years later, I did not see Jeanne. I did visit her at Saint-Anne's one week ago, and the poor woman I saw, who jumped at every noise and who whispered that she wanted her brooch back, was not Jeanne. That is why I've decided to write this. At a certain moment in life, it... [the rest of Jacqueline Castillo's text is missing].

As we can see, the accounts of that evening differ slightly. Yet both testimonies are equally valuable. Henri spoke of an invitation extended to two couples who were friends, while Jacqueline recalled three of Henri's colleagues and friends, whom she seemed to know only vaguely. Memory and emotion are intimately entwined, and they help explain the discrepancies in how events are recalled. Recent studies confirm this: emotions – their nature and intensity – filter what is retained, shaping a coherent narrative of what was experienced, of the self, and of the surrounding world⁷.

⁷ Eustache, F. Guillery-Girard, B Dayan, J. « Les liens ténus et complexes entre mémoire et émotions », *in Analysis*, Volume 1, Issue 1, 2017, p.32-38.

What emerges as a compelling common thread in these accounts is the sense of strangeness both witnesses perceived in Jeanne. On the one hand, she was frantically searching for a brooch, claiming not to care about the guests; on the other, she barely glanced at the exhibition catalog that had meant so much to her just weeks before.

In both instances, the mood seems extremely mobile and if the interlocutor (the husband or the friend) seems reassured in the short term, the days ahead will prove far more worrisome, first for Jeanne, then for Henri, and finally for Jacqueline, a while later.

Dr. Delmont, the psychiatrist who accompanied her during her final years, had this to say about her mood swings⁸ :

“Jeanne had a hyperthymic, hyperactive, and creative personality. In the early years of the illness, her social adaptation remained relatively intact, but as the years went by, the socio-psychic dysfunction grew increasingly severe. Marked emotional lability within the span of a single day, along with extremely intense – even excessive – emotional responses to environmental stimuli, even outside of any acute episodes, came to define what I refer to as the turning point in her illness. Jeanne later developed additional disorders, such as panic disorder and social phobia. Her hallucinations were not unrelated to her sleep disturbances. Like other patients with similar symptoms, she exhibited an exaggerated startle reflex and was significantly affected by stress. Events you might consider “minor” posed real risks of relapse or delusional episodes. Of course, as you know, her condition worsened considerably toward the end.”

This sheds light on the psychic context – the “turning point” – in which Jeanne found herself at the time of this birthday party. Now let's take the facts – or rather, the objects – one by one, as they may serve as clues: *a brooch* and an *exhibition catalog*. Strangely enough, *they are not unrelated*.

⁸ The medical confidentiality surrounding Jeanne's disorders was lifted at the request of her husband Henri Durieux for the purposes of writing this book.

Jeanne claimed to have found this fly-shaped brooch at Austerlitz station in the early 2000s.

Set with a blue stone in the center, two small red stones representing the eyes, and mother-of-pearl, the silver brooch had been the subject of an appraisal; however, the value was not communicated to me. Although Jeanne seemed very fond of this brooch, she never wore it, arguing that “flies land on corpses and garbage.”⁹

The brooch – both found and lost, kept and abandoned – is precisely the object that she goes frantically searching for, for the first time, at this birthday party on September 17th, 2010. Although she remains unable to get a hold of it, another document citing this evening tells us that she does bring it up during the party while talking about funerary rituals where flies play an important role.



Illustration 2 - A fly-shaped brooch

⁹ Interview with Philippe Durieux, June 27, 2022.

Document #2: Small card sent by Henri Fougerole to Jeanne and Henri Durieux on September 18th, 2010. Durieux Archives.

“Dear Jeanne, dear Henri, what a wonderful evening in your company yesterday! Thanks to you – to Jeanne in particular – I learnt more about the scientific investigations at the Huaca Pucllana site in Perou. It’s strange... I can’t stop thinking about those necrophagous flies gliding over skeletons and the role they play in the afterlife. This is what we call accompanying the departed!”¹⁰

Jeanne speaks about this brooch many times in the days following her birthday party. *“We do not know why she absolutely had to find that brooch, but perhaps if she had managed to find it, she would have been appeased.”¹¹* Jeanne turned the house upside down looking for it. She rummaged through everything, her boxes, her books, her cupboards: nothing helped, the brooch remained unfound. The wavering begins, slight at first, almost imperceptible. Soon, Jeanne is no longer interested in anything except finding the “lost object” that will gradually coincide with the loss of herself. What this brooch meant, and what it stood for, I wouldn't learn until much later. By chance – If there is such a thing.

What about the catalog – the object so desired, but then abandoned by Jeanne? Jacqueline Castillo states in her document previously cited, that they visited the exhibition together at the Musée Mayol and that her friend *“regretted not having bought the catalog”* to the point that they had returned to the museum, in vain, because Jeanne *“wanted to verify that a certain artist’s name appeared”*. This exhibition in 2010 received extensive media coverage.

¹⁰ On this subject, see Huchet, J.-B., « Des mouches, des morts, des offrandes : archéontomologie de tombes mochicas de la pyramide de la Lune, Pérou ». *Recherches amérindiennes au Québec*, 47(2-3), 23–34. 2017. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1048593ar>.

¹¹ Philippe Durieux, June 27, 2022.



Illustration 3 - © A much-desired catalog

“Its central theme focused on the way death consumed artists, particularly in how they represented the post-mortem body. Memento mori and all its metaphors were explored, from wilted flowers, rotting fruit, hourglasses, to skulls, and more. “From Pompeii to Damien Hirst, 'C'est la vie!' captures the metamorphoses of a death that suits us so well. At a time when the disappearance of the species is programmed.”¹²

¹² Presentation of the catalog by Nitti P., Tapié A., *C'est la vie : Vanités de Pompéi à Damien Hirst*, Flammarion, Paris, 2010.

The exact date of the visit to the exhibition is not mentioned, but we know that it ran from February 3rd to June 28th, 2010, the same year as the birthday party. The theme of death, linked to a “worrying strangeness” in mood, seems to have already affected Jeanne. The brooch, like the catalog, are together in the *unattainable*. The brooch is lost and the catalog – despite being found by Jacqueline who offers it to her – remains out of interest. It’s as if the time lapse since the initial strong desire for the catalog (yet not bought to begin with) functions as the necessary duration of time to gradually disinvest in the object. The catalog and brooch both evoke death and give shape to Jeanne’s “Dance of Death”: *In vain, I search for the death that I can display on my chest, and with a will that ignores itself, I abandon this death that is exhibited in museums*. This is what Jeanne seems to be telling us at the “turning point” of her illness.

Jeanne Durieux suffered from her first psychotic breakdown in the days following the birthday party. On September 18, her son, Philippe, visited his parents.

“My mother was in an unusual state of exaltation, she was speaking about her imaginary friend Ernst Legy – I don’t know if my father has told you about him – and at the same time the brooch that she had lost. I had offered her an Asmat Sheild that I bought at Parcours des Mondes, you know that international art show that brings together galleries from outside of Europe. I often went there with my mother, who loved to stroll through Saint-Germain. But that year, she said all that was just a show of outbidding! And I have to say, when she saw my gift she laughed and said that she hoped I hadn’t paid a fortune for it!”¹³ » !

¹³ Interview with Jacques Durieux, July 2022.



Illustration 4 - Asmat Sheild dating from the early 20th century

At this point in my research, I was already very interested in the story of Jeanne's imaginary friend. A photographer created during her childhood and whom she regularly called upon during two important moments in her life: just after the death of her father and then around the time of this psychotic breakdown. She had spoke of him as a real person in a letter to her friend Jacqueline a few months before her birthday dinner:

Document #3: Letter from Jeanne Durieux addressed to Jacqueline Castillo. Document from one of the “Jacqueline Castillo” archive boxes at the BDIC in Nanterre. Letter dated May 12th, 2010.

*“My dearest Jacqueline,
I was very happy to receive your long letter! I can imagine Georges and you on this journey, and I thank you for the beautiful photos that have us travelling by your side.*

Looking at the photos from Spain, I thought of mother and the time when she used to come visit me... It had me teary-eyed. I know you understand: the past that comes back to us when we aren't expecting it. Until we go on our trip to Polynesia, which will finally take place in October, I'm sending you my self portrait!¹⁴ Remember the one I did when I was 16 with the camera that father gave me? The same technique my dear! The same framing: I'm trying to find myself! If I'm still alive at 70, I'll do a third one. That will make a trilogy: me, me and me. I'm laughing as I write this, but really isn't taking a picture wanting to freeze something – to see it better – something that eludes us? Yes Jaqueline, I can tell you this: I feel like something is eluding me, something inside. I need to understand.

Ernst Legy (you know that photographer friend whom I spoke to you about before your trip) never did self portraits. I don't know if he was biased (like 'I look outwards at the world, not inwards at myself') or if he was just more of a documentarian (I'm thinking of his series on war, shanty towns, or exodus...). I should ask him about it when I get the chance.

And you? How are your projects coming along? Does Georges support you? You seemed in such high spirits last time; it was wonderful to see you like that! I know that you've suffered in the past, yet it seems with Georges life is comforting you and giving you your love story. That's all for today. Call me as soon as you are back in France. Let's organise a dinner here at my place. I'll invite the Moreaus; they are so funny! Did you know that Mireille wrote poems? A real wonder. You'll see! Sending you all my love, Jeanne”

Something inside her was eluding her she wrote before continuing with Ernst Legy. But to respect the chronologic order of my work, I won't say anything more here. I will come back to this point in detail in another chapter. For the moment, we'll remain focussed on the days after the birthday party.

On September 18th, Philippe and his parents spent some of the afternoon and evening together. Henri needed to prepare his suitcase because he was going to Lyon for a few days to settle a family estate. Philippe left his parents feeling a little worried for his mother whose absence and anxiety had given way to a feverish exaltation. At one point in the evening, she looked at her son and asked him if he had any news from his sister. Not having a sister, Philippe didn't respond. However, he and his father agreed that as soon he returned from Lyon, they would ensure that Jeanne "see a professional". A psychiatrist.

On September 19th, Jeanne was still sleeping when Henri caught his train. Until the 21st he couldn't get a hold of her by phone. That didn't sit well with him, but he didn't want to worry his son, or his friends, or his neighbours. He cut short his travels. At nearly noon, when he got back to their beautiful home, backing onto Montsouris Park, he called out to Jeanne several times before hearing her cries. Long cries of agony coming from the basement. At first, she was terrified, but Jeanne quickly recognised him and threw herself into his arms, crying and yelling "they are out to get me, I had to hide, I thought they had taken you with them."¹⁴

Convinced she was being chased by a heard of revenants, Jeanne had been hidden away in a corner of the basement since her husband had left. Henri says that he was shocked to find his "beloved wife" in such a state with such a "startled" look in her eyes. He called his son, then the doctor. An anxiolytic, a long sleep, and the start of a new life for Jeanne. A life haunted by ghosts and terrors of yesteryear, the return of anxieties that were previously so well tamed.

¹⁴ Interview with Henri Durieux, May 2022.

It's interesting to note the order of events here: while she is still looking for the fly-shaped brooch – that she herself has linked to death¹⁵ – Jeanne receives something with which she can symbolically protect herself – the Asmat shield given to her by her son. Yet the episode in the basement seems to demonstrate that she is incapable of defending herself; and those artworks, that used to be so sacred to her, have lost their effectiveness. Coincidentally, she cites a man who doesn't exist, her imaginary friend Ernst Legy, and believes that she has lost her husband: "I thought they had taken you". There is a certain logic that seems to be hiding behind the apparent chaos of these succeeding events.

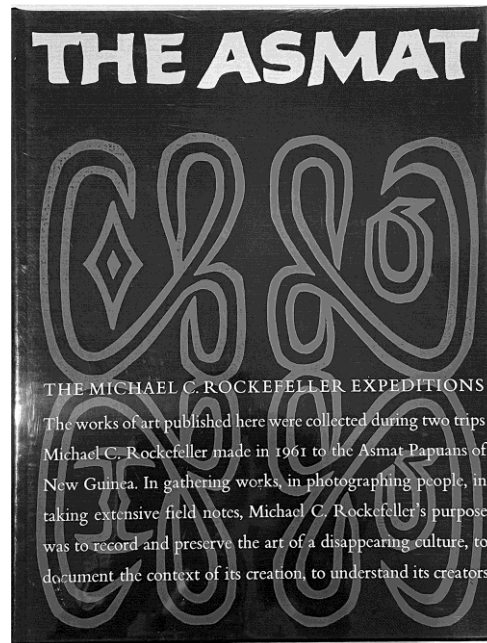


Illustration 5 - Library of Jeanne Durieux's work

¹⁵ " *Flies land on corpses* " *op.cit.*

All of this somehow resonates. Jeanne seems “caught in Medusa’s gaze”, which is reminiscent of the Greek myth of Medusa, decapitated by Perseus thanks to Athena's mirror-polished shield¹⁶. But what about the Asmats? They also practiced the decapitation of enemies, as well as cannibalism.¹⁷ Very interested in the Oceanic peoples, Jeanne spoke about them in one of her lectures.¹⁸ To say that there is a “certain logic” behind psychic events or sequences does not mean that these are completely devoid of altered cognition, as proven by the objects projecting themselves into a number of her anxieties.

Daily life becomes difficult for Jeanne who goes back to frantically searching, night and day, for her brooch. A message found in the family archives demonstrates the depths of Jeanne’s suffering and the social consequences it has.

Document #4: Message written on a piece of paper, undated and signed “all your neighbours”. The message is part of the Durieux family archives.

*Mr. Durieux,
We can no longer stand your wife’s noise, day and night. This is your last warning before we file an official complaint.
I want you to know that the other day I knocked at your door, and when your wife answered, she threw garbage at my face! Do you think that’s acceptable? We don’t!
We are counting on your understanding and your action to make sure this stops.
All your neighbours.*

Another document clearly showing that Jeanne is progressively unable to lead a social life.

¹⁶ Pardo, É. (2010). « Le regard médusé ». *Recherches en psychanalyse*, 9, 84-88. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rep.009.0084>. Consulté le 14 août 2022.

¹⁷ Hoffman C. *Le destin funeste de Michael Rockefeller*, Globe, Paris, 2016.

¹⁸ « Partir ailleurs et mourir : présentation du livre de Michael Rockefeller » Seminar of the Paris 8 Doctoral School. February 2008.

Document #5: Letter written by Henri Durieux addressed to Jacqueline Castillo. A letter from one of the “Jacqueline Castillo” archive boxes the BDIC in Nanterre. It is dated May 5th, 2013.

Dear Jacqueline,

I hope you are well. I am writing to ask you to not blame Jeanne for her behaviour, which I am sure you find very peculiar, especially as you two have always been so close. Philippe has certainly told you that she has been undergoing psychiatric treatment for two years. At first we were happy to see her less exalted, more calm, less victim of her anxiety attacks.

However, for two weeks now, several incidents have shown us that things aren't so simple: she doesn't want to see any of her friends, I am sure this has affected you, and I am truly sorry.

Furthermore, she's been obsessively searching for a brooch that she lost years ago. I am starting to wonder if this brooch ever existed. She spends entire nights tearing the house apart trying to find it. The situation is taking its toll on everyone. The neighbours are complaining about the noise.

Philippe and I don't know what to do anymore.

I hope to be able to give you news from her regularly.

Much love to you, and my warmest regards to Georges.

Henri

On June 30th, 2013 Jeanne is admitted to the psychiatric ward at Saint-Anne. The initial hallucinations are now accompanied by periods of maniac exaltation and deep depression.

During these five years, she becomes friends with a Norwegian patient ¹⁹, who is also “inhabited” by imaginary friends. They recount their escapades in a world where the fantasized Other has the consistency of the real. These were also the years of definitive estrangement from her old acquaintances. Jeanne only accepts visits from her husband, son, and grandson Luka.

¹⁹ Décédée en 2019.

It's as if the friends of yesteryear, unable to integrate into her world, no longer have a place in her life. Nathalie Ommundsen, biologist and niece of the Scandinavian patient, recalls her encounter with Jeanne²⁰ :

“One day, it must have been in 2015 or 2016, I can’t really remember, the hospital organised a small gathering for the families of the patients. I was there because I adored my aunt. It was there that I met Jeanne Durieux. Everyone called her Jeanne Labroche. Her face was familiar to me. I may have seen her before at a little cafe in the 13th arrondissement where I liked to go for cakes. Jeanne spoke to me about her friend Ernst Legy, and you know, since I was used to listening to similar stories from my aunt, I listened like you would listen to any fictitious story – without relating it to reality. My aunt and Jeanne, both had a very rich internal universe. My aunt even told me that one of her imaginary friends had really known Ernst Legy. Those two ladies laughed a lot together. When Jeanne died, my aunt suffered from a deep depression, in fact, she died the next year.”

During my research I contacted the healthcare workers at Saint-Anne several times. I wanted to know more about the daily life of Jeanne and how she was perceived. I proposed to record these communications. On March 28th, 2022 I received an email from Paul Lefebvre, psychiatric nurse, which I have reproduced below.

Document #6: Email from Paul Lefebvre nurse at the Saint-Anne psychiatric ward, currently retired, dated March 28th, 2022.

*Dear Mrs. Thomas,
To be quite frank, I’m not sure I can agree to be recorded because I’m not used to speaking on the record (I’m what you would call the “silent type”). But I did know Jeanne Durieux, who we affectionately called Jeanne Labroche on the ward, quite well.*

²⁰ Interview given to the author in May 2022.

We gave her this nickname because she was incessantly asking for her brooch. A brooch that she says was fly-shaped. She would smile when we'd say « Gooday Jeanne Labroche ».

She was a very nice person, and we had no idea that she was so well-traveled or that she was a lecturer. Her husband and her son regularly came to visit her. Sometimes her grandson came as well. She was always hoping that they would bring her that brooch. Other people wanted to visit her, but she never wanted to see anyone else. She would say "I don't have the time". That made us laugh.

To be honest, even though she was nice, sometimes she was very closed off; she wouldn't want to eat; and we had to administer her medication through intravenous because sometimes she would refuse to take them. She didn't like the activities. She could remain silent for several days at a time.

Her death affected us all. In fact, a number of us attended her funeral. There were photos of her with her family and friends, and many photos from her trips abroad, a sort of slideshow. It was very moving.

We can discover many things about people's lives from funerals, I've noticed that. We all agreed that it would have been great to have known her during the prime of her life.

We only knew her illness and anxiety. But I cannot tell you anymore about her health issues because that's against our professional code. We can't talk about that.

*I wish you the best of luck with your book.
Keep us updated!*

*Sincerely,
Pierre Lefebvre*

PS: Jeanne wrote a sort of diary when she first arrived at the hospital. Her husband or her son will surely have it and might let you use it for your research. It was very important to her.

A few days later, during a meeting at the Durieux's, Carole Pinel, doctor and researcher in clinical and pathological psychology said that

“Despite all the suffering Jeanne endured at the end of her life, one thing is striking and must be noted here: Jeanne never gave up on her desire. When I came to meet her at Saint-Anne, I saw a woman who, though undoubtedly living in her own world, had found a way to make sense of her wounds. At a certain point in her life – driven by reasons more complex than we might imagine – she chose her imaginary world.”²¹

Having been informed about the research and the book I wanted to write about Jeanne Durieux, Carole Pinel put me in contact, a few days after this encounter, with two former art-therapy interns, who were at Sainte-Anne hospital at the same time as Jeanne: Mathilde Lachat²² and Maëliiss Charpentier²³. We arranged to meet in a café in the 10th arrondissement of Paris on a cold and rainy Monday. They understood right away the interest that I had for the photographer. Here I reproduce the essential points from their testimony:

“We had heard about Jeanne Durieux from her son, Philippe Durieux, who we got to meet while we were interning at the hospital. We never saw the patient herself because she was too psychiatrically and physically unwell; however, we were present at an appointment between the psychiatrist, our internship supervisor, and Philippe Durieux. He was calm but you could tell he was devastated to see his dear mother in such a state. He spoke about the incredible life of his mother, a humble photographer, and her numerous trips all across the world. His story was moving (...) He was very attached to his mother. Philippe Durieux knew about Ernst Legy, an imaginary friend that his mother created. To confront Jeanne Durieux with reality, he asked her if

²¹ Interview with the author in May 2022.

²² Mathilde Lachat, *Les incubateurs de cultures alternatives*, supervised by Zineb Majdouli, FLSH October 2023.

²³ Maëliiss Charpentier, *L'influence du Pop Art dans la culture japonaise de 1960 à nos jours*, supervised by Hadrien Téqui, FLSH September 2022.

he could meet him. One day, while accompanying his mother to the Gare du Nord, they spoke about the last letter that she had written to her friend, and Philippe asked again if she could introduce him to Mr. Legy. But Jeanne, with a very serious look replied: 'You know my dear, Ernst is old and so am I. I am afraid we won't get to see one another anymore'. Jeanne Durieux didn't want to give up on what she had imagined."

I never got to meet the grandson of Jeanne Durieux, Luka who is now a musician like his father. We had made several appointments to speak together, some over of the phone, but they were always cancelled at the last minute. I believe that the relationship between grandmother and grandson was very strong, and he didn't want to take part in this research that does include some of the more somber aspects of Jeanne's life. In the family archives, I accessed a recording, sent via whatsapp that highlights the strong bond that Luka had with his grandmother:

"How are you Mamija? Dad told me you were up to your old tricks again (laughs). I love you, Mamija! Go ahead! Shake things up in the neighbourhood, it'll piss off all those fancy people (laughs). I'll be in Paris on Thursday. I'd love to see you. We can go out for icecream. We can take a trip together in our minds! Ok, I'm sending you my love. Don't foget your medication, it's important, Mamija. See you real soon!"

Chapter 2: The Diary (October 2013)

Two days after the incident in the basement, Jeanne admits without particular difficulty that she needs to see a psychiatrist. She is aware of these breakdowns, and says she feels an immense void within herself and wants to understand what is happening. When I first met Doctor Delmont, psychiatrist now retired, I was naive enough to think that he could give me a precise diagnostic for Jeanne Durieux. I didn't understand then that neuropsychological disorders – particularly those affecting mood – have a very large spectrum.²⁴ Nevertheless, this first encounter was very interesting. It shed new light on the excerpt from Jeanne's diary, which she had been keeping for several weeks after starting this therapeutic treatment at Saint-Anne's Hospital.

The doctor confided in me that his patient's discourse revolved essentially around impossible renunciations and, in particular, the imaginary persona she had created for herself following the death of her father when she was ten, and which, over the years, she had come to want to believe in.

Ernst Legy was his name, and he was supposed to be a famous photographer with whom she corresponded, or more precisely, to whom she wrote long letters that her mother, and then her husband – as odd as it seems – pretended to post. They were « caught in her game²⁵ ».

During one of her sessions with Doctor Delmont, Jeanne managed to get a glimpse of the unreal aspect of that which she held so dearly.

²⁴ Louis Bourgeois M., and coll. *Les troubles bipolaires*, Ed. Lavoisier, Paris, 2014.

²⁵ Interview with Henri Durieux.

“She looked into my eyes – she was seated there where you’re seated now – and she said: ‘Yes, I understand that I invented this character to overcome the death of my father and that he appeared later regarding my daughter.’ I didn’t understand why she was speaking about a daughter, but I knew that her mother had lost a little girl before giving birth to Jeanne.”²⁶

She didn’t say any more, and she even “froze up” when the doctor tried to get to know more about the girl she spoke of. Both Henri and Philippe, the husband and son of Jeanne, have particularly interesting memories of those early days of psychiatric care. Jeanne would go to her appointments without problem, and on the doctor’s orders, she kept a diary. It seemed like she was getting better. At first, she was only admitted to the day clinic. Henri invited her on outings, convinced that her troubles were dwindling. However, Jeanne didn’t want, or wasn’t ready, to see her friends. She claimed to be too tired or that she wanted to be entirely cured before seeing her friends again, especially Jacqueline Castello. She would say: *“I’d rather go for a stroll; I want to take some pictures²⁷”*. Was Jeanne actually feeling better? Reading the rest of the document, we see a woman in a state of immense disarray, apparently struggling alone against her troubles. I reproduce here the transcription that I made, respecting the association of photographs that Jeanne had established for each fragment:

Document #7: Excerpt from the Diary of Jeanne Durieux **Observation:** the texts are presented as pages torn from a notebook; they are accompanied by photographs. These written pieces are the only ones left of the journal that Jeanne herself destroyed a few days before her internment. The first page was also kept and had a title: *The Nocturnal Wanderings of a Lost Parisian*.

²⁶ Interview with Dr Delmont July 2022.

²⁷. Interview with Henri Durieux April 2022.

November 1st, 2010 8:17pm

So, it was all nothing but a weakness, right? A simple invention of a troubled mind, is that what I am supposed to think of myself? No, I refuse to believe it, even though I know you are no longer here Ernst. I mean almost, since I am writing to you once again, asking myself: If something never existed, can it really disappear? I don't like the medication. I don't like the reality that it comes with. I'm counting my steps as I move forward. One two three four five six seven and I start again. Sometimes I stop at four and start again. Sometimes I get mixed up. I prefer counting my steps to hearing the music I didn't choose that plays in my mind.

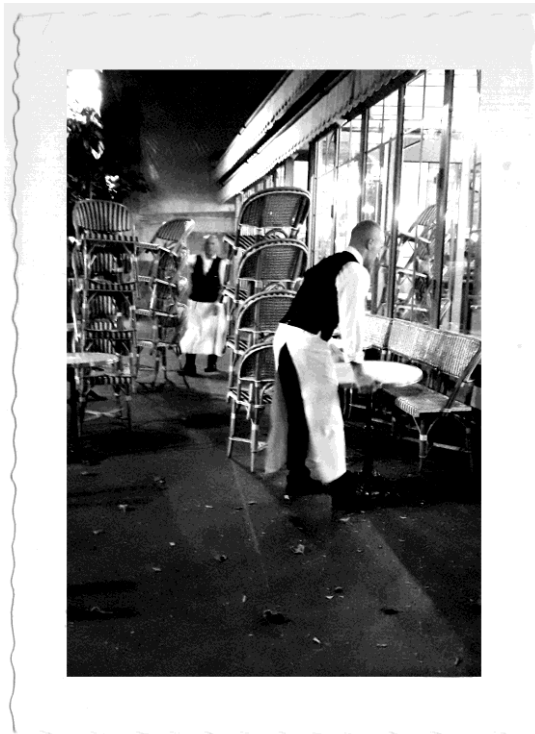


Photo n°1 - Jeanne Durieux's diary

November 4th, 2010 7pm

I know that Henri is looking for me in this city. It's impossible for me to remember where we said we'd meet. I don't have my phone. Was he supposed to pick me up at the station? I think we were going to a restaurant together. He told me the name of the restaurant where our friends were going to meet us. But it's getting harder and harder for my mind to pay attention to details. I need to find Henri. I should be able to meet him around the corner. My footsteps will lead me there without even thinking about it. I'm tired, but at the same time I don't ever want to stop walking. I don't really want to see any friends. I don't really want to speak to friends. Speaking is of no use anymore.



Photo n°2 - Jeanne Durieux's diary

November 5th

I remember a letter that I wrote to Ernst while sitting in this cafe. I was telling him about my conference at Quai Branly Museum, and I was telling him about language. Friendship is the precious discovery of a shared language that allows us to move toward one another. Love is something else entirely – the language there is often enigmatic and requires deciphering; oftentimes its mystery eludes the author himself. Even in long-lasting love, it works that way. I don't always understand what Henri tells me. The language of love is never as limpid as the language of friendship where things are expressed with explicit clarity. I wonder whatever happened to that letter. I would like to read it again. What has become of all those letters that I had sent to an imagined, imaginary, invented being? Why would Henri play along like he believed? 'I'm going to mail your letters' he would say: enigmatic language. Mysterious. He must find me in this city. It's cold. He'll be worried about me. I have a headache. One. Two three four five six seven and I start again.



Photo n°3 – Jeanne Durieux's diary

November 10th

The riverboats. The riverboats. Have I already gone out for a ride on a riverboat?

I'm too far from home, I'll need to walk much further.

Ernst, I could never have invented your series of photographs on the war in... where was it again?



Photo n°4 – Jeanne Durieux's diary

I could never have invented the photographs in Borneo. Or those in Rwanda. Or maybe. Yes. Perhaps you invented yourself, you pieced yourself together from a blank slate, and you waited until someone saw you in the realm beyond reality. And this person was me. I should tell you: if I have to give all that up, I won't take that medication anymore. Do you remember your exhibition at Austerlitz Station? I mean, I don't know anymore: was there ever even an exhibition or was it another one of your stories? In the end, you're annoying Ernst! You're annoying.



Photo n°5 – Jeanne Durieux's diary

November 11th, 2010, 10pm

Ernst, see this statue? Sometimes when I pass by here, she talks to me. I swear it's true. Not too often, but it has happened a couple of times.

The other day she said something along the lines of 'I'm the favorite of the fevers' and 'I am nothing but a trace in your life'. I would like to talk back to her, but I know that it's nothing but a statue. I just pretend like nothing happens. I don't want people to think I'm crazy. If it were possible for me to talk with her, I would reply that one trace can affect us profoundly. Sometimes it can damage us forever. The expression "just a trace" doesn't mean anything. Us photographers Ernst, we who transform life into traces, we've been haunted by many traces; we know. But that impassive and motionless statue, arrogant and proud, doesn't know. And in regards to being "the favorite of the fevers", I'm sure I've heard this expression in one of the books I've read. Yes, that's right, I said "I've heard" this expression (and not "read this expression"). I don't know if you've noticed this before, but when we read a book, between the written text and the read text, there's a kind of gap ready to welcome a voice in our head, that superimposes itself on the written and read text. That's where I've heard this strange formulation. In fact, I am also the favorite of the fevers, aren't I, Ernst? I told you about it in one of my letters; Henri took care of me when I had malaria in Zambia. I couldn't stop hallucinating!



Photo n°6 – Jeanne Durieux's diary

November 12th

How is it possible? I got mixed up! Instead of going home to rue Gazan, here I am at my old address. What would Doctor Delmont think?! Maybe he would view it as an attempt to turn back time. In any case, he doesn't care about what I have to tell him! And I never feel any better after having gone to see him. Speaking is of no use anymore.

You know Ernst, I have to tell you something. I have noticed – because I do wonder about it – that you have never once replied to any of my letters over the years. You are nothing but silence. Yes, you are nothing but silence Ernst. If you only knew how this silence causes an emptiness, a hollowness in me, you'd feel sorry for me. But see, life is full of surprises, my dearest: today, all I have to do is follow my treatment and your silence disappears with you. The only thing that remains an enigma for me is whether this immense emptiness I feel will also disappear.

Undated

I didn't invent all that I've seen and caught a glimpse of. I didn't invent the feelings I had. I did not invent you. That's impossible. I don't know why they want to make me doubt all of this. Henri, Philippe, and even you Ernst. And Doctor Delmont to top it all off! It's like you've all ganged up against me. I don't deserve that! OK, there was the incident with the basement, but that has nothing to do with it. I couldn't stand seeing those ghosts, hearing them speak out to me! I was so helpless. And now I don't feel like seeing those so-called friends who must think I'm making up stories and who are probably laughing at me. I'd rather lose my way. I like that expression: lose my way. Lost, way. A song is starting to play in my mind and I hate that. It's far off, in the distance. I need to count my steps.

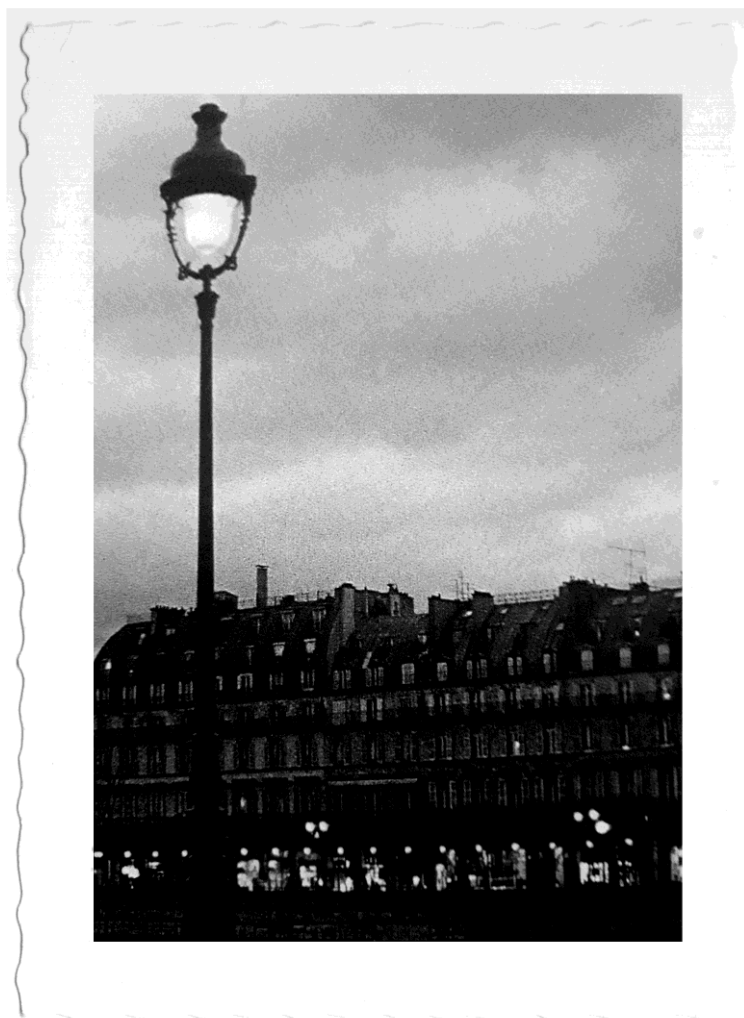


Photo n°7 – Jeanne Durieux's diary



Photo n°8 – Jeanne Durieux's diary



Photo n°9 – Jeanne Durieux's diary

Undated

I have the impression that everyone is abandoning me, Ernst. It hurts. I'm not sure I can survive this indifference very long. I might as well pretend it's me who's taking to the high seas. That's it! Instead of taking medication, I'm going to set sail. What's the open sea? Do you know? Maybe Henri can tell me, in his own words. I've got to find him; I feel like I can hear his voice calling me. Often when I'm walking alone in the city, I hear his comforting voice calling me. Jeanne! Jeanne!

Sometimes when I turn around I see him there within reach, but sometimes I don't, so I imagine him walking next to me and I ask "How are you Henri?" Maybe imagining is setting sail. But afterwards we get blamed for it. We politely get told "it's all in your head madame". Yet, in my head Ernst, there are just these songs that I don't like and these footsteps that I count. All the rest is merely a way to hold oneself together.



Photo n°10 – Jeanne Durieux's diary

Analysis

It is important to consider this writing on several levels. First, it reveals an intimacy whose disclosure must be ethically justified in order to remain within a responsible framework. Secondly, because it seems to go beyond its author, concerning all those who, at some point in their lives, find themselves in a form of topographical and/or mental wandering. The dates, photographs and contents of these paragraphs must therefore be considered.

The dates: eight days – including six dated between the 1st and 12th of November and two that are undated – are assembled in this handwritten document using different-colored inks (black or blue) or pencil. From the outset, we can see a desire for regularity and precision. At first, certain dates are accompanied by the time at which they were written. However, as the days pass, the time of writing disappears, followed by the date itself. There's nothing in this diary to indicate that the days and times – when they are indicated – correspond to any truth. Everything may have been written in one go, in different colors, carried along by the imagination contained in the photographs that Jeanne associated with her short texts. Nevertheless, one thing is certain: these writings were produced after the first appointments with the psychiatrist Dr. Delmont, who was working, on the one hand, to make Jeanne aware that Ernst Legy was an invention and to understand the function this creation could have in her psychic life, and, on the other hand, to explore – through language and texts – Jeanne's mental universe.

“I recommended that she keep a diary, not so that she could read it to me but because writing can bring about something within, an internal discourse that she could bring to me to help us understand together, you see?”²⁸

In discussions with the psychiatrist, I realized that Ernst Legy, Jeanne's imaginary character, reappeared forcefully when the loss of an object (in this case, the brooch) was mentioned, and this fact should not be overlooked.

²⁸ Interview with Dr. Delmont, July–August 2022.

She seemed to echo, in one way or another, the childhood ritual of the tooth fairy. The imaginary fairy replaces the lost tooth by a coin or something.²⁹ What did Ernst bring to replace her loss? I was also considering the relationship that Jeanne had with her mother: a tooth is related to the mouth, just as a brooch is related to the breast. One wears a brooch on the breast – on a breast, symbolic provider of milk, of life. Yet Jeanne said that the flies landed on garbage and dead bodies. What, then, was the unconscious mother-daughter relationship? This first female figure in her life? The question interested me, but Dr. Delmont hadn't approached it with her. As my research progressed, more and more pieces of the puzzle were revealed, and they began to take shape as a whole. A fragmented whole, but a whole nonetheless.

Ten photographs accompany these diary excerpts. Places often show up more than once: cafes, bridges, the Seine, like landmarks lining her photographic wanderings. Places that seem to hold something that Jeanne is trying to grab from oblivion or the confusion of her increasingly troubled mind.

Photograph number 1³⁰ is a nighttime photograph that depicts the closing of a Parisian bistro. Two servers are putting away the tables and chairs on the patio. The light is coming from inside the bistro and lights up the work of the two men who seem in a hurry to finish their job. Neither one of them is paying attention to the photographer, who would have had to stop to get this particular frame. Off-camera, she is facing the waiter in the background, whose face is blurred. On closer inspection, he seems to be enclosed in the two columns of stacked chairs. Does he act as a mirror for this woman wandering the city in search of herself?

²⁹ See Delalande J., *Un rituel de l'enfance : la petite souris*, Master's thesis in ethnology supervised by Georges Augustins and Béatrix Le Wita, University of Paris X Nanterre, 1990.

³⁰ The photographs are not numbered on the original document. I have numbered them to facilitate description and analysis.

Photograph number 2 is easy to situate for those who know the Parisian neighbourhood of the Nord and Est Stations. It was taken in the day, on the La Fayette Bridge. We can see some of the tracks of the Est Station. The angle and the frame are interesting because they highlight a disequilibrium. Just as darkness and light emphasize the composition in opposition. This is no ordinary place for Jeanne Durieux. Indeed, she already knew the filmmaker Jean Rouch³¹ when he shot *Gare du Nord* in 1964 as part of the “Paris vu par³² ». ” series. She was present at these exterior filming sites. In Rouch’s film, a man *commits suicide* from this bridge. In an interview, Henri Durieux recalls that every time Jeanne crossed that bridge she would never fail to mention that short film. By the mere presence of this photograph, we can deduce that the entire body of work is made up of highly symbolic locations.

Photograph number 3 shows the covered patio of a restaurant. It’s nighttime. Inside, people are seated at tables, but a close look at their expressions reveals no one is smiling. Something resembling boredom emanates from this interiority. We can see a few glasses and plates but it’s far from “a festive place and a temple to good food.”³³ Here the photograph seems to oppose the ready-made idea associated with place, as if to capture what lies behind clichés and commonplaces. Is this *a concept of photographic art?*

Photograph number 4 is reminiscent of the photograph of the La Fayette Bridge. Also taken at night, this photograph of the Saint-Michel Bridge plays with imbalance and contrast. Like photo number 2, the vanishing point and perspective it creates seem unstable.

In the background we recognize Notre-Dame and in the foreground the Seine River. Ripples render the water blurry, adding to the idea of *instability* within the photograph. Like with the previous photos, *a problematic logic of association emerges here.*

³¹ A letter from the Jacqueline Castillo archives, dated April 8, 1962, mentions her meeting with Rouch in Niger.

³² *Paris vu par...* : Jean Rouch, Jean-Daniel Pollet, Jean Douchet, Éric Rohmer, Claude Chabrol et Jean-Luc Godard, Les films du Cyprés, Les films du Losange, 1965, 95 min.

³³ Garval, M. « L'invention du restaurant ». *Critique*, 685-686, 520-529, 2004.

Photograph number 5 is, according to me, the most surprising. It's of the Grisette statue³⁴ between Jules Ferry Boulevard and Faubourg du Temple Street in the 11th arrondissement.

*"Modest smile, neat hairstyle, two buns over her ears and a high-set chignon, bare arms in a dress with puffed sleeves, she holds a bundle of flowers in a kind of satchel. This grisette embodies the young girls of the honest, hardworking people, whose fate was often tragic, as portrayed in Romantic literature, where she was a prominent figure."*³⁵

Taken at night, the blur remains, and the effect of light seems to transform the "modest smile" into a bitter sneer. Its presence and what is said about it in the diary bear witness to Jeanne's drift, which is not just nocturnal. She is victim of very real hallucinations. Why this statue and not another? Why does it resonate in Jeanne traces and fevers? *The representation of women as a narrow straitjacket* can be associated with the Grisette here. The unfortunate fate of a "good girl" who unknowingly carries within her the figures of vanity, those ephemeral flowers so well suited to her impeccable chignon.

Photograph number 6 is taken from the paved square in front of the Quai d'Orsay Museum. We can see one of the cast-iron statues representing the continents³⁶. It's the statue representing Asia by Alexandre Falguière that Jeanne frames. Another feminine figure, another representation, but this time off to the right. A woman looking off in the distance.

³⁴ Work from 1830 by sculptor Jean-Bernard Descomps. Cf. Monjaret, A. (2012). « À l'ombre des jeunes filles en pierre. Des ouvrières dans les jardins parisiens ». *Ethnologie française*, 42, 503-515.

³⁵ Hauer C. <https://www.parisladouce.com/2018/07/paris-la-grisette-de-1830-incarnation.html>

³⁶ Executed by various sculptors, these statues commissioned for the 1878 Universal Exhibition were originally installed in front of the Palais du Trocadéro. See Shimazu, T. "Personified Continents in Public Places: Internationalism, Art, and Geography in Late Nineteenth Century Paris". In: Schelhaas, B., Ferretti, F., Reyes Novaes, A., Schmidt di Friedberg, M. (eds) *Decolonising and Internationalising Geography*. 2020.

While the windows in the background don't show any life, they seem to be blocking all the openings – demonstrating a closed horizon: the horizon of all the invisible lives of the bourgeois, all of which are all the same. Lives grouped behind a particular allegory, not the motherland but the mother-continent. The individual (the window of a life) becomes a collective (windows of lives) frozen in a stereotyped allegory (the continent represented by the statue) from which no life emerges. *Shouldn't we be looking elsewhere? Towards something left out of frame?*

Photograph number 7 seems blurrier than the others. As if it was from another time period. The city lights in the background seem to echo the lamppost in the foreground, emphasizing its difference and solitude. The latter is isolated in the frame, and its light highlights a foggy sky. *Like a blanket gradually falling over all light.*

Photograph number 8 is taken from inside a cafe. Usually bustling with energy, here there is no sign of life. Yet again, from behind the camera, the photographer seems to focus on a place that has become lonely. The strong contrast in the photograph prohibits us from seeing what is happening outside, as if interior absence and waiting are part of the perspective. It's as if the photographer is sheltering herself, creating distance between herself and the overstimulation of the city, in the neither here nor there: neither entirely closed nor entirely open. It's hard to tell if it's dusk or dawn in *this threshold between here and there, as much a place of the mind as of the map.*

Photograph number 9 represents the bridge of an above-ground subway, a traffic light – which is red – and street signs. In the background, there are cafés, cars, a motorcycle, and a bus. Closer to us, there is a woman with her hair covering her face who is crossing at the crosswalk. Among the different directions shown on the signs, the last one captures our attention: *Saint-Anne's Hospital*, second on the left. It's taken in the daytime, yet something frozen cold emanates from it, despite all the movements that are apparent.

We know that Jeanne was hospitalized at Saint-Anne's during the last five years of her life. Was she going to an appointment when she took this photo?

Does she identify with what might be perceived as a double crossing, crossing the street and crossing towards the hospital? Is she experiencing a state of visual dissociation?³⁷

Photograph number 10 frames the Seine River once again. It's night, and the photograph is blurry, the lights and their reflections in the water are emphasized with the strong contrast. One important element draws our attention: a part of the photographer's finger appears on the left. This finger is Jeanne's whole person, present in this setting; but at the same time, it's a sort of signature on the entire series of photographs. And since night unmistakably evokes the end, with the shimmer of what can be perceived as flickering lights in the water, and the Seine here is reminiscent of "la saine" (the healthy one) can we not see in this photograph *Jeanne's struggle against the madness that stalks her?*

Let's take a look at the speech itself: the text that can be recovered from this diary consists of one hundred and six sentences, fifteen question marks, and eleven exclamation marks.

With this punctuation – found in almost a quarter of the text – Jeanne herself underlines her questioning and exaltation despite the medications she was prescribed at the time. Beyond the many repetitions (the word Ernst appears twelve times; Henri seven; references to "I" or "me" twenty-four times; and "you" eighteen); the text includes many negative formulations (which I've put in **bold**), references to her illness or her emotions (which I've underlined), and references to emptiness, absence, or loss (which I've framed). This is not really surprising given what we already know about Jeanne Durieux.

³⁷ I'm thinking here of the mechanism at the origin of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, who, to escape an inner emptiness or "absence of being", experimented - through his heteronyms - with phenomena of dissociation. On this subject, see : Teicher, N., *Fernando Pessoa ou l'écriture d'une vie*, Faculté de psychologie et des sciences de l'éducation, Université catholique de Louvain, 2019.

What is most interesting are the themes and points of view that she develops, especially regarding language (friendship, love, photography) and reading, as will we see in the analysis of these passages.

First Excerpt

*So, it was all **nothing** but a weakness, right?*

A simple invention of a troubled mind, is that what I am supposed to think of myself?

***No, I refuse** to believe it, even though I know you are no longer here Ernst.*

I mean almost, since I am writing to you once again, asking myself:

*If something **never** existed, can it really disappear?*

***I don't like** the medication.*

***I don't like** the reality that it comes with.*

I'm counting my steps as I move forward.

One two three four five six seven and I start again.

Sometimes I stop at four and start again.

*I prefer counting my steps to hearing the music **I didn't choose** that plays in my mind.*

In this first extract – beyond the refusals expressed by a woman who already seems to be struggling against herself – we can highlight the presence of a triple intertwined relationship:

A complicated relationship with herself (weakness, troubled mind, a psychic invasion of music, counting steps), a paradoxical relationship with Ernst, the imaginary friend (recognised as both real and imaginary) and a difficult relationship with medication (bringing her into an insufferable reality without all that she has made up in her imagination). Under her watchful eye and with the help of medication, Ernst, the imaginary friend, slips away from his function as a psychic envelope, a concept understood in the sense of Anzieu and Kaës' work highlighting the “diversity of its intrapsychic and interpsychic manifestations.”³⁸

³⁸ Kaës, R., « Du Moi-peau aux enveloppes psychiques. Genèse et développement d'un concept ». *Le Carnet PSY*, 117, 33-39. 2007.

Second Excerpt

I know that Henri is looking for me in this city.

*It's **impossible** for me to remember where we said we'd meet.*

***I don't have** my phone.*

Was he supposed to pick me up at the station?

I think we were going to a restaurant together.

He told me the name of the restaurant where our friends were going to meet us.

But it's getting harder and harder for my mind to pay attention to details.

I need to find Henri.

I should be able to meet him around the corner.

My footsteps will lead me there without even thinking about it.

*I'm tired, but at the same time I **don't ever** want to stop walking.*

***I don't really want** to see any friends.*

***I don't really want** to speak to friends.*

*Speaking is of **no use** anymore.*

This second excerpt brings up Henri, Jeanne's husband. There are many variations on that which is said in the first text: *Ernst the imaginary friend is replaced with the husband* with whom it is also difficult to communicate:

"I don't have my phone", "Henri is looking for me", "I need to find Henri." Here, the troubled mind expresses the difficulties in recalling important things, like the meeting point; at the same time, a saturation of speaking to others ("speaking is of no use anymore"); and finally, the *wandering* which seems to be vital for Jeanne – because even though she is tired, she doesn't ever want to stop walking, "*as if wandering can bring [her]back from her internal instability.*"³⁹ These variations also speak to us through the extreme solitude they portray.

³⁹ Sansot P., *Poétique de la ville*, Méridiens Klincksieck, 1988, p. 127.

The relationship to Other is essentially felt through a *melancolisation*⁴⁰ (no longer believing in friendship, no longer wanting to see friends) from which Ernst springs as a defense mechanism for Jeanne's unconscious search for a unity she senses or knows to be broken. Another element that seems very important to us here is the appearance of place, the city and its different spaces: station, restaurant, street, pathway. Jeanne's discourse suddenly grounds itself in a spatial reality. But there too, the container that could be the city turns out to be uncertain and uncomfoting: Should I wait at the station? Where's the restaurant? Jeanne Durieux seems doomed to drift. "*My footsteps will lead me there without even thinking about it*" she writes. We imagine a faltering woman who, like the hunted man – masterfully analyzed by Pierre Sansot – "painfully opens her path."⁴¹

Third Excerpt

I remember a letter that I wrote to Ernst while sitting in this café.

I was telling him about my conference at Quai Branly Museum, and I was telling him about language. Friendship is the precious discovery of a shared language that allows us to move toward one another. Love is something else entirely – the language there is often enigmatic and requires deciphering; oftentimes its mystery eludes the author himself. Even in long-lasting love, it works that way.

I don't always understand what Henri tells me.

The language of love is never as limpid as the language of friendship where things are expressed with explicit clarity.

I wonder whatever happened to that letter.

I would like to read it again.

What has become of all those letters that I sent to an imagined, imaginary, invented being? Why would Henri play along like he believed?

⁴⁰ On this concept, which we find particularly fruitful, see the work of Douville O., at the crossroads of anthropology and psychoanalysis, "Pour introduire l'idée d'une mélancolisation du lien social" (Introducing the idea of a melancholic social bond), *Cliniques méditerranéennes* 63, 2000, 239-261.

⁴¹ Sansot, P., *op. cit.* p. 124.

I mean, I don't know anymore: was there ever even an exhibition or was it another one of your stories? In the end, you're annoying Ernst! You're annoying.

In this excerpt, precise locations are listed one after another following the image of the riverboats on the Seine River: Borneo, Rwanda. Then, this outward movement, widely embracing the world, comes back to Paris: Austerlitz Station. Borders are blurred, Jeanne seems to be fighting against confusion. This piece of text is quite interesting because it places illusions, desires, and perceptions, at the heart of what is being told. It is questioning and outwardly projecting this character who she believes may have created himself “*you invented yourself, you pieced yourself together from a blank slate, and you waited until someone saw you in the realm beyond reality*”. Isn't this a subtle way of understanding the relationship with Other and its singularity? Let's forget Ernst for a moment: doesn't the Other construct and invent himself, waiting for a particular gaze to give a new meaning or structuring to his identity?

Fifth Excerpt

Ernst, see this statue? Sometimes when I pass by here, she talks to me.

I swear it's true. Not too often, but it has happened a couple of times.

*The other day she said something along the lines of 'I'm the favorite of the fevers' and '**I am nothing but a trace in your life**'.*

*I would like to talk back to her, but I know that it's **nothing** but a statue.*

*I just pretend like nothing happens. **I don't want** people to think I'm crazy.*

If it were possible for me to talk with her, I would reply that one trace can affect us profoundly. Sometimes it can damage us forever.

*The expression “just a trace” **doesn't mean anything**.*

Us photographers Ernst, we who transform life into traces, we've been haunted by many traces; we know.

*But that impassive and motionless statue, arrogant and proud, **doesn't know**.*

And in regards to being “the favorite of the fevers”, I'm sure I've heard this expression in one of the books I've read.

Yes, that's right, I said “I've heard” this expression (and not “read this expression”).

I don't know if you've noticed this before, but when we read a book, between the written text and the read text, there's a kind of gap ready to welcome a voice in our head that superimposes itself on the written and read text.

That's where I've heard this strange formulation.

In fact, I am also the favorite of the fevers, aren't I Ernst?

I told you about it in one of my letters;

Henri took care of me when I had malaria in Zambia.

I couldn't stop hallucinating!

This passage clearly indicates a turning point in Jeanne's mind, which couldn't go without mentioning André Breton's *Nadja*⁴², who took advice from the bust of Henri Becque, sculpted by Rodin, and reigning over Villiers Square. But if Nadja speaks to Breton, a writer who in a certain way entertains her delusion⁴³, here Jeanne is writing to an imaginary person – Ernst – telling him about this improbable dialogue between this statue that makes fun of her and her struggle to remain, one might say, “stone-faced.” That is, to take the place of the inanimate, so overwhelming is the turmoil of the living. Her defense against the mind that torments her is revealed, notably, through her many denials:

“I am nothing” “I don't want” “I don't know” “I couldn't stop.” The fever, the rift, that is heard (in her head while she is wandering or while she is reading), the very fact of being “haunted”, illustrates the emerging disorganisation.

Sixth Excerpt

How is it possible? I got mixed up!

Instead of going home to rue Gazan, here I am at my old address.

What would Doctor Delmont think!

Maybe he would view it as an attempt to turn back time.

⁴² Breton A., *Nadja*, Gallimard, folio, Paris first édition 1964, p.171.

⁴³ As Mourier-Casile points out in *André Breton's Nadja*, commentaire de l'œuvre, Gallimard, Foliothèque, 1994, it is from this “Other that Breton expects his identity to be revealed to him”.

*In any case, **he doesn't care** about what I have to tell him!*

*And **I never** feel any better after having gone to see him.*

*Speaking is of **no use anymore**.*

You know Ernst, I have to tell you something.

*I have noticed – because I do wonder about it – that you **have never once** replied to any of my letters over the years.*

*You are **nothing but** silence. **Yes, you are nothing but** silence Ernst.*

*If you only knew how **this silence causes an emptiness, a hollowness in me**, you'd feel sorry for me.*

*But see, life is full of surprises, my dearest: today, all I have to do is follow my treatment and your silence **disappears** with you.*

*The only thing that remains an enigma for me is whether this immense emptiness I feel will also **disappear**.*

A spatial disorganization manifests itself here, coupled with going back in time, which she herself conceives, attributing it to her psychiatrist. The questioning of the otherness that surrounds her, and of their intentions, is also at work here: Dr. Delmont “doesn't care”, and her imaginary friend is only silence and indifference. Her very interesting remark about medication gets us thinking: she could simply take it and give up this tumultuous imaginary world, but the fear of emptiness seems to be holding her back.

It's as if, like the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa – whom she loved to read – Jeanne Durieux feared being told: “I feel the full weight of all my dead life, of all my dreams in vain, of all that was mine without ever belonging to me.”⁴⁴ It's hard to give up these illusions.

Seventh Excerpt

***I didn't** invent all that I've seen and caught a glimpse of.*

***I didn't** invent the feelings I had.*

***I did not** invent you. That's **impossible**.*

***I don't know** why they want to make me doubt all of this.*

⁴⁴ Pessoa, F., *Le livre de l'intranquillité*, Ed. Bourgois, Paris, 1999 p. 482.

Henri, Philippe, and even you Ernst.
And Doctor Delmont to top it all off!
It's like you've all ganged up against me.
I don't deserve that!

OK, there was the incident with the basement, but that **has nothing** to do with it.

I couldn't stand seeing those ghosts, hearing them speak out to me!

I was so **helpless**. And now **I don't feel like** seeing those so-called friends who must think I'm making up stories and who are probably laughing at me.

I'd rather lose my way. I like that expression: lose my way. Lost, way.

A song is starting to play in my mind and I hate that.

It's far off, in the distance. I need to count my steps.

There are many negative formulations in this passage. We could say that they make up a kind of rhetoric of negation. But, what is negation? Is it to assert innocence in the face of designated persecutors? Is it to underline the dialectic of being and not being (delusion) or no longer being (Ernst)? The same goes for the lexical negations: impossible and destitute, seeming to function as a kind of “affirmation by the negative :”⁴⁵ *yes, it's quite possible, but I reject it, and yes, I once had many projects and friends.*

Eighth Excerpt

*I have the impression that everyone is abandoning me, Ernst.
It hurts.*

I'm not sure I can survive this indifference very long.

I might as well pretend it's me who's taking to the high seas.

That's it! Instead of taking medication, I'm going to set sail.

What's the open sea? Do you know? Maybe Henri can tell me, in his own words.

I've got to find him; I feel like I can hear his voice calling me.

⁴⁵ Conceived as an impossibility for the subject to affirm the disturbing real.

Often when I'm walking alone in the city, I hear his comforting voice calling me. Jeanne! Jeanne! Sometimes when I turn around I see him there within reach, but sometimes I don't, so I imagine him walking next to me and I ask 'How are you Henri?'

While the question “to be or not to be” was present in the previous passage, here we can explicitly see it. The world is abandoning Jeanne, and she is not sure that she can survive being alone. The formulation “*set sail*” resembles the beginning of a suicidal process – without actually being a suicidal scenario⁴⁶ – which is suddenly stopped by the caring Henri, her husband whose voice she hears and who can – we discover this here – also be imagined by her side, even while he is not there. We further notice that in this moment of immense solitude, she asks Henri “how are you?”, yet it is Jeanne who is not doing well.

Ninth Excerpt

Maybe imagining is setting sail.

But afterwards we get blamed for it.

We politely get told “it's all in your head madame”.

Yet, in my head Ernst, there are just these songs that I don't like and these footsteps that I count. All the rest is merely a way to hold oneself together.

Henri's appearance at the end of the previous passage gives new meaning to the phrase “set sail”. Imagining – which is creating – it's a way to not give into the temptation to escape life. This role of Ernst's, or sometimes Henri (when she imagines him at her side and addresses him as if his presence were real), acts as a fortification for Jeanne against herself, at a time in her life when mental disorganization has invaded a very large part of her psychic field. *A way of holding herself together*, she tells us.

⁴⁶ On this subject, see Vandevoorde J., et al., “Reconstruction and modeling of the suicidal process in suicidal individuals” in *L'Évolution Psychiatrique*. Volume 77, Issue 3, July–September 2012, Pages 352-372.

What can we say about Jeanne Durieux from her last years, from the testimonies that exist about them, and from the analyses proposed here? Dr. Julio Guillen, professor of psychopathology and psychoanalysis, put forward his ideas on the subject at a seminar⁴⁹ held at the Catholic University of Lille, focusing specifically on Jeanne Durieux's diary:

“The pages of this diary are already leftovers (...) and what jumps out at me is that it is also a sort of letter she’s writing to someone. A kind of calling out, or questioning, that doesn’t require any response, almost an entreaty. But there are some particular elements. There are specific parts that speak to me, notably this question of counting steps: there is life in her mind; people want to erase things from her mind ‘it’s all in your mind madame’; there’s also the presence of this imaginary man in her mind. But it’s what’s in her head that is what is disturbing. The steps that she’s counting and that she’s miscounting: is this a sort of rhythm? Is it something that might help her put things in order? A parasitic ritual grabs hold. There is also this other presence.

Beyond Ernst, she also addresses Henri, a presence who is looking for her ‘I know that Henri is looking for me.’ But it’s a ghost-like presence too. Even her husband, who does exist, she can’t find. One sentence strikes me, when she says of Ernst: ‘Perhaps you invented yourself, you pieced yourself together from a blank slate, and you waited until someone saw you.’ She’s asking herself questions about existence, and she is searching for traces. I also think that her photos, are also traces, don’t tell us much about anything. She’s built up a silence. Who is Ernst to her? He’s silence. And silence represents emptiness, void, and absence. (...) this object is not something she loves or someone she wants to meet. It’s her, addressing herself, through the Other. Her rejection of the medication states: “don’t take this silence and all that which it signifies away from me.”

Leftovers of an experience, of silence, of emptiness. Surrounded by spirits that she herself calls upon, Jeanne progressively loses touch with reality.

Part Two

A Life Through its Beginning

Chapter 1: Parental Exile, Childhood, Youth, and Adulthood (1936-2000)

Before becoming Jeanne Durieux and earning the affectionate nickname Jeanne La Broche – linking her to the object of her quest, both real and imagined – Jeanne was first known as Jeanne Lopes Rozda.

Jeanne was born in 1942 from a Hungarian father, Alfréd Rozsda, a tailor and magician during his day, and a Spanish mother, Mercedes Lopes, a seamstress. In 1935, her father who was Jewish, decided to leave Hungary, which since the 1920s had been subject to an increasingly anti-Semitic and openly discriminatory policy⁴⁷. A cousin asked if he wanted to join him in Spain, which he did, bringing with him only a change of clothes and a small photo album. “Looking at photographs is a wonderful way to escape⁴⁸”. In the train to Madrid, he met Mercedes, and they decided to stay together. At first, they lived for a couple of years in the small village of Valldemossa, but tensions from the Franco dictatorship left them no choice but to exile to Paris where they could protect their love and welcome the little girl they were waiting on. That’s when Jeanne was born, in a small one-bedroom apartment on Grenelle Street. The parents worked together on patterns and garments they had on order or sold in stores. Little documentation exists on the lives of Jeanne's parents. They were certainly among the many exiles who experienced a complicated life, explains Florentina Rodrigo Paredes, a lecturer specializing in Spanish Civilization, Civil War, Francoism and Family at the Université Catholique de Lille:

⁴⁷ Lacroix-Riz *Le Vatican, l'Europe et le Reich de la Première Guerre mondiale à la Guerre Froide (1914-1955)*, Paris, Armand Colin, coll. 1996. P. 149.

⁴⁸ According to Jeanne and reported in an interview conducted in July 2022 with Henri Durieux.

“A civil war broke out in 1936, an armed conflict that was not supposed to last long, but, thanks to foreign intervention, spanned across three years. Spain was torn in two: on one side, a republican government that was democratically elected, and on the other, a military insurrection led by General Franco, which broke out in thirty-six (...) This conflict would cause about one million casualties and left two-hundred to three-hundred thousand in exile. The majority left starting in February 1939 crossing the Pyrenees Mountains and arriving in France, others took boats to Latin America (...) Under Franco, women became socially invisible again, patriarchal society was re-established, along with the Napoleonic code, and the ban on civil marriage, abortion, and divorce, all those rights acquired during the Republican period. It was a dictatorship of terror. In forty, forty-one there was the context of the Second World War, a conflict that Spain steered away from, except for punctual aid to Germany and Italy (...). It was also a time where illnesses like typhoid and tuberculosis, which were previously eradicated made a come-back: one in five children were dying from tuberculosis before the age of five. Ration cards and parallel markets where basic foodstuffs were sold at triple the price were also part of this patriarchal society where women were told only to have children and look after their husbands (...) Jeanne Durieux's mother and her partner must have had progressive, democratic principles, and in this context, they had to leave Spain (...) They wanted a different future for their daughter, they wanted to spare her, but Jeanne was inevitably marked by this history, which is the same history that marked her parents. We are also shaped by our ancestors: being born to two parents on the run doesn't leave you unscathed. Her mother's stories must have affected her, and she must have been proud of her mother's decision⁴⁹ ”

It's impossible not to consider this parental exile – Jeanne Durieux's founding ground – as an important element in the psychic vulnerability which manifests itself more and more explicitly with time. From the original and whimsical young girl, to the vibrant and exuberant woman full of life, to the elderly woman who had lost her mind, Jeanne embodied the same story: that of a fighter – with whatever means she had at a given time – against the hidden terror inherited from her parents.

⁴⁹ Interview given to the author on May 18, 2022.

She is – in the Freudian sense of the term – the subject caught in the links of a generational chain “to which she is subjected against her will, or at least without its intervention⁵⁰”. Since Freud, and in parallel with or following much of the work undertaken on the transmission of trauma in the post-Shoah generation,⁵¹ new theoretical concepts have emerged in the field of psychiatry and psychoanalysis concerning the symptomatology of descendants presenting disorders comparable to those of the post-traumatic picture. René Kaës moves away from the individuality of the subject to conceptualize the “singular plural” subject, that of the group and the subject of the link.⁵² Considering that traumatic events – exile in particular – lead to a collapse of social and psychic meta-frames, he emphasizes: “*We better understand that the disruption, failures or defects of these metapsychic frameworks and guarantors directly affect the structuring and development of each individual's psychic life.*”⁵³ That's an interesting starting point to remember: parents trying to save themselves by fleeing. And a parallel is to be made: a young woman trying, through her imagination – we'll mention Ernst Legy later – to preserve a vital connection to life.

Back to the parents. One of the most incredibly fascinating elements visually captures the beginning of their lives together. Two photographs by Robert Capa portray Alfred Rozsda and Mercedes Lopes.

⁵⁰ Freud, S. [1914]. « Pour introduire le narcissisme ». in S. Freud, *La vie sexuelle* (81-105). Paris : PUF (1969).

⁵¹ See among others: Letzter-Pouw, S. E., & Werner, P. (2013). The relationship between Holocaust survivor women's unresolved losses and their children's emotional well-being. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 18(5),396-408. doi:10.1080/15325024.2012.701126; Levi, P. (1989). *Les Naufragés et les Rescapés*. Paris: Gallimard; Rowland-Klein, D., & Dunlop, R. (1998). The transmission of trauma across generations: identification with parental trauma in children of Holocaust survivors. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 32(3), 358-369; Sagi-Schwartz, A., van IJzendoorn, M. H., Grossmann, K. E., Joels, T., Grossmann, K., Scharf, M., Alkalay, S. (2004). Attachment and traumatic stress in female Holocaust survivors and their daughters. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 160, 1086-1092.

⁵² Kaës, R. *Un singulier pluriel : La psychanalyse à l'épreuve du groupe*. Dunod. 2013.

⁵³ Kaës, R. *La réalité psychique du lien. Le Divan familial*, 22, 107-125. 2009.

The young couple appears in three-quarter profile facing left, caught in a moment of departure. In one of the photographs, the father's arm is resting on the mother's shoulders. In the other, the mother is raising her fingers to her lips. Their expressions are closed. These two photographs are part of the collection of negatives known as *The Mexican Suitcase*⁵⁴. Lost and then rediscovered in the 1990s, the negatives were returned to Robert Capa's brother, Cornell.

It was at an exhibition in New York in September 2010⁵⁵[4] that Jeanne recognised her parents in two of the photographs. The next year, the photographs were also on display at Rencontres d'Arles. At Jeanne's request, Henri began to approach the ICP and its curator to obtain these two photographs. His efforts were in vain. We might say that this confrontation with the unexpected (the deceased parents brought back to life with this photograph) some place else (New York) had also marked the beginning of Jeanne's breakdown, since she began speaking incessantly about her beloved father.

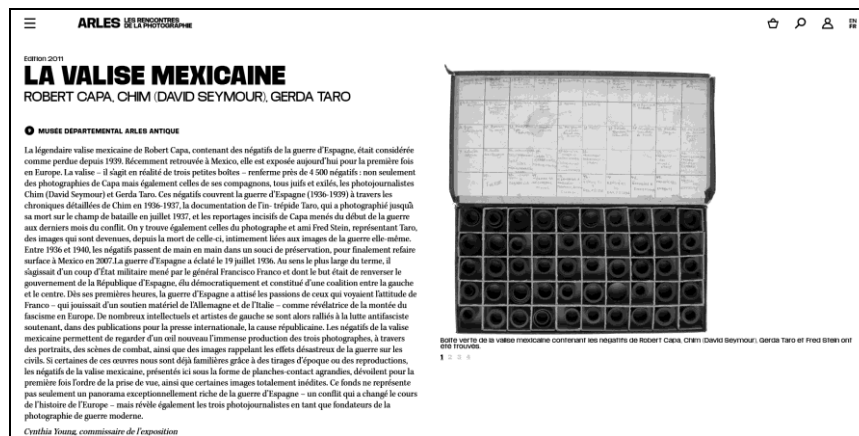


Illustration 6 – Exhibition *The Mexican Suitcase*, Rencontres d'Arles, 2011

⁵⁴ Collectif, *La Valise mexicaine, vol.1 L'Histoire et 2. Les films*, Actes Sud, 2011.

⁵⁵ *The Mexican Suitcase. The Rediscovered Spanish Civil War Negative of Capa, Chim and Taro*, International Center Photography, New York, septembre 2010.

Let's take a closer look at this father of hers. The Rozsdas lived modestly in a post-war Paris, where anti-Semitism was still persistent and the silence on history still far too thick.⁵⁶ He was not part of the intellectual or artistic exiled youth who hung out in the basements of the Latin Quarter, in Flore or Les Deux Magots café – those who created a network of solidarity and dreams to be realized. Jeanne's parents were ashamed of their accents. It's more isolation that characterises this couple about whom Jeanne would say never got the chance to develop a "taste for life". To make ends meet, Alfred did magic tricks at the local markets. Jeanne was very attached to her father. He died of a pulmonary embolism when she was ten years old. Jeanne then fell into a deep depression – refusing to eat and suffering from mutism – that lasted many months. Her mother, Mercedes, took her to a young psychiatrist. Progressively grief ran its course. The sessions with the psychiatrist got more and more spaced out, and eventually stopped and Jeanne discovered her passion: photography. She got her hands on a rolleiflex⁵⁷ bought by her father, and she returned to school. She told her friends that she had met, foreign photographer, Ernst Legy, at her doctor's: A lie or an innocent childhood desire⁵⁸. Thus, Jeanne returned to school not with the *loss* of father but with the *gain* of this figure who took the place of that which filled the void around whom she structured herself. A void from which her various activities would unfold and her future connections would take shape.

But before turning to the function of this imaginary friend, I would like to present a testimony to what was said regarding Jeanne's parents at a seminar organised at the Université Catholique de Lille on Jeanne Durieux,⁵⁹ and for which a call for contributions was put out. In addition to the speakers, the audience also included a number of participants with insights to offer.

⁵⁶ See Serge Moscovici's account of this period in his fascinating autobiography: Moscovici S., *Mon Après-Guerre à Paris : chronique des années retrouvées*, Grasset 2019.

⁵⁷ She will always refer to it as "a gift from [her] father".

⁵⁸ In his words to psychiatrist Dr. Delmont. Interview June 2022. We note that Jeanne, in certain sessions, recognized the fantastical and imaginary nature of this character.

⁵⁹ *Jeanne Durieux ou l'artiste enchantée*, Université Catholique de Lille juin 2022.

Young Millie Chiron, a specialist in Asian arts⁶⁰ spoke about a trip that she had taken with two of her young colleagues:

“During the summer of 2018, Souleyman Afaska⁶¹ Robinson Wullens⁶² and I found ourselves in the South-West of France, in Bordeaux. We had planned to spend our holidays in Spain at Souleyman’s grandparents’ house. We were in Bordeaux, and then we started our journey to Madrid by car. While getting gas along the way, we saw a man who was about fifty and whose car had broken down. We went over to him, and asked him if he needed assistance. That man was Philippe Durieux, the son of Jeanne Durieux. He was also going to Spain, to Madrid. While waiting for the tow truck, we had coffee and spoke together. Philippe mentioned his Hungarian grandfather and his Spanish grandmother. His mother Jeanne used to tell him lots of stories about his grandparents when he was younger. They escaped the Franco dictatorship and moved to Paris in the ‘40s. Their arrival and integration in their new country was difficult because they were poor and they didn’t speak the language. They had left everything they had behind. His eyes welled up while he spoke of his mother. She seemed to be psychologically frail and suffered immensely from the death of her father when she was quite young. That had broken something inside of her.”

These young researchers encountered Philippe Durieux the year that Jeanne died. She was already deeply affected by her illness at that point, and the son's emotion is understandable. During that same seminar, I myself spoke about the function of the “imaginary character.”

This question of the child and his imaginary friend is an object of great interest in scientific literature, yet it remains “poorly understood in psychology” according to Rachel Chouinard⁶³.

⁶⁰ Millie Chiron, *Origines et évolution d’un musée asiatique en France : l’exemple du musée Guimet*, supervised by Aude Cordonnier, FLSH, September 2022.

⁶¹ Souleyman Afaska, *La vision de la femme dans le monde hip hop*, supervised by Biliana Vassileva, FLSH, October 2023.

⁶² Robinson Wullens, *Ceci n’est pas humain*, supervised by Hadrien Téqui, FLSH, October 2023.

⁶³ Taylor M., *Imaginary Companions and the Children who Create Them*. New York, Oxford, 1998.

Perceived as both living and invisible, the imaginary friend, initially conceived as a “double,” will gradually take on the form of an otherness—a friendly Other, intimate and private⁶⁴a companion who puts into perspective the boundaries between Reality and Fantasy for the child who can consciously move from one universe to another⁶⁵.

We cannot say much about Ernst Legy, Jeanne’s imaginary childhood companion. But we do know that she did send him several letters, addressed to The Hungarian Museum of Photography from the age of eleven to fourteen⁶⁶ and then again from 2010 onwards – she is sixty-eight at the time, and her psychotic breakdown brings back this character. This shows that the reality and the imaginary get mixed up at precise moments of immense disarray. Between these two periods she does mention him from time to time, but without her friends and family ever really knowing if she’s talking about an acquaintance, an illustrious unknown figure, or if it’s just a joke. Two elements are particularly notable with the creation of Ernst Legy. First, the age at which he first appears (ten), and next, his permanence over time. The character’s fantasized “resurrection” – in 2010 – highlights his equally imaginary “death” and sheds a special light on the episode in the cellar where Jeanne is frightened by the dead. It may indeed be possible to see the figure of Ernst Legy as a form given to the dead,⁶⁷ and the cellar of the house as a metaphor for the unconscious.

“Go away! Go away! Word of the living!”⁶⁸

After her father's death, Jeanne and her mother moved house several times, from public housing to public housing.

⁶⁴ Giani G., *Il bambino e i suoi doppi. L'ombra e i compagni immaginari nello sviluppo del Sé*, Boringhieri 1993.

⁶⁵ Harris, P. L., « Penser à ce qui aurait pu arriver si... » in *Enfance*, 54, 2002.

⁶⁶ Interview with Jacques Durieux, June 2022, by Jeanne's mother, Mercédès Rozsda.

⁶⁷ Including the dead of the lines from which his father (the millions of Jews who died in the Second World War) and mother (the millions who died under Franco's dictatorship) descended.

⁶⁸ Saint-John Perse, *Œuvres complètes, Eloges XV, Vents, I*, Paris Gallimard, La Pleiade, p. 196.

Mother and daughter first settled for a few years in an apartment on Quai Louis Blériot in the 16th arrondissement, which in the 1950s was one of the first neighbourhoods to build large housing complexes.⁶⁹ Then Mercedes, Jeanne's mother, landed a job, thanks to a friend, as an administrative assistant at Carala, on Courcelles Street in the 8th arrondissement. They moved once again, and then again to the 20th arrondissement, Pyrénées Street, before one last move to the 13th, to Barrault Street.

Maybe all of these moves caused Jeanne to lose interest in school. She quenched her thirst for knowledge in the local libraries where she spent entire days, writing letters that she signed as her mother to get out of school. It was in a library in the 13th arrondissement where she met Jacqueline Castillo who would become a life-long friend⁷⁰. The friends would discuss serialized novels as they read the paper, *Ma cousine Rachel* or *Les gens de Mogador*, and novels like *Bonjour tristesse* or *Homme invisible pour qui chantes-tu ?* They went to the cinema to see *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* – this remained a cult film for Jeanne Durieux - *La Strada*, *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé*, *Les Tricheurs*. Together they roamed the upscale neighbourhoods of 1950's Paris, a Paris in the midst of renovation and rebuilding⁷¹. They'd admire the new cars showcased on the Champs Elysées, discover the book vendors who were just starting to appear along the Seine riverbanks, stroll through the Tuileries or Luxembourg Gardens, newly opened after the occupation years. They'd also visit Montmartre to watch the painters and artists there.

In January 1955, at thirteen years old, Jeanne and Jacqueline went to watch the construction of a dam being built to counter the flooding of the Seine. At this site, Jeanne would have made her first photographic report.⁷² The next year, she shot a series on the merchandise that arrived on the Seine: wine, wood, etc.

⁶⁹ Texier S., *Paris 1950, un âge d'or de l'immeuble*, catalogue de l'exposition, Paris, Éd. du Pavillon de l'Arsenal.

⁷⁰ See document n°1 in the first part of the book.

⁷¹ Crestani A., *Paris Années 50*, Geste édition, p. 145-158. 2011.

⁷² Interview with Henri Durieux, July 2022.

Jeanne and Jacqueline took the bus to watch the airplanes coming and going at Orly Airport; they enjoyed themselves at the fair, *la Foire du Trône*, which at that time was held in the 11th and 12th arrondissements; they'd go to the capital's free exhibitions and to events like “*la course annuelle des garçons de café*” or the 14th of July Ball. Jeanne was interested in the world around her and the jobs that risked to disappear: coal transporter, sandwich board advertiser, street peddler... She felt suffocated when confined to a classroom.

From a purely academic point of view, Jeanne was a fairly average student up until high school. In 1959, however, she passed her baccalaureate in philosophy in the first session. In 1960, Jeanne attended a year of seminars at the Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Sociale set up by Claude Lévi-Strauss at the EHESS⁷³. Despite her interest in anthropology, she could not remain within the confines of student life. During that year, Jeanne frequently visited Saint-Germain-des-Prés, la Fontaine des Quatre Saisons, le Vieux Colombier or le Blue Note. At that time, she also enrolled in photography classes in the 5th arrondissement. At the end of the year, thanks to Roger Bastide,⁷⁴ she received a grant to travel to Brazil and shoot a photographic series on the farmers of Nordeste.⁷⁵ Regarding this trip, Jeanne liked to tell, how just after her philosophy degree, she had gone to see a psychic on the 5th floor of a small building in Montmartre, Madame Smeralda, and that she had seen “a great journey” in her future.

She really couldn't believe it⁷⁶. This trip to Brazil was the start of a journey around the world where she would live off odd jobs and selling her photos to local papers.

⁷³Monod J-C., (dir) *Dictionnaire Lévi-Strauss, entrée Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Sociale (LAS)*, Collection Bouquins, Paris, 2022 p. 565-576.

⁷⁴ French sociologist and anthropologist (1898–1974) specializing in Brazil and Afro-Brazilian cultures.

⁷⁵ Unfortunately, this photographic series remains untraceable.

⁷⁶ Interview with Henri Durieux, May 2022; a photograph of the entrance to this building with the fortune teller's plaque can be seen in Anne Crestani, *Paris Années 50*, Geste édition, 2011, p. 256.

In Bahia she met Pierre Verger⁷⁷ who, certainly impressed with her sense of initiative, gave her the opportunity to enter the circles of *Candomblé*, the Afro-Brazilian religion into which he was initiated.



Photos Bresil family archives 1 – Nordeste ©

⁷⁷ French photographer and ethnologist (1902–1996) specializing in Afro-Brazilian religions. For more information on Pierre Verger's career, see the excellent book by Souty J., Pierre Fatumbi Verger. *Du regard détaché à la connaissance initiatique*, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 2007.



Photos Bresil family archives 2 – Nordeste ©

After Brazil, other trips followed as opportunities arose. It was also during her travels that she met the man she was to marry. In a letter to her mother, she recounts her meeting with Henri Durieux in 1962.

Document #8: Letter from Jeanne Durieux to her mother, undated – personal archives of the Durieux family.

Dear Mom,

I hope that you get this letter from across the world! I'm currently in Savai'i in the Samoa islands (look at a globe, it's in the middle of the Pacific Ocean). What beauty! I'm excited to show you my photos.

Mom, I'm also writing to tell you that I met – at the home of an old Frenchman, who tells me tales of his life on a schooner (The Korrigane, I think⁸²), a charming young man. His name is Henri Durieux, and he's a technician (though he prefers the term "explorer"!) at the Institut d'Océanographie in Paris. He is very funny. I think I've fallen crazy in love. I'm sending you all my love and I hope Charles is well.

Henri told us this about their first encounter⁷⁸ :

"Jeanne was so surprising. The day we met she smiled and said 'there's no need to court me, I'm already won over' before laughing out loud. I didn't know what it was really like for her at the time, but I was young and completely seduced by this intrepid young woman who was traveling the world, taking photographs and saying she would be the most famous photographer of the 20th century. There was magic in the air."⁷⁹.

One day, in 1965, while she was back in Paris, Jeanne sent a surprising letter to Henri :

Document #9: Letter from Jeanne Durieux to Henri Durieux dated June 13th, 1965 – Durieux family archives

*Dear Henri,
I hope that you're really missing me! You'll never guess who I met on the train to Brest! Jack!!
My God how he's changed since the last time. He was drunk; he barely recognized me. We chatted a little.*

⁷⁸ Interview July 2022.

⁷⁹ No mention of Jeanne Durieux is made in the magnificent work by Luce Lebart and Marie Robert, *Une histoire mondiale des femmes photographes* (A Global History of Women Photographers), published by Textuel, Paris, 2020.

*He explained how he'd missed his plane to Orly so instead he followed his desire to see his ancestors in Brest. We spoke a bit about the Ocean. A book written, or to-be written... I'll tell you all about it my love! That Kerouac!
Sending all my love, Jeanne.*

We know today that Jeanne was capable of many fantasies. Nevertheless, Stéphanie Leroux, lecturer at the Catholic University of Lille, geographer, and enthusiast of American literature, puts it this way:

"This letter really answers something, because we know from his writing and from certain testimonies that Kerouac did go to Brest for genealogical research and, mysteriously, as soon as he arrived there, he left. Jeanne Durieux's letter states that she met Kerouac and found him to be a changed man - which is true, from 1959 onwards he took to alcohol. In his book Santori in Paris, he recalls meeting a woman between Rennes and Brest (...). I imagine it could have been Jeanne. At the same time, you can feel that his state is changing. So, it's really a big mystery, and this letter explains, or at least gives clues that would be interesting to explore (...) Before meeting him on the train, it's possible that she had met him in France, Morocco or the United States. He was always surrounded by a lot of young people, students. The Ocean reference is interesting. There's actually a book he wrote called The Ocean is my Brother; he's referring to that."⁸⁰

The Durieux's decide never to part again, and wander the world for several years, stopping only briefly in Paris – mainly due to Henri's work. Passionate about world literature, Jeanne learns foreign languages. One evening, while visiting mutual friends in Paris, the couple met ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget,⁸¹ who spoke about his collection of Bantu music from French Equatorial Africa, recorded as part of the Ogooué-Congo Mission in 1946.

⁸⁰ Interview with the author June 2022.

⁸¹ French ethnomusicologist (1916–2017). Co-founder with Jean Rouch in 1964 of the Audiovisual Laboratory of the EPHE V^c section.

Jeanne decided, then and there, to start recording the sounds – songs and languages – of the people she met.



Illustration 7 - Bantou Music Collection Museum of Mankind ©

Jeanne also began making photographic assemblages for postcards. Travel was always a real source of excitement for her. Accompanying Henri on his missions was an opportunity to carry out her different projects, the usual visual ones, and the more recent sound projects.

The years go by, Jeanne was twenty-seven and they were in Ulan Bator, when she gave birth prematurely to their child, Philippe Durieux, in May 1969. While staying with a French geographer, Françoise Klein, whom she had met a few months earlier in Shanghai after an expedition to the China Sea, Jeanne felt the first contractions of the coming birth.

The parents were overjoyed at the sight of the baby and rushed back to Paris where they planned to stay a few months to “introduce the baby” to family and friends, including Jacqueline Castillo.

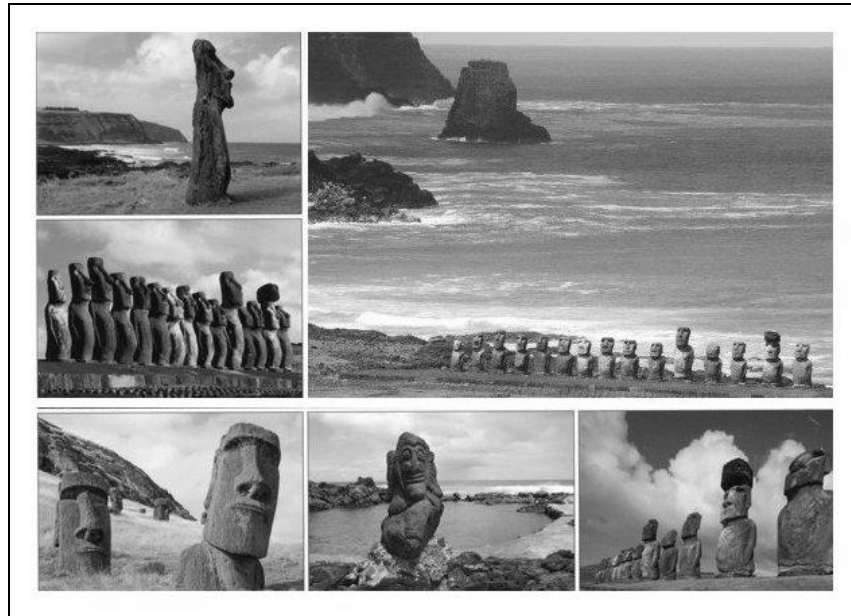


Photo Easter Island – Assembly for postcard, Easter Island ©



Photo Polynesia – Assembly for postcard, Rangiroa ©

In Vincennes, they moved into a small apartment at 27 Laitières Street, on the seventh and top floor. Philippe was a peaceful baby, and as a child he developed an early taste for music. At the time, Paris was undergoing major transformations. 1968 was on everyone's mind. Jeanne looked through the magazines kept by Mercedes at the images of the barricades in the Latin Quarter, the clashes between demonstrators and the CRS, the closed Sorbonne, the dissolution of the Assembly. She must have been thinking of her mother's accounts of the escape from Spain. She read Foucault, Barthes, Lacan, Bourdieu and, according to Henri, reveled in the new language and the new landscape of Paris. She listened to *Janis Joplin*, *The Beatles*, *The Doors*, but never forgot what she called “the musical notes of travel”: tango, salsa, capoeira, Celtic or Asian music. She enjoyed creating choreographies that she presented to Henri and Philippe.

It is in this context of cultural appetite that she decided to bring order to her photographs and writings and came up with the idea of presenting a series of lectures on her travels. In nearly ten years, she had journeyed through some forty countries. Henri had accepted every foreign assignment, and Jeanne had taken many photographs, sold numerous images to journalists, and designed many postcards. She also taught translation and ethnology at the EPHE.

More often than not, Jeanne's lectures took place at the EHESS – where she occasionally ran into Lévi-Strauss. Jean Rouch once attended one of her presentations and encouraged her to take an interest in the funeral rituals of the societies she visited. She didn't listen though. At that time, only life interested her. Her friends urged her to attend the increasingly popular lectures that Philippe Lacan was giving at Saint-Anne's Hospital. She preferred to spend her time in museums and cultural spaces.



Photo Rwanda – Assembly for postcard, Rwanda ©

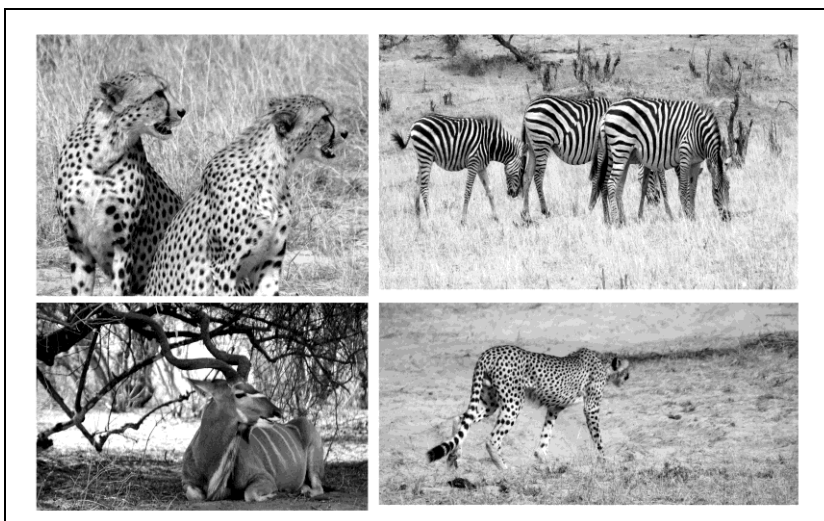


Photo Botswana – Assembly for postcard ©

Beyond the images she brought back, Jeanne recounts the construction of her identity in this quest for Elsewhere, and evokes the taste she developed during her travels for the postcard as a portion of Elsewhere within everyone's reach. Postcards were of growing interest to publications of the time.⁸² As far as Jeanne Durieux's postcards are concerned, we can observe a recurrence in terms of form: an assembly of photographs cropped to give different perspectives of the place visited, looking as far as the eye can see. But more interestingly, these assemblages seem to be organized around a point, a theme. Consider the two animal postcards: the one from Rwanda showing gorillas illustrates both their *belonging to a space* (from which they seem to gradually emerge) and the question of maternity and its place in the group.

⁸² Voltaire L., « La carte postale n'est pas un gadget » in *Communication et Langages* 31, 1976, p. 87-104.

We know that for gorillas, the bond between mother and baby is extremely strong – the baby doesn't leave its mother's arms until it is six months old, and is breast-fed until it is three. The postcard from Botswana seems to highlight *the question of out-of-view*: something is happening elsewhere, inaccessible to the viewer. It is towards this Elsewhere that possible departures converge. While a face-to-face encounter is possible with primates, the same cannot be said for savannah animals, who seem constantly on alert.

The years go by, and Jeanne Durieux's lectures never draw a full house. Jacqueline Castillo and other close friends attend, no doubt applauding her warmly. Yet these friends are increasingly absorbed by the political transformations of their time – particularly those affecting the status of women. Jeanne must have, once again, felt somewhat out of step with her social circle. Thanks to her acquaintances at EHESS, she finds employment as a research technician at the CNRS, but this excessively administrative work quickly bores her – much like George Perec. Just like in her school days, she starts playing hooky, and eventually doesn't show up to work anymore. According to Henri, during this time, she was suffering from depression and sleepwalking. This seems to frighten her young son Philippe, as illustrated by the testimony from the cultural mediators of the Philharmonie de Paris Lison Delforge⁸³ and Marie Vidal de la Blache⁸⁴

“In 2018, my friend Marie and I organised a conference at the Philharmonie de Paris about several pianist-performers, including Philippe Durieux. During a question/reply session, one man in the audience asked Philippe about how his mother inspired his artistic life. He muttered a response for the audience, but backstage – although we were not yet pursuing the question of who Jeanne Durieux was – he spoke to us of a deeply emotional childhood memory.

⁸³ Lison Delforge, *Construire les souvenirs et les identités*, supervised by Sylvie Dubois, FLSH, October 2023.

⁸⁴ Marie Vidal de La Blache, *Réappropriation du corps et de l'identité*, supervised by João de Oliveira, FLSH, October 2023.

One night, when he was only just a child, he woke up in a panic from a nightmare and called out for his mother. From his dark room, he saw his mother quickly appear in the doorway, a red light from an advertisement outside lit up her face in the dark. But she didn't move. She looked at him with hallow eyes and turned away, without saying a word. That night he felt entirely alone. It wasn't until much later that he would understand that his mother suffered from psychological illness."

Depression, sleepwalking, Jeanne's mood was ever-changing. One day Henri got offered a job which required him to travel to the four corners of the world to collect geological data ⁸⁵. Jeanne's enthusiasm returned. The couple and their child travelled the world. Sometimes they were very close to upheavals, sometimes far away. For example, they were at the Salar de Uyuni when the death of General de Gaulle was announced in France. In Chili for Pinochet's Coup d'Etat: one of their close friends, Miguel Asturias, is among the 4,000 who disappeared during this dictatorship. With her camera in hand, Jeanne tried to record the confusion in the *Plaza de la Moneda* before leaving the country for Colombia, but her roll of film was confiscated at the airport. The number of Chilean exiles in France soared to 15,000⁸⁶. And some of the couple's Chilean friends were able to claim exile in France. While they waited for housing, the Durieux's lent them their apartment. A network of activists was set up to welcome these friends and the ones who would follow. It was around this time that the couple met filmmaker Chris Marker. Over dinner at the home of a mutual friend, Marker explained that he wanted to help a Chilean filmmaker show his film denouncing the coup d'état, in France. Chris Marker would evoke this period in his short film *Ambassade*, in which the Durieux couple is featured in the last shot. In Colombia, they are welcomed by their friend Fernando Monroy, a specialist in Spanish art, who recounts:

⁸⁵ An unedited film, available for consultation at the BNF, was produced by the couple about their years of world travel: *Voyages (1970-2000, Durieux, 4h)*.

⁸⁶ Prognon N., *Les exilés chiliens en France, entre exil et retour (1973-1994)*, EUE, Saarbrücken, 2011.

“I remember that during a dinner I organized with members of the Picasso family, Jeanne was quite disagreeable and irritable. She found Picasso very macho and didn't like his relationship with women. The dinner was explosive! But now it makes me laugh!”



Illustration 8 - French Communist Party poster for Chile
Salvador Allende (1908-1973), 1973 ©

The seventies also marked the end of the Spanish and Portuguese dictatorships. From the Congo where they were, Jeanne sent a letter to her mother, unaware of her mother's difficult battle with cancer. Death came unexpectedly. Mercedes passed away on June 30, 1979.

Document #10: Letter from Jeanne Durieux to her mother Mercedes undated. The letter is part of the Durieux family archives

Dear Mom,

I would love to be there with you to celebrate this incredible moment in history! After darkness after agony, comes death, here it is: All that was left of Francoism is now dead, isn't it? I would love to be able to talk about it with you.

Sending you all my love, Jeanne.

A telegram from Jacqueline Castillo informed Jeanne of her mother's death. Jeanne was completely overwhelmed by this news that came totally unexpectedly to her. The couple and their child return to France for a few weeks. Among the various condolences received by mail, Jeanne found a postcard from an Iranian friend, Nahid Rahimi, who had returned home after studying in France. The Shah had been deposed and Ayatollah Khomeini was in power. The card contained a simple sentence: *"The shape may be different, but the core remains the same."*

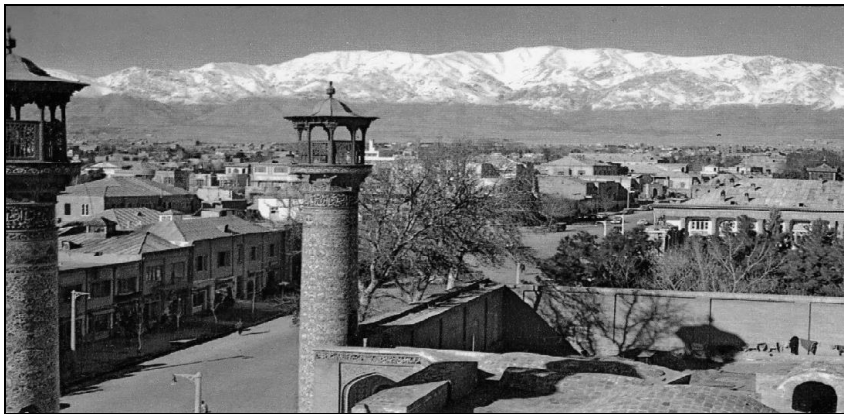


Illustration 9 - Postcard, Iran, 1979

At this time, Henri was made responsible for scientific missions in Africa, and the couple resumed their travels. They were in Botswana when, in 1980, Zimbabwe, formerly Rhodesia, was recognized as independent by the United Kingdom, its former British colony. They decided to go there after several years of civil war. It was also the year of John Lennon's death. The couple had thought they had seen him at an international airport just a few months earlier.

Philippe was fourteen when the Durieux family decided to return to France to send him to school in Paris. On this subject, two young researchers in the arts, one a specialist in photography, Sarra Barira⁸⁷ the other in musical art, Bertille Roux⁸⁸ bear witness to an encounter with Philippe Durieux and his experience of being a son:

“Following a weekend in Paris with Bertille, we unfortunately missed our train back to Lille. While waiting for the next one, we went to Café Terminus Nord for a hot chocolate. I told Bertille about the progress I'd made with my dissertation – I was working on black and white in documentary photography at the time – and about the women photographers I'd discovered – in particular a little-known photographer called Jeanne Durieux. At that moment, a man sitting at the next table said: ‘Excuse me, are you speaking about Jeanne Durieux? My name is Philippe, Philippe Durieux.’ By extraordinary circumstance, the son of one of the photographers I was researching had also missed his train and had come to take comfort in the same cafe. We had a long and interesting discussion about the work of his mother. Very quickly the conversation turned from general to personal. Both Bertille and I felt a contrast in the admiration he had for his mother and the sense of abandonment that he felt through his childhood and adolescence.

⁸⁷ Sarra Barira, *L'objet photographique comme support de la mémoire dans l'autofiction féminine des années soixante-dix*, supervised by David Faltot, FLSH, October 2023.

⁸⁸ Bertille Roux, *Les supports musicaux à l'ère numérique*, supervised by Zineb Majdouli, FLSH October 2023.

He spoke about the strong emotional investment that Jeanne Durieux put into her photography and how that left him feeling hollow when he was younger. Jeanne Durieux, in her strong desire to capture the essence of the lives of Others, sometimes forgot about those who were dear to her⁸⁹..”

Philippe Durieux suffered from being separated from his parents but understood that his mother had “an irrepressible need to escape any sedentary lifestyle.”⁹⁰ In 1983, when he was fourteen, there was a photographic exhibition at the Galerie Leroy in the 13th arrondissement. Jeanne presented photographs of countries she had visited, reworked with paint. Once again, the exhibition was not a success, even though she said she was satisfied with the experience. A few years later, while Philippe was protesting alongside those supporting the creation of the *Solidarnosc* trade union in Poland, Jeanne and Henri postponed a trip to Mexico due to an earthquake. The Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and AIDS are among the events that Jeanne wrote about in a diary destroyed in 2010.⁹¹ The world was starting to scare her. And then Nelson Mandela's liberation along with technological progress of the time – personal computers, cell phones, email... – got her excited once again. During the ‘90s, Jeanne’s conference series « *Capturer la beauté du monde* » finally seemed to get hold of the public’s eye. Michel Feugain, lecturer at the Université Catholique de Lille, poet, and specialist of Africa analyses some of the photographs that were presented:

“Mrs. Durieux had known Africa in its authenticity. Take this photograph where we see a drummer and his drum. This drum is the symbol of masculinity for the people of West Cameroon, and we see that he is obliged to carry the drum between his legs. If the image were whole, we would also see another drum with three legs standing upright, symbolizing the woman (...). It’s also important to know that the circle is the symbol of the whole.

⁸⁹ Interview 2023.

⁹⁰ Philippe Durieux, interview July 2022.

⁹¹ Philippe Durieux, interview July 2022.

In this photograph with the blue masks, the body paint, it's death that is being dealt with. For these aboriginal peoples, white is the colour of death. As for this photo of a hut, it's a relic, with its pyramidal shape and thatched roof, that's what's left of Egypt in Africa. These photos speak of the cycle of life and death. This way of portraying the rituals, festivals, and sacred dances is very interesting. It exposes the heart of the African people."



Photos Afrique 1 & 2 ©



Photo Afrique 3 ©

The couple spends more and more time in France. Whenever she is in Paris, Jeanne continues to visit cultural spaces: museums, music festivals, and galleries, where she often meets up with her friends.

Photographic retrospectives always attract her. If she sometimes seems to wander absent – minded through the exhibitions, in reality she's looking for something precise – and elusive to others – something on which to hang a dream, a desire, or a neurosis⁹².

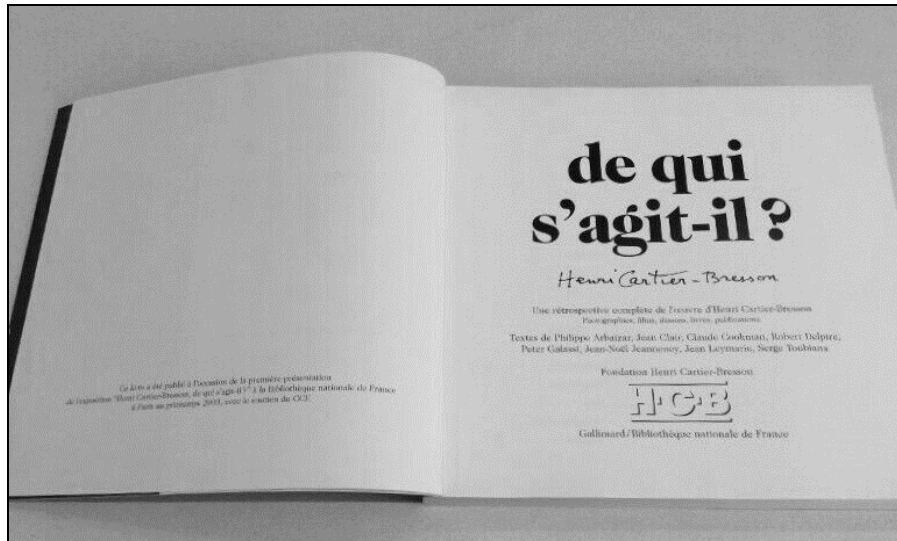


Illustration 10 - Catalog of the Cartier-Bresson exhibition.

Sophie Boutté⁹³, in charge of exhibitions for the City of Paris states:

“I crossed paths with Jeanne Durieux once at the BNF in Paris, during a major Henri Cartier-Bresson retrospective. It was in 2003 at an exhibition titled “De qui s’agit-il?” She must have been just over sixty then, I think. I was looking at one of the many photographs of couples embracing and more specifically, a couple kissing across a table on the patio of a Parisian café. In the photograph, the woman’s face isn’t visible; we see her from behind.”

⁹² Philippe Durieux, interview, July 2022.

⁹³ Friend of Philippe Durieux. Interview given to the author in July 2022.

And then someone came up to me and said 'it's me in the photo. I am Jeanne, Jeanne Durieux. And see over there? That's me too.' They were all photos of couples: one at Notre-Dame, the other at Saint-Sulpice. Couples in love at prominent Parisian locations. I didn't know how to act because I had the impression that it couldn't actually be her in all the photographs. Then she started to laugh, saying that she would have liked to be these women. Then she left, and I saw her saying the same thing to another woman who worked at the museum. I noticed that she was also pointing out a photograph of a child and a dog. It was funny, but also a little sad. She was both radiant and sad."

Et puis quelqu'un m'a abordée en me disant «c'est moi sur la photo. Je suis Jeanne, Jeanne Durieux et c'est moi sur la photo. Et vous voyez là ? Sur celle-là aussi c'est moi ». Il s'agissait toujours de couples : l'un à Notre-Dame, l'autre à Saint-Sulpice. Des couples d'amoureux dans des lieux parisiens. Je ne savais pas trop comment réagir car j'avais l'impression que cela ne pouvait pas être forcément elle sur toutes ces photographies. Soudain elle a éclaté de rire en disant qu'elle aurait aimé être ces femmes. Puis elle est parti et je l'ai vu dire la même chose à une autre femme du musée. J'ai remarqué qu'elle montrait aussi une photographie sur laquelle figurait un enfant avec un chien. C'était drôle mais aussi un peu triste. Elle était à la fois solaire et triste ».

It is interesting to see that Jeanne reproduced herself in these photographs evoking love. Was she alone at this exhibition? Was Henri with her?⁹⁴ Another interesting element is the fact that she pointed out a child with a dog. In fact, once while Bernard and I were having coffee at Philippe's house, two of his friends, documentarians Agathe Dupont⁹⁵ and Emma Fournier⁹⁶, spoke about when they met Philippe, and this resonates with the photo that Jeanne pointed out.

⁹⁴ Henri Durieux dit ne pas se souvenir de cette exposition et précise que Jeanne aimait s'y rendre seule ou avec son amie Jacqueline.

⁹⁵ Agathe Dupont, *Enjeux du documentaire intimiste*, FLSH octobre 2023.

⁹⁶ Emma Fournier, *Le deuil à travers le documentaire*, FLSH, octobre 2023.

"We met at a jazz concert. We knew Philippe Durieux by name, but we didn't know that his mother was a photographer. We were fascinated that night by the bar's little dachshund, Saxo, his biggest fan. When he saw how we admired little Saxo, Philippe told us that he had gotten the same type of dog for his fifteenth birthday. It was a gift from his mother. She had shot a series of photographs that she entitled "The boy and the dog". She was very proud of that. He told us about that time in his life with so much emotion; he had tears in his eyes and a smile on his face."

Chapter 2: Ernst Legy (1952-2018)

Having reached this stage of my research, one question emerges with a certain consistency: was Jeanne's whimsical behavior subjected to a form of family denial? The anecdote recounted by three musicians, friends of Jeanne Durieux's grandson, might suggest this? Here is the story of film-music creators, Paul René-Bazin de Jouy⁹⁷, Marc de Soyres⁹⁸ and Romain Basquin⁹⁹ :

“I knew Luka, the son of Philippe Durieux, because we went to music school together, and we worked together at the high school. We met Marc and Romain together. One day we were working at his house, well we were mostly playing actually. Luka’s parents invited us to stay for dinner, and we were talking about strange behaviours when Mr. Philippe Durieux, his father, told us about a strange memory: One day, during a trip to Quito with his parents, Jeanne Durieux, his mother, plain and simple, without any reason, got up and left the restaurant they were at. Afterwards they found her wondering aimlessly in the streets. Then, once she had seen them, everyone just acted as if nothing had happened”.

The story of Jeanne Durieux is an incredible one, of a woman who seems to regularly build up walls – and Ernst Legy seems to be just one of them – between herself and the world from which she sometimes withdraws.

Let’s try to better understand this imaginary character who accompanies Jeanne Durieux. As mentioned, he first appeared in Jeanne’s mind and life when she was grieving over her father, at ten years old.

⁹⁷Paul René-Bazin de Jouy, *Miyazaki, féerie et matérialisme* supervised by Sylvie Dubois, FLSH October 2023.

⁹⁸Marc de Soyres, *La course automobile au cinéma*, FLSH October 2023.

⁹⁹Romain Basquin, *Le deuil et la mort comme levier de déconstruction*, supervised by João de Oliveira, FLSH October 2023.

His characteristics gave him a sufficiently solid reality in the child's eyes for her to write him letters. In the course of a conversation with Henri Durieux, we discovered another aspect of this character and, by the same token, of the function he undoubtedly played in Jeanne Durieux's psychic life. The following is a transcription of the recording of a conversation we had with Henri Durieux on May 22nd, 2022.

"The first time that I heard about Ernst Legy, he was a character in a novel that Jeanne was trying to write. I remember she would read to me the different parts she had written in the day. The work never got finished, but she kept these different projects where Ernst Legy was the hero in a box. I must find it, you would certainly find some of it interesting. Up until then, nothing was abnormal. But one day I had overheard Jeanne talking about this novel with her mother, about this character, and I heard her mother cry 'No! Not that Ernst Legy again!' and Jeanne became enraged! She could sometimes be hot-tempered. She screamed, and swore to her mother that she would never tell her about her projects again. By that night the both of them had made up, but I couldn't help myself from asking Jeanne why her mother had said 'Not that Ernst Legy again!' So Jeanne told me the truth: she had created this character as a child, and she used to think he was real, wrote him letters, spoke to him, and that worried her mother. I didn't think much of it. Until one night, we were at some friends' house, and while eating dinner she said there was an exhibition of the famous photographer Ernst Legy at Austerlitz Station. It seemed so real. Time had passed, and then there was what we called "the episode in the basement", and the next day she asked me to post a letter to Ernst Legy. Then another letter the next day, and one the day after that. I don't remember what I did with those letters, but I did see reality: Jeanne did in fact believe that this character was a real person. At Sainte-Anne's they say she spoke about him from time to time. One day she told me that he came to visit her to show her his new photos, and that she found him to be very old and tired. That's what I can say about Ernst Legy."

One week later, Henri Durieux told us that their former neighbours, art restorers, had something they wanted us to see. So, Bernard and I went to the home of Sylvie and Christophe Brunellière one Saturday afternoon. We were only there a minute when Sylvie brought me a box:

“While they were moving, Jeanne – who I must say was already quite tired, and a little paranoid – told me to keep this box. I’ve looked through it with a rather distracted eye. It includes sketches, loose pages, notebooks. In short, works in progress. Henry told us that you are interested in her character, Ernst Legy. Well, he is everywhere in there.”

Christophe continued: *“I remember that when she spoke of Ernst Legy, saying he was a famous photographer, I believed it. She believed it to, I think, she spoke about it with such conviction!”¹⁰⁰*

Then Sylvie, herself a daughter of an Hungarian father added something important: *“Did you know that Legy means Fly in Hungarian?”* Immediately I thought of the brooch.

The box of archives, consulted on that same day, bears witness to the fact that Jeanne loved to write and draw up projects, most of which never saw the light of day, and Ernst Legy was present in various forms in the context of these multiple projects. It is important to reconstruct the fragments of her projects that have been found, before attempting to analyze the singular place of this being - in turns photographer, academic, poet, actor, director... - whom she absolutely could not renounce. We have numbered the projects that originally appear without numbering to facilitate reading and subsequent analysis.

Four projects in four pockets containing one or more handwritten texts, never dated, give Ernst Legy an important place, as the transcriptions below testify. Everything is imagined by Jeanne: publishing houses, summaries, events, stories...

¹⁰⁰ Interview August 2022.

Project #1: A Short Story: The Violin

A violinist forgets his violin in a hotel room after a night of love with a woman he met the night before. The woman is looking for him to give it back. Thus, she begins an urban wandering along the trail of bars where the man played. She meets old musician friends, a singer, a bartender, a photographer (Ernst Legy) and a magician, and is intrigued by a number of posters hung up on the city's main avenues, alleys and dead ends, echoing her quest.

*Wandering: to wander is not necessarily to be lost in a place, but rather to come to understand that we have lost or that we are lost within. Wandering implies a passage, a crossing, and an altered relationship to time: it seems to stretch, to slow down, as if in slow motion. To roam, to stray, to be mistaken—these are the prominent elements of the main stylistic figures associated with the notion of wandering, namely: **repetition** (to wander is to retrace a path already taken topographically or psychologically) **passage** (to wander is to reach – to rise or fall – to another state) and **dead end** (to wander is to carry the feeling of a dead end within oneself).*

Observation:¹⁰¹ : In this project there is an arrow linking the inscription Ernst Legy to the following text: “I remember having taken his photograph one night. Oddly enough when I developed my photo, he wasn’t there. Do you believe in ghosts?”

¹⁰¹ The “Observations” notes are mine.

Project #2: A work directed by the scholar Ernst Legy

Observation: the project includes 3 distinctive documents.

- **Document 1 – Publication: *Figures of the hen in European literature:***
Editions du Merlu – 185 pages – 75 francs. Texts compiled by Ernst Legy.

“This work, the 30th in the collection Dialogue des Editions du Merlu, is dedicated to the figure of the hen in European literature. It brings together all the texts presented at the Colloquium in Berlin. The texts, illustrating the interdisciplinary dialogue, are collocated and presented by Ernst Legy

The hen figure in European literature has particularly favoured the confrontation between disciplines. It is through intersecting perspectives that one begins to understand this figure and grasp its many layers of meaning. The arrangement retained by Ernst Legy highlights the richness of this figure, which in turn takes on the meaning of humanity’s frontier and anthropomorphized animality, and which gives meaning both to the notion of space, but also to that of time.” The editorial board.

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Narcissistic Wounds and Failures in The Red Hen by P.J. Mérouasse

(...) The hen, as we can see throughout the text, experiences various narcissistic anxieties and a masochistic behavior that will lead her to leave the peaceful space of the farm to venture and get lost in the meanderings of the Id. The beginning of the story depicts a worried hen – doesn't she look back several times to see the farm behind her in the distance? – but very quickly she'll be overcome with feelings of grandeur.

The reader can deduce that the hen thinks she is exceptional, "I will find my way all by myself." which signifies or implies to her "all the other hens will see my immeasurable grandeur". The goal of the hen is to become an object of admiration for all whom she meets. She is able to consider her entire life as an extraordinary one, one of admiration and envy. An attentive reader will quickly realise that the megalomaniac feelings are only temporary. Her journey makes her feel rejected by the other animals she meets along the way. In fact, the hen oscillates throughout the text – and here lies her strength – between her feelings of greatness and her profuse awareness that she is not as grand as she would have liked. In those moments, greatness was an ideal to which she measured her Self, whereas at other times – especially when she is engulfed in a feeling of omnipotence – she proves unable to distinguish between desire and reality. So, how to understand the role of the dove? The answer is at the very beginning of Mérouasse's text "The Red Hen was the farmers' favorite hen. She was born a few months after the sudden death of their child." It is all clear in this simple introduction! The farmers pour on the hen their overflow of love and affection. This outpouring over-stimulates the hen's narcissism (...)

The admiration that the farmers offer to the hen acts as narcissistic seduction, increases the very narcissism of the hen, and pushes her to identify with the phallus. The phrase «I will find my way all by myself» in the mouth of the hen illustrates the phallic character not sublimated of the ideal of the Self and its megalomaniac nature. But along the way, the hen encounters adversity.

The instability of the structure of Self and the oscillation between megalomaniac illusions and self doubt with the return to reality are reinforced by the existence of the primitive and cruel elements of the Higher Self: “you are just a hen” she says to herself over and over again. It is the return to reality that expels it from within her, casting her grandiose and redemptive Ideal into some distant elsewhere. This projection is embodied by the dove. The hen is the very illustration of what psychiatrists call a “borderline case.” It is an initiatory journey that the hen takes. What she outwardly projects as her ideal (the dove) substitutes the lost narcissism of her childhood when she was herself her own ideal (...)

- **Document 2: Interview with filmmaker Ernst Legy**

Journalist: Ernst Legy you're a renowned filmmaker. Why a film on the Red Hen?

E. Legy : Why not? (Laughs), it's a masterpiece of French literature. It was important for me to explore this tale and especially to give my opinion as an artist and a filmmaker on the controversial role of the dove. That's how I got the title “The Journey of the Hen”.

Journalist: You start the film with a dedication to certain ghosts. What does that mean? Do you already picture yourself in the great beyond? Or are you hoping for salvation at the wings of a dove?

E. Legy: (Laughs). No, No, the dedication is personal, an old childhood memory, all the more precious as I am not usually one to be nostalgic. I'm superstitious, and I use incantatory phrases in abundance! As for me, perhaps I'm slowly wasting away... (Laughs). No, I really shouldn't say that! The truth is, I hold Mérouasse in the highest esteem, and I simply cannot fathom how anyone could dispute his greatness.

Journalist: Where did you get the idea for this film? It's original...

E. Legy: I wanted to start with some very artistically fertile concepts for me such as saturation, repetition, or recycling of the same, as well as offset. All these things which, as an artist, I perceive very clearly in the book of Mérouasse and which, it seems to me, no exegete emphasizes.

Journalist: On that note, there's a slight audio delay...

E. Legy: That's what I wanted! On screen we can expose the disconnects between our words, our discourses..

It's like that in life, we would love to hear properly, but it's never easy, and even minor discrepancies are enough to obscure the way! The dissonance is there, but not only: it's also elsewhere in the film. The saturation of sound (from the beautiful music of Chico Science) and the saturation of light in certain scenes is an idea I borrowed from Brazilian cinema of the sixties.

Journalist: One might have the impression, since the word « journey » is in the title, that we don't really see a journey but more of a wandering with all these images of the city...

E. Legy: More like meandering. I like the idea of meandering. It's freer than walking and less dangerous than wandering. Maybe there is this idea in the film; in any case, the starting point was to move away from the podium – where I spoke to the audience, attempting to convince them that The Red Hen was, in fact, a metaphor for mankind's relationship with money – to find a space of resonance. And the city we roam, like any space we pass through, is always a fertile ground for resonance. Its echoes are endlessly diverse.

Journalist: And all those animals on the soundtrack?

E. Legy: There are two things to mention about that. First, since we were leaving the strictly animal realm of the book, we needed to keep the reference. Then, I wanted to emphasize an animalistic transformation – Kafka speaks of it so much better than I do! – in those to whom we deny our recognition. The hen is searching for recognition.

And with this film, I, myself, am searching for recognition. This is a never-ending quest of mine!

Journalist: You gathered a significant team to bring this film to life...

E. Legy : (Laughs). Those are the ghosts, but you know that!

- **Document 3: Obituary of Ernst Legy**

It is with much sadness that we announce the death of French filmmaker Ernst Legy. His family and friends said he was tired and brought down by the criticism of his most-recent film “The Journey of the Hen.” His suicide yesterday afternoon was a great shock to the cinema world. Some are saying that the press is responsible for the death of this filmmaker who was frequently condemned for his controversial opinions. The “cursed and pitifully misunderstood artist” as he called himself, suffered from great narcissistic failure, according to his psychoanalyst – who wishes to remain anonymous. His films were the projection of his Ideal Self. He left behind a filmography of immense wealth. Since the sad news, bouquets of flowers continue to arrive in front of his apartment at 18 Val-de-Grâce Street. His admirers will be able to gather in front of his coffin at the Montparnasse cemetery, this Thursday from 9am to 7pm. The private funeral will take place on Friday the 10th. To honour the memory of the filmmaker, Arte will be screening, at 8:50pm, Legy’s third feature film, Une vie de chien, with a brilliant performance by Dorothea Jouault, recipient of Best Actress at the Cannes Film Awards.

Project #3: News from Ernst Legy: The ghost of Ava Mirna,

To mark the 100th representation of Ava Mirna's Imaginary Memoirs at Saint-Antoine Theatre, actor Ernst Legy pays tribute to the great opera singer.

*"(...) No, do not turn off the light!
Do not try to break its hypnotic hold on
the poor butterfly. For you see, the butterfly,
with its life so brief, would still rather die
drunk on light than drowned in darkness..."
Ava Mirna, Imaginary Memoirs*

Destiny sometimes has a strange way of building bridges between what is and what once was. Yesterday, as everyday after rehearsal, I was walking home through Gabriel-Pierné Square, moving at a relaxed pace and already dreaming of a good glass of honey vodka. I suddenly felt something hard knock against my shoulder. An old woman, her right crutch raised toward me, called out:

-Look sir! You've lost something.

I must admit, at first, I was startled and agitated by the familiar and undistinguished tone with which this old lady had stopped me in the streets. But I also had this strange feeling come across me. Indeed, I had lost a pocket watch. Happy, I picked it up. This time piece was of great sentimental value to me. I stood up and had wanted to thank the stranger. But my breath had been taken away by surprise. I had to remain like that, speechless, incredulous, inert. She looked at me with a grin – or was it a smile? – raised her head in a semblance of pride and turned her back on me back before hobbling back along on her crutches.

That face, how did I not immediately recognize her... But was this possible?

Thirty years had passed. Yet Ava Mirna's eyes – despite the wrinkles, the dark circles, and that impenetrable glimmer of sadness – had retained their sparkling liveliness. Ava! Ava Mirna! I held that pocket watch tight in my hand and told myself that destiny sometimes has a strange way of building bridges between what is and what once was. That pocket watch, the very one I had just picked up, hadn't it been hers long ago?

I would like nothing more than to be able to remember all those details... But it's all difficult. I first met Ava Mirna at one of those suppers she loved to host at her home after the final performance of her shows. It was the Belle Époque. Or maybe the end. The Parisian facades had given way to the charm of Art Nouveau. All the young generation were out in the city's cabarets, like the Moulin Rouge. We admired the impressionist paintings, maybe because we knew that Picasso, Braque or Matisse would soon show us different pathways. Ava had invited a few close friends, including a photographer with whom I shared, at the time, the warmth of a bed, if not that of the heart. Back then Ava was a radiant image of beauty and joy. "The most promising opera singer of the year!" she'd like to say again and again. It was thus during that evening that I approached this singular being.

To explain what I found so singular, so unique in her seems very difficult to me! Perhaps it was the impression of light and poetry that emanated from her, or perhaps an intuitive and unconscious perception, at the time, of a deeply complex being. Of a being who would have given everything to conceal from others the sharp awareness she had of her own misery and her struggle simply to exist. But the fact remains that Ava had a gift for drawing attention – and as such, she drew mine. And for those fifteen or so years that followed this unique encounter, I would keep all the newspaper articles regarding the one they called "scandalous Ava."

From reading these various articles, Ava seemed to live up to the myth. Her clothing was as sumptuous and extravagant as her behavior. The little pop singer from the Eldorado stage, catapulted to diva status in Eastern Europe before performing for European audiences, found her first roles as courtesan Thaïs or princess Fedora – establishing her as one of the lyrical genre's rising stars.

Then came the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Flora Tosca, La Traviata, Carmen, each of these essential milestones solidified her presence with that distinctive mezzo-soprano voice, both sharp and velvety. Ava joyfully appeared on the covers alongside her lovers.

She would have murdered one of them, Eddy Saxes, tried to die for another, the young Pierre-Jean Moscoll... Despite this irresistible flame that she brought to her roles; despite her impudence; because she was not content with singing Salome, she also performed the dance of the seven veils revealing under the eyes of a hypocritically scandalized public, her milky and sensual nudity; despite all this, Ava was only a small flickering flame. A flickering flame in the heart of the metamorphosis wind that was blowing over Europe at the time when new artistic forms were being conceived and where the bourgeois certainties of the past were flattening in the face of expressionism, fauvism, cubism and other movements.

The apparition of silent film finally changed things. Movie stars became the new public idols. The divas looked very old-fashioned! I recall in my memoirs, this article where it is reported that during the Great War, Ava wore the mourning costume of the Alsations and sang the Marseillaise with her vibrant voice resonating at the front and in the back. Or another article, on November 11th, 1918, the day of the Armistice, when she sang the sacred anthem on the steps of the opera with her throat tied up in tears.

I also recall this photo of her, many years later, illustrating the few lines in Le Parisien the day after her death. A gloved hand resting on her nape, eyes strikingly rimmed with black, lost in memories and covered by a veil of mourning.

The article detailed the remains of accumulated wealth, clothing, jewelry, furniture and the torments of her long illness. I thought I knew everything there was to know about Ava Mirna. After the announcement of her death, didn't I have this project that had kept me in awe for two years, to write her biography?

Tireless, I had then questioned many of those who had approached her from afar or had close contact with her. But perhaps projects exist only to take us away from the idea of our own death. My book never came to be. Ava had me obsessed to the point of appearing to me as an optical illusion, an image of the mind.

I remember that day, some time after her death, at an auction house, I acquired her magnificent slant-front Venetian secretary desk topped with an ornamental element dating from the mid-18th century, decorated with lacquer paint and colored copper engraving depicting landscapes, as well as one of her magnificent jewellery boxes attributed to Martin Carlin around 1778 made of amaranth and plane wood, adorned with plaques of Sèvres porcelain. These two objects, onced placed in my home, might also be asked questions. Because objects do speak to those who know how to listen. And their language is often richer than the language of man. So, imagine my joy, my sheer delight, upon discovering within that secretary desk a false bottom, from which I was able to extract this pocket watch; and a sheet titled "Ava Mirna, The Imaginary Memoirs", where a few phrases written in her own writing could be read; and most importantly this precious little bundle of letters, carefully tied with a ribbon.

My memory, this precious gift that weaves the thread on which we tightrope walk, after all these years is unfortunately lacking. These are only a few fragments of letters that I can manage to glimpse in the incandescence of my memories. Love letters, breakups and insults too. But letters that gave a whole other impression of Ava.

No, Ava wasn't this force of nature. She was merely a butterfly drunk on light and death. No, she was not that cheerful confidence claiming to have no fear about competing with the stars of Hollywood.

No, she didn't love Pierre-Jean Moscoll, at the time a little-known poet who called her a fallen angel lost among men, to the point of wanting to commit suicide for him.

The reasons for suicide are often complex, and the cited cause is usually just an alibi, a pass that one may spend a lifetime trying to obtain. No, she would have never assassinated Eddy Sax because Eddy Sax was simply a figure of her imagination, Mr Sax had never existed. Jazz had arrived at that time from the United States, along with the great soloists from New Orleans and Chicago. The Casino de Paris was fully booked with shows including the triumphant Mistinguett and Josephine Baker.

And Ava, tired and prematurely aged, wanted people's eyes to remain on her. To continue to exist in her own eyes. A lover that we invent is never really a lie but more of a metaphor. The metaphor of desire or fear. It's an entire era that she would have liked to assassinate.

No, Ava wasn't at all as we'd imagined. I've forgotten now what the lies were because I prefer legends too. But I know that there wasn't much truth to Ava. I burnt the letters, all the letters from her only confidant, Pierre-Jean Moscoll who will take his secret to the grave. The only one who knows the entire truth about the Diva and her house of cards. A house as fragile as your soul, Ava. With these letters, I also burnt the idea of her biography. Because who cares about the truth? Hasn't it always been so irreverently transient? But tell me, Ava, can we lie about our own death?

Yesterday my legs were in pain and I had trouble walking down the boulevard. When this heaviness and immobility finally subsided, a very young man came up to me; he took off his hat and handed me a piece of paper and a pen.

– I'm sorry to bother you, he said, I was at your rehearsal this afternoon. Can I have your autograph? ... You were splendid in the role of Eddy Sax! But tell me, did this singer, Ava Mirna really exist?

– Ava Mirna, I replied with a tight throat and a heart nourished by these tears coming from the immaculate depths of my soul, Ava Mirna did not only exist, sir, she lived. And who knows? Maybe she is still living in this theatre which is life or on this very boulevard, between you and I.

Project #4: A collection of poems and prose, Ernst Legy, ed. Rivières, 1969

“I noticed the burns on the fingers. He told me that he was turning the pages of his book of life. That the pages were burning away as he was turning them. That all the passion that he put into writing them had disappeared under the burning embrace of passing time. That there remained now, after all those dreams and illusions of himself, only the certitude of having always been on the run. And he laughed whole-heartedly, seeing in the reflection of my eyes, that face of his, as he told me his story.”



Photo wilted flowers

Analysis

Let's take a closer look at these projects, some more complete than others, left by Jeanne Durieux and where Ernst Legry takes multiple forms.

In project #1, two elements are most noticeable: first, the anonymity of the people and places: a man, a woman, a hotel room, friends, a singer, a magician... Only Ernst Legy stands out in this blurry script. And this blur goes as far as the disappearance of the protagonist. ("I remember taking his photograph one night. Oddly enough when I developed my photo, he wasn't there. Do you believe in ghosts?") Second, the situation of wandering coupled with the quest for a missing being.

It's impossible to miss here the parallel between Jeanne Durieux's father, who had disappeared, and the camera that he left her. The tale is reconstructed into a love story between a man and a woman, where the camera is now the violin, but the heath seems to be the same, and out of it Ernst Legy is born as a separate being. As for the wandering – which much later will become Jeanne's wandering – it could be considered as one way to label the grieving that must be done. Thus, if we replace the term wandering by the term grief, her text would be as follows:

*Grief: to grieve is not necessarily to be lost in a place, but rather to come to understand that we have lost or that we are lost within. Grief implies a passage, a crossing, and an altered relationship to time: it seems to stretch, to slow down, as if in slow motion. To roam, to stray, to be mistaken – these are the prominent elements of the main stylistic figures associated with the notion of grief, namely: **repetition** (to grieve is to retrace a path already taken topographically or psychologically) **passage** (to grieve is to reach – to rise or fall – to another state) and **dead end** (to grieve is to carry the feeling of a dead end within oneself).*

While Ernst Legy emerges as a singular identity within the anonymous group, he isn't able to photograph the man who disappeared.

Moving from the postulate that this man is the father, we can then, like Jeanne Durieux, catch a sight of the limits of all sublimation. Nothing can restore this loss. It is not present in the photograph. “Do you believe in ghosts?” sounds like one last effort to think of him in an Elsewhere rather than nowhere.

What would have become of this project if it had been written? Would the different characters have a name? Was Jeanne Durieux – an avid reader – trying out a hybrid form of the Nouveau Roman (New Novel) where, as theorised by Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute:

*“The character-driven novel is indeed a thing of the past; it reflects a different time: one that celebrated the individual at their highest point. Whether or not this is progress is debatable, but one thing is certain: today’s era is one of coded identities.”*¹⁰²

*“It is with a heavy heart that the novelist grants everything that might make one [the character] too easily identifiable: physical aspects, gestures, actions, emotions, and familiar feelings, studied and so well-known, and which help give such a lifelike appearance and offer the reader such an easy point of entry.”*¹⁰³ »

We don’t think that. On the contrary, we think that all these projects were first and foremost written for her. Without any ambitions regarding the form, but with major stakes in the content: to heal the wound caused by her loss in a moment of psychological unpreparedness.

Project #2 consists of different elements: Firstly, the appearance of a work called “Figures of the hen in European literature” for which Ernst Legy is a scholar with a background in psychoanalysis, judging by the way he presents the work. Then, the interview with Ernst Legy the filmmaker, who has adapted the story to film. And finally, his obituary. In these three documents, the identity of Ernst Legy is shifting.

¹⁰² Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Pour un nouveau roman*, Minit, Paris. 1967, p.28.

¹⁰³ Nathalie Sarraute, *L’Ère du soupçon*, Gallimard, Paris, 1956. p.47.

First a scholar (after having been a photographer in Jeanne's imagination in project number 1) then a filmmaker, in the subsequent projects he takes on other identities.

It's important to bring out the common denominator between the scholar and the filmmaker. *Melancoly* seems to unite these two different characters or two different facets of the same figure. Behind the satiric first layer of the fake Table of Contents, the text of the presentation attributed to Ernst Legy uses vocabulary focussing on *hurt*, *weakness*, powerlessness, "*instability of the structure of Self*", a "*borderline-case*" and ending in language that is somewhat abstruse: "*What she outwardly projects as her ideal (the dove) substitutes the lost narcissism of her childhood when she was herself her own ideal (...)*" That is what is to be made of the first document. The second document, which parodies an interview, talks of *ghosts*, *agony*, and *childhood memories*. Once again, behind the laughs – always indicated in parenthesis – the gravity is apparent. The third document outlines the *suicide* of Ernst Legy, his fatigue, and his failure. Everything assembled here summons a melancholy to which Jeanne Durieux is able to give shape.

Project #3 is a text that Jeanne attributes to Ernst Legy and even in the title the question of disappearance and absence is present: "The Ghost of Ava Mirna". Here, this project gives real depth to Ernst Legy, and we see him morph from photographer, to scholar, and now actor; however, beyond that something is being said about social roles, that possibly imprison us in codes, and one particular element catches our eye: *the object*.

A valuable object was almost lost in the in-between ("I was walking though the square"). The object is an object that was found, an object hidden by the singer Ava Mirna, inside a valuable piece of furniture. *A found object, lost, and then found again*. This object – that always brings us to an Other because it never really belongs to the one who believes he possess it – allows Ernst Legy to go back in time – to take a trip down memory lane to repaint a Belle Epoque – and to question the limits of the imaginary:

All these things like the assassination, the suicide or other exuberances were false, but it doesn't matter. That's not what is most important.

The object is at the heart of the project because it allows to depict *the void* that was felt by Jeanne Durieux. Jeanne was an avid reader of psychoanalytical texts, and she must have understood – perhaps without consciously knowing about it – this idea of *object* as that of the Lacanian concept taking into account the Freudian “*lost object of desire*,” “*the transitional object*” of Winnicott and “*the partial object*” of Klein. These things considered, it is no longer a question of reading the novel in terms of something found, lost and found for Ernst Legy, but rather to see it as an indication of an absolute void that is felt more or less at different moments of our lives. Note as well, that the object in question is concerning time. And that yet again, this text speaks of ghosts and the dead.

Project #4 presents Ernst Legy as a poet. A creator who gives life to a man consumed by life (his fingers burnt) that then turns into ashes. Death is present again in the project. He talks about the passion for life that has left this character “always on the run”. It’s interesting to note that passion is merely a means of accessing a much sought-after escape. And finally, let’s look to this heart-felt laugh that he addresses to himself – through the reflection in the eyes of the narrator – this accentuates the hallucinatory nature of this poem.

All of these projects, and according to Henri Durieux there were many more, show Jeanne’s extraordinary creativity but also indicate how her mind was tormented by themes like nothingness, death, void, and ghosts. They also depict her inability to give these projects visibility, a concrete shape that goes beyond notes kept in drawers or boxes. Perhaps in this powerlessness lies the growing psychic weakness, before it becomes devastating.

Conclusion

What if I, in turn – before an explanatory postface – address myself to Jeanne Durieux?

Yes, dearest Jeanne it is my turn to write to you to conclude this project that I carried out in immense jubilation! I've always loved the complexity of human-beings, and you did not disappoint. I know that maybe I should have developed in more detail certain aspects of your life and contextualized them better, but I also know that lives can only be summed up at the cost of certain erasures and certain forgettings.

Telling your story was a way for me to talk about subjects that are important to me: The hold of the imagination, the journeys and the projects we draft that remain tucked away in drawers. What do they say about us these projects that remain secret until that moment that they are attributed to an Other? To a double?

Dear Jeanne, it's now the end... I see you now disappear, with Henri, Philippe, Jacqueline, Paul Lefebvre the nurse, Doctor Delmont, and the neighbours who complained about the noise all by your side... Evanescent, you seem to be moving away from me.

Before leaving you, I'd like to tell you this: Jeanne(tte) was the name of one of my dolls when I was seven years old. She could say « mommy » « hello » and « goodbye ». And since I can catch a glimpse of your friendly greeting from the in-between, let's say goodbye, my Jeannette!

Postface

Imagination, time and again

Like Russian dolls that fit together to enclose a smaller version of themselves, imaginary characters – as in this case – sometimes contain others. Ernst is an imaginary character, but so is Jeanne Durieux: mine. And while we're on the subject of Russian dolls, although I myself am not someone else's imaginary character, sometimes I do happen to be, as any of us do, unknowingly caught up in someone else's imagination. The truth is, it's impossible to get rid of the imaginary: dreams and belief systems bear witness to this.

But let's get back to the character in this book. I created this woman from scratch; this woman who had invented another character to whom she clung so intensely that it was impossible for her to renounce this imaginary being. Believing he was real was a defense against her fading away, her disappearance.

Jeanne Durieux is a character I created to be at the center of a larger research-creation scheme involving all the themes that would emerge as the story unfolded. Strangely enough, she first appeared to me in 2007 – and I'd completely forgotten about her until a few weeks ago – in one of my short fiction films, *Natures Mortes*,¹⁰⁴. I played her role, that of a plagiarized woman, saying this in another version of herself - a poster portraying her:¹⁰⁵ - :

"I've searched everywhere for myself and I found myself nowhere. So I invented myself. Yes sir! Concocted from scratch! How do you expect me to accept, even for a single moment, that someone would steal what I crafted in doubt and in pain?"

Retrospectively, I find this phrase strange: The character invents itself.

¹⁰⁴ <http://erikathomas.free.fr/cm.php>

¹⁰⁵ <http://erikathomas.free.fr/affiches.php#nature>

It might be hard to believe that I had actually given this character the name Jeanne Durieux in 2007, but it's true. Rediscovering what I had forgotten had a weird effect on me because just like with Ersnt Legy, Jeanne *resurfaced* in my mind. That was in 2022, during a night of insomnia.

I was looking for something to focus on. And this woman – in the guise of a very old woman – popped into my head. I had the strange impression that her story was unfolding before my eyes and, excited by this new project, I set to work the very next day.

To carry out this project, I planned to call on my sister (Nathalie Ommundsen), friends (Sophie Bouttée, Sylvie and Christophe Brunellière), I was going to gently set up ¹⁰⁶ a few “experts”, my colleagues at the Université Catholique de Lille (Carole Pinel, Julio Guillen, Florentina Rodrigo Paredes, Stéphanie Leroux, Fernando Monroy and Michel Feugain) and my Master 2 students (Millie Chiron, Souleyman Afaska, Robinson Wullens, Lison Delforge, Marie Vidal de la Blache, Sarra Barira, Bertille Roux, Agathe Dupont, Emma Fournier, Paul René-Bazin de Jouy, Marc de Soyres and Romain Basquin) were only too happy to help. I give my warmest thanks to all of them!

And then, something happened. From time to time I order collections of photographs of unknown people off the *Internet*, as an enthusiast and collector. And I came across a set containing the photograph with which I immediately associated my new Jeanne Durieux. The one of her on the cover of this book. A mischievous, youthful face. A face that we can easily lend the phrase: “*No need to court me, I'm already won over*”, supposedly reported by her husband Henri Durieux.

With the “discovery” of this photograph, comes an important question. Christian Boltanski liked to say, and I also often say it myself: “Someone said: we die twice. We die when we die, and we die again when someone finds a photo of you but nobody knows who it is...”

¹⁰⁶ At first, I made them believe in the reality of Jeanne Durieux.

Here's the question I asked myself: Do we die a third time when someone finds our photo and no one can say anything about it, not even a story that isn't ours, a fictitious story?

To me this question is an ethical question. So again, I solicited my family and friends. I listened to them to shape my own opinion. And then I felt some relief as I imagined that this process was also about proving wrong or delaying the fate that Roland Barthes attributes to these images: "*Every photo will one day be thrown in the garbage. With it will also disappear life and love.*"

I wanted to save them from being forgotten and I told myself that they should be treated as if they were photos of actors and actresses.

And if we were to think that this unknown person had, impossibly, – if only for a few seconds – imagined one day embodying a life other than her own, a life resembling, in some places, that of my Jeanne Durieux, then all this fiction would include a bit of the magic we can sometimes catch a glimpse of from in this earthly world.

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Why is it that certain things, which take us away from our main research, echo inside us so intensely? Some sort of strong desire ... Is it because of our own state at the moment we encounter these things? The fact is, I never could have imagined at the time, that the path I was heading down, week after week, would lead me into strange lands, bringing me face-to-face with people who, in one way or another, had encountered Jeanne Durieux, known as Jeanne Labroche. This woman – daughter of a Hungarian father and Spanish mother, haunted by political oppression, a self-taught ethnologist, a travel photographer, selling her photos and articles to armchair journalists who signed them in her stead – had all the makings of a book dedicated just to her. Bringing together the necessary elements, that had been dispersed over time, was not an easy feat. But one encounter always leads to another; and that's how narratives and stories are made.

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